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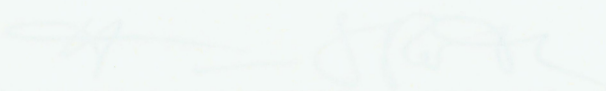
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Haptic Wake

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Masters of Fine Arts

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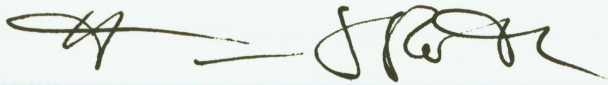


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Haptic Wake

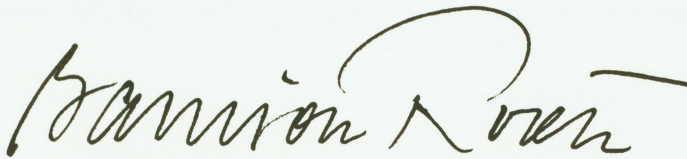
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¹⁴ Benn, S. "Three images for Kriševa: from Bellini to Proust." *Parallax 3* (autumn 1998): 63-79.

Introduction

Just as making is a way to explore my personal history. In this paper I will reflect on that history and conceptual theories of art making. In the installation *Haptic Walk*, I am exploring my transient journey of personal growth. The elements of the installation reflect this idea of growth through the use of the body and the physical nature of the art.

In an Installation it is the body in its entirety that is asked to participate through its sensations, through vision obviously, but also hearing, touch, on occasion smell. As if these artists, in the place of an "object" sought to place us in a space at the limits of the sacred, and asked us not to contemplate images but communicate with beings. I had the impression that the artists were communicating this: That the ultimate aim of art is perhaps what was formally celebrated under the term of incarnation. I mean by that a wish to make us feel, through the abstractions, the forms, the colors, the volumes, the sensations, a real experience.

-Julia Kristeva- writing about installations at the Venice Biennale¹

¹ Bann, S. "Three images for Kristeva: from Bellini to Proust." *Parallax* 8 (autum 1998): 65-79

Introduction

I use art making as a way to explore my personal history. In this paper I will reflect on that history and conceptual theories of art making. In the installation Haptic Wake I am exploring my transient journey of personal growth. The elements of the installation reflect this idea of growth through the use of the body and the time-based medium of video.

I am interested in installation as a narrative structure. Installation allows many objects to come together in a space. The objects then activate this space. These objects become elements that come together to create a new atmosphere. This surrounding space immerses the viewer in an experience. I am asking my viewer to participate in my installation by experiencing the artistic elements that I have presented in a given space.

In an installation the artist is asking the viewer to participate through sensations. The viewer is asked to question the intentions of the artist. The viewers are asked to locate themselves in the surrounding space of the installation; this is haptic perception. Haptic is defined as the ability of the individual to perceive the world adjacent to his or her body through a physical experience.

The Elements of Haptic Wake

Defining the title of this work presents an understanding of how I interpret the elements of this installation. "Haptic" refers to a sense of touch and physical experience. In this installation I have presented my body to the viewer in two ways, through video and audio. Both of these create distinct sensory experience.

A wake is the track left in water by a body moving through it. It can also be understood as the aftermath or aftereffects of a dramatic or powerful event. In this piece I am exploring the ability of a haptic experience to produce an emotional wake or reverberation. After an individual has any experience, in this case viewing art, thoughts of the experience can linger. The questions that the artist poses can linger through words or emotions related to the experience. An installation produces physical and emotional effects, through "the abstractions, the forms, the colors, the volumes, the sensations, a real experience."² This is the type of experience that Kristeva talks of having in the Venice Biennale, noted above.

In the installation Haptic Wake there are three thematic parts I will explore the Shadow, the Mouth and the Body.

² Bann, S. "Three images for Kristeva: from Bellini to Proust." Parallax 8 (autumn 1998): 65-79

Shadow

I am intrigued by the physical and emotional responses individuals have to light. The three slide projectors in the installation cast images of upside-down trees onto the surrounding gallery walls. The projections of trees create shadows of the other objects and elements in the installation, filling the space with dull light. The light from the projections also creates shadows of viewers' bodies that mix with other elements of the installation. The interaction of shadows (of both viewers and objects) allows me to integrate the viewers' movements into the installation.

Light is also used to draw attention to spaces. The house structure (as seen in image 1 & 2.) has a large, bare light bulb that illuminates the interior of the structure and casts light out of the cracks of the wood siding. These rays of light appear on the walls and the ground around the structure. The rays of light link the inside and the outside of the structure, metaphorically representing the inside and outside of body and the duality of mind and body. The rays of light and the shadows created by the structure represent an individual's conscious and unconscious experience of light.

The Shadow is the personification of that part of human, psychic possibility that we deny in ourselves and project onto others. In psychoanalysis the goal of personality integration is to integrate the rejected, inferior side of our life into our

total experience and to take responsibility for it.³ In my work shadows represent the viewers' attempts to locate themselves and their presence in the environment of the work. Through the interaction of their shadows and the other elements of the work, viewers take part in the narrative I have created, reflecting the fact that all personal history is an accumulation of interactions with other people. The complex visual interaction between shadows reflects the richness of personal history and experience. Drawing on Jung's interpretation of the shadow as the dark part of our psyche, my work asks whether the artist projects her troubled psyche onto the viewer, or if the viewers' project their own psychological traumas onto the art.

³ Jung, Carl G. Violet S. de Laszlo, translated by R. F.C. Hul "Psyche and Symbol; A Selection from the Writings of C.G. Jung" Bollingen, Princeton, N.J.

Mouth

For Freud the mind and body cohere in the individual's ego.⁴ If the body of an individual only experienced an incident, then the mind would not be able to continue to unify these events. The body of an individual may physically be involved in the event, but the mouth is where the construct of language creates terms and words to understand what occurred surround the event. The mind externalizes the event, creating a connection between the inside and outside of the bodily experience.

Freud presents different organs as libidinal organs. The psychic and emotional energy associated with instinctual biological drives.⁵ The organs that Freud associates with these libidinal drives are the genitals, anus, and the mouth. These orifices are points of connection for the inside and outside of the body. Of these points of connection, the mouth is the most interesting because it links the ego with physical experience.

The mouth is the place where the body and mind come together. In my work haptic perception is understood as the viewer's body locating itself in the space of the installation. Surrounded by fish heads with exaggerated mouths that reach almost to the viewer's knees, he or she must be aware of his or her position in space in order to avoid colliding with elements of the installation. The gaping

⁴ Grosz, Elizabeth. "Psychoanalysis and the imaginary body" P Florence and D Reynolds, ed. (Manchester University Press 1995), pp. 183-196

mouths of the fish heads recall the Freudian link between physical and mental experience of space.

Body

Both the theories of Freud and Simone de Beauvoir acknowledge the body as a presence that is capable of being perceived by others as well as being aware of its own environment. These notions of the body and self-awareness allow us to distinguish between the 1960's and 1970's performance art that addresses the body as a situation in space (interacting with other bodies or objects) from the contemporary work of body and video artists who use the body as an object, projecting bodies into the space of the installation to create a new and different understanding of the body.

Experiencing body and performance art presents the viewer with a direct confrontation of the body in space. de Beauvoir suggests that the body is a situation not an object.⁶ In my work I have attempted to make connections between my own body as an art object and the situated experience of the viewer's body in the space of the installation. Freud states that the body is aware of itself as an object, while de Beauvoir asserts the contrary. I am interested in looking at these two opposing theories and determining where an intersection between them might exist.

⁶ de Beauvoir, Simone. "The Second Sex" Penguin 1972;

I present my body as an object captured in the time and space of a video installation. The still frame animation I use to present the body through video accentuates the contrast between stillness and motion. The jittery image I have created draws attention to the difference between real time and the adjusted time of the video. By projecting the image onto a screen, the screen and the video both act to transform the body into an object. The hanging figure portrayed in the video meets the camera's gaze, and thus is aware of itself as a objectified image. By transforming my body into an object, I have created an unsettling situation for the viewers in which he or she can view but not interact with my body. Positioning my body in the video upside down and drawing upon a narrative heightens this sense of discomfort for the viewer.

Rather than rely on Freudian dualities of body/ mind, object/experience, inside /outside, I am working toward an understanding of the body and the experience of an installation as a zone. This idea is present in the work of Simon O' Sullivan, who advances the notion that art is not merely an object, but rather an environment in which viewers participate in the creation of an happening or event.⁷ In Haptic Wake, I have created such a zone, a space in which the bodies

⁷O' Sullivan, Simon. "The Aesthetics of Affect, Thinking Art Beyond Representation" *Angelaki journal of theoretical humanities*. Vol. 6, Num. 3, Dec. 2001

of viewers and my own objectified body come together to create a unified situation.

Personal History

In “The Aesthetics of Affect” Simon O’Sullivan discusses how the notion of “affect” represent moments of intense physical influence,⁸ like having goose bumps. Affect is a subjective experience; an individual can only understand his or her own emotional or physical perception of an event. I am interested in creating art that responds to affective moments that I have experienced, and I seek to recreate these moments for my viewers to experience themselves.

I use my body as a site. I feel my body physically reflects my personal history. I am interested in the ideas of affect in relation to my body because of physical or emotional traumas I have experienced. Affect is a moment of intensity that causes conscious and unconscious reactions. An example of this could be seeing something that made you vomit instantly, such as seeing a dead body. Later you may reflect on it during your dreams, daydream or night dreaming. In your dream you see yourself as the dead body. In this instance you have reflected yourself, subconsciously you are trying to identify with what you have witnessed.

⁸ Kristeva, Julia “The Power of Horror”

Reflecting on my own autobiographical traumas through my art-making process has allowed me to reexamine the emotional effects these traumas have inflicted onto my psyche.

One such trauma that resonates in my work results from a car accident that occurred when I was fourteen. An on-coming car swerved to avoid a deer and hit my mother's car. I was not wearing a seat belt, and I was thrown through the windshield. I sustained major lacerations to my face and head. I had to have multiple surgeries to remove the glass from my eyelid and forehead. I also broke my knee and hip on the left side of my body. In this traumatic incident I became aware of my mortality.

Since my car accident, I have been fascinated by the notion of my own mortality. Either through the ephemeral nature of a material or the depiction of my self through video, I am struggling to resolve these understandings of death to which I have been exposed. While growing up I was surrounded by the fragility of life in other ways besides the car accident. As a taxidermist, my father was constantly acquiring and killing animals. As a taxidermist, he was surrounded by dead animals and their skin. His job is to form these animals to their ideal state, to obtain their most beautiful qualities. As an artist I have looked at these qualities of body, skin, and process that my father has taught and inflicted me with.

The Conclusion

Haptic Wake uses the interactions between shadows, bodies, and objects to create a sensory experience for the viewer in which they are confronted with my own personal history. The surreal images of my body and the disturbing presence of the sculptural elements (including fish heads, trees, and a domestic structure) create an uncomfortable space for the viewer. As viewers make their way through the installation, they must confront both the difficulty of navigating the physical space of the work as well as mentally situating themselves in the narrative. The complex interplay of shadows contributes to both the viewer's difficulty in locating themselves in the space and making sense of the narrative. The use of shadows to create this difficulty draws on psychoanalytic notions of personal restraint. The shadows also provide the viewer with a reminder of their own physical presence, and thus can assist them in finding a way out of the environment and narrative I have created.

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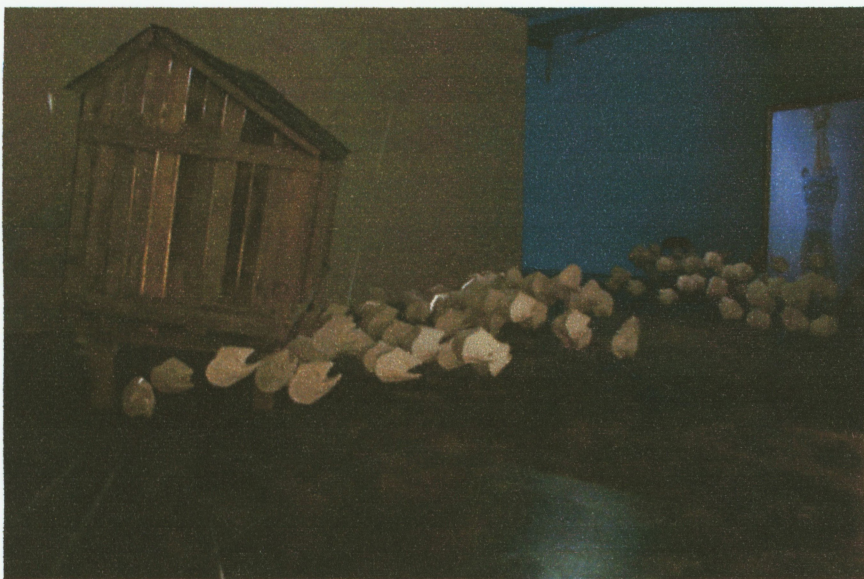


Image 1. Haptic Wake, installation at the CU Museum of Art



Image 2. Haptic Wake, detail of the House Structure, installation at the CU Museum of Art, April 2007



Image 3. Haptic Wake, detail of video projection, installation at the CU Museum of Art, April 2007

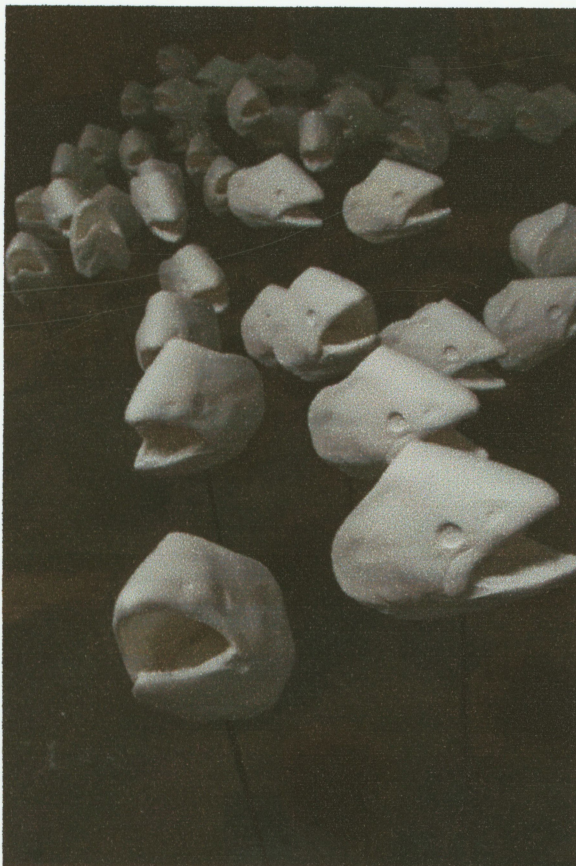


Image 4. Haptic Wake, detail of fish heads, installation at the CU Museum of Art, April 2007



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