THE ANATOMY OF BELIEF

Medicine, Persuasion, and the Anatomy of Human Belief

Residency Proposal
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Project Overview

The Anatomy of Belief is a multimedia installation examining medicine, institutional authority, and how information becomes accepted as truth. It builds on *The Exhibition for the History of The Division*, my fictional museum installation exploring mythology, propaganda, and historical authenticity, and on assemblages including *Assemblage 00987*, *Process 0013*, and *Process 00987*. The project combines ceramic sculpture, fabricated medical objects, photography, documents, and sound, including live performances with my rebuilt Anti-Tank Guitar (ATG).

Concept: The Authority of Belief

Medicine occupies a unique position in society. We trust medical professionals, scientific institutions, diagnostic technologies, and the instruments used to examine and treat our bodies. Modern medicine rests on scientific evidence and rigorous research, yet its history includes practices once accepted as authoritative that were later discredited. Phrenology, bloodletting, and patent medicines demonstrate how certainty can exceed evidence.

I am interested in how belief acquires the appearance of knowledge. Today, artificial intelligence can generate convincing images, voices, and explanations regardless of accuracy. Propaganda, commercial persuasion, conspiracy movements, and cult organizations similarly use specialized language, institutional imagery, and manufactured expertise to claim authority. How do we distinguish evidence from persuasion?

Museum Research and Artistic Development

The International Museum of Surgical Science offers an extraordinary opportunity to examine how medical knowledge, instruments, and institutional authority have shaped our understanding of the body. Access to its collections and archives will allow me to study the physical and visual language of historical medicine, including surgical instruments, anatomical models, diagnostic apparatus, and medical illustrations. These materials will directly inform the design and fabrication of my fictional medical devices, ceramic sculptures, and installation environments.

I will examine how objects communicate precision, expertise, and certainty, then translate those observations into original sculptural forms rather than replicas. The museum will serve not simply as an exhibition setting but as an essential source of research and artistic development. Its collections will also ground the project's questions in the evolving history of health sciences, bodily knowledge, and treatment.

Proposed Artwork

I propose a fictional medical institution devoted to the diagnosis of doubt and treatment of conviction. Its collection will comprise ceramic sculptures, assemblages, fabricated surgical kits, anatomical models, medical diagrams, photographs, and invented institutional documents.

The Belief Extraction Kit will resemble an antique surgical case containing devices supposedly designed to remove undesirable ideas from the mind. *The Anatomy of Suggestion* will use ceramic anatomical studies to identify fictional brain regions associated with obedience, superstition, conformity, fear, and independent thought. *The Department of Manufactured Consent* will present pharmaceutical-style containers advertising imaginary treatments for doubt and skepticism. *The Artificial Authority* will feature fictional diagnostic equipment issuing contradictory pronouncements with absolute confidence. *The Cure for Doubt* will suggest an elaborate procedure to eliminate uncertainty entirely.

Materials and Process

I will work with ceramics, metal, wood, textiles, found objects, photography, printed documentation, and sound. Historical instruments, teaching models, surgical cases, pharmaceutical packaging, and specimen displays will inform the objects' visual vocabulary. Each fabricated artifact will have an invented function, classification, and institutional history, creating the appearance of an internally consistent medical collection.

The Anti-Tank Guitar: Sound, Healing, and Belief

The original ATG is an approximately eight-foot experimental instrument I invented in 1989 to produce extreme sonic textures and low-frequency vibrations. As a founding member of the experimental industrial music groups Lab Report and Pigface, I incorporated the ATG into recordings and live performances. My musical career has also included collaborations with Genesis Breyer P-Orridge, Lydia Lunch, and Chris Connelly.

Recently rebuilt, the original ATG is now used in sound therapy and sound healing practices. Its vibrations are felt through the body as well as heard, offering a physical encounter with sound and an opportunity to consider how sensation, therapeutic experience, and belief interact.

The ATG will function as both sculpture and working instrument. I propose a live performance on opening night and additional evening performances, subject to museum approval and technical arrangements. These events will explore resonance, ritual, and the use of sound in historical and contemporary healing traditions. The instrument's evolution from industrial music experimentation to sound healing echoes the exhibition's investigation of how objects and practices acquire new meanings.

Previous Work and Public Engagement

The Exhibition for the History of The Division used life-sized wax figures, fabricated artifacts, recordings, and museum conventions to invent the history of a hermetic organization. My spell kits and assemblages similarly examine how objects communicate specialized knowledge and ritual authority. *The Anatomy of Belief* extends this practice into medical history and the interpretation of the body.

The installation will resemble a historical collection, with inventory numbers, medical illustrations, fictional treatment descriptions, and institutional documents. Recorded diagnostic announcements and conflicting instructions may form part of the sound environment. Drawing on my university teaching experience, I would welcome artist talks or workshops on medical history, visual persuasion, artistic fabrication, and misinformation.

Intended Outcome

My goal is an immersive environment that invites visitors to examine how scientific understanding evolves, how ideas gain acceptance, and how experience influences belief. By connecting medical history to artificial intelligence and contemporary information systems, the installation will encourage curiosity and critical inquiry without confusing fictional artifacts with actual medical evidence.

Ultimately, *The Anatomy of Belief* asks:

How do observation, experience, and the exchange of ideas shape what we understand to be true?