WINDOWS OF

(DIS)CONNECTION

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Depression and Loneliness in the Digital Era:

Do you feel depressed? I feel depressed when I feel disconnected. Invisible toxicity is attacking my mind. Everyone has a weak piece in their mind. Society is changing -- and people are changing -- because of the development of digital technology. Our screen time is increasing more and more. We are living a disconnected life. Social media and text messaging have become an integral part of how individuals interact with their social groups. In fact, for many teenagers and young adults, text messaging and social media communication is now more likely than in-person interactions (Nichols, 2017). How might depression be connected to 21st century cultural trends?

After the outbreak of COVID-19, our life is becoming screen time. We meet using Zoom, or other video conferencing applications, and it causes depression (Fig. 1).
A current COVID-19 lifestyle, we only have screen interaction. In Michael Ende’s novel *Momo*, people live in a rural town that changes after industrialization, which might remind us of how technology changes our society:

> When gray men start to show up, the pace of the town changes. Everything becomes more efficient; no time is wasted. As a result, the adults become too busy, and there is no longer any time to "waste" thinking, telling stories, or just listening to one another. (Ende 1973, cited in Miskec 2013)

Our digital lifestyle makes us think that telling stories and interaction is a waste of time, as we can see in the novel. The townspeople in the novel lost their own conversation. Another change due to COVID-19 is that we cannot read emotions in others’ facial expressions because of masks. This causes us to be very disconnected. This whole situation makes it hard to exist without a depressed mind. As we can see in the chart (fig. 1), the digital revolution brings disconnection and depression. However, there is a positive side to depression. As Karp (2016) notes:

> I think depression has made me a stronger person somehow. I think it's made me more compassionate. I think, because of it, I know what it's like to go through something like that, and I'm more curious about other people and what they're going through (247).
Karp says it becomes easier to deal with our situation when we realize we have depression. Also, depression makes us curious about other people’s struggles, and think about connections with others. Karp says we are getting stronger than we realize about depression. It means we are going past our obstacles; perhaps this is why we want to connect and find solidarity through deep emotions.

**Fragility and Loneliness in my Sculpture: What do I hope to Achieve?**

I want to express human relationships, emotions and states of mind. I want the viewers of my work to reflect on the fragility and loneliness some feel in their lives. I want my work to be able to make people empathetic. Moving forward, my work will drive people to think about others. I need my work to mirror people’s mental status, to give an evocative portrayal. The mirror nudges people to think about what we need: interaction and connection. I want the viewers of my artwork to feel empathy for each other. Thinking about what we need is not complicated. In *Momo*, “A young orphan girl lives in a small town with an uncanny ability to listen. The friendly townspeople take care of Momo, bringing her food and making her a stove and a bed, and in return Momo listens, resolving conflict and allowing imaginations to flourish” (Miskec, 2013, p.1). After reading this, I want the viewer to think about what we should do now. I want to express depression and fragility. But from this, I want them to feel some connection, and I hope this feeling helps them to find some intimacy.

How can viewers feel the fragility and depression in my work? I want my work to contain emotions the viewer can relate to what they think. From empathy and reading the sentiment from my work, people will think we are interacting via the work, me and viewers.
Intimacy is from noticing what emotions my work contains. My first attempt is for the viewer to think from an outsider’s point of view. If viewers see a third party’s perspective, I let the viewer take a look where they are not involved. I want to make them feel like an outsider. We are eager for the place that we envy. In my work, I make a virtual city where we cannot be part of the city. Lacan’s mirror stage is “a distinction between the psychological observation of the behaviour and the psychoanalytic interpretation.” (Billing, 2006, p. 11). Developing this idea, I want to put a more specific, individual point of view in my work, because people’s perspectives are from their own experience. I want viewers to share a common, alienated perspective, and common observation of my work. I want the viewer to feel disconnection. Viewers can see whole cities in my work. However, ‘I’ (who is watching) am not there. Johnson explains that from Lacan we have learned that we are social creatures: “To borrow one of Lacan’s many neologisms, the ego ultimately is something ‘extimate’ (i.e., intimately exterior, an internal externality) insofar as it crystallizes ‘the desire of the Other’” (Johnston).

The Cityscape and Abstraction

Abstraction makes people think. It has the strength to capture the viewer. Abstraction and methods are how the viewer approaches the subject. What level of abstraction should I use in representing cities and windows? In my work, this choice is based on what the viewer keeps thinking about our relationship and being aware of disconnecting. In Abstraction, Lind (2013) notes that the ambiguity of the word “abstracts” applied to works of art is useful. It reveals the ambiguity and confusion inseparable from the subject—pointing out Mondrian's plus (Fig. 2.) and minus as an example (Lind, 1996, p. 26). Abstraction has the power to capture the viewer. But there is a deeper question about abstraction. How minimal or abstract should the work be?
How effective is a high level of abstraction in approaching the viewer? Although my work is specific enough for the viewer to understand that the subject is a cityscape, it is abstract enough that this understanding takes a few minutes.

Fig. 2.

Windows and cities are metaphors of emotions. Symbolizing emotions with specific motifs will help the viewer to understand and feel what I want to express. For instance, when you look at the crowded city, it is the start of the disconnection and discrepancy. The city especially contains loneliness and a dark side of humans’ emotions as a metaphor. Windows are the status human’s emotions. Moreover, my work is using metaphors for reflecting human’s emotions.

I have my own personal feeling about disconnection. I feel uncomfortable when people are together in groups without me. I need to find someone who I feel connected to and comfortable to be around to be a local and make a community. From my understanding, I want the viewer to feel more connected with their surroundings and where they are.

The Window In my work:
1. The window as a signifier

I focus on emotions and perspectives in order to effectively show connection and disconnection at once. I have chosen the window as a metaphor to reflect the human mind. The window is reflective, yet we can also see through it. Johnston thinks Lacan often talks of mirrors as shiny reflective surfaces; he does not limit mirroring to being a visible physical phenomenon alone (Johnston). Adding to Lacan’s idea, first, the window is a signifier of our mind, a mirror per se. Peirce’s semiotic process discusses semiotic structure in three ways: representamen (the form that the sign takes), interpretant (the sense made of the sign) and object (the thing to which the sign refers).

Within Peirce’s model of the sign, a traffic light, when considered as a sign for the concept of stopping your car, would consist of: a red light at an intersection (the representamen); vehicles halting (the object); and the idea that a red light indicates that vehicles must stop (the interpretant).” (Chandler)

I am using windows in my work, as well as cities, as a representamen and asking viewers to think about the form of the sign. Noticing a sign, I am expecting the viewer to ‘object’ we are noticing our depression and disconnection. As the interpretant, we are checking people’s empathy and feelings.

2. The window is metaphor, the building as symbol

a. Reflection/mirror and connection

In my work, I am using the images of the city and windows. Viewers can read the reflected images of fragility and disconnection in my work. The window is a sign of human emotions/

How can I make the viewer feel that we are disconnected and fragile? I think the windows and
cities can be signifiers and mirror all emotions. In this work (Fig. 3.), I wonder if people can see and reflect on themselves, like a mirror. I do not think only a real mirror can reflect people. If the work can reflect someone’s mind, that is also a mirror.

b. Inside / outside

Each window looks identical but ambivalent. The window is a symbol of life. Life is uncertain. We look like we live the same pattern of life, but each of our lives has a lot of different struggles and disparate things happening. The window is the object to connect inside and outside. Each window/person has its own story and life. Windows reflect the people who live inside of the window. (Fig. 4.) A window is one of the components of buildings and cities. This work is motivated by windows. From this work, I hope that viewers can feel what is going on in people’s lives. I want to make
viewers take a look at what is happening in the windows. The interesting points of windows separate the place from the outside to the inside. However, windows exist inside and outside. It can disconnect from the outside. But windows can be considered a space to see through what we are, forgetting the importance of interaction and empathizing. Our lifestyle is changing, and we do not even engage with the people who live next door.

c. Connection/disconnection

I want viewers to engage with someone they forgot during their busy life, making them realize the necessity of caring and escaping from depression. I hope viewers can feel comfortable sharing fragility and disconnection. The window is reflective and transparent at the same time, sometimes showing disconnection, sometimes connection. The city is the image to reflect the life of disconnection. Transparent to show us connection. “Transparency means a simultaneous perception of different spatial locations.” (Rowe and Slutsky, 1997, p.45) From the window's transparency, we can see a simultaneous perception of different people's life. When viewers are feeling disconnection from the crowded cities and reflecting windows, I desire them to think about the importance of empathy for feeling connection.

In another work, I continued to explore the idea about windows. I am again selecting the windows as a symbol of connection and disconnection. The second intriguing point is it is reflective and transparent at once. Moving forward to a symbol of windows, I want my work to drive people to think about others. My work can be a sign to make people move to reach out to each other.

d. Building as a symbol
When I go to the city, I am overwhelmed and admire the city and buildings. I want to put the emotions I felt from the city into my work. The building contains a lot of meaning. According to Gaudi, "the straight line belongs to Man, the curved one to God. (The value)" I understand a straight line can show many people's minds and contain people's emotions. I want to remind the viewer of their anxiety and need for human engagement. I think the straight line can show clearly in the cities and windows. Also, I am trying to minimize building and city images. I explored this idea from my previous works. My first exploration (Fig. 5.) asks viewers to think about the city images and the buildings as symbols of people. Each building symbolizes a person, and that is why each building image looks different. When I look closely at the city and modern lifestyle, it is hard to engage with our neighbors as our ancestors used to do. I lived in the same apartment building for almost ten years, yet I did not know who lived in my neighborhood.

3. The Process as content:

I am looking for ways to deal with finding a balance between the interactive digital formulated clay and the hand-building process. My work combines both digital and traditional processes to formulate clay. I insist we blend together our digital, evolving culture and an embracing of human emotions. I want to make the viewer think about how we can harmonize
the digital world and humanity. What method can be used for both expressing digital
technology and our humanity? Hand-building has its energy to feel warmth and connection.

To Lacan, there is no doubt about the fact that the pleasure principle reissues
homeostasis for mental life: the mental system, in as far as it is ruled by the
pleasure principle, “echoes,” “repeats,” “redoubles” organic, homeostatic
requirements. (Van de Vijver 2)

We can trace the artist’s interaction with clay. My hand pinching mark will echo for defining a
life mark like wrinkles and freckles on our body. We reissue our mental life. We genetically feel
pleasure to see echoes and repeats. Hand-building starts from domestic labor. What does it
bring us? We are touching the clay, pinching and wedging. I was thinking about the
fundamental management of ceramics that we use. We can know where the artist’s hand has
been by following the traces of the artist’s hands. From this, we can find some human
connection through hand-building.

**Keraflex: Materiality and its Fragility as Content:**

Second, I was thinking about buildings and windows, and reflection and connection. Keraflex is
very easily broken. I believe this material closely reflects our weak status. It reminds us that our
mental health is fragile. Using this fragile Keraflex can connect people’s fragility as a material
part. A laser cutting and the digital working process can show the vulnerability as the act of
formulating. I respond that ceramics also needs to communicate with digital processing. In a
digital working process, there is a lot of room for change. We can tell dull hand-made and sharp
technology-made ceramics apart easily as technology evolves. However, my work asks the
viewer how we proceed to embrace the differences. I worked with paper clay, Keraflex.
3D printing buildings and 3D pen printing PLA structures are what I am looking for as an effective way to show the digital processes. I want to show the viewer about digital life and human life at once. I want to reflect our screen life in my work and digital evolution which has brought us many conveniences. However, it became the turning point to lose our intimate human interaction. The juxtaposition of digitally formulated and human-made can make us look at our screen life and how it differs from in-person interaction. (Fig. 6.)

For my thesis work (Fig. 7.), I work with digital cut fabrication for Keraflex. Keraflex is a material I can form using digital technology, specifically laser cutting. I use this material and digital formulation to show tangible fragility and showing digital strategy with a fine cut line.
Materiality and Color as Content:

In my work, I use blue and white. In his dystopian novel, We, Zamiatin writes “The sky is blue. Its limpidness is not marred by a single cloud.” (Zamiatin 5) This sky makes us think about the outside from the transparency of windows. “Blue sky, tiny baby suns in each one of our badges; our faces are unclouded by the insanity of thoughts”. (Zamiatin 6) Sky blue is an excellent color to show the connection for enjoying our day spending our picnic together. But also, “Tra-ta-ta-tam.... Tra-ta-ta-tam ... stamping on the brassy steps which sparkle in the sun; with every step you rise higher and higher into the dizzy blue heights....” (Zamiatin 7) blue can represent disconnection from looking up the sky to relax our rough day. Sometimes we forget the color of the sky from our busy life. We even disconnect from our nature. We are supposed to be fantastic to what we deserve; this is why we feel it is tougher to manage our feelings.

In this work, as a material, I used wood shims and white clay (porcelain). (Fig. 3). I think this is a great way to contain minimized thinking. I use white clay; this idea came from my cultural background. Koreans used to be called 'the people of white clothes.' I like to express my cultural background in my work. Also, there is an interesting point about wearing white clothes; you can assume how people live and their lifestyle. About me, there will be a clay stain on my white clothes. Who has a stain in their clothes and are not manual workers and laborers? I can assume how they live; you can trace their background story from the stain. I think this is a great color in which to contain people's lives. Second, when it snows, we feel stuck in the house. This feeling makes me more connected with family and friends in the same place. The color white usually reminds me of snow. When it snows, generally, we feel comfortable. Snow muffles sounds as a kind of insulation. That is why we feel more comfortable while it is
snowing. These examples correspond to a lot of the meaning of white. That is why I use white in my work.

The building style of 3D printing makes it hard to find traces of human storytelling on the work’s surface. But I want the viewer to feel their emotions when they see the modern style of life. I asked viewers to see themselves through each other. In one of my earlier explorations, (Fig. 5.) I hoped that viewers would participate physically in this work. They can jump on and step on the piece. Installation was an excellent way to play with participation with viewers. (Fig. 8.) For one of the pedestals, I used a distance sensor to light up under the pedestal. I wanted to show that when we approach, we are ready to open and show our emotions and thinking visually. I tried to use a distance sensor instead of a movement sensor; I want to talk about physical closeness and coming to the one whose mind is lighting off. The most important thing is that we need to connect and reach out to each other.

**Conclusion**

Symbols need to communicate between subjects. I see my work to share with my viewer. My work is the window-- to talk, to feel connected. The language of shadow, hand marks, digital process, and color speak as a sign to understand.
"Transparency", "space-time", "simultaneity", "interpenetration", "superimposition", "ambivalence": in the literature or contemporary architecture, these words, and others like that, are often used as synonyms. (Rowe and Slusky 22)

An architectural building that is around us speaks to us. It is hard to understand what buildings contain. It isn't straightforward to understand. It takes a lot of time to read their reason to exist. This journey, the exploration with clay for this work, was hard, lonely, and fragile. The people around you are showing their language in their way. To go through a hard time together is intimacy. I want viewers to see the sign as tangible mind language.
Works Cited


