

# **Stony Brook University**



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**Response and Interpretation**

A Thesis Presented

by

**Kathryn Elizabeth Cellerini**

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

**Master of Fine Arts**

in

**Studio Art**

Stony Brook University

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Abstract of the Thesis  
**Response and Interpretation**  
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**Master of Fine Arts**  
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Stony Brook University

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Building and printing are ways of thinking as well as creating. I make artwork inspired by overwhelming personal baggage, and invite strangers to investigate or probe my guts. Once inside, I want the navigator to instigate a sensory reaction from structure, such as movement or sound. I might hope that the viewer will internalize an emotional, visceral response of their own that will be burned into their physiological memory. On issues concerning identity, mental health, memory, cognition, and the physiology that ties it all together, I want my current conceptions to evolve into more aggressive disembowelments.

## Dedication Page

I cannot begin to express my unending gratitude to Randy J. Cellerini and Katherine E. Cellerini for never allowing me to settle. Thank you Nana, Catherine Hegglin, for providing me with hugs and safe haven when I need it most. And to my “biggest fan,” best friend, husband, Randel Moore, who continually keeps me firmly grounded and sane. Thank you for your unwavering support. His love and humor revitalize me.

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Forgive me, Eric and Angela Porter, for moving our small troop to New York for three years.



*Untitled*, 2011. Solar plate and collage on rice paper. 30" x 22"

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Influences**

“Pedro” was the name of the orange cat I dissected in high school as part of an advanced medical opportunities class. Studying the cat’s organs for a semester, I became fascinated about the inner workings of the body. I continued to pursue behavioral neuroscience in college, eventually landing myself in a Stress and Coping research laboratory.

In the laboratory we made correlations between how children reported feeling under stress and how their bodies physiologically reacted to a stressor. How well could they interpret their own bodily responses during and after each task? How accurately could they recall their emotions? My studio activities operate in a similar manner. I begin with a present feeling or with how I remember feeling during an emotional event in my life. During production I dissect, interpret, analyze, reorganize, and reinterpret my work in an effort to build closure. But closure is still, often, open-ended.

This perpetual magnification-demagnification between organ and organism is a challenge for me as I try to make sense of how place, circumstances, and experiences might affect people. The most genuine way to accomplish this, I feel, is to make artwork that first shares my own vulnerabilities- my thoughts and experiences. Perhaps the greatest artistic influence for my work is Louise Bourgeois. Bourgeois created fiercely charged sculpture, where every element was symbolic, personal, and emotionally specific to the artist. She was entirely unapologetic about this fact. While Bourgeois juxtaposed representational objects in two and three dimensional space, I attempt to communicate using abstract or stylized symbols.

The researcher in me must be as fully informed about my subject matter as possible, so I often incorporate literary and scientific references into my way of thinking about the work. This not only prepares me and satiates my curiosities, but also helps to extend the work beyond myself, beyond my own limitations. I read as much as I can during the creation of artwork, and resign myself to setting goals that are fluid and dynamic. Artist Ann Hamilton gathers extensive information for her installation projects, but doesn't require the viewer to absorb that specialized knowledge. Her work invites the viewer to learn through mind and body by offering intellectually and viscerally stimulating settings.<sup>1</sup> This is how I want my buildup of intuitive abstractions to function.

I feel installation art is tantamount to a living organism; a complete, functioning ecosystem with interconnected structures, ideas, and emotions. Each component has a pivotal role vital to the installation's overall function; just as osteocytes collectively function as a bone, which then works in conjunction with other bones to form a skeleton. The installations are meant to be continually installed, allowing materials to be recycled. The work should grow, expand, wane, and appropriate context from each variable space and time. This necessitates a realization that there will never be one constant way to interpret an artwork. Like an organism, patterns and relationships can be inferred through the duration of the installation's lifetime. Recently, integrating photography into my practice has allowed me the freedom to document my presence in the artworks and analyze their relevance in outdoor environments.

Artworks presented in this thesis are presented as individual research projects. They are organized chronologically to best illustrate the evolution of ideas and symbolism in the work, starting with intestines and migrating to barns. Within each project analysis I will describe initial

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Simon. *Ann Hamilton*. Harry N. Abrams; First Edition, 2002, p. 13-15.

inspiration, background information, references, and execution. When appropriate, I will describe viewer interaction with the work. I need to witness people inside of the installations to fully understand their context within the work as well as interpret the viewer's feelings about their experience:

“...The coordinates of perception were established as existing not only between spectator and the work but among spectator, artwork, and the place inhabited by both...Whatever relationship was now to be perceived was contingent on the viewer's temporal movement in the sphere shared with the object. Thus the work belonged to its site; if the site were to change, so would the interrelationship of object, context and viewer. Such a reorientation of the perceptual experience of art made the viewer, in effect, the subject of the work...”<sup>2</sup>

## Chapter 2

### Related Research

*Material=Process=Meaning*

I care about anatomical relationships because I have a chronic digestive illness that is sometimes physically, psychologically, and socially debilitating. Anything the human body ingests enters the digestive tract and all the other systems within our bodies, and may also

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<sup>2</sup> Erika Suderburg. *Space Site Intervention: Situating Installation Art*. University of Minnesota Press. 2000, p. 4. Suderburg was quoting Douglas Crimp's thoughts regarding Minimalism as a precursor for installation art.

contribute to behavior.<sup>3</sup> The muscles, the nails, and kidneys, the lungs; each organ is directly or tangentially connected. To transform a single drawing of intestines by repeatedly layering it atop itself through the process of printmaking is how I describe this rhizomatic<sup>4</sup> interconnectivity.

I wanted to explore the concept of digestion metaphorically. In the midst of carving a large piece of birch plywood, I interpreted the temperamental nature of wood as being similar to that of my viscera. The relationship I developed with each woodblock was consistently a conversation: a back-and-forth, give-and-take process that demanded respect and attention yet did not always return the sentiment. It was through carving woodblocks that I began to make the connections between technique, process, material, and message.

In woodblock printing, I developed a specific sequence of events that speaks as a metaphor for the physical, often violent visceral reactions our bodies have to everyday experiences and unsettling memories. The human body subconsciously responds positively and negatively to our daily interactions. In *Reparations I, II, III*, (2010), I chose to translate intestinal drawings through wood because of its conceptual relationship to the body. I placed the monoprints of stylized intestines on a floor prepared with flat, plastic sheets. I drenched them with warm tea and even threw some berries onto the prints for added texture and staining. The physically demanding process of kneeling over the prints, churning and massaging the paper drenched in tea and berries, emulated the way my digestive system deals with the things I ingest. During agitation the printed image dissolved, mixed with the tea to stain the paper, and in many instances, broke down the paper completely. Similar to how the stomach digests food, the monoprints were digested by my hands.

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<sup>3</sup> Esther Thelen and Linda B. Smith. "A Dynamic Systems Approach to the Development of Cognition and Action." MIT Press, 1994, pp 45-69, p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 21. My concept of interconnectivity was also informed by Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome, which ceaselessly makes connections at all points and negates any type of hierarchy. There is no beginning or end, only the process or journey between.

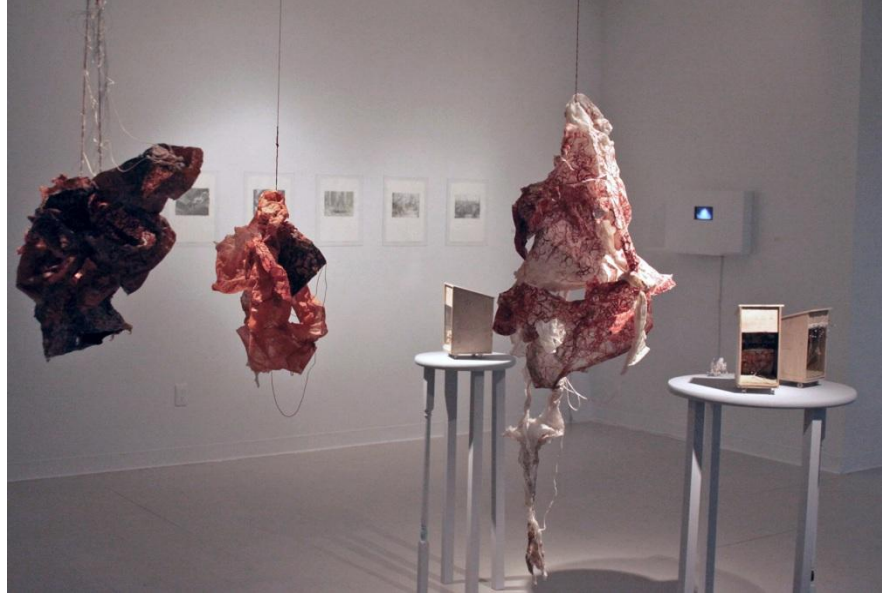


*Reparations I*, 2010. Beeswax, woodblock prints, tea stains, embroidery string, sewing thread, pins. 12" x 8" x 4"

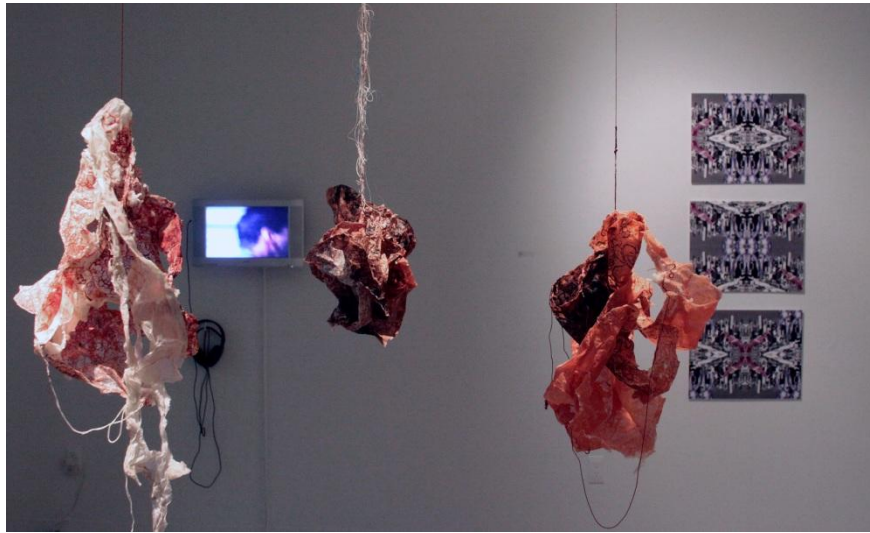
Once dried, I gathered the mangled vestiges and pinned them back together. I referenced anatomy books for stitching and suture diagrams. To pin the work back together was a raw,<sup>5</sup> painful, but sincere attempt to make amends. In the reconstructing process, the prints formed into paper bodies. As I stitched parts together, I also infused the paper with beeswax. The beeswax served as both a preservative and a safeguard to the prints, and gave the air in their vicinity a slightly sweet odor. The bodies symbolized my physical and emotional struggle to process, repair, and heal.

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<sup>5</sup> I felt as though I was stitching body parts back together.



*Reparations*, 2010. Exhibition view. Beeswax, woodblock prints, tea stains, embroidery string, sewing thread, pins.



*Reparations*, 2010. Exhibition view. Beeswax, woodblock prints, tea stains, embroidery string, sewing thread, pins.

*Percolation*, (2010-), bridged print, memory, and body. I applied a hand-carved rubber stamp in the shape of intestines numerous times to my own body. With each application of the inked block to the skin, there was a physical indentation. A failed attempt to wash away the ink was an action taken to suppress the memories. After vigorous attempts to rub off the ink with



water and grass, there was a moment of recognizing that memories rise and fall from the surface but never completely disappear. Memory behaves in a very similar manner; it is an impact on the body that is consolidated and stored, awaiting potential resurgence.



*Percolation*, 2010. Collaboration with Kristine Granger. Photo stills from video performance.

### *Systems Aesthetics*

Hans Haacke explained “a sculpture that physically reacts to its environment is no longer to be regarded as an object...it merges with the environment in a relationship that is better understood as a ‘system’ of interdependent processes.”<sup>6</sup> *Daughter* (2009) was a project composed of various elements designed to react to the immediate environment. The work consisted of 37 used teabags. The teabag represented a consumable product that I choose to ingest on a daily basis for an extended period of time, each cup affecting my heart rate, brain function, and mood. Each teabag was uniquely printed with a drawing of an internal organ. The original threads attached to the teabags were removed and replaced with tea-stained embroidery floss so that the length of each teabag would be flexible and exaggerated. The embroidery floss was strewn around amorphous beeswax castings of bamboo.<sup>7</sup> The beeswax had been stained with frozen berries, which gave the translucent castings a de-saturated, pink, flesh-tone. The waxes were suspended in open space using embroidery floss and swivels. Because the total mass of

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<sup>6</sup> Jack Burnham. “Systems Esthetics.” Reprinted from *ArtForum Magazine*, September 1968, p. 10.

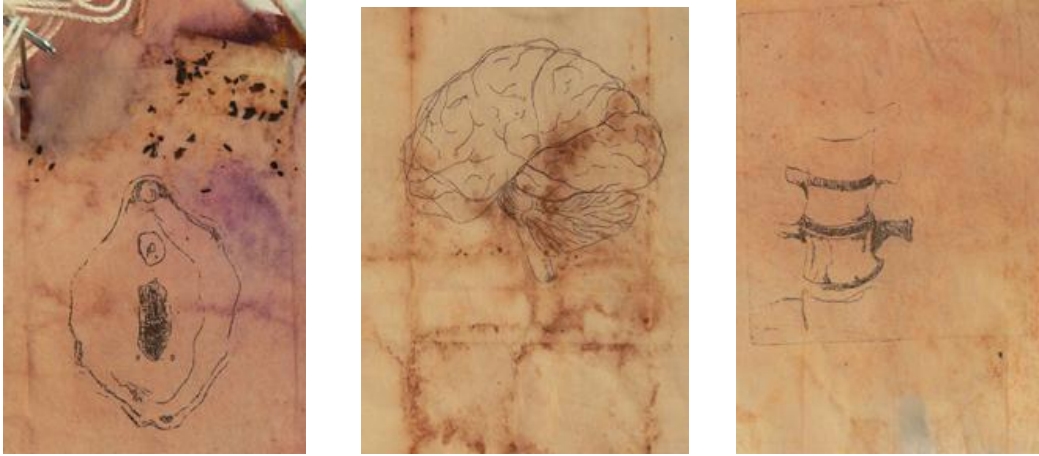
<sup>7</sup> Once the castings were pulled from the mould, they no longer appeared as bamboo. They resembled femur fossils.

castings and teabags was minimal, the installation became subjected to the fluctuating air currents within the room where it was installed.

The shape of *Daughter* was inspired by Gregor Mendel, who studied changes in pea plant families from generation to generation. His phenotype diagrams that modeled heredity gave me the idea to create a biographical artwork that related my body to those of my parents. Each organ (teabag) was carefully measured so that it would be suspended in the air at a height equivalent to each organ's approximate location in my body. If my frontal lobes are located at 56 inches above the ground, then the corresponding brain teabag would hang at 56 inches. The same was true of all 37 represented organs. To include the presence of my mom and dad, each casted wax was measured to be suspended at a height according to how tall my parents were. My dad was 75 inches tall, and so many of the waxes hung at 75 inches. The same was true for the waxes representing Mom, except at 62 inches. Interpersonal familial relationships and heredity were only one of several systems considered in *Daughter*.



*Daughter*, 2009. (Exhibition 2010). 37 Used teabags, 37 etchings, stained wax, string. Dimensions variable.



*Daughter*, 2009. Detail of organ etchings.

Using Haacke's terminology, *Daughter* was not a sculpture but a system. It relied on multiple interactions,<sup>8</sup> including that between the viewer and the environment, in order for the work to function. A shift in the overall shape of the structure occurred upon entering the installation. Recall that the work was entitled *Daughter* because it was a self-portrait which represented my physicality. As the viewer walked amongst the floating organs, the air currents changed, and the teabags fluttered and rotated. The viewers were affecting *me* with their presence. Some of the spaces between waxes were so narrow that they made inevitable skin-to-skin contact with the work. In other areas, the teabags were placed closely together and therefore ended up entangled when someone walked by. The installation was constantly in flux. For me, the reactionary movement of the teabags and the waxes was a metaphor for social interactions.

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<sup>8</sup> Edward A. Shanken. "The House That Jack Built: Jack Burnham's Concept of 'Software' as a Metaphor for Art." *Leonardo Electronic Almanac*, November, 1998, p. 2.

## Chapter 3

### Vinculum

In the summer of 2010, I was out for a drive near the property where I grew up in rural Colton, Oregon. Upon seeing the property I immediately had to pull the truck to the side of the road because my eyes and face were drenched with tears. There in the front yard stood my old set of monkey bars. The galvanized steel was black from use and weather-worn; the structure, tipped forward. When I saw this familiar object from my childhood my body reacted before my mind could make sense of it. After returning to my studio in New York, I was still deeply concerned and puzzled by the experience. I wrote a letter to the family now living at my old Colton address and introduced myself, along with my strange desire to dig up and re-install the monkey bars as part of an art project. The matriarch of the family reassured me that I could have the jungle gym; however, she informed me that her husband had just re-stabilized and painted it for their own kids to play with and enjoy. Through talking with this kind and generous stranger, I realized that the set of monkey bars was an object stained with oils from my body, the bodies of the kids who played on it before me, and now the most recent generation of kids. The monkey bars embodied memory. The exhibition *Vinculum (state I)* explored what I call physiological memory; the idea that we can have very real, visceral responses to objects or memories *before we realize or rationalize* why we are having them.



*Maquettes (Vinculum)*, 2010. Recycled teabags, woodblock prints, chicken wire, beeswax, berries.

While building the endoskeleton of *Vinculum*, I was introduced to an essay entitled “Two Floors” by philosopher Gilles Deleuze. Using the flowing, folding fabric of baroque sculpture as visual metaphor, Deleuze was interested in describing a membrane, or space, that is constantly in

flux and built of folds that are ever enfolding, refolding, and unfolding.<sup>9</sup> This shifting membrane, or vinculum, originated as both mathematical symbol and as the place of exchange during transubstantiation. But Deleuze considered the vinculum a membrane through which actions and perceptions pass between body and mind. For me, building this exhibition was a process to reconcile the tension inherent in discrepancies such as crying when looking at an object of play.<sup>10</sup> Because we define ourselves through memory and world experience, Deleuze's writings helped me visualize a new way to show the relationship between self-perception and physiology.



*Vinculum (state 1)*, 2011. Hand-pulled woodblock prints, hand-stained Thai tissue papers, chicken wire, copper wire, spray paint, berries, stained beeswax, recycled teabags, hemp, etched copper poles, latex paint. Monkey bars: 6.75' x 8' x 1.5' Membrane: 8.75' x 13' x 18.5' (at widest points)

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<sup>9</sup> Gilles Deleuze. "The Two Floors." *Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. University of Minnesota Press, 1992.

<sup>10</sup> This point refers back to the experience I had upon first seeing the monkey bars. A jungle gym is typically an object that kids have fun, laugh, and play on. I did not experience happiness, but sadness.



*Vinculum (state 1)*, 2011. Hand-pulled woodblock prints, hand-stained Thai tissue papers, chicken wire, copper wire, spray paint, berries, stained beeswax, recycled teabags, hemp, etched copper poles, latex paint. Monkey bars: 6.75' x 8' x 1.5' Membrane: 8.75' x 13' x 18.5' (at widest points)

Mom, Dad, and I used chicken wire fences to keep rabbits and chickens on the farm in Oregon. Recalling that memory, I built the endoskeleton for the vinculum with hundreds of folded pieces of chicken wire. The exterior of the structure was covered using porous, tea-stained rice paper that became translucent when adhered to the wire with berry-stained beeswax. The interior of the membrane was covered with hand-pulled woodblock monoprints of stylized intestines on colored rice paper. The intestine prints had come to represent my consolidated memories stored within the walls of the vinculum. To help enliven the structure with vasculature I collaged copper wire, hemp, and my saved, used teabags. The beeswax acted as a preservative and enhanced the paper's ability to diffuse and soften light. The beeswax also permeated the space with a sweet odor. Olfactory sensation helped to play a role in soliciting memories for those who entered the exhibition space because smell, emotion, and memory are strongly connected.

Another definition of vinculum is a unifying bond. In the exhibition, there were two contrasting structures for the viewer to consider. Referring again to my childhood, I welded a set of monkey bars using copper pipes. Each section of the monkey bars was etched with drawings of stylized digestive organs: pancreas etchings represented my dad who died because of alcohol dependency, and the liver represented my mom, who chronically struggles with the same issue. During the construction of *Vinculum (state I)* I learned that artist Eva Hesse created two works entitled *Vinculum I* and *Vinculum II* in 1969-70. Her preoccupations with the ladder as a transitional space are given homage and contextualized alongside my membrane as a visual and conceptual comment about the ephemeral inscription phase of memory. In my mind, the monkey bars were therefore an object being consolidated by the membrane.





*Vinculum (state I)*, 2011. Interior view.

Hesse and Deleuze escalated my desire for viewer participation with the work. *Vinculum (state I)* only became conceptually complete when people, who harbor pre-conceptions, entered the cavernous space allowing those perceptions to be altered. My hope was that viewers would move around and into the work while becoming aware of their own bodies within time and space. Children were, in fact, quick to crawl inside, while adults were cautious, and questioned whether or not it was appropriate to go in. As more and more viewers entered the space, my vinculum began to contain the memory of their presence, and therefore became a unifying bond between them and me.



*Vinculum (state 1)*, 2011.

## Chapter 4

### The (Barn)acle's Identity Crisis...and Other Bedtime Stories

“The line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps indistinct.”<sup>11</sup>

#### *Drawing Series (Chora)*

I had already started work on a new series of drawings when I first read Julia Kristeva's essays regarding physiological memory.<sup>12</sup> While making the drawings I began to be more critical of the nature of the symbolism in my mark-making. In addition to digestion and viscera, I began to see abstract shapes that were part of a larger, personally-derived vocabulary. I began to read the hexagonal shapes as representing the vinculum project but also farming, chicken wire fences and livestock. There were hundreds of egg-like shapes, which reminded me of female reproductive organs. Each of the four drawings in the series seemed like a different interior space. The drawings related, for me, to the Kristeva-Lacanian definition of the *chora*<sup>13</sup>.

Drawing and thinking through the meaning (or lack thereof) of the expanding symbolism, I felt the challenge arise to create a dense, otherworldly drawing installation that viewers might encounter and navigate through. I wanted to be surrounded by an interpretation of Kristeva's *chora*. I visualized the *chora* as a place where the inhabitant immersed in unsettling stillness

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<sup>11</sup> Suderburg, p.1. Quoting Allan Kaprow's "The Event."

<sup>12</sup> Julia Kristeva. *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Columbia University Press, 1984, p. 27. Following the *Vinculum* exhibition, I sought new perspectives about memory and physiology. Further reading suggested that Kristeva philosophized that physiological memories were passed from mother to child in utero.

<sup>13</sup> Dino Felluga. "Modules on Kristeva: On Psychosexual Development." *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*. Last updated January 31, 2011. Purdue U. April 20, 2012. <<http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/psychoanalysis/kristevadevelop.html>>. The *chora* is defined as a six-month phase following birth when a child cannot distinguish itself from its mother or immediate surroundings. There are not any boundaries between the child and environment, therefore, the fetus also cannot discern between reality and "symbolic representations" of reality. This time is described as the pure materiality of existence, or what Lacan described as "The Real."



*Drawing Series (chora)*, 2011. Charcoal, colored pencil, woodblock print, graphite, conte' crayon on paper.  
30" x 22"

could not differentiate between realities or falsities. The drawings became the aesthetic departure points for *The (Barn)acle's Identity Crisis...and other Bedtime Stories*.

### *Personal Background*

As I prepared to build the installation, I probed my history for meaningful, personal iconography. The project became convoluted and confusing. The drawings and the philosophical reference that triggered the desire to build the installation in the first place were replaced in importance by the explosive sentiments felt when recalling simple things from my childhood. Those feelings and memories continually propelled me forward. With some anxiety, I embraced these unexpected shifts.



*The (Barn)acle's Identity Crisis...and other Short Stories*, 2011. Screenprinted tulle, carved fenceposts, wood stain, antique barn windows, ladder, hay, house paint, pins, nails, cable, lights. Floor : 5'' x 12' x 10' Bunk: 8.5' x 6' x 2.5'

The installation began to take the shape of my first bedroom, which required remembering specific details. For example, my first bedroom was quickly attached to the side of

our house on the family farm. The previous owners built a long, narrow, rectangular space using numerous pieces of plywood, and joined it to the front of a single-wide trailer (effectively making it a double-wide trailer). A stinky, plywood, hand-built bunk bed was installed against the long wall farthest from the belly of the trailer. It was painted light pink. My dad often tucked me into bed. As an only child I chose to sleep on the top bunk where I would be closest to my glow-in-the-dark stars on the ceiling. The bed was my rocket ship because I wanted to be an astronaut. The bunk bed also contained built-in hiding spots where I could store my favorite toys and books. I would lay awake at night with my flashlight reading books. I played veterinarian on the bottom bunk. I graffiti'd the ply-underside of the top bunk. The bunk bed was my sanctuary, my play-place. The adjoining playroom was painted green until I became a teenager whose favorite color was "ice blue."

The *(Barn)acle's Identity Crisis...and other Bedtime Stories* began to deal with history and how memories intertwine to shape personal identity. To make sense of my feelings of loss, I investigated ways abstract symbolism could represent personal identity. I was also interested in individuality: the feeling of uniqueness as being derived from the recall of memories, whether true or false: False in the sense that some memories fade or become misconstrued over time.

The title of the exhibition, *The (Barn)acle's Identity Crisis...and other Bedtime Stories*, alluded to the optical presence of barns across Oregon's landscape. A barnacle can be defined as something or someone who is tenacious, numerous, and difficult to get rid of. The point was to position the old wooden barn as a metaphor for memory, which, like barns, are numerous and strong against being weathered over time. The unwanted memories are the most stubborn and difficult to get rid of. The title also intended to synthesize the plight of the dilapidated barn with

my anxious struggles, in the form of a superficially safe bedtime story with palpable violent, aggressive, obsessive undertones.



*The (Barn)acle's Identity Crisis...and other Short Stories, 2011.*

The exhibition was a place of longing and reaching for something intangible. It was meant to be a surreal, dreamlike space situated somewhere between a bedroom and barn. It was comprised of an ice blue wall with gold dots, colorful lights, a slatted plywood floor, and hay. On top of the ply floor was what I called the “bunk bed,” which was constructed using fence posts, screen-printed fabrics, wood carving, and an old, wooden ladder that had been abandoned near the studio. The fabric was nailed, wrapped, pulled, and pinned against the fencing. I chose to divide spaces using broken, dusty, antique barn windows from Oregon. I approached the arrangement of negative space, layered elements, and lighting as I did within the *Drawing Series (Chora)*.

The identity crisis manifested itself within the ambiguities of the exhibition. Recall the *chora* of space as being somewhere between reality and illusion: For example, the barn windows placed around the perimeter of the barn floor were *suggestive* of a building. The blue walls, for me, implied ‘bedroom,’ and there was a smaller ‘bedroom’ within the greater enclosure. Unlike previous work, there was a purposeful lack of interior and exterior. Also, the gallery space was split. One wall was devoted to the drawing series that inspired the formal elements and symbolism translated into the third dimension. The rest of the exhibition space was devoted to the installation. The exhibition organization was plotted to create a simultaneous tension and cross-illumination between the two areas. At the time I was building components for the *(Barn)acle* installation, I half-jokingly decried that I was going through an identity crisis:<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> James D. Fearon. *What is Identity (As we now use it)?* Mimeo, Stanford University, 1999, p.9. Erik Erikson coined the term ‘identity crisis’ in specific reference to adolescents: “the condition of being uncertain about one’s feelings about oneself, especially with regard to character, goals, and origins...”



“I am a teacher, a mentor, a graduate student, an artist, a newly declared fiancé. I am trying to work on building projects in the present moment but I am forced to extend my thoughts toward nine months from now as I try to find a job. I live in a place that I don’t consider home, and continually long to move back to the Pacific Northwest, even though my brain tells me that I need to go where the jobs are. I want to be settled. I want a house. A stable paycheck...I miss barns. I miss the way they make me feel.”



*The (Barn)acle's Identity Crisis...and other Short Stories*, 2011. Screenprinted tulle, carved fenceposts, wood stain, antique barn windows, ladder, hay, house paint, pins, nails, cable, lights. Floor : 5' x 12' x 10'  
Bunk: 8.5' x 6' x 2.5'

The bunk bed jungle-gym was another instance of hybridity. I wanted to create an object that embodied all of the memories and thoughts regarding play and imagination that I experienced as a child on my bunk bed. Made from stained wooden fenceposts, I carved into the wood to create drawings and graffiti. Carving still represented emotional bodily response. While I began the project by carving intestines I quickly realized that the drawing wanted to develop into something else. Screen-printed monotype prints on tulle fabric, which represented thoughts and memories, were wrapped onto the carved fenceposts. I placed sheet-like fabric across the top rungs and an old, wooden ladder decorated with wedding fabrics against the bunk bed.<sup>15</sup> Finally, green, pink, and blue lights illuminated the tulle and windows. The cast shadows were synonymous to a print. The sculpture in that sense, was the matrix and then the shadow-- the ephemeral print or haunt.

I can't recall whether or not I first read Marcel Proust during or after installation. But Proust changed the way that I thought about the physicality of memories entering and exiting the conscious. His description (see below) resonated with how I viewed the *(Barn)acle* installation space— one object at a time finding its position in relationship to my body until it felt emotionally and physically true:

“My body, still too heavy with sleep to move, would endeavor to construe from the pattern of its tiredness the position of its various limbs, in order to deduce therefrom the direction of the wall, the location of the furniture, to piece together and give a name to the house in which it lay. Its memory, the composite memory of its ribs, its knees, its

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<sup>15</sup> The olive green and silver fabrics reminded me of Jan van Eyck's painting titled *Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and his Wife*, 1434. At the time I called it the wedding ladder, though it has since evolved into a more developed project.

shoulder blades, offered it a series of rooms in which it had at one time or another slept, while the unseen walls, shifting and adapting themselves to the shape of each successive room that it remembered, whirled around in the dark. And even before my brain, hesitating at the threshold of times and shapes, had re-assembled the circumstances sufficiently to identify the room, it— my body— would recall from each room in succession the style of bed, the position of the doors, the angle at which the daylight came through the windows, whether there was a passage outside, what I had had in my mind when I went to sleep and found there when I awoke.”<sup>16</sup>



*The (Barn)acle's Identity Crisis...and other Short Stories*, 2011. Screenprinted tulle, carved fenceposts, wood stain, antique barn windows, ladder, hay, house paint, pins, nails, cable, lights. Floor : 5' x 12' x 10' Bunk: 8.5' x 6' x 2.5'

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<sup>16</sup> Marcel Proust. *Remembrance of Things Past: Swann's Way*. Vintage Books, 1982, p.5.

## Chapter 5

### Portals

During the long production of the *(Barn)acle* installation I shifted my focus onto a different project for a day. I spontaneously gathered materials from around my studio, which included barn windows, screen-printed tulle, a video camera, and a scale-model bunk bed. I placed screen-printed tulle fabric on my body and sat behind the window with the toy bunk bed, the camera pointed at me through the window. I hit the “record” button from where I was sitting and immediately felt awkward. I attempted to play with and examine a miniature version of the bunk bed sculpture. Eventually I lost sight of the video camera and my movements became slow and meditative. I recorded about four minutes of this video footage.

Using Adobe Premiere, I selected images from the video. I was struck by the contrast of intent and result. The photographs conveyed something different altogether than play. I saw the figure as myself, and I saw myself inhabiting an otherworldly space with elements that didn’t make a lot of sense. Proust wrote that when re-imagining spaces, objects whirl around in the mind until the brain can decide where they were in relationship to the body. In contrast to Proust, the relationship between body and object in my photographs seemed illogical because of scale and perspective. The images, for me, are emotionally unclear psychological places.

Lens-based media allow information—by way of light—to travel through a cavity and be re-described in the form of a captured picture. In *Portals (Barn)*, the pictures were presented as photographs, rather than the videos they were taken from. I enjoyed the loss of real-time chronology because each picture became a decontextualized action. For me, they were each singular, pinpointed investigations. This realization instigated serious consideration that

photographs of viewers (and myself) inhabiting my installations were stronger than the installations themselves. I hated that idea. Why put so much effort into construction of an entire environment only to have a photograph as an end product?

This frustration and discontent led me to investigate the introduction of attendants in visual artist Ann Hamilton's installations.<sup>17</sup> According to her unpublished writings, Hamilton believed that the inanimate attendants gave her installations a "tableau-like quality." But as her work evolved, the attendants became more dynamic within the installations, bringing forth the importance of the "ongoing life of the work."<sup>18</sup> However, Hamilton does not consider the photographs of her installations as works of art themselves because she feels that an installation is comprised of multiple images for a viewer to experience. I don't want to tell the viewer exactly what to see. I want them to find the visual experience for themselves. But images and objects don't have to be mutually exclusive. I just need to be clear about the role of lens-based media when combined with objects: And also, the role of object when photographed as subject.



Portals (Barn), 2011. Photographs from unedited video. 16" x 27"

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<sup>17</sup> I emailed Ms. Hamilton and asked her to describe her thought process regarding the introduction of performers in her early works. Her studio responded by sharing text that has not yet been published.

<sup>18</sup> Nicole Gibbs, e-mail message to author, March 9, 2012. Gibbs is an archivist at Ann Hamilton Studios, and provided me with text from a currently unpublished interview about the use of attendants in Hamilton's work. Eventually, this interview will be published online at [www.foconow.com](http://www.foconow.com).



*Portals (Barn)*, 2011. Photographs from unedited video. 16" x 27"

## **Chapter 6**

### **Fortitude**

Many of the wooden barns in the Pacific Northwest are over 150 years old. Since the land was settled in the 1800's by immigrants, agriculture has been the main activity of the region, but, as a changing economy weans out dairy farmers, fewer and fewer barns are kept up. The spring seasons are notoriously wet. Dilapidated barns that have not been tended over the years start to rot and lose more than one panel at a time. These buildings become shells (barnacles) embodying stories and history. They are just like people in this regard. To me, barns are the very definition of fortitude, embodying strength and courage in the face of danger and difficulty.

Some of the topics that I have thought about throughout the duration of the project included the similarities between architecture, the body and abstract symbolism, and the interconnection of identity, memory, and place. Post-construction, I saw my barn as a body with the potential of being broken over time by crippling thoughts/memories. Perhaps it is the self-introduction of viewers, who voluntarily enter the room, and are symbolic of human intervention, which gives the barn hope of survival.

A project began to take shape while I visited Washington State in August 2011. While driving along the countryside roads near my grandmother's house, it became glaringly apparent that barns were everywhere; some in disrepair and others relics in full working order. I then realized how much I miss seeing barns when driving around Long Island. These feelings inspired the thought of bringing a symbolic piece of architecture from the place I identify as home, to the place where I currently reside. It seemed like a way to ease the homesickness.



*Untitled*, 2011. Video still. Unedited video documentation of research and interview with barn owners in Washington State.

The first step involved photographing and touring barns to gain a better understanding of styles and structural integrity. The first barn we stopped and examined was a wooden, 1860's era barn used to store hay and protect cattle. The barn was impeccably constructed and maintained so that the majority of the original structure was intact. Like the barns on our family farm in Colton, there was a dusty, muddy smell and cloudiness about the air. I took note of the piecemeal application of plywood and other found lumber that was used to patch holes and create shelves and storage inside. Also of note was the slatted wood roof. It was a permeable divide between interior and exterior.

The second barn we toured that day was a 1920's era dairy barn, with refurbished metal roof and horizontal, red siding. The owners graciously allowed us to take video of the structure while providing an oral history of the farm. The most exciting, intriguing architectural detail



about the dairy barn was the upstairs loft, originally intended to store loose hay. There was a pulley system to unhinge a large door at the top front wall of the barn, and old farm machinery was used to lift the hay high enough for farmers to rake it inside. I was also impressed by the numerous windows. My barns did not possess these features.



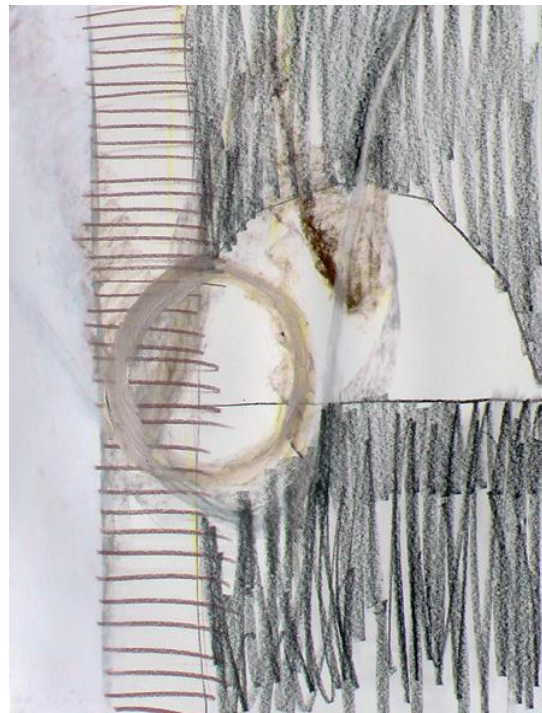
*Untitled*, 2011. Video still. Unedited video documentation of research and interview with barn owners in Washington State.

As we sketched out the dimensions of each barn, I thought about the functionality of this agricultural architecture. A barn's uses are multi-fold: houses livestock; functions as a supply house for food, hay, and tools; serves as a place for working animals; tractors and farm vehicles may be parked inside. What I decided to place on the inside of my constructed barn would be crucial. Artist Ofra Lapid described home as "an idea of a place: someplace emotional," rather than a specific place.<sup>19</sup> From there, you can posit that the specifics of the structure, such as

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<sup>19</sup> Jennifer Pappas. "Jennifer Pappas Explores the Identity of Decay with Ofra Lapid." *Hi Fructose Magazine*, vol. 22, 2012, p.32.

color, number of windows, gutters, presence of doors, etc., all build toward an identity.<sup>20</sup> For me, the barn functioned personally as a symbol of home and identity. I see barns as bodies encasing memories. It is a complete organism with the ability to change over time and change due to the influence of events occurring within. “Memory defines a person.”<sup>21</sup> I would argue that memory also defines architecture, and architecture represents memory.



From *Barn Gesture Drawing Series*, 2011. Charcoal, graphite, oil stick, conte' crayon. 30" x 22"

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<sup>20</sup> Pappas, p. 32.

<sup>21</sup> *NOVA Science Now: Where Did We Come From?*, managing director Alan Ritsko. Narrated by Neil deGrasse Tyson. (2011; Boston, MA: WGBH, 2011), DVD. Memories are stored in nerves and tissues underneath our skin creating the perceptions we have of our identity.

## *Materiality*

Following the development of photographs, video, and several blueprints, I created a series of gesture drawings related to my new concept of a barn. The drawings were quick texture studies which allowed me to gain insight to what style of barn I wanted to build. The drawings were followed by the construction of a scaled maquette. Having never built a structure of this scale and complexity, I needed to deconstruct my photographs and sketches and learn to build a mobile barn. Maquette building helped me identify a structural support system. I planned to finish the interior with the bunkbed from *(Barn)acle*, and decorate the walls with screenprints and textile-inspired patterns.



*Barn Maquette*, 2011. Screenprinted tulle, wood, house paint, netting, pins. 14" x 12" x 10"



*Barn Maquette*, 2011. Detail.

When documenting *barn maquette*. I was interested in placing the sculpture in natural surroundings, such as grass, leaves, dirt, and weeds. During this process the sculpture became subject rather than object. But it wasn't until I decontextualized the sculpture by placing it onto cement, an unnatural setting, or a bale of hay in my studio, for example, that I began to understand that I was taking a regional icon and placing it in surreal, unfamiliar contexts. The juxtaposition of icon to place was a fun exploration that reminded me of the importance of site. How would the scale of the large barn be interpreted in a gallery devoid of any semblance of natural surroundings?



*Barn Maquette*, 2011. Screenprinted tulle, wood, house paint, netting, pins. 14" x 12" x 10"

*Fortitude*, my next exhibition project, was proportionally reduced to 20% of actual dairy barn scale. This includes the positioning of the small windows and doors. But I wasn't interested in creating a replica. *Fortitude* became a hybrid of several barns borrowing elements from the two Washington barns in addition to barns from my memory on the farm. The façade was constructed with decaying found wood and furring strips. Each furring strip was stained several times; stain being another way of marking a moment in time. I chose variable shades of stain to imply weathering. However, the palette was clearly not that of a functional barn. The interior of the barn was painted ice blue, alluding to *(Barn)acle* and the teenage bedroom. All colors were intentionally unnatural, dreamlike, and celestial. I was encouraged about my direction when I

read a quote by Sigmund Freud: “...the uncanny happens when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced.”<sup>22</sup> This was the line I wanted to walk.



*Fortitude*, 2012. Screen-printed tulle, nylon rope, wood, found objects, lights, windows, block prints, nails, pins. 14' x 12' x 10'

Further research into the relationship between architecture, symbolism, and memory led me to an African art history documentary. Architecture of the ancient Mali Empire was influenced by the integration of Islam into the region.<sup>23</sup> Islamic practice forbids followers from

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<sup>22</sup> Sigmund Freud quote displayed at the Whitney Museum during the exhibition titled *Real/Surreal*, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> *Lost Kingdoms of Africa: West Africa*, directed by Sarah Howitt, Ian Lilley, and Mark Bates. Narrated by Dr. Gus Casely-Hayford. (2010; United Kingdom: Athena, 2010), DVD.

creating images with human form. In the northern city of Timbuktu, a capital trade city with Arab regions, artists had to develop a symbolic, abstract, geometric vocabulary. In the southern city of Djenne, between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, mud houses told visual stories. The number of columns on a house signified how many women a man had married.<sup>24</sup> Pillars at the top of the house each represented a child. If the size of a family changed, the house characteristics did as well.<sup>25</sup> The peoples of this region believed that earthly material, such as stone and dirt, embodied spirits. Masons made bricks by combining rice, charcoal, and other materials to build houses out of sentient, magical materials that would protect the homeowners.<sup>26</sup> In Nigeria, color had meaning: pink was the color of death to the Dogon tribe.<sup>27</sup> In a similar way, the materials I choose, including the found objects, are loaded with personal, regional, and cultural significance. Four Oregon barn windows were recycled from *(Barn)acle* and incorporated into *Fortitude*. Along the windows and corners of the interior I block printed a pattern in gold resembling vintage wallpaper.<sup>28</sup>

The Surrealists<sup>29</sup> and particular ancient African tribes believed in the investment of objects and spaces with symbolic power. These notions extend to the printmaking component in *Fortitude*. Tulle is a celebratory fabric primarily used for special events. The tulle was screenprinted with black ink, which covered the natural silver color of the material. This created a negative space in the fabric. Instead of the print being a trace of a moment in time, in this context, the print became a negative trace. Thinking in terms of physiology, the negative traces

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<sup>24</sup> *Lost Kingdoms of Africa: West Africa.*, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> At the time I felt like I needed to reintroduce the concept of archiving space with moments of my own, but now I am not sure that was necessary.

<sup>29</sup> Summarized from the vinyl text on the wall of the Real/Surreal exhibition at the Whitney Museum, 2011.

could be metaphors for repressed memories, which are thoughts that are chemically present but unconsciously subdued: A buildup of plaque on the fabric of memory, thoughts, synapses.



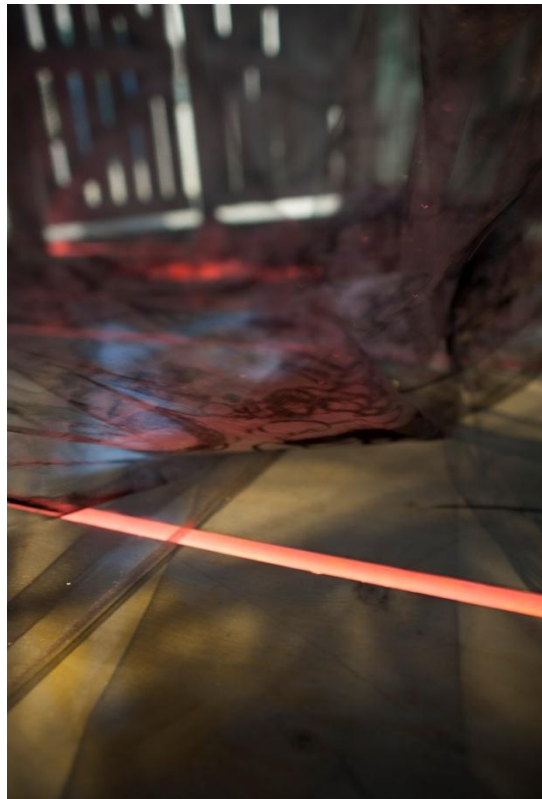
*Fortitude*, 2011. Interior View.



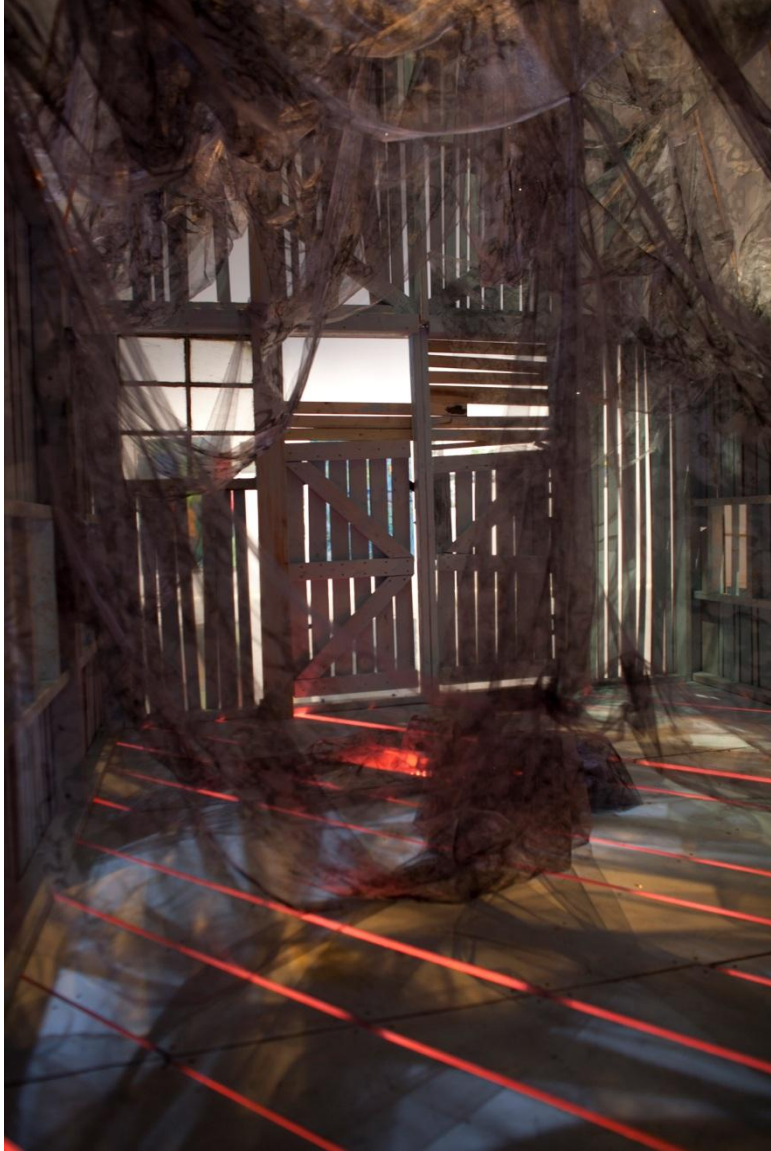


*Fortitude*, 2011. Interior view.

Colorful lights were utilized to animate the barn as though it was a hot, pulsing, breathing organ in an unnerved state. The warm, pink light was flesh, a lava flow, a slow slicing of floorboards to reveal the womb. The creaky, bouncy plywood floor atop the lighting also alluded to a floor below. And finally, the gold, nylon ropes included in the roofing represented the false elements of our memories, purposefully or chemically created. When *Fortitude* is reinstalled, the ropes will be replaced by leather strips. To include dead cow skin in the installation, which would also odorize the interior, I feel, would help allude to a history and industry outside of myself.



*Fortitude*, 2011. detail.



*Fortitude*, 2011. Interior view.



*Fortitude*, 2011.



*Fortitude*, 2011. Screen-printed tulle, nylon rope, wood, found objects, lights, windows, block prints, nails, pins. 14' x 12' x 10'

## Chapter 7

### The Vacillation between Clarity and Confusion

It has taken months of writing and research to realize that I have been attempting to make emotions manifest in the form of sculpture, installation, drawing, and now photography. The source of inspiration for each project is a personal event; yet frequent investigations into science, literature, history, and philosophy inform and expand principal concepts in ways that I could not initially foresee. I work without a solid state of completion in mind, and search for meaningful connections while creating.

The projects presented in this thesis grew in both complexity and scale thanks to the intellectual resources surrounding me at Stony Brook University. I have spent time analyzing intentions and reconsidering material choices. Until the last few weeks, I felt my installation works were closest to achieving the ideal of creating common ground between the viewer and myself. However, I am about to finish a second series of drawings that is perhaps stronger in this regard because they are in essence spontaneous, personal, emotional, and unapologetic. I feel that these new drawings embody the renewed spirit of *not* knowing, which leaves just enough space for the integration of new ideas and fresh discourse.

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