"Nothing is wrong with you"

Carlos Rigau

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Nothing is wrong with you

by Carlos Rigau

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

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The City University of New York

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Thesis Sponsor

May 28, 2018
Date

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Signature____________________

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Signature of Second Reader

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Table of Contents

Perception..................................................................................................................3

Sexuality .......................................................................................................................4

Race ...............................................................................................................................6

Bibliography ..................................................................................................................9

Image List......................................................................................................................10

Images...........................................................................................................................11
Perception:

Rudolf Arnheim writes in *Art and Visual Perception*, “Just as one object can give rise to multiple percepts, so an object may fail to give rise to any percept at all: if the percept has no grounding in a person's experience, the person may literally not perceive it.” Humans are unable to process new information without the inherent bias of their previous knowledge. For me the art-making process forces, through exposure and experimentation, a readjustment to generally held perceptions or preconceived ideas. Art may also equally embrace a particular preconception, as a way to challenge group-held or culturally biased notions.

My installation *Secrets of the Unknown*, 2008, means to disturb or disrupt commonly held Western preconceptions that, without conscious awareness, influence perception. For example, linear perspective is a Western concept that is questioned formally through my work. The work includes: a video projection of a man dressed as a clown attempting to teach the viewer a misconstrued phonetic alphabet; a series of words printed on vinyl, intentionally out of focus, that appear on a 7x5 foot flat floor sculpture; and a 40x40 inch photograph in an Ikea frame of a woman dressed as a native Amerindian posing in front of a man-made waterfall. With these three elements, I am considering the difficulty of comprehension through written language and linear perspective systems. I want the assembled words and images to rupture routine perception and unveil the reliance on previous experiences for understanding anything. Another construct I use is sexuality.

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Sexuality:

Michel Foucault wrote in *The History of Sexuality* that “Sexual activities and sensations are historical, as well as regionally and culturally determined, and, therefore, are part of a changing “discourse.” Sexual meanings of the erotic dimension of human sexual experience are social and cultural constructs that mediate the subjective experiences of individuals. For example, the popularity of the thinner body type as the most sexually desirable is a human construct. During the Baroque period a larger body type was deemed most desirable. The construction of sexual meanings, in turn, is an instrument by which social institutions (religion, marketing, the educational system, the psychiatric community, etc.) control and shape human relationships. In an advertisement for swimwear the images of the body are used to emphasis thinness. The sexual construct of thinness is then used for capital gain. My work intends to seduce and repel the viewer, and, by using sexuality, it can trigger those responses.

By composing a sexualized discourse, I intend to amplify contemporary art taboos, and to question standards of the acceptable. The work reflects a recognized social standard within which sexual insinuations are mixed with issues of power and control, issues imminent in interactions. For example, the objectification of the female body is a tactic used widely by the advertising industry, and by closely studying the way the gaze slips in and out of conforming norms, I can question these norms and intentionally bring forward an encrypted codex of images. The images in my work both appeal to knowns of the collective unconsciousness, and push back against the passive absorption of images on the part of the viewer by implanting an inquisition.

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instead of a consumable image.

It is important to never distance myself too far from the referential scope I’m utilizing, as such a position would be nothing but a predictable part of the tsunami of reactions contemplating “what images want.” What is inferred by “what do images want” is that an image can be consciousness. Working with that said idea in mind is part of my image making process.

They told Me to name It something Personal so I named it Personal, 2007, is an animation narrative. The main character is a baby’s body attached to an adult male head, or vice versa; the figure is naked. The man-boy is born in space and, soon after, lands on earth in a typical prefabricated suburb. His travels take him from a fast food restaurant to the top of a volcano where instead of lava, spiral-spinning flesh and mouths of innumerable women are calling for the man-boy. In this piece, the image of a naked baby with an adult head considers the taboo that questions even seeing a naked child’s body. Startling as the naked man-boy may be, there is an understanding that separates this character from immorality, as he is not represented in a sexual way. Instead, the character fulfills the role of a wanderer in search of an even more established preconception: his mother. The work seeks to support the oedipal stance of mother/son relationships as a conventional view of a somewhat tense and sexualized relationship.

Race:

The term “race” or “racial group” usually refers to the concept of categorizing humans into populations or groups on the basis of various sets of characteristics. The most widely used human racial categories are based on visible traits (especially skin color, cranial or facial features and hair texture), and self-identification. One’s race determines how one will be perceived by other people. For instance, if a Latina bank teller in New York City comes across a person visibly of Asian descent, and the teller expects a bit of a communication barrier prior to any actual interaction. This small, though telling, expectation may prepare the perceiver to readily accept pronunciation differences when communicating with the ‘Asian’ customer. A (mis)judgment, made in a fraction of a second, of what the teller sees in front of him/her determines his/her action or response. While hypothetical, the scenario is plausible if not familiar to people in New York City.

African American, visual artist William Pope L. made photo documentation of a performance in which he attempts to hand out dollar bills in New York City during rush hour traffic (*ATM Piece*, 1997). A written text alongside the documentation states, “It takes hours before he can hand out a single dollar bill.” What is happening in this piece? First, Pope L. is black. This may be one of the reasons for Pope L. not being able to give out money; or maybe the drivers, all Caucasians as seen in the documentation, assume he is a beggar who is asking for money instead of giving it away. What allows for this initial assumption may lie within a factor beyond race: a stranger approaching a car normally means that he will ask for something from the driver. Why stop and challenge that preconceived notion when there is no time for interaction with the stranger? More contemptuously though, it would be easy to conclude that the drivers all
believed that an African American male walking toward a vehicle at an intersection is most likely homeless and asking for money, or simply dangerous to some extent. Pope L.’s piece exposes how the mind categorizes and judges on the basis of erroneous preconceptions that lead to misjudgments that limit understanding.

_B.F.B. Beyoncé, 2007_, is a video work displayed on an iPod. The iPod format is necessary for the implication of the work being a portable form of music video, a form without a fixed size. The viewer picks up the iPod, places the headphones on her/his head and proceeds to play the video. The viewer is in a gallery-like space but, because of the immersive personal environment created by the iPod, the viewer is separated from anything else in that space. The video features a man dressed as a woman. She/he is lip-synching to Beyoncé’s _Say My Name_. Watching this video may embarrass the viewer. It also may serve to feed a guilty pleasure that comes from watching something that may be deemed offensive. It also may cause the viewer to be aware of the relationship to someone else’s race in that same room. The rupture this video creates between people, memory, race, and gender is a constant focus in my work.

_“The House of Seven Gables,” my thesis exhibition:_

I am choosing to use Nathaniel Hawthorne’s _The House of Seven Gables_ as the underlying structure for my latest work. Hawthorne’s book is a romantic novel that combines realism and fantasy in a sweeping shameless motion. While rooted in the everyday political structure of 18th century New England, _The House of Seven Gables_ sways into supernatural possibilities that seem to surround everything in the book. This tension between what is real and what may be real in a superstitious realm is what most interests me.
My aim is to cross and mix my interests in perception, sexuality and race in a hybrid project. My *House of Seven Gables* will include a projected narrative video, five photographic images in varying sizes and a performative/sculpture space. Combining and composing using three different media extends my notion of the hybrid into the material while at the same time providing flexibility to thoroughly investigate interests.

Visual artworks are not reality. Artworks present an interpretation of reality. What I am after in my work is a cross blending of disparate meanings. This blending can bring new meaning. The presentation of my thesis work is a hybrid of different media working together and against each other. The content of the work is injected with my research into perception, race and sexuality. Through my visual art works, I want to create a disturbance in the everyday.
Bibliography


Image List

1. Installation view of *House of Seven Gables*, video sculpture, dimensions variable, 2009.


*House of Seven Gables*, video sculpture, dimensions variable, 2009
House of Seven Gables, video sculpture, dimensions variable, 2009
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