

2017

## Baby's Day Out

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# BABY'S DAY OUT

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Art

in

The School of Art

by  
Andrea Berg  
B.A., Binghamton University, 2010  
August 2017

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone that I have known! It is only through the endless constellations of thoughts that are produced through comparison and contrast with other people's experiences that I feel like I begin to understand "what is this thing— human being<sup>1</sup>" and what is this thing— the world. People are always showing me different modes of thinking and approaching the world that are immeasurably interesting. I appreciate everyone on my committee for their feedback and encouragement. Also, I would like to thank Samuel Beckett for his existentially charged descriptions of the simultaneity of acuity and torpidity that are ever-present in human life:

All this business of a labour to accomplish, before I can end, of words to say, a truth to recover, in order to say it, before I can end, of an imposed task, once known, long neglected, finally forgotten, to perform, before I can be done with speaking, done with listening, I invented it all, in the hope it would console me, help me to go on, allow me to think of myself as somewhere on a road, moving, between a beginning and an end, gaining ground, losing ground, getting lost, but somehow in the long run making headway.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This quotation refers to the anxious but silly chorus of The Wipers in their song "What Is" (Sage 1983).

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Beckett. *Three Novels by Samuel Beckett: Molloy, Malone Dies, the Unnamable*. New York: Grove Press, 1965.

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## **Abstract**

Relying on memory and emotion I created a series of abstract figurative paintings. I sought to create images which could facilitate the exploration of fantasy in terms of the collusion of the subjective and objective realms. Exploring my daily experience as a visual diary, I tried not to capture literal experiences but to create dream-like representations of psychic and emotional states. I focused on figurative forms using fleshy pinks, purples, and yellows to cloak the figures in colors that could reference the inner and outer body. Claustrophobic space, biomorphic shapes, and symbolic characterizations are some of the ways that I sought to fuse the figures within a psychological space. The images were developed through a surrealist-inspired automatism in which quick mark-making, intuition, and gestural brushwork were at play. The images were then edited in order to create environments that could elicit emotional and psychic crystallizations reminiscent of dreams, poems, secret whispers, unconscious fantasies, and delusions.

## Introduction

My current body of work is about the relationship between figures and the psychological landscapes they inhabit. These figures and their environment are explored in oil paint and represent different emotional states and characters. I used an intuitive approach in order to allow for unconscious feelings, thoughts, or memories to register in unexpected ways<sup>3</sup>. I work spontaneously with the materials to allow a compelling visual trace of the process that occurred during the act of painting. I then develop this gestural remnant into a finished work which preserves the mark-making qualities that generated the initial image. These final images often maintain enough ambiguity to allow for a variety of interpretations with regard to what meaning is produced and what content is depicted. I am interested in developing the work into images that seem best able to reflect emotions and sensations accessible within memories or dreams and which can also unfold as an abstract visual diary.

When the conscious mind tries to access dreams or memories, it can feel as if there is an undulating surface that obscures as much as it reveals. This occurs when a hand tries to grasp into a clear pond to pick out a beautiful stone. Once the hand enters the water, the image and location of the stone immediately become hopelessly fragmented by the hands' reverberations across the water. The waves, caused by the hand, shatter the coherency of the previously clear

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<sup>3</sup> This was influenced by the Surrealist's use of automatism. Surrealism was an artistic movement in the early 1920s that sought to fuse dream and reality worlds in order to liberate artistic and revolutionary potential. They sought to explore the unconscious and dream states through surprise, non sequiturs, and unusual comparisons between objects or ideas. Automatism, spontaneously creating without censoring or premeditating the resultant content, was a central method they utilized in order to achieve these ends. Mary Ann Caws, *Surrealism*, (London: Phaidon, 2004), 40-65.

image that was shimmering beneath the surface. This is often the uncanny sensation or miasma that occurs when we try to access those parts of ourselves that are so close that they are inaccessible: the unconscious as it appears in dreams and memory.<sup>4</sup>

Within dream and memory, psychic kernels of interactions are represented in symbolic ways that can disrupt our customary experience of the rational world. Time and space take on psychological and symbolic qualities that form constellations of emotional coordinates rather than clear and assignable concrete meanings.<sup>5</sup> For example, memories and dreams can be clusters of synesthesia in which thought, sights, sound, emotions, and setting become indistinguishable. It is the collusion of all these elements that creates a sensation or emotion like a tickle on the tongue. Seeing a woman at the grocery store could register symbolically as an earlier or more ideal version of oneself, as a literally separate body in space, as a symbolic manifestation of hunger, or hold any number of possible associations for the viewer.

Slavoj Žižek explores this slippery slope between the dream world and a more objective sense of reality within his term-coordinates “subjectively objective” and “objectively subjective”. In *The Fright of Real Tears*,<sup>6</sup> he describes the phenomena of “subjective objectivity” as the way in which our individual sense of objective reality is necessarily flavored by our personal psychic and emotional orientations. “Objective subjectivity,” on the other hand,

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<sup>4</sup> Within the subjective realm, the unconscious motivations that propel our actions and desires are attributable to the unconscious and the play of the different psychological modalities (the id, the ego, and the superego). Psychoanalysis is one method which attempts to expose the source content that is driving a particular psychological constellation. Since excavating the source material that drives unconscious behavior breaks the antagonism which propels the ego there is a sense in which the site of our psyche is always cloaked in an uncanniness. An influential core kernel of our being must always remain inaccessible which makes us unknowable to ourselves. Slavoj Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieslowski between theory and post-theory*, (London: British Film Institute, 2009), 35-39.

<sup>5</sup> McGowan, Todd. "Finding Ourselves on a 'Lost Highway': David Lynch's Lesson in Fantasy." *Cinema Journal* 39, no. 2 (2000): 51-73. <http://www.jstor.org.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/stable/1225552>.

<sup>6</sup> Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears*, 50-67.

describes how our innermost feelings regarding private encounters, in terms of emotion and interpersonal interactions, are inextricably conditioned by the forces that surround us. The objective world intercedes in our identities in the sense that even our innermost thoughts and feelings are conditioned by our surroundings— the environs of the objective reality that are all around us.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, the dream world of intuitive emotions and the objective landscape of a rational reality that these individuals operate within become scrambled. Psychological states of mind are explored through reference to landscape and ambiguous environments. Images could be read as paranoid explorations of subjective objectivity or hijacked psyches at the mercy of objective subjectivity.<sup>8</sup> He describes this intertwining between subjective and objective reality in his descriptions of reality:

...it is not just a question of seeing things (that is, social reality) as they 'really are,' of throwing away the distorting spectacles of ideology; the main point is to see how the reality itself cannot reproduce itself without this so-called ideological mystification. The mask is not simply hiding the real state of things; the ideological distortion is written into its very essence... the moment we see it 'as it really is,' this being dissolves itself into nothingness or, more precisely, it changes into another kind of reality. That is why we must avoid simple metaphors of demasking, of throwing away the veils which are supposed to hide the naked reality.<sup>9</sup>

In such a world analogy takes the reigns; a problematic television commercial could effectively function as a furnace which engulfs the viewer. In the painting *Doily Rage* (Figure 1), a fire-tentacle connects an ethereal figure with a box-like television apparatus or bed. The tentacle can be read as an umbilical cord, tail, disintegrating smoke arm, radiant light, or lightning bolt. This association block references a spectator sitting in their living room, privy to

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<sup>7</sup> Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears*, 26-36.

<sup>8</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (United Kingdom: Verso Books, 1989), 24-35.

<sup>9</sup> Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 24-25.



the influences from the caged box that seethes beneath the doily that sprouts above the news-delivery machine. Explosive and fiery emotions swirl around the character. The excessive lines permeating out of the figure's left arm and head reference motion and transformation. Perhaps the character is tuning out the fire burning behind them with the spectacle of the doily box (aware or unaware of the image emerging behind them) or their interaction with the box is creating psychic environments within their inner bodies that is symbolically related to the imagery behind them (the obvious association that links fire with anger or anxiety).

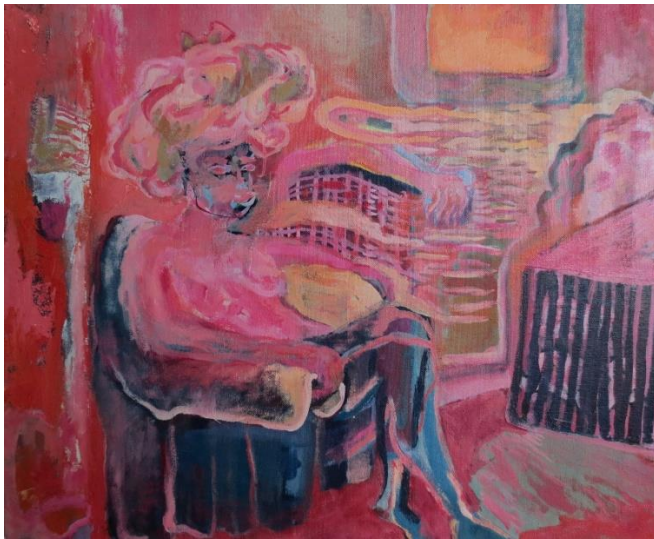


Figure 1. *Doily Rage*. Oil on Canvas. 2016. 18 x 22.

Without a clear answer to the visual information, the viewer is left to interpret the images as they might approach a distant memory or a fading dream. Meaning oscillates within the moments where several competing narratives are possible. This is done in order to approach the painting, less as legible answer present to the viewer, but as a subjective journey within competing narratives or accounts. The pink ghost image of the left arm wafts up, its form echoed, in the middle puff of a bone-meal arm in the middle (punctuating the wicker cross-hatched detail shot of the possible fiber configuration of the living-room-chair) of the two arms.

In this projected image, the future seems to be referenced, perhaps the future hand of the new person that is created in a moment of transformation.

Sense-making requires both frivolity and earnestness. A baby's day out requires relationships between bodies that are necessarily messy. The baby learns new signs and gestures which constantly redefine the contours of their sense of the world. Life is teeming with traumatic newness. Within the baby-freshness of play is the search for meaning outside of codified systems of control (the baby doesn't know what is appropriate or how subtle social cues operate) and a genuine appraisal of the world through phenomenological experimentation.<sup>10</sup> Thus the confusion present within the perceptions of a baby can lend itself to experimentation outside of what seems possible. A baby may perform the impossible (pooping in a shoe during a party quite casually) because not all their behavior and thoughts are confined within predictable avenues of expectation.

Dreams are another scenario within our everyday experience where constellations of associations are subject to individual interpretation. Making sense from the images are similarly based on each person's unique perspective and emotions. In *Subterranean Paranoia* (Figure 2), there is a blue figure on the top right of the painting that is made entirely of repeated blue contour lines tracing the form of the smiling cartoon face. The form is rendered more through its absence (in the sense that the insides of the figure are not painted but the contours trace the boundary between the character and its environment). The large blue blob erupting from the right upper hand side of the figure's head can be read as two things: a face with a unicorn nose and a

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Smith's performance character "Baby Ikki" uses ironically biting humor to highlight the tensions between the newness of a baby's phenomenological habits and the form of the adult human in his experimental performance work. Galleria Emi Fontana. "Michael Smith performing Baby Ikki at Galleria Emi Fontana". Filmed [January 2009]. YouTube video, 7:30. Posted [January 2009]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQZbgRtyKhk>.

tiny red eye looking to the right in the uppermost top right-hand corner of the panel and as a melting blue monster face with one protruding eye and a protruding red tongue (Figure 3).



Figure 2. *Subterranean Paranoia*. Oil on Panel. 2016. 32 x 48



Figure 3. *Subterranean Paranoia*. Oil on panel. Digitally Manipulated Detail.

## Process and Influences

Influenced by the spontaneous mark-making traditions, developed within surrealism and expressionism, I use the creative process to uncover psychological dreamscapes. New horizons of possibility are constantly at play in the process of art making. By attempting to make work without recourse to rationally predetermined imagery, I am interested in allowing images to emerge from the process itself. Each new line builds a new set of expectations or avenues. By spontaneously dissecting space with line, color, mass, or shape, a response is elicited until the stages of the process result in various resting places. This type of intuitive approach allows for the unexpected to occur and operates on formal as well as psychological levels. Responding to intuition, memory, and emotions the work often takes on autobiographical qualities and aligns itself with other artists concerned with the exploring the psychological realm.

Charlotte Salomon was a Jewish-German artist born in Berlin in 1917 who is most famous for a serial work containing hundreds of gauche paintings. In Salomon's work *Leben? oder Theater?: Ein Singspiel* she creates a visual diary of hundreds of paintings (Figure 4), accompanied by text, and songs that she references, in order to tell the story of her life. Her personal life intersects with the theater in the sense that her staging and recording of life creates a feedback loop where the two spheres become indistinguishable. Similarly, her personal life became swept up in the political theater of the Nazi's aesthetic project of creating a white Aryan race that resulted in Salomon being killed in a concentration camp in 1943 following the rushed end of her serial work (mentioned above). Her personal story is transformed into an allegory which extends and communicates her life experience. Similarly, I am also interested in using my personal life as a source of inspiration by harnessing my daily emotional and psychic concerns to

create imagery (mine often becomes entangled with the unconscious). I also rely on the format of a visual diary as a means to communicate beyond my individual experience. By creating emotional and psychological vignettes I hope to share a sense of my experience of the world with other people. I also generated work through intuitive mark-making which could build up a serial work with a sense of narrative (though my use of narrative is more ethereal than Salomon's).



Figure 4. Charlotte Salomon. *Leben? Oder Theater?: Ein Singspiel*. Guache. 1940-1942.

Cecily Brown provides mark-making possibilities with regard to constructing images that abstractly involve bodies in space by utilizing fleshy, organic brushstrokes that conjure associations with the body.<sup>11</sup> Through this mark-making, she is able to indicate the dynamism present within our experience of the world. Figures seem caught in motion. Biomorphic shapes, and the sensations they leave as they slip out of grasp, highlight the processes are present within the abstracted representations of bodies. Although the forms remain abstracted we get a sense

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<sup>11</sup> Cecily Brown is a British painter born in 1969 known for her gestural abstract painting that delves into topics such as temporality and sexuality. Cecily Brown and Dore Ashton, *Cecily Brown*, (New York: Rizzoli in Collaboration with Gagosian Gallery, 2008), 34-44.



that we are seeing the traces of a recent experience tracked across the surface of the painting. Through fragmentation the images take on interpretive possibilities that rely on the viewer to complete them (Figure 5). This spontaneous mark-making allows for an indeterminacy to remain within her work which references the psychological fragmentation and buoyancy that lurks underneath chrysalises of reality. In this reality, what may have appeared to be a bush of patterned light can quickly turn into a romantic encounter between two characters who hatched out of amorphous contortions of space and color.



Figure 5. Cecily Brown. *Teenage Wildlife*. Oil on Canvas. 2003.

The indeterminacy that lurks beneath the consistency and coherency we project onto objective reality contains a political dimension: By layering competing manifestations together, images can be read through a simultaneity that reveals the competing aspects of reality that are bound up within each other. The interpretive aspect involved in assessing objective reality is revealed by such psychological experiments as the investigations of Joseph Jastrow.<sup>12</sup> His work

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<sup>12</sup> Joseph Jastrow was a Polish-American psychologist who utilized optical illusions to speak to the nature of perception. Hull, Clark L. "Joseph Jastrow: 1863-1944." *The American Journal of Psychology*, vol. 57, no. 4, 1944, pp. 581–585., [www.jstor.org/stable/1417259](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1417259).

revealed that what we experience or see is not representative of an easily assignable reality but is a mental activity that relies on mood, psychological inclinations, and context. In Jastrow's investigations, he gives people a drawing to look at that looks equally like a rabbit or a duck (Figure 6). Depending on how the viewer initially perceives the image, either animal may take priority in their mind, either a duck or a rabbit will emerge in the place of the other. This causes competing factual claims about what constitutes their sense of objective reality. They either think "this is a rabbit" or "this is a duck."

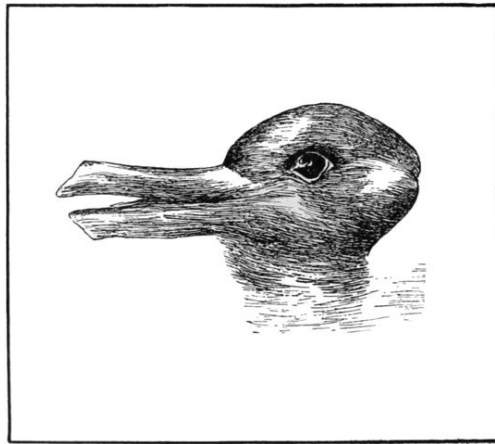


Figure 6. Joseph Jastrow. *Duck/Rabbit*. 1895.

Through these visual exercises the relativity of our sensory perception (and the accompanying judgements about what is real) is revealed. What the viewer thinks is depicted may slowly shift based on the length of exposure that the viewer engages in; the more of the fullness of the image that they witness, the more apparent it becomes that what was subliminally repressed (by the mind's tendency to create hierarchies of meaning in order to establish coherency) may emerge. This lesson in the relativity of perception can carry into other aspects of one's life. It causes the participants to realize that the way they interpret the images around them dictates, to a large degree, what their sense of reality is. By allowing some traces or marks in the

paintings to be read as pure color and pattern, abstracted from the utility of accurately describing space or light, I can similarly engage in a sense of play with the spatial read of the painting.

Pure perceptual patterns that can disrupt the image are better able to keep the image bracketed in the sense that it reminds the viewer that they are approaching pigments on a flat surface and emphasize psychological exploration rather than a clear realistic depiction of space.<sup>13</sup> Formally, Hans Hofmann's idea of push/pull was helpful in creating a sense of dissonance which could capture the chaotic instability present in an individual's psychically charged life journey. It can also remind the viewer that they are approaching a two-dimensional representation of reality that continually disrupts the illusory nature of the artwork. Through the careful study of blocking color Hofmann was able to highlight the tension that is created through the way our eyes react to color (Figure 7).<sup>14</sup> A wall that is behind a desk will appear closer to the viewer if, for example, it is a warmer temperature than the desk and this discombobulation will play out in the resultant visual image.



Figure 7. Hans Hofmann. *Equinox*. Oil on Canvas. 1958.

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<sup>13</sup> Bracketing is a strategic philosophical move developed by Edmund Husserl (a German philosopher credited with founding Phenomenology). In this mode of investigation, truths about the natural world, things-in-themselves, are suspended. For example, the reality of a chair is not put up for debate but instead it is merely bracketed. Supposing the chair exists, the philosopher is now able to analyze their own experience of the chair. This kind of investigation emphasizes the experiences and interpretations of the human mind. Smith, A. David. "Husserl and Externalism." *Synthese*, vol. 160, no. 3, 2008, pp. 313–333., [www.jstor.org/stable/27653668](http://www.jstor.org/stable/27653668).

<sup>14</sup> Cynthia Goodman, *Hans Hofmann*, (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1990), 33.



This sense of ambiguity captures the emotional and psychological play constantly at work beneath the surface of perception. In the paintings of Oskar Kokoschka<sup>15</sup>, visual possibilities for constructing psychological landscapes are explored through the interpretive play of color and expressionist mark-making. His landscape paintings seem to reference someone's experience witnessing the land and the inner journey that is conjured rather than the particularities of the location in isolation (Figure 8). The emphasis is not on the realistic depiction of a particular landscape, dutifully transposed from observation, but on the intertwining of the viewing body and environment or landscape.



Figure 8. Oskar Kokoschka. *Montana Landscape*. Oil on Canvas. 1947.

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<sup>15</sup> Oskar Kokoschka was an Austrian artist, playwright, and poet who lived between 1886 and 1980. Richard Calvocoressi, Oskar Kokoschka, and Katharina Schulz, *Oskar Kokoschka, 1886-1980*, (New York: S.R. Guggenheim Museum, 1987), 1-10.

## Relationships and Intelligibility: Sense Making from the Baby Body

The shallow space within the paintings eludes more to fantasy than to a specific, actual location in geographical space: a site in which disparate elements can meet and momentarily take shape. Hazy sheens of form speak more to parody and allegory than to specifically rendered individuals within their own demarcated time and space: this isn't Marge wearing her green sweater on a Tuesday drinking her daily cup of breakfast tea but the allegorical woman-child-bushy-haired-spindle-woman-metamorphisizing-into-pink-cloud-prisma-memory-time-vapor. In other words, the figures depicted aren't part of a specific time and space that situates them within a logical continuity but act more as symbolic representations of emotions or dreams.

Fantasy in this sense relates less to the surrealist flight from rationality and anti-art sensibilities and more to how interpretation (the creation of meaning) is co-determinate in the construction of objective reality itself and is anything but antithetical to systems of power<sup>16</sup>. The emancipatory power of fantasy comes in the recognition of the co-determination of fact and fiction rather than the exoticization of fantasy or the unconscious as such. This can be achieved through allowing for the participation of the viewer in decoding what they see in the painting and through creating psychological and emotional reactions that allow viewers to investigate their own inner worlds through comparison or contrast.

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<sup>16</sup> It is often fantasy itself that is deployed by the dominating sociopolitical bodies that Surrealism naively deems as the inverse of the creative unconscious (or at least an idea of the unconscious as it manifests in dream imagery and creative wit). Hannah Arendt locates Fascism's power and efficacy in a master narrative's ability to mobilize desire. The desire for coherency and solidity, offered by powerful propaganda machines within the Nazi and Stalinist Fascist movements, provided an unconscious site of national myth-making that mobilized people around concepts of anti-Semitism that caused people to conflate and ultimately forfeit their assessments of fact and fiction. Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, (New York: Meridian Books, 1958), 113-205.

Distorted space, comic figures, and humor speak to the psychological and emotional world. In *Jejune, Too Soon* (Figure 9), a girl looks towards the coveted (and humorously cliché) icon of childlike majesty and wonder- a unicorn! Fixation on this could mean a jejune preoccupation with adolescence/childhood or a healthy investment in the transcendent. The camouflaged figure of the boy could be an earlier or later version of herself (waiting to or having just emerged) or he could be an additional character curious about some of her features, about to or having just emerged or dissolved into or away from her psychic horizon. The character in front is spliced in a somewhat comic way as though a commentator or jester character framing the scene or a sarcastic inner or outer voice.



Figure 9. *Jejune, Too Soon*. Oil on Panel. 2016. 24 x 16.

The images can elicit emotions and act as vignettes of elaborated Rorschach tests<sup>17</sup>. This projective psychological test was developed by Hermann Rorschach and used widely in the 1960s. Psychologists would give patients biomorphic inkblot images in order to examine aspects of the patient's personality or emotional functioning. Psychologists would assess this functioning by allowing the people to respond to ambiguous catalysts and then seeing what hidden feelings or antagonisms that patient projects onto the stimuli. Ambiguous images can act as armatures for the viewer to rest their psyche on for a moment of reflection and act as points of departure for individual explorations.

Maybe more questions than answers ensue: Is the powerful visualizer, looking towards their transcendent goals or visions (in *Jejune, Too Soon*), a stand in for the future self of the dissolving onlooker (the 'boy' in the front) or is she a projected fantasy figure that the 'boy' subject itself holds as a threatening memory of his own past? How and why does the 'central' figure (in terms of scale and sharpness of detail) abscond in his environment? How do these movements within the painting effect the interpretation that the viewer has of the image? At a macroscopic level, how are the subjects defined with regard to their surroundings? Or, if they are read as multiple iterations of one figure, what kind of space does that figure inhabit?

David Lynch often mobilized this kind interpretive fantasy, bordering on kitsch or cliché, in his movies in order to present a more accurate depiction of psychological space: For example, in the movie *Lost Highway*, the main character (Fred Madison) morphs into a completely

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<sup>17</sup> Garb, Howard N., et al. "The Validity of the Rorschach and the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory: Results from Meta-Analyses." *Psychological Science*, vol. 9, no. 5, 1998, pp. 402–404., [www.jstor.org/stable/40063327](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40063327).

different character half way through the movie (Pete Dayton).<sup>18</sup> The relationship between these two characters is left up in the air. It is possible that Pete is a symbolic character acting out Fred's repressed fantasy world or that Pete is a projected version of Fred's own self that allows Fred to distance himself from his own actions. The relationships between the characters become less narrative and take on psychological and symbolic dimensions. Navigating this fantasy universe requires all the interpretive tools that are required in constructing sense from something as ambiguous as a dream. There is ultimately no objectively true answer or meaning of the film that is authoritative. The most impactful aspect of the film instead seems to lie in the structure which juxtaposes psychically charged content together in order to allow people to make connections between concepts that are emotionally or psychologically pertinent.

Fantasy at this level is fully engaged with investigating the atemporal and poetic dimensions that can connect bodies together and situate them within space. By breaking the temporal continuum, through a kind of psychic simultaneity, Lynch is able to juxtapose psychological realms from different times and hold them side by side in order to speak to the accumulated and dissonant experience of reality. This opens up time and space to be interpreted in existential ways in that it shows our sense of objective reality as a partial view of the world. What we have access to at any given time is determined by our vantage point (temporally, socially, and spatially) and is thus subjectively objective. Fantasy can also operate with regard to the objectively subjective. If we are projecting our subjective worlds into objective reality, what does that subjective world consist of and how is it shaped by the surrounding environment?

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<sup>18</sup> McGowan, Todd. "Finding Ourselves on a 'Lost Highway': David Lynch's Lesson in Fantasy." *Cinema Journal* 39, no. 2 (2000): 51-73. <http://www.jstor.org.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/stable/1225552>.

Foucault's idea of biopower, developed throughout his books and omnipresent within the *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, speaks to some of the more indomitable aspects of objective subjectivity. Biopower refers to the fact that power apparatuses no longer simply log the death rate for their governmental records but actually proactively try to shape subjects within the population. This is done through creating discourse surrounding things like nutrition (as it related to life expectancy) and identity in order to control populations of people and shape them at the individual, psychic level into ideal subjects to be dominated within the constraints of modernity.<sup>19</sup> Whereas feudal life involved sometimes arbitrary death sentences, meted out by the royalty, biopower instilled a constant surveillance and control methodology that interceded in the subject's daily life. The intended result was the internalization of systematized modes of operating that would condition subjectivity within disciplinary constraints.

Hair, screaming mouths, and intestines filter into the mix in the sense that personal, bodily, domestic habits and conditions are simultaneously private and public. Private in the sense that life is experienced by each being from the standpoint of one isolated body. Public in the sense that bodies in space are conceptualized and spatially organized within society based on preexisting sociopolitical dictates and patterns. This accounts for one possible source for the attenuation of subjects or bodies in space. They become diminutive and disperse as they are conditioned and influenced by looming structures of control. Again, Žižek's descriptive terms

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<sup>19</sup> For example, with the age of reason, madness was framed less as a holy departure into cosmic tragedy and more as a moral failure that should result in confinement. This was largely motivated by Capitalist tendencies to create a convenient narrative for removing undesirables and the hope to control unemployment and wages. Foucault, Michel, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, (London: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 133-160.

“objectively subjective” and “subjectively objective”, are relevant here in tracing these political undercurrents and the resultant feedback loops that condition the figure in space and vice versa.<sup>20</sup>

Intestines can be a symbol for tunnels and digestion both physically (the strangeness of the material world- my thoughts are housed in my particular body), politically (in the *biopower* sense) and symbolically (as in the idea of trying to ‘swallow’ emotions or feeling like one’s insides are tied up in knots). The build-up of crusts of oil paint reference scabs and crusts which may reference the internal functions bubbling beneath the surface of bodies or may highlight the materiality of the paint and its connection to the material nature of the world as such (the paint is made of material just like our own bodies). The color schemes of many of the paintings reference organs and flesh: pastel pinks and purples problematize the inner and outer world distinctions as landscapes rendered in pinks begin to look like giant stomachs or hearts. They are rendered in a cheesy way in the sense that organs are actually grey until oxygenated and it is only through a symbolic register that we associate hearts and organs with red. This playfully kitsch tonality allows the paintings to engage serious topics, such as life and death, without falling into the hackneyed pitfalls of over-sentimentality. Irony, in this case, allows the paintings to allude to their own clumsiness and arbitrariness in order to more potently deliver their imagery.

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<sup>20</sup> Slavoj Žižek. *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieslowski between theory and post-theory*, (London: British Film Institute, 2009), 33-40.

## Conclusion

When the fantasy world is held close to our conscious minds for reflection and contemplation it can register as a text which shatters our neat distinctions between objectivity and subjectivity (as previously explored within Žižek's thought and within Foucault's investigations into biopower). Trying to situate oneself in one's surroundings can often take on an uncanny otherness and dislocation that is often heightened or overemphasized in the symbolic and emotional landscape of dream and memory. In order to capture and communicate this, legibility is problematized in the painted images in order to produce a more faithful recapitulation of the confusion that accompanies the experience of life in its fullness or eventfulness<sup>21</sup>.

The landscape of the living room when viewed with contempt (bursting into flames as with *Doily Rage*) or the landscape of legs becoming engulfed into a rocky substrate of an ocean seaside (conflating self and environment) fuse the body with its environment. Fluidity becomes the operative term that connects and accurately navigates the indeterminacy that is visually present. Playfulness and intuitive mark-making allow for psychological and emotional exploration which allow a psychological and emotional view of the body and its relationship to the experience of life. This is conceptually epitomized in the writing of Samuel Beckett in his attenuated descriptions of psychic life where many times the stuffing is bursting out the seams disrupting the tidy borders between bodies and space. Characters are dislocated in the simplest routine acts (losing their place within the coordinates of space and being unable to use their legs to walk and then eventually stand).

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<sup>21</sup> François Raffoul, *The Origins of Responsibility*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 22-37.



The body begins to merge with its surroundings often in a self-conscious way as though to say:

Tottering over to the image of me

Three days before

Bulging, like a was-mouse-body

Contracting its way through

A snake-body.

Snake body with goobs of carcass

Passing through turns thin-body-fat-body.

Baby's bodies soft and fetid

Sss sss... Ssoooooo sssoooooofftttt

Even a hard fall bounces off of the soft-skull; \*Giggles\*.

Out among the people and bobs up and down.

A tod of hair balanced on its mouse-snake-body.

Dull nods.

Baby Falls Asleep.

“The blue face! The obscene protrusion of the tongue! The tumefaction of the penis! The penis, well now, that's a surprise, I'd forgotten I had one. What a pity I have no arms, there might still be something to be wrung from it.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Beckett, Samuel, Patrick Bowles, Samuel Beckett, Samuel Beckett, and Samuel Beckett, *Three Novels by Samuel Beckett: Molloy, Malone Dies, the Unnamable*, (New York: Grove Press), 165.

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## Vita

Andrea Berg received her B.A. in Studio Art from the State University of New York at Binghamton in 2010. She studied painting and philosophy and was an active participant in organizing bodies responsible for various music and art programming. She moved to Philadelphia where she continued to participate in various activities related to art such as showing work in galleries and painting. She moved to Baton Rouge to pursue her Master of Fine Art degree at Louisiana State University.