

Solidity and Liquidity

by Cameron Kunzelman

Look At All Of This Fun I Had Without You! black paint marking plastic substrata, taunts the viewer who comes to it with any assumptions. We can read it as thoroughly modern art reflecting on a common office supply material that is both ubiquitous and wholly abnormal when removed from its box or trashcan—*umwelt* that always, inevitably, leads to the landfill. We can take the other end of the spectrum and embrace a vulgar critique, claim that it is nothing or that a child could create it, but these are koans that close eyes.

I want to write a few short words about *Look At All Of This Fun I Had Without You!* that avoid reading it representationally, as speaking about experience or its material, or saying anything about Nikita Gale or even taking into account her existence. This is not about claiming that the author is dead, but rather that *Look At All Of This Fun I Had Without You!* has a particular life that we should have fidelity to. To make this claim is to agree with Darby English, writing about the representational space of black art, who argues that “conception too often replaces perception, in effect suspending the life of the object and replacing it with a predetermined social one.” Instead, letting perception reign, I want to suggest that *Look At All Of This Fun I Had Without You!* helps us think about the physics of blackness.

As a research collective, *liquid blackness* begins with the assumption that blackness possesses a quality of liquidity. By this, we mean that the material embodiment of lived blackness both remains material and lived but has also become abstracted and ephemeral so that it quite literally flows outward and away from bodies, sticking to objects, commodities, and anything and everything else. But what about this process? What happens in the moment of abstraction when blackness moves from being grounded in the life of a singular human and into a set of qualities

that circulate as if they were a liquid? At that moment we might speak of a state change from a solid, an ordered latticework of experiences, into a more dispersed and less-ordered state of things, or the “liquid” of liquid blackness.

What, then, are the effects of this state change? One is increased entropy, or increased disorder in the system. When solids become liquids, or when an understanding of blackness grounded in the body is abstracted into a flowing and sticky process, then it becomes much more difficult to pin it down, to find it, to speak of it in its own terms. After all, it does not look like it did in its previous state, it is denied a ground in a recognizable and identifiable form; the solid blue-green glaciers, melting in an anthropogenic sauna, do not retain their shapes when transformed into polar icewater. What ground does *Look At All Of This Fun I Had Without You!* possess?

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I’ll linger on perception here. *Look At All Of This Fun I Had Without You!* is constructed of half-spheres spread along a grid. Some are more inflated than others. The black paint spread over everything catches in the crevices between spheres, draws semi-lines between them, obscures and highlights the grid all at once. The black paint pools in the center of some of the semi-spheres, filling them up, making sure that they are not seen as well as the others. Some spheres drown in the paint.

To look at the fun that was had without me (who is the “I” and the “you” here?) is to see the effect of state change. It is to see a moment of abstraction, of solid to liquid, manifested physically. It is a visual example for a moment we have to read constantly in the context of liquid blackness: what happens when something becomes liquid, or alternately, what happens when a deluge of liquid manifests itself in such massive relation to the solidity of blackness? We should not read this work purely as a metaphor for something that is happening once, but as a physical process that is happening in the ontoepistemological order of things all of the time. Or, in other words, *Look At All Of This Fun I Had Without You!* stands in as a rendering of the physics of liquid blackness, of the complex interrelationships between solidity and liquidity. It also forces us to ask another question. If abstracted blackness that flows from grounded subjects onto objects is liquid, then what might be gaseous blackness? What are the possibilities for roiling black suns, supermassive and superconductive, as concentrations of power? Not black holes, absences, but vast profoundly dense and radiating entities?

¹Darby English, *How To See A Work of Art in Total Darkness* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2010), 34.