

Anchurus And His Remedy

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Abstract

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Contrary to the statement by the character Garcin in Jean-Paul Sartre's play *No Exit* that other people are Hell; it is in fact other people who offer us a glimpse of Heaven. But if one is to have that peek at paradise removed, be it voluntarily or involuntarily, one is left in a solitary Hell. What are the ways in which one can navigate through the personal abyss? My thesis will explore the usage of pharmaceuticals and the creation of private myths as mechanisms to escape this chasm. Through video I will create narratives based around the prescription drug Nortriptyline, a tricyclic anti-depressant, and its effects both emotionally and physiologically.

Introduction

This thesis will cover both the formal and conceptual elements in my artwork. I will be examining the importance of color and the use of light and space in the service of the narratives I create. My medium of video and its relevance to my work will be addressed. My fascination with mythology and notions of fictions and non-fiction will also be a point of emphasis. I will introduce my idea of a pluralistic self. Lastly, I will discuss the project I have completed for this thesis.

Color, Light, Space

I use color intuitively, employing my own color theory. It seems that in order to use it you must be in control of it, creating a limited palette or eliminating color entirely and using purely black and white.

But to see in terms of black and white is denying the physical truth of living in a world of color, and accepting the metaphor of seeing situations as strictly one way or another. My use of color began with a reading in which Galileo claims that he only saw six colors of the rainbow, but wrote that there were seven to fit into the religious doctrine at the time. This challenge of what is true and what is fabricated is of interest to me, and I will discuss it in a later chapter.

The use of color is a way of exploring an infinite number of possibilities. It is not limiting or controlling, in fact it is freeing. Much like in the film *Pleasantville*, where color signifies a change, allowing the town's residents to become their own with breaking away from their confines leads to more color.

Color is both in harmony to and opposition to light. Using saturated color then setting up in a dark scene causes a clash between these formal elements. This fusion or separation is echoed in the character's interactions. Light and color is also be used in my work to reveal or mask information, and emphasize importance of a particular moment.

I find myself traversing through painting, an illusion of space, sculpture, actual space, and videography being a recording of space in time. All of these interpretations of space are engaged in my practice. Painting allows depth to be created on a two-dimensional surface, much like the walls and floors of my stages. In my work I use this illusion of space to make the stages in my studio shallower by making them extremely flat. I have to also physically build and move through the sculptural space in my practice, creating claustrophobic settings to perform in. All of this is finalized in video, which combines the two-dimensionality of painting and film with the actuality of three-dimensional space.

Stage to Performance to Video

Stages can be seen throughout art history. Jacques Louis David's paintings are of a historical event, but perfectly composed much like actors acting out a scene. It creates a place to perform, whether that is a recreation of a past event or an entirely new fiction.

My proscenium is where the performances take place that are then realized in video. They become both believable space as well as unbelievable. Either they are seen as a space that could be inhabited or a place in which it is merely a set. Much like the performances, these sets find themselves caught between fictional and non-fictional to the viewer.

There is always an assumption that what is taking place on stage is always deemed fictional. However I (the actor) must still perform the action. The actions become real for me. Much like in my first piece at graduate school, *Reason To Apply A Clown Nose* where I sanded down my nose with sandpaper. Though I am dressed as a seemingly fictional character of a clown, I must still interact with the sandpaper that has a very physical response. I may be acting out a narrative and playing a character, but I am also engaging with objects, with space, with the camera.

Video is a record of these actions. The medium of video plays a similar role as the stage where it is seen as fictional because of the "fourth wall".

Fictions and Non-Fiction

I am constantly fascinated by what is factual versus what is not factual, in terms of both my own experiences as well as those in the public realm. What one may see as truthful another may see as not truthful. It is up to the individual to decide what is fictional and what is not.

Much of the actions in the video become a way of discerning my own personal experiences as either fact or fiction. However this is never to be resolved. Truth becomes elusive, or perhaps unattainable. I begin to invent tales of how the event occurred, distant from the actual event. I am interested in mythology, in terms of the moral lessons they teach and the fantastic nature taken in order to arrive at those teachings. It is this exaggerated experience that I aim to create in my videos, while as I try to gain meaning or learn something upon reflecting on my experiences. Mythology also puts lessons in terms of human experience, rather than purely clinical studies.

Linear Against Circular

Through my graduate career I have been creating videos that have been put on loop, and at the beginning I thought it was an easier way to display video than to have viewing

times. Recently I have realized the conceptual meaning of having a video being on loop. The loop creates a circular motion or a repeated pattern.

Experiences or thoughts from the past end up resurfacing. The cycle serves the function similar to the reappearance of experiences and thoughts.

Arrival of Pluralistic Self

Psychologically, I believe that we are a single being and being comprised of complicated, sometimes opposing parts. The use of myself as all components is extremely important and at the crux of my work. I am playing all roles in each scene, but director, editor, set designer, and cameraman. According to Heidegger one can never truly see oneself. I like to think of this both literally, in a physical sense, as well as psychologically. It is physically impossible to see oneself as you are. Mirrors give us an idea of what we look like, however is reversed. Photos and videos provide two-dimensional renderings of one but do not offer an internal Gestalt of a person.

Through time societies have moved from plural gods, to a singular God. That has, in recent time, become from a single God to a single self. However it seems as though it has come back to many selves.

In Ancient Greece the general public accepted polytheism. They would ask certain Gods to help them in farming, hunting, but also ask them questions as to how or why they had felt a certain way, or what action to take. The supposed answers they received from the Gods would be their reasoning and rationale as to why they performed a certain action. In most cases the polytheistic model faded out, and in return a new monotheistic model came into effect. In the same way, people looked towards a single God for answers and guidance, and sometimes act upon the guidance.

In the 20th century Friedrich Nietzsche claimed, "God is dead." Not that God was actually dead, but people were removing themselves from faith (and even further removed today) in favor of a more scientific approach. In my mind the guidance people sought after became internalized. We ask ourselves about the decisions we made, why we acted a certain way, and what should we be doing. In a sense, people became their own God.

In *The Power of Myth*, Joseph Campbell says, "Heaven and hell are within us, and all the gods are within us." I find myself not as a single entity, or a single "God", but as many gods and goddesses that is reflected in my neurosis. Imagine if your anger was personified into a version of yourself. Now imagine if they were introduced to your personified anxiety.

A theory of parallel universes has recently come up in quantum mechanics under the name “many interacting worlds.” In this theory it is debated that there are multiple universes in play at all times, and often come into contact with each other. They do not evolve independently, but are influenced by one another by repulsion. Much like the characters in my videos, which come in contact with each other but not in agreement. The clown character is often times seen laughing at another character.

Remedying Anchurus

For this particular body of work, I will be using the story of Anchurus, the son of King Midas. In the myth of King Midas, the earth opens up, asking for what is most precious in Midas’ possession. Midas then threw in copious amounts of gold and silver in order to appease the earth and have it close. This however did not satisfy the earth and the chasm remained open. Midas’ son Anchurus then mounted his horse and rode into the abyss and it immediately closed itself, effectively ending Anchurus’s life. With the loss of his son, Midas learned that life was in fact the most precious thing.

What measures could be taken to prevent a modern day Anchurus from sacrificing oneself? Doctors become ones who can help; pharmaceuticals can be introduced to the brain to help balance chemicals. The prescription drug Nortriptyline is one of these pharmaceuticals used as treatment. It is a tricyclic anti-depressant that inhibits the reuptake of Norepinephrine. I have read clinical studies on how it is tested as well as how it affects the brain. These studies seemed too sterile and cold compared to an actual example of what this prescription can do.

However this drug has been tested to both prevent depressive moods and actions and in some cases cause them. But is the drug the actual cause or is the mood inherent to the individual?