

WORKS OF LOVE
HARRY
DODGE

For Harry Dodge, making work means making a mess in celebration of mass. Making a mess is painstaking work. It makes you wonder, among other things, about the limits of certain terms. Is what it is to take pains separable from what it is to take pain? Is pain absorbed, or merely reassigned, or can art take pain all the way away? Is that capacity both a kind of bridge and a kind of break, not-in-between the work and the audience but in separation's overflow, which the artist joins in the making, having disappeared into a kind of curacy, the taking of pain become the taking of care, where taking care in the making, working all the way through the work's unworking, is pleasure's painfully, painstakingly uncountable continuum? Is the give and take of pleasure and pain what, finally, serially, neither art nor the artist nor the audience can withstand? There's a dispossessive empathy that makes me melt with you. It crushes us, turns our solidities into discharge. Such loss of composure is the work of love, which Harry Dodge's *Works of Love* compose. Consider the pain in the ass of watching paint dry, which is boredom's metaphor of choice. Dodge takes on the pain of boredom for the sake of our excitement. But he doesn't really watch paint dry. Rather, in the painstaking shaping of the paint's drying, in the care infused in color's metastasis, in the activation of surface's dimensionality, in the slow cultivation of surfeit, of spill, Dodge lets us watch paint dry, forcing upon us some menacingly chromatic fun. It's just that he lets us watch it melt, too, our fun cut up with subecstatic worry. Is the (very idea of the) work worried by this continual going over the edge, or is mess messed up in this interminable edging, this ongoing almost coming that never comes, this perpetual ruination of arrival? Is the mess made, or is this a mess in the making that has been stilled? Maybe this ongoing coming has come and gone. It's such a pretty mess, too, pretty being close enough to beautiful to let the problem of beauty back into play with sublime emulsion. But it's just pretend emulsion, play emulsion, this urethane resin, shaped but unmolded, shaped into something like a picture of active unshapeliness, anavoluptuously out of shape and unencompassed in the painstaking taking of care.

Mess and Mass or Pain and Care

Fred Moten

Pure Shit Hotdog Cake, 2017
Wood, urethane resin, aluminum, paint,
paint can, sock, stainless steel hardware
81"H x 36"L x 32"W





All this making and unmaking following color's materiality into the heavy terrain of (DeFeo's off-white rose and) Dodge's bright confection reminds us that casting pigment is a language problem. The activity of "paint" is all but suppressed in the shift from verb to noun. "Painting" works, or doesn't work, this way as well. "Work" works this way, too, so that art and its terms are simply replete with this restless tendency to be still. But if you say that Dodge urethanes, or if we call his *Pure Shit Hotdog Cake* (which is where I'm looking out from to the rest of this world he works and messes up and cares for) a urethaning, then you might move back into some of that motion. Just mess the noun up, so you can see what's happening. If you'd been inclined to call it a drip sculpture, the movement wants to make you want to say dripping sculpturing, while you go a-journeying, like Del Gue, the mountain man. Del Gue was a mess. His name is even messier than glue in the "l" having been ifted from it, regifting the "g" to itself in something like its purity. Not no grammar, just shitty grammar. Readable as mud or muck or shit, the way a mountain man might read it in being attuned to the natural mess in the name of the preternaturally unnatural. This is the shit and, in this regard, Dodge is a doo-doo chaser, doing, working, all up on and after pleasure's irreducible nastiness, its essential messiness, its melting, little mountainous massiveness, like George Clinton. Pure shit is the shit, in this regard, but can there be something like a pure messiness, or must messiness, in order truly to be itself, fall out of itself and into the all-but-absolutely fastidious? The careful arrangement of the mess, the painstaking taking care of it, is a deviant sacrament given in the transubstantiation of turds and dicks and hotdogs, or drapes and straps and buckets, and also in the delicate balance with which Dodge's shit is all off center on the pedestal, all off center and rough-hewn and strewn all over the room, all thrown all over the place with extreme precision. No divinity shapes these thrown ends, but they are shaped with painstaking profanity. Or maybe this is where divination and profanation converge. Not just to see but to materialize the stinking future in occult practice. Arranging shit so you can see and walk around in it. Talk it, so to speak, with a gaudy, common, spiky swerve. What if the future is just this coming to refuse the difference

Forms-to-Come / I-Got-Mine
(#companion_module), 2017

Wood, paint, aluminum, galvanized steel
structural screw, hardware, urethane resin
46"H x 47"L x 17"W



Pure Shit, 2017
 Sock, urethane resin, A-clamp,
 aluminum, pine dowel
 41"H x 31"L x 7"W

between what you see and are and walk and talk around in? All caught up in the shit, the thought that emerges is more and less than computation. It's not that information is processed, here, as much as it is that food for thought is digested, cosmic slop become cosmic birthday party. Cake is a divination engine, not a difference engine, in this regard, though difference is preserved in this thick, layered flatness. Walk around (in) it. What is a regard that you can walk around (in) it? You ever wish you could walk around in a painting, which is, as they say, a higher plane of regard? You can walk around in a gallery but you want it to be flat because you want the tangle even more than you want the air. Or you just want the air to be real close. So close that getting bumped or broken into falls to melting. You want to celebrate. We need to take care of our shit. Let's sculpt dripping. Let's walk around (in) painting. Let's talk until we find the truth, which is the shit, in urethaning.

Installation's literal dimensionality is unnecessary, in this regard. The gallery was supposed to be more crowded, so that the flatness, which could only be given pictorially, could at least be felt. By flatness, let's mean something like an absolute proximity, the palimpsestic embrace of the half-closed book, almost popped up in incomplete rub, anabsolute hold, see what it is to be close out in the open, to reveal these ana/meta/physical longings we be reveling in past the point of nonbelonging. Divination is, in this regard, a matter of the mother of God. Proximity is flow, in this regard, and flown, running, having run on as if through the end, aneschatalogically scatological, scat! scat! get on away from here, which is all you can do when you get caught up in some shit. Now, can you do it colorfully? Can you make the sausage factory seem like a studio? Can you make something beautiful, and hold it in your hand, and give it away? Dodge makes something beautiful to give away. He gives away this factory



I am a Strange Loop, 2017
Aluminum, lacquer (paint and clear),
wood, hardware, speed-rail joints
64"H x 62"L x 24"W

of making so you can make your own groupings and compositions in the space. You can because you must, angle being everything in this absolute tightness, which is angelic, insolvent imposition. Are you sure you want some? Do you really want to go there? It doesn't really matter. You already enter the space of a general sculpture, a congenial noncongenital machine, walking around in it as if it were a park or leaking, dripping, from piece to piece, having been both shaped and randomized by careful arrangement. You're already making angles and new, one-dimensional sculptures where the pieces, and whomever you come here with or find there, block and pierce one another. It's a hall of complex mirrors and you're already not yourself when you look in them. And yet you do walk around as if in the deep flatness of a painting. You walk around in curvaceous pictoriality—as if in the nonperformative relief of Dodge's drawing, or drying, or directing—toward something culminating in this assemblage,

this jamming together of bits or bots or bites into another complication of the world. In his impeccably incontinent terr/afforming, Dodge puts a luscious sign on all that mess, which nobody can tell him how to use. Meanwhile, you're all messed up. These are works of love, after all, and messing you up is the work love does. All that making and unmaking that is and infuses the object as it falls off and away from itself, in the mess of generative decay and decayed genesis, held among other objects all falling off and away, all playing *mas en masse* on the way to mass, being on the way being the mess we're in and the mass we celebrate, is what we do. That's how he do. You can't get the hell outta Dodge, Harry having taken such pains; but, since he's taken such care, you don't even want to.

Fred Moten is a poet, critic, and theorist and professor, Department of Performance Studies, Tisch School of the Arts, New York University.

The Virtual is Not Immaterial

An Interview with Harry Dodge

Harry Dodge is a Los Angeles-based artist and writer whose interdisciplinary practice is characterized by its explorations of relation, materiality, and the unnamable, with a special focus on ecstatic contamination. His work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, including solo exhibitions at Callicoon Fine Arts, New York (forthcoming 2019); *Works of Love* (2018) at JOAN, Los Angeles; *Mysterious Fires* (2017) at Grand Army Collective, Brooklyn; *The Inner Reality of Ultra-Intelligent Life* (2016) at Pasadena's Armory Center for the Arts; *The Cybernetic Fold* (2015) at WallSpace, New York; and *Meaty Beaty Big and Bouncy* (2013) at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, Connecticut. His solo and collaborative works are in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. In 2017 Dodge was awarded a Guggenheim Foundation fellowship. He is permanent faculty of the School of Art at California Institute of the Arts. His new book, *My Meteorite (Or, Without the Random There Can Be No New Thing)*, is forthcoming in 2019 from Penguin Press. *Harry Dodge: Works of Love* is Dodge's first one-person exhibition in the Boston area, and is co-presented with JOAN, Los Angeles.

The following dialogue is edited and condensed from a conversation conducted via email between the artist and Dina Deitsch, Director and Chief Curator, Tufts University Art Galleries, in November 2018.

Dina Deitsch: **In your writing you cite a wonderful phrase coined by Donna Haraway that seems to drive so much of your recent work: *the virtual is not immaterial*. This is at once both a very pragmatic statement (the Internet runs on cables...) and wholly philosophical, not unlike your practice, and perhaps the perfect place to begin our conversation.**

Harry Dodge: Yes, the digital is not immaterial, the virtual is not immaterial. Colossal data centers that power the Internet eat up monumental amounts of electricity and emit as much CO₂ as the airline industry. (I also just learned that the Internet is backed up on magnetic tape?! A guy

Opposite:

Luminiferous Aether (Works of Love #3), 2017
Aluminum pipe, speed-rail fitting, cloth tape, plexiglass, plywood, paint, screws
25"H x 17"L x 12"W

Next page:

Invisible Helpers (Works of Love #2), 2017
Cast bronze
19"H x 30"L x 9"W

Still from *Love Streams*, 2015
13 mins.



on the radio said, “Yes, because it’s safest there. It can’t be corrupted or lost this way, magnetic tape is much less vulnerable than a hard drive.” *Backed up on tape.*)

But you’re talking about my extended proposal too, the idea that mental states are genuinely virtual as well as genuinely material, the idea that all experiences—including virtual reality, thinking, and reading—are on this continuum. The word manifest comes to mind here; all of these things, no matter how dematerialized they may seem, are, in some weird way, manifest. Thought changes things, insofar as it *modifies consciousness*. I’m interested in *thinking* as something that is material, has undeniable effects, changes bodies. The world is dynamic, and in attending to it, imagining and precipitating (near and far) futures, etc., we do help bring it to pass. Simply, thought is action. Every cause (including thought) has infinite effects, and every effect is, in turn, a cause.

Related—I want to get this idea in up front—is the idea that the space between people (and between objects) is also a sort of meat, or matter. In *The Intertwining*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes the idea of a sort of “flesh of the world”: this charged space, this mucky tension (love?) between organisms in relation—space we commonly think of as empty. He writes that this “flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term ‘element’ . . . in the sense of a general thing, midway between the spatiotemporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle.” (I made a drawing recently in which a caveman is saying, “Love is very diffuse meat.”)

DD: Which brings us to the title of this exhibition—*Works of Love*—and your newest group of sculptures, many of which are smaller, tabletop works—some monochromatic in cast bronze, others brightly colored with aluminum—that share a similar formal composition: a small base for a pair of branching pipes that hold a different shape on each end—often variations on a flat rectangle or screen, but as varied as combs and crystals. In these double branches there’s a clear nod to pairings of similar but different things that one could take as a visual articulation of a nonbinary way of being in the world. And yet under the title *Works of Love*, these awkward

pairings take us into a world of encounters and relationships and all the wonderful and horrible things the collision of two people or things can and do create. To your point, does “Love” here operate as the space between, or even the immaterial?

HD: In the branched sculptures, you’ve picked something out there. Yes, right, the relationship between the two items is apparently at issue. One-thing-near-one-other-thing is a sort of minimum legible iteration of the idea of *relationship*. (Of course it’s never just two things in contact. We pretend that that can be, but thing-forces are necessarily more diffuse. Collisions and impacts are legion, unimaginable numbers of causes and effects; and, by that, nothing in this world has a binary way of being in this world if you think about it.) So, too, it is easy to see in these pairings a sort of unwillingness to polarize, provide identifiable opposites; these links can’t resolve, won’t (even eventually) sit still. When the space between things can’t quite be named, continues to hum (it stays lusty), then that is the buzz of always-fresh relation, or what I’m calling love. I’m talking about love as a fleshy energy, a flowing (of maybe-as-yet-imperceptible particles) that exists in all of the spaces we had heretofore considered to be empty. A kind of ether-as-love. The restless stuff of exchange: dynamic, the craziness of relation.

DD: For the past three or more years, much of your work has been preoccupied with reckoning with the virtuality that is immanent in materiality and vice-versa—with its first major public presentation being *The Cybernetic Fold* exhibition at Wallspace gallery in New York, in 2015. Can you talk about how you landed in this territory, and how sculpture—which in your hands is deeply material—lends itself to this question/issue/space?

HD: How I got here? I’ve been a materialist for a long time now—meaning, in other words, I’m convinced that nothing is immaterial, that the universe, consciousness, etc. is a result of the behavior of matter. A few years ago I decided to reassess my technophobia, a sort of panic that did not comport with [my] other closely held beliefs, e.g., that humans are continuous with nature. (Why would metals be excised from a list of





captivating materials? Why would inventions that have gotten very complicated be excised from a list of cosmic events that I'm curious about? It was a kind of senseless othering I decided to stop.) I realized I would have to bring to bear certain late-breaking observations relevant to molecular entanglement (e.g., that matter can be in two places at once, which fucks with conventions of place and time!) and (via a kind of unavoidable long-form extrapolation) the possibility of machine-borne intelligence (how intelligent will matter become?). This line of thought led me to intersubjectivity, this idea that the human body is supported by, permeated by, indeed, generated by the world around it. I got interested in this interconnectedness especially in relation to metals (inhuman!) and digital operations (sensually impoverished!). I started cutting, forming, and welding aluminum, and have been attempting to cultivate affection for machines as well as things made from binary code.

But to your question: I've always been interested in structure. Even as a child I liked being near things that seemed to be falling apart as they were being built, songs, stories, concepts. (I still spend time exclusively with ideas that I cannot resolve.) I could always feel a tidal wave of information coming at me in the vibration between two words in a poem, much more than say, in a story, and so, like I said above, that fluid form (odd relation), the charge and real meat of it is very, very powerful to me—at least as affecting as easily deciphered or more obvious linkages. Narrative (though I've used it a lot) can be so tyrannical, can really take over, especially if what you want to be messaging about is structural (or anything separate from the presented narrative). That said, I do like to deploy materials I'm suspicious of, it keeps me on my toes: if I'm in a constant wrestling match with stuff I mistrust, this results in a celebratory dissonance that I find deeply engrossing.

I used to feel that emotion was the best way to reach the most people, and I was committed

to a kind of social (pedagogical?) urge, and I've always been comfortable generating humor and pathos in a mix, but—as a sort of exclusive strategy—that subsided just after [Silas Howard and I] finished *By Hook or By Crook*.¹ It was all at once—I just wanted to get into using more specifically indeterminate forms (*poetics*, I call this for myself); at the same time I managed to become *permeable*, corporeally *social*, if you will, and started reading theory, science, history, philosophy. But I am not done with narrative, just as I'm not done with found forms, industrial objects, and words themselves. I still use character to deliver inquisitions on structure! (*Love Streams*, a humorous video about infinite addendums—protracted arms endlessly emerging—is an off-kilter metaphor about quantum entanglement.) Ultimately I'm a social animal, and one of ways we relate is by feeling as if we've had a clear communication, even if the absoluteness of that is (thankfully) always in question.

DD: And so we come back to the notion that there is no line between ideas and material.

HD: I read every day before and after studio work. This pleasure is one thread of what I call the *erotics* of my practice. I also heed physicalized desires (libidinal urges?) during moments of making and while choosing materials (*What do I want to touch today?*), but I don't understand these zones (libidinal) as distinct from the theoretical interests (intellectual)! Which is to say, I think of (both) these pleasures as imbricated and (therefore) mutually generating. Often, in this fashion (bodily saturation with erotic pleasures via extended bouts of thinking), structures I've been researching will in some way or another show up in the work. At least that is part of the experimental frameworks I'm interacting with. For example, I have stated interests right? Ideas I'm conscious of (or almost so—miasmatic), but I believe my organism's cells are at least three steps ahead of the language. And note, I'm educating those cells in every moment of any physical activity, but also by reading (or activities usually considered to be exclusively mental). Part of the action of my practice in making is letting

Fuck Me / Who's Sorry Now
(*consent-not-to-be-a-single-being series*), 2015
(featured in *The Cybernetic Fold* at WallSpace,
New York)
Polyester resin, metallic rainbow glitter, socks,
plywood
50.5"H x 32"L x 24"W

¹ *By Hook or By Crook* is a 2001 feature film co-written, co-directed, and co-starred in by Harry Dodge and Silas Howard, edited by Dodge.

the body's intelligences think, or manifest, via objects. In just this way I can learn what my interests are, ask myself new questions, crack open misalignments, i.e., grow. And this is different than intuition, which is a word I avoid; this is an idea about *educated particles*.

From my forthcoming book, *My Meteorite*: “One of the most astonishing things to happen in the almost fourteen billion years since the birth of the cosmos is that ‘dumb and lifeless matter’ has—by its self-organizing capacity (or, *autopoiesis*)—become conscious. These materials, these tiny parts of the universe have formed strange powerful collaborations and—by this immanent force, and by heeding the laws of physics—become self-aware, made *mind*. Jane Bennett suggests that in this long-view *mineral material appears the mover and shaker, the active power, and the human beings, with their much-lauded capacity for self-directed action, appear as its product*. Edward Robert Harrison has written, *Hydrogen . . . given enough time, turns into people*. Not all aeonian developments in form and function should be considered to be the result of minerals alone but rather the sum and effect of an interlinked variety of bodies and forces behaving as a kind of agentic assemblage. This web of pressures, situations and collisions saturates (and produces) the cosmos; along these lines we’re able to reconfigure our understanding of *self* as something that is not unitary, but as being made each moment by uncountable collisions in a complex, open system.”²

To your question, the thing that’s changed lately is that I’m not making any distinction at all between nature and culture; really, it’s been getting more extreme. My current understanding is that humans are animals, rafts of agent matter, and our making (therefore) quite possibly issues forth from a zone beyond the rational. (More like bees with hives, etc.) Yesterday I even tried on the notion that thinking itself, any kind of idea of free will, might be illusory; thinking might be just the body’s way of telling you that it’s receiving input, or as Max Tegmark has put it, “Consciousness is how it feels to process information.” That’s new (and totally bonkers), which isn’t to say that there would be no reason left to undertake a discussion of art objects as willful inventions if

such analysis would seem immediately gratifying! (And when is it not?!) The elision between will and animal urge is not something I am very familiar with, having been a longtime disciple of self-control, a sort of anti-drive. (Some people will be surprised to hear this. Ha.) So, to suddenly and thoroughly incorporate this weird thought-object should inject a quiet (perhaps less encumbered) sort of ardor into my forthcoming studio processes, but for this we shall have to wait and see.

DD: In addition to the new sculptures, your exhibition here at Tufts includes a set of new drawings that feature speaking objects (animated inanimates perhaps): there are LifeStraws (direct water filters) pontificating about corporeal existence; melting popsicles pondering time, dice speaking about free will, and virtual reality goggles (not surprisingly) questioning authenticity. These drawings encapsulate the sheer wit, humor, and then pathos that flows through all of your work, while also underscoring your overarching attitude toward matter—that the line between things and bodies is variable and perhaps non-existent. But I have to ask: why the LifeStraw?

HD: Ha. I was looking for objects to draw and came across these LifeStraw guys. They are filters—like any of our senses—apparatuses that allow us to clarify the outside world really easily and directly. Like, *Hi world, I’m just gonna suck some of you up into my tummy here*. (I mean, analogically speaking, every known and unknown personal aperture would seem to be comparable.) LifeStraw, it sort of sounds vampiric too, monstrous or homicidal, which is gross. I like the jauntiness of the branding, how it misfires and becomes mildly discomfiting.

DD: Clearly language is as much matter for you as say, paint, wood, or even ink. Being a materialist, does this ever pose a problem for you?

HD: The space between us is love meat. Words are material. Thoughts are objects. No problem. (When my studio is overfull with sculpture, words are especially great material because they’re so small.)

² Harry Dodge, *My Meteorite (Or, Without The Random There Can Be No New Thing)* (New York: Penguin Random House, forthcoming, 2019).



We Exceed Our Skins, 2018
Graphite and ink on paper
12"H x 9"W

Back cover:
Notes on Thought-Objects, 2018
Ink on paper. 12"H x 9"W

Tufts University Art Galleries

SMFA at TUFTS
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January 17 – April 14, 2019

Tufts University Art Galleries

Aidekman Arts Center / Medford

13 February 12:15pm, Wednesday

ALGORITHMS AND/AS CULTURE

Nick Seaver

06 March 10am, Wednesday

Gallery Tour with Harry Dodge

06 March 7pm, Wednesday

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

BECKWITH LECTURE

Harry Dodge and Amy Sillman

10 April 12:15pm, Wednesday

THE LONE ACCEPTABLE

APPLICATION OF DAYLIGHT:

A POETRY READING

Natalie Shapero

Exhibition Curator: Dina Deitsch,

Director and Chief Curator,

Tufts University Art Galleries

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