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Abjection and Vision

By Brianna Perry

Artist Statement

I am currently researching medieval Christian mysticism and Black Hoodoo. Both traditions are founded upon a more involved relationship with the body and spirit. The herbalism, magic and superstition involved in the Black Hoodoo tradition have served as means of resistance among Black Americans. In light of the Tuskegee Airman incident, Black Americans' doubt of the white medical establishment has increased. In a world dominated by reason and logic, magic makes less and less sense.

The role of mystics provided new opportunities and fulfillment for medieval women, who found their voices through articulating and illustrating their visions. Visions primarily served as communication between the individual and God, but were also instruments of pleasure. Hildegard of Bingen often writes of the wetness of the Earth, imbuing her appreciation of the natural world with an erotic charge. Visions are as ecstatic as they are horrific, and the feeling of both pain and pleasure mingle with no hierarchy. The Boniface nun, St. Leoba, pictures herself pulling purple thread endlessly from her mouth, rolling it into a ball. The dream ends with extreme fatigue and she wakes up. The physical pain involved in producing a vision results in something new: she learns from a wise woman that she will become an important leader. To me, visions articulate new potentials and horizons for the self. Imagination then becomes a part of the labor behind the act of becoming. I utilize object-making, performance, printed matter and video in order to investigate pleasure's relationship to abjection. Abjection is a space in which implicit dualities can collapse: human and object, human and animal, I and you; the inanimate object feeling and enjoying, deriving and extracting pleasure wherein pleasure is not simply reproduced but constantly re-created and re-invented, on its own terms.

Video becomes a fruitful space to enact and re-record a vision. When I am creating a video, the design of the space sets the tone for the actions that will occur, whether I am rolling an orange with a foot, or massaging screen doors with Vaseline. I believe that space is the key to liberation, individually and holistically. I find it useful to obscure the person within the videos, as I grapple with ways to present the black body in lieu of its hypervisibility and subjection to the white gaze.

Sight and the way we see others are key to the construction of race and gender. We aim to subject bodies to relentless classification. If the camera can capture a body in flux, consistently morphing and changing in the moment, perhaps the eye can resist classification. I arrived at video through a growing weariness with performance. The voyeurism innate to performance seemed out of my control, and I found it difficult to be seen the way I wished to be seen. By controlling the camera, I can exercise agency over how my body appears to the viewer.

Jacket



