

THESIS

EMERGING WORKER
PROJECT: C-0105

Submitted by
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In partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Colorado State University
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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY KEITH JENTZSCH ENTITLED EMERGING WORKER PROJECT: C-0105 BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Emerging Worker Project: C-0105

The relational conflicts within a given system serve as indispensable tools that give clarity to perception. For example, one cannot comprehend addition without simultaneously grasping the concept of subtraction. That is to say the process of identification, on the most fundamental level, is organized around the principle of opposites. I have extracted from this logic, a point of formal development in my work with the intent of breaking down both physical and conceptual structures. To accomplish this, I have employed a process of layering between material, form and image. The combination of layers used, begin to suggest (often paradoxical) associations that erode the strictness of structures that may otherwise exist in our perception as absolute.

Fabrication, layers, systems and shapes operate as foundational elements that inform my work both formally and conceptually. I use these words in the sense that a painter may work within the parameters of a particular size and shape of canvas; the boundaries are given but within those boundaries the possibilities are infinite and unknown. In keeping with the image of a blank canvas, consider a line dividing the canvas in half. This line delineates a center while designating right and left or perhaps top and bottom halves. The space on either side gives definition to the line, establishing it as the subject of the painting. This binary relation has no possibility of existing without either the line or ground on which it is drawn.

This illustration serves as a theoretical model for the way in which meaning finds shape; that is, through a subjective consciousness orientated toward a universal “ground”. I am interested in the way that we as the subject (line) bring meaning to experience by mapping the world (ground) in terms of polar identities. This aesthetic research is attempting to expose preconceived demarcations while at the same time suggesting an intersection or common ground between otherwise distinct categories. In this sense the work functions as both an affirmation and deconstruction of binary relations that are generally taken as absolute, i.e. subject/object, interior/exterior, human/animal, system/expression, natural/synthetic, containment/release and fabrication/truth. Through the deconstruction of these categories I hope to open a space for the re-conceptualization of various systems that shape our perception of “reality”.

The use of shape in my work has become the visual equivalent of a systemic construct; that is to say an order made possible by opposites or at the very least contrasting elements. This idea may be clarified by thinking of a shape drawn on a piece of paper. So long as the color of the drawn line contrasts with the color of the paper, our perception of the shape is made possible by the edge or line that defines an interior/exterior relationship. Furthermore, the degree of perceptual clarity of the shape is proportional to the degree of the perceived division between inner and outer zones. Thus, the perceived clarity of our experience is maximized to the greatest extent when the relational elements involved meet as polar opposites.

By using shape as a device and metaphor for a system, I have articulated a literal and metaphorical space that is both open and closed, simultaneously emphasizing interior and exterior conditions. My intent is that the viewer/participant will be implicated in the work as they move from voyeur to subject, having to locate their own position to, and within the space. This space has been defined by three structures placed within a field of synthetic grass. From within this zone the participant may engage in a multimedia experience through audio, visual, tactile and spatial means. The elements employed operate as dissonant and consonant layers, emoting a sense of theatrical tension from which the individual may become the protagonist of a text that has not yet been written. While the parameters have been articulated in a specific way, my intention is that the installation remains open to interpretation, emphasizing the plasticity of reality and its origins in an autonomous subject (see fig. 1).

The physical structures exist as modular units that may be easily set up and broken down via the application of hardware used in common construction or assembly applications: hinges, countertop connectors, cam clamps and adjustable floor levelers. The exposure and exploitation of hardware refers to the system as self-contained and absolute. The formal specificity of the construction acts as a counterbalance to the idea of prop or stage, thus setting up a contradiction between what is perceived as absolute versus a temporary or fabricated reality.

Exterior/Interior

Reality as fabrication is further emphasized through the use of synthetic grass as a cohesive ground. This field of grass articulates a specified perimeter, separating interior from exterior while suggesting the interiority of the outside environment. In a similar way the incorporation of a bamboo-forest-wallpaper mural and projected imagery of nature, coupled with sound, sets up a dialogue between reality-as-truth and reality-as-construct. A duality is established between absolute form and the ability of the image/sound to penetrate the space, expanding the otherwise strictly defined parameters of the installation. I have envisioned the overlay of graphic shapes and tightly fabricated structures as elements that compress the space. The opening up and penetration of these structures allows for a slippage between containment and release, while implicating the viewer as voyeur (see fig. 2).

The use of video and still image reflects on nature and the nature of reality as contrived, fabricated or synthetic vs. solid, transparent or absolute. In drawing from nature as the exclusive image source, a dialogue has been established between an exterior reality that we cannot fully apprehend and one that conveys a sense of verity. I regard the natural world as both external and internal to the human condition: the object of our lust for containment and the subject that defines the primacy of our being. It is the mirror by which our image is made transparent, consumed by the primordial pool from which all things originate and return. However, this reflection that designates our presence at zero, finds itself buried in a fractured identity; one that is made fluid in the immediacy of experience and one that finds itself isolated in self-awareness.

Continuity/Other

My depiction of nature as a synthetic construct emphasizes the separation between human reality and the natural world, while offering metaphorical and literal links that may indicate “continuity” between these seemingly distinct categories.¹ The field of synthetic grass (fescue) and the bamboo-forest-photo mural are perverse manifestations of our distancing from -- and distorted longing for-- a communion with the natural world. The plastic field of fescue is on the side of our desire for absolute control (the manicured lawn taken to the extreme) and the image of bamboo (another type of grass) suggests an attempt to break down the constructed or architectural barrier between man and nature (see fig. 3 and 4). In the context of Western culture, the bamboo forest or products made from bamboo have an exotic association that implies a romanticization of nature. In the context of China and other eastern civilizations, the history of bamboo resides as a cultural icon of continuity between humans and nature. In China, the use of bamboo spans over 5000 years, playing a crucial role in their cultural identity through a wide range of utilitarian applications (clothing, books, paper, architecture, transportation) as well as for food and artistic inspiration. The Tang poet Bai Juyi (772-846) expressed his feelings for bamboo in terms of metaphor for human virtue; “...its deep root denotes resoluteness, its tall, straight stem represents honorability, its hallow interior modesty and its clean and spartan exterior exemplifies chastity”.² In this installation, the image of bamboo is meant to suggest a duality in terms of human interaction with nature; nature as other and nature as intimately tied to human experience and the construct of cultural identification.

Open/Closed

Video projections accompanied by sound (*Container Flow* and *Emerging Worker*) simultaneously emphasize both open and closed systems. The subjects are respectively, water gurgling up from the ground and the activity of bees on a hive. The two videos utilize a mask in the editing process for the purpose of creating a shaped image. In both instances the contoured/contained image accentuates the marginalization/limitation of the human gaze on nature. For *Container Flow* the image is projected down from the ceiling into a rectangular four panel hinged enclosure with one end left open, allowing the projected image to flow out onto the gallery floor (see fig. 5 and 6). While the water image operates atmospherically within a three-dimensional open/closed system, the beehive activity is framed by the contour of a dramatized shape that may offer multiple associations (bee in flight, phallus, projectile, keyhole). A tension is made palpable to the viewer, not only by the close-up image of bees on a screen but in the acute awareness of the extension of bee activity cut off by the shaped cropping. The videos diverge as follows: the projected image perceived as a physical presence that is contemplative and calm (*Container Flow*), and the image as fabrication, an agitated and unsettling spectacle (*Emerging Worker*). Conceptually, water exists as a universal substance, indispensable to all life, while honeybees and the dynamic of the hive remain at a distance, speaking to the viewer via metaphor rather than through a literal and internalized experience.

Open System

If a shovel is used to dig a hole for the purpose of planting a tree that will then bear fruit, that will then be eaten or sold at market, then the shovel exists as a means toward a particular end outside itself. Now if one uses a shovel to dig a hole for no purpose other than the act of digging, then the shovel has been severed from purposes not intrinsic to itself; it has been restored to an autonomous existence. This designates the system as open, whereby it may be employed on its own terms, liberated from predetermined ends.

Creation/System

The metaphorical link between the beehive and the human experience extends beyond obvious social networks, to the individual and their involvement in a system that is both open and closed. The worker bee, upon emerging from her cell, is instinctually driven, while maintaining the capacity to adapt and improvise according to the needs of the hive. The queen designates the center around which all activity revolves, which is to say creation itself. Duality in the context of the hive (natural system) is not discerned, as the making and propulsion of life becomes a vortex that consumes conflict. Thus life/death, construct/entropy are dualities inherent to creation for creation sake. In this sense the system is not a means to some external end but rather a perpetuation of itself: an autonomous being, for and by itself.

Worker

determined form

emerging from her cell

without hesitation

project begins

warm-up activity

cleaning existing cells

refining her skills

she works by instinct

constructing new comb, feeding the drone, her duties will advance

collecting pollen and nectar for the colony

she embodies the perfect system

Subjective Center

The center is a subjective space whereby the individual may momentarily exist outside of binary relationships, where consciousness absorbs conflict into a homogenous body. George Bataille describes this binary in terms of a subject/object orientation to the world, suggesting that the human condition is cut off from the animal experience, where from our perspective "...the eyes that opened did not apprehend what they looked at, where indeed, in our terms the eyes did not see."³ Bataille's thinking suggests that the animal exists at zero, non-cognizant of a self-determination separate from the other; living in the world like "water in water", even on the occasion of one animal eating another, whereby the consumed "is only a disappearance in a world where nothing is posited beyond the present."⁴ The flattening of perception or "animal slumber" as Bataille would phrase it, is certainly questionable as a clearly distinct reality from our own. I can only speak from this human experience to the possibility of a dispersion of self. To locate a point of continuity with ones surroundings requires that the construct of self be deconstructed by a process of binary consumption.⁵ This is made possible through, but not limited to, the conduit of art, myth, ritual and sacrifice. However, never lasting, these fleeting excursions mark the possibility of a singular body that designates a fluid, non-conflicted, dispersion of identity, made palpable in the transparency of immediate experience.

Solid Empty Space

The work begins in an open zone defined by vague parameters:

paperboard, coffee, line, time of day, something flat.

Conceptual orientations are

found through

the act of

making

framed

by past

present

and future.

The future is a

void made tangible by

determination, a kind of absent shape

maker. In this case, the shape consists of two funnels

placed end-to-end, serving as a receptacle body and channel that

compress form with idea. This shape embodies a conflicted yet

centered existence as entry and exit, construct and entropy.

When repeated it signifies the rhythmic pulse

of constriction and release as an

infinite loop: the creative

process ad infinitum.

System as Center

The open system as a self-determined form becomes the antithesis of itself, setting up an internal duality. When duality is no longer defined by external binaries, categorization breaks down and a polar homogenous body is formed. In thinking of mitosis, where anaphase designates the departure of chromosomes moving toward opposite poles, duality is suspended in a singular form prior to cell division. Likewise, the system has become an external reference to the human condition through the embodiment of divergent poles contained in a monofrom. That is to say, a polar homogenous body defined as: open/closed, natural/synthetic, construct/entropic, interior/exterior, determined/vacillating, liberated/oppresed, fabricated and absolute.

*"Ones mind and the earth are in a constant state of erosion, mental rivers wear away abstract banks, brain waves undermine cliffs of thought, ideas decompose into stones of unknowing and conceptual crystallizations break apart into deposits of gritty reason."*⁶

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Notes

1. Throughout this document the term *continuity* is to be understood in the context of Georges Bataille's ideology of myth. See George Bataille, *Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989).

2. Hou JIanying, "Bamboo and the Chinese Spirit," *China Today*, October 2003, 50-53.

3. Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, 21.

4. Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, 18.

5. Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, 53.

6. Brian Wallis, *Land and Environmental Art*, ed. Jeffrey Kastner (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1998).

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Figure 1, Adrian Keith, *Emerging Worker: Project C-0105*, 2006, mixed-media installation (digital video projection, sound, synthetic grass, photo mural, medium-density fiber board, ply-wood, hardware), 139" x 269" x 254"

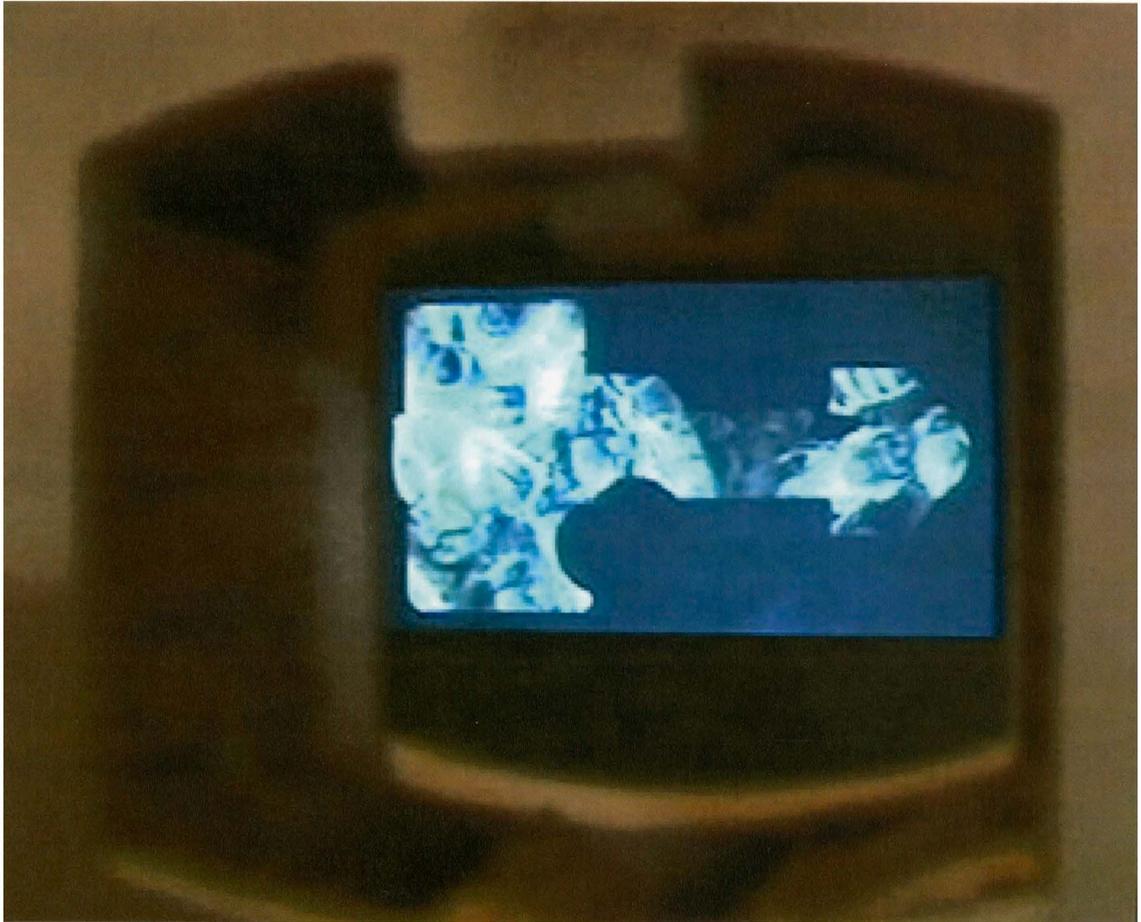


Figure 2, Adrian Keith, *Emerging Worker: Project C-0105*, 2006, mixed-media installation, (detail view through opening in stage wall)

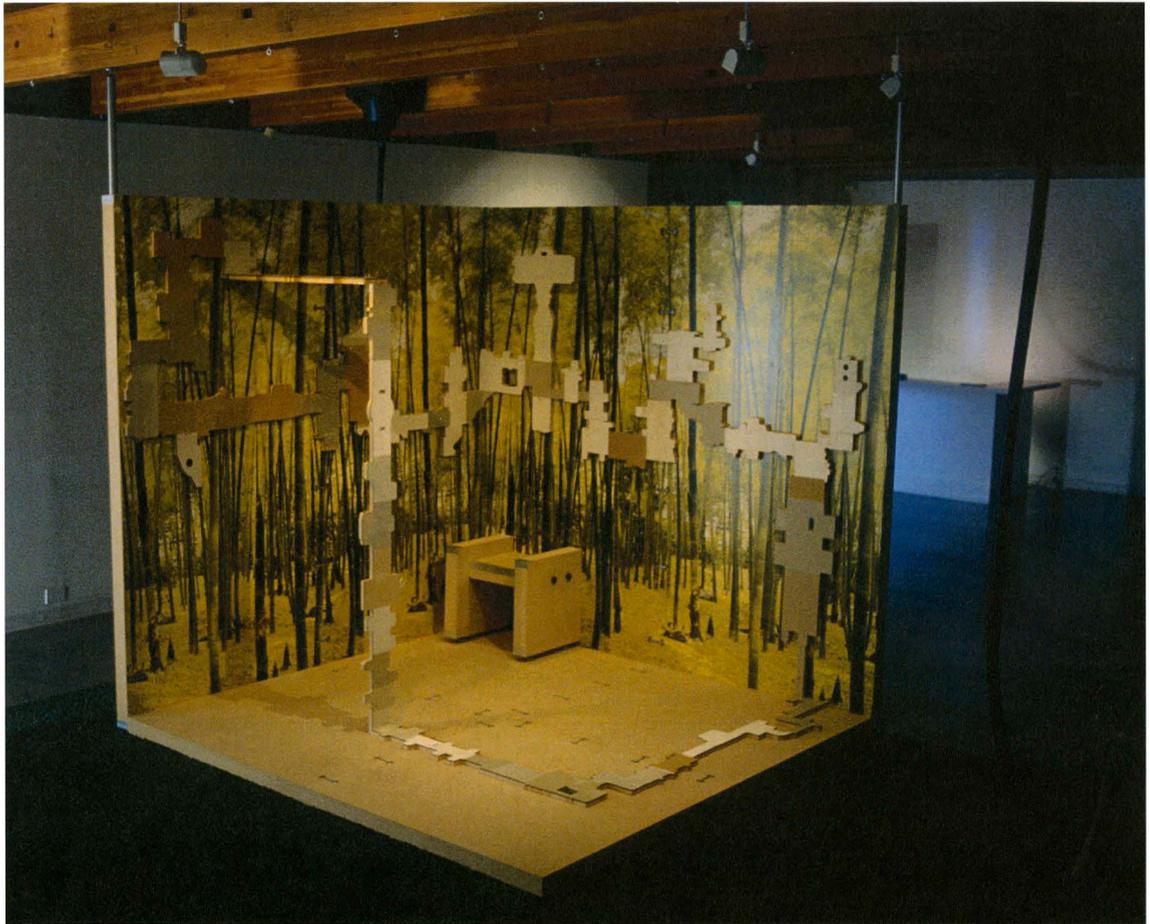


Figure. 3, Adrian Keith, *Emerging Worker: Project C-0105*, 2006, mixed-media installation, (stage) 98.5" x 101.5" x 101"



Figure 4, Adrian Keith, *Emerging Worker: Project C-0105*, 2006, mixed-media installation, (stage) 98.5" x 101.5" x 101"



Figure 5, Adrian Keith, *Emerging Worker: Project C-0105*, 2006, mixed-media installation, (*Container Flow*) 38.5" x 74" x 36"

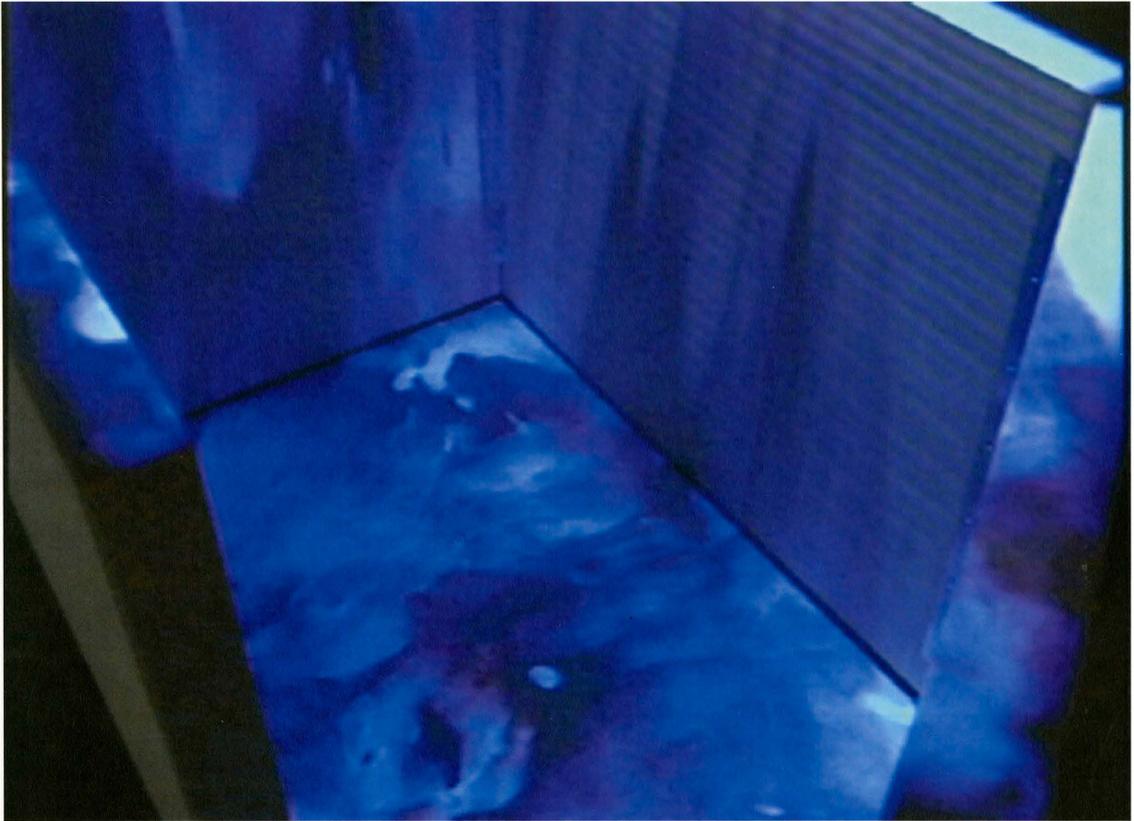


Figure 6, Adrian Keith, *Emerging Worker: Project C-0105*, 2006, mixed-media installation, (*Container Flow*, interior) dimension 38.5" x 74" x 36"