



spoonie a thesis by Jamie Hoy

December of 2007, I am nine years old and my family had just been gifted Rock Band for Christmas. I became immediately obsessed with performing the song *Maps* by Yeah Yeah Yeahs, an indie rock band from the early 2000s. I would spend countless hours alone in my basement singing the song on repeat. In June of 2008, I was ten years old and had just begun taking piano lessons. I learned Regina Spektor's *Us* on the piano and spent that entire summer consumed by Spektor's simple melody until my family could not tolerate it anymore—begging me to stop. During my entirety of middle school, I was obsessed with *The Ellen Show*. I would beg my mom to pick me up from school every day so I wouldn't miss the show, even though it was on DVR. During my first two years of high school, I became obsessed with swimming laps, sneaking out of school so I could go to the gym. My stories have been shaped by a childhood deprived of the knowledge that my experience was different because of my neuro-divergence. My thesis project was made to tell the story of my childhood neurodivergence and I used quilting as a form of literature—using photographs, fabric, motifs, and objects from my childhood—the tell the story of my unknown neurodivergence.

Spoon Theory was created by Christine Miserandino to give a physical representation of what invisible disabilities feel like. The spoon is representing the amount of energy any given task can take throughout the day: “Most people start the day with unlimited amount of possibilities, and energy to do whatever they desire, especially young people. For the most part,

they do not need to worry about the effects of their actions. So for my explanation, I used spoons to convey this point. I wanted something for her to hold, for me to then take away since most people who get sick feel a “loss” of a life they once knew. If I was in control of taking away the spoons, then she would know what it feels like to have someone or something else, in this case Lupus, being in control” (Miserandio). Before my Autism Spectrum Disorder diagnosis, I was mistaken about why I was so mentally exhausted after school and would spend my time alone in a dark room recharging instead of socializing with friends. Or if I did spend time socializing I would often lash out and become irritable. I was left perplexed on why I couldn't socialize like my other classmates and just blamed it on being excessively introverted. By learning about Spoon Theory and getting my ASD diagnosis I was able to make sense of my childhood. I could finally understand that at the end of a long overstimulating day, filled with fluorescent lights and constant social interaction, I was all out of spoons. I am utilizing spoon theory as a literary device within my quilts to represent my autism.

Anna Atkins, a 19th-century photographer creating scientific cyanotype illustrations of British algae, utilized the cyanotypes process realized by Sir John Herschel in 1842. During this period, photography was relatively unexplored and was not seen as an art form. The early use of photography was used to document and study the world in which they were living, with Atkins using cyanotypes as a method to explore and study plant life. Today, I am utilizing cyanotypes as a method to explore and study my undiscovered childhood neurodivergence. The method of cyanotype is a labor-intensive process but is rewarding in the end. Cyanotypes are made by mixing ferric ammonium citrate, water, and potassium ferricyanide to create a light-sensitive liquid that can be brushed onto any absorbent surface. Once on the surface a negative or object is placed in contact with the material and is either exposed to direct sunlight or under a UV light.

After the correct exposure, which can take hours, you place your object in running water. The water fixes the image and brings out a blue color through the process of oxidation. While drying the blues get deeper over time and once dried you are left with a captivating blue image.

Quiltmaking gained inspiration from the Ancient East, techniques used by those were brought back to Europe and quiltmaking became prevalent (Edelson). Applique and piecing were the techniques used which are ways for two parts of the fabric to be combined into one, making the craft optimal when Europe colonized America, quiltmaking took over because they only had scraps of fabric which were then quilted together into blankets and clothes for their families (Edelson). During this time quiltmaking was not yet an art form but rather a need for survival. While men went off to work or war, women were forced to spend time at home taking care of their families. During this time quiltmaking was a way for women to express themselves when words could not. The African American quilters of Gee's Bend are some of the most prolific quilters of all time—Gee's Bend is an isolated community in Alabama and has a long history of quiltmaking passed on from generation to generation (Sohan). The quilters converted scraps of fabric into self-portraits of themselves and their own identity, making this is the first time that quilts have been turned into a piece of art (Sohan). You can recognize Gee's Bend quilts by their use of bright colors, asymmetry, vertical stripes, and symbolism (Sohan). Understanding the historical context of quilt making is important to my art because every artist should understand and learn from those who have created before them.

The finished product of my quilts will display the complex and emotional story of my neurodivergent childhood. Each quilt has a cyanotype portrait of myself from different ages in my childhood. Behind these cyanotype images are quilted patterns and textures varying from piece to piece. I kept the quilt designs minimal because I did not want them to compete with the

cyanotype portraits, I want both the quilts and photographs to complement each other. Alongside the quilts, some stamps represent motifs within my neurodivergent story. The conch shell within my quilt is symbolic of two things: most importantly, a childhood spent on the beach with my grandmother collecting shells along the Gulf of Mexico. My grandmother was a haven for me when my home and school life seemed scary and hectic, she was able to understand me when others couldn't. In formal literature, the conch often represents a call to order or attention. In the infamous novel, *Lord of the Flies*, William Golding uses the conch to symbolize a sense of power, and later when the story unfolds it becomes a cry for help: “By the time Ralph finished blowing the conch the platform was crowded...before him small children squatted in the Grass. Silence now. Ralph lifted the cream and pink shell to his knees and a sudden breeze scattered light over the platform” (Golding 23). The conch is relevant to my childhood because of the obvious cry for help that was ignored by everyone around me. I had very apparent signs of ASD but unlike Ralph in *Lord of the Flies*, when I blew my shell no one listened. The butterfly in literature represents rebirth and a new beginning. Emily Dickinson's poem *The Butterfly's Day* alludes to the rebirth, cocoon emergences, that her subject is going through:

From cocoon forth a butterfly

As lady from her door

Emerged — a summer afternoon —

Repairing everywhere (Dickinson)

The butterfly is relevant to my story because of the resurgence I feel after my ASD diagnosis—I am emerging into the person I am supposed to be. All my life I spent time in a cocoon but now that I understand who I am, I can now become a butterfly. *The Tortoise and the Hare*, an Aesop Fable, was a very monumental part of my childhood: “slow and steady wins the race” was a

phrase I was often told during my childhood academia, as I would often rush through assignments in school and not pay attention to the little details. My struggle with school was because of my unknown neurodivergence, if I could have received the support I needed, perhaps this fable still would not haunt me to this day. I chose the tortoise instead of the hare for the stamp so I can remind myself to slow down. For the tree stamp, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* by Betty Smith is a novel about hardship and persistence even without having the necessary support to be thriving. The Tree of heaven in Smith's novel can thrive without water or the proper soil. I can relate to this because of how I was able to persevere through my childhood and was still able to grow without the needed accommodations. Lastly, the spoon stamp within my piece is a reference to Spoon Theory and how Miserandino can give a physical representation to an invisible disability.

Wrapped in the metaphorical quilt of my youth, *spoonie* provides warmth and relief to a weighing childhood. Through the use of literary devices, I can create stories within my quilts. And with the help of art history, literature, and theory I was able to create quilts that stood on their own but created a unique dialogue that needs to be had. *Spoonie* is an attempt to reconcile the past and to take back the narrative of my own story.

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