SCULPTURE’S CONDITION | CONDITIONS OF PUBLICNESS:
ISA GENZKEN AND THOMAS HIRSCHHORN

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Abstract

In a moment when sculpture’s generic specificity and political and aesthetic validity seem increasingly in doubt, Isa Genzken (b. 1948) and Thomas Hirschhorn (b. 1957) persist in making works explicitly situated in relation to the history of sculpture. They do so even if, or precisely because, continuing to make sculpture has entailed radically redefining that medium and its potential meanings in the public sphere. My dissertation maps the work of Genzken and Hirschhorn at the intersection of sculpture’s materialization, mystification, and extension in the hands of Beuys; its dematerialization in the 1970s; and its avant-garde legacy of failed utopian potential. Overlaying that map is a second, in which I consider the particular urgency of sculptural practice in the context of ongoing post-war reconstruction in Germany and of the discourse about Öffentlichkeit (the public sphere) that began to take shape in the early-1960s, initiated by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929) with his epochal 1962 book Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft, and revised and extended by sociologist Oskar Negt (b. 1934) and writer and filmmaker Alexander Kluge (b. 1932) in their co-authored works, namely, Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung. Zur Organisations-analyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit (1972) and Geschichte und Eigensinn: Geschichtliche Organisation der Arbeitsvermögen — Deutschland als Produktionsöffentlichkeit — Gewalt des Zusammenhangs (1981).

At the core of both Genzken’s and Hirschhorn’s projects are questions about the possibility and conditions of publicness and of the status of human subjects within and formed by publicness—questions that are perhaps best addressed by the three-dimensional quality of sculpture. In distinct ways, Genzken and Hirschhorn exploit the sculptural object’s proximity to
the monument (and architecture more generally), the commodity, and the human figure to explore the potentials for, and hindrances to, collective meaning production. How does one maintain utopian possibilities in the present, they ask, while reckoning with the promises and failures of the historical avant-garde of the early 20th century? Is it possible to enact sculpture’s full materialization and yet resist reification? What is an adequate artistic response to the historical predicaments of the period—advanced capitalism, mediation, terrorism, imperialism, for example? Does there remain an experiencing and expressive subject in which such a critical response might be rooted? Is a unified or “universal” public sphere imaginable? And, more to the point, would it be desirable? My aim in this dissertation is to understand the difference of Genzken’s and Hirschhorn’s approaches to the possibilities of publicness as related to, and expressed in, the possibilities of sculpture.
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Introduction

In the title of this dissertation, sculpture and publicness hinge on the word “condition,” with the slash operating as a sort of pin around which the two main terms revolve. The hinge metaphor is apt, for it signals my primary argument and a premise for the dissertation, namely that the possibility or impossibility of sculpture is bound up with the possibility or impossibility of publicness. In approaching the mutually implicated fates of sculpture and publicness, I aim to assess both present states and future conditions of possibility through an intense engagement with the works of contemporary artists Isa Genzken and Thomas Hirschhorn. The exemplary status I accord to Genzken and Hirschhorn derives from the consistency and radicality of their responses to the central problematic of art’s capacity to engage critically with the public sphere, whether in its present fragmentation or in its re-imagined viability.

This dissertation maps the work of Genzken and Hirschhorn in relation to a history of late 20th-century art in which sculpture’s generic specificity and political and aesthetic validity seem increasingly in doubt. Conceptual art’s negation of the visual in favor of the linguistic or legalistic; institution critique’s emphasis on the architectural and discursive frame; process art’s anti-formal tendencies; performance art’s temporal dimension; installation art’s emphasis on space and site—the range of postminimalist expressions beginning in the 1960s ostensibly signaled the dissolution of the discrete three-dimensional object as a meaningful category of artistic production. Genzken’s and Hirschhorn’s persistence in making works explicitly situated in relation to the history of sculpture pointedly reasserts its viability even as they subject the category to radical redefinition.
Upon this art-historical map I overlay a second, in which I consider the particular urgency of sculptural practice in the context of the discourse about Öffentlichkeit (the public sphere) that began to take shape in the early 1960s, initiated by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas with his epochal 1962 book Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft, and revised and extended by sociologist Oskar Negt and writer and filmmaker Alexander Kluge in their co-authored works, namely, Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung: Zur Organisations-analyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit (1972) and Geschichte und Eigensinn: Geschichtliche Organisation der Arbeitsvermögen — Deutschland als Produktionsöffentlichkeit — Gewalt des Zusammenhangs (1981). Negt’s and Kluge’s discussion of the power of media conglomerates to conjure an illusory public sphere has strongly informed the terms of my discussion. Indeed, mediation by the press and reification of relations in advanced capitalism constitute chief subjects of critical engagement for both Genzken and Hirschhorn. Yet it is worth noting that the publicness that is conjured in their oeuvres varies in substance and significance from object to object, project to project. Very rarely, if at all, do these artists’ works directly engage an ideal bourgeois public sphere à la Habermas; nor do they envisage a revolutionary counter-public sphere such as Negt and Kluge describe. At times, publicness in these works might be defined as the possibility of contestation and criticality, especially with regard to economic and political realities; at other times, it is more proximate to the ideal of universality. In certain of the projects under discussion, publicness is worked out in relation to a specific instance of public space and its non-unitary “public.” Other works approach the idea of collective meaning production and reception more abstractly through a investigation of the status of the monument. Still others engage publicness
on a more human scale, thematizing the possibility for intimacy or inter-subjective connectedness.

At the risk of over-generalization, then, publicness in this dissertation involves defined as involving criticality, communicability, and community—as well as a concept of subjectivity on which these might be based. This dissertation approaches the works of Genzken and Hirschhorn with the aim of identifying and theorizing the artistic gambits and sculptural tactics with which they confront these possibilities. Both artists’ projects achieve a dialectical complexity in which a utopian sense of communicability is worked out through a confrontation with forms marked by conditions of reification under commodity, media, and spectacle culture. For neither Genzken nor Hirschhorn does mere thematic engagement suffice. Their works are structurally informed by concerns of publicness; the works’ materials, means of composition, motifs, and modes of address respond to this central problematic.

At the core of both Genzken’s and Hirschhorn’s projects are questions about the possibility and conditions of publicness and of the status of human subjects within and formed by publicness—questions that are perhaps best addressed by the three-dimensional qualities of sculpture. In distinct ways, Genzken and Hirschhorn exploit the sculptural object’s proximity to the monument (and architecture more generally), the commodity, and the human figure to explore the potentials for, and hindrances to, collective meaning production. How does one maintain utopian possibilities in the present, they ask, while reckoning with the promises and failures of the historical avant-garde of the early 20th century? Is it possible to enact sculpture’s full materialization and yet resist reification? What is an adequate artistic response to the historical predicaments of the period—advanced capitalism, mediation, terrorism, imperialism, for example? Does there remain an experiencing and expressive subject in which such a critical
response might be rooted? Is a unified or “universal” public sphere imaginable? And, more to the point, would it be desirable?

Isa Genzken was born in 1948 in Bad Oldesloe, Germany. Between 1973 and 1977, she was enrolled in the Düsseldorf Art Academy. Konrad Fischer gave Genzken her first solo gallery exhibition in 1976. Fischer was a successful artist (exhibiting under the name Konrad Lueg) in the early- to mid-1960s until he founded his gallery in 1967.¹ As a dealer, he became a pivotal figure in post-war German art, not least for his role as a primary conduit for the introduction of American Minimalist and Conceptual art, artists, and ideas to European audiences and collectors. At that initial exhibition at Galerie Konrad Fischer Genzken showed her elegant *Ellipsoids*, elongated wooden forms precisely engineered with the aid of computer. With their lacquered surfaces, the *Ellipsoids* (and the *Hyperbolos* that followed) already hinted at the coloristic (one might say painterly) sense that has come to be a hallmark of Genzken’s sculptures. Despite the critical success of these early works, Genzken soon eschewed the exactitude and flawlessness of machine-aided construction, working with cruder means and more commonplace materials like plaster and concrete. From the outset, Genzken displayed a tendency to work out her ideas in series, with the implication that a given series often generated the terms for the next.

Architectonic structures and motifs constitute a mainspring of Genzken’s oeuvre, and she often plays formally upon the distinctions between fragment, model, and ruin. Conceptually, she aims her critique at the contemporary architecture that shapes our day-to-day experience as well as at forms of commemoration that govern our relation to moments of collective historical importance. But architecture’s role is multivalent in Genzken’s works. In addition to being an

¹ In 1963, Lueg, Gerhard Richter, and Sigmar Polke organized *Living with Pop—A Demonstration for Capitalist Realism*, an exhibition-cum-performance. Capitalist realism is often understood to be a German manifestation of Pop that aimed its wry critique at the *Wirtschaftswunder* [economic miracle] of the mid-1950s and early 1960s. Lueg, Richter, and Polke were students together at the Düsseldorf Art Academy, where Lueg was enrolled from 1958 to 1962.
external force that acts upon the human subject, it also serves as a metaphorical stand-in for the human body through which Genzken explores issues of interiority and exteriority, privacy and publicity.

In the early 2000s, Genzken’s work took what seemed at the time to be a dramatic turn. From the austerity of her works in concrete and glass (austere in material and form, if not in color, in the latter case) Genzken began to produce assemblages featuring a motley array of cheap, mass-produced wares. Until recently, the Genzken reception has tended to split between psychologizing interpretations of her work—sculpture as expression of psychosis or dreamwork—and those aspects that engage the public sphere. That these two approaches latch onto Genzken’s assemblages and architecturally-inflected work, respectively, should be no surprise. Yet a distinction between these two modes of composition within her body of work becomes harder and harder to uphold. At a basic level, an increasing number of the architectural works are composed by means of assemblage. Furthermore, the most riotous-seeming of her amalgams are often undergirded by subtle architectonic structure. But more to the point, even when Genzken’s work is at its most private it never fails to explore the status of the private (as distinct from, and in relation to, the status of the public). In the case of the assemblages of industrially-produced goods, Genzken makes visible the psychic dimension of a consumer’s love and loathing of the commodity. The oscillation between sympathy for the commodity and an enactment of violence against it is an artistic strategy that Genzken has exploited time and again.

Thomas Hirschhorn, born in Bern in 1957, trained as a graphic designer in the Bauhaus-influenced Schule für Gestaltung, Zurich, from 1978 to 1983. In 1983 he moved to Paris, where he intended to work for the Marxist graphic design collective Grapus. As Hirschhorn tells it, he abandoned graphic design in favor of art making in order to assume a radical responsibility for
his work. (Even Marxist graphic designers must answer to clients, he discovered.) Hirschhorn’s artistic training thus took place not in the academy, but before artworks in museums. As an autodidact, Hirschhorn has assembled a personal pantheon of artists and philosophers who figure prominently as icons and interlocutors in his works. Hirschhorn’s earliest works already bear the stamp of his artistic means and concerns: appropriation of vernacular forms; experimentation with non-conventional modes of display and distribution; interest in modes of exchange like the gift; adoption of a radically deskilled means of making; and commitment to the most plebeian of materials. So, too, does he seem intent from the outset to test the validity of his artworks in public space, beyond the discursive frame of aesthetic institutions, often subjecting them to conditions of risk, such as vandalism or destruction.

A self-proclaimed artist-worker-soldier, Hirschhorn is everywhere present in his work—in his inimitable visual “style” (though he would reject such a characterization), through his textual output, and in his very person. As a matter of principle, Hirschhorn grants frequent interviews. He is also a prolific writer about his practice, laying out in statement after statement his motives, his terms, and his points of reference. Declarative and emphatic in their rhetorical mode and presentation (his ungainly script is often reproduced in all its scribbled urgency), Hirschhorn’s pronouncements can seem alternately astute and obtuse. Often he manages to achieve both effects at once. However literal, dogmatic, or willfully simpleminded, his

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3 About Warhol and Beuys, Hirschhorn says, “Those were the two artists I discovered for myself in the late 1970s. From 1978 to about 1983 I attended the School of Applied Arts in Zurich, and in 1978–79, each had a one-man show, Beuys at the Kunstmuseum and Warhol at the Kunsthaus Zurich. They were equally important; I could say that both were in fact my teachers, though I never studied under them.” Benjamin Buchloh, “Interview with Thomas Hirschhorn,” October 113 (Summer 2005): 77. See also Thomas Hirschhorn, “I love Joseph Beuys” and “For the first time—Andy Warhol,” artist statements.
4 Hirschhorn often claims this threefold identity. For one instance, see and Thomas Hirschhorn, “Interview with Okwui Enwezor,” in Thomas Hirschhorn: Jumbo Spooks and Big Cake, The Art Institute of Chicago; World Airport, The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2000), 35.
statements seldom fail to stimulate passionate reaction. The capacity of his words to provoke might very well reside in his refusal of the veneer of refinement or the shield of circumspection. The effectiveness of Hirschhorn’s writing can be gauged by the degree to which his terms have dictated the critical debate surrounding his works and beyond. “Precarity,” just to name the most prominent example, is a term that Hirschhorn has used to characterize his works of temporary duration and, perhaps more compellingly, to describe an acute condition of urgency and risk he wants his works to inhabit. As Hal Foster has shown, Hirschhornian precarity is laden with socio-economic, ethical, and political implications. In his “presence and production” works, Hirschhorn’s physical presence suggests an artistic and political commitment to what he calls the “non-exclusive public.” Limited-duration projects often situated in (and realized with the cooperation of) working class neighborhoods whose populations are marked by legacies of colonialism and political and economic marginalization, the “presence and production” works stake a place for art within a public sphere that is anything but unitary.

The difference of Genzken’s and Hirschhorn’s approaches to the shared problematic of sculpture and publicness is critical for this project. For Genzken, these issues are manifested in the nexus between utopian and dystopian architecture, the reified commodity, and the human body and psyche. Whereas Genzken repeatedly tests the limits of sculptural coherence, maintaining all the while an attenuated object-pedestal relation so fundamental to the history of sculpture, Hirschhorn radically redefines the genre formally while attempting “to create moments of public space.” By appropriating vernacular forms, in insisting upon quotidian materials, and

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5 Hal Foster provides an excellent gloss and discussion of some of Hirschhorn’s key terms in “Toward a Grammar of Emergency,” in Establishing a Critical Corpus, Claire Bishop, et. al. (Zürich: JRP Ringier, 2011), 162–181. Foster elucidates “precarity” (or precariousness) in relation to the condition of economic insecurity of a disparate class of laborers, or “precariat,” drawing out the ethical and political implications of the term.
by actually engendering a “public” for his work through his “presence and production” projects, Hirschhorn upholds sculpture’s centrality in the constitution of the public sphere.

The first chapter of my dissertation establishes the historical context and theoretical frame for the chapters that follow. I present two major positions in the discourse of Öffentlichkeit: Jürgen Habermas’s foundational study of the bourgeois public sphere and Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge’s proposal for a counter-public sphere. In tracking the historical development and structural transformation of the public sphere, Habermas maintained its ideational core, in which private individuals gather to engage in disinterested rational debate. Negt and Kluge argue in response that the ideal of the bourgeois public sphere cannot be retained apart from its historical failure. In its stead, they propose the concept of a counter-public sphere based not upon the structures of the bourgeois public sphere but instead upon the experience [Erfahrung] and life context [Lebenszusammenhang] of the proletariat. I set this account of the discourse of Öffentlichkeit in relation to an art historical narrative of the crisis attending to the sculptural genre after Minimalism. In what has been called a “post-medium condition,” sculpture faced uncertainty regarding its materials, its means of production, and its motifs, not to mention its aesthetic and political relevance. I discuss at some length the legacy and influence of Joseph Beuys, not only because his simultaneous materialization and dematerialization of sculpture exemplifies the vagaries of the “post-medium condition,” but also because his work and person are so insistently situated in relation to the public sphere. The thesis for this chapter can be stated thus: the possibility or impossibility of sculpture in the present is inseparable from the possibility or impossibility of publicness. I argue that sculpture’s intimate relationship to architecture and the monument, to the commodity, and to the human body renders it particularly articulate about
and responsive to the conditions of publicness. The subsequent chapters elaborate upon, deepen, and complicate this thesis.

Chapter two examines Genzken’s architectonic works in concrete and glass, as well as her assemblage constructions. I explore the historical meanings that have accrued to Genzken’s chosen materials. I suggest that Genzken’s concrete structures allude to utopian visions of affordable mass housing as well as to the decidedly bleaker realities of prefabricated concrete slab structures from the Plattenbau to the Berlin Wall. Similarly, I situate Genzken’s New Buildings for Berlin (2004) in relation to the utopian aspirations of expressionist Glasarchitektur and to Mies van der Rohe’s early skyscraper designs as well as their transformation into the default architectural vocabulary of the corporate high-rise. Furthermore, as the title indicates, the New Buildings for Berlin need to be understood as a salient commentary upon the post-Wende reconstruction of Berlin. From Genzken’s architectonic works, I move on to explore her assemblages of mass produced wares. These works aim their critique not at the built environment but at the commodity. I offer an extended discussion of plastic, likening its mutability to the exchange value of the commodity under capitalism. Drawing upon Walter Benjamin’s writings on the combinatory possibilities of allegory, as well as its relation to the commodity, I argue that Genzken’s assemblage process is an allegorical one that attempts to combat conditions of reification. Throughout this chapter, I present Genzken’s tactics of diabolic destruction and allegorical recombination as Baudelairean.

In chapter three, I trace a strand of Genzken’s sculptural and collage output that insists upon the possibility of bodily integrity and enduring selfhood in relation to and in the context of conditions of commodity culture, spectacle, and mediation. In these works, architecture constitutes the body’s proxy and its governing metaphor. I engage with Genzken’s concrete
Fenster (1990) through the lens of the modernist debates between the porte-fenêtre and the fenêtre en longueur, I argue that the unglazed, unshuttered Fenster figure the subject as radically exposed yet integral. Furthermore, a subset of Genzken’s works—from Mein Gehirn (1984) to the Weltempfänger (1987), from her photographic depictions of women’s ears (1980) to the Fenster—seems to suggest that the risk of exposure is the necessary condition for receptivity. My investigation proceeds from architectural apertures to architectural skin when I draw upon Adolf Loos and Gottfried Semper’s theories of architectural cladding or “dressing” (Bekleidung) to discuss Genzken’s Columns (1998-2000). I assert that the Columns must be understood in relation to the fraught status of the figure in contemporary sculpture. Even as the Columns suggest armored bodies, they also evoke individuality and expressivity with their highly idiosyncratic and coloristic surface treatments. The fundamental sensuality of color is crucial to yet another sculptural series, Beach Houses for Changing (2000). With these works, Genzken envisions architecture given over to sensuality and bodily pleasure. Finally, I discuss and compare two series of collages, one that appropriates pornography and another that features images from architectural journals. The disorienting juxtapositions of human skin on the one hand and architectural skin on the other suggest surfaces reconfigured according to the workings of desire.

I argue in chapter four that Hirschhorn’s expressed intent to produce a “universal language of form” is enacted through an appropriation of extra-aesthetic and vernacular types of making, from protest placards to spontaneous memorials. I consider Michel de Certeau’s theories of bricolage as an everyday tactic through which the “consumer” asserts his or her autonomy. Hirschhorn’s “universal language of form,” I argue, is built upon the heterogeneity of everyday life. Furthermore, the extra-aesthetic forms that Hirschhorn appropriates are highly charged with
affect and invested with personal or political meaning. I draw upon the theories of heteroglossia and dialogism that Mikhail Bakhtin developed in relation to the genre of the novel, and demonstrate how Bakhtin’s concept of the novel’s presentation of “stratified social discourse” sheds light on Hirshhorn’s incorporation of multiple textual and visual discourses (academic, journalistic, aesthetic, popular, etc.) into his sculptural projects. Chapter four closes with an exploration of Hirshhorn’s “presence and production” works in relation to what I view to be their dialogic intent. I argue that in contexts marked by the legacies of colonialism and social and political marginalization (as in the Bijlmermeer of Amsterdam, where the Bijlmer-Spinoza Festival was realized in 2009) Hirshhorn’s insistence upon dialogue, which may at times be antagonistic, is a form of utopian action.

Chapter five centers on Hirshhorn’s extended series of Ur-Collages (2008) and its implications for a contemporary language of gesture. I engage Hirshhorn’s statements of antagonism toward the “dictatorship of information,” exemplified for him by journalism. Against vetted “information” Hirshhorn counterposes the photograph, which he understands to be non-hierarchical in the presentation of its contents. With the Ur-Collages, Hirshhorn attempts to reduce the collage to its “simple, primitive, prehistoric” form. He maximizes the tension between the two constituent elements of each Ur-Collage—namely, a fashion advertisement and an image gleaned from the Internet of a wounded and sometimes violently disfigured body. I argue that Hirshhorn’s Ur-Collages figure forth a contemporary Pathosformel, referring, of course, to Aby Warburg’s theory of highly-charged and primal emotive formulas. In particular, I highlight the degree to which the fashion adverts that Hirshhorn employs recapitulate the figure of the female “head-hunter,” so central in Warburg’s vocabulary of human passions. I argue that the Ur-Collages present a contemporary language of gesture, while at the same time also showing this
language to be depleted and evacuated through mediation, repetition, and technological intervention. I extend my discussion to *Superficial Engagement* (2006), a collage in three-dimensions.

This dissertation takes seriously the material, structural, and formal choices in the art of Genzken and Hirschhorn as the terms and very substance of their respective visions of publicness. In the process, I make arguments about Baudelairean diabolism and Bakhtinian dialogism, allegory and allusion, stupidity and travesty. Wide-ranging as these points of reference may seem, they coalesce around and enrich questions of privacy and publicity, collectivity and individual expression as suggested by the works themselves. Without cynicism but not without ambivalence, Genzken and Hirschhorn explore and enact the possibility of publicness through the possibilities of sculpture.
Chapter 1: Terrains Vagues

For the opening gesture of his succinct essay, “Sculpture: Publicity and the Poverty of Experience,” Benjamin Buchloh recasts a definition offered in Rosalind Krauss’s seminal “Sculpture in the Expanded Field.” The original reads, “The logic of sculpture, it would seem, is inseparable from the logic of the monument.” Buchloh proceeds by substituting the term “monument,” first with “commodity fetish” and then with “spectacle.” Having thus connected the logic of sculpture with the logic of late capitalism, Buchloh continues:

Thinking about sculpture in the present moment then confronts first of all two questions and tasks: the first one has to clarify the concealed, yet actually existing status of subject/object relationships and its impact on the production and reception of sculpture. The other one results from an increasing evidence about the disappearance of the last vestiges of social interaction in the residually existing forms of public space.\(^6\)

He then proceeds to pinpoint moments in the postwar period when sculpture begins to engage in such a confrontation. The later works of Alberto Giacometti register a series of losses: of figuration (in his attenuated personages), of artisanal production (in his sculpture made as if “from spittle”), and of public space (in his miniaturized plazas as if “mnemonic models of a conception of publicity long past” and in his *Figuraine dans une boîte entre deux maisons* (1950), which shows subjectivity relegated to the private sphere).\(^7\) For Buchloh, the subject-object relations “in a society of advanced and enforced consumption” determine the subject matter and the structural logic of Arman’s *Poubelles* and *Accumulations* and Claes Oldenburg’s *Ray Gun Wing* and *Mouse Museum*, all from the 1960s.\(^8\) Insofar as the task Buchloh sets himself is “to sketch out a historical trajectory,” he stops short of considering how contemporary

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\(^7\) Ibid., 166–67.

\(^8\) Ibid., 169.
sculptural practice has engaged these same questions. By way of closing, then, he offers the following pronouncement in regards to the work of the present:

I would argue that the work which will perform the most detailed and the most accurate analysis of the difficulties of constructing the representation of the real and of the social under the conditions of spectacle culture and sign exchange value will most likely also be the practice that would resist the totalization of these conditions most successfully.9

To a large degree, my inquiry begins where Buchloh’s ends in this essay.10 This is not only the case in that I will nominate Isa Genzken and Thomas Hirschhorn as living artists whose sculptural works are meaningfully engaged with questions of publicness, but also because I intend to explore more thoroughly the critical and theoretical discourses surrounding publicness that Buchloh’s suggestive text only gestures to.11

To speak of logics (as in, “the logic of sculpture”) is perhaps too definitive for the kind of inquiry I wish to pursue. My own slight, but not insignificant, reformulation: The possibility or impossibility of sculpture is inseparable from the possibility or impossibility of publicness—or, more specifically, of a counter-public sphere, a distinction that will shortly become clear.12 The irresolution involved in my formulation indicates the precarious status of each, but also,

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9 Ibid., 172.
11 The writings of Jürgen Habermas, Oskar Negt, and Alexander Kluge (shortly to be discussed here) bear passing mention in Buchloh’s text. Buchloh’s title, “Sculpture: Publicity and the Poverty of Experience,” alludes both to the Walter Benjamin’s 1933 essay, “Experience and Poverty,” and to Oscar Negt and Alexander Kluge’s *Public Sphere and Experience*. It is clear, of course, that his discussion is predicated upon the author’s more than passing engagement with said texts.
12 This formulation owes something to Stephen Melville’s writing on 1960s art. The effort to distinguish between Conceptualism as a movement on the one hand and the “conceptual” as a characteristic of a range of post-minimal works on the other, leads him to place “the possibility or impossibility of sculpture” as the central issue of 1960s art. Stephen Melville, “Aspects,” in *Reconsidering the Object of Art 1965–1975*, Ann Goldstein, et. al. (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1995), 242.
correspondingly, the urgency and necessity of pursuing a rigorous interrogation of the shared conditions as a result of which both sculpture and publicness are endangered. The works of Genzken and Hirschhorn are consequential precisely because any publicness they assert is hard won and far from unequivocal. They make no recourse to amiable relationality; nor do they celebrate an assumed community.

The German word Öffentlichkeit can be rendered variously—and only ever partially—in English, by “publicness,” “public sphere,” or “publicity.” In its matter-of-fact, grammatical conjunction of adjective and suffix, “publicness” conveys the senses of openness and “the state of being public” which bear relation to the German term. The capacity of “publicity” to engage these same meanings is largely eclipsed by its contemporary use to describe media exposure, public relations, and advertising. The commonly accepted translation, “public sphere,” draws upon a spatialized understanding of the term as well as its more abstract usage, which is to say the content and the criterion of public meaning production. The discourse of Öffentlichkeit was initiated in Germany in the early 1960s by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929) with his epochal 1962 book Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft (Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere).

Sociologist Oskar Negt (b. 1934) and writer and filmmaker Alexander Kluge (b. 1932) revised and extended this discourse in their co-authored works, namely, Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung. Zur Organisations-analyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit (1972) (Public Sphere and Experience). These texts should be seen against the backdrop of significant social, cultural, and political upheavals in the period: from the war in Vietnam to the race riots in the

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13 A remarkable fact that is often commented upon: Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere was unavailable in an English translation until 1989, nearly three decades after its original publication. Negt and Kluge’s Public Sphere and Experience was similarly slow to reach English-language readers, who were required to wait until 1993 (two decades had elapsed) for a translation.
United States; from the then emergent transnational New Left (in the case of Habermas), to the rise (and demise) of student movements in Europe and the US, and to the violent left-wing terrorism that arose in Germany.\textsuperscript{14} The limits of the traditional public sphere were definitively, at times violently, asserted.

Habermas’s study presents Öffentlichkeit as a historically-determined phenomenon subject to transformation and yet possessing an ideational core. Made possible by the establishment of a capitalist economy and by the separation of public authority from private autonomy in bourgeois society of the 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} centuries, Habermas suggests, the liberal public sphere became the condition and the medium through which to critique and oppose the state. Thus divorced from individual needs on the one hand (which remained in the “intimate sphere [\textit{Intimsphäre}]” of the family) and from ruling interests on the other, the private individual engaged in disinterested rational-critical debate:

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people’s public use of their reason (öffentliches Räsonnement).\textsuperscript{15} Habermas locates the disintegration of the bourgeois public sphere in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century. Penetrated by corporate interests, the public sphere becomes a pseudo-private vehicle for advertising and propaganda. The political situation is characterized by Habermas thus:

The process of the politically relevant exercise and equilibration of power now takes place directly between the private bureaucracies, special-interest

\textsuperscript{14} For the political context of Germany in which Habermas, Kluge, and Negt were writing, see: Miriam Hansen, forward to Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, \textit{Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere} (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1972/1993), xiv–xv; and Peter Uwe Hohendahl, “Recasting the Public Sphere,” \textit{October} 73 (Summer 1995): 35.

associations, parties, and public administration. The public as such is included only sporadically in this circuit of power, and even then it is brought in only to contribute its acclamation.\textsuperscript{16}

Under these circumstances, negotiation takes the place of rational debate; public opinion is no longer hashed out among private individuals but a mere product of publicity. The disintegration of the political public sphere (politische Öffentlichkeit) is coincident with the demise of the literary public sphere (literarische Öffentlichkeit). Historically, Habermas asserts, the latter, in the form of 17\textsuperscript{th}-century café societies and literary circles, was a principal step in the constitution of the former.\textsuperscript{17} Now, however, consumption of culture supersedes critical engagement with it.\textsuperscript{18} Flipping the terms produces a more summary statement: in the dissolution of the public sphere, a culture of consumption overtakes a culture of critique.

Having traced the historical disintegration of the bourgeois public sphere, Habermas nevertheless attempts to salvage its emancipatory potential, to be located in the exercise of reason by private individuals in the form of disinterested, rational debate. A decade after Habermas published his groundbreaking text, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge responded with Public Sphere and Experience (1972), which presents a thoroughgoing critique of the bourgeois public sphere and the suppositions upon which it is based. Unlike Habermas, Negt and Kluge refuse to separate an intellectual or ideal content of the bourgeois public sphere from its failure in reality. For these thinkers, writing in the wake of the student revolts of 1968, the bourgeois public sphere was always mobilized in the interests of property owners. Its claim to represent

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 176.

\textsuperscript{17}Habermas suggests that the political public sphere appropriated the culture of art criticism and sociality (the literary public sphere) that arose in 17\textsuperscript{th}-century coffee houses (Great Britain), salons (France), and Tischgesellschaften (Germany). Ibid., 32–7, 51. But the latter was always already political, Habermas tells us: “Even in its merely literary form (of self-elucidation of the novel experiences of subjectivity) it possessed instead a ‘political’ character in the Greek sense of being emancipated form the constraints of survival requirements” (160).

\textsuperscript{18}The transition from a critical relation to culture to one of mere consumption is described in ibid., 159–75.
anything other than capitalist concerns was merely a façade of “feigned collective will.”\(^{19}\) “The illusory synthesis of the totality of society” was predicated on exclusions, specifically of the workers—their interests, their experiences, which Negt and Kluge call the “proletarian context of living” (Lebenszusammenhang). The Marxist underpinnings of Public Sphere and Experience are evident in the author’s concentration on a specifically proletarian public sphere. At the same time, however, they theorized society as encompassing a number of conflicting, heterogeneous, overlapping public spheres (rather than as a unified entity). It is this recognition of plural publics that has been so generative for thinkers who have subsequently explored its possibilities in relation to gender, race, sexual orientation, and issues pertaining to diaspora and deterritorialization.\(^{20}\)

Negt and Kluge’s notable contributions to the discourse of publicness include the bringing to bear of the concept of experience (Erfahrung). Miriam Hansen’s parsing of the etymology of Erfahrung is helpful:

> The German root of ‘fahren’ (to ride, to travel)…conveys a sense of mobility, of journeying, wandering, or cruising, implying both a temporal dimension, that is, duration, habit, repetition, and return, and a degree of risk to the experiencing subject (which is also present, though submerged, in the Latin root periri that links ‘experience’ with ‘peril’ and ‘perish.’)\(^{21}\)

Though both translated in English as “experience,” Erfahrung, which draws from a collective and personal past, stands in marked contrast to Erlebnis, which signals an isolated event. The temporal dimension of Erfahrung is a long and continuous one, and, as such, Negt and Kluge suggest that Erfahrung is rendered impossible under conditions of industrial production in which

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\(^{19}\) Negt and Kluge, Public Sphere and Experience, 11.

\(^{20}\) Hansen notes that in their writings subsequent to Public Sphere and Experience, Negt and Kluge cease to describe the counter-public sphere as “proletarian.” Hansen, forward, Public Sphere and Experience, xxxv.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., xvi–xvii. The senses of perilousness and mobility will be particularly relevant to any understanding of the works of Genzken and Hirschhorn. Of course, Walter Benjamin was instrumental in theorizing the crucial distinction between Erfahrung and Erlebnis. Walter Benjamin, “Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” Illuminations (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 202.
time is divided into units exploitable by the sphere of production (as in the work shift, work week, vacation time, etc.). More insidious is the way in which temporal fragmentation overtakes social experience, from education to child-rearing. The authors quote Theodor Adorno, who writes, “Remembrance, time, and memory are ultimately eliminated from developing bourgeois society as irrational mortgage.” Furthermore, the effects of disjunction are compounded by the total infiltration of media into all areas of life. The public sphere has become a matter of publicity, in the way that we have come to understand that word. For Negt and Kluge, so prescient in their understanding of the ramifications of technologies only then coming into being, the consciousness industry was gaining hypertrophic powers with new modes of distribution and with the rise of privately organized media conglomerates. Having shaped the political sphere, the consciousness industry sets its sights on exploiting every aspect of human experience—through the distribution of news, in the exercise of influence over policy makers, by the shaping of educational systems, in the ceaseless flow of entertainment. “The consciousness of the worker becomes the raw material and the site where these [pseudo-] public spheres realize themselves,” Kluge and Negt contend. (Writing in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the authors could not have imagined the degree to which the Internet would come to lay claim to work and leisure time, to mediate the bulk of communications between people, and to so thoroughly blur the distinctions between news, advertising, and opinion.) The writers assert that what is assimilable as experience has already been coded by and structured around expectations, desires, and needs pre-

22 Negt and Kluge, Public Sphere and Experience, 18–21.
23 Quoted in ibid., 19.
24 For a discussion of the intersection of the media conglomerates and the political sphere, see ibid., Excursis 1 to Chapter 4.
25 Negt and Kluge write, “What is actually ‘for sale’ are the life context and learning context that are preorganized in the media cartel. The media cartel is a macrocommodity, which fuses the individual commodities of education, entertainment, and information into one overall complex.” Ibid., 131.
26 Ibid., 18.
programmed by the culture industry. All of this marks a radical change from media understood as limited to print and radio—another reason why no conception of the 19th-century public sphere could possibly apply to the present.

Yet Negt and Kluge conceptualize Erfahrung dialectically—it is the long, culturally-bound experience that is blocked by the bourgeois public sphere and its governing interests; it is the experience of alienation that is produced by such blockage; and, finally, it is the authentic experience upon which any resistance to blockage must be based. Negt and Kluge call for a targeted and organized response to the present conditions they summarize thus:

…the context of living that had not hitherto been directly valorized by the interests of capital are now likewise preorganized by society. The proletarian context of living is thus split into two halves. One is reabsorbed into the new public spheres of production and participates in the process of industrialization; the other is disqualified in relation to the framework established by systems of production and the public sphere of production that determine society. The proletarian context of living does not as such lose its experiential value; however, the experience bound up in it is rendered ‘incomprehensible’ in terms of social communication: ultimately, it becomes a private experience. As a result, those domains that relate to human activities that are not directly necessary for the production process and the substructure of legitimation are subjected to an organized impoverishment. At the same time, public-sphere activity, ideology production, and the ‘management’ of everyday life—the latter in particular, in the form of pluralistically balanced leisure and consciousness programs—appropriate as raw material human beings’ desire for a meaningful life, as well as parts of their consciousness, in order to erect an industrialized façade of programming and legitimation.

Indeed, the authors imagine nothing short of a counter-public sphere (Gegenöffentlichkeit), the revolutionary potential of which draws upon the complex and contradictory experiences of marginalized individuals—experiences unassimilable to the purposes of capital. In other words, those very experiences that were rendered “incomprehensible” must be made public, and must be

27 “What one is allowed to feel, express, communicate as a realistic person is molded by the modes of interaction in the factory, in everyday life, and above all, transmitted in the mass media.” Ibid., 31.
28 Ibid., 18.
made foundational for a public sphere that counters the dominant narratives with the horizon of experience specific to alienated populations.

Insofar as the consciousness industry and commodity capitalism have attempted, and to a large extent succeeded, to take over the “proletarian context of living” (*Lebenszusammenhang*), the organization of genuine experience in the *counter*-public sphere meets with obvious challenges. Yet Negt and Kluge identify fantasy as a subconscious remainder that cannot be appropriated (or can only be appropriated with difficulty\(^{29}\)) to the purposes of capital, and which constitutes a worker’s “defense mechanism to shield from shock effects of an alienated reality”\(^{30}\): That which, from the standpoint of valorization, appears particularly difficult to control—the residue of unfulfilled wishes, ideas, of the brain’s own laws of movement, which are both unprocessed and resist incorporation into the bourgeois scheme—is depicted as fantasy, as the vagabond, the unemployed member of the intellectual faculties. In reality, this fantasy is a specific means of production engaged in a process that is not visible to the valorization interest of capital: the transformation of the relations of human beings to one another and to nature, and the reappropriation of the historically marked dead labor of human beings…It is the specific work process whereby libidinal structure, consciousness, and the outside world are connected with one another.\(^{31}\)

Thus *Erfahrung*, that form of collective and long experience so greatly under threat, survives in the workings of fantasy, which expresses unconscious memory and a continuity between past, present, and future that defies temporal fragmentation. Once the relationship between fantasy and conditions of alienation has been theorized, the former exceeds its status as mere reaction and can be harnessed as an active force against the thorough takeover of the latter. Brought into contact with reality, fantasy and desire, and not of the types that are induced by advertising, have the capacity to connect individuals and to tap a collective class experience.

\(^{29}\) “The existence of this subliminal activity is presently in danger because it is precisely the workings of fantasy that constitute the raw material and the medium for the expansion of the consciousness industry.” Ibid., 34.

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 33.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 37.
Concerned with the political organization of a proletarian public sphere, Negt and Kluge have little to say about what the visual arts might have to offer in the bringing of fantasy into contact with reality. In a footnote, the arts are disparaged for their role in the “internment” of fantasy. Tamed and depoliticized through dissociation, and “[seeking] to avoid coming into contact with alienated contemporaneity,” the elements of fantasy “are barricaded away into the ghettos of the arts, dreaming, and ‘delicate feelings’.”32 But might we able to imagine what remains unconsidered in the pages of Negt and Kluge’s *Public Sphere and Experience*, namely artistic projects in which the imaginative faculties are precisely geared toward critical confrontation with reality?

Certainly, the historical avant-garde—Dada, in particular—was predicated upon just such disruptive fantasy work. Collage and assemblage practices were means by which Dadaists used the print media against itself. Collage’s combinatory imagination ruptured the seamless image and called into question the naturalness of seemingly logical juxtapositions. More affirmative in their aims, Russian Constructivists like Alexander Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova sought to integrate artistic “laboratory work” into the actual means of production in post-revolutionary society. Indeed, there are moments in the oeuvres of Genzken and Hirschhorn that are redolent of utopian aspirations, with evidence in particular of various kinds of intense engagement with the historical avant-garde. In those earlier artistic movements, artists aspired to being constructors of new consciousness and sculpture seemed to contain radical potential, whether positive or, in the case of Dada, destructive. Vladimir Tatlin’s *Monument to the Third International* (1919) is only the most obvious example of a sculptural-architectural project in which the form would symbolize and effect social transparency and dynamism.

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32 Ibid., 36, fn 56.
For Genzken and Hirschhorn, the subjects of this study, engagement with the historical avant-garde has been crucial to finding a way beyond postmodern cynicism and evacuation of meaning and toward the prospect of politically relevant, artistically advanced activity. Though palpable, the utopian energies of the historical avant-garde appear refracted in their works—refracted, that is, through the medium of time and through each artist’s strategies and sensibility. Homage and travesty operate in tandem in Genzken’s allusions to the history of assemblage and to the history of expressionist, modernist, and avant-garde architecture. When Genzken straps together a pizza box and the remnants of a shopping bag, topping off the structure with a Gehry-esque flourish of construction site netting, for instance (fig. 1.1); when she arrays plastic containers, clipboards, and a slinky to resemble a madcap high-rise, setting beside it an overturned light fixture as architectural dome (fig. 1.2); when she stacks metal discs and a propeller so that one doesn’t know whether they will topple or take off (fig. 1.3); and, finally, when she names this series of works *Fuck the Bauhaus (New Buildings for New York)* (2000), I understand her to accomplish more than the insider’s jab at the revered design school’s reputation, however reductive, for functionalist architecture and rationalized production. ³³ It is clear, of course, that Genzken, tongue lodged in cheek, flouts the conventions that have come to be understood, or better yet misunderstood, as a coherent “Bauhaus style,” which already in 1930 one commentator reduced to: “houses with lots of glass and shining metal” featuring “smooth white walls, horizontal walls of windows, spacious terraces and flat roofs.” ³⁴ But the flamboyant polychromy, cheap materials, and slapdash construction of Genzken’s *New Buildings for New* ³³ For an earlier engagement with Bauhaus design, see Genzken’s *Lamp* (1992, from the series *More Light Research*), which bears the ghostly outlines of the iconic Wagenfeld lamp. ³⁴ Ernst Kállai, “Ten Years of Bauhaus (1930),” in Hans Maria Wingler, *The Bauhaus: Weimar, Dessau, Berlin, Chicago* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1969), 161. Barry Bergdoll addresses the myth of Bauhaus style as well as its actual building and design practices in an excellent essay in the recent catalog from the Museum of Modern Art. Bergdoll, “Bauhaus Multiplied: Paradoxes of Architecture and Design in and after the Bauhaus,” in *Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art), 41–61.
York clearly also owe something to László Moholy-Nagy’s experiments in plastic, for instance, and Herbert Bayer’s dynamic and colorful designs for multi-media kiosks (figs. 1.4–5). They take seriously as a way of making, even as they travesty, Walter Gropius’s development of a prefabricated, modular architecture. Genzken’s ruby-red high-rise is, after all, constructed of Baukasten (the system of cubic building components that Gropius developed) though her Kasten are cheap plastic containers not spaces of cast concrete (fig. 1.6). Finally, Genzken’s New Buildings for New York maintain first of all the possibility that architecture can radically alter our perceptual landscapes and, second, that imaginative freedom can be seized from the world of commodities through the assemblage process.

Hirschhorn’s engagement is more direct, but no less complicated. In word and sculptural form Hirschhorn avows the contemporary relevance of figures associated with modernism and the historical avant-garde, yet his sculptural idiom repeatedly insists upon their past-ness. Thus Hal Foster identifies an archival impulse in Hirschhorn’s “move to (re)cathect cultural remnants.”35 Access to avant-garde predecessors is often negotiated in Hirschhorn’s work through the form of souvenirs (Artists’ Scarves, 1996; Souvenirs du 20ème siècle, 1997), memorials (Mondrian Altar, 1997; Otto Freundlich Altar, 1998; John Heartfield Memorial, proposed in 2009), and museological displays (Musée Précaire Albinet, 2004), and through reproductions, whether photomechanical or manual (as in the hand-wrought copies of sculptures by Rudolf Haizmann that appeared in the Skulptur-Sortier-Station, 1997, and Marcel Duchamp’s Bicycle Wheel, 1913, and Jacob Epstein’s Rock Drill, 1913-15, both incorporated in Hirschhorn’s

35 Foster is referring to Hirschhorn’s altars, kiosks, and memorials in particular. Foster’s essay argues for an archival impulse in contemporary art characterized by an “idosyncratic probing into particular figures, objects, and events in modern art, philosophy, and history.” Along with Hirschhorn, Foster includes Sam Durant and Tacita Dean as makers of archival art. “The work in question,” he writes, “not only draws on informal archives but produces them as well, and does so in a way that underscores the nature of all archival materials as found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private.” Hal Foster, “An Archival Impulse,” October 110 (Fall 2004): 5.

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Through instantiations of mediation and temporal distance, these forms nevertheless preserve the possibility of collective viewing and meaning production, a touchstone of avant-garde art making.

For both Genzken and Hirschhorn, then, issues of collectivity, community, criticality, expressivity, autonomy—issues bearing upon publicness—are negotiated and explored in the medium of sculpture. But just as the conditions of publicness are yet to be settled, so too are sculpture’s current conditions (its materials, its formal means and procedures) in a state of indeterminacy.

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A rectangular board bearing a single horizontal line is staked in each of four urban wastelands—lots filled with gnarled metal rods and the particulate remnants of razed buildings (fig. 1.7). Turned on its side, a spiral staircase declares its functionlessness. The horizontal pleats of metal barriers serve as ruled lines for unruly graffiti. Occasionally, tufts of hardy weeds break through the inhospitable sediment of pulverized plaster, insulation, and concrete. Beams, exposed and collapsed, uphold nothing. Stoic façades look on. Hirschhorn planted his abstractions, titled Terrains Vagues (1990), in what are arguably the quintessential landscapes of late capitalism. These voided sites and vacant lots bear witness to overdevelopment, poor urban planning, economic decline, and social marginalization. While awaiting the next round of urban

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36 Hirschhorn’s reproduction of Rudolf Haizmann sculpture (1928, destroyed) was based upon an illustration in the Degenerate Art exhibition catalog (1937). Hirschhorn’s original conception for the U-Lounge, one part of his contribution to the Tate Modern Exhibition “Common Wealth,” 2003, involved the incorporation of original artworks from the Tate’s collection. A shortlist of works Hirschhorn considered includes Duchamp’s Female Fig Leaf and Wedge of Chastity, Jacob Epstein’s Euphemia Lamb (1908), and works on paper by Wyndham Lewis, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Helen Saunders, and David Bomberg. As ongoing negotiations regarding the works’ safety (for conservation and security reasons) placed restrictions on the ways in which the work had to be displayed and secured, Hirschhorn opted to produce replicas of the Bicycle Wheel and Rock Drill instead. Folder 521.0: Commonwealth/Organization/Hirschhorn/Production (some restricted material), 521.0: Commonwealth/Organization/Hirschhorn/Research, Tate Archives.
renewal (which may or may not ever come) such lots become dumping grounds and sites of illicit activity. Literal destruction becomes a metaphor for the disintegration of the promises held out by architectural structure, namely economic vitality, social stability, and bodily safety.

Composed of single strips of black electrical tape applied to corrugated cardboard, Hirschhorn’s enigmatic signs are almost of a piece with their surroundings. Materially speaking, they are composed of the stuff of urban detritus. They laconically reject the distancing effects of high art and refuse the aesthetic values attached to artistic gestures (e.g. the brushstroke) and traditional materials. However reduced in means (suspended, that is, in the ambiguity between concentration and depletion) the Terrains Vagues, as markers in public space, are linked to the long history of monuments and memorials. But if markers, what do they enjoin us to recall, what do they locate? If stakes, what territories do they claim, what boundaries do they draw? If signposts, to which horizons do they point?

Architect and critic Ignasi de Solà-Moralés Rubió offers a gloss on the connotations and etymology of the French phrase terrain vague.37 Terrain refers to a site or a plot of land. The etymological roots of vague can be found in the German Woge, meaning sea swell or wave, and in the Latin vacuus and vagus. Vacuus denotes something empty, unoccupied, and unclaimed but also something unrestricted and free. Similarly ambivalent, vagus can mean vacillating and diffuse or, more positively inflected, moving freely. On the one hand, then, terrain vague refers to

strange places exist[ing] outside the city’s effective circuits and productive structures. From the economic point of view, industrial areas, railway stations, ports, unsafe residential neighborhoods, and contaminated spaces are where the city is no longer. Unincorporated margins, interior islands void of activity, oversights, these areas are un-inhabited, un-safe, un-productive.38

38 Ibid, 120.
On the other hand, these very abandoned and ineffective spaces, these spaces in flux, hold out the possibility of freedom beyond the strictures of social, cultural, and architectural control.\textsuperscript{39} Any suggestion of freedom (for movement, for appropriation) must be understood in relation to the very real social and economic conditions that govern these spaces, conditions that cannot and should not be so easily redeemed. The Situationist \textit{dérive} was a critical strategy because it confronted these conditions: “The city and its quarters,” Thomas McDonough writes, “are posited as social constructions through which the \textit{dérive} negotiates while simultaneously fragmenting and disrupting them.”\textsuperscript{40}

“In 4 terrains vagues in Paris I exhibited my work,” Hirschhorn writes.\textsuperscript{41} Indeed, Hirschhorn’s reimagining of waste grounds as viable exhibition sites makes for a powerful statement about the place of sculpture in the public sphere. To this topic I will return later. But for the present I wish to suggest that these works also inhabit (and thus allow us to visualize and articulate) a less localized site, namely, the \textit{terrain vague} of sculpture. Once the metaphor is available, its aptness is felt. After all, in her seminal essay “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” (1978), Rosalind Krauss declares that already in the early 1960s “sculpture had entered a categorical no-man’s-land.” In the postmodern moment, so her argument goes and her Klein group renders schematic, sculpture was “only one term on the periphery of a field,” which now

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\item \textsuperscript{39} Architectural historian Luc Lévesque has identified the tendency within theorizations of \textit{terrains vagues} to polarize the positive and negative connotations: “These two antagonistic views…are limited, each in its own way, by a degree of idealism. The ‘terrain vague’ may well symbolize economic stagnation, and, it is often associated with careless investors and permissive municipal authorities, but consigning it to urban decay, simply because it does not correspond to the ideal of a functional city, is reductionist at best. At the same time, to make the ‘terrain vague’, a priori, as a territory of emancipation is to risk wallowing in a romantic vision with some disconnection with reality. The ‘terrain vague’ cannot be dissociated from the forces that produced it….” Luc Lévesque, “The ‘terrain vague’ as material—some observations” (2002), <http://www.amarrages.com/textes_terrain.html>, accessed 9 September 2010.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Thomas F. McDonough, “Situationist Space,” \textit{October} 67 (Winter 1994): 74.
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included site-construction, marked sites, and axiomatic structures. Modernist sculptural autonomy, achieved through a break with its historical function as monument, was in turn superseded by a range of minimalist, post-minimalist, conceptual, earthwork, and site-specific experiments. Not nearly so ready to give up the idea of sculpture as a viable category of object production for artists in the 1970s, Anne Wagner has more recently insisted on the medium’s particular access to bodily experience, especially when it engages architecture and its attendant psychological and emotional associations. But even Wagner acknowledges that the sculptural terrain is hardly firm. From Gordon Matta-Clark’s *Anarchitecture* (1974) (fig. 1.8), a published image of a house set on a barge and floated on a “literal and metaphorical sea”—and here I remind the reader of the *Woge* at the root of vague—Wagner extrapolates a larger situation: “Let us call that sea, for the purposes of argument, sculpture’s latter-day expansion, in the form of site specificity, earthworks, and the like. There it still floats at the present time.”

The 1960s were crucial in this unmooring. In the early part of the decade, Minimalism forcefully challenged sculpture’s historical identity. Rather than three-dimensional artworks that engaged haptic sensation through an exploration of material plasticity and through a compositional relation of parts, Minimalism offered industrially produced unitary forms serially arrayed. The result, in Robert Morris’s oft-quoted words, was that such works became “a function of space, light, and the viewer’s field of vision.” Minimalism’s opening up of the work to include the architectural frame and the viewer’s bodily movement in space and time was productive for artists, for in relatively quick order they elaborated (sometimes critically) upon its

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44 Ibid, 29.  
implications. A range of Conceptual art practices questioned even more radically the status of the art object, enacting its dematerialization in favor of the linguistic formulation, the analytical proposition, and the system as generative of and, what’s more, constitutive of the artwork. According to Stephen Melville, the stakes of Conceptual art’s withdrawal of visibility, and of the art of the sixties more generally, resided in nothing less than “the possibility or impossibility of sculpture.”46

Whereas artists practicing in the Conceptual vein largely withdrew the material object from vision—consider, for instance, Lawrence Wiener’s declaration that “the piece may not be produced at all”—others, sometimes discussed under the rubric of process art, concentrated their attentions on rematerializing the artwork in the extreme. With Eva Hesse’s manipulation of latex; Richard Serra’s slinging of molten lead; Morris’s working of grease, threadwaste, dirt, etc., the material’s tactile qualities, its associative potential (what is conjured may be corporeal, industrial, or quotidian, for instance), and the process of manipulation come to the fore. Yet, sculpture qua medium was no less challenged as a result of rematerialization than it was by the asceticism of dematerialization. As Alex Potts has observed, the extreme materiality and tactility of these works served to undermine rather than to reinstantiate the structural principles that traditionally defined the sculptural medium. “What was to disappear most categorically from a post-1960s, post-medium art world, then, was not so much the concern with medium as such, but the category of sculpture,” he concludes.47

47 Alex Potts, “Tactility: The Interrogation of Medium in Art of the 1960s,” Art History 27, no. 2 (April 2004): 298. Potts takes pains to distinguish the exploration of medium in such work in the 1960s from the modernist idea of medium specificity, which “had to do with a structuring appropriate to the formal characteristics of a generic medium.” When what was at stake was the mere manipulation and working of the raw material, “the formal imperatives underpinning the traditional ideas of medium specificity were effectively rendered redundant” (296).
In the European context, the pushing of the bounds of medium proceeded in distinct directions with the works of artists associated with Nouveau Réalisme, Arte Povera, and the Zero Group. With his vitrines filled with mass-produced articles or detritus, Arman jettisoned the sculptural principles of form and disposition of parts in favor of accumulation on the one hand and chance on the other. In Italy, the varied objects, installations, and events of the Arte Povera artists expanded the material repertoire of sculpture to include “impoverished” materials even as they re-engaged artisanal traditions. Experimenting with installation and events, with kinetic sculpture and Lichtballets (Otto Piene), the Zero Group artists, including Piene, Günther Uecker, and Heinz Mack, used everyday materials with the aim of transcending materiality, primarily through the play of light. Hans Haacke employed a pared-down vocabulary of form to register atmospheric conditions and biological phenomena with his “real-time systems” of the 1960s and 70s. Increasingly, beginning in the late 1960s, Haacke explored social systems (political and economic) that he mapped through multi-media installations involving photographs, texts, archival materials, and various forms of technology (teletype machines, computers, etc.). Such diverse experiments across France, Italy, and Germany developed alongside and sometimes in dialogue with American minimalist and post-minimalist art, though always with their own material character and conceptual agendas.

In full effect by the early 1970s, the so-called post-medium condition, which could be marked in Europe and the United States, included a range of practices—performance, video, and installation among them—that essentially spelled the end of the notion of a sculpture as a discrete three-dimensional object in space. Indeed, a general convergence of opinion regarding sculpture’s uncertain status can be mapped in the writing of art historians who subscribe to distinct methodologies. Benjamin Buchloh, for instance, sees in the work of Michael Asher a
definitive assertion of sculpture’s loss “of its material and historical legitimacy.”48 Potts voices a common sentiment when he concludes regarding the late 1980s, “Sculpture as a medium has been liquidated, even if it hangs on as a convenient label.”49 The liquidation may be located in a loss of conviction or certainty regarding sculpture’s materials, techniques, forms, and motifs—formal and technical concerns on which depend broader issues of artistic and political validity. Sculpture was faced with a fundamental (and extended) crisis of means and meanings, one might say. One might also surmise from the grave remarks I have gathered here that it is a crisis from which sculpture has not, and might never recover.

The particular urgency of revisiting the 1960s and the early 1970s that is evident in the writings of the art historians I have cited above must be seen in relation to current disenchantment with the subsequent proliferation of multi-media practices. After all, they write from the point of view of the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first, during which installation practices have become ever larger, glossier, and more costly. Such extravagant displays are suspected of being complicit with, or at least not sufficiently critical of, the logic of late capitalism and spectacle. Furthermore, divorced from any sense of medium that might generate the conventions and therefore the measure of the work, multi-media installations tread near the realm of the arbitrary, which, as any student of modernism and abstraction knows, has traditionally been regarded with profound wariness.50 Thus, the attention to the 1960s and 70s sometimes has the feel of the scholarly equivalent of a

49 Potts, “Tactility,” 300.
50 This is especially of concern for Rosalind Krauss, who attempts to salvage what is useful in the idea of medium specificity: “Although this is another, unfortunately loaded concept—abusively recast as a form of objectification or reification, since a medium is purportedly made specific by being reduced to nothing but its manifest physical properties—it is (in its non-abusively defined form) nonetheless intrinsic to any discussion of how the conventions layered into a medium might function.” Krauss, “Voyage on the North Sea”: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 7.
retracing of one’s steps to locate a thing misplaced. In this case, the lost thing is the sense of a defined and definable medium.

I have outlined a familiar history in order to underscore the sense of sculpture as a field evacuated—deemed unproductive and exhausted as a locus of artistic investigation. Furthermore, it is a field marked by its history, by the remnants of former constructions, conceptions, and configurations. But if I insist on the metaphor of sculpture as a terrain vague, I am motivated by the fact that the concept encapsulates not only these negative conditions, but also the positive potential that arises from out of them. Solà-Moralés Rubió insists after all, “While the analogous terms [for terrain vague] that we have noted are generally preceded by negative particles (in-determinate, im-precise, un-certain), this absence of limit precisely contains the expectations of mobility, vagrant roving, free time, liberty.”51 Hirschhorn’s rather unassuming work—no more than a wooden post, a piece of cardboard, and a length of common electrical tape, all placed in an insignificant urban locale—can thus be read as something of a manifesto.

Hirschhorn’s Terrains Vagues encapsulates many of the issues that preoccupy this dissertation. I stake my project on the idea that it is only in relation to the complex history of sculpture, to its ongoing redefinition, and to its capacity to engage conditions of publicness, that Hirschhorn’s and Genzken’s projects can be most productively understood.

* * *

Any discussion of late 20th-century sculpture’s relationship to the public sphere, especially in the European context, must confront the figure of Joseph Beuys. In the late 1940s and 50s, sculpture in Germany had been divided between a gently abstracted figuration on the one hand and a pictorial abstraction derived from late-cubist sculpture on the other—a division

51 Ibid., 120.
that paralleled the debates in painting, tellingly enough. The emphasis, in other words, was on pictorial idioms, and their political connotations, rather than on sculptural concerns, per se. The impasse resulted in part from the fraught image of man in the aftermath of National Socialism. The existential quandary was coupled with an artistic one—figuration, however anti-heroic or inflected by abstract form, seemed too proximate to the fascist preference for sculptural depictions of idealized physiques. Beginning in the 1960s, Beuys’s deployment of fat, honey, felt, and chocolate rendered this discussion moot by returning materiality to sculptural practice in force. Tactile, olfactory, and drawing upon the sense of taste, Beuys’s works often elicit a decidedly embodied perception on the part of the viewer, who is likely to know these materials intimately. The artist’s rudimentary manipulation of these materials resulted in anti-formal piles, globs, slabs, and stacks, which emphasize texture and substance rather than underlying structure.\(^\text{52}\)

Beuys’s materials were not, however, coded only by the quotidian. With materiality came mysticism, for Beuys developed a pseudo-Christian symbolic system in which healing and social transformation were metaphorized (indeed, manifested) in the ephemeral, organic, or debased materials and processes with which he worked. Formless and malleable in its warm, liquid state; defined and ordered in its solid state; fat was the quintessential Beuysian material, embodying the continuum between chaos and structure, between rigidity and pliability. Regarding his performance at the “Festival of New Art” in Aachen in 1964 (fig. 1.9), during which he melted two blocks of fat on a hotplate, Beuys explains, “The intention: healing chaos, amorphous healing, in a particular direction through which the frozen and the rigid forms of the past, and of

\(^{52}\) Potts discusses this phenomenon in Beuys’s work as a simultaneous hypostatization (of tactility) and desubstantiation (of underlying structure) of qualities traditionally associated with sculpture. Potts, “Tactility,” 286.
social convention, are dissolved and warmed, and future form becomes possible.” Beuys’s mystical symbolism is bound up with his well-known and highly contested autobiographical narrative. A familiar version of the story recounts Beuys’s rescue by nomadic Tartars after the WWII dive bomber he was piloting was shot down over the Crimean. The Tartars salved his wounds with fat and wrapped him in felt, whence the symbolic import of healing and insulation that those materials came to bear in his oeuvre. Beuys’s detractors see this origin myth as precisely the sort of “fantasy work” that allows the dreamer to dissociate from rather than to engage with conditions of society. More significantly, as this line of criticism goes, it amounts to a refusal to confront and accept responsibility for Germany’s recent fascist past and the horrors of the holocaust. Buchloh, whose scathing rejection of Beuys has shaped the U.S. reception of the artist, finds Beuys’s shamanistic self-fashioning to be morally objectionable and indicative of a larger trend of post-war German refusal to come to terms with its history. Buchloh asserts,

In the work and public myth of Beuys the new German spirit of the postwar period finds its new identity by pardoning and reconciling itself prematurely with

54 The factual validity of this autobiographical account has been the subject of heated debate. For a good encapsulation of the issues, see Peter Nisbet, “Crash Course,” in *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy*, ed. by Gene Ray (New York: D.A.P.; Sarasota, FL: John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 2001), 5–18.
55 In a very interesting 1976 interview with Georg Jappe (unavailable in English until Nisbet’s recent translation), Beuys distinguishes between two kinds of “key experiences”: actual experiences and subconscious, associative, imagined experiences. Beuys says, “And all the images I had then, I didn’t have them fully conscious….But all these images fully entered into me then. In a translated form, so to speak. The tents… the felt tents they had, the general behavior of the people, the issue of fat, which anyway is like….a general aroma in their houses…also their handling of cheese and fat and milk and yogurt—how they handle it, that all in effect entered me. I really experienced it.” Jappe, “Interview with Joseph Beuys about Key Experiences,” in ibid., 188. In Beuys’s conception, certain elements of fantasy are as valid as history.
its own reminiscences of a responsibility for one of the most cruel and devastating forms of collective political madness that history has known.\textsuperscript{56}

The polarization of scholarship on Beuys is such that a countervailing position holds that Beuys’s sculptural objects and installations actually initiate a “project of mourning,” the first such artistic initiative in reconstruction Germany. Indeed, Gene Ray offers a specific iconography for Beuys’s materials, one not articulated by the artist himself. For Ray, fat and felt bear unavoidable associations with death camp crematoria, the burning of bodies, and the making of felt from hair collected from its victims. By extension, Beuys’s vitrines of affectively-charged everyday objects can be seen to conjure lost owners, absent victims. In this reading, “negative presentation and other strategies of evocation and avowal” are Beuys’s attempts to come to historical consciousness of the Holocaust (and to induce the same in the viewer) rather than the means of ahistorical oblivion.\textsuperscript{57} Irit Rogoff, too, credits Beuys with attempting to reckon with German history by means of an innovative material repertoire, writing, “In its conscious resistance to simplified forms of historical signification, [Beuys’s early work] touches off an involuntary collective memory.”\textsuperscript{58} For Rogoff, Beuys is precisely engaged with the sort of deep, cultural memory connoted by \textit{Erfahrung}.

It is impossible within this brief discussion of Beuys to offer a full account of the scholarly discourse that has accumulated around his oeuvre. Nor is it within the scope of this project to derive a nuanced argument of his fraught relationship to German history and to art

\textsuperscript{56} Buchloh, “Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol, Preliminary Notes for a Critique (1980),” reprinted in ibid., 203. The reproach for ahistorical and false reconciliation is coupled with a critique of Beuys’s ahistoricity of artistic means. Buchloh faults Beuys for his appeal to transhistoric models of artistic expression and aesthetic apprehension. Revisiting his 1980 text in 1998, on the occasion of a symposium organized by Gene Ray at the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art (the proceedings of which were subsequently published as \textit{Mapping the Legacy}), Buchloh’s position on Beuys was more measured but no less firm: “What Beuys lacks most of all is the understanding that artistic languages are public entries into the symbolic order, and as such they are both historically overdetermined and socially constructed.” Buchloh, “Reconsidering Joseph Beuys: Once Again,” in ibid., 89.

\textsuperscript{57} Ray, “Joseph Beuys and the After-Auschwitz Sublime,” in ibid., 71.

history. What I do wish to highlight is the degree to which Beuys’s body of work and artistic persona are emphatically situated in the public sphere, broadly defined. This remains the case whether one views him as a peddler of obscuring myth or as exemplary mourner—in either instance the artistic project is responsive to, indicative of, and responsible for collective social needs. More important for my line of inquiry, however, is the fact that Beuys’s engagement with the public sphere and his vision of its workings were explicitly articulated in sculptural terms.

Beuys emphasized the distinction between the words Bildhauerei and Plastik, both of which are commonly translated as “sculpture.” The former denotes the process of carving an image into a matrix, whereas the latter indicates a molding or forming of the material. For Beuys, the two processes express “fundamentally different intentions.”

Wholly committed to the logic of sculpture as Plastik, and thus with the process of forming over the resultant motif, Beuys had an unconstrained and increasingly ambitious view of the nature of his artistic materials, which ranged from traditional wax to unconventional matter such as fat and, in its most expansive definition, to society as a whole. In his concept of Social Sculpture, the boundaries of the medium are both profoundly enlarged and utterly dissolved:

Only on condition of a radical widening of definition will it be possible for art and activities related to art to provide evidence that art is now the only evolutionary-revolutionary power. Only art is capable of dismantling the repressive effects of a senile social system that continues to totter along the deathline: to dismantle in order to build A SOCIAL ORGANISM AS A WORK OF ART. This most modern art discipline—Social Sculpture/Social Architecture—will only reach fruition when every living person becomes a creator, a sculptor or architect of the social organism....

Thus, Beuys extended not only the material repertoire of sculpture but its very definition: the theory of Social Sculpture was concerned less with the viewer’s body, in the phenomenological

60 Beuys, “I am searching for a field character,” in Tisdall, Joseph Beuys, 268.
sense, than with the body politic, the transformation of which constituted the sculptural material, its process, and its goal. In this conception, the public sphere and the sculptural sphere are collapsed, a prospect that is as productive of thought as it is potentially productive of alarm, especially for those who maintain art’s autonomy as the source of its capacity for critique. Beuys’s professed desire to “make politics into art,” in particular, has troubled art historians for its echoes of the aestheticization of politics that Walter Benjamin associated with fascism.61

In the late-1960s and 1970s Beuys increased his activities in the political sphere, helping to found the German Students’ Party in 1967 (later recast as the “Organization for Direct Democracy”) as well as the Green Party in 1979.62 But his political work was intimately tied to his artistic project: at the pivotal Documenta V (1972), organized by Harald Szeemann, Beuys carried on one-hundred days of debate and dialogue with visitors under the auspices of the “Organizational Office for Direct Democracy” (fig. 1.10). A further dimension of the politics-performance-art complex was effected through the circulation of art objects that resulted from, or were produced in association with, the ephemeral events. In addition to actual props and remnants from performances (such as the quite beautiful chalkboards crisscrossed with Beuys’s diagrams and gnomic keywords) Beuys often issued related works in editions. Many, if not the majority, of the multiples—produced from 1965 until 1985—are mechanically or industrially produced objects variously inscribed with the artist’s signature; impressed with stamps (for the Free International University, an organization that Beuys formed with writer Heinrich Böll, for

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62 For an account of Beuys’s involvement in political organizations see Lucas Beckmann, “The Causes Lie in the Future,” in ibid., 91–111. See also Claudia Mesch, “Institutionalizing Social Sculpture: Beuys’ Office for Direct Democracy through Referendum Installation” (1972), in Joseph Beuys: The Reader, 198–217. Mesch suggests that Beuys’s Documenta projects involving discussion are a form of “rational discourse” à la Habermas, which is interesting if not entirely convincing.
example); or daubed with *Braunkreuz*, a signature brown paint he deployed. Created in editions, circulated, and collected, the multiples grant ephemeral performances a prolonged life and allow Beuys’s work and ideas to reach a broader audience. The breadth of forms to be found in the multiples is remarkable, as is their indication of Beuys’s little-acknowledged capacity for wit. As Peter Nisbet has noted, the multiples multiply the possibilities for the imaginative and associative potential set up by any two of Beuys’s works in combination.

The implications of Beuys’s practice for sculpture are therefore deeply conflicted: art that confronts the aftermath of historical catastrophe and its effects of individual and collective trauma in tension with art as ameliorating, even therapeutic, spectacle; political action coupled with mystical, quasi-religious symbolism; intense sculptural materiality leading to dematerialized “Social Sculpture.” Beuys explored the dialectical tensions between matter and spirit, art and activism, private mythology and public healing. His legacy resides in these contradictions and in the unprecedented scope he granted to art in general and to sculpture in particular. His claim for the latter is sweeping: “Sculpture is simply the law governing the world.”

It seems fair to say that Beuys is a figure to be reckoned with whenever sculpture, materiality, and publicness are concerned. Indeed, in his drawing together of the social and sculptural spheres, Beuys functions as a crucial reference point for Genzken and Hirschhorn, even as his influence is set in necessary and productive tension with that of a constellation of

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63 Regarding the multiples, one must acknowledge Buchloh’s assertion of Beuys’s fundamental misinterpretation of the Duchampian readymade: by reinvesting industrially produced objects with symbolic and metaphoric value, Beuys “dilutes and dissolves the conceptual precision” of the readymade as originally conceived. Buchloh, “Twilight of the Idol,” in *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy*, 206.


other significant predecessors and contemporaries, from Warhol (in the case of Hirschhorn) to
the minimalists (in the case of Genzken). Genzken attended the Düsseldorf State Art Academy
from 1973-1977, after Beuys’s 1972 dismissal from his post as Professor of Monumental
Sculpture at the institution. Yet Beuys remained an ever-present figure whom Genzken
occasionally encountered. She recalls,

I once called him and said, “I must talk to you.” And he said, “Just come
over.”…We sat under the cherry tree in his wonderful little garden and he asked,
“Well, what do you want from me?” I said, “Architecture is a catastrophe in
Germany; we’ve got to change that.” Then he said, “Go ahead, you can always
sign for me.” [Laughs.]  

It is impossible to decipher Genzken’s laughter from a transcript, but one might venture to guess
that it is a lighthearted and knowing response to the presumptuousness of Beuys’s offer to lend
his name to her project. Yet one must take seriously a young Genzken’s desire to approach
Beuys with a quite grave concern—a monumental concern, one might say, risking the pun: the
state of architecture in Germany. It was, after all, Beuys who so provocatively proposed in 1964
to raise the Berlin Wall by 5 centimeters—“for better proportions!” he claimed. The ironical
proposal treats the Wall in sculptural terms as a means to dematerialize it, to render it conceptual
rather than merely physical. “Disarm the Wall immediately,” he offers by way of explanation,
“Through inner laughter. Annihilate the Wall.” Astute and obtuse in equal measure—or at least
confounding one’s ability to decide which is the more accurate assessment—Beuys goes on to
declare, “The Wall as such is totally unimportant. Don’t talk so much about the Wall! Establish
through self-education a better morale in mankind and all walls will disappear. There are so

66 Tension between Beuys and the administration of the Düsseldorf Art Academy came to a head in 1972 when
Beuys and 60 students occupied the registrar’s office (for the second time) to demand that all applicants be admitted
to the academy. Beuys was dismissed from his post.
67 “Who Do You Love? Isa Genzken in Conversation with Wolfgang Tillmans,” Artforum 44, no.3 (November
many walls between you and me.” On the one hand he ignores the very real spatial and social ramifications of the concrete slabs dividing Berlin, as well as their political specificity. On the other hand he can be seen to have been prescient in articulating, in some partial and ultimately inadequate way, the possibility of an enduring mental construction of division—something, in other words, that approaches the phenomenon of the *Mauer im Kopf* (“the wall in the mind”) that has often been said to haunt Germany after reunification.

Genzken’s engagement with Beuys’s work is at times quite direct, though seldom literal. Genzken volunteers that her 2007 installation for the German Pavilion of the Venice Biennale was inspired by Beuys’s *Schmerzraum* (1983-84) (fig. 1.11), exhibited in Konrad Fischer Gallery, Düsseldorf. A small room entirely clad in lead sheets illuminated by a single dim bulb, Beuys’s *Schmerzraum* is a claustrophobic, bunker-like container that effectively spatializes pain. The *Schmerzraum* is largely undetectable as a formal point of reference for *Oil*, with the exception of a room lined with mirrors and a few matte metal panels—but even with the latter, Beuys’s imagery of the cold-war bomb shelter is transfigured into a kind of spacecraft-cum-tomb for recumbent astronaut figures (fig. 1.12). (With Genzken, a critique of contemporary industrial design is never far from mind. There’s something about the metal panels that suggests the fetishization of stainless steel surfaces in the contemporary kitchen, for instance.) Yet something of pain resides in Genzken’s *Oil*, with its motley cast of stuffed animals, sightless...

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69 The West German writer Peter Schneider is often credited with the first articulation of the metaphor “the wall in the mind.” In his 1982 novel he writes, “It will take us longer to tear down the Wall in our heads than any wrecking company will need for the Wall we can see.” See Peter Schneider, *Der Mauerspringer: Erzählung* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1982); *The Wall Jumper* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 119. See also Hans-Dieter Klingemann and Richard I. Hofébert, “Germany: A New ‘Wall in the Mind’?” *Journal of Democracy* 5, no. 1 (January 1994): 30–44.
mannequins in spacesuits, and sculls in Venetian carnival masks that register as the fabrications of a feverish nightmare. To spatialize pain, Beuys drew upon an architectural imaginary, whereas Genzken draws upon the world of things.

As Dieter Schwartz has noted, Genzken’s longstanding interest in the idea of the artwork as receiver and transmitter of “energies” can be traced to Beuys, though her appropriations of advertisements for hi-fi systems (1979); her photographs of women’s ears (1980); and her series of concrete Weltempfänger (World Receivers) (1987-1989) (fig. 1.13)—concrete blocks equipped with antennae—show how her artistic explorations of such ideas are marked by singular humor and élan as well as by a rich media-historical perspective. These works cannot help but call to mind Beuys’s multiple Telephon S-------E (1974) (fig. 1.14), the form of which is familiar: two tin cans strung together with a length of twine as in a child’s makeshift toy. “S-------E”, inscribed on one can, stands for Sender-Empfänger (‘transmitter-receiver’). With this work Beuys asserts communication as a fundamental human need that can be addressed by the most economical of means. One might say that Genzken, more than any other artist or art historian, understands and draws out (by drawing upon) Beuys’s sculptural intelligence—as opposed to his performative tendencies or rhetorical strategies, for instance, which tend to dominate Beuys reception—and its capacity to engage affect, to conjure psychological states, and to articulate human needs.

For Hirschhorn, who encountered Beuys’s work in the late 1970s while still a student of graphic design at the Schule for Gestaltung, Zürich, “[Beuys] opened the question of sculptural

72 As I have indicated before, I think Beuys’s moments of humor and lightness of touch are often underestimated. Genzken, for one, is attuned to Beuys’s wit. See interview with Wolfgang Tillmans, “Who do you Love?” 227. I believe that Beuys’s humor is nowhere in greater evidence than in his multiples.
function with his idea of social sculpture.”

In his unqualified insistence that only art, as art, can create the conditions to confront reality, Hirschhorn is at his most Beuysian. His “presence and production” works, ambitious and complex projects often realized in the context of working-class neighborhoods, are structured around daily interactions with the residents of his host communities, which constitute for him a “non-exclusive audience” made up of “the other.”

Hirschhorn writes and speaks extensively about his work, developing a lexicon that is allusive, emphatic, and, at times, idiosyncratic. “The other,” he explains, “can be my neighbor or can be a stranger, someone who frightens me, whom I don't know and don't understand. The other is someone I did not think of and did not expect.”

With his work in public space, the issue of art’s address to “the other” becomes acute: “The question of public, the question of public space, the question of the Other, the question of a ‘non-exclusive audience’ are – more than ever – set forth,” he writes of The Bijlmer Spinoza Festival, a “presence and production” work set in the low-income Bijlmermeer, housing estates at the outskirts of Amsterdam largely populated by Surinamese immigrants. “The Bijlmer Spinoza Festival is the affirmation that Art must be a tool to create this public space.”

Such a conception echoes Beuys’s contribution to Documenta V as well as the many forums he hosted. Hirschhorn acknowledges,

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73 Buchloh, “Interview with Thomas Hirschhorn,” 77. See also Hirschhorn, “I Love Joseph Beuys,” artist statement. Beuys is a recurring figure in Hirschhorn’s idiosyncratic pantheon of artistic heroes: an exhibition at the Musée Précaire Albinet 2004 was dedicated to Beuys.


76 Documentas V, VI, and VII (in 1972, 1977, and 1982, respectively) were the occasions for some of the most programmatic expressions of Beuys’s expanded concept of sculpture. At Documenta VI, Beuys rigged up a mechanism to pump two tons of honey through the Museum Fredericianum, where he hosted a series of lectures, workshops, films, and discussions that took up political and social issues, including nuclear energy and migrant workers. As a metaphor for the functioning of the Free International University in society, the action of the Honey pump was complete only with people and events. In 1982 Beuys planted the first of 7,000 oaks in Kassel’s Friedrichsplatz, initiating an artwork that would only be completed posthumously, and the presence of which is still evident in Kassel. With 7,000 Oaks Beuys simultaneously articulates an ecological principle and an artistic one: the trees, each paired with a basalt column, would constitute ever-changing monuments.

42
With Beuys it is not primarily the mysticism that intrigues me; what moves me is his continuous appeal to the public, the fact that he was constantly talking, approaching people, carrying on conversations. He didn’t see art as something sacred but as a contribution to the ongoing discussion. I learned that from Beuys.\footnote{77}{Buchloh, “Interview with Thomas Hirschhorn,” 78.}

Just how dialogic Beuys’s attitude proved to be was debated at the time and continues to be debated still, but Hirschhorn takes the intention seriously. Yet distinctions can readily be marked between the Beuysian and the Hirschhornian modes of engagement: unlike the former’s tendency to treat the notion of community and the possibility of dialogue as a given, the latter understands it as a highly contested and, as with Genzken, mediated, possibility that must be negotiated in each encounter.

* * *

The possibility or impossibility of sculpture is inseparable from the possibility or impossibility of publicness. But why should their two fates be associated at all? As Fredric Jameson has so influentially expounded, the postmodern age is one in which culture has been fully absorbed into the logic of late capitalism, in which mass consumption and spectacle reign. Nothing—not sculpture, not painting—is exempt from this pervasive logic in which “‘culture’ is a commodity in its own right.”\footnote{78}{Fredric Jameson, \textit{Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism} (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), x.} Yet I contend that sculpture’s proximity to the thing on the one hand, and to architecture and the monument on the other, make it particularly vulnerable to the workings of the commodity and the construction of power relations in the built environment. But if sculpture is indeed more susceptible, it is also more articulate about the precariousness of publicness and the reified relations that result from conditions under late capitalism. Just as sculpture’s thingliness engages the commodity, sculpture’s long tradition of depicting the human form (a tradition that persists with regard to abstract sculpture in the issue of anthropomorphism).
as well as the embodied nature of the sculptural encounter, make it profoundly and materially
responsive to the loss of connection between one individual and another, between people and
their individual and cultural histories, between a person and his or her self.

The thing-like quality of sculpture—what Potts has called its “limiting condition”—has
long been evident to commentators. In his ruminations on Rodin, Rainer Maria Rilke recognizes
this defining characteristic, writing, “It was a thing on its own, and it was only right entirely to
give it the character of a thing that one could move around and view from all sides. And yet
somehow it must distinguish itself from other things, those ordinary things that anyone could
grab just like that.”79 The proximity of sculpture to thing is an asset and a liability, both the
grounds for sculpture’s autonomy and difference from two-dimensional illusionism and the basis
for its potential dismissal as little more than the making of obstinate objects.80 It was to this
conundrum that a movement like Conceptualism could be seen to respond by producing “non-
object art.”81 As the absorption of Conceptualism into the market amply shows, however,
evasion proved futile. Rather than circumvent its thingliness, then, sculpture’s intractable
objecthood can be utilized to draw into focus the contemporary subject’s fraught attachment to
the commodity: the workings of desire, the pleasures and disgusts of accumulation, and the

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79 Quoted in Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven: Yale University
Press, 2000), 78.
80 It is not without reason, then, that so many anti-art gestures have historically depended upon collapsing precisely
what Rilke advises to hold apart. Duchamp’s readymades are paradigmatic in this regard. Not only did Duchamp
flout the idea that sculpture must be distinguished from thing, he went several steps further, elevating the banal,
industrially produced object to the status of sculpture. A disruptive gesture in the 1910s, the readymade alone can
radicalize art no longer. Our eyes are largely inured to any shock that the commodity might once have had in the
context of art. More importantly, in a situation in which “aesthetic production…has become integrated into
commodity production generally,” as Jameson described postmodernism, the readymade loses its critical thrust as an
81 Hence Lucy Lippard would talk of 1970s “Non-object art” as a response to “the need for an independent art that
could not be bought and sold by the greedy sector that owned everything that was exploiting the world and
promoting the Vietnam war.” Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object* (Berkeley and Los
exhaustion of overconsumption. Succinctly stated, the complexity of subject-object relations can be critically enacted in the form of subject-sculpture relations.

Not only subject-object relations, but also subjectivity and intersubjectivity are bound up in sculpture’s ontology. The art of sculpture,” Walter Pater declares of the classical sculptural ideal, “records the first naïve, unperplexed recognition of man by himself.” Writing in 1873, Pater was already attuned to the impossibility of such innocent self-awareness for the modern subject. According to Pater, the Renaissance sculptors, Michelangelo in particular, addressed this new type of subjectivity by animating his figures with an “inwardness” and “individuality and intensity of expression,” effects achieved by means of an “incompleteness” of form and a modulation between highly finished and raw areas of stone. But what happens when neither “outward life,” which Pater used to describe the classical ideal, nor the “inwardness” of modern statuary—which Rilke also noted as an achievement of Rodin’s figures—befits the representation of the contemporary subject? The postmodern individual, Jameson asserts, is marked by “depthlessness” and a “waning of affect” that obviate expression. “The very concept of expression,” he argues, “presupposes indeed some separation within the subject, and along with that a whole metaphysics of the inside and outside.” Upon the ability to conceive of inwardness and outwardness, surface and depth, hangs the possibility of “communication and the outward dramatization of inward feeling.”

Stephen Melville writes in quite similar terms about the “possibility or impossibility of sculpture” after minimalism, an equivocation he quickly sets aside in favor of the negative

82 Unlike painting, for instance, which from its beginnings featured landscape and still-life subjects, the human figure was long understood to be the purview of free-standing sculpture. Not until the 20th century was sculpture, at least in the Western tradition, released from the requirements of bodily form and disposition.
84 Potts, Sculptural Imagination, 68–9.
85 Jameson, Postmodernism, 11–2.
term. This “impossibility of sculpture” in the 60s is, “inscribed as a particular intersection of concerns with transparency and opacity, interiority and exteriority, surface and depth, and deployed as a material grammar offering to figure our mutual exposure and hiddenness.”

Melville’s concern here is less with depthlessness, than with a depth that refuses to communicate itself, an interiority that rings hollow. In extrapolating from Michael Fried’s seminal essay “Art and Objecthood,” Melville recasts Fried’s investment in the anti-theatricality and syntactical relationships of Anthony Caro and David Smith’s works—and, correspondingly, Fried’s attack on literalist theatricality and anthropomorphism—as first of all a concern with “aspectuality and publicness.” (Aspectuality would be the condition of presenting all aspect—or face, or surface—with no suggestion of a hidden core.) Echoing and updating Pater’s observation of more than a hundred years ago, Melville’s concluding sentences reflect upon

…our current inability to exist—to desire, to speak, to experience—as the unified subject Hegel imagined to have found or affirmed itself in the face of classical sculpture. We would find ourselves instead torn between a dream of telepathy darkly doubled by surveillance and some other social fact or imagination in which what we call community can no longer stand apart from or above its own scattering and aspectuality.

As the medium that has traditionally been seen as “essentially public, open from all sides and graspable in its integrity at every moment,” sculpture figures in our fitful dreams of communicability and community, recognition and self-recognition.

If the sculptural encounter can register as a confrontation with a thing or with another personage, a third possibility cannot be overlooked, namely as an encounter with a monument.
Indeed, for much of sculpture’s history it served as a large-scale, three-dimensional or relief work—in public space and in an architectural context (whether an open square or an architectural niche)—around which collective memory and consciousness coalesced. A public sphere is indeed constituted by such monuments, but it is a public sphere of a particular type—namely one in which the ruling power (political, economic, or religious) reinforces a version of history and proposes exemplary figures amenable to its interests. Who can forget George Bataille’s damning assessment of the powers at work in the monument?:

Thus great monuments are erected like dikes, opposing the logic and majesty of authority to all disturbing elements; it is in the form of cathedral and palace that Church or State speaks to the multitudes and imposes silence upon them. It is, in fact, obvious that monuments inspire social prudence and often even real fear.\(^{92}\)

Governed by what Denis Hollier calls a “mirror-trap” structure, architecture and monuments, according to Bataille, readily convert from reflections of authoritarian power to its enforcers. Elsewhere he states, “The ideal is architecture, \textit{or sculpture}, immobilizing harmony, guaranteeing the duration of motifs, whose essence is the annulment of time.”\(^{93}\) Bataille’s texts demonstrate the ways in which the terms architecture, monument, and sculpture are mutually dependent for meaning, and to such an extent that the distinctions between them are sometimes elided. (Non-figurative sculpture’s adoption of architectural scale in the late-20\textsuperscript{th} and 21\textsuperscript{st} centuries, and architecture’s sculptural ambitions in the same period, show them to be implicated

\(^{91}\) The three possibilities—sculpture experienced as thing, personage, or monument—are related to the experience of scale. This is evident in Tony Smith’s responses to questions about \textit{Die} (1963), a six-foot cube:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Q: Why didn’t you make it large so that it would loom over the observer?
  \item A: I was not making a monument.
  \item Q: Then why didn’t you make it smaller so that the observer could see over the top?
  \item A: I was not making an object.
\end{itemize}


in one another still.) In this instance Bataille allies architecture and sculpture as quintessential expressions of suspended time. By storming the Bastille, Bataille goes on to assert, the masses wrest their freedom from dictatorial architecture.

What I am trying to identify is something like a set of associations and conditions specific to sculpture, as a historical category and as a material entity. Upon these conditions—sculpture’s proximity to the thing, to the human form, and to the monument—have depended the evaluation of sculpture’s art-historical importance or marginality, its cultural relevance or irrelevance, its political conservatism or radicality. At the same time, sculpture’s capacity for thingliness, for anthropomorphism, and for monumentality render it a particularly powerful medium in which to explore issues pertaining to the public sphere: the reification of relationships and tenuousness of collectivity under conditions of commodity culture and of the uneven distribution of power, wherein a minority have access to the means of representation. I do not mean to suggest a Beuysian notion that these concerns might be redressed in the sphere of art or cathartically purged through its workings. Rather, something more measured, though no less significant: in the sculptural medium, fantasies of destruction, consummation, and transcendence can be enacted even as realities of subject-object and subject-subject relations are confronted and made visible. In the material and artistic making-visible and making-palpable of fantasy and reality, the utopian possibilities of critical engagement and resistance arise, however momentary or partial. Thus responsive to lived conditions, sculpture becomes profoundly motivated by what one might call ethical imperatives. If the sculptural medium has lost its formal and conceptual specificity in recent decades—finding itself in the situation of a terrain vague, as I have asserted—these ethical imperatives establish its orientation and its purpose once again.
Chapter 2: “Make Life Beautiful!”

A total absence of illusion about the age and at the same time an unlimited commitment to it—that is its hallmark. “Experience and Poverty,” Walter Benjamin

Subtle gray gradations—dove, ash, lead, silver, pewter—tinged with brown or blue, marked by wooden molds, speckled and streaked with uneven sediment, pockmarked with air pockets: Isa Genzken’s concrete sculptures of 1986-90 exploit the irregularities of the material, further exacerbating its grittiness with raw edges and with uneven horizontal breaks (fig. 2.1). Titles like Zimmer, Saal, Halle, Kirche, Hochhaus, Durchgang, Welle, and Bühne demonstrate that Genzken’s reference points are architectural, though the roughly model-scaled works seldom mimic the morphology of specific architectural typologies. With the exception of a few early examples, the rectilinear structures in Genzken’s works are never sealed or solid but instead roofless walls that delineate space. Breaks in the outer walls reveal dark corridors and niches partially lit by slanting rays that snag on concrete ridges. The pieces are lifted on their bases to eye level, and the viewer’s wandering gaze navigates those corridors and occasionally encounters corners that cannot be turned. The pleasures of parallax are economically produced, as a walk around the sculpture opens up new lines of sight previously unmappable.

Much like the different pourings of cement that make up the structures, or like their compositional compounds, layers of often conflicting referents settle and aggregate in these concrete sculptures. The hulking masses conjure derelict and dimly lit housing projects and bombed out buildings. Genzken does not shy from explicit content or associative properties. By comparison to Genzken’s construction-site frankness, the polished metal cubes and tiles of

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Genzken’s minimalist forebears look designed and hermetically sealed. Genzken’s concrete works rise like pseudo-romantic ruins, gaping structures that speak eloquently of a grandeur that has succumbed to the ravages of nature and time. For Robert Morris, the ruin straddled the sculptural and the architectural, a condition of liminality that aptly describes Genzken’s works, the scale of which belies their palpable presence. Morris writes, “But whether the gigantic voids of the Baths of Caracalla or the tight chambers and varying levels of Mesa Verde, such places occupy a zone that is neither strictly a collection of objects nor an architectural space.”

Genzken’s concrete works exert a spatial power akin to architecture rather than to scaled models (as such, they act less like miniatures than metonyms for architectural presence). This is true even as they maintain sculptural intimacy, upheld, so to speak, by her attention to their attenuated steel pedestals, which raise the sculptures to eye level.

Additional conflicting meanings inhere in the sculptures’ material. Sigfried Giedion’s view of concrete’s nearly alchemical possibilities (1928) speaks to its original promise:

> From slender iron rods, cement, sand, and gravel, from an “aggregate body,” vast building complexes can suddenly crystallize into a single stone monolith that like no previously known natural material is able to resist fire and a maximum load. This is accomplished because the laboratory intelligently exploits the properties of these almost worthless materials and through their combination increases their separate capacities many times over.

But even as concrete evokes early and mid-twentieth century utopian aspirations for air- and light-filled spaces, and even as Le Corbusier’s *Unité d’Habitation* in Marseilles compellingly reimagined flexible mass housing in undisguised concrete, we have now come to know it better for its degraded manifestation in post-war low-income housing the world over. The more immediate referent in post-war Germany would be the ubiquitous prefabricated concrete slab

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96 Sigfried Giedion, *Building in France, Building in Iron, Building in Ferro-Concrete* (Santa Monica: The Getty Center for the history of Art and the Humanities, 1995), 150.
structures built beginning in the 1960s throughout the German Democratic Republic. By the fall of the Berlin Wall, the large developments of GDR Plattenbau, nicknamed die Platte (“the slab”), housed nearly a third of the East German population. The concrete slab structures were conceived as an expedient solution, given limited resources and a small labor force, to the GDR’s severe housing shortage. Its supporters claimed that the Plattenbauten embodied socialist ideals of progressive housing and resulted from a rationalized production process. Its detractors decried the monotony of the resulting landscape, the developments’ lack of infrastructure, and the privileging of economic factors above actual living conditions. So if Genzken’s sculptures cite concrete’s utopian promise, their bulky masses aspiring to lightness on thin legs, they simultaneously bring home the failure of architects and urban planners to make good on that promise. As we shall see, utopianism in Genzken’s work cannot be pried apart from its perversion. But if cynicism is one possible and common response to utopianism’s corruption, Genzken keeps the original optimism intact and in play without lapsing into naïveté. Indeed, a dialectical awareness (often expressed in her sculptures as friction, oscillation, or instability) can be seen as her project’s activating energy.

Benjamin Buchloh writes that Genzken’s sculptural work in concrete “insists conspicuously and consistently on addressing the collective conditions of existing in

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98 This is clear in the importance to Genzken of Joseph Beuys, for whom an expanded notion of sculpture as social activism was bound up with a hyperinvestment of his self with shamanistic power. The steel bases of Genzken’s concrete sculptures pay homage to Beuys’s vitrines, even as her choice of concrete stoically refuses any of the properties suggestive of transformation and energy transfer that Beuys favored (fat, felt, and beeswax).
architecture. " One might add that she shows those collective conditions to be deeply conflicted. In Genzken’s works the same stony face of concrete variously reads as sublime ruin, Brutalist Je-
m’en-foutisme, Corbusian harmony and airiness, GDR drab, and Giedionesque technological optimism. The suggestive power of Genzken’s sculptural practice is precisely a richness of reference irreducible to a single position. Furthermore, hers is an exploration of those positions and possibilities active in the present—as legacies to be reckoned with, tested against one another, deployed, or transformed. More specifically, in the case of the concrete series and the *New Buildings for Berlin*, the present to be explored would be Germany’s in the decades leading up to and after reunification.

Like the GDR *Platte*, the Berlin Wall—first a literal barrier and then a differently insurmountable “wall in the mind” post-1989—can be seen as an unavoidable referent for Genzken’s concrete works, executed between 1986 and 1990. The works are by no means tediously editorial or merely topical, however, but complicated by myriad referents and by their optical and phenomenological complexity. In their fissured and ruined states, Genzken’s sculptures suggest a rupture of circumscribed space and a breakdown of inside and outside, interior and exterior. The emptiness emphatically articulated by the structures and their brutal and unyielding permanence nevertheless speak poignantly about “existing in architecture,” as Buchloh puts it, and specifically the formidable structure of the Berlin Wall. The barrier erected in August 1961 was a drastic solution (a manifestly and violently physical one) to heightened political conflict between the Western Allies and the Soviets over the status of Berlin. It was also


100 Of course, the appearance of the Wall changed from the time of its hasty erection in 1961 to its destruction in 1989. It was only the third and final iteration of the Wall, begun in the 1970s, that prefabricated concrete slabs were systematically employed. See Pugh, *The Berlin Wall*, 80–91; and Frederick Baker, “The Berlin Wall: production, preservation and consumption of a 20th-century monument,” *Antiquity* 67 (1993): 709–33.
a measure to halt the tide of East German emigration to the West, for which Berlin served as
gateway. But for architect Rem Koolhaas, to encounter the Berlin wall was to be confronted not
by a political situation but by “architecture’s true nature”:

Were not division, enclosure (i.e., imprisonment), and exclusion—which defined
the wall’s performance and explained its efficiency—the essential stratagems of
any architecture? In comparison, the sixties dream of architecture’s liberating
potential—in which I had been marinating for years as a student—seemed feeble
rhetorical play. It evaporated on the spot.101

Koolhaas’s account is yet another narrative of the potential dissolution of a utopian outlook in
the face of reality.

Rapidly removed, auctioned, or chipped into memento-ready chunks, little was left of the
Wall by 1991. In its absence a large swath of no-man’s-land cut through the center of the city
from the Brandenburg Gate to Potsdamer Platz, Leipziger Platz, and beyond.102 But the voids,
about which Andreas Huyssen has eloquently written, were destined to be patched in a rushed
and uncoordinated manner, with corporate entities and private developers vying for spots in the
new Weltstadt. Potsdamer Platz, a primary node of activity until it was devastated in World War
II, was transformed from a thriving center to a barren periphery by the erection of the Berlin
Wall. The fall of the wall prompted frantic efforts to reinstate Potsdamer Platz as the symbolic
center of Berlin. Even in the months before the fall of the Wall, the city government of Berlin
negotiated the sale of fifteen acres of Potsdamer Platz to Daimler-Benz at a fraction of their
market value. The controversial sale was finalized in 1990 and site work began in 1992 in
accordance with Renzo Piano’s prize-winning scheme. Only around 1995 were structures seen

101 Rem Koolhaas, “Field Trip: A(A) Memoir (First and Last…),” in Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large: Office for
Metropolitan Architecture, Rem Koolhaas, and Bruce Mao (New York: Monacelli Press, 1995),
226. One might note in this context that the German word Mauer, translated into English as “wall,” indicates a
barrier rather than a face/surface (which is connoted instead by the word Wand.) See Baker, “The Berlin Wall,” 710.
above ground. The Daimler-Benz building was finished in 1998 and the Sony headquarters in 2000, with still other buildings in progress over the next few years. Friedrichstadt Passagen, Checkpoint Charlie, and Alexanderplatz were also being re-envisioned as commercial and corporate centers in these years. With considerable leeway in regards to design and materials, the first of these, Friedrichstadt Passagen, was built according to the envelope dictated by Berlinische Architektur, a policy of conservative and illusory historicism upheld by the Senate Building Director, Hans Stimmann. Francesca Rogier summarizes the policy thus:

Berlinische Architektur, an allusion to classical convention, is a homogenization of Prussian tradition blended with the severe architecture of the Third Reich…. Berlinische Architektur is, in practice, a rudimentary formula of closed, squat volumes with cornice lines at twenty-two meters and roofs no higher than thirty meters; sober punched-window facades, restrained ornament if any, and preferably drab materials such as stucco or stone.104

Alexanderplatz, with little surviving “historic fabric,” was exempted from these regulations. (Its more recent history as the rebuilt center of East Berlin was all too readily dismissed.) Against the bitter protest of community groups, big business representatives dominating the Alexanderplatz jury rallied behind Hans Kollhoff and Helga Timmerman’s winning scheme, which proposed the construction of thirteen high-rises and garnered the nickname “Little Manhattan.”105

Critics have described the post-wall refashioning of Berlin’s image, with faux-historicism on the one hand and anonymous corporate architecture on the other, as a making of a theme park, media city, and Schausette (site of viewing and spectacle); as a sign of willed ignorance of Germany’s Weimar-era legacy of advanced architecture by figures like Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, and Bruno Taut; as a troubled reckoning with the Nazi past; and as a stale debate between berlinische Architektur and kritische Rekonstruktion—stale because both

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104 Ibid., 48.
105 Ibid., 55–7.
positions ultimately reduce to a fictionalized notion of an European city of uniform building structures.\textsuperscript{106} It is against this backdrop of architecture as image and of reconstruction as spectacle, in the Debordian sense of a pseudo-reality of signs, that we must see Genzken’s series \textit{New Buildings for Berlin}, begun in 2001 and continued in 2002 and 2004 (fig. 2.2). Rectangular strips of jewel-toned, clear, and textured glass, eighty centimeters high, lean one against another like Richard Serra prop pieces made luminous (if precarious) skyscrapers, or like streamlined descendents of Vladimir Tatlin’s \textit{Monument to the Third International} (1919). But are these Serras made luminous or simply Serra “lite”? After all, Serra’s meticulous architectonics of gravity and weight hold hefty slabs and plates in perfect suspension—and we feel this tension. Genzken’s \textit{New Buildings}, on the other hand, are held together with sticky tape and silicon. But Genzken’s aim is not to dilute the original, altering its substance to make it more palatable or less difficult. Rather, Genzken pays homage even as she travesties Serra’s work, taking to task the hyper-masculine tendencies and blue-collar pretensions of some of the rhetoric surrounding it. In his parsing of historical forms of parody, French literary theorist Gérard Genette defines travesty as a stylistic translation of a heroic idiom into a base, more familiar one, while the content remains ostensibly the same.\textsuperscript{107} In its attention to the original, travesty constitutes, at least in part, an appreciation of the original.\textsuperscript{108} Genette observes, “Travesty may be turned, depending on context and tone, into either a derisive buffoonery or a subtly ambiguous glorification. Parodic incongruity is a bifid weapon, a form in search of a function.”\textsuperscript{109} For Genzken, the function of travesty resides in its capacity to generate evaluative distance from the oeuvres, aesthetic

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 48.

\textsuperscript{107} Genette, \textit{Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 58.


\textsuperscript{109} Genette, \textit{Palimpsests}, 71.
principles, and utopian motivations of her avant-garde predecessors (as well as more recent ones), even as it draws them nearer to the present.\footnote{In its translation and transposition of the heroic, historical, and grand into familiar, everyday idioms, travesty “updates” the original, Genette asserts. Travesty is thus tethered to the contemporary. While this increases its topical interest in the present, travesty’s contemporaneity destines it to be quickly outmoded. Genette writes, “Travesty is by nature a perishable commodity, unfit to survive its age and ceaselessly in need of being modernized: i.e., replaced by another, more topical update.” Ibid., 62. It is interesting to consider, then, that Genzken’s penchant for travesty destines her works to a similar fate as the commodities of which they are sometimes composed.}

Transcription, transposition, substitution, amplification, and interjection, the elements of travesty\footnote{Genette breaks down these elements using the example of the \textit{Aeneid}, the travesties of which were the origin of the genre in the 17th century. “Take the \textit{Aeneid}, for instance: to ‘travesty’ it, in the burlesque sense, means first to transcribe its heroic Latin hexameters (whose French equivalent would be alexandrines) into ‘short verse’ or ‘burlesque verse’—namely, into octosyllables….Next, it means transposing the consistently noble (\textit{gravis}) style of its narrative and of the characters’ speeches into a familiar, indeed, vulgar style. In addition (and the second trait is inconceivable without this third one), it means substituting the Virgilian thematic details with other, more familiar details, both more vulgar and more modern; here is where the well-known practice of anachronism comes in…. It also means embellishing Virgil’s text with amplifications or additions, to the point of treating it as a mere script to be developed by the parodist….The fifth and, to my mind, the last consists of intrusive asides by the parodist, who is visibly having a good time clowning at the expense of the Virgilian action, or even of his own diction….” Ibid., 58–60.} are characteristic of many of Genzken’s works: Tatlin’s \textit{Corner Reliefs} (1915) made flaccid, jangling mobiles of mangled cake pans, rakes, and other household wares, for instance (fig. 2.3). Or the \textit{Merzsäule} (1923) (fig. 2.4), Kurt Schwitters’s early assemblage-\textit{cum}-memorial that featured at its apex the death mask of his infant son, transposed to Genzken’s rowdy \textit{Street Festival} (2008-09) in the form of a ribbon-bedecked spectator/participant composed of a Styrofoam head atop a dress form with incongruous appendages (fig. 2.5). An uncanny resemblance resides between the expressionlessness of the mannequin head and that of the plaster death mask, a resemblance made emphatic with the white, stiffened cloths draped over each. Another example: observe Genzken’s \textit{Social Façades} of 2002 (fig. 2.6), compositions on panel of mirror foil in saturated color and disco-ready finishes, which suggest gleeful perversions and amped-up iterations of abstraction’s opticality. Gridded foil taunts the stoic modernist grid; the purported non-referentiality of geometric abstraction gives way to glittering façades; and
sublime uplift is trumped by the specular ecstasy of the dance hall and club culture. Imperfect application of mirror foil creates visual hiccups and distortions in the flow of reflections: literal cracks in the image surface. Consider also Genzken’s public sculpture Rose (fig. 2.7)—an eight-meter tall stainless steel, aluminum, and lacquer rose, which could be read as a kitschy, banal, and ludicrous literalization of Beuysian utopianism à la Rose for Direct Democracy (fig. 2.8), in which a fresh bloom in a graduated cylinder enlivened each of the one hundred days of Documenta 5 in 1972. Beuys writes, “Bud and bloom are in fact green leaves transformed. So in relation to the leaves and the stem the bloom is a revolution, although it grows through organic transformation and evolution.” The revolution is arrested in Genzken’s Rose, a steely column memorializing the loss of transformative potential, a public punch-line to Beuys’ outsized romanticism; and yet it remains generous somehow. With sculptural intelligence and keen wit, Genzken balances her objects on the line between homage and ridicule—a line she shows to be remarkably fine.

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In the 2006 Phaidon monograph on Genzken, the artist included Charles Baudelaire’s prose poem, “The Bad Glazier,” from his collection Petits poèmes en prose, alongside reproductions of 2004 versions of New Buildings for Berlin. The poem begins, “There exist characters, purely contemplative and completely unsuited for action, who, however, influenced by a mysterious and unknown impulse, sometimes act with a speed of which they would not
have believed themselves capable.” The poem’s speaker proceeds to relate instances of “harmless dreamers” “abruptly hurled into action by an irresistible force,” finding an “excess of courage for executing the most absurd and often even the most dangerous acts.” He ends by retelling his own brush with demonic inspiration. Flinging open his window to the grimy Parisian air, he hears the discordant cry of a glazier hawking his wares. “Seized by a hatred for this pitiful man as sudden as it was despotic,” the narrator calls the glazier up to his room, up seven flights of narrow stairs. Examining the fragile wares, the speaker cries in disbelief, “What? You have no colored panes? No pink panes, no red, no blue, no magic panes, no panes of paradise? You are shameless! You dare walk through poor neighborhoods, and you don’t even have panes which make life beautiful!” Having wrestled his wares back into the street, the disgruntled glazier is knocked on his back by a falling flowerpot, his precious cargo crushed. The narrator, perpetrator of senseless violence, recalls, “drunk with my madness, I shouted at him furiously, ‘Make life beautiful! Make life beautiful!’” Whether or not Baudelaire’s poem directly proposed the terms for New Buildings for Berlin, it describes an aesthetic attitude critical for understanding Genzken’s work, and particularly its development into the twenty-first century. Baudelaire deftly illustrates that the call for beauty and for life’s betterment is implicated in violence, irrationality, and intoxication (ivresse); that the dystopian inheres in its more idealistic opposite; and that advocacy may erupt in antagonism.

Baudelaire describes the clamor of the glazier’s crushed glass as “the brilliant sound of a crystal palace smashed by lightning,” a likely reference to the Crystal Palace built for the 1851 London exhibition. Dolf Oehler extends the link to the rapid changes to the Parisian urban fabric brought about by Baron Haussmann’s impetus to modernize, sanitize, and make rational the

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medieval city.\textsuperscript{115} For my part, I relate the wholesale reconfiguration of Baudelaire’s Paris to the re-envisioned \textit{Stadtbild} of Genzken’s Berlin. In the context of the Friedrichstadt Passagen development, with its strictures of false historicism, Genzken’s glass towers raise the specter of Mies’s 1921 competition entry for Berlin’s first skyscraper (fig. 2.9), also designed to be built on Friedrichstrasse. Mies’s crystalline structure, with its expressionist, skyward thrust, bespoke a utopian belief in transparency brought about by technology: steel construction would free the glass walls from their load-bearing function. Mies’s fascination with “the rich interplay of light reflections” is mirrored in the shifting perspectives offered to the ambulatory viewer of Genzken’s \textit{New Buildings}, which additionally offer the delights of shifting colors and texture’s subtle distortions. Genzken could be said to give us a taste of glass architecture as figured in Paul Scheerbart’s ecstatic vision of “the earth…adorned with sparkling jewels and enamels.”\textsuperscript{116}

Writing in the 1910s, Scheerbart imagined the opening out of living spaces

by introducing glass architecture, which lets in the light of the sun, the moon, and the stars…through every possible wall, which will be made entirely of glass—of coloured glass. The new environment, which we thus create, must bring us a new culture…. We should then have paradise on earth, and not need to watch in longing expectation for the paradise in heaven.\textsuperscript{117}

Does this call for cultural change through the liberating effects of colored glass remind us of Baudelaire’s narrator, who demands that the glazier remake the world in rose-tinted lenses? (“No colored panes…no magic panes, no panes of paradise?” he asks.) In Baudelaire’s poem, deliberate irrationality and perversion quickly becomes nastiness; soon prismatic hopes shatter into shards. In Genzken’s work, too, we begin to wonder if the glittering facets of color circumscribe emptiness. For even as Genzken’s kaleidoscopic towers invoke glass architecture’s


\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 41, 46 [chapters 1 and 18].
utopian promises, they reflect the evacuation of Miesian optimism and rigor from the ubiquitous curtain walls of the anonymous corporate structures such as those rising rapidly at Alexanderplatz and elsewhere in the city. Colin Rowe diagnosed commercial architects’ deployment of the curtain wall as the creation of “a suitable veneer for the corporate activities of ‘enlightened’ capitalism.”\(^{118}\) Taking Genzken’s title literally, for a moment, might we suspect that her “buildings” offer us pure veneer, empty of function or program? If architect Dagmar Richter perceives “that Berlin will become the first state-organized media city of surface,” surpassing even “our expectations of Las Vegas, Disney, and City Walk,” do Genzken’s glass façades reflect the apotheosis of image culture, of surface pure and simple?\(^{119}\) Does Scheerbart’s vision of culture reconfigured by glass architecture metamorphose into the nightmare of a thoroughly mediated culture, in which light-filtering glass darkens and becomes the ubiquitous, image-dispersing LCD screen? Does Genzken show glass to be a cut-rate substitute for an authentic “jewelry of brilliants”? Or, alternatively, could she be seen to pointedly literalize the recent trend among star architects to wed literal and phenomenological transparency into sculptural preciousness, as diagnosed by Hal Foster?

Sometimes [Foster writes]…skins and scirms only dazzle or confuse, and the architecture becomes an illuminated sculpture, a radiant jewel. It can be beautiful, but it can also be spectacular in the negative sense used by Guy Debord—a kind of commodity fetish on a grand scale, a mysterious object whose production is mystified.\(^{120}\)

Of Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin wrote, “To interrupt the course of the world—this is Baudelaire’s deepest wish…. From this wish sprang his violence, his impatience and his anger. From it too sprang the ever renewed attempts to strike at the heart of the world, or to sing it to


\(^{120}\) Foster, “The ABCs of Contemporary Design,” *October* 100 (Spring 2002): 194.
sleep….”121 Not prone to lullabies, Genzken’s impulse to burst the glass bubble of our complacency cannot be extricated from an urge to effect change. However, to “strike at the heart of the world” is an ambivalent motion that can either still the life-sustaining organ or induce it to beat again. The dialectical tension between destruction and construction propels effective action—“to see, to know, to tempt fate,” as Baudelaire’s speaker says—while the alternative is ineffectual ennui.122 Richard Burton articulates the coexistence of opposing forces in Baudelaire’s poems thus:

The appalling fascination of ‘Le Mauvais Vitrier’ and ‘Une mort heroique’ lies in their insinuation that creation and destruction, the urge to bind, combine, and unite and the counter-urge to break, draw ultimately from the same reservoir of energy…. For Baudelaire, it cannot be stressed too often, is both the vitrier and his tormentor…sado-masochistically united in their very dividedness and opposition, a congeries of antagonistic urges whose truly explosive conflicts are acted out on and beneath the textual surface of the Petits poèmes en prose.123

If Genzken’s sculptures in concrete and glass hold the two poles in balance, or at least refuse to tip her hand, it is partially due to their restrained visual vocabulary and limited materials. Substantial and conflicting stakes play themselves out on the gritty surface of concrete and across the glossy planes of glass, but the forms are more or less articulations of post-minimalist and architectural structures. Even the object-pedestal distinction of traditional sculpture is clearly maintained.

For those viewers most familiar with Genzken’s early series in concrete and glass (as well as her other sculptures with clearly architectural morphologies, such as the series of windows and paravents of the early- to mid-1990s or the series of slender, clad columns succeeding them)

121 Walter Benjamin, “Central Park,” New German Critique 34 (Winter 1985): 39. Jennings’s edited volume, The Writer of Modern Life, offers an alternate translation: “from it, too, sprang the ever-renewed attempts to stab the world in the heart of sing it to sleep.” In this case I prefer the more ambiguous possibilities offered by “to strike at the heart of the world.”
the radical breakdown of sculptural restraint, if not of sculptural control, embodied by her suite of assemblages collectively titled *Empire/Vampire, Who Kills Death*, begun in 2003 (fig. 2.10), came as something of a shock. The antinomies economically alluded to and evoked in the earlier structures now rupture the surface and wage full-blown war in the combat zone of the pedestal. The dystopian, destructive, and negative clearly win the day: Genzken gives free rein to the travesty, the comic-grotesque, the diabolical act, and the hysterical outburst.

With *Empire/Vampire, Who Kills Death*, post-minimalist form explodes into the myriad surfaces and shapes offered by consumer culture: action figures, denim jeans, straws, cheap glass goblets, sunflower seeds, plastic flora, boots, and bread. Exuberantly spattered with glossy paint (in blinding white or day-glo colors) and topped or wrapped in sheets of mirror foil, these mad constructions seem to flout rules of compositional harmony, visual cohesion, or sculptural complexity with their off-handedness. Where the earlier works evoked architectural scale despite their modest size, the assemblages are collections of innumerable things: objects to be held in the hand. The architectural is hardly absent, but it has suffered grotesque and hilarious disfigurement. Glass architecture is reduced to glass goblets and vases; soaring arches are mimed (and maimed) by rubber tubing or by a sheet of bent foil, held in place by liberal distribution of tape. (In her gratuitous use of tape, Genzken thumbs her nose at the architectural fetishization of the joint and seam.) The cheapness and tackiness of her materials, too, is a reflection on the architectural context in Germany:

> The awful thing about architecture here is that everything, almost everything, is done in the cheapest construction style, the cheapest. They don’t make sure people use the best materials, they just use what’s cheapest. Just look at Potsdamer Platz, it’s like a piece of scenery!  

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The new term here is *scenery*, for Genzken’s sculptures are now clearly stagings. In scenes of destruction and deconstruction, armies of tchotchkes play out grisly warfare, both ludicrous and unnerving. A figurine of a goalie guards the mouth of a wine glass containing plastic prisoners (fig. 2.11). Another figure (friend or foe?) lies splayed on the battlefield of a crumpled brown jacket, spray-painted garish red and white (fig. 2.12). Discordances in scale and of genre (sleek sci-fi fighters, porcelain ballerinas, clumsy cartoon characters), heightened by seemingly haphazard construction, give the sense that a sadistic child has wreaked havoc on a world of unsuspecting playthings. The diabolic fervor and perverse humor of these works seem to be carried out under the aegis of the same sudden, irrational impulses that incite the idle dreamers of “The Bad Glazier” to action and that drive Baudelaire’s narrator to torment the hapless glazier. He confesses, “More than once I have been victim of such attacks and outbursts, which justify our belief that some malicious Demons slip into us and, without us knowing it, make us carry out their most absurd wishes.”\(^{125}\) In his letter of June 26, 1860 to Gustave Flaubert, Baudelaire writes, “…I realized that I’ve always been obsessed by the impossibility of understanding certain of man’s sudden thoughts or deeds, unless we accept the hypothesis that an evil force, external to man, has intervened.”\(^{126}\) The diabolic, demonic, and evil as motivating forces in Baudelaire’s work, particularly in *Les Fleurs du Mal* and *Paris Spleen*, have been dismissed by Frederic Jameson as the expressions of the “second-rate post-Romantic Baudelaire, the Baudelaire of diabolism and cheap frisson, the poet of blasphemy and of a creaking and musty religious machinery that was no more interesting in the mid-nineteenth century than it is today.”\(^{127}\)


Jameson wants, instead, to home in on the postmodern Baudelaire, the one who speaks to
Jameson’s own moment of late capitalism and image culture with an affectless euphoria. But if
for Jameson, writing in 1985, the diabolic smacks of old wives’ superstitions and late-Romantic
gloom, there is a way in which our present moment, when postmodernism’s endgame of
simulacrum has dead-ended, might reach back to the diabolic—a pact with the devil to escape
the end times—to find in it strategies for drastic action. The actions prefigured in Genzken’s
works are both public and private: public insofar as they respond to shared conditions under
commodity capitalism and because they enter the public sphere in the form of art; private insofar
as they stem from one individual’s intuition and impulse. I will argue below that the allegorical
workings of assemblage constitute the most potent model of action offered to us by Genzken’s
sculpture.

Benjamin seemed to understand the gambit of Baudelaire’s invocation of the diabolic.
“Spleen,” he wrote, “is the feeling that corresponds to catastrophe in permanence.”128 With
regard to what is at stake in Genzken’s work, that haunting phrase “catastrophe in permanence”
would describe our inheritance from the twentieth century, heightened, renewed, and
compounded by the opening bars of the twenty-first century. Genzken has stated that
Empire/Vampire, Who Kills Death responds to the attacks of September 11, 2001 (Genzken was
in New York at the time), to America’s political machinations in their aftermath, and to the threat
of the Iraq War. Empire and vampire refer to American hegemony by metonymic proxies: the
Empire State Building and its “vampiric” counterpart, the Chrysler Building. On the world stage
the theater of war plays itself out in encore after encore (featuring frequent set, cast, and costume
changes):

The course of history, seen in terms of the concept of catastrophe, can actually claim no more attention from thinkers than a child’s kaleidoscope, which with every turn of the hand dissolves the established order into a new array. There is profound truth in this image. The concepts of the ruling class have always been the mirrors that enabled an image of ‘order’ to prevail. – The kaleidoscope must be smashed.\(^\text{129}\)

In a decisive gesture, Genzken slams the kaleidoscope against the sculptural pedestal on which she lets the pieces fall. The mesmerizing subterfuge of mirrors is diffused in the utter banality of mirror foil. In dropping the flowerpot-turned-missile, the narrator of “The Bad Glazier” does his part as well, irreparably shattering the myth of transparency. In “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” Benjamin describes the poet’s artistic project as a “parrying of shocks” dealt by the city and by existence—one might add to this list those shocks dealt by catastrophe. Benjamin writes, “[Baudelaire’s] shock defense is rendered in the image of combat.” Seized by a diabolic paroxysm, the Baudelairean figure takes aim.\(^\text{130}\)

At her exhibition at the Vienna Secession in 2006 (fig. 2.13), Genzken expanded on the sculptural idiom initiated in *Empire/Vampire, Who Kills Death*, and subsequently continued in *Wasserspeier and Angels* and *Der Amerikanische Raum (The American Room)*, both from 2004. The untitled 2006 works, effectively installed as a motley group, are the culmination of a no holds barred, head-on strike against the sculptural form. In terms of shock value, these works offer the most devastating parry. For here—even more so than in *Empire/Vampire*, where the pedestal remained intact and the scenic aspect palpable—Genzken sabotages sculptural integrity, pushing it to its very limits. If the earlier series addressed the catastrophe of architecture become theater, war turned deadly play, and world morphed into an aggregate of interchangeable commodities, the 2006 works turn up the decibel level of her commentary with strident visual

\(^{129}\) Ibid., 137.

effectiveness. Wheelchairs and walkers take the place of the base—how more succinctly and literally could Genzken convey the crippled state of sculptural practice? Sculpture’s “body” collapses into the wheelchairs as so many lengths of ribbon, unbuckled belts, and crumpled sheets of fabric and plastic sheeting—sculptural structure is deflated, flaccid and formless. We are looking at the sorry degradation of sculpture’s meticulous imitation of the fall of drapery. Long a means of implying an underlying form while transforming matter—marble into chiffon, wood into silk—drapery here is a formless heap of coarse ticking and polyester net (fig. 2.14). For all the seeming lack of restraint, however, these untitled works are remarkably economical sculptural puns: the walkers are armored vehicles that double as complex torture devices as well as rehabilitation aids for the war-wounded (fig. 2.15). Hi-tech crutches lean against the wall like rail-thin automatons or sci-fi firearms. That they call to mind Genzken’s elegant early *Hyperboloids*, 1979-83, makes vivid Genzken’s assertion that her sculptures must look as if they could be readymades. “[A sculpture] must have a certain relation to reality,” she writes. Hence Genzken shows a sophisticated and complicated understanding of art’s relationship to mass production, the challenge the latter poses to the former (in terms of relevance or claim on the viewer’s attention), and the former’s need to confront the problem of the latter directly. The “enlightened human” comes in the form of a some-assembly-required torchiere lamp outfitted with stick-figure arms, legs, and head. Infant dolls are shaded by slashed beach-umbrellas—like pint-size Buddhas, wise before their time. Two more dolls slouch over their plastic ponies,

131 Alex Potts has remarked upon a similar “negation of armature” in relation to Beuys’s exploration of matter and of the *Felt Suit* (1970), in particular. Potts, “Tactility,” 288.
132 “When I was photographing the hi-fi adverts [Genzken refers here to her appropriation of hi-fi advertisements in 1979] I thought to myself, everyone has one of these towers at home. It’s the latest thing, the most modern equipment available. So a sculpture must be at least as modern and must stand up to it. Then I hung the pictures on the wall and put an ellipsoid on the floor and thought, the ellipsoid must be at least as good as this advert….Yes, and I have always said that with my sculpture you have to be able to say, although this is not a ready-made, it could be one.” Genzken, “Interview with Wolfgang Tillmans,” 138.
mockeries of the heroic genre of equestrian statues that are acute enough to elicit laughter (fig. 2.16). A figure sports something on its head that looks like Napoleon’s bicorn. They will never make it across the St. Bernard Pass.

Yet Genzken’s relationship to the object world is a complicated one. What Yve-Alain Bois says is true, “[Genzken] is a voracious consumer, but one who is at war with the merchandise: all she buys—even the most expensive design objects—she immediately declares as trash.” But Genzken’s antinomy is thus: even in her “destructive furor” her sensitivity to (and obvious pleasure in) the material and visual properties of her materials suggests something akin to sympathy. This is in great part a formal affinity—she does not struggle against or cancel the properties of the objects, but harnesses the forms and colors particular to the commodity. Genzken possesses a keen eye for plastic’s palette, just as she taps the humor and pathos in the subjection of objects to human whim. But while Genzken sympathizes with the materials, she stops short of redemption.

Any decoding of Genzken’s assemblage work belies its sculptural radicality; aggressive in address, trespassing upon formal conventions even as it upholds them through allusion, they are decidedly in excess of comprehension or pithy summary. Genzken’s assemblages distinguish themselves from similar contemporary aggregations that seem studied and caption-ready. They exhibit a deliberate unmooring from tested aesthetic formulas or conventions, the results of which read as ecstatic outburst. The structures — constructions built of destruction, held together as if by sheer force of will and exuberant energy— threaten at every moment to splinter into irretrievably disparate elements. Baudelaire’s narrator of “The Bad Glazier” would be Genzken’s

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patron saint (or imp?), whose call to “Make life beautiful!” is accompanied by a convulsive, spontaneous action that results in shattered structures.

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Divorced from their use-value, objects are repurposed (and de-purposed) in Genzken’s assemblages. She aggravates the lack of “natural mediation” between parts, playing up disparate scales and drawing from unrelated object categories. Individual elements are hardly subsumed into a coherent whole but remain agonistically and tenuously combined. (Genzken’s drips of paint, for example, never amount to a unifying coat.) Like ensemble casts in which every B-list player thinks himself the star, Genzken’s objects jostle for the spotlight. Indeed, Genzken’s tableaux can be seen to make literal a situation described by Guy Debord in which “Each individual commodity fights for itself, cannot acknowledge the others and aspires to impose its presence everywhere as though it were alone. The spectacle is the epic poem of this strife.” Genzken turns epic poem into mock-epic sculpture marked by manic energy and residing at the brink of collapse. She does not merely juxtapose but grafts, binds, smashes, and pits objects against one another.

Genzken has significant predecessors in the use of mass-produced materials in assemblage, of course, from Schwitters’s Merz constructions of the 1920s and 30s to Robert Rauschenberg’s combines to Arman’s Accumulations, Trashcans, and Robot Portraits in the post-war period. Out of culture’s shattered remains after the First World War, Schwitters developed an aesthetics of detritus. Obsolescence and waste generated his raw materials, which he then mined for their melancholic, poetic, and formal values. As Leah Dickerman has

134 “[T]he allegorist rummages here and there for a particular piece, holds it next to some other piece, and tests to see if they fit together…,” Benjamin writes, “The result can never be known beforehand, for there is no natural mediation between the two. But this is just how matters stand with commodity and price.” The combination of disparate objects is exemplified by the display window. See Benjamin, “Central Park,” 148.
explored, Schwitters’s particular interest in objects intimately associated with individuals singularized the commodity and invested it with a mnemonic function.\textsuperscript{136} Roughly three decades later, Arman visualized mass production through accumulations of objects ranging from recovered doll parts and clock faces—replete with poignant metaphor—to new electric razors with their looping and tangled cords. Displayed in roughly grid-like patterns in glass or Plexiglas vitrines, the heaps of nearly identical objects embody at once all stages of the production/consumption cycle, from the repetitive action of manufacture, to the promise of abundance, to the scrap heap of obsolescence.\textsuperscript{137} Arman’s vitrines are the boxes in which goods are delivered but also some future archaeologist’s drawers of sorted artifacts. In Rauschenberg’s combines, found objects and images settle in painterly fields that conjure a mental space of memory, association, and metaphor.\textsuperscript{138} For all that Genzken might owe to these predecessors, her works remain unattached to any overall pictorial structure like the grid. But the more crucial distinction between Genzken’s use of found materials and those of Schwitters, Arman, or Rauschenberg, resides in the relentless newness of the majority of her chosen objects. Unmarked by use, without the patina that time imparts, and still bearing the sheen of manufacture, they derive less from the flea market stalls than from the newly stocked shelves of the 99¢ store or designer boutique. If the former was the privileged site of Surrealism’s “objective chance,” where the subject found his or her desires anticipated, manifested, and fulfilled by the found object, it is from the latter that the commodity fetish leers back at the consumer. With their lurid colors and designer curves, Genzken’s works might be said to embody what Walter Benjamin so


memorably called “the sex appeal of the inorganic.” But more often than not, that sex appeal is laced with, if not overtaken by, perversion and a whiff of deathliness. In Geschwister (2004) (fig. 2.17), “Eros,” the luminous Philippe Starck-designed swivel chair, is turned on its side and propped up on the struts of an upturned folding chair. Blank-eyed and smeared with paint, a mangled doll is entangled in this rack-cum-scaffold. Possessed of a dark humor, Genzken courts the repulsive, bombastic, and hyperbolic. Yet she is also ever the formalist, rhyming the swivel chair’s circular base with polished metal platters and balancing its strong color with the diagonal and downward extension of the doll. A second folding chair—collapsed, seatless, and backless—leans against the column. The two folding chairs, one open and one collapsed, articulate concisely and with the aid of readymades a sculptor’s fascination with the spatial extension of two-dimensional form into three dimensions.

More than any of her predecessors, Genzken’s choice of objects manifests the terror of the ever-new, which is also the ever-same, a condition under mass production that Benjamin calls, “the eternity of hell.”139 This eternity is not unmarked by stages of development—hell, after all, has its descending circles. Rauschenberg created his Combines (1954-1962) and Arman his Accumulations (from 1958 onwards) at the beginnings of what Marxist economist Ernest Mandel has termed the period of late capitalism, the purest manifestation of capital we have

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139 Benjamin, The Arcades Project, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 544 [S1.5]. Benjamin Buchloh suggests that it is the condition of the universal equivalence of things that brings Genzken’s works to the “brink of psychosis”:

To have the self succumb to the totalitarian order of objects brings the sculptor to the brink of psychosis, and Genzen’s new work seems to inhabit that position. However, since total submission to the terror of consumption is indeed the governing stratum of collective object relations, that psychotic state may well become the only position and practice the sculptor of the future can articulate.

heretofore seen. This period is marked by the “prodigious expansion of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas,” writes Fredric Jameson, an expansion into whatever enclaves of precapitalist space (geographical or psychological) or modes of interaction that had been preserved through the previous stages of market or monopoly capitalism. Internationalization of corporations and banking systems, transfer of labor to advanced Third World nations, transnational division of labor, total penetration of life by media and commodities—these are the manifestations of late capitalism. The “immense dilation of the sphere of commodities” is of crucial importance to Jameson, a principal theorist of culture in this (our) period, as it is for this discussion of Genzken’s work, for the exponential growth of commodity production and the commodification of culture raises the pressing question of what it might mean to produce art, especially a critical or utopian art, against a system from which one cannot step apart. As an artist of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, Genzken operates in a context in which consumer capitalism, only just initiated in 1950s and 60s, has firmly taken hold. Unable and unwilling to presume a critical distance or moralizing superiority, Genzken produces artwork through an exaggerated performance of her consumerism, at once joyful and self-loathing, gratuitous and compulsive. Crucially, Genzken’s object world is composed of contemporary, manufactured

140 Fredric Jameson, who hews to Mandel’s model of the development of capital through its market, monopoly, and late stages, explains, “Thus the economic preparation of postmodernism or late capitalism began in the 1950s, after the wartime shortages of consumer goods and spare parts had been made up, and new products and new technologies (not least those of the media) could be pioneered. On the other hand, the psychic habitus of the new age demands the absolute break, strengthened by a generational rupture, achieved more properly in the 1960s….Meanwhile, it is my sense that both levels in question, infrastructure and superstructures—the economic system and the cultural ‘structure of feeling’—somehow crystallized in the great shock of the crises of 1973.” Jameson, Postmodernism, xx.
141 Ibid., 36
142 Ibid., xix.
143 Jameson speaks of the “aestheticization of life” (referring to, but altering the thrust of, Benjamin’s equation between fascism and the aestheticization of politics), writing, “What has happened is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation.” Ibid., 5. Central to Jameson’s inquiry is the possibility of a utopian artistic practice a the postmodern age in which critical distance is unavailable. Ibid., 48–9.
things—a world that precludes nostalgia for the pre-capitalist object or the pre-consumerist subject. Indeed, neither is even entertained as a possibility.

It strikes me as fitting, then, that the predominant material featured in Genzken’s hellish tableaux is plastic, a material whose ongoing takeover of every visible surface and interior mechanism begins to gain ground in the post-war period. Its growing dominance coincides with the development of late capital. In Genzken’s *Elephant* (2006) (fig. 2.18), hulking mass is made light in vertical blinds, plastic toys, artificial flowers, bubble wrap, and plastic tubes—the last of these the “trunk” that functions synecdochically for the animal. These are the wonders of polymers with multisyllabic names and plosive abbreviations: PP, PC, PVC, PS, PETE, ABS, etc. Genzken not only works in *Plastik* (f.)—which is to say in the plastic art of three-dimensional sculpture—but she also renders such sculptures in *Plastik* (n.), that ubiquitous material that can be variously treated (stamped, extruded, vacuum-formed, compression or injection molded) and that can withstand high degrees of deformation while maintaining its molecular structure. Both the adjective and noun forms of the word derive from the Greek, *plastikos*, meaning moldable. From the jointed carapace of a toy grasshopper to the curved petals of metallic blooms, from ridged tubes to sheets of dazzling optical foil: molecular plasticity in its infinite mutability might be seen to trump sculptural plasticity. Traditionally understood as the molding and modeling of three-dimensional forms, sculptural plasticity in Genzken’s assemblages is under duress. The bundling and piling of disparate materials, secured with weight, tension, or rudimentary systems of fastening, seem worlds apart from the skilled manipulation of surfaces and volumes to animate mere matter with expressive life. If the sculptural idiom of modeling has been in decline since Rodin, with an expression of its extreme attenuation in the work of Giacometti, Genzken has had to redefine and reimagine sculptural
plasticity in different terms. Her gambit has been to appropriate and exploit the plastic properties of her chosen materials. And therein lies a source of drama of Genzken’s work, for at times their plastic expression is limited by the vocabulary of mass-produced forms or eclipsed by the perversity of the scenarios she dreams up for them. Yet at their most visually compelling, Genzken’s works shape space in quite unexpected ways, as when circumambulation of Elephant shows that what droops and sags on one side arches with jaunty energy on the other.

The first semi-synthetic plastics were developed in the mid-19th century and the first fully synthetic resins in the first decade of the 20th century—not coincidentally, then, in the era of monopoly capitalism and the phantasmagoria it ushered in. Celluloid, the first mass-produced semi-synthetic plastic, was patented in the United States in 1869. Bakelite, made of fully synthetic polymers, was invented in 1907. Further developments followed quickly, and continue still. In their earliest history, plastics were intended as mass-producible substitutes for expensive and increasingly rare materials such as ivory, tortoiseshell, and amber. In this capacity for cost-effective simulation resides both plastics’ utopian potential (for the distribution of inexpensive, quality wares to a wide sector of the population) as well as the grounds for their dismissal as the material of dystopian simulacra.144 Indicative of its polarized connotations is the fact that in the post-World War II period, plastics facilitated the transition to a culture of planned obsolescence in American capitalism even as it was touted in the German Democratic Republic as the material means of achieving socialist utopia.145

144 When Benjamin writes, “With the new manufacturing processes that lead to imitations, semblance is consolidated in commodities,” one can easily imagine that he is speaking of plastic. Benjamin, “Central Park,” 146. 145 On the economic importance of the plastics industry in the GDR as well as the material’s symbolic importance in the imagining of a socialist society, see Eli Rubin’s excellent study. Rubin, Synthetic Socialism: Plastics and Dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008). For a discussion of utopian dimension of plastic in the GDR, see in particular page 25. In a workshop regarding the peacetime conversion of the plastics industry, the vice president of Du Pont asserted, “a satisfied people is a stagnant people.” In order to survive and expand, the plastics industry would have “to see to it that Americans are never
Indicative of plastics’ divergent cultural meanings is the fact that hand-in-hand with its reputation as a surrogate material, and with its association with inexpensive disposable items, goes plastics’ connection with the most advanced technological developments, not least the chemical wizardry required in its making. Today’s plastics are employed for action figures as well as for weapons of mass destruction. The connection between the two is not negligible, for the greatest advances in plastic were developed for military purposes. Bakelite, for instance, was employed in military production during World War I before it became available for product design in the 1920s. And as America and Germany battled on the world stage a second time, Du Pont (USA) and I. G. Farben/Bayer (Germany) engaged in a parallel struggle for dominance in their laboratories to develop new synthetic fibers for the manufacture of parachutes, tires, windshields, etc. More directly implicated in the violence of warfare, napalm contains as its principal ingredient polystyrene. One need only follow this line of thinking to its extreme to arrive at Norman Mailer’s attempt to link the threat of nuclear apocalypse to the loss of humanity to synthetic polymers. In our day, the ecological threats of non-biodegradable trash are as real as the specter of biochemical warfare. Derived from fossil fuel, oil, natural gas, and coal, plastic remakes the remains of millennia in its image, one that asserts its own monstrous longevity in our landfills.

The confluence of plastic and plastic art—or the exploration of a “plastic Plastik,” one might say—was already initiated in the 1920s by Naum Gabo and László Moholy-Nagy at a
moment when the material yet embodied utopian potential (figs. 2.19-21). Gabo’s call to “transfer the constructive thinking of the engineer into art” and Moholy’s to promote a “new unity between art and technology” suggested, among other things, the embrace of new industrial-scientific materials such as celluloid and Plexiglas. Each experimented with the pliability and transparency of plastic sheets in three-dimensional works to effect something approaching a dematerialization of sculpture—its liberation from mass and its play in light and space.

Genzken’s *Untitled* of 2006 (fig. 2.22) can best be understood as a succinct postscript to the mixture of technological optimism and formalism that governed these early experiments in plastic sculpture. Rather than the modulation of light produced by Moholy’s experiments in undulating Plexiglas or the precise rationalist-formalist intersecting planes of Gabo’s constructions, here a single, brightly hued plastic sheet is “draped” over the pedestal. While embodying the high-gloss, hi-tech sheen of plastic and its suggestion of the seductive design object, *Untitled* can nevertheless be seen to render flaccid the once lofty promises of plastic. Because if plastic lent itself to “space modulators,” it was soon to be, if not already, the stuff of imitation-bone letter openers, novelty ashtrays, disposable dinnerware and the like. Even Moholy-Nagy, recounting in 1944 his experimental sculptural work, recognized the ambivalences inherent in the tantalizing material (though he warns less of kitsch than of decorativeness): “The results [of using plastic], although very pleasing, bring some danger with them. The smooth perfection of the plastics, their light-flooded, sparkling planes, could easily lure one into an effective but decorative performance.”

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149 One might note that the roots of plastic lie in antiquity, as amber is fossilized resin and horn and tortoiseshell have thermoplastic properties. These are natural materials, however, and semi-synthetic and synthetic resins were developed in the 19th and 20th centuries. Ulmer, *Plastics + Design*, 9.

Whether as decorative surface, tawdry imitation, democratic material, biochemical threat, or techno-scientific shape-shifter, plastic smacks of the unsubstantial. (Unsubstantial, that is, in a way that is quite distinct from what Gabo and Moholy had hoped for in terms of the dematerialization of sculpture.) Why else the frequency with which we hear the question, “Is this real or plastic?” Roland Barthes’s reflections upon an exhibition of plastics in Paris circa 1954 elaborate upon the source of plastic’s seeming unreality:

Despite having names of Greek shepherds (Polystyrene, Polyvinyl, Polyethylene), plastic, the products of which have just been gathered in an exhibition, is in essence the stuff of alchemy. At the entrance of the stand, the public waits in a long queue in order to witness the accomplishment of the magical operation par excellence: the transmutation of matter. An ideally-shaped machine, tabulated and oblong (a shape well suited to suggest the secret of an itinerary) effortlessly draws, out of a heap of greenish crystals, shiny and fluted dressing-room tidies. At one end, raw, telluric matter, at the other, the finished, human object; and between these two extremes, nothing; nothing but a transit, hardly watched over by an attendant in a cloth cap, half-god, half-robot.151

The magical aura that Barthes describes results from two types of abstraction, first in the chemical transformation of pellets of polymer resins into an object of daily use, and second in the absence of human labor in the production of that object. The two are deeply involved, however, for this trick is no sleight of hand, the hand having little to do with process. Half-god and half-robot, the attendant is anything but human and his task hardly seems like work.152 (Mailer, virulent opponent of plastics, opts for a baser register when he declares: “we looked to new materials which were cooked in vats, long complex derivatives of urine which we call

152 Meikle’s historical and theoretical writings on plastic are wonderfully informative. “Physically and visually, each of these plastic artifacts seemed to announce its integrity as a single housing or shell, moulded rather than put together, created instantaneously in a manner outside the experience of a carpenter, welder, machine-tool operator, or assembler of cast metal parts….No clearly contrived series of human actions, indeed no human action at all, lay between conception and final form.” Meikle, “Into the Fourth Kingdom: Representations of Plastic Materials, 1920–1950,” Journal of Design History 5, no. 3 (1992): 173–4.
plastic.” If in Moholy and Gabo’s early 20th century moment, plastics offered a new dazzling, technical capacity; and if, Barthes, writing in the mid-century, regarded plastics with distrust; in our late-20th century and early 21st century moment, plastics have lost their capacity to thrill or threaten. We are largely inured to its presence.

In Genzken’s assemblages, the obscurity of plastics manufacture, represented in part by the myriad forms of plastic toys, is coupled with and contradicted by the transparency of the artist’s own labor. Unlike traditional sculptural processes like carving and casting—the former exhibiting finely honed skill and the latter requiring the expertise and resources of a foundry—the basic act of juxtaposition that governs Genzken’s assemblage process is both visually evident and mundane. That the combinatory imagination governing these assemblages remains aggressive and arbitrary—inaccessible to the viewer as compositional or organizational “logic”—hardly subtracts from their availability as the results of piling, taping, grouping, leaning, bending, and splattering.

Plastic’s “transit,” to borrow Barthes’s word, is the subject of Le Chant du Styrène [The Song of Styrene], Alain Renais’s 1958 short film commissioned by Pechiney, the French plastics maker. The film is an “anti-allegory,” according to Yve-Alain Bois, that presents the manufacturing process in reverse, starting with the finished product (bowls and ladles); passing

153 Mailer, *The Presidential Papers*, 159, 178–9. The tendency to relate this laboratory material with bodily effluvia (shit, urine, and vomit) is not at all uncommon in journalistic and literary texts. The image of plastic extrusion lends itself to this association.

154 The concerns Barthes voiced in his essay, “Plastic,” overlap with those he expressed on the topic of toys. In his essay collected in *Mythologies*, he bemoans the rise of the plastic toy, for him a quintessentially bourgeois object, as the “product of chemistry not of nature.” Unlike traditional wooden toys, plastic ones destroy “the humanity of touch,” he writes. Barthes, “Toys,” *Mythologies*, 54. One might be prompted to think back to Benjamin’s writings on toys in 1928, in which he recounts their cultural history as one in which toys were linked to workshop production rather than manufacturing. This issue of skilled labor and, crucially, of materials and their association with certain types of labor, would be precisely what is missing from the manufacture of plastic toys. Benjamin, “The Cultural History of Toys,” in *Selected Writings*, v. 2, part 1, ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1996), 113–4.

155 I owe sincere thanks to Yve-Alain Bois for bringing this film to my attention and for facilitating my viewing of it. My understanding of this film is greatly indebted to Edward Dimendberg’s analysis of the film. Dimendberg, “‘These are not exercises in style,’” 63–88.
through the molding, sifting, extrusion, drying, and polymerization stages; extending beyond the refinery; and ending finally with the image of the ocean, indication of the natural resources that are plastic’s distant source. The film’s accompanying narration is written by Raymond Queneau, French poet, novelist, and founding member of the group Oulipo. Queneau composed his text in strict alexandrine verse, which lends the voiceover a mock gravitas. It begins, “O time, suspend your bowl. O plastic, where do you come from? Who are you? And what explains your rare qualities? So what are you made of? And where did you come from?” While the film purports at some basic level to answer these questions (Pechiney is footing the bill, after all), it ultimately maintains in its visual and textual rhetoric the lack of transparency of plastics manufacture. The “magical” qualities of the process—the molding matrix is deemed a “mysterious being,” the raw materials are “circulated endlessly, effectively, and secretly”—are reinforced in The Song of Styrene through evocations of mechanical fecundity and steely erotics. The “heap of greenish crystals” (here shown in yellow, blue, and red as well) is alternately transformed into a rectangular basin and a set of plastic dining utensils with minimal human aid or intervention. Designers and users are absented as well, lending the process and

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156 In The Origin of German Tragic Drama, Benjamin identifies alexandrine as its characteristic poetic form. He writes, “Every bit as characteristic of this verse is the contrast between the logical—if one will, the classicistic—structure of the façade, and the phonetic violence within….The language of the baroque is constantly convulsed by rebellion on the part of the elements which make it up…..In this way language is broken up so as to acquire a changed and intensified meaning in its fragments.” The convulsion of language as exhibited by phonetic excess—anagrams, onomatopoeia, etc.—liberate word and sound from the strictures of meaning; they are “flaunted as objects.” Benjamin, The Origin of German Tragic Drama, trans. by John Osborne (London: Verso, 1985), 206–7. 157 Dimendberg, from whose essay I draw the transcriptions of Queneau’s text, details Queneau’s sources and parses layers of meaning that accrue in the narration. Dimendberg identifies the phrase in Alphonse de Lamartine’s poem ‘Le Lac’ upon which the opening lines of the narration are based: ‘O time, suspend your flights’ (‘Ô temps, suspend ton vol’). Dimendberg writes, ‘At once deflating the Romantic project of transcendence from the ravages of temporality, the pun in Queneau’s text reinforced by the image track of the film also introduces a prosaic materialism. The flight of time, subject of mythological fabulation and philosophical speculation since the dawn of human culture, is eclipsed by an ordinary plastic bowl as the object of the poet’s attention.” Dimendberg, “‘These are not exercises in style,’” 69. This materialism can be compared to Genzken’s own. 158 Ibid., 70, 73.
product an autonomy that renders use-value moot.\textsuperscript{159} As the film concludes its visual journey, the narration is hardly conclusive: “Does petroleum not come from masses of fish? Nor is too much known about where coal comes from. Does petroleum come from plankton in labor? Controversial questions…obscure origins.”

In his reading of \textit{The Song of Styrene}, Edward Dimendberg argues that alongside the film’s celebration of plastic’s saturated colors and streamlined forms (enhanced through abstract compositions of objects against dark backgrounds) Renais and Queneau smuggle into the film commentary that undercuts the commercial interests they were commissioned to serve. Toward the end of the film, the narrator intones: “Now it is necessary to ask where these essential products ethylene and benzene come from. They are extracted from oil, magical liquid/treasure, that is found from Bordeaux to the heart of Africa. They are extracted from oil and also from coal.” The two locations correspond to the geographical reach of Pechiney’s interests in plastics manufacturing. The former is the home of one of its processing plants, and the latter would provide its raw materials. By 1950, Dimendberg recounts, the French petroleum industry had tapped reserves in the Congo, Angola, and Tunisia. Pechiney maintained operations in Cameroon and French Guinea.\textsuperscript{160} Queneau’s text “assert[s] the primacy of geopolitics, especially the flows of petroleum, as the ultimate domain where matters can get too hot and explode,” Dimendberg argues.\textsuperscript{161}

Over fifty years after Renais’s film and Barthes’s essay, one might say that the explosive moment in geopolitics has been reached and exceeded. Regarding \textit{Oil}, her 2007 installation for the German Pavilion of the Venice Biennale, Genzken says, “I like the title because that is what

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 72.
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 85.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 86. Here Dimendberg alludes to a crucial passage in Queneau’s text that reads “Purified, distilled, and redistilled, and that these are not exercises in style. Ethylbenzene can and indeed must explode if the temperature reaches a certain point.” Ibid., 82.
the whole world is about. Whether there’s war or not, that’s what it’s all about. Energy and oil. Genzken doesn’t treat in any literal way the cost of crude oil that continued to rise precipitously in 2007, nor does she take up America’s ongoing war in the Middle East. Instead, under the banner of “Oil”—a literal banner, one might say, as the exterior of the pavilion is draped in orange construction site netting (fig. 2.23), of which Genzken says, “Das ist Plastik, auch Öl”—Genzken contemplates consumption more generally: how we as subjects are consumed by it, how it consumes our history and our future.

“They come from all over the world,” Genzken says of her purchased materials, “one component is from Taiwan, the next from Mexico, and the third from somewhere completely different.” As interested in the conditions of production of consumer goods as in their depicted motifs, Genzken shows herself to be attuned to the mechanisms of commodity chains and the exploitation of cheap, unskilled labor by multinational corporations. Not only has the manufacturing of goods long since been displaced from the craftsman’s workshop, it has been dispersed across an international network of producers of parts only subsequently assembled into wholes. A lack of transparency governs every stage of commodity production, a fact which finds its analog and material expression in the “effacement of the traces of production” from the objects themselves. This effacement Jameson equates with reification and with an object-aided and willful forgetting of the work (especially of the laboring Third World Other) that goes into the manufacturing of things. Genzken’s assemblages don’t render commodity production any more transparent, but in their chaotic pileups and inscrutable scenarios they make the commodity’s opacity confrontational and monstrous. Indeed, they might be said to defamiliarize

165 Jameson, Postmodernism, 314–5.
the banal. Genzken engages with issues of labor, production, and capital, not in any literal or expository way, but through her choice and combination of objects in which such issues are anything but peripheral. Thus, assemblages which might seem at first only to express psychosis or an impulse toward diabolical play, in fact engage important issues that bear upon the public sphere: its peril in a society governed by commodity capitalism and the possibility of grounding a counter-public sphere in the workings of fantasy.166

In drawing on the wide realm of consumer goods for her materials, Genzken has been seen to elaborate upon the Duchampian tradition. She nevertheless insists, “I am not interested in readymades. The meaning is in the combination of things. In a time such as the present one, a time when things go to seed, it is important to use cheap materials.”167 Genzken’s sculptural operations have little to do with designating the readymade object as art via a nominal gesture. Instead, meaning resides in juxtaposition. The aggressive combinatory aspect of Genzken’s sculptures, as well as their emphasis on cheap, mass-produced things, can be productively understood as an allegorical mode of working.168 With titles like Empire/Vampire and The American Room (fig. 2.24)—in which Disney’s Scrooge McDuck stands watch from atop an executive’s desk while figurines of bald eagles perch on white pedestals—one might say that Genzken’s allegorical intention is far from subtle. But if such an intention is manifested in overt thematics (whether they tackle modern warfare, terrorism, imperialism, or urban planning), it is also, and perhaps more critically, enacted through the commodity-cum-allegory. Just as the commodity fetish, according to Marx, severs the object from the labor that produces it, abstracting human relations into relations between things, the allegory severs the organic

166 See Chapter 1 for a discussion of fantasy and the counter-public sphere in Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge’s Public Sphere and Experience.
167 Interview, Isa Genzken: Oil, 156.
168 A connection between Genzken’s assemblage process and Benjamin’s conception of allegory has also been drawn in Vanessa Joan Müller, “Allegory and the Everyday,” Isa Genzken: Oil, 165–7.
relations between the emblem or thing from its meaning. The exchange value of goods in a capitalist economy finds its analog in the arbitrary significance assigned by allegory to its emblems. In his volume of collected fragments on late 19th-century Paris and in the various other texts that bear on his unfinished project with the working title *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, Benjamin sketches an image of Baudelaire as exemplary allegorist. In the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin writes, “The meaning of the commodity is indeed: Price; as commodity it has no other. Thus the allegoricist with the commodity is in his element.” Thus, for Benjamin, allegory corresponds to, and is a violent revolt against, the ubiquitous commodity.

Collage and assemblage are allegorical processes par excellence insofar as the combination of things accentuates arbitrariness. That Genzken’s chosen material is plastic gives added depth, meaning, and emphasis to Genzken’s allegorical manipulation of commodities. For if in allegory “any person, any object, any relationship can mean anything

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169 “Baudelaire’s allegory bears traces of the violence that was necessary to demolish the harmonious façade of world that surrounded him,” Benjamin writes in *The Arcades Project*. The “diabolism” discussed earlier in this chapter remains active in allegory. Benjamin’s texts on Baudelaire include “The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire,” “On Some Motifs on Baudelaire,” and “Central Park.” The first of these was to comprise the second chapter of the unrealized book project. At the urging of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer Benjamin developed the central section of “The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire” into the shorter text “On Some Motifs on Baudelaire.” For an analysis of the various iterations and elements of Benjamin’s Baudelaire project, see Michael W. Jennings, introduction to Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life*, 1–26.

The concept of the commodity does not feature in the discussion of Baroque allegory in Benjamin’s *Habilitationsschrift, The Origins of German Tragic Drama*. It predates Benjamin’s engagement with Marxism. That said, the alignment of commodity and allegory appears in the epigram to the chapter on “Allegory and Trauerspiel,” in which it operates as a governing metaphor: “Whosoever would grace this frail cottage, in which poverty adorns every corner, with a rational epitome, would be making no inapt statement nor overstepping the mark of well-founded truth if he called the world a general store, a customs-house of death, in which man is the merchandise, death the wondrous merchant, God the most conscientious bookkeeper, but the grave the bonded drapers’ hall and ware house.” From Christoph Männling, *Theatre of death, or funeral orations*; quoted in Benjamin, *German Tragic Drama*, 159.


171 Benjamin again, “[T]he allegorist rummages here and there for a particular piece, holds it next to some other piece, and tests to see if they fit together…. The result can never be known beforehand, for there is no natural mediation between the two. But this is just how matters stand with commodity and price.” Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 368 [J80,2; J80a,1].
else,” in plastic’s molecular structure resides the capacity to realize an infinite number of forms.\textsuperscript{172} Here one might invoke again Barthes’s commentary on this “disgraced material” of polymerization, “At the sight of each terminal form (suitcase, brush, car-body, toy, fabric, tube, basin or paper), the mind does not cease from considering the original matter as an enigma.”\textsuperscript{173} 

As an abstract and inorganic material, one without essential materiality and which is characterized by a mysterious transmutability, plastic is perhaps the ideal material for the production of a contemporary allegory. As the conjunction of allegory, commodity, and chemical metamorphosis, the mass-produced plastic thing can be held up as the perfect emblem of our alienated times.

In insisting upon the object as a material entity resulting from specific social and economic forces, however, Genzken’s practice exhibits a powerful materialist impulse that might seem to contradict (but in fact gives depth to) her allegorical impulse. On the one hand, then, the utter instability of meaning and value; and on the other hand, the intractable presence of the material thing. Indeed, a perverse “truth to materials” plays itself out in her work. For what might this modernist edict mean when the material at hand is seen to be fundamentally untrue?\textsuperscript{174} To ponder this question is to enter a hall of mirrors (acrylic, of course, not glass). One need only think on Nikolai Tarabukin’s gloss on Constructivism, “The material dictates the forms, and not the opposite,” to realize the impossibility of enacting this principle in relation to a material whose very quality, either vaunted or loathed, is a lack of intrinsic form.\textsuperscript{175} Plastic’s truth is not one, but infinite. Put differently, if plastic is “ubiquity made visible,” any proper expression of its

\textsuperscript{172} Benjamin, \textit{German Tragic Drama}, 175.
\textsuperscript{173} Barthes, “Plastic,” 97.
\textsuperscript{174} I am reminded in this context of Debord’s haunting claim, “In a world that \textit{really} has been turned on its head, truth is a moment of falsehood.” Debord, \textit{Spectacle}, 14 [Thesis 9].
\textsuperscript{175} Quoted in Margit Rowell, “Vladimir Tatlin: Form/Faktura,” \textit{October} 7 (Winter 1978): 91.
essence would make visible that ubiquity. In contrast, then, to the succinctness of Tatlin’s *Selection of Materials* (1914)—rolled iron, milled wooden rod, and triangle of cut glass—Genzken’s assemblages of accumulated wares are sprawling, overstocked, visually demanding, and occasionally repulsive. Comprehensiveness is obviously impossible, but Genzken achieves something of the gratuitousness of the commodity spectacle. It is important to stress in this context that unlike Lynda Benglis’s polychrome pools of poured plastic or César’s spectacularization of polyurethane’s transformation from liquid into solid, Genzken’s plastics are explored only as pre-formed commodities and never as raw material.

To say that plastic has no intrinsic form or texture is not to indicate that it is without defining characteristics. As many commentators have noted, Barthes only the most eloquent among them, plastic’s hollow sound and unidimensional colors are its dead giveaways. Indeed, one of the most notable aspects of Genzken’s assemblage work in this vein is its heightened palette of synthetic colors, exuberant and grating, forcefully unharmonious. The visual impact is one of great and sometimes difficult intensity. And its effects recall Jameson’s description of the experience of pure and isolated material signifiers, which overtakes the postmodern, schizophrenic subject with “undescribable vividness”—an experience that results from the breakdown of temporality in the late-capitalist period. Jameson’s conception of the schizophrenic, derived from Lacan via Deleuze and Guattari, is not clinical but aesthetic. And like the anti-oedipal subject of Deleuze, this aesthetic model of the schizophrenic is open to “joyous intensities” and the intoxicating power of the signifier unmoored. To varying degrees in each work, Genzken maintains both the terrors of this intensity and its pleasures.

177 “But what best reveals it for what it is is the sound it gives, at once hollow and flat; its noise is its undoing, as are its colours, for it seems capable of retaining only the most chemical looking ones. Of yellow, red and green, it keeps only the aggressive quality…” Ibid., 98.
The forceful materiality of Genzken’s sculptural allegories contradicts an inherited prejudice against allegory as a merely rhetorical and conventional mode, a prejudice that can be traced to the mid- to late-18th century, when Goethe and Schelling valued the supposedly organic and unitary symbol over the artificial allegorical construct. Whether employing plaster, concrete, glass, or, in the assemblages under discussion, plastic, Genzken’s work raises the issue of the material’s means of production, its social uses and connotations, and its mass-produced forms. Indeed, the material is constitutive of the work and its meaning. Few, if any, of the artists who might have partaken of an “allegorical impulse” in the 1980s engaged so directly with material. Most were concerned with the mass-circulated image. Genzken’s materialism and her attunement to color in particular brings her allegory down to earth and up to date. She sets the arbitrary in tension with the historically and economically determined. Thus grounded, Genzken’s allegories become more powerfully legible. Or, perhaps more accurately, their demands to be read and reckoned with become more articulate, even aggressive. In expounding upon allegory’s demands upon and relationship to the viewer, Stephen Melville offers the following:

In The Origin of German Tragic Drama, Benjamin is at pains to refute earlier dismissals (and misapprehensions) of the nature of allegory: “perfunctory dismissals of the allegorical form by their excessively logical character, which, in accepting the distinction between ‘the expression of a concept and the expression of an idea,’ accepts precisely that untenable modern view of allegory and symbol.” He contradicts the understanding of allegory as “a conventional relationship between an illustrative image and its abstract meaning.” Benjamin, German Tragic Drama, 162.

An “allegorical impulse” was much theorized in the early 1980s, beginning with Craig Owens in his influential two-part essay, “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism,” which characterized a range of “postmodernist” practices as allegorical in nature. Citing a suppression of allegory in modernism and in formalist art history, Owens recuperates the term for postmodernism, linking allegory’s characteristics to specific trends in artistic practice. Allegory’s textual doubling, its embodiment in the ruin, its suspension of the transitory, its piling up of fragments, and its resistance to narrative find, for Owens, correspondences in appropriation art, site-specificity, photography, photomontage, and repetitive structures, respectively. Craig Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism,” October 12 (Spring 1980): 75. Central premises in Owens’s text are called into question by Stephen Melville, who traces the allegorical impulse through the formalist discourse of Michael Fried, thereby arguing against the idea that allegory had been discounted in modernism. Melville, “Notes on the Reemergence of Allegory, the Forgetting of Modernism, the Necessity of Rhetoric, and the Conditions of Publicity in Art and Criticism,” October 19 (Winter 1981): 55–92. Other writers on the topic of allegory in the period include Douglas Crimp, Benjamin Buchloh, and Joel Fineman.
Allegory, as a trope of revelation and concealment, is a mode at once public and private, and if allegorical works appear to embody the deep and obscure promptings of the self, they do so successfully only to the extent that these promptings are communicable, are already what we might call “public.” Such works pose as a condition of their inner sense their outer publicity; they are works that demand a beholder, and they do so in order to show the beholder his or her own difficult presence to (absence from) the work.\(^{181}\)

The brooder who contemplates the fragments in her hands makes of those fragments an artwork, the very structure of which compels the viewer to take account of self and work. Melville’s contribution to the understanding of allegory’s relevance is crucial for my argument. For while others have elaborated upon the formal aspects that characterize allegory in art (fragmentation, repetition, accumulation), Melville emphasizes the communicability that is its premise and thus also, one might add, its utopian promise. He argues forcefully, “Allegorical works do not exist except in a universe of continuing allegoresis, commentary, and interpretation.” It is in this aspect of Genzken’s allegorical impulse—that is, in its implicit commitment to publicity and communicability as well as in its preservation of the possibility of “inner sense”—that her practice breaks through a fixed contemplation of present threats under late capitalism (alienation, reification, spectacle) to make its bid on the future. If the plastic commodity is the material of Genzken’s assemblages, and allegorical combination their means, I would argue that the possibility of publicity (and the privacy that is its other face) is their most important message.

“Everyone needs at least one window,” Isa Genzken has avowed. As if to make her assertion tangible, Genzken produced in 1990 a series of Fenster [Windows] (fig. 3.1), unglazed, rectangular apertures delimited by cast concrete. With edges more or less finished, and often with wide embrasures or a fragment of a jamb jutting perpendicular to the plane of the window, the concrete portions of the Fenster are lifted to eye-level by elegant steel pedestals that are integral to the works’ overall effect. Structurally, the jambs offer some stability; visually, they provide sculptural depth. Some of the Fenster feature fluted surfaces, others have slightly bowed lintels (fig. 3.2). Unlike the concrete works that immediately precede them, and from which they derive, the Fenster address the viewer not as architectural models but in the scale of 1:1. To look at one is to engage a sculpture in the round, to peer through an unglazed window, to see into a frame, and, crucially, to feel oneself mirrored in its anthropomorphic proportions.\(^{182}\)

Genzken is among the contemporary sculptors most consistently and intelligently engaged with the history of modernist architecture, from Glasarchitektur to prefabricated concrete structures, as I argued in Chapter two. It is perhaps surprising then that typologically, the Fenster take the form, not of the picture window or the ribbon window that were noted modernist innovations, but of the traditional vertical window, and rather small ones at that. The vertical window was a feature of solid brick and stone edifices, the dominant building types until the 20th century. Genzken’s choice of the vertical format is especially pointed, given that the Fenster are realized in precisely the material that made the ribbon window possible, namely concrete. Reinforced concrete relieved walls from their load-bearing function, allowing for ever-
larger apertures to be opened in façades. Technical developments made the stylistic and morphological innovation possible, ushering in a new worldview, literally and metaphorically speaking. Combined with the increased height of buildings, picture and ribbon windows facilitated a sweeping, commanding gaze over the landscape and cityscape onto which they opened. “The horizontal gaze leads far away,” Le Corbusier asserts, extolling the virtue of the horizontal window that was a hallmark of his buildings. “From our offices we will get the feeling of being lookouts dominating the world order.”

To understand the implications of Genzken’s choice of vertical format for her Fenster, one might look to the heated architectural debate between Le Corbusier and his mentor Auguste Perret regarding the virtues of the horizontal fenêtre en longueur versus those of the vertical porte-fenêtre (fig. 3.3). Perret, a proponent of the latter, argued that the vertical window offers a view of the fore-, middle-, and background, creating thereby “the impression of complete space.” As Bruno Reichlin has noted, the vertical window upholds the system of perspectival recession of space so central to the western tradition of representation—hence its prominence in paintings from Caspar David Friedrich to Henri Matisse. By contrast, Le Corbusier’s ribbon windows open up a succession of dramatic views to the perambulating body (fig. 3.4). It was precisely this panorama-like aspect of the horizontal window to which Perret objected. In occluding the foreground and the open sky, he argued, the ribbon window presents an unbounded and spatially abstracted scene (fig. 3.5).

185 Colomina’s writing has crucially informed my discussion of the porte-fenêtre and fenêtre en longueur.
186 “I detest panoramas,” Perret is to have said as part of his rejection of the horizontal window. As recounted by Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeannerete, “Petite Contribution à l’étude d’une fenêtre moderne,” in Almanach d’architecture moderne (Paris: G. Crès et cie, 1925), 96.
On a sheet titled “Ronéo,” Le Corbusier rendered a series of thumbnail sketches illustrating the debate over the two types of window (fig. 3.6). His positioning of the human body vis-à-vis the windows in the sketches is particularly elucidating. The sliding fenêtre en longueur pushes the figure to its margins, whereas the figure stands framed in the porte-fenêtre, his arms thrown open as if in a world-embracing gesture. Perret held that “the porte-fenêtre provides man with a frame, it accords with his outlines…The vertical is the line of the upright human being, it is the line of life itself.” The horizontal, by implication, cuts across the vertical posture of the human and thus undercuts his authority in the world. The subject is centered in the vertical window; or, reversing the formulation, the vertical window corresponds to a centered subject. In its anthropomorphic relation to the body (“the porte-fenêtre...accords with [man’s] outlines, Perret asserts), the porte-fenêtre is a physical and metaphorical site for the constitution of the humanist model of the subject, who is conceived as a self-contained monad separate from his surrounds.

Genzken’s use of the vertical format for her Fenster can be taken to signal her persistent desire to imagine the meaningfulness of the body and a psychic space to which it is related. The subjects evoked by these works are not quite centered, to be sure, but they neither are they entirely shattered. Whereas an entire strand of Genzken’s work can be seen to be devoted to the expression of the fragmented, alienated subject of postmodern spectacle and commodity culture (as epitomized by her assemblages of mass-produced wares), yet another important aspect of her œuvre should not be overlooked: one that attempts to visualize a selfhood that endures in the face of these conditions. In the works that constitute the subject of this chapter—the sculptural

187 Colomina elaborates on this aspect of the sketch: “There is something paradoxical about the Ronéo drawing. While Le Corbusier intends by this drawing to illustrate the superiority of the horizontal window, in fact the intensity and detail with which he draws Perret’s porte-fenêtre, in contrast to the sketchiness of the horizontal window, show it to be much more emotionally charged.” Colomina, Privacy and Publicity, 134.
188 Quoted in Reichlin, “The Pros and Cons,” 71.
series *Fenster, Columns* (1998-2003), and *Strandhäuser zum Umziehen* (2000), as well as the collage series *Liebe als Wesen* (1996) and *Architekturcollagen* (2001)—Genzken explores the formal and spatial articulation of inside and outside, surface and depth, opacity and transparency to insist upon the possibilities of psychic interiority and expressivity as the bases for connection and intimacy with others. The exploration of architectural idioms within these works is therefore hardly arbitrary. In addition to suggesting a particular way to frame and shelter the body, architecture and architectural motifs serve as the body’s proxy. There is much in the language of architectural discourse to assert the long history of thinking of buildings as bodies: face and façade are one, architectural skin and human skin converge, the building’s interior doubles for the psychic interior.

Yet, by proposing an identification between subject and architecture, Genzken inscribes dis-identification and mediation as central problematics to be negotiated in the constitution of the subject, for architecture is also, as Beatriz Colomina suggests, a mass media. In *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, Colomina argues that Le Corbusier’s façade-spanning ribbon windows manifested an appreciation for the decisive role of media in modern society. Le Corbusier’s houses, she asserts, must be understood as cameras, with the horizontal windows acting as lenses through which scenery is captured and presented as filmic montage.\(^{189}\) In dubbing a 418 x 520 cm steel frame canted over the 3rd-floor balcony of an apartment building *Camera* (1990) (fig. 3.7), Genzken cannily equates the window with lens. Of this project Genzken says, “...I had a fourth window placed up on the balcony, tilting over the balustrade, so that when you are walking on the street under it you really think, ‘Oh God, I hope that doesn’t

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\(^{189}\) Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity*, 312.
fall on my head.’”\textsuperscript{190} Camera does seem impossibly, precariously, to “rest” on the balustrade.

The sensation of danger to which Genzken jokingly refers has a serious (and more sinister) undertone when one considers it in relation to surveillance, a government-sanctioned means of making the private public.\textsuperscript{191}

As the subtitle of her book indicates, Colomina understands the mass media as “the true site within which modern architecture is produced and with which it directly engages.”\textsuperscript{192} Architecture, then, thoroughly embodies (and is at times complicit with) the changes wrought by these new means of communication and information distribution. Colomina writes,

\begin{quote}
The way we think about architecture is organized by the way we think about the relationships between inside and outside, private and public. With modernity there is a shift in these relationships, a displacement of the traditional sense of an inside, an enclosed space, established in clear opposition to an outside. All boundaries are now shifting. This shifting becomes manifest everywhere: in the city, of course, but also in all the technologies that define the space of the city: the railroad, newspapers, photography, electricity, advertisements, reinforced concrete, glass, the telephone, film, radio,… war. Each can be understood as a mechanism that disrupts the older boundaries between inside and outside, public and private, night and day, depth and surfaces, here and there, street and interior, and so on.\textsuperscript{193}
\end{quote}

Yet if Colomina’s assessment remains relatively neutral with regard to the ramifications of this “shift in relationships,” Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge argue unequivocally that the rise of

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\textsuperscript{191} A different sort of gaze, also threatening, is registered in Genzken’s ongoing series of \textit{Flugzeugfenster}—she appears to have made them in 1992, 2003, 2009, and as recently as 2011. These works take up a touristic gaze that is associated with the commodification of place. The series features the curved and molded panels of passenger jet interiors, each featuring a pair of windows, mounted a slight distance from the wall. At times exuberantly slashed with paint, these \textit{Flugzeugfenster} are a cheeky, even glib, addition to the history of painted panels and sculptural reliefs. They show that the meticulous seriality of Donald Judd’s metal wall-mounted works—or Charlotte Posenenske’s \textit{Series B Reliefs} (1967), for that matter—can be easily come by. They have an effect and significance distinct from that of Genzken’s free-standing windows. The anthropomorphism of the \textit{Flugzeugfenster} is palpable. With their sliding shades, the pairs of lozenge-shaped windows resemble cartoon eyes that seem to return the viewer’s gaze, as many commentators have noted. This returning gaze is all the more explicit and terrifying in \textit{Flugzeugfenster (Medusa)} of 2011, in which each aperture is papered over with a reproduction of Caravaggio’s \textit{Medusa} (c. 1598). (The Medusa heads overlay and obscure yet another image in each instance. In one case it is da Vinci’s \textit{Mona Lisa}.) With \textit{Flugzeugfenster (Medusa)}, the gaze turns deadly.

\textsuperscript{192} Colomina, \textit{Privacy and Publicity}, 14.

\textsuperscript{193} Ibid., 12
\end{footnotesize}
media conglomerates not only disrupts but also abolishes the possibility of private and public spheres as traditionally defined. They suggest that individual autonomy and collectivity can only exist in compromised form in a context in which private (i.e. corporate) interests have come to constitute a pseudo-public sphere. Negt and Kluge describe a situation in which “the consciousness and programming industry, advertising, the publicity campaigns of firms and administrative apparatuses,” all driven by capitalist interests, constitute “new public spheres of production” that overlay and overtake the classical public sphere. Difficult to trace in all their interconnected and intricate workings, media conglomerates have as their final goal the surreptitious exploitation of consciousness. Negt and Kluge argue,

> These [new] public spheres of production are nonpublicly anchored: in contrast to the traditional form of public sphere, they work the raw material of everyday life and they derive their penetrative force directly from the capitalist production interest. By circumventing the intermediate realm of the traditional public sphere (the seasonal public sphere of elections, the formation of public opinion), they seek direct access to the private sphere of the individual.

In Jürgen Habermas’s influential formulation, the bourgeois public sphere, as the locus of disinterested debate, was predicated upon its clear separation from the private sphere in which personal needs and interests were worked out. With the infiltration of the private by the pseudo-public, as described by Negt and Kluge, the ideal of the bourgeois public sphere is but a distant dream.

Where do Genzken’s freestanding Fenster stand in relation to this dream of the classical public sphere and to the nightmare of its false double? One might extend this inquiry to Genzken’s related works realized outdoors, which include ABC (1987) for the Skulptur Projekt Münster, Spiegel (1990), and Camera. Each of these works consists of a large-scale frame or set

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194 Negt and Kluge, Public Sphere and Experience, xivi.
195 Ibid.
of frames, often made of steel. The boundary between inside and outside is dissolved. Space is continuous rather than divided. The window’s function in marking the interior from the exterior, or in bridging the two, by making each visible to the other is rendered moot. Can these works be seen to instantiate in visual terms the utter collapse of private (i.e. domestic and interior) sphere and public sphere? And what do they say regarding the status of the subject, which is not only the figure that stands at the (non-functioning) window but also the figure mirrored by the concrete-and-steel ensemble? Do the anthropomorphic Fenster present the terrifying prospect of the subject as emptiness, as void? And how might this reading jibe with the evocation of the humanist subject, which I hold to be of chief importance to Genzken’s choice of the vertical window format? To raise these contradictory interpretations is to point to the kinds of ambivalence Genzken puts into play as she works through the possibilities of privateness and publicness, subjectivity and collectivity. And this is precisely the point: privateness and publicness remain meaningful, if troubled, possibilities to Genzken. The Fenster are hardly melancholic ruminations upon a lost public sphere or evacuated subjectivity. Something about their address to the viewer seems unresigned. It is perhaps their emphatic openness, which evokes the “offen” that is at the root of Öffentlichkeit (publicness). In dispensing with enclosure, Genzken might be seen to offer a model of the subject, and of subjects in relation, that is predicated upon other terms than the strict division between interior and exterior.

Yet Genzken’s outlook is neither nostalgic nor naïve. Rough-hewn, the concrete windows hint at destruction and fragmentation, suggesting the impossibility (and perhaps the undesirability) of returning to any ideal, humanistic subject. So too does Genzken seem to acknowledge that the window is not only the means by which space is mastered through sight,

196 ABC, situated next to the library of the University of Münster, consisted of two concrete gates topped with two rectangular, steel frames. Hoisted high up into the air, these horizontal frames bracket only sky. (The work was dismantled after the exhibition.)
but also the site of potentially dangerous exposure. Thomas Keenan offers a decidedly darker vision of this architectural feature when he writes, “The window can breach, tear open, the ‘protection’ that is the human subject, overcome it with a violence that proves remarkably resistant to knowledge (especially that of vision) or representation.”\(^{197}\) Genzken’s series of *Paravents* (1990) (fig. 3.8), related to the *Fenster* in form and concept, make explicit the artist’s interest in the deliberate refusal of protective functions. (Paravents are wind-buffering screens.) Empty frames that sit on the floor rather than on a pedestal, the screenless “screens” flout the etymological root of *paravent, parare* (Fr.), meaning to shield, guard, or ward off.\(^{198}\) Having had their shielding functions obviated, Genzken’s *Paravents* and *Fenster* might be seen to suggest that the risk of exposure is the necessary condition for the possibility of meaningful contact. Such a conception would run counter to the Habermasian model of the public sphere as another space, one distinct from the private. “The ‘public sphere’ cannot simply be a street or a square,” Keenan writes, “someplace where I go to become an object or instead heroically to reassert my subjectivity, some other place out into which I go to ‘intervene’ or ‘act.’” Critical of the Habermasian conceit, in which publicness is defined by its separation from the private (and vice versa), Keenan argues,

> The public is the experience, if we can call it that, of the interruption or the intrusion of all that is radically irreducible to the order of the individual human subject, the unavoidable entrance of alterity into the everyday life of the “one” who would be human…. Publicity tears us from our selves, exposes us to and involves us with others, denies us the security of that window behind which we might install ourselves to gaze. And it does this ‘prior to’ the empirical encounter between constituted subjects; publicity does not befall what is properly private, contaminating or opening up an otherwise sealed interiority. Rather, what we call


\(^{198}\) Even more than the *Fenster*, perhaps, the *Paravents* speak of the human form in their shape and symmetry. A set of three paravents in descending sizes is entitled *Family* (1991).
interiority is itself the mark or the trace of this breach, of a violence that in turn makes possible the violence of the love we experience as intersubjectivity.\footnote{Keenan, “Windows,” 133–4.}

Counter-intuitively, perhaps, it is not separation but breach that constitutes interiority in Keenan’s view. If in format, Genzken’s \textit{Fenster} evoke the humanist subject, their detachment from any enclosing wall also contradicts that older model of interiority, opening up onto another model in which rupture, risk, and exposure are the bases for privacy and publicness. Genzken’s unglazed and unwalled \textit{Fenster} both stand in for the radically exposed subject and serve as the insecure window at which that subject stands.

Elsewhere, notably in her \textit{New Buildings for Berlin} (2001-2004), Genzken explored the utopian possibilities of \textit{Glasarchitektur}, and of visionary, modernist skyscrapers, in conjunction with their dystopian development into the bleak sameness of corporate high-rises.\footnote{See my discussion of Genzken’s use of glass in Chapter 2.} In the glass curtain wall of corporate buildings, the promise of transparency darkens into rebuffing reflectivity. If the glass pane is the screen exploited by media, Genzken’s unglazed apertures refuse the phantasmagorical images that play across this lustrous screen. Openness is a permanent condition of Genzken’s \textit{Fenster}—one that is opposed to what Jeff Wall terms the “falsified openness” of the corporate high-rise.\footnote{Wall, “Dan Graham’s Kammerspiel,” in \textit{Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Writings} (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2007), 50.} Unshuttered, unglazed, and without obscuring curtains, her windows cannot be closed. As a building’s organs, ones that negotiate the relationship between inside and outside, they are therefore more akin to ears than to eyes.\footnote{The human aural faculty takes revised form, one with a media-historical dimension, in Genzken’s early sculpture in plaster, \textit{Mein Gehirn} (1984). Not from a head, exactly, but this lumpy, paint-daubed plaster “brain”—Genzken’s own, the title tells us—emerges a whimsical metal wire, an antennae of sorts for the reception of sonic waves. This work relates to the series of \textit{Weltempfänger} (1987 and 1999), concrete blocks from which sprout radio antennae.} (The language of anatomy bears out the window-ear analogy in the naming of \textit{fenestra ovalis} and \textit{fenestra rotunda}, apertures in the wall that divides a mammal’s middle ear from its inner ear.)
After all, Georg Simmel famously wrote regarding the “sociology of the senses” that the ear “cannot turn away or close itself.” In 2002 Genzken plastered the side of the Kunst im Rathaus, Innsbruck, with a greatly enlarged image of an ear (fig. 3.9)—an image that reads as the building’s appendage. *Ohr* suggests to Pamela Lee a model of “architecture at ‘ear-level’: at the threshold where the interior space of mental life represented by the ear—generally conceived as private—is intertwined with the public space of the architectural environment, experienced in stereo.” Genzken’s ‘ear-level’ architecture might be seen to contrast with the building imagined as an all-mastering eye, as shown in Le Corbusier’s sketch in *La Ville radieuse* (1933) (fig. 3.10). If the openness of the ear renders the subject vulnerable (as made vivid, and deadly, in the fratricide of King Hamlet), that same openness is the necessary precondition of intimacy and connectivity.

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With only a few exceptions—the square, marble tiles of *Lawrence* (2000) (fig. 3.11), for instance, or the alternating panels of wood veneer and perforated metal that comprise *Wolfgang* (1998) (fig. 3.12)—Isa Genzken’s series of *Columns*, some three dozen works realized between 1998 and 2003, feature a motley array of claddings: a high-low mix of copper, marble, glass, aluminum, alloy, wood, mirror, reflective foil, tape, and, occasionally, photographs or other printed matter (fig. 3.13). Intrinsic differences in material properties are intensified with

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For Genzken, the ear evokes a specifically gendered sociality. *Ohr* features a woman’s ear in particular, calling back directly to a 1980 series of photographs of the same subject. The “models” were women Genzken approached on the streets of New York City. See Lee, “The Skyscraper,” 78.
additional treatment, either in the manufacturing process or by the artist’s hand. Metal plates come matte, polished, perforated, or textured (gridded or hammered). Wood panels and particleboards may be stained, painted, lacquered, or veneered. Add to the mix the reflective properties of mirror and glass (often tinted) and the optical pizzazz of metallic foil (holographic, gridded, and color-saturated), and one has the elements for an exuberant play in polychromy and surface effects.

The Columns are highly allusive, by way of synecdoche and pun. The gridded, mirrored foil, darkened glass, and metal cladding of Untitled (1998), Christopher (1998), and Layout (2001) evoke the steely façades of corporate high-rises (fig. 3.14). (Untitled also features black-and-white photographs of the towers of the World Trade Center.) Lawrence’s white marble veined in grey and hints of brown calls to mind hushed lobbies. Wood panels lacquered blue with tufts of white—featured in A, B, and C (2002/2003) (fig. 3.15)—make permanent (and opaque) the fleeting reflections of the sky on glass curtain walls. (Four smaller Columns, each titled Vom Himmel Zurück (2003) (fig. 3.16), are entirely lacquered in this manner. If one thinks of them as architectural models, they can suggest puzzles à la Magritte, or, in a more sinister vein, the insubstantiality of corporate capital as expressed in architecture.) Anomalous-seeming at first, Aquarium (fig. 3.17) and Kleine Fischsäule (2001) are entirely covered with collaged images of tropical fish. Never one to resist a visual pun, Genzken highlights and mimics the natural cladding (and ornament) of fish scales in the medium of collage—so many paper scales. She draws a sly analogy between the denizens of glass architecture and those of a fish tank. The Columns that feature a punchy mix of holographic foil and metallic tape evoke an urban stroll, where digital billboards, illuminated marquees, and colored awnings jam the visual field (fig. 3.18).
Not just architectural references, but art historical ones abound. One face of *Lehmbruck* (2000) (fig. 3.19) is painted silver with a central, red stripe. A polished metal plate covers its lower quarter. At its middle Genzken has attached four identical postcard reproductions of expressionist sculptor Wilhelm Lehmbruck’s *Standing Youth*, also known as *Ascending Youth* (*Emporsteigender Jüngling*), of 1913 (fig. 3.20). Arguably the last significant German sculptor to have practiced figuration in the neoclassical vein, Lehmbruck was invested in presenting an essential image of man, even when, after the First World War, that essence necessarily involved trauma. However attenuated his sculptural physiques then became (*The Fallen Man*, 1915; *Seated Youth*, 1916), the human figure remained intact. Genzken punctures the profundity of Lehmbruck’s image of introspection in *Standing Youth* by affixing above it an image of a puppy. This characteristic levity aside, I would argue that *Lehmbruck* raises an issue crucial to Genzken's *Columns* as a body of work, namely the place of the human figure in contemporary sculpture. Describing the crisis attending to the statue in the 20th century, Jeff Wall writes,

> The avant-garde movements understood that industrialized modernity destroyed the social bases for such a notion [the classical Greek ideal] of the human image, and that, under such conditions, any further promotion of the traditional ideal of statuary would be in the service of a deceptive ideology of ‘unity,’ the unity of the power-state. Thus, statuary, either nude or uniformed, collapsed as a legitimate sculptural form.\(^{206}\)

In order to regain that legitimacy, sculpture (and statuary, in particular) has had to radically rethink its terms, from its established repertoire of gestures and poses to its traditional materials, from its monumental scale to its amenability to the expression of power.

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\(^{206}\) Wall, “An Outline for a Context for Stephan Balkenhol’s Work,” in *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Writings*, 106. These words were written in the context of a discussion of Stephan Balkenhol, a contemporary German sculptor who has developed a distinct idiom of wooden figures. For Wall, Balkenhol’s generic but non-universal, non-idealized figures respond to the limits of what he calls “open form sculpture” of the 1970s without actually returning to monumentalized statuary.
Genzken’s *Columns* re-imagine statuary after Minimalism, by which I mean in dialogue with Minimalism and emphatically *not* in the vein of monumental Neo-Expressionist figuration in hewn wood daubed with paint. Or, put another way, with this series Genzken tests the possibility of abstract statuary, though it would seem an oxymoron. For if, with their architectural claddings and small footprints relative to their height, the *Columns* evoke skyscrapers, as so many critics have noted, they also have the bearing of personages.\(^\text{207}\) In their simple, geometric forms, the *Columns* are minimalist gestalts. In “Art and Objecthood,” Michael Fried criticized the sculptural volumes of so-called literalist art for their latent anthropomorphism. Of Tony Smith’s cubic *Die* (1962), for example, he writes:

> One way of describing what Smith was making might be something like a surrogate person—that is, a kind of statue… [T]he apparent hollowness of most literalist work—the quality of having an *inside*—is almost blatantly anthropomorphic. It is, as numerous commentators have remarked approvingly, as though the work in question has an inner, even secret, life.\(^\text{208}\)

One might recall in this context that Robert Morris’s first sculptural work, *Column* (1960) (fig. 3.21), was a plywood box in the hollow center of which the artist could stand.\(^\text{209}\) The anthropomorphism that Fried perceives to be a great weakness of so-called literalist forms Genzken courts explicitly. Yet there are important formal distinctions to be made between Genzken’s columns and their minimalist predecessors. If the quintessential minimalist form is a geometric volume rendered in some impervious industrial material by industrial means, Genzken breaks the surface of the forms with a myriad of surface treatments, the application of which is


\(^{208}\) Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 156.

\(^{209}\) Morris’s *Column* (1960) was conceived for a performance of the Living Theater in New York, during which the upright box was tipped over after three and a half minutes and allowed to lie flat for an equal length of time. The toppling, triggered by the tug of a string from offstage, would have appeared to the audience as if animated by the “inner, even secret, life” of the *Column*. Initially, Morris planned to stand in the *Column* during the performance and to topple the structure from within it. See Robert Morris: The Mind/Body Problem (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1994), 90.
so idiosyncratic as to render the far side of the gestalt unknowable. Even the most colorful of minimalist works—Donald Judd’s tinted Plexiglas and anodized aluminum come to mind—seem restrained by comparison to Genzken’s off-kilter chromatic sensibility. While Genzken's Columns are hollow, any "inner life" is lived on the surface.

A large number of the Columns bear the names of Genzken’s coterie of friends and fellow artists (fig. 3.22). Wolfgang refers to the photographer Wolfgang Tillmans, Genzken’s occasional collaborator, and Lawrence can boast a namesake in conceptual artist Lawrence Weiner. Kai (2000), fraternal twin to Isa (2000), is named after contemporary artist Kai Althoff. (Both don yellow-on-black racing stripes that double as homage to Barnett Newman’s “zips”.) The Columns are manifestly handmade, an important quality that is lost in photographic reproduction. Excess glue seeps from edges; painted panels show streaks and air pockets; materials are often overlapped rather than set seamlessly one alongside another, producing a subtle dimensionality. In a section of Dan (1999), for instance—Dan Graham is its namesake—a wood core is covered with a mirror, then a marble tile, followed by a tinted mirror. Contrary to the one-thing-after-another logic of minimalist seriality, each of the Columns is unique, not just in terms of surface treatment but in dimension—the columns range in height from 215 to 324 centimeters, with square or rectangular bases that vary from 18 to 38 centimeters in width and depth. (Crucial to the Columns’ allusiveness is that, unlike Morris’s Column or his Box for Standing (1961), their dimensions do not closely approximate those of the human being.) Thus individualized, the Columns can be seen as a compelling response to Wall’s assertion that “the possibility of recovering the potential of the statue as an emancipatory body-symbol, one which could take up the project of experimental sculpture, not dispense with it, depends on its
reappearance as a specifically de-universalized emblem.” Genzken’s *Columns* embody individuality exteriorized as surface, as cladding. Or, changing the emphasis, one might say that the *Columns* present surface decoration as constitutive of individuality.

The connection between architectural cladding and the designation between interior and exterior, private and public, are elaborated in the writings of Gottfried Semper and Adolf Loos. Indeed, Semper goes so far as to argue that the concept of subjectivity is predicated upon architectural division. “Im Anfang war die Bekleidung [In the beginning was cladding],” writes Adolf Loos in his 1898 essay, “Das Prinzip der Bekleidung.” The principle promised in the essay’s title dictates that cladding must not be imitative of the underlying structure but call attention to itself qua cladding. In the formulation of this principle, Loos refers to the work of Semper, for whom architecture’s origins and essence are to be found in woven coverings that demarcate space. Semper asserts that the basic pen woven of natural materials served “as a means of dividing the ‘home,’ the inner life from the outer life, as a formal construct of a spatial idea.” Only after interiority and exteriority are visualized and actualized can the “inner life” of the subject become thinkable. Subjectivity by this definition is a product of the most basic architecture. So too, then, is intersubjectivity, with “outer life” understood to indicate something like sociality or publicness. As Mark Wigley writes in his discussion of Semper’s theories of Bekleidung, “The evolution of skin, the surface with which spatiality is produced, is the evolution of the social. The social subject, like the body with which it is associated, is a product of decorative surfaces…. Interiority is not simply physical. It is a social effect marked on the

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newly constituted body of the individual.” If the clad body can signal of extreme alienation, as is evoked by the Vorticist imaginary of segmented and armored monsters, Genzken’s Columns suggest subjects that, though hardened, have reclaimed the surface for the possibility of sociality. They render physiognomy as architectural skin, with none of the dissimulation that “façade” implies.

Whereas in the Fenster, Genzken explores subjectivity and intersubjectivity through a formal language of openness and breach, she might be seen to invert the visual terms in the Columns. With this series, individuality and connectivity are investigated via heightened attention to, and literal reinforcement of, the surface. Yet it must be noted that in both cases Genzken locates her investigation at the very point of contact between inside and outside. Further, both the Fenster and the Columns interrogate—one might even say challenge—the designation between inside and outside, exterior and interior. This is clear enough in the Fenster, which take the form of apertures open everywhere in and around. The Columns operate rather more counter-intuitively, perhaps. In emphasizing the surface through an accumulation of claddings, and in making that clad surface the locus of individuality, that which is “inner” is made a function of, and inseparable from, the “outer.”

Both Semper and Loos put great store in the fact that the term Bekleidung has as its root kleiden, “to clothe, to dress,” thereby establishing the textile origins of architecture. Similarly, the German words for wall [Wand] and garment [Gewand] share the same root. Cladding’s etymological and anthropological relationships to the body and to dressing resonate in Genzken’s Columns, on the surfaces of which cladding and clothing converge and where the creation of the subject follows fast on the creation of space. It is hardly coincidental, then, that in the same year

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that Genzken made her first *Columns*, 1998, she also produced a series of two dozen paint-
slashed and spray-painted garments, mainly shirts and jackets but also a lone dress (fig. 3.23).
Violent and exuberant, expressing the freedom of individuation and the aggressiveness of 
vandalism, these altered garments have as much to say about abstraction in painting as about the 
assisted readymade. Hanging from wire hangers, they call to mind Joseph Beuys’s iconic *Felt 
Suit* (1970) (fig. 3.24), even if the grating palette of Genzken’s *Hemden* seems a world away. A 
self-portrait of sorts that refers to Beuys’s mythic autobiography, the *Felt Suit* also encapsulates 
his theory of felt’s heat-retaining properties, the implications of which extend to his vision of 
evolutionary/revolutionary energy in society. Yet the purpose suggested by Genzken’s *Hemden 
and Jacken* is not the insulation of inner-generated heat but the repulsion of external forces.
Indeed, the preponderance of metallic paint on some of the garments suggests that they should be 
understood as the armor of a ragged urban warrior or tribe of warriors. If so, these warriors are 
spoilering for a fight—the garments do not camouflage or mask, but only draw attention to their 
wearers. Defensive in some respects, this aggressively ornamented garb also makes possible 
affiliation and identification within a sub-culture. As such, an anarchic-revolutionary energy 
remains intact.

Not to dress but to undress, to de-clad, as it were, becomes the theme of another 
3.25–3.26a-i). Six small, square mirrors lean against two coffee cans that serve as the structural 
core of an effortless architectonics. A single, aluminum sheet, casually bent, defines a walled 
space with an open doorway. A three-sided structure is decorated with striped crepe paper, 
covered with a mural on its back wall, and stippled everywhere else (inside and out) with 
confetti, the round forms of which echo the mural’s pebble motif. Wrapped in blue, red, and
yellow plastic and topped with regular peaks of molded plastic, an upturned box of woven fiber forms a cylindrical chamber awash in tinted light. The blue molded peaks—a repurposed liner or cradle for holding fruit—recall waves, an apt motif for a seaside construction. The Umziehen of the sculptures’ title means to change one’s clothing (specifically one’s workaday attire into bathing gear and back again). As changing rooms these provisional structures provide a place for the shedding of one identity for another. Umziehen also means to relocate. In this case one imagines that the move is from the frenetic city to the seaside. But one might also consider a rarer use of Umziehen—in the sense of “to surround; draw the outlines of; cover, hang with, envelop”—as a way to describe Genzken’s demarcation of space with bent planes of aluminum and plastic.\(^{214}\) Intimate in scale, constructed of simple materials by simple means, the Strandhäuser series asserts the possibility of private experience—as an embodiment inaccessible to others—through an evocation of physical and erotic pleasure. The predominance of curved sheets of colored film emphasizes transparency. Privacy, in this case, is happy to show off its assets. A couple of beach huts bear on their exterior walls found images of sunbathing bodies; emblazoned on another are images of two males engaged in anal sex. As exterior projections of sexual desires, these changing rooms bring public and private realms into contact on architectural skin. David Bussel writes eloquently on this subject, asserting that the Strandhäuser display correspondsences between sexuality and the built environment: social, psychological and corporeal configurations whose foundations are here literally made as foundational as building materials, objects-in-themselves, and disruptive manifestations of an architectural unconscious. They are thresholds that schematise binaries of interior and exterior, architecture and sculpture, public and private, voyeurism and exhibitionism, but also circuits of desire, queer desire.\(^{215}\)

\(^{214}\) In this usage, the stress is on the second syllable. *The New Cassell’s German-English Dictionary* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1971), 493.

Yet, the sexual pleasure made explicit in the wall mural already inheres in the structures themselves, specifically in their exhilarated polychromy.

In *White Walls, Designer Dresses*, Wigley teases out the profound and ambiguous role of color in the writings and buildings of Le Corbusier. Associated with “femininity, sexuality, intoxication, addiction, and savagery” color is that which must be disciplined and subject to surveillance in architecture, and yet it serves as a necessary mechanism for directing the eye and for the classification of spaces.\(^{216}\) Color is a “psycho-physiological excitant,” in Le Corbusier’s words, and the drive to discipline it amounts to a need to curb the psycho-sexual desires it might set loose.\(^{217}\) In the *Strandhäuser* the effects of color are compounded by those of light, which penetrates the transparent and curved planes to envelop the interior with its touch. The sexuality of light, and the transfer of touch from the sun-kissed surface to the inhabitant, is made explicit in Wigley’s assertion, “The experience of architecture becomes that of a ménage à trios in which the most active partners (and the most ambivalent in terms of gender) are the building and the light.”\(^{218}\) Wigley’s parenthetical aside regarding gender is suggestive for understanding the *Strandhäuser*, which explore polymorphous sexuality and desire. For fear of “intoxication,” “unrestrained debauchery,” and “insanity,” the erotics of light must, as with color, be kept in check.\(^{219}\) But what if one is not governed by anxiety regarding desire and its potentially destabilizing effects? The “architect” of the *Strandhäuser* seems not to be so tortured. With their

\(^{216}\) Wigley, *White Walls*, 190, 205.
\(^{218}\) Wigley, *White Walls*, 207.
\(^{219}\) Ibid. The architect’s role is to utilize the effects of color and light, while keeping them from overwhelming the subject. Wigley continues, “The ‘masterly play of forms and light’ is erotic. Yet it is only ‘masterly’ inasmuch as its excesses are controlled, regulated by an architect so that the observer of a building can preserve a stable identity. The architect shelters the occupant of a building psychologically from the ambivalence of the physical shelter itself.”
transparent and colored planes, the *Strandhäuser* picture what it might look like to give oneself over entirely to color and light, and the results suggest repose rather than intoxication.

In size, the *Strandhäuser* bear direct relation to the hands that shape them. The effortlessness of construction, the quotidian aspect of the materials, and the smallness of the works all suggest imaginative play, the taking of some everyday object and investing it with another, imagined, meaning. Certainly the structures are suffused with sensuality and sexuality, yet these are not only pavilions for the enjoyment of adult pleasures but childhood ones as well. The inclusion of paper cut-outs of human figures, which ostensibly serve to indicate relations of scale, calls to mind paper dolls and dollhouses. The innocence of play is strongly evident in the *Strandhäuser*, such that it overtakes, or at least is in tension with, erotics. The bringing together of adult sex and children’s play might be discomfiting, but with these works Genzken suggests, powerfully and provocatively, how the former might be reinvested with the latter (and also, perhaps, the ways in which children’s play is not necessarily so innocent.)

Yve-Alain Bois writes of this series, “For the first time perhaps in Genzken’s production, plastic is not connoted as the nasty non-biodegradable dreck that the post-war economy has forced upon us, the flotsam and jetsam that pollutes our beaches, but celebrated for its…plasticity.” Genzken follows avant-garde and neo-avant-garde predecessors, from Surrealists to the Fluxus artists, in critiquing consumerism and spectacle through a thematics of play and desire. Tapping basic creative impulses and long cultural history, imaginative play, such as the *Strandhäuser* suggest as their mode of making, holds out against the fragmentation of time. One could argue, of course, that these seaside reveries remain haunted by the concept of leisure as a construct of alienated labor and by spectacle and advertising. But to experience the

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nonchalance and the ludic quality of these intimate, brightly-colored constructions is to understand their openness to the flow of visual and bodily pleasures. The Strandhäuser are not anthropomorphic in the manner of the Fenster and Columns, the vertical orientation and roughly human-scale of which correspond to the viewer. Yet their address to the body is palpable: they allude to inhabitation and embodiedness (as physical condition and psychological state) through explorations of color and transparency, intimate scale and imaginative play.

* * *

In Liebe als Wesen [Love as Being], 1996, flesh is folded on itself, skin is pressed against foreign skin (fig. 3.27). Genzken appropriated images from pornographic magazines to create this series of forty-eight collages that seem remarkably true to their collective title and far from their source. An exercise in monochromatic abstraction, the small, rectangular field of each collage is filled edge-to-edge with flesh tones in such a way that there is no clear orientation. A tangle of hands forms a swirling composition. The collages betray a sculptor’s interest in folds and planes, and in bodily contortions. The hairless male body, ephebic or muscular, is after all the classical sculptural subject par excellence. The flexed and curved torso in one of Genzken’s appropriated images recalls the Belvedere Torso, however galling the allusion might be to one’s sense of high and low, ideal and base.221

“Pornography is the mass-cultural mode of sexual representation,” it has been suggested.222 Jennifer Wicke summarizes this position, “Pornography is thus on par with the predations of advertising or the induced delusions of television narrative; what it gives proof of is the penetration of capital into yet another legitimate conduit of desire—the desire for

221 That Genzken seems frequently to have appropriated images from gay porn, in particular, bears an interesting relation to the homoerotics that are involved in the Greek statue and its circuit of desire and identification. See Alex Potts: Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).
sexuality, here trammeled by, made less serious by, its usurpation by mass cultural forms.”

Setting aside the contentious debates about the moral status and social effects of pornography—whether, for instance, pornography is the equivalent, if not the root cause, of violence against women—the bind between pornography and mass culture seems incontrovertible. The commodification of sex in the form of the pornographic image is subverted quite simply and subtly in Genzken’s collages. Any graphic representation of the sex act is excised. The edges of the collage elements are cleanly scissored in most cases, but some are ragged. Even the most “explicit” reference to a sexual organ still operates by allusion: a leg folds against itself, suggesting labia. Genzken eschews the hard-core; rather, the fluid contours of torsos meet and overlap. It is difficult to definitively ascribe gender to some of the bodies shown. Genzken fragments and diverts the pornographic image toward visual pleasures and explorations that are traditionally defined as aesthetic—the abstract composition of adjacent tones, for instance, the sculptural appreciation of the male physique, or the oscillation between flatness and volume. At the same time, Genzken utilizes the pornographic to render a fantasy of intense psychic and bodily intimacy. The overlapping papers suggest the sensual pressing of bodies. Not all the collages are without heat, of course: the bodily contortions are clearly motivated by other than the visual elegance of a sinuous curve. Yet one might be inspired by these works to speak of a

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224 Where Genzken has used entire pornographic images—as in Strandhäuser mentioned above and Windscreen 1 and 2 (2008)—they picture male homosexual intercourse. In the latter, strips of black electrical tape cover the genitals, as if they had been censored.

225 Wicke urges for a consideration of pornography through the lens of Michel de Certeau’s theories of the consumer as “maker.” In de Certeau’s discussion of tactics of the everyday, the act of consumption (of texts as of commodities) is not merely passive but a means of reappropriation. “Without romanticizing the pornographic per se,” Wicke writes, “a similar shift [to de Certeau’s revaluation of consumption] needs to be undertaken in gauging its cultural scenario. In other words, it needs to be accepted that pornography is not ‘just’ consumed, but is used, worked on, elaborated, remembered, fantasized about by its subjects.” Wicke, “Through a Gaze Darkly,” 70.

Genzken’s appropriation and artistic diversion of the pornographic image can be an instance of this shift that Wicke desires to theorize. It is not at all clear from Liebe als Wesen that Genzken’s attitude toward pornography is entirely negative.

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fantasy of love—*Liebe als Wesen*—as the blurring of bodily bounds. In *Liebe als Wesen*, to love is to hazard exposure to and radical merging with other beings.

Five years later, Genzken would produce a series of collages that use as their source material not the pornographic magazine but the architecture glossy. In this case, it is not bodies, but façades and interiors that are the subject of the desiring gaze. As with pornography, the architectural journal might be said to distort and impoverish complex, ambiguous experiences into consumable images. In the architectural photograph, haptic experience of space is flattened into a two-dimensional representation. Loos famously boasted that his interiors were so oriented toward tactile experience and a distracted mode of viewing that they lacked all effect when photographed.\(^ {226}\) The implication is that photography presents itself only to the eye, creating a distance between the viewer and building that has very little to do with any actual experience of the latter’s spaces and surfaces. Genzken’s *Architekturcollagen* (fig. 28-29) are addressed to architecture displaced from the construction site to what Colomina has called the “immaterial sites” of publications and exhibitions.\(^ {227}\) The challenge they take up is to reconfigure the architectural image according to the whim of a human inhabitant who is not just an eye but a body and a psychic entity.

Perfectly lit and strangely unpeopled, the meticulously orchestrated images featured in architectural journals are fodder for Genzken’s series of disorientating cityscapes-cum-abstractions. Some works in the series have relatively few elements and adhere strongly to the grid (fig. 30). In one instance, four towers seem spontaneously to break through the insistent horizontality of a complex of buildings overlooking a body of water (fig. 31). The comparison between the collage series and Paul Citroen’s *Metropolis* (1923) has often been drawn, and

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certainly the more complex of the Architekturcollagen have the feverish and fragmented aspect of Citroen’s “gigantic sea of masonry.” Yet in their saturated color, Genzken’s early 21st-century collages depart from their early 20th-century predecessor. Electric oranges—as local color or as luminescent façades bathed in ever-flattering late-afternoon light—punctuate blue skies and the cool palette of metals. Vibrant and large, measuring around 80 x 60 cm, the works in Genzken’s Architekturcollage series achieve strong visual impact. The high production values of the original images lend themselves to such a project. The disorientations offered by the Architekturcollagen seem joyous rather than anxious. They picture delirious cityscapes and unnavigable spaces reconfigured by fantasy.

Across the five years that separate the creation of Liebe als Wesen from the Architekturcollagen, the two series speak directly to one another. Mediated by photography and by the press through the respective distribution of the pornographic magazine and the architectural journal, sexual experience and spatial experience are each reduced to objects of capitalist consumption. By subjecting these mass cultural images to the ruptures and combinatory possibilities of collage, Genzken reconfigures them according to a spatial complexity that conveys the workings of fantasy. Façades are cut apart and spliced; perspective is jumbled so that vanishing points veer uncontrollably in different directions; inside and outside are interlaced; bodily bounds are ruptured. Architectural fixtures and human anatomy become abstract patterns in rhythmic play. Depthlessness is the stuff of which these collages are made: the emotional shallowness of gratuitous sex, the flat flawlessness of the architectural photograph. But the collage juxtaposition of human skin on the one hand and architectural skin on the other imbues the (literally) superficial with the possibility of psychic depth through dizzying

disorientation, the fluid boundaries, and unmappable itineraries that suggest the operations of desire and fantasy.

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In his writings about postmodernist image culture, cultural critic Mark C. Taylor has mined the significance of the biological fact that human skin is not a mere envelope but the very stuff from which the whole is generated. He offers provocatively, “Since the organism as a whole is formed by a complex of dermal layers, the body is, in effect, nothing but a strata of skin in which interiority and exteriority are thoroughly convoluted.” For Genzken the drama of the self and of the self-in-relation is negotiated on bodily skin that is always and already inside and outside, and on the architectural skin that is its double. Exploring the themes of surface and depth, public and private, interiority and exteriority, Genzken elaborates a vision of subjectivity grounded in the desiring and sensate body. Repeatedly, Genzken shows interiority to be a matter of surface. In her works, subjectivity and intimacy are variously effected by breaching the surface, as in the Fenster; by reinforcing it, as in the Columns; by rendering it transparent and polychromatic, as in the Strandhäuser; and by cutting it apart and reassembling it, as in the collage series. Genzken exploits architecture’s address to the body and accentuates its anthropomorphism, finding in it a rich metaphor for working through conceptions of publicness and privacy, especially as they intersect with questions of media and mediation. Ultimately sanguine in outlook, these works nevertheless insist upon rupture, exposure, and hardening as necessary risks and possible gambits to attain the pleasures of intimacy and connection.

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Chapter 4: Toward Universality

Partially excised with the swift movement of a box cutter and partially torn to reveal a fluted interior, pieces of corrugated cardboard bearing photographs and handwritten legends document Thomas Hirschhorn’s *33 Ausstellungen im Öffentlichen Raum, 1998-1989* [sic]. The projects represented within are as unassuming as the mode of presentation: rudimentary collages of colored tape and found images hang on the exposed aggregate wall of a stairwell in a housing estate in the banlieu (fig. 4.1); parked cars line one side of a nondescript Parisian sidewalk while, on the other side, at the seam of sidewalk and façade, sit plastic bags fattened with crumpled paper and marked with strips of colored tape or applied photographs (fig. 4.2); and among the assorted stalls in the Marché de Pantin stands one that offers framed reproductions, embellished plates, and customized baseball caps, all commemorating artists, philosophers, and film makers (fig. 4.3). Only apparently unassuming, these artworks—respectively titled *La Redoute* (1991), *99 Sacs* (1994), and *Souvenirs du 20ème Siècle* (1997)—and the thirty others documented in Hirschhorn’s catalogue, bear far-reaching implications for the presence of art in public space, long associated with monumental sculpture. George Bataille, a thinker important to Hirschhorn, argued that monumental architecture and sculpture were aligned in a mutual purpose: that of “immobilizing harmony, guaranteeing the duration of motifs, whose essence is the annulment of time.”

Hirschhorn’s works in public space invert these characteristics, creating temporary exhibitions the status of which is precarious *vis-à-vis* their surroundings. Composed of impoverished materials—packing tape, aluminum foil, corrugated cardboard, and plastic sheeting—and inserted into the flux of everyday life, his works are vulnerable rather than

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inviolable, situated in urban peripheries rather than in prominent or historically significant locales. If the traditional function of the monument involves the enforcement of narratives of nationhood or models of exemplary citizenship, Hirschhorn’s works in public space tend to be more ambiguous in message. Even when he pays homage to literary or artistic figures, as with *Souvenirs du 20ème Siècle* (1997) or the four *Altars* (1998) reproduced in *33 Ausstellungen*, his appropriation of popular or debased forms of tribute complicates homage with irony and futility.

Although Hirschhorn’s works have since grown in conceptual and formal complexity as well as in scale, these early exhibitions bear many of the hallmarks of Hirschhorn’s approach to public space: adoption of exacerbated weakness in relation to urban surroundings, especially through mimicry of states of devaluation; development of a lexicon of provisional structures, often to be peered into, sometimes attached to or otherwise dependent upon existing buildings; exploration of common means of distribution, modes of product display, and sites of exchange; appropriation of the language of non-art object culture (e.g. souvenirs, sports paraphernalia, arts and crafts); and attentiveness to social, economic, and physical margins. Hirschhorn’s exhibition tactics in public space amount to an exploration of art’s capacity to engage publicness—the *Öffentlichkeit* that bears relation to, yet remains irreducible to, any particular instance or site of the *öffentlicher Raum*—through a language of form derived from and inhabiting the everyday.\(^{231}\)

“My art must appropriate the world,” Hirschhorn asserts.\(^{232}\) As a positioning of his artistic practice in dynamic engagement with life, this imperative conceives of art as an autonomous sphere that nevertheless acts upon and claims the world for itself. The same statement, “My art must appropriate the world,” simultaneously accounts for Hirschhorn’s artistic means and compositional methods, for his collages and sculptural ensembles incorporate

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\(^{231}\) See Chapter 1 for a discussion of the discourse of *Öffentlichkeit* in the writings of Jürgen Habermas, Oskar Negt, and Alexander Kluge.

and refer to the actual stuff of the world: its texts, its images, its spaces, and its three-dimensional forms.

It is to forms and structures that in their original instances respond to extra-aesthetic demands—demands that may be rational or irrational, practical or extravagantly expressive—toward which Hirschhorn’s appropriative energies are most frequently directed. Such forms, he writes, are created out of “an obvious desire for profit, sales, political message, or in order to impress, to explain, or to make understood, to be effective, secretive or for any other reason requiring a form. Form follows function, use.” He continues, “All the forms born from this urgency please me: buffets, tombolas, voting booths, laboratories, devices one has tinkered with [des appareils bricolés soi-même], stalls, provincial discos, etc. All these forms have something in common, that is to say a provisional, hasty, open and political aspect.”

To be attentive to Hirschhorn’s articulations is to become attuned to his artistic sensibility and his insight into motives for making. Hirschhorn defamiliarizes the quotidian by asking us to see these vernacular structures (if they even warrant such a descriptor) as sculptural forms or exhibition strategies. The linear arrangement of chafing dishes on a long buffet table; the array of unrelated items in a display of raffle prizes; the informational kiosk lined with placards and flyers; the banks of three-walled voting booths with their obscuring curtains: in these examples, structure and spatial disposition of elements (fundamental sculptural concerns) address problems of access, display, distribution, and privacy in a direct and commonsensical manner largely untouched by considerations of design. Hirschhorn exploits the immediacy of these forms as well as their familiarity.

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Hundreds of collages of disparate sizes and shapes lean against the back wall of Hirschhorn’s *Blaue Tombola* (1994) (fig. 4.4) or lie in dense configuration on its horizontal surface. The collages are infinitely varied and yet circumscribed in means. Salvaged wood or cardboard bear on their surfaces simple collage compositions from the series *Moins* and *Fifty-Fifty*.234 These found supports are never “blank” (in the way that convention might seem to grant to a fresh canvas or a sheet of drawing paper), but always refer to their former uses and the wholes to which they belonged. The strips of tape articulate linear designs or demarcate closed shapes—the latter evoke crime-scene outlines of abstract figures now absent, while the former, especially when configured in left-justified rows, body forth blocks of text that foreground their opacity.235 The occasional found object makes its appearance as well—a household sponge, for instance, a brightly-colored plastic plate, or a fully-exposed Polaroid (all operate as instances of monochromatic, geometric abstraction). Adopted as sculptural and display strategy, the tombola (a type of raffle found in parts of Europe) (fig. 4.5) provides a vernacular model for the dense presentation of miscellaneous, autonomous elements in a unifying visual field, which in the cases of the *Blaue Tombola* and *Rosa Tombola* (1994) is achieved with swaths of blue and pink fabric, respectively. Hirschhorn has similarly plumbed the formal possibilities and metaphorical resonances of buffets (*Très Grand Buffet*, 1995), market stalls (*Souvenirs du 20ème siècle*, 1997), and recycling receptacles (*Skulptur-Sortier-Station*, 1997), among others. In the last of these (fig. 4.6), the receptacles for sorting recyclable glass seen in many urban non-places

234 The collage series *Fifty-Fifty* and *Less* [Moins] were initiated in the early 1990s. Both series are governed by rudimentary non-compositional “formulas”—in the former, half the surface is covered by a collage element, in the latter, less than half—that suggest extra-aesthetic, political impulses. “Fifty-fifty” expresses not the geometric partitioning of a surface area but the ideal of total equality or the stalemate presented by a 50-50 vote in the democratic process. Hirschhorn, “Fifty-Fifty and Moins,” artist statement.

235 Buchloh has compellingly described these compositions made from masking-tape as “evacuated abstractions.” What is evacuated is the heroic potential: “Once it was cut off from its spiritual and utopian promises, once it had to see its musical chords voided, to lose its sinuous or architectural correspondences, it would inevitably end up as vacuous.” Buchloh, “Thomas Hirschhorn: Lay Out Sculpture and Display Diagrams,” in *Thomas Hirschhorn*, 50.
European cities provide the reference point for the Skulptur-Sortier-Station’s site (as a public sculpture realized in an unexceptional metropolitan locale) as well as its concept (first, as a structure used to sort types of sculptures and, second, in the “recycling” of cultural remnants into motifs in Hirschhorn’s work.)

In addition to functional structures, Hirschhorn is also invested in more marginal and provisional manifestations. He describes a woman who binds an overburdened suitcase with brown packing tape to ensure its closure, “She simply wants to fix something that presents a problem to her. And she thereby creates a form.” A car’s cracked quarter glass sealed with packing tape is similarly deemed an implicitly sculptural form. Resourcefulness of this sort is suggested by the word bricoler, which Hirschhorn employed in the phrase cited earlier, “des appareils bricolés [par] soi-même.” The bricoleur, as traditionally defined, is a jack of all trades that applies his non-specialized skills to heterogeneous tasks, employing a set of materials characterized by their availability and adaptability. The quotidian materials of cardboard, particleboard, aluminum foil, packing tape, and plastic sheeting are ubiquitous in Hirschhorn’s works, in which they maintain their matter-of-fact appearance and connection with the world of use. His preference for spray paint, marker, and ballpoint pen, the vandal’s preferred tools, courts

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236 Marc Augé characterizes the “non-place” as a space of “supermodernity” that “cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity.” It is a space the use of which is governed by contract and which produces conditions of solitude among its users. Augé, Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity (London: Verso, 1995), 77–8, 94. Yasmil Raymond notes Hirschhorn’s evocation of non-places in “‘Take care—Take Care,’” in Thomas Hirschhorn: Establishing a Critical Corpus (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2011), 269. An inventory of Hirschhorn’s references to non-places would include airports, waiting rooms, laundromats, hotels, and shops. Characteristically, Hirschhorn recuperates the spaces of alienation: ubiquity and non-differentiation are recoded as Hirschhornian universality. Hirschhorn’s position is that waiting rooms, just to take one example, can be found all over the world; people are familiar with waiting rooms, understand their function, and feel comfortable in them.


239 Claude Lévi-Strauss, The Savage Mind [La Pénée Sauvage] (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), 17. The translator’s note reads, “The ‘bricoleur’ has no precise equivalent in English. He is a man who undertakes odd jobs and is a Jack of all trades or a kind of professional do-it-yourself man, but, as the text makes clear, he is of a different standing from, for instance, the English ‘odd job man’ or handyman.”
the degradation of the written word. Where elsewhere fluorescent tubes have been the source of a diffuse, aura-like glow and the means of optical sleight of hand (consider Dan Flavin and, more recently, Olafur Eliasson) Hirschhorn returns them to the stubborn reality of cheap eateries and nondescript cubicles. When he rigs—or bricolages, one might say—an automobile with fluorescent tubes, the vehicle becomes makeshift vitrine-cum-gallery, the contents of which are visible twenty-four hours a day (Pub-Car, 1996) (fig. 4.7).

Cultural theorist Michel de Certeau embraces bricolage as a quintessential tactic of the weak and the Other. He writes, “Users make (bricolent) innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules.”240 Consumer becomes producer, user becomes maker, subverting intended uses and diverting resources in order to answer to his or her own pleasure and creativity. De Certeau expands the definition of bricolage to include everyday activities like walking, reading, and cooking. These are for him acts of making and making do, which, in turn, he interprets as forms of resistance against regimes of domination. Hirschhorn adopts the means and forms devised by individuals in their attempts to circumvent or interrupt social forms of control. His appropriation of images and text can be taken to test the limits of copyright and licensing strictures.241 His exploration of the gift—à la Marcel Mauss via George Bataille’s notion of expenditure—eschews capitalist economy in favor of a different mode of exchange and distribution.242 The video Fifty-Fifty à Belleville (1992) (fig. 4.8), for instance, documents an

242 “A work of art is always an assertion and as an assertion, it is a gift,” Hirschhorn writes. “A challenging and unexpected gift. A gift which – by its generosity – blows off any thoughts of calculation and economization. I want to give everything, I want to understand the form of my work as a gift. But the gift is not the work itself – the gift is the actual doing it and doing it that way! What I love about the notion of “gift” is its offensive, demanding and even aggressive part, the part that provokes the Other to give more! It’s the part which implies a response, a real and
action in which Hirschhorn stands at the entrance of a Paris metro station, handing out collages to nonplussed commuters. 243 Hirschhorn releases his works into circulation with a gesture simultaneously extravagant (that of an artist giving away his work) and banal (that of a proselytizer or a small business advertiser). His series of Lay-Outs (1993) (fig. 4.9) feature collage ensembles displayed atop textiles laid on the ground. They immediately recall the means favored by stealthy peddlers of illicit or counterfeit goods, who, with great economy, use sheets of fabric to present their wares as well as to transport them from site to site.

One might be tempted to align de Certeau and Hirschhorn—both speak of adopting weakness as a position of strength, both are concerned with how the marginalized defy subjugation through quotidian acts, and both draw upon warfare as the operative metaphor for such acts. Indeed, Hirschhorn is attuned to material manifestations that result from inventive use of limited resources, manifestations whose lack of refinement amplifies their formal and political power. Notably, however, Hirschhorn is without de Certeau’s sanguine view of consumption as untroubled expression of subjective will and creativity. The latter is carried aloft on the rhetorical swell of his optimism when he calls consumers “unrecognized producers, poets of their own affairs, trailblazers in the jungles of functionalist rationality.” 244 Where de Certeau presumes the success and untroubled nature of any given tactic, Hirschhorn insists upon the precariousness and ambivalence that better characterize the Other’s acts of making as well as the stakes involved in such acts. As adaptive actions of the dispossessed, jury-rigged structures and makeshift repairs often testify to conditions of economic lack and social and political marginalization. Even when

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active response to the gift.” Hirschhorn, “Inventing my own terms,” artist statement. For Hirschhorn’s statements regarding the importance of Bataille’s concept of the potlatch, see Buchloh, “An Interview,” 93.

243 The works on paper belong to the series Fifty-Fifty, in which half the support surfaces (in this case white A4 sheets) are covered with collage elements and the other half left for the viewer to fill in imaginatively. See fn. 234.

244 de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, 34.
some degree of creative will is asserted, such actions cannot be divorced from the conditions that necessitated them in the first place.

A more measured and explicitly political evaluation of the everyday is offered by Henri Lefebvre, who, in the three volumes of *The Critique of Everyday Life* (appearing in 1947, 1961, and 1981, respectively) assessed the constitution of daily life at pivotal historical junctures, especially in relation to the reach of advanced capitalism, and considered the possibility of its transformation. The first two volumes, as well as his book *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (1967), had a profound impact on the thinking of the Situationists as well as on the student movement that culminated in the events of May 1968, to which Lefebvre’s work provided a philosophical ground for the call *changer la vie*. For Lefebvre, everyday life is increasingly programmed and organized by capitalist and bureaucratic interests. “In the modern world,” Lefebvre asserts, “everyday life (le quotidien) has ceased to be a ‘subject’ rich in potential subjectivity; it has become an ‘object’ of social organization.” In the third volume of *The Critique of Everyday Life*, Lefebvre takes account of the advent of information technology, which has only strengthened “the administration of daily life, as a general product at once of the economic, the political and the strategic, and even of ideology.” For Lefebvre, *la vie quotidienne* testifies to and is evidence of reification, even as it is the necessary ground for any resistance to reification. Lefebvre distinguishes between *le quotidien* [“the everyday”] and *la...

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246 Lefebvre, *Critique, vol. III*, 127. Regarding information, Lefebvre writes, “What is novel about the contemporary world is that there is a world market in information, which positively ‘drives’ the other markets, through advertising, propaganda, and the transmission of positive knowledge, and so on. Is not information, the supreme commodity, also the ultimate commodity?” Ibid., 145. To compare Hirschhorn’s attitude toward information, see Chapter 5.
quotidienneté [“everydayness”] as aspects of la vie quotidienne. In Peter Osborne’s gloss, the former suggests “the ‘good,’ but unrealized universality of an historically produced species-being” while the latter indicates “the ‘bad,’ abstract but realized universality of its alienated forms (money, the commodity, the state, etc.).”

Two kinds of universality might be seen to be at work in Hirschhorn’s The Procession (2005) (fig. 4.10). On the one hand, the media and its organization of information as well as a related poverty of expression; on the other, Hirschhorn’s own assertion of a “universal language of form” derived from the props of agitprop. Disembodied mannequin hands, rising from pools of viscera-like blown foam painted red, hold aloft four rectangular “coffins” papered with text. The bold, sans-serif type of news headlines read, “The Rough Justice of War,” “Cash from Chaos,” “Big Brother’s Watching,” “Is Philosophy Dead?” In these sensationalist headlines the media’s regulation of information is shown to be literally and metaphorically unanchored. A dense network of graffiti and scrawled tags, codified and banal—“Kilroy was here,” “We will B back,” “Erwin loves Elena”—covers the floor and climbs up the walls.

In the catalogue accompanying The Procession Hirschhorn reproduces images of Yasser Arafat’s casket amidst a sea of mourners as well as images of mock coffins carried on protest marches (fig. 4.11). What is being protested varies: the deaths of children as “collateral damage” (photographic portraits attached to small caskets, lined up beneath a banner inscribed with Arabic text), the loss of jobs (coffins emblazoned with the names of corporations: Connex, Electrolux), and the continuation of the American “War on Terror” (caskets draped with the American flag). All of these causes articulate themselves through a single symbolic form, made

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248 David Joselit has applied Michael Silverstein’s concept of corporatized language to describe the imagistic shards of text that Hirschhorn culls from the media and presents, decontextualized, in his exhibitions. Joselit, “Thomas Hirschhorn,” Artforum 44, no. 7 (March 2006): 286.
specific for each occasion with the aid of linguistic markers. *The Procession* refers to no individual instance of its deployment, but to all. Hirschhorn writes,

The ritualized bearing of coffins is the same all over the world. It is a manifesto of mourning. It doesn't matter whether it is the coffin of a deceased statesmen, the coffin of a revolutionary, the coffin of a martyr, or Arafat's false—or empty—coffin which his compatriots in the Gaza Strip "carried to his grave" at the same time as his "real" coffin was interred in the West Bank. The coffin that is carried always has the same meaning -- it conjures up the future dead by means of the coffin of actual dead soldiers! The coffin that is carried during demonstrations in opposition to the closure of a factory is as important as the "coffin" of actual unemployment. The coffin becomes a symbol of sadness. A sadness without hierarchy. 

The truism about death as the ultimate leveler finds a material corollary in its metonym, the coffin, which accords equal gravity to any cause it comes to bear. But it is not just to the coffin that Hirschhorn ascribes this expansive, non-hierarchical capacity:

I love the sculptures that people carry at protest marches or demonstrations. They are quickly made objects with an unambiguous mission: to give form to a grievance! I love these objects because they are universal. They possess the utopian power of a universal image language!

If a modernist tendency had been to equate universality with forms purified of the world’s intractable heterogeneity—Mondrian’s distillation of the world into immutable verticals and horizontals, for instance, or Malevich’s search for the “zero degree” of painting—Hirschhorn locates universality precisely in ephemeral objects and manifestations of everyday life. Not in

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transcendental geometries but in protest banners, football jerseys, market stalls, and machine guns does he ground a universal visual language. It is this universality—as quotidian as it is utopian, as impoverished as it is generative—that Hirschhorn posits as a means to counter the fragmentation and infiltration of everyday life by the interests of capital. Crucially, he does so largely without sarcasm or judgment, though not without ambivalence. Hirschhorn proposes a universality that is as radical and moving as it is sometimes preposterous. Indeed, to posit a positive model of universality, of whatever kind, seems extraordinary after the failure of avant-garde utopias, in the age of globalism and cautious relativism, and even as battles against totalizing narratives (patriarchal and imperial) continue to be fought. Yet, it is precisely due to its untimeliness (and to what he would call “headlessness”) that Hirschhorn’s conception of universality gains its radical potential.251

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In his 1934–35 essay, “Discourse of the Novel,” Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975) describes the social stratification of language, which is to say living discourse marked by class, region, profession, social groups, relation to authority, and passing fashions.252 This “heteroglossia” is a centrifugal force that works toward diversification rather than unification. Against it, centripetal,

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251 Here I invoke Nietzsche’s formulation of untimeliness in his essay, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” Untimely Meditations (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). The subject who aspires to take action in the present, Nietzsche argues, must demarcate around him- or herself a zone of forgetting, an enclosure of the unhistorical, where, undaunted by failure or heroic precedent, the subject decisively and recklessly proceeds. Nietzsche declares, “no painter will paint his picture, no general achieve his victory, no people attain its freedom without having first desired and striven for it in an unhistorical condition such as that described.” Nietzsche, “On the Uses,” 64.

252 Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 259–422. Bakhtin’s examples of linguistic strata are: “social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour…” (263).
unitary language asserts and struggles to maintain sociopolitical centralization. 253 “Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject.” Bakhtin reminds us, “serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear.” 254 Which is to say, the speaker obeys to some degree the rules of usage and diction even as he or she injects markers of her own class, profession, region, and social networks. The generic characteristic of the novel, according to Bakhtin, resides in its embrace of heteroglossia within its stylistic unity; individual speech types retain relative autonomy even as they serve the higher artistic goals of the whole. 255 Implicit to Bakhtin’s argument is the egalitarian nature of the novel (and any aesthetic project that encompasses heteroglossia’s decentralizing properties), which resides in its amenability to “discourse in the open spaces of public squares, streets, cities and villages, of social groups, generations, and epochs.” 256

Bakhtin’s concept of stratified social discourse, and the art that might harness its powers, helps us to understand the textual and visual overabundance that has come to be a hallmark of Hirschhorn’s work. 257 If the artist has tended to emphasize sheer quantity as anti-hierarchical compositional principle—“more is more,” “I want to super-inform,” he asserts—heteroglossia allows us to better characterize and derive meaning from the nature of the information that he

253 “We are taking language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as concrete opinion, insuring a maximum of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life. Thus a unitary language gives expression to forces working toward concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization, which develop in vital connection with the processes of sociopolitical and cultural centralization.” The political stakes become even more pronounced—especially evident in his diction—when Bakhtin goes on to characterize the effort to unify European languages (by Aristotle, Augustine, Leibniz, and others) as “the victory of one reigning language (dialect) over the others, the supplanting of languages, their enslavement, the process of illuminating them with the True Word, the incorporation of barbarians and lower social strata into a unitary language of culture and truth, the canonization of ideological systems….” Ibid., 271.
254 Ibid., 272.
255 Ibid., 262.
256 Ibid., 259.
257 For a discussion of textual and visual overabundance in relation to what Hirschhorn calls “the dictatorship of information” and in light of Negt and Kluge’s discussion of media cartels, see Chapter 5.
incorporates. In other words, the effects of quantity are amplified by multiplicity. Reportage, advertising slogans, pop cultural paraphernalia, forms of everyday expression, historical documents, and academic writing (philosophical, socio-historical, economic, aesthetic, and critical) fill the visual field and cover surfaces, horizontal and vertical. Texts are fragmented and decontextualized; they are posted, transcribed, and disseminated. The Procession, for instance, incorporates journalistic headlines, philosophical and sociopolitical treatises, and urban tags. Each discursive mode conjures distinct rhetorical conventions, graphic means, and material sites (the newspaper, the bound volume, and the façade); each bears a specific relation to time and to authority. Although less prominent in The Procession, a corresponding social diversity of image production consistently operates in Hirschhorn’s work: photojournalism, pornography, advertising, corporate logos, fashion photography, craftwork, original artwork, and reproductions.

Bakhtin elaborates further on the condition of discourse. No utterance proceeds unmediated from the speaker’s mouth, nor does any phrase emerge unimpeded from the writer’s pen. Each must traverse an already-spoken terrain. Bakhtin’s vivid description of this invisible yet active discursive field is worth quoting at length:

Indeed, any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist—or, on the contrary, by the ‘light’ of alien words that have already been spoken about it. It is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents. The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and

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258 Thus compositional means reflect an ethical position confronting the allocation of resources: “I think more is always more. And less is always less. More money is more money. Less success is less success. More unemployed are more. Fewer factories are fewer. I think entirely in terms of economics. That’s why I’m interested in this concept: more is more, as an arithmetical fact, and as a political fact.” Hirschhorn, “Less is Less, More is More (1995),” in Thomas Hirschhorn, 122. The principle “less is less, more is more” is also a direct refutation of the modernist design principle, “less is more.”
out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group…

Staking its place dialogically in this atmosphere already thick with word and thought, any utterance is necessarily itself accented and partisan. Thus—and crucially—Bakhtin understands dialogic engagement to be anything but neutral. Instead, it is agonistic, conspiratorial, defensive, and solicitous.

In featuring coffins papered with headlines, a carpet of graffiti, and proffered tomes, *The Procession* renders visible the world as enveloped in heteroglossia. As if to instantiate the “tension-filled environment of alien words,” its disjunctive plethora of headlines conveys heightened anxiety: “gone wild,” “the grand illusion,” “La fin d’un regime,” “looking for a way out.” Everything is in a state of emergency. Countless other works of Hirschhorn literalize our existence in discourse as an encirclement by actual texts and appropriated images—from *Cavemanman*’s walls lined with photocopied pages and posters to *U-Lounge*’s precarious stacks of leaflets (2002 and 2003, respectively.) Against the distribution of instrumentalized and instrumentalizing information by the media, Hirschhorn poses the expansiveness of philosophical discourse, which is frequently incorporated into his works. A pantheon of thinkers, including Baruch Spinoza, Georges Bataille, Gilles Deleuze, Antonio Gramsci, and Michel Foucault, have been the subject of “presence and production” works. Their writings are collected, excerpted, enlarged, mapped, reproduced, and discussed as integral parts of the exhibition and its programming. So too are the writings of the young German philosopher Marcus Steinweg, Hirschhorn’s frequent collaborator. Of the philosophical writings,


[260] Hirschhorn has discussed their collaboration in terms of “unshared responsibility: ‘Unshared responsibility’ means that each of us takes over – each one on his own – the entire responsibility of the work done. I take over the entire responsibility of the work contributed by Marcus and Marcus takes over the entire responsibility of the work.
Hirschhorn presents much too much material than can be readily digested. In some ways, then, both journalism—an agent of what Hirschhorn calls “the dictatorship of information”—and philosophy are proffered in Hirschhorn’s works abundantly and in fragmentary states. But whereas the former registers pithiness unanchored to real meaning, the latter suggests the plenitude associated with difficulty.

Hirschhorn’s engagement with and treatment of philosophical texts is central to the conceptual and utopian stakes of his project as a whole. The utopian impulse resides in his assertion that anyone can find access to and establish a relationship with the writings of Bataille or Spinoza, for instance, or the lectures of Steinweg. Addressed through Hirschhorn’s provisional structures of packing tape and particle board, the metaphysical is confronted with the basely material, the ideal with the realities of everyday life, and the universal subject of philosophical inquiry with the historically-, culturally-, and economically-marked subjects of the 21st century (and vice versa, in each case). Hirschhorn insists upon the ongoing relevance of philosophy by bringing it down to earth. But if philosophical thought is no longer so rarified in Hirschhorn’s hands, it is hardly tamed or rendered user-friendly. Indeed, the intractability of philosophical thought is never disguised in Hirschhorn’s works, but instantiated through a visual and verbal density. It becomes abundantly clear that his goal cannot be to “educate” the viewer but to create the conditions under which philosophy might work upon participants in ways that are partial, incremental, ambient, and osmotic. One might say that Hirschhorn recasts the marks

 contributed by me – this is friendship. Each one – without sharing – is entirely responsible for the work of the other.” Hirschhorn, letter to Elisabeth, n.p.

261 Confronted with the criticism that the Bataille Monument presumes to engage an audience in a way that is doomed to failure, Hirschhorn articulates, “First, I didn’t want to exclude anyone. I find that anyone who thinks that local Muslim kids could not get involved with Bataille makes a huge mistake. I reject that strongly. That would mean that someone was excluded from the outset, for what reason I don’t know. Why should they be shut out? Why would anybody say they can’t handle it? I don’t buy that. Sadly, it is precisely this argument that frequently comes from a leftist position. If I say I want to make a work for a collective public, then I am obliged to, and it is my desire to make a work in which I don’t ever exclude anyone.” Buchloh, “An Interview,” 86.
of failure as the terms of success, in such a way that unsettles what it means for public art to be “effective” or to “have an impact.”

The discursiveness made explicit by these text-heavy environments often already inheres, powerfully, subtly, and meaningfully in the sculptural objects themselves. Dialogic even without the inscriptions and textual inclusions, these sculptures are objects “open to dispute, charged with value,” to borrow Bakhtin’s description of the object overlaid with verbal discourse. The hollow, rectangular volumes of The Procession are as if bottomless containers in which meanings accrue. The caskets they recall are focal points of collective and private mourning. Acute images of loss, they are vehicles for the public expression of widely disparate values.

While Hirschhorn speaks compellingly of his pursuit of universal forms—that is to say, forms through which diverse, often opposed, parties give shape to their interests, needs, or ideological positions—what he describes can also be productively understood as dialogic. Whereas universality suggests immutability and therefore stability, dialogism offers a model imminently dynamic and contingent. In Hirschhorn’s dialogic sculptural forms the most contentious debates and profound human passions are negotiated.

Grief, love, and fervent (if irrational) identification find material expression in the spontaneous memorials that mark sites of tragic and violent death. Whether mourning the suicide of a pop culture figure like Kurt Cobain or the assassination of a political one like Yitzhak Rabin, whether responding to a single obscure death or a host of lost lives as at Columbine High School, the World Trade Center, or Atocha station in Madrid, the manifestations of grief are remarkably consistent. Laminated photographs and handwritten letters, flickering candles, cellophane-wrapped bouquets, banners, and stuffed animals populate a street corner, a park, or a square. The uniformity can be perceived as formulaic expression of mass-culture-induced sentiment or as
authentic materialization of collective grief. If these positions seem mutually exclusive, Hirschhorn’s sculptural series of four street-side *Altars* (dedicated to Piet Mondrian, Ingeborg Bachmann, Otto Freundlich, and Raymond Carver, respectively) engages both possibilities in complex fashion. Hirschhorn’s *Altars* are realized in nondescript locations that bear no relation to the figure commemorated. Neither site nor timing of an *Altar* is grounded in biographical fact. Instead, the abstraction from biographical fact underscores the idea that “these very local sites of memory become very universal sites of memory.” When Hirschhorn names this series of works “altars,” he inserts ephemeral, road-side shrines into an aesthetic tradition of sculptural-architectural works that serve ritual functions as well as into more popular traditions like the cults of saints. Buchloh observes, “[T]he commemoration of some of modernism’s most heroic and, more often than not, tragic figures—in a sudden revelation of the dialectics of subjectivity and cult—is strangely short-circuited with mass cultural forms of celebrity.” In dedicating these pseudo-spontaneous memorials to literary and artistic figures, Hirschhorn simultaneously elevates and deflates their cultural status. He lives out the fantasy that high-culture figures might enjoy the popular recognition of a Princess Diana or a Steve Jobs.

The *Piet Mondrian Altar* (fig. 4.12) was first realized in Geneva in the summer of 1997. Photographs of the reserved and bespectacled artist are clustered with flowers, candles, and reproductions of his canvases (framed in aluminum foil, pasted to cardboard, or attached to a “commemorative” platter). On a blue cloth, yellow letters spell out “Ciao! Piet.” Below it “I ♥ Piet” is written into a white space in one of Mondrian’s classic compositions. Naturally,

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262 “Spontaneous memorials are actually highly orchestrated performances of mourning: rituals of visibly public lamentation aimed at expressing, codifying, and ultimately managing grief. Their spontaneity is only in their origination, in their swift response to the sudden and unexpected events of tragic and traumatic death. Their materiality and meaning, however, are highly scripted.” Erika Doss, “Spontaneous Memorials and Contemporary Modes of Mourning,” *Material Religion* 2, no. 3 (2006): 294–318.


everything conforms to Mondrian’s palette of primary colors, even the white-and-red striped tape that cordons the site. The subsequent altars are more motley in appearance: a pack of plush Dalmatians throngs Bachmann’s altar (fig. 4.13); boxes of Marlboro cigarettes spell out her name, and an inflatable blue alien wears a sign around its neck that reads “I.B. phone home!” Hirschhorn’s mimicry of the colloquialism of spontaneous memorials is unerring, to the degree that his altars often inspire anonymous additions and subtractions. These contributions from the public are just as likely to stem from naïve sympathy as from knowingness. In either case, the logic of the form—a form generated by an accumulation of individual contributions—elicits a response. An element of the parodic can be detected in Hirschhorn’s skilled deskilling. The pack of identical stuffed animals is only the most explicit reference to mass production, the culture industry, and herd mentality (or herd sentimentality, as it were). Not incidentally, parody, as an imitation of another linguistic act or cultural manifestation, is one of the clearest examples of dialogism.265 But if Hirschhorn highlights the formulaic nature of such memorials—their mass production by the masses—so too does he take them seriously as the means by which a vast number of people chose to express their authentic affective impulses. Hirschhorn acknowledges that any publicness and collective expression available to us is also tainted by late capital and the culture industry. But rather than mourn this condition, Hirschhorn redeems this publicness of questionable value by making it the positive basis for his sculptural language.

265 Bakhtin identifies the ironic and polemical modes as two additional examples of explicit dialogism, in “Discourse on the Novel,” 274. Much can be said about the dialogical nature of Hirschhorn’s rhetorical modes. On the one hand his many statements and writings seem to be emphatically monologic. His authorial voice is unmistakable and the first-person is foregrounded. On the other hand, he frequently employs the parodic and polemical modes. Consider for a moment the example of his practice of titling artworks: For his 2006 exhibition Superficial Engagement, Hirschhorn combined military terms with aesthetic ones to derive the title and subtitles: Chromatic Fire, Abstract Engagement, Concrete Shock, and Spatial Front. He parodied the language of the military and politics when he named a series of collages, Provide Ruins, in the manner of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Restore Hope.
The effectiveness of Hirschhorn’s forms \textit{qua} sculpture, \textit{qua} art, depends on a very specific dialogic interaction, for the forms he derives from the street are always negotiated through the history of artistic practice, and vice versa. In this way, the \textit{Altars} draw upon avant-garde engagements with sentimentality and kitsch while also elaborating upon the readymade, assemblage, and entropic accumulations. Kurt Schwitters’s \textit{Merzbau (Cathedral of Erotic Misery)} and \textit{Merz Column} (1923/25) are obvious precedents. Mannequins, too, boast accumulated layers of meaning: appropriated from the realm of commerce and display, their uncanny presence had been exploited by Dadaists and Surrealists. Hirschhorn shows notable astuteness in creating works that simultaneously refer to art historical tropes and to forms freighted with socio-political and economic significance. The \textit{11 vernagelte Fenster} (1993) (fig. 4.14) readily participate in the traditions of relief, shaped canvases, and assemblage even as they conjure images of urban blight and economic depression. \textit{99 Sacs plastiques} (1994)—grocery bags whose filmy polyethylene gains ungainly volume when stuffed with crumpled paper—can be read as a canny contribution to the series of 20\textsuperscript{th}-century experiments in the capacity of two-dimensional surfaces to expand or extend into sculptural forms.\textsuperscript{266} Hirschhorn describes the \textit{Sacs} as “sculptures without volume.”\textsuperscript{267} At the same time, \textit{99 Sacs plastiques}, installed once against a building’s façade on a Parisian street and once against the wall in a private apartment in Brussels, refers more broadly to issues of mass production, consumption, and waste. And if the \textit{Lay-Outs} mentioned earlier can be seen to draw from the peddler’s means, they also refer to an

\textsuperscript{266} In his description of the project, Hirschhorn emphasizes the two-dimensionality of the bags: he speaks of the recto and verso of the flat bags, to which he applies collage elements in the manner of his series \textit{Moins}. See fn. 234. Earlier instances of three-dimensional extension of two-dimensional surfaces include Alexander Rodchenko’s famous \textit{Hanging Spatial Constructions} (1920–21), Charlotte Posenenske’s \textit{Series DW Vierkantrohre} [Square Tubes] (1967), and Hanne Darboven’s \textit{Constructions} (1966–68). Posenenkse’s \textit{Series DW} consisted of four modular, industrially produced corrugated cardboard elements reminiscent of air ducts. The elements arrived flat and could be assembled very simply and configured at will. With her \textit{Constructions}, Darboven experimented with cutting, creasing, and taping large-scale, grid-based drawings to form three-dimensional “spatial models.”

\textsuperscript{267} Hirschhorn, “99 Sacs plastiques (Dépôt),” artist statement.
entire realm of artistic experimentation in the displacement of the artwork from vertical to horizontal surface, ranging from Pollock’s drip paintings to André’s metal floor sculptures. Claes Oldenburg’s *The Street* (1960) is especially resonant, not only for its anti-hierarchical display but also for its debased materiality, its thematics of consumption and waste, and its reflection on the urban.268

Bakhtin suggests that the world is immersed in an atmosphere agitated and alive with arguments and counter-arguments, accents and alien opinions. Hirschhorn accentuates this ontological condition by selecting from the flux of life those forms that constitute the strongest visual encapsulations of ideological positions, economic needs, and affective urges.

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A long subway ride outside the heart of Amsterdam, past a bustling outdoor market and across a grassy expanse, the provisional structure of Hirschhorn’s *Bijlmer Spinoza Festival* (2 May – 28 June 2009) sits dwarfed by the Bijlmermeer’s concrete behemoths (fig. 4.15). Its physical presence is such: a one-story, wedge-shaped structure made of wood, built on a platform, and topped with a several-meter tall mock *Ethics*. The pages of the book are indicated with a few whitewashed boards, the placement of which correspond to the rooms in the structure below, rooms that house a library of books on and by Spinoza, an internet lounge, a documentation center regarding the history of the Bijlmermeer, and an exhibition space. The form suggests that the activities and components of the *Festival* are a symbolic extension of Spinoza’s thinking. The partitioned structure leads onto the open platform on which one finds a worktable with tools, a snack bar, announcement boards, a desk, and several pieces of exercise equipment. In a makeshift garage extending off the “wedge” sits a car encrusted with hand-made

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268 In an unpublished manuscript, Hirschhorn cites three additional models for the form of the *Lay-Outs*: the young recruit who disassembles and reassembles his gun for inspection; the person who lays out nuts and bolts when repairing his bicycle; and the street vendor. Hirschhorn, “Lay-Out,” artist statement.
and exuberant declarations of love for the philosopher (fig. 4.16). Handwritten notes declare, “We will remember you,” “I love him, I love him, I love him, and where he goes I follow,” and “We are waiting for your reincarnation.” Excerpts of Spinoza’s texts are transcribed onto bits of cardboard and laminated with clear packing tape. These adoring accretions recall the language of spontaneous memorials, of fandom, and of so-called “art cars,” often considered a form of outsider art. The enlarged book harkens to roadside attractions (once considered kitsch, now regarded by some to constitute historic landmarks) in the form of buildings shaped like larger-than-life objects and products. The structure is thus an example of what Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown have designated a “duck”—i.e. a “building-becoming-sculpture”: “Where the architectural systems of space, structure, and program are submerged and distorted by an overall symbolic form.” The structure is only one component of the Festival, which encompasses daily lectures and performances as well as guest speakers and special events.

The Bijlmer Spinoza Festival is the most recent work to be produced under Hirschhorn’s guidelines of “presence and production.” Previous projects include the Bataille Monument

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269 On the website that operated as a real-time documentation of the Bijlmer Spinoza Festival, Hirschhorn traces the inspiration for the Spinoza Car to “the universal act of customizing.” “Customizing or tuning is an act of resistance to the non-written laws of all kinds of exclusion. In the desperate and useless act of car-tuning I see a form of resistance throughout form. And as an artist—what can interest me more than Form?” <www.thebijlmerspinozafestival.nl>. The website was taken down shortly after the run of the exhibition.

270 In its structure, the Bijlmer Spinoza Festival seems related to The Road-Side Giant-Book Project, a proposal Hirschhorn drew up for the exhibition Monuments for the USA at the CAA Wattis Institute of Contemporary Art, 7 April–21 May, 2005. The components mentioned in the proposal are a 50-day lecture series with invited philosophers, an exhibition of philosophy and art, a library of books by philosopher Marcus Steinweg, a coffee shop, and a daily newspaper. Regarding the enlarged book that would be the material form of the project, Hirschhorn makes reference to “roadside giants,” writing, “I like their obscene plastic strength that is turned towards reality.” Ralph Rugoff, ed., Monuments for the USA (San Francisco: CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, 2005), 74–6.

271 The “duck” is named after the paradigmatic “Long Island Duckling,” a duck-shaped building captured in a photograph by Peter Blake, in his volume God’s Own Junkyard: The Planned Deterioration of America’s Landscape (1964), and theorized in Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, Learning from Las Vegas (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1977), 87.
(2002) in Kassel, Germany, and the Musée Précaire Albinet (2004) in Aubervilliers, France. The guidelines require the artist to inhabit the neighborhoods in which the works appear and to be on site throughout the limited duration of the exhibitions. Hirschhorn has also situated “presence and production” projects within institutions, as with 24h Foucault (2004, Palais de Tokyo, Paris) and Swiss-Swiss Democracy (2004, Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris). “Presence and production” means, in Hirschhorn’s own words, “my presence (the artist’s presence) and my production (the artist’s production) first of all, because that’s the condition which makes participation possible for all the inhabitants....”

Hirschhorn asserts absolute artistic authorship, yet his “presence and production” works involve multiple collaborators whose contributions are critical in the development of the character and content of the projects. In the Bijlmermeer, for instance, the German philosopher Marcus Steinweg delivered a lecture each evening (fig. 4.17); the French philosopher Alexandre Constanzo produced the daily edition of The Bijlmer Spinoza Newspaper; and the Italian art historian Vittoria Martini held the post of “Ambassador” from art history. Rehearsed daily and performed weekly, the “Child’s Play” (by Guillaume Désanges in collaboration with Frédéric Cherboeuf) (fig. 4.18), involved a rotating group of child performers from the neighborhood who reenacted seminal works of performance art, from Joseph Beuys’s How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare (1965) to Marina Abramovic’s Art Must be Beautiful (1975). Written by Steinweg and directed by Hirschhorn, the “Spinoza Theater” (fig. 4.19) was performed nightly by a cast

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272 Hirschhorn may not have conceived of the term “presence and production” until fairly recently (beginning in or around 2009), but the principles have been at play for quite some time. The term has therefore been applied retrospectively to the relevant artworks.

273 In a description for the Foucault Squatter (2008), an unrealized project, Hirschhorn discusses the desire to create “moments of public space within institutions.” Hirschhorn, “Foucault Squatter,” artist statement.

drawn from Bijlmermeer residents. Invited guests such as the French poet Manuel Joseph, French art historian Georges Didi-Huberman, and Italian philosopher Antonio Negri presented their work. A series of “running events” featured performances, readings, and discussions proposed and led by members of the Bijlmermeer community. (fig. 4.20)

This heteroglot ensemble of living voices is joined with the significant presence of historical ones, asserted through texts and artworks. Hirschhorn has realized three “monuments” to date, and they have been dedicated to the philosophical writings of Baruch Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze, and Georges Bataille (1999, 2000, and 2002, respectively.) A fourth monument, devoted to Antonio Gramsci, is in the planning stages. A related project, the *Musée Précaire Albinet* (2004) focused on modernist and avant-garde masterpieces borrowed from the Centre Pompidou. The work of Michel Foucault inspired an eponymous “presence and production” project in the Palais de Tokyo, Paris. Hirschhorn employs various strategies to present the works of such historical figures: original artworks or facsimiles hang in the exhibition spaces, primary and secondary literature stocks the libraries’ bookshelves, maps make visual the intellectual terrains charted by the thinkers, and lecturers and discussants grapple with the implications of the concepts put forward in philosophical texts or in artistic practices. In the case of the “Child’s Play,” art history is literally embodied and performed.

Hirschhorn has expressed his frustration with the art press that often resorts to categories and catchwords like “site-specific installation” or “community-based art” to describe the “presence and production” works. To counter the vocabulary of art criticism, Hirschhorn has attempted to wrest interpretive power by insisting upon the singular perspicacity of his own

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275 The play was written in Steinweg’s native German and translated into Dutch, the language in which it was performed. See Hirschhorn’s statement, “Toward a ‘Precarious Theater,’” in which he discusses the failures of the “Spinoza Theater”—a disaster, in his estimation—as well as the concept of the “Precarious Theater” that he derives out of the lessons learned from the experiment. Hirschhorn, “Toward a ‘Precarious Theater,’” artist statement.

276 See fn. 35.
lexicon. It is true that his works in public space are sited without being site-specific, intensely engaged with resident populations, yet autonomous in conception. Indeed, one of the most notable aspects of these projects is that neither the site nor the context governs Hirschhorn’s choice of subject matter. In siting a work or body of works, either artistic or philosophical, at the center of his public projects Hirschhorn puts into practice Jacques Rancière’s assertion that a principle of equality between individuals can only be achieved with the aid of a “mediating third term” to which all can direct their intelligence. The quintessential “in-between thing,” according to Rancière, is the book. In Hirschhorn’s “presence and production” projects the role of the “in-between thing” is variously played by the philosophical treatise, the painting, the sculpture, the body of critical or artistic work.

Hirschhorn’s mediating terms distinguish his “presence and production” works from the anthropological bent in site-specific art, where the artist-turned-ethnographer enters a community, to which he or she may or may not already belong, in order to produce an artwork that speaks of the concerns and experiences of that host community. A “presence and production” project’s guidelines stand in contrast with a participant-observer model of engagement. Less detached than observation and more tangible than participation, “production” also reverberates with the utopianism of a certain subset of the historical avant-garde—from Walter Benjamin to the Russian Productivists—who envisioned the role of the artist as intervening in modes of production. For Hirschhorn, “production” refers to the artist’s output, which includes initial preparations, execution of the structure, planning of events, and daily

maintenance of the work once erected. The residents in turn are invited to become producers as well. Hirschhorn contracts members of the community to help in the construction of the structure and to participate in its day-to-day operations. Through “running events,” television broadcasts (Bataille Monument), and writing workshops (Museé Précaire Albinet), residents have the opportunity to construct and disseminate their own narratives.

On the platform of the Bijlmer Spinoza Festival, and in the “presence and production” works generally, discipline-specific concerns and personal investments confront one another, weaving a dense discursive fabric. If the philosophical corpus or work of art is the ostensible subject of such projects, the dialogic encounter—between individual worldviews, between art and life, between artist and viewer—is its actual object. Theorizing “internal dialogism,” perhaps his most profound insight, Bakhtin suggests that in living conversation the word anticipates and requires a response: the as-yet-unspoken answer structures and informs the initial utterance. Further, the orientation toward the anticipated rejoinder is simultaneously an orientation toward a listener’s “active understanding,” a subjective realm where the speaker’s utterance undergoes complex negotiations, is accommodated or rejected, found to be in conflict or in consonance. Bakhtin’s spatialized metaphor for “internal dialogism” resonates: “The speaker breaks through the alien conceptual horizon of the listener, constructs his own utterance on alien territory, against his, the listener’s, apperceptive background.” (Emphasis mine.) In Hirschhorn’s works in public space, the alien territory is double: it describes the mental and emotional realm of

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279 The worker-collaborators were paid an hourly wage. Additionally, the Bijlmer Spinoza Festival’s refreshment stand and the Bataille Monument’s Imbiss and taxi service were run by community members; the resources were their own, as were the profits.

280 “The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer’s direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word.” Bakhtin, “Discourse,” 280.

281 Ibid., 282.

282 Ibid.
another (the listener) as well as the spatial, socio-political, and historical reality of an Other in the early 21st century. As xenophobia becomes an even more widespread phenomenon, sometimes solidifying into policy (Switzerland passed in 2009 a referendum barring the building of new minarets, for instance, and in 2010 France instituted a ban against burqas), “alien” indicates not only the unfamiliar but also a threat to be counteracted. Thus Hirschhorn’s professed desire “to engage in dialogue with the other without neutralizing the other”—a particular capacity of art, in his opinion—is an ethical and political position that privileges friction over untroubled accord, centrifugal over centripetal properties. Reading Hirschhorn’s practice as antagonistic rather than ameliorative, Claire Bishop writes, “[The] work acknowledges the impossibility of a ‘microtopia’ and instead sustains a tension among viewers, participants, and context.”

It is worth noting that whatever their distinct historical moments and theoretical aims, Bakhtin and Rancière intersect on this crucial point: the former’s concept of “active understanding” and the latter’s theorization of the “emancipated spectator” privilege cognitive processes of comprehension. Neither understands spectatorship, readership, or listenership as passive acts. For his part, Hirschhorn rejects the idea of “interactive art” as nonsense, for every engagement with art is an act of cognition.

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283 Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 70. Bishop makes this remark about Hirschhorn and the Spanish artist Santiago Sierra, both of whom she presents as counter-examples to the practitioners of relational aesthetics as set out by Nicolas Bourriaud. Her discussion of antagonism is in dialogue with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s theory of democracy.

284 See, for example, Hirschhorn’s text on *Foucault Art Work*, in which he discusses the “activity of reflection, activity of questioning.” Hirschhorn, “Foucault Art Work,” artist statement. In this way, Hirschhorn seems to be aligned with de Certeau’s privileging of reading as an act of production, of bricolage. The latter writes: Reading (an image or a text), moreover, seems to constitute the maximal development of the passivity assumed to characterize the consumer, who is conceived of as a voyeur…in a ‘show biz society.’ In reality, the activity of reading has on the contrary all the characteristics of a silent production: the drift across the page, the metamorphosis of the text effected by the wandering eyes of the reader, the improvisation and expectation of meanings inferred from a few words, leaps over written spaces in an ephemeral dance….He insinuates into another person’s text the ruses of pleasure and appropriation: he poaches on it, is transported into it, pluralizes himself in it like the internal rumblings of one’s body (de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xxi).

Yet, a depoliticized aspect can be detected in de Certeau’s theories of the pleasures of reading that distinguishes it
Dialogism’s political stakes come to the fore. Who speaks, to whom, for whom, and how: these issues are paramount when grappling with Hirschhorn’s projects as they operate within their settings in public space, settings in which conditions of alienation and reification are not merely theoretical but actual. Without a doubt, Hirschhorn chooses his sites with care. In each instance—Bataille Monument, Musée Précaire Albinet, and Bijlmer Spinoza Festival—Hirschhorn has selected a context at the periphery. This is true on the social level, in that the residential populations with which Hirschhorn worked are marked by the legacies of European colonialism or cultural and economic domination. In Kassel’s Friedrich Wöhler Siedlung, where fifty percent of the population is composed of people of foreign descent, and of those fifty percent half are of Turkish descent, the ramifications of Germany’s 1960s Gastarbeiterprogramm continue to play out.285 France’s colonial past is evident in the large number of residents of Maghrebi origin in the Albinet housing estate in the Landy neighborhood of Aubervilliers, while the Surinamese population in the Bijlmermeer (nearly 70 percent of its residents in 2000) registers the history of slavery and Dutch colonialism.286 Each of these sites is plagued by high rates of unemployment, particularly among the disaffected youth, and occasionally by manifestations of unrest—the former giving rise to the latter. Describing a

from either Hirschhorn’s or Rancière’s understanding of the cognitive act. As Tom McDonough has asserted, “[W]e can detect the pacifying quality of de Certeau’s characterization [of poaching]…. For if we must concede that poaching constitutes an act of popular resistance, we may nevertheless note that it is a largely private and atomized form of opposition, and one that is content to leave existing power relations intact. It is, as de Certeau would designate it, a means of “making do” within a dominant, in fact practically invulnerable, culture.” McDonough, “No Ghost,” 119.

285 The Gastarbeiterprogramm of the early 1960s recruited foreign workers to fill labor shortages in Germany. Although recruitment stopped in 1973, a portion of the migrant population chose to remain in Germany to raise their families. Subsequent generations of German Turks have diminishing ties to Turkey even as may struggle to be considered fully German. Anthropologist Jenny B. White writes, “While Turks may become ‘cocitizens with equal rights’ (Gleichberechtigte Mitbürger), they can never become ‘German’ or participate fully in German society, regardless of where their behavior falls on the scale. German ethnicity and national identity are based on blood, not on behavior.” White, “Turks in the New Germany,” American Anthropologist 99, no. 4 (1997): 760.

“figurative suicide” enacted by “young ethnics” in France in the 1990s, Azouz Begag, sociologist, novelist, and France’s first cabinet minister of North African origin, writes, “During this period rioting by young ethnics often took self-destructive forms, morbid procession-like spectacles.” This spectacle can be seen to culminate in the 2005 violent disorders in the banlieues.

The marginal status granted to these minority populations in society is further enforced architecturally and spatially. Situated at the periphery of urban centers, many Siedlungen and HLMs [Habitations à Loyer Modéré—moderate-income housing] have become “ethnically stigmatized environments.” Despite the specific national, regional, and local politics that gave rise to these conditions, the pattern is actually remarkably consistent in the three cases: housing solutions aimed at middle to lower-middle class populations become undesirable to the intended residents, thereby creating vacancies then opened to “starter” renters (often foreign). The influx of foreign nationals often rendered a neighborhood even more undesirable to prospective middle-class tenants. The Friedrich Wöhler complex initially housed workers from nearby industry, but that population moved away with the shuttering of factories in the 1960s. The cité Albinet is typical of the HLMs built after the war in France as a response to severe housing shortages. Inhabited by lower middle-class French families in the immediate post-war period, such large


289 Alec G. Hargreaves writes in the context of the HLMs, “The growing presence of immigrant families was sometimes regarded by French tenants as a mark—if not indeed the cause—of the deteriorating conditions in HLM estates.” Hargreaves, Immigration, ‘race’ and ethnicity in Contemporary France (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 72.

scale, high-rise apartments began to be filled with immigrant families in the 1970s when the French families moved on to home-ownership in the private sector.\textsuperscript{291}

The Bijlmermeer (fig. 4.21) is a particular and particularly interesting case because, while it too responded to a need for housing in the downtown area, its architects and planners subscribed strongly to Le Corbusier’s ideas and those propagated by CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne) beginning in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{292} According to such principles, the Bijlmermeer plan boasted large green spaces open only to pedestrian traffic, elevated roads and car parks, and functionalist separation between work, living, and recreational areas.\textsuperscript{293} The massive concrete high-rises featured indoor walkways and communal spaces, intended to foster collectivity. The uniformity of the Bijlmermeer high-rises spoke to the architects’ belief in social equality expressed through architectural non-differentiation. (Rem Koolhaas coined it “The Las Vegas of the welfare state.”\textsuperscript{294}) Partly due to funding shortages that led to the omission of crucial planned amenities, the Bijlmermeer, as realized, never achieved its aims. Furthermore, abstract values did not coincide with actual desires.\textsuperscript{295} When the middle-class opted for single-family homes over the Bijlmermeer’s uniform apartments, empty flats were leased to “starters,”

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\textsuperscript{291} Hargreaves, \textit{Immigration}, 70–1. The statistics provided in Hargreaves book indicate that in 1990, only 14 percent of French- and 18 percent of European-headed households lived in HLMs, while 42 percent of Maghrebi-headed households, 43 percent of South-East Asian households (from ex-French Indo-China), and 45 percent of Turkish households lived in HLMs. Speaking of the sectors in which these HLMs tend to be built, Hargreaves writes, “The peripheral location of most jointly aided districts, their poor facilities and physical separation from other parts of the city, combined with high unemployment levels and dense concentrations of mediocre and poor-quality housing, have turned these areas into a byword for social exclusion” (73).

\textsuperscript{292} Although CIAM dissolved in 1958, its principles continued to influence the architects and city planners in the Netherlands. Amsterdam was particularly shaped by the thinking of CIAM, as Cornelius Van Eesteren, head of the Urban Development Department of Amsterdam until 1959, was also president of CIAM from 1930–34. Van Eesteren played a crucial role in the development of “The Functionalist City,” and in 1933 he completed the Amsterdam Extension Plan, the first urban planning scheme to be based on extensive statistical data. See Eric Mumford, \textit{The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928–60} (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 2000), 59–64.


\textsuperscript{294} Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, \textit{Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large} (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1995), 863.

\textsuperscript{295} Bodaar, “Multicultural Urban Space,” 179.
including an influx of Surinamese immigrants after the independence of that nation was declared in 1975. Annemarie Bodaar notes that with the increasing socio-economic marginalization of the Bija

mermeer population, the area gained a reputation as a place of poverty and crime. Built on the principle of social equality, the Bija

mermeer became the means of spatializing inequality. The Bija

mermeer has thus been subject to several rounds of revitalization efforts. In 1992, interested parties razed twenty-five percent of the Bija

mer high-rises; in 1999 an additional fifty percent of the remaining buildings were torn down to make way for low-rise buildings.296 It is therefore significant that Hirschhorn chose to situate the Bija

mer Spinoza Festival amidst the extant high-rises, massive testaments to modernism’s aspirations and to their failure. In the confrontation between his modest plywood wedge and the concrete colossi, Hirschhorn affirms the latter’s utopian intent, confronts its foundering, and asserts his own version of utopian action in the present.

In the first volume of The Critique of Everyday Life (1946), Lefebvre writes of the festivals of rural France that punctured and opposed the everyday: “[Festivals] were like everyday life, but more intense; and moments of that life—in the practical community, food, the relation with nature—in other words, work—were reunited, amplified, and magnified in the festival.”297 Festivals break through the alienation imposed by colonization (Lefebvre spoke of the “colonization” of everyday life by the forces of capital, but in this case we would include also the historical colonization of peoples) through play and surprise, as well as through “rupture, transgression, ecstasy,” which release the extraordinary from the ordinary.298 In subsequent volumes of Lefebvre’s three-part opus, the philosopher notes that while the French peasant

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festivals are historical phenomena no longer recoverable as such, there remains in the concept a potential for agitation. If Hirschhorn’s Bijlmer project has little of the overtly volatile and revolutionary energy of the peasant festivals about which Lefebvre wrote, and which he argued to be manifest in the revolts of March 1871 and then again in May 1968, Hirschhorn’s choice to adopt the concept of the “festival” can be seen as a gesture toward and assertion of the original utopian promise of that social form. In interviews, several Bijlmer residents who participated in Hirschhorn’s project returned again and again to the conviviality, the eventfulness, offered by the Bijlmer Spinoza Festival—a welcome contrast to the monotony of daily life, especially in the face of unemployment and social and cultural marginalization.

As children clambered on and off the exercise machines nearby, chasing each other across the platform of the Bijlmer Spinoza Festival, the soft-spoken Steinweg talked of “The ‘Uncertainty Relation,’ Europe/America” (lecture 11) and ruminated on “Aporias of Love” (lecture 12). When Steinweg proposed during the latter lecture, “To love is to risk contact with the otherness of the other,” and, “To love is to transgress one’s egosphere,” it was palpable that his message was being enacted at that very moment (and every evening) as he offered his philosophical practice to an audience that sometimes included only those involved with the project. Indeed, the following statements could stand for the tactics as well as the goals of

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299 Stuart Elden, Understanding Henri Lefebvre: Theory and the Possible (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 118.

300 Lefebvre, “The Style of the Commune,” in Key Writings (New York and London: Continuum, 2003), 188–9, and “Spectral Analysis,” in Writings on Cities (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 142. In Lefebvre’s writings about the Commune and the student revolts, the spatial politics of center and periphery, city and suburbs, were explicit: “In 1987, the people were armed; the entire people took to the streets, festival and battle….In March 1871 as in May 1968, the people come from the periphery, from the outside where they had been driven, where they only found a social vacuum, assembled and headed toward the urban centres in order to conquer them.” Lefebvre, “Spectral Analysis,” 142.

Hirschhorn’s “presence and production” projects: to transgress one’s egosphere (Steinweg); to break through the alien conceptual horizon of the listener (Bakhtin); to open a door, cut a window, even break a hole into reality…into the hard core of reality (Hirschhorn).

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Just as frequently as Hirschhorn has avowed art’s capacity to change life—a utopian goal of the artistic avant-garde if ever there was one—he has insisted upon art’s ability to provoke and create the conditions for dialogue and confrontation. The former is predicated upon and conjoined to the latter. Hirschhorn’s self-directed and motivating questions, “Where do I stand? What do I want?” simultaneously imply an other-directed prompt: “Where do you stand? What do you want?” The same operation undergirds even the most banal declarations like “I ♥ [blank].” Hirschhorn characterizes “I ♥ [blank]” as a universal and all embracing symbol, infinitely adaptable, expressive of equality. Hirschhorn attempts to rescue “I ♥ [blank]” from the vacuousness of commodified sentiment and finds in it the power of an unjustified and unjustifiable affirmation of faith and allegiance, one that resides in the realm of the affective and personal, beyond rationalization. To whom and to what will you declare attachment and allegiance? To a sports team, a philosopher, a religion, a regime? Neutrality is hardly the higher ground, as the Swiss-born Hirschhorn must feel acutely. Leveled at himself and at the viewer, the call to take a position is bound up for Hirschhorn with the necessity of adopting radical responsibility.

As with his verbal and textual output, Hirschhorn’s artwork speaks in the interrogative, declarative, polemical, and rhetorical modes. Hirschhorn’s rhetorical style can seem on first
impact to be emphatically monologic. One might cite his insistent use of the first-person pronoun and the tendency for all statements to issue from him as if energetic pronouncements. But I would argue that the opposite is the case. His writings are rife with borrowings from the realm of philosophy; from agit-prop slogans (“No Exclusion – Inclusion!” “Energy, yes! Quality, No!”); and from everyday, non-academic, extra-aesthetic speech. What’s more, his articulations (argumentative, persuasive, iterative, and provocative) are always aimed at the reader or listener with the expectation of a reaction. Drawing upon stratified discourse for its forms and content, Hirschhorn adopts an intensely personal rhetorical style structured to have maximum impact on the “active understanding” of his listener.

Particularly in museum and gallery exhibitions, Hirschhorn tends to bring highly contentious materials into contact. Through rudimentary (and thus all the more forceful) formal means he draws questionable equivalences, adopts counterintuitive propositions, and creates entire worlds governed by extended metaphors. To offset the authority asserted by cultural institutions—whether the patrimony maintained by the museum or the market values asserting by the gallery—Hirschhorn overtakes the white cube, remaking it floor to ceiling with his material accretions. Assertiveness is not only directed at the institutions but at the viewers also. Visual and textual overabundance, immersive environments, and the sometimes-brutal images he forces into consciousness constitute a pointed address, to which the viewer cannot but react.

Hirschhorn’s tactic in regard to public space is distinct, as reflects the changed context. Whereas he must puncture the vacuum of the institution with reality, public space is already shot through with it. “In a gallery, museum, private collection or when participating in an exhibition I don’t necessarily have to agree,” Hirschhorn explains. “But when working in Public Space, to
agree is a necessity….Reality cannot be changed unless you agree with it.”

This is not to say that his approach in public space is complicit with its structures of inequality or ameliorative of them; agreement for Hirschhorn means an unblinking acknowledgement of its conditions.

Though affirmative in nature—affirmative of art and philosophy’s relevance to life, that is—Hirschhorn’s “presence and production” works are by no means without risk (or without the risk of failure). Even more so than the projects experienced through institutional frameworks, the orientation of the public works toward the other demands a readiness to negotiate conflicts, tolerate contradictions, and maintain antagonisms. Hirschhorn’s summation is as poignant as it is pithy: “To exhibit in public space is cruel, but public space is just.”

Without the guarantee of value offered by the institution, without its intervening rhetoric or its offer of safeguarding, the work of art in public space is subject to the unmediated response of those whose space it inhabits. That response has at times endangered the work through theft and vandalism. An extreme example would be the Théâtre Précaire, exhibited in Rennes in 2010, which was vandalized and then partially consumed by fire, leading to its being dismantled after only two performances of the theater piece integrated into the exhibition.

Hirschhorn’s distinguishes between “the spectre of evaluation” (i.e. the professional opinions of art world insiders) and the

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304 Hirschhorn, “About the ‘Musée Précaire Albinet,’ about an artist’s work in Public Space, and about the artist’s role in public,” artist statement.
305 “To agree means to confront oneself with reality as it is. To agree is the condition for a possible acceptance or refusal of something.” This is a recurring concept in Hirschhorn’s work, and he traces its genesis to his encounter with the work of Andy Warhol: “Andy Warhol is the artist of agreement.” Hirschhorn, “My Warhol,” artist statement.
307 Theft of equipment from the Deleuze Monument caused the work to be de-installed in advance of the planned end-date. From this experience Hirschhorn derived the principle of “presence and production.” A subsequent incident of theft from the Bataille Monument was resolved without sacrificing the project—a result, according to Hirschhorn, that was made possible by the relationship of trust built between him and the community. Hirschhorn, “A propos de la ‘Fin du Deleuze-Monument,’” artist statement.
308 The Théâtre Précaire was revived (as Théâtre Précaire 2) for a duration of ten days, now under the aegis of L’Atelier Culturel Gros Chêne. The theater piece was written by poet Manuel Joseph and performed by residents from the community. See Hirschhorn’s statements “Théâtre Précaire” and “Toward ‘Precarious Theater,’” as well as his letter to the residents in Rennes announcing Théâtre Précaire 2.
judgment of the “non-exclusive public,” which overlaps with critics, art historians, curators, et al., but is primarily the domain of the “the other.” His submits himself to the judgment of the “non-exclusive public”: whether subject to its cruelties or recipient of its generosities, the work in public space has to potential to “touch the ‘hard-core’ of reality.”

Hirschhorn’s great artistic insight is that positions of extreme prejudice and passionate partisanship express themselves through shared forms, thus charged with volatile energy. Unimpeded by strictly aesthetic demands, these forms instantiate raw desire, need, and expressivity. Hirschhorn’s appropriation of such extra-aesthetic forms and his engagement with multiple and varied publics constitute the two primary modes of his dialogic impulse. In both cases, dialogism is internal—internal to the sculptural forms (as encapsulations of and conduits for manifold human urges) and internal to Hirschhorn’s attitude toward the viewer (as an orientation toward the “active understanding” of the other, understood to be partial and historically specific). Hirschhorn takes existence-in-discourse—and a public, contentious discourse, in particular—as a fundamental thematic of his art making as well as its precondition. “My art must appropriate the world,” he says, declaring thereby his dialogic intent.
Chapter 5: Beyond Information

What Thomas Hirschhorn terms the “dictatorship of information” is the presentation of “facts” that have been deemed significant according to predetermined sets of values. Information is offered by text and image alike, but the “dictatorship of information” is exercised through words in their capacity to impose meaning. By contrast, Hirschhorn asserts that the image and, crucially for this discussion, the photograph offer a non-hierarchical field of visual information from which the viewer is at liberty to draw significance for him or herself. It is this fullness (excess, even) of possible meaning that that the verbal supplement—identifying or explanatory caption, written or televisual reportage—attempts to control and to contract to a point, to a sound bite or headline. The rhetorical aspects of photography (single-point perspective, differential focus) and the possibility for manipulation hardly compromise the truth-value of the image for Hirschhorn: “Even a posed or feigned or retouched image does not lie, it always shows only what it is…. In the image, everything is important and everything is equally important.”309 With this characterization, Hirschhorn posits the image as radically available to understanding. Yet to say that the image is available to understanding is not to say that it is transparent to it; Hirschhorn acknowledges the work and duration required “to look at the image, to consider it, to consider it for a long time, to look at it until we need no additional information…”310

Gleaned from the Internet or appropriated from fashion magazines, newspapers and news journals, tabloids, special interest publications, and pornography, the plethora of images in Hirschhorn’s works appears exclusively without original, accompanying captions. Thus decontextualized and disposed across myriad surfaces, the innumerable images are articulate and

310 Ibid.
wordless, explicit in their visibility but unspecified as to what is being shown (figs. 5.1–2). The viewer alternates between an intensely focused type of looking and a scanning, “dedifferentiated” vision that attempts, but always fails, to grasp the whole. Dedifferentiation (a term proposed by Anton Ehrenzweig) featured in Robert Morris’s discussion of new perceptual possibilities based upon lateral extensions of heterogeneous “stuff.” He writes, “What is revealed is that art itself is an activity of change, of disorientation and shift, of violent discontinuity and mutability, of the willingness for confusion even in the service of discovering new perceptual modes.”

By comparison, Hirschhorn’s pronouncement is typically blunt but vivid: “I want to super-inform and super-detail, in order not to inform or detail. I do not want to communicate.”

This refusal to communicate might seem confounding in light of Hirschhorn’s ongoing commitment to a dialogic engagement with what he calls a “non-exclusive public.” So too does it seem to contradict the artist’s prolific writings and frequent interviews about his practice. What is the goal of such wordfulness (for lack of a better word) if not communication, one might well ask. Yet to immerse oneself in Hirschhorn’s lexicon is to become attuned to the way in which he invests certain words with highly specific, one might say idiosyncratic, meaning and value—as when he refuses the term “ephemeral” in favor of “precarious” when describing his works of limited duration, or when he insists upon the idea of “unshared responsibility” rather than “collaboration.” In rubbing against the grain of common usage (and often of common sense as well), and in trying to render stable and specific the meanings of words, Hirschhorn opens himself to the possibility of being misunderstood. But the viewer’s experience of incomprehension or disbelief vis-à-vis Hirschhorn’s visual and verbal assertions can also operate productively, giving rise to a cognitive dissonance or delay that invests his or her relation to the

artwork with a critical dimension. Returning to the particular term under scrutiny, Hirschhorn’s aversion to “communication” can be illuminated by contrasting it with his sense of “engagement.” When speaking of the power of art to create the conditions for “one-on-one engagement,” his vocabulary suggests assertive, even aggressive, directness: “to touch,” “to confront,” “to implicate.” In contrast, “communication” must be understood as the work of persuasion, justification, and information—it is, in other words, the domain of public relations and the media.

In their seminal study, Public Sphere and Experience, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge suggest that the media, and specifically the consolidated form of media conglomerates, present an illusory public sphere that predetermines what is sayable and thinkable in accordance with the interests of capital.313 “The media cartel,” they maintain, “is a macrocommodity, which fuses the individual commodities of education, entertainment, and information into one overall complex.”314 Media’s infiltration into all areas and stages of life renders it nearly impossible to wrest autonomy from “the preparation of consciousness.”315 Negt and Kluge describe a situation by which knowledge of political situations (and the writing of their history) is shaped by the capacity of news services to select only certain images for distribution, the effect of which is then compounded by media conglomerates’ perpetuation of those same images and the narrative sequences they convey:

It is possible to imagine the uniformity of such a presentation of history by keeping in mind how even today press photos that are distributed by news services overdetermine the polymorphic image world of real political events. This tendency is increased for the media conglomerate because only it can intensify the commodity value of image sequences and the presentations of material through

313 Negt and Kluge, Public Sphere and Experience, 31. Indeed, Negt and Kluge offer a grim summation: “What one is allowed to feel, express, communicate as a realistic person is molded by the modes of interaction in the factory, in everyday life, and above all, transmitted by the mass media.”
314 Ibid., 131.
315 Ibid., 139.
recognizability in such a way that it corresponds to its monopolistic interests in exploitation. Regardless of whether the conglomerate hereby produces a falsified image of history or whether it attempts to evade it through an insistent neutralization, in either case the polymorphism of real history is reduced to stereotypes, and tendentially to a trademark.\footnote{Ibid., 140.}

Hirschhorn’s determination to “super-inform,” to present simply too much material than could possibly be assimilated, might be understood as a refusal to dictate meaning or to deliver pre-digested conclusions. Needless to say, it is a refusal that can only be evoked and partially enacted, for however numerous and varied the images and texts that Hirschhorn incorporates into his works, the act of selection is operative.\footnote{In his review of Hirschhorn’s “Superficial Engagement” exhibition at the Gladstone Gallery in 2006, Jerry Saltz observes that the majority of destroyed bodies pictured in the work are “apparently Arab.” The principle of selection focuses, geographically and ideologically, the critique leveled by “Superficial Engagement.” Saltz concludes that the exhibition is “loaded with ideological baggage.” “This may be [Hirschhorn’s] intention,” Saltz writes. “It may also be unavoidable. All editing is misrepresentative.” Saltz, “The Them Question,” \textit{The Village Voice} (24 January 2006), accessed at <http://www.villagevoice.com/2006-01-24/art/the-them-question/>.

\footnote{Joselit’s writings on Hirschhorn are few in number and brief—two exhibition reviews in \textit{Artforum} and a catalogue essay for the exhibition \textit{The Subjecters}—but they contain perhaps the best account of the role of media in Hirschhorn’s works. Joselit compares the “swarms” of images in Hirschhorn’s \textit{Utopia, Utopia} (2005) and \textit{Superficial Engagement} (2006) to the web. “A swarm is chaotic but not without structure,” Joselit notes. “Hirschhorn’s swarms establish nodes, almost as though pictorial fragments were magnetically drawn to one another.” Joselit, “Thomas Hirschhorn,” 286.}}

Yet I take seriously Hirschhorn’s aspiration to give visual form to something like the “polymorphism of real history” that Negt and Kluge describe. In so doing Hirschhorn shows such polymorphism to be necessarily intractable and messy. Indeed, the “too much” of Hirschhorn’s work can be seen to do double duty: at the same time that it defies the tendency of traditional forms of media to streamline information, it simultaneously mimics the structure of new media and specifically the Internet, as David Joselit has observed.\footnote{Joselit’s writings on Hirschhorn are few in number and brief—two exhibition reviews in \textit{Artforum} and a catalogue essay for the exhibition \textit{The Subjecters}—but they contain perhaps the best account of the role of media in Hirschhorn’s works. Joselit compares the “swarms” of images in Hirschhorn’s \textit{Utopia, Utopia} (2005) and \textit{Superficial Engagement} (2006) to the web. “A swarm is chaotic but not without structure,” Joselit notes. “Hirschhorn’s swarms establish nodes, almost as though pictorial fragments were magnetically drawn to one another.” Joselit, “Thomas Hirschhorn,” 286.}

Referring to the “outgrowth,” Hirschhorn’s term for bulbous accretions of newspaper and packing tape that he applies to objects such as mannequins, Joselit writes,

\begin{quote}
An outgrowth suggests a form of communication, or information, that does not pretend to a transparency of meaning, but rather operates according to the exorbitantly hyper-reproductive logic of tumors. The circulation of images, Hirschhorn suggests, may obstruct messages as easily as it conveys them…. Too
\end{quote}
much information results in a kind of blockage, a tumor or cancerous outgrowth where communication is suffocated in mute shock.\footnote{Ibid., 285–6.}

To “super-inform” is a sculptural principle as well as a political and ethical stance in regard to forms of media in the information age.

Yet a glut of heterogeneous printed material, visual and verbal, is only one means by which Hirschhorn responds to and counters the media’s manipulation of consciousness. A process of drastic reduction is still another. Concise and systematic, the series of \textit{Ur-Collage} (2008) (figs. 5.3–12) may be the extreme expression of Hirschhorn’s general approach to two-dimensional image juxtaposition.\footnote{Hirschhorn produced 142 \textit{Ur-Collages} in 2008. Email correspondence with the artist, 3 February 2012.} Defined as a “simple, primitive, prehistoric collage,” each work in the series derives from the same compositional principle.\footnote{Hirschhorn, Press Release for \textit{Ur-Collage}, Galerie Susanna Kulli, 5 December 2008–19 January 2009.} A double-spread advertisement from a fashion magazine establishes the physical extent of the whole, thus serving as an element in the collage as well as its ground; an image of a mutilated body sourced from the Internet is then positioned atop or abutting the advertisement.\footnote{Hirschhorn, \textit{On the occasion}, n.p.} Of the two elements that make up an \textit{Ur-Collage}, one is the lifeblood of publications, insofar as the sale of ads generates revenue; the other belongs to the “polymorphism of real history” (specifically of bloody conflicts in the Middle East) that is suppressed in the American press, whether in response to political and ideological agendas or considerations of “good taste” (which one might argue is also ideological).\footnote{See Hirschhorn’s text on “Taste” in \textit{Texte zur Kunst} 75 (September 2009): 124–5.} About this series Hirschhorn asserts, “The dictatorship of information has no grip on my \textit{Ur-Collages} because these works won’t be neutralized.” Indeed, the \textit{Ur-Collages} are relentlessly charged, not only due to the nature of the included elements (the blown bodies and fragments of flesh resist assimilation) or to the audacity involved in their juxtaposition, but also
because of the aesthetic principles of color and composition that govern the pairings, which I will consider in depth shortly. In semiotic terms, one would say that the Ur-Collages explore syntagmatic reduction (merely two images in combination) and paradigmatic explosion. Commodity culture and the culture of warfare provide an endless stream of images for paradigmatic substitution. One result is that the serial production of the Ur-Collages—Hirschhorn made over 140—reinstituates their structural logic and conceptual force. Another is that the Ur-Collages themselves become interchangeable, substitutable.

At its origin (Ursprung), Hirschhorn proposes, collage comprises two disparate elements set in maximal tension with minimal compositional interference. Yet despite this reduction (or perhaps because of it), a variety of dynamics are established between the advertisements and documentary images in the Ur-Collages. In some, the gestures and affectless expressions of the models are transformed or recoded, through juxtaposition with the gruesome corpses, into reactions of aversion, pensiveness, denial, or fear (figs. 5.3–4). Others are based upon extreme contrast: the model whose toned legs are shown mid-stride is paired with a cadaver, the lower limbs of which have been blown off, leaving a stringy mass of bone and tissue where the torso ends; a crowd of men gaping at a corpse is compared with a model’s narcissistic contemplation (figs. 5.5–6). Still another type of comparative logic ties two images together with like motifs or gestures (figs. 5.7–12). The apparent contrast between ideal body and ruined body is set in tension with a superficial, even banal, similarity—a shot of color, a formal rhyme, a mirrored gesture—for an effect that Sebastian Egenhofer has characterized as “abstractly decorative.”

In its uncanniness, the now-doubled detail redoubles the viewer’s sense of disjunction: how is

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324 Ur-Collages 111, Série B III, 139, 127, A17, A2, and A9, for example.
325 Ur-Collages 110 and A8, for example.
326 Egenhofer, “What is Political about Hirschhorn’s Art?” in Thomas Hirschhorn: Establishing a Critical Corpus, 112.
this visual likeness supposed to mean? What are the ethics of looking a mutilated body in terms of color, texture, and pattern? The bringing together of aspirational or advertising imagery with atrocity images is not unique to Hirschhorn, but the moral ambiguity produced by means of unmitigated juxtaposition and decorative likeness may be. Works like Martha Rosler’s *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful*, 1967–72 and 2004, operate by fitting together images of a consumer ideal of American domesticity with documentary photographs of the Vietnam War, in the first iteration of the series, and of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, in the second. These powerful works operate by creating a cohesive scene in which the seamless incorporation of dissonant figures or images punctures American isolationism and capitalism. Rosler declares her preference for

> the creation of something that is spatially plausible, in which the construct within the frame obeys the laws of gravity and proportion, not to mention perspective and size commensurability. I want to be welcomed into the frame, to have a place to stand within it….The spatial comfort of these constructed works is belied by the discomfort of the details, in which two (or more) discourses are visibly made to collide…rupturing the surface with the previously hidden, ripping a seam into a seamless tale.³²⁷

Crucial distinctions thus lie between *Bringing the War Home* and Hirschhorn’s collages: disjunction is formal as well as thematic in Hirschhorn’s work (he does not fit the images together) yet by tethering the two images together with “decorative” or formal motifs, he renders a clear moral message elusive.

> A blood-stained kaffiyeh and the pattern of a designer caftan (fig. 5.7); a lone, severed leg wrapped with tattered fabric and the exposed gam of Claudia Schiffer, who stands loosely draped in a cloth emblazoned with the interlocking c’s of Chanel’s logo (fig. 5.8); the circular pattern of a coat and an arc of exploded flesh (fig. 5.9); a cobalt handbag and the crumpled blue

plastic on which the head of a cadaver rests (fig. 5.10).328 Turned 180 degrees, the pose of an evening gown-clad model maps onto the contorted posture of a cadaver thrown amid dry reeds, the stalks of which are additionally echoed by the model’s brunette tresses, accessory elements in motion (fig. 5.11).329 Swollen and smashed, with bits of straw stuck to viscous blood, the pink flesh of a severed head, accented with dark hair and beard, echoes the drapery of a rose-colored dress, made articulate with strong light and deep shadows (fig. 5.12).330 What might be considered the incidental detail, Hirschhorn brings into focus and declares to be critical. The Ur-Collages instantiate in visual terms the claim that “everything is equally important” in the image. Hirschhorn elaborates,

Let’s take, for example, one of the elements of an Ur-Collage, the image of a ravaged human body; in such an image—and this touches me deeply—there are always a great number of things to see that imply me. The clothes this human being wore. That is an element that is not “informative,” but instead can connect me to this person—as a human being. That goes beyond the information: Who? What? Where?

Hirschhorn’s distinction between what is merely informational and that which “touches” and “implies [implizieren]” is reminiscent of Roland Barthes’s influential concepts, studium and punctum. In a photograph, the studium is that which the viewer recognizes as a result of cultural mediation: “The studium is a kind of education (knowledge and civility, ‘politeness’),” Barthes writes.331 Whereas the studium is mediated, the punctum is im-mEDIATE. The punctum is the “detail” or partial object that breaks through the surface of placid general interest. “It is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me,” Barthes

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328 My descriptions pertain to Ur-Collages Série B XVII, 114, A20, and 130, respectively.
329 Ur-Collage 140
330 Ur-Collage 115
331 Barthes, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 27. He elaborates further on the studium, “In these photographs I can, of course, take a kind of general interest, one that is even stirred sometimes, but in regard to them my emotion requires a rational intermediary of an ethical and political culture. What I feel about these photographs derives from an average affect, almost from a certain training” (26).
asserts in *Camera Lucida*. The *studium* and the *punctum* coexist within a single photograph because the photographic mechanism captures everything within the frame indiscriminately, “[the photographer] could not *not* photograph the partial object at the same time as the total object.” Photography’s particular fullness of and to meaning (“The photographic image is full, crammed: no room, nothing can be added to it,” Barthes declares) hinges in the double negative of the “*not not*.”

Barthes limits the *punctum* to the realm of subjective responses. The photograph of his mother as a young child (the elusive “Winter Garden Photograph”) epitomizes for Barthes the affective power of the *punctum* as a deeply private affair. But it would be simplistic to map Barthes’s argument as an opposition between private/*punctum*, public/*studium*. If the *studium* is “public,” it is only so in regard to the form of publicity that is a construct of media—and, to invoke Hirschhorn’s phrase again, of the “dictatorship of information.” Indeed, Barthes underscores the commodity aspect of the *studium*, writing, “For culture (from which the *studium* derives) is a contract arrived at between creators and consumers.” Though emerging from subjective response, the *punctum* is where the viewer’s empathic attention and impassioned commitment to another might be located. The *punctum* understood as a private response that involves, in the most complex way, one human being with the existence and fate of another, may have a public dimension that exceeds publicity.

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332 Ibid., 26. Regarding the *punctum* as a detail that overtakes the image, see 42–5.
333 Ibid., 47.
334 Ibid., 89.
335 That Barthes’s wariness is with regard to publicity of the press is evident in his statement, “[T]he age of Photography corresponds precisely to the explosion of the private into the public, or rather into the creation of a new social value, which is the publicity of the private: the private is consumed as such, publicly (the incessant aggressions of the Press against the privacy of stars and the growing difficulties of legislation to govern them).” Ibid., 98.
336 Ibid., 28.
337 Hal Foster notes that the *punctum* can have a powerful public dimension. See Foster, “Death in America,” *October* 75 (Winter 1996): 46 and fn 34.
Of the Ur-Collages, those pairings featuring parallel gestures or motifs—the latter often found in the “partial objects” and peripheral elements of the images—register as if with a blow to the consciousness. It is interesting to speculate that by means of the collage, by means of the tension between the two images, Hirschhorn fixes the puncta, so otherwise fleeting, of both photographs as they appeared to him. In so doing, he makes palpable and visible his “wound” while at the same time inflicting a “wound” of the second order—these images are nothing if not painful to look at. This is especially compelling when one considers that both types of photographs Hirschhorn employs might well belong to the category of the unary, which Barthes suggests is one that “emphatically transforms ‘reality’ without doubling it, without making it vacillate (emphasis is on a power of cohesion): no duality, no indirection, no disturbance.”

The two examples that Barthes gives of the unary are the news photograph and the pornographic image. The advertisement, in which each element is posed in order to best project a unified message regarding the product depicted, would seem to fit the category. So, too, do images of grisly death and mutilation resound with a single, harrowing note, one that compounds the unknowability of death with the breach of bodily integrity. (To be clear, photography is suffused with death for Barthes, but its particular melancholy and poetic resonance has to do with past death and future death bound up in the perpetuation of yet-living subject in the

338 Barthes, Camera Lucida, 41.
339 One might yet consider the intersection between pornography and the images of violently mutilated bodies circulating on the internet. There has been considerable press about the phenomenon of soldier-produced videos and images dubbed “war porn.” Chris Wilson, who operated a pornographic website with user-created content, traded free access to his website for footage from soldiers of and from the war in Iraq. “[A]s the Iraq war took a turn for the worse in late 2004, the photos and footage got bloodier and included shots of headless corpses and body parts like intestines, brains, and what appeared to be limbs.” Jessica Ramirez, Newsweek (10 May 2010), accessed at <www.newsweek.com/2010/04.30/carnage-com.html>, 14 October 2010. Jean Baudrillard published an essay, “Pornographie de la guerre,” in the Wednesday, 19 May 2004 edition of Libération, in which the Abu Ghraib photographs are discussed as a form of pornography, “the ultimate form of the abjection of war which is unable to be simply war, to be simply about killing, and instead turns itself into a grotesque infantile reality-show....” Translation in International Journal of Baudrillard Studies 2, no. 1 (January 2005), accessed at <www.ubishops.ca/baudrillardstudies/vol2_1/taylorpf.htm>, 15 October 2010.
photographic present. The image of death in the *Ur-Collages* has no such temporal ambiguities.) By pairing (overlaying) the advertisement with a violent and violently *other* image, Hirschhorn imparts to the unit a *punctum* where none existed before. In so doing, inconsequential aspects break through and subvert the monolithic messages about the lure of the commodity or the horrors of death. There is something disturbing about having one’s attentions diverted from the important, if difficult, visual actuality of the mutilated bodies toward some insignificant *thing* the urgency of which is inarticulate yet palpable. Typical reactions—aversion and horror in the case of the documentary images and jaded disinterest or aesthetic attraction in response to the advertisements, for instance—are short-circuited. Once seen, the recurrent motifs overtake vision.  

In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag’s rumination on photographic documentation of atrocities, the author dismisses as profoundly cynical the idea that photographs of atrocities have diminished moral impact in a society of spectacle. So too does she reject the accusation that looking at such images amounts to prurient interest. Instead, she insists upon “the ethical value of an assault by images.” “Let the atrocious images haunt us,” she urges. “Even if they are only tokens, and cannot possibly encompass most of the reality to which they refer, they still perform a vital function. The images say: This is what human beings are capable of doing—may volunteer to do, enthusiastically, self-righteously. Don’t forget.” Hirschhorn, too, insists on the necessity of looking, confronting these difficult images, repudiating “exaggerated sensitivities and exaggerated consternation.” In a programmatic statement entitled “Why is it Important” (2012), Hirschhorn enumerates the reasons he feels it necessary to look at images of

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340 “[W]hile remaining a ‘detail,’ it fills the whole picture,” Barthes writes of the *punctum*. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 45. This magnification fairly characterizes the effect of Hirschhorn’s compositional rhyming of colors and forms.


destroyed bodies such as those he incorporates into the *Ur-Collages* and other works. The authorship, authenticity, and the aesthetic quality of the majority of images uploaded to the Internet are irrelevant to their making and to their reception. The terms Hirschhorn applies to this decidedly contemporary mode of image-making and distribution are “unclear provenance” and “irrelevance of quality.” To use these unregulated images is to take a counter-position with regard to the official media’s censorship and control of the flow of images and information. Media outlets, in cooperation with political interests, produce “a phenomenon of invisibility,” in which the vast majority of images of grisly death are suppressed for rhetorical purposes. At the same time, the media privileges a select number of other images that it circulates widely, a process of through which these few images attain an emblematic, iconic status. In their incommensurability, the images of mutilated bodies, Hirschhorn argues, refuse a “reduction to facts” and resist any urge to neatly classify the depicted as victim or perpetrator, guilty or innocent. To confront such images is to decline “a comfortable, narcissistic, and exclusive distance from today’s reality,” a distanciation that claims to serve the viewer’s “sensitivity.” Finally, the ethical responsibility to look at these images resides in the recognition of their “redundancy”: “Redundancy is not repetition, the repetition of the same, because it is always another human body that is destroyed and appears as such redundantly…. We do not want to accept the redundancy of such images because we don’t want to accept the redundancy of cruelty toward the human being.” In offering these eight points (which he terms Provenance, Irrelevance of Quality, Invisibility, “Iconism,” Reduction to Facts, Victim Syndrome, Distanciation through “Hyper-Sensitivity,” and Redundancy), Hirschhorn combines an argument

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343 Hirschhorn, “Why is it Important?” artist statement. I present Hirschhorn’s eight points out of their original sequence, which was: Provenance, Redundancy, Invisibility, “Iconism,” Reduction to Facts, Victim Syndrome, Irrelevance of Quality, and Distanciation through “Hyper-Sensitivity.”

about the ethical responsibility of grappling with the content of images of wounded bodies with a recognition of the need to also confront the modes of contemporary image-making and distribution—i.e. the proliferation of technology-aided forms of witnessing (cell-phone photographs, social media, the Internet) and the workings of media conglomerates, especially as they enact political agendas. The ethical dimension of Hirschhorn’s use of such images is heightened by an awareness of the media-historical conditions of our image world.

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In setting out to create “ursprüngliche Collagen” Hirschhorn articulates an ambition to reach beyond the currentness and topicality of his source materials. Yet the works themselves testify to another aim besides the desire to derive a hypothetical “primal” state of the collage technique. I would argue that the Ur-Collage series demands to be understood as an extensive and rigorous exploration of the pictorial representation of bodily gesture as it intersects with questions of media and mediation. The writings of Aby Warburg (1866-1929), and specifically his theory of Pathosformeln (“emotive formulas” or “pathos formulas”), will be the crucial lens through which I develop an argument about how the language of gesture operates in the Ur-Collages.

In a moment when the concept of “visual studies” could not yet be fathomed, Warburg was the first art historian to deem advertisements, news imagery, and other forms of ephemera as visual texts worthy of study. Kurt W. Forster writes in his introduction to the English-language edition of Warburg’s essays, The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity,

…Warburg revealed a predilection for art that was not made for its own sake but on some external prompting. He could take postage stamps and press photographs as seriously as the ephemeral art of waxworks, or the pageantry of the theater and

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the court, or the chaotic mass of broadsheet imagery and astrological prophecies, or arcane questions of philology. The crucial factor here was not the curiosity value of the image: its anonymity appeared to Warburg as a mask—a veil and a protection—for its continuity. He looked to the obscure and the unfamiliar for something that in works of high art had been filtered, refined, sublimated beyond all recognition.  

What is it that persists behind the mask of mass culture? Warburg traced images, high or low, as “engrams” of human experience, storehouses of potent and potential energy embedded deeply within our collective memory. Warburg famously conceived of Pathosformeln, bodily gestures and physiognomic expressions rooted in pagan antiquity that represent highly charged, primal states of emotion. Under the mask of ephemera’s banalities lie passions, in a state of potentiality, to which the fate of civilization is tied. Thus the Pathosformeln involve more than questions of representation, for each recurrence of an antique emotive formula is a renewed threat and opportunity, a renewed struggle between Dionysian frenzy and Apollonian clarity.

As forms of stored energy, “engrams,” “emotive formulas,” or “dynamograms” are continuously reactivated:

The dynamograms of ancient art are handed down in a state of maximal tension but unpolarized with regard to the passive or active energy charge to the responding, imitating, or remembering artist. It is only the contact with the new age that results in polarization. This polarization can lead to radical reversal (inversion) of the meaning they held for classical antiquity.

To track the inversions, polarizations, and re-deployments of “dynamograms” across time,

Warburg conceived of his Mnemosyne Atlas. (Ernst Gombrich describes Warburg’s Mnemosyne

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347 In Richard Semon’s 1908 volume Mneme Warburg found a theory of memory’s operation in the human psyche that correlates to his own concept of symbols. As Gombrich summarizes, “Any event affecting living matter leaves a trace which Semon calls an ‘engram’. The potential energy conserved in this ‘engram’ may, under suitable conditions, be reactivated and discharged—we then say the organism acts in a specific way because it remembers the previous event.” Gombrich, Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 242.

348 Quoted in ibid., 248.
Atlas as a presentation of “a basic vocabulary, the Urworte of human passion.” Examples of heterogeneous printed matter met on the black cloth ground of the plates of the Atlas. Photographic reproductions of paintings, prints, medals, manuscript pages, architectural reliefs, astrological charts and sculptures; postage stamps; contemporary advertisements; and clippings from newspapers and illustrated weeklies were deployed across these surfaces irrespective of chronology, source, genre, original media, or place of origin. Begun in 1925 and developed intensively in 1928, the Atlas was yet incomplete at the time of Warburg’s death in 1929. The final plates (both sequentially and chronologically speaking) of the Atlas, Tables 77-79, include contemporary images from the press and popular culture. These last plates suggest a shift in Warburg’s attention (borne out only in part due to his untimely death) away from the Renaissance inversion of antique models toward the persistence of Pathosformeln in contemporary media such as the illustrated weekly.

Among the images dispersed on Table 77 (fig. 5.13) of Warburg’s Atlas are those of golfer Erika Sell-Schopp, right foot extended behind her and club swung over her left shoulder; Eugène Delacroix’s Medea, 1838; a Japanese golfer; and the suicide ritual of hara-kiri. These juxtaposed images illustrate the principle of “energetic inversion,” where the symbolic form is activated (and transformed) and where the latent energy of antique expressions is negatively or positively expelled. Regarding these pairings Warburg noted in his journal, “The catharsis of the

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349 Ibid., 287.
350 Two threads of Warburg’s thought were represented in the Atlas: the transformation of the Greek gods in later astrological depictions and the permutations of antique Pathosformeln. See ibid., 283. Charlotte Schoell-Glass argues for the inclusion of contemporary imagery as the logical culmination of Warburg’s theory. See her essay “‘Serious Issues’: The Last Plates of Warburg’s Picture Atlas Mnemosyne,” in Richard Woodfield, ed., Art History as Cultural History: Warburg’s Projects (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 2001), 183–208. Schoell-Glass also provides an interpretation of the significance of the images collected in the final plates.
351 The image of hara-kiri was clipped from the Hamburger Fremdenblatt of 29 July 1929 and documents the ritual suicide of Kiten Nogi, a Field Marshall, and his wife at the funeral of Emperor Mutsuhito in 1912. For image, see Warburg, Der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003), 128. For an interpretation of the significance of the hara-kiri image, see Charlotte Schoell-Glass, Aby Warburg and anti-semitism: political perspectives on images and culture (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008), 160.
female head-hunter in the shape of the golf-player.” Elsewhere he suggests a similar relationship of “detoxification” between the cut of the ritual blade and the swing of the Japanese golfer. Warburg considered sport one of the ways in which violent passions could be sublimated.

Hirschhorn’s Ur-Collage Série B XIV (2008) (fig. 5.14) is comprised of two images, first a magazine advertisement for Dior and second a grisly image of a mutilated face. It holds the energy of a Warburgian dynamogram and extends the logic of plate 77 into the present. Just as the Nympha’s basket of fruit is a positive (and less threatening) inversion of the severed head of Holofernes or John the Baptist, so we might understand the model clutching her handbag as a contemporary manifestation of the head-hunter, a Judith or a Salome with her trophy. It is crucial, however, that the displacement in the advertisement is undone by the inclusion of the gruesome photograph. The decapitated body of Holofernes at Judith’s feet in this mid-fifteenth-century Florentine engraving (fig. 5.15) finds its corollary in the faceless corpse pushed to the foreground of the Ur-Collage. Undercutting the apparent difference of the two images brought together in Ur-Collage Series B XIV—subject matters, intended audiences, modes of transmission, and means of production—are striking formal consistencies. Out of deep, black backgrounds reds and oranges figure forth. The swirling bands of light in the advertisement—blush bleeding into aubergine, into darkness—coincide with the fleshy indistinctness of the disfigured face. Glistening pulp is picked up in the gleam of oiled leather. Thus a visual

352 Dated 31 July 1929. Quoted in Gombrich, Aby Warburg, 301.
353 Regarding the hara-kiri and golfer images, the phrase was “detoxifying of the gesture of the executioner.” See Schoell-Glass, Aby Warburg, 207, fn 19.
354 See Gombrich, Aby Warburg, 301.
355 The handbag is a recurring motif in the Ur-Collage series and is often juxtaposed with a disfigured face or severed head. (See Ur-Collages B XVII, 111, B X, 130, 116, 113, B XIV, A6, A21, A2, and A13).
356 This engraving appears in Table 47 (plate 22) of the Bilderatlas, which tracks the motifs of the head-hunter as well as its positive polarization in the form of the guardian angel. See Warburg, Bilderatlas, 86–7.
correspondence is established between a gaping wound where a face had been and the lipstick red of a Dior handbag. In drawing the formal connection, Hirschhorn forces the viewer to look (and to look closely, attentively, and using an aesthetic vocabulary of color, contour, and texture\textsuperscript{357}) precisely when he or she might wish to look away. Hirschhorn can be said to re-toxify the advertising image, bringing to the surface (literally attaching to it) the violence that had been tamed and contained within it.

Judith and Salome form a blood sisterhood with the antique maenads, whose frenzies of destruction and celebration were immortalized on antique sarcophagi.\textsuperscript{358} The Florentine engraving of the \textit{Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne} (after Botticelli, c. 1480-90) (fig. 5.17), featured on plate 40 of the \textit{Bilderatlas}, bears the stamp of those primal gestures.\textsuperscript{359} Moving right to left beneath a grape arbor, a procession of Bacchus’s followers, all wild hair and loose garments, hold aloft instruments and sacrificial animals. Warburg, who saw mass culture as a mask behind which the primal persisted, would have recognized in the empty, slightly anemic gestures and the vacant stares of the models in Gucci’s Fall 2008/2009 advertisement campaign all the traits of ecstatic trance, however enervated (fig. 5.18). In a frieze-like configuration, receding from the picture plane at right, present-day pseudo-maenads with kohl-rimmed eyes and loose locks dance in a field of flowers. Nearly everything from their strides to their raised arms and uplifted gazes echo the Renaissance intermediary. Dressed not in early modern imaginings of Grecian garb but in Gucci’s post-modern, sartorial mash-up (hussar-cum-flower child-cum-rocker), they are recognizable nonetheless. What is present in the Bacchic sarcophagi as well as

\textsuperscript{357} While Hirschhorn draws out the formal aspects of the photographs of the shattered bodies, the effect is never one of aestheticization.

\textsuperscript{358} Warburg laid out the genealogy of this female type: “On headhunting: Judith, Salome, maenad, via the Nymph as a bringer of fruit, Fortuna, the Hora of Autumn, to the server of water at the well, Rachel at the well, the fire-fighter at the Borgo fire….” \textit{Grundbegriffe}, Notebook II, 1929, p. 82, cited in Gombrich, Aby Warburg, 287.

\textsuperscript{359} See plate 2\textsuperscript{1-2} of Table 40 in Warburg, \textit{Bilderatlas}, 70–1.
in the engraving, yet remains absent in the Gucci advertisement—namely, the maenad’s unlucky victims—Hirschhorn supplements in *Ur-Collage A7* (fig. 5.19).\(^{360}\) In the lower right corner, he has attached a photograph of two cadavers with garments bloodied and faces bruised. Similarly, the striding glamazons of *Ur-Collages 124 and A8* (figs. 5.20–21) are paired with the remains of rent bodies—compare the models’ poses with Botticelli’s triumphant Judiths (Table 47) (fig. 5.22) or the maenad/nympha attending the death of Pentheus on a sarcophagus in the Campo Santo, Pisa (Table 5).\(^{361}\)

From the orgiastic cult of Dionysus to the serpent rituals of the Pueblo Indians, from the wax effigies that persisted in the churches of Renaissance Florence to the samurai practice of ceremonial disembowelment, Warburg was attentive to rituals and cults as the repository of primal passions and, importantly, their tamed or violent manifestation in abiding cultural practices.\(^{362}\) Hirschhorn may be less superstitious in his approach to cult and ritual but he frequently mines them in his attempt to derive a “universal language of form,” showing thereby a sophisticated understanding of contemporary rites as expressions of fundamental human urges.

In the fervent urgency of the funeral procession or protest march (*The Procession*, 2006), in the routinized violence of warfare (*Superficial Engagement*, 2006), in the frenetic energy of sports

\(^{360}\) At least three additional *Ur-Collages* (116, A5, 113) feature images from this Gucci campaign. The appeal of this particular campaign for the work of the *Ur-Collages* must be related to the trance-like aspect of the models. Whether or not the artist thought of the images in relation to an antique trope is incidental to my argument.

\(^{361}\) Plates 23 and 24 of Table 47 in Warburg, *Bilderatlas*, 86–7. On the same table, see Domenico Ghirlandiao’s paintings of Judith and her maid, who carries the head of Holofernes in a basket above her head (plate 25a–b). See plate 14 of Table 5 for a rendering of the Campo Santo sarcophagus, ibid., 22–3. A photograph can be found in Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, pl. 47a.

\(^{362}\) Rituals also involve mythic and symbolic work critical for the establishment of *Denkraum*, the space for reflection and thought, threatened by the technologically induced immediacy of modernity. At the end of Warburg’s serpent ritual lecture, he writes, “With these [electrical] waves, the culture of the machine age destroys what the natural sciences, borne of myth, so ardously achieved: the space for devotion, which evolved in turn into the space required for reflection….Telegram and telephone destroy the cosmos. Mythical and symbolic thinking strive to form spiritual bonds between humanity and the surrounding world, shaping distance into the space required for devotion and reflection: the distance undone by the instantaneous electric connection.” Warburg, “Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America,” in *Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America*, trans. by Michael P. Steinberg (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 54.
fandom (*Artists’ Scarves*, 1996), and in the excess of emotional identification in the cult of
celebrity (*Altars*, 1997-98), Hirschhorn identifies public displays of deep investment that also
give rise to a charged material culture of placards, souvenirs, etc. When Benjamin Buchloh
presses Hirschhorn on the issue of “social rituals” and “cult behavior in mass culture,”
Hirschhorn responds,

> I simply believe that there are in fact certain everyday forms... that are in
> themselves incredibly expressive. Now, I am naturally interested in this seemingly
> uncreative process, because it is about reproducing something... [Buchloh
> interjects, “....or creating memory structure in the seemingly uncreative
> process.”] Quite right, to create history. This form interests me tremendously
> because I believe that there is an explosive force in it, like dynamite.363

Much in this remark is Warburgian, from the “mask” of the uncreative process to its explosive
potential. So too is the emphasis on form as a carrier of historical meaning. Even when parodic,
Hirschhorn’s engagement with such everyday expressions takes them to be meaningful and valid
expressions—“I believe in their innate form,” he declares.364 (Hirschhorn’s practice has been
described as archeological and archival;365 but in this respect, it also exhibits an anthropological
intent.) His long-standing embrace of Joseph Beuys and Andy Warhol as artistic models
discloses a sympathy for art that involves, whether sincerely or ironically, quasi-religious ritual
and cult of celebrity.366

In *The One World* (2008) (fig. 5.23) dozens of mannequin arms embedded in a foamy
mass reach toward, are crushed by, and/or bear the weight of an imperfect globe. The base is
covered with a cloth on which Hirschhorn has arranged images of war-torn and violently

363 Buchloh, “An Interview with Thomas Hirschhorn,” 98.
364 Ibid.
366 In his remarkable interview of Hirschhorn, Buchloh begins by counterposing the influence of Warhol and Beuys.
Regarding Beuys’s shamanism, Hirschhorn has said, “I take it seriously as a form of artistic expression.” He goes on
to say, “Warhol is for me by no means the apparent opposite of Beuys.” Buchloh, “An Interview,” 77.
mutilated bodies in the context of high-fashion advertisements featuring recumbent models arrayed in deliberately awkward and angular poses. A severed leg, wound round in shreds of torn garment, is bent in the fashion of that of the model pictured to its upper right. She is engaged in an acrobatic feat: upturned and arched, body tensed and features improbably relaxed.

On another panel both model and corpse lie with arms raised, she on a sandy beach, he on a dirt road; both their faces are turned to the left, but his is in a state of decomposition. On January 21, 2010, The New York Times declared that “Fashion Takes a Lie-Down,” but Hirschhorn was already alert to the trend. Heightened sexuality and a regression into traditional gender roles were offered in the article as likely reasons for this vogue, but Hirschhorn’s collages suggest a compelling correlation with casualties promulgated by the protracted conflicts in the Middle East. War’s brutally mutilated bodies—suppressed in the American press, harrowing to see, and difficult to identify—are displaced and rendered tolerable in the extreme poses prevalent in high-fashion photography. The aesthetic preference for flawless, shell-like skin contains and wards off its opposite: soft masses of perforated flesh. These poles are reinforced in the sculptural ensemble by the mannequins’ poreless casing and the amorphous matter from which they rise. If Warburg tracks the afterlife of antiquity across large stretches of historical time, Hirschhorn is occupied with the rapid transformations of “energy charge” in the present. In these motifs we identify a contemporary Pathosformel.

369 Hardening—or “concretion”—and softening are important themes in this respect, the various aspects of which David Joselit has written compellingly. Joselit writes, “In the realm of spectacle, hardening suggests both the indifference or apathy of viewers inundated by hoards of images, and also the ‘hardening’ of contemporary icons and stereotypes...Hirschhorn meets such ‘hardening’ of photography with a complementary ‘softening’ of destroyed bodies whose released viscera exerts its visceral effect by ‘softening’ the viewer—opening her up to a feeling of responsibility for the photograph.” Joselit, “The Subjecters,” in The Subjecters, (Madrid: La Casa Encendida, Caja Madrid, 2009), 54.
Spyros Papapetros discusses the *Pathosformel* simply and clearly as “the depiction of a reflex bodily response in moments of mortal danger.” But the protective gesture, he writes, is always and already a declaration of death’s imminent victory:

Although supposedly defensive, the gesture of *Pathosformel* does not suggest any comfort from pain, it makes a monument of it. A moment before it dies, the body friezes [*sic*], inanimates itself beforehand in a futile sign, more verbal than visual—a meaningless exclamation mark marking ‘life’ in its final exit…. For in fact although the *Pathosformel* is the result of an intensive reaction it signifies the very secession of motion and life.

Orpheus at the moment he is struck down by the maenads, Flora in her desperate flight from the amorous Zephyr, Daphne in her defensive and dramatic metamorphosis: depicted by Albrecht Dürer, Botticelli, or Gian Lorenzo Bernini, the liminal state between life and death is the stuff of art, especially when deathliness turns erotic and when vitality is transferred from the stilled body to the animated accessories of hair and fabric. But if Hirschhorn does offer us a contemporary *Pathosformel*, it is one in which death is no longer artfully signaled but conveyed through photography’s indexical force and digitization’s pixilated aspect. The grisly and mangled face of death, shown through affectless amateur photographs transmitted through the Internet, reveals no dramatic suspensions, erotic displacements or reanimations. For their part, the models cast as maenads merely go through the motions. Not frenzied but blank are their expressions. Their movements, however elegantly executed, seem unmotivated and thus emptied of meaning. If

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371 Ibid., 134–5.
372 Papapetros notes the privileging of Orpheus’s gestures of suffering over those of his female counterparts in Warburg’s theorizations of *Pathosformel*. He offers a reading of this “gender trouble” as a response to a crisis in fin-de-siècle masculinity. Ibid., 133, see fn 91. (Papapetros argues that the first articulation of the theory of *Pathosformel*—though not so named—can be found in Warburg’s discussion of Zephyr’s pursuit of Flora in Botticelli’s *Spring*, the subject of Warburg’s doctoral dissertation. Ibid., 134.) The roles in Hirschhorn’s *Ur-Collages* are also clearly divided between male corpses and female models.
373 Papapetros writes, “What is finally at stake in this battle is not only to arrest and ‘kill’ animate movement, but also to ‘regenerate’ it, to refabricate motion, first in the ‘animated accessories,’ fabric and hair, and second and most important, in the reanimated body itself—the ‘dead’ human figure which by authorial in(ter)vention becomes miraculously resurrected, posthumously revivified.” Ibid, 138.
expressive forms are stamped here, they register as but faint impressions. Indeed, the *Ur-Collages* testify to the depletion of gestural meaning due to mediation, repetition, and habituation. Warburg’s project was to explore “the function of personal and social memory,” made explicit in the title *Mnemosyne*, as encapsulated by *Pathosformeln*. But if collective memory and access to personal experience (*Erfahrung*) are precisely that which is blocked by the capitalist aims of media, as Negt and Kluge assert in *Public Sphere and Experience*, then the workings of emotive gestures, along with their crucial function in the regulation of human emotion, are short-circuited. “Telegraph and telephone destroy the cosmos,” Warburg laments at the end of his lecture on the Serpent Ritual of the Hopi Indians. The instantaneous transfer of information and of vast numbers of images across the Internet collapses the distance necessary for the creation of *Denkraum* (space for thought).

The *Ur-Collages* suggest that at this historical moment the contemporary is not a mask facilitating gesture’s survival so much as its death mask, molded to its contours yet utterly impassive. Beneath it, gesture’s body lies lifeless. Giorgio Agamben postulates in “Notes on Gesture” that “by the end of the nineteenth century the gestures of the Western bourgeoisie were irretrievably lost.” The clinical recognition of Tourette’s syndrome in 1885—the effects of which Agamben describes as a “catastrophe of the gestural sphere”—would be the extreme

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374 Gombrich recounts Warburg’s use of financial metaphor for the workings of collective memory: “He spoke of the gold reserves of suffering of which our civilization disposes and compared the ancient heritage to a mint or ‘savings bank’ whose issues were backed by the archeaic passions of which they bore the stamp.” Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 250. Kurt Forster responds to and extends this metaphor: “The sheer quantity and constant flood of images in modern times may aptly parallel the financial consequences of inflation….[Warburg] may have realized, a quarter of a century later when embarking upon the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, that the dialectics of progress had optimized his means of mapping the historical development of mimetic language, while the increasing uniformity and inflation of images threatened to wipe out large expanses of collective memory.” Forster, “Aby Warburg’s History of Art: Collective Memory and the Social Mediation of Images,” *Daedalus* 105 (Winter 1976): 175.


medical expression of this cultural predicament. But by the late 20th century, Agamben asserts, “ataxia, tics, and dystonia had, in the course of time, become the norm…. Beyond a certain point everyone had lost control of their gestures…” (Not incidentally, in the course of his essay Agamben mentions Warburg’s *Mnemosyne* as “virtually a moving representation of the gestures of Western humankind from classical Greece up to Fascism.”) Another contemporary assessment of the fate of gesture, this one from the point of view of an artist, attests to its irrevocable reconfiguration as a result of a scientistic view of the body. “The ceremoniousness, the energy, and the sensuousness of the gestures of Baroque art are replaced in modernity by mechanistic movements, reflex actions, involuntary, compulsive responses,” writes photographer Jeff Wall.

Contemporary movements, which can no longer be termed “gestures,” properly speaking, “are physically smaller than those of older art, more condensed, meaner, more collapsed, more rigid, more violent.” But the diminishment of gesture coincides historically with the photographic capacity to magnify, Wall notes, by which means what remains of bodily expressivity might be enlarged and brought to sight:

> The contracted little actions, the involuntary expressive body movements which lend themselves so well to photography, are what remain in everyday life of the older idea of gesture as the bodily, pictorial form of historical consciousness. Possibly this double magnification of what has been made small and meager, of what has apparently lost its significance, can lift the veil a little on the objective misery of society and the catastrophic operation of its law of value. Gesture creates truth in the dialectic of its being for another—in pictures, its being for an eye. I imagine that eye as one which labors and which desires simultaneously to experience happiness and to know the truth about society.

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377 Ibid, 150.
379 Agamben, “Notes on Gesture,” 152.
In Wall’s view, photographic mediation, if not the media, offers the possibility of rescuing the communicative potential of gesture. Hirschhorn’s work suggests a more ambivalent position, not least because it inhabits the extreme low-tech end of the spectrum, diametrically opposed to Wall’s luminous and seamless cibachrome prints. In Hirschhorn’s *Superficial Engagement* (2006), the images of bodily devastation gleaned from the Internet are doubly, triply “blown up” through enlargement (fig. 5.24). In the realm of information theory, the data lost in the process of compression leaves its trace in the form of “artifacts,” defined by one author as “places where the compression process leaves its scars on the data.” Information theorists have termed this *lossy* compression, a term that registers the necessary deficit involved in transmission of images.

The heavily pixilated photographs in *Superficial Engagement* are additionally atomized: sheets of A4 paper, each bearing just a portion of the image, are pieced together and secured with clear packing tape to form the whole already broken (fig. 5.25). Magnification is also a trope in *Crystal of Resistance* (2011), Hirschhorn’s project for the Swiss Pavilion of the Venice Biennale.

The *NASDAQ Crystal* (fig. 5.26), one element in the visually and spatially dense artwork, consists of a tower of television sets each focused upon a finger scrolling through and magnifying, as on a touch-screen tablet, images of ravaged bodies. A “Doubting Thomas,” perhaps, fingering wound after wound. The *NASDAQ Crystal* revealed something of contemporary gesture as well, for the repeated swipe of the finger across the tablet to scroll

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381 Fredric Jameson’s discussion of the “waning of affect,” particularly acute in depictions of the human figure, bears upon this discussion of gesture and photography. Regarding a concept of human expressivity that prevailed up through modernism, Jameson writes,

"The very concept of expression presupposes indeed some separation within the subject, and along with that a whole metaphysics of inside and outside, of the wordless pain within the monad and the moment in which, often cathartically, that ‘emotion’ is then projected out and externalized, as gesture or cry, as desperate communication and the outward dramatization of inward feeling."

The postmodern “waning of affect” has to do, for Jameson, with a depthlessness that is exemplified by the superficiality of the photograph. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 9, 11–2. Hirschhorn’s attempt, in *Superficial Engagement*, to locate an ethical relationship to the photograph and its content precisely in and on its surface both confronts and attempts to invert the value of superficiality.

through images and the coordinated thumb-and-forefinger action to zoom in amount to a new and restricted vocabulary of movement dictated by technology. If bodily gesture is repeatedly shown in his works to be under duress, Hirschhorn might be seen to signal the threat, though not the consummation, of yet another loss—that of the redemptive aesthetic gesture. Everything about Hirschhorn’s scrawled lines, textual fragments, and jury-rigged displays suggests an expressivity at its limits. Even the collage “gesture” of ruptures and displacements seems drastically curtailed in Hirschhorn’s work by comparison to the textual complexity of the Dadaist montage one the hand (floating phonetic fragments, both stuttering and aggressive) and John Heartfield’s satirical dexterity on the other. Hirschhorn eschews the skilled and intricate fitting of parts, favoring brute juxtaposition. That he elects to use only the most plebeian of materials—packing tape, corrugated cardboard, aluminum foil, plastic sheeting—compounds expressive difficulty with an impoverishment of material means.

To the degree that Hirschhorn refuses aesthetic refinement, he embraces excessive output of energy. (“Energy, Yes! Quality, No!” Hirschhorn asserts.) In this regard, Hirschhorn has been influenced by the writings of Georges Bataille, especially the notion of expenditure, in which human activity is governed not by production and conservation, as is generally assumed, but by a principle of necessary loss, of unproductive expenditures (play, mourning, war, luxury, spectacles, art). Hirschhorn’s determination to produce art in a state of “headlessness” [Kopflosigkeit] recalls the Batallean figure of Acephalus. The acephalic figure, Denis Hollier argues, “should be seen as a powerful figure of dissemblance, the negative imago, of an

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383 Hirschhorn described these movements as “new” and “typical” in a lecture on Crystal of Resistance at Princeton University, 6 December 2011.
384 See Hal Foster, “Toward a Grammar of Emergency,” in Thomas Hirschhorn: Establishing a Critical Corpus, 162–181. In developing this theory, Bataille is indebted to Marcel Mauss’s writings on the potlatch: a loss that requires a return, an extravagant giving that demands a like investment on the part of the viewer. Hirschhorn created the Bataille Monument (2002), a “presence and production” work realized for Documenta 11.
antimonumental madness involved in the dismemberment of ‘meaning.’”

Bataillean headlessness represents liberation from the constraints of intellect and of imposed order, embodied in built architecture and in the architecture of the body. Thus Bataille declares, “Man escapes his head as a convict escapes his prison.” A freedom from bondage, then, but a freedom from order, not a restoration to it. Such “headlessness” suggests a kind of instinctive, impulsive “working from the gut.” But might freedom from intellect, with its high-flown connotations, find a debased state in stupidity? Rarely one to reach for a higher register where a lower one will do, Hirschhorn professes his interest in the stupid (often used interchangeably with the “headless” in the Hirschhornian lexicon). Indeed, something in the word gets at the heavy-handedness, directness, and lack of finesse so evident in his stark juxtapositions and rudimentary means of production. Even the formal parallels Hirschhorn draws are of a deliberately artless sort.

Yet Hirschhorn’s most unsubtle logic of compositional rhymes and repetitions, of the “abstractly decorative,” which opens him to accusations of gross simplification on the one hand and obviousness on the other, lends his juxtapositions something like irrefutability—which is to say that one might choose to reject them, but they are not susceptible to argument, to reasoning. Often, too, are his conceptual premises and declared aims patently absurd or anachronistic. In a word, they are ahistorical. This, too, is strategic. Counter-intuitively, perhaps, in their refusal of “the dictatorship of information” his works attain the status and power of the visual and material fact, for which the work is both the manifestation and its evidence. It is crucial, however, that Hirschhorn does not attempt to persuade. Instead, the very forcefulness of Hirschhorn’s assertions opens up a space for critical disidentification. His works generate in the viewer a sense

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385 Hollier, Against Architecture, xii.
of friction brought about by the coexistence of resistance and acceptance, the rubbing of doubt against conviction. This irritation, if you will, keeps Hirschhorn’s work from becoming one-dimensional even when it is so often polemical.

The redemptive aesthetic gesture may be neither possible nor desired, yet when Hirschhorn enacts the emptying-out of means and meanings, he renders those very losses articulate. Like the Dadaists before him, Hirschhorn pursues exacerbated weakness (impoverishment of materials, rejection of skill, tenuousness of claims and propositions, refusal of steeling cynicism) with a nearly hyperbolic will, the result being works of art that are as grating as they are compelling.

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If stupidity is one sort of weakness Hirschhorn claims as a position of strength, another might be superficiality, a term of criticism that is regularly applied to that which lacks rigor, seriousness, and sincerity. Hirschhorn argues to the contrary, “Superficiality is not negative, superficiality is the condition for real engagement because if there is no engagement on the surface there cannot be a profound engagement. To go deeply into something I must at first begin with its surface.”387 A transfer of his principles of collage into three-dimensions, Hirschhorn’s 2006 work Superficial Engagement consists of four related components: Concrete Shock, Spatial Front, Chromatic Fire, and Abstract Resistance (figs. 5.27–30). The titles bear out the principle of collage in the linguistic realm. Aesthetic terms juxtaposed with warfare’s diction generate distinct conceptual entities, strange and suggestive. Painted a playroom’s palette of primary and secondary colors, cardboard-covered walls and makeshift platforms serve as the ground for hundreds of individual elements: ominous headlines in boldface type, mannequins

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and totems bristling with nails, single or stacked television sets, oriental rugs, plywood panels into which screws have been driven to form circles and rectangles (under the pressure of this aggressive ornamentation, the panels buckle). Two types of images assault the viewer from myriad surfaces; photographs, often enlarged, of violently mutilated bodies (as in the Ur-Collages that would follow two years after) and reproductions of geometric abstractions. The majority of the latter feature drawings by Emma Kunz, the Swiss mystic and healer, but works from the Swiss Concrete movement (specifically, paintings by Max Bill), from Op-Art, and from constructivists Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner are also present. Diagrams of energy flow rendered with pencil and crayon on millimeter paper, Kunz’s drawings served divinatory and diagnostic purposes in her healing practice.\(^{388}\) As visually striking as they are delicate, these symmetrical compositions of endless variety soar and hover in the space of Superficial Engagement, mounted as they are onto flat cardboard boxes and held in dynamic suspension between ceiling and ground with colored cord. But visionary abstraction is met with a more violent sort in the form of torn bodies—severed heads, bruised and bloated faces, clumps of soft tissue, scraps of scalp. (In the direct confrontation of abstraction and violence, and in the production of traumatic repetition, Warhol’s disaster series serves as a crucial reference point for this method of working.\(^{389}\) Hirschhorn has deployed these horrific images on various structures: plastered to poster boards, to large medallions (the obverse featuring geometric designs) strung from the ceiling with metal chains, to arched structures (here they are mixed in with works of

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\(^{388}\) Hendel Teichner, “Kaleidoscopic Visions,” in 3x Abstraction: New Methods of Drawing by Hilma af Klint, Emma Kunz, and Agnes Martin, ed. by Catherine de Zegher and Hendel Teicher (New York: The Drawing Center; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 128–137. Harald Szeemann, “Swiss Primeval Mud and the Mysticism of Light,” Emma Kunz (Triesenberg: Art Selections International, 1975), n.p. Szeemann played a crucial role in bringing Kunz’s art into the discourse of 20\(^{th}\)-century art. He included her work in the exhibitions The Bachelor Machines/Le Macchine Celibi (1975, Kunsthalle Bern) and Visionäre Schweiz (1991, Kunsthaus Zurich). It was through the latter exhibition that Hirschhorn first encountered Kunz’s work. Again in the Kunsthaus Zurich, a large number of Kunz drawings were included in the 1999 exhibition Rudolf Steiner/Andrej Belyj/Joseph Beuys/Emma Kunz/Directional Forces for the 21\(^{st}\) Century, curated by Guido Magnaguango.

\(^{389}\) For a discussion of repetition and trauma in Warhol’s work, see Foster, “Death in America,” 38–46.
Concrete Art and Op-Art), and across an uneven topography from which nail-riddled totems rise. Hirschhorn often reproduces a single image numerous times, juxtaposing and overlapping the “traumatic” duplicates, forcing us to reckon with what we see even as a sort of numbness sets in.

Salvaged fragments of particleboard and plywood line the edges of the platforms. Each is a diptych featuring a Kunz drawing and a photograph of a mutilated body. Many of these pairings exhibit the characteristic Hirschhornian mode of stark, and what Egenhofer calls “decorative,” compositional correspondence, as when semi-circular arcs fanning out from a central point are echoed in the hooked arm and bent leg of a prostrate corpse or when a nearly kaleidoscopic pattern is juxtaposed with the bashed face of a severed head. (The complex network of geometric figures in Kunz’s drawing bears an eerie resemblance to the pieces of straw clinging to the disfigured face.) This latter, grisly image would be reused in Ur-Collage 115—a not incidental point. For if, in the Ur-Collage, the pairing underscores the emptying out of gesture and artistic expressivity under duress, here the claim is that Kunz’s drawing (and, by synecdoche, all art) embodies the tremendous capacity to heal the world’s wounds. Hirschhorn avers that he uses Kunz’s drawings “as healing images against war, terrorism, violence, resentment, fear and ignorance”390: here the redemptive gesture of art is not at all imperiled but hyperbolically robust. So too do the nail-spiked mannequins serve as ritualistic stand-ins.391 But


A similar principle of ritual substitution can be found in the pagan practice of life-size wax votives that persisted into Renaissance Christianity. In his study “The Art of Portraiture and the Florentine Bourgeoisie,” Warburg describes the material manifestation of “the magical fetishism of the waxwork cult”: “By the beginning of the sixteenth century there were so many of these voti at the [Santissima] Annunziata that space ran out; the figures had to be suspended from the entablature on cords, and the walls had to be reinforced with chains....The interior of
if ritual and fetish serves premises for *Superficial Engagement*, the power of art is actualized in the exhibition by the space of thought (*Denkraum*) and critical self-reflection opened up by the works’ confrontation between violent realities and aesthetic experiments. Curator Yasmil Raymond eloquently articulates the dynamics at play thus:

Hirschhorn’s Pandora’s box holds no hierarchies of differentiation between abstraction and representation, craftsmanship and art, empathy and responsibility. Instead, each of these elements is encoded with shared meaning, each soiled with the obscenity of war and the material reality of the human body….Hirschhorn’s antiaesthetic stance situates the work of art not as a cathartic experience but as a thinking experience that extracts reason from the abstraction that envelops it.\(^{392}\)

In Hirschhorn’s work the extravagant belief in art’s power to create dialogue, to generate experiences, and to confront the world coincides with the acknowledgement, through its motifs and materials, of the precariousness of artistic expression and aesthetic means in our times. Indeed, it might be more accurate to say that the former is predicated on the latter: only by their keen sensitivity to the present (to our historical moment) do the works’ ahistorical aspects gain any credibility at all. In the reverse, it is through Hirschhorn’s dense anachronisms (by which I mean to indicate both their complexity and their deliberate obtuseness) that the viewer is challenged, sometimes uncomfortably so, to abandon habitual ways of seeing and thinking the possible. At the same time that Hirschhorn’s work invites us to ruminate on the thoroughness of mediation in contemporary culture as well as the concomitant loss of human expressivity, he reasserts the agitational potential and redemptive possibility of his own artistic gesture.

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Epilogue

Sheets of corrugated cardboard, painted to resemble cinder block walls, line two interconnected gallery spaces. Gray expanses of PVC flooring, seams reinforced with packing tape, lie underfoot. Wires and casings in plain sight, bare fluorescent tubes illuminate the spaces with cold light. Strips of packing tape, dangling from the ceiling like fly traps, have captured not insects but images on their sticky surfaces.

The first room of this “double garage” features four tables, each topped with a rocky landscape built up of cardboard and packing tape (fig. 6.1). Photojournalistic images gleaned from German-, French-, English-, and Arab-language periodicals cover the topographic surfaces. Giant mushrooms (the larger ones handmade of cardboard and packing tape, the smaller fabric ones purchased from a supplier of decorative articles) rise out of this landscape-cum-substrate. Model trains circle each terrain. On the walls have been attached decals and excerpts of “integrated texts” written by Marcus Steinweg for the exhibition. The texts pertain to the ramifications of Nietzsche’s thought for a political theory of radical freedom and responsibility. A shelf features books selected by Steinweg. Construction tools—mallets, right-angle rulers, crowbars, saws, etc.—are attached to the walls, on which are also drawn the outlines of tools.

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“Interview mit Thomas Hirschhorn zu Material, Technik un konservatorischen Belangen der Rauminstallation ‘Doppelgarage’ (2002), Sammlung Moderne Kunst un der Pinakothek der moderne, München,” 4, downloaded from <http://www.inside-installations.org/artworks/detail.php?r_id=299&ct=interview>. Doppelgarage was one of 33 artworks extensively documented as part of the project “Inside Installations. Preservation and Presentation of Installation Art,” funded by the European Commission, Culture 2000 program. Many of the project’s very useful findings (especially with regard to the construction of the work and the conservation and museological issues involved with it) are published online at <http://www.inside-installations.org/artworks/artwork.php?r_id=215>.
The adjacent space is dominated by a large, tubular form covered in gold foil, quotations from Steinweg’s text taped to its surface (fig. 6.2). Placed on sawhorses, this “mega-form” protrudes from the second chamber into the first. The walls are papered with additional excerpts from the “integrated texts” and with pornographic images. Low, short “walls” extend at right angles from one side of the space. On the opposite side, hollow, bulbous forms constructed of cardboard and tape are suspended from wooden frames. From the open mouths of these forms, which the artist describes as “image nests,” hang photographs depicting destroyed homes and ruined structures from “Grozny, Palestine, America, Africa, Asia, Kosovo.” Hirschhorn emphasizes that these images show devastations wrought by human actions rather than natural forces. The destruction of the World Trade Center towers is here presented as one instance of a broad range of human violence. By contrast to these images that Hirschhorn considers to be “sachlich-universal” (objectively universal), those attached to the topographies and the “fly traps” are “media and propaganda images” circulated by press in its coverage of September 11th, 2001. The latter, Hirschhorn asserts, are “un-sachlich und un-universal.”

The two conjoined spaces constitute Hirschhorn’s *Doppelgarage* (2002), a work created in response to (and as a form of reckoning with and taking responsibility for) the events of September 11th. The “double garage” is the workshop of an imagined subject. This “space of an

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394 “Interview mit Thomas Hirschhorn,” 7.
395 Ibid., 10. Not having had a chance to view *Doppelgarage* in person, I cannot say whether Hirschhorn’s distinctions are elucidated or borne out in a clear way by the work itself.
396 “I wish to assume responsibility for something for which no responsibility can be assumed, something that is too much, too big for me,” Hirschhorn writes in his statement regarding *Doppelgarage*. Steinweg’s integrated texts take up the Nietzschean political ontology of “strong and uncompromising responsibility” in which the subject withdraws “from the control of morality, the imperative of conscience, history, society and its opinions (doxa) and its pathos of self-righteousness.” Steinweg, “On the integrated texts for Thomas Hirschhorn’s ‘Doppelgarage’/‘Double Garage,’” accessed at <http://artnews.org/marcussteinweg/?t=4029&g_a=reviews>, 4 March 2008.
“Other” is devoted to the articulation of this subject’s desire for retribution. “Media and propaganda images” constitute the substrate that breeds this need for vengeance. Like the massive cultured mushrooms, which are more terrifying than whimsical, his thoughts are magnified to the point of obsession within the contained space of the garage-turned-laboratory/bunker. Hirschhorn imagines this “garage” as a space even more private than the domestic space of the home. If the living room, dining room, kitchen, bedroom, etc., constitute the circuit of familial intimacy, the subject of Hirschhorn’s Doppelgarage retreats from the intimate sphere into an annex in which his thoughts become fully and physically manifested. As viewers, we are interlopers in this solitary space. “It is not meant for the public,” Hirschhorn explains. “We stumble onto the Doppelgarage only by chance and we are witnesses to this private engagement with September 11.” If the nearly 400 elements of the work refuse to lend themselves to full explanation (Does the oblong “mega form” symbolize something beyond obsession as physical obstruction? Why the shelf of packages resembling bricks of cocaine? Do the images actually adhere to the categories Hirschhorn laid out?), such obscurity underscores the personal nature of the vision that conjures them—a vision that belongs simultaneously to the artist and to the fictional subject he has created.

Doppelgarage attempts to locate the individual that is necessarily involved with, implicated in, and imprinted by collective and historical trauma. A commentator on the difficulties of memorializing September 11th at the site of the World Trade Center writes,

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397 Both Doppelgarage and Chalet ‘Lost History’ (2003) are described by Hirschhorn as “spaces of an other”—an imagined subject other than himself, who might also be a possible iteration of himself. Hirschhorn, “Chalet ‘Lost History,’” artist statement.

398 In Hirschhorn’s statement about Doppelgarage, he recounts his immediate reaction to the destruction of the Twin Towers. He perceived the attacks as an act of retribution for the events of 28–29 February 1991, during the first Gulf War, in which Iraqi soldiers retreating from Kuwait were subjected to American airstrikes. Through the Doppelgarage, Hirschhorn wished to give visual form to this theory of revenge. He calls it “a work, an engagement, a ‘bricolage,’ a philosophy, or a paranoid amateurish psychology,” though it is not entirely whether it is his work, engagement, etc., or that of the fictive other. Insofar as the Doppelgarage is a “space of an other” (“Lieux d’un autre”), who is also a “possible other me [Hirschhorn],” both are in play.
“Because the shock of history turns catastrophic events into something intimate, it erases the distinction of what is private from what is public, forcing them to merge in unexpected ways.”

The obliteration of distinctions might be overstated in this remark, but the uncomfortable merging of public and private is not. In the Doppelgarage, pieces of the “public,” in the form of media depictions of global conflict and devastation, are brought into the private sphere. In this controlled and total environment, the images are collaged, processed, and incubated (as suggested by the metaphor of “nests”) in a highly subjective way. One the premises of the work is that the desire for revenge nursed in this environment would give rise to the events of September 11th, the aftermath of which, as we know, has given rise to an alarming interpenetration of public and private (or a subsuming of the latter within claims for the former) in issues of war and of surveillance.

Hirschhorn’s Doppelgarage, with its introversion and its goal of avoiding moral fixity (its fictional subject is both victim and perpetrator), can be thought of as an anti-monument and anti-memorial. At the same time, Doppelgarage, a work of art now in the permanent collection of the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, asserts a place in the public discourse. If the public monument traditionally served a didactic function (to present exemplary figures and exemplary deeds) and, more recently, a therapeutic function (“to heal a collective psychological injury”), Hirschhorn refuses them both, preferring his agonistic contributions to the public discourse.

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400 Kirk Savage, “Trauma, Healing, and the Therapeutic Monument,” in Terror, Culture, Politics: Rethinking 9/11, ed. by Daniel J. Sherman and Terry Nardin (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), 106. Savage asserts that Maya Lin’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial was “the first truly therapeutic monument in the U.S.”
From 2002 to 2008—and from an imagined space of privacy to a hypothetical project for publicity—we shift from Hirschhorn’s *Doppelgarage* to Genzken’s *Ground Zero* (figs. 6.3–12). Genzken presented her idiosyncratic vision for the fraught site of the September 11th attacks even while the actual process of rebuilding was mired in logistical, financial, and political trouble. With her sculptures’ exuberant polychromy, Genzken thumbs her nose at the vast majority of contemporary memorial designs, characterized by monumental abstraction or figuration aided by the age-old material rhetoric of marble and granite. All of the *Ground Zero* works incorporate MDF plinths outfitted with casters (sometimes doubled by wheeling structures like trolleys and carts), a presentation that refuses monumental permanence in favor of mobility. Where solemnity is called for, Genzken’s garish constructions are deliberately and provocatively in poor taste. There is no mistaking at whom and at which professions she takes aim. For the exhibition’s catalogue, Genzken mimics the visual tropes of design competition submissions and architecture glossies, creating photomontages in which her polychrome *Ground Zero* works are set against black-and-white images of the site (fig. 6.4). She parodies the conventions of the architecture establishment, flouting its formulaic ways of dealing with wounds in the urban fabric and in the collective memory.

Instead of the “Freedom Tower,” memorial, and transportation hub that Daniel Libeskind’s master plan maps out for the site, Genzken offers seven structures: church, garage, memorial tower, memorial sculpture, disco, hospital, and retail space. Genzken alludes to the brief for the redesign of the site: *Lights* and *Memorial* suggest its memorial function; a retail space (perversely titled the *Osama Fashion Store*) represents its commercial interest; and the *Car Park* addresses its status as traffic hub. The *Memorial Tower* (fig. 6.5) is composed of rippled and transparent plastic cubes. Lengths of undeveloped film dangle from the exterior and images
of “Ground Zero” immediately after the attacks line several of the cubes. The textured but transparent walls both facilitate and distort our view of the contents. The tangled floor lamp, curtain rods, coat racks, wire trivets, and fruit bowls of Light (fig. 26.6) call to mind the gnarled metal remnants left in the wake of the September 11th attacks. The visual airiness of both sculptures and the palpable lightness of their materials stand in contrast to the physical heaviness and rhetorical heavy-handedness of much memorial design. But beyond this inversion of sculptural-architectural tropes, one is forced to ask whether Light goes too far—whether, in other words, Light makes light of tragedy in evoking the ruins of the World Trade Center with a mishmash of household items. Indeed, such a question is integral to the conception of the entire Ground Zero series, in which Genzken seems to embrace vulgarity as a visual idiom and as a critical mode.

Both Car Park and the Osama Fashion Store are composed of stacked, modular, polycarbonate baskets. The Car Park (fig. 6.7) is surrounded at the base by three circular mirrors or platters traversed by tiny figurines. Toy cars line its radiating, prismatic ribs. The Osama Fashion Store (fig. 6.8), with its uppermost layer set askew and filled with a kitschy pillow, a crumpled plastic sheet, a length of coiled rope, and a shopping bag emblazoned with the store’s name, combines department store and trash bin. In a gesture of provocation, Genzken’s Osama Fashion Store collapses the counterposed ideologies of fundamentalist Islam and capitalism, precisely at the site where these two forces came into spectacular and violent contact.

If Genzken offers her versions of the commercial, transportation, and memorial structures that are planned for the site, her addition of the menacing structures designated as “church” and “hospital” makes visible the disciplinary functions that govern Western society.401 In Church

(fig. 6.9), gridded industrial carts overlaid with sheets of transparent plastic travesty the intricacies of stained glass windows while a makeshift cross topped with a toy skull renders the sacred profane. Animal figurines stuck to the base of the cross play at being gargoyles. Evoking ill-fitting hospital gowns or constrictive straitjackets with draped green, silver, and brocade fabrics secured with colored ties; gurneys with a drink trolley; and get-well bouquets with a vase of synthetic blooms, Genzken’s Hospital (fig. 6.10) is constituted metonymically by the ubiquitous elements found in the patient’s room. Each of nine shot glasses can measure out perfect doses—ideal for medication or self-medication. There is something of Frankenstein’s monster in this anthropomorphic assemblage.

The seventh element in Genzken’s proposal for Ground Zero is Disco ‘Soon’ (fig. 6.11). A shipping crate, raised on bricks, topped with red plastic, and partially covered with mirrored foil, serves as the disco’s main volume. Against the front of the structure leans a mirror bearing the name of the establishment. A flashy marquee hovers over the frames of a folding screen. With drooping lengths of light ropes and spools upon spools of colored ribbons heaped in a tangled mass, Disco ‘Soon’ offers the visual pleasure of spectacle come undone, unwound.

In a June 2005 article, the New York Times architectural critic Nicolai Ouroussoff expresses a general sense that ground zero is “doomed architecturally.”402 He laments that “the city is likely to end up with a memorial geared to tourists with short attention spans rather than to the serious contemplation of human loss.” Such an attraction would amount to “a theme park haunted by death,” Ouroussoff writes. In more ways than one, Genzken’s fantastical proposal for Ground Zero can be seen to visualize just such a theme park, but one from which any which the

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402 Nicolai Ouroussoff, “For the Ground Zero Memorial, Death by Committee,” The New York Times (19 June 2005), accessed at <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/19/arts/design/19ouro.html>, 2 April 2012. Ouroussoff objects not to the original design for the memorial by Michael Arad, but to the alterations, additions, and expansion of the plan to satisfy the demands of various stakeholders.
veneer of solemnity and sincerity has been dropped. Garish glitz and kaleidoscopic color-effects simultaneously draw the eye and repulse it. By adopting vulgarity as a dominant visual and conceptual idiom—what does the Disco suggest, if not a dancing on the grave?—Genzken makes explicit the vulgarities that have pertained to the rhetorical use of September 11\textsuperscript{th} for capitalist, jingoist, and imperialist purposes. Yet there might yet be some redemptive potential in Genzken’s brand of vulgarity and dark humor: Ground Zero suggests a welcome relief from, even as it brings into relief, the traditionalism, neo-modernism (as with Libeskind’s neo-expressionist tower), and slick futurism that have dominated the official and unofficial proposals for the reconstruction of the World Trade Center site.\textsuperscript{403} In their materiality, Genzken’s sculptures refer not to the past nor to the future, but seem decidedly of the present (of its things, its economies, and its everyday life). The toy cars of Car Park and the shot glasses in Hospital, to offer just two examples, retain the intimacy of the hand-held object. The works’ titles and forms prompt a mental projection into architectural scale—which is to say that they operate without the sometimes oppressive physical impact of monumental scale.

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In the Doppelgarage, a defining event of the early 21\textsuperscript{st} century is “worked through without any attempts at publicness.” In Ground Zero, the ongoing political, social, and cultural fallout from that same event is negotiated through a parody of the decidedly public forms of historic monuments and symbolic rebuilding. In these two very different works by Hirschhorn

and Genzken, respectively, sculpture is the means and the site in which to confront collective trauma and to critique the political rhetoric and media images that have defined the public understanding of that trauma.

Writing powerfully about the political stakes of the redesign of the World Trade Center site, Reinhold Martin calls architects and critics to task for failing to address the historical conditions that gave rise to the events of September 11\textsuperscript{th}.\textsuperscript{404} In his view, supposedly “progressive” and “visionary” architecture (as vigorously promoted by the late New York Times critic Herbert Muschamp, who bears the brunt of Martin’s critique) has been too ready to give visual and spatial expression to a rhetoric of enlightened rationalism, which operates “in the service of an emboldened sense of empire and war on all fronts, and not against it.”\textsuperscript{405} Martin asserts,

\begin{quote}
The architect’s job, with respect to the future of ground zero as framed by this context, becomes one of assisting in the foreclosure of any real public debate regarding the historical dimensions of the event itself. Instead, architects were essentially asked to plant a three-dimensional (neo-) modern flag on the site that pointed toward a triumphant future, symbolically opening the door to cultural and economic imperialism while declaring the historico-political case closed, ready for assimilation into the memory industry…. Thus, as a pretext for further aggression, “9/11” had only just begun.\textsuperscript{406}
\end{quote}

For Martin, the visual and verbal rhetoric by which “progressive architecture” was linked to nationalism and to dehistoricization made it the testing ground for the official and media rhetoric that would justify the military actions after (and in the name of) September 11\textsuperscript{th}.

Doppelgarage and Ground Zero are serious attempts, however partial, to address the historical dimensions and cultural contexts of the events of September 11\textsuperscript{th} and their aftermath. Fundamentalist Islam, free-market capitalism, and Christianity are brought to bear in the forms

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\textsuperscript{404} Martin, “Architecture at War,” 217-225. \\
\textsuperscript{405} Ibid., 224. \\
\textsuperscript{406} Ibid., 218.
\end{flushright}
of *Osama Fashion Store* and *Church*. The wheeled plinths might be understood in this context to suggest the instability of these institutions. With a wheeled industrial cart turned on its side and inserted into yet another cart, *Church* thematizes redundancy and impotence. The structural fragility of the stacked constructions, conveyed by the tilted upper layer of *Osama Fashion Store*, can likewise be mined for subtext. Finally, in the very makeup of the *Ground Zero* works—which is to say, in the commodities of which they are composed—the issue of economic interests are acknowledged to be central. For his part, Hirschhorn contests the exceptional status granted to September 11th by setting the World Trade Center attacks in a context of global militarized violence. As Martin observes, the promulgation by the American media and political establishment of 9/11 as an event “that changed everything” “has had the effect of authorizing, without sustained political debate, sweeping initiatives in U.S. foreign and domestic policy.”407 Hirschhorn’s effort to imagine and to give visual expression to a counter-position is noteworthy, even if *Doppelgarage* might be deemed to be inadequate to its task.

At their most powerful, the sculptural works of Genzken and Hirschhorn are borne of the urge to respond adequately to current social, political, and economic conditions—an urge that necessitates the rethinking of the limits of aesthetic form. Declining to contribute to narratives of rationality or progress, the works admit bad taste and deep ambivalence, the possibility of failure and the utility of stupidity, as the means of forwarding inquiry rather than foreclosing it. Through their materials, means of production, conceptual premises, and modes of address, the artists are willing to risk the viewer’s resistance and skepticism with the hope of securing a more active engagement. Genzken and Hirschhorn

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insist upon the publicness of sculpture—its capacity to work through the full spectrum of human realities—even as they show its publicness to be at times incomplete, insecure, and inadequate.
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1.1 Isa Genzken, New Buildings for New York 2, 2004

1.2 Isa Genzken, New Buildings for New York 4, 2004

1.3 Isa Genzken, New Buildings for New York 6, 2004
1.4 László Moholy-Nagy, Construction of opaque, ground and plate glass, metal and ‘vulcan fiber,’ 1923

1.5 Herbert Bayer, Design for a newspaper stand, 1924

1.6 Walter Gropius, Baukasten [modular prefabricated building system], 1923
1.7 Thomas Hirschhorn, *4 Terrains vagues*, 1991

This image has been omitted due to copyright considerations.

1.8 Gordon Matta-Clark, *Anarchitecture*, 1974
1.9 Joseph Beuys, Festival of New Art, Aachen, 1964

This image has been omitted due to copyright considerations.

1.10 Joseph Beuys, Büro der Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung, documenta V, 1972

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1.11 Joseph Beuys, *Schmerzraum*, 1983-84

This image has been omitted due to copyright considerations.

1.12 Isa Genzken, *Oil*, 2007

This image has been omitted due to copyright considerations.

2.3  Isa Genzken, *Schwules Baby*, 1997-98
2.4 Kurt Schwitters, 
*Merzsäule*, c. 1923

2.5 Isa Genzken, 
*Strassenfest*, 2008-09

This image has been omitted due to copyright considerations.
2.6 Isa Genzken, *Soziale Fassaden*, 2002

This image has been omitted due to copyright considerations.

2.7 Isa Genzken, *Rose* [installation view, Leipzig], 1993/7

2.8 Joseph Beuys, *Rose for a Direct Democracy*, 1972
Mies Van der Rohe, Friedrichstrasse Skyscraper Project, Berlin-Mitte, Germany, Exterior perspective from north. 1921
2.11 Isa Genzken, from *Empire/Vampire, Who Kills Death*
2003

2.12 Isa Genzken, from *Empire/Vampire, Who Kills Death*
2003
2.13  Installation view, Isa Genzken, Vienna Secession, 2006

2.14  Isa Genzken

*Untitled*, Vienna Secession, 2006

2.15  Isa Genzken *Untitled*, Vienna Secession, 2006
2.16  Isa Genzken *Untitled*, Vienna Secession, 2006

2.17  Isa Genzken *Geschwister*, 2004
2.18  Isa Genzken, *Elephant*, 2006
2.19 Naum Gabo, *Construction in Space with Balance on Two Points*, c. 1924

This image has been omitted due to copyright considerations.

2.20 László Moholy-Nagy, *Construction in Space with Balance on Two Points*, 1923

This image has been omitted due to copyright considerations.
This image has been omitted due to copyright considerations.

2. 21  László Moholy-Nagy, *Construction*, 1923

2.22  Isa Genzken  
*Untitled*, 2006
2.23  Isa Genzken, *Oil* [exterior view of German pavilion], 2007
2.24  Isa Genzken, *The American Room*, 2006
3.1  Isa Genzken, Installation view of _Vier Fenster_, Galerie Varisella, Frankfurt 1990

3.2  Isa Genzken, _Fenster_. 1990, and _Fenster_, 1990
3.3 Le Corbusier, sketch, from *L'Architecte vivant* (1929-31)

This image has been omitted due to copyright considerations.

3.4 Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, Poissy, 1929, Jardin suspendu

This image has been omitted due to copyright considerations.
3.7
Isa Genzken
*Camera*, 1990

3.8
Isa Genzken
*Paravent*, 1990
3.9  Isa Genzken, *Ohr*, 2002

This image has been omitted due to copyright considerations.

3.10  Le Corbusier, sketch in *La Ville radieuse* (1933)
3.11  Isa Genzken, *Lawrence*, 2000

3.12  Isa Genzken
*Wolfgang*, 1998
3.13 Installation view, Kunstverein Braunschweig, 2000

3.14 Installation view, Galerie Daniel Buchholz, 1998

3.16  Isa Genzken
*Von Himmel Zurück*, 2003

3.18  Installation view, Kunsthalle Zürich, 2003

3.20  Wilhelm Lehmbruck

*Standing Youth*, 1913

This image has been omitted due to copyright considerations.
3.21 Robert Morris
*Columns*, 1973
reconstruction of 1961
original

3.23 Isa Genzken, Jacke and Hemd, 1998

3.24 Joseph Beuys, Felt Suit, 1970

This image has been omitted due to copyright considerations.
3.25  Installation view, Isa Genzken, Straundhäuser zum Umziehen, 2000
3.26 a-e
Isa Genzken
Straundhäuser zum Umziehen, 2000
Installation view, Isa Genzken, Straundhäuser zum Umziehen, 2000
3.27  Isa Genzken, from *Liebe als Wesen*, 1996
3.28  Isa Genzken
Architekturcollage, 2001

3.29  Isa Genzken
Architekturcollage, 2001

3.30  Isa Genzken,
Architekturcollage, 2001

3.31  Isa Genzken,
Architekturcollage, 2001

4.4 Thomas Hirschhorn, *Blaue Tombola*, 1994

4.5 Example of a tombola, a regional type of raffle
4.6  Thomas Hirschhorn, *Skulptur Sortier Station*, 1997

4.8  Thomas Hirschhorn, *Fifty-Fifty a Belleville*, 1992

4.9  Thomas Hirschhorn, *Lay Out*, 1993

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4.10 Thomas Hirschhorn, *The Procession*, 2005
4.11 Thomas Hirschhorn, Page from the catalogue for 
*The Procession*, 2005

4.14 Thomas Hirschhorn, from *11 vernagelte Fenster*, 1993
4.15  Thomas Hirschhorn, *Bijlmer Spinoza Festival*, 2009

4.16  Thomas Hirschhorn, *Bijlmer Spinoza Festival (Spinoza Car)*, 2009
4.17  Thomas Hirschhorn, *Bijlmer Spinoza Festival* (lecture by Marcus Steinweg), 2009

4.19 Thomas Hirschhorn, *Bijlmer Spinoza Festival* (“Spinoza Theater”), 2009

4.20 Thomas Hirschhorn, *Bijlmer Spinoza Festival* (“Running Event:: Anton de Kom discussion”), 2009
This image has been omitted due to copyright considerations.

4.21 Aerial view of Bijlmermeer
5.1 Thomas Hirschhorn, *Cavemanman*, 2002

5.2 Thomas Hirschhorn, *U-Lounge*, 2003
5.3  Thomas Hirschhorn, *Ur-Collage Série B III*, 2008

5.4  Thomas Hirschhorn, *Ur-Collage III*, 2008
5.5 Thomas Hirschhorn, *Ur-Collage 110*, 2008

5.6 Thomas Hirschhorn, *Ur-Collage A8*, 2008
5.7  Thomas Hirschhorn
*Ur-Collage Série B XVII,*
2008

5.8  Thomas Hirschhorn
*Ur-Collage 114,* 2008

5.9  Thomas Hirschhorn
*Ur-Collage A20,* 2008

5.10 Thomas Hirschhorn
*Ur-Collage 130,* 2008
5.11 Thomas Hirschhorn *Ur-Collage 140*, 2008

5.12 Thomas Hirschhorn *Ur-Collage 115*, 2008
5.13 Aby Warburg, *Mnemosyne*, Table 77, and detail showing golfer Erica Sell-Schopp

This image has been omitted due to copyright considerations.
5.14  Thomas Hirschhorn, *Ur-Collage Série B XIV*, 2008

This image has been omitted due to copyright considerations.

5.15  Florentine engraving, c. 1465 (represented on Table 47 of *Mnemosyne*)
This image has been omitted due to copyright considerations.

5.16 Aby Warburg, *Mnemosyne*, Table 40
This image has been omitted due to copyright considerations.

5.17 Detail of *Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne*, engraving after Sandro Botticelli, c. 1480-90 (represented on Table 40 of *Mnemosyne*)

5.18 Gucci Fall 2007/2008 ad campaign

5.19 Thomas Hirschhorn, *Ur-Collage A7*, 2008
5.22 Detail of Table 47 of *Mnemosyne* showing various manifestations of the “headhunter” in paintings by Sandro Botticelli and Domenico Ghirlandaio, and in a Florentine drawing

This image has been omitted due to copyright considerations.

5.20 Thomas Hirschhorn
*Ur-Collage 124, 2008*

5.21 Thomas Hirschhorn
*Ur-Collage A8, 2008*
5.23 Thomas Hirschhorn
*The One World*, 2008,
and details
5.24  Thomas Hirschhorn, *Concrete Shock* in “Superficial Engagement,” 2006
5.25  Thomas Hirschhorn, *NASDAQ Crystal* in *Crystal of Resistance*, 2011
5.27  Thomas Hirschhorn, *Concrete Shock* in “Superficial Engagement,” 2006
5.28 Thomas Hirschhorn, *Spatial Front* in “Superficial Engagement,” 2006
5.29 Thomas Hirschhorn, *Chromatic Fire* in “Superficial Engagement,” 2006
6.1 Thomas Hirschhorn, *Doppelgarage*, 2002
6.2 Thomas Hirschhorn, *Doppelgarage*, 2002
6.3 Installation view, Isa Genzken, *Church, Light, Memorial, and Disco*, Hauser & Wirth, London, 2008

6.5 Isa Genzken, *Ground Zero, Memorial Tower*, 2008

6.6 Isa Genzken, photomontage of *Ground Zero, Light*, 2008

6.7 Isa Genzken, photomontage and detail *Ground Zero, Car Park*, 2008
6.8  Isa Genzken, detail of 
Ground Zero, 
Osama Fashion 
Store, 2008

6.9  Isa Genzken, Ground Zero, Church, 2008
6.10  Isa Genzken  
*Ground Zero, Hospital, 2008*

6.11  Isa Genzken  
*Ground Zero, Disco ‘Soon’ 2008*