Making with Caution

A Master’s Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts in the Graduate School of the Ohio State University

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2011

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Abstract

Making With Caution, my most recent art installation, will serve as an investigation into the meaning of death and dying. It will be on display at the Urban Art Space, in Columbus, Ohio, and will operate as a culmination of my formal education in contemporary fine art. Furthermore, it will operate as evidence of my very existence, and will abstractly illustrate the quiescence of death and dying through a video, perceived live performance, and sculpture. Each of these three components will be deconstructed in great detail in regards to their conversation in fine art and religion. In the following pages, I will examine how art may appease the overwhelming angst associated with death and dying, which consequentially allows me to enjoy, savor, and appreciate the little time I have on earth. Through a thorough investigation of Making With Caution, I will describe how I use art as a supplement to pacify my anxiety related to my fear of death, and how it operates as a direct consequence of my current spiritual dissatisfactions.
Dedication

For my encouraging and supporting wife, who strives to illustrate the beauty of art in life and life in art.
Acknowledgments

My sincerest thanks goes to my graduate committee: Mr. Robert Derr, Mr. Tony Mendoza, and Ms. Alison Crocetta for your honest and thorough critique of my artwork. For Robert, thank you for your willingness to support all of my artistic ventures. You have provided an invaluable amount of insight into the theories of art-making, which I closely cherish. In addition, thank you for your guidance in writing this document. For Tony, thank you for your humor, willingness to understand, and willingness to listen. Your sincerity will not be forgotten. For Alison, thank you for your honest and challenging critique. You have helped provide me with the tools necessary for succeeding in the art arena. Together, you have all displayed the values and attributes that a good educator should have. Each of you serve as a role model which will help shape my future as an educator.

I thank my studio mates, Ash Woolson and Ashley Moore. Your continuing support and encouragement has allowed me to treasure the past two years. I also thank my colleagues in the Department of Art at The Ohio State University for your helpful critique and conversation. Most of all, I thank my wife and family for your enduring support and love. Collectively, you have all shown that living is really about surrounding yourself with the people you care about and doing the things you enjoy.
Vita

2009-2011 .................................................. Instructor of Record, The Ohio State University

2009-2011 .................................................. Graduate Teaching Assistant, The Ohio State University


2008 .................................................. Pre-Service Art Educator, Philadelphia Public Schools

Awards and Selected Exhibitions

2011 ............................................................. Master of Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition, Confluence(s), The Urban Art Space, The Ohio State University

2010 ............................................................. Love, Cloudhaus, Via Vecchia, Columbus, Ohio

2010 ............................................................. Annual Members’ Small Works Exhibition, ROY G BIV Gallery, Columbus, Ohio

2010 ............................................................. Annual Thumb Box Exhibition, OAL Gallery & OSU Arts Initiative, Columbus, Ohio
2010..............................................................Ohio State University MFA Show,
The Ohio State University,
Hopkins Hall, Columbus, Ohio

2009..............................................................The Human Canvas, The Center for Fine Art Photography, Fort Collins, Colorado

2008..............................................................Pennsylvania State Photography Showcase, The Pennsylvania State University, State College, Pennsylvania

2008..............................................................BFA Student Exhibition, The Pennsylvania State University, State College, Pennsylvania

2008..............................................................Juried Exhibition, The Pennsylvania State University, State College, Pennsylvania

2007..............................................................Sparks Space Exhibition, The Pennsylvania State University, State College, Pennsylvania

Field of Study

Major Field: Visual Arts
# Table of Contents

Abstract.......................................................................................................................... ii  
Dedication....................................................................................................................... iii  
Acknowledgments.......................................................................................................... iv  
Vita.................................................................................................................................... v  
Table of Contents........................................................................................................... vii  
List of Figures................................................................................................................... viii  
Preface............................................................................................................................. 1  
Introduction..................................................................................................................... 3  
Chapter 1: The Body as a Site for Art........................................................................... 8  
Chapter 2: Recognition of Existence.......................................................................... 19  
Chapter 3: Freudian Death Drive & The Implied Death........................................... 27  
Chapter 4: The Wooden Box Live Performance......................................................... 32  
Chapter 5: Conclusion................................................................................................. 40  
References....................................................................................................................... 45
List of Figures

Figure 1. Joshua Cloud, *Making with Caution*, 2011....................................................7
Figure 2. Otto Muehl, *Oh Sensibility*, 1970.................................................................13
Figure 3. Joshua Cloud, *The Staring Exercise*, 2011...................................................20
Figure 4. Vito Acconci, *Centers*, 1971.......................................................................22
Figure 5: Joshua Cloud, *The Powder Paint Exercise*, 2010.........................................30
Figure 6. *The Wooden Box Performance*, Boy by Box, 2011.......................................36
Figure 7. Carpe Diem Business Card, 2011....................................................................39
Figure 8. Caravaggio, *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*, 1601.................................41
I was thirteen when I had to make one of the hardest decisions of my life. I remember I was thirteen because my closest friend, Max, was thirteen too. In dog years, Max was 91 years old. At that time, I had never lived without him.

Our relationship was not all that different than most young boys and their first dog—he was a faithful companion and a loyal friend. He was a consoler and could cure just about any bad day with just the warmth of his soft golden fur. He harbored me during the times I was afraid to go to bed. Stretched on the foot of the bed, his 80 pounds was very constricting on a single sized mattress. However, he would, without hesitation, save me from the creaks and noises heard throughout the night. He was more than an average friend—we were very close. When I reflect on my childhood, Max was almost always present in my fondest memories.

After years of watching his body deteriorate, we held a family meeting to determine the next appropriate steps. My mother calmly explained that I would be the one who would ultimately determine his future. It was in late August, just four months before his 14th birthday, when I made the decision to put him down.

When the scheduled day came, my mother asked if I wanted to stay home from school and go to the animal hospital with her. I reluctantly said, “No, it will be too hard. I just can’t do it.” I was totally convinced if I had, I would have broken down,
changed my mind, and forced my Mom to cancel the appointment before we even got to the car. She accepted my decision, and gave me my final minutes alone with Max. I cried while petting him over and over, telling him “I’m sorry, I’m sorry.” When the school bus came, I watched him disappear as we pulled away. I remember struggling with the thought that this would be the last time I would ever see him, and that I was responsible for ending his life. Those are some of the most vivid memories I have of that age. I believe it was the first time I encountered death.
Introduction

As an artist who takes pictures, I feel obligated to document experiences that describe my temporal nature, known more commonly as life. As humanity reaches new heights of exploration, discovery, creation, and invention, some may argue that today humans are better than the day before. Like the prescribed recipe for evolution, we are designed to operate within social norms, to produce a better, smarter, and stronger generation for the betterment of mankind. I am interested in illustrating this cycle of preservation, our attempts to remain fossilized in an environment which will *always* prevail in our erasure.

I am jealous of those who believe in the afterlife. For those who do not believe, we recognize that the true reality is consciously unbearable. A trip to blissful heaven is a clever disguise for an eternity of nothingness, but better yet proves to be an elegant example of checks and balances derived by those in power. It is this idea that gives me anxiety, and keeps me awake at night. My art serves as a catharsis, freeing me from my fear of the inevitable.

The photograph operates as a document to the performances that are shown before the camera. Viewers are perceived as unaware voyeuristic participants of the bizarre rituals shown. My performances, often including the manipulation of the body surface, become the art itself. My body becomes a site for objectification. The body,
being a vessel in which we operate our mission of preservation, becomes manipulated as it transforms the original form, use, or function of each part. These manipulations allow me to use my body as a site for art, and consequently illustrate my acceptance to these natural forces, specifically the forces of death and dying physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

The installation, *Making With Caution*, will serve as a personal investigation into the meaning of death and dying. It will be on display at the *Confluence(s)* exhibition at the Urban Art Space, in Columbus, Ohio, and will operate as a culmination of my formal education in contemporary fine art. Furthermore, it will operate as evidence of my very existence, and will abstractly illustrate the quiescence of death and dying through a video, perceived live performance, and sculpture. Each of these three components will be deconstructed in great detail in regards to their conversation in fine art and religion. In the following pages, I will examine how art may appease the overwhelming angst associated with death and dying, which consequently allows me to enjoy, savor, and appreciate the little time I have on earth. Through a thorough investigation of *Making With Caution*, I will describe how I use art as a supplement to pacify my anxiety related to my fear of death, and how it operates as a direct consequence of my current spiritual dissatisfactions.

Nearly 15 years ago, ironically on our way home from church, I remember asking my Mom, “Is it weird to be you, because you aren’t me?” In hindsight, hearing a question like this from a nine-year-old would raise some eyebrows. I remember my general concern of living as I tried to focus on the trees sweeping past over 35 miles
per hour. It was beautiful metaphor for the passing of time; how it’s present for only a moment then becomes unreachable—only accessible as a memory. At nine, I was already rich with memories and experiences that caused me to consciously fall in love with the idea of living and consequently fearful of not. My mother replied with a surprisingly philosophical answer, “Is it weird that you aren’t me?” As we continued to drive home, I began to wonder if her idea of living was the same as mine.

As an artist, this philosophical inquiry has notably surfaced on multiple occasions and has culminated in the installation, *Making With Caution* (2011). For years I have been obsessed with the obligation to document my investigations into the physicality and emotional stress of death and dying. My desire is to communicate my *pathos* and *ethos* simultaneously, and to introduce audiences to a philosophical questioning that asks of participation in the examination of existence from *Making with Caution*. As the nexus of the performances, I am interested in the intimate acquaintance of self-knowledge and self-understanding of not only my physical body, but more importantly my spiritual-self. This requires an extensive investigation in both pain and suffering arenas, displayed not only as physical pain but also emotional, spiritual, and psychologic trauma. As a result, the experiences are consequently cruel, painful, but authentic. It’s a questioning of death through life and a search for light in the darkened subcutaneous layers of death. Upon the liberation of this existentialist knowledge, I believe art is made. In the performances, there is an overwhelming physicality to communicate something that has already been felt before: such as the residual of past performances and the revisiting of repressed emotions that is also
congruently being felt presently in the form of experience. Through the manipulation of the body, one can experience the physical past, without ever leaving the present.

In *Making With Caution* (2011), viewers are invited to experience a constructed space (See Figure 1: Joshua Cloud, *Making with Caution*, 2011) which challenges our comfort and willingness to explore environments that question our preconceived notions of death. The installation will consist of three components: the *Staring Exercise* projection, the *Wooden Box Exercise* (an aspen wooden constructed coffin-like box approximately. 6ft x 2ft x1.5ft), and the *Wooden Box Performance*, which is a perceived performance transmitted by a presumed live feed projection on an adjacent wall. The goal for this project is to more directly question my fears of my physical burial and likewise the constricting aspects of death itself.

To explore this, I will construct a wooden box, just inches larger than my body. In the box, a video camera will record my actions over a predetermined amount of time (approx. 90 minutes). During recording, I will lay in the box as if this was a psuedo-coffin. This video will be projected and seamlessly looped on a wall immediately behind the actual box. This video loop will be played, even when I am not physically in the box, creating a perceived live performance during the length of the entire exhibition. Viewers may never be aware that the box is actually empty. I believe this questioning is crucial as it serves as a visual metaphor of my own questioning of death and dying, as well as my uncertainty in religion itself.

The last component of the installation, *Staring Exercise* (2010), will be projected on an adjacent wall. In the video, I stare at the camera, consciously not
blinking, until it is no longer bearable. Running at nearly 4 and a half minutes before it seamless loops in reverse, viewers are invited to challenge the subject in a one-on-one staring contest.

During the exercise, viewers become consciously aware of their own existence by breaking the “imaginary” fourth wall of film. As some viewers accept the fourth wall as transparent, they suspend their disbeliefs between the fictional work and audience, allowing them to enjoy the fiction as if they were observing real events. While in the presence of The Wooden Box Exercise, and The Wooden Box Performance, viewers may recognize the physical effort of not blinking as a visual metaphor for our efforts to stay alive. In that regard, the blink, which is never shown, references the moment in which we die. The video loops before the sitter blinks, making the game impossible to win—symbolically referencing our inability to cheat death and dying.

For the purpose of clarity, the components will first be described collectively, and in future chapters they will discussed in further detail individually. To begin, let’s examine how the body has been used in art in the recent past to better understand how it is being used in Making with Caution.
Chapter 1: The Body as a Site for Art

The body has been used by artists for decades to examine such issues as the human condition, personal identities, cultural conventions, and societal behaviors. The body is and has been used as an artistic language by a number of individuals in various disciplines including dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts. Even though the phenomenon touches upon artists who represent different cultures and tendencies, ways of making, and modes of thinking, certain qualities of this way of making art are found in almost all of those manifestations. Similar to my own pursuits in *Making with Caution*, many times the individual is interested in the uncovering of hidden qualities of living, which may be liberated through uninhibited actions, events, and performances (See artists such as Antonin Artaud, Viennese Actionists, Arnulf Rainer, Egon Schiele, Yves Klein). In other cases, these qualities may be examined through intellectual, emotional, and systematic pursuits (as opposed to brutal physical manifestations).

Greatly defined by the social climate of the 1970’s and 80’s, the Body Art era may be conceived as the consummation of an artistic orgy including aspects of Expressionism, Performance Art, Dadaism, and Surrealism. In short, these movements meant the definitive liberation of the artist from any necessity of representation. As such, some artists practiced in splash painting, vast color fields,
and general abstraction of shape and form. Simultaneously, other artists concentrated on the abstraction of content and concept as a valued form of art-making. Many artists who participated in this latter ideology, such as Vito Acconci, Keith Arnatt, Terry Fox, Otto Muehl, Lucas Samaras, created art based on instinct and impulse. As explained by Lea Vergine, author of *Body Art and Performance: The Body as Language*, the current use of the body is different than that of the past. “...the body in art is more than a revival of Expressionism...These phenomena must also be seen as so many documents of a style of living that also remains outside of art.”¹ As such, many artists who participated in this ideology subscribed to the idea that art may serve as a viable arena for such explorations in life and living, but should not be considered the only space for such investigation. Rather, this mode of investigation revealed itself in not only art-making, but also in their daily living rituals, relationships, and interactions among those outside art. For some artists, the body became the primary mode of self-exploration, and as a result, the site of self-mutilation, defecation, destruction, and sexual exploration. In 1975, Carolee Schneemann performed *Interior Scroll*, which radically altered the public’s perception of the body in art. In *Interior Scroll*, Schneemann extracted a scroll from her vagina, and read aloud feminist text aloud. There is a sense of dematerialization, as artists argued that art requires no extra physical properties or materials—that we are born with everything we need to make and question art (see *Staring Exercise*, Chapter 2). As a result the body becomes the site for artistic endeavors. Some artists question our presence in the world, our ability to be remembered, the declining (and rising) of social classism, values, and the sheer
absurdity associated with just living. Body art, therefore, pushes the limits of the physical and mental being, through endurance tests and new conceptual forms of art making (See Joseph Beuys, *I Like America and America Likes Me*, 1974, Chris Burden, *Five Day Locker Piece*, 1971, Bruce Nauman, *Self-Portrait as a Fountain*, 1966). In one particular piece that is especially relevant to *Making with Caution*, Chris Burden spent five days in a small locker with a suspended bottle of water above and a bucket for urine below. As a feat of endurance, which Burden increasingly known for, *Five Day Locker Piece*, was one of the first performances that examined the physical endurance of the artist and the body.

Body artists attempted to illustrate the body in its truest state, in an attempt to be free from social norms and expectations. There was a distinct rejection and general renouncement of cultural norms, not only including the government control, societal pressures, appropriate and not appropriate behavior, but also the general identity of what art *is* and can be. Artists who participated in this ideology examined the physicality of pain, suffering, and paralyzation (both emotionally and physically, see Marina Ambromovic, *Rhythm 2*, 1972) as a annunciation of existence and as rejection of such obligations. These actions often had a therapeutic, self-meditative purpose on both the individual and social levels, all with the intention of awakening those unaware of the brutality of living. Although each artist utilizes the body in different manifestations, they collectively address the loss of personal identity, a refusal to allow the sense of reality to invade and control the sphere of emotions, and a romantic rebellion against dependence upon both people and things.²
As a consequence of the resurfacing of repressed emotions from the Second World War, the European body art era became characterized by a plethora of philosophers, such as Deleuze, Debord, Baudrillard, Barthes, McLuhan, Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, et cetera who all shared a profound interest in the study of semiotics, Existentialism, and Structuralist and Poststructuralist theory. Philosophers who studied these theories were primarily concerned with structures that form, limit and affect society. Such structures include the religious empowerment, government, and social stigmas that limit individuals in their abilities to improve their living conditions and even art. Decades after the war, Europeans still suffered from the numbness of the newly established bureaucracy, and the deafening shouts of National Socialism. The political pressure to exercise traditional social roles, including the promotion of Catholicism created an artistic tension that was manifested through actions (occasionally violent) on the body, and aggressive portrayals of human existence. It is important to recognize the absurdity of religion in post-war Europe, and more specifically the absence of God during the War itself. To some citizens, if God exists, “How could he allow such tragedies to happen?” The answer must be that God and all its related themes must be considered blasphemy, non-existent. These emotions and fears trickled to individuals and artists. In an effort to describe the social absurdity and inadequate guise of universal peace, painting progressed to a performative aktion, in which the application of the paint became a self-meditative libration that documented these emotions. With the aim of releasing creative energy, painting
became a behavior; the product or painting transformed to the document of the art, as opposed to the art itself.

Contrastingly, in light of such tragedies, the majority of public citizens sought for salvation in the arms of God. This proved to create friction and further strengthen the insufficient universal peace and salvation ideal. As a result, the performative actions that followed were considered groundbreaking, awakening, and shocking to the unbeknown public eye. Like other artists of that era, such as Joseph Bueys and other Fluxists, they were also primarily interested in shocking their public into an awareness and acknowledgment of the absurd truth. Simultaneously, Jackson Pollock’s developments within Abstract Expressionism reached a new height as their popularity crossed the Atlantic, making stops in fragile Europe and Japan. In combination with the French thinkers, their still-fresh wounds from the War, and the popularity of Abstract Expressionism, artists began to explore the possibilities of the scream, the violence, and grotesque as responses to the devastating effects of war, the confining political powers they functioned under, and the general absurdity of modern life and living. The destructive, nihilistic, and narcissistic aspects of Dada returned in full force as the Gutai artist group was constructed in Japan as an artistic reaction to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which was clearly unendurable and inexpressible through language alone. Likewise, the Viennese Actionist group was formed as the European equivalent of avant-garde action based art. In addition, an avant-garde attitude was forming in Vienna for the first time, no doubt looking forward while clearly cognizant of what they left behind: a politically, spiritually, and
emotionally wrecked nation that can only be rebuilt on the expulsion of these associated emotions. What emerges is an attack on asceticism as spiritual restraints were lifted and championed artistically. (See Figure 2: Otto Muehl, *Oh Sensibility*, 1970 and examples by Gunter Brus such as *Selbstverstummelung*, 1965, and other pieces of Actionist’s work) In the case of the Actionists, some actions were created to shine light on hypocritical ways of living of the societal masses. Similar to my own modes of making, there is an innate awareness of our precarious existence and an unreconciled relationship with what we believe to be real and what we believe to be morally valuable. In one of Otto Muehl’s most famous actions, *Oh Sensibility* (1970), Meuhl and other actors perform ritualistic sexual acts on a real goose. As one of his most taboo-breaking actions, Muehl forcibly fornicates with the live goose. In the short film, Muehl exhibits varied heights of sexual excitement as the goose transforms from aggressive and defiant, to finally complacent. When Muehl was later interviewed about *Oh Sensibility* decades later, he claims that this action and many others turn the mirror on society so they may recognize the dissimulation they have subscribed to. He claims,
“In another action with a goose, I used it as a dildo after I cut off the head. I stage myself pornographically in order to show truths. I provoke the moralists who do the same thing on a daily basis. I hold the mirror before them. They have marriage laws, morals, and at the same time, the brothel. I make no accusation, but I demonstrate the two-sidedness, the split in which human beings live. The public was appalled by my intentions. The spectators rejected the slaughter of the goose. If I think of the killing of human beings in the prisons of the USA, that is a crime. I do not condone animal murders. I show the sentimentality and hypocrisy. With tears in their eyes they gobble up their geese! Actionism is provocation and performance, the representation of moral double standards.”

Although Making with Caution has little to do with the repressed emotions from the Second World War specifically, or the enlightening of such associated hypocrisies, the European body artists of that era serve as a particular model of psychological art-making, and more importantly as valued art primarily made of “emotional cleansing,” as seen by galleries, museums, curators, and viewers alike. Body artists, such as the Viennese Actionists, explored the liminal action of art-making by utilizing it in a cathartic manner, and advocating for art to be a valid form of psychotherapy. Furthermore, the reverberations of their actions continue to influence my own art-making and thinking in regards to death and dying. As seen clearly in Staring Exercise (2010), I stare at viewers who pass through the installation space. Although viewers may participate in the game of staring, they may also simply empathize with the subject staring as he experiences various levels of pain and discomfort. For those who do participate, viewers recognize their own living while simultaneously experiencing pain similar to that of the subject in the video. By
acknowledging the “not deadness” one consequently recognizes the fragility of that current state. Although most of us are not consciously obsessed with our own death, nor the death of others, its lingering potential remains a part of our everyday human experience.

Through *Making with Caution*, I hope to bring this lingering potential to light in an effort to learn more about the processes of living and dying. These processes include the fragility of the living state, the quiescence of death and the emotional stress associated with such transformations. Of course, since *Making with Caution* is a simulation, it is impossible to *truly* experience such processes without my own execution. This innate problem, to understand death without experiencing it, creates an unsolvable paradox that can only be resolved through simulated, pretend, and staged performances which investigate those processes on an attainable level. I am not naive; I recognize the process in which I am most interested, the actual transition from life to death, is only attainable upon my actual death.

* Interruption of Spatial Norms through Installation Art

Spatial normality in the art exhibition space may be regarded as an oxymoron. For decades artists have purposely called attention to spatial normality (or the absence of) in an effort to comment on ways of seeing (Marcel Duchamp), methods of organization (Rachel Whitbread), collection (Allan McCollum), navigation (Richard Serra), or even the space itself (Ann Hamilton). Although this list of artists and modes of making is far from conclusive, installation art generally transforms a viewer’s
perception of space through the introduction of new media such as video, sound, and performance art, in addition to traditional art practices including sculpture, painting, and photography. The relationships between media and viewers often evokes complex associations, thoughts, longings, and moods which may be absent in the floating frames on stark white walls or atop of the traditional art pedestal. If one considers the works by Doug Aitken, it is clear his wide array of media and artistic approaches leads viewers into a world where time, space, and memory are fluid concepts (See Doug Aitken, *Sleepwalkers*, 2007). By interrupting spatial norms, Aitken not only questions the models of theatre and visual culture, but also the nature of artistic consumption and comprehension itself. Likewise, in *Making with Caution*, the installation interrupts our notions of time and space, which may be seen in the endless looped videos and general questioning of the presence of the subject in the wooden box.

In many cases one’s visual perception of the work cannot be separated from one’s bodily understanding of its presence. Consider Richard Serra’s monolithic elliptic steel structures, Donald Judd’s minimalisic cubes, or Carl Andre’s wooden arrangement sculptures. Each of these examples illustrate an experience of space and time that is entirely dependent upon the viewer’s physical locality and interaction with such objects. Like *Making with Caution*, these art pieces are minimalistic by design yet still retain powerful contents. Martha Buskirk, author of *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art*, explains the success of such minimalistic installations.

“One reason why every nuance of the intersection between object, surrounding space, and viewer’s experience takes on such importance is that so much has been
excluded from the work. The “cool” quality that early critics found in minimalism came from the smooth untouched surfaces of these simple shapes. The deceptive simplicity that inspired the label of minimalism—which stuck over the objections of the artist—led some to focus on ideal form at the expense of the specific material realization.”

By highlighting notes of disruption, through scientific presentation in the case of Mark Dion, natural phenomenon in the case of Cai Guo-Giang, and architectural interventions in the case of Doug Aitken, artists call attention to traditional conventions, culture, lifestyles, and predispositions that would otherwise be difficult to discuss without such interventions.

In *Making with Caution*, objects and videos are devoid of all decorative additions. Clearly minimalistic by design, I purposely attempt to highlight features that I find value in pursuing, such as physical suffering and endurance in *The Staring Exercise* and the confining space of *The Wooden Box Performance*. As a result, the installation is simple in both design and concept, but complex in nature and content. The installation is dependent upon the site in which it is located in addition to neighboring artworks and pieces which may influence, affect, or alter viewers perceptions of *Making with Caution*.

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Chapter 2: Recognition of Existence

In Greek mythology, Narcissus was a handsome hunter from the territory of Thespia in Boeotia. Narcissus was the son of the River Cephissus and nymph Liriope and was known for his undeniable beauty. He was so handsome that all women who beheld him at once fell in love with him. The vain Narcissus, however, only had eyes for himself and disdained those who loved him, including one such admirer named Echo. Upon seeing Narcissus, Echo immediately fell in love with his beauty. Narcissus, uninterested in the nymph, shooed her away leaving only the echo of her voice. Nemesis, who saw this, condemned the vain Narcissus to spend the rest of his days admiring his reflection in the crystal waters of the pool until the day he died.

The myth of Narcissus has been retold in various disciplines from art to literature, and functions as not only an interesting story, but one that has severe philosophical, biological, and psychoanalytic foundations. Sigmund Freud, who was particularly interested in narcissism, explains “Loving oneself is the libidinal complement to the egoism of the instinct of self-preservation.” 5 In other words, we all have innate impulses to maintain our health, protect ourselves from danger and risk to better care for future generations in an attempt to increase the stability of our passing genes. As Freud argues, it is impossible to separate our desires for other individuals, and our inwardly directed desire to care for ourselves. Freud calls this
basic, sexually charged desired directed at the self as “primary” or “normal” narcissism. When individuals have abnormal amounts of self-directed libido and show signs of withdraws from culture, society, and things, this emotional state is referred to as as “secondary narcissism.” As in the case of Narcissus, secondary narcissism is a magnified, exaggerated, and excessive form of primary narcissism. Although the story of Narcissus is a particular example of extremism, it is an valued model of comparison when examining the *The Staring Exercise* projection (See Figure 3), a primary component in *Making With Caution*. Using Freudian psychoanalysis, we can begin to recognize the importance of primal narcissism (even secondary narcissism) as a tool for examination in the deconstruction of self-preservation, notably seen in *The Staring Exercise*.

By operating as an acknowledgment of living for both viewer and subject, *The Staring Exercise* inadvertently comments on our desire to maintain a healthy sense of

Figure 3. Joshua Cloud, *The Staring Exercise*, 2011.
primary narcissism. Furthermore, this primary narcissism may be considered a device
to examine our overall wellbeing and can act as a warning system when our lives are
at risk. Our innate necessity to maintain this healthy living, as illustrated through
narcissism, not only affects our daily living rituals but the lives of our immediate and
remote interactions. Because of this, I believe maintaining a healthy dose of primary
narcissism requires an excessive amount of time, effort, and energy in both physical
and emotional territories. In The Staring Exercise, I stare at the camera (not unlike
Narcissus and his reflection), consciously not blinking, until it is no longer bearable.
As such, I hope to cultivate critical thinking and more importantly a conscious
awareness of one’s self-preservation. As a looped projection, viewers never witness
the moment when I blink, making the simple task an interesting paradigm of an
existentialist drama. Metaphorically, as anticipation of the blink builds, so may the
resistance to death and dying.

As Video Art

Similarly, in 1971, Vito Acconci made a video titled Centers (1971) in which
he points at a fixed video camera until he can no longer endure the physical
exhaustion. In Centers (See Figure 4), Acconci faces the camera in close-up as he
points straight ahead at his own image projected in the video monitor. Throughout the
21 minute video, he attempts to keep his finger at the exact center of the screen. As
the tape proceeds in real-time the only changes are the height of his weighing finger.
Acconci, commenting on his video claims,
“Pointing at my own image on the video monitor: my attempts to keep my finger constantly in the center of the screen — I keep narrowing my focus into my finger. The result [the TV image] turns the activity around: a pointing away from myself, at an outside viewer.” 7

Similar to The Staring Exercise, the mode of questioning is reversed through the breaking of the imaginary fourth wall. By it’s very design, Centers, is a film about film. Operating in an era when film was mostly reserved for theaters, artists including Vito Acconci, Dan Graham, Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra, Andy Warhol, and Nam June Paik, championed the progression of film from theater to gallery. As such, artists deconstructed the limitations of the frame, audience participation, and the very concept of mise-en-scene itself. On Vito Acconci’s Centers, Thérèse Beyler claims,

“Vito Acconci highlights the screen as a limit in the space of the video setup which presupposes the space and the subject filmed, on the one hand, and the reception area and the spectator, on the other. The spectator actually feels singled out and pointed at. The tension of his index finger indicates, by inversion and symmetry, both the pointer and the person being pointed out. The video lasts quite a long

Figure 4. Vito Acconci, Centers, 1971.
time considering the action and the meaning which it may convey. It sets up an area of reflection for the spectator and physical performance for the performer.”

As a result, Acconci and other artists radically altered the idea of a solo theatrical projection. They recognized the traditional forms of projection as passé in regards to the art world; perhaps a signifier for a “lack of creativity,” but furthermore, an ineffective display of their messages due to the limited perspectives. During its somewhat brief 40 years of existence, video art has evolved to a medium that most often exists in meta-narratives that also function as institutional and medium-specific critiques through varied projection abilities, devices, and instruments, which some would argue is postmodern by design. As art evolved to an intellectual discussion saturated with political agendas, the video camera seemed like a natural progression. As such, artists examined and re-examined the attributes of making art through video. (See Blow Job (1964) by Andy Warhol, Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square (1967) by Bruce Nauman, Hand Catching Lead (1968) by Richard Serra, 24 Hour Psycho (1993) by Douglas Gordon)

Likewise, The Staring Exercise attempts to deconstruct the inherent properties specific to only film and video. These qualities include its ability to be projected, its request of audience participation, and the literal moving image. The very essence of authorship, including the author’s authority, ownership, and decision making, are easily definable and become a dominant component when examining such pieces, including The Staring Exercise. After watching The Staring Exercise, viewers may recognize the artist’s ongoing virtual existence as a substitution for the artists’s
physical presence in an effort to comment on not only the medium of video, but also the property of the looped projection. Thus, the authorship and identity of the subject are in constant conversation in lieu of their absent physical counterpart.

*Making with Caution* invites viewers to rethink the notions of privacy and publicness. The referential action of dying is considered at the very least a private moment; a moment convoluted with reflection, sorrow, fear, and in some cases relief and excitement. It is revered by many cultures as the passing of one life into another, or the transition from mortal being to a spiritual one. It is without saying, regardless of personal belief, that death of oneself or another marks the end of a world as we know it. As such, relics from such events are maintained as exhibition value objects, worshiped for their physical or implied presence at the time of transition. In a common example, consider the cherishing of death shrouds, blankets, personal possessions, objects, and images of those deceased. These objects not only provide remembrance of the deceased to those still living, but also allow the individual to maintain a fleeting memory, feeling, emotion that only quickens pace with time. As in the case with my dog Max, I still have his collar, leash, and tag. It serves as a reminder of him, and of our time together. In other cases, autopsy photographs, death-scene images of suicides, pictures of the dead in both open and closed caskets, and tapes and transcripts of emergency telephone calls that contain dying words, are frequently saved but rarely viewed. Their morbidness makes viewing or handling them difficult, but in most cases, they are strangely difficult to discard due to their archival value as evidence of trauma. They are however, private objects. Rarely, are these
personal objects put on public display. Instead, tombs, altars, reliquaries, votives, statues, shrines, et cetera are constructed to allow for public remembrance or worship of well-respected individuals. I believe it is important to make a distinction between these two types of objects; although both respected for their spiritual qualities, historic presence, or religious significance, one is *destined* for the private sphere, while the other is often *constructed* for the public one.

Walter Benjamin, a famous mid-20th century philosopher and author of *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, describes a similar distinction among art objects as their *cult value* and *exhibition value*. In the text, Benjamin describes the evolution of art objects as ceremonial objects hidden from public display (cult value), to art objects that have displaced their original function of a cult value object and then serve as an publicly exhibited work of art. He continues his argument, claiming that photography and film (written before the advent of video, but it is assumed to be included), only serves as exhibition value simply due to the nature of its production. Benjamin states,

“The cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture. For the last time the aura emanates from the early photographs in the fleeting expression of a human face. This is what constitutes their melancholy, incomparable beauty. But as man withdraws from the photographic image, the exhibition value for the first time shows its superiority to the ritual value.”
As in the case of *The Staring Exercise*, one may attribute the video of the performance as an abstracted private relic, inserted into the public arena. As such, viewers may deconstruct the video as an undeniably private moment between two individuals exercising in a staring contest. While in a public environment, the object gains exhibition value as something or someone of importance, but also is vulnerable to foreign interpretations and explanations. Consider putting my dog Max’s collar and leash on spectacle in public sphere. Those who viewed it would likely consider Max as a important dog, one that likely did something of significance that other dog’s did not. In some cases, viewers (perhaps dog-lovers) may even be in awe of its presence and undeniably sympathetic to his death over 15 years ago, even if they never met him in person. Likewise, viewers may be sympathetic towards the subject in the video, even under the assumption that the individual is not dead, or have never come in contact with the subject outside of that experience.


6 Ibid.


Chapter 3: Freudian Death Drive & The Implied Death

While in the presence of all three components, *The Staring Exercise, The Wooden Box Exercise, and the The Wooden Box Performance*, a viewer may recognize the implied death. The implied death may best be witnessed when examining the coffin-like box and the performance within. When in conversation with *Making with Caution*, the implied death may be described as the allusion to objects of death, such as the coffin-like box, physically being in the box, and video of being in the box. In addition, the very absence of actual death and violence in an environment in which it is expected calls to attention the condition of death itself.

Returning to Freud, he describes this interest in death as the death drive. Late in his career, Freud describes what many would call contrary to his initial argument of the “pleasure principle.” The pleasure principle was the basic premise of Freud’s discourse that states, “the course taken by mental events is automatically regulated by the pleasure principle.” In other words, all of your actions are dictated by the consequential production of pleasure and/or avoidance of unpleasure. Freud continues to explain his stance on an economic way of living as an effort to reduce costs (pain) in order to gain reward (pleasure). In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud re-examines three particular areas of conflictual evidence that are contrary to his initial argument.
Firstly, Freud encountered numerous instances of repetitive trauma. While working with subjects who experienced a particular trauma (especially those returning from World War 1), he found a number of subjects tended to repeat or re-enact these traumatic experiences in both dreaming and awake states. For Freud, this is a particular example of contradictory evidence to his initial argument of the pleasure principle. In Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Freud states,

“This would seem to be the place, then, at which to admit for the first time an exception to the proposition that dreams are fulfillments of wishes. Anxiety dreams, as I have shown repeatedly and in detail, offer no such exception. Nor do ‘punishment dreams,’ for they merely replace the forbidden wish-fulfillment by the appropriate punishment for it; that is to say, they fulfill the wish of the sense of guilt which is the reaction to the repudiated impulse. But it is impossible to classify as wish-fulfillment the dreams we have been discussing which occur in traumatic neuroses, or the dreams during psycho analyses which bring memory the physical traumas of childhood. They arise, rather, in obedience to the compulsion to repeat…” 9

Secondly, Freud found another example of contradictory evidence in children’s play. Notably, the game Fort/Da involved the staging and re-staging of the disappearance of toys and favorite objects. Freud asked, how does this distressing game fit with the pleasure principle? 10 Lastly, during clinical practice, Freud found patients dealing with painful experiences that had been repressed regularly, “obliged to repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, remembering it as something belong to the past.” 11 Freud
continues to argue that our compulsion to repeat, often trumps our ecological balance of pleasure and pain.

In an effort to better understand this compulsion to repeat, even unpleasurable events, Freud sends a disclaimer to readers stating, “What follows is speculation, often far-fetched speculation, which the reader will consider or dismiss according to his individual predilection.” 12 He claims that the answer to this problematic repetition is ultimately found in “an urge in organic life to restore an earlier state of things.” This urge to return to an earlier state of existence is commonly considered the Freudian death drive or the death instinct. Through such a compulsion to repeat, the subject attempts to "bind" the trauma, thus allowing the subject to return to a state of quiescence. He continues,

_It seems, then, that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; that is, it is a kind of organic elasticity, or, to put it another way, the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life._ 13

In the form of an artistic psychoanalytical transference, _Making with Caution_, tries to make visible the repressed emotions of death and dying while concurrently commenting on the nature of trauma itself: the compulsion of the human psyche to repeat unpleasurable events over and over again. Specifically, this compulsion to repeat may best be seen in _The Staring Exercise_ and _The Wooden Box Exercise_'s repeatable, looped, projections. This compulsion to repeat, suggested by Freud, allows the subjects to temporarily suspend the trauma. When in conversation with
Making with Caution, the visual repetition allows for the deconstruction and examination of related emotional states of death and dying. Such emotional states may include various states of fear, including dread, reverence, and anxiety. These states may also include states of quiescence, peace, and tranquility. Since the videos are seamlessly looped, they play indefinitely, constantly questioning the role of death and dying in contemporary society.

In 2010, I created the *The Powder Paint Exercise* (2010) to further examine the physical, emotional, and spiritual death through art making. In *The Powder Paint Exercise*, a video records me getting hit in the face from a cannon filled with black powder paint. The powder shoots out with immense force and engulfs me and almost the entire video frame. When the video is radically slowed, a once terrifying explosion becomes an illustration of physical recovery as I strain to gather composure.

Figure 5: Joshua Cloud, *The Powder Paint Exercise*. 2010.
The implied death of Making with Caution surfaces on multiple occasions. It may be witnessed in The Staring Exercise; as the subject endures the physical pain from staring, one may attribute this exertion as living. The blink, which is never shown, but alluded to, may be considered a visual metaphor for death. As such, although the actual death is never witnessed, it’s implied presence is critical when deconstructing the video. Since the The Staring Exercise loops indefinitely, one may assume the subject has not yet died but is aware of its lingering potential (as we all are). Secondly, the implied death may also be seen when in conversation with The Wooden Box Exercise. When in the presence of the wooden box, one may define the box as a coffin-like container, suitable for burial purposes. Again, the box alludes to death’s omnipresence (not unlike that of a God). This questioning is further highlighted by the actual questioning of the subject’s presence within the box. In an abstracted game of hide-and-seek, Making with Caution, seemingly searches for death but never finds more than it’s shadow.

10 Ibid., p9.
11 Ibid., p12.
12 Ibid., p18.
13 Ibid., p30.
Chapter 4: The Wooden Box Live Performance

On May 7th, 2011, I performed live in *The Wooden Box Exercise*, during the *Confluence(s)* exhibition reception at the Urban Arts Space in Columbus, Ohio. In an effort to further comment on the questioning of existence and presence, I felt it was necessary to perform live, to not only experience *The Wooden Box Exercise* again for a longer length of time, but to also witness reactions, comments, and questions from viewers about the artwork and installation. Like described in previous chapters, the coffin-like box kept my physical presence hidden from viewers. A video camera and digital projector projected my actions live on the wall adjacent to *The Staring Exercise*.

As my first live public performance, I had some natural reservations. I was fearful of performing in front of family, friends, and colleagues for the first time. As one of Urban Art Spaces largest exhibitions of the year, there was estimated to be over 500 attendees at *Confluence(s)* that night. Although the event was more of a celebration than a critical analysis, there would be no shortage of critique from both peers and mentors. Ultimately, I decided that the piece called for a live performance which forced me to deal with my fears head on. The event was scheduled for two hours, from 6 PM to 8 PM. I decided it would be most interesting if the majority of viewers never saw me enter or exit the box. Since viewers never actually witness me
entering or leaving, they may never know for absolute certainty whether or not I’m actually in the wooden box. As noted before, I believe this questioning is crucial as it serves as a visual metaphor of my own questioning of death and dying, as well as my uncertainty in religion itself. In addition, The Wooden Box Exercise creates a critical examination of presence, itself. One may attribute the allusion of the subject’s presence as the lingering presence of death, presence of God, or presence of a loved one. One may recognize this presence as ever present, but almost always physically unattainable. In The Wooden Box Exercise, I investigated this role of presence as a slippery condition that is malleable and often, undefined.

Since the goal of the performance was to last for more than two hours, I knew modifications had to be made to allow me to last for such a length of time. My immediate fears were that I would run out of oxygen, or even worse, pass out from carbon dioxide inhalation (known as hypercania). Symptoms of early hypercania include flushed skin, full pulse, rapid breathing, breathlessness, and raised blood pressure. In extreme cases of hypercania, the human body responds by hyperventilating, sensing the individual is low on oxygen. The person would become dizzy, panicky, convulse, and eventually lose consciousness. In prolonged exposure, brain death from lack of oxygen will occur, in addition to massive organ failure. To reduce these risks, I drilled extra holes at the bottom of the box to allow more fresh air to enter the box. Notably, I believe losing consciousness from lack of oxygen would not only be an interesting performance, but one that would be especially poignant to the conversation of death and dying, and quite literally an elegant example of the
exhaustion of living. However, this was a risk that I was unwilling to take at the present moment and one in which I was ill prepared for. Nonetheless, I prepared my friends and family of the possibility of hypercania, and asked them to watch for signs or symptoms associated with it. Naturally, prior to entering the box, my fear response gained momentum as I recognized the inherit danger to such a performance.

Upon approaching the space, I recognized the approachability of the box; externally, it seemed hospitable, accessible, and benign. It was harmless in its shape, and warm and smooth to the touch. The warmth of the walnut wood was inviting and it’s aromas were pleasing. The space was quiet, other than a neighboring art piece which murmured undistinguishable sounds and hums, it was otherwise silent for a few brief moments. At ten minutes till six, when the gallery was still empty, I entered The Wooden Box Exercise and the performance began.

Within minutes from entering, I recognized that my initial pleasant thoughts of the box were contrary to the hostile space it held within. Almost immediately, the temperate atmosphere outside of the box that I was used to, was long gone. The temperature in the box quickly rose which was likely mentally exaggerated by my increasing fears of hypercania and my quickened pulse. I soon found myself at the early stages of perspiration at only ten minutes into the performance. I began to consider exit strategies, because at that moment, two hours was simply unattainable. As the camera continued to project my actions live for viewing audiences, I wondered if my symptoms of fear translated to the projection screen. I assumed they were, but I wasn’t sure. As the first few minutes passed, I consciously calmed myself through...
breathing exercises: “Deep breath in, hold, deep breath out. But, not too deep. Too deep will use too much oxygen. Pace yourself Josh, heightened anxiety will shorten the performance.” I continued this self-coaching as my fears heightened and subsided in a roller-coaster like way. I don’t know for sure, but I believe the moments before death operate in a similar way: intense fears of anxiety and apprehension shortly followed by feelings of serenity and tranquility. The climax of the event, death, or in my case, hypercania, still remains unknown.

Shortly after ten minutes, I began to hear footsteps and unfamiliar voices approaching the box. I assumed the gallery had opened its doors to the public, and viewers were now in question: “Is he really in the box?” I was, of course, and I soon found myself eavesdropping on private conversations in a strange game of artistic voyeurism. The viewers were doing the same, as they could see my actions via the one-way live video on the wall in front of them. Unable to know for sure, viewers questioned my presence in the box in the same way I was questioning their’s. Surprisingly, many viewers took this questioning a step further as they began to knock, hit, tap, and in one case, kick the box in a effort to elicit a reaction. My reaction to their prodding, would surely answer their question of presence. I attempted to maintain my composure as these taps occurred, and they soon became common place. Later in the performance, I became prepared for such noises, and they generated little to no reaction. In some of the first few minutes, viewers of all ages would talk to box in a way they would talk to a dead loved one with such questions like, “Can you hear me? Are you okay? When are you coming out?” In one particular case, a young boy
who sounded around six-years-old asked, “Are you going to be in their forever?” After receiving no response from the box, nor the video, he asked his mother, “Mom, will he be in there forever?” She responded, “I don’t know.” A picture was later found of this child, shortly after (See Figure 6).

As my roller coaster of fear continued its highs and lows, I found the box’s hostile nature reached its peak at 45 minutes into the performance. At this point, the temperature of the box seemed to plateau, and the amount of oxygen was neither increasing nor decreasing (at least it seemed). It was still, nonetheless, and uncomfortable atmosphere by most standards, but tolerable for a longer length of time than I had originally imagined 45 minutes ago. The goal of two hours, although still quite difficult, was at least reachable. As time progressed, friends, family, and colleagues gathered to gaze at the display of endurance. I consistently heard comments such as, “I didn’t think he would make it this long” and “I’m surprised he didn’t come out yet.” It seemed at almost every interval of twenty minutes an unknown messenger would come and report the amount of time remaining. “It’s almost 7:00 now, Josh. You are halfway.” Like a coach cheering a team on, I
found the crowd of spectators gradually transformed to a gang of supporters that willingly gave generous amounts of encouragement. The crowd, undefined entirely by visual amount, sounded to be at most between 10-15 persons. I later found out that my estimated number of viewers was largely underestimated.

In the box, the hostile environment continued to take its toll. Although the temperature and ability to breathe stayed relatively the same, the exhaustion of being in such an environment was radically affecting my confidence and morale. I found myself consciously checking those conditions that lead to hypercania. “Breathing? Check. But it’s hard to take a deep breath. As long as I can take another, I’ll be okay. Pulse? Quickened, but not irregular. Temperature? Hot, but not much worse than a summer day at the beach.” At almost every five minutes, the questions were re-asked and similar answers resulted. At nearly an hour and a half into the performance, I had noticed I had been staring at the same grain of wood for some time. Ironically similar to The Staring Exercise, which was playing adjacently, my gaze focused on the shape and pattern of a particular area of the lid. After staring for an indefinable length of time, I noticed the wood grain began to sway back and forth. Having never experienced something like this before, my fear response radically quickened and I decided to no longer allow my eyes to focus at one place for longer than a few seconds. The performance continued with more knocks on the box, and even subsequent picture taking.
Chris Burden’s *Five Day Locker Piece* (1971) is particularly relevant when examining the live performance of *Making with Caution*. In *Five Day Locker Piece*, Chris Burden transformed his physical body into living showcase of confinement and sensory deprivation as he confined himself to a tiny student locker for five consecutive days. Hallway dwellers and passerby’s were forced to affiliate themselves with the social dilemma that interrupted their daily living rituals over a five day period. As his MFA exhibition, Burden was already on the forefront of body art and the undefined limitations of art-making. Over the next three years, Burden made some of the most challenging, radical, and demanding artworks of the decade. Shortly after *Five Day Locker Piece*, Burden performed his most famous piece, *Shoot* (1971). In *Shoot*, Burden was shot by a .22 rifle from an assistant from a distance of about five meters.

As the performance closed on the two-hour mark, I could sense the crowd of spectators were growing. They knew, at some point, if I was really in the box, I would have to come out. The last fifteen minutes of the performance were the slowest as I longed for fresh air and cold water. Upon reaching 8:00 PM, my wife whispered near the box, “It’s eight-o-clock, do you want to come out?” I decided to wait another two or three minutes to gather my composure, and turned off the cameras. I lifted the lid, with the help of my wife, and found myself surrounded by a large number of viewers clapping and cheering at the achievement. It was at moment I’m sure I’ll remember forever. I took a moment or two to gather my composure since my body was being flooded with fresh oxygen. The oxygen, literally breathed new life into me, and I immediately felt rejuvenated.
Hugs and handshakes were abound as I joined in the congratulations. Family and friends asked, “How hard was it, how do you feel?” I responded, “It was hard and I’m glad it’s over, but it really was a journey.” Reminiscing on my experience in the box, it was a performance that I learned a great deal from. It is, rightfully so, hard to put into words, but what I believe happened was a heightened awareness of my own existence. The Wooden Box Performance gave me the opportunity to question the very notion of presence and experience intense states of emotional fear and tranquility. I suspect these states may be similar to the processes of death and dying.

Upon my exit from the box, my uncle David gave me a note handwritten on the back of his business card (See Figure 7). It states, “Welcome back. This is part of your reborning. You’re ALIVE! It will never serve you well to fear death; you can only Carpe each Diem! The phrase today, Carpe Diem, is a commonly used aphorism to suggest “Seize the day.” Although the phrase has become somewhat cliché since it can found on everything from CD albums to tattoos, I find it ironically fitting as the last page of The Wooden Box Exercise. It is true, from the past two years of working with the undefinable, hard to understand, notions of death and dying I have gained a new awareness of the preciousness we call life. Since the performance, I have carried this card with me at all times.

Figure 7: Carpe Diem Business Card, 2011.
25 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

25 The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the LORD. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

26 And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

27 Then saith He to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My LORD and my God.

This short lesson can be found in the Book of John, and describes the disbelief of Thomas the Apostle upon hearing the news of Jesus’ resurrection. Thomas, unconvinced that Jesus has risen, demands to physically touch Christ’s wounds to serve as evidence of his being. A week after his plea, Christ appeared and instructed Thomas to “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” Although the Bible does not explicitly mention Thomas touching Christ, followers may assume he fulfills Christ’s demands. Upon touching the wounds of Christ, Thomas exclaims, “My Lord and my God,” as an
indication of his newly found faith. Because of his hesitancy to believe, Thomas was famously dubbed, “Doubting Thomas.”

*The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* (1601), by Baroque artist Caravaggio, illustrates this exact scene (See Figure 8). Guided by the hand of Christ, Thomas penetrates the wound of Christ, and in doing so, finds unquestionable evidence of his existence. What is important to note is Caravaggio illustrates the moment at which Thomas elevates his knowledge from *a priori* to *posteriori* as his finger passes through the gaping wound. As a symbolic gesture, evidence of its very being, the penetrating finger acts as a larger signifier of its bestowed presence within the dark hole. Most importantly, the finger’s location is in constant discussion with its location within the hole, as opposed to the moment just prior to entering. Imagine if you will, the same image, but moments before—before the finger has entered the orifice. Without the penetration, the painting would lose its discussion of location that is entirely contingent upon the breaking of the surface, and therefore crucial in the initial argument of disbelief. Because of this, *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* serves as a seminal piece of art that is strangely congruent in the topics of disbelief today.

Immanuel Kant investigates a similar structure of reason, including the systems of *a priori* and *posteriori knowledge* in his most prominent piece of philosophy, *The
Critique of Pure Reason (1781). Written over 200 years ago, it continues to be one of the most influential works of philosophy ever written. In The Critique of Pure Reason, Kant further distinguishes the two types of knowledge, \textit{a priori} and \textit{posteriori}, as vehicles used to examine morality and ethics of modern living. In it, he advocated for a blend of rationalist and empiricist theories. In short, \textit{a priori} knowledge refers to knowledge that is justified independently of experience, i.e., knowledge that does not depend on experiential evidence or warrant, such as the belief that God exists. In contrast, \textit{a posteriori} knowledge is justified by means of experience, and depends therefore on experiential evidence or warrant, such as the touching of Christ’s wounds. The importance of this epistemological comparison is found when presented with any proposition, such as the existence of God, as it serves as model of judgment in determining our will to believe and accept as fact.

Like the finger of Doubting Thomas, \textit{Making with Caution} serves as an abstracted form of posterior knowledge of related themes of death and dying. As noted to earlier, true posterior knowledge of death would require actual death. However, I believe \textit{Making with Caution} reaches an understanding of death and dying that surpasses a priori knowledge. I have a gained an abstracted awareness of my existence through the physical action of staring, acknowledging this staring as a form of living, and participating in this replayed action of staring as a revisitable moment. This gained knowledge may only be learned through experience. The experiences shown in \textit{The Staring Exercise}, \textit{The Wooden Box Exercise}, \textit{The Wooden Box Performance}, resonates with me differently than it does with viewers. In part, this is
due to having gained this knowledge of such experiences, but also because it affects my ethos and pathos differently than one who has not experienced such events.

Since the completion of *Making with Caution*, at The Urban Arts Space in Columbus, Ohio I’ve had the opportunity to contemplate it’s effectiveness as a piece of art and as a vehicle to examine death and dying. As a piece of art, I believe it was overall quite successful. There is a eerie stillness that is easily witnessed in the videos, due to their little action and movement. The space almost becomes serene in its quietness, which allows for uninterrupted investigation of each component. Neighboring noise form other installations does affect one’s experience within the *Making with Caution* space, but does not seem to detrimental to its overall success in my opinion. It is in close conversation with other artworks, including Vito Acconci’s *Centers* film and *Seedbed* (1972) performance, and Chris Burden’s *Five Day Locker* (1971) performance. Like *Making With Caution*, in each of these artworks there is an element of endurance as the artist endures physical exhaustion and questions the public perception of gaze and presence.

As a vehicle to investigate death and dying, I believe *Making with Caution* allowed me to examine those related conditions through an abstracted artistic lens. Particularly, the live performance during the reception of *Confluen(s)* allowed me to better investigate physical endurance as an acknowledgment of living and the very notion of presence itself. However, when examining *Making with Caution* from outside of the author’s circle, I believe there is an allusion to death and dying that is firmly supported by *The Wooden Box Exercise*’s coffin reference. Without this object,
I believe not every viewer would consciously recognize its close relation to death and
dying specifically, although they may be sympathetic to the actions within. As a piece
of function art making, Making with Caution has allowed me to investigate my fears
of death and dying in ways that would not be possible otherwise. Collectively the three
components of Making With Caution served as an investigation into the meaning of
death and dying through the examination of presence, endurance, and confinement. I
believe the emotions, feelings, and attitudes I experienced during the live performance
are strangely congruent to those elicited from a death, or near death experience.
Notably so, Making with Caution began to pacify my anxiety related to my fear of
death and associated spiritual dissatisfactions. I look forward to future art
performances that continue to examine, and hopefully, alleviate my fears.

References


