

Stress and angst of a material body: waste and disgust in the Built
Environment.

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Abstract

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Through both imagery of a grotesque body and through symbolism of industrial materials, my work reveals a visceral connection between a damaged body and a mutilated environment. This is a result of man's irresponsible use of material through the construction and deconstruction of our built environment.

Problem: I want people to notice this stressful and unhealthy condition

Method: I build anthropomorphic sculptural forms using poured concrete, hand built ceramic, industrial steel and other found materials.

Result: to elicit a human empathetic response and understanding of materiality through sensate corporeal structures that embodies stress and angst.

Conclusion/implications: I have developed a physical language with a palette that speaks to exposes the grotesque qualities of material.

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1. Influences

Growing up in Seattle and attending college in Chicago, I have been surrounded by dense urban Architecture for most of my life. While Studying ceramics and sculpture at the Art Institute of Chicago, I couldn't resist being inspired by the sheer size and quantity of Chicago's urban center. Though the inspiration from these architectural forms was great, in return there was a void of nature within the dense urban landscape of Chicago. As time went on, my interest in architecture moved further away from an inspiration and developed more into a critique of it. In the studio I started to build, design and imagine my work as an alternative response to the formal and capitalistic forces that build and design our cities.

With this notion, I started to investigate Antonio Gaudi and Friedensreich Hundertwasser. Both of these architect's designs contrasted the conservative and capitalistic design of our cities, by embracing a harmonious relationship with nature, art and a respect for individualism.

Through research I became enamored with Gaudi's, Park Güell in Barcelona. Resting on top Barcelona's high hills, Gaudi created a masterful city park, blending natural features, art, unique architecture, and open space. Completed in 1914, the park still stands, providing Barcelona with beautiful refuge from the city below.



1. Large vernacular retaining structure, Park Güell



2. Planter, Park Güell



3. Mosaic window with Vernacular structure. Park Güell

All photos taken by me, from a research trip funded by the Wally Grant during my artist residency at Pottery Northwest in 2016. During my travels I visited Barcelona to See Gaudi and Vienna to see Hundertwasser's Architecture.

Viennese artist and architect, Friedensreich Hundertwasser's colorful and naturalistic architecture inspired by his paintings responded to the asphyxiating formalism of the Vienna city streets. Hundertwasser's buildings were built with organic, colorful shapes, and flooded with natural features. He planted trees on balconies (*assigning them as tree tenants*) and was one of the first to include green roof technology into city buildings back in the 1980's. Identifying as a painter, he called himself an artist who was able to design buildings.



4. Hundertwasserhaus, Vienna. *Photo taken by me, 2016.*



5. Hundertwasser- Agip Service Station, model, 1989.



6. Kawakawa toilets, Liz Lewis NZ

As both Gaudi and Hundertwasser have provided me the roots of my interest in alternative architecture and it's ecological inclusion, my interests have further developed since studying in Chicago 10 years ago.

When I moved back to Seattle in 2015, I witnessed a changing landscape. The skyline was being deconstructed to allow for the new constructions of buildings for Amazon, Google, Facebook and supporting firms.



7. 3-year time lapse video of South Lake Union growth by Ricardo Martin Brualla.

This video provides visual insight to the rapid deconstruction and construction of South Lake Union, an area in Seattle where Amazon occupies much of the 19% of all prime office space in city.¹

¹ <https://www.seattletimes.com/business/amazon/thanks-to-amazon-seattle-is-now-americas-biggest-company-town/>

Right before my eyes, I saw the demolition of functional structures to make way for new corporate infrastructure. In addition to this, homebuilders were taking advantage of the rising costs of rent and influx of new residents. Preexisting homes were torn down for the construction of luxury homes and apartments built for high paid tech workers. A 2019 report from the Seattle times stated that 10.5% of all available apartments for rent in Seattle are left empty. And while these units remain empty, *“A total of 24,000 units are under construction or scheduled to begin in 2019, with a pipeline for future potential projects at 34,000 units”*²

Witnessing Seattle transform like this was hard to take in, and as both a builder and sculptor; I felt some of the guilt of this. While working as a carpenter’s apprentice, I saw first hand the exponential waste that goes in and out of the asphyxiating process of constructing and demolishing. I have seen people tear out perfectly good bathrooms and kitchens in order to put in new ones. I’ve seen material waste coming in and going out through these processes (to the dump and back to the lumberyard.)

Through many years of working landscaping, carpentry and labor jobs I have developed a deep sensitivity and visceral understanding of this material waste and excessive use. With my experiences as a builder, I have witnessed this disgust first hand and thinking about it on a larger scale provides an anxiety and paranoia I cannot avoid.

² <https://www.seattletimes.com/business/real-estate/amid-building-boom-1-in-10-seattle-apartments-are-empty-and-rents-are-dropping/>

2. Anthropocene

Anthropocene “*relating to or denoting the current geological age, viewed as the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment.*” Oxford Dictionary.

For me, the Anthropocene epoch has been something that I have referenced and embodied throughout my research and in the making of my thesis work. Because my work references this geological activity, specifically in the critique of our use of materials, it has been crucial for me to understand this era more from a research background.

From the film *Anthropocene: The Human Epoch*, Researchers say that we have entered the Anthropocene epoch “*because humans now have changed the earth and its systems more than all natural processes combined.*”

It is said that, “*Humans extract 60-100 BILLION tons from Earth every year and Move more sediment than all the rivers in the world combined.*”³

As I have researched about material use and waste in the Anthropocene age, I have in return found it important to learn more about the implications of the materials that build our city environments. Specifically, understanding what concrete is has been important, for it is a major material used in my work.

³ [Jennifer Baichwal](#), [Nicholas de Pencier](#) and [Edward Burtynsky](#). *Anthropocene: The Human Epoch*, 2018, film documentary

Concrete

Mined from Lime quarries, the material has to be heated to 1650 °F - 1800°F in order for it to turn into castable cement, there is an automatic CO2 output.

The material itself is responsible for 4-8% of the worlds CO2.

If the production of concrete were its own country it would be the third largest carbon emitter after China and the US. On top of that, it uses a 10th of the Worlds industrial water, and 75% of this is in drought and water stressed regions.⁴

When I look at these numbers and when I see first hand the overuse of this material in the urban environment, I in return have no doubt in my mind that our infatuation and reliance of this material is devastating our Earth.



Extraction



Production



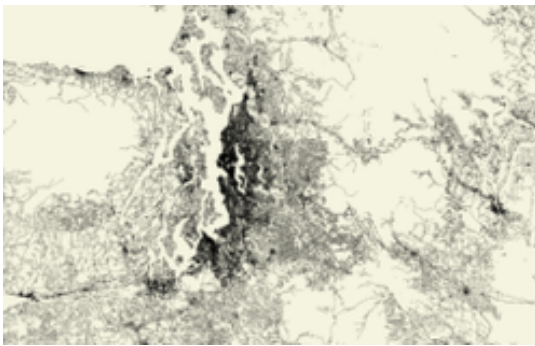
Use

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/feb/25/concrete-the-most-destructive-material-on-earth>

8.

When I think about the process of commercial Concrete: extraction, production, use, I make immediate connections to the implication of other materials minded from Earth. Particularly, I think of the way we log our timber forests, and mutilate the land for big agriculture.

Aside from the excavation and processing of this material, we proceed to suffocate more of Earths surface each year by ever expanding roads and structures.



Fathom, design firm in Boston mapped out all concrete use in every state, taking away everything but roads. (Pictured is a zoomed in view of Puget Sound and surrounding areas.)

<https://www.citylab.com/design/2014/12/you-d-never-know-it-from-these-beautiful-maps-that-us-infrastructure-is-crumbing/383316/>

9.

Being \$4.50 for an 80lb bag, there is little holding anyone back from building or casting any form, big or small with this material.

Methodology

Within my experiences in construction and through my research in material waste, my work has evolved past just responding to architecture and structure. No longer just about architecture or design, my work has developed more into a direct and visceral response to the overconsumption and irresponsible material use humans incur on Earth through the manipulation of land and the construction of our built environments.

In regards to construction, much of my thesis work's inspiration comes from the disgust and material excess that I have seen in the past 5-10 years at building demolition sites and also at new construction sites throughout Seattle. These in between phases of process (at deconstructed and construction sites) are interesting to me, because they expose materials for what they are, rather than the outcome of what it will become or what they once were.

It is at these sites that I witness a more truthful view of the waste and destruction that humankind incurs. At these locations, I see a more visceral and grotesque representation of materials and abundance. In deconstruction and in construction development, the internal structure and matter is seen bare: pipes are jutting out of the ground, woodpiles high and rebar bends like broken bones.



10. Demolition of Montlake market. Seattle 2020



11. Residential construction, Seattle 2020

Future expansion for SR 520 - Montlake Project

At these sites, I see a problem that I want to articulate into something more descriptive, relatable and more human. For at these ruins, whether old or new, I see a state of materiality and process that exposes issues that won't be seen once a structure becomes a glass box or once the materials are sent off to the landfill.

Seeing and absorbing the problems that I see at these sites, provides me with feelings of angst and discomfort. Having these feelings provides me with sympathy for these manipulated places. Feeling sympathy for the site that once had trees, the quarry that once was a mountain, I can't help but find a connection between the problems with my state of health and ill problems in our built environment.

With my current work, I have focused on the pain and angst that I feel in my body and know so many others feel too. With this embodiment, I then connect this focus to the material discard and wreckage I see caused by our manipulation of Earth during the construction of our built environments. Seeing the strength and

similarities in both subject matter, I am compelled to fulfill and depict a connection between the two.



12. Stress and angst of a material body: waste and disgust in the Built Environment.

Photo: Mark Woods.

In my works representation of a body, abstraction is utilized to create sensate and grotesque corporeal forms in order to elicit a human understanding and sympathy for the structure and material. Identified through my own experiences, I create these sculptural forms from my most honest and visceral emotions. Stemming from a deep-rooted gastrointestinal discomfort and paranoia, stress is felt and manifested when I construct my work.

When forming and illustrating this connection of shared pain between the body and materiality, it is helpful to describe the work in different categories of process and application. As the body is the main focus and facilitator, I believe that: material, anthropomorphism, the gut, improvisation, and pathos are all descriptors, facilitators, and tools that conduct this connection of a hurt body to a failed and stressed built environment. Broken into sections or small chapters, I will provide insight to each of these facilitations, processes and actions in my work.

1. Material

Creating a hurt body from the very materials that we build our cities with is the most clear and representative way I can highlight the disgust and instability I see in the construction and deconstruction of our built environment.

With the use and symbolism of construction materials in my work, it is important for the matter to be exposed and transparent. Found industrial rebar from demolished sites, used pvc pipes, insulation foam, wire, plastic, duct tape, rusted rebar, and concrete are left to be seen and hold representation for what they are.

Leaving ruff and aged construction materials bare, allows the work to retain its rooted language as material. Because of this transparency, there is an inevitable connection to the built environment. As I leave materials bare to be seen as what they are, it is in return the configuration and exaggeration of the matter into hurt and stressed bodily forms that allows the work to elicit this human reaction and understanding between material and self. This manipulation of material into stressed corporeal forms provides a transformation of human stress to the direct material used.

An artist's work that has helped me understand material and disgust, specifically through the action of process, is Richard Serra's *Splash/Cast* pieces from the late 1960's. During this time, Richard Serra was splashing molten lead across the junctures of the floor and wall in his studio in NYC. Capturing both the flat side of the wall and floor of a room, but also splattering up and out from the two-sided mold.

His works from the mid to late 1960s were intended to express the actions of "process." In so doing, they demonstrate the deployment of basic procedures that activate the primary qualities of media derived from construction and industrial fabrication, such as fiberglass and vulcanized rubber.

To address the splash/cast pieces as a discrete group is to engage the specificity of their circumstances and means.⁵

These Splash/Cast pieces have been integral for me in linking connections between the duality of process, contained and uncontained. This process has sparked connections in the way in which I see or don't see concrete and cement used in the built environment. In Architecture and construction there must always be control and order for the liquid slop of concrete to be formed in a mold with closed sides. Serra's process has helped me understand the other messier side, by leaving an open side to the mold.

Serra's exposure of process, which is rarely seen in construction, allows the physical outcome of matter and gravity to be seen. To witness liquid substance splash, spill, cast, and harden, provides insight to the true behavior of material and also to the true behavior and actions of the human that made the work.

⁵ <https://www.artforum.com/print/201509/due-process-richard-serra-s-early-splash-cast-works-55532>



13. Richard Serra, *Gutter Splash Two Corner Cast*, 1992, lead. Installation view, De Pont, Tilburg, the Netherlands, 1998.

Photo: Peter Cox. © Richard Serra/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

2. SENSATE ANTHROPOMORPHISM.

Anthropomorphism plays an important role in facilitating a human relation to the raw and industrial materials that I configure together. Whether a human or being is seen in the literal configuration of an abstract figure, or if it is embodied in sensate bodily shapes, my incentive is to form connections between an unhealthy human body and an unhealthy damaged material Earth.

Creating sensate (*perceiving or perceived by the senses*) and grotesque (*comically or repulsively ugly or distorted*) rather than anatomically correct features of anthropomorphism, allows me to embody and capture visceral and emotive

human senses (focusing on pain, discomfort, and angst) in shape and form rather than a direct human body.

As these sensate forms come together a guttural and ill being is formed. Tension and stress are seen and understood. Pathos is embodied and sympathy is felt for the structure and the construction materials used.



14. Photos by Mark Woods



15.

Tightly wrapped wire and epoxy precariously connect salvaged rebar together. Weighted gestural concrete forms twist, spill and layer around an armature or skeleton. Constricted, squeezed and filled ceramic shapes and pipes

embodiment clogged throats unable to swallow. Insulation foam expands into inflamed intestines and sporadic attachments of plaster attach like parasitic cancers.



16. Photo By Mark Woods

3. The Gut

Identified through my own experience with gastrointestinal disease, The gut has played a large role in representing the connections between the material and body. Not only is the gut a physical system in the body, but it also is a mechanism that provides senses, answers and instinctual responses, “having a gut feeling, or gut response.”

When thinking about the pain and anxiety felt in my throat, esophagus, stomach and intestines, I can't help but see a connection between the ill working system of my gut and the stress that we inflict on an Earth manipulated by Man. To utilize my gut as a facilitator provides the most honest response and description of the body when making.

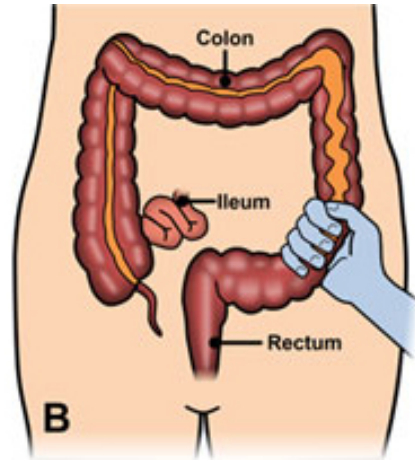
4. Improvisation.

With the materials used, improvisation allows for unseen guttural feelings to be expressed in the most real and responsive narration. In my process's of building, failure and mistake are seen and captured and emotions not surfaced are embodied.

With improvised abstraction I am able to harness my internal discomfort and pain and bring reference to the internal and broken structure that I am creating. Having an improvised and gestural engagement with found metal, cast concrete, and hand-manipulated ceramic enables me to depict and draw feelings of irritation, tension, and release, in return stimulating and activating a material to reference these emotions and feelings.



17.



18.

Layers of poured concrete and manipulated bodily ceramic shapes fill, overflow and harden. Looking like bloated and clogged intestinal shapes or overflowing pipes, pain and inflammation are captured in form. Weight and heaviness prevail and an inherent empathy to fix follows.



19.



20.

Plastic wraps and holds wet clay and plaster in order to further amend, connect, strengthen and repair. Large connected and arranged metal armatures hold the internal skeleton together, allowing for more acts of chance, distortions and reactive decisions to be applied.

5. Pathos and Angst

When I develop my ideas and produce work, I strive to create a feeling of pathos (*a quality that evokes pity or sadness.*) With all of the problems that humans create in the world today, I think it is important to provide transparency and confrontation with the state of reality that I (we) see and know. With this notion, I build from the most honest and direct feelings and comprehensions. I don't care to make

something with flawless beauty and strength, for that is not the message I want to convey.

My forms are discordant, connected by a limb and look to be barely standing, or held together by wire or chains.

My work is a counter to the stature and disguise of formal architecture and design. I don't want to form material into something as simple as a square or circle. I use overt emotions of pathos to challenge our infatuation with standard forms that stand emotionless in our built environments.

Building with impatience and urgency, I allow and accept failure, spillage, and mistake to manifest itself into something more. Mended concrete connections sag over bent architectural steel. A hurting body is seen in the structure and destruction and repair are layered haphazardly.



21.



22.

6. Importance of work

As a result to my research and current body of work, I aim to elicit a human empathetic response and understanding to materiality through the building of sensate corporeal structures that **embody stress and angst.**

With this notion, I have developed a physical language utilizing a material pallet that embodies a more grotesque and truthful representation of the over abundance of material usage and waste in the construction of our built environments.

Because of my unique and visceral interpretation of this topic, I deliver a message more emotive and descriptive than just words. Through my works emotive language, a human understanding can be felt for an abstract idea.

An insertion of self into a conversation about waste and disgust of construction and deconstruction is alluded, but an openness and elusiveness, allows one to build connections not only to the issues brought up, but ask new questions and create new answers from them.

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