INFINITE LIMITS

A Thesis
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By
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ABSTRACT

This research is representative of the present condition of my art practice and the underlying conceptual basis for it. My work is generated out of the body's capacity to employ external resources to satisfy inner drives. It draws from all stages of the developing self, simultaneously approaching an adult of 25 with an infant in a mother's womb.

The work mostly takes three-dimensional form, consisting of artifacts appropriated from the realm of everyday consumer goods, and sometimes involving performance. The works are ephemeral, emphasizing the unstable conditions inherent in such materials as lipstick, sexual lubricant, and vegetable shortening.

A concentration is placed on the artist's body as a site of constant negotiation between inside and outside. Upon contact with my materials, through thought and physical touch, substances are passed through my being, dissolving the body's limits. The viewer is addressed from a psychologically charged arena of emotion and desire, demonstrating how personal homogeneity is ruptured by inevitable projections of a part of oneself outside the self.

Finally, I have sustained a belief in this body of work, that consciousness is inseparable from a body, and the notion of a completely integrated self is impossible.
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INTRODUCTION (LOCATING THE WORK)

This text chronologically documents and evaluates the products of my research over the past two years. Behind the works is an ongoing process of negotiating one's life. Marcel Duchamp once compared his rejection of painting to breaking a leg. "You don't mean to do it," he said.\(^1\) There are aspects of these works that have little to do with a willingness on my part. Rather, they just happen. This body of work, therefore, can be seen as a parallel reflection of the events and overall drives that my life is made of.

The works I have made should be viewed as part of a process of exploration. I conduct this search with a conscious disregard for first answers, intending always to explore more than is already known or can be proven. I embrace chance and doubt as necessary conditions, and a fertile ground, from which to draw.

My work is driven by an internal logic that comes from the body and its psychological drives. 'Drives' can be defined as energies or forces that move between the body and representation.\(^2\) I seek to give form to that which simultaneously horrifies and attracts me. I look to bodily excretions such as oil, spit, snot, semen, and shit as markers of a psychological state of being in the world. The work is the by-product of this state of being, a tangible (and often embarrassing) release of emotion, inner conflict, and desire.

I look for a spark within the combination of distinct, yet inseparable, parts of a work—its concept, material, process, structure, gesture, and intensions. That initial spark may change entirely from a work's conception to completion. I am not interested in controlling this process, or repeating the same procedure from one project to another. Rather, I value a spontaneous and intuitive working process.

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\(^1\) John.

\(^2\) Oliver VIII.
My creative process is typically slow. I have to go around the block to go through the front door. I jump from literal deliberation, to spontaneity, then back again. I like to approach the edge of danger, and hopefully retain the feeling of being on that edge without actually crossing it. For the most part, the works remain contemplative and discrete, reflecting a slow ontological thoughtfulness.

My practice is not defined in relation to a singular medium. I am primarily concerned with addressing concepts, generated out of a psycho-formal sensibility, for which a variety of mediums might be used. Ordinary objects and materials from everyday culture are appropriated into my work as a means of investigating what is essentially a social phenomenon: the abstraction of everyday life through the psyche. As consciousness would cease without a body, a question is posed over and over in my art: How and to what purpose does the body modify inert material? This material is appropriated in my work as metaphorical protagonists in the development of a complex personal iconography. The use of these materials is determined by the relationship of a given artifact to the culture in which it was produced. These artifacts are encoded by what their makers and generations of users have projected onto them. I look for opportunities to twist the common function of these artifacts, physically, symbolically, and metaphorically, ultimately associating a new thought for the that object or material. These works emphasize ephemerality, which is intended to bring their viewer back to a heightened sense of lived experience.

Whatever is made visual is often the tip of the iceberg as far as the meaning of my work is concerned. Benjamin Buchloh refers to Beuys’ reliance on “the idealist metaphor: this object stands for that idea, and that idea is represented by this object.” The objects in my work are diffused into Beuys’ kind of naive context for representing meaning. In this model where nothing is as it seems, the field of formalism is disrupted and an appeal is made to the unconscious.

I believe that my function as an artist is to begin a work that can only be completed by the viewer. For me, art is a means to what Elaine Scarry has referred to as

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3 Buchloh 39-40.
"remaking human sensibility" by projecting experience into the realm of the sharable. In order for this phenomenon to happen, experience must be objectified, taking on some form. The form may be a painting, sculpture, installation, performance, etc.—but these are simply artifacts, and in the end it is none of these things first. It is, rather, a thing to be thought, a thing to be felt—a thing in an infinite transition from the object realm to the human realm where consciousness itself can be altered and remade.

Body

The body presents the paradox of contained and container at once. Thus our attention is continually focused upon the boundaries or limits of the body: known from an exterior, the limits of the body as an object; known from the interior, the limits of its physical extension into space.

Traditionally, painters begin with a canvas, sculptors with clay or a stone, etc. I view my practice beginning with a lack, or an absence of what is to occur. This lack is manifested in the everyday lived reality of my own body. This body functions like an artifact, able to change and be charged by other artifacts to produce meaning.

I would locate my work in a private, domestic sphere, which is "regarded as disquieting, since the domestic sphere is the realm of the body—"the domus being where the body is kept fed, clothed, and clean, where it procreates, defecates, and regularly retreats into the world of greatest privacy and secrecy, the world of sleep and dreams."

Eventually, in the 'performances,' I turned to my own body as an instrument in space and time, a ground as tangible as any canvas, a medium as corporeal as clay or stone. I wanted to approach a condition where my body and other objects might become interchangeable. The 'live' works are comprised of a task or series of tasks that are assigned based on the relation between my body and a given inanimate object. Whatever else was necessary to complete the composition, considering formal and conceptual factors, was added.

\[\text{Scarry 307.}\]
\[\text{Stewart 104.}\]
\[\text{Hajimian 78.}\]
inserting myself into the work enabled me to more directly explore how material
culture is inflected by the human body. For the sake of not overemphasizing the
difference between ‘performance’ and ‘sculpture’ (both words I am reluctant to stand
behind), I will appropriate two terms associated with bottled drinking water—sparkling
and still. Both terms are pure water, only the sparkling variety contains carbonation, i.e.
bubbles, thereby tasting different. These terms will help me distinguish two bodies of
work without reinforcing a needless set of boundaries which would keep one or the other
on the periphery of my practice. The main difference between the two is that one lives
and breathes a still life, while the other includes the presence of myself, sparkling live.

My ‘live’ works have more of a kinship with the plastic arts—painting and
sculpture—than with theatre. One important difference between the two is how a
conventional drama unfolds while the spectator follows like a fish on the end of a hook.
My performances, on the other hand, were made to be read like one would a sculpture.
In addition, my performances all took place on the same ground with the audience. This
is imperative because this common ground implicates the viewer’s body in a way that
viewing anything on a raised platform or pedestal does not.

Stealing a Body

The thief is not looking for the object that he takes. He is looking for a person. He is looking for his own
mother, only he does not know this.

The infant who quite ordinarily and heartily claims possession of his mother, and who pursues whatever
attracts him, is looking in the illusion that he created whatever interests him in the world’s shop window.  

I simply place the two excerpts above from D.W. Winnicott’s “The Impulse to Steal,” to extend his observation to what underlies my, and perhaps the overall, practice of
‘appropriation’ in terms of an art process. How far could one apply this? Duchamp, of
course, immediately comes to mind, as do the Paleolithic wall paintings in caves such as
Lascaux.

1 Winnicott, “The Impulse to Steal” 177.
2 Winnicott, “The Impulse to Steal” 186.
CHAPTER 1

INSERTION INTO A PROJECTION

Existance, as existential philosophy understands this concept, is a movement, it is that by which our being is oriented to what is other than itself. It is simultaneously a movement out of one's own given or present state of being.  

I Shall Remain Dough

...as I do not care about being a cake: I shall remain dough, subject to any impression which I am satisfied comes from the region of truth.  

-George I. N. E. S.

One of the first works I made in graduate school was called I Shall Remain Dough. The idea behind this piece involved embracing oneself as a subject-in-process. Dough, a substance in-between edible and indigestible, assumed me as a metaphor for the self. I identified with 'inness' quote, however I saw this fluid condition more as a matter of reality than of choice.

I began by mixing up a pasty mass of dough. This batter was poured into a mold of my face, then placed in a freezer for several hours to temporarily solidify. The mold was released and the piece photographed. In a matter of minutes, the work changed from a life-like mask of my own features to a flattened pile of viscous formlessness.

To allow this matter to stand in for 'me,' the watch is lost itself, was both attracting and repelling. It demonstrated the universe's tendency to attain a state of maximum homogeneity, regardless of the precious boundaries I like to think protect things as whole and separate. The resulting pile of batter was most pleasing of all, a humorously disordered non-object, particularly pitiful on the concrete floor of my studio.

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1 Linggi 528. (emphasis mine)
2 Cohnvsky 61.
Lipstick

When you’re born, a long life of mouth enslavement begins. From infancy, it’s the key connector to the world beyond one’s own skin. When an infant touches an object, it thenmouths it. Right from the start, reality is constantly tested on the lips.\(^1\)

I purchased 104 tubes of lipstick at an outdoor flea market, with which I had an automatic visceral fascination. The ingredients listed on the tube sounded at once crude and pure, dirty and erotic: castor oil, acetylated lanolin, candelilla wax, hydrogenated glycerides, petrolatum, etc.

I was familiar with several artists who had already made compelling works with lipstick. Along with these and lipstick’s strong associations as a ‘sexed’ material, I concentrated on approaching it from my point of view as a heterosexual male. Wherein in that view is the position from which I encounter lipstick as an ‘other.’ I find it strange, mysterious, seductive, dangerous, and erotic. The colored lips of women simultaneously attract and terrify me. In that redness I see a blurred duality: blushing, blooming, arousal inviting one to occupy its interior and savage man-eater with bloody vestige of fresh kill.

I was interested in how cosmetics are used to simultaneously conceal and reveal, cutting and pasting the body. Lipstick, of course, is used on the fleshy folds that form the margins of the mouth. While there are holes in us and around us, the mouth is the part of the human body I am most fascinated with. It is the place where we greet the world, the beginning of a long pipeline to the anus. I must concentrate to look into the eyes of someone speaking across from me. Otherwise I catch myself, having cropped the rest of them out, staring at a mouth.

\(^1\) Palingenst 28.
Tracing

To live means to leave traces. 12
-Walter Benjamin

The first work I made with lipstick was a drawing entitled Tracing. The drawing was made by laying down on a sheet of paper and tracing the contour of my body with red lipstick. I wanted to set myself outside of self, set at a distance for presentation. I wanted to see the impossible—to stand back and see myself. It was important that I was not merely wielding a mark-making tool, but a cosmetic associated with women’s mouths. This procedure allowed my mind to oscillate between a hypothetical mouth’s inside and outside, as if I was the lip that lined its edges.

Later I finished the drawing by adding dark brown lipstick, as if entering at the mouth, running down the throat and neck, then flowing straight up the shoulder into the right arm, until finally running out at the fingertips. After making these marks, I impulsively smeared my hand into the ‘image-hand’ to assimilate the sweet-smelling brown grease onto my skin. Then I performed a measured chance operation, quickly letting go of the paper and feverishly reaching back to the image so that my handprint would be slightly off-registered. I repeated this two more times until I was satisfied with what appeared to be a messy movement of color that seemed to be traced by the image-hand itself.

Tracing incorporates the act of making a vestige, a word epistemologically related to “footprint,” or “the act of putting one’s steps in the traces of steps.” 13 The image plays on both presence and absence, showing myself hollow and lacking. It references chalk-lines used in homicide scenes, but the image stands vertically displaced, and the quality of line follows the body’s edges more specifically. The gender of the body hints at male. The body’s gesture is also ambiguous, displaying a corpse-like stiffness as well as what one friend named “hallelujah”. This ambiguity makes for the mapping of an awkward body, emphasizing an anxiety over preconceived borders that circulate and describe it as a fixed organism.

12 Benjamin 155.
13 Nancy 95.
Figure 1.1 *Tracing* 2000,
lipstick on paper, 84 x 30 in.
Knob

The idea for Knob (Fig. 1.2) came after seeing a box of used doorknobs for sale at a flea market. A door is a wondrous place of transition where two worlds converge and flow into one another. Without actual doors, the antique knobs had a clumsy, out of place character. They suggested points of entry to displaced, or normally inaccessible, locations. As my thoughts were occupied with lipstick, it occurred to me how the mouth is like a door to the body, and the size of a mouth and a doorknob are the same. This train of thought led to a lipstick doorknob.

I cast one of these doorknobs using twenty-two lipsticks. The transformed object catches the viewer off-guard after identifying, either through scent or the text on the accompanying exhibition label, what initially appears as a merely red doorknob. The uselessness of the object humored me. Even "knob" as a word sounded inept. What was it good for? It could serve no utilitarian purpose; and its material condition as a semi-solid challenged the notion of an art object with immutable boundaries.

It was also, to me, a completely erotic object. Projecting from the wall, hung at the approximate height of a person’s mouth, it was charged as an object to be viewed not just with the eyes, but also the body. I was particularly interested with the knob’s keyhole. Since this object’s ordinary use was negated, I could imagine the keyhole as a site of potential entry into a sensual thought realm. I was particularly struck with how, as my body related to this thing as a projectile, my mind’s eye was inserting itself into its hole. This cooperative plunging in and pushing out became one of the gestures I would be after in my work from that point on.

Bump

I happened upon a nice selection of doorstops while in the hardware store. I was provoked by how the doorstop’s function was complementary to its visual immediacy projecting from a surface and abruptly stopping. I took one into the studio, and promptly replaced the white rubber tip with one cast from molten lipstick.
I was satisfied with the succinctness which one presented in a given space. Noting how Knob had the ability to implicate a viewer's body, I displayed Bump (Fig. 1.2) screwed into the wall at approximate penis-height. The doostop's shape and volume, in context to the wall, presented an amusing "projection of a surface," a phrase used by Freud to describe the ego.\textsuperscript{14} I imagined it passively advancing itself upon the viewer, intimating sexual/oral interaction.

By sealing this form with red lipstick I had performed another castration. This was an impossible doostop, as its use would only result in its destruction. If one imagined the form as a 'phallus' with a softened red tip, the piece could easily be humorous or horrifying depending on your view.

Doorstops

The formal shift from Bump to Doorstops (Fig. 1.3) represents a lesson in control over material. I was very careful handling the lipstick in Bump. I became aware that the absence of touch afforded by the casting process left the object less immediate and further removed from the body and the nature of the material (lipstick) serving as a metaphor for that body. Knob, because it is an object already directly associated with the hand, opened up a pleasantly implied sense of touch. This was not the case for Bump.

Bypassing the casting procedure, lipsticks were sliced out of their tubes and stuck in place of a doostop's rubber tip. Here the sculptural act lay not in creating forms but in selecting and placing them. This backward step resulted in a work with less visual delay. It is readily apparent that lipstick is the material used. Because the shape of the original lipstick would inevitably get deformed, each doostop was unique, making the idea of displaying several together compelling. A dozen or more of these were made, each with a different color, and titled by the name on the original tube: 'Persian Melon', 'Pink Icing Desert Rose', 'Nature's Blush', etc. They were screwed into the wall at approximate mouth-height, in groups of three or more. A minimum gap of 28'' between one doostop from another was imposed to compensate for the average size of a human body.

\textsuperscript{14} Freud 16.
Figure 1.2  top left: **Knob** 2000, cast lipstick, 2 x 2 1/4 x 2 1/2 in.

top right: **Bump** (detail below) 2000, cast lipstick, metal doorstop, 5 x 1 1/4 x 5/8 in.
Figure 3.3  **Doorstops** (detail below) 2001. lipstick, metal doorstops. 11 x 11 x 4 in.
...the summit of elevation is in practice confused with a sudden fall of unheard-of violence. The myth of Icarus is particularly expressive from this point of view: it clearly splits the sun in two—the one that was shining at the moment of Icarus' elevation, and the one that melted the wax, causing failure and a screaming fall when Icarus got too close.15

These body fluids, this effluent, this shit are what life withstands, barely and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body exacts itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so fast I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit—cadere, cadaver.16

I thought about my work's appropriated objects in an active, dramatic sense—inflected by the human body and psyche. It became important to construct an event to help me actualize these thoughts. This event, consisting of a task-oriented activity carried out by my body, would be framed as a sculpture.

In search of an ordinary object with which I could interact with, I encountered a toilet plunger in a hardware store. As an experiment, I took the plunger into the store's bathroom and plunged it against the wall of a painted enamel stall door. The plunger stuck to the wall. Its wooden rod projected outward in my face, slowly bobbed up, down, and slightly around. Finally, unable to hold its breath any longer, the plunger suddenly lost its suction and popped loose.

With the plunger activity in mind, I wanted to draw a visual correlation between the falling and dissolving of Icarus, described by Basille in his 1930 essay "Rotten Sun," with the everyday flushing operation of the toilet. The plunger is an extension of man for the purpose of saving me when the systems set in place for flushing away disorder have become clogged. It is an instrument of heroic intervention standing between us and the taught awfulness of our own waste.17 I painted the plunger yellow to also signify, however loosely, the sun.

I wore a pair of kneepads over my buttocks. The straps of the kneepads had to be stretched as tight as possible, constricting my movement considerably. The decision to wear kneepads was intuitive, although I have continued this practice in all three

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15 Basille, "Rotten Sun" 58.
16 Kriševa 231
17 Flood 164.
performances discussed within this text. The "buttpads" function in at least two ways. They signify that something dangerous may be taking place, while also permitting the audience to read past my overall demeanor, which would reflect only the utmost concern and concentration.

Disparate elements were loosely tied together using the color yellow. The plunger and kneepads were covered with yellow spray-paint. The plunger's handle was wrapped with yellow tape. An eight-inch length of yellow tape was stuck on the wall, about five feet from the floor. The second eight-inch length of tape was placed on the floor, about twelve feet away from the wall.

The piece began with a high-powered stage light turning on. This light was positioned behind me so both spotlight the wall marker and cast my shadow onto the wall. A second stage light was positioned at the wall, several feet away from the wall marker, and directed at the floor marker from a height of nine feet. The space was black with the exception of these two lights. I began crouched down like a short-distance runner, placing my toes just behind the floor marker. This sense of urgency is maintained for the duration of the performance. Taking the plunger in hand, I burst full-speed at the wall, pumping the plunger against the wall until it stuck. I raced back to my starting point, spun around, and proceeded to produce high-pitched squeak noises with my banana-shaped toy. I stood with one foot slightly in front of the other, knees bent, ready to run the instant the plunger popped loose. Once the plunger dropped, I threw the toy on the ground and ran again. Three total plunge cycles were produced. Both lights shut off the moment the plunger dropped the third and final time.

The concept behind Rotten Sun (Fig. 1.4) is rooted in a relation between 'I' and 'Other.' The sun is a terrifying 'other' for me, remaining alien, savage, and unknowable. The sun opposes my finitude being, making it an enemy. However, it is not the presence of a restraining or alien 'enemy' that destroys man; but the removal of this enemy. When the "other" is obliterated the individual is also obliterated. In this sense, I am made of the sun. This should make man uneasy with himself, with nature. His inner sun is as hostile as the external sun, as perilous and majestic.
Figure 1.4  
*Rotten Sun* (video still from performance) 2001,  
Hackett Hall Sound-Stage, Ohio State University  
plunger, duct tape, banana-shaped squeaky toy, kneepads.  
paint, duration: approximately one minute.
CHAPTER 2

APPENDAGE

The body is like an implement, moving in and through the world in such a way that its material environment is a physical extension of the needs and wants of the body. 18

At the beginning of my second year of study at OSU, I had an accident that resulted in the loss of ability to use both my hands for over three months. While in my studio, a faulty ladder collapsed from underneath me. I shattered my right wrist and broke a bone in my left hand. As a result, I underwent reconstructive surgery on my right wrist using bone grafted from my hip. For ten weeks I wore an external fixator on my right wrist. Essentially this involved four metal rods secured into the bones of my hand and lower arm, which prevented movement to allow the break to heal. In addition, there were three pins holding the reconstructed fracture together. My left hand was in a cast during this time as well. During these months I was able to do very little for myself, and depended greatly on my wife for assistance with everything.

Incapable of coordinating my body’s operative functions, the feelings of vulnerability and helplessness during this period recalled the intensity of infantile experience. My memory was triggered of an incident that took place in nursery school during afternoon nap. As the others around me were asleep, I lay restless in the hushed darkness, growing more and more worried that I remained completely alone. I comforted myself with one of my stuffed animals, which had a tag that I enjoyed loopin around my finger. Having no frame of reference for my finger’s throbbing numbness (the circulation being cut off), I panicked and wet the bed. When the body’s extremities, out there

18 Stewart 102.
wielding their own influence, are 'caught' in the act, I can feel them as if they were attached to the base of my spine, like my finger during pre-school nap.

The works in this chapter made use of forms that resembled an external, 'dismembered' appendage. While these 'part-objects' may have helped me cope with my own feelings of dismemberment, it is worth mentioning here that the collapse of the World Trade Center towers occurred just two days after the ladder collapsed in my studio. So, for me, these 'part-objects' functioned in the larger, contemporary sense of representing grief over the loss of a departed totality.

*Rocking-Horse Winners*

I had in mind a sculpture that would involve a slippery rock. By covering a rock with something slippery, I could play against its surface, volume, and weight. It was finally the concrete master-of-factness of a rock that compelled me to make it slippery, led by the idea of fumbling over a fact. K-Y Jelly, a commercial product for the enhancement of sexual intercourse, was squirted directly out of its tube over the rock. Marcel Duchamp once spoke of the pleasure of using eroticism like a tube of paint, injecting it into one's creations. I have incorporated K-Y Jelly in that fashion.

I turned to objects that would readily signify childhood because I wanted to call the notion of childhood innocence into question. I began collecting used stuffed animals, particularly their parts—a leg, an arm—from children's resale shops. These 'appendages' accumulated in my studio when I attached one to a rock. This simple juxtaposition suggested a play between hard and soft, heavy and light.

A series of four works were made according to this procedure, and grouped under the name *Rocking-Horse Winners* (Fig. 2.1), after a short story by D.H. Lawrence. The individual pieces were named after winning horses in the story: Daffodil, Lively Spark, Sassovino, and Malabar. The size of the rocks used was determined by what I could lift with both my hands at the time, which was less than normal due to my healing arms.
Figure 2.1  Rocking-Horse Winners 2001, rocks, appendages from stuffed toy animals, K-Y Jelly
Clockwise from top-left:
  (Daffodil) 18 x 13 x 9 in.
  (Lively Spark) 18 x 13 x 14 in.
  (Malabar) 13 x 12 x 15 in.
  (Sansovino) 19 x 13 x 12 in.
  (Daffodil) (detail) 18 x 13 x 9 in.
Do You Think I'm Lucky, Mother?

One night I awakened terrified, as if an immense weight had fallen on me, but from within. This inner weight was pushing me to the earth, burying me into the ground. At the same time, I was feeling something so intangible, so heavenly, as if I was outside myself, limitless, sovereign; I was reborn. As I practiced over and over throwing my body outside of myself — outside my limits — I would often imagine my mother walking in, or standing, unknown to me, right there in the room.

—excerpt from my notebook

Do You Think I'm Lucky, Mother? (Fig. 2.2) came from thinking about the early events during a male childhood when erections, associated with love feelings, trigger a subconscious fear of castration. Boys are said to be especially afraid of castration during the toddler age and puberty, when they are at the height of their sex-wave. I set about developing a larger work to represent a scene of a tormenting dream, as experienced in the bed, signifying early encounters and discoveries of fear, violence, sexuality, and death. The title for this piece was also pulled from D.H. Lawrence's "The Rocking-Horse Winner," from the end of the story when a dying Paul asks his mother if she thinks he's lucky.

I encountered a toddler bed while visiting childhood-resale shops around the Columbus area. Standing next to this bed in the store, I was confronted with a tragic distance, impossible to return from, once a safe-haven, I imagined that bed deformed, squashed, interrupted by the swelling knowledge of sex and death.

The white toddler bed and soft pastel tones of the blanket and velvet suggest the coziness and cleanliness of a child's room. These qualities remain in the piece but are emphatically contradicted. The bed frame is immobilized by a massive 300-pound rock, which was heavy enough to instantly deform the child's furniture simply by being placed on top. A velvet, flesh-colored, teardrop-shaped form (fabricated specifically for this work) stretches out and upwards from beneath the rock. A pink tuft of fabric pokes subtly from the end of the long appendage, indicating tissue, as if the end of the form had been circumcised or severed. Globes of freshly squirted sexual lubricant ooze down the surface of the rock.

18 Winnicott, "The Child and Sex" 156.
Figure 2.2  **Do You Think I'm Lucky, Mother?**  (detail right) 2001. toddler bed, blanket, rock, K-Y jelly, sewn velvet, polyester filling, fragment from toy stuffed animal, 32 x 60 x 28 in.
For Honour Bright? (A Performance in Three Acts... Each Act Featuring a VocAL Utterance) (Fig. 2.3-4), I attempted to demonstrate my overall practice, not merely as an artist, but as a being in the world. The appendage idea is finally adopted physically in the actual sense, as an extension of myself. It is a tool to extend the self outward in a play against a reality that is not me, yet made of me.

Assuming the condition of an exhibited thing; I wanted only the audience to see, removing my glasses and closing my eyes for the duration of the piece. I wanted to show myself, or be shown as a subject in the act-of-becoming. A public exaggeration, or monstration, of my body that was implicit in Tracing was made explicit in this piece—animalistically crawling with my nose to the ground, biting and chewing an inedible substance, allowing that object to dictate my behavior.

The yellow object, a 5-foot polystyrene floatation toy to play with in a pool, is appropriated as a feeler or probe to measure the space around my body. Touching the end of the noodle at the wall is a symbolic representation marking the creation of the 'self.' Jacques Lacan looked to the mirror to explain how a child acquires an imaginary identification of the corporeal with the notion of a unified subject. In other words, the goal behind this work was the poetic exhibition of a body in its paradoxical condition as both means and object of knowing, and of the self constituted outside its physical being by its image.\(^{26}\)

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\(^{26}\) Stewart 131.
The following is a sequence of events I wrote out prior to performing *Hommur Bright*:

**SET:**
A 5-ft. yellow water-noodle has been placed on the floor directly in front of, and perpendicular to, a man’s bathroom door. The opposite wall of the room is opposite the door, approximately twenty feet away.

**ACT I: FLOOR**
The performance begins with my entrance into the ‘exhibition space,’ stomach flat against the floor, from inside a man’s bathroom. Knee pads are strapped over my buttocks. I begin crawling forward, using my mouth to slowly push a yellow ‘water noodle’ towards a wall twenty feet away. My body divides the audience in two, forming a middle passageway, which I occupy during the performance.

**VOCAL I:**
I blow against the noodle once, until I lose my breath. The moment the end of the noodle contacts the wall surface in front of me, my mouth opens to bite off several chunks of foam, until my mouth is filled.

**ACT II: WALL**
I stand up and face the wall, taking the noodle in both hands. The end of the noodle closest to me is placed just inside my partially unbuttoned shirt. The other end is placed right at the wall, but not yet touching.

**VOCAL II:**
A groan, muffled (almost gagging) by foam, is sustained until I lose my breath.

**ACT III: ENVIRONS**
While the grasp and posture of the noodle remains the same, I face away from the wall, reorienting myself towards the audience.

**VOCAL III:**
“Mom?,” I call out. The voice is muffled, making this cry unintelligible. Immediately after this word is spoken, my mouth drops open, full of yellow scraps of foam. After a pause, I begin gently jiggling the noodle’s end towards audience members. My eyes remain closed as I slowly turn in place. Upon completing a full rotation, the noodle is dropped and I exit the performance area through the men’s bathroom door.
Figure 2.3  Honour Bright? (A Performance in Three Acts...
Each Act Featuring a Vocal Utterance)
(video stills from performance) 2002, Warehouse Cafe Gallery, Columbus;
water-noodle toy, kneepads, duration: approximately five minutes.
Figure 2.4  *Honour Bright? (A Performance in Three Acts... Each Act Featuring a Vocal Utterance)* (Performance views) 2002.
Warehouse Café Gallery, Columbus; water-noodle toy, kneepads, duration: approximately five minutes.
CHAPTER 3

DISPENSED FROM THE WOMB

The mother is needed as someone who survives each day, and who can integrate the various feelings, sensations, excitements, angers, griefs, etc. that go to make up an infant’s life but which the infant cannot hold. The mother is holding the infant, the human being in the making.\(^{31}\)

The works in this chapter share the use of hollow, expandable forms filled either with the artist’s body itself or with substances that reference that body. An emphasis is placed on the suggestion of an invisible maternal figure holding an infant, seeing the infant as a whole person while the infant is incapable of feeling whole. Various attempts are made at simulating the being inside of an intra-uterine cave.

Between G & E

...if the origin of things is not like the ground of the planet that seems to be the base, but like the circular movement that the planet describes around a mobile center, then a car, a clock, or a sewing machine could equally be accepted as the generative principle.

The two primary motions are rotation and sexual movement, whose combination is expressed by the locomotive’s wheels and pistons.

These two motions are reciprocally transformed, the one into the other. Thus one notes that the earth, by turning, makes animals and men have coitus, and (because the result is as much the cause as that which provokes it) that animals and men make the earth turn by having coitus.\(^{23}\)

Between G & E (Fig. 3.1) was the product of a collaboration with Ran Berdichesky. Our initial ideas had to do with working at an edge between ‘gross’ and ‘eros.’ The thought of dissolving ‘near’ and ‘far,’ which we exaggerated to mean flesh and solar system, also occurred to us. We liked what it meant to flip the natural order of


things, having a yellow light (sun) rotate around human feet. The floor was conceived as a pictorial ground, onto which our activity would be 'poured.' Our activity was to be oriented as close to the floor as possible, pondering what it means for the body to be horizontal. Like the other two 'live' works, everything was rehearsed several times before the public event took place.

The piece began when the audience, who had been waiting patiently outside, was invited in. They entered what was a large dark room with black walls and ceiling. I lay flat on my stomach, inside of a yellow 60 x 108-inch plastic bag, breathing through a funnel wrapped over on its outside with yellow duct tape. Globs of what appeared to be a bright-yellow fat or grease substance (yellow-dyed vegetable shortening) was placed on the plastic over my back and legs. I am wearing yellow plastic 'rain-pants' and a white shirt. Placed at my head is an aluminum wash basin, spray-painted yellow, on its side. Ran was on his back, the basin's open end at his head, crouched into a ball with his feet in the air. He wore a black skirt and pants, and held a clamp light towards the basin's interior, producing a strong yellow light.

Five minutes of stillness preceded any movement on our part. This stillness prompted the audience to wander around the space, observing us in context with other objects placed in the room. One of these objects was a 'slide-n-slide' (2-foot long yellow sheet of plastic for child water play), which was stretched out on the floor at the other end of the room.

Movement began with me using my arms (as best I could since I was enclosed in a bag) to turn the wash basin like a large steering wheel. A clockwise rotational movement ensued, dictated by the basin's conical shape. I rolled my body like a log to keep my feet in the center of this rotation. Ran's movement was determined as well by the basin, rolling to the side while keeping his knees bent up to his stomach.

Several things happened as a result of this movement. The yellow grease worked its way all over the place, especially at my feet in the center of the cycle. A number of times my teeth would lose grip of my funnel breathing apparatus. At these points in the rotation, I had to stop ... find the funnel ... poke a finger-size hole in the plastic and work
its tip through the hole where I could reinsert it into my mouth. The light's cord, which we had extended to a length of 80 feet, began to wrap around both of us. By the end of the first rotation we were literally tied up, constricting our movement considerably. The sequence ended after approximately two full rotations, when the cord's plug was finally pulled out of its socket nearby, causing the light to abruptly shut off.
Figure 3.1 *Between G & E* (performance views) 2002, collaboration with Ran Berdichevsky, Hackett
Hall Sound-Stage, Ohio State University;
aluminum wash basin, aluminum framed, plastic, Crisco
All-Vegetable Shortening, paint, clamp light, electrical
cord, Slip-n-Slide, duration: approximately ten minutes.
Two-Timer Supreme (Fig. 3.2) incorporated the same toddler's bed-frame and mattress used in Do You Think I'm Lucky, Mother?. I continued to ask how this bed could display a loss of control. What would it look like for a bed to leak, have an accident, or be embarrassed?

A different rock, also weighing approximately 300 pounds, is placed on top of the mattress. Under the bed, a torso-sized yellow plastic bag appears to be crushed from the load above. The bag is filled with Crisco vegetable shortening, dyed with bright yellow paint. Attached to the bag is a cake decorating tip, out of which some of the substance had been squeezed out, forming a linear pile on the floor. The appropriated cake decorating tip references a sweetness made sickening in the excess displayed. The bag's scale could be associated with the human body, perhaps a colostomy bag—or an abstraction of a body part—such as an organ. A pair of baby shoes in the corner of the room are filled with freshly squeezed yellow shortening. These 'soft-sole' shoes are sized to be worn during a baby's crawling and first-step adventures.

On the bottom edge of the mattress, available to the viewer's vision, is an image featuring a portrait of a woman holding an infant. The picture opens up maternal associations to the work, which are complicated by the image's accompanied text, "Two-Timer Supreme." This wording suggests a mother and infant's split-body relationship.

Placing part of the work on the other end of an otherwise empty space reinforced the idea of a loss of unity between mother and child. The work further suggests nightmarish themes of bladder compression, and the implied horror of the body disappearing via an escape of its inner matter through holes.
Figure 3.2 Two-Timer Supreme (details below) 2002. Toddler bed, plastic, Crisco All-Vegetable Shortening, paint, cake-decorating tip and coupler, rock, baby shoes, dimensions variable.
If an object which I hold in my hands is solid I can let go when I please... Yet here is the slimy reversing of terms... I open my hands, I want to let go of the slimy material and it sticks to me, it drags me, it sucks at me.

My thesis exhibition, "In / Finite Limits" (Fig. 3.3-8) consisted of four elements: two sculptures, a small digital video projection of edited performances, and a framed photographic image. The two objects in the show are essentially containers transformed from vernacular objects—a bag for dispensing liquid soap in public bathroom facilities, and a bag for dispensing icing or dough by a baker or cake-decorator. The finite boundaries of the original containers (both dispersed with after their use) are performed against the infinite possibilities of their transformation.

Backing up, when faced with the impending necessity of a thesis exhibition, I decided not to include any previously made objects. I wanted to challenge myself to organize a larger and more ambitious sculptural project that would develop the concepts that drove previous works. At the same time, I wanted to include documentation of the three 'live' works. None of the video footage from these pieces had been shown. I was curious what might be gained by seeing them together, and in the context of new 'still' works.

I set out to more directly approach ideas considered in recent works such as Two-Timer Supreme. Initially, the controlling idea for exhibition was the impossibility of keeping the body's inner matter contained. Taking into account the holes in us and around us, I aimed to examine the complex functions of boundaries. I wanted to collapse the notions of inside and outside—seeking to upset, rather than reinforce, the binary logic that would simplify these terms. The edges between these terms are significant. It has been said, for instance, that sex is "not so much the urge to get inside, or the urge to have something inside one, so much as the desire to oscillate across the threshold established..."
between inside and outside.”

The project would state its claim in the belief that “we do not accede—either to the inside or to the outside of ourselves. Thus we exist.”

Two materials from previous pieces had caught my interest—shortening and plastic bags. Crisco vegetable shortening suggested matter evacuated from the body, yet conversely, it is bought from supermarket shelves every day to be consumed. Crisco is ordinarily used for baking or frying food, making it a transformative agent. I have used it to represent disorder of form. It is form in crisis, neither solid nor liquid. Gooey and sticky, it is a glorious mess packaged for human consumption. I suppose this is the state in which I find myself.

I have a memory of observing my mother decorate a cake when I was very young. The cake itself was not what fascinated me. She allowed me to squeeze some icing out onto the kitchen counter. Imbedded in my imagination is an image of that pastry bag. Partly because I was already using Crisco in my work, the idea of filling a pastry bag with a greasy material was amusing since these bags are typically associated with sweetness and decoration.

The bag under the bed of Two-Timer Supreme, which involved a coupler and tip made for decorating bags, reminded me of industrial sized dispenser bags for wine, ketchup, liquid soap, etc. I removed a bag of liquid soap from a bathroom dispenser and kept it in my studio for inspiration. Later, I placed it into a scale-model construction of the gallery where I knew my show would be installed. I was amused by its massive slouching gesture against the wall, all of its ooze pushing the limits of its bulging skin. It looked a bit like a scrotum, particular because of the dispenser, which seemed to try out to be squeezed.

How do we become estranged from ourselves when we deny the body’s base realities? What attitude should we have towards ‘waste’? Soap, as a vehicle for maintaining order, helped pose these questions when placed in relation to grease. Of

24 Howell 1.
25 Nancy 61.
Figure 3.3  View of the exhibition, "In/Finite Limits". 2002,
Sherman Studio Arts Center, Ohio State University.
Figure 3.4 Views of the exhibition, "In / Finite Limits" 2002. Sherman Studio Arts Center, Ohio State University.
importance to this soap in particular was its color, standard in the liquid soap industry and referred to by one of its manufacturers as "gojo pink." As with so many cleaning agents, the pink color in the actual soap dispenser is distinctly artificial, which plays against its claim to help the body feel natural and healthy. Simultaneously, one can't help to associate that pinkness also with skin tissue. Eventually, I abandoned the idea of using actual soap in the exhibition because I wanted to offer no simple solution to the reality of disorder.

Pastry Bag is constructed from four large sheets of 8-mil sheet plastic, and taped along the seam at the base of the sculpture. The linear yellow pie, as well as the emphasis on color throughout my work, visibly demonstrates my pleasure in painting. I delight in its crudities, which were products of the method used to extract the pile. While the Crisco in Pastry Bag is not manipulated, taking advantage of the artificial "butter" coloring already in the product, the contents of Skin Care Dispenser Bag were mixed with pigment to approximate the psychological effects of "gojo pink."

Video documentation footage of Rotten Sun, Honour Bright?, and Between G & E was edited into short snippets and looped. I wanted the projection to be discrete, not over-riding the sculptural forms in the room. Rather, I hoped they would complement one another, the video lending just the right dose of movement to the otherwise frozen forms. To ensure this, the scale of the projection was limited to an image that was only large enough to read from any point in the gallery. This way, the content of the video could be woven into the viewer's experience of the rest of the exhibition.

A projector and DVD-player were stored within a shelved, gray pedestal. Controlled lighting ensured an area dark enough for an adequately clear projection. The audio is loud enough to hear from all points in the gallery, coming out of two small speakers placed on the ground to the sides of the pedestal. The soundtrack further permeates the atmosphere with a living, sensory dimension, functioning as a kind of exhibition armature.
Figure 3.5  **Pastry Bag** (detail below) 2002, Crisco Butter Flavor All-Vegetable
Shortening, polyethylene sheeting, polystyrene, aluminum, ca. 30 x 85 x 50 in.
Figure 3.6: *Skin Care Dispenser Bag* (detail) 2002. Crisco All-Vegetable Shortening, paint, polyethylene bag, polystyrene, wood, ca. 44 x 36 x 68 in.
Artists such as Claes Oldenburg and Robert Gober have masterfully used scale to place an initial object of contemplation into an entirely new context. For instance, Skin Care Dispenser Bag at its original scale is a cleanser. At this scale it's a polluter. The difference is relational to us, the one suitably sized for human hands; the other, a disaster. I wanted the scale of these two sculptures to be no smaller than me to emphasize an equation between the materiality of the sculpture with that of the human viewer. I realized that, structurally, that deformation was inevitable and especially anticipated such this in Skin Care Dispenser Bag. What was really important was not resembling the thing mimetically but losing control and becoming physically devoured.

At the same time, form was a consideration. Both bags contained hidden foam armatures for the sake of providing some structural support where necessary. If anything, there is a structural blockage at this scale. They are constipated. The soap bag dispenser seems impotent. Forcing an emission out of either of these sculptures would mean exploding the bag itself, which is a beautifully sad idea. I'm not completely comfortable, however, with how theatrical these pieces appear. This emphasis on the artifice, or image, of the work was not intended, but is present nonetheless. At the time, actual functionality was just less important to me than the fantasy or desire that holds one to believe something could perform substitutionally. Theoretically, this desire ultimately fails, but that does not keep it from being worthwhile. Furthermore, the shortening itself is a substitute, artificially flavored and colored to resemble butter. It is inconceivable for a viewer to not associate the potent smell in the gallery with something natural. And yet, this is what humans consume.

As the dispensing in these works are only simulated, only portrayed; the actual key gesture of the exhibition became filling. Thus, the excretions that appear on the floor have their origin not in the bags but in my body, which goes unseen. Pondering this, I realized how much I need a physical form of loving. I need to be held affectionately in a way once provided by my mother's womb.
Figure 3.7  Skin Care Dispenser Bag  (details) 2002.
Crisco All-Vegetable Shortening, paint, polyethylene bag, polystyrene, wood. ca. 44 x 56 x 68 in.
My activity during the installation can be charted out as:

FEEDING: stealing, a taking in of another's body, in order to fill my body; then digestion followed by rejection (cleaning, separating)

INSERTING: inserting oneself into a hole (sexual penetration – acting out my male impulses) upon which my outside becomes inside, and the hole's inside becomes my outside; then orgasm, ejaculation, a losing or dissolving of oneself.

While soap, or any cleansing agent, does not appear in the exhibition, it remains implicated through the careful means in which the artist has covered his tracks. No trace of the shortening's chaotic mess remains in the exhibition space, except for those few places where the shortening is left available to the touch. The meaning of the works, however, rely on the conditions inherent in their materials. Therefore, the exhibition hinges on the viewer's close examination of the works themselves, the information provided in the text labels, and the small image (Fig. 3.8) on the room's east wall. This image serves as a record of the work in progress and a clue to the consequences involved in its making. It shows the artist pushing both the *material* into Pastry Bag and *himself* into Pastry Bag.
Figure 3.8  Untitled (Inside) (detail) 2002, digital print, wood frame, paint, 9 x 11 x 3 in, framed.
The following statement was written just prior to the exhibition, and attached to the wall.

STATEMENT FOR "IN / FINE LIMITS"

the universe is within me as it is within itself
nothing separates us anymore
I bump against it in myself

-from the poem, "The Tomb," by Georges Bataille

The beginning and thus most existential stage of my individuality took place within a permeable envelope. This envelope was never owned by me, but shared in a state of osmosis. Eventually an interruption occurred, followed by a fall. I was spilled out into the world. Having lost that envelope, I see myself spending a lifetime adopting others that will never replace the first. My body itself is an envelope, however this fact provides no resolution. No matter how fixed and contained I may imagine myself, there are holes in me and around me, which allow for coming and going in all directions. Experiencing these passages of bodily fluids and/or inner matter, I find myself suspended between horror and desire.

The three-dimensional works in this exhibition are conceived after ordinary objects. These objects are chosen to stand in as signifiers of 'bodies' wrapped in transparent skins, exhibited in a state of unfinished negotiation between inside and outside. The process of making these situations afforded a break through the confines of the static to experience an in-between body, an infinite dissolving of a subject-into-object without boundaries. Thus, the vegetable shortening used here was chosen for the conditions and consequences inherent in the material: a profoundly slippery and messy thing to touch, with limits that lie somewhere between liquid and solid.

Excerpts from three performances have been included to interact with the two bags. Each of these events, as with the exhibition on the whole, derived out of a fundamental urge to approach a partial displacing of myself through interaction with an ordinary, inanimate object. In expending myself outward I am released to experience myself as an object, setting off a fluid and infinite showing of myself to my self.
CONCLUSION

"Then, on the surface of being, in that region where being wants to be both visible and hidden, the movements of opening and closing are so numerous, so frequently inverted, and so charged with hesitation, that we could conclude on the following formula: man is half-open being." 26

Desire directs itself through my body toward an immaterial, maternal body. I find myself stretched out, longing, like the figure in Tracing (Fig. 1.1). Desire can never be a taking hold of that other of my desire, but a placing one's body against it. It has a way of compromising me, grasping me to itself. Desiring entails affirming and being affirmed. But desire fails, always missing its goal because it is directed at a transcendent, thus impossible, object. Working with senseless objects, like the noodle in Honour Bright?, emphasizes this failure.

My practice as an artist must not attempt to alter the fact that life is difficult. The work is an arduous process of negotiating a system of interaction with the world around me. However private I would like to be, it is always a social practice. "I," unable to maintain a totally private interior, expend inner matter in a trajectory that is public.

Suggested within the works is perhaps a theme of 'sacrifice.' This would be manifest most dramatically in the last exhibition. It is figuratively evident in a willingness to squeeze myself through impossibly small holes. Literally, however, prolonged immersion in the oil induced nausea just up to the point of vomiting. It's not that I was harmed, but this queasiness lingered for a couple of days after the project was finished, provoking gags when visiting the exhibition. This raises questions about my longing to return to the womb. Perhaps its impossibility is exactly what sustains it.

26 Bachelard 157.
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