

LET ME BE AN EVIL GENIE
OF OBJECTS THAT SCREAMS
MATT MORRIS

The object is never innocent, it exists and takes revenge.¹

I haven't been human for a long time. They wanted me to be an object. I am an object. An object dirty with blood. An object that creates other objects and the machine creates us all. It makes demands. Mechanisms make endless demands on my life. But I don't totally obey: if I have to be an object, let me be an object that screams.²

Suddenly he began to scream. The sound was piercing, like steam escaping... And as Orvil screamed he knew that he could not stop, that he had been working up to this scream all his life. Through his madness spoke these very clear thoughts, "Now they'll never touch you again. You can be mad for the rest of your life, and they'll leave you alone."³

She was never a subject. He was never a subject if he was dark skinned or had sex with other men or failed fabulously at masculinity or was not physically able or lacked class or economic status. They were not a subject if their gender wasn't legible within an imposed binary. The cruel twist of the transcendence to subjecthood even for the portion of men who were granted it was that its promises were bankrupt, predicated as they were on compliance rather than the liberation that was assured.

She was never a subject, ergo she is an object? At least a hysteric, clattering around in caverns and swamps, "trailing sequins and incense."⁴ A gorgon, Medusa in a garden of stone bodies. An object, in psychoanalytic terms, can be disappointment, denial, rejection materialized. But fine. Monique Wittig called for her readers to vacate the category of 'woman,' to be other than even the othered position contrived in contrast to a subject. Not 'she' but 'it.' After 'it.'

After Frank Garmann – the police officer who accompanied Timothy Loehmann when he shot twelve-year-old Tamir Rice in Cleveland in 2015 – described: "I didn't know it was a kid."⁵ It. What is uncovered in the

deadly intent of these officers if we listen closely to their utterances and slips? From Loehmann's written statement following on the shooting: "I saw the weapon in his hands coming out of his waistband and the threat to my partner and myself was real and active."⁶ When a child is an it, when a toy is a weapon, when that imagined threat comes "out of his waistband," when these grown men admit to seeing something other than the boy in front of them, when what is "real" is in a total state of breakdown, one can see the pernicious effects of the ways subjects act upon their objects.

Common parlance uses the word 'object' to denote a nonhuman, inanimate thing: a belt, a shopping bag, a moving blanket, for instance. Yet when psychoanalysts say 'object,' they mean the foiling, complicated counterpart of the subject (a subject being one who acts upon the world around him, extending himself from interior consciousness into his surroundings). The demarcations of subjects' relationships to objects is not simple, and yet power has a history of being produced coextensively with the positions of subjects, favoring them at the expense and disenfranchisement of his related objects. This text and the exhibition which it accompanies doesn't easily distinguish between these uses of 'object'; instead I am led by a curiosity for how artists as object-makers might intervene into these power relationships and redefine how an object is understood formally, psychoanalytically.

This exhibition holds subversions to how political and psychic power have been traditionally and consistently distributed in accordance with who is perceived to operate with agency and thought, in contrast to the disinvestment of groups and communities read as 'other.' Particularly, the persistent privileges of white masculinity are problematized across feminist, queer, and racially critical inquiries. Historical counter-narratives and accounts of artists' own lived experiences shift emphasis off of the typical subject, while elsewhere projects reject the specious claims tacit to subjecthood in favor of stranger possibilities of an object that misbehaves – or "screams," as the exhibition title, quoted from Ukrainian-Brazilian author Clarice Lispector, describes.

The position of the object is not under-theorized. To name just a few, there are Lacan's *objet petit a*, Freud's lost object, Karl Abraham's partial object, Klein's good or bad objects (good or bad breast, good or bad mother), Fairbairn's exciting object, Bion's bizarre object, Winnicott's transitional object, Arjun Appadurai's work with Georg Simmel's economic object, Sherry Turkle's evocative object used to describe personal computers and the Internet's role as extensions of self and as "intimate machines,"⁷ Timothy Morton's hyperobjects, Baudrillard's "the fatal reversibility of the object, pure object, pure event (the fatal), mass-object (silence), fetish-object, femininity-object (seduction),"⁸ and what Baudrillard arrives at calling the "Evil Genie of Objects."⁹ And these are just a few choice theories that serve as support for the exhibition at hand, some of which will be further elucidated below.

Theories of "object relations" in psychoanalysis have proposed that individuals relate to both "good" and "bad" objects, the former being necessarily incorporated toward the goal of a healthy ego, and the latter, the "bad objects," epitomizing detachment and frustration brought on from these objects failing to perform in service of the ego. Fairbairn expands on Lacan and Klein by conceiving of a third "exciting object," the one for which a subject hopes will care for them and meet their needs. Neither "good" nor "bad," this object is a wish and a phantasm.

Anna Campbell's "*I have nothing to declare except my genius*," said Oscar Wilde to the customs agent, 2017, is a set of bronze fig leaves that quote from the convention of sculpted leaves to cover nudity during modest and repressive periods of art history. The leaves alone on a wall, each bulging suggestively, are more than simple phallic signifiers; they gesture to precisely a phantasmic actor or object of desire, and in so doing form a critique of how power is often masked in such institutional settings as white gallery walls (and the white bodies privileged in their proximity). These pieces build upon Campbell's research into the potential of queer forms of objects, an investigation that brings her to, as the artist describes, "poach key signifiers of gender- and hetero-normativity and open them onto new attachments of possibility and desire from what might seem otherwise to be static legacies."¹⁰

Leo Bersani paraphrases Lacan to say that objects comprise the emergent subject's world, "not as projections, but rather as that which has been detached, cut off from the subject, as a result of our entrance into language as signification; we are in the world as the psychic dropping...the unacceptable, hidden, lost cause of our desires."¹¹ So then objects – that is, the entire world as one experiences it – is, or is at least understood as, cast offs of the one who becomes a subject. To further complicate matters, Judith Butler draws attention to not only the multiple inferences bound up in this language but also the history of political power that serves as a backdrop for these notions of subjects and objects: "'Subjection' signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject."¹²

To be a subject is also to be subjected, at best always a mythic reward in the form of granted agency. At closer inspection, if one is a "subject," one is someone else's "object," good, bad, bizarre, exciting, or otherwise. To analyze our national politics, arguably it is a crisis in the conception of subjecthood, fears, and outrage over the tacit forms of submission inscribed therein that gave shape to the election results of November 2016. The U.S. witnessed heightened self-interest directing many of the votes of those most associated with social privilege: straight, white men threatened by an expanding sensitivity toward oppression of people of color and other minoritarian positionalities.

Thomas Huston's practice responds to those fixated with achieving and maintaining centrality in society by strategically performing a destabilization of the privileges afforded to artists as social actors. Huston instead submits to being utilized in supplemental roles typically defined by art exhibition and display. For the past year, much of the work Huston has produced has resulted from volunteering his services as an art handler for artists, friends, and colleagues. The moving blankets he uses, accompanied with documentation of artworks being packaged and transported, become his work displayed in gallery settings. This iteration of *Standard Moving Blankets* performs wily power relations, with the artist both submissive in his

labor and incorporative in his modes of attachment to objects, makers, and institution.

In *Fort/Da* (2015) Huston physicalizes Sigmund Freud's narrative of observing his grandson's play of tossing a toy away from him ('fort' meaning 'gone') and drawing it back toward him ('da' meaning 'there'). Freud deemed this a game of mastery and a revenge fantasy for the toddler to cope with his mother leaving him from time to time. In Huston's iteration, an installation made from the building elements of the gallery itself – sheetrock, white gallery paint – is combined with photographic evidence of a sculptural addition (now absent) situated in the space. In other versions of Huston's *Fort/Da* the 'lost object' was a bouquet of artificial flowers. In this case, the photograph shows a real bird's nest holding three faux eggs.

In a more compassionate than accusatory view, we might look at what infantile drives motivate apparently deep, profound fears of loss among voting citizens. So visible are the ways those conferred with power have taken violent – physical, psychological, symbolic – measures to withhold freedom and agency from those they objectified and relegated to sites of Otherness. And while this curatorial work develops claims toward radical possibilities in, through, and beyond objecthood, so also does it hold space open for remembering and tracing forms of objectification as persecution in our national and cultural history.

Nona Faustine's photographs serve as poignant reminders of these times and effects. She places her disrobed body into historical sites where slavery functioned as a major economy within the United States. In so doing, a simultaneity occurs wherein Faustine recalls the dehumanization of black bodies in this country – the consequences of which continue today – while also documenting her incisive interventions into these spaces. Faustine proceeds from a tradition among black women artists that humanities scholar Uri McMillan calls *performing objecthood*. Projects such as Faustine's "violate the 'distinct ontological zones' between human and object. Meanwhile, the sense of the uncanny provoked by some of these more nefarious objects...is precisely because they uncomfortably remind us that 'our history is one in

which humans were reduced to things (however incomplete that reduction)'... Black performance art's usage of the black body as its artistic medium is especially loaded when confronting a historical legacy of objectification and the generations of slaves who did not legally own the bodies they acted with."¹³

Accompanying Faustine's complex self-portraits of protest and reflection is her 2016 photograph *Legacy of Lies, Jefferson Memorial*, from a series in which she casts her own gaze onto institutions and monuments that reify the patriarchal figures who authored racialized injustice in this nation. As xenophobia's hold tightens internationally, with terrifying strides toward institutionalizing and legislating distinction between the 'haves' and 'have nots,' the 'ares' and 'are nots,' Leonard Suryajaya stages elaborately fantastical scenes as a means to process memories of nationalist social control exerted upon his family in Indonesia as well as developments in the artist's own sexual explorations. With participation from his parents, partner, and other volunteers, Suryajaya populates photographs that are densely layered with pattern, color, ritual, prosthetics, constructed scenery, and makeshift costumes that range from direct cultural references into sexualized role-play. Personal attachments are performed within the artist's rich erotic imagination where oral fixations, surreal nudity, and consensual objectification build into alternative, inner realms.

Suryajaya's *Candyman* (2016) centers on two bodies in repose, both covered in imbricated packets of individually wrapped candies. Recalling Felix Gonzalez-Torres' candy works made to the weight of his dying lover Ross, Suryajaya crowds the scene with masked figures whose shifting glances – and an isolated instance of fingers touching, echoing Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* (c. 1508–1512) – charge the relationships between the figures that also seem to merge into their ornamented surroundings. The differences between a person, an objectified person, an object, and the surrounding environment in which they are situated are shown to be shifting, dreamlike.

In spaces conditioned by the sorts of identificatory ruptures demonstrated in Suryajaya's photographs and videos, new definitions and conceptions of meaning-making become possible. The dialogue of images and sculptures in *Let Me Be an Object That Screams* is organized into research that follows upon artist and writer Gordon Hall's pursuit of an engagement with objects that might teach alternative ontologies, "to make objects that frustrate even my own attempts to know them, once and for all, as one thing and not others. I make things that ask for nuanced, open-ended forms of reading that can accommodate these objects of ambiguous functionality."¹⁴ I take Hall to challenge the ways nonhuman, inanimate things have the potential of being more than what they are typically understood to be. But what if a similar logic is read across psychoanalytic treatments of objecthood and those other object-oriented theories that proceed from these traditions? If inner psychological self-recognition and the social symbolic orders by which psyches become organized under current regimes of power are brought into this line of question, I am enlivened by the added potential in Hall's observation, "I have come to think of the object lessons described therein as ways of approaching our variously felt struggles against hegemonic methods of taxonomizing, cataloging, and controlling bodies, as modestly offered resources toward imagining more expansive forms of embodied life."¹⁵

Wilfred Bion's theory of bizarre objects pertains to a process by which an individual "splits off a part of his personality and projects it into the object where it becomes installed, sometimes as a persecutor, leaving the psyche, from which it has been split off, correspondingly impoverished." While this concept occurs within a diagnostic study of psychotics, what if one refuses these disruptions as solely delusional and reconceives them as a productive mode of derangement with some degree of intent? The bizarre object appears alive in the perception of the personality that was embedded into it. "The object, angered at being engulfed, swells up, so to speak, and suffuses and controls the piece of personality that engulfs it: to that extent the particle of personality has become a thing...these bizarre objects."¹⁷

When set to envision how such hybridity might be portrayed in sculpture, Terry Adkins' assemblage sculptures come to mind, constructed as they were across four decades as a means of drawing forward obscure, forgotten, and misunderstood figures in history by translating the events and particulars of their lives into objects of ambiguous functionality. With Adkins' sculpture as the residue of his own nimble intellectual instincts, Bion's bizarre objects might be worked into comparison with traditions such as the *minkisi*, objects inhabited by spirits, harkening from the Congo Basin in Central Africa. Keeping these psychological and mystical references in mind, one turns with wonder toward Adkins' *Tonsure*, 2010, a power object awaiting animation.

Tonsure is the totemic mind of the exhibition, named after the custom among certain religious devotees who shaved their head in humility to indicate their devotion to unseen, supernatural forces. *Tonsure* physicalizes the movement between the self-recognition of subjects and the objects Adkins has imbued with abstractions of personhood. A sequence of signs amalgamates into a model for cognition and epistemological apprehension. The glossy black, fur-lined medicine ball connotes embodiment through the object's prior function in physical exercise, and here serves as the giant head of a monk, shadowed with knowledge, set atop his library. The several tomes that lie horizontal under the ball indicate a passage by way of language into active identificatory exchange with laws, codes, and social consciousness – the reader as subjected subject. The recognition of these forms as abstract, yet still legible in their relationships is supported by meaning production supplied to art by its institutional context, in this case the gallery pedestal designed especially for this work upon which mind and text rest. Adkins' methods of assembling materials to reflect on the qualities of those to whom he paid homage manifest what a bizarre object – spliced personality and things – may do when it is read as more than a symptom.

Things congeal as fragments of that which was subjugated; to rescue it means to love things. We cannot eliminate from the dialectics of the extant what is experienced in consciousness as an alien thing...its happiness would lie in the fact that the alien, in the proximity it is granted, remains what is distant and different, beyond the heterogeneous and beyond that which is one's own.¹⁸

The prospect of this mode of objects is reappropriative, on the order of reclaiming pejoratives as empowered self-identification, as with 'fag' or 'dyke.' It is a quaking site of undoing, unthinking. It was queer momentarily, before language coopted, subsumed, and used the term as capital. I find it resists naming. Some approach the quake after they have looked past meanings that occur easily because they are considered beautiful. Others never trusted easy answers or good looks, maybe because we never had either.

We are shadows cast by nothing, casting spells, demonic outliers who see that the Law always broke itself in order to appear to protect its subjects, see the extent to which our minds have been colonized and even subversive forms of labor and production have been capitalized, see ahead of ourselves without obstruction.

Enter upon the gallery installation of *Let Me Be an Object That Screams* where the first room is arrayed with moody works that map out exterior representation and interior appetites. Running diagonally across the room is a blockade of signage that conjures the stubborn borderline along the subconscious. "He waits, thinks, says, 'Perhaps that's what the matter is. I never want anything ever.' Suddenly she laughs. 'We could leave together if you like. I don't want anything any more either.'"¹⁹ A system of desire without labels, underwritten with cathected libidinous energy. Jeff Gibson's haunting work seems familiar, imitative of the form of targeted advertising, yet surreal in the way of Magritte's smartly opaque signifiers. Belying their own intensity, the five sets of panels are printed with images of sleek objects ready for consumption, tiled into grids, floating in an anxious white vacuum

in the style of popular product photography – forms with only distant context, ripe for projections and longing.

In this way, Gibson reflects on the power of the desired object. Here is Marx's *commodity fetishism*: the solidification of belief in an intrinsic value transformed from the subjective, abstract aspects of economic value. Gibson's two-sided sandwich board *Untitled (bread, air intakes, bearings; donuts, bicycle seats, blue pumps)*, 2015, is filled with the sorts of arousing associations that may be parlayed into meaning and subsequent value. As erect, high-heeled shoes hover alongside cream-filled doughnuts and bike seats that may as well be aerodynamic asses darting among the commodity orgy, the determinants of the relationships that result are observed by Marx thus: "It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things...I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities."²⁰

While Gibson suggests an infinite field of products and their possible combinations laden with projected desires, Arnold J. Kemp characterizes the point of view of those objectified within a social terrain crowded with presumptions, misunderstanding, and oversimplification. Kemp's sculptural tableaux aggregate trappings of interiority, exteriority, anteriority, and consequence through display systems fashioned with personal attire – garments and accessories, belts and shoes. The heartbreaking *WHEN WILL MY LOVE BE RIGHT* (2013) is snaked with leather belts, quietly kinky, and evocative with belt buckles shaped into the word "SHY." These accoutrements that the artist has fastidiously produced issue questions of how identity touchstones like sexuality, race, and socialization are consumed. Several of Kemp's works on view incorporate custom built steel plinths and racks into the inventory of objects that are situated between artisanal handmade and conceptually charged Readymade modes of production. Kemp theorizes selfhood with moderate skepticism, attendant to the deconstructive, socially-contingent turns on

identity that accrue in queer theory, Thelma Golden's 'post-blackness,' and third wave feminism. Unworn clothes, as in the shoes displayed in *IN BLACK AND WHITE SPACES WE CAN'T LOSE OUR LOSS* (2013) signal absent and unseen bodies, contextualized by an apparatus of trays and shelves that serve to model what systemic conditions conspire to support or distort legibility of an individual in the subcultures they move through. Kemp's work shuffles psychic life between the social production of signs (of bodies) through reductions and the challenge of having one's desires appreciated or legitimated relationally.

Alongside Kemp's artworks that include their own display apparatuses is a trio of objects comprising *SCULPTURE (the history of)* (2012). In contrast to the trays and furniture that support Kemp's other pieces, the elements of this work are set directly on the gallery floor. Pivotal in the overall exhibition, these art objects speak to the objecthood of art directly by gathering together an aluminum cast the artist made of a diminutive African figurine, an exhibition announcement for a Rodin sculpture exhibition at Gagosian Gallery, and a small cardboard box shipped to the artist from Matthew Marks Gallery and containing a ceramic Roy McMakin sculpture that Kemp acquired but has never unpacked. The philosophical questions raised among these parts are vertiginous: original and copy, authorship and ownership, depiction in image and physical presence, repetition, circulation, provenance. Rodin's *The Three Shades*, shown in reproduction, is itself formed from a triad of identical figures meant to represent the shades from Dante, famed for warning: "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here."

So what reassurance is to be had amidst the fraught conditions – functionally the gates of hell, it seems – objects are made to endure in art institutional spaces such as this one and those commercial galleries cited in Kemp's materials? For me, I hold to the seashells that Kemp includes in several sculptures. While there are no doubt personal associations for the artist, the privacy around which remains intact, presented here they might be the symbol for the cabal of dissenting objects gathered into this

exhibition, at the thresholds between social pressure and inner tenderness. They have begun recurring in my dreams. They've glimmered in my sleep from within dreamt-up bathhouse corridors, flooded homes, and art classrooms.

The productive usefulness of dream and fantasy cannot be overemphasized in this exhibition. As much as scholarly and psychological literature informs the ways that these artists code possible relationships to objects (who are other people, that are other things), so, too, do they draw on virtual spaces and popular culture to orient to power. In the case of Puppies Puppies' video *Sauron (Bataille Solar Anus)*, 2016, the artist fills the gallery space with the ambient sound of harsh whispers and alluring commands quoted from the film adaptations of J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* epic. A ring, called 'the Precious' by characters under the sway of its corrupting influence, is transitional objecthood par excellence, as one or another hobbit or spirit appear to bond with it on every possible emotional and mental level. In Puppies' video, footage of the fiery all-seeing eye of Sauron, the titular Lord of the Ring, is collaged with a close-up clip of power bottom autoeroticism. We see a high, plump ass stroked, massaged, and fingered while gentle moans float in the audio between Sauron's more ominous seductions. Puppies Puppies works critically into the recapitulating reflexes that can be traced from collage traditions and Readymades to contemporary milieus of self-appointed auteurs, DJs, and 'prosumers.'

Beyond direct literary quotation, artists like Puppies Puppies, E. Jane, and Isabelle McGuire immerse themselves in problems of modes of consumption in our digital ages. Throughout this exhibition, assisting devices are brought under examination for being both I and also not-I. These partial objects include gallery display furniture, the involvement of staff and interstitial operations around the exhibition (as in Huston's *Standard Moving Blankets work*), and the pervasive relationship to the camera. This object, complicit in the production of a majority of works included, is the fulcrum of its own extensive theorization as self-extension, object, other, prosthetic. The camera itself is frequently implied but never shown objectified within

these artworks, with the exception of Leonard Suryajaya's remarkable photograph *Gap* (2015) which presents the artist naked down to his waist and face turned away, lying against a bearded man, piled and all but bound to one another with a band of grey jersey knit and a mound of raw ground meat. Formally, the image is neatly composed of repeating groupings of red and blue. At center a mirrored tray lays before the couple. On Suryajaya's arm, a red and blue camera is tattooed. The significance of this illustrated object is formidable in how it appears marking the artist's body, mirroring the apparatus by which the photograph is made. What more demonstrably incorporative gesture might there be than this boyish pile as the surface for an image of a camera? Layers of reflections and simulations saturate their captured repose, haunting the artwork with the subject-object relations of its production.

More specters drift in this ambiguous field of objects, particularly beyond the blurred edge between what is appointed real or virtual. What new ways have objects come to perform when they exist as hypertext and avatars, occupying the Internet, hovering to face us from within one of the most powerful hyperobjects on which our culture depends? 'Hyper' in the sense of Timothy Morton's view of massively distributed imaginaries-cum-material effects that are detectable by way of the interrelationships they contain. The computer, like the camera, is prevalent in the shape of the exhibition before us. Questions loom about the effect of such object-relations not only on consciousness itself but also what we come to understand consciousness to be. Sherry Turkle surmises, "The instrumental computer, the computer that does things *for* us, has another side. It is also a subjective computer that does things *to* us – to our view of our relationships, to our ways of looking at our minds and ourselves."²¹

While the possibility of a subjective computer is in no small way produced by histories of capital and demand, performative speech acts that issue from such sites of being nonetheless propose new distributions of power. What might have been a controllable subject is now a network of positions, recurrent of one another, simultaneous, strategically divergent,

flickering in and out of being. “I am the master of this room. I am so powerful in this room, I can dematerialize on demand.”²² So begins the web series *E. The Avatar* (2015) by the Philadelphia-based interdisciplinary artist E. Jane. The personae that populate Jane’s practice pressure the stability of identities that are culturally generated and projected onto individuals without negotiation. Jane’s practice performs objecthood in the sense that McMillan describes: “an adroit method of circumventing prescribed limitations on black [bodies] in the public sphere while staging art and alterity in unforeseen places.”²³

For Jane, those spaces traverse embodiment and disembodiment across gallery, Web, and commerce. Jane remains critical of the platform; the commercials that interrupt their cycle of web episodes and their tie-in products available for sale exemplify a necessary ambivalence toward the Internet as a space that is regulated, surveilled, and organized for profit from our participation in it.

“A virtual object is effectively the same, yet formally different. A virtual body *does* even though it *isn’t*.”²⁴ Accompanying Jane’s video series are two *Design Objects*, print-on-demand garments and bags that are imaged with fragments of the artist’s Avatar dressed in studded black leather, each fabricated at the time it is purchased. Function, application, and materialization are disorganized: the online gallery of more than thirty objects derived from Jane’s Avatar is a hypothetical space like that of Gibson’s composite images. Desire is materialized through exchange value. Like a haunting surrealist painting, the tissue nylon eco-tote is printed with the Avatar’s visage. Their face is removed to accommodate the handles of the bag, and yellow text is printed across their hands: “Why can’t I see your face?” Screaming object.

Just as distinguishing between real and virtual has come to be troubled (and the need to do so ripe for analysis, too), so have the means of apprehending the material world through the psycho-symbolic system of Subject and Object. The “Thing Theory” turn pressures what things might mean before they are swept up as Objects in the disorienting maze of alternating theories that have only been etched out in these pages. Bill Brown asks:

Could you clarify this matter of things by starting again and imagining them, first, as the amorphousness out of which objects are materialized by the (ap)perceiving subject, the anterior physicality of the physical world emerging, perhaps, as an after-effect of the mutual constitution of subject and object, a retroprojection? You could imagine things, second, as what is excessive in objects, as what exceeds their mere materialization as objects or their mere utilization as objects – their force as a sensuous presence or as a metaphysical presence, the magic by which objects become values, fetishes, idols, and totems. Temporalized as the before and after of the object, thingness amounts to a latency (the not yet formed or the not yet formable) and to an excess (what remains physically or metaphysically irreducible to objects). But this temporality obscures the all-at-onceness, the simultaneity, of the object/thing dialectic and the fact that, all at once, the thing seems to name the object just as it is even as it names some thing else.²⁵

The object, it seems, does not account for enough of the alterity and excess that moves beyond tidier psychoanalytic formulations of self and other. Brown asks after an engagement with physicality anterior to the restrictions of language and knowability, and drawing closer to tactile presence. Jennifer Chen-su Huang shifts shapes, dissolves structures, and compounds meanings in her installations. *Goo goo too* (2017) is an inventory of fragments arranged across overlapping wooden platforms and sheets marked out with tracings from the space in which it is sited. Here is a sand garden; there is a disjointed toolbox. Huang’s material language takes as its premise that modes of being (inclusive of objecthood) are always partial, rarely definitive, and perpetually attached to more excesses than have been accounted for. Temporary relationships between soft, slight things enact content in flux. Curious, viscerally sensual, and responsive to the incidental conditions of its display, Huang’s work is a blend of excitable experimentation and perverse curation of a world in pieces.

For this iteration of *goo goo too*, Huang designed a set of instructions that could be used to make her installation in her absence for the first time. These instructions articulate Huang's processes that, in spite of the gentle aesthetic sensibilities of her arrangements, give way to negotiations of control. In the text, a box is flipped to become a stool; bodies are directed where to stand and from where to place a litany of intriguing sculptural fragments. Commanding yet open-ended, this iteration of Huang's installation is one in which her fantasy and even the methods by which to produce a fantasy are shared first with me, her proxy, and then audiences.

"Holy crap! Is that you Emma?! Gosh, you're a ball!" you said in surprise upon viewing the contents of the box, only to discover that it was Emma herself inside of it, tightly squished into the shape of a basketball, all her characteristics plastered to her sides with her distressful face on top... You picked her up and started fondling her globular, squished body around in your hands, feeling all of her rubbery crevices, as she was indeed tightly packed and compressed into the shape of a ball like some kind of cartoon. "It sure was a... a hard trip though. Got any hand pump around?" Emma tried to speak again through squished lips, almost pleading you to restore her back as you took her under your armpit and started walking to the basement.²⁶

Such is the engrossing and unsettling morphological fantasy narrated in Isabelle McGuire's *3 Women* (2016) one of two video works of theirs included in the exhibition that reject body ideals and gendered roles enforced by the sexed divisions upheld in the earliest psychoanalytic theories and continuing to shape mainstream society at large. McGuire substitutes the always necessarily incomplete pursuit of those types with inquiries into the powers and effects of performing as a sexual object. In this video, McGuire constructs a story around commissioned fetish art renderings of themselves made by an artist they met online, who uses the

moniker HellResident. Likewise in the video *Love Me Harder* (2015) the artist metamorphoses into a lip-syncing white balloon as a radical proposal for new ontologies and self-transformation. If elsewhere in the exhibition artworks rethink oppressive histories of dehumanization, ways objects may be charged psychologically, and interdependencies between things and consciousness, McGuire negotiates role-play as an extra-human object. Sexualization serves as a point of departure in imagining alternative bodies and interpersonal encounters, such as when the balled-up Emma is carried down to the basement, into unknown depths.

Whereas the risk of being or behaving as defiantly something else and other directs McGuire's video narratives, Nayland Blake's work hazards these strategies, taking them as the pleasure and responsibility of art. Inextricably entangled with their concurrent involvement in kink and BDSM communities, Blake's artistic practice gathers memories and found materials into the delights of what Sigmund Freud called "polymorphous perversity," a means of libidinous gratification outside of social norms. Works like Blake's *Untitled* and *October Chain*, both 2007, are assemblages of talismanic objects variously strung along jewelry and furniture that might figure in childhood episodes of make-believe. The straps, chains, and other signals for bondage in Blake's work are combined with bits of recovered refuse rendered magical within these configurations. A previous exhibition of Blake's *Spirit of 69* garnered the observation, "Turned a caustic and cold black, miniature 'LOVE's [by Robert Indiana] were stacked like an oversized, goth charm bracelet on a suspended wood table dangling from the back wall. Draped in chains, it was like a Readymade strangled and piled high with crap: a little lantern, a lot of love – hanging off a side bar like dead little Indiana earrings. This was some dark shit, an America so wrong that everything seems so right...."²⁷

Blake's sculptures fetishize and deconstruct aspects of bodies, language, and personal association. Across decades, their work has been iconic for a queer politics that advances creativity, role-play, and fragmentation as generative forms. Theirs is a long recognized penchant for

identificatory slipperiness, humor, and mystique. Blake's work alludes to multiple realms of consciousness, noticed through the little leftovers that accumulate along the artist's journeys. In their caring, deliberate additions of parts, Blake demonstrates that "...accepting the otherness of things is the condition for accepting otherness as such."²⁸

Many of the artworks gathered into the investigations of this exhibition show kink in the context of the everyday, rather than relegated only to the remotely subcultural. In Oli Rodriguez's ongoing series *The Markings Project*, depictions of what the artist calls "sexualized mundane arrangements" disorient audiences from preconceptions of an object's use and ability to stimulate. A politics of desire is here enacted, as with cellophane and striped straws found in a kitchen and repurposed for a necessarily trusting scene of breathplay, or with a child's black faux-leather dress found while thrift shopping that is full of reminders of pre-adolescent childhood sexuality and the difficulties encountered in speaking to those experiences.

A related video collaboration between Oli Rodriguez and Jovencio de la Paz entitled "*I want something more than my husband and my house.*" (2015) has the two artists acting in response to a set of fantasies given as textual instructions by Nicole Ciesla. In their statement for the work, they describe, "We are queering notions of the domestic realm and the realm of Collaboration by introducing queer family as a challenge to hetero and homonormative hierarchies based in marriage and binary partnership, through role play, fetish and material negotiations."²⁹ The video documents each artist in their own frame, occasionally traversing into the other's, as they gradually construct combinations of household materials onto their counterpart's body. Instances of the instructions to which they submit and respond include: "Stand still, arms extended, balancing lit candles while I wax your legs and then clean you out with an enema. Zipper of clothespins attached up and down your extended arms. I connect the zipper to your feet and you are tickle tortured and struggling."³⁰ Pain, pleasure, service, objectification, drifts from outside to inside the bodies involved – all these sensations and possibilities bleed together along a continuum of shifting

orientations in which the "I" and "you" of the text challenge the fixity of those designations.

Within these collaborations and scenes, consent buzzes as a problem that should be examined from prismatic, plural positions. Within S/M play, the sub holds more power than they may be seen to have, given the ways they allow themselves to be dominated. Sometimes what an object screams is a safe word.

Which is to acknowledge that there are complications in the propositions this exhibition gathers together – complications brought forward from history, exacerbated by fear, traumatic memories, and socially-minded concerns that circulate around the receptions of these artists' practices. Amidst experimentation with inverting power relations, reenacting fraught materials, and risking "giving up" what subjecthood promises to permit, one would do well to remember the fragile territories that are traversed in the process. By approaching radicality with humility and honesty, a deeper account of the effects of power on those human and non-human components might be articulated. Kink maven Mollena Williams advises sensitivity to the moments when the scene veers sideways or perhaps when the argument does not hold:

In spite of your best efforts, things will not always go according to plan. This is a gift. Why? Because flawless perfection will absolutely not provide you with the dirt and grit and pain and suffering and transcendence you need to play rough and tumble on the edges... Things can and will fall apart. Be honest when they do. Don't ever 'fake it' when it comes to your emotions around edgy taboo play.³¹

In recalling the histories and traditions in which objectification has been associated with suffering outright, "the dense ligatures between agency, self-objectification, and black female subjectivity...performing objecthood does not always, or necessarily, point toward an emancipated subjectivity."³²

Adjoining McMillan's research into black female positionalities, one ought to appreciate the difficult task of discerning complexity within power relations. Works such as Rodriguez's *The Markings Project* evidence how near pleasure draws to what may have otherwise only been understandable as exploitation. Further consideration of McMillan's performing objecthood reveals affinities to José Esteban Muñoz's theorized politics of *disidentification* as another strategy of resistance to the norms and hierarchies by which socialized bodies have been forcibly organized. To disidentify is to refuse strict binaries (such as assimilation and anti-assimilation) and look for ways that a self might be crafted not by identifying with or against dominant cultural forms, but by strategically misrecognizing and re-performing materials sampled from those identities forcibly upheld by the dictates of that culture. And so, in thinking beyond what kind of object one might become through a resistant relationship to subjectivity, I recall Muñoz's word of caution:

It is also important to note...that disidentification is not *always* an adequate strategy of resistance or survival for all minority subjects. At times, resistance needs to be pronounced and direct; on other occasions, queers of color and other minority subjects need to follow a conformist path if they hope to survive a hostile public sphere. But for some, disidentification is a survival strategy that works within and outside the dominant public sphere simultaneously.³³

Catalina Ouyang delves into the interstices of subjugation, gender, monstrosity, and race relations through a practice that traverses sculpture, performance, installation, and video. During the opening reception of *Let Me Be an Object that Screams*, a series of sculptures were displayed in the hands of a group of 'white dudes,' a set of actors who serve as embodiments of a privileged archetype. While the statuses of white men within a society imagined through subject/object relations are pressured elsewhere in the exhibition by Campbell, Faustine, Huston, and certainly

Suryajaya, Ouyang's staging of white men as pedestals is a sharp-witted, playful attempt at a counter-narrative enacted within the institutional space of the gallery. A subject position that has long enjoyed social supremacy is here scripted into the supportive role of display furniture for Ouyang's objects that the artist describes as "images of female villains, villainhood being so often a coded way to refer to either strong or abused women."³⁴ Here and there are verdigris clawed hands, femme counterparts to Campbell's fig leaves; both artists permit the bodily fragments to engender apparitions that enliven how these objects are understood. First held in the hands of a would-be aggressor (but also, possibly, an object of desire), then displayed on a sunny ledge beneath one of the gallery's windows is Ouyang's *medusa* (2016) which transforms a quotation of Constantin Brancusi's oft-repeated sculptures of untroubled heads in repose into a decapitation with snaking pigtails. From her pale green mouth falls a slender chain, a stunning physicalization of the contradictions of subjecthood with the permission to speak.

And I, too, said nothing, showed nothing; I didn't open my mouth, I didn't repaint my half of the world...Where is the ebullient, infinite woman who, immersed as she was in her naiveté, kept in the dark about herself, led into self-disdain by the great arm of parental-conjugal phallocentrism, hasn't been ashamed of her strength? Who, surprised and horrified by the fantastic tumult of her drives (for she was made to believe that a well-adjusted normal woman has a ... divine composure), hasn't accused herself of being a monster?³⁵

Draped dungeon-like from the rafters of the gallery space are a pair of Ouyang's works intertwined. *The Snake* to which this heavier chain refers is the white snake spirit of Chinese legend, sometimes called Madame White Snake, whose adventures traverse acquiring magical powers when pills of immortality are vomited into the lake where she resided and transforming her body to rescue an ambiguously homoerotic love interest. Hanging from

The Snake are a series of small, heart-shaped vials comprising *arsenic*, *love* (both works 2017). Concoctions of realgar wine, dye, and water hold blue contact lenses like those that have been worn by other 'white dudes' in previous performances the artist has orchestrated. With these fragments both bodily and narrative, Ouyang searches through myth, fairytale, art history, and systems of signs for positions of dissent.

So, too, does this exhibition search for dissenting positions within and through what have been marked out as objects in psychoanalysis and our cultural pasts. As has been shown here, an object can dislocate itself within symbolic orders to critique less sensible forms of power and to herald desires yet to be accounted for within prevailing characterizations of society, as with Anna Campbell's project of queering with sculpture. Thomas Huston operates submissively, longing after lost objects within systems of art circulation, rendering meaningful interstitial non-places and the labor by which they are activated. Nona Faustine reenacts the objectification of black and female bodies like her own; and in her performance an interventionist protest is incited. Leonard Suryajaya's photographs and videos show fantastical scenes that experiment with issues of control as they relate to whiteness and other racialized signs, homoerotics, familial bonds, and nationalist identity.

Terry Adkins' legacy is one of powerfully animated bizarre objects that he made to hold particular and abstract accounts of lived histories. His sculpture *Tonsure* models consciousness as approached from the outside and from within. Jeff Gibson's sandwich board signs track how objects of desire are taken up into systems of economics, marketing, and consumption, while holding on to the visceral anxiety that drives feelings of lack and yearning. Arnold J. Kemp likewise scrutinizes the ways that display and adornment operate within constructions of identity, and how depictions of such are represented in art.

Puppies Puppies draws from pop culture to give enchanting voice to objecthood – simultaneously corrupting and erotic. E. Jane shifts problems of selfhood into an Internet-based information economy, testing the effects of a self that is variously fluid in forms especially supported by virtuality and produced "on demand." Jennifer Chen-su Huang breaches

"object" as language and taxonomy, spreading her sensual engagements into excesses of both material itself and matters of control. In Isabelle McGuire's videos, sex objects morph beyond the human, inflating, compressing, and fantasizing into ontological uncertainty.

Nayland Blake's assemblage sculptures hold in their disparate fragments capacities for fetishization, remembering, and non-normative pleasures in the way parts come together. Oli Rodriguez and Jovencio de la Paz act upon one another in mutual objectification, using each other's bodies in compositions of domestic kink. And in playing with sculptural interpretations of mythic women's bodies as well as the roles white men occupy in society, Catalina Ouyang rescripts subject/object relations along lines of gender, sexuality, and race.

This exhibition is demonstrative of Baudrillard's conception of the evil genie of objects aforementioned. Keeping in mind that the whole of Baudrillard's writing occurs beyond the bounds of conventional morality, substantive theology, and stable dualities (like good and evil), understanding his frequent use of the word 'evil' can be a conundrum to parse. Baudrillard's evil is "the non-unification of things,"³⁶ "all the forms of radical, heterogeneous, irreconcilable otherness."³⁷ Continuing in this exhibition's reappropriative work then, evil describes those of us who coalesce across differences, who exhume hidden life from the margins to which we have been relegated by supremacists committed only to those who reproduce what they believe to know about themselves. The evil genie of objects counters the projected nightmares of armed agents of the law (and for that matter, the Law, in all its patriarchy, masculinity, whiteness, and heterosexism). The evil genie of objects "has no desire at all to be analyzed and observed, and taking this process for a challenge (which it is) it's answering with a challenge...today the analyzed object triumphs everywhere, by its very position as object, over the subject of analysis. It escapes the analyst everywhere, pushing him back to his indeterminable position of subject. By its complexity it not only overflows, but also annuls the questions that the other can ask of it."³⁸

The scream of an evil genie of objects sounds in the voice of Eartha Kitt.³⁹ These are objects in revolt, confounding those from whom they are designated as 'other' by pursuing otherness yet further. Hopes to be treated as a person preoccupy too much energy when an enormous quantity of caring is required in times like these. A care that is not determined by subjecthood, personhood, or the criteria of either. Rather, an object might be abyssal by contrast – the stubborn opacity of its shell serving merely as a threshold opening into itself more deeply, onto temples of pleasure. The screams of these objects are heard in the households of queer families and in those of Chinese descent in Indonesia where legal, economic, and cultural discrimination persists. Echoes float before national monuments, amongst the delicate detritus of the streets. Evil genies of objects wrap themselves in moving blankets, tighten their belts, and tighten the leather lashes around their consenting playmates. They explore intimacies in alternative forms of relationships “to counteract the shattering effects of discriminatory objectification not by striving to convince the public that ‘yes, we actually are subjects,’ but to be objects for one another, and to get so much better at objectifying one another. We can excel at being ever more complex and nuanced objects – so much so that we learn together how to see, and do it with a vengeance.”⁴⁰

Start with the excess, utter undoing, and a curiosity with what you are that you haven't yet been allowed to be. Rest in the radicality of unsanctioned action. The most abhorrent trait of these imbricated systems of control are the policed apertures through which love is seemingly withheld. See ahead of yourselves without obstruction: see not only that you are loved but that you are able to participate in love that can hold your horror and exhaustion and malaise and melancholy. Making objects that scream is making love. Ronald Fairbairn would say that this is exciting. I say that it's necessary.

Now scream.

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