French and English lyrics (Pryde translated the lyrics into English). The song charts a love affair and the waning of youth, recognition and belief as tied to the weak finances of an artist (aka an exemplar of economics reversed). The lyrics feature a mordant imagery of invoices, the dividing of the couple's scant worldly possessions, a piano and stereo, and the appearance of the artist's name on a poster, to which Rogerson's playing and Pryde's delivery applied a straight conceptual reasonableness. Pryde's decision to include this song-performance suggests that a theater of response and discourse was being constructed for the work. Being the artist of "Chains" (2004), a work that trades the humanist, bodily latex-dipped rope of Eva Hesse's 1970 "Untitled (Rope Piece)" for hard-working chains, for Pryde, criticism often begins with the ideas and beliefs of critical reception and in particular, the assumptions about gender and class that haunt the aesthetic and its languages. Pryde's press release and the bohemian narrative of the song suggest that viewing this exhibition of fourteen photographs will mean navigating a displaced field of debate before we can know in what ways the images of the infant boy will mean. It is from this reasoning, I thought, that the reading of "The Artist's Life" that has the infant boy depicting the artist would be too literal. Instead, my perspective on this work began from the idea that the child might be a visual foil or mirror through which Pryde speaks to more than one discourse, the second being a history of feminist, sex and identity politics-based critiques. The biological form of sexuality – reproductive sentiment – is the work's embarrassing and fearlessly deployed decoy.

Pryde has sequenced her works succinctly and complexly within the installation, emphasizing the individuation of one image from the next and suggesting possible dissociations among narrative or thematic readings. Viewing the exhibition begins with the black and white "I Love Music", a detached photograph of a heated subject: the boy being overtaken by a futile cry. The direction of a single tear (or is it a mark of the photograph?)
and a patch of blond, airborne hair suggest that the print has been rotated, displacing the body of the toddler from its psychic-gravitational thrust. His face in wrinkles, he levitates in the picture as an armless torso-figure who plaintively seeks the edges of the frame. As composed, the rectangular image is perfectly bisected into triangles, separating the child’s torso from belly to flying hair from a mark-less gray and open zone that takes up the other half of the visual field of the photograph. The difference this gray “other” rectangle of materiality projects is important. It denaturalizes the event of the boy’s crying and situates a conceptual screen within the work alongside its emotional or affective content.

In the slightly larger, color “Adoption (i)” the boy’s mouth hangs wetly open, his smile impossibly wide and motivated by someone or something. His tongue is extended. This tiny model is not so easily objectified, however. The boy’s eyes are rolled as far as possible sideways, his gaze meeting its want with surprising penetration. According to its placement, “Adoption (i)” is a hinge photograph, beckoning the viewer’s sight line from the entrance gallery where “I Love Music” hangs into the space of the main gallery where eleven more framed photographs are arranged. (“Adoption (i)”, a silent red explosion of orbs, mouths and shining surfaces traced by multiple heads being superimposed, was installed by itself in a back gallery.) “Adoption (i)” takes us into the space and history of the gaze – looking, being looked at, looking away, being photographed, framed and placed and looking at all of these. Our looking at the boy and Pryde’s looking is met with a pair of diagonal, arrow-like eyes from across the room. In one of the most elegantly alien images of the show, “Adoption (7)” shows an enlarged face, its sides bleached by lighting effects and the textures of skin and hair. A dark cluster of features coheres a person out of this hazy illuminated field. Including this face, a small catalogue of polymorphous qualities could be listed from the photographs, serving to dislodge ideas of the male gaze from an outmoded fixity of sexual-

ity and gender. Perhaps that was Pryde’s point in selecting a male infantile child as her model.

A profile focused closely on the infant’s head, nose and chin, “Adoption (12)” exhibits the seriously empirical and tactile qualities of Pryde’s conceptual images. The focus of the photograph shows its subject to be the soft facial hairs that blanket the child’s chin (looking more like a beard). I want to say that “Adoption (12)” is abstract, and it is, but social material is more precise a descriptor. This kind of materiality de-psychologizes the associations of sexual and social roles that swirl around this group of images. In this way, the exhibition’s images can be seen to divide into loose groupings – either the expressive unit of the boy and his act or event is displaced by visual detail and idea, or, the event comes to position the boy close to narrative situations. In this latter type of photograph gesture, clothing and props have a greater role. Working with the processes and codes of studio and catalogue photography, Pryde knows resistance or withdrawal from fashion and its dominations is not possible. Two articles culled from infant and children’s clothing lines are utilized among a small selection of meaningful studio objects in the photographs, one of which is a white oxford-cloth button-down shirt with an outsized MOSCHINO logo emblazoned down its left side. In “Adoption (6)”, the white shirt is worn over a Levi’s t-shirt with old-fashioned long under-wear styling and the boy sits upon or before two drapes of richly patterned fabric. He reaches for a stuffed animal toy, also wearing a white shirt. At moments like these, the wit to be gleaned from Pryde’s intelligent compositions can be destabilizing. The modernist philosophies of art education and childhood subtly alluded to by the inclusion of patterning and scenes of creation or play mingle with the trappings of quantitative and paternalistic, white-collar industrial orders. The model and his situation seems to be given over to articulating an opposition between, let’s say, the forces of socialization and very adult subjectivization and, on the other hand, qualities such as
the boy’s baby-like and pliable body and interior world of gesture and impulse, the latter which might be read as “other” to an order (writ absurd) of masculin heteronormativity.

I left several viewings of Pryde’s exhibition carrying a vexed and contrary formulation — that the presence of the small child could be read as representing the condition of the artist’s life that has to do with money and its lack. The pairings of conceptual and material qualities of this very focused photography session led me, complexly, to think again about the opening night’s bohemian story of the song. I don’t think Pryde has made an allegory of the neo-avant-garde artist as an infantilized subjectivity, whether as jester in farce, sex object or victim, or knowing idiot savant. What is framed as infantilized is the artist’s attitude toward his life, specifically its economics. I take the liberating energy of the work to speak less specifically about how ensnaring and limiting feminist and post-feminist expectations of having “it all”, work and child, are to imagining the creative-intellectual life. Here the fact that Pryde has reversed the gender of Ferré’s song is significant. The child then figures as an emblem of bourgeois values and, more problematically in a contemporary context, feminist values are revealed as paternalistic. (The oppositional relationship to bourgeois family life may still involve particular difficulties for women’s subjectivities, and this is certainly a social condition to contest.) Yet the assumed reproductive sentiment of the photographs Pryde is playing with echoes a sentimentality about something else: the artist’s lack of money (and the absence of child can stand in for that lack). That idea, the romantic way we think about the artist’s lack of money, is our sentimental object, along with the other idealizations to which it is attached. Thinking about money as the antinomy of the artist’s life, money in all its conditions from cash in your bank account to an index of market values, may be the more potent theoretical and political obstacle to artists and art.

How I see this knot of binaries and problems is speculative and, it is subjective. What I can be sure I have witnessed in Pryde’s exhibition is the meaningful gaps of her serious materialism, holes of language, song, expression, color and form that question how one is to read to the social event of the studio session with the child.

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