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A fly has died a splendid death in a pool of strawberry ice cream.

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A FLY HAS DIED A SPLENDID DEATH
IN A POOL OF STRAWBERRY ICE CREAM

By

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B.A., Indiana University Southeast, 2012
B.F.A., Indiana University Southeast 2012

A Thesis
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University of Louisville
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May 2017

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A Thesis Approved on

April 24, 2017

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ABSTRACT

A FLY HAS DIED A SPLENDID DEATH IN A POOL OF STRAWBERRY ICE CREAM

Miranda L. Becht

April 24, 2017

Humans have evolved an overwhelming awareness of self, other, life, and death. We have learned to selectively process information and to replace dissociated memories with less disturbing ones. We have evolved this ability to deceive ourselves, thus producing a personal reality that is innately false.

As a society we tend to idealize our vision of the past, particularly our vision of home. Our idealized notion of home presents itself as a supposedly traditional form of domestic life, but bears little relation to the way people actually lived. This concept of a cozy home full of family love is an invented tradition.

Two poles are created: the ideal and the broken self. The sweetness and pleasure in seeing or recalling certain objects or experiences, that nostalgia, intermingles with feelings of sadness, loss, and regret. Glimmers of memory, perhaps real or perhaps fabricated, become dreamlike flashes in the landscape of our mind. Nostalgia and sentiment can be deconstructed through the frailty and distortion of memory by investigating the reality of lost innocence.

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Figure 1. *Garfield* "Alone," comic strip from October 23, 1989

“A fly has died a splendid death in a pool of strawberry ice cream.”¹

“An imagination is a powerful tool. It can tint memories of the past, shade perceptions of the present, or paint a future so vivid that it can entice... or terrify, all depending on how we conduct ourselves today.”

–Jim Davis, from *Garfield* “Alone,” October 23, 1989

In “Alone,” published in October of 1989, Garfield wakes up in a dilapidated house, alone. There is a fan theory surrounding this comic strip in which Garfield’s life to this point has all been imagined.² He has fabricated Jon and Odie as a coping mechanism as he is starving to death. This particular strip was published for Halloween, in some papers under the title “Garfield’s Horror Theater.” This moniker makes the situation more palatable, however there were several other strips and cartoon specials that share a similar, darker theme. It is quite upsetting to think of my beloved childhood friend, starving to death, alone, and hallucinating his comfortable, lasagna-filled life in order to cope. However, the truth is, our brains do this to us all the time.

If we don’t know where we come from, how do we know where we might go?

Our brains have evolved the ability to make an infinite number of associations to any event. Our memories are comprised of this information, growing throughout our lifetime. Our emotions are entwined with our memories. We have developed innate mechanisms that we use to cope with psychological

1 Pamela Zoline, “The Heat Death of the Universe.” *Daughters of Earth: Feminist Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century*. Ed. Justine Larbalestier. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press: 2006), 130-143.

2 A quick Google search produces pages of articles, blogs, etc. relating to this fan theory.

overload. This dissociation is a disintegration. Through dissociation we are able to alter our own reality through a “capacity to enter into different states of consciousness that allow us to maintain separate and contradictory bodies of knowledge”³ and memory. This is vital for us, as “a species whose consciousness demands a constant ordering of reality.”⁴ There is a great deal about reality that we simply cannot handle.⁵

Dissociation occurs in both acute and chronic instances.⁶ It is easy to recognize acute dissociation in relation to a specific traumatic event. Chronic dissociation is quiet and slower. It can result from “experiences that we all have every day.”⁷ “Traumatic experience produces a physiological overload that the brain and body are unable to adequately manage...”⁸ thus producing a state of hyperarousal. Dr. Sandra L. Bloom discusses how “exposure to overwhelming traumatic events and human evolution are intimately entwined” in her paper “Bridging the Black Hole of Trauma: The Evolutionary Significance of the Arts.” She quotes author and political activist Barbara Ehrenreich, “The original trauma, meaning of course, not a single event but a longstanding condition- was the trauma of *being*.”⁹ Life is dystopian.

“The Heat Death of the Universe” is a domestic science fiction short story by Pamela Zoline. This genre of science fiction deals with domestic or “inner

3 Sandra Bloom, “Bridging the Black Hole of Trauma: The Evolutionary Significance of the Arts,” *Psychotherapy and Politics International* 8, no. 3 (2010): 198-212.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Examples of everyday dissociation can be found in the way many of our behaviors have become automated, such as driving. Driving is potentially a very dangerous activity, yet we regularly “zone out” while performing it.

7 Bloom, “Trauma,” 198-212.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

space,” most often that of women. The domestic category explores interpersonal spaces, but more particularly “those shared by mothers and children, husbands and wives, domestic economy and the public sphere,”¹⁰ or the domain of relationships pertaining to the woman. These stories do so by “extrapolating from the everyday reality of a middle-class American wife and mother a nightmare vision of endless meaningless routine, demands, and expectations, focusing intensely on issues of gender, the ethics of care, and the promise of the future.”¹¹

Readers are first introduced to Sarah Boyle’s world with a primer on Ontology. “(1) ONTOLOGY/ That branch of metaphysics which concerns itself with the problems of the nature of existence or being.”¹²

The story is set up in numbered sections, alternating between descriptions of scientific laws and vignettes of Sarah’s life, dealing with themes of birth and continual growth with “babies’ fingernails” and death and decay with the “rotting fruit,” “the hair of the dead,” and the fly who “died a splendid death in a pool of strawberry ice cream.”¹³ Sarah lives in a California suburb in a beautiful home with her husband and children. By patriarchal standards, she seems to lead an *ideal* life. She is, however,

The Heat Death of The Universe

by Pamela Zoline

(1) ONTOLOGY

That branch of metaphysics which concerns itself with the problems of the nature of existence or being.

(2) Imagine a pale blue morning sky, almost green, with clouds only at the rims. The earth rolls and the sun appears to mount, mountains erode, fruits decay, the Foraminifera adds another chamber to its shell, babies’ fingernails grow as does the hair of the dead in their graves, and in egg timers the sands fall and the eggs cook on.

(3) Sarah Boyle thinks of her nose as too large, though several men have cherished it. The nose is generous and performs a well-calculated geometric curve, at the arch of which the skin is drawn very tight and a faint whiteness of bone can be seen showing through, it has much the same architectural tension and sense of mathematical calculation as the day after Thanksgiving breastbone on the carcass of a turkey; her maiden name was Sloss, mixed German, English and Irish descent; in grade school she was very bad at playing softball and, besides being chosen last for the team, was always made to play center field, no one could ever hit to center field; she loves music best of all the arts, and of music, Bach, J.S.; she lives in California, though she grew up in Boston and Toledo.

(4) BREAKFAST TIME AT THE BOYLES’ HOUSE ON LA FLORIDA STREET, ALAMEDA, CALIFORNIA, THE CHILDREN DEMAND SUGAR FROSTED FLAKES. With some reluctance Sarah Boyle dishes out Sugar Frosted Flakes to her children, already hearing the decay set in upon the little white milk teeth, the bony whine of the dentist’s drill. The dentist is a short, gentle man with a moustache who sometimes reminds Sarah of an Uncle who lives in Ohio. One bowl per child.

(5) If one can imagine it considered as an abstract object, by members of a totally separate culture, one can see that the cereal box might seem a beautiful thing. The solid rectangle is neatly joined and classical in proportions, on it are squandered wealths of richest colours, virgin blues, crimsons, dense ochres, precious pigments once reserved for sacred paintings and as cosmetics for the blind faces of marble gods. Giant size. Net Weight 16 ounces, 250 grams. “They’re tigeriffic!” says Tony the Tiger. The box blatts promises. Energy, Nature’s Own Goodness, an endless pubescence. On its back is a mask of William Shakespeare to be cut out, folded, worn by thousands of tiny Shakespeares in Kansas City, Detroit, Tucson, San Diego, Tampa. He appears at once more kindly and somewhat more vacant than we are used to seeing him. Two or more of the children lay claim to the mask, but Sarah puts off that Solomon’s decision until such time as the box is empty.

Figure 2. Image of text from “The Heat Death of the Universe” by Pamela Zoline

10 Mary Papke, “A Space of Her Own: Pamela Zoline’s ‘The Heat Death of the Universe’.” *Daughters of Earth: Feminist Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century*. Ed. Justine Larbalestier. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press: 2006), 145.

11 Ibid.

12 Zoline, “Heat Death,” 130.

13 Ibid, 130-143.

suffering from what Betty Friedan calls the *feminine mystique*. Friedan states, “There was a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform, the image that I came to call the feminine mystique.”¹⁴ Sarah is living in a world where it is thought that women could “find fulfillment only in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love” and the “highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfillment of their own femininity.”¹⁵ Sarah is not happy. She is actually quite numb.

Sarah becomes obsessed with ordering the things in her house, i.e. her world. “Sarah Boyle writes notes to herself all over the house; a mazed wild script larded with arrows, diagrams, pictures, graffiti on every available surface in a desperate/heroic attempt to index, record, bluff, invoke, order and placate.”¹⁶ She makes notes about all sorts of things, including entropy.

On the fluted and flowered white plastic lid of the diaper bin she has written in Blushing Pink Nitetime lipstick a phrase to ward off fumey ammoniac despair. “The nitrogen cycle is the vital round of organic and inorganic exchange on earth. The sweet breath of the Universe.” On the wall by the washing machine are Yin and Yang signs, mandalas, and the words, “Many young wives feel trapped. It is a contemporary sociological phenomenon which may be explained in part by a gap between changing living patterns and the accommodation of social services to these patterns.” Over the stove she had written “Help, Help, Help, Help, Help.”¹⁷

A place for everything and everything in its place.

The best way to stay organized is to keep things in their proper position. Aside from the obvious places, such as keeping dishes in the kitchen and toiletries in the bathroom, how do we determine where things are kept? I particularly

14 Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell, 1963), 9.

15 Ibid, 43.

16 Zoline, “Heat Death,” 132-133.

17 Ibid, 133.

Figure 3. *What's a dream and what is real? (Entropy)* by Miranda Becht

the memories that were attached to it. I was ingrained at a very young age with this attachment to objects and desire to preserve these precious memories.

Just as we desire to collect objects and organize them in a significant way, our brain collects memory and experience. Compartmentalization occurs simultaneously, physically and mentally. The constant demand to impose order on our reality is referred to as “the cognitive imperative.”¹⁸ This term speaks to our drive to “order [our] world by differentiation of adaptively significant sensory elements and events, and to the unification of these elements into a systematic, cognitive whole.”¹⁹ Order allows us to create “safety and meaning.”²⁰ Bloom raises a good question: “How does one place into a meaningful scheme, the idea of one’s own death?” or death in general?

18 Bloom, “Trauma,” 198-212.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

Compartmentalization is used as a means to cope with entropy. Entropy is a law of thermodynamics that is discussed by Zoline in “The Heat Death of the Universe.”

(13) INSERT ONE. ON ENTROPY.

ENTROPY: A quantity introduced in the first place to facilitate the calculation, and to give clear expressions to the results of thermodynamics. Changes of entropy can be calculated only for a reversible process, and may then be defined as the ratio of the amount of heat taken up to the absolute temperature at which the heat is absorbed. Entropy changes for actual irreversible processes are calculated by postulating equivalent theoretical reversible changes. The entropy of a system is a measure of its degree of disorder. The total entropy of any isolated system can never decrease in any change; it must either increase (irreversible process) or remain constant (reversible process). The total entropy of the Universe therefore is increasing, tending towards a maximum, corresponding to complete disorder of the particles in it (assuming that it may be regarded as an isolated system.) See *Heat Death of the Universe*.²¹

The brain has evolved “our unique consciousness and its overwhelming awareness of self, other, life, and death.”²² As a result, we developed the “evolutionary strategy that would allow our brain to dissociate itself from its own information when necessary,” particularly when contradictions in life become too overwhelming.²³ The effects of stress wreak havoc on our mind and body. Overwhelming stress is “physiologically and cognitively disorganizing. Dissociation helps to protect and buffer the central nervous system from physiological and emotional hyperarousal.”²⁴ Dissociation allows us to “deny important aspects of reality that are too disorganizing [and] too threatening to our own inner stability.” Our brain keeps this information, though “out of conscious awareness” in case “we should happen to need it.”²⁵ So, “the memories, feelings,

21 Zoline, “Heat Death,” 132.

22 Bloom, “Trauma,” 198-212.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

and thoughts associated with dissociated fragments do not disappear from the mind; they simply disappear from consciousness.”²⁶ Those of us who feel compelled, may try to uncover this hidden information through therapy.²⁷ We are not ignorant of its presence, though we may not be privy to its exact contents.

The experiences that our brain has deemed worthy of dissociation “could not be categorized, ordered, or placed in a meaning scheme that is in the past and can therefore not be relegated to the past as a memory.”²⁸ These dissociated experiences thus remain “still present.”²⁹ They reestablish themselves as post-traumatic stress symptoms, haunting the person as they reappear as nightmares and flashbacks.³⁰ They can manifest as “anxieties, phobias, depression, and a variety of physical symptoms.”³¹ Melancholia is a “form of mourning” by a person who is unable to properly “grieve the loss of an object, a place, or an ideal,” thus becoming haunted by it.³² Without the ability to properly order, I am haunted by the same broken melody.

Through our traumatic history as a human race, we have learned to “selectively process information” and to replace dissociated memories with less disturbing memories.³³ We have evolved the “ability to deceive ourselves,” thus producing a personal reality that is innately false.³⁴ This raises the question: How much of our existence is fabricated?

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 David Eng, “Melancholia in the Late Twentieth Century,” *Signs* 25, no. 4 (2000): 1276.

33 Bloom, “Trauma,” 198-212.

34 Ibid.

Our “personal, individual sense of reality is profoundly determined by how much it lines up”³⁵ with what our culture defines as reality. What is normative? Our culture defines this idealized notion of what is meant by the word *normal*. *Normal* is a social construct. It does not exist. Individuals participate in society. Scholars have theorized that “movement through time and space [is] traumatic.” In our society, we “may feel pained by such changes, [we] hesitate to show that emotion lest [we] appear maladjusted.”³⁶ “Those who feel grief” associated with the loss of *home* “hide the emotion, believing it a sign of immaturity, maladjustment, and weakness.”³⁷ Once an alteration surpasses what is culturally acceptable, twisted forms of reality become psychopathology. Past a certain threshold, a person becomes labeled as “mad” or “delusional.”

I grew up surrounded by mental illness. My grandmother and mother both suffered from severe depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, substance abuse, and at times displayed symptoms of schizophrenia. What I thought was normal as a child is not what I learned to think is normal as an adult. More times than my brain will probably allow me to remember, my mother tried to commit suicide. My uncle once told me that his mother (my grandmother) tried to drive her car off a cliff into a body of water with two of her children in the car. I was raised in verbal abuse. I was raised in unhealthy relationships. I was raised in very altered versions of reality. Our survival is greatly served by the development of “dissociation that allows us to reorder reality in a more palatable way... [and] separate our sense of self from the reality of what is happening.”³⁸

35 Ibid.

36 Susan Matt, “You Can’t Go Home Again: Homesickness and Nostalgia in U.S. History,” *The Journal of American History* 94, no. 2 (2007): 471.

37 Ibid, 497.

38 Bloom, “Trauma,” 198-212.

Traumatic experiences are very disruptive to the way we function. If a person “cannot adequately protect themselves by either fighting or fleeing, then the only option he or she may have open is to separate from- or dissociate- from emotions entirely. This is particularly true for children in frightening situations who are physically unable to fight back or to run away from the source of the danger.”³⁹

I investigate the relationship between control and chaos in a way that is similar to that of Zoline in “Heat Death of the Universe.” Just as Sarah Boyle uses compartmentalization to impose order on her life, I very purposely place every item in my installations. I am very conscious of display and its inherent identity politics. By putting my objects on display, I am considering identity and representation. There is a struggle as an *other*. When we are put on display, our agency is removed. As an objectified *other*, how do we construct our identity?

Figure 4. *Skin* (detail) by Miranda Becht

You Can't Go Home Again

I have always seemed to long for some sort of metaphorical home, “located somewhere in the past.”⁴⁰ This “yearning for a lost home”⁴¹ is not a novel phenomenon. It is tied to very common notions of homesickness and nostalgia. The meanings of these two terms have changed over time, but today, “homesickness is defined as the longing for a particular home, nostalgia as a longing for a lost

39 Ibid.

40 Matt, “Home,” 469.

41 Ibid.

time. Nostalgia may carry within it a yearning for home, but it is a home faraway in time rather than space.”⁴² Nostalgia, oftentimes used to refer to something sweet and pleasant, is bittersweet. It is the longing for something that is unattainable. Nostalgia represents a person’s “attempts to establish continuity with past selves. Longings for lost places, peoples, and times represent a desire to bridge past experience and present conditions.”⁴³ It is a desire to order and make sense of our reality.

As a society we tend to idealize our vision of the past, particularly our vision of *home*. Our idealized notion of *home* presents itself as a “supposedly ancient form of domestic life” and bears “little relation to the way people actually lived in the past.”⁴⁴ This concept of a cozy home full of family love is an “invented tradition.”⁴⁵ Historian Susan J. Matt explains that this is a “modern phenomenon that reflects a desire for custom and routine in a world characterized by constant change and innovation.”⁴⁶

This bittersweet idea of *home* becomes “a source of comfort and hope.”⁴⁷ Collection and display pay “homage to the ideal of the stable home.”⁴⁸ It is common practice to preserve “relics of bygone days”⁴⁹ and surround ourselves with things that remind us of home.⁵⁰ These treasured objects celebrate “family unity and permanence.”⁵¹ Relics are preserved, collected, and displayed in the

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid, 470-471.

44 Ibid, 479.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid, 481.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid, 497

51 Ibid, 481.

name of something that is false. They honor “domestic relationships even as they [acknowledge] their fragile nature.”⁵²

Inevitable in our linear understanding of time, we are constantly being “uprooted from home and from the past.”⁵³ Because of the fallibility of our memory, the past and the home as we remember it, no longer exists, or perhaps it never did.⁵⁴ “The loss of home, the necessity of movement, and the impossibility of return”⁵⁵ are painful inevitabilities of life. From this, some may experience “trauma of separation,”⁵⁶ or at the very least the numb sadness associated with nostalgia. I mourn for a home that perhaps I never had.

I search for kitsch objects and Americana that are charged with nostalgia and sentiment in order to conjure memory narratives in the viewer. Just as a person tends to surround themselves with “tokens of home and roots”⁵⁷ which are often “not mementos of their actual homes so much as items associated with the romantic image of home,”⁵⁸ the objects that I include in my installations are cast from objects I attain from thrift shops and antique stores. I search for artifacts that “offer a feeling of connection and history, an illusion of timelessness and permanence, even when one is far from home both in time and in place.”⁵⁹

These objects cause a certain sense familiarity for the viewer. By appropriating these forms I am entering into a dialogue with the past. This conversation plays on the viewer’s sense of nostalgia, or perhaps more aptly

52 Ibid, 481.

53 Ibid, 485.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid, 497.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

melancholia, as I intentionally deal with themes of attraction, home, the past, and decay. My nostalgic references to home, “even if they are reproductions,”⁶⁰ work on this level to provide some sort of uneasy “comfort and connection to the past.”⁶¹

Figure 5. *The sweet, nostalgic sadness of something lovely and lost. (Order)* by Miranda Becht

The use of kitsch elevates the mundane and references that which is “feminine.” These objects are accessible and signify enjoyment. The attractive qualities are also exploitative. These objects work on multiple levels for me. They are cute and innocent, but also serve to reveal how I, as a proxy for all women, girls, and *others*, have been and are manipulated and exploited. We desire objects/ are objects of desire. The patriarchy demands innocence as it violates it. I also intentionally use the references to home as a domestic, idealized, “safe” place as parallel to women’s traditional roles in that space. That, in concert with my pink, kitsch casts reference women’s close relationship to commodities and the way we are objectified and gendered from a very young age.

Figure 6. *Underside (detail)* by Miranda Becht

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

In much of the work, my objects also operate as memory fragments or flashes, referencing the way a certain vision of a past object or place may recur during a post-traumatic stress event. Viewers may form connections between these fragments in the form of memory narratives. The use of the eerily familiar vintage artifact gives substance and authority to this narrative. I enjoy using this cute, kitsch imagery and natural elements that signify decay in concert to create a visual discord. The sweet kitty cats offer comfort while the teeth remind viewers of loss and decay. Both are vessels for an empathetic experience and emotional curiosity.

The repetition of appropriated objects recontextualizes these forms and creates a disruption for the viewer, “[imbu]ing them with new meaning.”⁶² This act signals that things we thought we knew, we did not know. This calls into question our preconceived notions of truth. Nietzsche said that “truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are.”⁶³ Appropriation creates what Walter Benjamin called “dialectical images,” “in which the relationship of past to present is not one of linear time, but of constant negotiation. The past not only influences the present; the present also influences the past... The past is never completed, static, at rest; it too is always vulnerable to reconsideration.”⁶⁴

Zoline questions our reality in “Heat Death of the Universe.” One way she does so is by positing: what is real in our culture of copies and simulations? What is our state of existence in this post-modern civilization? Order and chaos are different sides of the same coin, just like reality and simulacra. Just as the repetition of copied images in Sarah Boyle’s world and in our society creates a simulacrum, so it does in my work. My copies can be treated as though they are

62 Claire Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics.” *October* 110 (2004): 55.

63 Edward Said, “Latent and Manifest Orientalism,” *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 203.

64 Donna Stonecipher, “A Poetics of Appropriation,” *Hyperallergic* (2015).

the original objects as the hierarchical relationship between the “original” and the “imitation” is deconstructed. We live in an era of replication, where “representation precedes and determines the original.”⁶⁵ “Real” and “fake” no longer exist, but rather are simulations of reality. We are left with Jean Baudrillard’s phenomenon of hyperreality.

Baudrillard theorized about the seductive qualities of the surface of appearances that is created.⁶⁶ We are looking at a “reality that is concealed behind a brilliance of appearances.”⁶⁷ We are looking into a dark or denied reality, which lies just beneath the surface. So, we have two spaces that are created, that which is a seductive simulation and that which is the actuality of reality. This is closely tied to the idea of the fetish.⁶⁸ We are all victims of a comprehensive structure of illusion. We have developed an inability to know and desire to ignore. The dark or denied reality is the reality that you do not know how to see or that you do not want to see. This is where fetishes manifest and dwell.

This tendency to naively believe has created a group false consciousness. Bruno Latour discusses this inclination that has structured our belief system in his essay “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern.” He states that “facts are made up, that there is no such thing as natural, unmediated, unbiased access to truth.”⁶⁹ He goes on to say, “Reality is not defined by matters of fact. Matters of fact are not all that is given in experience. Matters

65 “Simulacra,”(ArtCenter College of Design), people.artcenter.edu/~hyang4/mdp01/simulacra.pdf.

66 Mark Poster, *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings* (Stanford University Press, 1988), 5.

67 Jacques Ranciere, “The Misadventures of Critical Thought,” *The Emancipated Spectator* (New York: Verso, 2011), 25.

68 Bruno Latour, “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,” *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 225-248.

69 Ibid, 227.

of fact are only very partial and, I would argue, very polemical, very political renderings or matters of concern.”⁷⁰

You are not who you see in the mirror.

As a young child, you see yourself in a mirror. Lacan theorizes that this is when you begin to form a sense of identity. You become conscious of yourself in the mirror and that you are trapped in an environment, in something fundamentally alien to you, outside of you. *You* differentiate yourself from this *otherness*. You are shaped by your experience in this environment. A mother raises a baby to see its reflection, placing it in a symbolic universe. The identity assumed depends on the words of the mother, the signifiers; mimicry. All children really know is what their mother tells them. In the mirror, we become unconsciously ingrained with an identification of the ideal. The *ideal ego* is the image assumed, what you project into the world. The ego that you wear is but a mask, giving you a place, dictating how others see you. This ego seems whole and complete, but it is merely hiding a fragmented, lack of unity. You will never be that ideal. You will never be what you see in the mirror.⁷¹

Two poles are created, this *ideal* and the broken self. The sweetness and pleasure in seeing or recalling certain objects or experiences, that nostalgia, intermingles with feelings of sadness, loss, and regret, now residing in an uncanny valley. Glimmers of memory, perhaps real or perhaps fabricated, become dreamlike flashes in the landscape of our mind. Nostalgia and sentiment can be deconstructed through the frailty and distortion of memory by investigating the reality of lost innocence. Childhood is seen as this formative, safe time of innocence and naivety, but how can our mind reconcile wanting to fondly remember while simultaneously

⁷⁰ Ibid, 232.

⁷¹ Lionel Bailly, *Lacan: A Beginner's Guide* (London: Oneworld, 2009), 28-40.

recalling, say, childhood trauma or suffering? How can I reconcile this dialectic?

This notion of “polar ideas” or “system of oppositions” occurring in the process and theoretical approaches surrounding it is undeniably related to the philosophy of dialectics, wherein a discourse occurs between two opposing views, which can be regarded as two ends on the same bridge.⁷² Two seemingly disparate ideas at once are in opposition and accord. These pairs rely on one another. If we did not know noise, we could not know silence.

I am very concerned with exploring the relationship of dialectics. Lacan’s mirror stage creates a dialectic between the ego and the reality of the fragmented self. Similarly, Latour

discusses the relationship between the “brilliance of appearances” and the dark or denied reality. I have recently been investigating these relationships in the way I approach space in my work, particularly domestic

Figure 7. *Underside* by Miranda Becht

spaces. In “Underside” I use the familiar form of a dining room table. The tops of the tables in our homes get all of our attention. My grandmother and mother took great pains to make sure the tabletops had a perfect appearance, adorning them with nice tablecloths, fine china, and shiny decorations. I particularly remember the ritualistic way my grandmother would add the leaves (which were always kept leaning against the adjacent wall) and neatly set the dining room table before a dinner. The women in my family went to great lengths to “keep up appearances”

72 Hans Ulrich Obrist. “Do It,” *Ways of Curating* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2016), 129.

and make sure they projected a very beautiful, put-together impression to others, even though it was just a façade.

I was always more interested in the bottom of the table and could often be found playing under it. It provided an adequate haven to me if all the chairs were pushed in. All of the tables in the house had small drawings underneath that were my little secrets. There was something so special about having that space and having the small act of mischievous defiance. I am an only child and underneath the dining room table was a clubhouse just for me. In this work I am investigating the relationship between top and bottom, ego and fragmented self, and appearances versus reality.

Thinking about these particular experiences and remembering the reality of my life (my mother's life, my grandmother's life), makes me wish that I could just be nostalgic for childhood innocence. However, I cannot separate from the disruptions I experienced. That is my reality. I long to romanticize the past, and there is a part of me that does, but stopping there denies my biography. I feel I am trapped in this borderland between nostalgia and melancholia. My work is mediating this bridge and unifying these two spaces. To quote Hans Ulrich Obrist, life is a "continuously articulated struggle between the past, the present, and the future... [the] vision of history [is] under constant negotiation."⁷³ By *recontextualizing* and *remembering*, I am creating a new space and temporality.

I am also investigating the dialectic between old and new in my process of casting. As discussed, I curate objects for my installations from hunts in thrift shops, flea markets, and antique stores. I choose objects that excite and enter into discourse with me. I make silicone molds of these vintage objects and cast them anew, most frequently out of pink tinted resin. Resin is a synthetic, plastic-y

73 Ibid.

material. This is a very deliberate recontextualization. Not only does it reference simulacra and appropriation, but it is a direct reference to the way our memory, behaving much like an echo, changes over time. Creating this very real, visceral object out of a fake, plastic material adds a conceptual layer alluding to the way our memories and desires become fake and manufactured over time.

The pleasant, nostalgic sadness of something lovely and lost.

I have fond memories. I remember green shag carpet. I love that carpet. I dream about that carpet. I often sat on that carpet as a child, running my fingers through it. I loved the avocado color, the soft strands squeezed between my fingers, the smell. I would get really close, press my cheek against the floor. I loved the fine fuzzy wisps that stuck out of the small crevices created by the spun fibers. That green carpet was comfortable. That green carpet was home.

Figure 8. *In Hiding* (detail) by Miranda Becht

I would sit and play with an odd, white vessel, full of wonder about its use and its origin. This vessel seemed so big, so white and pure, so curious. My grandmother told me it was a bedpan, but it wasn't until much later in life that I realized just what a bedpan *was*. My most cherished childhood memory is soiled with urine and feces.

Lost innocence often takes the guise of idealized memories. My work is a vehicle for my fetishized, fragile memories. I am pressured to be the object of desire... this untrue illusion, the *ideal*.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Miranda Becht

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Education

MFA	2017	Sculpture	University of Louisville
BFA	2012	Ceramics	Indiana University Southeast
BA	2012	Printmaking	Indiana University Southeast
Minor		Psychology	

Selected Professional Experience

2015-2017	Graduate Teaching Assistant, University of Louisville , created curriculum and taught foundations courses in two-dimensional design, three-dimensional design, and introduction to art history; assisted in introductory drawing courses
2016	#IAMPUBLICART Event, Carnegie Center for Art and History and University of Louisville , planned and implemented large scale public art work
2016	Jeffersonville Public Art Commission , assisted in fabrication of puppets for <i>The Stunning Bicentennial Puppet Extravaganza: Pioneering Spirits of Clark County</i>
2015-2016	Aegis member, University of Louisville , published exhibition reviews on group blog, co-curated exhibition <i>Larry and Ladonna was here</i> that was held at KMAC
2014-2015	Graduate Research Assistant and printmaking studio assistant, University of Louisville , assisted in introductory printmaking courses, tended to printmaking studio maintenance
2014	Commissioned to create public art through the Jeffersonville Public Art Committee , <i>Creative Crosswalks</i> , Curated by JPAC, Jeffersonville, IN,
2013	Commissioned to create public art through the Jeffersonville Public Art Committee , <i>Powering Creativity</i> , Jeffersonville, IN

- 2011-2014** **Assistant Manager/ Tour Manager**, Payton Glass Center (formerly **Glassworks**), Louisville, KY, fused glass workshop instructor, tour guide, production artist
- 2012, 2013** Volunteer for *The New Albany Public Art Project Bicentennial Series*, through the **Carnegie Center for Art and History**, ran a screen printing booth, helped the public with poster project, New Albany, IN
- 2012** **Ceramics teacher**, summer camp teacher, and assistant at **Spot Five Studios**, Louisville, KY, created curriculum and taught various art courses
- 2012** **Teaching assistant**, Arts Institute, Young Artists Workshops, **Indiana University Southeast**
- 2010-2011** IUS Fine Art Program work-study dealing with gallery preparation and assisting professor with various tasks, such as paperwork, class preparation, and studio maintenance, Indiana University Southeast
- 2009** Completed 15 hours of practicum work with grades K-5 in art classes under Cathy Gruninger at Bridgepoint Elementary School, Jeffersonville, IN
- 2009** Completed 15 hours of practicum work with grades 9-12 in studio art and art history classes at Louisville Male High School under Judy Fertig, Louisville, KY
- 2008-2009** Teaching assistant, Jeffersonville High School Art Club, Jeffersonville, IN
- 2007** Completed 8 hour job shadow under Cathy Gruninger at Bridgepoint Elementary School, working with grades K-5 in art class, Jeffersonville, IN

Technical Abilities

Monotype three color separation print process; screen printing; plaster mold making; slip casting; silicone mold making; resin casting; electric kiln firing; Raku firing; gas kiln firing; throwing on a potter's wheel; handbuilding clay construction; operation of power tools including handheld and press drills, miter saw, table saw, vertical table saw, band saw, jig saw, handheld and belt sanders, lathe, pneumatic nail gun, sewing machine, Dremel tool; beginning MIG welding; soldering; Mac and PC proficient

Selected Honors

- 2017** Outstanding Graduate in Fine Arts Award from Hite Art Institute
- 2016-2017** Nora Iasigi Bullitt Memorial Outstanding Work in Sculpture Award
- 2012** Graduated with Honors Distinction
- 2011** Art History Award, *IUS Juried Student Art Exhibition 2011*
Preston's Ceramic Best in Show Award, *IUS Juried Student Art Exhibition*
People's Choice Award, *IUS Library Art Exhibition 2011*
Recipient of Kate Torp Memorial art scholarship
- 2010** Printmaking best overall award, *IUS Juried Student Art Exhibition 2010*
Susan and Kyle Rideout Purchase Award, *IUS Juried Student Art Exhibition*
Printmaking concentration award of merit, *IUS Library Art Exhibition 2010*
- 2007-2012** Chancellor's Honors List
- 2004-2012** Dean's List

Shows and Exhibitions

- 2017** MFA Thesis Exhibition: The fly has died a splendid death in a pool of strawberry ice cream. Cressman Center for Visual Arts, Louisville, KY
- 2016** *Mantra: It Bears Repeating*, Barr Gallery, Indiana University Southeast
#IAMPUBLICART, Carnegie Center for Art and History, New Albany, IN
MFA Colloquium, Dario Covi Gallery, University of Louisville
- 2015** *Fire and Art 9: MFA Showcase*, Cressman Center for Visual Arts, Louisville, KY
- 2014** *Untitled*, Mellwood Arts and Entertainment Center, Louisville, KY
Curator: Meg Loop, Curatorial Assistant at Tim Faulkner Gallery and Curator at Mellwood Arts & Entertainment Center
Artifactual: Kitties, and Owls, and Kitsch! Oh My! (Solo Exhibition), Silica Ceramic Studio, Jeffersonville, IN
Creative Crosswalks, public art Commission, Jeffersonville, IN
Curators: JPAC
- 2013** *Powering Creativity*, public art commission, Jeffersonville, IN
- 2012** *The Block Show*, Spot5 Studios, Louisville, KY
Rites of Passage, Manifest Gallery, Cincinnati, OH
Curator: Jason Franz, Executive Director, Chief Curator, Visual Artist and Adjunct Assistant Professor, University of Cincinnati
Femme Fatale, BFA Thesis Exhibition, Barr Gallery, Indiana University Southeast
Introducing, Graduating BA Exhibition, Barr Gallery, Indiana University Southeast
IUS Fine Art Open House, sponsored by the Dirt Bags Art Club, Indiana University Southeast

- 2011** *Clean Fossils*, Fine Art Exhibition, New Albany, IN
IUS Juried Student Art Exhibition 2011, Barr Gallery, Indiana University Southeast,
 Juror: Joey Yates, Curator for LOT Gallery, Louisville, KY
Nostalgia, joint art exhibition, Indiana University Southeast Spacelab Gallery
IUS Library Student Art Exhibition 2011, Indiana University Southeast Library
 Gallery; Juried by IU Southeast librarians
 IUS Fine Art Open House, sponsored by the Dirt Bags Art Club, Indiana
 University Southeast
The Illest Show the Spacelab Has Ever Seen, Indiana University Southeast
 Spacelab Gallery
 Curator: Ashley Stewart, ceramic artist, Jeffersonville, IN
- 2010** *IUS Juried Student Art Exhibition 2010*, Barr Gallery, Indiana University
 Southeast, Juror: Daniel Graham, Professor of Art at Georgetown College
The Reject Show, Indiana University Southeast Spacelab Gallery
 IUS Fine Art Open House, sponsored by the Dirt Bags Art Club, Indiana
 University Southeast
IUS Library Student Art Exhibition 2010, Indiana University Southeast Library
 Gallery; Juried by IU Southeast librarians
IU Southeast Celebrates Dia De Los Muertos: A Celebration of our Cultures, Barr
 Gallery, Indiana University Southeast
 Curator: Pako Martin, designer, New Albany, IN/ Mexico
- 2009** *IUS Juried Student Art Exhibition 2009*, Barr Gallery, Indiana University
 Southeast, Juror: Julie Schweitzer, Executive Director of the Arts Council
 of Southern Indiana
 IUS Fine Art Open House, sponsored by the Dirt Bags Art Club, Indiana
 University Southeast
Junk Food Collaborative Portfolio, Indiana University Southeast Library and
 Aronoff Center for Design and Art, University of Cincinnati, OH
- 2008** *IUS Juried Student Art Exhibition 2008*, Barr Gallery, Indiana University
 Southeast, Juror: Scott Scarboro, Practicing Artist, Louisville, KY