Baby

Hexuan Cai
hc1541@rit.edu

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Baby

By Hexuan Cai

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Committee Approvals:

Chief Advisor: Luvon Sheppard
Date: //

Associate Advisor: Elizabeth Kronfield
Date: //

Associate Advisor: Eileen Bushnell
Date: //

Signature of Author: Date: //
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Abstract

In this thesis, I discuss human nature by exploring the psychological state of human beings in the first period of life. A baby symbolizes the beginning of a life cycle. Most people have forgotten their state at the beginning of life, the period when human beings have the purest humanity. The baby is like a magnifying glass, completely expressing human nature, and demonstrates many different aspects of the human inner world. Through the baby, the diversity of human personality can be clearly seen, making the baby a suitable object to study human characteristics.

For me, a baby is both a complex and simple individual to explore. When people grow up, the environment in which they live and their education may change some of their personality characteristics while others are retained. Through reading, I found that the two most apparent psychological characteristics that are most pronounced during infancy are omnipotent narcissism and paranoid division. Starting from these two characteristics, I thought about the essential character of human beings, the relationship between humans and the universe, and what that relationship means.

This thinking and research produced a series of artworks. Each piece of the work opened up new thinking, and guided the creation of the next. The thesis work functions as a mirror that reflects the innate qualities of people. The whole process was a record of questions and answers in which I kept asking myself questions in an attempt to find answers, broaden my thinking, and evaluate my feelings. This process led me to an infantile field where I can feel and appreciate life, the universe, and self from a whole different perspective. Throughout the production of these artworks, I strove to improve my cognition and help myself out of the confusion of life.
Sources and Research

I often think about some questions about self-cognition, hoping to further explore the self on a spiritual level. When I paint an object, I need to know what its inherent color is. So I also wanted to know what my natural spirit characteristics are.

The sculptures of artist Christina Bothwell gave me some inspiration. She uses glass and stone combined to express her understanding of the soul and body. Nature is the primary source of inspiration for her work. She looks for the relationship between nature and humanity in her artworks. The creativity process helps her to maintain an awareness of the interconnectedness that exists among all of life. In her artworks, she expresses the process of birth, death, and renewal, in which she gets much different philosophical thinking. Her creative concept gave me much inspiration. If I want to understand the human soul from the fundamental level, I need to understand the initial state of the human mind. A baby symbolizes the beginning of a life cycle, and also the period when one first begins to have self-awareness.

I read some papers on infant growth and books on social psychology to understand infants' psychological states. These materials reflect the psychological status of infants through the behavior of adults and exemplify many of the events that have occurred in adults whose psychological level is that of infants. Through reading, I began to think about why infancy has such a profound influence on the psychological state of development and the meaning of the psychological state of infants. According to these materials, I found there are two critical characteristics of the infant's mind level.

The first is omnipotent narcissism. Although a baby's ability to perceive the outside world is minimal after birth, the innate instincts make them control the people around them by crying. Any need can be satisfied by this crying, and afterward, they will become quiet or sleep after having their needs met. Because babies think that there is no separation between themselves and the world, they believe they are one with the world, and the world is part of them, so, naturally, the world works according to their mind. The second characteristic is the paranoid division; if the babies' needs are not met, it reveals a paranoid dissociation in the form of absolute anger. Babies neglected and not taken good care of can fall into utter helplessness, and at the same time, can develop a rage that desires to destroy the world or themselves. However, babies must project the destructive forces surrounding helplessness and anger onto the external world because their ego cannot accommodate this "bad." Once they believe that this "bad" belongs to themselves, their fragile self will immediately fall apart. Paranoid of an external world that does not represent internal perception causes a division to their consciousness, malice, and ego, and they cannot co-exist.
There is a generally accepted theory that babyhood is a critical period in personality development where the foundations of adult personality are laid.\textsuperscript{3} In my mind, the world of the baby is chaotic and borderless, sky and earth seem to blend, but at the same time, it is clear and straightforward, as if they only exist in black and white, almost a pure world. They are spiritually rich enough to own the whole world while also feeling lonely and helpless. The infant state is a person's original state that carries the innate nature of humankind, like a raw stone. All my thoughts start from this state; it is the initial point of my work. I have incorporated my feelings and thoughts about life into this set of works.
Critical analysis

I began this investigation of my concept of a baby (fragile, abundant, and straightforward) with a sculpture. In my mind, infancy is the most physically sensitive and fragile period in the whole process of human growth, with minimal resistance to the outside environment and the need to be protected with complete care. Holding a baby is like carrying a very fragile piece of glass. The infant's mind is also as transparent as a clear glass because the infant never hides its emotions and reveals all its thoughts outwardly, such as the baby's desire for perfect motherly love. Since the baby cannot talk, he will actively want the mother to understand his thoughts directly. So he hopes that his thoughts are transparent and accessible to be perceived and understood.

In my opinion, people cannot understand each others' feelings fully. Furthermore, babies cannot express their thoughts perfectly. Therefore, even in the mother-infant relationship, mothers cannot truly empathize with the baby's actual needs and cannot realize the perfect ideological resonance. Glass has a hard and cold texture, symbolizing the isolation felt between baby and mother. This material also serves as a reflection of the innate loneliness of human beings. This loneliness is the strongest in infancy because of omnipotent narcissism.

There is no doubt that the newborn's mind is by no means blank. In the first few years of life, babies generate more than 1 million new neural connections per second, continually creating new ideas based on external stimuli. The brain is like a high-speed computer running programs written from everyday experience. I imagined these thoughts that constantly appear in the baby's mind as countless planets in the universe, one by one, appearing in the dark sky, and then all becoming subconscious, slowly drowning in the bottomless sea, some of them floating in the waves.

So I chose clear resin to make a lot of small balls of different colors and sizes and placed them into hollow glass shells in the shape of a baby to represent the opulent ideas that babies produced. I think our humanity possesses a collective subconscious like the sea to accommodate these new ideas, allowing the perfect integration of self-consciousness and the world's consciousness. So I poured blue syrup that symbolized the collective subconscious into the glass shell and allowed the syrup to drown these small resin balls. This sculpture shows the most intuitive image of a baby: transparent, fragile, and abundant. In my mind, the world in the baby's brain is like a universe in the sea.

I started thinking about the relationship between the baby's rich self-consciousness and the external world. In the beginning, babies are unable to distinguish between themselves and the outside world. They will naturally assume that they are one with
the outside world and that their will is the will of the world. The actual core of narcissism is 'Symbiosis,' which has no boundaries with the outside world; I am the world, and the world is me. It is an extreme narcissism that makes babies control the world itself as if they were the Almighty God, so there is no "inside" or "outside" distinction for babies in their spirit world.\(^7\) It reminds me of the Klein bottle.

The Klein bottle is a complicated mathematical concept that refers to a three-dimensional ring surface with no internal and external division and no orientation. The Klein bottle, which belongs to the abstract concept, cannot be realized in the three-dimensional space. The existing glass Klein bottle product is the projection of the four-dimensional Klein bottle in the three-dimensional space, so the Klein bottle in this world must intersect with itself. The glass Klein bottle has a hole at the bottom, and the extending neck is twisting, bent into the inside of the body connected to the bottom hole. The Klein bottle belongs to the geometric model of odd circles, which is a kind of variable system structure: the interpenetration and entanglement of different levels of the system, including "inside" and "outside," "high" and "low," "two dimensions" and "three dimensions," "finite" and "infinite," "parts" and "whole."\(^8\)

If I place a small bug on the "outside" of the Klein bottle, and the little bug will walk along the surface into the "inside" of the bottle and return to the original point, it is an infinitely dynamic process, and it reminds me that the universe exists in such a dynamic relationship. The scientific community now generally believes that the universe was born in a "big bang" before 10\(^{-20}\) billion years ago; the big explosion created matter, energy, time, and space.\(^9\) Roger Penrose, in the field of astrophysics, has proposed the concept of Conformal Cyclic cosmology (CCC), which holds that the universe will never end but is in a cycle from growth to extinction.\(^10\) The Big Bang was neither a beginning nor ending point of the universe, merely a "transition" from one stage to another. This process of dynamic substitution is mainly coincident with the mathematical functions of the Klein bottle at the level of four dimensions. So the cyclic process of the universe can be abstractly understood as a Klein bottle.

The original infinite density before the explosion was called the "singularity."\(^11\) If I regard the growth process of the human as the process of the formation of the entire universe, then babies are just like the "singularity." In the early stages, because of sensory stimulation to the external world, their mind has a "big bang," consistently generating lots of ideas, such as the planets in the universe. Then some were illuminated by dazzling stars, and some were hidden in the subconscious darkness. With the growth, the degradation of physiological functions gradually drags down the spiritual world, and the mental world begins to collapse in old age and finally returns to the black hole.\(^12\) In the dimension of time, this is a cyclical movement. The generational alternation of human beings and the expansion and contraction of the universe develop harmoniously in this dimension. Therefore, the Klein bottle established another new philosophical thinking between the characteristics of the
baby's spiritual world and the dynamic laws of the universe, so I chose the Klein bottle as an essential symbol in my work.

I created my oil painting based on this thinking, a three-layer nested Klein bottle on the canvas. The first bottle is the shape of the brain, symbolizing the omnipotent narcissism in the baby's mind. The second bottle is shaped like a baby, representing the ever-growing human race, and the third bottle is smooth glassware that meets the mathematical description, expressing the universe in which the entire human being lives.
The oil painting had a relatively slow drawing process that allowed for extended time to investigate my thoughts on humanity. Through creating this painting, I realized that this omnipotent narcissism of the infant is an inherent undercurrent of humanity and perhaps the basis of human spiritual growth for all of humankind. A description of Śākyamuni in Buddhism explains: when Śākyamuni was born, he began to walk seven steps in each direction; one finger pointed to the sky, one finger pointed to the ground, said, "From Heaven Through earth, I am the one." This "I" does not refer to Śākyamuni himself, but the true self of all people in this world, the most primitive omnipotent narcissistic self. In Buddhism, the meaning of "I" is not just a concept, nor is it consciousness, but a kind of personal experience. As it says in the "Dharma Sutra," "We are what we think, and what we are coming from our thoughts, and we create the world with our thoughts," the infant's perception of himself is the whole world, and this absolute narcissism establishes his experience of oneness with the whole world. However, this experience is not continuous; after all, man cannot exist in an abstract state of mind and must be dependent on the flesh.

In my opinion, the infant's ability to change his external environment is minimal and entirely insufficient to match his strong personal will. This enormous sense of division is painful to the infant. This kind of pain can cause people to feel incompatible with the environment and intuitive feeling to realize that I am independent of the environment. Therefore, people's growth is often accompanied by pain because growth means gradually becoming aware of being separated from the external environment. So a baby will resist it instinctively, rejects it, and wants to escape from it instinctively, and an imperfect "I" is realized. The lack of full expression of the will of the self causes the baby to become angry. Because of his omnipotent narcissism, he cannot recognize that this anger is caused by his helplessness and instead attributes it to the malice of the external world. It is a confrontation between self-consciousness and the material world. Because of the purity of the infant's narcissism, this confrontation is also highly polarizing, and there seems to be no lasting middle ground.

I think printmaking is a perfect medium to express this state. The printmaking also achieves no traces of brushstrokes, while it can show distinct and hard outlines. After printing, there is a feeling that everything is naturally present, which is very suitable for showing this innate sense of contradiction. So I continued the previous idea and made a series of prints. I continued to use elements such as babies, glass, Klein bottles, sea, planet, and universe in these prints. I asked questions about the first print and tried to express my answer in the next print. With continuous learning and thinking, different religious cultures have added to the symbolism of time, a dimension of reincarnation and eternity, and thus the content of the pictures becomes more abundant.
During the printmaking process, there was a time when I stacked these translucent films together, and the patterns on the films blended indistinguishably, becoming a black area with only outlines and shapes. I realized then that this was my previous state of consciousness, like a cloudy sky. I came up with a way to illuminate these films with a beam of light. I printed the image on a glass plate and placed a light behind the glass-like back, and a projection of the image appeared on the wall. I used light, images, and projections to express my feelings abstractly, forming another self, and observing the other-self as a stranger at a further position. The beam of light that exists between the wall and translucent film provides me the distance to examine myself. This process is just like a Klein bottle; everything originates from the self and goes back to the self.

I realized that this way of looking at me along the same path was a way to re-understand myself. Babies will inevitably grow and change themselves regularly according to the things around them. There are too many complicated things slowly accumulating in their mind over time, like a layer upon layer of thick fog to cover the self, making people immersed in a kind of confusion. However, perhaps at the beginning of the birth, they have their destiny navigated, but they never realize it. Based on this insight, I created the second sculpture in my work. I put many transparent resin balls that symbolized the initial perception of the world into a baby-shaped plaster sculpture. Gypsum has an opaque and smooth surface, signifying a state of a person whose body is full of accumulation of external growing environmental influences. Then I used various tools to dig on the surface of this plaster sculpture, trying to find those resin balls.
The significance of this work to me lies in the process of searching. The whole process is the pursuit of the essence of life and the awakening of instinctive consciousness. As I grow, self-exploration has been a complicated and lengthy process. By subtracting the unnecessary in life, I tried to go back to the spiritual world of babies, thinking about the relationship between the human spiritual world and nature. Then I extracted my ideas one by one and examined them as a third party, thinking about their special meaning to my life.
Conclusion

The production process of this group of works was a journey of self-discovery and a philosophical reflection on self-worth. I spend more time thinking and reading than producing. The work no longer served the ultimate purpose but became a record of my thoughts. This group of works was a journey of returning to the mind. I tried to find and collect the stars along the way and turned them into new guidance for the future. In the process of doing the work, the relationship between art and me was reshaped. The natural state of mind was complex, and what art had to offer is a disappearance of complexity, a vacuum through which I can arrive at a state of complete relaxation of the mind. Art gave me a more pure mode, abstracting my consciousness and presenting it out. Art had become a tool for me to discover my true self in spirit.
The work

Figure 1: The exhibition view 1

Figure 2: The exhibition view 2
Figure 3: Printmaking on wall display

Figure 4: Printmaking on glass board display
Figure 5: Printmaking on acrylic board display

Figure 6: Printmaking display demo