MARTIN KIPPMENBERGER AND MIKE KELLEY: THE ARTIST PERSONA
AND THE PRECARIOUS MIDDLE CLASS

Christopher J. Reitz

A DISSERTATION
PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY
OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

RECOMMENDED FOR ACCEPTANCE
BY THE DEPARTMENT OF
ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Adviser: Hal Foster

September 2015
© Copyright by Christopher John Reitz, 2015. All Rights Reserved.
Abstract

This dissertation is an analysis of the work of artists Martin Kippenberger (German, 1953-97) and Mike Kelley (American, 1954-2012) in the context of postwar political and economic internationalization, particularly between West Germany and the U.S. It describes the tactics that they developed to engage imported and imposed aesthetic vocabularies and to navigate a nascent international art market. Central to the analysis is the concept of the artist persona, a figure implied in the artists’ work, writing, and art-world behavior that merged the punk rock antagonism of their local countercultures with the painterly idioms—principally abstraction and Pop—championed by art schools, fairs, and galleries as the visual language of international culture. Although these artists came from very different backgrounds (Kippenberger grew up in an economically booming West Germany while Kelley was from the declining American Midwest), their personae were performed in response to the same confluence of social, cultural, and economic phenomena developing in step with 1970’s and 80’s Western globalization: the emergence of post-1968 anti-idealism; the rise of neoliberal economic policies and, with them, the production of a new, entrepreneurial socio-political subject; and the emergence of a global art market, one increasingly dominated by transnational galleries, group shows, and art fairs and biennials. In their early work, Kippenberger and Kelley used their personae to mimic the effects of internationalization on their local middle-class cultures. However, these personae, which were adaptive, hyper-productive, and flexible with respect to style and media, proved well suited to the art market emerging between West Germany and the U.S. As they became popular in this transnational market, their personae were tasked with mapping the complex of spaces, educational practices, and production methodologies that called for transitive art objects and art makers—a kind of exchangeability that was increasingly built
into art works and the lives of artists. Finally, at the very end of their lives, when their work and personae were all but transformed by their transitivity, Kippenberger and Kelley started to explore modes of disconnecting as a way to disrupt this international network and to preserve some vestige of their selves.
Acknowledgements

It is with sincere gratitude and enormous pleasure that I thank the following individuals and organizations for their time, insight, and support. This project would not have been realized, in this form or any other, without it.

Princeton University’s Department of Art and Archeology, both faculty and staff, have been essential to my success. The project was born of seminar papers and conversations, and developed thanks to generous departmental resources—financial, intellectual, and empathetical (on that last register I must thank Esther de Costa Meyer for her friendship and kindness during what were the most difficult of circumstances).

Preliminary research for the project involved numerous interviews and informal conversations with the friends, critics, and fellow travelers of the artists under analysis. Given the circumstances (Kippenberger died in 1997, Kelley in 2012), I expected to encounter some resistance, or at least reluctance, to speak at length about the artists’ lives. On the contrary, I discovered a generous, kind, and welcoming community. Tearful, heartbreaking, sometimes ecstatic but also always, impossibly, joyful, what they offered can hardly be quantified as research. My work and my thinking, here and hereafter, are hugely in debt. First, my conversations with Susanne Kippenberger were revelatory. Her brother’s biography was an invaluable resource; her time even more so. Conversations with Diedrich Diederichsen, Jutta Koether, Isabelle Graw, Walther König, Sven-Åke Johansson, John Miller, Elisabeth Sussman, Bruce Yonemoto, Ann Goldstein, Bennett Simpson, Klaus Krüger, Fredrik Nilsen, T. Kelly Mason, David Ross, and Richard Modiano all greatly informed my writing. A very special thank you is owed to Emi Fontana, who spent hours guiding me through Kelley’s work and his life. Her insight, thoughtful analysis, and generous spirit shaped my time in Los Angeles.
Regina Fiorito at the Martin Kippenberger Estate at Galerie Gisela Capitain and Mary Clare Stevens at the Mike Kelley Foundation for the Arts were both unimaginably accommodating. Likewise, Janelle Reiring and Helene Winer of Metro Pictures, New York, Rosamund Felsen of Rosamund Felsen Gallery, Los Angeles, and Rafael Jablonka of Jablonka Galerie, Cologne generously provided essential exhibition history and equally essential personal anecdote.

Molly Nesbit introduced me to the kind of historical, political, and material analysis I hope to pursue for the rest of my career, and her friendship and insight sustained me through this project. Hal Foster is the reason I came to Princeton, and our discussions, from seminars though the final stages of this project, have shaped my thinking at the most fundamental level. I am grateful to them both.

Finally, the greatest measure of thanks goes to Julie Henderson. Her fearsome support, patience, and (in the proper dosage) impatience are the source of my success here and everywhere. Insofar as a dissertation can be dedicated to someone, this is for her. But in every other way it is because of her. Thank you, Julie.
# Table of Contents

Abstract iii

Acknowledgements v

Introduction 1

Chapter 1. Martin Kippenberger’s Painting from Photography 18
    Bad Painting 24
    The Legacy of Abstraction and Pop in Postwar West German Art 28
    After 48 Portraits 36
    Souvenirs From Home 43
    Dear Painter, Paint for Me… 49
    Staged Authenticity 69

Chapter 2. Martin Kippenberger: Making the Neoliberal Persona 75
    Lessons From Punk 79
    Directions for a Homemade Universe 91
    From Punk Rock to Heavy Mädel 108
    Disconnected 118

Chapter 3. Mike Kelley: The Order of Things 127
    Lessons From Punk 128
    Performance and the Birth of a Persona 139

Chapter 4. Mike Kelley: Going Home 152
    Education Complex 166
    Kandor: No Way Out 183

Conclusion 187

Bibliography 194

Illustrations 207
Introduction

According to his short autobiographical text, “Life and Work,” Martin Kippenberger met Mike Kelley in 1990. He spent much of that year in Los Angeles, where Kelley lived, and had two solo shows at Metro Pictures Gallery in New York, where Kelley was also showing work. In fact, both artists had been featured in group exhibitions at Metro Pictures beginning in 1985, although neither artist lived in New York at the time. A year after this first meeting, in an interview with artist Jutta Koether, Kippenberger described Kelley as one of “the professional colleagues I feel particularly close to.” One year after that, in 1992, Kippenberger invited Kelley to make a poster for his fourth solo show at Metro Pictures. Kelley’s design recreates the popular Schnitzelbank Song poster, a novelty German-language primer that often hangs in bars as a visual aid for a drinking song—a song commonly referred to as the “international friendship song.” Kelley’s addition to the poster, a small note that reads, “St. Patrick’s Day Special, Corned Beef and Cabbage / Boiled Potato / Ala Carte $6.45 Dinner $7.70,” is a nod to his own Irish Catholic cultural heritage, one that affirms the internationalism of this new friendship [Figure 1].

Kelley, for his part, does not mention Kippenberger’s work until 1999, and only then in reference to his transnational reception. That year, Kelley, Franz West, and curators Anne Pontégnie and Catherine Bastide had a conversation on the occasion of the two-person exhibition, “Mike Kelley, Franz West,” at Hôtel Empain, Brussels. In the course of their conversation, West offered a story about his artistic development, one couched in terms of youthful sensibility, bohemia and, in his cryptic poetics, “being thrown out of everywhere and all

---

1 Kippenberger updated this document until the end of his life. It was first published in Angelika Muthesius, *Kippenberger: Ten Years After* (Cologne: Benedikt Taschen Verlag, 1991), 150-151.

the time—more or less like falling.” When he finished it was Kelley’s turn. “You want a
comparable story?” Kelley asked. “Well,” said West, “we have been talking about survival, this
is about survival.”

In the beginning, [Kelley responded], I could only do paintings in
black and white as a reaction to maximal painting. I got sick of
that…. That’s why I started working with craft materials because
that was art when I grew up. I wanted to go home, and that is when
it got sort of bright and that’s the work they liked in
Europe….That’s why I was associated with artists like
Kippenberger and Oehlen and Franz. I also liked that because I
thought their work was involved in specific cultural things, unlike
international style….I really dislike this idea of international style.
I like to see some vestiges of the history of the person.3

Kelley’s response is matter-of-fact, even a bit flippant, though his claims are grand; this,
we might say, is Kelley’s poetics. Survival is about going home. It is about youth and “specific
cultural things,” about saving some vestiges of personal history from international culture.
Perhaps survival is what personal history and “specific cultural things” do in the face of
international culture. In any case, this is Kelley’s account of his development and eventual
association with Kippenberger. But if his plain speech belies the grandiosity of his claims, it also
belie its stagedness. The quotation comes from the second scene of To Be Read Aloud (2010),
a performance work based on the transcription of a conversation the artists and curators had
while planning the exhibition. In the performance, Kelley was played by Frédéric Saint Pol,
West by Pascal Dubois, and Bastide and Potégnie by Inès Turian and Emmanuelle Moreau
respectively. Another origin story staged by an artist, this time explicitly so. My dissertation,
which maps the careers of Kippenberger and Kelley as their work found its way into the same

3 Anne Pontégnie and Catherine Bastide, Mike Kelley / Franz West (Brussels: Pakesch & Schlebrugge, 2002), 25-26.
He goes on to say that this is not about working with an authentic cultural origin, but with a constructed one—one
that nevertheless works against an international style. When asked by Pontégnie, “So the notion of a pure cultural
origin is not implied in what you say?” Kelley responds, “No, it’s not a kind of Expressionism. In that sense, it is not
that different from the New York art scene or the appropriation artists. It’s just that the appropriation artists most
often worked with international style and mass media when the artists I was interested in were working in styles that
were associated with individual psychology, but it was false, it was fake. That’s the difference.”
commercial galleries, group shows, and art fair booths in the 1990s and 2000s, is also about self-
performance and survival, although neither artist will make it out alive.

In Kelley’s recollection, it is his return home—his turn to the regionalisms of his
Midwestern American upbringing—that first interests his international audience. This gets to the
central concern of my project. Both artists’ careers were marked by departures from or returns to
the spaces, conventions, and visual languages of their regional, middle-class homes (Kelley’s
poster, mentioned above, gets to this issue directly—it is an advertisement for a commercial New
York venue that plays on the artists’ cultural regionalisms). These departures and returns, I
argue, facilitated their art-market integration because they affirmed the logic of transitivity and
internationalization on which the 1980s art market was built. For Kippenberger, an artist born in
West Germany in the immediate postwar years, this gesture is one of perpetual departure. Bitte
nicht nach Hause schicken [Please Don’t Send Me Home] reads a painting by the same title from
1983, an image that reappeared, in part and in whole, again and again in later work. For his
earliest projects, Kippenberger adopted a tourist persona, a figure whose souvenir and photo-
collecting habits mirrored the wanderlust of West Germany’s postwar middle-class, a class with
newly fungible income due to the rapid economic expansion now referred to as the
Wirtschaftswunder [Economic Miracle]. Later in his career, Kippenberger’s explorations of
travel and transport were articulated through the material of international shipping (crates,
pallets, etc.), and then in his construction of an imagined international subway system—means
for Kippenberger to carry himself and his work away.

Kelley, an agoraphobe in both his work and his life, was perpetually on his way home.
The craft materials he refers to in the aforementioned interview were part of the multipart
project, Half a Man (1987-93), a work that explores themes of arrangement, collection, and
keepsake within the domestic interior. In later work, Kelley literally recreated his childhood home: first in miniature, as part of the foam-core model *Educational Complex* (1995), then to scale, in the work *Mobile Homestead* (2005-2013). Like Kippenberger, Kelley also adopted various personae to perform or articulate his homesickness. In one of his final series, a collection of miniature cities enclosed in bell jars, Kelley takes on the role of Superman, a hero stranded from his home planet, who maintains a miniaturized version of his home city, Kandor, in his fortress of solitude. For Kelley, these self-productions are articulated across domestic keepsakes (rather than Kippenberger’s travel souvenirs), objects Kelley uses to preserve what he calls “the history of the person.”

For both artists, gestures of departure and return (and the personae who undertake them) emerge in response to the reshaping of the social and cultural conditions of their “homes” and corresponding middle classes. The gestures are about survival, about maintaining some vestiges of the person at a moment when the spaces and cultures of their origins were being remade by the international socio-economic shifts Kelley hints at in the phrase “international culture.” In the 1970s, when Kippenberger began his first series of paintings, West Germany was in the midst of a rapid international reintegration, which was led in part by national political forces, and in part by an international community of capitalist nations (principally the U.S. and U.K.) intent on opening trade relations with West Germany and thus ensuring the nation’s capitalist future. Concurrently, many of the nation’s commercial and institutional venues for art were dominated by exhibitions of work produced either before the war or outside its borders—a gesture of departure from the aesthetics and art policies of Germany’s National Socialist past. In response, Kippenberger went in search of a contemporary West German painterly idiom abroad, following his fellow middle-class countrymen—the neophyte generation of middle-class tourists—in
search of authentic experience elsewhere. His early tourist travels thus undertake a search for authentically West German idiom in the very gesture of departure.

Kelley’s earliest work was produced in response to the deteriorating conditions of Detroit, an automobile and arms-manufacturing city decimated by a confluence of American deindustrialization, the OPEC oil crisis, and racial segregation and violence precipitated by white flight. His undergraduate work criticized the many inherited ideologies and social and cultural practices that he believed had failed his home, including hippie utopianism, leftist direct action, industrial capitalism, and Catholicism. Kelley’s student work also took aim at the formal and conceptual underpinnings of his undergraduate and graduate studio education, education that he treats as complicit with such bankrupt programs (education in general is often under scrutiny in Kelley’s work, appearing as an apparatus for indoctrinating subjects into the rules and conventions of a damaged social order). His mid-career work then explored themes of regression and infantilism in an attempt to recover a pre-social relationship to the world—to escape imposed rational organizational systems and get back to something “natural” or primary. Later in his career, Kelley would return to his early work to explore how the conditions of his artistic development (the home of his implied artist persona) may have produced such desires for regression—desires that he then treats as learned rather than natural, and desires that he frames as the precipitating factor in his international reception.

Chapters 1 and 3, the first chapters on each artist, take up their early projects in context, situating them in terms of the artists’ education and development, and the specific regional economic, social, and political shifts underway in their respective homes. Chapters 2 and 4 describe the artists’ international market reception, specifically their integration into the network of galleries, art fairs, and institutions emerging between the U.S. and West Germany just as
Germany was reunifying. The primary conceit is that this integration was facilitated by the working methodology they developed in response to their class cultural conditions—that Kelley’s “specific cultural things” enabled their integration into “international culture.”

Moreover, I argue that the international art market they encountered between the U.S. and West Germany was built on a political and economic ideology that was driving West German international reintegration and was forged, in the U.S., in response to the same economic downturn eroding industrial cities like Detroit. At stake in their work, in other words, is the survival of specific cultural things at a moment when Western democratic nations were being made over by a new mode of international capitalism—a complex of national and commercial programs, policies, and partnerships that I will collectively refer to as neoliberal capitalism.

Neoliberalism describes a set of theories and political policies, as well as their social and cultural consequences, which emerged in the last quarter of the twentieth century in response to an international recession exacerbated by the OPEC oil embargo. Prior to the neoliberal turn, the economic policies of most Western nations were guided by some version of Keynesianism—the belief that robust government intervention, including an active central bank and significant and ongoing investment in infrastructure, could mediate the devastating boom/bust cycles of classic liberal (laissez-faire) capitalism. Keynesianism and its variations developed in response to the Great Depression, and took hold largely throughout the West following the Second World War. In the 1970s, American stagflation and British recession prompted world leaders to adopt policies that advocated decreased government intervention in favor of uninhibited economic competition (the writing of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, among others, was key in the formulation of such policy). Their thinking, put simply, was that no government body could predict the needs of a complex modern economy, and thus government intervention, particularly
with respect to supply and demand, could only hinder necessary market adaptations. The solution was to encourage unrestrained competition through a return to classical liberalism, and thus to let the market decide which ideas, programs, and investments were best suited to its needs. These ideas found favor with a new conservative class of leaders, particularly Ronald Reagan in the U.S. and Margaret Thatcher in the U.K., who decreased industrial and financial regulation and oversight. They were then carried abroad through a series of “free trade” agreements between sovereign nations—pacts that undid trade restrictions and tariffs in order to extend uninhibited competition across the globe.

In West Germany, where my project begins, the story unfolded a bit differently. There the theories of the Ordoliberals—a group of thinkers that advocated free international trade and industrial and financial deregulation, but who also believed that a strong interventionist government was necessary to ensure stability—helped to shape postwar economic policy. Under Konrad Adenauer, the first Chancellor of West Germany, and his Minister of Economics (and future Chancellor) Ludwig Erhard, West Germany underwent a rapid process of economic development and international reintegration referred to as the Wirtschaftswunder. Erhardt’s policies were largely abandoned when this miracle slowed in the 1960s. Nevertheless, by most measures, West Germany was at one point the original neoliberal state. Although the Ordoliberals had advocated an active central government, their policies were not implemented in isolation, and much of West Germany’s economic relationship with the West was guided by American and British doctrines that ensured West Germany’s more lax version of economic liberalism (moreover, Erhard was more neoliberal in his leanings than his Ordoliberal compatriots).
At the tail end of the *Wirtschaftswunder*, in 1967, the first modern art fair, the Kunstmarkt Köln, was founded, and a new generation of Cologne galleries emerged with a focus on international contemporary art, and on developing transnational partnerships with galleries like Metro Pictures in New York. West Germany’s neoliberal, international integration thus served as both the backdrop for Kippenberger’s artistic development, and as the “international” market undergirding the art market that would take up Kippenberger and Kelley’s work. My argument, in short, is that Kippenberger and Kelley’s artwork was produced in response to the same phenomena prompting or encouraging the development of neoliberal capitalism between the U.S. and West Germany—phenomena shaping not only their home cities but also their future audiences and international markets. Their earliest work was formed in reaction to such shifts. Their midcareer work (work that first reached an international audience) sought to map the expanding network of their international reception. And their final projects, work produced at the very ends of their lives, began to explore how they might stall or shut down these networks in order to recuperate the “specific cultural things” of their origins.

My understanding of neoliberal capitalism is informed largely by the writing of Michel Foucault, who articulated a theory of neoliberalism in a series of lectures at the Collège de France between 1978 and 1979. Published in English under the title, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2004), these lectures describe the origins of neoliberal thought and policy (my short history draws from them), and have served as foundational texts for many writers who continue his critique (Wendy Brown, for example). For other writers, the term “neoliberalism” is ill-suited to describe the evolution of postwar capitalism—and indeed, in many respects their arguments are closest to my own. Gilles Deleuze, departing from Foucault, describes the shift from industrial

---

4 It has also been greatly informed by the writing and lectures of Michel Feher, including “Self-Appreciation; or, The Aspirations of Human Capital,” *Public Culture*, Volume 21, Number 1, (2009), 21-41.
capitalism to postindustrial capitalism as a move from Societies of Discipline to Societies of Control. In the disciplinary society, he argues, individuals spend their lives moving between discrete, “closed” institutions (i.e., the school and the factory), “each having its own laws.” In the Society of Control, discipline now freely floats across these institutions, following its subjects because its logic has now been internalized by them.

For Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri the transition is better articulated as a shift from imperialism to Empire. In their analysis, imperialism describes the process through which sovereign nations spread power across political boundaries in the modern era (that is, the heyday of the nation state). Empire, on the other hand, is both post-modern and post-nation state. It is the administration of political power at a moment when sovereign power has become global: “Empire establishes to no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers.” Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, meanwhile, describe the shift to neoliberalism as a move from second-wave to third-wave capitalism. The authors use the term “spirit” to describe the ideological justification for and legitimization of processes of capital accumulation employed by those who are doing the accumulating (that is, the enforcement of capitalism through its representation). For these authors, economic theory is not the driver of economic reality; instead, justification in the face of critique is the main engine for establishing and preserving economic structures—justification that “must both coincide with people’s moral experience of daily life and suggest models of action they can grasp.” Boltanski and Chiapello argue that such justifications have undergone three major developments in step with the increasingly elaborate systems of capital accumulation. “The ‘first’ spirit of capitalism…was in tune with the

---

8 Ibid., 14.
essentially familial forms of capitalism of an age when gigantic size was very rarely sought after. Owners and employers were personally known to their employees…. [T]he ‘second’ spirit, which was organized around the central figure of the director…was bound up with a capitalism of large firms…. The ‘third’ spirit…[is] isomorphic with a ‘globalized’ capitalism. In this latest iteration, laborers are so far removed from the capital accumulators that this spirit of capitalism must be distributed through popular management discourse.

These three approaches share two very general underlying concepts. The first is that the transnational network—and with it a more general ideology of connectivity or transitivity—has come to order both economic and interpersonal exchange. Second, and related, that the individuals being governed, managed, or controlled by capitalism (its subjects) have adopted or internalized the logic according to which capitalism advances, and thus have become self-regulated or self-governing agents of the global capitalist order. This internalization of the logic of capitalism—and its performance and perversion—is precisely the task of the “artist personae” under analysis in this project.

Other key critics of neoliberalism include the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, neo-Marxist David Harvey, and linguist and philosopher Noam Chomsky, who are varied in their emphasis and specific characterizations of the expanding neoliberal world order. These writers have also informed my thinking, although my engagement with their ideas is driven primarily by the artwork under analysis, its relationship to the institutions of its reception, and the writing of a number of critics and historians who describe the work of Kippenberger and Kelley in terms of

9 Ibid., 19.
its transnational reception. In the 1990s, these critics and historians began to register the ways in which art objects had become inseparable from networks of promotion and exchange, and the ways in which artists reflected or resisted this new status. David Joselit, for example, locates Kippenberger at the crux of the shift to what he calls “transitive” painting—that is, artwork that makes legible the networks of its “distribution and exhibition,” and its inseparability from them. Joselit’s essay, “Painting Beside Itself” (2009), goes on to describe a generation of contemporary transitive painters, including Wade Guyton, Amy Sillman, and Thomas Eggerer. Artist Seth Price makes a different, though related, proposal in “Dispersion” (2002), asking readers to “conceive of a work positioned within the material and discursive technologies of distributed media.” Price suggests that this is not simply the new status of art but its only conceivable future: the “space into which the work of art must project itself lest it be outdistanced entirely by … corporate interests.”

Predating these essays, curator Nicolas Bourriaud’s Relational Aesthetics (1998) described the 1990s work of artists Rirkrit Tiravanija, Liam Gillick, Carsten Höller and others as setting up spaces outside of networks of market-determined social organization. Like Joselit, Bourriaud describes artworks as transitive: “Transitivity…denies the existence of any specific ‘place of art’, in favor of a forever unfinished discursiveness.” In his analysis, even while artists and their work might be included in the increasingly complex networks of capitalist exchange, certain relational projects can nevertheless temporarily construct spaces outside of or

---

11 “Certainly, painting has always belonged to networks of distribution and exhibition, but Kippenberger claims something more: that, by the early 1990s, an individual painting should explicitly visualize such networks. And indeed, Kippenberger’s studio assistants and close associates (some might call them collaborators)—such as Michael Krebber, Merlin Carpenter, and his interviewer of 1990-91, Jutta Koether—have developed practices in which painting sutures a virtual world of images onto an actual network composed of human actors, allowing neither aspect to eclipse the other.” David Joselit, “Painting Beside Itself,” October 130 (Fall, 2009), 125.


parallel to these networks, and within those spaces participants can then explore alternative
modes of interpersonal relationship.

My dissertation describes the careers of two artists who started to produce work just
before this shift to transitivity and dispersion. It describes a moment when regional formal and
conceptual interventions were being brought into a broader, international network—a moment
when art production and reception was made over by international capitalism, and reordered
according to the logic of transitivity. In my analysis, however, it is not only artworks but also
their producers reconfigured by this shift, a turn that these artists register in their construction of
various artist personae. Isabelle Graw, a founding editor of the journal Texte zur Kunst (a journal
with a long history of support for Kippenberger), describes the current conditions facing “artist’s
practicing market reflexivity today[:]…the heightened interest in the artist as a person….the
biopolitical turn that also occurred in the art market results in an increased demand for the
personality and life of the artist.”14 Graw’s “biopolitical” refers to Foucault’s biopower, the
network of apparatuses, institutions, and systems of control that post-industrial nations use to
subjugate the bodies and souls of their subjects—part of the reconfiguration of life under
neoliberal capitalism. Indeed, even in Kippenberger’s earliest work, art production always
includes the marketing and promotion of one’s person, and much of the literature on
Kippenberger to date describes such self-promotion and self-production. Diedrich Diederichsen
uses the term “Selbstdarsteller” [self-promoter or self-producer] to describe Kippenberger’s work
before 1983 (Diederichsen’s term, and his related notion of Kippenberger’s “secondarity,”
greatly inform my first and second chapters). Compatriot Koether has also explored
Kippenberger’s self-performance in numerous articles and interviews, arguing, in part, that

---

Kippenberger extends avant-garde life-into-art practice to include the embarrassment and failure that accompany the life of the postwar West German artist. “Despite the necessity of a radical new start after the war,” she argues, “history hasn’t been obliterated. German art after 1945 is an evasion of this history, but it is also a processing of the same.”\(^{15}\) It thus requires both heroism (even if only in performance) and masochism—it requires painting, but also failed painting—and its failed painters. Kippenberger offers such in spades.

Indeed, many of Kippenberger’s writers locate his work at the junction of failure and self-production. These are key themes of two of the monographs written about his work. Roland Schappert’s *Martin Kippenberger; Die Organisationen des Scheiterns [the Organization of Failures]* (1998) describes his provocations and self-performances as semiotic failures or ruptures. More recently, Stefan Hartmann’s *Martin Kippenberger und die Kunst der Persiflager* (2013) catalogues Kippenberger’s many artist-identities, and the traces of various modernist clichés that accompany them (the genius, the author, nature, etc.). Hartmann describes these partial constructions as misunderstandings of received convention. But Graw and Diederichsen’s writing comes closest to my own. My project treats Kippenberger’s early failures to compose a cohesive artist identity as reflecting his fractured homeland and the divided artistic inheritance thereof (split, I will argue, between recuperations of Germanness and importations of contemporariness). Chapter 1 asks to what extent Kippenberger’s self-production mimics the conditions of art making in West Germany in the 1970s, and to what extent his personae were imposed by the expanding apparatuses of neoliberal capitalism. Chapter 2 then extends this question, asking to what extent Kippenberger might reflect market conditions (as Joselit would have it), and to what extent he might critique, undermine, or pose an alternative to them (as Price and Bourriaud ask of their artists).

Kelley’s critics and historians have also described his work as staging various performed personae. John Welchman, Kelley’s longtime friend and supporter, introduced his mid-career monograph with the essay “The Mike Kelleys,” a survey of the artist’s “multiple personae and split infinities.” Like Kippenberger’s, Kelley’s personae are often described in terms of failure, embarrassment, and pathos, and with respect to inherited conceptions of artisthood. Ralph Rugoff describes Kelley’s personae as operating against hierarchy, heroism, and sublimity. They “dismantled the conventional image of the masculine self… [and were] directed against the grandiosity of the artist as a cultural hero.” Rugoff, writing in the catalogue for Kelley’s first retrospective, “Catholic Tastes” (1993), describes such operations in vaguely Freudian terms: “As members of a civilization whose highest achievements rest on a foundation of repressed anality—one which Kelley embarrassingly foregrounds—the joke’s on us.”

Kelley’s work has long been read in psychoanalytic terms, and the joke has offered a few historians a way in to Kelley’s sometimes overt psychoanalytic and psychological references and commitments (Welchman’s contribution to the catalogue for Kelley’s 2013 retrospective is on “The Comedic”). However, as Rugoff’s invocation of “anality” suggests, Kelley is most often situated in terms of excrement and abjection. Indeed, his early and mid-career work features scatological and anal imagery, and his objects are often composed of the cast-off material of contemporary culture (he harvested material from thrift shops and flea markets, for example). Key touchstones for critics and historians in this vein are Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection,
articulated in the 1980 “Powers of Horror,” and Georges Bataille’s *informe* and base materialism. These works explore how an analysis of social and corporeal abjection, and a recuperation of social and corporeal excreta, might undo systems of power and repression. The 1990 Whitney Museum exhibition “Abject Art; Repulsion and Desire in American Art,” which was informed by Kristeva’s essay, marked Kelley as a key contemporary abjectionist. The term has since been taken up and complicated by art historians like Rosalind Krauss, Yves-Alain Bois, and Hal Foster. In *Formless, A User’s Guide* (2000), Krauss and Bois read Bataille’s term *formless* into an art historical lineage from Jackson Pollock through Robert Morris to Kelley—a lineage based on operations of horizontalization, of bringing things off of the wall and onto the ground. In their formulation, such horizontalizations are *informe* operations against the rational organization of human production (political, social, cultural) and knowledge about the world (scientific, ontological, etc.). Foster also invokes Kristeva and Bataille to discuss Kelley’s anality (*Return of the Real* [1996]), although his account—which also describes Kelley as a persona-performer—is grounded in terms of specific, rather than general, socio-cultural reactivity:

“infantilist personae tend to perform at times of cultural-political reaction….Yet these figures of regression can also be figures of perversion…of a turning from the father that is a twisting of his law. In the early 1990s this defiance was manifested in a general flaunting of shit.”

Like Foster, I ground Kelley’s regression and reactivity in socio-political context (first Detroit, then the international art market). In Chapter 3 I explore how Kelley’s perversions—his twisting of the law of the father—also elaborated and extended the logic of the dominant socio-culture order. Chapter 4 then explores the ways in which Kelley’s work shifted in response, first mapping the

---

expanding logic of neoliberal capitalism, and then attempting to shut down or disconnect from such logic.

There are other authors who have described the work of Kippenberger and Kelley in terms of “cultural-political reaction.” Art historian Cary Levine, whose writing has greatly informed my own (particularly Chapter 3), describes Kelley, Paul McCarthy, and Raymond Pettibon as grappling with the split inheritances of the 1960s:

Indeed, no era has been packaged and repackaged so much as the 60s has…Liberals often romanticized the period as a time of peaceful marches, sit-ins, [etc.]…. Conservatives turned “the 60s” into an epithet, denouncing it as the source of an ongoing cultural decline…The Reagan administration’s rhetoric…was based on a pseudohistorical trajectory in which the upheavals of the 60s…were blamed for a dramatic 70s decline, necessitating an 80s rebirth….A return to the “normalcy” of the 1950s….This regressivism was, of course, no less fanciful than the wide-eyed progressivism it countered.23

For Levine, both the 60s idealists and the 60s denouncers hope to recover an imagined historical moment. Kelley, McCarthy, and Pettibon, he argues, “ravage convictions on the Left and Right, treating them as mutually reinforcing sides of the same coin.”24 This is where my project begins. I argue, like Levine, that this post-68 generation is characterized by “disenchanted points of view”; it is an era of ideological skepticism accompanied by calls for return (to the 60s, to the 50s, to the avant-garde, to the modern), and by a departure (in Kippenberger’s case, through travel abroad) or withdrawal (in Kelley’s case, to the home) from culture in an attempt to recover or uncover the real, the personal, and the authentic. In this respect, my point of departure is similar to that of Gregory Williams’, whose book Permission to Laugh (2012) describes West German art produced at a moment of cultural skepticism and loss of faith in the social and

24 Ibid., 9.
political efficacy of avant-garde art practice. Williams argues that the 1970s generation of West German artists, a generation that included Kippenberger, used jokes and anecdotes as a method of critical reflection “in a time of political disenchantment.”25 Like Levine, Williams situates the work of this generation between conservatism and progressivism—as resolutely ambiguous in order to reveal contradictions within the contemporary social, political, and cultural discourses.26

Levine and Williams map constellations of loosely-affiliated artists based on regional sensibilities and reactions to specific sociopolitical conditions. My project takes the next step, describing a loosely-affiliated dyad of artists whose reactions to their cultural conditions turned out to be in line with the operations of the international art market emerging in the 1980s and, by extension, the international capitalist complex on which that market was built. It then explores the work that these artists developed in response to their market receptions—work that attempted to disconnect this international network. Kippenberger and Kelley are not the only artists in this constellation, of course. But their sensibilities, practices, and responses were, like two sides of the same coin, equally opposed and linked, and thus a combined analysis of their work yields a nuanced account of the artistic responses to the American-West German economic and political network that formed in the 1980s.

26 This turn to political disaffection, known in Germany as the Tendenzwende [change of direction], is often described as a hangover from the 1960s exacerbated by the international economic downturn that followed the oil crisis. Once again, this socio-political downturn is the precondition for the personae of the artists under analysis.
Chapter 1
Martin Kippenberger’s Painting from Photography

“My first Photo Picture?,” Gerhard Richter asked himself in a note in 1964. “One day a photograph of Brigitte Bardot fell into my hands, and I painted it into one of these pictures in shades of grey. I had had enough of bloody painting, and painting from a photograph seemed to me the most moronic and inartistic thing that anyone could do.”¹ The quotation comes from the second of the artist’s “Notes” published in translation in Gerhard Richter, The Daily Practice of Painting (1995). The first note, dated 1962, covers his “impulse towards painting” and his drive to art more generally.² There was no mention of photography that year. Instead Richter was concerned with the role of art in human understanding (“art is making sense and giving shape to that sense”) and the relationship between painting and faith (“To believe, one must have lost God; to paint, one must have lost art”³). But by 1964, one year after his Demonstration for Capitalist Realism (1963) with Sigmar Polke, Wolf Vostell and Konrad Lueg, Richter was all but ready to abandon painting. Photography entered the picture, and painting became moronic.

The next major turn in Richter’s practice came in 1976 with a series of colorful Abstraktes Bilder [Abstract Paintings]—paintings of photographs of abstract paintings.⁴ In a 1977 letter to art critic and historian Benjamin Buchloh, Richter claimed that “the premise of my new pictures is the same as that of almost all my other pictures: it is that I can communicate nothing” through painting.⁵ Painting, in other words, was still moronic. Yet the abstract paintings were clearly a departure—an affirmation—that even if he was ready to abandon painting, he

² Ibid., 11.
³ Ibid., 15.
⁴ They were not his first abstract pictures, but the first to be titled as such. The only earlier Abstract Painting was a lone oil and tape assemblage made in 1964.
⁵ Richter, The Daily Practice of Painting, 84.
could not do so. Its history and its conventions persisted in his work, and he was forced to grapple with them.

As it happens, 1976 was also the year Martin Kippenberger began his first series of paintings, *Uno di voi, un tedesco in Firenze* [One of You, A German in Florence] (1976-77) [Figure 2]. Taking Richter as his “role model,” Kippenberger produced eighty-four uniform grayscale paintings based on snapshots, advertisements, and newspaper clippings that were found or captured by the artist during an extended trip to the Italian city (at least one of which, *Ausschnitt aus ‘ner kinderpostkarte* [Detail of a child’s postcard], is a painting of a photograph of an abstract painting) ⁶ [Figure 3]. Once completed, the collection of paintings stacked front to back was to equal the height of its painter, 189 centimeters, a sculptural self-portrait composed in banal souvenir images. ⁷ But according to Kippenberger, the task was never finished, and the stack of paintings fell ten centimeters shy of the goal. ⁸ These paintings were then individually photographed, and their photos mounted to A5 cardboard and labeled with descriptive titles in the fashion of a tourist’s scrapbook [Figure 4]. Upon returning to West Germany Kippenberger attempted (and failed) to sell the series as a whole. ⁹ In 1978 he again tried to sell the work, this time in batches (half dozen, dozen, “small selection,” “one third,” etc.). ¹⁰ Finally, in 1978, he


⁷ Interview with Daniel Baumann, Krystof et al. eds., *Martin Kippenberger*, 60.


¹⁰ Stelly, *Ihr Kippy Kippenberger*, 161. Stelly claims that he did in fact sell some paintings in 1978: “one Sunday morning... at Peter Preller’s Hamburg home..., a sale matinee was held at which each painting could be purchased separately... at a price of DM499. In the end, five were sold. Four to me and one to Birgit Hoffmeister” (Ihr Kippy Kippenberger, 7). However, Kippenberger told Baumann that “at first there weren’t any buyers, just gifts.” Krystof et al. eds., *Martin Kippenberger*, 61.
gave the photo-paintings to his friend Michel Würthle, co-owner of the Paris Bar restaurant, in exchange for a lifetime of free food and drink.  

Derivativeness and secondariness are the central concerns in Kippenberger’s first series. Although they are related, the terms do not mean quite the same thing. Derivativeness implies that an artist actively adopts or mimics the practice or style of another artist. Students often produce work that is derivative of their teachers; early-career artists often produce work that is derivative of the prior generation. Models exist, and young artists mimic them. On the other hand, secondariness, as I use it here, describes the conditions of materials, techniques, and concepts an artist encounters when he sets out to work. It is the condition of being second-hand, that is, both used and inherited or borrowed. It is also the condition of being second-rate, similar to, but not quite as good as, the original—and this is why failure is so often a theme in Kippenberger’s work. Indeed, where “primariness” implies originality, authenticity, discovery, invention, and the state of being unfiltered and unmediated, secondariness implies the opposite—inauthenticity, unoriginality, and mediation.

In application to Kippenberger’s work, I adapt the term secondariness from Diedrich Diederichsen, who has for years been Kippenberger’s primary critic and historian.

For Kippenberger, secondarity was in the first instance not a post-modern position, enlightened about its own status, which had to take into account the real impossibility of primary expression…[but] a new form of authentic handle on the world that befitted the time—not unconnected to the often cited paradox of authentic/non-authentic.  

Diederichsen uses “secondarity” to describe Kippenberger’s turn to “medially transmitted images and concepts” and to the “boulevard and run-down forms of public life.” His concerns are ontological (“the involuntary comic truth….of a life that was not just damaged, but utterly

11 Interview with Baumann, Krystof et al. eds., Martin Kippenberger, 61.
12 Nach Kippenberger, 49.
ruined” and “the humanness at the pole of absolute failure”). Mine are political. *Uno di voi* is derivative of Richter’s photo-painting practice, but it uses derivation as a way to explore states of secondariness as Kippenberger encountered them in 1970s West Germany—a nation that had undergone a rapid process of international reintegration following the war and a nation that was being made over culturally, politically, and economically in the image of the American-led Allied Forces. Secondariness was the state of West German culture—film culture, commodity culture, image culture, and painting culture—that Kippenberger engaged with his first series of derivative paintings.

Despite his youth, Kippenberger was relatively well traveled when he left for Italy at the age of twenty-three. He had attended boarding school in the Black Forest as a child, and in his teen years traveled to England, Brazil, and Scandinavia, dividing his time between drugs, alcohol, and women. At the age of eighteen, when his mother could no longer tolerate his addictions, he was admitted to a rehab commune called Release outside Hamburg. Although he had no high-school diploma, he then enrolled at the Hamburg Academy of Art before briefly staying at Sigmar Polke’s commune outside Düsseldorf in 1974. In his youth, Kippenberger had produced artwork with varying degrees of seriousness. He staged events for friends and family, and in the Kippenberger family tradition made drawings for parents and siblings. But Florence was formative in his professional development. It was there, living abroad and alone, that he began to explore the conventions of West German contemporary art, specifically

---

13 *Nach Kippenberger*, 49.
15 Ibid., 86-95.
16 Ibid., 96.
Richter’s painting from photography, in an international context. During his stay his only regular connection to his culture and language were the lengthy and at times inscrutable letters that he wrote to friends, family, and Gisela Stelly, a film maker he was courting (Kippenberger was dyslexic), and the weekly copies of German magazines *Der Spiegel* and *Der Stern* that he picked up from the local train station.\(^\text{18}\) Embracing this cultural distance, Kippenberger produced a self-portrait using the souvenir-collecting practices of tourist travel and letter writing, composing it in *Uno Di voi’s* image-scrap from life elsewhere.

Kippenberger’s international itinerancy—his cultural turn away from his native country as he attempted to find his painterly voice—was concurrent with West Germany’s postwar international reintegration. By the 1970s, imported cultural forms, particularly American image culture, but also foreign food, clothing, and even cars, had come to dominate West German middle-class consumption habits, and for decades West German art institutions had been celebrating imported and prewar aesthetic vocabularies, particularly French and American abstraction. Simultaneously, as the *Wirtschaftswunder* brought more West Germans into the middle class, German tourists became increasingly visible the world over.

At issue in Kippenberger’s first travel paintings is this overdetermination of West Germany’s postwar international reintegration. In their totality, these collected pictures offer a sculptural self-portrait, a rendering of the many guises of West German international reintegration, in a touristic-persona constructed from the evidentiary material of the artist’s personal experiences. Richter, the model that Kippenberger chose for the undertaking, had for years explored postwar German culture through the commodity and painterly forms of

---

\(^\text{18}\) In a letter to Gisela Stelly from Florence he wrote, “Heute ist Montag = das heisst am Hauptbahnhof ist der Stern + Spiegel da = grosse Freude = deutsche Sprache.” [“Today is Monday = that means the station will have Stern + Spiegel = immense joy = in German”]. Stelly, *Ihr Kippy Kippenberger*, 111-112.
international capitalism and international art practice.\textsuperscript{19} That is, by 1976, Richter’s painting practice had been split into two international aesthetic languages, Pop and gestural abstraction—two dominant idioms exported from postwar America.

Formal correspondences between Kippenberger’s Florence paintings and Richter’s grayscale practice are immediately legible, and it is not difficult to imagine that Kippenberger produced the work by simply following instructions Richter had provided years earlier: “All painters, everybody, ought to paint from photographs. And they should do it the way I do (including the selection process). Then such paintings should be exhibited everywhere, and everywhere they should be hung—in homes, restaurants, offices….”\textsuperscript{20} Following Richter’s instruction, each of Kippenberger’s Uno di voi paintings was copied from a photographic source. Some were taken from newspapers, others from advertisements, and many from snapshots that the artist captured with his ever-present Nikon camera. Each photograph was then painted in the Richter manner. In a general sense this meant that they were grayscale paintings from photographs, but specifically the work was produced serially on uniform canvases just like Richter’s 48 Portraits (1971/72) [Figure 5], a series of black and white paintings from encyclopedia and dictionary images shown at the 1972 Venice Biennale.\textsuperscript{21} In addition, just as Richter instructed, paintings from Kippenberger’s series were hung in quotidian spaces. They hung in the Berlin apartment where he often stayed, affectionately known as the Fabrikneu [Factory-New], and eventually in the Paris Bar restaurant after he traded them to the

---


\textsuperscript{21} A number of art critics and historians have drawn parallels between Kippenberger’s Florence paintings and Richter’s 48 Portraits, including Kathleen Bühler in Nach Kippenberger, 31.
establishment’s owner. Of course, it is not uncommon to find evidence of a previous generation’s influence in the work of a young artist, and it might be easy to dismiss similarities between Richter’s and Kippenberger’s work as simply the residue of a technical education (as derivative). However, these similarities are not merely formal, and it is in fact precisely at the level of technique that Kippenberger begins to depart from his model. Slapdash by comparison, Kippenberger’s painting is gestural where Richter’s is calculated, and approximate where Richter’s is precise.22 His paintings are, in other words, bad copies.

**Bad Painting**

Compared with the virtuosic technique of Richter’s paintings from photographs, evidenced by the near elimination of facture, Kippenberger’s brushwork is amateurish and imprecise. Heavy impasto in some areas gives way to bare canvas in others, ensuring that none of the paintings might be mistaken for its photographic original. These gestural surfaces confirm the work’s hasty execution, a counterpoint to the painstaking precision of Richter’s portraits. There are eighty-four known *Uno di voi* paintings and the artist only spent three months in Italy.

Where Kippenberger departs most pointedly from Richter, however, is in his selection and treatment of photographic source material. Taking up the older artist’s practice of painting from family snapshots, cityscapes, and pictures of industrially-produced consumer goods [Figure 6], Kippenberger’s collection of source images depict random passersby, buildings, and manufactured goods [Figure 7]. But unlike in Richter’s rendering, unusual angles, close cropping, and the absence of contextualizing visual information makes each of Kippenberger’s

---

22 “Needless to say, this series is no slavish emulation of Gerhard Richter’s doubting stance on the painterly aesthetic, but, by comparison, a violent derailment in which the twin trains of subject matter and craftsmanship plough into one another.” Rudolf Schmitz, “‘Uno di voi’ Martin Kippenberger sucht sich selbst und findet uns” in *Ihr Kippy Kippenberger*, 26.
otherwise familiar objects (sandwiches, cartoons, restaurant signage) appear foreign. Compare Richter’s 1965 *Toilet Paper* with Kippenberger’s *Uno di Voi* painting of three rolls of toilet paper unraveled by ascending balloons [Figure 8]. The original source material for Kippenberger’s work was most likely an Italian advertisement. In its photographic reproduction he captions the image “Der Beweis” [The Proof], which may refer to whatever the advertisement originally sought to demonstrate (that one roll of toilet paper was longer than its competitors, or perhaps that it was somehow lighter or softer), but because Kippenberger cropped the advertisement’s text there is no way to be sure. What remains is a whimsical, odd image of toilet paper removed from its familiar context. In comparison, Richter’s toilet paper appears just as it should, on a toilet paper roll affixed to a white wall. The image is even cropped so as to eliminate all traces of the personal and the specific. This banal consumer object is anonymous and generic, toilet paper denatured of any cultural or personal affiliation.

Kippenberger knew very little Italian when he traveled to Florence, and so the Italian toilet paper ad would have been just as inscrutable to him as the advertisement without copywriting is to his audience. In his reproduction, this banal, internationally ubiquitous consumer product remains obstinately foreign and untranslatable, at least in isolation. Like the rest of the paintings from the series, the image is inseparable from the letters that Kippenberger sent back to Germany describing his trip—inseparable from his touristic, narrative self-fashioning in postcards and “wish you were here” correspondence that turn these illegible images into keepsake souvenirs. “[T]he souvenir is by definition always incomplete,” writes poet and

---

23 At the time of this publication the location of that particular Kippenberger painting is unknown. However, it was included in Kippenberger’s photographic reproduction of the series mounted to A5 cardboard.  
24 He tells Stelly that the search for an apartment “ist mir momentan ohne Sprachkenntnisse zuviel” [is “too much for me without any language skills”]. Stelly, *Ihr Kippy Kippenberger*, 110.
literary critic Susan Stewart in *On Longing* (1984). It “must remain impoverished and partial so that it can be supplemented by a narrative discourse.” “What is this narrative of origins?,” Stewart asks. “It is a narrative of interiority and authenticity. It is not a narrative of the object; it is a narrative of the possessor.” The effect, in other words, of Kippenberger’s “bad” snapshots and their scrapbook-like reorganization is the production of a souvenir-possessing subject—the production of a tourist persona, a gesture that is also legible in Kippenberger’s plan to make a sculptural surrogate from the stacked paintings.

Personal narrative, sometimes fictionalized, though always based on personal experience, was indeed a key component of Kippenberger’s early photo-painting series. For the Florence pictures this narrative came piecemeal and by post. Stelly seems to have received the bulk of it, including multi-page, handwritten letters, a map, cut-out souvenir photographs, a Polaroid of the artist in the bathtub, and kitschy postcards. But she was not the only recipient. “His letters from Florence were sometimes copies, sometimes excerpts from other letters, copied and distributed to several people, but intimate nevertheless, no matter who they were addressed to,” Stelly recalls. By photocopying these letters, Kippenberger inverted the transformation enacted in the photo-paintings, the transformation of infinitely reproducible photographic image to painted original. Nevertheless, the stakes of his project were not mechanical reproduction or simulacra. In Kippenberger’s handling, the souvenir and the travel narrative are simultaneously primary,

---

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Stelly, *Ihr Kippy Kippenberger*, 10-11. For example, Kippenberger writes, “Please don’t be cross with me for sending a photocopy today—seems so silly to be writing the same thing (3 people)” Stelly, *Ihr Kippy Kippenberger*, 112. In one of these letters Kippenberger expresses surprise that these recipients write back, indicating that the gesture is more performance than correspondence (and despite regularly asking Stelly to respond): “I’ve already got my streets + shops, houses + views here. The thread rarely breaks. The same goes for letters + cards—they all go to Hamburg + my thoughts with them + (ideas = partly), the only astonishing thing is that they all write back at length (even Peter P.).” Translated from the original letters in Stelly, *Ihr Kippy Kippenberger*, 115. Peter P. likely refers to the Austrian gallerist and curator Peter Pakesch.
personal objects and secondary, mediated evidence of experiences. In the example of the toilet paper ad, the image is secondary; it is mediated, it has been removed from its original context, and, unlike in Richter’s photo-paintings, its resultant foreignness remains intact. But it is also a primary object in the context of Kippenberger’s scrapbook and travel correspondence—both an “authentic” Italian advertisement and an “original” souvenir, and thus an original component of the tourist persona he sought to construct. Kippenberger’s gesture is not a particularly mystical operation, of course. The postcard industry relies on such oscillations. When a tourist purchases a card from a souvenir stand, jots a personal note on the back, and mails it home, he transforms an infinitely reproducible image into a personal, original keepsake. But this gesture does depart from Richter’s practice, which also drew on travel and vacation photos. Where Richter’s Boat Trip (1965), Motorboat (1965), and Tourist Office (1966) [Figure 9] appear to be based on personal keepsakes, their uniform composition and his use of an equalizing “blur” effect transform them into snapshots in general. They are legible without recourse to personal narrative because they are generic rather than specific images, and thus feature appropriately generic titles. Kippenberger’s images, on the other hand, manage to be both foreign and personally specific, evidenced not only by the illegibility of the images without narrative supplement but also by the odd specificity of their titles (e.g., Villa Monteforte; Mein Zimmer [Villa Monteforte; My Room] and 20er Jahre Bild aus meinem Schlafzimmer. Erste Ausführung von Principessa Barberini! [20s Picture from my bedroom. First version of Principessa Barberini!] (both 1976-77)) [Figure 10].

If painting a copy of a photograph was the most “moronic and inartistic thing” Richter could imagine, what did it mean for Kippenberger to copy badly or illegibly the gesture to paint

---

29 The exception to this is Uncle Rudi (1965), a picture of Richter’s uncle preparing to go off to war. The title announces the personal relationship between the figure and the artist. Other snapshots from Richter’s photo-painting practice are clearly generic, however.
from a photograph? What is more moronic than the most moronic? The questions concern the registers of derivativeness and secondariness in the art and commodity culture landscape of 1970s West Germany, and the apparatuses through which cultural forms were imported and repackaged for national audiences. Specifically, these questions concern postwar West German returns to the painterly techniques of avant-garde modernism, and the ways that these returns were couched as part of West Germany’s cultural “internationalization”—a process that was deemed necessary for West Germany’s future security and liberalism, and which paralleled political and economic process of trade deregulation and corporate internationalization. Kippenberger’s first series sought to turn secondary cultural forms into primary, personal objects of experience, to turn secondary images and derivative art practices into the “authentic” and “original” material from which he could construct his tourist persona.

The Legacy of Abstraction and Pop in Postwar West German Art

By “moronic and inartistic” I take Richter to mean that painting from a photograph is a particularly crude form of deskilling. Photo-painting substitutes the copying of images for the composing of images. Thus to paint from a photograph is to deny received late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century bourgeois ideas about art making—about artists composing images based on specialized academic knowledge and technical skill, and about the autonomy of those images from the material of the world itself.\(^\text{30}\) With regard to photo-painting specifically, skill is still necessary for the transposition of photograph to paint. However, this is an almost mechanical skill, a quality underscored by the mechanical origins of the paintings’ source images. Photo-painting therefore substitutes one skill for another; the skill of composition is

\(^{30}\) Peter Bürger describes the relationship between art making and daily life in nineteenth century bourgeois aestheticism as “the detachment of art as a special sphere of human activity from the nexus of the praxis of life” in Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 36.
displaced by the skill of reproduction. John Roberts describes the use of photography in avant-garde practice in similar terms: “the place of photography, for instance, in the avant-garde, is a history of the unambiguous and radical displacement of fine art craft; the defense of the photograph as a readymade is concerned precisely with the prosthetic eradication of craft-based skills.”  

Richter evokes such a displacement of skill through the terms “inartistic” and “moronic,” but of course he did not belong to the historical avant-garde—the early twentieth-century American and European experiments to which Roberts refers—and the use of found material as a tactic of deskillning was not a new strategy when Richter took up photo-painting in 1964. Instead, his readymade practice was a reinvestigation of these earlier techniques. It was itself a kind of artistic readymade, a return that writers from Peter Bürger to Hal Foster and Benjamin Buchloh have described as the neo-avant-garde. Kippenberger’s imitation of Richter’s neo-avant-garde return is thus not just a copy of a photograph, but a copy of a German return to prewar practice—a copy of a copy, as it were.

Like his turn to photo-painting, Richter’s 1976 turn to abstraction was also a neo-avant-garde return. In the immediate postwar years, representational artwork had been disavowed due to associations with the aesthetics of National Socialism. In its place, artists, institutions, and critics championed a return to abstraction (to an aesthetic idiom labeled Degenerate by the Nazis), which was staged as a “world language” that could integrate an isolated West Germany into contemporary international culture.  

Susanne Leeb describes this turn to abstraction as a “double movement of delimitation as the country attempted to distinguish itself from both its National Socialist past and from the totalitarian state and the artistic doctrine of” East

---

32 I borrow this phrase from Susanne Leeb, “Abstraction as International Language” in Art of Two Germanys; Cold War Cultures, Stephanie Barron and Sabine Eckmann eds. (New York: Abrams, 2009), 120.
Germany. In contradistinction to the aesthetic realism and political isolation of National Socialism and the GDR, abstraction was promoted as open and integrative.

The operative term here is “promoted.” In the immediate postwar years, reinvestigations of prewar practice in West Germany were part of a complex network of foreign and domestic policies and commercial undertakings that played out against the backdrop of the Cold War. As is well known, the CIA was promoting the work of Abstract Expressionists during the Cold War as evidence of American cultural freedom and openness. In the 1950s, the CIA covertly sponsored numerous international exhibitions, including the Museum of Modern Art’s (MoMA) “The New American Painting” (1958-59), which traveled to major European cities including Berlin. By the 1960s, American abstraction had indeed risen to the level of an international language, which was legible across both art institutions and art markets. This dominance was hardly an effect of “freedom” or “universality,” however, but rather of culturally, politically, and economically guided international policy.

To this end, the first Documentas, which took place in Kassel in 1955 and 1959, were conceived as a way to bring West German audiences up to speed with work that had been banned or disavowed as degenerate under Nazi authority. Documenta 2 in particular had a “massive presence of Abstract Expressionist painting lent by the Museum of Modern Art in New York,” and the catalogue for the exhibition included a celebratory entry by art historian Werner Haftmann on the internationalizing power of such art:

> [M]odern art has today become a solid basis for interpersonal relations worldwide. In the past decade it has been able to produce

---

33 Barton et al. eds., *Art of Two Germanys*, 119.
a human consciousness that transcends all the limits of language, customs, history, feelings of race, and folklore...It can be considered the first model case for human culture.36

According to German art dealer Rudolph Zwirner (in conversation with Susanne Kippenberger), even in the late 1960s, museums “were only interested in restitution, in art that atoned for the past. Everything they showed had to be [what the Nazis had vilified as] ‘degenerate art,’ or if it was modern, then École de Paris, Henry Moore, nothing offensive.”37

It was not until the late 1960s that realism returned to West German art institutions, and when it did it too arrived as an import.38 Zwirner cofounded Cologne’s Kunstmarkt with Hein Stünke in 1967 in order to address the “urgency of the need to put new life into the lack luster art market in West Germany.”39 The fair was conceived as a way to integrate Cologne into the global art market, and to develop and educate a national consumer base for contemporary art. Zwirner in particular championed the arrival of American Pop, exhibiting Warhol’s Most Wanted (1964) series at his gallery during the first Kustmarkt.40 1964 was also the year that Robert Rauschenberg won the Venice Biennale’s Grand Prix, an event that is often cited as Pop’s displacement of Abstract Expressionism as the dominant American art idiom internationally. As art historian Hiroko Ikegami notes, “Since the 1964 Biennale was the first in which the United

37 Susanne Kippenberger, Kippenberger, 239.
38 Andreas Huyssen argues that figuration first entered postwar West German art via East Germany in the work of Georg Baselitz, Eugen Schönebeck, Markus Lüppertz and Gerhard Richter. “[N]ew uses of figuration in painting, though very different from artist to artist, were primarily initiated by artists who had grown up with the demands for realism before leaving the GDR and resettling in the West….These artists were therefore not steeped in the dogma of abstraction and informel.” Andreas Huyssen, “Figures of Memory in the Course of Time” in Art of Two Germanys, 232.
39 From the beginning, the fair’s leadership debated the role that imported work might play in such an endeavor. Dieter Wilbrandt, who took over as secretary of Kunstmarkt’s organizing body, the Verein Progressiver Deutscher Kunsthändler, e. V. (VPDK), in 1968, described the fair as “an alliance of necessity….in order to hold one’s own against overseas [sic] and to compensate for the missing metropolis.” Mehring, “Emerging Market,” 328. Nevertheless, it became instrumental in bringing American Pop to West Germany.
States government assumed official sponsorship for the American Pavilion, Rauschenberg’s award has been considered an outcome of American cultural diplomacy during the Cold War.”

West Germany’s return to abstraction, like its turn (via the Kunstmarkt) to Pop, was couched as a form of reeducation necessitated by Germany’s years of cultural isolation. And education for the sake of internationalization was also an explicit aim of the cultural policies of the occupying forces. Yule Heibel has collected a number of documents to that effect in *Reconstructing the Subject; Modernist Painting in West Germany 1945-1950* (1995). Most notably, she cites a July 18, 1947 directive from General Lucius D. Clay, military governor of the U.S. zone, titled, “Subject: Objects of Military Government,” which states:

> Your government holds that reeducation of the German people is an integral part of policies intended to help develop a democratic form of government….it believes that there should be no forcible break in the cultural unity of Germany, but recognizes the spiritual value of the regional traditions of Germany….You will encourage German initiative and responsible participation in this work of cultural reconstruction and you will expedite the establishment of these international cultural relations which will overcome the spiritual isolation imposed by National Socialism on Germany and further the assimilation of the German people into the world community of nations.

General Clay’s language implies that America’s role in West Germany’s cultural integration was to support or encourage rather than direct. He also implies that the roots of international assimilation are embedded in Germany’s own cultural heritage—that such internationalism is not a foreign imposition, but a national return. Hiebel argues that, in the “realm of high art,” “reorientation to the West and to internationalism was left largely in German hands…and was not ‘directed’ by OMGUS (the Office of Military Government for Germany—

---


United States).”\textsuperscript{43} In this guise, Germany’s cultural international integration was analogous to its concomitant economic integration, which included calls for a return to prewar “world trade” and for a reeducation of the West German public that might help in the expansion of international trade partnerships. Ludwig Erhard, in his 1953 account of West Germany’s economic recovery, \textit{Deutschlands Rückkehr zum Weltmarkt} [Germany’s Comeback in the World Market], describes the education necessary for the nation’s economic liberalization and international integration: “If our policy is to be successful, every German should have a sound knowledge about the nature of foreign trade.”\textsuperscript{44} A major architect of West Germany’s economic recovery in his roles as both Minister of Economics under Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and as Chancellor himself from 1963 to 1966, Erhard argues that National Socialism marked a break in Germany’s history of internationalism, that for Germany to succeed it would need to return to international integration, and that such integration had as a prerequisite uninhibited economic trade.\textsuperscript{45}

At the time of their proclamations, Clay and Erhard’s cultural and economic agendas were described in terms of openness, freedom, self-direction, and national heritage. However, the fact that they were mandated as training and education suggests the opposite—that these programs were synthetic, foreign impositions. Erhard acknowledges the necessity of adhering to international trade policy to effect West German internationalism: “For this reason the new ideas for international co-operation as developed in the Havana Charter or the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, in the idea of European integration, in the International Monetary Fund and in

\textsuperscript{43} Heibel, \textit{Reconstructing the Subject}, 88.


\textsuperscript{45} “There was a time when politicians thought that they were acting in the national interest if they erected a nationalist wall around the country and replaced imports by a domestic production which was artificially protected….They destroyed world trade, and with it the international foundations of mutual trust….The alternative is a policy of stimulating foreign trade. This aims at an international division of labour, which works by exchanging the national specialties against those of the rest, thus contributing to the prosperity of all. This is the way we have chosen since the war…We have thus contributed to strengthen free trade all over the world….We thus become part of a greater whole which will increase our prosperity the more we can increase its own by adopting a policy of all-round free trade.” Erhard, \textit{Germany's Comeback in the World Market}, 13.
the World Bank, are particularly relevant to the interests of our trade policy."46 Such policies were not always or only aimed at mutual prosperity and freedom, however. As Jürgen Weber notes of the Marshall Plan in his short summary of Germany’s postwar period:

In order to avoid an imminent economic impoverishment of Europe, which the Truman government was convinced could only benefit the Communists and allow the Soviet Union to achieve hegemony on the continent, the USA offered all the countries of Europe generous financial help….However, of equal importance was the American concept that lay behind this material assistance, namely that of free world trade.47

The legacy of abstraction and deskilling were thus part of a much broader phenomenon in postwar West German political and cultural life—part of an agenda to integrate the nation into the international community by liberalizing trade and networking markets, and to do so by making recourse to notions of “prior,” “natural” and thus authentic German tradition. Richter was for Kippenberger the model contemporary West German artist for this new international network. Until his 48 Portraits, West Germany’s contribution to the Venice Biennale was largely retrospective. Through the end of the 1950s the German pavilion was dominated by Expressionism and other prewar avant-gardes (Blaue Reiter in 1950, Die Brücke in 1952, Oskar Schlemmer and Paul Klee, among others, in 1954) and then various German abstract painters, many of whom had been labeled degenerate by the Nazis, through the 1960s.48 At the same time, Richter set up equivalences between contemporary West German painting and painting from

46 Erhard, Germany’s Comeback in the World Market, 17.
47 Jürgen Weber, Germany 1945-1990; A Parallel History (New York: CEU Press, 2004), 22-23. My analysis of the political and economic internationalization of postwar West Germany is indebted to the work of Michel Foucault here, particularly his 1978-79 lectures at the Collège de France collected in English in The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979 (2010). Foucault traces the development of neoliberalism in West Germany to two events: 1) a vote by a Scientific Council made up of members of the Freiburg School of Ordoliberals and “socialists, such as K. Schiller” that called for “the immediate deregulation of process in order [to bring prices in line with] world prices.” 2) A speech by Erhard ten days later in which he “laid down the principal of no price controls and called for gradual deregulation.” Foucault then describes American support for such programs of liberalization, the total elimination of governmental price controls by 1952-53 and, with them, the end of Keynesianism in West Germany. All quotations Foucault, The Birth of Biopolitics, 97.
48 Buchloh offers a short reading list for the history of the German pavilion. Buchloh, “Divided Memory” in Gerhard Richter, 94.
outside the nation. While 48 Portraits posed a counterpoint to American and British Pop, within this framework, it did so as their derivative. Richter had likely seen Andy Warhol’s Thirteen Most Wanted Men at Zwirner’s gallery in Cologne in 1967, for example, and even if he had not, Pop had been exhibited in Venice before 1972.49 As noted, Rauschenberg won the Grand Prix in 1964. In addition, Roy Lichtenstein’s work was shown by the U.S. in 1966, and David Hockney was part of the 1968 British pavilion.

By mimicking Richter from abroad, Kippenberger inverted the West German practice of aesthetic derivative for the sake of internationalization—that is, Kippenberger’s work, produced outside Germany, was derivative of a German artist. Moreover, Kippenberger’s “bad” and illegible rendering of Richter’s international practice was part of an attempt to transform derivative and secondary cultural forms into original and primary constituents of his tourist persona. By mimicking such forms through the conventions of tourist travel and documentation (i.e., the scrapbook and travel correspondence) they became “authentic” evidence of the first-hand experiences of their collector. The goal of his failed sculptural self-portrait was thus to produce an authentically West German figure from the secondary cultural forms used to internationalize West Germany. And this too was an adaptation from Richter—a lesson learned from Richter’s contribution to an international biennale.

49 Ibid.
After 48 Portraits

48 Portraits is a series of black and white portraits of European and American men based on photographs selected by Richter from encyclopedia and dictionary entries. The series presents a narrowly circumscribed group of white men from the nineteenth and early twentieth century who had considerable influence in their respective fields, including literature (e.g., Franz Kafka), music (e.g., Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky), and science (e.g., Enrico Fermi). For the 1972 Venice Biennale, the work was installed in single file across the walls of the central spaces of the German Pavilion, appearing like the historical record of a board of trustees or a hall of fame.  

Benjamin Buchloh, Richter’s most persistent critical champion, sees 48 Portraits as an attempt to construct an “imaginary congregation of acceptable paternal figures.” The conspicuous absence of any artists in his pantheon suggests that these men are not personal surrogates or ego ideals. That most of them belong to the generation of Richter’s parents or grandparents supports Buchloh’s argument that they serve as imagined forefathers. Buchloh draws on Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich’s classic work, The Inability to Mourn (1967), to argue that such a fabrication was necessary for a generation of Germans who came of age in the 1930s and 1940s. According to their work, this generation’s loss of the Führer, who had become an object of cathexis and an ego ideal, led to a distorted process of subject formation “that would make any future paternal identification highly problematic.” In Buchloh’s formulation, Richter’s series addresses the postwar German psychic need for an acceptable surrogate national legacy and paternal heritage, but it also reveals that any such attempt could only fail: “[I]t would have to shift continuously between negating the ‘natural’ paternal image of

---

50 Ibid., 84.
51 Ibid., 89.
52 Ibid., 85.
53 Ibid., 88.
the Germans as fascists and laboring to construct a radically different *paternal* legacy and a post-traditional *national* identity—while emphasizing at the same time the artificiality of any such retroactively constructed positive paternal identification."\(^{54}\) In short, “Richter’s pantheon of historical subjects is—at the very moment of its constitution—always already depicted as a precarious enterprise, if not derided as a fraudulent promise to reestablish conditions that are irretrievably lost.”\(^{55}\)

Richter’s contribution to the Venice Biennale, his performance “of the role of international avant-garde artist,” as Buchloh frames it, characterized contemporary West German painting as a “precarious enterprise” of historical recreation and transnational identity formation. His international figures were drawn from various canons of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, mirroring similar turns to prewar heroes as a way to reintegrate into international culture. This same impulse can be discerned in the selection of West German representatives to earlier Biennales—abstract painters from Germany’s immediate past, inheritors of a Romantic/Expressionist tradition amounting to a recapitulation of prewar Western humanism as a way of speaking the international language of abstraction and reconnecting with a German cultural heritage.

In 1976 Kippenberger was not interested in recuperating a German past. He was born after the generation that the Mitscherlichs described, and would have been more likely to paint an aging Nazi war criminal (as he did for the Florence series, more on which below) than to imagine an acceptable historical substitute. Nevertheless, Richter’s lesson was essential to his orientation. Where Richter’s series makes legible the impossibility of fabricating an alternative international (or “post-national”) paternal surrogate from secondary international practice,

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 88.  
\(^{55}\) Ibid., 91.
Kippenberger’s first series explores the impossibility of constructing a contemporary art-making persona from those same sources—from the resuscitated abstract and imported Pop vocabularies that were being instrumentalized by political authorities guiding West German reintegration, and by art dealers internationalizing the West German art market. To do so, Kippenberger used these vocabularies to produce a series of souvenir travel photos—to produce the kind of scrapbook registry that was increasingly common in West Germany’s middle-class households.

Kippenberger’s 1976 trip to Florence was couched as a voyage of self-discovery.\textsuperscript{56} Claiming that he resembled “Helmut Berger in his prime,” the trip was supposedly part of an attempt to forge an acting career.\textsuperscript{57} However, he soon realized that Florence was not particularly well suited to cinematic discovery, and so he purchased a stack of uniform canvases and settled on becoming a professional artist. Once committed to painting, he began collecting souvenir images and snapshots to use as source material for his first series. Thus unlike Richter, who sourced dictionaries and encyclopedias for his images, compendia that purport to objective knowledge about the world, Kippenberger’s images belong to the categories of the tourist photo album or travel scrapbook, subjective compendia organized by the arbitrary logic of their collector and his travels.\textsuperscript{58}

Like Richter’s \textit{48 Portraits}, which attempted (and, according to Buchloh, failed) to construct a surrogate paternal history, Kippenberger’s collected paintings were a failure to

\textsuperscript{56} Kippenberger here follows in the tradition of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the model German traveler in Italy.\textsuperscript{57} Krystof et al. eds., \textit{Martin Kippenberger}, 59. Helmut Berger is a well-known Austrian actor. His films include \textit{Ludwig} (1972) and \textit{The Godfather Part III} (1990).

\textsuperscript{58} A letter to Stelly from Florence Kippenberger describes the origins of the project: Scribbles + painting. Now I’ve also included painting on my agenda—even on canvas=PS=have made a magical piece (primed) just have to buy oil paints (bloody expensive). Then it’ll get the finishing touch.—Now it’s time to fiddle about a bit more with newspaper + collages. The concept isn’t quite finished yet (months) for the moment I’m feeling my way through it emotionally + trying to introduce some order to into the system. Finally I’ll make photo-series from the pictures + object inside + outside—still looking for characters. (Already found 3 = waiter—parking attendant—shoemaker). Still hoping for some Japanese tourists (they turn out especially well).” Original and translation, Stelly, \textit{Ihr Kippy Kippenberger}, 111-112.
produce a sculptural personal surrogate. In addition to sculptural self-portraiture, however, the pedestrian images that constitute Kippenberger’s series were tasked with providing “a good picture of Florence.” The paintings include images of local sculptures, street scenes, portraits, pictures of food, and views of Italian interiors. They are, in other words, nothing more than a tourist’s snapshots and image keepsakes. But this gesture too was concerned with self-presentation. “For example,” writes Kathleen Bühler in Nach Kippenberger (2003), the artist “twice painted his apartment by night. The words ‘Perché no!’ [‘Why not!’][Figure 11] are in fact a reference to an ice cream salon of the same name frequented by Kippenberger, while the rear of a stone lion [Figure 12] is a detail of a monument at the end of the street he lived in.” In other words, the “good picture of Florence” that the series provides is in fact a good picture of Kippenberger’s Florence—a picture of the artist’s daily movement through the city, the spaces he occupied in private, and his interaction with Italian newspaper and street culture. Like the tourist’s snapshot, they subordinate a foreign place and its monuments to the private life of the traveler, converting them into waypoints on a personal map or nodes within a personal network.

Street scenes, photographs of food, Italian interiors, and commercial displays and advertisements make up a little over half of the Florence paintings. The rest are portraits, and these works have the greatest formal correspondence with Richter’s 48 Portraits. Within this subset of works the figures can be broken down further into roughly three categories. The first is made up of portraits captured by Kippenberger during his travels around the city. These include a

---

59 As Buchloh has argued, in a collaborative work with Blinky Palermo that preceded 48 Portraits, Richter did indeed produce a sculptural self-portrait, a plaster cast of his face painted in the grayscale tones of his photo-paintings. Buchloh, “Divided Memory” in Gerhard Richter, 76.
61 Nach Kippenberger, 31.
62 Although the exact number of original paintings is unknown, assuming Stelly’s count of 84 is correct, roughly half could be counted as something like portraiture (about one fifth are busts after Richter’s model).
local milkman and patrons of local bars. The second group includes images appropriated from local media, like advertisements and comics, as well as newspaper images of criminals. The third features pictures of artists or artwork. These include a portrait of Austrian artist Anna Oppermann and photos of paintings and sculptures. In each case, the figures Kippenberger chose to reproduce were not at all significant, at least not according to Richter’s selection criteria. Thus if Richter’s fabrication of a parental surrogate situated the artist as the product of (but not one of) his prominent figures in Western culture production and scientific discovery, Kippenberger’s portraiture situated the artist as one of a class of otherwise unremarkable individuals—an early iteration, perhaps, of Kippenberger’s often cited quotation from years later, “Every artist is a person,” an update of Joseph Beuys’s “Every person is an artist.”

The inclusion of criminals in the Florence series adds an additional layer of correspondence with Richter’s work. As Buchloh has noted, Richter’s 48 Portraits was partially informed by Warhol’s Thirteen Most Wanted Men, which was originally commissioned for the exterior of New York’s pavilion at the 1964 World’s Fair [Figure 13]. Warhol’s series consisted of twenty-two uniform mug shots of thirteen of New York’s most wanted criminals arranged in a twenty by twenty-foot grid. In one respect, then, Kippenberger makes reference to Richter’s series by citing his source directly, and in so doing, the Florence paintings underscore the fact that in 1972 West Germany’s official contribution to an international contemporary exhibition involved a turn to non-German art practice. But Kippenberger’s criminals also signaled a

---

63 This is not to suggest that Oppermann is an unimportant artist, of course, but that Richter had excluded artists and women from his pantheon of significant figures.

64 Richter’s Warholian turn was also derivative, as Warhol’s series was in part a reference to Duchamp’s Wanted, $2,000 Reward (1923), a souvenir-style poster in which Duchamp mentions his Rrose Sélavy alter ego. See Buchloh, “Andy Warhol’s One-Dimensional Art: 1956-1966,” Andy Warhol (October Files), 43 (footnote 48). Also, and as noted above, when the Florence trip was complete, each of the paintings was reproduced in photographic form, returning the source images to their original medium. This, too, was a lesson from Richter. As Buchloh writes, “Richter decided to negate the work’s pictorialization of the painted photographs and its precarious monumentality by producing an exact photographic facsimile edition of the series. This seemingly paradoxical
departure from Richter’s practice—not only because the criminal inverts the social significance of Richter’s “important” men, but because a couple of Kippenberger’s criminals were Nazi fugitives, part of the international legacy of recent German history. One is simply labeled “Pensionierter Nazi” [Retired Nazi] in photographic reproduction and the other “Kappler,” a reference to Herbert Kappler, the former head of German police and security services in Rome and, in 1978, an escapee from the Italian prison system [Figure 14]. In the decades following the war, the specter of the Nazi in exile haunted both Germany and the international constellation of countries unknowingly hiding the fugitives.65 By producing his series of touristic photo-paintings the same year that Kappler escaped from an Italian prison and returned to West Germany, Kippenberger’s series suggests (absurdly, to be sure) that the villainous figure of the German abroad—the antecedent of Nazi heroics—has been replaced by the pedestrian character of the souvenir-collecting tourist.

A derivative of a derivative, the Florence paintings are at once a continuation of, and a departure from, adopted models of painting from photographic sources. Thus the phrase “One of You” from the series’ title refers simultaneously to the aforementioned linage of photo-painters (Duchamp, Warhol, Richter) and to a more humble, everyday class of tourist photo collectors. In contradistinction to both Richter and Warhol’s important and “most wanted” men, Kippenberger selected portraits of contemporary shop owners, bar patrons, and delivery men, situating his inversion of the process of representation (from photographic reproduction to original painting to photographic reproduction) was paralleled in the inversion from monumental installation to a reinscription of the images onto the plane of the archival registry and the photographic document from which they had originally been drawn.” Buchloh, “Divided Memory” in Gerhard Richter, 89. In Kippenberger’s reinscription, each of the photographic reproductions was adhered to a white paper support and labeled in pencil, mimicking the collecting and archiving habits of the scrapbooking tourist persona he had adopted for the production of the series. In so doing, Kippenberger not only reaffirms the pedestrian character of his artist-persona, but also substitutes a personal archival registry (the scrapbook) for a universal one (Richter’s encyclopedia). Accordingly, when Kippenberger returned to Germany, he marketed the Florence paintings as a collection of souvenirs. Calling them “Abenteuerbilder” [Adventure Paintings], he priced them like a souvenir merchant’s postcards, offering discounts for bulk orders of a half dozen, dozen, etc.65 One notable example is Adolf Eichman, who was captured in Argentina in 1960.
tourist surrogate among them.\textsuperscript{66} And where Richter’s and Warhol’s paintings were conceived as monumental contributions to international exhibitions, Kippenberger’s paintings were humbly traded to a restaurant owner in exchange for dinners and drinks. In this way Kippenberger continues Richter’s practice of portraiture and surrogacy, but substitutes the personal and quotidian for Richter’s “precarious monumentality.”\textsuperscript{67} This is not to suggest that Kippenberger, or his artist persona, was humble (he was quite the opposite), but, rather, that when the languages of the avant-garde returned to West Germany as part of internationalization they became inseparable from everyday life (presented here as the international-traveling tourist)—inseparable from the increasingly international quotidian. In other words, the visual language of the avant-garde had made over daily life—had realized its historical goal—as part of a broader reconfiguring of daily life under international capitalism. Kippenberger’s tourist surrogate modeled this new international West German subject, constructing him in the languages of avant-garde painting and in the images, habits, and tastes of the newly international West German middle class.

\textsuperscript{66} In the postscript to a letter to Gisela Stelly, Kippenberger makes clear his task of self-creation in Florence: “Ich weiss noch immer nicht, wie ich aus mir einen neuen Menschen machen soll!? [I still don’t know how I’m supposed to make a new [man] of myself?!]. Stelly, \textit{Ihr Kippy Kippenberger}, 122.

\textsuperscript{67} Buchloh, “Divided Memory” in \textit{Gerhard Richter}, 89.
Souvenirs from Home

The tourist was a particularly generative figure for Kippenberger, and it persisted in his work until his death in 1997. Although appearing in many forms, the tourist had three key functions in his work. First, it allowed Kippenberger to literalize West Germany’s cultural internationalization by composing an artist-surrogate from the souvenirs of international travel. Second, it allowed him to transform inherited and imported artistic conventions, as well as imported or mediated images and objects, into authentic souvenirs of his personal experience. Third, the figure of the tourist allowed Kippenberger to situate his practice within the cultural sensibilities of a contemporary West German class—the aspirational, emulative, culture-consuming middle class that had emerged during the Wirtschaftswunder of the 1950s and 1960s.

Leisure travel in West Germany had been limited in the years immediately following the war. But as manufacturing wages grew, unemployment fell, and GDP climbed in the 1950s and 1960s, tourism became a yearly ritual for the growing middle class. Between 1954 and 1980, the “proportion of traveling vacationers…rose continuously, from 24% to 57.7%. In addition, international travel became the dominant mode of tourism, further evidencing postwar West Germany’s internationalization. “In 1954, most travelers (85%) remained within Germany. As early as 1968, the number of foreign and domestic trips was equal. By 1986, foreign trips made up two-thirds of all travel.” These new travelers belonged to a group of emerging middle-class

---

68 Unemployment in postwar Germany fluctuated significantly. In 1950 the unemployment rate was 11%. This dropped to .7% by 1962, rebounded to 4.7% in 1975, eased slightly at the end of the 1970s and then increased to 9.3% by 1985. However, in the 1960s and 1970s the trend was significantly lower over the decade prior. Wolfgang Glatzer, Karl Hondrich et al., Recent Social Trends in West Germany, 1960-1990 (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlang, 1992), 149.
69 Ibid., 448 and 450.
70 Ibid., 448.
consumers—a transitional class of neophyte tourists joining or rejoining the middle class as an effect of West Germany’s economic growth and international integration.

In 1950, nearly half of West German jobs were blue collar. By 1985 that number had decreased to less than forty percent. During those same years the number of salaried employees increased from just under sixteen to just under forty percent, and most of these salaries were situated in the middle of the economic spectrum. Average annual income increased dramatically during this time as well, especially among white collar workers. In 1950 the average net yearly salary was just 1,674DM. By 1975 that number increased to 12,997DM. New outlets emerged during these decades to meet the growing demands of this booming consumer class. “Between the founding of the republic and the middle of the 1960s rising consumption of Genussmittel [things consumed for pleasure] far outstripped any other type of expenditure. During this period, expenditure on beer exceeded the rise in real income by a third…. [By] 1963, alcohol and tobacco purchases had risen more than threefold.” This rise in West German middle-class spending was concurrent with the nation’s cultural internationalization, particularly its importation of American entertainment, fashion, and leisure goods, which were all but ubiquitous by the 1970s. For Kippenberger, the changing consumption habits of the West German middle class, and the rise in American consumer products to fill those demands, was

---

71 That is, the Wirtschaftswunder that followed West German reconstruction.
72 Glatzer et al., Recent Social Trends in West Germany, 198.
73 Ibid., 379. With respect to class differences the author notes: “Self-employed households have consistently had the highest average income, and blue collar workers the lowest. Over time, the gap has widened somewhat,” 378.
74 Ibid. (Note: this is the same reference as above, but I believe it is a typographical error. I will cite the correct reference below.)
75 David Crew ed., Consuming Germany in the Cold War (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2004), 182.
most clearly manifest in the popularity of the Ford model Capri, a mid-priced American sports car that managed to outsell many German models into the 1970s.

The Ford Capri became a recurring subject for Kippenberger in the early 1980s, but it first appeared in his work as an absence.76 Kein Capri bei Nacht [No Capri by Night] (1981) [Figure 15], one of twelve photo-paintings from Kippenberger’s second series of paintings, Lieber Maler, Maler Mir... [Dear Painter, Paint for Me…] (1981), depicts an unrecognizable car covered in snow with “Kein Capri” [No Capri] written on the rear windshield. “Capri” here is doubly absent from the snowy picture, since there is not only no Capri car in the painting, the winter scene is “no Capri” Italy. Capri was (and remains) a popular Mediterranean vacation spot for many upper-middle-class German travelers, although by the 1970s it had also become something of a tourist cliché, lending its name to everything from fashionable pants to Italian eateries.77 Each negation implied in the phrase “Kein Capri” thus points to a middle-class aspiration: on the one hand, the desire for an imported, Italian sports car, on the other, the desire for an expensive, semi-tropical vacation. The suggestion that the snow-covered mystery vehicle is a poor substitute for either “Capri” betrays a secondary inadequacy—that the Ford Capri itself was a poor substitute. It was neither an Italian sports car nor an American muscle car.

The Capri problem was for Kippenberger evidence of a broader crisis in the consumption habits of the West German middle class: the emulation of jumbled, imported cultural tropes. A 1973 German advertisement for the Capri reveals as much [Figure 16]. It features the imported car in classic orange parked in what appears to be the wide open spaces of the American

---


Southwest. The ad abandons any Italian aspirations and instead conflates the sports car with American notions of freedom and ruggedness (and in this register looks more like an American pickup truck advertisement). But even though Kippenberger’s painting finds the objects of West German consumer desire to be jumbled and second-hand, it does not disavow them. Instead, Kippenberger exaggerated his own desire for fancy cars, nice clothes, and consumer goods, and emphasized this desire in his work and life in order to construct a persona that mimicked the habits of West Germany’s middle class.

Kippenberger’s own childhood was by all measures bourgeois, not middle class. His mother was a dermatologist and his father eventually became the director of a local mine, positions that afforded the family an upper-middle or professional-class lifestyle. Their home was filled with artwork—mostly by contemporary Germans—and regularly hosted parties and society events. Nevertheless, the Kippenbergers also experienced intermittent job loss and an eventual divorce. Their neighbors and many of their family friends were miners, and their financial security hinged on the tumultuous coal industry in the Ruhr region. In short, like the petit-bourgeoisie in Marx’s famous formulation, Kippenberger’s family shared traits with the transitional class of postwar West Germans who were straddled between working-class affiliations and bourgeois aspiration. In the 1970s, this class became a frequent topic of analysis for a generation of intellectuals born just before or just after the war.

---

78 Diederichsen has made a similar observation: “The display of the little people’s sports car—forerunner of the Opel Manta, which would later be as popular—also contained Kippenberger’s eternal personal dialogue with his own petit-bourgeois (kleinbürgerlich) origins, the Italophile yearning of the Wirtschaftswunder years for pasta and Capri, the island that not only gave its name to the sports car but also to a cheap and very popular sherbet by Langnese, a fruit drink, and a hit song of the day.” Diederichsen, “The Poor Man’s Sports Car,” Problem Perspective, 130.

79 Susanne Kippenberger mentions Janosch specifically. They also collected furniture and design objects: “Our house filled up. In the living room were Arne Jacobsen’s ‘Swan’ and ‘Egg,’ Braun’s ‘Snow White’s Coffin,’ and plastic stools from Milan that you could spin around….Our parents wanted to be surrounded by beautiful things, and what was modern was beautiful.” Susanne Kippenberger, Kippenberger, 60. On the parties, see Susanne Kippenberger, Kippenberger, 29. Martin Kippenberger also described the artwork in their childhood home in his interview with Baumann, Martin Kippenberger, 59.
Polke, Kippenberger’s other role model, took up the cultural sensibilities of the *kleinbürger* at length in his work. Polke ingratiated himself into Polke’s company in the early 1970s, spending time with the established artist in Düsseldorf and at his commune in Willich. During these years Polke was at work on a series of paintings and collages collectively titled *Wir Kleinbürger!* [We Petit-Bourgeoisie!] (1972-1976). The series is comprised of ten large-scale works on paper that take their iconography from leisure activities and materials, including comic books, exotic travel, shopping, and sex [Figure 17]. It is not difficult to imagine that the tastes and habits of this new *kleinbürger* were a topic of Kippenberger’s conversations with Polke. Poet Hans Magnus Enzensberger, whose work also took up West Germany’s postwar middle class, provided an account of the *kleinbürger* in 1977, while Kippenberger was at work on his Florence pictures:

> The petty bourgeoisie is not one of the principal parties in the (famous) antagonism; it is neither the ruling nor the exploited class, but the class in between, the class left over, the floating remainder….The petty bourgeois claims to be anything but petty bourgeois…..the petty bourgeois is always someone else….The social image of the petty bourgeoisie tends toward mimicry…..Its relation to the means of production is always extremely derivative….No one is more anxious to take advantage of the newest trend….He is the new Proteus, ever eager to learn something—even to the point of losing his identity….[he] constantly has to struggle with a sense of its own superfluity….[his] is the experimental class par excellence….From tourism to do-it-yourself, from avant-garde art to urban studies...every alternative movement in our culture has been promptly disarmed and absorbed by the petty bourgeoisie.\(^{82}\)

Enzensberger’s account of the petit-bourgeoisie, particularly with regard to its mimicry and loss of identity, reads like an account of Kippenberger’s artist persona. And if Richter was

---

80 Susanne Kippenberger claims that Martin considered Polke “the great artist of the seventies.” Susanne Kippenberger, *Kippenberger*, 103.

81 Ibid.

the model for this persona’s first series of paintings, *Uno di voi*, Polke was the model for his second, *Lieber Maler, male mir…*, the suite of works that includes *Kein Capri bei Nacht*. This series of large-scale photo-paintings elaborated Kippenberger’s touristic artist persona, very much in the fashion of Enzensberger’s characterization, and explored a range of middle-class cultural icons, including packaged food, TV celebrities, and overly coiffed family pets. By turning to Polke for his second series, Kippenberger enacted the painterly dilemma faced by many West German artists born in the 1950s. As Koether writes, “When people needed to describe who they wanted to feel affiliated with—with which representation of painting, with which mode of artistic action—it often came down to either/or: Richter/Polke.”

Kippenberger’s turn to Polke was not a displacement of one father figure by another, however. Instead, he synthesized a similar lesson from each artist—that in postwar West Germany the languages of the avant-garde returned as part of neoliberalization, and thus were inseparable from the habits, images, and commodities of everyday life. As noted above many of Richter’s photo-paintings depicted the increasingly ubiquitous commodities of postwar West Germany. For Polke, particularly in the late 1960s and early 70s, the consumption habits of the upper- and middle-classes could not be separated from the imported aesthetics championed by West German art and cultural institutions, particularly the return of modernist abstraction.

---

84 For example, many of his abstract paintings and collages from the late 1960s draw their formal logic from trends in furniture design, or from the grid patterns of tablecloth and wallpaper. In this respect connections with the work of Blinky Palermo are clear. Indeed, Kippenberger later made a series of works under the persona “Kippenblinky” that takes up the aesthetic language of modern decoration. “In addressing the conditions surrounding the fate and acceptance of modernist abstraction,” writes Mark Godfrey, “Polke’s work of the late 1960s went beyond parody. One group of works addresses what Buchloh has called the ‘amoeboid amorpheousness’ of post-Klee and post-Kandinsky Neirentisch design….Polke first used the kidney shape in *Beans (Bohnen)* (1965), in which green beans are set against a cheap checkered fabric; the curved tables were being sold as semi-luxurious home furnishings….Polke seems to have had in mind how the commercialization of abstraction went hand in hand with the rise of new leisure industries and the creation of new desires through advertisements.” Mark Godfrey, “From *Moderne Kunst* to *Entartete Kunst*: Polke and Abstraction” in *Alibis: Sigmar Polke, 1963-2010*, 121.
Dear Painter, Paint for Me…

In 1978 Kippenberger moved to Berlin and founded *Kippenbergers Büro*, an office, living, and exhibition space that served as a platform for producing and displaying work. That same year he took over management of the punk club SO36, and along with Berlin’s Café Einstein and the Paris Bar restaurant, these spaces provided the artist with stages for multimedia events and performances. The Büro project also made explicit the class position from which these works were produced. Although Kippenberger insisted that he was forced to adopt an “office” space because Warhol had already taken the factory (thus characterizing the space as an ersatz Pop project), his choice of alternative set up a key binary. In an industrial society the factory is the work space of the proletariat. It is the site in which the proletariat sells his labor power to the bourgeois factory owner who in turn accumulates the surplus value of that labor. Warhol’s Pop factory conflates industrial manufacturing and culture production, and in this respect has parallels with Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s concept of the “culture industry” advanced in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944). Kippenberger’s Büro, however, substitutes the office for the factory, shifting the terms from an industrial to a postindustrial economic model. In a postindustrial economy, manufacturing is outsourced and replaced domestically by service providers (including administrators and managers) who labor in the office. In post-reconstruction West Germany, the office became the primary space of the

---

86 These will be discussed at length in the following chapter.
88 With respect to West Germany specifically: “Regardless of their affiliation with economic sector, 64% of employed persons were engaged in service jobs in 1982. Within the broad class of service jobs, expansion was observed primarily in the fields of business services, financial services, civil services, and educational and health services.” Glatzer et al., *Recent Social Trends in West Germany*, 162.
contemporary West German worker, and thus Kippenberger adopts it as the space appropriate to contemporary West German art production.

The Büro project also introduced a production methodology that would become central to Kippenberger’s practice—the coordination of all aspects of an object’s promotion, reception, and display as constitutive of the work of art itself. Adopting a managerial role, Kippenberger began outsourcing the production of painting and sculpture while painstakingly designing promotional posters and books. Accordingly, the first poster for Kippenbergers Büro promoted the many services that the office could provide: “Use the entire palette of our services: mediation, consultation, and pictures.”

Kippenberger called himself the boss of the Büro, and management—a position between the capitalist who owns the means of production and distribution and the proletariat who owns only his labor power—is the profession par excellence of the middle class. This was Kippenberger’s ultimate transformation of Richter’s deskilling. Rather than displace craft-based skill with reproduction, Kippenberger’s deskilling replaces production with management. He mimics, in other words, processes of deskilling taking place in Western nations under neoliberal capitalism—the displacement of skilled blue-collar industrial labor with flexible, managerial white collar postindustrial labor. And it was from this explicitly managerial position that Kippenberger set about his second series of photo-paintings.

The collection of source material for Lieber Maler began in 1979, one year after the founding of the Büro, with a trip to the United States. There he and travel companion Achim Schächtele, founder of SO36, took and collected photographs of a range of tourist sites and Americana. Like the Florence photographs, these pictures then became the basis for other projects, including painting, performance, posters, and books. For the Lieber Maler series,

---

89 Nutzen Sie die ganze Palette unserer Dienstleistungen Kippenbergers Büro (1978).
Kippenberger supplemented these images with commodity logos, photographs from other trips and vacations, and images from around Berlin. Unlike for Uno di voi, however, he did not translate these photographs to canvas himself. Instead he selected twelve images from the group and outsourced their painting to a local movie sign painter. The resulting series includes a picture of the artist dressed in a suit and seated on a discarded black leather couch in New York [Figure 18], an autographed headshot of the German TV star Hansjörg Felmy [Figure 19], a picture of Kippenberger wearing a fur-lined coat and standing in front of an advertisement for souvenirs from East Germany [figure 20], a black and white image taken from a pornographic magazine, and the Capri painting already discussed.

In 1981 the work was exhibited at the Realism Studio of the Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst [New Society for Visual Arts] (NGBK) under the title, “Werner Kippenberger; Lieber Maler, Maler Mir…. ” Combining Kippenberger’s name with that of the hired sign painter, the title stages the work as the product of a manager-laborer amalgam artist-surrogate. According to the artist book that accompanied the exhibition, a scrapbook-like collection of material from Kippenberger’s youth and early career titled Durch die Pubertät zum Erfolg [From Puberty To Success] (1981), Lieber Maler was commissioned during a self-imposed ban on painting, and Kippenberger’s hiring of the commercial sign painter was simply a way to circumvent the prohibition.91 This wry Conceptual turn proved commercially successful, resulting in his first sale of an artwork.92 Similarly, Kippenberger only managed to secure the exhibition by leveraging the painting practice he had abandoned. In 1981, the NGBK was “a left wing collective” that just happened to be looking for “new forms of political art beyond socialist

---

91 Alison Gingeras, Martin Kippenberger; Lieber Maler, male mir (New York: Gagosian Gallery, 2005), 9.
92 Susanne Kippenberger, Kippenberger, 202. Again, Stelly claims Kippenberger had sold five of the Florence paintings before he sold work from the “Lieber Maler” show; however, he only sold the work to Stelly and to a friend helping to organize the sale.
realism.”

Because *Lieber Maler* looked like photorealist painting, and because Kippenberger’s earlier work had aesthetic correspondences with Capitalist Realism, the series seemed in line with NGBK’s mission. However, as curator Barbara Straka notes in her introduction to *Durch die Pubertät*, Kippenberger’s project was a multimedia and multifaceted blend of photorealism and conceptualism [eine Mischung aus Concept-Art und Fotorealismus] in the service of Kippenberger’s many self-marketing and self-promoting ventures [his “selbstdarstellungen”].

The book itself, *Durch die Pubertät zum Erfolg*, is a testament to this practice. It begins with a collection of letters, some by Kippenberger and others to him, written during the artist’s early travels. It also includes travel snapshots and experimental writing that Kippenberger produced in 1980 during a stay in Paris, and ends with press clippings about his SO36 and Büro projects. Only occasionally depicting the *Lieber Maler* paintings, the book is not strictly an exhibition catalogue, but is instead the key textual element of a multimedia series that came to include performance and musical events produced under the same title.

Kippenberger’s outsourcing of the painting process for *Lieber Maler* had a number of historical valences. Richter claimed to have taken up photo-painting as a way to reject painting while still painting; recall his statement from 1964: “I had had enough of bloody painting.” Duchamp also claimed to have abandoned art making (for chess) in the early 1920s, a move prefigured by his abandonment of painting for work on *The Large Glass* (1915-23). In this respect, Kippenberger’s gesture is a continuation of avant-garde practice rather than a departure from it, and thus also a continuation of his adaptation of prewar artistic conventions. However, in the context of the West German art scene of the 1980s, this Conceptual maneuver did indeed

---

94 With the exception of *Rotomint* (1981).
96 *Tu M’*, Duchamp’s last painting, was finished in 1918.
mark a break. At the beginning of the 1980s, gestural Neo-Expressionist painting was beginning to dominate commercial venues. In the 1970s, Rainer Fetting, Helmut Middendorf, Bernd Zimmer, Salomé and others had founded the Moritzplatz Gallery in Berlin, and these artists attracted critical attention in 1980 with the “Heftige Malerei” [Violent Painting] exhibition at Haus am Waldsee. Drawing similar attention at the time were the artists associated with Max Hetzler’s gallery, which moved from Berlin to Cologne in 1983 and represented the Oehlen brothers, Georg Herold, Werner Büttner, and Günther För. Although these artists were diverse in their media and philosophical orientations, large-scale painting emerged by the early 1980s as the dominant vanguard West German form, as evidenced by its strong representation at Kasper König’s 1984 exhibition survey of contemporary art, “Von hier aus – Zwei Monate neue deutsche Kunst in Düsseldorf” [From Here Out – Two Months of New German Art in Düsseldorf]. Kippenberger had ties to both the Moritzplatz painters and Hetzler’s gallery. Salomé and Fetting participated in events at the Büro, Albert Oehlen was a regular collaborator, and later in Cologne Kippenberger became something of a ringleader for Hetzler’s artists. “Max without Martin’s strategy would have been unimaginable in the early years,” Vienna gallerist Peter Pakesch recalled to Susanne Kippenberger.

By outsourcing the painting for his Lieber Maler series, Kippenberger was able to participate in the contemporary turn to large-scale painting while also maintaining his distance from it. Such ironic detachment was not always treated as serious art making, however. For example, Kasper König excluded Kippenberger from “Von heir aus” even while he selected

97 Susanne Kippenberger, Kippenberger, 200.
98 The exhibition, organized by the brother of Kippenberger’s friend and publisher Walther König, took place in Hall 13 of Messe Düsseldorf and was organized by the Düsseldorf Society for Contemporary Art (Gesellschaft für aktuelle Kunst Düsseldorf e.V.).
99 Susanne Kippenberger, Kippenberger, 247.
100 “No one took him seriously as an artist at the time,” Peter Pakesch later told his sister. Susanne Kippenberger, Kippenberger, 247.
heavily from Hetzler’s gallery and the Moritzplatz artists. The exclusion was certainly not because Kippenberger was unknown in Cologne and Düsseldorf at the time. On the contrary, he was a constant presence in the close-knit scene, instigating and antagonizing wherever he went. But his withdrawal from painting was part of a broader shift in methodology, which substituted practices of management and promotion for processes of composition and production. With his Büro project and the related Lieber Maler, Kippenberger’s itinerant tourist persona was elaborated as a white-collar manager, another registration of socioeconomic trends in West Germany. Moreover, this manager persona allowed Kippenberger to continue exploring the “collecting” habits of the tourist, now extending it to include the collection of consumer goods, contemporaneous painting practices (i.e., the large-scale painting of his peers), ephemera of celebrity culture, and even the time and labor of others.

Only one of the Lieber Maler paintings employs the figural abstraction of Kippenberger’s Neo-Expressionist peers. The rest make clear their photographic sources. For the untitled painting of Kippenberger on a couch in New York, for example, the sign painter was careful to maintain the lens glare of the original photo. Similarly, the portrait of German actor Hansjörg Felmy includes the characteristic margins of the actor’s promotional headshot, underscoring the painting’s material source. In this respect at least the Lieber Maler series continued Kippenberger’s exploration of Pop Art aesthetics, and in Pop fashion the subjects of these paintings range from a celebrity portrait to consumer products like Kraft cheese, pasta, soda, and

---

101 The exhibition catalogue includes two pages on Kippenberger (Kasper König et al., Von heir aus (Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 1984), 216-217), but he was not included in the actual exhibition. According to his sister this was due to outcry from participating artists: “When Büttner and Oehlen protested, Martin was given two pages in the catalog as a compromise, but no space in the show itself.” Susanne Kippenberger, Kippenberger, 248.
102 The Hetzler Boys almost always appeared as a group in the early eighties: talking, singing, provoking, and stripping. The main thing was to be loud. ‘With Hetzler,’ Oehlen later said, ‘we made asses of ourselves and made everyone hate us. We climbed on the tables and pulled down our pants….’ And according to Andreas Schulze, one of Monika Sprüth’s artists and thus from the enemy camp, as it were, Martin ‘was the boss. He always had the biggest mouth, and the others followed him.’ Susanne Kippenberger, Kippenberger, 246-247.
disposable pens [Figure 21]. As in Pop generally, Kippenberger used these commodity and cultural forms to conflate categories of high and low culture. One untitled still-life from the series, for example, is composed like a seventeenth-century vanitas [Figure 22]. Its subjects include a bag of dried pasta, a burning candle, a can of some illegible food, a block of soap, a bottle of orange Fanta soda, and a jar of Nivea cream. Rather than remind its viewer of the fleeting nature of earthly pursuits, however, this new vanitas celebrates the persistence of modern commodities. Where the traditional *memento mori* symbolizes mortality through ephemeral subjects (ripe fruit, soap bubbles, the smoke from a recently extinguished candle), each of Kippenberger’s objects has a near endless shelf-life. The artificial carbonated beverage displays no obvious expiration date, the canned food and mass-produced dried pasta are modern conveniences manufactured for long-term storage, and the Nivea face cream, a stand-in, perhaps, for the traditional skull, offers its user’s visage protection against the aging process. Thus the candle in Kippenberger’s commodity anti-vanitas still burns brightly—the promise of the commodity is the eternal rather than the ephemeral.

Despite Kippenberger’s celebration of banal consumer goods in this large-scale painting, however, his conflation of “high” and “low” is not absolute. Instead, these poles meet in the middle, blending ubiquitous commodities like dried pasta and soda with upscale toiletries like brand-name face cream and imported bar soap. Alison Gingeras, in her contribution to the catalogue for an exhibition of the series at Gagosian Gallery in 2005, describes the socio-cultural coding of such a combination:

> While it might be hard for a contemporary eye to decode, many of the seemingly banal subjects depicted in these paintings carry a legible sociological charge related to middle-class West Germany of the 1970s. The Kraft logo, which now appears to be an allusion to American Pop, in fact evokes the dominance of this prepared food company on postwar dinner tables….Another painting
showing a suit-jacket pocket full of a meticulously organized collection of pens mimicked the middle-class fashion of lower-level businessmen and office managers.  

Indeed, across the Lieber Maler paintings, Kippenberger employs the international aesthetics of Pop to depict the objects and habits of the internationalizing West German middle class. Thus for Kippenberger as for Polke, the consumer behavior of postwar West Germany is inseparable from the imported aesthetics of postwar painting. However, Kippenberger’s commodities are not anonymous consumer goods, or they are not only anonymous consumer goods. In addition, just like the subjects in his Florence paintings, they are personal keepsakes and evidentiary souvenirs. “Adding together all of these charged sociological and pop cultural signs,” continues Gingeras, “Kippenberger’s Lieber Maler series is in fact a veiled portrait of 1970s Germania.” It is also a self portrait. Like Uno di voi, the vanitas was painted from a photograph related to the artist’s personal travels. And like the Uno di voi paintings, the vanitas was then photographed and reinscribed into a personal archival registry, this time as part of Durch die Pubertät. An image of the painting is included in the book under the title, “Mitbringsel aus einem kleinen Dorf in Palästina” [Souvenirs from a small village in Palestine], which is followed by ten cryptic “Kippermann als Neckermann” [Kipperman as Neckermann] travel narratives that figure the artist as a tourist alter-ego named Neckermann. “Playing off the name of a well-known, lower-middle-class travel agency (Neckermann),” Gingeras argues, “this nonsensical essay recounts a ‘sea, sex, and sun’-style holiday that Kippenberger took with his girlfriend in Tunisia.” Again, Kippenberger’s point of departure for the work is the novel West German middle-class fondness

---

103 Alison Gingeras, Martin Kippenberger; Lieber Maler, male mir, 19.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid., 18.
for pleasure travel, here socio-culturally coded by the invocation of a budget travel agency. The resulting souvenirs, collected and posed for a keepsake photo-painting, not only evidence this trip, but together serve as a stand-in for their collector, the middle-class tourist-persona Neckermann.

At least two of the commodities in the vanitas painting are German in origin. Nivea was founded in 1882 by Paul C. Beiersdorf and dermatologist Paul Gerson Unna in Hamburg. Fanta, a Coca-Cola brand, was invented during the Second World War by the company’s German operations executive Max Keith because the ingredients for Coke products could not be imported. But in Kippenberger’s painting these commodities appear foreign. The Nivea cream is captioned in Arabic (the Arabic word for Nivea, appears where the word “cream” would be on the German packaging), and the Fanta bottle is branded for the Tunisian market [Figure 23]. They are, in other words, German products abroad, evidence of the reintegration of West German commodities into international markets, and stand-ins for Kippenberger, the perpetually traveling German artist. The dried pasta staged on a sheet in the bottom right-hand corner of the painting serves a similar function. Pasta was Kippenberger’s favorite dish, and he included references to dried noodles and pasta casserole in many of his early projects as both a signatory convention and a stand-in for his petit-bourgeois taste. It was a meal he demanded from his friends, collaborators, and various surrogate families he adopted as he made himself at

---

106 This reading is only slightly confused by the title given to the work in Durch die Pubertät, “Souvenirs from a small village in Palestine.” However, Tunisia was an ally of the Palestinian Liberation Army (PLO), and many Palestinians lived in Tunis, Tunisia in the early 1980s. Thus souvenirs like the square Nabulsi Palestinian soap pictured in the painting would have been easily acquired while on vacation there.

107 Information provided by the company’s website. http://www.beiersdorf.com/About_Us/Our_History/Founding_History.html.

108 A German surrogate for Coca-Cola, Fanta was particularly appropriate to Kippenberger’s project. See, for example, Crew, Consuming Germany in the Cold War, 126.

109 While all of the objects refer to Kippenberger’s vacation in Tunisia, the only other souvenir with a Kippenberger-specific charge might be the can of food. A veiled reference to Warhol’s soup, Kippenberger included a press clipping in Durch die Pubertät (unpaginated) in which a music reviewer refers to the artist as “Deutschland’s Andy Warhol.”
home in cafés, restaurants, and family houses throughout Germany. It is also mentioned in the Neckermann travel narratives in Durch die Pubertät and was featured in the title of the artist’s second Berlin exhibition, “Kippenberger in Nudelauflauf sehr gerne” [Kippenberger in noodle casserole yes please], which opened at Galerie Petersen immediately following “Lieber Maler.” Surrogacy was thus recurrent throughout the Lieber Maler paintings and related projects, appearing in the exhibition’s title (in the form of the artist-surrogate “Werner Kippenberger”), in the tourist avatar “Neckermann,” and in the German products abroad depicted in the vanitas.

Insofar as they stand in for the past experiences of their possessors, souvenirs like the ones in Kippenberger’s vanitas are always tasked with surrogacy. But as Stewart argues, this surrogacy is not enacted solely by collected objects. Instead, the souvenir allows access to prior experiences only with the addition of personal narrative: “It will not function without the supplementary narrative discourse that both attaches it to its origins and creates a myth with regard to those origins.”110 Where the photocopied letters from Florence narrate the souvenir photo-paintings Kippenberger produced there, the experimental writing from Durch die Pubertät serves as narrative for the Lieber Maler paintings. On the scrapbook-like page that depicts the vanitas painting, for example, Kippenberger not only included a description of the image, “Souvenirs from a small Village in Palestine,” “Hammamed (Tunesien),” but also a short, whimsical poem of remembrance “Après Solä / Gabs nicht als Spray.” Informed by the “Neckermann” stories about Kippenberger’s romantic vacation that follow, this verse becomes at least partially comprehensible: in Tunisia, after spending too much time in the sun with his girlfriend (a misspelling of Après Soleil), Kippenberger searches for a product to ease the pain, which he finds does not come in a spray (Gabs nicht als Spray). The product in question is perhaps the Nivea cream perched on top of the square bar of soap. The misspelling of “soleil”

could reflect a regional pronunciation or Kippenberger’s dyslexia. However, *solä* is also the Italian word for “alone/single,” and unlike his Italian trip, which was undertaken “alone,” his Tunisian trip (which came “après”) was a couple’s retreat.

Even at this early moment in his career, narrative anecdote was crucial to the legibility of Kippenberger’s work. This is in part what Straka implies by her characterization of his photo-painting as “selbstdarstellungen.” And as Stewart’s formulation suggests, such narrative discourse is inseparable from the surrogate capacity of the souvenir. In one respect, Kippenberger’s early paintings and their subjects operate as souvenirs of the personal experiences of their implied artist-collector. Constructed from the objects and images of contemporary West German life, these surrogates continued Kippenberger’s fabrication of an artist persona proper to his cultural moment—a figure specific to West German contemporary culture and articulated through the imported commodities and aesthetic vocabularies that had come to characterize it. But more than merely corresponding to middle-class travel habits, the souvenir is for Kippenberger a way of constructing a personal network of signification out of the secondary material of international mass culture—of being both original and secondary, or at least oscillating between the two. The products depicted in the vanitas are at once foreign and domestic, mass-cultural and uniquely personal. Where Kippenberger’s tourist persona for *Uno di voi* sought to transform inherited and imported art practice (abstraction and photo-painting) into primary evidence of personal experience, his manager-persona for *Lieber Maler* expanded the tourist’s collecting habits to include aspects of life under international capitalism generally: the rise of white collar work with the end of industrialism; the transnational exchange of commodities like Nivea cream, the Ford Capri, and Kraft food; and the pervasiveness of celebrity culture. Kippenberger constructed his artist-persona, in other words, from souvenirs of
neoliberal capitalism. He did so in an attempt to create an authentic, original, self-determined subject from such secondary materials and practices—that much is clear. Kippenberger was certainly engaged in a practice of self-production and self-promotion (both his first curator, Barbara Straka, and his friend and critic Diederichsen agree on that point). What is not clear, however, is if performing aspects of neoliberal capitalism in order to reclaim something like authenticity differs, substantially, from being made over by neoliberal capitalism, by a transnational logic that was developed and expanded through the promotion of “authentic,” “open,” and “expressive” cultural idiom. Or put another way, it is not clear whether there is a difference between playing a tourist everywhere and being made a tourist everywhere.

Following Lieber Maler, Kippenberger’s tourist persona became an increasingly miserable figure, a character whose life and work were perpetually caught in transit, on the road or between series. He became a consummate traveler, producing objects and images that, to borrow Joselit’s term, insist on their transitivity—that make legible the networks of their distribution, and that are illegible without recourse to other objects and images in the artist’s expanding body of work. In these projects, tourism is not an activity that the artist undertakes in order to produce or perform himself, it is the miserable state in which the West German artist finds himself.

Vacation snapshots and their ensuing slideshows were nearly ubiquitous in West Germany by the early 1980s, and even artists were not immune to trends in international souvenir collection. In 1970 Richter traveled with Blinky Palermo to New York City on a kind of pilgrimage, and their voyage was almost certainly the model for Kippenberger and Schächtele’s
trip. But where Richter and Palermo mined New York for avant-garde art practice (both American Pop and New York School abstraction), Kippenberger and Schächtele returned with only souvenir photos. American painterly idioms were by now pervasive in West German art markets and institutions, and Kippenberger’s travels were about accumulating evidence of his West German tourist identity and experiences.

If Richter’s trip prefigured Kippenberger’s, Polke’s work was the model for the painted series that resulted. As noted, Polke's Wir Kleinbürger! explored the iconography of petit-bourgeois leisure in the mid 1970s, an exploration prefigured in the 1960s by work like Das Palmen-Bild [The Palm Painting] (1964) [Figure 24], which he painted ten years before Kippenberger visited his commune outside Düsseldorf. Polke’s influence is legible in much of Kippenberger’s practice, from his excessive life-into-art ethos to his stylistic heterogeneity. And although the snapshot and photo-painting were complex inheritances, Kippenberger’s self-performance—his performance of middle-class habits and behaviors—was certainly informed by Polke. Throughout the 1960s, Polke collected image artifacts of the West German middle class as a tourist might collect souvenirs from exotic summer vacations. In so doing, he mimicked the cultural aspirations of his subjects, aspirations which included exotic travel, and explored the aesthetic of an emerging consumer class for signs of its own nascence. As Martin Hentschel has argued:

A whole range of motifs that Polke embraces in his visual world in the sixties seem like collections of finds from reconnaissance missions in petit bourgeois, German living rooms. And it is not by chance that “the exotic” crops up so frequently. This is wholly in keeping with the conservatism of any emergent affluent society which first finds expression within the individual members’ own four walls. In this context the exotic takes on the role of a projection screen. As yet, foreign travel is beyond the means of

---

most people, so the only thing to do is to create a visual “idyll” in one’s own “interior space” by incorporating some touch of foreignness, fleetingly glimpsed in travel brochures.  

Polke’s petit-bourgeois “exotic” was constructed out of stylized flamingos and the palm trees of travel advertisements, symbols of tourism dislodged from any specific context, because in the 1960s such sites were still out of reach for the majority of the transitioning West German middle class. In the first year of that decade only twenty-eight percent of the German population took a vacation of at least five days. But by the late 1970s and early 1980s, the West German middle class was well traveled, with over fifty percent of the population taking a trip of five or more days per year.  

Kippenberger’s travel images, adopted from the snapshot practices of the 1970s West German petit bourgeoisie, are thus not abstracted exotic tropes like Polke’s, but an emerging class’s evidence of its own experience—evidence that filled the souvenir books and adorned the walls of a now internationally integrated West German middle class.

The Lieber Maler vanitas is not the only painting in the series that references or includes souvenirs. Most explicitly, one painting depicts the artist standing in front of wall signage for a souvenir stand commemorating thirty years of the DDR. Less obvious, however, is the souvenir quality of what is perhaps the best known of the Lieber Maler works, the untitled painting of Kippenberger wearing a suit and sitting on a discarded black leather couch on a street corner in New York City. The image made several appearances in Kippenberger’s oeuvre. It was taken while on his U.S. trip with Achim Schächtele and was first exhibited as part of the performance Knechte des Tourismus [Slaves of Tourism] (1979) staged at Café Einstein in Berlin. This

---

performance consisted of a slide presentation of images from the trip (which included stops in New York, Las Vegas, and Los Angeles) narrated live by the two travelers and in a recorded message from the artist and musician Christine Hahn. The image then became the source material for the *Lieber Maler* painting, was included in the book, *Was immer auch sei Berlin bleibt frei* [Whatever May Be Berlin Stays Free] (1981), which was part of the series of events organized under the umbrella of “Durch die Pubertät zum Erfolg,” and in 1994 was used as the cover image for the catalogue for the exhibition “The Happy End of Franz Kafka’s America” at the Museum Boymans-van Beuningen in Rotterdam.

Such reiterations were common in Kippenberger’s practice—one image or concept from an artwork repeated or reused as the ephemeral material for later shows (posters, catalogues, invitations, etc.), or simply reappearing in future artworks. These images, like their artist, were well traveled, and their multiple iterations connected disparate projects and exhibitions across media and national boundaries. That is, they formed a kind of network, and were transmitted from node to node, artwork to artwork, and exhibition space to exhibition space according to the itinerary of Kippenberger’s tourist persona. With *Lieber Maler* and the images that informed it, this reiteration began to look more like compulsion than souvenir collection. For Polke, tourism had been a kind of fantasy projection, an abstract notion across which the middle class could express its identity. But as tourist travel became as mundane as foreign commodities, the West German middle class started leaving the country in hopes of finding evidence of original, authentic, primary experience elsewhere; in hopes of bringing it home and using it to construct an authentic life there. As Kippenberger demonstrates, however, souvenirs are always already secondary (since they are evidence of experience but not experience itself), and so this self-production (this selbstdarstellung) is conscribed to endless repetition. The title of Kippenberger’s
travel slideshow, *Slaves of Tourism*, reflects this compulsory status, which was then reiterated in the performance itself. It featured a seemingly endless parade of clichéd tourist snapshots (Kippenberger at Disneyland hugging Pluto, in the American southwest riding a horse, etc.) narrated with a restless enthusiasm that borders on desperation.

*Uno di voi, un tedesco in Firenze* was the first of many projects based on Kippenberger’s travel experiences. In addition to *Knechte des Tourismus* and the souvenir images from the *Lieber Maler* series, the most notable works in this vein include his many drawings on hotel stationery and his *Input-Output* series (1982-1992). The hotel drawings, which he produced intermittently until his death, are color drawings sketched on found stationery from the various hotels where the artist stayed—the compulsive doodles of a restless traveler [Figure 25].

These drawings were often explicitly secondary to other projects, either preparatory sketches for paintings or sculptures, or drawings produced after a series or exhibition that expanded on the theme. The largest suite in this vein was composed on the stationery of the Hotel Chelsea, Cologne, where Kippenberger often stayed in exchange for artwork. It is not incidental that he chose a hotel named after the famous New York landmark that had housed many of Warhol’s factory regulars, another West German derivative of American art culture.

Kippenberger’s *Input-Output* similarly employs ephemeral, travel-acquired paper as a support for drawing. For this series, he collected receipts during a project he called the *Magical Misery Tour* (1985-1986), an artwork/holiday in Brazil that involved the artist and his friends overindulging in alcohol, drugs, and sex to the point of near torture [Figure 26]. These receipts, which chronicle Kippenberger’s food and alcohol consumption (the “input” end of the equation), were then overdrawn with floor plan sketches of the spaces where he had produced or exhibited

---

114 Kippenberger did not stay at all of the hotels were he acquired stationery. *Nach Kippenberger*, 133.
115 The Hotel Chelsea was one of the primary sites of the Warhol and Morrissey film *Chelsea Girls* (1966).
artwork (his “output”). Both the hotel drawings and the Input-Output series use travel and the accumulation of travel ephemera as a way to construct a portrait of the artist. In the case of the hotel drawings, the Kippenberger tourist persona is mapped according to his travel itinerary. In his Input-Output series a more general sketch of the artist is composed out of records of his consumption habits and recollections of spaces bound up with the creation and reception of his work. These series underscore the performative integration of Kippenberger’s real life and his art. His travels and experiences are articulated across these secondary objects, rendering his tourist-persona contingent on such material—a persona Kippenberger then embodied by living an itinerant life, working out of hotels, restaurants, bars, and friends’ houses, and perpetually refusing to go home [Figure 27].

More than just a middle-class surrogate constructed from secondary objects and practices, the tourist was for Kippenberger the quintessential figure of West German enthusiasm and misery—a figure now financially able to go out into the world to search for signs of authentic life, but also a figure compelled by political and cultural circumstance to do so (compelled, that is, by West Germany’s internationalization). For the few theorists who have engaged with phenomena of modern travel, Stewart among them, the tourist and the souvenir serve as metaphors for modern crises of authenticity broadly.116 “Within the development of culture under an exchange economy the search for the authentic object becomes critical,” Stewart writes. “As experience is increasingly mediated and abstracted, the lived relation of the body to the phenomenological world is replaced by a nostalgic myth of contact and presence.”117 Dean MacCannell describes modern inauthenticity in similar terms. In the modern era, he argues, daily

---

117 Stewart, On Longing, 133.
life has been rendered inauthentic through the reification of experience and the fragmentation of cultural heritage. The tourist departs from his quotidian existence in order to encounter or recuperate some form of authenticity elsewhere, and to bring back evidence of his having experienced it. However, once removed from its original context, the souvenir loses access to the authentic and becomes yet another reminder of the inauthenticity of its possessor’s daily life.\textsuperscript{118} MacCannell, who offered the first comprehensive account of the modern tourist, describes the circular pattern that results:

\begin{quote}
The spurious side of the social structure of modernity is composed out of the information, memories, images and other representations which become detached from genuine cultural elements….This is no longer a simple matter of an occasional souvenir ashtray or the little bars of soap from The Motel that are stored away with the pressed and dried wildflower. It is now possible to build an entire life out of these and other spurious elements…. [E]veryday life is composed of souvenirs of life elsewhere.\textsuperscript{119}
\end{quote}

Kippenberger built many such lives: the life of the tourist, the office manager, the club owner and restaurateur, the artist, of course, but also the poet and punk (described in Chapter 2). In \textit{The Magical Misery} tour this construction of an authentic life from the souvenirs of life elsewhere is perhaps most torturous (although like in \textit{Slaves of Tourism} there is some pleasure in the compulsion). He spent three months in Brazil overindulging in drugs, alcohol, sex, and art production. He collected souvenirs and made music, drawings, and an installation. Even his best friends were barely able to handle the extremity. Albert Oehlen, for example, only lasted ten

\textsuperscript{118} As MacCannell argues in the introduction to the 1999 edition of the text, “Modernization simultaneously separates…things from the people and places that made them, breaks up the solidarity of the groups in which they originally figured as cultural elements, and brings the people liberated from traditional attachments into the modern world where, as tourists, they may attempt to discover or reconstruct a cultural heritage or a social identity.” Dean MacCannell \textit{The Tourist; A New Theory of the Leisure Class} (Berkeley: University of California Press), 13. I borrow primarily from MacCannell for this summery, however questions of “authenticity” figure prominently in each of the other author’s analyses.

\textsuperscript{119} MacCannell, \textit{The Tourist}, 147-160.
days. “In the blazing sun they drank Sexy Piranhas from morning till night—Martin’s hands were shaking so badly that he couldn’t butter his bread.”

*Input-Output* was not the only work to emerge from the trip. It was not even the most elaborate. Kippenberger also bought a gas station in Salvador and named it after Martin Bormann, the head of the Nazi Party Chancellery, and a conflation, in Kippenberger style, of his name and that of a surrogate. Here again Kippenberger gestures to historical precedent for the German tourist. Brazil had been a popular destination for German emigrants prewar and became a hideout for Nazis in exile in the immediate postwar years. Kippenberger, for his part, contributes an entrepreneurial persona to this German-Brazilian legacy. After purchasing the gas station he converted the signs to indicate that the pumps dispensed alcohol—a winning business model, at least in the mind of the alcoholic Kippenberger. He then documented the project in black and white photographs and displayed them in large-format as part of an installation in the exhibition “Miete Strom Gas” [Rent Electricity Gas] (1986) at Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt. This quotidian title stood in contrast to the rather grand scale of the exhibition, suggesting that the elaborate project—the Magical Misery Tour—was simply a way to pay the bills. As Oehlen recalled, “All the content and meaning proliferated alongside the financing situation—it was like a three-dimensional spiderweb of financing, printing, exhibition obligations, plus this whole insanity of content.” That is, Kippenberger’s contribution to the German legacy in Brazil was entrepreneurial. It was a continuation of the middle-class tourist persona he had cultivated in previous work, a persona who operated as part of a network of

---

120 Susanne Kippenberger, Kippenberger, 284.
122 Susanne Kippenberger, Kippenberger, 289.
international exchange as determined by market capitalism, and whose every experience, habit, and recreation was financialized (serving here to pay the rent, the electricity, and the gas).

_input-output_ advances a similar logic. The equation that the work takes as its title suggests the rational accounting of economic exchange (perhaps the difference between the input and the output is the surplus Kippenberger hoped to accumulate). But the project also reveals the miserable compulsion at the heart of his souvenir collection and art production. The receipts that make up the body of work evidence both his experience abroad and his addiction to alcohol, and measure them according to the documentary evidence of financial obligation (a bill). This debt is then paid out as artistic production (as the drawings). Thus his search for “authentic,” primary experience elsewhere, as well as the ensuing art production based on his personal experience, are in this work obligatory—are the result of an addiction and the resulting financial obligation—which he must then pay as artwork.

On the scale of postwar Western culture generally, Kippenberger’s tourist avatar embodies MacCannell’s crisis of authenticity, performing the construction of a contemporary life from the souvenirs of life elsewhere. But Kippenberger’s crisis of secondariness has much more proximate roots in the socio-cultural context of West German internationalization. The preconditions for tourism described by MacCannell were well established in postwar West Germany. Imported culture had followed a national cultural disavowal, and grand, unifying national narratives were fragmented after National Socialism. Like the tourist, the emerging West German middle class sought new narratives from life elsewhere. New hobbies, imported cars, foreign food, and exotic travel all participated in the drive to construct a novel personal narrative from the “spurious elements” of “life elsewhere.” Kippenberger’s tourism projects suggest that this drive was not only an optimistic effect of _wirtschaftswunder_ enthusiasm and
opportunity (although there is certainly optimism in Kippenberger’s work), but also a miserable compulsion. In these early projects, avant-garde painting and cheap sports cars arrive in postwar West Germany as equal parts of the same reconfiguration of life under international capitalism. With his tourist persona Kippenberger articulated the apparatuses through which such postwar lives were remade, but he also participated in their fantasies—after all, this was the system that promised to realize Kippenberger’s deepest petit-bourgeois desires for fame, travel, nice clothes, good food, fancy hotels, and fast cars. Even though these projects were often presented as failures (recall the not-quite-tall-enough stack of photo-paintings), they were not a rejection, refusal, or a critique of his middle-class desires. They were not even a single program, but rather a series of revelations that the promises of the *Wirtschaftswunder* and reintegration were, like an addict’s cravings, the origin of endless searching and unfulfillment. Nevertheless, these projects are also naively optimistic, even in misery, maintaining the hope that one might find an authentic life—if also a temporary, performed, and totally constructed life—in the inauthentic and secondary images, objects, and behaviors of neoliberal capitalism.

**Staged Authenticity**

In 1964 Richter described his photo-painting as a product of circumstance: “One day a photograph of Brigitte Bardot fell into my hands, and I painted it into one of these pictures in shades of grey.” This origin story is revealing, even if it is untrue. There are no pictures of Bardot from 1964 in Richter’s catalogue. Nevertheless, there are two lessons to be learned from the story. The first is that Richter acquired the source for his photo-painting passively. That is, he did not select a picture of a famous actress—it simply “fell” into his hands. Second, the

---

123 *Mund* [Mouth] (1963) from one year earlier apparently depicts Bardot’s lips, but it is not in grayscale, and *Mutter und Tochter (B.)* [Mother and Daughter (B.))] (1965) was generated from a paparazzo’s photograph of the actress and her mother, but was not Richter’s first photo-painting.
story sets up a West German/American celebrity culture binary. Warhol had begun producing his Marilyn Monroe silkscreens from a promotional photo of the recently deceased American actress two years before Richter painted Bardot. In the early 1960s there was no German equivalent to this international celebrity, and thus the photograph that he passively acquired depicted a foreign import (Bardot is of course French).

Kippenberger’s correlate to Richter’s Bardot and Warhol’s Monroe is the *Lieber Maler* painting of a signed headshot of the German actor Hansjörg Felmy. As noted, the work emphasizes its material source by including the recognizable white borders of the actor’s promotional photograph, a very specific kind of souvenir image-object. When signed and handed over to a fan, these staged photos become authenticated proof of an experience and, following from Stewart’s description of the souvenir, an illustration for future stories about “the time I met Hans Felmy.” Such narration is necessary because the signed headshot is detached from lived experience. The picture that the actor signs is styled and composed, and is set in a studio somewhere far from the locations where he will likely hand them out. In other words, the Felmy headshot is another example of the spurious material that makes up modern everyday life, a souvenir of an “authentic” experience that is itself a secondary object.

Like Warhol’s Marilyns, Kippenberger’s painting elevates a figure from popular image culture to the status and scale of a royal portrait. However, unlike Monroe, Felmy was not an international A-list celebrity. He was instead a German TV and film star, most famous as Commissioner Heinz Haferkamp in the popular German crime drama *Tatort* from 1974 until 1980.124 His departure from the show coincided with the commission of Kippenberger’s *Lieber Maler* series, and so the large Felmy portrait acts as a kind of memorial. Just as Warhol’s

---

Marilyns were produced immediately after her suicide, Kippenberger’s painting followed Felmy’s departure. The gesture is hardly equivalent, and thus Kippenberger’s Pop-esque painting plays at an American/West German culture imbalance. Where America had the superstar from *The Seven Year Itch* (1955), West Germany had a TV detective; where America has Andy Warhol, West Germany has Martin Kippenberger.

Whatever the humor of the Monroe/Felmy false equivalence, however, this binary had political stakes. Near the end of the Second World War the allies dismantled Joseph Goebbels’ Reichsministerium Für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda [Reich’s Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda], a key component of Nazi cultural control and the centralizing agent of German cinema.  

This alone derailed Germany’s film production, which had grown to near Hollywood proportions during the war. In addition, as part of the West German reeducation plan, the allies encouraged the screening of Hollywood films as a way to foster democratic ideals and notions of Western liberalism—the filmic correlate to the promotion of American abstraction. For the American film industry this meant a new consumer base for older films that were banned during the war. These films, having already covered production costs in the U.S., were sold to West German cinemas at rates much lower than local competitors. As a result, American film flooded the market, and for decades after the war West German cinema had to contend with an abundance of high production American imports. Although by the 1970s

---


126 “The German film industry of the late 1930s and early 1940s enjoyed a success paralleled only by its American counterparts….The four main German studios, which eventually became a part of the portfolio of Goebbel’s propaganda ministry, produced more than a thousand feature films during the Nazi era….At the industry’s peak in 1943, there were 6,484 cinemas with over 1.1 billion spectators.” Shandley, *Rubble Films*, 9-10.

a generation of directors, including Alexander Kluge, Rainer Fassbinder,\textsuperscript{128} and Wim Wenders were producing vanguard cinema for an international audience, the West German equivalent to the international popularity of Hollywood cinema was the exclusively national popularity of the television series \textit{Tatort}. The disparity between the relative celebrity of Warhol and Kippenberger’s subjects was thus a function of the practical cultural and economic realities of postwar West Germany’s reintegration into Western international culture.

Nevertheless, Kippenberger’s Felmy portrait is not critical or even ironic. \textit{Tatort} was so popular that “at one time three-quarters of German television viewers tuned in,” and even today Germans know better than to call their friends at 8:15 on Sunday evenings when the new episodes air.\textsuperscript{129} A signed portrait of the star actor would have been a prized possession for any regular TV watcher, not simply a contrast point for American celebrity culture. Felmy also had personal valences for Kippenberger. His character, Commissioner Heinz Haferkamp, investigated crime in Essen, Kippenberger’s home town. And Felmy was a known bon-vivant with an appetite, like Kippenberger, for alcohol and tobacco. He was, in other words, another Kippenberger stand-in—the famous actor Kippenberger had at one time hoped to be—and thus represented, via surrogacy, another failure. Yet against this backdrop of secondariness and unfulfillment (Felmy is secondary to Monroe, Kippenberger to Warhol, West German film to Hollywood), the most obvious and overwhelming effect of the colorful painting is the registration of enthusiasm for primary objects of experience—this, announces the enormous headshot, is an authentic, one-of-a-kind, real-life photo signed for me by the one-and-only commissioner Haferkamp!

\textsuperscript{128} Fassbinder comes up a number of times in Kippenberger’s work. For example, he gives his name to one of Kippenberger’s \textit{Peter} sculptures (1987).
Diederichsen invoked the term secondarity to describe the artist’s self-performance and self-production strategies (his Selbtdarsteller). “For Kippenberger, secondarity was…a new form of authentic handle on the world that befitted the time.” Kippenberger, for his part, was fond of telling friend and book collaborator Walther König that he was the “best of the second-rate artists.” From the second-hand material of everyday postwar West German life he built a second-rate artist persona: a tourist, a middle manager, an unskilled impersonator. At a time when the West German middle class was filling its ranks with a generation in economic transition—with first-time tourists, knickknack collectors, managers, and conspicuous consumers of foreign imports—Kippenberger was constructing an artist-persona out of souvenirs, office ephemera, bad pasta, snapshots, posters, postcards, ill-fitting suits, and exotic vacations. This method of constructing a personal network from the material of cultural internationalization would soon become a strategy for navigating international apparatuses of artwork exchange and display (the subject of Chapter 2). In this early moment, however, Kippenberger tasked his artist-persona with articulating a uniquely West German middle-class spirit out of the images, objects, and aesthetic languages of the nation’s cultural internationalization. Through this staged duality, Kippenberger’s artist-persona allowed him to embrace his own petit-bourgeois sentiment in a way that was both contrived and unironic, enthusiastically optimistic and miserably compulsive. This sentiment was registered in his love of pasta casserole, for example, a dish he ate at least as often as Warhol had Campbell’s soup, and a dish that could be found on middle-class dinner tables throughout West Germany, each one a unique family recipe, and all basically the same. It was similarly evident in his enthusiasm for imported pop and commodity culture, in a picture of

---

130 Nach Kippenberger, 49.
the artist meeting Pluto during his first trip to Disneyland [Figure 28], for example, and in his love of the Ford Capri. It was also evident in the self-indulgent melancholy that he embraced with equal gusto, in the tears he shed when he was not invited to participate in Documenta and in the many self-portraits that foreground his alcoholism [Figure 29]—an affliction that first took is youthful figure and then his life [Figure 30]—blurring the lines between the artist and his persona. The new form of international capitalism that Kippenberger encountered between West Germany and the U.S. in the 1970s and 80s sought to erase political boundary so that capital (and consumers) could flow across borders. But its most successful boundary transgression was not between nations. It was the erosion of the line between life and work, an erosion that Kippenberger registered in all its misery in his tourist persona.
Chapter 2
Martin Kippenberger: Making the Neoliberal Persona

In the 1980s a schism developed in the writing of critics and historians on the historical and political ramifications of various postmodernisms, particularly with respect to painting and photography. In the midst of an international art market bubble (a prefiguration, as it turns out, of an even greater 1990s market boom), the stakes of the debate were high, and writers were divided into two antagonistic camps. On the one hand, painterly returns to figuration, often produced by highly visible male artists like Julian Schnabel, championed a return to the “heroic” or “genius” concept of the artist through the retrieval and accumulation of formal and aesthetic devices—and often by stripping these devices of any historical charge. Meanwhile, a subset of American artists, many of whom were women and many of whom were working with photography, had for years been challenging the notion of authorship itself, posing the figure of the artist as the construct of so many fragmentary representations and received conventions. Whether couched in terms of authorship, identity, or heroism, the figure of the artist was central to the debate, particularly in its capacity to resist, reveal, or integrate into increasingly powerful and pervasive apparatuses of mass culture and the art market.¹

¹ This schism has since been described in, for example, Hal Foster et al., Art Since 1900, “1984,” pg. 596, as well as in Artforum’s two-issue “Fortieth Anniversary: The 1980s,” particularly in the roundtables “The Mourning After” and “Thick and Thin” (Artforum, March 2003, 206-211, 267-270 and Artforum, April, 2003, 175-179, 238-244, respectively). Many have noted that this split emerged concurrent with the rise of “theory” (a term used to designate the influence of French philosophy—very often specifically “post-structuralism”) in dominant art critical and art historical approaches (see here Thomas Crow, “Marx to Sharks,” Artforum, April, 2003, 44-52). Nevertheless, painterly returns were championed by major exhibitions rather than texts. “A New Spirit in Painting” at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, in 1981 was key in this regard, showing a range of expressionist painters from a number of backgrounds, including Anselm Kiefer and Julian Schnabel as well as Willem de Kooning and Francis Bacon. This “new spirit” was often described as a return (i.e., neo-primitivism, neo-expressionism, neo-geo, etc.), particularly by a generation of critics who understood painting to be critically obsolete or even deceased at this moment (see specifically Douglas Crimp’s “The End of Painting,” October, vol. 16 [Spring, 1981], 69-86, which champions photography as painting’s successor. Crimp’s exhibition “Pictures” at Artists Space in 1977 was a precursor in this regard). Others, like Benjamin Buchloh, understood these painterly returns to evidence a conservative “Return to Order”—specifically, to the authority of a bourgeois mode of experience and expression (see Buchloh, “Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European
Kippenberger’s work was rarely mentioned in these debates, although it was certainly relevant to them. His painting practice was largely figurative (with the exception of antagonistic abstractions like *Ich kann beim besten Willen kein Hakenkreuz entdecken* [With the Best Will in the World I Can Not See a Swastika (1984)] [Figure 31]). His work drew on various historical devices; it was deeply concerned with commodity culture and art object display; and, more than anything else, it explored the construction and performance of the figure of the artist. However, rather than align Kippenberger with one camp over the other, I want to open the debate up to questions of authorship and artist identity in the context of Western capitalist internationalization. In the 1980s and 90s, sites that had previously been peripheral to the art world, Cologne and Los Angeles among them, were becoming art market centers due, in large part, to the growing popularity of commercial art fairs and to the spread of international aesthetic vocabularies through art schools. Concurrently, Western economic policies were driving processes of globalization, and local, regional, and national boundaries were redrawn or erased as international trade was deregulated. Boundaries between life and work were also being erased as businesses demanded increasingly flexible workers and dismantled union organization and collective bargaining—fallout from the deindustrialization of the West. The entrepreneur replaced the factory worker under this new transnational economic paradigm because his work is characterized by independence, innovation, and flexibility. The entrepreneur does not specialize, but is expected to adapt and adjust to the ever-changing needs of the economy, shaping his work

---

Painting,” *October*, vol. 16 (Spring, 1981), 39-68. For many of these critics and historians, “appropriation” was the key operation of critical work of the time (this is articulated, for example, in the 1986 exhibition, “Endgame,” and its catalogue: Yves-Alain Bois, Thomas Crow, et al., *Endgame: Reference and Simulation in Recent Painting and Sculpture* (Boston: The Institute of Contemporary Art; Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986)). Nevertheless, despite Kippenberger’s tactics of appropriation, his painting from photography, and his performance of the figure of the artist, he was rarely mentioned in these debates.
and life in accordance with his financial interests. The figure of the artist, particularly the modernist artist-genius with his avant-garde life-into-art ethos and stylistic and media flexibility and experimentation, reemerged during this time as the cultural correlate to the entrepreneur. Kippenberger’s artist-persona began to mimic this neo-artist-genius as he engaged with the international and market reception of his work—sometimes enthusiastically, but just as often miserably.

Chapter 1 began with painting from photography, a process that Kippenberger adapted from Gerhard Richter as he explored the possibilities of an art practice based on international derivativeness and secondariness. It ended with commissioned paintings from photographs, a series collectively titled Lieber Maler, male mir... [Dear Painter, Paint for Me...] (1981), which continued this exploration through the cultural aspirations of 1980s West Germany and the attendant sentiment of an emerging, touristic consumer class. Across these series the figure of the artist loomed large. He was reproduced in non-traditional self-portraiture, appearing as an incomplete surrogate in a not-quite-Kippenberger-high stack of paintings from photographs (Uno di voi, un tedesco in Firenze (1977)) and as a collage of souvenirs from Tunisia. Both of these early projects presented the artist in the guise of a tourist, an avatar that allowed Kippenberger to occupy a state of simultaneous foreignness and domesticity, and thus to register the fractured nation’s cultural overdetermination by international idiom.

---

2 Foucault’s formulation of neoliberal capitalism and, specifically, of the role of “biopower” therein (the regulation of the bodies and minds of subjects by the state), turns on his redefinition of homo economicus, the idea that humans are rational and self-interested actors. “In neo-liberalism—and it does not hide this; it proclaims it—there is also a theory of homo economicus, but he is not at all a partner of exchange. Homo economicus is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself..., being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings.” (Foucault, The Birth of Biopolitics, 226). The entrepreneur develops himself as capital—and capital has come to include everything from education and health to mobility (Ibid., 229-230). Also see here Michel Feher, “Self-Appreciation; or, The Aspirations of Human Capital,” Public Culture, Volume 21, Number 1: 2009, 21-41.
I have used the term “artist persona” colloquially to describe these strategies of surrogacy. Throughout his oeuvre, these personae allowed Kippenberger to use his life as a source for his work. In the beginning the gesture was not at all critical, because although he played with various constructions of artisthood, he did not do so in order to challenge or even expose apparatuses of mass culture or neoliberal capitalism. As a young artist, Kippenberger’s role-playing was an optimistic byproduct of the *Wirtschaftswunder*—even if it was, also, alternatively miserable and antagonistic. He was an active participant in Berlin’s punk counterculture, for example, not in order to resist West Germany’s internationalization, but to embrace it (most of Berlin’s punk music was in English, after all). Punk DIY experimentation offered Kippenberger a model according to which anyone could do anything, a sentiment in line with the petit-bourgeois ethos of post-reconstruction West Germany. And in the intimate art world of late 70s Berlin, the bad behavior of his punk persona, which included public drunkenness, pants dropping, inappropriate, long-winded jokes, and overt womanizing, also afforded him a kind of brand-name status. Nicknamed “Kippy,” his persona unified his diverse experiments in style, media, and composition.

By the mid-1980s, West Germany had become a major art market center, and Kippenberger abandoned “Kippy,” focusing instead on developing a more flexible, and truly international, practice. He began to explore the ways that artwork was organized, accumulated, and contextualized as it was taken up by systems of international display and exchange—by the art fair and the gallery in particular. He was also increasingly concerned with artist name-recognition—his own and others—which he treated as inextricable from art-market integration. Finally, in the early 1990s, Kippenberger’s persona collapsed into his practice. Not only had he failed to achieve international fame, but he had also made over his persona so completely
according to the logic of the art market that he lost track of his person. After a few attempts to reclaim the essential “Kippenberger” from documentation of his old work, he began to create his own institutions of display and exchange, and to build his own international network, one that mirrored processes of the international art market generally, but was irreducible to it and, in his words, “ineliminably” separate from it.3

In 2009, twelve years after Kippenberger’s death, and on the occasion of his first posthumous retrospective, George Baker would ask, “What would it mean to make over art practice…on the very model of capital?”4 In Kippenberger’s oeuvre the answer comes thrice. It comes first by accident and in punk rock, of all places, as an effect of the seeming limitless possibilities afforded by the Wirtschaftswunder. It comes second quite deliberately, in Kippenberger’s attempt to find fame. It comes third inescapably, because as it would turn out, Kippenberger was not making over his practice on the model of neoliberal capitalism; rather, neoliberalism was making over art practice in its own image.

Lessons from Punk

One of the earliest and most persistent metaphors Kippenberger employed to elucidate his omnivorous practice was gastronomical. “Don’t throw it away! I can still use it for noodle casserole” [Nicht wegwerfen! Kann man noch für Nudelauflauf gebrauchen] reads a poster from 1980 [Figure 32]. Through a professed love of noodle dishes, Kippenberger laid claim to a naively enthusiastic, unrefined, and insatiable cultural palette. Often artworks were constructed


from the leftovers of earlier projects. For example, images that were taken as part of his early
*Uno di voi, un tedesco in Firenze* and *Knechte des Tourismus* returned as illustrations for books,
posters, and exhibition catalogues as late as his 1994 *The Happy End of Franz Kafka’s America*,
a collection of interview chairs loosely related to the final scene of Kafka’s unfinished book,
*Amerika* (1927). That the metaphorical pasta casserole was “bad” was a requisite for its culinary
flexibility. Anything can be used to make the dish as long as the finished product doesn’t have to
be particularly good.\(^5\) Similarly, Kippenberger’s persona allowed the artist to explore a range of
artistic practices and cultural positions—including music, writing, design, acting, painting,
photography, sculpture, and restaurant ownership—precisely because he was “bad.” Anyone can
do anything so long as they don’t have to be good at it. The metaphor entered Kippenberger’s
work as pasta, but the lesson was originally learned in his years as a punk impresario. As
Diedrich Diederichsen argues:

> The epochal uncertainty that seemed to fulfill golden phrases from
the past like “everyone is an artist” and “everybody will be famous
for fifteen minutes” opened up a land of unlimited possibilities,
and perfectly fitted the mood of punk, which, for its part, presented
itself as the unconditional completion of 60s fantasies of self-
empowerment and projects intended to realize the same. Punk was
to realize the notion (which hitherto had only been true in theory)
that everyone can do everything.\(^6\)

Kippenberger’s interest in musical counterculture can be traced to his teenage years.
Growing up outside of Essen he had access to numerous mainstream and alternative venues. His
long hair and enthusiasm for drug abuse and sexual promiscuity found company in the city’s
rock scene.\(^7\) When he moved to Berlin in 1978 Kippenberger cut his hair and joined the
burgeoning punk movement. As Deiderichsen argues, punk rock provided Kippenberger with

\(^5\) “He rejected good taste—‘bad food is good food, good food is bad food,’ just as bad painting was good in his
view, and paintings with impeccable craftsmanship were bad.” Susanne Kippenberger, *Kippenberger*, 339.
\(^6\) *Nach Kippenberger*, 53.
\(^7\) Susanne Kippenberger, *Kippenberger*, 88-89.
what 1960s and 70s rock-and-roll had only offered in fantasy—a platform on which everyone could do everything. During his time in Berlin he formed two bands, Grugas, named after a rock club he frequented as a teenager, and Luxus (with Christine Hahn and Eric Mitchell). In 1978 he took over as manager of Berlin’s club SO36, a music venue on Oranienstrasse in Kreuzberg named after the regional postal code. Similar to New York’s CBGB in its historical role, SO36 (or “the SO” as it was often called) was the epicenter of Berlin’s thriving punk scene. Claiming to be a drummer, Kippenberger used music as a vehicle to stage antagonistic performances. Some nights he would sing American swing standards, which were his favorite dance songs. Other nights he would sing contemporary German or American pop songs (badly). If that failed to antagonize the audience he would resort to making atonal noises and screaming into the microphone. He characterized his music as “waste-sound,” and it was often little more than an excuse to get up on stage.

In addition to his own performances, Kippenberger invited experimental musicians to play concerts at SO36 and events he coordinated at his favorite hangouts (usually Café Einstein on Kurfürstenstraße and his apartment). One such invitee was free-jazz musician Sven-Åke Johansson, who is perhaps best known for playing phone books as musical instruments, but whom Kippenberger invited to play “good” concert music for intoxicated punks at the SO. He later asked Johansson and his group Day and Night Band (which featured Rüdiger Carl

---

8 The band’s name, “Luxury,” both mocked the impoverished aesthetics of punk rock culture and celebrated Kippenberger’s desire for nice things and a comfortable lifestyle.
9 Susanne Kippenberger, Kippenberger, 170.
10 Johansson writes: “Naturally, the audience was not used to music being played in this form there. That someone suddenly played a solo on the cello was perhaps okay with the audience, but people also protested, which you can hear in the recordings. I responded to audience interjections by reciting a text in English that explains how said Melodie in F evolves over the course of the piece. My speaking in English didn’t go over well with them either, even though people sang in English there most of the time. So I also improvised a short text in German. There was resistance against us, naturally.” Sven-Åke Johansson, “Inner sound is mightier than the crash of 50 cymbals; Sven-Åke Johansson in conversation with Thomas Groetz.” Artist’s website: http://www.sven-akejohansson.com/en/publications/posters/interview-with-thomas-groetz/. Accessed May 3, 2015.
Alexander von Schlippenbach on piano and Jay Oliver on contrabass) to play swing music at his openings. He also occasionally invited the group to collaborate on projects, including a 1987 album by the Golden Kot Quartet, which purportedly included Günter Förg on tenor saxophone, Albert Oehlen on piano, Hubert Kiecol on bass, and Martin Kippenberger on drums but was, in fact, music played entirely by Johansson’s band [Figure 33].

There was little conceptually or thematically unifying Kippenberger’s earliest performances aside from a restless antagonism, a lack of musical ability, and the brand-recognition of a local bad-boy. Nevertheless, his practice had correspondences with the anti-virtuosic, deskillled punk and protopunk stars of the era, particularly Iggy Pop (b. James Osterberg), who frequented SO36 while he lived in Berlin in the late 1970s. Such an alliance was made explicit in Kippenberger’s 1981 Durch die Pubertät zum Erfolg [Through Puberty to Success] discussed in the previous chapter. The book traces the development of its implied author through a scrapbook-like collection of snapshots, ephemera, real and fictional narratives, and press clippings. One article, appearing at the end of the book undated and unattributed, describes a scene at Kippenberger’s club:

Iggy Pop staggered into West Berlin’s Klub S.O.36 recently to see the Warm Jets who were with the drummer from Tangerine Dream and Anglosaxophonist Bob Summer. During the last number a guy called Kipper Bergen started goose-stepping round the stage in a Tyrolean goatherder’s outfit. Deutschland’s Andy Warhol as Bergen is known in certain artistic quarters, was attempting to exorcise his nation’s Hitler guilt complex by parodying the Third Reich’s European adventures. After this little overcompensation he decided to strip to the sensuous rhythms of the Warm Jets who saw someone push Bergen into a bemused audience. Unperturbed Mr. Bergen clambered back on stage and pleaded to be beaten up. Paul Balance, being the obliging rock singer he is,

duly whipped the man’s naked buttocks. At which point Ig exited rapidly.\textsuperscript{12}

The anecdote is humorous, casting Kippenberger as too offensive even for Iggy’s antagonistic sensibilities. But what the author fails to recognize is that the “overcompensation” he witnessed at SO36 was in fact an homage. In 1974 Osterberg organized his first public performance without the Stooges and staged it as a ritual sacrifice of the Iggy persona—a death that was also a rebirth. Under the title \textit{Murder of a Virgin}, Iggy (deep into drug addiction and wearing a pair of pants borrowed from Jim Morrison) had his former band-mate Rob Asheton flog him on stage dressed as a Nazi Afrika Korps officer. After the beating, Iggy attempted to convince a black member of the audience to stab him with a rusty kitchen knife. When the man refused, Iggy lacerated himself, and was dragged off stage and tossed in the gutter.\textsuperscript{13}

Iggy Pop probably exited the SO that night frustrated that Kippenberger was stealing his act. And this was likely not the first time the two had crossed paths. Iggy Pop and David Bowie (b. David Jones) arrived in Berlin around the same time as Kippenberger, and like the rest of Berlin’s immigrant intellectuals and counterculture heroes they quickly found their way to Kreuzberg. At night the two would patronize the same handful of bars in West Berlin that catered to a mix of subcultures.\textsuperscript{14} In addition, the anonymous review’s claim that Iggy Pop went to SO36 to see the Warm Jets play with the drummer from Tangerine Dream is likely true.

Tangerine Dream’s drummer at the time was Kippenberger’s roommate Klaus Krüger, whom

\textsuperscript{12} Kippenberger, \textit{Durch die Pubertät zum Erfolg}, unpaginated.
\textsuperscript{14} Paul Trynka describes Pop’s Berlin: “At night, Jim [aka Iggy Pop], David [Bowie], and Coco [Schwab] would often eat at Kreuzberg’s Café Exil, overlooking the Landwehr canal, or hang in the smoke-filled back room, which was invariably full, says Bowie, of ‘intellectuals and beats’. Other favourite hangouts included the Dschungel 2, [probably a misspelling of Dschungel, or The Jungle in English] the Asibini restaurant and the Paris Bar at Kantstrasse” Trynka, \textit{Iggy Pop}, 252. Kippenberger’s sister describes her brother’s Berlin stomping grounds in similar language: “The artists’ city was more like a village, consisting of Kreuzberg, Charlottenburg, and the stretch in between. ‘There were really only a few places you could go,’ the artist Uli Strothjohann said—the Exile [German: \textit{Exil}], Einstein, Fofi’s, the Paris Bar, Axbax, Zwiebelfisch, Gabi’s bar, the Kingdom of Saxony, the Jungle [German: \textit{Dschungel}]—‘so you ran into each other all the time’” Susanne Kippenberger, \textit{Kippenberger}, 146-147.
Iggy Pop later invited on his 1979 U.S. and European tours. While courting the young drummer, Iggy occasionally attended art events in the Fabrikneu, a large apartment and artist hang-out in Kreuzberg where Kippenberger often stayed.\textsuperscript{15}

There was, in short, a considerable amount of contact between Kippenberger and Iggy Pop in 1978, and the artist found a new role model in Osterberg’s antagonistic, bad-boy persona. Unlike Richter, who taught Kippenberger about deskilling and derivative, Iggy’s “badness” operated as a vehicle for unbounded experimentation. Of course, the Iggy Pop persona was not a uniquely punk rock phenomenon. Stage persona were a hallmark of 1960s and 70s rock music from Bob Dylan and Jim Morrison to Alice Cooper and KISS. Rather, Iggy’s punk gesture was his insistence on amateurism and inability. Even his band’s name, the Stooges, implied a lack of capacity.\textsuperscript{16} Early music writers were quick to point out that the group was not particularly skillful, even when those writers were fans. Rock critic Lester Bangs celebrated the Stooges for their apparent lack of technical talent: “none of them have been playing their instruments for more than two or three years, but that’s \textit{good}—now they won’t have to unlearn any of the stuff which ruins so many other promising young musicians.”\textsuperscript{17} Nick Kent, writing for the British \textit{New Musical Express} in 1972, described Iggy Pop’s music in more incendiary language, although

\textsuperscript{15}He called himself a “friend of the house,” though likely was not on the lease. Susanne Kippenberger, \textit{Kippenberger}, 141. Paul Trynka writes: “They [Iggy Pop and Coco Schwab] were checking out a fashion party in the Fabrikneu, a loft shared by a bunch of local artistic types, including Tangerine Dream drummer Klaus Krüger and photographer—and later artist—Martin Kippenberger. Kippenberger had created a photocollaged floor with another photographer, Esther Friedmann; together they’d made up over a thousand prints and pasted them all over the improvised catwalk.” Trynka, \textit{Iggy Pop}, 252. Also Gisela Stelly mentions “Iggy Pop used to drop in occasionally to borrow our snakeskin jacket for a gig.” Stelly, \textit{Ihr Kippy Kippenberger}, 13. The “photocollaged floor” Trynka describes was Kippenberger’s \textit{Untitled (Installation für Claudia Skoda)} (1976), Kippenberger’s first major Berlin project. The work consisted of 1,300 photographs of Kippenberger’s daily travels around Berlin shellacked to a twelve by 150 foot runway. Susanne Kippenberger, \textit{Kippenberger}, 141. As Iggy’s biographer suggests, the runway was used to showcase the fashion designs of Kippenberger’s housemate Claudia Skoda. However, the artist also used the structure to stage his own performances (both planned and improvised), and as a sculpture in its own right.

\textsuperscript{16}A stooge in a staged performance assists the more skilled main act and is often the butt his or her jokes. In addition, the band adopted their name from the blundering Three Stooges characters.

\textsuperscript{17} Ryan Moore, \textit{Sells like Teen Spirit: Music, Youth Culture, and Social Crisis} (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 44. Note that Ron Asheton was actually a very talented guitarist.
with a similar sentiment: “The music wasn’t just bad, it was downright offensive…. The lyrics were of pure cretin simplicity, the music was primal and stark to the point of total banality: in other words, a great rock n’ roll album.”\(^\text{18}\) The short, aggressive tracks that the Stooges recorded shed the labored virtuosity of their hippie rock predecessors. They were an angry refusal of the musical decadence that had become the successor of 1960s idealism. This protopunk, like its punk rock inheritors, was quick in tempo and execution. It sounded as if it had been recorded in someone’s garage during one long, intoxicated afternoon. And indeed it often was. But simplicity and inability were not exclusively in the service of rejection and critique. They also afforded Iggy and the Stooges the freedom to explore a multitude of performance and music-making practices.

Especially in the early Stooges years, when Iggy’s bad behavior was better known than his music, individual tracks operated as the stage on which the “Iggy Pop” persona was articulated. Like many rock musicians, Osterberg borrowed heavily from the blues. Blues performance offered Iggy a platform for musical exploration and improvisation between and on top of the pliable structure of verse and chorus. Pop music and commercial jingles played a similar role in his work. For example, he frequently covered Richard Berry’s “Louie Louie,” a simple, narrative rock standard, as well as the jingle for the popular cereal Sugar Crisps,\(^\text{19}\) to deploy his own provocative lyrics and performance.\(^\text{20}\) Over these simple melodies, Iggy experimented with non-traditional sounds, instruments, and performance. On stage an Iggy Pop song could be as long or as short as the audience would tolerate (or more precisely, just a bit longer or shorter than the audience would tolerate). It might bleed inelegantly into another song,

---
\(^\text{19}\) Trynka, *Iggy Pop*, 44.
\(^\text{20}\) This gesture began early in James Osterberg’s career and continued until the breakup of the Stooges around 1975.
or start over abruptly after the band lost all musical connection to what their front man was doing. It routinely included blood, nudity, and physical contact with the audience. It was aggressive, antagonistic, and abrasive, and more than anything, it was voracious. As Trynka writes, “Iggy would sing into the vacuum cleaner, vocalizing lines that were then picked up by Ron and Dave in long, repetitive loping riffs, while Scott Asheton kept up a Bo Diddley-influenced tribal beat, banged out on 55-gallon oil cans, augmented with a set of timbales and battered cymbals.”

The Iggy Pop persona thus served as a branding force, allowing Osterberg to unite heterogonous experiments with music making and performance. Everything was fair game as long as the finished product did not need to be “good.”

Kippenberger’s homage to Iggy Pop the night Tangerine Dream played the SO was only the most explicit of his many Iggy-esque performances. His obnoxious drumming, atonal singing, and “waste-sound” all had roots in the ineptitude of protopunk. Such performances took place at the Fabrikneu, Kippenbergers Büro, Café Einstein, and SO36. Although documentation of such events is meager, Susanne Kippenberger reconstructed a number of performances through interviews with her brother’s collaborators. Citing his total lack of musical talent, Susanne claims that “It’s precisely because he was clueless that Martin drummed, sang, and produced and staged music. He called it his ‘principle of embarrassment, the do-it-even-more system.’”

“What did punk mean to him?...‘That you do what you want,’ said Gisela

---

22The deskilled “anything goes” ethos of Iggy Pop’s protopunk gave way to a punk rock culture of Do-It-Yourself (DIY). This culture generated a range of objects, from fashion to music to books and magazines. Like the impulse to deskilling generally, DIY culture rejected technical acumen in favor of democratic access to the means of culture production and distribution. In the late 1970s, punk culture was synonymous with the homemade albums and cut-and-paste zine aesthetic that was ubiquitous at counterculture venues. Kippenberger produced not only his own albums, books, and exhibitions, but also his own punk zine, *Sehr Gut, Very Good* (1979), which only existed for one issue and was so unpopular that he ended up using stacks of unwanted copies to support his mattress.
Capitain.”

This musical free-for-all quickly gave way to multimedia art events. The opening for the Büro, for example, happened on “May 20, 1978, at ‘19.30 (academic time),’” and included “Aschamatta, Balkan folklore, beer, pictures, young people, and Angie with candles.”

The Balkan folklore was provided by Gisela Capitain’s Turkish schoolgirls; Angie was a stripper although, as it turned out, she didn’t want to dance at the opening. There were pretzel sticks and beer, Klaus Krüger played the drums, and Ina Barfuss and Thomas Wachweger showed slides of their trips with Martin and Sigmar Polke.

The next year Kippenberger organized “¼ Century of Kippenberger,” a celebration (one year late) of his 25th birthday. The event lasted for two consecutive nights at SO36, and was the platform for launching a variety of Kippenberger-centric performances and objects, including his music, a biographical video, paintings, and posters. The catalogue for the event, Vom Eindruck zum Ausdruck. 1/4 Jahrhundert Kippenberger [From Impression to Expression. ¼ Century Kippenberger] (1979), was published by Verlag Pikasso’s Erben, one of the artist’s many self-publishing ventures [Figure 34]. Left almost entirely blank, it came with a stack of Kippenberger snapshots and family photographs that audience members were encouraged to paste onto the pages, many of which depict the artist behaving badly—for example, a picture of Kippenberger as a child holding a beer [Figure 35], a picture of the artist as an adult measuring his penis, and a picture of the artist (drunkenly?) yelling at a sculpture. It was a celebration, in other words, of the origin of a delinquent. By asking his audience to paste his personal snapshots into the publication, Kippenberger extended the anything-goes DIY construction of his persona to include even work done by its audience.

---

24 Ibid., 169.
25 Ibid., 148.
26 Ibid., 148.
27 Ibid., 166.
In its first iteration, Kippenberger’s persona was unrecognizable as a visual artist. He was a punk-rock provocateur who used ineptitude and bad behavior as a pretense to explore a variety of artistic forms and media, including performance, music, poster and book design, fashion, and photography. Punk rock offered Kippenberger a postwar reimagining of modernist deskilling. In his handling, the anti-virtuosic badness of this counterculture served as justification for stylistic, media, and even behavioral experimentation, which he backed by a larger-than-life front-man persona—the “Boss” of the office, manager of SO36, and star of “¼ Century of Kippenberger.” If Richter’s deskilled photopainting was moronic, Kippenberger’s anything-goes multimedia gesamtkunstwerk was idiotic—the Idiot here referring to the title of Iggy Pop’s 1977 album by the same name.  

Berlin’s art historical precedent for such eclectic performance was the 1920 “First International Dada Fair” organized by George Grosz, Raoul Hausmann, and John Heartfield as an “‘Exhibition and Sale’ of roughly two hundred ‘Dadaist Projects.’” Although Kippenberger’s punk-rock antagonisms were apolitical (unlike Berlin Dada, a movement deeply engaged with the politics and suffering of World War I), his events were, like the Dada fair, commercial enterprises. Indeed, if “front man” characterizes Kippenberger’s role in these events, so does “entrepreneur.” He almost always wore a suit to his performances, much to the dismay of his punk compatriots. To secure his management role at the SO Kippenberger simply bought out one of the partners (using money he had inherited when his mother died). He then raised the price of beer to 2.50 marks, further enraging the club’s regulars. A number of clashes ensued,

---

29 In fact, the word Richter used to describe painting from photography, Blödsinnigste, often translated “moronic,” is better translated as “idiotic.” The words idiot and Blödsinnigste both predate “moron.”


31 Susanne Kippenberger, Kippenberger, 166.
which Kippenberger documented in paintings based on photographs taken of him bruised and bandaged in a Berlin hospital [Figure 36].

“I’ve always been involved in wheeling and dealing,”32 Kippenberger once recalled.

He was the head of sales and head of marketing in one: everyone knew him, lots of people were afraid of him or hated him, but no one had to tell him that a bad reputation is a whole lot better than no reputation at all.33

For Kippenberger, punk rock DIY zines, presses, and anything-goes performances were not methods of resisting commercialization (as they were for many American and British punks); they were means by which an unskilled entrepreneur might start an empire—an effect of the enthusiastic spirit of post-*Wirtschaftswunder* West Germany. The techniques that he developed for the articulation of his punk persona during these years, including his appropriation of the work of other artists and musicians, his reliance on the physical and conceptual labor of others in the fabrication of his work (e.g., the DIY book *Impression to Expression*), and the piling up pasta-casserole-style of objects, actions, and ideas, formed the foundation of his working method for the rest of his short life. But the most important lesson Kippenberger took from punk rock concerned artistic flexibility. Although he often worked project-to-project, he never committed to a single medium or method to the exclusion of others. Instead, Kippenberger’s punk persona engaged in a range of production techniques simultaneously. This too had roots in the *Wirtschaftswunder* and, more specifically, the related emerging effects of neoliberal capitalism. Gille Deleuze, writing on the transition from societies of discipline (Western societies under capitalism in the eighteenth- through early twentieth-centuries) to societies of control (societies under neoliberalism) argues,

---

32 Ibid., 159.
33 Ibid., 154.
In the disciplinary societies one was always starting again (from school to the barracks, from the barracks to the factory), while in the societies of control one is never finished with anything—the corporation, the educational system, the armed services being metastable states coexisting in one and the same modulation…. [T]he man of control is undulatory, in orbit, in a continuous network.  

“Kippy” was a man of control, undulating among a range of artistic practices and roles and part of an increasingly elaborate artistic-social network.

Kippenberger did not turn a profit from these projects. In fact, he lost a good portion of his inheritance on such ventures. His Büro closed when money ran out, just two years after it opened, and his investment in a friend’s leather workshop was a financial disaster. The point was never to make money anyway. For Kippenberger, the draw of punk and the Büro was social, professional, and artistic networking. It was about a kind of cachet, which meant that he was not only part of something bigger than himself, but that he was a big part of it—the boss. These experiments continued into his late twenties. In 1980 he left Berlin for France with the hopes of becoming a famous writer—a remarkable dream for a dyslexic who was not a particularly avid reader. But in the end visual art proved Kippenberger’s best bet for making his mark. When he returned from France his tactics and interests shifted. His old personae were still recognizable in his behavior and work—the tourist persona registering the international overdetermination of West German culture, the punk registering its flexibility and entrepreneurialism. But Kippenberger began to focus on the social and cultural networks undergirding artistic exchange and display rather than on producing events and objects that

34 Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” October, 5-6.
35 According to Susanne Kippenberger, Hella Uresch’s workshop was located next to the Büro and was a financial disaster. Susanne Kippenberger, Kippenberger, 150-151.
36 “He wasn’t the slightest bit interested in money as such” his sister writes, “Martin took one of the earliest checks he ever got…, cut the outline of a palette out of it, and painted it: ‘Gotta clown. Waddeveridcosstss. Leonardo Luxury.’” Susanne Kippenberger, Kippenberger, 155.
would allow him to navigate them. In other words, when Kippenberger returned to West Germany his focus shifted from pasta-casserole-style accumulation of techniques and methodologies, to mirroring the artistic conventions and market systems according to and through which art objects circulated internationally.

**Directions for a Homemade Universe**[^37]

In Chapter 1, Susan Stewart’s *On Longing* provided a framework for understanding the souvenir effect of Kippenberger’s work. For Stewart the souvenir is not an endpoint; instead, it is part of a system of signs determined by and constituent of the souvenir collector. Distinct from the souvenir, the collection has its own logic and function in Stewart’s account of the relationship between narrative, objects, and experience. “The collection,” she writes, “is a form of art as play, a form involving the reframing of objects within a world of attention and manipulation of context…. [I]ts function is not the restoration of context of origin but rather of a new context, a context standing in a metaphorical, rather than contiguous, relation to the world of everyday life.”[^38] For Kippenberger too the souvenir was inseparable from the collection it would ultimately inhabit, a metaphorical rendering of the relationship between art objects and their organization and display as part of exhibitions and art collections. Indeed, Kippenberger maintained his own art-collecting practice, and in the mid-1980s his serial production methodology began to look more and more like “collections” of interrelated objects. In this work, Kippenberger mimicked the conventions according to which art objects were accumulated by galleries, fairs, and even art collectors as he attempted to expand his reception beyond West Germany’s borders.

[^37]: The phrase is borrowed from Stewart, *On Longing*, 162.
[^38]: Ibid., 152.
Kippenberger’s engagement with the art fair/gallery system was bookended on the one side by his move to Cologne in 1983, Germany’s then art capital and a city newly important to the international art market, and on the other by his shift from a painterly to a more sculptural sensibility. This later transformation began in 1987 with the exhibition “Peter. Die russische Stellung” [Peter. The Russian Position] at Galerie Max Hetzler in Cologne, which introduced a series of furniture-like sculptures constructed from found objects and impoverished, industrial materials. By many accounts, “Peter” was a turning point in the artist’s career. As his sister writes, “Taking stock…at the end of his life, Martin could point to one unqualified hit he felt he had had as an artist: the 1987 Peter exhibition.”39 Diederichsen gives the show a similar place of distinction in the artist’s oeuvre, describing it as “a pivotal point for [his] sculptural work” and a springboard that launched his future installation projects.40 1987 was a Documenta year, and so the exhibition had a larger and more international audience than it might have otherwise. And although not everyone who saw “Peter” thought it was a success, many people saw it, which undoubtedly pleased Kippenberger. “Peter was a bombshell,” Gisela Capitain told Susanne Kippenberger. “The show divided the art world of the time even more clearly into two camps: Those who admired his work and those who despised it.”41

For the exhibition, Kippenberger and his assistant Michael Krebber filled Max Hetzler’s gallery in haphazard fashion with their impoverished constructions, giving it the appearance of a storerroom for used or broken home and office furniture in various states of repair [Figure 37]. Worktimer (1987), for example, is a steel dolly that holds a pair of leather briefcases [Figure 38]. Korrekte Syntax [Correct Syntax] (1987) is a rectilinear particle-board structure that features,
among other things, a slotted time-card box and a list of acceptable excuses for missing work (“underline applicable” “Cough/cold/fever” etc.) [Figure 39]. Scattered among these workaday constructions are various subtle references to the day-to-day business of the art world.

_Transporter für Skulptur (Nicht zum Ausrutschen, zum Stolpern)_ [Transporter for Sculpture (Not for Slipping, for Tripping)] (1987), for example, is a wooden dolly or mail cart holding thirty-six bananas cast in resin [Figure 40]. In this work Kippenberger jokingly elides the office and gallery space, producing a makeshift cart for moving sculpture. The bananas are another of Kippenberger’s Warhol references, and here the number of bananas refers specifically to _Ethel Scull 36 Times_, Warhol’s first commissioned painting, a series of thirty-six portraits of collector Ethel Redner Scull.\(^{42}\) In these subtle provocations and allusions—and indeed this is the primary function of the series—_Peter_ imitates the ways that art objects are moved, sorted, stored, configured, and collected by the business and administration of the art market, a system with which Kippenberger had increasing familiarity. In the mid-1980s his practice was starting to look less like that of a punk performer and more like a Cologne-gallery regular. He had a number of solo and group shows from 1983-87, and although most were in West Germany (and many were at Hetzler’s gallery), he also showed at Metro Pictures in New York (1984, 1985) and at Kuhlenschmidt/Simon Gallery in Los Angeles (1985).\(^{43}\)

Despite the attention that the “Peter” exhibition initially garnered, it has remained fairly resistant to art-historical contextualization. The reason is tripartite. First, the show explored

---

\(^{42}\) The banana was a recurring subject for Warhol, and was most prominently featured on the cover of the Velvet Underground’s album, _The Velvet Underground & Nico_ (1967).

\(^{43}\) The art historical precedent here is Marcel Broodthaers’s _Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles_, begun in 1968. Like _Peter_, Broodthaer’s _Museum_ opened in a number of venues (Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, 1972, and Documenta 5, 1972) and explored institutional practices of display. However, Kippenberger’s _Peters_ also take up gallery practices of exchange (that is, not just plinthing but also shipping and transporting). Moreover, the art boom in Cologne in the 1980s was almost entirely a gallery phenomenon. Accordingly, Kippenberger’s _Peters_ are not concerned with state institutional practices of art object display but rather with commercial apparatuses for promoting and distributing art works and their makers.
Kippenberger’s interest in anecdote, miscommunication, and the piling up or accumulation of an overabundance of information, providing the critic and the art historian with a frustrating array of false starts, unknowable associations, and inside jokes. Second, the exhibition was reiterated and transformed in the years following the Hetzler show, and thus the objects were moving targets for critical analysis. Third, writing on the series to date has privileged insider information that only a select few (particularly Diederichsen) are able to access. In his analysis of the in-joke in 1970s and 80s German art, Gregory Williams describes Diederichsen’s role in the reception of Kippenberger’s work as the “not-so-secret explainer”: “The impression given is that the meaning embedded in the artists’ work cannot be conveyed by anyone but a Mitstreiter, or comrade-in-arms, familiar with the group conversation that initially led to a painting or a sculpture.”

This is perhaps nowhere more true than in critical accounts of the “Peter” exhibition.

My thinking about the Peter series is indebted to Diederichsen. However, I want to resist the notion that a work about anecdote in general is inscrutable without recourse to anecdotes specifically. It is important to know that in the long-winded jokes Kippenberger infamously told at parties, punch lines were practically incidental. The point is not to “get it,” but rather to get how it works. Nevertheless, some anecdote is unavoidable. The title of the exhibition, “Peter. Die russische Stellung,” refers both to the crowded St. Petersburg or Hermitage Museum style of hanging artwork (what is also often referred to as Salon-style hanging) and to the German word Peter, which Kippenberger adopted into a favorite suffix. Diederichsen has provided a thorough account of Kippenberger’s use of -Peter, describing it as both an essentialization and a catch-all:

The suffix “-peter,” used by Kippenberger as a flexible linguistic module (as in Gesinnungspeterei, probably used to mean pride in

---

44 Williams, Permission to Laugh, 161.
45 As he said in an interview with Jutta Koether, “Art, taken as a science, has the same sluggish beauty as a joke without a point, but it’s full of details.” Martin Kippenberger: I Had a Vision (San Francisco: Museum of Modern Art, 1991), 21.
one’s Gesinnung, or convictions…), is present in his discourse all the way back to the 1980s. During the mid-1980s, however, it became a constant suffix in his everyday speech. It was a morpheme that could function as a placeholder, connecting a person, object, performance, or event with what he viewed as its defining function or attribute. It was still plausible when he called, for example, an artist with a trademark interest in patchwork Flickenzpeter (patchwork guy)…. Soon, however, it became increasingly inanimate and process-oriented things that received the name “Peter,” so that it became synonymous with “thingamajig.”

Moreover, Kippenberger used the word Peter to reduce a person, artwork, or even art practice to a single process within a larger system or network.

The “Peter” exhibition was thus a collection of “thingamajig” artist-operations positioned (rather than hung) in the piling-up manner of the Hermitage museum. Aside from the found objects incorporated into the sculptures, most of the materials used to construct the thingamajigs are cheap, industrial, and ubiquitously available, including particle board and foam rubber. This accumulation of impoverished sculptural material continued Kippenberger’s interest in the anti-virtuosic, anything-goes DIY ethos of punk rock—with the caveat that, once again, Kippenberger did not make the thingamajigs himself. Instead, the sculptures were a combination of found objects, including a Richter painting, an Aldo Rossi chair, and a microphone, and work produced by Kippenberger’s assistant Krebber, an artist in his own right.

By employing an assistant to fabricate the Peter sculptures, Kippenberger also continued the managerial method of art production begun with Lieber Maler, his role as boss now literalized through his ability to afford a proper assistant. In this way the artist traded the work

---

46 Diederichsen, Problem Perspective, 119-120.
47 The notable exceptions to his use of impoverished materials are a Gerhard Richter painting and an Aldo Rossi chair (Model intercont and Not to Be the Second Winner (both 1987), respectively).
48 Doris Krystof has described the sculptures in similar terms, calling them “poor-looking objects with…[a] blatant Do-It-Yourself aesthetic.” Krystof, Martin Kippenberger, 29.
49 Recall that the painting of this series was outsourced to a movie sign painter.
of production for the work of accumulation and organization. Again, his deskilling here is a transformation of the modernist displacement of craft by reproduction into a displacement of production by management. And indeed, the “Russian positioning” announced in the exhibition’s title suggests that organization was central to the logic of the series. Moreover, the crowded Hermitage-style positioning of these objects reflects the artist’s role in the work’s realization—the collecting and piling up of the objects, ideas, scraps, and mistakes from the process of production itself. Eva Meyer-Hermann, in her entry on the series for the catalogue Nach Kippenberger (2003), describes the origin of the project:

Work on Peter started when Kippenberger’s assistant Kreberger was commissioned to develop various bases for the multiple of a bronze-case broomstick (1986). On a visit to Tenerife and in the Cologne studio this soon turned into a prolific production of objects and drawings on hotel letterheads, with a highly economic use of available means. Nothing—not even the tiniest scrap of paper—was wasted, but often integrated into the production…[T]heir discussions gave rise to ideas, starting with a specific found object (a box, a rack, etc.).

Most of these ideas concerned the themes, personalities, and practices of modern and contemporary artists. They include explicit references to Manzoni and Richter, as well as more indirect references to Warhol, Dada, and Conceptualism. In its totality, the Peter series appeared like “a huge memory labyrinth of twentieth century art.” The effect of Kippenberger and Kreber’s anything-goes, free-associative production method (much like a musician’s jam session) was, to borrow a phrase from Stewart, a “surplus of signification,” and in this way the work opens up an abundance of possible art-historical allusions or connections. Yet at the level of individual works most of these allusions are opaque or partial. For example, the point of departure for the project was Kippenberger’s 1986 series Anlehnungsbedürfnis [In Need of

50 Nach Kippenberger, 103.
51 Ibid.
52 Stewart, On Longing, 159.
Support], a sculptural meditation on supports and plinths for a bronze broom handle. One of the works from that series was titled *Penis*, effecting a little joke about erectile dysfunction. In the *Peter* series this object became *Anlehnungsbedürfnis*, a bronze broom handle perched on top of a trapezoidal plinth that forces the broomstick to tilt and rest against the wall (literally requiring support) [Figure 41]. The propping and plinth very generally suggest practices of postwar sculpture—particularly Richard Serra’s Pole and Prop pieces from the 1960s—though the target of the joke is unclear. If Serra is indeed the butt of this “Dick” joke, the tilted broom handle may invoke his *Shovel Plate Prop* (1969), which maintains its own allusions to Duchamp’s *In Advance of a Broken Arm* (1915). Both objects involve not only a shovel but also a sense of impending collapse (Duchamp’s shovel is precariously hung from the ceiling, and the title suggests a state prior to slipping on the ice while shoveling one’s sidewalk). However, neither Serra nor Duchamp displayed their works on a plinth.

A more proximate reference of the sculpture is Joseph Beuys’s *Silberbesen und Besen ohne Haare* [*Silver Broom and Broom without Bristles*] (1972) [Figure 42]. Although the sculptural edition was also plinthless, it did include a leaning metal broom handle. The work refers to the artist’s *Ausfegen* [*Sweeping Up*] (1972–85), a vitrine filled with a broom and the detritus Beuys swept up from Karl-Marx-Platz following the 1972 May Day demonstrations. In this register Kippenberger’s *Peter* work would seem to validate critics who accused the artist of participating in an apolitical turn—here a turn from direct action to an unclear penis joke. Nevertheless, the connection to Beuys is suggested rather than overt. This is because Kippenberger and Krebber began with objects, not with references. Starting with a broom handle, the two artists played with tilting and plinthing in order to activate certain artist-associations—to evoke certain artists’ *Peterhood*. As a whole, the exhibition did not provide
specific examples of individual artists or art practices, but set up a network of impoverished, generic objects in ways that drew out various associations much in the way a private conversation might string together partially-related anecdotes. By occluding the original references, lines of thought, and anecdotes that preceded the fabrication of its constituent objects, Peter places emphasis on the totality of the network of reference and meaning-making rather than on specific references and meanings—and thus too on the entire system of art object exchange and display rather than the specific objects that operate within it.

Kippenberger’s design for the exhibition’s promotional poster was similarly concerned with the series’ status as a matrix [Figure 43]. It features an appropriated advertisement for the Burlington clothing company’s new “Burlington Set” of matching argyle socks and sweaters staged in an art gallery or artist’s studio. In the foreground a man crouches to get a better look at a sculpture, revealing the argyle socks that match his sweater. In the background the artist (a sculptor identifiable by his black beret) explains his work to two women who are visibly distracted by the well-dressed Burlington man. The heading for the advertisement, which was overprinted by Kippenberger, reads: “Martin Kippenberger; Burlington Communicates; New: The Burlington Set.”

Within the logic of the poster, communication and branding are keyed to the company’s allover argyle pattern. In the advertisement this pattern repeats in the man’s clothing (his socks and sweater), in the artwork itself (the sculptor appears to be explaining a marble argyle square), and in the brand’s logo at the bottom right of the poster. Meanwhile, the artwork in the foreground of the image vanishes before the crouching observer, disappearing into the patterned tile floor. The networked pattern or set is given primacy over the individual objects, and it is the
set rather than the artwork that communicates. A bright red speech bubble emanating from the man’s mouth concurs: it communicates Peter—a single organizing principle.

Like the artwork from the advertisement, which disappears into the allover Burlington pattern, even proper names seem to give up their significatory power to Peter’s matrix. Many of the sculptures take famous names as their titles, including Artauds Kreuz (pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu) [a misspelling of To Have Done With the Judgment of God], Rainer Werner Fassbinder, and Wittgenstein. At one time during the creative process these names might have corresponded to their objects, or at least to associations that Kippenberger and Krebber maintained between the objects and famous figures to which their titles refer. In their final manifestations, however, the signifiers function like broken links. Wittgenstein, for example, is a cheaply made empty armoire, “the sloppy reconstruction of an unfinished piece from the early days of an assistant,” claims Eva Meyer-Hermann. Any remaining connection to the philosopher is incidental. Yet the structure is perfectly at home among the menagerie of similarly constructed furniture-esque sculptures, its rectangular cuboid shape reiterated in Korrekte Syntax, which was installed directly in front of it in Hetzler’s gallery, as well as in Aufnahmeprüfung in Rot [Entrance Exam in Red], Hinten ist noch ein Loch frei [There’s Still an Empty Hole at the Back], and Reutsche Kasten [Retouching Box] [Figures 44, 45, 46]. Wittgenstein and Fassbinder thus operate like the broom handle in Anlehnungsbedürfnis, as nodes within the network of associations that inform contemporary art practice. They do not point to any single artist, but to the way various philosophical and filmic references might open up connections between artists and works in the broader network of contemporary art practice (and perhaps also critical reception).

53 Nach Kippenberger, 103.
The network that Peter mimics, activates, and lampoons is not just art practice in general, however; it is very specifically the interconnected world of international artists, galleries, and art fairs for which Cologne had recently become a primary locus. This is perhaps most evident in the many signs on display in the series, appearing in both Wenn’s anfängt, durch die Decke zu tropfen [When it Starts Dripping through the Ceiling] and Documenta-Wegweiser [Documenta-Signage] like the waypoints at an art fair [Figures 47 and 48]. Documenta-Wegweiser in particular includes recognizable Documenta signage stacked neatly next to a blue metal support, suggesting exhibition labels ready to be hung or recently taken down. The work provides a tidy metaphor for the operation of Peter as a whole. Documenta signage reduces an artist and his practice to a label, indicating his location in Kassel in relation to the broader network of international artists selected to participate. Returning to Diederichsen’s description of the term Peter, a person’s thingamajig as his essentialization in the service of communicability and recognizability: “[Peter] could only be used for things or people that were not sufficiently complex, that could be reduced to an attribute or function. To the extent that someone was a Peter, he was reducible…to a brand.” As Diederichsen uses it, the term “brand” implies more than just a recognizable style. It is a “simple conceptual signature” that allows an artist to be taken up by the apparatus of market exchange: “The Peter-ness of an object or person contained their willingness to carry themselves to market.” Although Documenta signage does not brand an artist, it does indicate their communicability within the logic an international market (fair) system.

In addition, the catalogue for the exhibition featured Kippenberger’s Preis [Prize/Price] pictures (1987), a series of checkered paintings that play on the dual meaning of the German

---

54 Diederichsen in Martin Kippenberger; The Problem Perspective, 120.  
55 Ibid.
word for price (e.g., 2. *Preis* [Figure 49] can be read as both “second prize” and “second price”). The joke refers to contemporary practices of ranking that had taken hold of West German art journalism of the time, which Isabelle Graw describes in *High Price: Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture* (2008):

> The journalistic field as a whole has also seen the rise of ranking, by which I mean the widespread use of top-ten or best-of lists. In the 1980s, such personal hit-lists were used in intellectually ambitious music magazines like *Spex* as a way to break with the kind of anti-hierarchical consensus attributed to hippies and old-guard leftists….This kind of ranking has long since conquered “high-brow” arts journalism in German papers including *Die Zeit*, *FAZ*, and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

Susanne Kippenberger notes a similar phenomenon in the gallery culture on the Rhine, where prices were determined by “how big the painting was, and how big the painter; length plus width (in centimeters), times the artist’s multiplier (1 for beginners, 5 for stars). In Cologne, everyone knew each other’s multipliers.”

With *Peter* Kippenberger attempted to make over his art practice according to the logic of art exchange and reception in West Germany. Not willing to reduce his work to a single *Peterhood*, he instead presented his practice as the accumulation of such brands and their activation with in a broader network—indeed, he presented his practice as that very network. Thus the exhibition at Max Hetlzer looked, in its totality, like the back room of an art gallery or the staging area of an art fair just before or just after a show. The space crowded with *Peters* seemed to include not only artworks (completed, half completed, on their side, propped against the wall, etc.), but also their containers, the foam rubber padding used to secure them, their photographic documentation, and the art-fair signage ready to bring them to market. *Peter* even literally took artwork to market—not only because Kippenberger’s work was for sale, but

---

because Peter enacted a system through which the work of other artists could be redistributed. For the most famous work from the series, Modell Interconti (1987), Kippenberger purchased one of Richter’s grey abstract paintings and attached four legs to the canvas, transforming it into a Peter coffee table [Figure 50]. A cynical gesture to be sure, the transformation is the most explicit reference to another artist in the series. It is also the series’ only work to draw parallels between contemporary art and luxury decorative objects, a foretelling, perhaps, of the role Richter’s work would soon play on the global art market and within the domestic interiors of wealthy collectors worldwide. In any case, as part of the Peter-market-complex Richter’s painting became even more valuable: “The original Richter painting was purchased by Kippenberger for 12'000 DM at Galerie Jöllenbeck. The work by Kippenberger was then sold for DM 17'500 directly from the ‘Peter’ exhibition.”

Processes of accumulation and reconfiguration had been an essential component of Kippenberger’s methodology before the “Peter” exhibition. His habit of transforming bar-room conversations into artworks overnight (stealing, some might say, every idea that arose during the course of the evening) is well documented; a practice that was often met with frustration from his unwitting collaborators. He made reference to this practice of accumulation and recontextualization in an interview with Marius Babias in Artscribe in 1992, saying “Every picture I see belongs to me the instant I understand it.” It can even be traced to his earliest series of paintings, Uno di voi, un tedesco in Firenze, for which he accumulated photographs, newspaper clippings, and advertisements as the source material for a group of photo-paintings.

---

58 Regina Fiorito in conversation with the author February 25, 2013.
59 Susanne Kippenberger cites a conversation with Kippenberger’s former assistant, Michael Krebber: “Martin took a lot of what Krebber told him—about things he had read, about his own life and thoughts—and appropriated it, turned it upside down, and spit it out in a new form.” Susanne Kippenberger, Kippenberger, 303.
60 Kippenberger interviewed by Marius Babias, “Martin Kippenberger: Clean Thoughts,” Artscribe 90 (February-March: 1992), 45. Also quoted by Goldstein in Problem Perspective, 39. He goes on to say that, “When I have my retrospective it will have pictures by other people in it.”
that he then piled into a stack measuring (nearly) his own height. *Peter* was thus not a departure from earlier accumulation and organization practices, from punk-rock performances and *Büro* events that compared artwork to noodle casserole. Instead, it was an essentialization of that practice, what Diederichsen describes as the “exacerbating condition” of the “Peter” exhibition: the artist’s desire “to take his own Peter-hood as an object.”61 Where the souvenir effect of Kippenberger’s earlier work had privileged the real and implied experiences of the artist—experiences that then became the source material for work—the *Peter* series replaced the anecdotes, allusions, and associations essential to the production of the work with the organizing logic of the art exchange, promotion, and exhibition itself—a logic that Kippenberger takes as his own Peterhood.

Some of the self-reference in the *Peter* sculptures is obvious. For example, in the sculptures that include self-portraiture. *Aufnahmeprüfung in Rot* [Entrance Exam in Red] features a black and white image of a long-haired Kippenberger leaning against a wall, and *Korrekte Syntax* includes a photographic image of Kippenberger with a sign around his neck that reads “Bitte Nicht Nach Hause Schicken” [Please Do Not Send Home] repeated thirty-two times [Figure 51].62 These are also references to the artist’s prior series—*Bitte Nicht Nach Hause Schicken* was painted from the same photograph in 1983, and *Korrekte Syntax* includes a photograph of an orange Ford Capri, one of the artist’s favorite subjects. Another work from the collection, *Hinten ist noch ein Loch frei* [There’s Still an Empty Hole in the Back], includes the close-up picture of pens in a suit pocket taken from *Lieber Maler*. Other references are less clear. As noted, *Anlehnungsbedürfnis* refers to a Kippenberger exhibition from a year earlier. Unbeknownst to the viewer, the red rug of *Bergwerk II* [Mine II] conceals a metal plate that

---

61 Diederichsen in *Problem Perspective*, 123.
62 I suspect that this too is a reference to Warhol, specifically the thirty-two paintings that comprise *Campbell’s Soup Cans* (1962).
covers a shaft leading to dried pasta, Kippenberger’s favorite dish waiting to be excavated by a miner (the occupation of his father) [Figure 52]. It’s a One Man’s World, titled in English, refers to James Brown’s It’s a Man’s Man’s Man’s World (1966). The joking title, which substitutes one “man” for three, suggests the male-dominated Cologne art scene and the performative chauvinism therein. This too is likely a reference to Kippenberger and his punk-rock antics, the one-time microphone-hogging manager of club SO36 figured as the “One Man” who runs the (Cologne art) world.

Of course, Peter was derisive in Kippenberger’s vocabulary, and he had no interest in settling on his own “simple conceptual signature.” So as soon as this Peter-persona-as-art-market was complete he set about eroding its boundaries and retracing its lines; flexibility, after all, is a hallmark of the neoliberal subject. In September 1987 he presented the first reiteration of the “Peter” show, “Einfach geht der Applaus zugrunde” [The Applesauce Simply Dies] at Galerie Grässlin-Erhart in Frankfurt, the poster for which depicts Kippenberger standing in front of dozens of nonsensical Documenta signage pointing nowhere in particular [Figure 53]. This was followed by solo and group exhibitions after the “Peter” theme, including “Petra” (Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne, 1987), “Broken Neon” (Forum Stadtpark, Graz, 1987), “Pop In” (Forum Stadtpark, Graz, 1987), “Peter 2,” (Galerie Peter Pakesch, Vienna, 1987), “Die Reise nach Jerusalem” (Galerie Bleich-Rossi, Graz, 1987), and “Nochmal Petra” (Kunsthalle Winterthur, 1988).

For each of these exhibitions Kippenberger produced a catalogue based on the design of a 1972 Piero Manzoni catalogue that featured Socle du Monde [Base of the World] (1961) on its

---

cover [Figure 54]. The invocation aligned Kippenberger’s work with an early Conceptual moment that explored the role of the artist in determining what counted as a work of art. *Socle du Monde* consists of an upside-down bronze plinth labeled “Base of the World.” The plinth, which normally supports an artwork and marks its boundary from the rest of the world, here functions to transform the world itself into a “Manzoni,” and in turn poses the artist’s role as one of demarcation, selection, or labeling rather than creation. In Kippenberger’s treatment the world is restaged ad infinitum, each iteration of “Peter” redrawing the boundaries of the Kippenberger-complex. In this respect, the series in its entirety can be understood as a collection of plinths—structures that support, bound, and display the Kippenberger program (and thus an extension of the series of broom handle plinths, *Anlehnungsbedürfnis*, that prefigured “Peter”).

If the Hetzler exhibition created an art market-matrix in miniature, the expanding collection of “Peter” shows set up a Kippenberger art world. As an idiom, *Peter* was both iterable and marketable. It was capable of including sculpture, painting, and drawing (primarily on hotel stationery) by Kippenberger and others willing to show with him (“Broken Neon,” for example, was a group exhibition curated by Kippenberger that included work by Joseph Beuys, Werner Büttner, and George Herold). The work also took Kippenberger to spaces outside of Germany—primarily Austria, but also New York and Serbia. Although not yet an international market phenomenon, the series set the terms for Kippenberger’s market integration. Rather than reduce the artist’s practice to a trademark or style, it made over his practice according to the

---

64 This design was also employed for the 1987 book edition Martin Kippenberger, *67 Improved Papertigers Not Afraid of Repetition* (New York: Edition Julie Sylvester, 1987).
65 Pamela Lee discusses the *Peter* sculptures in terms of the plinth or sculptural support. Although we draw different conclusions, her essay also describes the plinth-effect of the work in relation to marketability. Pamela Lee, “‘If Everything is Good, Then Nothing is Any Good Any More’: Martin Kippenberger, Conceptual Art, and a Problem of Distinction” in *The Problem Perspective*, 202-203.
logic of the market—a sprawling, flexible, international matrix of artworks and their apparatuses of promotion, display, and exchange.

Even before “Peter,” Kippenberger’s practice was sprawling. It shifted to accommodate a range of media, production methods, and collaborative practices—an accumulative tactic I have traced to his roots in punk rock. But Peter changed the terms of this pasta-casserole accumulation, transforming it from punk DIY to art-market imitation. Beyond simply branding, Peterhood was for Kippenberger a position within a market system (or at least a system that facilitated the marketability of artwork). However, in 1987 market integration was still a challenge for the artist. Although Kippenberger was an enthusiastic self-promoter, generating endless posters, postcards, stickers, and books to that end, international success did not come easily. While fellow Germans, both his Neo-Expressionist contemporaries and the prior generation of artists that included Richter and Anselm Kiefer, were showing overseas, Kippenberger struggled to find a supportive audience outside of West Germany.

At the time, the Rhine was quickly becoming a significant locus of international art commerce, an emergence with roots in the Cologne Kunstmarkt. As described in the previous chapter, the Kunstmarkt was founded in 1967 as a way to integrate West Germany into international art commerce, and to develop a national consumer base for contemporary artwork. At the time of the fair’s founding, West Germany’s art market was highly provincial.66 International artwork found its way into West Germany, whether via the emerging art market, international exhibitions, or German institutions like the Wallraf-Richartz Museum, but the flow was one-directional. By the late 1980s, however, the balance had shifted, and German artwork,

---

66 As Diederichsen argues, “When West Germany began to take cultural shape over the course of the 1950s, the standard in nearly all the arts was extremely provincial…For the visual arts, of course, there was neither a globalized art market nor an international network to connect dissident and avant-garde artists….This was particularly true in Germany, due to general structural problems but also for specific political and historical reasons.” Diederichsen in Art of Two Germanys, 136.
particularly West German painting, became an export. This coincided with changes in West Germany’s art market. In the early 1970s, Cologne’s Kunstmarkt prompted a number of sympathetic and competing regional fairs as it became integrated into the fabric of European art commerce. In 1984 the fair was renamed Art Cologne, a registration of its bygone German provincialism, and the city on the Rhine was established as a major market center.

Kippenberger was part of this increasingly international Rhineland art world, and his work was beginning to reach a non-German audience. His first New York solo show, “Selling America and Buying El Salvador,” was held at Metro Pictures in 1985, his work was first shown in France in 1987, and in 1991 he had his first American museum exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. His reception, however, was tepid. For example, he was first mentioned in a U.S. publication in a 1983 issue of *Art in America* devoted to “The Expressionism Question.” There he is acknowledged briefly and despairingly in Donald Kuspit’s otherwise positive account of new German painting, “Acts of Aggression,” as a realist appendix to Neo-Expressionism. The article, which spells Kippenberger’s name incorrectly, describes the artist’s “anti-pictures” as reflecting a “hatred of the existing [German] social reality,” with which they have an undialectical engagement. Kippenberger’s first gallery exhibitions at Metro Pictures in New York (1985, 1987), meanwhile, were commercial failures. Then in 1989 he

---

71 The gallery sent his work back to Germany after the exhibitions closed (Janelle Reiring in conversation with the author).
moved to Los Angeles and similarly failed to find an audience. Although he worked diligently to integrate into the art and Hollywood social scenes, and later bought a share of an Italian restaurant called “Capri,” Los Angeles was largely indifferent to his presence.\footnote{According to his sister, for example, Kippenberger was particularly frustrated when Dennis Hopper ignored a personal invitation. Susanne Kippenberger, \textit{Kippenberger}, 384.} He left California the following year disappointed, although not before securing an exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and making the acquaintance of Mike Kelley.\footnote{A fact Kippenberger notes in his personal biography “Life and Work” as one of the primary accomplishments of 1990. Kippenberger in \textit{The Problem Perspective}, 351.}

\textbf{From Punk Rock to \textit{Heavy Mädel}}

The transition from Kippenberger’s early interest in the souvenir and DIY punk to his later engagement with the networked status of artworks and their producers was not abrupt, nor was it total. His practice of drawing on hotel stationery, for example, which was very much a souvenir project, continued to the end of his life, and his \textit{Input-Output} series of drawings on receipts from a trip to Brazil ran until 1992. Between 1989 and 1990 he again took up the question of his \textit{Peterhood}, this time piling up both the evidence of his personal experiences (souvenirs) and the conventions of his art production (his various \textit{Peters}) in an attempt to reclaim something personal and specific from his many flexible, indeterminate personae. The result was \textit{Heavy Burschi} [\textit{Heavy Lad}] (1989/1990) and the related \textit{Heavy Mädel} [\textit{Heavy Gal}] (1990), a suite of works that elevate Kippenberger’s painting-from-photography practice to greater registers of complexity. Like the \textit{Peter} sculptures and \textit{Lieber Maler} paintings before it, \textit{Heavy Burschi} began as a commission. Kippenberger instructed his new assistant, Merlin Carpenter, to make a group of paintings in Kippenberger style, which Carpenter was to glean from catalogue images of the artist’s previous work. When Carpenter was finished, Kippenberger reviewed the
paintings, determined that they were all unsatisfactory, and destroyed them.\textsuperscript{74} Before doing so, however, he asked photographer Wilhelm Schürmann to document all fifty-two objects and print them to scale. For the 1991 exhibition of the project at Kölnischer Kunstverein, Kippenberger displayed the broken pieces of the Carpenter paintings in a large wooden dumpster-like container surrounded by framed prints of Schürmann’s photographs [Figure 55]. Complicating the project further, \textit{Heavy Mädel}, the second iteration of the work, is a series of mirror-image copies of Carpenter’s paintings on the stationery of the Hotel Chelsea, Cologne.

Both \textit{Heavy} projects “pile up” Kippenberger references. In the case of \textit{Heavy Burschi}, this piling-up was literal—the broken canvases painted in Kippenberger-style were heaped into a container like so much garbage. In the case of \textit{Heavy Mädel}, the accumulated images were reproduced serially on stationery from the artist’s hotel stays. This accumulation of Kippenberger references was underscored by the series’ joking titles. In 1989 the artist’s slim build was beginning to yield to his heavy alcohol use, and so the series titular “heavy lad” conflates the expanding field of Kippenberger reference with the artist’s expanding beer belly (the second project, “Heavy Gal,” inverts the artist’s gender to reflect the series’ mirror-image inversion). For Carpenter’s part, Kippenberger-reference was achieved through both imagery and wordplay. Iconographic images were pulled directly from the artist’s prior work. One painting features a Ford Capri, for example, and is captioned “To be as kool as Kippi,” referring to the nickname Kippenberger had used in his youth and early career.\textsuperscript{75} Other paintings pair Kippenberger with Warhol and Jeff Koons—comparisons that Kippenberger had drawn himself

\textsuperscript{74} Ann Goldstein claims that Kippenberger believed the paintings were “too good.” Goldstein, “The Problem Perspective” in \textit{The Problem Perspective}, 93.

\textsuperscript{75} Usually spelled “Kippy.”
in both interviews and works. Additional references include lampposts (a reference to his *Street Lamps for Drunks* [e.g., 1988]), crucifixions (a reference to his *Fred the Frog* crucifixions, 1988-90), a sign that reads “Hysterialand” taken from the painting *San Carciano* (1984), and the word *Elend* (referring to an exhibition at *Kippenbergers Büro* by the same name, 1979).

The second referencing convention Carpenter employed was linguistic, and came in the form of small cast-resin objects that were affixed to the paintings [Figure 56]. The material evokes Kippenberger’s sculptural self-portraits, *Martin, ab in die Ecke und schäm dich* [Martin, into the corner, You Should be Ashamed of Yourself] (1989) from that same year, life-size models of the artist obediently standing in the corner as punishment for his bad behavior. One of these sculptures was made from cigarette butts suspended in clear cast-resin, a gesture not only to Kippenberger’s smoking habit but also to his name—“Kippen” in German is slang for cigarette or cigarette butt [Figure 57]. Thus in addition to the sculptural surrogate, this “mountain of cigarette butts” offers a linguistic surrogate (that is, a “Kippen Bergen” [cigarette-but mountain]). Carpenter reused this naming convention by employing the cigarette-resin material to make the small sculptural objects attached to his paintings, which then operate as logoes or signatures.


---


77 *Nach Kippenberger*, 17.

[unvollständigen Homonymie] that amounts to an ersatz-signature.\textsuperscript{79} This signatory convention corresponded to the ersatz artist at the origin of the work, that is, the collaboration between Kippenberger and Carpenter that produced the final objects.\textsuperscript{80} But this ersatz-artist also stands in for the many Kippenberger personae that these works conflate—Kippy, the tourist, \textit{Peter}, etc.

When Kippenberger copied these paintings onto hotel stationery for \textit{Heavy Mädel}, none of the cast-resin objects was transferred or reproduced, but all of the other Kippenberger references were maintained. The gesture is clear: rather than develop a new signatory convention in this work (a new \textit{Peter}), Kippenberger wanted to expand his network of self reference based on its own logic. The goal was to fashion a new Kippenberger matrix by destroying and amalgamating his old ones (much in the way Iggy Pop sacrificed his persona as a form of rebirth). This was the role of the hotel stationery on which the images were re-articulated.

Carpenter’s task in the \textit{Heavy} series was to distill an essential Kippenberger aesthetic from a retrospective analysis of his work, and to use it as a template to generate additional objects. Kippenberger then accumulated these branded objects, removed their signatory convention, and reorganized them according to a Kippenberger logic not explored in Carpenter’s series (hotel stationery). Where \textit{Peter} made over Kippenberger’s practice according to the logic of the market (a market that seemed resistant to his charms), the \textit{Heavy} work attempted to remake Kippenberger’s old practice according to a logic of its own—first as interpreted by his assistant, then as interpreted by himself. The result was a new persona doppelganger, the heavy boy and girl.

\textsuperscript{80} For Schappert, these objects open the work up to questions about naming, branding, indexicality, and identity, which he tacks to the abundant logos that Carpenter included in his paintings, including those for BMW, Chanel, and Yves Saint Laurent.
Kippenberger's personae allowed him to render “practice” and “person” synonymous. They combined his lived experience, his excessive productivity, and what Diederichsen describes as the artist’s “willingness to carry [himself] to market” into an ever-expanding persona-matrix. Of course, Kippenberger was not unique in exploring the creative potential of a constructed artist-persona in postwar West Germany. Beuys’s shamanistic persona is perhaps the best known, and his notion of “social sculpture” was particularly generative for Kippenberger—not the belief that creative practice could enable social change and shape a political future, but the more general concept that everything, including the social, could be counted as art. Each of Kippenberger’s projects was conceived as always already part of a social network. Ideas were formulated in conversation at bars among friends, and objects were produced through collaboration with assistants. However, where Beuys’s utopian project elevated the individual to the role of artist, as evidenced by his famous phrase, “every person is an artist,” Kippenberger proffered its inverse: “Every artist is a person.” Kippenberger understood every aspect of personal experience as serving in the construction of artwork. Conversations, personal hygiene, addictions, and vacations were all fair game. By constantly remaking his persona in the service of his work, and in Peter doing so in the image of the art market, he not only failed to achieve market success, but he also lost track of his person. In the Heavy series, Kippenberger attempted to reclaim this personal network from the broader social/market networks with which it engaged—to demarcate what counted not as art or art-market logic, but as “Kippenberger.”

He advanced such a reading of his work in his 1994 publication, *B. Gespräche mit Martin Kippenberger* [B. Discussions with Martin Kippenberger], a verbatim transcription of a series of interviews that he conducted with Jutta Koether in 1990 and 1991. At one point in their conversation, Koether asks Kippenberger about his “egomaniacal” bent, claiming that
Kippenberger presents himself in everything that he produces. Kippenberger’s answer to this question, and to the questions that followed, articulate how he understands his work to generate networks and context out of his own personhood and experience:

I effectively present myself entirely and unambiguously as a living vehicle. With others this is perhaps better styled and more precisely calculated in relation to the project. With me role-playing wouldn’t really work because I haven’t got a style…the evidence for this is already there in my childhood. My father always told me I really had to have a style, and I was terrified that I would never be able to bring off a Chagall, or a Dubuffet….Until I realized that my style is just there where the personality is. This gets presented through performances, individual objects and actions, decisions, and a kind of history that arises out of that….My original approach was to take things I liked from other people and incorporate them into my own production, the sculptures, objects, books, etc. Today, as I’ve said, the collection itself is part of this production….Or it is also shaped by what my assistants build into “my production” according to Kippenberger-guidelines….I believe it is increasingly important to be permanently clear about the context in which you exhibit and live. To determine what this context is, to build up your own network, is a crucial task for the artist. That is what I am working on now. And not merely in order to produce this connection, but also to make it visible, to make it ineliminably manifest.  

With Heavy Burschi and Mädel Kippenberger not only created a personal network, but also attempted to produce a network among individual objects that was “ineliminably manifest,” a term I understand to mean legible, inescapable, and persistent even when those individual objects are separated from their series through exhibition or sale. The gesture was not simply a reaction to his tepid international reception. The fact that a young artist was not immediately understood

---

or celebrated by audiences outside of his home country is neither surprising nor particularly significant, and even if Kippenberger was not as successful as German painters of the prior generation, his reputation was steadily growing. It was instead a response to lessons he was learning abroad, specifically from American artists like Louise Lawler, who treated apparatuses of artwork exchange as powerful systems of recontextualization—as networks that might disrupt an artist’s own meaning-making conventions. It was also a response to the continuing internationalization of postwar West Germany, a country that seemed perpetually made over in the image of neoliberal capitalism. In the years Kippenberger produced the Heavy series East and West Germany reunited, and the nation and its cities were rebuilt to reflect their commitment to international trade and integration.

The interviews in B, which are critical to understanding Kippenberger’s later work, are inseparable from the format in which they are articulated, the ways that Kippenberger framed them, and the ways that they were used as narrative support for later exhibitions—that is, from the matrix out of which they emerged. For example, the title under which they were collected, B, refers to Andy Warhol’s book a (1968), a verbatim transcription of a day in the life of Factory regular Ondine. It is, like a, an unedited glimpse into the personal life of the artist, which at times reads like drunken rambling. However, even this personal life is staged as culturally secondary or derivative (to Warhol’s a), another in a series of Kippenberger’s explorations of West German secondariness.

Like Uno di voi and Lieber Maler, however, B also references contemporary artists working with photography. The book begins with praise for Lawler, and Kippenberger and Koether briefly discuss Lawler and her compatriots Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, and Andrea Susanne Kippenberger, Kippenberger, 315. Warhol’s a was conceived as an homage to James Joyce’s Ulysses, 1922, which chronicles events in the life Leopold Bloom on June 16th 1904. Kippenberger’s B was thus an homage to an homage.
Fraser before Kippenberger elucidates his practice of collecting and network-building. At one point Koether asks Kippenberger if he sees himself “on the side of the new ‘women’s art,’” and Kippenberger exclaims, “Yes, I’m a woman too [laughs]. It’s quite true!”

Kippenberger’s alliance with the American women now known as members of the “Pictures Generation” announces his engagement with problems of representation, authorship, and market integration. In particular, Lawler’s photographic work of the 1980s was concerned with apparatuses of the display, exchange, and collection of artwork. Like Kippenberger, Lawler often produced promotional material, including matchbooks, invitations, and even gift certificates, making legible the inextricability of artworks from the systems of their reception. However, her gestures were not made via a performed persona—they did not produce their own networks in opposition. Instead, her photographs of private and corporate collections document the power these collections have in determining the context and meaning of art objects. Works like Arranged by Donald Marron, Susan Brudage, Cheryl Bishop at Paine Webber, Inc., NYC (1982) suggest that the formal organizing apparatus of sites of display is determined by the sensibilities of the artworks’ owners, not their artists, and that these objects ultimately function to affirm the tastes of their collectors.

Kippenberger had for years explored the systems and ephemera of art promotion and display—in posters, catalogues, matchbooks, and multiples, as well as in his proselytizing persona, his entrepreneurial ventures (e.g., Kippenbergers Büro), and his Peters. But these explorations were an optimistic byproduct of the Wirtschaftswunder and of the now bygone

---

83 Translation here comes from Harrison and Wood eds., Art in Theory, 1103. Kippenberger’s claim to womanhood was at least in part provocation. He had been accused of misogyny by Wolfgang Max Faust in 1989. Nevertheless, Kippenberger did collect work by these artists when he was in the U.S., much of which he brought to the Paris Bar in 1991 in order to “update the collection.” Kippenberger, “Life and Work” in The Problem Perspective, 351.

84 The title comes from a 1977 exhibition curated by Douglas Crimp at Artists Space, New York, although most of the women now associated with the group (Lawler, Kruger, Sherman) were not included in the exhibition.
provincialism of West Germany’s art market. Kippenberger was, at one time, able to imagine himself as the entire complex of the production, promotion, display, and even reception of his work, or was at least able to manipulate the individuals and institutions responsible for doing so (like Max Hetzler). But in the context of the international art market this was no longer the case. In B Kippenberger makes explicit the inevitability of, and his resistance to, the authority of the art-exchange complex. At one point in his interview with Koether he claims that he does not make work for collectors, and then immediately acknowledges that, on occasion, such work is unavoidable: “I shouldn’t provide anything for dentists, and I wouldn’t want to be taken for someone whose pictures would hang nicely over the mantelpiece. I admit that I also do small pictures, to pay for my meals, and that they actually do look bloody good ‘over the mantelpiece.’”

Although couched as simply a way to pay the bills, Kippenberger’s resignation to paint “small pictures” evidences the influence of market demands on his practice, and it registers the authority that the international art market was beginning to have over his production methods. In response he set about building his “own network” in order to make it “ineliminably manifest.” That is, Kippenberger sought to create a parallel network of apparatuses of exchange and display, one that might not prevent individual objects from looking good over the mantel, but would provide an alternative context for the work that could not be revoked or overwritten.

The terms of market integration and collector recontextualization were not the same for Lawler and Kippenberger, of course, a disparity that Kippenberger underscores with his absurd claim to womanhood. Where Lawler’s rendering legible of the determining power of a “systematized set of presentational procedures” came to inform a feminist critique, Kippenberger’s protection against recontextualization concerned the secondariness of his West

---

85 Translated in Harrison and Wood eds., Art in Theory, 1104. See also Kippenberger, I Had a Vision, 19, and Kippenberger, B., 16.
86 Ibid., 1103-1105.
German moment. The particularity of West German internationalism was thus the crux of Kippenberger’s third framing device for B, established at the very end of the text: “These discussions took place on November 15, 1990 / February 20, 1991 / February 21, 1991 / May 27, 1991 / September 14, 1991 in Cologne, Frankfurt, and the Deutschen Bundesbahn.” In 1990 Germany unified, a process that began with the redrawing of boundaries (the destruction of the Berlin Wall in 1989) and the standardization of currency (and thus the standardization of exchange) between the formerly divided East and West. In 1990 the newly unified Berlin was once again designated the capital, though Bonn remained the official seat of government. In other words, these interviews took place in the Rhineland and in transit between major Rhine cities just as Germany’s capital was being moved from the Metropolregion Rhein-Ruhr back to Berlin. The art scene would soon follow, at least to a degree; however, in the 1990s the art market became increasingly decentralized, in part due to the prominent role of art fairs (and the abundance thereof), and in part to the increasingly transnational nature of art galleries (many were beginning to establish satellite locations in multiple countries, and those that were not at least had booths in multiple international fairs). For Kippenberger, making a parallel market-network meant mimicking the physical systems of exchange that moved artists and their work, and the systems of collection and accumulation that displayed them—a move, in metaphor, from the souvenirs of personal experience to the trains that carried the souvenir collectors, and carried the collections themselves.

---

89 This was effected by the May, 1990 Unification Treaty.
Disconnected

The plinth (*Peter* sculptures) and the dumpster (*Heavy Burschi*) were early metaphors for Kippenberger’s network apparatus. In 1993 he added to these a museum and a subway system. The former, *The Museum of Modern Art Syros MOMAS*, is an art institution located on private property on the Greek island of Syros; the latter, *Metro-NET World Connection*, a series of locked underground train entrances and ventilation systems installed in locations around the world. Together these projects formed the entirety of the Kippenberger-complex, a system of artwork transport and display built on the logic of the internationalizing art world, but accessible only to Kippenberger’s personal social network.

The museum was a natural conclusion to Kippenberger’s interest in plinths, frames, and signage. If the plinth determines the limits of individual art objects (as it had in *Peter* and the related publications based on a Manzoni catalogue), the museum serves as the boundary for an entire art collection. *Museum of Modern Art Syros MOMAS* was established in an abandoned structure on a Greek island as a private art institution. Following its opening in 1993, Kippenberger invited friends to contribute work to the project, among them Christopher Wool, Stephen Prina, and Christopher Williams, and took for himself the title of director. Like *Kippenbergers Büro*, *MOMAS* stages the artist as a manager and promoter instead of a producer—or rather, as a producer of systems of promotion and display rather than individual objects [Figure 58]. His response to Lawler’s problematic (the inevitability of the art collection in determining the context of the work) was the production of his own collection. That is, *MOMAS* resists international institutions of art acquisition and display because it is itself such an institution.

---

90 Koch, *Annotated catalogue raisonné of the books by Martin Kippenberger*, 304. See also Angelika Taschen and Burkhard Riemsneider eds., *Kippenberger* (Cologne: Taschen, 2014), 170 for invitation cards from these artists.
The international subway, meanwhile, was a natural conclusion to Kippenberger’s explorations of systems of transportation and exchange. That exploration had begun in 1985 with a series of architectural models constructed from shipping pallets. The wooden sculptures, collectively called the *Müttergenesungswerk* (1985) series, were named after the German Maternal Rest and Recreation Foundations established after World War II as spaces for new mothers to convalesce. The construction materials Kippenberger used, called EuroPallets, were common wooden supports designed to package and move bulk commodities and other large consumer goods for container shipping. By employing these uniform pallets to build models for government institutions, Kippenberger conflates the standardization of international commodity exchange with the standardization of postwar German institutional care. In Kippenberger style, this impoverished material also had a personal register. In 1976 his mother was killed by a stack of EuroPallets when they fell off of a truck. These “Maternal Rest” foundations are thus also personal memorials—the resting place of a lost mother.

In several respects, the *Müttergenesungswerk* series prefigured the “Peter” exhibition. In their regular geometry, these cheap wooden supports mirror many of the *Peter* sculptures, cheaply made supports in their own right. Both sculptural series were also shown alongside paintings that parodied Cologne’s business-like art world. As noted, the *Peter* catalogue included images of Kippenberger’s *Preis* paintings. Likewise, when the *Müttergenesungswerk* series was first exhibited at Galerie Heinrich Ehrhardt in 1985, it was shown alongside Kippenberger’s *Kostengebirge* [Cost Peaks] (1985), a series of drawings and paintings that look like profit and loss graphs (some of which included limited edition Beuys works). Together the paintings and EuroPallet constructions tie art production to the logic of international shipping and economic
exchange.\textsuperscript{91} As also noted earlier, a few of the Peter sculptures look like means of conveyance, including \textit{Worktimer} and \textit{Transporter for Sculpture}, an artwork transportation system. And some of Kippenberger’s later sculptures continued to depict art objects and their transportation systems and materials. For example, an untitled 1994 series of wall-hung sculptures displayed next to their elaborate shipping containers was included in the exhibition “A man and his Golden Arm” at Nolan/Eckmann Gallery in New York. In each of these projects, art works, prices, and systems of shipping and transportation (for works and their creators) are inextricably linked, casting the production of artwork as an exercise in exchange (economic, international, and—with respect to the personal registers of these projects—interpersonal).

In short, as Kippenberger’s practice increasingly substituted the international network for the souvenir and the museum for the artwork, the tourist metaphor was replaced by apparatuses of international transport. This transformation was realized literally in \textit{METRO}-Net (1993-1997), a group of life-size subway entrances and ventilation shafts. Like \textit{MOMAS}, the series commenced on the Greek island of Syros, where in 1993 Kippenberger lived for months with his friend Würthle, co-owner of the Paris Bar restaurant. Syros was an appealing site for constructing a parallel international network due to its very remoteness. Only friends of Kippenberger and the Würthles visited the museum and subway entrance, and so these projects began as a somewhat private affair.

\textit{METRO}-Net, \textit{Syros} was completed in 1993. Like \textit{MOMAS}, the subway entrance was integrated into existing abandoned architectural elements [Figure 59].\textsuperscript{92} Constructed of cast-iron and concrete, the sculptural work consists of a stairway leading underground that terminates in a

\textsuperscript{91} Diederichsen makes a similar observation, noting that the rational logic of the maternal rest centers is repeated in the rational logic of the \textit{Cost and Profit Peaks}. Diederichsen in \textit{The Problem Perspective}, 140.

\textsuperscript{92} “Again, a local piece of construction was the start of the piece, in this case an ornate railing in a field.” Susanne Kippenberger, \textit{Kippenberger}, 440.
locked gate adorned with the logo of the Lord Jim Lodge, a social club that Kippenberger founded in the mid-1980s with artist Jörg Schlick and writer Wolfi Bauer among others.\textsuperscript{93} The finished work has the appearance of a nondescript entrance for a public transportation system, one that would look perfectly at home against the aesthetic backdrop of the island, if not for the fact that Syros has no subway system.

The Lord Jim Lodge was founded by Kippenberger and friends as a social club for male artists. Patterned after fraternal organizations like the Freemasons and the Elks, it was in part a parody of the “boy’s club” backroom dealings of the art world.\textsuperscript{94} More than satire, however, the club short-circuited the effect of such backroom alliances. By transforming the gendered, mysterious, in-crowd practices of the art world into an official club—one with a logo they used to brand many of their works—the group made these practices legible. In addition, the Lord Jim motto, “Keiner Hilft Keinem” [Nobody Helps Nobody], suggests that the group’s goal was to create an art-world social club that would counteract the kind of support and access promised by actual art-world boys’ clubs.\textsuperscript{95}

Kippenberger deployed the club’s logo, two breasts attached to a sun shattered by a hammer, in \textit{METRO-Net} as a way to signify simultaneous connection and disconnection. Emblazoned across each of the station’s locked gates, the logo reads as both the brand of an international train system (like the logo for London Underground) and the emblem of a secret members-only club. Kippenberger’s rendering of the fractures that spread across the damaged sun plays with a slippage between connection and division, since this cracked lattice could just as

\textsuperscript{93} Susanne Kippenberger offers a fairly comprehensive account of the boys club in her biography of the artist, Susanne Kippenberger, \textit{Kippenberger}, 324-325.
\textsuperscript{94} Susanne Kippenberger quotes Schlick: “The exclusion of women…was meant to [make] fun of ‘the boy’s-club situation in the art business and in politics in general,” \textit{Kippenberger}, 324.
\textsuperscript{95} I am skeptical that the effect of this club amounted to as much, however. Whatever its pretenses, the club was still a misogynistic enterprise.
easily read as a spider’s web [Figure 60].\textsuperscript{96} The experience of encountering one of these objects is similarly one of simultaneous connection and disruption. The entrances are a perfectly familiar sign of mobility to any urban or internationally traveled viewer. And as any subway-traveler can attest, equally familiar is the experience of stumbling upon a much needed subway station only to discover that it is closed, the possibility of rapid travel revoked as quickly as it is discovered.

The second \textit{METRO}-Net station opened in Dawson City, Canada, in 1995 next to the Bunkhouse Hotel, an establishment owned by Würthle’s Paris Bar partner, Reinald Nohal [Figure 61]. Like the original station, the Dawson city sculpture, which is constructed of local wood, looks perfectly at home in its surrounding—at the foot of a tree-lined hill in the parking lot of the somewhat rustic Bunkhouse, which overlooks the Yukon River.\textsuperscript{97} And as is the case with the Syros work, entrance to this imagined subway system is denied by a locked door and a cryptic logo. Following these two isolated entrances, Kippenberger produced a station for the 1997 Trade Fair in Leipzig. A decades-old institution, this large fairground was moved outside the city in 1996 as a result of reunification. There it continued to operate as a major hub for annual trade shows, most notably the Book Fair and Auto Mobil International. The construction of a \textit{METRO}-Net station at such a venue elides the then market-dominating fair culture of the international art world and the temporary trade shows of international commodity exchange. Moreover, the Leipzig fair was a German institution, and although it had persisted as an international meeting-place through Germany’s division, its relocation and rebranding following German reunification anticipated an era of increased international trade. Here \textit{METRO}-Net acts

\textsuperscript{96} “Spiderman” was another of Kippenberger’s avatars, which appeared in works like \textit{L’atelier Matisse sous loué à Spiderman} (1996) and \textit{Spiderman-Atelier} (1996).

most antagonistically (though symbolically) to disrupt exchange—a recalcitrant and cryptic barrier at a site that otherwise encourages and enables international trade.

In addition to these site-specific works, Kippenberger made two METRO-Net Transportable Subway Entrances (1997). The first was included in Documenta X and was originally designed to be installed partially submerged in a local water feature, and thus to be inaccessible, but was ultimately placed on the lawn. The second was exhibited at Metro Pictures in 1997 and needed to be crushed in order to fit into the gallery’s doors (and thus became METRO-Net Transportable Subway Entrance (Crushed)) [Figure 62]. Concurrently, Kippenberger made plans for two ventilation shafts for the imaged subway network. The first, METRO-Net Transportable Ventilation Shaft (1997), was included in the 1997 Sculpture Projects exhibition in Munster. It “consists of a curved intake tube and a boxy exhaust chamber covered with grates” along with fans that pump air out of the grates and a speaker system that plays the sounds of passing subway trains. The second exhaust, which was commissioned by a Japanese patron, was only realized after Kippenberger’s death; however, preparatory computer-aided drawings of the work have it installed in a sidewalk and appearing like any nondescript subway grate. As in the other ventilation work, “fans and an intake chamber” were “always expressed as key elements in the engineering studies for the piece.” In this way, the exhaust works make sensible the invisible infrastructure of international exchange, although they render it totally inaccessible (there is no subway entrance in sight). Like Lord Jim and the locked subway stations, their promise of exchange is also a denial.

Together METRO-Net and MOMAS offer a model of international integration in which original context does not completely yield to the recontextualizing authority of market-

---

99 Ibid., 65.
determined systems of exchange and display. MOMAS, the Kippenberger-museum, is safely tucked away on a Greek island, accessible from remote locations all over the world through an international subway system, the entrances to which are always locked. It is both local and international, both a personal network (the building is on the property of Kippenberger’s friend and was populated by work from his personal contacts) and a “world connection,” as he described it in a contribution to the catalogue for Documenta X. Moreover, these subway stations and ventilation shafts propose an ineliminable, if imagined, union between Kippenberger works, that is, an invisible system of underground tunnels and tracks. And this, ultimately, was Kippenberger’s final sculptural gesture, to create a personal registry for his works—an extension of the tourist’s scrapbook—that would not prevent his artwork from traveling international art markets, but would render impossible their total recontextualization by those markets.

In the end, however, it was not entirely clear if Kippenberger succeeded in his goal. It is certainly difficult to speak about his work without addressing his personae—his various avatars as well as the elaborate system of self-reference that he constructed in his art and life. But this alone is not much different from the Peterhood of other artists working today, artists who blend production with self-promotion as a matter of course. Moreover, the project that began as an attempt to mimic the logic of the art market (a market built, as I have noted, on the logic of neoliberal capitalism) ended as an attempt to protect against it. Nevertheless, in its resistance Kippenberger’s practice came closest to resembling postwar capitalism. The notion of a transnational network of exchange accessible only to an elite few is precisely the model of a neoliberal world, a system that erases national boundaries for the purpose of economic exchange,

---

100 Catherine David, Jean-François Chevrier et al., *Politics, Poetics - Documenta X: The Book* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Cantz, 1997), 194.
and for the benefit of a select few. Kippenberger’s reaction to the international system of his reception was thus a reinscription of its very logic, an affirmation of the logic of neoliberalism from which he hoped to escape—both in the remoteness of Syros and Dawson City and in the seclusion of his protected personal network.

In his earliest painted series, Kippenberger’s self-as-context allowed for the persistence of the individual, the regional, and the national while the work engaged (or was engaged by) cultural, political, and economic apparatuses of internationalization. In work like *Uno di Voi* and *Lieber Maler* the artist persona was presented in the guise of the tourist, a metaphor for the nascent international cultural sensibilities of the 1970s West German middle class. By forging his souvenirs from personal experience, Kippenberger opened space for the possibility of a personal “authenticity,” even if it was expressed in a derivative vocabulary (in the language, as it were, of internationalization). As West Germany’s role in the global art market shifted from periphery to center, Kippenberger shifted from souvenir to collection—from evidence of personal experience to personal network in its totality. Through investigations of his own brand and artist-identity, these later sculptural works explored how the figure of the artist might embody the kind of international networks that he hoped would take up his artwork. Eventually, however, Kippenberger was lost to his personae. Made over so many times according to the logic of postwar internationalization (first West German, then art-market), his personal network became indistinguishable from apparatuses of neoliberalism. Years after his death, the Dawson City station was purchased, dismantled, and moved across national boundaries. If the network

---

101 Chile’s internationalization under Augusto Pinochet, argues David Harvey, marked the first neoliberal experiment, and suffices as evidence of my point: “A group of economists…were summoned to help reconstruct the Chilean economy. They did so along free-market lines, privatizing public assets, opening up national resources to private exploration and facilitating foreign direct investment and free trade…[T]he benefits were not well-distributed. The country and its ruling elites along with foreign investors did well enough while the people in general fared badly.” David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: A Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (New York: Verso, 2006), 12-13.
Kippenberger had developed was ineliminable, it was nevertheless bound by the rules of market exchange.
Chapter 3
Mike Kelley: The Order of Things

There is nothing more tentative, nothing more empirical (superficially, at least) than the process of establishing an order among things…. [And yet] there is no similitude and no distinction, even for the wholly untrained perception, that is not the result of a precise operation and of the application of a preliminary criterion.  
—Michel Foucault

Jannelle Reiring, cofounder, with Helene Winer, of Metro Pictures, New York, recalls that one of the first meetings between Martin Kippenberger and Mike Kelley involved a trade. Both artists were living in Los Angeles at the time (1990), and Kelley was at work on Half a Man (1987-1993), a series of sculptural objects constructed from domestic keepsakes, including found stuffed animals, blankets, and handmade crafts. Intrigued, perhaps, by Kelley’s substantial collection of found objects and the criteria he had used to select and sort them, Kippenberger suggested an exchange, his art for Kelley’s raw material. Kelley agreed.

Reiring does not recall what either artist got out of the deal, but Kelley’s estate owns a number of Kippenberger’s Hotel Drawings. If these were indeed part of the trade, then what Kippenberger proposed was an exchange of keepsakes—his travel souvenirs for Kelley’s found domestic mementos. Both artists constructed and performed their artist personae through such keepsake objects. As discussed in Chapter 1, Kippenberger’s original artist persona, the tourist, did so through souvenir photos, travel receipts, and hotel stationery. Kelley’s early work, which was often articulated in craft or Detroit-area cultural vernacular, was not tied to a fixed persona like Kippenberger’s (not at first, anyway). Instead, his work explored the ways that individuals are raised or trained into, and also damaged by, the logic of their homes and educational systems. His earliest personae took up, exaggerated, and perverted the languages of his cultural and

---

educational authorities. He then deployed these personae to collect and arrange ideas, images, and objects in painting, performance, and sculpture, posing all systems of rational organization as the irrational or arbitrary imposition of social, political, and cultural authorities—authorities that he believed had failed his Midwestern American home. Although Kippenberger and Kelley formed their personae in response to very different middle-class conditions, both artists used them to explore the ways in which personal and cultural objects are accumulated, arranged, and displayed—to explore the logic that determined the organization of their “specific cultural things” (to borrow a phrase from Kelley’s performance that introduced this dissertation).

Moreover, both artists modeled their early personae on the countercultural front men of punk and noise rock.

Lessons from Punk

Born in the Detroit suburb of Wayne, Michigan in 1954, Kelley spent his youth immersed in the politics and music of post-68 counterculture. His favorite bands included MC5 and Iggy and the Stooges, early practitioners of what would become punk rock. Although briefly affiliated with the White Panthers, a Marxist political group sympathetic to the Black Panthers’ struggle, Kelley came of age in the era immediately following civil rights and hippie-era idealism.2 “I was fourteen in 1968,” he recalls,

conscious enough to feel a part of the general social turmoil, too young to be a real hippie….However, my worldview was very much a by-product of the countercultural movement….I didn’t feel connected in any way to my family, to my country, or to reality for that matter….I was experiencing, I think, what has come to be known as the postmodern condition.3

---

2 In an interview with Franz West Kelley claims that “My biggest influence then was the White Panthers, which was an anarchist party….But I was too young to participate and I hated them for that.” Pontégnie and Bastide, Mike Kelley / Franz West, 26.
His disappointment with the utopianism of the prior decade found company in the aggressive and sometimes nihilistic ethos of Detroit-area noise bands. In particular, as he recounted in an essay in 1991, the staged antagonisms of Iggy Pop informed his performance sensibility. In 1972, Kelley began his undergraduate art education at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. He also started the band Destroy All Monsters (DAM) with Cary Loren, Niagara, and Jim Shaw (like Kippenberger, Kelley played drums). Part noise rock, part performance art, Destroy All Monsters played bad music for unwitting audiences. Their first concert took place at a New Year’s Eve comic book convention after only a single practice session. “We played one song: two lines from Black Sabbath’s ‘Iron Man’ repeated over and over against a wall of feedback,” Kelley recalls. “We were thrown out.”

Like the early Stooges, DAM often incorporated nontraditional instruments into their musical experimentation, including “hair dryers, rattles, army-surplus cassettes, vacuum cleaners, metallic objects, squeeze toys, and garage-sale amps.” Kelley described such experiments as a “pastiche of serious avant-garde music, free jazz, and hard rock, leavened with black humor—a mixture that could definitely be called proto-punk.” What distinguished DAM’s collaborations from Detroit-area bands like the Stooges, however, was the group’s commitment to the visual arts. Each of DAM’s members had his or her own art practice, a practice that grew

---

4 While attending college at the University of Michigan he hitchhiked through a snowstorm to see Iggy and the Stooges play a biker bar outside of Detroit. He describes the show as one of two concerts (the other a Sun Ra show at the Ann Arbor Blues and Jazz Festival) that “changed everything”: “When the Stooges arrived, Iggy was dressed in a ridiculous jazz-dancer’s outfit, a kind of leotard with spangled skirt….His whole demeanor said, ‘Fuck you.’” Iggy proceeded to antagonize the audience, first by kicking out a female fan for no apparent reason, then by playing “Louie Louie” on repeat. Occasionally punctuating these antagonisms with crowd pleasing songs to keep the show going, Iggy “played the audience like a fish,” until finally a riot broke out and the band escaped out the back. Mike Kelley, *Minor Histories: Statements, Conversations, Proposals* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 42-44.

5 The name was a somewhat impromptu selection made before their first show and based on a Japanese monster movie.


7 Ibid., 6.

out of, but remained separate from, the band’s musical experimentation. Jim Shaw made painting and collage mash-ups that included comic book, religious, and pornographic imagery. He also produced numerous photocopied posters for DAM shows that were never hung but instead served as experiments with copy machinery and toner.\(^9\) Kelley’s work during this time included grotesque drawings in the cartoon style of Ed Roth’s *Rat Fink*, dystopian psychedelic paintings, [Figures 63 and 64] and depictions of trans- and intersexual figures. Based out of Kelley’s basement apartment in an off-campus house known as “God’s Oasis Drive In Church,” DAM thus provided an umbrella under which these artists could explore multimedia and multifaceted art production—the collage and juxtaposition of disparate styles, production methodologies, and found materials united only by a loose musical affiliation.

Collaboratively, the group also explored the antagonizing potential of performance art.\(^10\) For example, one year before the founding of DAM, Shaw and Kelley

hung flyers around the university campus publicizing fake lectures. When students showed up to these events, they were met with “noisy and offensive” guerrilla-style performances, such as the “Futurist Ballet,” which simultaneously combined a pornographic reading; an enactment of an interview with Pat Oleszko, the queen of the Ann Arbor Hash Bash; and the noise music produced by vacuum cleaners, untrained musicians, and tape loops.\(^11\)

These early performances had much in common with Kippenberger’s staged events, particularly the opening of the *Büro* in 1979 and “¼ Century of Kippenberger” in 1980. Amateurism, the use of diverse materials and disciplines, and music as a pretense for antagonistic performance were abundant in each. Such correspondences emerged out of Kippenberger and Kelley’s shared Iggy Pop influence, as well early punk rock’s more general anti-utopianism and anything-goes amateurism. Again to quote Diedrich Diederichsen, “Punk was to realize the notion…that

\(^9\) *Return of the Repressed*, 9-10.
\(^10\) “This doesn’t come out of music’ Kelley…insisted, ‘This comes out of art.’” Ibid., 14.
\(^11\) Ibid., 9.
everyone can do everything.”12 However, where Kippenberger’s voracious DIY evidenced an entrepreneurial enthusiasm for boundless experimentation—an opportunism afforded by the Wirtschaftswunder—Kelley’s DIY looked and sounded like pessimistic nihilism. For Kippenberger, everyone could do everything as long as the product did not have to be good. For Kelley, everyone could do everything because everything was already bad—was already impoverished and broken. His musical performance was inextricable from the 1970s Midwestern American deindustrialization in which it was forged, the economic downturn that dragged a once prosperous blue-collar middle class into working class poverty.

Destroy All Monsters…was spawned from within the national recession of the seventies [the band later claimed]. By 1974, Detroit’s economy had collapsed, shaken by riots in 1967, massive social disorganization, and the deindustrialization of the American car industry. The Rust Belt’s social promise was dead, and DAM rejected outright the legacy of hippie optimism.13

The conflation of “hippie optimism” and Midwestern deindustrialization is key to Kelley’s particular Midwestern disillusionment. For Kelley, the economic promise of Fordist industry and the social promise of hippie activism were equally broken—antecedents of a damaging American ideological inheritance. His early work sought to reveal such ideologies as imposed, arbitrary systems of economic, social, and political organization, and in turn to resist all apparatuses and institutions advancing these ideologies. In his later writing, some of which is quoted above, Kelley described his resentment and artistic and musical reaction in terms like “postmodern” and “pastiche,” terms from a lexicon critics developed in the 1980s and 1990s to account for late twentieth-century political disaffection, skepticism of grand historical narratives, and artists’ and authors’ resistance to, and seemingly effortless oscillation between, received cultural conventions. Kelley’s retrospective analysis of this disaffection—one that must be

12 Nach Kippenberger, 53.
13 Return of the Repressed, 5.
understood, like all of his writing, as tied to his artistic production—is convincing enough, although it sometimes reads like adolescent nihilism (“the world seemed to me a media façade, and all history a fiction—a pack of lies”). But whatever its tone, the skepticism of Kelley’s “postmodern condition” took aim at a range of social, economic, and political phenomena, “pastiching” them together just as DAM juxtaposed disparate musical styles, instruments, and performance techniques. Along with hippie optimism and Detroit industry, his undergraduate artwork included references to the Catholic Church, popular and subcultural cartoons, middle-class home décor, gender conventions, political rhetoric, collectivism, and, importantly, the abstract and Pop painterly techniques that he was learning in his studio art classes. He treated them all as the secondary hand-me-downs of broken ideological programs—as the objects, images, and conventions organized, displayed, and taught according to a failed logic. In this early work Kelley used sloppy amateurism and jarring, often illegible juxtaposition to mimic these conventions of organization and display, casting such “logical” systems as arbitrary impositions.

In Sheep Shape (1976) [Figure 65], an eight-and-a-half by eleven inch mimeograph flyer “designed to be inserted under windshield wipers of cars in public parking lots,” Kelley adopts Christian symbolism as a metaphor for failed collectivism. The typeface list of phrases is divided into four categories: Carnal, Christ, Mass Man, and Rights of Passage [sic]. The work’s uniform letter-size format and two-tone color palate give it the appearance of a church bulletin or leaflet overdrawn with a bored parishioner’s amateur doodles. Decorated in the top right corner with a lamb on a pedestal outlined in black ink on a red background and in the bottom left with a red lion surrounded by black text, the work roughly articulates a transition from sacrificial lamb

---

14 Kelley, Foul Perfection, 94.
15 Kelley was raised Catholic.
16 Return of the Repressed, 305.
to wolf in sheep’s clothing—an inversion of victim and victimizer that is also a descent from the heavenly to the demonic. The list begins with examples of the “carnal” lamb, and includes the phrases “sheep fucking,” “items of wool to be worn,” and “eating lamb products.” Next, under “Christ,” Kelley invokes a passage from *Revelations* to describe Jesus as a Janus figure, simultaneously the sacrificial lamb and the conquering lion: “good” and “higher body” “vs. / sheep face beast of revelations / innocence and deception.” Under the heading “Mass Man” Kelley uses the lamb metaphor to conflate collectivism and mass manipulation, moving from “one of the flock” to the “little lamb who’s lost his way.” Evidencing “vulnerability and stupidity,” this lost lamb will nevertheless eventually lead the “sheep to slaughter.” The transition from victimized lamb to violating predator is marked by the “diploma” and “condoms,” Kelley’s “Rights of Passage,” which are listed at the bottom of the page under “wolf in sheep’s clothing.” Kelley’s joke—a combination of word play and dark humor that would persist throughout his oeuvre—turns on the fact that both diplomas and some condoms were traditionally made from sheep products.¹⁷ These symbols of educational and sexual coming of age are cast in the work as evidence of indoctrination (by Catholicism and collectivism), the final step in the transformation from a mindless sheep following the herd to a predator concealed in “sheepskin.”

However, *Sheep Shape* is somewhat atypical of the work Kelley was making while an undergraduate in Ann Arbor, at least in terms of media. Other photocopy works on paper from this time were produced as part of a nine-page zine with the same title (a popular format among DIY punks of the era), which includes a black and white photograph of a roasted lamb, drawings of half-sheep, half-snake monsters, and an illustrated joke about sheep-fucking.¹⁸ However, most

---

¹⁷ Sheepskin for diplomas and sheep intestine called lambskin for condoms.

¹⁸ It is worth noting here that Kippenberger’s zine, *sehr gut / very good* was produced three years later, in 1979.
of Kelley’s surviving student work combines painting and collage. Like his contemporaneous DAM performances, these early works juxtapose recognizable second-hand images and styles into noisy visual compositions. For example, *Shrimp, Head, Pot* (1976) [Figure 66] is an acrylic painting on wallpaper that combines found commercial imagery with painterly abstraction. The central images—a kitchen pot, a picture of Joe Namath, and a cooked shrimp—are stacked on top of each other, forming an absurd totem. This totem is surrounded by two concentric blue halos on a yellow, green, and brown color field rendered in gestural brush strokes and paint drips. The field is further broken down into triangular and polygonal planes and punctuated by geometric shapes in primary colors. The painting is then framed by the edges of wallpaper Kelley left bare. Altogether the collage reads like a hodgepodge of incommensurate painterly vocabularies—a conflation of geometric and gestural abstraction and found commercial imagery. Kelley’s totemic stacking of the found pop images underscores the absurdity of the mash-up, as the totemic form suggests symbolic or mythic kinship among images that are obviously unrelated.

*Shrimp, Head, Pot* was part of a series of paintings that Kelley exhibited in 1995 at the Kestner-Gesellschaft in Hannover under the title “Missing Time: Works on Paper 1974-1976, Reconsidered.” For the exhibition, Kelley selected from his archive of his student work, leaving some paintings as he found them and altering others in order to “make them stronger in their own terms.”19 In his retrospective analysis of the work, Kelley claims that the paintings were a reaction to the dominant teaching methodology in the art program at the University of Michigan:

Most [of the teachers] were not touchy-feely painters, but staunch formalists who had studied under Hans Hofmann in America or under various modernist masters in Europe….The typical student painting was a gestural, abstract formalist composition in the Hofmann manner….Arguments over painting were still caught up

in questions of composition, and had not really got beyond the shock offered by pop art and color field painting...Some of the painters most influential in this training were gestural pop painters. Robert Rauschenberg and Larry Rivers found favor with both faculty and students alike.\textsuperscript{20}

The “Missing Time” exhibition first introduced Kelley’s student work to art audiences, and so it is impossible to separate these paintings from the interpretative frame he provided (if for no other reason than that we cannot know which of his student paintings were excluded from the series in order to illustrate this frame). Nevertheless, Kelley’s account of his stylistic program is convincing. The blend of gestural and geometric abstraction with found imagery corresponds with an art student’s early encounter with, and interpretation of, Rauschenberg. More generally, the juxtaposition of Pop and abstract painterly vocabularies is commensurate with the formal experimentation of a student educated in the 1970s, particularly outside of New York, at a moment when abstraction and Pop were being taught nationally and promoted internationally as the languages of contemporary art.\textsuperscript{21} What Kelley describes as the “Hofmann manner” refers to the pedagogical inheritance of Hofmann’s “push-pull” formal theories, that is, to training in the use of bright color and geometric shape against gestural ground to produce the illusion of movement and depth [Figure 67]. Kelley claims that, as a student, he understood Rauschenberg’s work to employ a similar compositional strategy to arrange found images. “[I]n Rauschenberg’s work, any image could replace any other, and…little attention was paid to the associative tensions between them….Image was equivalent to paint smear in his paintings.”\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{20} Kelley, \textit{Minor Histories}, 64. This exhibition will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{21} In Chapter 1 I elaborated on the role of Abstract Expressionism and Pop in the international reintegration of West Germany. Howard Singerman has argued that New York School abstraction was inseparable from the postwar spread of studio art programs—a function of the G.I. Bill and the ensuing professionalization of teaching, which had the effect of standardizing and institutionalizing artistic idiom. More on this below.

\textsuperscript{22} Kelley, \textit{Minor Histories}, 64. DAM was, in some respects, also an ersatz Pop project. “Comparisons between DAM and Warhol’s collective studio environment...are convenient (\textit{Orbit} magazine retroactively characterized Destroy All Monsters as a ‘dorm-room version of Warhol’s Factory’), and Niagara in particular professes a fascination with Edie Sedgwick and the superstars.” \textit{Return of the Repressed}, 10.
Like Kippenberger, Kelley did not reject such imposed languages but instead imitated them badly. In *Shrimp, Head, Pot* he offers a “perverse reading of Hofmann by replacing the [geometric forms] with Pop imagery derived from the lowest kinds of crap that came in the mail.” In addition to popular image culture, Kelley also drew from subcultural cartoon forms, what he calls “weird second-rate comic books” in the style of Ed Roth, as well as other elements of “fringe popular culture,” like “erotica, Santo the Mexican masked wrestler, and drawings by adolescents.” The juxtaposition of such disparate iconographies sought to undermine what he understood to be Pop’s insistence on the homogeneity of image culture. At the other pole, Kelley’s adopted abstract vocabulary juxtaposed not only geometric and gestural abstraction, but also avant-garde and decorative patterns (i.e., the grid), particularly in his use of wallpaper as a support for painting. In short, Kelley’s student paintings use DAM-style juxtaposition to pervert the Pop and abstract vocabularies of his art school education, presenting such systems of image and paint organization as arbitrary.

Art historian Cary Levine has provided the most thorough account of Kelley’s early work to date, concluding that “[a]long with the antirock of Destroy All Monsters, his decorative militant paintings, nonallegorical ‘allegorical’ drawings, and nonpolitical ‘political’ cartoons [Figure 68] can be understood in relation to his growing doubts about supposedly rational

---

23 Interview with John Welchman at the Walker Arts Center, June 2, 2005.  
25 Here in particular Kelley’s student paintings invoke Harold Rosenberg’s famous characterization of Pollock’s paintings as “apocalyptic wallpaper,” as well as Sigmar Polke’s conflation of abstraction with middle-class home décor.  
26 Mike Kelley, *Minor Histories*, 65. Kelley renders this practice figural through the transsexual included in *New!* (1974). Despite the title, the image does not depict a wholly new sex, but a jumbled mismatching of established symbols of maleness and femaleness, including facial hair, breasts, body hair, and a vibrating dildo pointed at a triangular patch of pubic hair. This “new” figure is analogous to the “new” style produced in Kelley’s conflation of Pop and abstraction—a jumbled and jarring collection of familiar forms.
thought”—his conviction that “there is no reality, except provisional reality.”\textsuperscript{27} Kelley’s other historians have drawn similar conclusions: “There’s no center here,” writes John Welchman, “not even in its absence, and there’s no point in making one up.”\textsuperscript{28} “Art (and, by extension, music),” says Nicole Rudick, “represented the best place to explore meaninglessness.”\textsuperscript{29} It is of course always difficult to assign a consistent program to an artist’s student work; such work is by its very nature experimental. But what each of these projects share is a mode of mimicry—a kind of bad copying—of the aesthetic vocabularies of his educational authorities, which Kelley then conflates with inherited ideologies of post-68 America. Branden Joseph argues that DAM’s references to death in their noise-rock mash-ups (he cites the songs “Can’t Kill Kill” and “I Love You But You’re Dead,” both from 1975) were part of the band’s refusal of hippie optimism.\textsuperscript{30} A related gesture can be read in paintings like \textit{Elegy to the Symbionese Liberation Army} (1975) [Figure 64], which features the symbol of a militant leftist organization that kidnapped and then recruited heiress Patty Hearst—a bizarre and violent successor to 1960s civil rights activism. Kelley’s \textit{Allegorical Drawings}, also produced while he was a student, make up a perverse series of trading cards featuring Detroit’s resident sufferers. One includes the phrase “Car Problems” and an American-style vehicle perched on the head of social activist John Reed [Figure 69]. Another depicts a black woman with an Afro under the label “Deepest Darkest,” a reference to Detroit’s recent history of racial conflict and white fear [Figure 63]. Others are less clear, however, offering no specific allegorical program, but instead a more general picture of the monsterification of Detroit in the wake of its deindustrialization.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{28} John Welchman, et al., \textit{Mike Kelley} (London: Phaidon, 1999), 44. Welchman says this of Kelley’s work in general.
\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Return of the Repressed}, 5.
\textsuperscript{30} Meyer-Hermann and Mark eds., \textit{Mike Kelley}, 315.
\textsuperscript{31} Levine calls these “caricatures without an identifiable target.” \textit{Pay for Your Pleasures}, 47.
The stakes of Kelley’s early work were both far-reaching and imprecise, an effect of his youth, disaffection, eclecticism, and the collaborative (and chaotic) nature of DAM.\textsuperscript{32} Fueled by a steady stream of counterculture and booze, the work was reactive, and conflated his most proximate authority figures and their historical precedents (his art school teachers, Hofmann and Rauschenberg) with the more general social, political, and economic conditions of the American Midwest and the ideologies that had precipitated them. The conflation, in Kelley’s youthful iconoclasm, was arbitrary, but it was not absurd. Howard Singerman has argued, thoroughly and convincingly, that the proliferation of studio art programs in postwar American was tied to the spread of Abstract Expressionism as a national idiom. Moreover, both phenomena were part of a broader postwar reconfiguration of American society. “Abstract Expressionism in the university—often taught by Hofmann school students—provided a professional charge, an arena within which the young artist had to act in order that his work could be seen as serious.”\textsuperscript{33} Singerman describes the spread of Abstract Expressionism to studio programs as part of the professionalization of art practice, which he credits in large part to the G.I. Bill:

\begin{quote}
The G.I. Bill funneled money into educational settings, accompanied by the demand that they professionalize and accredit themselves and credential their graduates….The gender of the veterans coupled with the career demands that they…were seen to embody insisted, along with the federal government, on the streamlining of art teaching and a professionalization of its goals.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

Just as Abstract Expressionism had been used by American political institutions to spread American social and economic ideology internationally, it had also been a component of national

\textsuperscript{32} Most of the projects were produced or staged in God’s Oasis, an off-campus “three-story Victorian” populated by at least six people that Kelley described as “a garbage dump with a path running through it.” \textit{Return of the Repressed}, 4-5.
\textsuperscript{33} Howard Singerman, \textit{Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 130.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 128-129.
policies that changed the character of postwar American education; specifically, the expansion of college education as a form of professional specialization.

**Performance and the Birth of a Persona**

In 1976 Kelley and Shaw left Ann Arbor to pursue graduate work at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts).\(^35\) Kelley had hoped to study with composer Morton Subotnik in the music department, but was denied due to his lack of classical training.\(^36\) Instead he studied with the largely Conceptualist faculty of the art department, which included Laurie Andersen, visiting professor David Askevold, and Douglas Heubler, who became Kelley’s adviser. In the course of his two years at CalArts his work quickly shifted away from painting, but his interest in music persisted. He and Shaw rented a house together in Sylmar where they produced music, mailed cassette recordings back and forth with the DAM members still in Michigan, and converted objects found at local flea markets (called “swap meets” in California) into musical instruments. Their house was located close to the San Fernando swap meet, which, as Kelley recalled, was “one of the junkiest [in town], with a section where people sold used items spread out in the dirt, or out of the trunks of their cars. [Their] house was filled with swap meet pickings, a lot of it noise-producing.”\(^37\)

“Junk collecting” was, in a sense, already Kelley’s musical and artistic methodology—that is, the accumulating and arranging in down-and-dirty fashion of second-hand painterly and

---

\(^35\) Jim Shaw left as well, and they were replaced by Ron Asheton of the Stooges and Mike Davis of MC5, evidence of these bands’ shared sensibilities.


\(^37\) Kelley, “Introduction to an Essay,” unpaginated.
musical practice—and in California he had better access to his material. There he quickly started
a band, Polka Dot and the Spots, after buying a particularly “killer” collection of polka singles at
the swap meet.38 Soon fellow CalArts student Tony Oursler joined the group, and in 1977 The
Poetics was born. In its earliest incarnation, The Poetics blended disparate performance formats,
including “purposely-pointless prop comedy, shaggy dog stories, abstract jokes and lounge
music”—all vaguely recognizable performance tropes—into an absurd amalgam of performance
art and variety show.39 The “Pole Dance,” for example, was “a choreographic work parodying
Bauhaus-style structural theater. In it, Oursler and [Kelley] worked at shoving poles into each
[other’s] stretch pants-suit outfits until [they] were barely able to move.”40

Again, like Kippenberger’s, Kelley’s early musical performances were committed to
amateurism, eclecticism, and ribald comedy. They traded practiced, technical ability and
traditional musical formats for anything-goes experimentation, often to the point where music
seemed like pretense rather than main event.41 But for Kelley it was the flea market rather than
noodle casserole that provided the metaphor for such performance pastiche. As Oursler recalled,

In LA, Mike discovered swap meets and music, and scouring the
two scenes became habitual for him…. [H]e liked the way the
sellers arranged their disparate goods, laying out marvelous
juxtapositions of fluorescent buckets, toys, wigs, electronics, and
clothes organized by color or texture.42

The key to Kelley’s interest in the swap meet, Oursler suggests, was its organizational logic—the
fact that a perfectly rational organizational system (color or texture) might yield totally irrational
juxtapositions of objects. This would become the central conceit of Kelley’s CalArt’s work. In

39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 This should not be taken as an indication that Kelley’s interest in music was anything but serious, however.
42 Tony Oursler in “Image of the People” with Ann Goldstein, Michael Smith, Paul McCarthy, Jim Shaw, and Kim
both his music and his art he explored how varying the techniques of staging, explaining, and performing sounds and objects (what I have referred to as systems of organizing) might affirm or disrupt the rationality of the relationships between them.

Musical performance was once again the precedent for Kelley’s art making. As Joseph argues, The Poetics’ “Juxtaposition of different performance formats (while also often offering ‘pathetic versions’)” sought to “shift viewers’ attention from the musical and/or thematic contents to the spectatorial conventions and institutional structures by which they were framed.”

Joseph’s claims are difficult to confirm, since most of what remains of The Poetics output was produced or reproduced years after the band was formed. Nevertheless, those later projects were indeed explicitly engaged with issues of staging and “spectatorial conventions.” For example, Kelley and Oursler organized a Poetics retrospective at Metro Pictures and Lehmann Maupin, New York, in 1998 in which large-scale paintings were installed in the middle of the gallery like the temporary walls of a stage performance [Figure 70]. These works were then lit using gelled, clip-on lamps in the fashion of garage-band performance and small-town community theater. Viewers navigated the maze-like installation to a soundtrack of “mostly inaudible video interviews, raw sound and cacophonous music.”

The effect was a haunted-house-like space, a dizzying accumulation of conventions for presenting content (the interview format, musical performance, painting, and stagecraft) that failed to offer any legible content (\textit{The New York Times} summarized the show as a “loud, chaotic, unintelligible and pretentious two-gallery extravaganza”—“the most irritating show in New York”). In addition to exploring

\begin{flushright}
43 Meyer-Hermann and Mark eds., \textit{Mike Kelley}, 323.
45 Ibid.
\end{flushright}
conventions of stagecraft, The Poetics’ early performances often involved the production of over-the-top staged characters, which Oursler refers to as personae:

Out of these sessions came songs as well as invented characters. One persona that stood out was the Dream Lover, who…danced around like an idiot onstage, smelling flowers and laughing a low, submoronic laugh, like a cartoon character just before the anvil drops on its head…. A host of other characters followed: Crazy Head (half man and half woman), the Vein Fucker, the Boneless Sack of Flesh, Heathens in Limbo, the Comedian (some kind of failed Rat Pack guy who told nonsensical jokes), the Crowd Pleaser (everyone enjoys an enormous penis).46

This more radical version of The Poetics did not last long, however. It segued, on the one hand, into a more “nightclub” version of the band and, on the other, into Kelley’s experimental object-based performance work.47 These latter projects were staged explicitly as artworks, and continued his experiments with the construction of staged personae. In 1978 he performed a group of such works at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE), including Perspectaphone, Tower of Babel, and Spirit Voices under the title Poetry in Motion.48 In these performances, found and fabricated objects are given multiple roles, operating as instruments and as props, and often serving to demonstrate overly complex concepts, or to demonstrate simple concepts in overly complex ways. In Perspectaphone (1977-1978), for example, Kelley used hollow trapezoidal sculptures as both megaphones and as 3D models to demonstrate single-point perspective [Figure 71].49 He referred to these instrument-props as “demonstrated sculptures,” and indeed in these performances he often adopted a demonstrative or professorial tone, one that could be exaggeratedly authoritarian. Timothy Martin writes,

---

46 Tony Oursler in “Image of the People,” Artforum, 249.
48 As Timothy Martin notes, this show took place during Kelley’s final semester at CalArts. Timothy Martin, “Janitor in a Drum; Excerpts from a Performance History” in Catholic Tastes, Elisabeth Sussman ed. (New York: Abrams, 1993), 57.
49 Kelley did not allow any of the performances to be videotaped; however, a few can be partially reconstructed through photographic documentation and the remembrances of those who attended.
[S]houting through the hand-held megaphone Kelley demonstrates that it’s “loudest near the mouth,” and adds, “you’re not hearing it louder; I’m fooling you.” He traces the megaphone on a nearby chalkboard, turning it into a perspective diagram and adding big and little stick figures at the appropriate ends. He then explains: “the big person is near, has a big voice; little person is far, has a small voice.”

Just as he had done in his student paintings, in these works Kelley mimics and perverts the voice of his educational authorities. His performance persona generally takes on the role of art school professor, here lecturing on the illusionistic capacity of perspectival drawing. More specifically, these performances conflate education with the demonstrative format of the Conceptual Art he encountered in graduate school. Kelley recalled in a statement on the work of David Askevold that CalArts was his first exposure to Conceptualism, which he understood to be “loosely defined as a movement that attempted to point out, and experiment with, the presentation of ‘knowledge.’” Such presentations could be carried out in language, narrative, or in the “parodic recreation” of pedagogical or demonstrative forms found in “the typical page layouts of academic textbooks: bland documentary photographs accompanied by redundant footnotes; absurd charts, graphs, maps, and diagrams.” In Kelley’s performances, however, such “knowledge” was cast as bizarre spiritualism and magical thinking—as the organization of disparate objects, beliefs, and phenomena according to an arbitrary logic.

For Tube Music (1977-79), for example, Kelley takes up two equally absurd pseudoscientific beliefs about sound. The first is the spiritualist contention that the white noise produced by audio devices can capture the voices of ghosts. The second is the conspiracy theory that the U.S. government developed a

---

50 Martin in Catholic Tastes, 59.
51 Kelley, Foul Perfection, 197.
52 Kelley’s negative treatment of mysticism is another facet of his post-68 disaffection. Moreover, this was a particularly common criticism from West Coast punk rock. The Dead Kennedys’ California Über Alles (1980), for example, is critical of West Coast spiritualism.
weaponized musical note that could induce defecation—a so-called “brown noise.” In the performance Kelley does not offer a sincere reading of either phenomenon, but instead develops an authoritative persona according to whom unrelated objects (primarily cardboard tubes) are used and organized in relationship to one another.

In 1978 Kelley also began work on a series of wooden birdhouses that would eventually serve as his master’s thesis exhibition. “The earliest [of these] were built directly from how-to manuals, but they quickly assumed strange shapes illuminated by idiosyncratic titles and ‘explanations’ that seemed to derive either from the mind of a madman or from some alternative physical universe.” Although odd, most of the birdhouses read, at least initially, as playful jokes. Catholic Birdhouse (1978) [Figure 72] looks like a typical backyard decoration, except that it has two entrance holes; the bottom, which is labeled “The easy road,” is larger and features a sturdy-looking perch, and the top, “The hard road,” is smaller, rough, and splintered, and has a similarly worn perch to match. Other birdhouses employ a kind of pseudo-physics to make their jokes. Birdhouse for a Bird That is Near and a Bird That is Far (1978) [Figure 73] features two trapezoidal boxes, “one with a large hole and perch at the wide end and the other with a small hole and perch at the narrow end.” A note and sketch that accompanies the sculpture plays with the effect of proximity and scale, claiming that the small hole is for far away birds and “prohibits the entrance of the larger near bird who has the first chance.” The trapezoidal boxes that constitute the work, and the play with perspectival illusion, have obvious parallels with Kelley’s Perspectaphone performance. And much like Perspectaphone, which involved as much yelling and berating as explaining and elucidating, these humorous birdhouses

---

53 Levine describes the work in similar language, Pay for your Pleasures, 56.
54 Levine, Pay for Your Pleasures, 54.
55 Ibid.
could also be darkly violent in their absurdity. Each is potentially dangerous to its avian
inhabitants, or at least inhospitable.

Like Kelley’s performance work, the birdhouses were formed in reaction to his
Conceptualist education at CalArts. He recalls, “Building a birdhouse would be a typical
masculine pastime in the suburb in which I grew up, but was hardly the norm at CalArts….They
developed naturally out of my own experience and the elitist frame of graduate art school.”
Their humorous juxtaposition of object and text (the text came in the form of descriptive notes
that are exhibited next to the birdhouses) offers a jocular provocation of his mentors in their own
aesthetic vocabulary. But these works also extended the logic of Kelley’s contemporaneous
performances: they are constructed and arranged according to bizarre, imposed pseudo-logical
systems.

For both the birdhouses and Kelley’s sculpture-based performances, the crux of the work
is the framing and determining power of language over objects, a theme he explored by
producing authoritative speaking or writing personae. In the performances, meaning was
“contingent, changeable, depending on how [objects] were acted upon or talked about,” writes
Martin. And in each, pedagogical description and demonstration shifts the use of his
“demonstrated sculptures.” These gestures relied on clever wordplay, often homonymy, and on
objects that were recognizable and yet generic enough to serve many purposes. Cardboard tubes,
for example, which were featured in Tube Music and Spirit Voices (1977-79), are treated
alternatively as megaphones, hearing aids, and monoculars in the way that a child plays with the
empty tube from a roll of paper towels.

56 Meyer-Hermann and Mark eds., Mike Kelley, 368.
57 Again, Levine offers a similar analysis of these structures, arguing that they “evoke craft culture, familiar to
Kelley from his suburban Detroit upbringing, and the ‘blank’ aesthetic of conceptualism and minimalism.” Pay for
Your Pleasures, 53.
58 Martin in Catholic Tastes, 56.
Kelley did not allow these performances to be filmed because, as he argued, “What I wanted was for somebody to watch them and to feel a logic. If you could go back and watch it on videotape, that logic would be disproven because it made no sense.” The performances walk the line between logic and illogic, meaning and absurdity. In one sense, they extend the ideological skepticism of his undergraduate work by treating authority in general as the imposition of arbitrary systems of categorization and organization—as always a kind of mysticism (or, alternatively, conspiracy theory, which was one of Kelley’s favorite types of pseudo-logic to explore).

But in his embodiment of an organizing authority they also created a space for such systems to seem logical. In these performances Kelley had it both ways, treating ideology as mysticism while nevertheless convincingly producing the effects of authority on the meanings and uses of objects, images, and ideas in the work.

In many respects, these projects were an elaboration of Kelley’s earlier DAM performances, work that challenged systems of organization and rationalization and yet set up its own organizational apparatus to do so (that is, the band itself, which offered an umbrella under which a variety of objects, performances, and practices were organized). Like the artwork that Kelley produced under DAM, these performances were also decidedly American in their frame of reference. *Monitor and the Merrimac* (1979), for example, is loosely based on the Civil War battle at Hampton Roads, Virginia. *Meditation on a Can of Vernors* (1981) is “a long and tortuous rumination on American cultural heritage viewed through nineteenth-century landscape

---

60 Kelley maintained an abiding interest in UFO theory throughout his life.
61 Levine and others have made similar claims. Levine, citing both Elisabeth Sussman and Richard Armstrong’s contributions to the catalogue for the exhibition, *Catholic Tastes*, writes, “Often supplemented with detailed diagrams, illustrations, and placards, his lectures endowed his crudely made contraptions and otherwise worthless odds-and-ends with weighty meanings, which seemed at once absurd and deductively reasoned. The goal was a pseudoacademic presentation-performance that, as he puts it, ‘sounded rational, yet fell apart.’” *Pay for Your Pleasures*, 56.
painting, fiction, nature philosophy, and government monuments.” In this performance in particular Kelley returned to themes from his Midwestern home, adopting the advertising mascot of Vernors Gingerale, a Detroit-area soda brand, as the work’s imposing authority. In general, these works abandoned art-school aesthetics as their target, taking up instead the pastimes of Kelley’s American suburb much like the Birdhouses that had preceded them. For example, The Parasite Lily (1980, LACE) is, according to Martin, “a fairy tale of daily life,” which involves arranging furniture, cleaning an imaginary car, pondering the “newness” of the imaginary car, and sweeping up. The central metaphor is a symbiotic relationship between a parasitic water lily and the performed persona—a metaphor for marriage that explores domestic power dynamics and co-dependence through a host/parasite relationship.

However, it was not until Kelley’s final performance/exhibition from this period, the multi-part Plato’s Cave, Rothko’s Chapel, Lincoln’s Profile (1985-86), that he adapted this American persona in order to pressure the rational system undergirding his own artistic practice. As Levine writes, “Kelley increasingly came to see his assault on the rationality and belief systems of others as a denial of the specificity and socially constructed nature of his own perspective,” and so he began to investigate the presuppositions of his anti-authority and anti-rationality critique itself. He started by using three unrelated phrases (the possessives from the work’s title, representing philosophy, art, and politics) to draw out a string of personal associations—a map, in a sense, of his personal method of organizing and relating ideas. The major touchstones include Western Philosophy, Christian mythology, Abstract Expressionism.

---

62 Martin in Catholic Tastes, 70.
63 As Martin says, he sets up this persona as “as a pantheistic über-patriarch.” Catholic Tastes, 71.
64 Martin in Catholic Tastes, 68.
65 Levine, Pay for Your Pleasures, 59.
(including Hofmann’s push/pull theories), and American race relations, specifically with respect to the racial politics of Los Angeles (where he had moved after graduating from CalArts).

The forty-five minute performance component of the project, staged at Artists Space, New York, in 1986, begins in the cave, a space that serves alternatively as a metaphor for bodily orifices and for the dark recesses of memory. Throughout, his monologues and dialogues offer first-person associative chains that link up the performance’s possessive phrases. For example, he claims, “I have mental images of the configuration of Rothko’s last emission and of the shape of the large puddle found under John Wilkes Booth’s horse.”66 These associations are connected through the kind of word play that Kelley developed in earlier performances, allowing one image or concept to slip into the next (“I’m going to take my pants off now…and lay it right on the line. It doesn’t matter if it’s a ruler. I am no longer ashamed, for all the rulers have been dethroned”).67 And in the same manner as his earlier performances, Plato’s Cave presents the organization of objects and ideas as the arbitrary imposition of pseudo-logic. It culminates with a descent into the cave that is also a withdrawal from categorization and hierarchy: “Modern urges are pushing toward a looser and more fluid attitude about how things are categorized,” Kelley announces.68 In the cave’s dark utopia social division, particularly racial difference, melts into an irreducible, monochromatic corporeal ooze: “This plum field painting of vital fluid darkens in hue as it flutters down into the depths…[colors] exert no influence here at the edge of night.”69

As the title of the work suggests, the metaphor of the cave turns on Plato’s allegory, his elucidation of the effect of education on human nature and knowledge about the world. In the

---

66 Mike Kelley, Plato’s Cave Rothko’s Chapel Lincoln’s Profile (Venice CA: New City Editions, 1986), 4-5. This publication was produced on the occasion of the exhibition and related performance at Artists Space. The text differs in parts from the performance script. When I cite the book I use this format. Otherwise quotations come from the recording of the performance: Mike Kelley, Mike Kelley: Plato’s Cave, Rothko’s Chapel, Lincoln’s Profile (with Sonic Youth) and The Peristaltic Airwaves (Los Angeles: Compound Annex, 2012), compact disk.
67 Ibid., 59.
68 Ibid., 92.
69 Ibid.
allegory, mankind is posed as a group of prisoners who have lived their entire lives in a cave seeing only shadows cast on the wall. According to Plato, education can bring the prisoners out of the cave and into the light of day where they might see things as they really are. The allegory relates to Plato’s Theory of Forms—the notion that “Forms” (universal ideals, in the allegory represented as things seen in the light of day) are distinct from perceivable objects (specific things, like a tree or a cup rather than treeness or cupness, represented in the allegory as shadow). In Kelley’s reformulation, however, sunlight enables illusion, not knowledge of true forms. It is only in darkness that one might come to know the true nature of things:

Though in the bottom of a pit and shrouded in darkness, there are no lies here. The chameleon needs light and color to enable it to conform, to hide itself, to lie. In the richness of mud things cannot be changed for they are what they are.70

The speaker in Plato’s Cave seeks a way back from the light of day to the richness of cave mud—a retreat from idealism to the specificity and materiality of things that simply “are what they are.” This is the fantasy of Kelley’s final performance: a vision of things deep in the cave, prior to education and socialization, where nothing is rationalized or categorized but simply is.

This fantasy takes material form throughout the performance, appearing as a corporeal ooze of “vital fluid” that might upend racial, economic, and social categorization.71 Such material is the unstable ground of Kelley’s attack on rationality—it is both an agent that can negate hierarchical division and a space in which such division does not exist: “In the cave is the lowest foundation; here lie the irreducible themes.”72 It is a vision after George Bataille’s base materialism, a theory against dialectical idealism which, rather than synthesize categorical

70 Kelley, Plato’s Cave Rothko’s Chapel Lincoln’s Profile, 72.
71 For example, Kelley says in the performance, “The shade of Christ’s bruises are constant no matter what skin tone acts as their background. Black Jesus, Red Jesus, Yellow Jesus, White Jesus all lie together in the same melting pot where fatty purple cooks to the top.” Recording.
72 Kelley, Plato’s Cave Rothko’s Chapel Lincoln’s Profile, 91.
oppositions (i.e., high/low), sought to negate them. As usual, Kelley’s articulation of even this Bataillean program is illogical and contradictory (he says, “These stories are not meant as parables in defense of the abolition of upper and lower…Anyone who has been to the farm can testify to the importance of a pecking order”). Even his own (ir)rational system is rendered absurd when he takes it as an object of scrutiny. But the fantasy is not rejected. If education trains subjects in the logic of damaging inherited ideologies, then to escape such ideology one must get to a state prior to education—from must get back into the cave.

Cave imagery featured prominently in the exhibition component of Plato’s Cave as well, particularly in the centerpiece of the project, a room lit by fake firelight titled, The Trajectory of Light in Plato’s Cave [Figure 74]. The work consists of a room adorned on the outside with black and white paintings (many depicting caves) and on the inside with bed sheets that appear as monochromatic painting, Rorschach tests, and death shrouds—objects that again suggest associative chains connecting Kelley’s key references to philosophy, Abstract Expressionism, Christianity, and racial politics. To enter the space the viewer must crawl through a one-and-a-half foot gap below a painting that reads: “When spelunking sometimes you have to stoop…sometimes you have to go on all fours…sometimes even crawl…” [Figure 75]. To get to a state prior to education, to get into the darkness of the cave, to encounter Kelley’s base material, you have to get down on all fours like an infant or an animal. You have to regress.

Plato’s Cave is not resolved in its materialist program. The work is a meandering exploration of associations—a Rorschach-like ideological spelunking—that traces the outline of the foundations of Kelley’s critique of rationality. However, Plato’s Cave set the terms for his next major project, Half a Man (1987-1993), a series composed of found stuffed animals.

---

73 Kelley, Plato’s Cave, Rothko’s Chapel, Lincoln’s Profile, 75.
74 In the performance Kelley articulates a racial hierarchy based on colors and bodily excrement. These colors are reiterated in the bed sheets that hang in the exhibition’s cave space.
blankets, felt banners, and furniture. In *Half a Man*, regression takes the form of childhood play, bringing Kelley’s practice literally down on all fours to the floor of the child’s playroom. For the series Kelley abandoned performance in favor of installation, and abandoned his mimicry of the aesthetic programs of art school in favor of mimicking the organizational logic of the American domestic interior. As he said of this transition, “I started working with craft materials because that was art when I grew up. I wanted to go home.”

*Half a Man* marked Kelley’s first turn home, one of many to come. It was not a turn to his home specifically but to a generic home, to an imagined space of childhood experience prior to formal education. The home is, after all, the very first site of socialization, and in *Half a Man* the home operates as the primary institution imposing rational order on the formless material of the world.

Although Kelley would abandon performance when he began *Half a Man*, he did not abandon his performed personae. Instead, they were folded into his practice. As the title of the project suggests, *Half a Man* sets up a bifurcated figure of the artist—a persona split into a down-in-the-mud regressive and an authoritative pedagogue. The first half of the persona, the regressive, is the implied maker of his objects, a figure that continued to explore Kelley’s fantasy of base materialism and regression. The other half, the pedagogue, is the successor of his performance pedagogues, a figure who writes the catalogue essays, gives works their titles, and lectures and conducts interviews, usually in order to reveal such fantasies as constructed by the very ideologies they sought to topple.

---

75 Pontégnie and Bastide eds., *Mike Kelley / Franz West*, 26.
Chapter 4
Mike Kelley: Going Home

*Half a Man* [Figure 76] did for Kelley what *Peter* did for Kippenberger: it marked a major development in his practice—a development that would lead to greater international attention—and it created a template for his future production methodology. Like *Peter, Half a Man* is a series of primarily sculptural objects that grew over the course of multiple distinct but related exhibitions, and often shifted in response to its audience reception. The first took place at Rosamund Felsen Gallery, Los Angeles, in 1987. It was included in the exhibition, “Three Projects; *Half a Man, From My Institution to Yours, Pay for Your Pleasure,*” at the Renaissance Society in 1988, was shown at Metro Pictures, New York that same year, and was exhibited at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C. in 1991. Although often described as a collection of craft objects, *Half a Man* is more accurately seen as a multi-part meditation on the domestic keepsake. Many of the works do indeed include handmade crafts, but other elements are industrially produced, including stuffed animals like those won in carnival games, stuffed cartoon figures (like Winnie the Pooh and Garfield the Cat), as well as more generic plush toys, blankets, and even furniture—second-hand finds from swap meets and thrift stores.

Of the *Half a Man* works that do include true craft objects, *More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid* (1987) [Figure 77], which was part of the first iteration of the series, is perhaps the best known. It is a seven-and-a-half by ten foot canvas covered in a patchwork of afghans to which Kelley affixed yarn and fabric toys. In its allover composition, *More Love Hours* appears like a flea-market rendering of a Jackson Pollock. And indeed like Pollock’s drip paintings, which were painted on the floor of his studio, the mass of toys and blankets in Kelley’s collage looks as though it was constructed on the floor rather than the wall (albeit the floor of a child’s playroom).
This tension between the work’s horizontality and verticality is reiterated in *The Wages of Sin* (1987) [Figure 77, candles], a collection of partially melted wax candles on a small table that is always displayed next to *More Love Hours*. In both, the dripping or drooping forms look like they are trapped in transition, slowly creeping their way back to the ground. Other works from the series are similarly oriented. *Plush Kundalini and Chakra Set* (1987) [Figure 78], a white, serpentine object punctuated with knot-like plush nodes representing six chakras, is hung from the ceiling so that it pools onto the gallery floor as the coiled “Kundalini,” a mystical energy located at the center of the pelvis that awakens up the spine through tantric or yogic practice.\(^1\) Similarly, *Ascending Hosts* and *Descending Order* (both 1989) [Figure 79] are vertical felt constructions hung so that they collapse into piles on the ground. The most gruesome of these dangling sculptures, *Eviscerated Corpse* (1989) [Figure 80], is a gutted doll mounted to the wall, her oversized offal spilling out onto the floor as plush snakes and bananas. Although grizzly, this work is also evocative of normal childhood play, which can yield broken toys and playrooms covered in their batting and yarn guts. Indeed, many (although not all) of the *Half a Man* works would appear like the innocent and happenstance constructions of children if it were not for the very adult-themed titles Kelley provides. *Innards* (1990) [Figure 81], for example, is an abstract constellation of stuffed-animal parts strewn across a white sheet. Others, like *Arena #2 (Kangaroo)* (1990) [Figure 82], are gruesome all on their own—here a Kangaroo is attached by a long cord to a disembodied head, a scene of birth or death that, in either case, terrifies a pair of on-looking elephants. But Kelley is also playing with his adult, museum-going audience in these works, inviting his viewer to apply obviously adult anthropomorphization to what are, of course, just used toys.

\(^1\) This work was also part of the original exhibition of *Half a Man*. 
The tension between horizontality and verticality is thus a tension between childhood play and adult imposition and interpretation, between a pre-social process of arranging objects “down in the dirt” (to quote Kelley on the flea market) and the form that such an arrangement might take as it is fit into or organized by conventions of the world of adults. It is a binary that Kelley reads through a specific post-Pollock lineage. In *Yarn* (1990) [Figure 83], for example, the titular material is unraveled against a white blanket support, forming abstract, calligraphic, and Pollock-like “drips.” Kelley’s felt constructions from 1989, meanwhile, are evocative of felt work by Robert Morris, and of the gravity-shaped early work of Richard Serra [Figure 84 a. and b.]. Both cite Pollock as a reference point for their process and gravitational attacks on form. The crux for each artist is axial orientation and, inextricably, material and its organization. Morris, in his short essay “Anti-Form” (1968), describes this tension in terms of Minimalist geometry. The use of rectilinear forms in such sculpture, he argues, is part of a history of human production that favored “well-built” things.

This imperative for the well-built thing solved certain problems. It got rid of asymmetrical placing and composition, for one thing. The solution also threw out all nonrigid materials….But the broad rationality of such schemes is related to the reasonableness of the will built. What remains problematic about these schemes is the fact that any order for multiple units is an imposed one that has no inherent relation to the physicality of the existing units.

The tension, for Morris, is between imposed rational order and the physicality of the specific things being ordered. It is a tension rendered in his felt work between verticality and horizontality, according to Rosalind Krauss, because form, a function of the “well-built,” is oriented against gravity. Its antithesis, anti-form, is therefore whatever “yields to gravity.”

---

Horizontality is a key term for Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois, a Bataillean operation—meaning to “lower from the vertical” rather than simply “on the horizontal axis”—that they use to reread a number of modernist trajectories. The post-Pollock lineage is one such trajectory. “Formless,” rather than “anti-form,” is another key term in their project—the key term—which, in addition to rereading certain trajectories, sought to render useful to art history Bataille’s famous formulation: “formless is not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down in the world.” Bataille’s definition comes from his “Critical Dictionary,” an irregular contribution to the journal Documents that he founded with Pierre d’Espezel in 1929. The term, he argues, refers to an operation against institutions of reason and knowledge, against idealist philosophy, which are tasked with categorizing the world. It affirms instead “that the universe resembles nothing and is only formless.” Formless operates against Platonic forms—ideals to which all perceptual things in the universe refer—and also against what Morris refers to as form—imposed schemes for ordering a well-built world.

Rational systems of organization had long been a target of Kelley’s work. In these dangling sculptures the tension between form and gravity, verticality and horizontality, is cast as a tension between pseudo-rational systems of organization and the material specificity of the things those systems organized—a tension between imposed adult systems for categorizing the world (Tantra [Kundalini], Christianity [Ascending Hosts], and economic exchange [More Love Hours]) on the one hand, and formless piles of material on the floor on the other. On the wall these works read in their gestalt totality; for example, in Eviscerated Corpse we see a flayed person, something wholly different from the sum of its used toy components. As gravity pulls the work to the ground, however, it starts to look more like individual toys than an organized whole.

---

Accordingly, once the adult organizational structure has crumbled to the ground the many stains, rips, and rubmarks left on the toys by years of play become more obvious. 6 The evidence of the playful use of these objects—evidence that is obscured by the vertical, gestalt organization on the wall—becomes legible once the objects are spread out on the floor.

Another subset of felt objects from *Half a Man*, a series of craft banners, also draws on Batiallean terminology and notions of horizontality [Figure 85]. Images of eyes are abundant throughout, including images of pineal eyes [Figure 86], a reference to the title of a posthumously published collection of short texts that describes humankind’s vertical orientation in tension with the horizontality of animals. According to Bataille, humans are the only creatures to have managed to tear themselves “away from peaceful animal horizontality.” However, this liberation has come at a cost: “human nature is far from surrendering without resistance…. [His] eyes [the “horizontal axis of vision”] continue to fetter him tightly to vulgar things.” 7 In Kelley’s banners animalism and vulgar things are celebrated. *Animal Self* and *Friend of the Animals* (1987) [Figure 87], for example, are erotic depictions of communion with animals. *Three-Point Program/Four Eyes* (1987) [Figure 88], a banner punctuated in each of its four corners with beady white eyeballs, declares “Pants Shitter & Proud P.S. Jerk-off too,” enthusiastically embracing not only the vulgar, but also the infantile and the excremental, another important operation in Bataille’s base materialism. In these felt banners, *Half a Man* implies both the creaturely and the infantile—two visions of regression. It invokes phrases like “half-man, half-beast” but also “half-pint,” contradictory statements of animalism and childishness. The banners advocate, in other words, a return to the horizontal.

---

6 Ralf Rugoff argues that “Kelley’s well-fingered playmates… [return] us to a childhood scene where the doll is less a screen for a projected alter ego than a tactile object to be sucked, squeezed, humped, and drooled on until its last erotic delights have been yielded and it has become literally filthy.” *Catholic Tastes*, 165.

As argued, however, the title of the project also refers to Kelley’s bifurcated persona, the implied art-maker responsible for the works who is spilt into a celebratory regressive and a pedagogical authority. As a foil to the banners’ enthusiastic regressiveness, the pedagogue half of his persona argues that these works are not celebrations of regressive behavior, but are instead imitations of pedagogical instruments used to train children in the social conventions of the world of adults:

The felt banners are reminiscent of the type found in church meeting halls and school classrooms. Derived from modernist sources such as Henri Matisse’s cutouts…their outward form elicits a joyous primitivism, a stylized adult misrepresentation of children’s art. Because they are used to preach to children, or to the child in us, we infer the rules of authority and the family—the patriarchy.  

The bifurcated persona thus speaks twice with respect to these works, first through them (“Pants Shitter and Proud”) and then about them. Neither voice has the final say. Instead, they combine to reiterate the horizontal/vertical tension in the works—the tension between work and its title, between material and its organization. To put it colloquially, Kelley has it both ways: he indulges, on the one hand, in a version of materialist regression while committing, on the other, to the belief that even his assault on rationality (his joyous primitivism) is, as Levine puts it, “socially constructed.” These specific banners refer to Catholic social justice paraphernalia in the colorful craft style popularized by Sister Mary Corita in the 1960s—banners from Kelley’s childhood that originally celebrated hippie ideals but were eventually co-opted by Catholic youth outreach groups in order, as Kelley puts it, to preach the rules of authority.

This “having it both ways” is perhaps nowhere more evident than in another of Half a Man’s excremental celebrations, an edition of photographs titled Nostalgic Depiction of the Innocence of Childhood and Manipulating Mass-Produced Idealized Objects (both 1990) [Figure

---

8 Kelley, Minor Histories, 14.
The rambling titles of the works alone create a clinical distance from the subject of the photographs: a scatological stuffed-animal orgy. In these images, Kelley’s blankets and stuffed animals are now back on the floor, temporarily hidden from authorities in a basement-like (and thus subterranean and cave-like) space of partially remembered childhood sexual experimentation. Behind the figures, an opened door suggests the imminence of adult intervention; these are the moments just before mom and dad enter the room and with them judgment, self-awareness, and shame. Thus the figures in the photographs are turned away from the camera, unaware they are watched (though in one image the man in the foreground looks to his side, just enough for the viewer to see a hint of a smile creep across his face).

Despite the obvious orgiastic enjoyment depicted in the images, Kelley’s discussion of the photographs years after they were produced all but dismisses them as jokes.

These photos were jokes on pornography and played on people’s fear of the dirty stuffed animal. I invented a genre of scatological stuffed animal porn that did not, in fact, exist. The double titling of the works should make it completely clear that the photos were thoroughly ironic…. They are ridiculous.⁹

The work’s elaborate titles certainly do create a kind of ironic distancing. But this no doubt comes after the viewer has already confronted the image, and thus has already experienced whatever shock or revulsion or attraction he or she might feel in response to a picture of a stuffed-animal shit orgy. Moreover, the images themselves offer no evidence of irony.

*Manipulating Mass-Produced Idealized Objects*, the black-and-white image from the series, reads as straightforwardly pornographic, while the sepia-toned *Nostalgic Depiction of the Innocence of Childhood* looks sincere in its nostalgic depiction of fondly remembered (though adult) sexual indulgence. This sincerity is legible not only on the male subject’s face, but also in what I find to be the photograph’s punctum, the man’s pierced nipple, which would feature

nowhere in a remembrance of childhood innocence, but would be relatively commonplace in an underground sex club. In fact, the models for the work were poets Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose, minor celebrities in LA’s underground S&M performance scene and personal friends of Kelley’s. For Flanagan and Rose, the performance of sexual fetishism was not ironic or ridiculous; it was a central component of their personal and artistic lives.

In these photographs, the regressive persona has the upper hand. Although the pedagogue persona’s writings serve as a hedge against their scatological enthusiasm, the photos nevertheless suggest that sometimes adults can find their way back to the horizontal, if only temporarily (again, some kind of authority looms behind the opening door). Other works from the series, however, are more pessimistic, and in these works “joyous primitivism” only ever reaffirms the “rules of authority.” Another subset of *Half a Man*, a collection of used and retouched dressers, is explicit in this regard. These works display the competing design sensibilities of their various owners—the owners who first purchased the dressers and those who inherit, fill, and refurbish them. *Antiqued (Prematurely Aged)* (1987), for example, has been refinished in dusty pink as if by a crafty parent decorating a daughter’s room [Figure 90]. On top of the dresser a collage of press clippings and promotional photos of Kelley have been set under glass, “suggesting he is a heartthrob for an anonymous teenage girl”¹⁰ [Figure 91]. A mirror below the dresser reveals the more private evidence of this implied young woman’s sexual awakening—birth control pills, sex-ed books, and a diary [Figure 92].

The work might look absurd if it were not so familiar: a grandparent’s old dresser, cutified for a not-yet-mature young adult, and decorated with the found images and private keepsakes of budding individualism. But in *Prematurely Aged* expressions of individuality only affirm the patriarchy, as Kelley calls it. The birth-control pills belong to a body now capable of

¹⁰ Ibid., 89.
reproduction, and thus of sex with consequences, and the sex-ed manuals stand in for heterosexual training, the adult imposition of narrowly circumscribed beliefs about “normal” behavior. The top of the dresser, meanwhile, displays socially acceptable expressions of youthful female desire—desire displaced onto an absent, idealized male idol. In the dresser the process of becoming an adult is cast as a reordering of images and objects as if to express one’s individuality, but which in fact affirms the rules of the dominant social order. Fantasies about a separate, personal space—a hidden space below and within the drawers, an expressive space on its surface, even the increasingly sexual space of the implied girl’s room—prove to be so many constructed variations of the same dominant social logic. The titles of the other dresser works from this series, Nature and Culture and No Exit, are explicit regarding the false binary of the natural and the social. In every case, there is no tension between one’s nature and the imposition of culture; instead, expressions of the former only affirm the latter.

Kelley’s writing about these objects describes this affirmation in terms of the dressers’ status as objects:

The chest of drawers gives up its “presence,” its objecthood, in favor of the story played out by the things layered on top of it. The old piece of furniture starts life anew with its fresh coat of paint, and sometimes this new life has nothing whatsoever to do with the object’s previous function. Now, these household objects speak the narratives of the household. They seem to represent certain ages, mentalities, or genders—to have specific voices. But this openness, this willingness to bare all, is only a protective coloration disguising the fact that these are merely stories, simply constructs.

In other words, the adults and those becoming adults in the Half a Man house sacrifice the “objecthood” of their things to the “stories” (or as I have put it, rational organizational systems) elaborated across them. The move away from dressers to household narratives is a move from

---

11 Although here there’s a kind of joke that this gangly, pock-marked, little-known artist might serve such a role.
12 Mike Kelley, Minor Histories, 15.
the horizontal to the vertical—from specific things to rational systems of organization and, following from Kelley’s description of the banners, to affirmations of imposed ideology. These stories therefore do not belong to any single member of the household. That is, like the adolescent girl, the adults in the *Half a Man* house are also arranging objects according to constructed narratives of the dominant social order. *Manly Craft*, for example, is a series of shoddily made yarn penises [Figure 93]. The little joke here is that men might not be particularly skilled at yarnwork, and anyway their dolls always end up looking phallic. But these objects are part of a larger suite of wall-hung stuffed animal assemblages in which “stuffed animals” become taxidermy mounts, the products of a traditionally “manly” craft practice. A series of *Estral Stars* (1989), for example, refers to a beach along Lake Erie that was a forty-minute drive from Kelley’s hometown of Wayne, Michigan, and seven minutes from the 4,000 acre Pointe Mouillee State Game Area, a hunting destination for Detroit residents. *Estral* also refers to the cyclical ovulation patterns of female mammals, estrus phases that are an indication of prime deer hunting. Rather than evidence the secure masculinity of their creators, these limp yarn penises and (un)manly animal mounts reveal, as Levine has put it, “the artificiality of both masculinity and femininity” through their “mashup” of gendered craft practice and iconography. Dad’s

---

13 Taxidermy had appeared in Kelley’s work years earlier as set pieces for the performance *Confusion: A Play in Seven Sets, Each More Spectacular and Elaborate Than the Last* (1982-83) [Figure 94]. His South Pasadena home also included a chandelier and table that incorporated antlers. Later, Kelley would develop the notion of “manly crafts” to include a series of wood constructions for *Documenta IX* (1992). Works like *Orgone Shed*, *Colema Bench*, and *Torture Table* (all 1992) extend the logic of his earlier *Birdhouses*, wooden craft objects based on schematics that appear to have been made by a deranged suburban hobbyist. Once again Kelley blends bizarre spiritualism and new age practice with sexuality, cruelty, and violence. *Orgone Shed* refers to a pseudoscientific psychoanalytic belief in a universal “life force,” a theory originally developed by Wilhelm Reich. Proponents of Orgone theories advocate constructing energy accumulating boxes in order to harness this force. In Kelley’s rendering such an “energy accumulator” is filled with soiled paper towels, and has thus been transformed into a jerk-off shed. *Colema Board* is a wooden construction used to facilitate at-home enemas (Colema Boards is the brand name of a California company that produces such equipment). The work evokes the popularity of the home enema health craze that took hold of the West Coast in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly the coffee enema, which ultimately proved to be harmful. Rather than medical equipment, however, the wood-grain contraption looks like a torture device, especially when installed next to *Torture Board*, a wooden sculpture that appears to facilitate at-home genital removal.

expression of individualism, like his daughter’s dresser, is just another reformulation of inherited narratives.

*Half a Man* is a series about authority, even if there are no specific authorities implied in the works. Oscillating between fantasies of free play and social imposition, individual expression and cultural affirmation, it casts the home as a network of interconnected spaces where occupants arrange objects according to received conventions as a performance of their individuality. The authority is not a specific patriarch, but rather a logic—an order among things that is repeated in each of the “narratives of the household.” While it appears as sexuality, masculinity, femininity, and New Age spiritualism in individual works, as a whole *Half a Man*’s combination of old dressers, a mattress, a table covered in half-burned candles and endless used toys and blankets is organized according to the logic of the flea market—that is, arranged in series like the booths of a flea market and, in the case of the *Arenas*, arranged on blankets on the ground. Indeed, it is at the flea market where consumers buy and sell their hobbies, histories, and keepsakes, arranging and rearranging their individuality in second-hand materials.

As described above, Kelley had begun using southern California swap meets as sources for his work as soon as he moved to the West Coast. The San Fernando meet was a favorite, a “junky” place “with a section where people sold used items spread out in the dirt.” And as Oursler recalled, it was the meet’s organizational logic (“marvelous juxtapositions of fluorescent buckets, toys, wigs, electronics, and clothes organized by color or texture”15) that most appealed to Kelley. As a model for artistic production, the swap meet, like punk DIY, allowed Kelley to juxtapose various frameworks for organizing found images and objects. It also afforded him a certain measure of fantasy—of horizontality and dirtiness, of bringing things down in the world. But of course the swap meet is a space ordered by capitalist exchange, not an *informe* mass of

---

culture organized simply by “color or texture.” Even if individual booths are organized thusly, the markets themselves are ordered by the logic of economic competition. It is a space where everyone is an entrepreneur, assuming he is willing to bring his hobbies, collections, and keepsakes—indeed, himself—to market. Moreover, despite whatever fantasies flea market enthusiasts might maintain about escaping dominant commodity exchange, such markets were very much a product of postwar American capitalism.

Although there is scant writing on the historical origins of the American flea market, the famous markets of San Jose, Hell’s Kitchen, and San Fernando (where Kelley got his swap-meet start) were founded in 1960, 1976, and 1979 respectively.\(^\text{16}\) Indeed, an Ngram of the use of phrases “flea market” and “swap meet” in books scanned by Google shows that the terms were rarely used in English before 1960 [Figure 95]. They became much more prevalent thereafter, particularly between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s—that is, concurrent with Kelley’s art production. As America’s industrial middle class was slipping into working-class poverty—as neoliberalism was championing a return to more “natural” policies of free trade, to permeable boundaries, and to a tearing-down of economic regulation—the households of white-collar workers were increasingly filled with swap-meet finds.\(^\text{17}\) “The growth of flea markets in recent years may be, to some extent, an element in the deepening crisis of accumulation afflicting our imperiled economy,” writes David Laibman, editor of the Marxist journal Science and Society: “the increasing capital flight and outsourcing associated with imperialist ‘globalization’ destroys


\(^\text{17}\) “Neo” designates a return to, and reformulation of, classical liberalism.
the skilled jobs base, sending large numbers of workers into insecure, unskilled, casual or part-time labor—or flea markets.”¹⁸

Laibman’s claim is more observation than analysis, but so was Kelley’s, born of weekend trips to sprawling suburban flea markets where collectors, part-timers, and crafty mothers sold their handmade trinkets, their hobbies, and their time. At the swap meet the logic of capitalist competition was extended to facets of postwar life that decades earlier would have been called recreation. In the process, the role of merchant and consumer began to break down—where “second hand” once meant goods sold at stores specializing in previously owned merchandise (bookstores, “junk” shops, automobile and machine dealers), it came to mean used items endlessly bought and sold between consumer-merchants at the barely regulated, sprawling flea market.

For the most part, the imposition of market logic onto aspects of domestic life is legible only in Half a Man’s totality (its organizational logic), not its individual objects. The only exception comes in the title of More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid, one of the first objects produced as part of the series. According to Kelley, the title refers to the accumulation of “love debt” by children. “The hidden burden of the gift [from adult to child] is that it calls for payback, but the price is unspecified.”¹⁹ And anyway, since “nothing is owned by the child,” “nothing material can be given back.” Thus “the child is put in the position of being a perpetually indentured servant.”²⁰ In a number of interviews and exhibition catalogues, Kelley argued that More Love Hours was a critique of 1980s artistic responses to the commodification of the art object; specifically, it challenged artists who claimed “an artwork could function analogously to

¹⁹ Kelley, Minor Histories, 51.
²⁰ Kelley, Minor Histories, 51.
the gift, an object outside of the system of exchange.”\(^{21}\) For Kelley, the handmade gift is more fraught than the commodity because it extends the logic of debt and obligation to interpersonal relationships and to the time spent by craft makers on their hobbies. In the craft, “[t]he equation is not between time and money; it is a more obscure relationship drawn between time and commitment, one that results in a kind of emotional usury.”\(^{22}\) Or, as Foucault has argued, “[T]he mother-child relationship, concretely characterized by the time spent by the mother with the child, the quality of the care she gives, the affection she shows…all constitute for the neo-liberals an investment which can be measured in time.”\(^{23}\)

An investment, that is, in “love hours.” It is precisely because of their impoverished, junky, or amateur appearance (because of their material form) that each of the objects in *Half a Man* conveys such emotional usury—“the highly loaded nature of these objects is intensified by their material nature: by the seeming contradiction that their emotional weight far exceeds the worth of their cheap and lowly materials.”\(^{24}\) Thus while *More Love Hours* is the only work in the series to explicitly “use the market economy…to decipher non-market relationships,”\(^{25}\) the logic extends to each of the obviously handmade or refinished objects in the series. *Half a Man*’s matrix of arrangements of worn toys, refinished furniture, and handmade crafts conflate the interconnected rooms of the suburban home with the booths of a flea market. In so doing, they demonstrate that the individual narratives of the household—of the father, mother, and child and their various frames for understanding themselves and one another—are all constructed narratives of individualism that belie their uniformity—their market logic. To return to Kelley’s

---

21 Ibid., 52.
22 Ibid., 52.
description of the dressers, “this willingness to bare all, [that is, to express one’s individuality, love, manliness, spiritualism, mysticism, etc.,] is only a protective coloration disguising the fact that these are merely stories, simply constructs” that reiterate the same market logic. Moreover, this logic is not upended by the materiality of these objects (by rejecting their organizational logic in favor of their material specificity); on the contrary, it is a function of their materiality.

**Education Complex**

With *Half a Man* Kelley’s reputation grew, not only outside of Los Angeles but also outside of the U.S. In 1989 he had shows at Metro Pictures in New York, Robin Lockett Gallery in Chicago, Galerie Peter Pakesch in Vienna, and Joblonka Galerie in Cologne. Cologne was particularly receptive to his work. In 1989 Jutta Koether, under the pen name Mrs. Benway, provided a positive account of *Half a Man* and *Pay for your Pleasure* (1988) in the influential alternative music magazine *Spex*. Arguing “Mike Kelley der L.A. Kippenberger ist” [Mike Kelley is the L.A. Kippenberger], she primed Cologne’s countercultural intelligentsia for his work, presenting him as an American analog to Cologne’s resident bad boy: “Dies ist ein Porträt eines Pranksters in der Kunst” [This is a portrait of Pranksters in art].26 When his show opened the following year at Jablonka Galerie, Koether’s review was almost celebratory: “Schließlich ist der amerikanische (Westküsten) Künstler Mike Kelley in unsere Stadt gekommen” [Finally, American (West Coast) artist Mike Kelley has come to our city].27

While artists and critics like Koether and Diederichsen were central to the reception of American contemporary art in Cologne, it was the city’s newly minted galleries that facilitated artistic exchange between the Rhineland and America. Jablonka Galerie, which was founded in

---

1988 and showed Kelley’s work five times between 1989 and 1995, was part of a second-wave of galleries to open in the city, which included Hetzler’s Cologne space (founded 1983), Galerie Monika Sprüth (founded 1983), and Galerie Gisela Capitain (founded 1986). In the late 1980s these galleries drove the transatlantic exchange of art, both through exhibitions and through their booths and programming at art fairs. By the 1990s Kelley had become one of the principal figures in the constellation of artists forming around the Cologne-New York (and to a lesser extent, L.A.) corridor. His work was included in group shows at Max Hetzler’s galleries in Cologne and Santa Monica, for example, and was shown alongside work by Kippenberger, Robert Gober, On Kawara, Jeff Koons, Albert Oehlen, Julian Schnabel, Cindy Sherman, Thomas Struth, and Christopher Wool.28

In 1988 the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, in conjunction with the Städtische Kunsthalle, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, and the Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, set out to map the emerging, heterogeneous terrain of art between America and Germany with the joint exhibition, “BiNational: American Art of the Late 80s; German Art of the Late 80’s.” Rather than blend work by artists from each country into a single show, “BiNational” featured two traveling exhibitions, one exclusively composed of American artists, the other of Germans. According to the organizers, “BiNational” sought to “re-explore the possibility of serious international exchange during a time in which major international

28 Kelley had been showing at Metro Pictures, New York, since 1982, a gallery that represented increasingly prominent European and American contemporary artists and was central to the New York-Cologne connection. In 1985, Galerie Monika Sprüth began an influential three-part exhibition, “Eau de Cologne,” and included a number of Metro Pictures’ artists. Although the series did not feature work by Kelley (the exhibitions and related publications were motivated by concerns about the role of women in this emerging market network), it cemented the role that Metro Pictures’ artists would play in the Cologne-New York connection. Additionally, in 1990 Kelley produced a limited-edition artist book with Thea Westreich and Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne (Reconstructed History), and in 1991 part of Half a Man was exhibited at Jablonka Galerie in conjunction with a screening of Kelley’s video work at Broadway Kino for Art Cologne (Banana Man (1982), Kappa (1986), Blind Country (1989), and One Hundred Reasons (1991)). This transatlantic exchange was the subject of the exhibition “No Problem: Cologne/New York: 1984-1989” at David Zwirner Gallery in 2014. See also the forthcoming catalogue for the exhibition and Chris Reitz, “After Market” in Texte zur Kunst Vol. 24, issue 95, 196-198.
exhibitions have begun to take on a homogenized look,” and to do so by reinscribing national boundaries at a moment when those boundaries were breaking down. Curator Jürgen Harten, in his introduction to the catalogue for the German component of “BiNational,” argued in part that the breakdown of such borders (what he calls the “international discourse”) could not be understood without recourse to the market: “Attempting to exhibit ‘the late 80s’ in the late eighties, in order to let the contemporary viewer look into the mirror of history, one must be prepared for the fact that the BiNATIONALE can also be regarded as an event of the ‘market.’”

He points out that two years earlier critic Donald Kuspit had made a similar claim in his review of the transnational exhibition “Europa/Amerika” (1986) at the Ludwig Museum, arguing that “internationalism in practice, whatever it may mean theoretically, means a trans-national market for art.” And indeed many of the artists who were championed by the emerging U.S.-German gallery network were shown in “The BiNational,” including Kelley, Koons, Oehlen, Wool, and Gober.

In his retrospective account, Kelley claims that the success of Half a Man overseas was due to a combination of audience misinterpretation and misplaced empathy (more on which soon). He makes no reference to the correspondence between his practice and the workings of the art market in the 1980s. However, it is not incidental that Half a Man was his first major non-performance project, and was thus the most marketable of his early career (not only are performances difficult to sell, but Kelley also refused to record them, which meant that this work

---

29 David Ross and Jürgen Harten, eds., The BiNATIONAL: American Art of the Late 80s (American volume of the two volume set, American Art of the Late 80s, German Art of the Late 80s) (Cologne: DuMont, 1988), 10. Indeed, the organizers of the American component claim “something significant can be revealed about a nation’s character and mood by surveying its art of a given period” even though the concept for the exhibition suggests that art of the late 1980s must be thought in transnational terms.

30 David Ross and Jürgen Harten, eds., The BiNATIONAL: German Art of the Late 80s (Cologne: DuMont, 1988), 15.

could not travel without him). With *Half a Man* Kelley’s objects were freed from site-specificity. Moreover, the art world that Kelley encountered between West Germany and the U.S. proved adept at accommodating his trans-media practice. Indeed, it was in part due to Kelley’s shifting, all-consuming practice that his work could be shown in disparate venues and as part of disparate thematic group exhibitions. In the late 1980s and early 90s he was included in shows devoted to drawing, American popular culture, sculpture, video art, cartoons, and Heavy Metal. Like Kelley’s DAM and swap-meet practice—a constant reordering and reconfiguration of a range of styles and materials—the burgeoning U.S.-German art market was built on the perpetual reorganization of artworks into group shows and art fair booths. In short, the international art market of the 1980s was, like Kelley’s practice generally, a series of boundary transgressions (national, stylistic, material, media-specific) that enabled an endless parade of interconnected “projects” and interpretive frames (i.e., group shows). Once Kelley’s work was no longer bound to his physical presence, the market had no problem endlessly reordering and recontextualizing it too.

If *Half a Man’s* flea-market organizational structure affirmed its neoliberal market logic, its reception redoubled that affirmation: Kelley’s very mode of artistic address proved felicitous with the workings of the art market that took up his objects. In effect, this meant that his work amounted to an “international style”—if style can mean an operation rather than an aesthetic program. By “operation” I invoke Krauss and Bois’ use of *formless* as an artistic operation. Kelley contrasted Bataillean materialism with rational organization, but he did so just as neoliberalism was advocating economic “liberty” against political boundary and elaborate systems of trade regulation—just as neoliberalism was championing a return to an imagined state

---

of pre-Keynesian economic policy, and of competition “freed” from the imposed rules of
government and organized labor. It was the international style, in other words, of regression
against imposition.

In 1993 Kelley’s first retrospective opened at the Whitney Museum of American Art,
affirming his position as a central figure in American art, and soon after he returned to the
“specific cultural things” of his childhood—this time couching them as part of an elaborate
system of indoctrination, one that produced a broken subject in its own image. The process
paintings, some of them retouched, that Kelley had produced as an undergraduate. According to
Kelley, the reinvestigation was provoked because viewers were constantly psychologizing his
work, speculating that he had been sexually abused as a child. The misdiagnosis dovetailed with
what he perceived to be the “raging” debate in the United States over “Repressed Memory
Syndrome” (RMS), the theory that “memories of traumatic experiences can be completely and
unconsciously blocked out and made inaccessible to the conscious mind.”33 The debate
concerned the veracity of such memories when they were recovered through psychotherapy, and
had become part of the public discourse after a series of highly publicized sex-abuse cases. The
most prominent of these concluded with the trial of a number of faculty members at the
McMartin Preschool (1987-90), a Los Angeles County daycare accused of facilitating ritual
abuse, torture, and devil worship based on children’s false “memories.”

Kelley’s art did not evidence childhood sexual abuse, he claimed, just as the stories told
by those children were not evidence of any specific wrongdoing. Yet such false histories were
able to mobilize entire systems of discipline—police investigations, court hearings, and

33 Kelley, Minor Histories, 61.
sometimes even prosecutions—and thus had very real effects in the world. Writing in the catalogue for the first exhibition of the work, Kelley claimed,

This is where I, as artist, become interested in the debate….Life at its most “real,” that is, where it interfaces with the hands of power, with that which controls you, must then also lie in the domain of art, of fiction….My presumption was that my recent aesthetic production must in some way be affected by my art training, even though I consciously rebelled against this training….The “symptom” of my recent work must be the by-product of elements of my training that I repressed. And, the repression proves, this training must have been traumatic.  

According to Kelley, the abuse narratives invented by his viewers (in conversation with his work) and the children in these RMS cases (in concert with their psychologists) may not have been “real” in any literal sense, but they nevertheless served as evidence of real “institutional or sociocultural abuse” generally. So in 1993 he began reviewing and then repainting his student works in an attempt to “recover” whatever institutional abuse they might evidence, and in order to relearn the rules of his “Hofmannesque” indoctrination in order to “understand …[it] more fully, and thus deal with it in future work.”

Kelley’s account of this process offers a kind of inversion. His argument, in part, is that if apparatuses of state power can be mobilized in response to (fictional) repressed memories, then such apparatuses must also produce the traumatized subjects who construct these fictions—who make art. The maneuver, in turn, allowed Kelley to treat the international reception of his work (which, in fact, rarely involved audiences projecting abuse narratives) as a product of his early training by and indoctrination into institutions of art education. As Carl Haenlein wrote in the introduction to “Missing Time,” “Kelley has come to see new relevance in the response depicted

34 Kelley, Minor Histories, 62.
35 Ibid.
36 “When the Arena series debuted at Metro Pictures in 1990, the reviews were overwhelmingly positive. Most of the critics were unconcerned with traumatic abuse and none of them suggested that Kelley had suffered any himself.” John Miller, Mike Kelley: Educational Complex (London: Afterall Books, 2015), 16.
on these sheets of paper to the two poles of his academic training, Abstract Expressionism on the one hand and Pop Art on the other.”37 That is, in the wake of his international market success, Kelley returned to the foundations of his practice, abstraction and Pop, which I described in the previous chapters as foundational idioms of the neoliberal art market (of “freedom/expression” and “commodity culture”), and presented them as a form of abuse and indoctrination.38

After relearning his Hofmannesque training, Kelley set about producing a new series in his old style, a collection of thirteen oval paintings titled *Thirteen Seasons (Heavy on the Winter)* (1994), which was first shown at Jablonka Galerie in 1995 [Figure 96]. In the exhibition catalogue, Kelley describes this return to old practice as a kind of homesickness:

> Whenever you “rediscover” your old creations, isn’t it funny that you find them so satisfying? You’re as engrossed as a baby is with his or her own poop. And, to top it off, it seems as if a hiatus from old ways sharpens your skills at those abandoned practices. Then you ask yourself:
>  “Why did I ever stop doing this?... And then you cry out: “I want to go home again!”39

What he finds in this return home, however, is that the fantasy of a regressive, scatological art on all fours only conceals trauma. The “rediscovered” old creations are both screens for fantasy projection and false memories displacing abuse, a fact that Kelley hints at in the wordplay of the essay’s title, “Goin’ Home, Goin’ Home; At the crossroads of life. At Tross City Limits” (read “Atrocity”).40

---

38 The “domain of art” and the domain of “that which controls you” thus have three registers here—first, the “fictions” of children and the systems of power they mobilize in RMS narratives; second, Kelley’s student work and the ideological imposition they evidence; and third, Pop art and abstraction and the neoliberal markets that took up their aesthetics.
40 This full title is provided in Kelley and Ponténge, *Educational Complex Onwards*, 208, a catalogue that Kelley co-edited. The phrase “at the crossroads of life, at Tross City limits” originally appeared as lines 17 and 18 in the
The text is uncharacteristically poetic—saccharine and sincere, even schmaltzy, it is over the top, though not ironically so. I imagine it would be difficult for an agoraphobe to write ironically about returning home, especially after so many years showing abroad. In any case, the hometown to which Kelley refers in the subtitle of the essay, “Tross City,” has nothing to do with *Thirteen Seasons*. Instead, it prefigures his next major, multi-part project, a collection of works organized around and including *Educational Complex* (1995), an architectural model of his childhood home and every school that he attended [Figure 97]. After two years of retrospective formal analysis, *Educational Complex* and its related work was Kelley’s response to the art-market reception of *Half a Man*. Even more sprawling than that earlier project, it articulates an elaborate psycho-educational system that produces traumatized, fantasizing, art-making subjects in its own image—in the image of international capitalism.

*Educational Complex* was first shown as part of the exhibition “Toward a Utopian Arts Complex” (1995) at Metro Pictures, where it was introduced by the wall-hung sculpture *Entry Way (Genealogical Chart)* (1995) [Figure 98]. Appearing like a suburban-American city-limits sign, *Entry Way* is Kelley’s reimagining of his family tree, a network of blue and pink circles constructed according to the Kelley family genealogical chart (his mother’s side is on the left, his father’s on the right, with blue dots representing males and pink representing females). Most of the circles are painted with the logos of social organizations—some familiar, like the Lions and Rotary Clubs, and others countercultural organizations from Kelley’s youth, like the White Panthers and the punk rock Anti-Christ Fan Club. At the top of the genealogy a sign reads “Welcome to ___SS,” a reference to Kelley’s fictional “Tross City,” with the first three letters...

---

first iteration of this essay published in the catalogue for “Thirteen Seasons Heavy on the Winter;” Mike Kelley, *Mike Kelley: Thirteen Seasons (Heavy on the Winter)* (Cologne: Jablonka Galerie, 1995), unpaginated.

41 Kelley argues as much in his recorded interview with John Welchman at the Walker Arts Center, June 2, 2005.
overpainted as if by a city worker concealing graffiti.\textsuperscript{42} It is not at all clear what the worker’s paint might conceal, however. Perhaps some local teenagers, filled with suburban angst, vandalized the sign (“Welcome to Ass”?). Whatever the original crime, the concealment is certainly just as bad. “Welcome to SS” evokes the German Schutzstaffel.\textsuperscript{43} And in any case, we know from the subtitle of Kelley’s contribution to the catalogue for “\textit{Thirteen Seasons}” that this sign comes from “At Tross City limits,” and thus that the paint obscures atrocity. Painting (and abstraction in particular) is once again culpable in this project, framed as part of a constellation of social and cultural institutions that together amount to an atrocity and its concurrent repression or concealment. The painterly model is once again Hofmann’s push/pull theory (or at least Kelley’s interpretation thereof), whereby monochromatic, geometric shapes cover and conceal gestural color fields and, in this work, also conceal atrocity.

If \textit{Entry Way} marks the border of Kelley’s (A)Tross City, \textit{Educational Complex} is its city plan. The foam-core maquette includes scale models of Kelley’s childhood home, “a Catholic elementary school with adjacent church and gymnasium, a junior high school, a high school, two undergraduate art schools, and a graduate art school.”\textsuperscript{44} According the Kelley, the exteriors of the buildings were reconstructed using photographs and “in some instances, floor plans,” but the interiors were constructed entirely from memory. Whatever interiors he could not remember were left blank (visible through cut-out roofs), with the supposition being that these were the spaces of repressed, traumatic, and thus inaccessible, memories. The missing rooms, in other words, are the spatial correlate to the “missing time” of RMS, to the trauma he sought to recover through an exploration of his \textit{Missing Time} paintings, and to whatever “trauma” might be

\textsuperscript{42} Howard Singerman makes a similar observation in his contribution, “Memory Ware” in Kelley and Pontégnie eds., \textit{Educational Complex Onwards}, 307.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 21.
covered by the monochromatic blocks of Hofmann’s push/pull paintings. Adding to this trauma narrative, the maquette is supported by a series of saw-horse-like legs, and below it a white, child-sized mattress invites viewers to lie on their backs and stare up at the scale model basement of CalArts, literally concealed beneath the artwork [Figure 99]. Hidden below the model, this structure appears like a secret subterranean lair—an invocation of the elaborate tunnels and caves purportedly concealed beneath the McMartin Preschool where adults subjected children to violent sexual abuse and Satanic ritual torture. By climbing under the work and lying on the mattress the viewer becomes both victim and victimizer—lured, vulnerable, beneath the work but acutely aware that he or she is occupying a child’s bed. Here Kelley’s “cave,” which the viewer again enters on all fours, is reconfigured as both a subterranean site of trauma and a space for childish play and fantasy (one cannot help but feel at least a bit playful and transgressive climbing underneath an enormous artwork installed in the middle of a gallery).

In keeping with the McMartin Preschool references, Satanic and cult ritual abuse were dominant themes throughout the Metro Pictures exhibition. The Cult Paintings, for example, are a series of brightly-colored works on biomorphic wood supports that combine macabre, sexual, and commercial found imagery (for example, a picture of Satan made by Kelley’s nephew Kevin and pictures of Jack-O-Lanterns) with gestural and geometric abstraction [Figure 100]. Along with Thirteen Seasons Heavy on the Winter, these paintings were part of an ongoing series of “Timeless Paintings” (1993-2011), which Kelley described as “the official visual art production of Educational Complex.”45 And like Thirteen Seasons, they elaborated on the Hofmannesque techniques Kelley adapted from his student work in Missing Time. Specifically, over the painted images Kelley affixed monochromatic rectangles, which look like Hofmann’s geometric color

planes and like the censor bars painted over the Tross City sign, to cover sexual imagery (for example, Satan’s erect penis).  

Cult and ritual abuse are also prominent themes in *Timeless/Authorless* (1995), a series of black and white image and text works resembling enlarged newspaper pages. Each appropriates the masthead of a paper from a city where Kelley was educated or had shown work, including *The New York Times, Michigan’s The Westland Eagle*, and Cologne’s *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger* [Figure 101]. The pages feature images of high school extracurricular activities (parades, Halloween parties, pep rallies, sporting events) alongside text of restaurant reviews and violent sexual abuse. Through this juxtaposition, *Timeless/Authorless* is perhaps the most explicit in its conflation of education and trauma. However, these trauma narratives are so graphic and fantastical that they read more like erotic fantasy than witness testimony (and thus, once again, conflate fantasy projection with traumatic memory recovery). One describes a young man’s experience held captive on an island populated by barbarous Amazonian woman (*Timeless/Authorless #11*). Another describes a young boy “kidnapped by [a group of] hillbilly greasers” who have initiation ceremonies in basements “presided over by characters from Hanna Barbera cartoons” (*Timeless/Authorless #9*).

In these works, found images of high school extracurricular activities act as the screen memories of the student of the *Educational Complex* (Kelley’s artist persona); that is, they act as mnemonic residuals of real events that relate to, but also conceal, other traumatic experiences or unacceptable desires. The accompanying graphic textual narratives, in turn, offer the

---

46 As Kelley says, they are “meant to read as blocked-out areas associated with trauma.” Foldout in Kelley and Pontégnie eds., *Educational Complex Onwards*, 12-13.

47 My use of the term is Freudian, and here Kelley conflates the debate over the veracity of the “repressed memories” of RMS (also called “false memories”) with Freud’s account of the screen memory, which can conceal either unacceptable adult fantasies or childhood trauma. In Freud’s writing, the concept was not fixed, but evolved over a number of unpublished letters, articles, and books. It appears in “Screen Memories” (1899) (*The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume III (1893-1899): Early Psycho-Analytic*)
recuperated trauma/fantasy that these otherwise innocent snippets of student life conceal. In the narrative mentioned above, for example, the Amazonian captors are described as wearing flower pot hats “perched atop their hairless domes.” The pictures that accompany this text depict a high school girl wearing a cowboy hat at a pep rally and a girl wearing a bald cap in what appears to be a stage performance [Figure 101]. Together the image and text are an analog to psychic operations of displacement (they shift the significance of the content of the “remembered” scene from violent sex to high school extracurricular activities) and condensation (the pictorial snippets stand in for multiple parts of the trauma/fantasy narratives). That is, they approximate the processes though which a healthy mind substitutes acceptable memories for unacceptable fantasies, and the neurotic mind substitutes partial memories for traumatic experiences. In RMS Kelley finds a modern psychological update to Freudian psychoanalysis, allowing him two different but related conflations: first, by way of Freudian screen memory, he conflates fantasy and trauma (and, in turn, conflates his fantasies about an art on all fours with the “abuse” or ritual indoctrination of his studio education); second, RMS provides a popular-culture analogy to the psychologizing he claims to have received from his audiences, and thus the work conflates the relationship between RMS patients and their therapists with the relationship between Kelley and his audience/art market. As many critics of RMS point out, “recovered” memories are very often a fictional product of patient-psychologist conversations. Moreover, sometimes such patient-psychologist interactions actually enact the “abuse” that they were attempting to

Publications, 299-322) to describe how fragments of intense but seemingly innocuous childhood memories are screens onto which otherwise healthy adults project fantasies that their conscious minds are unwilling to accept. In later writing, like Freud’s 1939 Moses and Monotheism (The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXIII (1937-1939): Moses and Monotheism, An Outline of Psycho-Analysis and Other Works, 1-138), screen memories are invoked to describe processes of trauma repression in neurotic patients. See in particular pp. 73-74.
uncover—they produce traumatized subjects through analysis. As Kelley’s friend and collaborator John Miller says of the McMartin case,

> the search for abuse devolved into behavior characteristic of abuse when [therapists] conducted extensive physical examinations, using a device called a colposcope to make detailed photographs of the children’s anus es and genitalia. (Here, by implying that the popular suspicions about his *Arena* series victimized him, Kelley aligned himself with the young [therapy] clientele.)

Thus Kelley presents his work as the trauma-concealing fantasy-projection of an art-making subject produced by an elaborate system of education and interpretation, trauma and analysis.

Within the context of “Toward a Utopian Arts Complex,” *Timeless/Authorless* acts as the press component of a major sex-abuse scandal—an event of the type and scale of the McMartin Preschool investigation. Altogether this includes scale-model recreations of the sites of the abuse, children’s paintings evidencing that abuse, the trappings of suburban America (city-limits signage, local restaurant reviews, etc.) proving that such things are a pervasive part of American life, and finally, the psychological apparatus that revealed/constructed the trauma/fantasy that activates systems of discipline and control in the first place—that activates what Kelley calls “life at its most ‘real.’” This results in two models of artist persona formation. The first posits the artist as a product of an educational complex—the buildings and training programs of his youth. The second posits the artist as the product of psychological complexes—the network of feelings, memories, and desires that emerge, the work suggests, as much from experience as from analysis. In each case, this artist is produced in the image of the Complex.

For example, and as Kelley suggests, the “official visual art production” of the Complex is Hofmannesque painting, implying that the artist persona created by the system (Kelley)

---

48 Kelley and Pontégnie eds., *Educational Complex Onwards*, 64.
49 Principally, the series *We Communicate Only Through Our Shared Dismissal of the Pre-Linguistic* (1995), which included drawings by children Kelley taught as an art student alongside his psychoanalytic interpretations thereof.
perpetuates its educational program. But unlike *Half a Man*, which bifurcated the persona into an authoritative pedagogue and a fantasizing regressive, *Educational Complex* combines the two—trauma and fantasy (education and reception), the work suggests, produce one another, and are equally constitutive of the art-making subject.

The pivot from the domestic space of *Half a Man* to the educational space of *Educational Complex* turns on “extracurricular activities,” Kelley’s metaphor for screen memories. Extracurricular activities are generally volunteer activities, clubs, or sports teams that students join in addition to their curricular requirements. Because they are “extra” or outside of normal educational curricula, such activities serve as a bridge between a student’s institutional/educational life and his or her personal life and hobbies. In Kelley’s writing on extracurricular activities he argues that they are “generically carnivalesque,” referring to Mikhail Bakhtin’s term for literary devices in which dominant social order is temporarily overturned. That is, the extracurricular activity opens up a space for fantasy projection. To some extent, certain extracurricular activities do indeed provide students with a space to overturn the rules and mores of their educational system. In the pep rally, for example, students break dress and behavioral codes (and often on those days wear team uniforms to class, upending the division between work and play). In newspaper and yearbook clubs students might also take on managerial roles, temporarily elevating their otherwise subordinate position with the school. But as Foucault argues, the carnivalesque emerged in literary traditions at a time of social trauma:

> A whole literary fiction of the festival grew up around the plague: suspended laws, lifted prohibitions, the frenzy of passing time,

---

50 They serve as stand-ins for screen memories because, in high school yearbooks and school newspapers, images of such activities often stand in for the whole of educational experience. Student clubs, sports teams, and pep rallies usually have yearbook pages, but homework, science lessons, and all the various forms of academic and behavioral discipline—the bulk of one’s educational experience—do not. Thus just as images of extracurricular activities conceal other high school experience in yearbooks, the performative/fantastical space of extracurricular activities conceal the curricular trauma of education within the logic of the *Educational Complex*.

51 Kelley and Pontégnie eds., *Educational Complex Onwards*, 11-12.
bodies mingling together without respect…But there was also a political dream of the plague, which was exactly its reverse…; not of laws transgressed, but the penetration of regulation into even the smallest details of everyday life….The plague as a form, at once real and imaginary, of disorder had as its medical and political correlative discipline.52

In response to the real social trauma of the plague there emerged two opposite but related fantasies: the first, a desire to overturn rules; the second, a desire for the order of law and medicine (of protection) to permeate all aspects of life. This fantasy then allowed apparatuses of discipline and control to penetrate all aspects of life in fact (i.e., medical and regulatory controls were put in place). In the Educational Complex, education is treated as trauma displaced by the screen memories of extracurricular activities. These carnivalesque fantasies, in turn, are the vectors though which discipline and control enter into all aspects of student life—into the parts of their experience that are not, strictly, educational.

Extracurricular activities are, for many young Americans, a way of investing in their future—a kind of self-directed learning and résumé building. Students at any grade level might have the opportunity to participate in such activities, but in the American school system they tend to take on particular significance to students’ social lives in secondary school, and are often treated by parents and institutions as preparation for higher education and even professional life. That is, extracurricular activities are elective activities that extend students’ educational training to facets of noneducational life (sport, art, performance, etc.). In Kelley’s Complex, “education” is the imposed formal conventions of Hofmannesque painting, a small component, as I have argued, of a broader ideological shift in postwar social and economic organization. Specifically, such education stands in for training in the ideology of neoliberalism or international capitalism. Extracurricular activities train students to occupy a multitude of different roles, and to do so

---

simultaneously rather than consecutively. Returning to Deleuze’s formulation, in discipline societies—that is, under capitalism from the eighteenth through the beginning of the twentieth century—“one was always starting again (from school to the barracks, from the barracks to the factory),” moving through life stages in a discrete fashion. However, “in the societies of control [that is, under neoliberalism, within the “Complex”] one is never finished with anything.” One moves, in other words, like a high school student between clubs and practices, “undulatory, in orbit, in a continuous network.” Extracurricular activities become the dominant metaphor for artist-persona formation within the Educational Complex because they imply a very specific kind of American student-subject—one who oscillates fluidly across a network of different roles and responsibilities and does so in order to raise his or her stock in a competitive college market, extending the logic of competition to recreation. The Complex produces students who fantasize about carnivalesque boundary transgression (Kelley’s art on all fours) precisely because they have internalized the logic of neoliberal boundary transgression.

In his discussion of subject production under “societies of control,” Deleuze refers to educational institutions (among others) as part of a networked, “universal system of deformation”—a system that extends beyond its buildings and conventions to become a universal apparatus of subject-production. Kelley’s Educational Complex, and the body of work that followed it, offer a map of such a system, a map that Potégnie attempted to articulate with the 2008 exhibition “Mike Kelley: Educational Complex Onward 1995-2008” at Wiels Contemporary Art Centre. For the poster for the exhibition Kelley produced an Educational

---

53 Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” October 59, 6.
54 Deleuze says, “Indeed, just as the corporation replaces the factory, perpetual training tends to replace the school, and continuous control to replace the examination. Which is the surest way of delivering the school over to the corporation.” Ibid., 5.
55 Ibid.
“project-related flow chart,” which demonstrates how all of his major projects from 1995 onward relate back to the foam-core maquette [Figure 102]. A path through the chart might begin, for example, with Educational Complex and the related Gauntlet, a piece of the Complex’s gymnasium floor that was shown as part of “Toward a Utopian Arts Complex” [Figure 103]. This associative line continues to Timeless/Authorless, which includes images of high school activities that largely take place in a gymnasium (pep rallies, parades, etc.).

Timeless/Authorless is then connected to Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction #1 (A Domestic Scene) (2000) (hereafter EAPR), a video work that restages one of Educational Complex’s extracurricular activities based on a found image—in this case, an image from Timeless/Authorless #11 [Figure 101, bottom left].

EAPR#1 is the first in a series of EAPR video and set pieces to provide such a recreation, and it is not incidental that the found image Kelley uses for the work is taken from the Cologne newspaper of Timeless/Authorless. That is, the first work to extend the Educational Complex logic beyond the Metro Pictures exhibition also refers to the first international city (Cologne) in which Kelley received significant market support. EAPR#1 then led to EAPR #2-32 (2004-2005), a series of videos and set pieces collectively shown at Gagosian Gallery as the exhibition “Day is Done.” Like EAPR#1, the videos in “Day is Done” were based on found photographs of extracurricular activities, the “screen memories” of repressed abuse/fantasy that took place in the Educational Complex. The series eventually came to include thirty-six components, though Kelley had planned to produce 365 separate EAPR works, constituting a twenty-four hour

56 This video documents a day in the life of two roommates, one an abusive neat-freak, the other a child-like slob. I cannot help but think that Kelley here plays with the two personalities of his artist persona—one half a controlling pedagogue, the other a messy, down-on-all-fours regressive.
*Educational Complex* cycle—evidence that the complex had taken over all aspects of its student/subjects’ daily lives.\(^57\)

**Kandor: No Way Out**

Kelley had introduced *Educational Complex* as a return home ("Goin’ Home, Goin’ Home") even though it was primarily concerned with educational, not domestic, institutions. The two were perhaps inseparable for him—when Kelley was a child his father had worked as the maintenance manager of the local public school system. And in any case school and home, public education and private life, are cast in this work as part of the same “universal system of deformation.” Where *Half a Man* explored how objects in domestic spaces might be arranged according to an imposed logic, *Educational Complex* explored the apparatus responsible for the imposition. However, already by 1996, just one year after “Toward a Utopian Arts Complex,” Kelley started to reconsider the elision. He began to imagine wrestling the domestic space from the Complex. That year he wrote an article for *Architecture New York* about *The Educational Complex*, concluding,

> I find myself constantly thinking about the bottled city that Superman keeps safely stored in his Fortress of Solitude. Inside a bell jar is an entire city filled with living people from this home planet Krypton—a planet that has exploded. Krypton is the home that can never be returned to, the past that can never be revisited. Yet there it is, shrunken to the size of a dollhouse—an ageless memento in real time. I wonder if the eternal man of Steel ever feels the desire to smash this city and finally live in the present.\(^58\)

In 1999 Kelley began a project related to Superman’s Kandor, but his *Kandor* (2007-2011) series did not start in earnest until 2007. Consisting of variations on Superman’s

---

\(^57\) The exact number of *EAPR*’s is confused by the fact that many of the “activities” have multiple components; for example, *EAPR* #25 and #25b.

\(^58\) Reprinted, Kelley and Pontégnie eds., *Educational Complex Onwards*, 25.
miniaturized home city based on twenty images from the original comics, it includes sculptures, installations, lighted wall animations, and video, and is nearly as elaborate in scope as, and larger in scale than, *Educational Complex.* The bulk of the series consists of sculptural recreations of Kandor, many enclosed in glass jars. Each is precious in its construction. Some look like crystalline geodes or elaborate science experiments, others like ornate glass keepsakes or saccharine candy displays. Others still combine elements of both, like *Kandor 16* (2010), an illuminated resin city atop a Minimalist-esque green support split open like a rock formation to reveal its craggy black interior [Figure 104]. Domes, caves, and enclosures are numerous throughout the project, as are inversions of scale. For example, many of the sculptural *Kandors* were made into smaller two-dimensional animations. Some, despite depicting a miniaturized city, are enormous, and one requires viewers to climb it in order to get a better view (*City 000*, 2010). Others include towering projections of bell jars filled with gas or mist, which appear to cover the shadow of any viewer who stands in front of them—an inversion of the familiar comic book scene in which Superman peers into his miniature city [Figure 105]. In *Kandor* the cave has become the bell jar, an enclosure that serves to protect and preserve. The fantasy is now not of regression but of separation—of inaccessibility.

In Superman mythology the story of Kandor has a few variations (comics, particularly ones with long histories, circle back on origin stories using alternate-reality or alternate-timeline devices). In the main storyline, Kandor was the capital city of Superman’s home planet Krypton. Several years before Krypton was destroyed, the super-villain Brainiac shrunk the city and enclosed it in a bell jar. In later comics his motives are explained as either a desire to rule over a collection of tiny cities or a desire to extract their knowledge. In any case, at some point in these

59 The *Kandors* were not exactly a departure from the *Educational Complex*. As the exhibition “Education Complex Onwards” suggested, all of Kelley’s work after 1995 can be related to the *Complex* in some way. *EAPR #34-36* take place within the city of Kandor or feature bell jars, and in this respect are both *EAPRs* and *Kandors*. 
storylines Superman discovers his shrunken city, steals it from Brainiac, and hides it in his Fortress of Solitude for safekeeping while he hunts for a method of restoring his fellow Kryptonians to full size.\(^{60}\)

Superman’s conflicted relationship with his home city surely resonated with Kelley. As numerous critics have noted, Superman can be read as an American immigrant narrative: “Born on an alien planet, he grows stronger on Earth but maintains a secret identity tied to a homeland that continues to exert a powerful hold on him even as his every contact with those origins does him harm.”\(^{61}\) Kelley offers a rereading of this immigrant story. Born in America, he grew much more popular internationally—not just in West Germany, but between nations, as part of an international art market. Throughout his career Kelley remained tied to his suburban Detroit upbringing, even though it became clear that this Midwestern culture had indoctrinated him into the Complex logic of neoliberal capitalism.

Kelley’s work concluded in much the same way as Kippenberger’s; like MetroNET, it symbolically closed off access to the international network that it also, though its many international iterations, reinscribed. The series was first shown at Jablonka Galerie in 2007, was shown in part at Galerie Ghislaine Hussenot in Paris in 2009, and culminated in 2011 with “Exploded Fortress of Solitude” at Gagosian Gallery, London.\(^{62}\) The centerpiece for this final show was the titular Exploded Fortress of Solitude, a monumental black cave-like sculpture that

---

\(^{60}\) Notably, in some versions Superman does succeed in enlarging Kandor, after which he relocates the residents to a new, suitable planet. As a keepsake he recreates the Kandor miniature, which is soon repopulated by another race of miniaturized refugees. When Superman discovers that Earth bacteria transform these otherwise docile inhabitants into uncontrollable beasts he fashions a gas system to the Kandor, producing a synthetic atmosphere. This is almost certainly why many of Kelley’s Kandors include gas systems.


\(^{62}\) The Jablonka show was the first time the series was shown independently. It was also exhibited in a different format in 1999-2000 at the Kunstmuseum Bonn. Kelley’s studio was at work on more Kandors when he died, indicating that the Gagosian exhibition was not the last in the series.
viewers could enter in order to see Superman’s preserved city—one last glimpse into the cave, one last nostalgic turn home, before he exploded the fortress [Figure 106].

Neither Kippenberger nor Kelley found a resolution to the problem of their networked personae. What began as reactions to ideological fatigue and imposed international culture ended up becoming a working method felicitous with an advancing international art market. Their protests mingled with those of their punk-rock predecessors who discovered, much too late, that the market facilitated—even demanded—the flexibility, indeterminacy, self-management, self-promotion, and self-production of DIY. Their solution was not to fight this logic. Indeed, such logic had pervaded the international exchange of art objects to the point of determining the very subjects who produced them. Instead, Kippenberger and Kelley attempted to close their corners of the network. They attempted to maintain within their work and practice a separate, inaccessible space. For Kippenberger, the consummate traveler and social operator, this space was a series of international transit lines foreclosed to all but his closest friends. For Kelley, an agoraphobe who hated to leave home, this space was a miniature hometown safely tucked away in a fortress of solitude. And to prevent access further—to keep even himself from reentering the city—he contemplated its destruction.
Conclusion

We have been talking about survival, this is about survival.¹

“If you want my opinion…I mean, if you really want to know—and this is off the record—Gagosian killed Mike.” This is the answer I received, again and again, to a question I never asked. It wasn’t a question I needed to ask. I knew what killed Mike Kelley months before I conducted any interviews for this project (an article in The Wall Street Journal—a journal that, appropriately enough, once adopted the slogan, “Adventures in Capitalism”—made sure this information was available).² He committed suicide in the bathroom of his South Pasadena home, a home perched on top of a hill and nestled under a water tower so that it looked, to Kelley, like a superhero’s lair. Alone in his fortress, his death resulted from a combination of carbon monoxide and sleeping pills. Or, really, a combination of alcoholism and the complex of mental and physical health issues exacerbated by alcoholism.

Kelley’s relationship with Gagosian Gallery was not at all coercive. In fact, Kelley prompted his move from Metro Pictures. He had come to feel “locked into the gallery pecking order” there, and believed that he “was never going to do better in New York” if he didn’t leave for a more international organization.³ The 2005 exhibition “Day is Done” at Gagosian’s New York gallery was his trial run of a new, monumental production and exhibition strategy. Unlike Metro Pictures, Gagosian Gallery is an international corporation, with locations in eleven cities and the attendant resources to mount museum-scale shows and elaborate, multi-part artworks. “Day is Done” was the first of such projects. Others included Kandor and what would become Pontégnie and Bastide, Mike Kelley / Franz West, 26-27.

¹ Pontégnie and Bastide, Mike Kelley / Franz West, 26-27.
Kelley’s last major work, *Mobile Homestead* (2005-13), a recreation of his childhood home that could be transported by tractor trailer from venue to venue when not docked at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD) [Figure 107].

The contradiction here is that Kelley moved from a New York gallery to a transnational one just as his practice was finally finding its way home—just as the agoraphobic artist reconnected with the Midwestern origins of his persona. And *Mobile Homestead* is particularly polar in this regard, split in its sensibility much as *Half a Man* is. On the one hand, the façade of the home is designed to be perpetually in transit. But another component of the project, a subterranean lair built below the home’s dock at MOCAD, permanently fixes the work in Kelley’s home city [Figure 108]. In addition to affirming the project’s sitedness, the subterranean space also renders part of the work inaccessible to Kelley’s audience. According to the plan, the basement structure was constructed exclusively for “secret or ritual uses” by Kelley and his friends (and here there are obvious parallels with Kippenberger’s *Metro-NET* and the *Lord Jim Lodge*). In Kelley’s final project, the artist’s home is simultaneously set adrift and closed off. It appears both stuck in transit and forever preserved like a tiny *Kandor* trapped in a bell jar, a keepsake that is also a journey.

Kelley wasn’t killed by an art gallery. But he didn’t survive his internationalization either. Survival, Kelley’s work suggests, is about preserving one’s culture, one’s home, and one’s self as they are cast into perpetual transitivity. What Kelley’s later work could not reconcile, however, was the role that his home played in his internationalization. He had developed his working methodology in response to the class cultural conditions of his origins—a methodology that turned out to be in line with the operations of the transnational art market. *Kandor* and *Mobile Homestead* are a last attempt to abandon what is already lost—to smash a

---

4 Meyer-Hermann and Mark eds., *Mike Kelley*, 308.
home that is already destroyed, to set adrift a home that is already dislocated. But they are also
an attempt to preserve a home that persists inescapably, like a neurosis that follows a traumatic
childhood.

By 1996 Kippenberger was dying of his excesses. His distended beer belly—a hallmark
of his self-portraits for years—now evidenced a liver swollen with cancer. That year, the artist’s
last major sculptural work, *The Happy End of Franz Kafka’s “Amerika”* (1994) [Figure 109],
was shown alongside Theodore Géricault’s *Raft of the Medusa* (1818-1819) for the exhibition
“Memento Metropolis” at Turbinehalle in Copenhagen. The pairing cast Kippenberger’s large-
scale installation as a study in being desperately overwhelmed. *Amerika* is a collection of tables
and chairs set up on a green carpet painted like a soccer field. The point of departure for the work
was Kafka’s unfinished novel, *Amerika* (1927) (a.k.a. *The Man Who Disappeared*), a story of the
American misadventures of emigrant Karl Roßmann. *Amerika*’s unrealized ending was to
include Karl’s encounter with the Nature Theatre of Oklahoma, a company that promised
employment for anyone who applied. Kippenberger’s installation imagines the preconditions for
such universal employment, a field of bizarre and varied interview stations that reflect the
multitude of positions to be filled. In one of the texts published as part of the *Amerika* project
(*B. Gespräche mit Martin Kippenberger*), Kippenberger claims to have interviewed for the
position of interviewer, announcing once again that the artist’s role in the work is administrative.
We are to imagine that Kippenberger would someday sit in a chair at each of the stations
questioning candidates. However, for the time being, the installation’s chairs remain empty, the
promise of universal employment, and a happy ending to Kafka’s novel, unrealized. This
indeterminacy is perhaps what prompted the pairing of Kippenberger’s installation with
Géricault’s painting in Copenhagen. Equally, though very differently, a figuration of indeterminacy, *Raft of the Medusa* depicts the moment when survivors on an imperiled life raft see a potential rescue ship, unsure if they are seen in return.

The only other apparent connection between Kafka’s *Amerika* and Géricault’s *Raft* is the fact that international travel leads to misfortune in each. Kafka’s novel describes a perilous trip to America, while Géricault’s painting depicts the survivors of a makeshift life raft that had escaped the French ship *Meduse* after it ran aground off the coast of Africa. Whatever the original motivation, however, Kippenberger found the juxtaposition revelatory, and for the next year Géricault’s painting informed one of his last series of self-portraits, *Das Floß der Medusa* [The Raft of the Medusa] (1996). The series, which eventually included dozens of paintings, drawings, and lithographs, as well as an eight by fifteen foot rug that depicts the raft’s schematic layout, began, in Kippenberger fashion, as a commission. The artist asked his wife, Elfie Semotan, to photograph him posed as each of the passengers in Géricault’s painting [Figure 110]. Caught between peril and salvation, the strongest of the group of stranded sailors wave fragments of cloth or stretch out to a potential rescue ship on the horizon, while others lay limp, dead or dying, reduced to a heap of pale flesh and limbs. In Semotan’s photographs, Kippenberger reaches out hopeful and desperate, sits slumped and exasperated, recumbent in agony, resigned to death. Given the work’s overt engagement with mortality and suffering, it is tempting to frame the *Medusa* series as the last gasp of a dying artist, an outlier, and thus as an excusably melancholic terminus to a career cut short. But like every object in Kippenberger’s oeuvre, *Medusa* cannot be read in isolation from the artist’s earlier work, even in its misery.

In fact, misery was a central theme in Kippenberger’s practice. In 1979 *Kippenbergers Büro* organized the group exhibition “Elend” [Misery]. From there the theme can be traced
through his *Alkoholfolter* [Alcohol Torture] (1981–82), a collection of paintings and images of the artist beaten and bandaged under the title “Dialog mit der Jugend [Dialogue with Youth]” (ex. 1979 and 1981), his *Magical Misery Tour* of Brazil (1985–86), and his crucified *Fred the Frogs* (1988–90). In *Medusa* misery is coupled with Kippenberger’s career-long interest in travel and transportation. This theme is suggested not only through recourse to a painting about a raft, but also in the material used for the construction of the works. Some of the paintings, for example, include Kippenberger’s foreign pocket change adhered to their surfaces, keepsake evidence of an internationally traveled creator. After he completed the paintings, the theme was taken up again in a series of *Medusa* drawings on hotel stationery. These ephemera from the life of an itinerant artist-persona had, of course, been featured in many of Kippenberger’s earlier projects, including *Heavy Mädel, Peter, MOMAS,* and *METRO-Net.* Altogether the *Medusa* paintings frame Kippenberger’s oeuvre retrospectively as a study in transportation misery. It figures the artist as perpetually between boundaries, stranded in transit, always on the way but never arriving. It is, in short, a portrait of the novel state of neoliberal subjectivity. In the shift from industrial capitalism to neoliberal capitalism—or, to use Deleuze’s terminology, from societies of discipline to societies of control—“we have passed from one animal to the other, from the mole to the serpent, in the system under which we live, but also in our manner of living in our relations with others. The disciplinary man was a discontinuous producer of energy, but the man of control is undulatory, in orbit, in a continuous network.” Deleuze likens the state to “surfing.” For Kippenberger it was floating on a raft, lost at sea. There he drifts, undulating

---


6 It also invokes earlier paintings that incorporate currency, like *Gibt’s mich wirklich [Do I really Exist?]* (1982-83) and contemporaneous but unrelated paintings, like *Infatuated Egg* (1996).

7 Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” *October,* 5-6.
within a continuous network, never arriving, always in between—a serpent of a man, which Kippenberger announces in the largest painting from the series, an eighty by ninety-five inch masterwork in red, which reads “Je suis meduse” [Figure 111].

The artists in my analysis never committed to a single medium or style, as is often noted in the literature on their work. But they were both committed to the keepsake, to objects that are used to record and perform one’s history and identity—one’s personhood. The keepsake is an object always trapped between the home and the journey. The souvenir is evidence of travel but it also brings the trip home (a souvenir is not a souvenir until it is removed from its origins). The childhood keepsake, meanwhile, is a souvenir from the past, and registers the distance between one’s childhood home and one’s adulthood—it registers a departure. But more than simply recording, keepsakes are tasked with preserving. For Kippenberger and Kelley, they are used to preserve a self trapped in transit. The neoliberal world that these artists encountered between West Germany and the U.S. cast them out of their homes and set them adrift. Their keepsakes record the journey, but they also maintain vestiges of personal history against a logic of capital transitivity that was making over their homes and their selves (“the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations.” “Since it is no longer the body, it must be the soul”). Finally, the keepsake is always bound up with self-performance and self-production. The self we preserve is the self we present through collections of souvenirs, family photos, and handmade crafts. These performed personae are what Kippenberger and Kelley deployed as a matter of self-protection—as a matter of survival. But these personae were, from the start, exercises in failure—as Kippenberger

---

8 Medusa/e is also the biological term for jellyfish, an equally undulatory—and drifting—creature of the sea (in conversation with Hal Foster).
reminded Koether on the train between Cologne and Frankfurt: “Even surviving ends in being
dead.”\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{10}Kippenberger, \textit{I Had a Vision}, 67.
Bibliography

Archival Resources:

Archiv der jungendkulturen e.v., Berlin.

Axel Springer AG Archive via Infopool Recherche, Berlin.

Buchhandlung Walther König (Archive of Kippenberger books).

Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions Archive, Los Angeles. Mike Kelley folder.

Mike Kelley Foundation for the Arts.

Spex Register digital index and Spex magazine archive (remotely).

Books, articles, and exhibition catalogues:


Ross, David and Jürgen Harten, editors. The BiNATIONAL: American Art of the Late 80s/German Art of the Late 80s. Cologne: DuMont, 1988.


Williams, Gregory, Jeff Koons, Jan Avgikos, Christopher Wool, Ronald Jones, Andrea Fraser, Stephen Prina. “The Happy End of Kippenberger’s Amerika as told to Gregory Williams.” *Artforum.* February, 2003, 96-104.


Films/Recordings/Albums

Kelley, Mike. *Mike Kelley: Day is Done (Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstructions #2- #32).* 2 DVD set.

----. *Mike Kelley; Plato’s Cave, Rothko’s Chapel, Lincoln’s Profile (with Sonic Youth) and The Peristaltic Airwaves.* Los Angeles: Compound Annex, 2012. Compact disk.


Illustrations

[ALL IMAGES REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT CONSIDERATIONS]
Figure 1

Martin Kippenberger, *Was Gott im Herrschen, Bin ich im Können* [As God is to Lording, I Am to Doing], 1992, screen-print poster, 67.8 x 87 cm. Designed by Mike Kelley.

Figure 2


Figure 3

*Ausschnitt aus ‘ner Kinderpostkarte* [Detail of a child’s postcard] 1977, oil on canvas 60 x 50 cm

Figure 4

*Uno di voi, un tedesco in Firenze* photos mounted to A5 cardboard, c. 1977, Collection Gisela Stelly.

Figure 5


Figure 6

Richter, *Stadtbild* [Townscape], 1969, oil on canvas, 70 x 70 cm and *Kissen* [Pillow], 1965, oil on canvas, 100 cm x 108 cm.

Figure 7

Kippenberger, *Stadtansicht* [City View], 1977, oil on canvas, 60 x 50 cm and *Taschenventilator* [Pocket Fan], 1977, oil on canvas, 50 x 60 cm.

Figure 8


Figure 9

Gerhard Richter, *Kahnfahrt* [Boat Trip], oil on canvas, 1965, 150 cm x 190 cm; *Motorboot*, [Motor Boat] 1965, 170 cm x 170 cm; *Reisebüro* [Tourist Office], 1966 150 cm x 130 cm.
Figure 10

*Villa Monteforte; Mein Zimmer* [Villa Monteforte; My Room] and *20er Jahre Bild aus meinem Schlafzimmer. Erste Ausführung von Principessa Barberini!* [20s Picture from my bedroom. First version of Principessa Barberini!], 1977, oil on canvas, both 50 x 60 cm.

Figure 11

*Warum nicht* [Why Not], 1977, oil on canvas, 50 x 60 cm.

Figure 12

*Löwe am Anfang der Poggio Imperiale; BR: Brigada Rossa* [Lion at the Start of the Poggio Imeriale], 1977, oil on canvas, 50 x 60 cm.

Figure 13


Figure 14

*Kappler*, 1977, oil on canvas, 50 x 60 cm.

Figure 15

*Kein Capri bei Nacht* [No Capri by Night], 1981, oil on canvas.

Figure 16

1973 Ford Capri advertisement.

Figure 17

Sigmar Polke, *Supermarkets*, 1976, gouache, gold bronze, spray paint, enamel, collage, felt-tip pen, and acrylic on paper mounted on canvas, 207 x 295 cm.

Figure 18

*Untitled* (From the series, *Lieber Maler, male mir* [Dear Painter, Paint for Me]), 1981, acrylic on canvas, 300 x 200 cm.

Figure 19

*Untitled* (From the series, *Lieber Maler, male mir* [Dear Painter, Paint for Me]), 1981, acrylic on canvas, 200 x 300 cm.
Figure 20

*Untitled* (From the series, *Lieber Maler, male mir* [Dear Painter, Paint for Me]), 1981, acrylic on canvas, 300 x 200 cm.

Figure 21

*Untitled* (From the series, *Lieber Maler, male mir* [Dear Painter, Paint for Me]), 1981, acrylic on canvas, 300 x 200 cm.

Figure 22

*Untitled* (From the series, *Lieber Maler, male mir* [Dear Painter, Paint for Me]), 1981, acrylic on canvas, 300 x 200 cm.

Figure 23

Arabic-market Fanta bottles.

Figure 24

Polke, *Das Palmen-Bild* [The Palm Painting], 1964, polymer paint on patterned fabric, 91.5 x 75.4 cm.

Figure 25


Figure 26


Figure 27

*Bitte nicht nach Hause schicken* [Please Don’t Send Me Home], 1983, oil on canvas, 120 x 100 cm.

Figure 28

*Knechte des Tourismus* [Slaves of Tourism] (detail), 1979, slideshow.

Figure 29

*Alkoholfolter* [The Torture of Alcohol], 1981-82, oil on canvas, diptych, 50 x 60 cm each panel.
Figure 30

*Untitled* (from the series *Das Floß der Medusa* [The Raft of the Medusa]), 1996, oil on canvas, 100 x 120 cm.

Figure 31

*Ich kann beim besten Willen kein Hakenkreuz entdecken* [With the best Will in the World I Can’t see a Swastika], 1984, oil on canvas, 160 x 133 cm.

Figure 32

*Nicht wegwerfen! Kann man noch für Nudelauflauf gebrauchen* [Don’t Throw it Away! I Can Still Use it for Pasta Casserole], 1980, offset poster 43.4 x 30.5 cm.

Figure 33


Figure 34


Figure 35


Figure 36

*Dialog mit der Jugend* [Dialogue with the Youth] (detail), 1981.

Figure 37


Figure 38

*Worktimer*, 1987, steel, briefcases, and rubber, 243 x 257 x 140 cm.

Figure 39

*Korrekte Syntax* [Correct Syntax], 1987, wood, Plexiglas, stickers, silkscreen print, and socket box, 124 x 107 x 112 cm.
Figure 40

Transporter für Skulptur (Nicht zum Ausrutschen, zum Stolpern) [Transporter for Sculpture (Not for Slipping, for Tripping), 1987, wood and thirty-six bananas in casting resin, 104 x 74 x 65 cm.

Figure 41

Anlehnungsbedürfnis [In need of Support], 1987, wood and bronze, 134 x 29.5 x 26.5 cm, edition of 3.

Figure 42

Joseph Beuys, Silberbesen und Besen ohne Haare [Silver Broom and Broom without Bristles], 1972, wooden broom with silver casing, copper, felt.

Figure 43

Peter (exhibition poster, Galerie Max Hetzler), 1987, screenprint, 82.6 x 60.2 cm.

Figures 44, 45, 46

Aufnahmeprüfung in Rot, Hinter ist noch ein Loch frei, and Reutliche Kasten [Entrance Exam in Red, There’s Still an Empty Hole in the Back, and Retouching Box], mixed media, all 1987.

Figures 47 and 48

Wenn’s anfängt, durch die Decke zu tropfen and Documenta-Wegweiser [When it Starts Dripping Through the Ceiling and Documenta-Signage], both 1987, mixed media.

Figure 49

2. Preis [Price/Prize], 1987, oil and oat flakes on canvas, 180 x 150 cm.

Figure 50

Model Interconti, 1987, Gerhard Richter painting from 1972, wood, and metal, 33.2 x 79.3 x 60.2 cm.

Figure 51


Figure 52

Bergwerk II [Mine II], 1987, shoe, foam rubber, wood, metal, and carpet, 80 x 50 x 60 cm.
Figure 53

*Einfach geht der Applaus zugrunde* [The Applesauce Simply Dies], 1987, offset poster, 97.8 x 68.6 cm.

Figure 54


Figure 55

*Heavy Burschi* [Heavy Lad], 1989/1990, installation view, Tate Gallery, 2006.

Figure 56

*Heavy Burschi*, two details, 1989-90.

Figure 57

*Martin, ab in die Ecke und schäm dich* [Martin, Into the Corner, You Should Be Ashamed of Yourself], 1989, mixed media, 175 x 80 x 40 cm.

Figure 58

*Untitled*, 1993, colored pencil and letraset on CAD print, 29.7 x 42 cm.

Figure 59

*METRO-Net, Syros*, 1993, concrete, cast-iron grillwork, 380 x 1380 x 280 cm.

Figure 60


Figure 61

*METRO-Net, Dawson City*, 1995, wood, 350 x 1400 x 300 cm.

Figure 62

*METRO-Net Transportable Subway Entrance (Crushed)*, 1997, aluminum, 295 x 850 x 215 cm.

Figure 63

Mike Kelley, *Untitled (Allegorical Drawing)*, 1976, marker on file card, 4 x 6 in.
Figure 64

Elegy to the Symbionese Liberation, 1975, mixed media on paper, 36 x 24 in.

Figure 65

Sheep Shape, 1976, mimeograph on paper, 11 x 8 ½ in.

Figure 66

Shrimp, Head, Pot, 1976, mixed media on paper, 27 x 18 ¾ in.

Figure 67

Hans Hofmann, Autumn Chill and Sun, 1962, oil on canvas, 51 x 60 in.

Figure 68

Political Cartoon (In the Clutches of Evil), 1976/2011, pigment print, 44 x 30 in., edition of 100.

Figure 69

Untitled (Allegorical Drawing), 1976, ink on file card, 4 x 6 in.

Figure 70


Figure 71


Figure 72

Catholic Birdhouse, 1978, wood, paint, composite shingles, 22 x 18.5 in.

Figure 73

Birdhouse for a Bird That is Near and a Bird That is Far, 1978, wood, acrylic, metal, 27.625 x 37 x 11.25 in.

Figure 74

The Trajectory of Light in Plato’s Cave (interior), 1985-86.

Figure 75

Figure 76


Figure 77

*More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid* and *The Wages of Sin*, both 1987, 2 parts: found handmade stuffed animals and afghans on canvas, dried corn; wax candles on wood, metal base, 96 x 127 x 5 in. and 52 x 23 x 23 in.

Figure 78

*Plush Kundalini and Chakra Set*, 1987, stuffed animals, 264 x 24 x 24.

Figure 79

*Ascending Hosts* and *Descending Order*, both 1989, glued felt 93.5 x 18 x 12.5 in. and 93.5 x 17 x 16 in.

Figure 80

*Eviscerated Corpse*, 1989, found stuffed animals, tied, 23 x 10.5 x 5 in.

Figure 81

*Innards*, 1990, stuffed animals on blanket.

Figure 82

*Arena #2 (Kangaroo)*, 1990, stuffed animals on blanket, 10 1/2 x 49 1/2 x 40 in.

Figure 83

*Untitled, (Yarn)*, 1990, cotton blanket, yarn, 1.75 x 85.75 x 89.75 in.

Figure 84

a. Robert Morris, *Untitled (Tan Felt)*, 1968, nine strips, each 120 x 8 in.


Figure 85

Figure 86

*Trash Picker*, 1987, glued felt, 94.5 x 59 in.

Figure 87

*Animal Self* and *Friend of the Animals*, 1987 (2 parts), glued felt, 96.75 x 72 and 94.75 x 67.75 in.

Figure 88

*Three-Point Program/Four Eyes*, 1987, glued felt with ribbon, 94 x 59.5 in.

Figure 89

*Nostalgic Depiction of the Innocence of Childhood* and *Manipulating Mass-Produced, Idealized Objects*, both 1990, sepia-toned black and white photograph and black and white photograph, 14 x 11 in. each.

Figure 90

*Antiqued (Prematurely Aged)*, 1987, painted wood dresser, glass, magazine clippings, objects, mirror, plywood, ephemera (in drawers), overall 75.5 x 35.875 x 22.125 in.

Figure 91

*Antiqued (Prematurely Aged)* (detail), 1987.

Figure 92

*Antiqued (Prematurely Aged)* (detail), 1987.

Figure 93

*Manly Craft #2*, 1989, found yarn animals, tied, 5.5 x 3.5 x 1.5 in.

Figure 94


Figure 95

Figure 96

*Thirteen Seasons (Heavy on the Winter); #5 Summer Rage, #6 Fall, and #7 The Decent*, all 1994, acrylic on wood panel, 62.5 x 40 in.

Figure 97


Figure 98

*Entryway (Genealogical Chart)*, 1995, acrylic on wood with steel frame, 101.5 x 115 x 3 in.

Figure 99

*Educational Complex (detail)*, 1995.

Figure 100

*Castrati Satan*, 1995, acrylic on wood panel, 64 x 47 in. and drawing by Kevin Kelley, undated, source for *Castrati Satan*.

Figure 101

*Timeless/Authorless (#11)*, 1995, black and white photograph on museum board, 31 x 24 in.

Figure 102

“Educational Complex Onwards (Project-related Flow Chart)” (2008), copied from Mike Kelley and Anne Pontégnie, eds., *Mike Kelley; Educational Complex Onwards 1995-2008*, 2010 (foldout). Originally designed as the exhibition poster.

Figure 103

*Gauntlet*, 1995, 6 wood panels with acrylic and Varathane, 48 x 382 x 3 in.

Figure 104

*Kandor 16*, 2011, mixed media, 77.25 x 4.75 x 40.375 in.

Figure 105

From *Superman and His Incredible Fortress of Solitude*. Summer, 1981 (DC Special Series Vol. 5 No. 26), pg 34.
Figure 106

Figure 107

Figure 108
Computer rendering of MOCAD *Mobile Homestead* dock (undated).

Figure 109

Figure 110
Elfie Semotan, Study for *Das Floß der Medusa*, 1996.

Figure 111
Kippenberger, *Untitled (from the series The Raft of Medusa)*, 1996, oil on canvas, 200 x 240 cm.