Another Pornographic Film That Takes Place Inside of a Bread Bowl

Lillian P. Walton
CUNY Hunter College

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Another Pornographic Film That Takes Place Inside of a Bread Bowl

By

Lillian Paige Walton

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Thesis Sponsor:

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Date
Carrie Moyer
Signature

December 21, 2016
Date
Drew Beattie
Signature of Second Reader
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2. *Touch Me/Don’t Touch Me* (Detail), 2015


5. *Image is of a girl with hands around her face. the brown underneath the hands is her hair. she is happy to be held*, 2014.

“A collapsed billboard lies a few feet in front of us – an advertisement for a new brand of ice cream. A recent excise tax on the production plastic and vinyl means that an increasing amount of the city’s advertisements are now hand-sewn. In the hands of a clearly inexperienced seamstress, however, it is hard to tell what product is being represented, if any. The billboard, facing upwards appears to be a strange embroidery of two humans licking each other’s hands, fighting for possession of the ice cream cone — the only truly identifiable object in the composition — while a dog in a human mask watches hungrily from afar.

In a television commercial for the same product, the cone is accidentally knocked to the floor in a Dutch-angle shot and the dog in the human masks leaps in to claim the snack as the brand is blasted onto the screen in shiny bubble letters....

...Gazing into the Art Handler’s reflection, eclipsed partially by my own, I feel the heat of our bodies in the physical proximity to one another. A sudden presence of heat on the back of my neck and the Art Handler has positioned himself closer and I close my eyes involuntarily as his lips gently touch the side of my neck. The Art Handler’s tongue is soft, slicking over my mouth and accidentally grazing my earlobes and inner ear as he touches me with warm hands...

...Suddenly, the trees behind us start to rustle vigorously. Completely entwined and on the verge of connection, we freeze. I can feel the Art Handler’s heart fluttering wildly through his thin flesh between my legs. A naked entity about eight feet tall emerges from the darkness, its rough, bark-like skin visible in the soft glow of the full moon. With a repulsive groan, the creature cranes its neck to inspect our trembling, half-naked bodies. Its mouth stretches open with some difficulty and, from somewhere within, a shrill howl like a violent wind ascends and expresses interest in partaking in sexual intercourse.”

- “Blooming Event,” 2016
Much of my time at Hunter has involved the exploration of fantasy, particularly that of a romantic and/or sexual nature. Throughout my practice, I address the topic of fantasy on both personal and general (shared) levels, the latter primarily through the means of tropes, clichés, and taboos. I’m interested in the topic of fantasy because I believe there is a direct connection between the culture of escapism (i.e. retreat into fantasy) and collective dissatisfaction (economic, political, cultural or otherwise). I think about the obvious parallels between the *Wizard of Oz* and the Great Depression in the United States. The culture of youth in America at this moment is one of incredible loneliness, which could explain why so many people turn toward means of self-exposure and conversely, why people retreat from human interaction and instead opt to indulge in fantasy worlds with inanimate objects that can’t reject or hurt them. The time in which we currently live is a strange one, an age of increasing technologization and globalization. Living in New York City within a community of artists and students who can’t afford therapy magnifies this feeling. Using my own experiences within this culture, my work is both critical and empathic, addressing sentiments that others can relate to.

*Touch Me/Don’t Touch Me*, a series of sculptures I began to produce in 2014, perhaps most strongly illustrates these personal and shared levels of fantasy in coexistence. In *Touch Me/Don’t Touch Me*, I staged multiple photo shoots, then manipulated my own portraits and combined them with anime (a graphic art form with Japanese origins) imagery sourced from the Internet to create body pillows in the fashion of Dakimakuras (fig. 1). Dakimakura pillows or “hugging” pillows are life-sized body pillows available for purchase on the Internet and specialty stores. The pillows are originally from Japan but have gained worldwide popularity, breaking through mainstream American culture via the means of a 30 Rock episode starring James Franco.
The pillows have their roots as “security objects,” intended to provide life-sized human comfort in the absence of another real body. In the 1990’s when I was growing up, versions of the pillows that were combined with anime imagery became available. Within this genre of anime body pillow imagery, more illicit variations emerged, depicting in anime character (both male and female) in sexualized poses, with some examples more pornographic than others. The pornographic pillows adhere to a standard format: one side of the pillow will depict a character more clothed, while the other side depicts the character with less clothing that is sometimes torn or ripped, thus establishing a sexually graphic and perhaps even violent narrative. The Dakimakuras are representative of a very specific culture and have a select appeal, one that is deeply entrenched in fan fiction and “otaku” a term for anime culture. There is something especially tragic about the pornographic pillows, as they depict fantasy “girls” who function as a replacement for real human presence, companionship, affection and sexual fulfillment. These pillows literally embody an impossible fantasy, the “untouchable” fictional character is suddenly touchable, part of the pillow owner’s imaginary narrative.

*Touch Me/Don’t Touch Me* is also a self-parody of my own “neediness” in that it uses my own huggable image to explore how sexuality, fantasy, and loneliness are commoditized in our culture. In the community of young artists living in New York, I encounter many young women who use their bodies (predominantly white, upper class, privileged bodies), the Internet and social media for documentation, promotion, and as the primary platforms for their performance art. I have watched as the bodies of my female peers in the form of selfies and documentation become co-opted and appropriated by male artists (i.e. Richard Prince) via the Internet. When the attempts to these young, female artists “reclaim” the female body from centuries of the male gaze fall into the hand of male artists via the means of appropriation, the attempts of the young
female artists to “reclaim” the female body seem in a way, a sort of failure — especially when these efforts are countered by non-artist peers who approach with the images without any understanding of the ideologies behind the sexual exterior.

Without context, the gestures of my female peers are confusing to the public because they mimic other forms of posturing, editing, and self-fashioning that are produced without the intention of cultural critique or instigation of some type of reform. Amalia Ulman’s Instagram performance *Excellences and Perfections* was a source of confusion to social media users, even her close friends. In the series, which now exists solely on the New Museum’s website via a Rhizome archive (which notably shows an edited version of the project isolated from the rest of Amalia’s Instagram as the performance was originally presented), Amalia attempted to create a critique of the search for perfection in love, life, beauty and health, through a series of Instagram posts in which she was the main character. During the performance Amalia documented her fake breast implant surgery, her pole dancing lessons (in this case, actual), her meals, her emotional perils (subsequently washed away by the spirit of capitalism via a post documenting the purchase of designer bags and clothes), whilst appropriating the language of memes and hash tags to make her act more convincing. People unaware of the artist’s practice and intention saw images of a hot girl, oblivious to the cultural critique the images presented, and responded to her posts with propositions, criticisms, and lewd comments.

In my body pillows, I heavily manipulated my own image using Photoshop to give my natural features a more exaggerated, artificial appearance and help the photographic imagery blend with the body parts sourced from high-resolution Dakimakura dolls found online (fig. 1). However, it is my intention that the pillows reveal more than a just a sexualized body but also an emotional truth: the typical presentation of a “desirable” self-image masks the hidden neediness
and loneliness that so often underlies many of online interactions. Instead of showing the usual paired images — clothed/naked or scared/complicit — that adorn the front and backs of typical Dakimakura, my pillows are identical on both sides, thereby disrupting the “fantasy” of sexual completion. In this sense, the pillows I have created are confrontational as opposed to passive inhabitants of a pornographic narrative sequence. The disruption of the fantasy starts where the pillows become characters in themselves (the lonely and confused Young Art Student) or rather, aware of their pillow-ness, they feel at times “too real.” The pillows are tactile, but also seem to “feel” emotions, something I have attempted to convey through the bizarre facial expressions. These days, the pillows live on in Craigslist ads, for sale as sexual objects while undergoing their own existential crises. I continue to reactivate the listings with slightly varying written content. As of yet, I have yet to sell any of the pillows but continue to market them as purchasable objects.

Treating myself as a character and reproducing my likeness in various three-dimensional forms is a provocative gesture that comes with potential consequences. My artistic practice is motivated in part by a sort of antagonistic or disruptive impulse and in this project I realized that the most disturbing potential was realized by putting the pillows into the public arena. In creating Craigslist ads for the pillows, I open myself to sinister responses to the project, such as the possibility that the pillows are appropriated for illicit purposes or an instance in which I am personally approached, contacted, or stalked in an inappropriate way as a result of self-fashioning my own image in a sexualized way onto a fetish object (fig 2).

Martin Kippenberger has served as a major influence on my work, as we share mutual interest in cross-media exploration and an interest in performance and provocation. However, there are vastly different consequences when I enter the realm of performance and provocation
through the female body. The “bad boy” artist or painter carries none of aberrant sexuality projected onto a “bad girl” artist. Rather the term “bad” used in relation to women implies either noncompliance with traditional gender roles or sexual deviance and/or aggression and is depicted in mainstream male heterosexually dominated mass media as somehow also “hot.” Though I have a great respect and admiration for Martin Kippenberger, I cannot deny that he and many of his cohorts participated in sexist and exclusionary behavior in regard to other female artists (though I respect the attempts of Kippenberger’s sister to claim otherwise in the biography, Martin Kippenberger: The Artist and His Families). I too want to put Kippenbergian plate of spaghetti on my head at the dinner party or strip down to my underwear with my gallerist at my opening, but I am completely aware that through the body of a young female artist, these actions have entirely different implications, regardless as to whether or not the intention is the same.

I’m very interested in the concept of “neediness,” because even as a pejorative, there is an underlying comedy and tragedy embedded in the word. In the BCuties project begun in early 2015, various methods were used as a means of collaboration and communication with others both inside and outside of the academic or “artist/professional” environment to test the commodity format as the ultimate means of seeking attention and satisfying the needy impulse. Greatly indebted to Martin Kippenberger’s Dear Painter, Paint for Me series, the works in the BCuties series represent a shift from representing neediness. Using only my two-dimensional works — drawing, paintings and photographs — I initiated a dialogue with a toy company that turns children's drawings into three-dimensional stuffed animals, thereby moving the conversation between “artist” and designer outside an institutional environment. In documentation of these works, I renamed my product “BCuties,” less for the protection of said “company” and more for highlighting the comedic and disturbing aspects of my exchanges with
a toy company. Guided by a prompt on their website, the correspondence included a drawing and brief written “description” used to create a three-dimensional stuffed animal.

My instructions to the toy company were essentially impossible — short on descriptions of what was being visually represented and long on what I wanted to be conveyed emotionally. At first I sent bizarre portraits of a two characters entwined in an embrace (one of which is based in my image). As the correspondence progressed and the first batch of objects were made successfully, I began to send imagery that was even more ambiguous and sexually suggestive. The antagonistic impulse is alive and well in this project, as my exchange with the company became incredibly complicated. I often repeated the company's pseudo-art jargon and improper usage of terminology back at the company representatives via a long winded email exchange.

The company was using the term “abstract” as signifier for profanity, informing me that “Unfortunately, we are not able to do the abstract art.” In response to my protests that the work was not ‘abstract’ they elaborated: “It's not so much that they're all abstract, it's that they don't really conform to what we are able to do in plush. Also, to be honest, the one with the cheese sticks on the belly makes our founder a little uncomfortable with the G-rating we prefer to have for our Budsies [original, unchanged name for products produced by the original company]!” I was eventually told, “Unless you have any art that is more concrete/less abstract, we will have to refund you for your order.” As referenced above, correspondence turned sour when the toy company rejected a real photograph of my own bare stomach with wrapped mozzarella cheese sticks on it, an image that “disturbed the founder” and went against the company’s “G-rating.” Determined to “finish” the series, I eventually I began working with a Craigslist seamstress and producing and/or remaking many of the sculptures by hand. The actory-manufactured objects
were displayed alongside hand-made sculptures and Craigslist seamstress-made sculptures and a wall text chronicling my correspondence with the toy company (fig. 3, fig. 4).

The drawings that I incorporated into the BCuties project feature two characters entwined in an embrace, one of whom is depicted with realistic features and the other of whom is thickly outlined and stylized to suggest two levels of operation: one physical and one purely psychological (fig. 5). While producing the drawings, I was inspired by the visual rhetoric of advertising and stock image photography, simple images that would surface as a result of putting complex and expansive requests such as “love” or “lonely” into a search engine. There was something humorous about the way that things like happiness, love, and loneliness were simulated and I used many of these examples as a “guide” for expressing such emotions in my own work. While I was making the work, I was came into contact with some drawings by Marguerite Burnat-Provins (1872-1952) at the Swiss Institute and was particularly struck by the drawing Hanugre et le Chat from 1919 (fig. 6). Burnat-Provins’ drawing became a direct inspiration for one of the images I sent off to the seamstress. Eventually I began using paint as a way of abstracting the images further, making them more difficult to represent or to be deciphered by viewer or seamstress.

I am interested in the fragment, how parts combine to make a whole or how one a piece is suggestive of a larger picture. This interest can be seen in the Dakimakuras and the “BCuties” drawings in which I have directly sourced imagery from external sources and combined them with my own self-generated content. The concept of fragmentation is even more obvious in my written work, as the fragment is the primary means through which I generate inspiration and construct a story. I have developed a habit of obsessive note-keeping in the “Notes” app on my smart phone, allowing me to jot down stream-of-conscious thoughts that occur to me wherever I
am (gym, train, supermarket, bed, studio floor, the back of the party, etc.) Most recently, I have been considering the fragment as the final form for the writing, considering how the pagination, presence of blank pages and fragmentary writing style contribute to the sense of passing time, the separation of scenes, or sense of closure.

After using writing as an instructional component in the “BCuties” project, I became interested in writing as its own art form. What began as poems and fragments with a narrative tone soon expanded into fully-realized short stories. A desire to depict one “scene” (as I felt I was doing with my paintings and drawings) grew to multiple scenes. These writings, though also rooted in fantasy, cultural clichés, tropes, and taboos, are more intimate and personal than anything I have yet produced. Though I enjoy the level of opacity that can be achieved from an isolated sculpture or painting, I am also interested in the inverse. I want to speak about loss, failed connections, loneliness, and writing has become a way to manifest my own experiences with these overarching concepts. Even more importantly writing has offered me an entirely new and gratifying territory for expression. All of the characters in my stories experience some sort of sexual frustration or longing for affection, playing out their desires through dreams and reflections on past experiences. In many situations the line between reality and fantasy are blurred, the worlds and conditions under which these relationships exist (sexual or platonic) are hyperactive, surreal parodies of my own life and the lives of others around me. My own experiences of intimacy, rejection, destructive behavioral patterns, and desire are all experienced through the eyes of first-person narrators, all of whom could be said to be hyperbolized versions of myself. George Saunders changed the way I thought about narratives through his use of animated language. I loved the way that he could create fictional worlds under which anything was possible, the movements, landscapes and interactions in which could be filmic or animated.
in a way that a still image could not. I was particularly stuck by a scene in George Saunders’s 1996 novel *Civil War Land in a Bad Decline* in which a character, in a fit of hysteria, blasts off into the sky like a rocket. I strive to fuse similar over the top, hyperbolic gestures in my own work.

“Out Patient,” a short story that I wrote while visiting Montréal this summer revolves around a young woman’s car ride “home” from Canada. The story is told in a series of flashbacks revolving around a character named Moody Pierre that the unnamed protagonist experiences throughout the course of the car ride. Moody Pierre is later revealed to be source of her misery. The narrator finds solace from feelings of rejection, loss, and exclusion by falling asleep in the car. During her nap, she dreams about redeeming a Groupon Voucher in exchange for a sexually explicit spa treatment that blossom into a long-term relationship with two men. A sudden movement of the car jerks the narrator back awake, transporting her back into reality and the re-lived scene of humiliation.

It is important to me to have a degree of fluidity within my practice. In current work, a personal language is evolving based in the specific materials and imagery drawn directly and/or indirectly from past art projects. Fragments of past works often have an invasive, parasitic relationship to more current projects. Sometimes this reference occurs in a more poetic sense, as I will discuss in the instances of the short stories, or more literally, as in the direct cutting and pasting of photographs “failed” sculptures alongside the figures on my Dakimakura body pillow project. In my book, “Blooming Event,” the fabric billboards and failed seamstresses are a reference to the hand-sewn projects I was making around the time of the *BCuties* series. These buried “clues” appear as a quiet self-deprecating joke (one that isn’t very funny) about my poor sewing abilities, as I identify with the seamstress who is dismissed in the story as “an intern.”
“Blooming Event” a fictional story about two individuals that find sexual connection at an exclusive event marked by the death and rebirth cycle of a rare tropical plant. The plot revolves around employment, sex, death, miscommunication, material possessions, taboo, social deviance, and “culturally enlightening” situations and activities. In its parodic portrayal of American life, Blooming Event owes much to Civil War Land in Bad Decline, however my story is as much about the exclusive culture of the art world as it is about popular culture or middle-class struggles. Within the story, characters are introduced and identified not by name, but by professional title. The main characters, as workers in the art industry, are in proximity of great wealth and decadence, though never fully possessing it. In the end, they feel most comfortable drinking sake stolen from the “Blooming Event” and exchanging sexual favors with a mysterious forest dweller. Despite the optimistic tone with regard to romance and sexual fulfillment, the story contains a classic literary trope of the disruption of the sexual through the means of the antagonistic force (i.e. the forest dweller). The characters get to live through a fantasy, providing a welcome distraction from their otherwise mundane existence and work-centric lives.

The blooming event itself is inspired by an anticlimactic journey to the Bronx Botanical Garden to see the corpse flower. While in the process of blooming, the corpse flower has an incredibly phallic appearance and the spadix reaches the heat of human body temperature. The hundreds of families who came to the Bronx Botanical Gardens to see this blatantly sexual and bodily object struck me as absurd. During the train ride home a friend and I made up a jokey scenario in which the botanic garden employed a Marina Abramovic style one-on-one visitation with the flower. This conversation led me to imagine the foundational scene upon which the rest of the events of the story could unfold.
Though I have been a longtime reader, enjoying the works of Raymond Roussel and JK Huysmans (influences I was heavily considering in regard to descriptions of objects within a larger narrative), writing is an unknown territory for me and for that reason all the more attractive. As I have no formal training in creative writing, much of what I have learned about conveying space and time has been informed by watching films. Peter Greenaway’s films *Drowning by Numbers* (1988) and especially *The Cook the Thief His Wife and Her Lover* (1990) are a huge influence on both “Out Patient” and “Blooming Event”, mainly via the emphasis of color, material, texture, rich symbolism and dark humor. Greenaway’s films are inspired by the language of Baroque painting and use the similar visual techniques to lend drama and sensuality his spaces and characters. I’m also interested in establishing a similar visual/imagistic language throughout the stories, as directors like Peter Greenaway, Jacques Rivette or Walerian Borowczyk establish throughout their films. In this manner, elements of my own visual practice are often interwoven into the text, as with presence of felt, sewn objects that populate the fictional city in Blooming Event.

The world of Blooming Event is informed by the logic and visual language of fantasy and more prominently, science fiction. This summer I began Mark Von Schlegel’s *Sundogz* and was floored by Von Schlegel’s manipulation of the genre (Frank Herbert’s 1965 book, *Dune*, is among my five favorite books ever) via lush, visual imagery and fantastical description. A large portion of the book takes place in an aquatic bubble in one of Uranus’s rings, containing a lush world populated by unique sea life. The book teeters on the line between fantasy and science fiction and describes a world in which space crafts and mermaids coexists. This combination of magical realism, fantasy and science fiction is one that I too seek to emulate in *Blooming Event*. 
Coming into the graduate program at Hunter as a painter, I couldn’t have imagined that three years later my thesis project would center on fiction writing. However, upon further reflection, this evolution seems completely natural. Writing, though in many ways abstract, has been a means of more closely addressing or capturing the sentiments that I am interested in conveying. I am eager to continue to explore writing in addition to my visual art making practice and am interested to see in what ways my interest in writing, visual art and film may come together in the future.
Bibliography


*The Cook the Thief His Wife and Her Lover.* Directed by Peter Greenaway. Allarts, 1990.


Von Schlegel, Mark. *Sundogz.* South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2015.
Figures

(Fig. 1) Lillian Paige Walton, *Touch Me/ Don’t Touch Me* (Detail), 2015. Digital print, 1x7ft.
If you ever feel lonely, you’re not alone.

Young Art Student is exhausted from mentally-taxing critiques, day-to-day frustrations, and her seeming inability to relate to her older, less "curious" peers and professors. Young Student Artist craves intimacy, sloppy, unbridled affection and reassurance. She doesn’t want you to talk about it, just feel.

These erotic body pillows slip covers are smooth to the touch, like overly soft and will fit and standard size body pillow. Pillows are complete with realistic and highly detailed features and are available in multiple varieties.

Though best suited covering your favorite body pillow, Young Art Student makes an enticing tapestry or poster for your walls.

Complete confidentiality is assured; contact for more details and images.

If you’re interested in something, go at it full speed ahead.

(fig. 2) Lillian Paige Walton, *Touch Me/Don’t Touch Me* (Detail), 2015, Screenshot, dimensions variable.
(Fig. 3) Lillian Paige Walton, *NFPTFL (Natural Family Planning Trembling for Love)* A, 2015. Assorted materials, 22 x 19 x 15.
(Fig. 4) Lillian Paige Walton, Foreground: *NFPTFL (Natural Family Planning Trembling for Love)* C, 2015. Mixed media, 42 x 26.5 x 13.5in. Background: *Little Hands*, 2015. Mixed media, dimensions variable.
(Fig. 5) Lillian Paige Walton, *image is of a girl with hands around her face. the brown underneath the hands is her hair. she is happy to be held*, 2014. Mixed media on paper, 13x10in,
(Fig. 6) Marguerite Burnat-Provins, Hanugre et le Chat, 1919. Assorted media on paper.
Installation Image List


Lillian Paige Walton, *Dead Fish*, 2016. Silicone and acrylic, 3x2ft.