In a Building, a Stairwell, a Room speaks

Tsz Wai Wallis Cheung

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd

Part of the Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons, and the Fine Arts Commons

© The Author

Downloaded from
https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/5862
In a Building, a Stairwell, a Room speaks

Keywords: Feminism, Intersectionality, Otherness, Monster, Monstrous females, Female sexuality, Potato, Fountain, Hybrid Identity, Agency
In a Building, a Stairwell, a Room speaks

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

Tsz Wai Wallis Cheung
Master of Fine Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2019
Bachelor of Arts Honors, University of Guelph, 2008

Director: Noah Simblist
Chair and Associate Professor, Painting and Printmaking Department

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
May 6, 2019
Acknowledgement

To my mother and grandmothers, thank you for raising a difficult child and trusting me to walk my own path as a woman.

To Ryan Clayton, I would not be able to make it through without your endless support, thank you believing in me and my many ruthless decisions.

To my classmates, our generative discussions and laughter will stay with me beyond the end of this experience, thank you for spending numerous late nights with me.

To Noah, Holly and Cara, thank you for challenging my thinking and expanding the horizons of my art practice. With your guidance I have unlocked many places that I could never have imagined myself to be.

Last but not least, to my feline monsters, thank you for showing me those bright eyes, sharp claws and teeth and when to use them properly.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................. 4  
Introduction ......................................................................................................... 5  
First-Wave Feminism .......................................................................................... 6  
Third-Wave Feminism (Intersectionality) ............................................................. 8  
Third-wave feminism (Subjectivity) ..................................................................... 15  
Fourth-Wave Feminism ...................................................................................... 22  
Potato .................................................................................................................. 23  
Do potatoes tell me anything about being a woman? ......................................... 24  
Fountain ............................................................................................................. 30  
Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 39  
Bibliography ........................................................................................................ 41
Abstract

IN A BUILDING, A STAIRWELL, A ROOM SPEAKS

By Tsz Wai Wallis Cheung, Master of Fine Arts

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2018.

Major Director: Noah Simblist, Chair and Associate Professor, Painting and Printmaking Department

Working toward a personal definition of womanhood while progressing with my research in feminist discourse, I frame biographical events alongside the intricate use of language surrounding feminist theory. Experimenting with material specificities that speak to my personal narratives and cultural significance, my work seeks to address the interlacing operations of subjectivity expanding on the intersection of class, gender and race.
Introduction

Someone once asked me, if I was given an option, would I choose to be a woman again? I said, “100%,” with no hesitation. Growing up in Hong Kong, I had the privilege to be raised by some of the strongest women I have encountered in my life; both my maternal and paternal grandmothers set the tone in my early years of what a woman is capable of achieving. Despite frequent restrictive circumstances, my grandmothers always found ways to overcome invisible limitations. What I learned from them about femininity is an unwillingness to compromise; an attitude to fight for what they believe. If being a woman means having the ability to handle impossible challenges, then why is it that my paternal grandmother seemed so insignificant and pathetic in front of her husband when she got up at 4am everyday, dug dirt, carried wooden buckets of water and herded water buffaloes in the farm? She alone did the cooking, cleaning and caretaking for six children. Why is it that my maternal grandmother’s second marriage is a shameful event no one in the family wants to address? Why is having breast cancer such a stigma that when my mother was in the midst of battling with the illness, she could not talk about it openly? Why is that I felt accustomed to sexual assault and violence that it became a norm? It is my dissatisfaction from having many unanswered questions that caused me to turn to feminist discourse.

As a younger artist, I saw notions of feminisms occupying a separate space from the dominant patriarchal way of thinking in Canada. To secure a space and larger audience for my art practice, I felt the pressure to situate my work in the dominant conversation rather than investing in feminist discourse, which at the time seemed to me theoretically trivial and overly subjective. Years of active resistance, however, did not inspire adequate solutions to my questions.
Turning to feminist discourse in my art practice is an approach to analyze my own psychology and history, drawing biographical details from my personal history to form a narrative that constructs a representation of an identity. It is important for me to show examples of the pertinent theory I pull from in the different waves of feminisms in order to more fully understand how my work has developed. In this thesis, I will also be borrowing various waves of western feminist theories to articulate my personal narratives and to demonstrate how my sense of being had shifted over time with the changes made in politics, trade policies during the colonial period in Hong Kong, and obtaining legal status in Canada.

First-Wave Feminism

In one of the foundational texts of feminist discourse, Simone de Beauvoir points to childhood as the gender formative years in an attempt to provide an answer to the question of “what is a woman?”:

“One is not born, but rather, becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine. Only the intervention of someone else can establish an individual as an other.”

The process of othering, to Beauvoir is the differentiation between boys and girls and it is created through a culture which centers on the male as the subject in relation to the female object. Male is the dominant sex, female is the other sex. Beauvoir introduces the idea that a woman is socially constructed rather than essentialized, made up of more than biological

---

functions and psychological differences. However her analysis failed to acknowledge the importance of how race and class intersect in gender formation.

Within my work gendered othering has become pertinent to my understanding of myself and how I perceive myself through which I stand under the societal gaze within public spaces. The concept of gendered othering becomes the first space I tend to. When locating specific demands and critiques in the feminist discourse within my personal narrative, the split between time I spent in Hong Kong, Canada and the United States has contributed to a misalignment of my perspectives and thoughts. Every relocation adds to my sense of being; sometimes fitting, sometimes alienated. This complexity of self-recognition as separate from the environment forges a new sense of Otherness from my gender and cultural backgrounds. It feels like I have become a hybrid that has been rejected by the cultures I have called home. The feeling of being the Other became the underpinning of the installation Monster Swamp.

Monster Swamp was an installation made for the end of my first year candidacy exhibition. It summarizes the initial driven intention for my practice and research throughout the year. I arrived to the United States to pursue my MFA in 2017 and was immediately embroiled with the urgent conversations on identity politics in America. This atmosphere inspired me to find my own voice while being able to participate in the post-colonial conversation. This installation gravitates to my background being born and raised as a woman in British Hong Kong, a Crown Colony under governance of the administration of the United Kingdom. The installation centred on the time period in the 80s and 90s of what I witnessed as a child and how my mom, sister and myself would work as a factory line at home in exchange for pennies of our laborious work. The rapid economic blooms in Hong Kong changed my family’s status, values and traditions. Monster Swamp addressed my inner struggles developing my own identity where East meets West which later became the identity of post-war Hong Kong. In Monster Swamp I
incorporated textiles, video, text, sound and dim lighting in a below ground and rundown space. Each medium points to specific historic reference and personal cultural upbringing.

Third Wave Feminism (intersectionality)

As feminism moved from fighting for enfranchisement and onto broader social equality, it was observed that voices of women of color and marginalized people were excluded from the equality demands made by first-wave feminists.

In Sojourner Truth’s prominent speech, “Ain’t I a woman?” she says:

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain’t I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain’t I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain’t I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain’t I a woman?²

Inequality does not stand within gender construction alone: it is interlaced in the white-dominated patriarchal society with oppressed racialized bodies and class structures. Hence, the liberation of women has to come from this intersectional origin where numerous oppressions tangle. This intersection informs the initial idea of monstrous females, which resolved itself into a video included in Monster Swamp.


*Construction of Monsters* is a video in this installation in which I perform as various headless monsters participating in different tasks in the fabrication of a monstrous female. The monstrous females are masked in green color appropriated from popular representations of Frankenstein’s monster. The adaptation of the monster draws parallels to the colonial identity of Hong Kong: a population re-assembled liminal ideology of the East and West yet simultaneously being rejected for their incomplete status ascribed to the political conflicts and power domination. Chinese migrants in Hong Kong were portrayed by the Western colonizers as uncivilized, violent villains who needed to be domesticated and liberated by the Western civilization to which Yiching Wu says,
“The establishment and maintenance of naturalized boundaries between categories of people was a constitutive modality of colonial practice...the British made the social landscape of Hong Kong more convoluted, with the constitution of the undomesticated, “free” Chinese migrant as criminal and barbaric, a menacing construct symbolically assimilated as the mirror image of the colonial (dis)order. The appearance of the "masterless men" in the colony, a shifting population belonging to no specific community and subject to no all-embracing surveillance, rendered colonial rule deeply problematic.”

Henri Meyer, *En Chine - Le Gateau des Rois... et des Empereurs (China - the Cake of Kings... and of Emperors)*, 1898, 46 x 33cm, Persuasive Maps: PJ Mode Collection.

---

Rendering the Chinese as “criminal and barbaric” was a colonial strategy to justify the British invasion of Hong Kong. What has been revealed through the renderings is the brutality of the colonial mindset, whom the menacing monster reflects. At a young age, I learned the language of the colonizers. Studied their manners and traditions to gain acceptance and to share their power while rejecting Chinese traditions and values that my family fought to preserve. The struggle to assimilate into western culture is paralleled in *Frankenstein* when the monster starts to learn the language, expressions and traditions of a human family from afar:

I found myself similar yet at the same time strangely unlike the beings whom to conversation I was a listener. I sympathized and party understood them, but I was unformed in the mind; I was dependent on none and related to none. ‘The path to my departure was free,’ and there was none to lament my annihilation. My person was hideous and my stature gigantic. What did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination?

---

Rejected by his creator and society, the monster has to navigate between acceptance and rejection, similarity and difference, human and monster, belonging and alienation. His sense of being is developed from acknowledgement of what was projected onto him; his monstrosity is therefore a reflection of the creator and society. My adaptation of the monster allows me to talk about the cultural construction of Otherness in the colonial context, in-between the East and West, human and monster. With Monster Swamp, I dove into how embodying the monstrous figure is a gesture to personify power.
Monster Swamp (2017), installation view: textile, spot light, humans and shadows.
The textile pieces *Monsters Dance* are portraits of female monsters dancing in animalistic poses, celebrating their flamboyant displays of sexuality. No longer bound to the restrictions of identifying with social norms, the outcast, wicked female monsters fully embrace themselves and their sexuality. These textile pieces point to the economic peak in Hong Kong during the 80s and 90s created through the rapid flow of foreign investment. Colonized bodies in Hong Kong were and continue to be the subjects of exploitation due to abrupt industrialization and modernization of the West. The imagined freedom in and of Hong Kong as means to vindicate hegemony behind the colonial project is clarified by Yiching Wu:

“...the colonial image of Hong Kong as the “haven of freedom” - it was the magic formula that served to discursively reconcile the contradiction between the moral pretensions of the universalist
discourse and the exploitative subjects from the colonial body politic and incorporating them as “freedom,” in this instance, lies in the construction of a coercive system, in which the discipline of labor can be effectively maintained.⁵

While attempting to address the notions of Otherness through incorporating the racialized and gendered monstrous bodies in my work, I was not completely convinced of the idea that claiming female sexuality is best done by rejecting the pre-existed lens looking at the female body. If claiming my own sexuality means having to monsterify and reject the body I love, then I am still subject to patriarchal traditions and standards. I have not yet claimed the needed agency and subjectivity to subvert the act of looking from the masculine gaze.

Third-wave feminism (Subjectivity)

Informed by post-colonial theory and influences, this wave of feminism thought about the notion of subjectivity in the historic western narrative and the peripheral narratives that looked outward. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak criticized western radical theory, stating that research and theory on the European colonial project was inadequate as these intellectual productions were and are still centralized in the western world. She saw the West as Subject and therefore perpetuating the imperial-centric mentality. She wrote:

Some of the most radical criticism coming out of the West today is the result of an interested desire to conserve the subject of the West, or the West as Subject. The theory of pluralized 'subject-effects' gives an illusion of undermining subjective sovereignty while often providing a cover for this subject of knowledge. Although the history of Europe as Subject is narrativized by the law, political economy and ideology of the West, this concealed Subject pretends it has 'no geo-political

⁵ Wu, “Prelude to Culture,” 154.
determinations'. The much-publicized critique of the sovereign subject thus actually inaugurates a Subject.⁶

According to Spivak, the discourses and criticisms claimed by the West discerns women and the marginalized as the Subject, rather than as subjects of post-colonial discourse. Subjectivity determines who has agency and power to take control over a narrative. The construction of subjectivity has developed to a wider scope beyond the intersection of gender, race and class, and it makes sense that fluidity became a key concept, allowing for inclusivity of diverse ethnicities, economic classes, religions, and genders. Judith Butler's concepts of gender performativity offers a deeper vision of who is the subject and who has the right to perform:

Performativity is a process that implies being acted on in ways we do not always fully understand, and of acting, in politically consequential ways. Performativity has everything to do with "who" can become produced as a recognizable subject, a subject who is living, whose life is worth sheltering and whose life, when lost, would be worthy of mourning. Precarious life characterizes such lives who do not qualify as recognizable, readable, or grievable. And in this way, precarity is rubric that brings together women, queers, transgender people, the poor, and the stateless.⁷

If, as Butler suggested, performativity determines recognizable subjectivity that can be defined and fixed in the position, then precarious positioning could be understood as those who are not bound to specific definitions and therefore are able to expose the hegemony being held

---


by in the construction of subjectivity. These lines of thinking inspired me to start considering an explicit performance as a form of ruthless political resistance, an act that utilizes and focuses on exploring gender and sexual conventions of my female body. In looking at how had other artists embraced this challenge of explicit performance, I see Sidsel Meineche as a contemporary way post in this field.

Sidsel Meineche Hansen’s *No Right Way to Cum* is a virtual reality experience of a 3D animated woman masturbating in a private, minimal, well-light room. The aesthetic choices made here for the video resemble what is often staged for pornographic production. The camera pans in and out of her mouth and eyeballs, passing through bubbly saliva and into her chest cavity to observe her beating heart, signifying a state of sexual intensity.


Female sexuality in this piece is not activated by the male counterpart as most heteronormative sexual pornography depicts; instead it is a representation of female desires and
pleasure embodied in a solo performative act. The complication of pleasure transference between the performance and spectator in pornography is an interesting relationship that offers a different analysis at the construction of Otherness. Paul B. Preciado elucidates the process of desubjectification in masturbatory performance. He says:

“Pornographic excitation is structured according to the boomerang: pleasure-in-the-desubjectification-of-the-other/pleasure-in-the-desubjectification-of-the-self: watching a subject that can't control the force of its sexual production (potentia gaudendi) and seeing it at the very moment it recounces that force, to the benefit of an all powerful spectator (oneself, the person who is watching) who, in turn, and through the representation, sees him or herself desubjectified, reduced to a masturbatory response. The one watching is pleasured by his or her own process of desubjectification.”

Masturbation is a political act. It challenges the notions of female sexual dependency, in which women are sexual beings only with the presence of male companions, or performing for the pleasure of the male spectators. The euphoric force that comes from pleasuring oneself has no gender; all sexes and gendered beings have the capacity to experience this form of excitement. It is within this undefined space that predetermined Subject and Object relationships are able to become undone. To be able to imagine and desire by oneself is to gain full autonomy and agency of one’s body and mind, working in resistance against being confined by social norms and taboos.

---

Cherry’s first solo is an installation exhibited after Monster Swamp. It was intended to approach a working definition of female sexuality, pleasure, desires, and gender roles in the construction of Otherness. The installation consisted of a recording of a performative act, textile, sound and light. Similar to the use of green in Monster Swamp, color was once again deployed as a visual signal. In Cherry’s first solo I utilized purple light, gesturing towards the otherworldly, sexual, feminine as an underpinning tone for the exhibition. In an attempt to transcend the female body as monstrosity, I wanted instead to embody the female body as a powerful site, and use female sexuality as a weapon to subvert the masculine gaze and gendered expectations.
Cherry’s first solo (2018), installation view: textiles, purple stage lights.

Textile spider webs were made with stripes of fringe from women’s garments. One of the functions of these fringes is to increase attractiveness and feminine appeal. Incorporating these into a textile piece, the space is transformed as a lure: sexual appeal becomes bait to capture those who falls for the conventions of women’s sexuality. In front of the textile spider webs is a video projected on purple velvet curtain. A cell phone camera closely frames the body as the gaze travels in slow motion across the terrain of my body. The hypervisibility of the sexualized body mediated by the distance of technology alludes to the ambivalent nature in the power of
looking and being looked at.\textsuperscript{9} Agency is a powerful means to subvert the predetermination of a normalized hetero-relationship. Expressions of female desires and pleasure in turn destabilize this dominant apparatus which often renders women as powerless objects under the male gaze. This video aims to invite the gaze even closer: to the goosebumps on the skin, to the untrimmed body hair, to the stretch marks on the thighs, this highly controlled way of looking with advanced camera technology. How does understanding female sexuality, pleasure, desires and gender roles help the viewer understand the Subject and Object narrative? Julia Kristeva in Powers of Horror says,

“When narrated identity is unbearable, when the boundary between subject and object is shaken, and when even the limit between inside and outside becomes uncertain, the narrative is what is challenged first.”\textsuperscript{10}


Cherry’s first solo (2017) 30:55, HD video, video still. Close-up of Cherry gliding her hand in between her legs.

In thinking about how my work tethers to personal narratives while untangling the notions of Otherness, the tension required to move between the subject and object becomes blurry, confusing and agitating. To articulate the notions of Otherness, I realize it is necessary to embrace the contradiction within one’s narrative. The existence of “I” is not comprehensive to the exclusion of the “other.” In the process of talking about being othered, one inevitably needs to talk being othered by the other. This contradiction and transference of subjectivity and objectivity sparks my research to explore the power of abjection and transgression in the feminist discourse. For my thesis exhibition, I will include elements represent intersection of class, gender and race.
Fourth-Wave Feminism

Thinking about decentralizing the narrative comes from the perspective of privileging the West. The commonality of the internet offers a mobilized space for those who have been invisible and silenced in the past, amplifying their voices and allowing them to appear. Correspondence about feminist discourses and women’s life experiences are able to be quickly disseminated and shared with larger audiences.

In the fourth wave of feminism where digital social spaces become the common public domain, discourse has returned to the public realm where it is openly mobilized and challenged. Social movements, protests and debates happen simultaneously in both physical and digital realities. In collapsing these two realities, both have power to shape their cohabitated reality. Some of the global scale movements initiated with the use of online social platforms that give space for these urgent voices include, #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, and Women’s March.

Anonymous, Photo of #Metoo women’s protest march in Korea, in “Why The #MeToo Movement Is So Important To South Korea,” affinitymagazine, http://affinitymagazine.us/2018/04/14/why-the-metoo-movement-is-so-important-to-south-korea/
The importance of occupying digital space with marginalized voices is stressed by Laboria Cuboniks:

"Ours is a world in vertigo. It is a world that swarms with technological mediation, interlacing our daily lives with abstraction, virtuality, and complexity. XF constructs a feminism adapted to these realities: a feminism of unprecedented cunning, scale, and vision; a future in which the realization of gender justice and feminist emancipation contribute to a universalist politics assembled from the needs of every human, cutting across race, ability, economic standing, and geographical position." ¹¹

What would be the intersection that cuts across race, gender and class? I think to my love/hate relationship with potatoes.

Potato

The village I grew up in Hong Kong translates to “Water Banana Village.” Its name came from the domination of the overgrowth of banana trees in the natural landscape. Most of the village population were farmers which included my grandmother, who grew vegetables alongside keeping a livestock as a way to sustain a family. My grandmother was not a local to the village; she was sold to my great-grandfather as a child-bride and immediately became a maid, a caregiver to my great-grandparents and my grandfather, and later a mother to her six children.

With her hard work and beautifully grown vegetables my grandmother produced, it was never made apparent to me as to why her children (including my father) grew up suffering from

nutritional deficiency. The question of where the variety of vegetables grown in the farm went never got answered by the plate of stir-fried potato leaves on the table everyday. In the days before I was born, potato was food my family couldn’t afford to consume but needed to grow and sell. Potato is an ideal source of income and it is a quickly maturing vegetable that can be flipped between crops because it grows in such large quantity with little care. The veining potato leaves across the farm were consumed by my families while the potatoes were sold. The food market operated as a organized monitor dominated by men and was often “protected” by the local criminals. The local farmers would sell the produce to them for a controlled low price that the criminals would resell for a much higher price.

Do potatoes tell me anything about being a woman?

My grandmothers from both sides of my family each have six children. They could not afford to have less for numerous reasons. The most important reason is the extra labor in the farm and domestic maintenance as well as security for their elder life. In case of death of another child, they would rather to have too many children than not. My grandmother passed down this hot potato of being a woman to my mother. My mother produced another potato with her uterus that later became me; one of the many potatoes she was withholding in her basket, but this one sprouted. Everyone has seen the forgotten potatoes growing silently in the potato sack, and everyone has frowned upon the disgusting, wasted, toxic potatoes. Becoming a woman is similar to a potato sprouting; it is a raw, violent and grotesque experience. When we think about one day this little girl becoming a beautiful woman, we do not think about the potato which has been sitting in the potato sack for days, growing in the dark, sustaining itself on its own nutrients. Potatoes do not grow in a day and they don’t grow beautifully.
I am skeptical about potatoes because of the labor they require to grow and cook, the reward for having a potato is not appealing. Even with one of my mother’s specialties - potato, tomato and carrot soup, I still do not like it very much, not because of the taste, but I am skeptical about the overly lazy-looking potatoes, mingling amongst other vegetables in the hot broth without contributing much.

Potatoes in present times are no longer just vegetables but have become a highly sophisticated food produce through engineered and chemically processed: potato chips. I love potato chips. Potato chips are a status symbol. My mom’s potatoes get soaked in the hot broth, like a bathhouse with a bunch of mushy and soggy vegetables. Potato chips, however, get deep fried in hot oil and become crispy and edgy. The idea of being young and carefree is the image that comes when eating potato chips. We get into the communal bag of chips, digging into the fat and salt, delivering the chips into our mouths, licking and sucking on the remnants of salt on our fingers. This is the image of a potato chip eater. It is sensual, salt, and alluring without effort.

Potatoes tell me what has changed for a woman over the course of three generations and what has remained the same. Under capitalist development, the labor of women, children and the colonized populations have been and continue to be exploited and expected as part of the unpaid contribution to global capitalism. I cannot deny that many things have changed since my grandmother’s generation, however, some of the structures have also simply been hidden in different disguises.
For my thesis exhibition *Address the Line*, I have begun to reimage potatoes as racialized, gendered bodies eating themselves alive to grow. By the rancid smell and squishy touch to the body of the potato, you know they are absorbing themselves in order to sprout. Life and death happen simultaneously inside potatoes; it is an active negociation to give way. Something dies for those to live. Living takes new forms to survive. Within yourself, be ready to kill that which never lived, be able to live for those have killed. The line between surviving, living and decaying presented in potatoes is fascinating. The potatoes encapsulate the politics between recognizable and unrecognizable bodies.
To Judith Butler, the comprehension of recognisability depends on:

“...a normative ideal as a preexisting condition of our analysis; we have, in effect, already ‘recognized’ everything we need to know about recognition. There is no challenge that recognition poses to the form of the human that has traditionally served as the norm of recognizability, since personhood is that very norm.”

She then poses a key question:

“The point, however, will be to ask how such norms operate to produce certain subjects as “recognizable” persons and to make others decidedly more difficult to recognize.”

What is the measures and historical construction of a recognizable subject? To gain visibility to be a recognizable subject, one has to gain agency to control the framing of a narrative, refusing to fall into the cast role of victimhood by the hegemonic authority. This paradox of a non-recognizable life or a recognizable non-life in transference to agency through the passing of life and death is a common theme in the Japanese horror genre.

---

Ju-On: The Grudge is a Japanese horror movie beginning when Takeo finds out about his wife Kayako falling in love with another man. Takeo decides to kill his wife and their son Toshio. In the movie the officials documented the murder but did not look at the motive. It was merely framed as a domestic tragedy; Kayako and Toshio were invisible neighbors in the community, and their deaths were soon forgotten. Instead of falling into victimhood, Kayako and Toshio turn into two vengeful ghosts, haunting those who set foot in their home. It is through haunting that they are remembered and become visible. They gain agency to frame and claim their narrative in the moment when they turn into terrifying ghosts.
Address the Line (2019), installation view: Potato stamp carved into a potato inserted into another potato.
The line of this haunted home operates between life and death, human and non-human, danger and safety, violence and sexuality. This feeds into the thinking about the potatoes. I learned and walked this line to be a potato that survived; these potato bodies squirt liquids, juice, fluids, blood, cum into the water fountain, bathed in a bed of mixed fluids, perpetuating the cycle in the environment where they continue to grow and shrivel.

My thesis exhibition considers the notions of otherness as a survival coping mechanism in analyzing ways that identity politically distributed lines that differentiate surviving and living. To further problematize notions of otherness, the exhibition begins with an analysis of being “othered”, then departs from the bodily divide of “you” and “me” to instead demarcate paradigms of the possible overlapping space within oneself - when and how the “other” within ourselves become the acceptable subject and vice versa.

Fountain

Body water is the water content in an organic body, making up a significant fraction of a human body. The percentage of water contained in a mature human body ranges from 50-80% of the body mass. We are made out of water. We are water.

I was born in the mid-summer when the sun hangs high and the day treads long. The temperature often goes up to 100 degrees on an average day in Hong Kong. To avoid getting heat stroke, people need to take constant cold showers to cool off. In the village where I grew up before the sewer system was connected to our homes, there was a water fountain in the central area where the villagers would get water with buckets and proceed to carry them home. The water fountain was the heart of the village: it was the intersection of traffic, the gathering
place where people, animals and activities crossed boundaries. The significance of the water fountain differs sociologically and politically from those in the West.

Anonymous, Photo of Chinese rural residents collecting water from a communal well, China, in "記憶中的壓水井！你還記得嗎？," kknews,
http://affinitymagazine.us/2018/04/14/why-the-metoo-movement-is-so-important-to-south-korea/
Going to school in Canada, I had to connect buses at City Central where I would encounter a public fountain sculpture depicting a happy heteronormative family; the male as the foundational figure lifting up the female with an infant in her hands, both gazing upwards to the sky and the infant. The stream of water is projected upwards with air bubbles mixed in like hazy clouds. This picture speaks to me deeply of the ideological differences between the East and West. Water in the East was accessible to maintain everyday functions of the household. It was meant for sustaining life forms in the East, while in the West, water fountains are a display feature, a signifier for abandonment ejaculating into the sky and travelling with the wind, sowing this ideology into the world. The picture of the seemingly harmonic and joyous idealized white family represents the colonial mindset, how it imagines itself and how it defines the Other.
Address the Line (2019), *Keep It Wet*, ink drawing and enlarged screen print of a potato stamp, fountain.
Address the Line (2019), detail of the fountain.
As a woman of color whose cultural background overlaps in both the East and the West, I have experienced injustice based on my gender, race and class. I find it difficult to explain the contradictions and struggles in this sometimes in-between, sometimes overlapping space. I want to reconcile the differences I have with others and myself while at the same time honor the struggles I have overcome. The urge to construct my own water fountain becomes an opening for the intersectional conversation to happen.


*A way out of the mirror* is an installation by Canadian artist Geoffrey Farmer at the Canada Pavilion for the Venice Biennale. Attempting to address both global and personal histories, Farmer constructed the installation of a ruin using rubble from the site, invoking the
history of French occupation and how as a Canadian, he himself is complicit in the history.\textsuperscript{15} The chaos that happened in the ruins seems to be an aftermath of his grandfather’s car accident to which he claimed, “...tragedy and devastation are written not just in books, but also on our bodies, and how we must process this trauma through emotion. Through tears.”\textsuperscript{16} I am not certain if water in his installation is a stand in for his tears, but I have similar thoughts about how much information and emotions our bodies process before being addressed by our rational thoughts. Bodily fluids are a potion that transmits and processes emotions. Water transgresses and develops boundaries. The power in bodily fluids and water is what I want to communicate with the fountain in my thesis exhibition. Understanding what a line signifies and how and when it is drawn at the intersection facing others or with myself is a continuous negotiation. The fountain is a reflection to imagine; a reflection of an imagined-self that is constantly disrupted. There is never a fixed moment when we identify ourselves in this water; water moves and never goes in a single direction. This installation is an invitation to follow the water and refuse to walk a straight line.

\textsuperscript{16} Prata, “Geoffrey Farmer in Venice.”
*Address the Line* (2019), installation view: ink drawing and sprouting/rotting potatoes.
There have been many lines drawn to divide, lines that are imposed upon, and self-claimed to define one’s identity and position. Refusal needs to be our tactic when we see these lines. The fountain offers a form and a shape for us to take comfort in. Seemingly self-consistent, the fountain's form is one in constant movement where your reflection is never the same. The constantly shifting water will keep you from staying within the easily defined. Your definition instead comes from the shifting between the dead and alive, sloshing around like the fluids which intermittently leak from both yourself and the fountain. Even your body’s boundaries refuse easy definition when they are within movement, within flux, it always must be found within contemplation of this ever-changing reflection.

Conclusion

If someone were to ask me once again, “if you were given an option, would you choose to be a woman again?”, my answer would remain the same. Only this time I would answer the question with a sense of acceptance. Instead of repressing memories from some of my experiences and desires as a woman, I chose to move forward differently this time. Feminist discourse has been a compass for me to navigate my personal history, visiting places that I was terrified of returning to and confronting. It was a journey in searching for ways to accept myself. In going down this path I have collected many stories alongside my own. Bodily processes and unresolved emotions have been stored and neglected for years. These emotions have manifested in my bodily pains. By slowly gathering pieces of the rejected others, I am able to accept myself as whole. This wholeness isn’t one that makes my body unitary, but rather my wholeness is made up of many contradicting parts. Address the Line is a process of
acknowledgement: that a wholeness can contain contradictions and differences, that the potato can be both soup and chip and, a personal distaste for soup can still hold love for the chip.

Water, on the other hand, is ceaseless when it cannot be contained like emotions and pain. The process of acceptance and understanding is ceaseless as well, a single drop of water can ripple and move a whole body of water. Potatoes and water push the bounding lines within their restrictive environments, refusing to be contained. We all have lines that we draw, we are all responsible to adjust these lines as we move, and to refuse to have our lines redrawn for us.
Bibliography


