Entangled Art Histories

The United States and the Two Germanies 1960–1990

Valérie Mavridorakis, Alexander Streitberger, Hilde Van Gelder, Erik Verhagen (eds)

Leuven University Press

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Preface

The organization of a project on the entangled art histories of the United States and the two Germanies by four researchers from two French and two Belgian universities may well cause astonishment. Yet, the personal and academic backgrounds of the editors of this volume provide some good reasons for such an undertaking. Valérie Mavridorakis's research covers American art since the 1960s, and she has a profound knowledge of German artists, such as Martin Kippenberger, who, as we will learn in the introduction to this volume, had a very special relationship with the USA. As a specialist on the work of Allan Sekula, Hilde Van Gelder completed a PhD on American art of the 1960s. What is more, during her studies in the early 1990s, she spent ten months in Germany, which prompted a lasting interest in the work of photographers from the circle of the so-called Düsseldorf school, on whom she has published extensively. Alexander Streitberger, who is now at UCLouvain, grew up in Germany. He studied art history in Heidelberg and Cologne, with a special focus on American and German conceptualism. Erik Verhagen, finally, was educated at the German school in Paris. He has worked extensively on German artists, such as Franz Erhard Walther, Stephan Balkenhol, and Gerhard Richter. Even though we are geographically removed from Germany and USA, our close familiarity with the German and American art worlds seemed an ideal departure point for embarking on this adventure, because it affords us genuine enthusiasm and critical distance.

When we thought about a location for the conference we had planned for autumn 2023, the Wiels, as the leading center for contemporary art in Brussels, immediately came to mind. The Wiels's mission is to stimulate the exchange of ideas and to enrich debates about and provide new perspectives on contemporary art. This perfectly matches our aim to explore the complex relationships, interactions, and collaborations that took place between the West and East German and the North American art scenes from the 1960s to the 1990s. We were extremely delighted that Dirk Snauwaert, the director of the Wiels, generously accepted to host the event and also agreed to give a paper on the role North American artists played in the exhibition program of the Kunstverein München, Germany, during his tenure as director.

The conference, which took place from Thursday 11 to Saturday 13 October, 2023, was organized around four major themes: the reception of the art on either side of the Atlantic, travel pragmatics and exhibition politics, artistic strategies, and cultural and institutional circulations between East Germany and the USA during the Cold War.

We quickly realized that, thanks to the outstanding quality of the contributions, it was definitely worth considering publication in book form. In the meantime, the international political situation has changed dramatically with the election of Donald Trump as president of the USA in 2024, which also had—and will continue to have—far-reaching economic, political, and cultural consequences for transatlantic relations. Within this context, the book takes on an unexpected relevance, for we have the impression that the contributions of this volume allow a differentiated view on the historical significance and complexity of transatlantic exchange. We believe that the book can also be understood as a strong signal against tendencies toward protectionism, isolationism, and nationalism, which are, unfortunately, becoming increasingly fashionable on both sides of the Atlantic. As we wrote in the text announcing the conference, transatlantic relations should not be considered in hierarchical terms, emphasizing American political, economic, and cultural hegemony. Instead of thinking of these relationships in terms of influence, preponderance, or dependence, we think of them in terms of interweaving, crossover, and interference. In this respect, our approach matches historians Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann's definition of a *histoire croisée* (entangled history). Hence, the objects of research are considered not "only in relation to each other, but also through each other, in terms of relations, interactions, circulation."[1] With regard to our field of study, this concerns the artists as much as it does the institutions, the market, and the critical and theoretical discourse.

1. Werner, Michael, and Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Penser l'histoire croisée: entre empirie et réflexivité," *Annales* HSS, 1 (Jan–Feb 2003): 16.

Our deepest thanks go, first, to the Wiels: to Dirk Snauwaert, who was extremely supportive, but also all the collaborators of the Wiels, who were of great help during the organization of the conference. We, further, would like to express our gratitude to those who supported the conference and the publication financially: UCLouvain; Sorbonne Université; Université de Lille; Centre André-Chastel; Centre de recherche en théorie des arts (CERTA); Institut des civilisations, arts et letters (INCAL); Fonds de la recherche scientifique (FNRS); Institut de recherches historiques du septentrion (IRHIS); and the KU Leuven Fund for Fair Open Access. Special thanks go to Paula Cook, who revised and translated several of the essays contained in this book, and to Suzanne Needs-Howarth, the extremely thorough and efficient freelance copy editor for Leuven University Press. Finally, we want to thank the Estate of Martin Kippenberger, represented by Galerie Gisela Capitain, for permission to reproduce the cover image of this book.

Valérie Mavridorakis, Alexander Streitberger, Hilde Van Gelder, and Erik Verhagen

Introduction

Valérie Mavridorakis

> "*It is really a question of the image one has of oneself.*"
>
> Jean-Luc Godard, quoted in the preface to Walter Abish's novel *How German Is It: Wie Deutsch ist es* (1980)

The essays in this collection stem from a conference entitled *Entangled Art Histories between Germany and the United States, 1960–1990: Production, Diffusion, Reception*, held at Wiels–Contemporary art center in Brussels, November 9–11, 2023. The lectures given during the conference provoked a wide range of lively exchanges between participants and questions from the audience. These interactions served to feed the papers presented here. The historical context that inspired our scientific project will be familiar to specialists in Western art of the second half of the 20th century. Many American artists of the 1960s and 1970s were able to launch their careers with the help of West German collectors, gallery owners, and curators. Several German artists and art dealers became Americans, and New York and Cologne were the strongholds of a market dominated by Neo-expressionist painting in the 1980s. This broader panorama deserved closer investigation through a series of converging surveys. As we shall see, the ensuing case studies add a new level of complexity to the geopolitical and economic issues surrounding American–German relations, as the title of this book suggests: *Entangled Art Histories: The United States and the Two Germanies 1960–1990.* Indeed, the triangular relationships between the different cultural hubs on two continents and the two sides of the Iron Curtain—in other words, in the two *blocs*—constitute the central theme of some of the essays in this volume.

Methodologically speaking, our project's transnational perspectives are rooted in entangled history. Artistic interconnections between East Germany (English: German Democratic Republic [GDR]; German: Deutsche Demokratische Republik [DDR]) and

West Germany (English: Federal Republic of Germany [FRG]; German: Bundesrepublik Deutschland [BRD]) and the United States serve as the starting point for our research. More specifically, we share the objectives and methods of the field of entangled history, defined by French historians Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann as *histoire croisée*. (Werner and Zimmermann, 2003, 2004) Pivotal to Werner and Zimmerman's historiography is its self-reflexive dimension. This desire for self-reflexivity has complicated the issues at stake here, as it involves incorporating the viewpoint of the historian, which is often overlooked, as well as the points of view that are being observed. Yet, being situated themselves, historians are not immune to the determination of their language, their culture, and the historiographical tools available to them. While we strive to reflect this need for clarity, we must point out that our scientific project, developed in France and Belgium (in both Wallonia and Flanders), assembles scholars from Germany, the United States, and other European countries, thereby allowing multiple viewpoints to emerge.

While *histoire croisée* involves the study of cultural transfers between poles, it also examines the impact of the various economic, social, and cultural entities circulating from one pole to another. In our field, this entails interactions between key players in the art world (artists, dealers, curators, and critics) and the institutions (museums, galleries, and alternative exhibition spaces) interacting with other social agents and non-art institutions. Ideological dynamics are also involved here and are more "entangled" than the Cold War logic might have suggested. To complicate our task even further, we must also consider the intersections between the artworks themselves—which produce their own effects—sometimes independently of what the artists and institutions anticipated. The circulation of ideas and objects, cultural dynamics, political confrontations, inertia, and critical fervor are among the phenomena requiring our attention. By studying specific intersections, the *histoire croisée de l'art* we aspire to will disrupt the preconceptions and static views we may still project onto the relationships forged between the USA, the Federal Republic of Germany, and the German Democratic Republic over three decades.

A Historiographical Review

Our research draws on the work of Detlef Junker, who supervised the two-volume collective work *The United States and Germany in the Era of the Cold War, 1945–1990*. In the first volume (1945–1968), we shall primarily focus on Sigrid Ruby's chapter on transatlantic artistic networks in the postwar period. (Ruby, 2004: 472–479)

Spanning from the late 1960s to the 1990s, the chronological framework we have defined incorporates the many studies on the emergence of American artistic hegemony in the first period of the Cold War. Gregor Stemmrich's text, the first of this collection, builds on this literature, exploring specific historical elements that have led him to produce original analyses of this period, as we shall see later. He discusses the issues at stake during the second, 1959 edition of *documenta*, when American art was gaining a foothold on the German scene, eager to reconnect with the avant-garde Modernism that the Nazis had sought to destroy. The different subjects explored span the period up to the 1990s. During the years of the reunification of Germany, Cologne had established itself as one of the world's art market capitals. However, the particular imbalance that characterized German–American relations during these three decades lingered. (see the anthologies compiled by Hopkins and Whyte, 2020a,b)

American art, which made its grand entrance in Germany with Abstract Expressionism, was welcomed with almost unwavering enthusiasm in the West, although opposition to the Vietnam War tarnished its popularity. In 1964, *documenta* III helped to launch the generation that followed Abstract Expressionism, for instance Ellsworth Kelly, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenberg, who was again selected. The following edition, in which a third of the artists were American, consecrated both Minimal art and pop art. The latter had already established itself in private and public collections in West Germany. On the subject of pop art, we would like to refer to the earlier work of the German-born comparativist Andreas Huyssen, who studied in Switzerland before moving to New York. In his articles for *New German Critique*, Huyssen drew an insightful picture of the state of the arts in postwar Germany and, more specifically, the perception of American pop art. (Huyssen, 1975: 77–97; 2010: 209–227) In West Germany, however, the response to Abstract Expressionism was somewhat delayed and the impact of pop art was almost immediate. According to Huyssen, this was based on a misunderstanding. In the wake of student protests and the diffusion of the theories of the Frankfurt School, pop art was perceived by the German Left as a critique of capitalism and consumer society. Catherine Dossin has nuanced this interpretation by demonstrating the passion for pop art among dealers, collectors, critics, and the general public, revealing an opposite ideological adherence. Since pop art was viewed as the embodiment of a culture of democracy—a "soup for the people" according to a headline in *Der Spiegel* in 1964—its popularity actually reflected a need to build an alliance with the comforting power of the United States. This need was driven largely by a desire to shed the weight of a deeply burdensome national identity. (Dossin, 2011: 100–111)

In the second volume of *The United States and Germany in the Era of the Cold War,* which covers 1968–1990, Stefan Germer and Julia Bernard paint a broad picture of transatlantic relations up to the 1980s. Between the late 1960s and the 1980s, the FRG emerged as a major art market, culminating in 1967 with the creation of Cologne's Kunstmarkt and an experimental art scene unrivaled in other Western countries, as evidenced by the creation of Prospekt in Düsseldorf at the same time. Thus, by the turn of the 1960s, the FRG had become—as Phyllis Tuchman described in the pages of *Artforum*—a haven for American artists. (Tuchman, 1970: 58–69) The pop artists, whose pieces were now considered emblematic of imperialism, were gone, replaced by the Minimalists and Conceptualists in the broadest sense, backed by some very powerful dealers, including Paul Maenz and Rudolf Zwirner in Cologne; Konrad Fischer and Alfred Schmela in Düsseldorf; and Heiner Friedrich in Munich. Many American artists had their first exhibition in Germany, while their work had not been shown in New York. "American art—whether we recognize it or not—is now to be seen in museums in Germany," commented Tuchman in 1970. The observations by American critics were limited to West Germany. Yet, we shall see in the essays of Claudia Mesch and Nóra Lukács that American artists representing Realism and—more surprisingly—Modernism enjoyed a favorable reception in the GDR, albeit somewhat marginal for the latter.

In the 1960s and 1970s, several German artists tried to build their careers by spending time in the United States, either briefly, as Franz Erhard Walther and Hanne Darboven did in New York, or permanently, as Hans Haacke did, for example. Despite this, the flow of artists from West Germany to the United States remains somewhat understudied. Erik Verhagen's and Althea Ruoppo's essays in this publication provide a precious contribution to addressing this lacuna. We should, however, mention the 2006 exhibition curated by Bennett Simpson at Philadelphia's ICA, *Make Your Own Life: Artists in & out of Cologne*, supplemented some ten years later by an exhibition at the David Zwirner Gallery, focusing on the Cologne–New York axis. (Simpson, 2006; Whitney, 2015) Peter Kueger's voluminous compilation, *Art Bridge: New York–Cologne–New York* also provides interesting insights into the art market. (Krueger, 2001) As for the GDR–United States axis, we shall see it sketched out in the following pages through the essay by Gregory Williams.

We should add that we have chosen the 1990s as our reference point (although Dirk Snauwaert's account is included as an addendum) simply because the globalization that succeeded the Cold War radically reshuffled exchanges, flows, and intersections. From that point onwards, transatlantic traffic would no longer mean exclusively the flows connecting North America to Europe, but a plethora of links spanning the entire continents of Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

Exhibition Policies

Our book is split into two sections with complementary or even overlapping themes. The first section focuses on specific exhibitions and the relational problems they present between the three poles—American, West German, and East German.

The stakes at the second *documenta*, held in 1959, were ideological and diplomatic, as Gregor Stemmrich explains when recalling the challenges of this second edition, with its liberal motto "Abstraction as world language." Having little knowledge of American art, Arnold Bode and his adviser Werner Haftmann entrusted New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) with the task of selecting the artworks to be shown at Kassel. Among the Abstract Expressionist paintings selected by the museum were three Robert Rauschenberg assemblages, including *Bed* (1955). Adopting a real *crossover* perspective, Stemmrich identifies, first, what the selection of these unclassifiable works meant for MoMA and, second, how the organizers in Kassel received these works. An in-depth analysis of *Bed* also allows the author to hypothesize the confusion provoked by such works in the era's German consciousness.

Felix Vogel tackles the best-known *documenta,* the 5th edition, masterminded by Harald Szeemann in 1972. Szeemann turned it into a comprehensive survey of experimental art in all its forms in a break with abstraction. While much has been written about *documenta* 5, Felix Vogel gives us an original socio-pragmatic approach. Drawing from the institution's archives, Vogel invites us behind the scenes of this mega exhibition, which, despite being described as "conceptual," necessitated countless material resources and practical skills to be staged. The author argues that *documenta* represents not only a new type of art but also a new model for the division of labor, an "American-style" neoliberalism that emerged in Kassel in 1972. Here, Vogel contributes to a social and economic history of exhibitions that is only now emerging.

Along similar lines, Alexander Alberro's essay demonstrates how some art world players responded to the prevailing liberalism twenty-five years later. While at the end of the 1980s the market's conformist power seemingly triumphed in Cologne, Alberro identifies a twofold critical, aesthetic, and social trend in this city, where alternative exhibitions were being invented along with a "counter-fair" intended as a political forum. The author also focuses on the forward-looking critical duo made up of German art historian Helmut Draxler and American artist Andrea Fraser in reaction to the new neoliberal status of the artist as a "service provider."

Alexander Streitberger focuses on the exhibitions and performances of Andrea Fraser, who is widely acknowledged as a representative of second-generation institutional criticism. The author analyzes Fraser's

1990 and 2001 exhibitions at the Christian Nagel Gallery in Cologne. For Streitberger, the German political context and history allow the artist to deploy what he describes as an "aesthetics of critical ambivalence." Fraser's subtle stance, which, as Streitberger demonstrates, points to the fundamental ambiguity of all artists vis-à-vis institutions, is audaciously displayed in her second exhibition. During the latter's opening, the American artist impersonated Martin Kippenberger (who died in 1997), the "bad boy" of the German art scene in the 1980s and 1990s. Drawing on this parody, Streitberger establishes an unlikely parallel between the role performed by the analytical American and that performed by the German provocateur.

Nóra Lukács takes us to the other side of the Wall, proving that it was not an entirely impenetrable cultural frontier in the 1970s. Her research in numerous archives (including the Stasi's) enabled her to retrace the conditions and contents of New Yorker Charles Simonds's 1978 exhibition at East Berlin's EP Galerie with the greatest accuracy. The case of Simonds and his GDR gallery owner, Jürgen Schweinebraden, challenges preconceived notions of the Cold War and allows Lukács to emphasize the entanglement of artistic activities between the USA, West Germany, and East Germany.

Gregory Williams concludes this first section on exhibition policies with an account of the opposite flows, from the GDR to North America. Indeed, the American public first discovered East German painting on the eve of the fall of the Berlin Wall, when the exhibition *Twelve Artists from the German Democratic Republic* was staged at Harvard University's Busch-Reisinger Museum. Reframing the event within the political debates sparked by the revival of painting on the German American scene, Williams also recalls that, in the reunified Germany, painters from the former GDR were widely shunned by their peers for colluding with the regime. This reveals the complexity of the reaction to art from the "second world." Williams reveals that, in the United States, it was, paradoxically, expected to provide an alternative to market-corrupted Western models.

Artistic Strategies

The second section of this publication moves away from exhibitions per se and turns to the strategies employed by artists. Such strategies obviously entail exhibitions, as well as curators, gallery owners, and critics. The case studies in this section explore the strategies adopted to target a different audience and integrate into a particular scene, network, or sociopolitical context.

Erik Verhagen's account of Franz Erhard Walther's sojourn in New York between 1967 and 1970 opens these reflections on the expectations and rewards of artists' travels. In Walther's case, the cruel irony of fate dictated that he met decisive interlocutors in New York, albeit they were not Americans, but Germans. While he exhibited at MoMA in the prestigious group show *Spaces* (1969–1970), the repercussions of the exhibition proved greater in his native country than in the USA, even though—as Verhagen points out—his oeuvre inspired many of his peers.

Fifteen years his junior, Thomas Schütte had a different approach to American art than Walther. By 1975, when he completed the piece entitled *America*, upon which Stefaan Vervoort bases his reflections, his sojourn in New York had become a "Grand Tour" of sorts. Moreover, Conceptual art had supplanted abstraction as a universal language. But it was from Düsseldorf's Kunstakademie that the young Schütte delivered his Nietzschean critique of mainstream art, as analyzed by Vervoort. The author pinpoints Schütte's position at the intersection of strong German and American influences, noting his sophisticated strategy "for mediating German–American intersections."

In his sculpture, Reinhard Mucha, born in the same era as Schütte, evokes his origins in the industrial and manufacturing heartland of the Rhine–Ruhr region, to the extent that, as Althea Ruoppo notes, one can detect a certain autobiographical provincialism. Yet, beyond this idiosyncratic dimension, Ruoppo endeavors to unravel an entanglement of local and global references in Mucha's work, particularly in the large-scale piece *The Wirtschaftswunder, To the People of Pittsburgh* (first exhibited in 1991, at Pittsburgh's 51st Carnegie International). The author's analyses position Mucha's "Industrial Transnationalism" in the composite wake of Dan Flavin and Blinky Palermo.

Moving from West to East, Claudia Mesch explores the relationship between African American artist Charles White and the GDR. During the 1950s, White, representing the "other America," enjoyed a warm and positive reception in the GDR. As Mesch explains, the benefits were reciprocal. The anti-colonialism of the regime echoed White's antiracist stance, while Socialist Realism encouraged White to pursue his own realist style grounded in African American history and conditions. Consequently, White's first monograph was published in Dresden, in 1955. But by 1974, when the artist exhibited in East Berlin, Mesch detected a clear stylistic and technical inflection in his monumental drawings, which seemed to revive a certain Modernism. Thus, the author suggests, White shifted away from Socialist dogma with the aim of articulating a manifestly African American experience.

Shortly afterward, Yvonne Rainer moved to West Berlin, where she lived for 1 year, from 1976 to 1977, as her artistic practice evolved from choreography to film. The film *Journeys from Berlin/1971* (1980) resulted

from her year in Berlin. Sabeth Buchmann examines this film's structure, themes, and political implications. Based on a principle of free psychoanalytic association, the montage combines sequences of everyday life in New York and Berlin with images of political events, many of which relate to Ulrike Meinhof, the radical left-wing theorist and leader of the Rote Armee Faktion (Red Army Faction). Meinhof was found dead in her prison cell during Rainer's stay in Berlin. Therefore, numerous displacements caused by Rainer's journey, in terms of intimate existence, political consciousness, and artistic activity, mobilize Buchmann's reflections.

Ultimately, the strategies adopted by conceptual artist Robert Barry—as outlined by Stefano Agresti—are completely different. First, they involve a gallery, i.e., Paul Maenz's, in Cologne. Second, they reflect a desire on the part of both the artist and the gallery owner to forge a transnational network, as Agresti shows when he focuses on the beginnings of their fruitful collaboration, during the first half of the 1970s. While Maenz helped the artist gain a foothold in the increasingly powerful German market while simultaneously spreading out the ubiquitous poetics of his work, Barry also enabled his gallerist to forge commercial links with New York and Turin. Here, we are witness to a genuine crossover dynamic.

To close the book, we invited a leading expert in exhibitions, Dirk Snauwaert, to testify. Today the director of Brussels' Wiels, Snauwaert previously headed Munich's Kunstverein, between 1996 and 2001. Given that Munich was the scene of Heiner Friedrich's activities as a dealer and tireless champion of Minimal, Conceptual, and land art, Snauwaert showed particular interest in the movements between Germany (whose art scene at that time revolved around Berlin) and North America (which, in the wake of globalization, now encompasses Canada and Mexico as well as the United States). Snauwaert also reminds us that, in the early 1990s, the Gulf War sparked an economic recession that dramatically disrupted artistic and curatorial practices by impacting the art market.

To close this introduction, we should briefly revisit the book's cover image. (fig. 1) Excerpted from Martin Kippenberger's *Heavy Burschi* [Heavy Lad] series (1989–1990), the photograph features Madonna as the Queen of Clubs, an American car, and Kippenberger disguised as a cowboy. Assertions in German compete with equally prosaic declarations in English. Another image of the series depicts Jackson Pollock and Martin Kippenberger as children, painting upside down. Kippenberger's art abounds with American Dream stereotypes, as discussed in Streitberger's essay on Fraser's appropriation of the masculinist stereotypes that the painter delighted in personifying. Kippenberger evidently cultivated clichés with an almost childlike glee.

Fig. 1.

Martin Kippenberger, *Untitled* (from the series *Heavy Burschi* [Heavy Lad]), 1989/90. Colour photograph, 240×200 cm. © Estate of Martin Kippenberger, Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne Photo: Lothar Schnepf. See also Plate 1.

It is common knowledge that Kippenberger did not paint the canvases photographed that make up the *Heavy Burschi* [Heavy Lad] series. While staying in New York, he told his assistant Merlin Carpenter to produce paintings "in the Kippenberger style," using his favorite motifs. When he realized that New York galleries were promoting photography instead of painting, he argued that the parody was too clever for his own taste and ordered the paintings to be destroyed—but not before he had had them photographed. The paintings were then destroyed and transferred to a wooden container resembling a dumpster, while the photographs, printed on the same scale as Carpenter's pseudo-originals, were hung on the walls, from picture rails. (fig. 2) After a decade during which the notion of authorship was subjected to all manner of abuse, Kippenberger could not easily let his guard down when it came to auctoriality, but he played the game of distancing. His American dreams were very much alive. He had to compete against esteemed artists, and,

most significantly, he aspired to become an actor. In 1977, he traveled to Florence to become just that but found himself in the wrong place at the wrong time. In 1989, he decided to rectify the course of his life and stayed in Los Angeles, hoping to be spotted by Hollywood. Once more, he failed. Out of spite and wanting to leave something of himself in the city, he invested in an Italian restaurant, whose name, Capri in Venice, synthesized his "intersecting dreams" of American cars and Italian cinema.

Fig. 2.
Martin Kippenberger, *Heavy Burschi* [Heavy Lad], 1989/90. Installation view at *Martin Kippenberger – Bitteschön Dankeschön. Eine Retrospektive*, Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn, 2019. © Estate of Martin Kippenberger, Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne.
Photo: Simon Vogel, Cologne.

Although the Americans appreciated his work, he scorned them in his interviews, only treating actors and a handful of artists with grace. (cf. Kippenberger and Koether, 1991: 14–15, 156–157) Through his comments, the rest of America appears to be nothing but garbage, potentially recyclable, such as the paintings that Carpenter made for him.

Kippenberger epitomizes the complexity of an artist from the Cold War generation who entered the world of art through family culture and Berlin punk before moving to the US to embrace and trample on American myths. This image alone provides a fitting introduction to the texts that follow.

Translated from the French by Paula Cook

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Rauschenberg’s *Bed* (1955) and *II. Documenta* (1959)

Histoire Croisée of a Transatlantic Conundrum

Gregor Stemmrich

Analyzing the relationships of German and American art as an *histoire croisée* poses a complicated challenge. During the Cold War, the social sciences preferred a comparative approach that assumed fixed entities. Apparently, this model was no longer tenable after the Cold War ended. (Werner and Zimmermann, 2006) But how can the relationships of German and American art that were shaped by the Cold War be analyzed in the manner of an *histoire croisée*? Analysis is possible only by adopting intersecting perspectives, without settling on a single explanatory model.

The rhetorical elevation of abstraction to a “world language” at the second *documenta*, in 1959 signaled both establishing a front against Socialist Realism in the East, especially in East Germany, which was located only thirty kilometers from Kassel, as well as a historical continuity of the prewar avant-gardes that had helped abstraction achieve a breakthrough. A crucial share of the funding for *documenta* came from the Ministerium für gesamtdeutsche Fragen [Ministry of All-German Affairs], which aimed to culturally influence the eastern part of Germany, which was controlled by the Soviet Union. It had some success, as is evident if one considers that the young Gerhard Richter traveled from Dresden to visit *documenta*, which had a lasting influence on his thought. The borders were still permeable.

Because no one in Germany in the 1950s had any expertise in art from the United States, and presumably also to save money, the *documenta* organizers asked MoMA in New York, on relatively short notice, to put together a selection of works from the previous fifteen years. Porter McCray, the director of the International Program, was assigned the task. The American selection was striking for the paintings by Abstract Expressionists, with their outsized formats and uninhibited gestural language. The painters were exhibited as a national

Fig. 1.

Exhibition *Jackson Pollock (1912-1956),* Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Berlin, 1958 Photo: Gert Schütz; Landesarchiv Berlin, F Rep. 290 (08) 0060937. On the walls: Jackson Pollock, *Blue Poles: Number 11*, 1952, 212.1 cm × 488.9 cm, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (right), and Number 32, 1950, 269 × 457,5 cm, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf (left)

Fig. 2.

Exhibition *Neue Amerikanische Maler,* Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Berlin, 1958. Photo: Gert Schütz; Landesarchiv Berlin, F Rep. 290 (08) 0060935. On the wall: Willem de Kooning, *Woman I*, 1950-52, 192,8×147,3 cm (right) and *Woman II*, 1952, 150×109.2 cm (left), The Museum of Modern Art, New York

group. The presentation at *documenta* had been preceded by two exhibitions of Abstract Expressionist painting that were organized by MoMA and toured all of Europe: *The New American Painting* and *Jackson Pollock*. (fig. 1 and fig. 2) The appearance of the Americans at the second *documenta* was in that sense a reprise. But *documenta* was not a traveling exhibition, and it brought together works from different countries.

Two official guiding ideas were intended to characterize the second *documenta*: It was to document the international developments in art of the previous fifteen years (this was new, because the first *documenta* had offered a historical retrospective of European Modernism), and it was to present art under the motto "Abstraction as world language." It did not occur to the exhibition's planners that these two goals were incompatible. They placed representational, figurative, realistic art on the Communist side of Germany. The division was part of the program, and based on the preceding traveling exhibitions of American art they knew—or thought they knew—that the American side should not be expected to submit figurative painting.[1] Apparently no one had any idea that there were newer developments in the United States that were distinct from Abstract Expressionism and could not be placed within the simple antithesis of abstraction and representation. Artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns did not gain much prominence in the United States until 1958. Porter McCray included three works by Rauschenberg in the American selection. This essay seeks to shed light on the fate of these works at *documenta* and to take the opportunity to ask follow-up questions concerning the American context and MoMA's art policy. It will also show how at least one of these works reflects on its own historical position.

German art experts in the late 1950s knew little about the sociopolitical context in which Abstract Expressionist painting had emerged in the United States and what role the antithesis of abstraction and representation had played in that context. Republican congressmen, above all George A. Dondero, directed continuous smears at modern art from 1946 to 1956, because it refused to serve the glorification of the United States. He declared: "[M]odern art is Communistic because it is distorted and ugly, because it does not glorify our beautiful country, our cheerful and smiling people, our material progress." (Hauptman, 1973: 48–52; see also de Hart Mathew, 1976/2000: 155–180; Frascina, 2003: 69–97) What many Americans expected of modern art was patriotic painting of the "American scene." Modern art seemed un-American, European, foreign, incomprehensible, and dangerous to them. When Abstract Expressionism emerged as a genuinely American avant-garde art movement with international ambition, it provoked vehement defensive reactions. Barnett Newman explained the situation retrospectively:

> People were painting a beautiful world, and at the same time we realized that the world wasn't beautiful. The question, the moral question that each of us examined—de Kooning, Pollock, myself—was: What was there to beautify? And so the only way to find a beginning was to give up the whole notion of an external world, so to speak, that one could glorify and to put oneself into the position of finding this possibility, which people call a medium, of saying something that would be important to oneself. (De Antonio and Tuchman, 1984: 43–44)[2]

In 1952, Alfred H. Barr Jr., the first director of MoMA and later director of collections, published an article in *The New York Times Magazine* titled "Is Modern Art Communistic?" to demonstrate that attacks on modern art were all too common from both communists and fascists. (Barr, 1952/1986)

Without either side of the Atlantic having planned this, the divided Germany became an allegory for the intra-American confrontation that had preceded it—an allegory based on an inversion, since a kind of American art that, at the time it was created and gained acceptance, had been hysterically attacked as "Communist" because its protagonists leaned to the Left, had become the showpiece of America's values. *Documenta*'s motto, "Abstraction as world language," which was aimed against Socialist Realism in East Germany, introduced a policy of alliance into German cultural politics that built a transatlantic bridge to counter an opposing realist doctrine of art at home. This allegorical doubling presumed a temporal shift that mitigated immediate confrontation. In America, the accusation that modern art was Communist had largely faded in 1959, but the memory of it was still fresh, as was the memory of the all-German exhibitions after the war in Germany, but the separation had already occurred in the politics of art.[3]

The political division went hand in hand with a massive transformation in the political climate. When Daniel Bell's collection of essays *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* was published in 1960, it struck a nerve. The most powerful weapon in the Cold War was the success of the welfare state.[4] The ideology that one had no ideology sidestepped alternative political ideas. Daniel Bell was a member of, if not the driving force behind, the Congress of Cultural Freedom, which had been founded in West Berlin in 1950 and been secretly initiated and sponsored by the CIA, and which was active in thirty-five countries in its heyday.[5] Its goal was to motivate Left-leaning intellectuals and political leaders to strict rejection of Communism as part of Westernization.[6] This was supported by the activities of public and private institutions that sought to focus leftist political ambitions on artistic manifestations that, with an existentialist force, lent

expression to dissent with the mainstream. (see Jachec, 2000) It was possible to imagine that this was successful. In fact, despite the anti-communist program of *documenta*, it was not the East–West conflict that moved people but the fact that American art was different, in that it was Western but not European. In a transatlantic activation of mirror neurons, Abstract Expressionism appeared to have an affinity, more or less, with European Art Informel, and at the same time, in its difference, was seen as *the* American art. (Jachec, 2000: 199–205) Max Kozloff later complained that the exhibitions of Abstract Expressionist painting shown in Europe had "furnished out-of-date and over simplified metaphors of the actual complexity of American experience." (Kozloff, 1973/2000: 138)[7]

Not until the late 1960s did it become public that, since its founding in 1947, the CIA had been massively involved in the cultural life and cultural policies of other countries. In the context of the Vietnam War, people responded with outrage, but it took a few years for there to be a reaction related to art. In 1973, Max Kozloff published his essay "American Painting during the Cold War" in *Artforum*, which stirred up a controversial discussion that continues today. (Kozloff, 1973/2000: 138) In the 1960s, Kozloff had concluded that more recent art had the effect of devaluing the role of the critic. He coined the term "Warholism" for it. (Kozloff, 1965/1968: 307) Whether Warhol's art should be interpreted as social criticism or, rather, as total affirmation could not be as easily determined, since it also depended on the viewers' projections. This situation was experienced as schizoid. Kozloff analyzed the critic's reaction to this situation and justified his suspicion that the critic unwillingly serves hegemonic structures. (Harrison, 2001: 146–168) He applied this suspicion to the entire evolution of postwar art. The discussion that followed, however, focused more and more on the emergence and international breakthrough of Abstract Expressionism, which in 1974 Eva Cockroft called a "weapon of the Cold War." (Cockroft, 1974/2000)[8] This debate reached its culmination, if not its termination, in 1983 with Serge Guilbault's *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War*. (Guilbault, 1984) The undisguised revisionism of his title, which denounced the shift of the international center of art from Paris to New York as a shady and illegitimate act, avoided looking like the helpless protest of someone living in the past only because its argument had an unspoken rapport with another discussion—namely, that of the concepts of Modernism and Postmodernism. The common denominator in both discussion threads was disavowing the role that Clement Greenberg's concept of "Modernism" had played in Abstract Expressionism gaining acceptance and in the shift in the international center of art. The Postmodernism debate that began in the United States in the 1970s had made it obvious

that American art critics and art historians were dependent to a considerable degree on theory imported from Paris (Barthes, Baudrillard, Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, and Lyotard, to name just a few) to give Postmodernism a theoretical profile. Moreover, the time had come to demonstrate that the era or American dominance of the art world was over. That happened in 1981, in the exhibition *WESTKUNST*, curated by Kaspar König and Lazlo Glozer in the trade fair halls in Cologne, in 1981.[9] In that historical context, Guilbault was able to reactivate anti-American resentment by recalling the École de Paris; and whereas influential American art critics (Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Douglas Crimp, Craig Owens) deemed it appropriate to identify the beginning of postmodernism (qua allegorical renegotiation of modernism) in America in the work of Robert Rauschenberg, for example, it became popular in the 1980s to identify postmodernism with a recycling of myth in European figurative Neo-Expressionist painting.

The second *documenta*, in 1959, in which Abstract Expressionism was extremely well represented and in which Jackson Pollock, who had died in 1956, was also in a hall of honor, certainly contributed to the École de Paris losing the high ranking it had enjoyed up until then in both Europe and the United States. But it would be an oversimplification to infer that this was calculated power politics. When Porter McCray sent the dimensions of the works selected to *documenta* management, those responsible failed to understand that they were in inches rather than centimeters. They had to change plans on short notice, which resulted in the works of French and German Art Informel, which *documenta* had conceived as its apotheosis, being moved to the attic, where it was crowded, stuffy, and unbearably hot. (Zwirner, 2021: 73–86; see further Polster, 1995: 114–118) But this demotion was not intended as such; it was merely a last-minute solution.

That was not true of another decision of *documenta*'s organizers, which went beyond the American selection and the associated contractual agreements. Porter McCray and his team had submitted three works by Robert Rauschenberg, one of which, *Bed*, of 1955,[10] was not even exhibited at first, while the other two, *Thaw* and *Kickback*, were initially exhibited but after a time silently removed from the exhibition.[11] (Fig. 3)

In its approach to Abstract Expressionism, *documenta* had undermined its own concept, because, unlike the Venice Biennale, it was not intended to be an exhibition of nations but instead a mixture of provenances. The Americans had not opposed this, but *documenta*'s organizers did not know how to deal with the oversized formats other than to present them as a national group.[12] The removal of Rauschenberg's works amounted to equating America with Abstract Expressionism. This censorship was, however, based on an ideological reorientation of the concept of abstraction that Uwe Schneede summed up as follows:

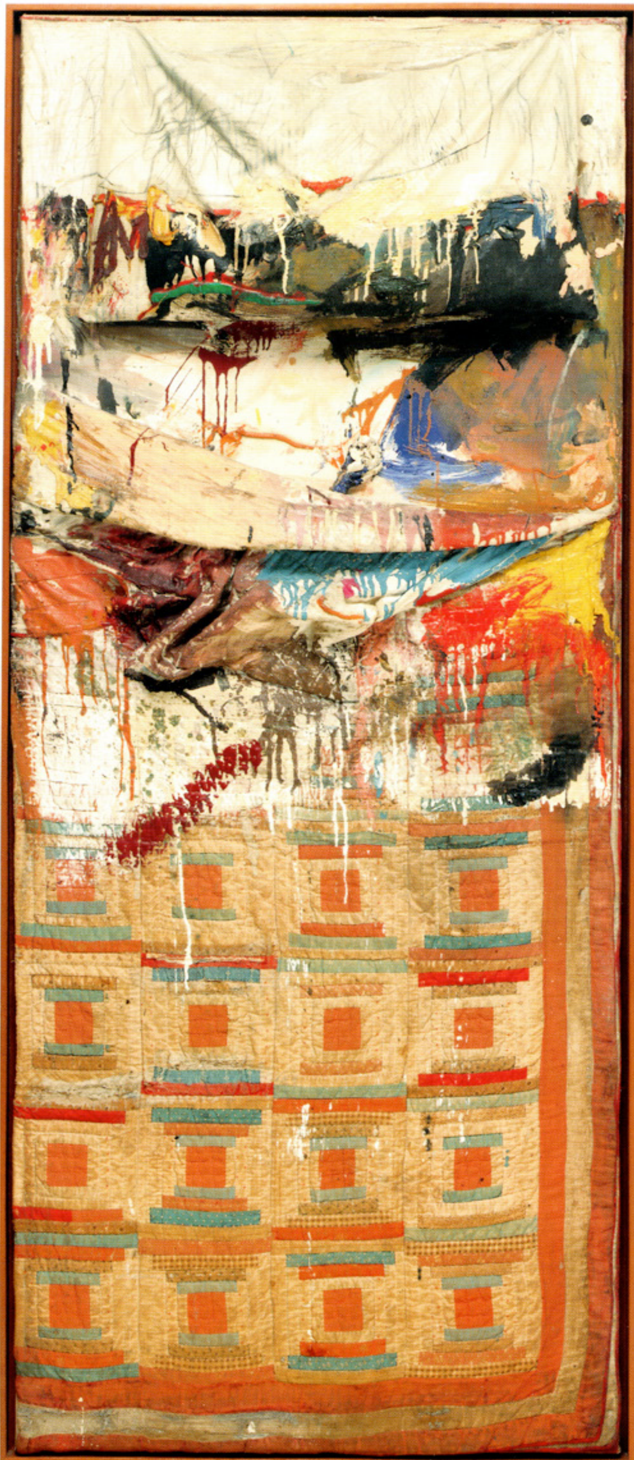

Fig. 3.

Robert Rauschenberg: *Bed*, 1955, 191.1×80×20.3 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, New York

See also Plate 2.

“Apparently horrified equally by the condemnation of art in the Third Reich and the norm of representation in the GDR, Haftmann asserted in a counter doctrine that abstraction was a Western bulwark against a lack of freedom and associated it with a claim to international validity.” (Schneede, 1989: 39) That does not, of course, explain why Rauschenberg’s works fell prey to German censorship, since these works most certainly do not conform to the norm of representation of the GDR or that of Nazi art. It may, rather, have offered an opportunity and occasion to return to the beginnings of art’s evolution toward abstraction and specifically to Wassily Kandinsky’s essay “Über die Formfrage” [On the Question of Form], of 1912, in which he advanced the thesis that modern art has two poles: “great abstraction” and “great realism.” In the ideological animosity between abstraction and figuration, which was exactly what Kandinsky was hoping to avoid, there was no room for realism that did not partake in this animosity.

We do not know why Rauschenberg’s works made it into the American selection. Two historical developments may provide some insight. In 1957, the New York Area Research Council of City College conducted a 6-month study on the situation of young artists, which concluded that it was nearly impossible for young artists to live from their art and that gallery owners were pressuring young artists to work as Abstract Expressionists. (Tuchman, 1984: 177) This finding caused concern. In 1958, in a speech at the Club, the forum of the New York School, Alfred Barr called on young artists of the second generation of Abstract Expressionists to respond more rebelliously to their elders. (Zelevansky, 1994: 91)[13] Rauschenberg’s inclusion in the American selection for the second *documenta* is (more) understandable against that backdrop.

Further insight is provided by Russell Lynes’s *Good Old Modern: The Museum of Modern Art* (1973). He makes it clear that the constellations of power at MoMA were precarious in 1959. Attacks were aimed in particular at Porter McCray, who had developed the International Program into a parallel structure, with its own curators, its own members, and its own “public information service.” Porter McCray was forced to resign, which he ultimately did in 1961, but not without declaring someone else to be the main offender:

> Alfred [Barr] was the real fly in the ointment. He controlled the loan of materials from the collection, and we weren’t allowed to show any artists who weren’t represented in the Museum’s collection. In the *Documenta* in Germany, the second show, Alfred wouldn’t let us show Rauschenberg or Jasper Johns just because the Museum didn’t have any. (Lynes, 1973: 390)

This raises more questions than it answers: first, how Rauschenberg's *Bed* could be sent to *documenta* anyway and, second, why Jasper Johns was not selected, since McCray's assertion is incorrect, since MoMA had selected four works by Johns in 1958 and acquired three of them: *Target with Faces*, *White Numbers*, and *Green Target*.[14] Concerned about how the trustees would react, Barr had asked Philip Johnson to purchase Johns's *Flag* (1954–1955) in order to donate it to MoMA later.[15] By contrast, when the collector Robert Scull offered Rauschenberg's Combine Painting *Monogram* (1955–1959) to MoMA as a gift in the spring of 1959, Barr rejected it.[16]

We cannot penetrate the micropolitics at MoMA, but we can get another perspective on the complex connections by consulting Rauschenberg's oeuvre and statements. In an interview by Barbara Rose, Rauschenberg stated: "I have the feeling that that's what they [the Abstract Expressionists] were after. They were after the elusive presence of the piece without the physicality. I want the physicality also." (Rose, 1987: 109; see also Leggio, 1992: 79–117) *Bed* clearly alludes to Pollock, who emphasized the physicality of the act of painting by flinging paint and by working on canvases spread on the floor, but who presented his paintings vertically, on the wall. Rauschenberg, by contrast, painted the assemblage of materials that we identify as a bed—and hence associate with a horizontal position—in a vertical position, as is evident from the flow of the paint.[17] In his approach to materials that pronounces their tactility and in his uninhibited application of paint, physicality is manifest not only in relation to the situation of production, as in Pollock's work, but also in relation to the situation of reception. Whereas Pollock had spoken of being literally *in* his painting when painting it, which meant that the painting presented on the wall evokes *absence*, Rauschenberg's presentation of an empty bed in a vertical orientation lends meaning to the absence of a literal, physical meaning.

The bedspread's pattern of interlocking squares alludes to Josef Albers, Rauschenberg's teacher at Black Mountain College, and in particular to Albers's *Homage to the Square* series, while it eschews Albers's figure–ground relationships, and because it is a textile, one thinks of Anni Albers as well. Because there are serially organized square elements that add up to a rectangular plane, however, they suggest a reference not only to the Bauhaus tradition, but also to Jasper Johns's alphabet and number paintings, which illustrate holistically the reproducibility of signs in serially structured pictorial fields. In *Flag*, Johns had developed a concept of "single image painting," which is serially structured internally. This is done by using a ubiquitous patriotic sign: the American flag. Rauschenberg's *Bed* of 1955 can be read as an answer to his question of what a "single image painting" could be in his own art. (Feinstein, 1998: 78–79)[18] It is indeed difficult to imagine that he did *not* ask that question.

Bed represents a condensation of both Rauschenberg's own biography and the postwar evolution of American art.[19] His mother had—like most women in Port Arthur, Texas, where he grew up—embroidered quilts under which he played as a child ("Even if they had talents for other things," he remarked, "this was what their job was") (Rose, 1987: 62–63), and the elementary, spartan look of the bed is easy to connect to his time in the navy, where friends had encouraged him to study art, which had seemed "completely absurd" to him. (Rauterberg, 2006/2013: 61) The traces of pencil on the pillow evoke the art of Cy Twombly, whom he had met at Black Mountain College, and the pillow itself, whose upper half is painted in white whose lower half is painted in black or at least dark colors, suggests Rauschenberg's early series the *White Paintings* and *Black Paintings*. "It is completely irrelevant that I am making them," he declared of the *White Paintings*; "Today is their creater [*sic*]." (Hopps, 1991: 230) Today unites night and day.

Between the lower area of the pillow and the sheet turned down over the bedspread, a dynamic and a drama unfold in color, gesture, and material that confounds the figure–ground relationship in a way that recalls an act of violence. This is a direct reference to Willem de Kooning's *Woman* paintings of the early 1950s, whose development Rauschenberg could observe and documented in photographs. De Kooning's *Woman I* and Rauschenberg's *Bed* are connected by an impression of violence and an erotic charge problematized by it. There has been much speculation about de Kooning's relationship to women.[20] But another line of questioning seems more important in relationship to Rauschenberg. In the chapter of *Das Kapital* on the fetish, Marx explained that an ordinary functional object—a table—becomes the specter of itself when it becomes a commodity; as Derrida has explained, the table is the "apparition of a strange creature: at the same time Life, Thing, Beast, Object, Commodity, Automaton—in a word, specter." (Derrida, 2006: 190) *Woman I* attracts this spectrum of contradictory determinations like few other paintings.[21] That does not suggest any corresponding intention but, on the contrary, something that *cannot* have been intended. Jasper Johns explained this later: "I think that most art which begins to make a statement fails to make a statement because the methods used are too schematic or too artificial. I think that one wants from painting a sense of life. The final suggestion, the final statement, has to be not a deliberate statement but a helpless statement. It has to be what you can't avoid saying, not what you set out to say."[22] To put it in pointed terms: de Kooning could not help but say that a painting cannot help but exist as a commodity fetish and that social and libidinal relationships appear in reified form in the commodity fetish. The question nevertheless remains whether and how a painting can be related to that. In her essay "Robert Rauschenberg and the Materialized Image," Rosalind Krauss explained

that Rauschenberg had succeeded in his Combine Paintings in offering an experience that was not in commodity form. (Krauss 1974/2002: 39–56) Rather than distorting the commodity form of a tableau to the point of recognizability, as de Kooning did in his *Women* paintings, Rauschenberg sought to challenge the commodity-compatible expectation and perception in the materialized image that rejects the conformity that could otherwise be assumed.[23]

Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, of 1953, should also be mentioned in this context. The work counteracts commodity form. The bedspread in *Bed* is, as is clear from the two border stripes, large enough for a bed for two people, but the bedspread has been folded for a bed for just one person. By erasing a de Kooning drawing with de Kooning's permission, Rauschenberg had demonstrated that de Kooning's drawing can, by turning one drawing into another by erasing the first, be treated as a "bed" that is large enough for two artists but can only be presented as a bed for one person. Rauschenberg's other partnerships and the associated separations should also be considered as possible biographical references. (Wagner, 1996: 196)

The references and explanations thus far have been entirely on American soil, but Rauschenberg also made statements about *Bed* that shed light on why this work in particular was selected for *documenta*. In an interview with Barbara Rose, in the context of *Bed*, he refers to Bradley Walker Tomlin, whom he describes as "terribly underrated": "I thought that Tomlin was one of the first really substantial breaks from Mondrian. He just took Mondrian and exploded him." (Rose, 1987: 50)[24] And referring to *Bed*, he said: "The only way I could abstractly free the quilt was to turn it into an abstraction—into a piece of color. Tomlin could do that. Every two inches of his work is recharged with something new. It wasn't until I put the pillow on it that the quilt became an abstraction of a bed." (Rose, 1987: 63) (fig. 4) Tomlin, who died young and is no longer numbered among the "big names" of Abstract Expressionism, but whom Pollock had appreciated like he had few of his other colleagues, was represented both in the second *documenta* and in the traveling exhibition *The New American Painting* (1958–1959). Moreover, his painting had also been presented in 1955, in parallel with the first *documenta*, in a traveling exhibition organized by MoMA: *Moderne Kunst aus USA/Modern Art in America*, alongside works by Robert Motherwell and Mark Rothko. Rauschenberg's statements read like a reflection on how his *Bed* would fit in a selection of American paintings for an exhibition with the motto "Abstraction as world language." Starting out from the visual affinity of many of Tomlin's paintings to a quilt, he reflects on the latter's approach to Mondrian in order to make a connection to *Bed*. Mondrian's reduction of painting to the three primary colors plus black and white may be alluded to by the

painting of the pillow and the turned-down bedsheet in these colors on the right edge. Rauschenberg imagined Tomlin causing a formal, geometric structure to explode or, vice versa in the case of the bedspread, a formal geometric structure turned into an informal structure in order to explain against that backdrop his shifting of the concept of abstraction to everyday objects. As other statements by him in interviews make clear, in the way he clung to the concept of abstraction, he was also rejecting the then-widespread idea that *Bed* was a Dadaist or Surrealist painting.

Fig. 4.
Bradley Walker Tomlin, *Number 9: In Praise of Gertrude Stein*, 1950, 124.5×259.8 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, New York

The Surrealist reading appears to have been so convincing, especially in France, that the work was shown in 1959, at the suggestion of Duchamp, in the *Exposition inteRnatiOnale du Surréalisme* (December 15, 1959 – February 15, 1960, Galerie Daniel Cordier), immediately after the second *documenta*, to demonstrate the vitality of this art movement. In that context, the suggestion of violence was also used to read it as taking a position on the Algerian War of Independence. (Parkinson, 2023) The work could be interpreted as an echo of the *Exposition internationale du Surréalisme* in Paris in 1938, in which four beds decorated with Surrealist paraphernalia had been presented in the corners of the main room, and the echo of Delacroix's painting *The Death of Sardanapalus* (1827) could also be heard in the reference to the Algerian War.

Although the work was supposed to be shown in Italy on an earlier occasion, at the *Festival of Two Worlds*, in Spoleto, in 1958, it was not exhibited then because the curator, Giovanni Urbani, saw it as a Dadaist attack on serious art. (Parkinson, 2023: 36) It would appear that immediately before and after the second *documenta*, Dadaism and Surrealism were the only options for categorizing how to approach the work.

In Germany, however, the situation was different. Hans Haacke, who was studying in Kassel in 1959 and worked at *documenta*, wrote retrospectively: "I remember overhearing Werner Schmalenbach, one of the members of Bode's team, insisting that Robert Rauschenberg's *Bed* be removed." (Haacke, 2009) Schmalenbach had done more than anyone in Germany for Kurt Schwitters's reputation. In 1960, he presented him at the Venice Biennale, and later he published an extensive monograph on

Schwitters. So it cannot have been an aversion to Dadaism that moved him to insist that Rauschenberg's *Bed* be excluded.[25] Much the same can be said of Werner Haftmann. In *Malerei im 20. Jahrhundert* [Painting in the 20th century], published in 1954, he treats Dadaism favorably and with historical understanding, without disparaging it relative to other art movements.[26] Apparently, both understood that *Bed* was neither Dadaism nor Surrealism, but they did not have categories that made the work seem comprehensible, much less any that would have enabled a broad audience to understand it. Because the second *documenta* was waving the banner of defending artistic freedom, however, in the eyes of the German exhibition organizers, "artistic freedom" was not a category that could be applied to Rauschenberg's *Bed* either. *Bed* could only be shown in Europe around 1959 by *embedding* it in Surrealism in Paris.

It did not go unnoticed that *Bed* had been locked out of the second *documenta*. *Der Spiegel* not only reported on it but also illustrated the work.[27] The work emanated uneasiness. Contemporaries and art historians have repeatedly felt obliged to speak of the decision to exclude it. But their views were polarized. Commentaries that refer directly to *Bed* ignore the fact of impermissible censorship so that *documenta*'s decision would be understandable, whereas other commentaries made use of the thesis of Max Kozloff, Eva Cockcroft, and Serge Guilbault that Abstract Expressionism had served MoMA and the CIA as a compliant weapon in the Cold War, with the proviso that it could influence their thematic orientation but not relate them to specific decisions or policies.[28] In the confrontation of these two positions, the American selection of *Bed* for *documenta* could therefore be cited as evidence that the thesis was untenable.

Rudolf Zwirner, the secretary of the second *documenta*, also held that view. He addressed *Bed* a number of times, and in the most detail in his autobiography. (Zwirner, 2021) He wrote that Arnold Bode, the director of *documenta*, had simply found it unacceptable to exhibit the work. But because he was contractually obliged to exhibit it, Bode had Rauschenberg's *Bed* hung in Zwirner's office.[29] When Porter McCray and William S. Liebermann of MoMA viewed the exhibition, they were beside themselves. Zwirner reported that he was able to calm them by saying it had been done to protect the work, since the other two works by Rauschenberg were being constantly attacked by the public.

Rudolf Zwirner described a corresponding public reaction to Rauschenberg's Combine painting *Kickback* (1959). Objects that visitors had attached to it had to be removed daily. (Zwirner, 1976: 142) Because attacks on paintings were all too common in the history of salons but they were never a reason not to exhibit a painting, the attachments cannot have been the reason why *Bed* was not exhibited. And because Zwirner makes it clear that the guards had acted only after visitors had

the opportunity to tamper with Rauschenberg's work unobserved, one has to ask whether it suited *documenta*'s organizers to have a reason to point to for removing Rauschenberg's works from the exhibition and not showing *Bed* in the first place. Based on Zwirner's later explanations, the question can only be answered in the affirmative, because he explains that Bode had hired students as guards, "who usually didn't take their job very seriously" (Zwirner, 2021: 84) Zwirner himself had been the one who during his morning rounds removed the objects that visitors had applied to Rauschenberg's *Kickback* and *Thaw* the day before.

In his essay "II. documenta '59: Kunst nach 1945" (1988), Kurt Winkler wrote that "McCray's selection was already retrospective from an American point of view" and that "*The Bed* [*sic*] was, on top of that, rejected by the jury [*ausjuriert*] of documenta's advisory board." (Winkler, 1988: 432) [my translation] By using the word "ausjuriert," he categorically ignores the contractual agreements that offered no legal grounds for the *documenta* advisory board to make a jury decision. Winkler suggests that there was an orderly process, even though there was not, and no reference to different states of knowledge on the two sides of the Atlantic can change that.

In her book *Have We an American Art? Präsentation und Rezeption amerikanischer Malerei im Westdeutschland und Westeuropa der Nachkriegszeit* (1999), Sigrid Ruby claims that Rauschenberg's *Bed* was not shown at the second *documenta* because there was no room to show all of the works that MoMA had submitted and that Rauschenberg's was also affected by this because it had been met "with horror." (Ruby, 1999: 224)[30] She thus avoids speaking of censorship but at the same time leaves it unclear how the "horror" she cites relates to the reference to the "condemnation of art in the Third Reich and the norm of representation in the GDR." What role might it have played that Rauschenberg's *Bed* evoked ideas of defilement?[31] Abstraction, by contrast, promised "purity," and the question was never asked how that promise relates to Germany's Nazi past and, specifically, to prominent members of the *documenta* team. (see Redmann, 2021: 79–82)[32]

The various explanations cited here can be derived in one way or another from the idea of a preservation or production of orderly relationships, of a normality qua normativity to be produced. This is particularly true in transatlantic relationships and all the more so when American guidelines are overlooked to prevent confusion, offer simple explanations, or to cover up.

Other voices from Germany—for example, Hans Haacke and Stefan Germer (Germer, 1996; Haacke, 2009)—adopted more or less unfiltered the thesis that Abstract Expressionism served as a "weapon in the Cold War" with the CIA's participation, which continues in more recent publications. (Franke, 2021) Whereas this thesis emphasizes an

interest in the ideas of artistic freedom and hence of making people aware of its possible sociopolitical overdeterminations, it could also be used—as it was by the critic Eduard Beaucamp—to forcefully bring art from the former GDR into play against the one-sided preference for Western and especially American art. (Beaucamp, 1998)

It became clear over the course of the controversial discussions of this that they cannot reach a conclusion because artistic freedom is both presumed and disputed, and political interests are pursued in order to combat other political interests. This theory, however, helped to establish a deliberate fissure between Abstract Expressionism and later American developments in art that was ultimately shored up by the paired terms Modernism and Postmodernism. The fact that Rauschenberg's *Bed* was supposed to be shown at *documenta* suggest that Porter McCray did not have such a fissure in mind in 1959, but the fact that *Bed* was excluded implies the determination of such a fissure, not in the sense of setting the new against the old but as clinging to the rhetorical fiction of abstraction as "world language".[33]

But because the second *documenta* was supposed to document the developments in art of the previous fifteen years, it remains unclear why MoMA did not submit other works to *documenta* that cannot be categorized as Abstract Expressionism, such as works by Jasper Johns that were, in fact, in MoMA's collection. The choice of *Bed* must indicate a conscious decision against Johns.[34]

Dan Graham's essay "The End of Liberalism" (1981–1982) can shed light on the American situation. He makes it clear that the Cold War against Communism that was fought in the domestic and international politics of the United States during the McCarthy era subconsciously turned every ordinary advertising icon into a patriotic symbol. He argues that new media forms and publicity strategies imposed this, especially the use of oversized formats and the massive use of color. Viewers were unconsciously compelled to project a subjective, "personal" meaning onto media offerings—offerings that they could not reject, so that they could penetrate their psyche. The result was a hollowing out of the viewers as individual subjects and hence a pressure to conform. The way in which liberalism heralded freedom led to a division of the subject that was imposed precisely by the techniques that aesthetically and psychologically contested this division. Graham adopts the thesis of Adorno and Horkheimer that the mass psychology techniques of the National Socialists in Germany did not disappear after the war but were instead employed to liberal ends, and he relates them to American art: "Jasper Johns was the first American artist," he wrote, "to fully understand that the newly subjectivized advertising icon and the gestures of the abstract expressionist painting (which struggled against the cultural domination of these new forms) were virtually identical." (Graham,

1981–1982/1993: 73) By designing paintings that reproduce the American flag and by breaking down seemingly spontaneous gestures along the lines of a rigid formal construct that emphasizes the material conditions of a painting so much that it appears to be a divided object, Johns made it possible to experience this sociocultural situation in the first place.[35]

In the United Kingdom, artists had eagerly been adopting the new media offerings from the United States since the late 1940s, which led to the exhibition *This Is Tomorrow*, in 1956, in which one section enthusiastically opened a broad forum to the new visual worlds and advertising technologies coming from the United States. (see Wallis, 1987)[36] This, too, rang in the decline of the École de Paris, even though we were reminded in this context that the Décollagistes of Paris had begun to make art aimed at the aggressiveness of publicity strategies in an urban ambience.[37] The difference between the London exhibition *This Is Tomorrow*, on the one hand, and the first and second issues of *documenta* in Kassel, on the other hand, could scarcely be greater. Focusing on the relationships between exhibitions in different European countries and their relationship to US-American policies would be in keeping with the concept of the *histoire croisée*. I would not only counter false ideas of homogeneity, but also make it clear that recognizing real or virtual propagandistic overdeterminations of art does not require conspiracy theories.

The present essay makes use of two publications by the author published at very different times (Stemmrich, 2000, 2023) and supplements them. For reasons of space, specific references have not been cited here.

Notes

1. Early postwar traveling exhibitions of US-American art in the 1950s had presented a broad spectrum of art movements, including varieties of figurative painting, but by the late 1950s, that could no longer be said, and if US-American Institutions had submitted figurative paintings to *II. documenta*, *documenta*'s organizers would have seen them as culturally retrograde.
2. Newman distanced himself not only from the idea that the purpose of art was to "beautify" something, but also from the idea that art is obligated per se to the idea of beauty; he preferred to keep to the idea of the sublime. During the McCarthy era, abstract art was not the only art attacked; so was Modernist-inspired art with sociocritical content, because sociocritical content was identified with a Modernist formal language. Newman realized, however, that sociocritical content was tied to the beautiful–ugly polarity. He sought a genuinely American quality by transcending this polarity.
3. Because exhibitions not based on political exclusion, that is, exhibitions with artists from both Germanys, were held immediately after the war not only in Soviet-occupied East Germany but also in West Germany and because official artists from East Germany had been unequivocally excluded from the first

documenta, held in 1955, Walter Grasskamp has called the first *documenta* an "allegory for Germany." (Grasskamp, 2009)

4. In its Godesberger Programm of 1959, the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany) abandoned its traditional self-image as a party of the "working class." (Bell 1988)

5. Like Daniel Bell, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., was also part of the CIA network. His book *The Vital Center* (1949) and Daniel Bell's *The End of Ideology* (1960) frame the 1950s. In his consequential essay "American Painting During the Cold War" (1973), Max Kozloff referred to Schlesinger's book. Serge Guilbault later made Schlesinger's concept of liberalism directly responsible for the success of Abstract Expressionism:

   Avant-garde art succeeded because the work and the ideology that supported it, articulated in the painters' writings as well as conveyed in images, coincided fairly closely with the ideology that came to dominate American political life after the 1948 presidential elections. This was the 'new liberalism' set forth by Schlesinger in *The Vital Center*, an ideology that, unlike the ideologies of the conservative right and the Communist left, not only made room for avant-garde dissidence but accorded to such dissidence a position of paramount importance. (Guilbault, 1984: 3)

   For a critique of Guilbault's undiscriminating account, see Jachec (2000: 3).

6. When neither politicians nor the general public in the United States were prepared to distinguish among leftist intellectuals, socialists, and communists, the CIA observed that the Soviet Union was wagering everything on winning to its side people and organizations who were receptive to leftist ideas and establishing them in institutions. The Congress for Cultural Freedom was the liberalist counterprogram of the United States. Countless "public intellectuals" worldwide were involved in it, some of them aware of the CIA's involvement and some of them not. Through a network of cover organizations, the CIA financed journals, conferences, and cultural events that for political reasons would not have received funding through the usual government channels. (see Coleman, 1989; Hochgeschwender, 1988; Saunders, 1999) As related to the field of art, see Franke et al., 2021. For a brief account of the relevant contexts, see Dasal, 2020, esp. Chapter 2, "Secrets and Lines: The CIA/AbEx Connection," 21–36.

7. Kozloff's comment was in reference to the exhibition *New American Painting* (1958), but in my view it can be applied to the second *documenta* as well.

8. This talk of a "weapon" in itself says nothing about who controlled it or who employed it more successfully. By the communist side, Abstract Expressionist painting was characterized as devoid of meaning, bourgeois, and capitalist. Part of the myth of this movement in the West, however, was the rhetorical idea that each artist's work was "hard won" in the face of internal and external resistance and that this willingness and ability to resist was extremely important in the fight against Communism.

9. This was, in any case, Dan Graham's assessment. See Brillembourg, 2012: 16.

10. *Bed* was always called *The Bed* in the context of *documenta*. I employ its usual title here.

11. Virginia Pearson communicated this to Porter McCray on October 11, 1959; quoted in Ruby 1999: 413. Apparently, this was never considered from the human perspective: the exclusion from the exhibition, without any legal grounds, of works by a young artist that had already been selected for *documenta* is inexcusable.

12. That the lack of opposition should not be understood as a failure of the nationalities to mix was expressed openly by Porter McCray in a letter: "Their effort to integrate the Americans with the Europeans did not work for with every effort our artists knocked hell out of the others." Porter McCray to Frank O'Hara, July 10, 1959, quoted in Ruby 1999: 224.

13. Imagined in Freudian terms, it can only seem grotesque that Barr, as the "dominant father figure of the museum's grace," called on his Abstract Expressionist "sons" to rebel against their "father." Perhaps he noticed this himself, and perhaps that was also a reason he could endorse submitting Rauschenberg's *Bed* to the second *documenta*.

14. Lynes states this without providing further details, suggesting that he did not get any further with his research on this issue.

15. This information can be found on the website of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. See also Allen, 2019.

16. This information can be found on the website of the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, https://www.rauschenbergfoundation.org/art/art-context/monogram.

17. Leo Steinberg coined the term "flatbed picture plane" for this "angle of imaginative confrontation"; alluding to Clement Greenberg's capitalizing of the term "Modernism," he referred to this shift as "post-Modernist." (Steinberg, 1972: 86–87)

18. The connections between Johns's *Flag* and Rauschenberg's *Bed* are closer than Feinstein notes. Johns reports that he dreamed of painting an American flag and did so the very next day; because he had no canvas, he used a bedsheet. See Yau, 1996: 16–17.

19. Richard Koshalek explained: "Bob painted himself into the picture, much as Velázquez did. The difference is that 'himself' is what he happened to have around him, at the moment." (quoted in Kotz, 1990: 87) This is in keeping with Rauschenberg's own statements: "It is my own personal psychosis that it is only by the background that you can see what is in front of you. Only by accepting all that surrounds you can you be totally self-visualized. And at the same time, your self-visualization is a reflection of your surroundings. Albers was right about that." (Rose, 1987: 72) Albers's concept, which he meant to be understood as applying strictly within the work, had been a source of suffering for Rauschenberg, which he then applied to his relationship to his surroundings. He was thus reaching a radical conclusion from Albers's concept of self-visualization with which he could counter the Abstract Expressionist concept of self-visualization as self-expression.

20. Characterizing Abstract Expressionism as machoism became another strategy for creating an art-historical fissure between it and the developments that followed.

21. With reference to de Kooning and Rauschenberg's approach to him, Leo Steinberg referred to the role of the work of art as a commodity fetish: "As Rauschenberg said in a recent interview, 'Business sure screwed up the art world.' And the early fifties is when the screwing up got under way. I recall the *frisson*, the thrill that went through the New York art world at the news that a de Kooning painting had just sold for $10,000. Wow! More than most of us earned in a year." (Steinberg, 2000: 16)

22. Jasper Johns, interview with David Sylvester, recorded for BBC in June 1965 in Edisto Beach, South Carolina, excerpted in Johns, 1996: 113–121, esp. 118. What Johns says can be applied to his own painting as well as to that of Abstract Expressionism, but with different concerns. The Abstract Expressionists emphasized that their painting resulted from the unconscious, while Johns emphasized that signs depend on context and use.

23. If one asks whether there is an art historical precedent for it, Van Gogh's *Bedroom* is the only possibility—in an inverted sense, since Van Gogh painted a bed with two pillows in all three versions, although he lived alone. Rauschenberg, by contrast, sought closeness in an exclusion that divides in half but can, nevertheless, be understood as a continuity.

24. Tomlin was older than the other Abstract Expressionists; for example, he was fourteen years older than Jackson Pollock and John Cage (who were both born in 1912). By referring to Tomlin, Rauschenberg was implicitly going back to the beginnings of Abstract Expressionism and the conditions of its origin, and with his assessment that Tomlin was "terribly underrated" he was also complaining that people had lost sight of these preconditions which he saw as preventing an assessment of more recent efforts in art.

25. On leaving an exhibition of Schwitters's works at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York, Rauschenberg remarked in 1959: "I felt like he made it all just for me." (Kotz, 1990: 91) Schmalenbach's assessment was clearly diametrically opposed to Rauschenberg's disarming openness in his narcissistic inversion of causalities.

26. See Haftmann, 1960, esp. the chapter "Dadaism," 181–188. In the expanded second edition of his book, published in 1965, he treated Rauschenberg, too, as if there had never been a censorship of his art in Germany. One could get the impression that the *documenta* organizers had taken license from the fact (if they even noticed it) that *Bed* had been banned from an exhibition in Spoleto in 1958 to not exhibit the work in 1959 either. This is, however, unconvincing because there is no evidence either that the *documenta* organizers were prepared to take a public position on excluding the work from the exhibition or that they had a negative view of Dadaism.

27. *Der Spiegel*, July 29, 1959, p. 5r1. On this, see Dossin, 2014: 92. *Bed* was also illustrated in the catalogue for the second *documenta*; it could scarcely have been otherwise, since the

American delegation insisted on its selection. Its illustration in black-and-white doubtless mitigated its confrontational aspect.

28. The difference between the discussion in Germany and that in the United States is revealing. The latter was, from the outset, marked by the antithesis of formalist art criticism and history and diverse varieties of "social history of art." This led to an experience of an "impasse." See Clark, 1994: 26. In Germany, by contrast, one felt obliged to either (1) reduce the thesis to the formula "MoMA+CIA=Success of Abstract Expressionism" (which really seems applicable only to Cockroft) in order to confront it with claims to historiographic scholarship, although there was no doubt about the result, especially since MoMA and the CIA largely prevented access to the files (see Ruby, 1999; Dengler, 2010; Bätschmann, 1997: 278 n. 14) or (2) cling to the documented personnel connections between MoMA and the CIA as well as the CIA's involvement in the Congress for Cultural Freedom and to statements by former CIA officers on its art policy (see Saunders, 1999: 259–260) in order to make people aware of the problems of hidden influence. This discussion also led to an impasse. Under the heading "Revisionism Revisited," Francis Frascina collected essays that claimed to point beyond these impasses retroactively and correctively. (Frascina, 2010: 229–366) Because the acronym CIA is always used in this discussion as a provocative term, I mention Cora Sol Goldstein's study of the problem of perceived pressure *before* the founding of the CIA. (Goldstein, 2005: 747–778) On German–American art relationships in the Cold War, see Boyd Whyte, 2000: 237–250.

29. It has often been claimed that the work was pulled out of its crate and then packed back into it immediately after it was assessed, only to remain there. See, for example, Zeitgeschichte in Hessen, 1959. See also Dossin, 2015: 139. Because Hans Haacke (Haacke, 2009) cites Schmalenbach's instruction that *Bed* had to be "removed," three contradictory explanations must be assumed; they can at best be brought partially in line if one assumes that the work first had to be tested as an exhibition contribution, if only by placing it in front of a wall, but then packed into its crate again, then brought out and briefly hung on a wall in Zwirner's office prior to the MoMA delegates visiting, in order to appease them.

30. Ruby set herself the goal for her book of telling a story different from those of Kozloff, Cockroft, and Guilbault. She sought an answer to the question of what helped Abstract Expressionism succeed in Europe and especially Germany that was, she believed, neither one-dimensionally political nor formalist and modern but something she calls in turn "dialogical," "receptive," and "dialectical." She understood that to mean a process of negotiation on the model of supply and demand in an emerging transatlantic market for contemporary art in which, despite different initial situations, certain common artistic values could be established. Despite the important results of her research, her criticism of others also applies to her own approach to research and presentation: "The end result and its object, the European success of Abstract Expressionism, always determine the approach and choice of subjects with accounts and analyses that address the theme." (Ruby, 1999: 13) Ruby concludes her study with the sentence: "The enduringly fascinating thing about this painting [Abstract Expressionism] lies in an overlapping of aesthetic quality, national coding, and ideological appropriation that can never be clearly differentiated." (Ruby, 1999: 236) What she describes as "fascinating" is precisely what Max Kozloff abhorred, because it disavowed the possibility of criticism. The debate that he initiated in 1973 with his essay "American Painting during the Cold War" was always also about not giving up the possibility of criticism; for all the problems, that is demonstrated by the determination with which the theses were presented. Ruby, by contrast, positioned herself on the side of the "fascinating." What was abhorred at the second *documenta*, however, was Rauschenberg's *Bed*.

    Continued discussion about the im(possibility) of criticism led to the concept of "criticality," which can be understood as the call associated with Poststructuralism/Postmodernism but without a directive with regard to content for (self-)critical approach to knowledge, that every criticism, in the content and form of its expression, is or can become part of situations that are themselves critical. (see Perl, 2017: 35–54)

31. Rudolf Zwirner explained: "This painting was nothing but a quilt that he had nailed to a bed. The bedspread was completely plastered with paint." (in Polster, 1995: 114)

32. On Werner Haftmann, see Voss, 2021: 68–77. On Will Grohmann, see Schieder, 2012. On

the ideological battles over abstract versus representational art in Germany in the postwar era, see Dengler, 2010.

33. In their efforts to decode the success of Abstract Expressionism politically, culturally, ideologically, and geographically, art historians are sometimes so fixated on it that they overlook new artistic approaches that were developed in parallel with Abstract Expressionism. Jachec, for example, emphasizes that Abstract Expressionism was instituted as American art for the purposes of mirroring in and of European Art Informel, but even though the second *documenta* can also be cited as evidence of that, it in no way explains why Rauschenberg's *Bed* was one of the exhibits submitted. Although the second *documenta* is nearly at the end of the period studied by Jachec (1940–1960), it is clear that the turn to a new phase of development can neither be grasped in the same way as the developments that preceded it nor extrapolated retrospectively from the emergence of Pop Art.

34. Johns's paintings were presented at the Venice Biennale in 1958 in a room dedicated to young international artists, whereas paintings by Mark Rothko and Mark Tobey were exhibited in the American Pavilion (which was owned by the United States). There was no categorical exclusion and banning here like that of Rauschenberg's *Bed* in Spoleto in 1958, simply a division into young and old tied to a distinction between national and international. Johns had attracted the interest of Pierre Restany and other French art experts. But when Johns had a solo exhibition at Galerie Rive Droite in Paris in the spring of 1959, it met with minimal response. If one assumes that Porter McCray was aware of this, the decision to present Rauschenberg's *Bed* can be understood as a decision in favor of maximum impact. The assessment in the literature that one American goal of exhibitions of American art in Europe after World War II had been to present America as a cultural nation—see Ruby, 1999, and Jachec, 2000—is unconvincing with regard to *Bed*, at least if one assumes that such presentation demanded recognition by the public.

35. Graham's analysis implies a three-part criticism of the way the role of Abstract Expressionism in the Cold War was discussed in the wake of Kozloff's essay. (1) The discussion grew blind to the effect of forms of publicity in the mass media, even though Kozloff's diagnosis of Warholism would have provided an occasion to focus on them. (2) The thematic fixation on supposed entanglements of MoMA and the CIA in US-American foreign policy gave the misleading impression that a semantic overdetermination of Abstract Expressionist painting could only be due to a secret-service operation. (3) It was believed that one had to conclude from the observation that Abstract Expressionist painting became an international poster child for liberalism in the Cold War that art had to position itself in the political field at once more actively and more critically. "Liberalism," by contrast, Graham noted, "proposes an art of social change or formalist abstraction, which psychologically denies any loss of individual self." (Graham, 1981–1982/1993: 70–77).

36. It is worth mentioning in this context that while working on his *Woman* series, de Kooning cut women's mouths out of magazine photographs to place them in the painting and then replaced them with brushstrokes only at the very end. See Willem de Kooning, "Content Is a Glimpse," excerpts from an interview by David Sylvester (BBC), compiled by Thomas B. Hess, in de Kooning, 1988: 67–100.

37. In his book *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, Guilbault did not discuss Décollage, which emerged in Paris at nearly the same time that leading Abstract Expressionists had their breakthrough to their personal idiom (1947–1949), but he did end the book with another aggression observed, namely, that against a perceived aggressiveness: "Abstract Expressionism established such a hold on the European mind that rebellious French students used a form of the style to express their alienation and their desire for freedom on the walls of Nanterre in 1968. Painting as ejaculation was the way one poem scrawled in chalk on the wall put it: 'The porridge you forced down my throat as a kid: I've come with it all over your wall.' Was this finally 'action painting' in action? Was this at least popular art, the true mural art of Jackson Pollock's dreams?" (Guilbault, 1984: 205)

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“If It Is Possible, It Is Best If You Bring Your Work Yourself”

Infrastructure, Logistics, and Production at *documenta*

Felix Vogel

Introduction

It is fair to say that *documenta*—at least until Catherine David’s iteration in 1997—has been characterized by the dominance of the United States.[1] The invitation of numerous American artists, the orientation toward a Western liberal conception of art, and the direct involvement of MoMA, not to mention the establishment of a New York office to handle American art at *documenta 4*, in 1968, which accounted for about a third of the entire show, all speak in favor of such a dominance. While this dominance can certainly be described as a history of the diplomatic soft power of the USA, the activities of the CIA, and the Congress for Cultural Freedom—entanglements that have already been researched in great detail and which exerted an influence on German cultural policy—a certain obsession with the USA is also evident on the part of Kassel.[2]

Arnold Bode, the founder of *documenta*, went to enormous lengths to bring *documenta 6*, planned for 1976 but ultimately not to take place until 1977, to Philadelphia as the official German contribution to the USA’s bicentenary celebrations. Bode envisioned none other than Memorial Hall as its venue. It is almost regrettable that the plans could not be realized, for reasons of cost and capacity, as the *documenta* would have come into its own in the USA, as a kind of re-import of the Western hegemonic understanding of art.

My contribution, however, will not deal with diplomatic relations, and I will only implicitly address obvious questions of canonization. Instead, I will deal with the processes of logistics and production that made the exhibition possible in the first place, using the example of US artists at *documenta 5* (1972). An underlying central idea is the assumption that

the examination of the backstage of an exhibition, especially in relation to the category of labor, contributes to a more appropriate idea of collective production and thus to a decentering of classical models of authorship. In connection with this, I pursue the thesis that the much-invoked renewal of art and the exhibition around 1970 was only possible through a certain infrastructure, through changed conditions of production and thus also through a different division of labor. While such an approach might give the (generally valid) impression that it can be applied to art from any country, two underlying assumptions prove that it can make a specific point about the relationship between Germany and the USA: On the one hand, the basis of this type of production is a concept of the work of art as it was developed primarily on the US East Coast within Minimal and Conceptual art. On the other hand, and on a more fundamental level, the underlying conditions of production, labor relations, and infrastructures are part of the history of ideas of Western post-industrial society and neoliberalism and thus have a strong American imprint.

Working Conditions

In the magazine *Manager*, Willi Bongard reports on *documenta 5* (1972), curated by Harald Szeemann:

> But all of Szeemann's endeavors would have been in vain if he had not been able to inspire his employees for months on end for the joint task and encourage them to work additional—unpaid and unaffordable—hours. At Bellevue Palace and in the exhibition buildings, work has been going on practically around the clock since Easter, both on weekdays and Sundays. If one wanted to describe Harald Szeemann's management principle, one would have to speak of 'management by love.' However, it remains unclear whether the 'love' of his employees was for the cause itself or for Harald Szeemann's personality. The exhibition architect of *documenta*, the engineer Lorenz Dombois, provided an example of a loyalty to Harald Szeemann that bordered on self-sacrifice. The young Berliner fell while setting up a steel sculpture by the American Richard Serra and contracted a painful muscle inflammation. Although the doctor prescribed strict bed rest, Dombois dragged himself through the two exhibition buildings on crutches to supervise the workers. By night, however, he squatted in front of his drawing board in Bellevue Palace, where he cheered on Szeemann's other employees by example, who more than once seemed close to collapse [my translation]. (Bongard, 1972: 56)

This anecdote illustrates central aspects that are still valid today for the functioning of contemporary art exhibitions: precarious employment relationships; personal sacrifice; self-exploitation; and, ultimately, the immense, mostly invisible labor of numerous participants that goes into an exhibition, especially that of the diverse group of art handlers. I understand "art handling" as a wide range of activities that include, but are not limited to, the installation of works; their production on site; the construction of the exhibition architecture; the proper packaging, loading, and transport of works; and much more.[3]

Harald Szeemann himself refers to the conditions under which contemporary art is created in an essay published almost two years before the opening of *documenta 5*:

> Artistic production has entered its 'post-object' phase worldwide. All exhibition organizers know what this means: it means the presence of the artists for weeks, a response to all material requests, a multiple of the effort for setting up and maintaining the works. It also means that if negotiations are held with an artist today, he or she will want to do something else in May 1972, even though all the materials have been ordered and paid for. This requires a staff of technicians, engineers and craftsmen who work only for d5 and who cannot simply be rounded up at the last minute. It also requires different working hours [...]. (Szeemann, 1972)

What the curator describes as the "post-object phase" has been summarized in art history using such terms as Conceptual art, post-medium condition, post-studio practice, or site-specificity. Crudely put, on the one hand these terms refer to different phenomena of the dissolution of boundaries in art (*Entgrenzung*), while on the other hand they describe the supposed privileging of the idea over a concrete object. Nevertheless, ideas must also materialize in exhibitions, and Szeemann refers to the supposed paradox that "post-object" art requires considerable material expenditure in "installation and maintenance" compared with traditional works. Art exhibitions are now not only created by sending objects from A to B, but works are produced in the exhibition by a large number of differently specialized actors on site.[4] Although the "presence" of the artists at the exhibition venue is essential, as Szeemann claims, they are integrated into a network with other actors and infrastructures that are also essential for the preparation of the exhibition. This not only has consequences for the concept of the artwork itself (*Werkform*), but also for the concept of the exhibition. To put it another way, the changed forms of the work of art and of the exhibition around 1970 are mutually dependent.[5]

There are two further points in Szeemann's statement: first, the insight that, despite all the discussion about de-skilling and a supposed rejection of artistic-technical skills, it is still about a craft, even if this is outsourced to actors other than the artist and, second, that it is the exhibition in which art materializes in the first place. When Helmut Draxler speaks of the central category of the "exhibitionary" (*Ausstellungsförmigkeit*) (Draxler, 2015) of contemporary art or Peter Osborne sees the "exhibition form" (Osborne, 2013: 167) as the core of contemporary art, this is aimed precisely at these modes of production but says nothing about the concrete production and forms of division of labor. The following remarks are intended as an attempt to come closer to such a concretization.

Case Studies

The following examples relate to different aspects of production and logistics during *documenta 5* and will hopefully reveal different aspects of the exhibition infrastructure. While earlier editions of *documenta*, with a few exceptions, propagated a concept of the work that regarded artworks as singular, material units, closed entities, so to speak, that were sent from A to B, there is now a visible change emanating from a concept of the work of art that is "open" in many respects.

A first example is the section *Idee + Licht* [Idea + light], which—in the broadest sense—exhibited Conceptual tendencies (fig. 1). An archival document outlines the provisional budget for this section curated by art dealer (!) Konrad Fischer and curator Klaus Honnef. Insurance values are listed in the upper part: Frank Stella's works alone are valued at 350,000 US dollars, whereas no value is given for "Conceptual art." In comparison with other sections of the exhibition, the value of 50,000 Deutsche Mark for transportation listed below that is low. The artists' plane tickets consume a large part of the section's budget. In comparison with the sum insured, this is as much as two-thirds of it. There is also a reason for this. A letter (fig. 2) from Konrad Fischer to the artist Michael Harvey makes it clear that it was no longer works that were being sent, but artists: "If it is possible, it is best if you bring your work yourself."

John Baldessari, also part of the *Idee + Licht* section, asks about plane tickets and refers to his working method: "Is airfare provided to install? Are any other expenses provided? The answer will dictate what I do. Some last things I have done have involved marking directly on the wall, others depend largely on my installation. Does the idea section mean only those exhibits that be sent thru the mail?" (fig. 3)

The short excerpts from the two artists' correspondence show the dependence of artistic production on infrastructures: John Baldessari

Agnes Martin Vers. 60'000 $ | einziger
+ 6 Z. | US Transport

Kelly – Ludwig, Stedl, Emilh.
200'000.–

Stella – 350 000.–

Mampom – 100'000.–

Schoonhoven – 100'000.–

Minimal – dt+holl. 300'000.–

Earth Art

Konzept

Tesen Raum 300 000.–

10 Künstler Tickets 15'000 DM

Dokumentation 5 000 DM

Vers. 20'000
Transp. 50'000
Einl. Künstler 15 000
Dok. 5000
Spesen Hennef/Fischer 3 000
+ Spesen Kassel 2500
Reserve (Kelly) 3 000

98'500

Fig. 1. Budget of the section *Idee + Licht*, *documenta 5* (© documenta archiv, AA, d05, 106, fol. 33).

May 13th, 72

Konrad Fischer Klaus Honnef

Mr.
Michael Harvey
U.S.A.

Dear Michael

We are happy to tell you that 'documenta 5' will be able to give you a ticket N.Y. - d5 - N.Y..
You will get it from a N.Y. traveller agency in the next two weeks.
We are expecting you in Kassel on the 27th of June.
'documenta 5' will pay you for 2 day, DM 51,- each day.
Thw hotel reservation for you is done.
Please write us about the work you want to show. We have to know the size ect. and what you need, frames ect..
We have show cases for showing books also.
If it is possible, it is best if you bring over your work yourself.

Hoping to hear from you, see you soon in Kassel

Konrad Fischer

Fig. 2. Letter by Konrad Fischer to Michael Harvey (© documenta archiv, AA, d05, 106, fol. 8).

California Institute of the Arts Valencia California 91355 805 255 1050

9 Feb. 72

Dear Harald Szeeman--

Thank you for the invitation to Documenta. Of course I have many questions, some of which (perhaps all),should go to Konrad .

1. Is airfare provided to install work? Are any other expenses provided? The answer will dictate what I do. Some last things I have done have involved working directly on the wall; others depend largely on my installation. Does the IDEA section mean only those exhibits that can be sent thru the mail?

2. You ask that I send bio., biblio, etc. info. which I am doing, and you ask for photos. Konrad has asked for pretty much the same stuff. Is this a duplication of request? That is, is the material I am to send to you and also to Konrad for the same purpose--the catalog? Let me know if you also need photos and I will send them.

I suppose the main question is the one of airfare for installation. Ideally I would like to come to install a work so that I know exactly how it will look. I can handle some expenses, but the airfare is more that I can afford .

I am asking the same questions of Konrad if, as I said above, these questions should be directed to him.

Warmest regards

John Baldessari

Fig. 3. Letter by John Baldessari to Harald Szeemann (© documenta archiv, AA, d05, 131, fol. 95).

and Michael Harvey rely on transatlantic air travel and a cheap and fast international postal system: "sent thru the mail" certainly does not mean a costly and lengthy freight route. Baldessari's statement, specifically, makes it clear that it is the material infrastructures that determine artistic practices and the final work. The exhibition becomes visible here as a place that is not an empty vessel that only needs to be filled (with already existing artworks) but, rather, as a place that takes on an active role in the production of works.

Lucy Lippard discussed this new approach as early as 1969 in an interview with Ursula Meyer, which is partly re-published in her anthology *Six Years*:

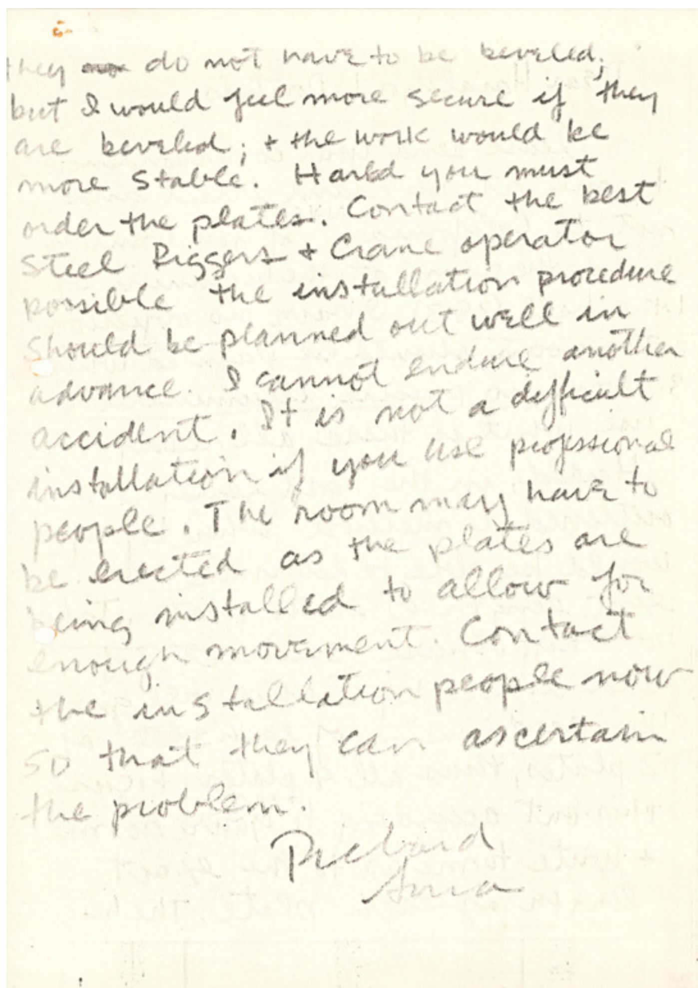
> One of the most important things about the new dematerialized art is that it provides a way of getting the power structure out of New York and spreading it around to wherever an artist feels like being at the time. Much art now is transported by the artists, or in the artists themselves, rather than by watered-down, belated circulating exhibitions or by existing information networks such as mail, books, telex, video, radio, etc. The artist is traveling a lot more, not to sightsee, but to get his work out. (Lippard, 1973: 8)

Michael Sanchez examined these new conditions of production, namely, how it is no longer works that are sent, but artists: "The artist's body, in other words, replaces the commodified artwork." (Sanchez, 2025) It is no coincidence that Konrad Fischer was one of the key gallerists who promoted—or even invented—this type of production and thus built up a transatlantic network. While such a mode of production implies, on the one hand, that artists have greater control over their work—that is, what is shown, how it is shown—it implies, on the other hand, that numerous problems arise, ranging from a lack of resources on location, to spatial restrictions communicated in advance, to the establishing of mechanisms of exploitation, because although the artists received the cost of their flights, they did not receive a fee, only a small per diem, from which they had to cover even their hotel.

A second example concerns Richard Serra's contribution to *documenta 5*. Lorenz Dombois's muscle inflammation, mentioned earlier, shows that the work requires a certain amount of physical effort and cannot simply be "sent thru the mail." There are many traces in the *documenta archiv Kassel* of the elaborate preparations to produce the work, which weighed several tons. Numerous letters and telegrams deal with technical details: room dimensions, load-bearing capacities, material thicknesses, etc. Serra sent several sketches describing the exact execution, but always pointed out that it had to be carried out by professional craftspeople: "Harald you must order the plates. Contact the

best steel riggers + crane operator possible the installation procedure should be planned out well in advance. I cannot endure another accident. It is not a difficult installation, if you use professional people." (fig. 4)

The exact way in which the work was ultimately installed in Kassel is no longer traceable in the archive. This fact reveals a central methodological problem in researching the backstage of the exhibition: The actual production of works in situ and the installation of exhibitions are almost always extremely poorly documented. In the documents on the production of *documenta 5*—and this is an exhibition that was hardly ever prepared via telephone agreements but, rather, via letters and telegrams—there are sketches by artists who make suggestions of varying concreteness, but the actual genesis of form or technical realization is usually unknown.


they do not have to be beveled,
but I would feel more secure if they
are beveled; + the work would be
more stable. Harald you must
order the plates. Contact the best
steel Riggers + Crane operator
possible the installation procedure
should be planned out well in
advance. I cannot endure another
accident. It is not a difficult
installation if you use professional
people. The room may have to
be erected as the plates are
being installed to allow for
enough movement. Contact
the installation people now
so that they can ascertain
the problem.

Richard
Anna

Fig. 4.

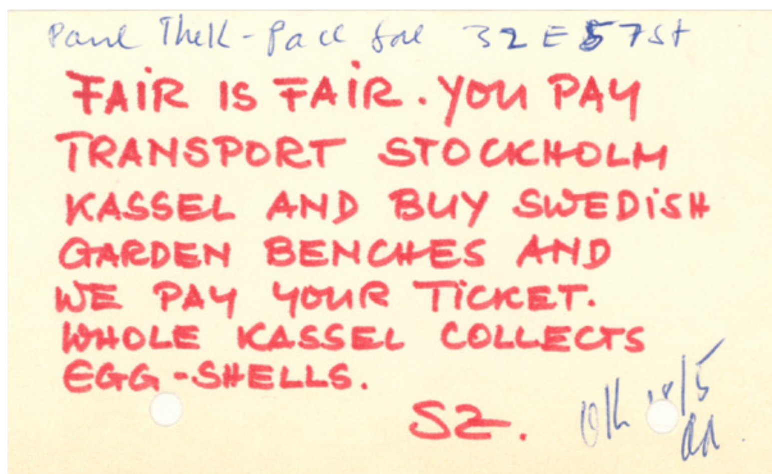
Correspondance between Richard Serra and Harald Szeemann (© documenta archiv, AA, d05, 139, fol. 90).

Letters addressed to Harald Szeemann often contain just a simple handwritten note “Dombois” or “copied for Dombois.” The curator therefore forwarded the correspondence to his technical coordinator, who had to deal with the specific implementation. In rare cases, plans and correspondence between Lorenz Dombois and the artists exist, but we can almost always assume that central decisions were made ad hoc on site and are not documented due to their oral nature. This may be due to the fleeting and often stressful situation of the installation. Or it may be due to the low esteem in which these forms of labor are held. But it may also be due to the fact that the knowledge of the art handlers is best described by the term tacit knowledge—that is, implicit or informal knowledge. As Michael Polanyi, who coined the term, sums it up: “we can know more than we can tell.” (Polanyi, 1966: 4) It is knowledge that is difficult to verbalize, that is neither formalized nor codified, and it is personal knowledge that is tied to a body. It can therefore be described more as a “skill” (Schabacher, 2022: 124). In other words, it is a “knowing how” rather than a “knowing that.” Accordingly, it is dexterity, skills, routines, and habits that determine the activities of the art handler. The “knowing how” cannot be standardized. It is often guided by a hunch, which presents us with a major methodological challenge, since “how do you demonstrate the reliability of a hunch?” (Easterling, 2021: 29) Needless to say, there are no manuals, and art handling is not a profession that requires formal training. However, it is striking that the profession is largely carried out by trained artists, which says more about precarious labor conditions than it does about formal training.

A final example from *documenta 5* is Paul Thek’s installation *ARK, PYRAMID*. The work is of relevance for our topic, because Thek integrates elements that originate from earlier works, so a complete, self-contained work unit is not guaranteed from the outset—or at least must be questioned. There is also a self-reflective moment when Thek presents his “wax effigy” not in a coffin but in a transport crate, as Michael Sanchez has pointed out. (Sanchez, 2025) However, I am concerned with something else: The correspondence kept in the archive bears witness to an exhaustive negotiation process, which above all represents an attempt to keep the costs of transporting the work as low as possible. At first glance, these seemingly purely logistic issues do, however, have an impact on what appeared as the actual work. Thek’s installation had previously been shown in a major exhibition at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, and *documenta* was keen for the work to tour Europe afterward—not least to avoid paying expensive freight costs back to the USA. In the end, Kunstmuseum Luzern was persuaded to exhibit the work after Kassel. The correspondence therefore involves not only *documenta* and Paul Thek, but also other institutions and actors.

One of the central questions for the transportation of the work was: What needs to be sent from Stockholm and what can be added in Kassel? A dispute began over almost all the elements: garden benches, crates, tubes, bathtubs, plants, eggshells, stuffed animals, etc. In the end, a compromise was found after Paul Thek requested two plane tickets via telegram. Granting this request put *documenta* in a better position to negotiate other aspects in their favor. A draft of Szeemann's telegram answer describes this compromise as follows: "Fair is Fair. You pay transport Stockholm Kassel and buy Swedish garden benches and we pay your ticket. Whole Kassel collects egg-shells." (fig. 5) It could also be added that the stuffed animals were borrowed from the Natural History Museum in Kassel and that Paul Thek did not opt for the same selection as in Stockholm but wanted a small white hare instead of the eagles.

The question of the "exhibition copy" could be discussed in this context and it would also be possible to examine why certain elements have to be "original" or "authentic" while others do not.[6] My intention here, however, is to point out once again the simple truth that such a work can only come about through a tough negotiation process in which far more actors are involved than just the artist or the curator.



FAIR IS FAIR. YOU PAY
TRANSPORT STOCKHOLM
KASSEL AND BUY SWEDISH
GARDEN BENCHES AND
WE PAY YOUR TICKET.
WHOLE KASSEL COLLECTS
EGG-SHELLS.
SZ.

Fig. 5.
Correspondance between Paul Thek and Harald Szeemann (© documenta archiv, AA, d05, 140, fol. 178).

Methodological Implications

How can this be connected to current research on infrastructure? What can the discipline of art history learn from infrastructure research? I will argue that by considering problems of infrastructure, the exhibition can be understood as a social form, and that such an approach can ultimately initiate a renewal of the social history of art. Research on infrastructure has shown that infrastructures must be understood as both "product

and process." (Leigh Star and Ruhleder, 1996: 111) Infrastructures are "embedded," they are "sunk into, inside of, other structures, social arrangements and technologies." (Leigh Star and Ruhleder, 1996: 113) They are, furthermore, "transparent to use, in the sense that it does not have to be reinvented each time or assembled for each task." However, they must not only be seen as "physical forms" and "built networks that facilitate the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over space," (Larkin, 2013: 328), but must also be examined in relation to the work they perform and what Gabriele Schabacher calls "Infrastruktur-Arbeit" (infrastructure work) that flows into them. (Schabacher, 2022: 124) In relation to the exhibition, this implies that the exhibition is not simply a static structure for the presentation of art, but that such a structure must be set up and maintained in the first place through a complex process involving a division of labor between different actors. Keller Easterling's examination of the concept of disposition and the distinction between "object form" and "active form" is helpful in this context:

> Disposition is the character or propensity of an organization that results from all its activity. It is the medium, not the message. It is not the pattern printed on the fabric but the way the fabric floats. It is not the shape of the game piece but the way the game piece plays. It is not the text but the constantly updating software that manages the text. Not the object form but the active form. (Easterling, 2016: 21)

If we shift our view of the exhibition from its object-like form to an active form, this allows us to focus on the processes that make exhibitions possible—and how exhibitions make works of art possible in return. This shift in perspective is also an expansion, as it becomes necessary not only to examine the exhibition in the narrower sense (that is, a product that can be viewed by spectators), but also to investigate the infrastructures linked to it and thus, ultimately, to focus on socioeconomic conditions.

However, this is not to advocate any form of economic or infrastructural determinism. The interrelationships are more complex. For example, international air travel (which was massively expanded and became affordable from the end of the 1960s) is external to contemporary art, but it enables other modes of production, which ultimately also inscribe themselves in the works. A more general hypothesis can be derived from this: The fact that since the 1960s art has no longer been tied to media and that since the 1980s it has increasingly taken the form of installations and exhibitions cannot be described solely by a different concept of *Werkform*. Instead, this development is made possible by new infrastructures, or, rather, new processes must be developed so that this art can appear in the first place.

The shift in understanding the exhibition not as an object form but an active form also implies that form must inevitably be understood as social form:

> Artistic production […] is always the production of a mode of presentation, which is a social form at the same time as it is an artistic form. What has changed with 'contemporary art,' since the late 1950s […] is that artistic form has increasingly become immediately tied up with social form, since social forms have themselves become important artistic materials. (Osborne, 2019: 271)

When the findings of infrastructure research are included in such a reading of contemporary art, the meaning of the exhibition as a "social form" is clear: The exhibition is the materialization of social, economic, and therefore also political conditions and the encounter of different human and nonhuman actors, not as an "object" but as an "activity." The fact that these social relations are not directly visible in the exhibition, that they are almost concealed, is due to the nature of infrastructures, in that they only become visible when they break down, when there is a disruption or an accident. We are also familiar with this from exhibition research: when works break, are stolen, cannot be realized at all, or are incorrectly executed, or when the staff go on strike.

For the study of the exhibition and contemporary art, this means that things must be included that we rarely consider in art history, and that is to follow Susan Leigh Star's encouragement to "study boring things." (Leigh Star, 1999: 377) These include the logistics of art (from packing materials and crates to air-conditioned trucks), travel infrastructures, loan and insurance certificates, tools (such as the use of cordless screwdrivers or forklifts), display systems, cost estimates, temperature and humidity logs, material reports, fire regulations, funding guidelines, employment contracts, and the like. As Monika Dommann explains for the history or logistics, these "anonymous things […] are anything but aimless and apolitical. As links and neuralgic points, they are particularly suitable for investigating the social and political conditions and consequences of the interwoven movements of people, things and signs." (Dommann, 2023: 31)

This is also linked to the fact that, as a social environment, exhibitions form a "community of practice." (Wenger, 1998) In addition to the knowledge of formalized or at least routine processes (for example, the precisely defined handling of loaned works when setting up an exhibition, from the responsibilities toward the courier service to the acclimatization of the works before they are taken out of the transport crate, to the use of gloves) and learned manual skills, such a collective of practice also has social agreements and values that are extremely

difficult to determine—or rather, it produces them in the first place. These practices and the practical knowledge they contain are also reflected in the exhibition and they become visible if we understand the exhibition form as a social form.

I have suggested that the exploration of issues of infrastructure in the field of exhibitions can also be thought of as a renewal of the social history of art. T. J. Clark, in his introduction to *The Image of the People*, from 1973, which is programmatic for the social history of art, writes about the tasks of a social history of art and, in doing so, poses questions that are in principle self-evident to us today, but which still often remain underexposed with regard to the history of exhibitions:

> What I want to explain are the connecting links between artistic form, the available systems of visual representation, the current theories of art, other ideologies, social classes, and more general historical structures and processes. [...] I want to discover what concrete transactions are hidden behind the mechanical image of 'reflection,' to know *how* 'background' becomes 'foreground;' instead of analogy between form and content, to discover the network of real, complex relations between the two. These mediations are themselves historically formed and historically altered; in the case of each artist, each work of art, they are historically specific. (Clark, 1973: 12)

What, if not an examination of the infrastructure of the exhibition, would allow for an implementation of these methodological suggestions? It would not only mean including the above-mentioned "boring things" and discussing them in relation to the form of contemporary art and the form of the exhibition, but it would also mean once again addressing working conditions and the question of the "precarious class" in the field of the exhibition, and thus perhaps placing large-scale exhibitions, with their specific paradigm of production, in a history of neoliberalism. Taking Clark's assumptions seriously does not mean that works of art are simply determined by their conditions of production and social relations, as if a one-way mechanism were at work. On the contrary, by focusing on precisely these infrastructural conditions, it is possible to identify an artistic agency.

Notes

1. This paper is part of a larger project that deals with the history of exhibition and the infrastructure of contemporary art. Parts of this paper (especially the chapter on methodological implications) have previously been published in German by Vogel, 2025.
2. A good overview with reference to the state of research can be found in Bang Larsen, 2021.
3. The state of research on the topic of art handling is limited. Worth mentioning is the anthology by Kolb, 2016. Burcu Dogramaci and Ursula Ströbele are currently working on the research project *(Un)Mapping Infrastructures: Transnational Perspectives in Modern and Contemporary Art*, which, however, relates more to questions of logistics; a discussion of their perspective can be found in Buchmann and Lafer, 2022. Also worth mentioning is the (apparently) unfortunately discontinued magazine *Art Handler*, www.art-handler.com, accessed March 26, 2024.
4. The in situ production does not replace the shipping of artworks but, rather, complements it. For the format of the periodic contemporary art exhibition (Biennale, Manifesta, *documenta*, etc.), however, this represents the dominant mode of production. The fact that the art logistics sector professionalized and expanded during the same period, with the development of site-specific production conditions, does not contradict this but must be understood as an effect of the fundamental dominance of the exhibition form of contemporary art.
5. On the changed quality and novel aesthetics of exhibitions around 1970, see Calderoni, 2007.
6. The history and theory of the exhibition copy remains a research desideratum. A good overview is Tieneberg, 2015.

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Artists, Critique, and the New York–Cologne Axis in the 1980s and 1990s

Alexander Alberro

The West German city of Cologne created its own art center model in the mid-1980s. The opening of pioneering exhibition venues, such as Galerie Christian Nagel, which was then allied with New York's American Fine Arts gallery and featured many US and Western-European-based artists working in the legacies of Conceptual art and institutional critique, turned the city's ambitious cultural milieu into a nexus for critical debate and experimental art. What seemed to be different trajectories became highly productive in a specific network of exchange and discussion. My argument is that the two dominant types of critique that circulated in this context in the late 1980s and 1990s—an aesthetic critique that focused on the artist's personality and a social critique that sought to transform art practice through the theorization of non-exploitative practices and techniques—culminated in what came to be called "artistic service provision." (Fraser, 1994/2005c) The latter terminated the modern notion that artists live and work in a manner that separates them from the division of labor—that the alienating conditions of labor do not dictate how artists work. It collapsed the distinction between the artistic production of essentially useless or purposeless things and the means-to-an-end rationality of economic imperatives.

Both aesthetic and social critique encouraged artists to develop project works that unfolded over time and did not culminate in art objects. But they did so for different reasons. Whereas artists engaged in social critique produced works that primarily emphasized social engagement and art theory, those inclined to the aesthetic critique folded earlier forms of Conceptual and institutional critique into what artist Josef Strau retrospectively describes as a "semi-glamorous attitude" of non-production. This inclination sought to cultivate a bohemian subculture of aloofness and a "cool" disdain for professional ambition and success. (Strau, 2006: 31) The artists used their creatively driven personalities and socially intense lifestyles to gain recognition. In this sense, the aesthetic critique is similar to what Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello

refer to in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* as counter-cultural "artistic critique," which the sociologists describe as a current of critical analysis that has spanned modern society for almost two centuries. (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999/2005: 201) Like the aesthetic critique, the artistic critique aspires to an unalienated life of complete autonomy, unfettered by conventionality. The human subjects it theorizes are free to pursue creative activities whose only purpose is self-realization. They refuse production-oriented values in favor of free-wheeling contemplation, individual expression, and non-regimented daily patterns. (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999/2005: 30)

Michael Krebber's artistic production in the late 1980s and early 1990s is a quintessential example of the artistic practice of aesthetic critique. During these years, Krebber explored alternative exhibition modes, such as gallery presentations of the work of other artists or empty vitrines (*Untitled (Daniel Buren, Allan McCollum)* [1989]), that probed Postmodernist issues of authorship and originality. His work assumed a hyper-referential, appropriationist, fan-like approach. Jutta Köther, Cosima von Bonin, and Heimo Zobernig's art practices took similar approaches. So, too, did the activities of artists affiliated with Friesenwall 120, a storefront venue in Cologne that functioned as both a social site and an exhibition locale. Founded in 1990 by Stephan Dillemuth and soon co-run with Strau and Nils Norman, Friesenwall 120 had been outfitted by the artists with ample space for viewing art and a well-stocked reading and video lounge. They regularly displayed project works of various types throughout the space and held film screenings and public discussions in the reading room. Typical projects included a presentation of videotape recordings put together by the Munich group BOA. This archive, which BOA assembled in their effort to generate a counter-public sphere, features a mix of old news broadcasts and advertising videos for the West German army's main battle tank: the Leopard. Friesenwall 120 also hosted exhibitions, such as *Internationale Situationniste*, curated together with scholar Roberto Ohrt, and *Wahrheit ist Arbeit: Wie es wirklich war* [Truth is work: How it really was], co-organized with Krebber and Uwe Gabriel. The exhibition space further showed a vast display of newspapers and journals that focused on the student protest movement in the 1970s, the history of the Red Army Faction in West Germany, and counter-hegemonic artistic practices. As Dillemuth recollects,

> people used to come around [to Friesenwall 120] in the evening to watch a video or read, brought videos along too, contributed material, which meant that the archive grew. The archive also reflected our own activities; it became a tool for self-observation and the transferal of information. (Dillemuth, 2016: 213)

The Friesenwall 120 storefront was near the Cologne gallery district. But it functioned in stark contrast to the nearby commercial galleries. Friesenwall 120's growing constituency disdained the pursuit of unique artistic creation. Dillemuth observes that the group clustered at the storefront venue exhibited "the bohemian atmosphere surrounding artists and the byproducts of their work rather than artists and their work as such." (Dillemuth, 2016: 214) The emphasis was on the exodus of artists from the stranglehold of artist-gallery relations. This departure was not an actual escape to some new outside but an immanent flight to create an artists' community that leveled the differences between the (commercial) gallery and (public) project cultures. The success of Friesenwall 120, Dillemuth notes, led its participants to realize that there were various initiatives that were trying out different forms of production and distribution and that they were "not alone on the periphery of the official art system." (Dillemuth, 2016: 218)

The Unfair

The depressed art market at the turn of the decade limited possibilities and strained the little institutional support there was from private collectors. By the early 1990s, the Cologne art fair, Art Cologne, which had brought artists, dealers, collectors, and critics together since 1967, had withdrawn from marketing experimental work, promoting instead art that followed by then well-established US minimalist and pop art legacies. (Galloway, 2009) This change took a heavy toll on young, unconventional art galleries that served as testing grounds for novel ideas. Added to this, exhibitions such as the 44th Venice Biennale, of 1990 (curated by Giovanni Carandente), and Documenta IX, of 1992 (curated by Jan Hoet), completely ignored the robust art discourse circulating in such institutions as New York's Whitney Museum of American Art's Independent Study Program and the newly founded Cologne-based journal *Texte zur Kunst*, and were chock-full of the 1980s Expressionist Postmodernism dismissed by critics as a reactionary return to solipsism, unreflective emotionalism, and unreflexive cultural affirmation. (Buchloh, 1981: 39–69)

In response to the increasingly dismal conditions, in 1992, Christian Nagel, Tania Grunert, Daniel Buchholz, and the directors of a few other local galleries that Art Cologne had locked out developed an alternative event they polemically titled the Unfair. The smaller-scale commercial galleries teamed up to rent a large, former bank building away from the city's main drag. There, they installed approximately two dozen project spaces featuring work by young artists excluded from the official art fair's program.

For an alternative space, the Unfair was remarkably successful, generating enormous sales, a lot of publicity, and a certain *cachet* of iconoclastic credibility for the sponsoring galleries and the artists they represented. The event functioned not only as an exhibition locus, but also as a space of information exchange and a location for discussing a wide range of topical issues. A parallel project space installed and managed by the Düsseldorf art collective BüroBert (Renate Lorenz and Jochen Becker) operated as a film and video screening site and a forum for debate. BüroBert stocked the space with an extensive archive of books, magazines, newspapers, photographs, and video and audio material. There was also a photocopy machine available for visitors to use, as well as a working bar and café, where Unfair participants and visitors could gather and converse.

The Unfair's popularity and success were difficult to ignore. Many who attended Art Cologne also visited the Unfair, where the provocative events and plethora of young artists generated considerable buzz. The activity of the Unfair made Art Cologne seem quaint in comparison, and the latter's patrons antediluvians. The Unfair's remarkable success contributed to the financial backers of Art Cologne's decision to buy it out in 1994. The deal hinged on a provision in the transfer of rights contract that assured the local galleries that had started the alternative event three years of full participation in Art Cologne. Revealingly, the first thing Art Cologne's administrators did upon acquiring the Unfair was to take out a copyright on its name, ensuring that no art institution could ever again use it in an official capacity. Art Cologne absorbed the young galleries, ending whatever alternative to the art establishment the Unfair had initially promised.

Messe 2ok

To address this complex development, artists Alice Creischer, Andreas Siekmann, Birger Hübel, and Dierk Schmidt, who identified with the trajectory of social critique that extended from 1980s and early 1990s institutional critical art organized the large "counter-fair" *Messe 2ok ökonoMiese machen* [Messe 2ok Talking Economics]. (fig. 1 and fig. 2) The artists held the event in November 1995 to coincide with Art Cologne, which had by then set aside all pretense and ritual as it directly recruited art's end consumer. The pogroms against migrants in Rostock, Mölln, and Hoyerswerda in 1991 and 1992 motivated *Messe 2ok*'s social agenda, which sought to fight against racist violence. The abolition of the right of asylum § 16 in the German constitution in 1992 also prodded the counter-fair's program. So, too, did massive privatization in the former GDR and pervasive neoliberal debates concerning public space, urban planning, and the deregulation of work.

Fig. 1.

Alice Creischer, Dierk Schmidt and Andreas Siekmann, *Messe 2ok ökonoMiese machen*, printed in Rijksakademie Amsterdam, 1996, p. 5. Courtesy Alice Creischer and Andreas Siekmann.

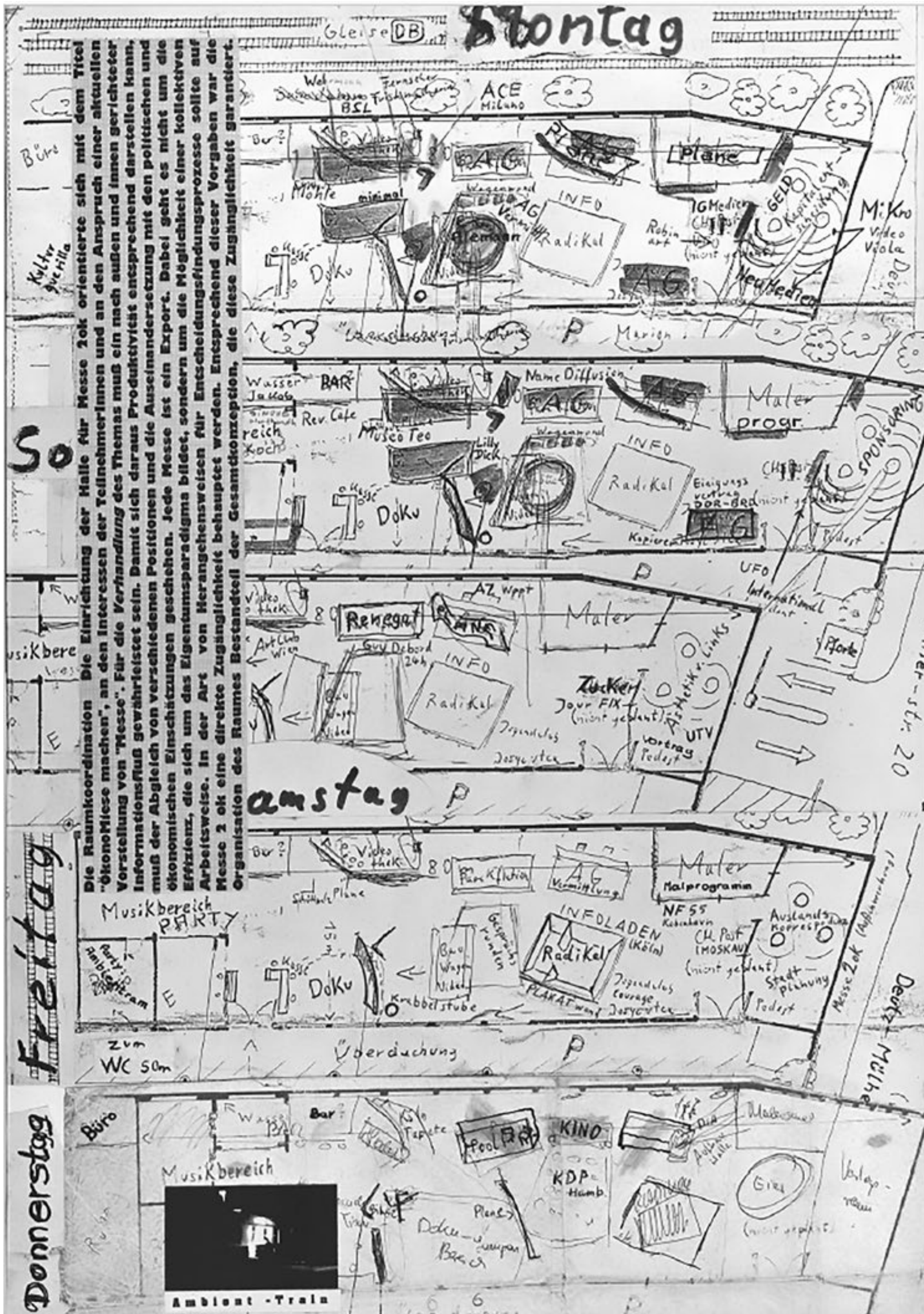

Fig. 2.

Alice Creischer, Dierk Schmidt and Andreas Siekmann, *Messe 2ok ökonoMiese machen*, printed in Rijksakademie Amsterdam, 1996, p. 6. Courtesy Alice Creischer and Andreas Siekmann.

Messe 2ok created a meeting place for socially engaged artists, critics, and others concerned with culture's increasingly reactionary conditions. It favored collaboration and partnerships between artists, communities, and organizations. The coordinators and artists involved focused their attention on the various ways art's brazen mercantilization overlapped with transformations taking place in the public sphere. (Creischer and Siekmann, 2002) A sense of purpose and determination offset the artists' awareness of art's economic realities. Creischer and the others were deeply aware of the circumstances of their own artistic labor and yet continued to believe in the professional artist's socially valuable role. At one of the public panels held during the counter-fair, Creischer described artists as prime "examples of freelance workers providing services": "[I]t looks like we have undergone a metamorphosis from producers to service providers." (Munder, 1996: 227) The organizers were determined to move art beyond "product" and expand artists' rights. "Maybe we should take the demand for compensation as a starting point," Creischer proposes.

> This could open up the possibility of viewing other types of labor, 'non-product oriented', and other forms of authorship such as collective work, as eligible for compensation. But more than this, the campaign to ensure payment for exhibitions [...] could contribute to the demystification of artistic production. (Munder, 1996: 227)

The Siemens corporation's cultural program initially offered to sponsor *Messe 2ok*. (Creischer et al., 1996: 69–75) This patronage produced a dilemma for the organizers and participating artists, who were wary of the underlying interests that motivated the sponsorship. That the Siemens Culture Program was not underwriting these events because the corporation supported the political initiatives of the artists and artists' groups taking part was clear to all involved. Accordingly, Creischer and her cohort attempted to formalize greater autonomy from the corporate sponsor by drawing up a legal agreement. (Creischer et al., 1996: 74–75) The contract preserved the organizers' independence and barred Siemens from influencing the content of the event's artistic contributions. It also safeguarded the organizers' control of all public relations related to the counter-fair. This authority meant that while all announcements for *Messe 2ok* (e.g., on invitation cards, posters, and media advertisements) would include the sponsor's logo, the organizers would not be obliged to collaborate with Siemens's publicity department. The contract delegated press conferences and releases solely to Creischer, Siekmann, Hübel, and Schmidt. It also rendered the artists responsible for designing and distributing all public relations material. Siemens's publicity office sought much more control of press relations

than the artists' contract granted it. With negotiations between the corporation and the artists at loggerheads, Creischer and the others abruptly declined the sponsorship money in a letter that bid Siemens farewell ("bye-bye"), and *Messe 2ok* was self-organized and self-funded (on a shoestring). The official sponsorship credits read "Sponsored by Bye Bye." (Creischer and Siekmann, 2002: 80–82)

Creischer and her cohort's principled rejection of corporate funds for an art exhibition was a new political issue in Germany. Neoliberal reforms and developed economies' financialization had altered patronage. Whereas corporations had previously purchased artworks and built collections, their interest subtly shifted in the 1990s, to promoting affinities between creative production and the company's public image. Even the sponsorship of art exhibitions for publicity, with the company placing its logo on all advertising materials, now had a different function. Financial investments in culture signaled the corporation's role as benevolent corporate citizen, ready to assume more of what was formerly the state's responsibility. Thus, while patronage of cultural events such as *Messe 2ok* still operated as publicity, Siemens's financial backing also signaled the ever-greater role of private interests.

When it was finally staged, *Messe 2ok* was situated in a large, empty building block directly opposite Art Cologne. The post-industrial building had long belonged to the Bahnpost, the rail-based mail delivery service, but the public corporation had recently sold it to private interests. Approximately thirty artist groups from Austria, Denmark, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and West Germany participated in the counter-fair. None of the art in the show was for sale. Exhibition booths were conspicuously absent, and there were very few objects that the uninitiated visitor would immediately identify as artworks. According to the organizers, their goal was to realize a "non-hierarchical space," to develop "a structure that was transparent, democratic, anti-administrative, informal, and extremely subjective." (Creischer, 2015: 148) The event had three main platforms: project-oriented art, electronic music, and political philosophy. Artist collectives produced most of the project works on display and organized a bookstall. The music program, coordinated by Michaela Odinius and her colleagues at the journal *Spex*, comprised house and techno. And the critical theory component of *Messe 2ok* introduced the ideas of mostly young art critics and philosophers.

The entire event ran for four consecutive days. The organizers constructed semi-portable art booths so the exhibits could move from one place to another in the enormous building daily. The day's content, which varied from focuses on urban development to the vicissitudes of Left aesthetics and collective artistic practices, determined the booth's movement. The show's layout was perpetually in flux, transforming

from one day to the next. (Creischer et al., 1996: 16) For Creischer, Siekmann, Hübel, and Schmidt, this was an important Conceptual element: it showed that the issues raised by the project works on display could take multiple forms during the exhibition's run and that spectators could contemplate what they encountered from various perspectives.

Services

Another group of artistic practitioners, centered around curator Helmut Draxler and artist Andrea Fraser, shared Creischer's observation that in the new economy of the 1990s, artists had become not producers but service providers. These figures also recognized the extent to which capitalism's business interests had adopted crucial aspects of the counter-cultural artistic critique's appeals to individual creativity and irregular working hours. They saw that while capitalism had transformed the world of work to give laborers more varied and individual working conditions, closer to an artist's lifestyle, the new economy erased the previously defined borders between labor time and free time. Draxler and Fraser responded to the business world's cooptation of artistic critique by theorizing artistic service provision.

Service provision artists assumed a reflexive and critical stance toward art's economy and the increased importance of the tertiary or service sector in the late 20th century. They developed "a self-conscious artistic critique of the cultural commodity, of the exploitation of art for economic and symbolic profit." (Fraser, 1997/2005a: 52) This form of critique contemplated the new pressures generated by the increasing demand for project work in the 1990s. As Fraser reflects in retrospect,

> In addition to being expected to undertake site-specific projects for little or no fee, [by the early 1990s] artists were routinely expected to design invitations, posters, advertisements, and catalogues, write catalogue texts or prepare sections of catalogues without compensation. Artists with policies not to undertake projects without receiving a fee were treated as 'difficult' and set against other artists in exhibitions. Sometimes artists were promised fees, only to be told after the exhibition opened that those fees were considered part of the project budgets and had already been used up in production. Artists' budgets were suspended when their process-oriented projects took longer to complete than the duration of the temporary exhibitions for which they were commissioned. (Fraser, 1996: 210–211)

Added to this, the exhibiting institutions often kept the work upon the show's conclusion or sold it to cover production costs. If artists insisted on their rights to the work, the costs of returning de-installed materials fell to them. At the same time, the rights to the original installation's documentation remained the exhibition venue's property. (Green, 1996: 124–125) Accordingly, many artists who made project work "found themselves exhausted and in debt. [...] It was as if they were being expected to work in two jobs: one for compensation, the other on a voluntary basis." (Fraser, 1996: 211)

The meetings and discussions artists began to hold to discuss these new relations and material conditions culminated in the decision to draft a questionnaire that gathered grievances and proposed reforms. The artists sent the survey to more than thirty peers committed to project work. The goal was "to create a database that would provide artists with more confidence in making certain demands and which could also serve as the foundation of a general contract to be developed by the larger group" the artists hoped to convene. (Fraser, 1996: 211)

Draxler and Fraser conceived of ways to bring attention to the new conditions and the social and material relations that structure them. The two analyzed the service industries and contemplated the sociopolitical implications of the precarious working conditions of contemporary artists who did not cater to conventional market practices. As they observe in a jointly written text,

> the artistic practices currently characterized as 'project work' [...] involve the expense of an amount of labor that is either in excess of, or independent of, any specific material production. [...] This labor, which in economic terms would be called service provision (as opposed to goods production), might include the work of the interpretation or analysis of sites both in and outside of cultural institutions; the work of presentation and installation (where those terms have come to refer more to the activity than the environment produced); the work of public education both in and outside of cultural institutions; advocacy and other community based work, including organizing education, documentary production, and the creation of alternative structures. (Draxler and Fraser, 1996: 196)

Thus, for Draxler and Fraser, service provision describes recent artistic production's economic condition and the nature of the social relations under which artists carry out that production. It also conveys the new conditions artists face. While still self-employed, artists must now operate as busy multitaskers, producing an increasingly wide range of immaterial goods.

Draxler and Fraser organized several discussion workshops and exhibitions that investigated contemporary art's protocols and material conditions and addressed the effects of service provision on the economy of art production. The stated goals of these events were to bring together arts professionals to address project work's artistic implications and challenges and "to prepare a set of general guidelines and perhaps a basic contract by combining to form some sort of association." (Fraser, 1994/2005c: 155)

One of these events, an exhibition entitled *Services* held at the University of Lüneberg, comprised documents Draxler and Fraser collected by relating to the history of professional artists' organizations and collectivization, instances of museum censorship and unionization, and the drafting of artists' contracts. The two asked the participants to contribute materials about recent project works they had carried out. The curators featured the materials in the show and played videotapes of the workshop discussion on a monitor. (Fraser, 1996: 211) Fraser has noted that,, rather than exhibiting a historical overview of project work or the service provision concept, she and Draxler aimed with this show to present a growing archive of materials that visitors could easily duplicate using the photocopy machine (free of charge) and then disseminate. Draxler and Fraser conceived the working discussions and installations as a model for a continuing forum at which artists, curators, and institutions interested in project-based art activities could develop a framework that would "integrate the practical and the theoretical, encompassing material and political as well as artistic concerns." (Fraser, 1996: 211) The hope was that they could organize regular events and publications at different venues and that the project would grow exponentially.

When *Services*, after its first installation in Lüneburg, traveled to other exhibition spaces in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, and the US, between 1994 and 1997, it included the workshop with arts professionals, adding local representatives. Group discussions were "an integral component" of these events, which offered a research-oriented model of discursive exhibition programming. In effect, this enabled artists and curators "to address each other by reflecting on their shared and yet alienated relationships with the divisions of labor, means of production, and mediating functions of exhibitions." (Stone, 2014: 122–123)

But the many limitations of *Services* soon became apparent. As Fraser acknowledged already in 1996, probing services infrastructure failed to resolve the practical problems artists encountered when producing project work. It also failed to realize an artists' contract, viable policies, or any form of organized association that could lobby for project artists' interests:

> Services did not come to any conclusions on questions of the threat posed to artistic autonomy by professionalization or by the construction of cultural organizations as 'clients,' [or] get to the root of conflicts among artists, curators, cultural organizations and audiences. Services was not, through the material collected for the installation, able to provide a coherent history of the transformation of relations among artists, curators and cultural organizations; of the professionalization of curating; of the artists' fee or of the role particular phenomena played in such developments. Finally, 'Services' did not establish the meaning or relevance of the concept of service provision for contemporary artistic practice. (Fraser, 1996: 212)

In effect, the *Services* project only ended up relating to a small cluster of European and North American artists and curators attuned to Draxler and Fraser's methods of interpretation—methods that did not fully anticipate the ways the ascendancy of financial capital shifted the site of conflict away from the dynamic of employer and employee to that of the investor and investee. (Stone, 2014: 125)

From today's perspective, it is also apparent that the *Services* project grossly underestimated the extent to which several new elements had transformed contemporary art in the 1990s. The celebrity branding of artists that began to proliferate during those years bolstered a range of objects and situations. The market played an ever-growing role as a driving force in art's production and reception. The relationship between economic success and artistic significance became ever more proximate. And collectors were increasingly buying objects for the opportunities the purchases afforded to mingle with artists and take part in the ambience of creative glamour, celebrity, business, and radiant superficiality associated with an art-centered social scene.

The legacy of *Services* is the practical way its program stressed the artistic labor that encompassed a wide range of project work, from traditionally intangible forms, such as performance, to site research and interpretation, art presentation and installation, and educational and community-based activities directly involving artists with audiences. The working group's discussions and installations of project works and exhibitions called into question, at least in theory, the late 20th-century art production and exhibition economy. They also touched on how neoliberal capitalism was shaping the image of artists as producers and transforming artistic labor and the demands placed on art's content. In the new economy, the artist's lifestyle became the aspirational paradigm of the new worker: creative, unconventional, flexible, nomadic, generating value, and endlessly traveling. In this respect, the services model echoes Boltanski and Chiapello's claim that whatever freedom was residual to the artistic critique did not survive the 20th century and

presents precarious living and working conditions and a life of debt as the new normal.

By the end of the millennium, the marginal position artists had once assumed to gain personal independence, creative spontaneity, and self-realization was beginning to characterize a large sector of the working population in Western Europe and the US, though without the original freedom. A massive reduction in permanent employment opportunities and a concomitant increase in relatively low-paying temporary jobs now faced those whom industrialized nations had earlier integrated as crucial agents of Fordist capitalism's production regime. These conditions, which define today's "gig" economy of precarious multitaskers, call for high mobility and flexibility, without even minimal social benefits. They favor the deregulated casual laborer who does not distinguish between working hours and free time, who is at once creative, versatile, and willing to risk working for minimal forms of the security and remuneration that go with permanent employment, in the hope of future rewards. In this respect, the autonomy and resilience traditionally associated with the criticality of the artist now became the cornerstone of the deregulated world of work. Neoliberal modes of production, where multitasking and the fusion of professions are the norm, now integrated the artist's refusal of the division of labor. The new economy hailed artists as model entrepreneurs. As Fraser explains in an early 21st-century text, by the late 1990s, the "'privilege' of freedom […] and instability" once reserved for artists had turned into the "insecurity, flexibility, deferred economic rewards, social alienation, cultural uprooting and geographical displacement" of the new economy's labor conditions, rendering artists "the poster girls and boys" of the neoliberal economic order. (Fraser, 2003/2005b: 251) The freedom and flexibility of the artistic critique had become the dominant traits of a deregulated, insecure workplace. The systematic deepening of capitalist relations had largely assimilated even Western art's most critical artistic practices and lifestyles and turned them into an occupational role model.

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Must Art Hang?

Critical Ambivalence in Andrea Fraser's Exhibitions at Galerie Christian Nagel

Alexander Streitberger

This paper examines Andrea Fraser's two exhibitions at Galerie Christian Nagel in Cologne, held ten years apart, in 1990 and 2001.[1] I will argue that the two exhibitions, which mark pivotal moments in Fraser's artistic career, address the historical, political, economic, and institutional conditions of the art world in West Germany—and more specifically in Cologne, as one of the world's leading art scenes from the 1970s to the 1990s—to develop what I would call an aesthetics of critical ambivalence. On the one hand, Fraser adopts strategies of enactment, montage, distanciation, and de-propriation to explore the inconsistencies of the political and cultural relationships between the USA and Germany. On the other hand, she investigates the ambivalent position of the artist being complicit with the art system while simultaneously being expected to transgress or violate its norms and conditions. It is ultimately in the controversial figure of Martin Kippenberger, the enfant terrible of the German art scene of the 1990s, that these two strands intersect, when Fraser reenacts a drunken diner speech of the German artist in her second solo show at Galerie Christian Nagel, in 2001. For his capacity to stage his contradictory behavior, Kippenberger becomes a catalyst for Fraser's critical ambivalence toward the artist's construction of identity across the fields of the aesthetic, the social, the economic, and the political.

Fishy Beginnings: Conceptualizing Reception

Like many American artists before her since the 1970s, Fraser had her first solo show in Germany, when she exhibited her work at Galerie Christian Nagel in Cologne from November 15–December 15, 1990. At that time, Cologne was still the cultural and artistic capital of Germany, before being replaced by Berlin over the course of the 1990s. Fraser knew the Cologne art scene through Joseph Kosuth, who had often spent time in the city since his early solo exhibitions at Galerie Paul Maenz, in 1971 and 1973. Around 1988, Fraser met Christian Nagel, in New York. He was planning to open his gallery in Cologne and offered her a solo show. (Simpson, 2006: 42) In the summer of 1990, Fraser traveled to Germany, where she was included in a group show of young American artists at Stuttgart's Galerie Ralph Wernicke. On this occasion, she also met artists linked to Nagel in Cologne, such as Cosima von Bonin, whose work was presented at the inaugural exhibition of Galerie Christian Nagel in the spring of 1990, and Michael Krebber, a close friend and collaborator of Martin Kippenberger who had attained the status of a legend in the local art scene. For her exhibition at Nagel, Fraser transformed the gallery space into an art fair booth. She mimicked the wall covering, the rubber floor, and the furniture used at Art Cologne, which was being held at that precise moment, albeit without the presence of Galerie Nagel. Fraser's conception of the exhibition as a kind of mini-retrospective was not exempt from self-irony given the scarce artistic production of the then-25-year-old artist, who was still at the beginning of her artistic career. (Breitwieser, 2015: 117)

The exhibition consisted of only five works, namely the wall text pieces *Notes on the Margin* and *The New American Painting* (both dated 1990); four poster pieces (1984); the six aluminum "Smileys" and "Frownys" of the 1989 installation *Amuse(um)*; and the video *Museum Highlights* (1989), presented one year before by Colin de Land, during the 1989 Cologne Art Fair. (Fraser, 2006) The exhibition display functioned as a stage set for the sole work produced for the exhibition. Placed on a table, the piece was a black binder replicating the design of presentation books used by galleries at art fairs to present the artist's biography and works. (fig. 1) While the exhibition's invitation card at the beginning of the presentation book appears to confirm this usage, the four following pages point in an unexpected direction. What looks like the artist's biography is in fact a chronology tracing back the political, cultural, economic, and artistic relationships between the United States and Germany since the end of World War II. The unconditional surrender of Germany acts as the first entry, and Fraser's exhibition at Galerie Christian Nagel as the last. The remaining sixty-nine pages feature a selection of photographs and texts cut out from multiple sources,

Fig. 1.

Andrea Fraser, Installation View, Galerie Christian Nagel, Cologne 1990. Photo: Andrea Stappert. Courtesy: Andrea Fraser and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/ Cologne/ Munich.

including newspapers, magazines, catalogs, and other print medias. These documents start with an installation view and a review of Fraser's exhibition at Nagel. Moving back in time, they conclude with a 1945 photograph showing Harry S. Truman and James F. Byrnes preparing the Potsdam Conference to set the stage for the United States' postwar policy with respect to Germany. In between, numerous photographs and photocopies analogize various political, artistic, and biographical events to reveal the historical, cultural, and local conditions within which Fraser's show at Nagel ought to be situated.

Looking closer at the chronology, we learn that in 1953, when Fraser's mother, Carmen Magrina, was sojourning in Paris, she went skiing in Germany. At that same moment, MoMA was organizing the exhibition *12 amerikanische Maler und Bildhauer* at Kunsthalle Düsseldorf. For the

year 1954, the chronology describes that her father was stationed in Germany, Calder had an exhibition at Hannover's Kerstner-Gesellschaft, and the Federal Republic of Germany joined NATO.[2] However, instead of reconstructing one particular story on a micro- or a macro-level (her personal life and artistic career, the reception of American artists in Germany, or US policy in postwar Germany), the presentation book provides a fragmentary multitude of histories, loosely confronting and intertwining episodes of Fraser's biography; the encounters between representatives of the US and West German governments; the role of the Amerika Haus as an instrument to spread American ideas and information to the German people; the chronology of exhibitions organized by MoMA with CIA funding in German museums promoting American art and cultural life; and the growth of the art market in Germany, with a special focus on Cologne's art fair and gallery exhibitions. Indeed, the city served as an artistic center showcasing and marketing the latest American artistic trends. This history is not homogeneous and linear but fragmentary and heterogeneous.

For example, one sheet protector contains the catalog cover of *Neue Realisten & Pop Art*, the first survey exhibition of pop art in Germany, held at Berlin's Akademie der Künste November 20, 1964–January 3, 1965. In the opposite plastic sleeve, an installation view of the exhibition overlaps a Polaroid photograph of a man in a domestic setting reading a newspaper, probably the artist's father. Above, a photograph of US president John F. Kennedy and German chancellor Konrad Adenauer surrounded by a crowd in front of the Cologne cathedral and a short newspaper report of Kennedy's famous "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech testify to the fervent welcome that the US president received in Germany during his 1963 visit. This collage of various documents confronts what an American citizen could *read* in the newspapers about Kennedy's popularity in Germany with what a West German citizen could *see* of American pop art as it was presented in West German art institutions. The missing element of this story is dissenting voices, such as René Block's critique of the absence of the artists of Kapitalistischer Realismus (Capitalist Realism), the German branch of pop art represented by Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke, and Konrad Lueg.[3]

Another example reveals that Fraser was well aware of such tensions and their conflictual potential in political and artistic spheres. (fig. 2) Elsewhere in the binder, the cover of the brochure for the first Kunstmarkt Köln, in 1967—which became Art Cologne in 1984—is opposed with three article cutouts and one photograph. An article in *The New York Times* titled "Big Cologne Exhibition Seeks to Focus German Art Market" praises Kunstmarkt Köln as a "landmark exhibition, designed to turn the Rhineland city of Cologne into the modern art capital of West Germany." Further, the article informs about the

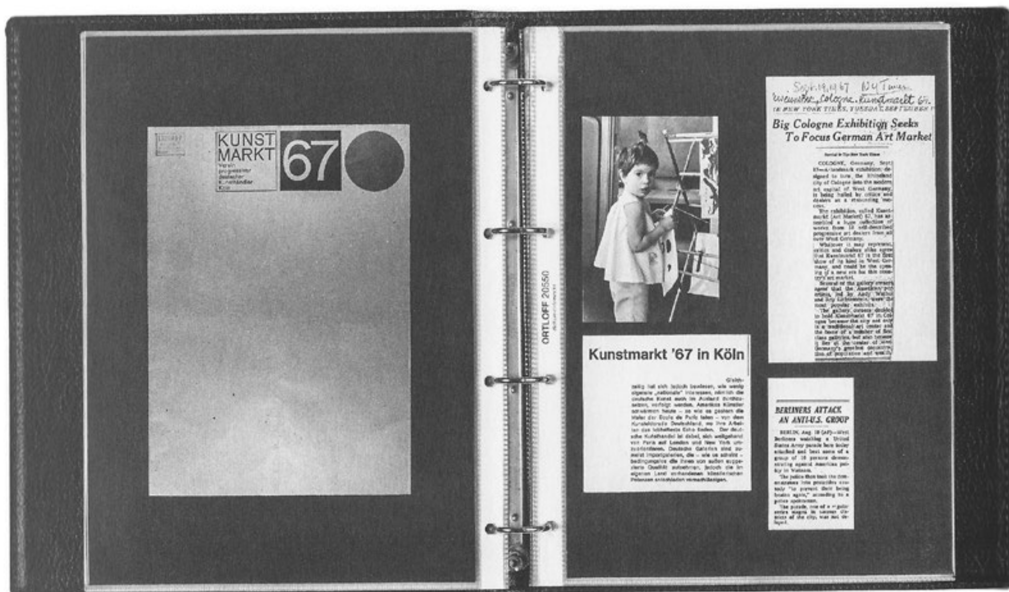

Fig. 2
Andrea Fraser, *Presentation Book*, 1990. Courtesy: Andrea Fraser and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/ Cologne/ Munich.

number of German art dealers who "present recent art with American pop art as the main attraction," suggesting that Kunstmarkt Köln 67 was held in Cologne "because the city not only is a traditional art center and the home of a number of first-class galleries, but also because it lies at the center of West Germany's greatest concentration of population and wealth." (*The New York Times*, September 19, 1967: 44) On the lower left, Rolf-Gunter Dienst's critical review of Kunstmarkt Köln 67 abruptly contrasts with this favorable account by criticizing the German art trade's unconditional worship of American art, which was turning Germany into an Eldorado for American artists while simultaneously disregarding its national interests, namely the promotion of German art abroad. (Dienst, 1968: 65) Finally, the third article refers to pro-American West Berliners who attacked demonstrators against American policies in Vietnam. (*The New York Times*, August 20, 1967: 7) Amid these controversial political and cultural accounts, a photograph depicting a young girl turning her gaze toward the viewer emerges. It is of the four-year-old Andrea painting in her home in Berkeley, California, in 1969. (see Fraser 2004)

In a completely unexpected, more evocative than documentary move, Fraser turns public history into private biography, suggesting that her artistic breakthrough on the European art market ultimately stems from the historic entanglements between American cultural and military policies and the institutional and economic development of the art world in West Germany. Fraser felt distinctly uncomfortable

with this situation, as she confirmed later in her contribution to the exhibition catalog *Make Your Own Life: Artists in & out of Cologne*:

> The idea was to contextualize my reception in Germany and the peculiar fact that I was having my first gallery show—anywhere—in Germany, and at the tender age of twenty-four. Why Germany? It smelled fishy to me, and if I was the beneficiary of a CIA plot, I wanted to get to the bottom of it. (Simpson, 2006: 43)

Elsewhere, she describes the presentation book as one of her most self-reflexive works. (Fraser, 2006) The inclusion of the 1969 photograph of her as a child among documents of the first Kunstmarkt Köln, in 1967, underlines the fact that this contextualization is equally historical, documentary, subjective, and fictional. Rather than being inserted in an unbroken, coherent history, the decontextualized material is reassembled in fragmentary, heterogeneous collages spanning an associative network of cross-references to be interpreted by the viewer–reader.

De-propriation as Performance

In an essay on the theatricality of Fraser's work, Shannon Jackson argues that the performance *Museum Highlights* draws on Brechtian theater techniques of historicization, trans-contextualization, and distanciation to elucidate the position she—or, rather, her alter ego, fictional museum docent Jane Castleton—occupies within the ideological, social, and institutional framework of the art field. (Jackson, 2015: 21–22) In some respects, the exhibition at Nagel employs theatrical principles by functioning as a stage set in which the presentation book plays the role of an actor. As Fraser said in a lecture in 2006, the book should be understood as performance, not in terms of an acting body, but in terms of appropriating positions and functions within a specific institutional context. (Fraser, 2006) Seen in this light, the contrasting juxtaposition of various materials of diverging linguistic, national, political, ideological, and cultural origins may be described as the acting out of conflicting positions with regard to the conditions of artistic production.

However, I feel that Fraser's appropriation technique is inspired less by Brechtian epic theater than by Martha Rosler's quotational and ironic "practice of critical photography and text" (Rosler, 1982/2004: 139) and Mary Kelly's concept of de-propriation. Both artists transfer Brecht's principle of Verfremdung (distanciation) from theater to text–image montage. For instance, Rosler explicitly refers to Walter

Benjamin's claim of montage as a political instrument, "for montage interrupts the context into which it is inserted." (Benjamin, 1966/1998: 99) Indeed, that is precisely how Fraser's presentation book functions. Furthermore, both artists reject purely quotational appropriation in favor of contextual appropriation aiming to critique the social, gender, and political conditions in art and society. In the catalog text of her notable exhibition *Beyond the Purloined Image*, Mary Kelly opposes purely quotational appropriation with a "strategy of de-propriation." (Kelly, 1983: 68) Referring to Brecht, Kelly defines de-propriation as a heterogeneous, disruptive, open, pleasurable, and political practice that aims to "transform finished works into unfinished works." (Kelly, 1983: 72) The presentation book is such an unfinished, discontinuous work that maintains viewers in a "constant process of reading" (Heath, 1974: 120), inviting them to fill in the gaps and detect the cross-references scattered throughout the pages of the book and extending into the exhibition space.

While the presentation book's appropriation of text and images provides a kind of chronology of American art in West Germany, the exhibition space mimics the format of the art fair booth, thus situating the show within the specific economic context of Art Cologne. The selected works presented in the gallery function as both an independent retrospective and a spatial extension of the presentation book. Once again, used as a tool, de-propriation as a technique of decontextualization and recontextualization reveals the multifarious, shifting significations and values attributed to the artwork according to varying ideological, political, and economic agendas.

Take the English and German wall texts. At first sight, they seem to comment on the other works presented in the exhibition. Next to the television set that plays Fraser's performance *Museum Highlights*, a German text describes the "Americans as globetrotters and conquerors [...]. They push themselves to the forefront in their work, their actions, the act of creation." This might indeed be interpreted as an ironic comment on the video, in which Fraser plays the role of a fictional museum guide. A little further up on the right, another sentence—this time in English—adopts a completely contradictory stance: "This work is shocking, abhorrent, completely undeserving of any recognition whatsoever. Millions of taxpayers are rightfully incensed that their hard-earned dollars were used to honor and support this trash." Next to it, on the adjoining wall, the text printed on a poster of Goya's *Manuel Osorio Manrique de Zuniga* (1787–1788) acclaims "the brilliant technique and breadth" of this Masterpiece, while another, German wall text further right ponders on Europe's state of defense because of "these young Americans" who are "beyond heritage and psychology, almost beyond good and evil." Confronted with these puzzling

contradictions of complete dispraise and unconditional admiration, gallery visitors are prevented from behaving as expected in a museum. Wall texts usually inform the visitors about the aesthetic qualities or the historical background of the displayed works, therefore confirming the authority of the art-historical discourse and the museum as an institution. Here, by contrast, it is anything but clear to what the texts refer to—Fraser's art or Goya's. Nor is it obvious who is speaking—the artist; the gallery; or, respectively, an English-speaking and a German-speaking critic expressing opposing viewpoints. But once again: viewpoints on what, exactly?

The English texts draw their origin from *Notes on the Margin*, a series of wall texts presented by Fraser at New York's Gracie Mansion Gallery in February 1990 as a reaction to the political attacks aimed at the National Endowment for the Arts at the time. (Breitwieser, 2005: 72) The piece consisted in seven wall texts in which the artist quotes right-wing members of the United States Congress who expressed their disgust with the work of Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano. In contrast, the German wall texts were installed alongside other works by young American artists exhibited in the show *Art Supplies and Utopia*, at Galerie Ralph Wernicke in Stuttgart, in June and July 1990. (Dziewior, 2003: 118–119) The texts are excerpts of an article by art historian Will Grohmann in the Berlin newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel.* (Grohmann, 1958) In the article, Grohmann gives an enthusiastic account of *The New American Painting* exhibition organized by MoMA and circulated in Europe in 1958–1959 as a promotional vehicle for American art and culture. (*The New American Painting*, 1959: 10–11)

Attentive visitors to the exhibition may have deciphered the origin of the German quotations while flipping through the presentation book. Next to the cover of the German catalog of *The New American Painting* and a photograph of a German crowd welcoming the then–American president Dwight David "Ike" Eisenhower, two pages celebrate the hegemony of American painting in the Western world. The left page reproduces the first paragraph of Alfred H. Barr's introduction to the German catalog for *The New American Painting*, transferring Karl Jaspers's existentialist claim "to grasp authentic being by action" to the attitude of American Abstract Expressionists. (Barr, 1959: 16) The right page is drawn from the American reprint of the English catalog for the iteration of the exhibition in London's Tate Gallery, to which quotations from a range of international exhibition reviews have been added. (*The New American Painting*, 1959: 2) Clearly, the aim is to provide evidence of American dominance not only in the political and military fields, but also in the artistic realm. In his introduction to this montage of quotations, Porter McCray writes that the reviews prove

that "it was acknowledged that in America a totally 'new'—a unique and indigenous—kind of painting has appeared, one whose influence can be clearly seen in works of artists in Europe as well as many other parts of the world." (*The New American Painting*, 1959: 7)

While in the original catalog the series of quotations begins with an extract from Helmi Gasser's article in the *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, in the presentation book the page features Will Grohmann's review as the first entry. We may conclude from this that Fraser changed the order of the reviews to establish a link between the text on the wall and the quote in the catalog. Far from trying to provide an objective, impartial assessment of the complex relationships between the USA and Germany, Fraser opted for a de-propriational, pluri-perspective approach, contrasting, cross-referencing, and reshuffling heterogeneous documents and voices across time and space. In this case, the historical glorification of Abstract Expressionism as a radically unique, independent, and authentic expression of supposedly genuine American values of freedom and innovation was projected into the actual exhibition space, where it collided with recent vilifications of contemporary artists by conservative US politicians, pronounced thirty years later.

The six aluminum disks distributed across the walls ultimately provide a sort of humorous meta-comment on the items presented in the exhibition. The three smiling and three frowning faces were part of Fraser's installation *Amuse(um)*, produced for the group exhibition *The Desire of the Museum* at the Whitney Museum of American Art, where they were installed along with an audiotape player reproducing a series of phrases relating to behavioral codes in public and private contexts. (Dziewior, 2003: 112) At Nagel, the Smileys and Frownys looked down on Fraser's own pieces, commenting on the antithetic contents of the wall texts in an equally contradictory manner. The presentation book and the exhibition are separate but related forms of critical montage, insofar as they are both based on the principles of fragmentation, de-propriation, and re-appropriation of visual and textual materials of diverging origins. They, further, provide the stage on which the exhibits interact not only with each other, but also with their specific historical, discursive, and institutional contexts, as well as with the viewer–readers, who have to connect all these items themselves. As such, the exhibits are performative in the sense that Fraser gave the term:

> What concerns me is the relationship between what is performed or enacted in art, as well as in art discourse, and how those enactments are symbolized, represented, interpreted and understood, or not, by critics and historians as well as artists, but in art discourse above all. What concerns me is what that relationship itself performs. (Fraser, 2011: 155–156)

Performance as Aesthetics of Ambivalence

Yet this relationship is always fragile, shifting, and ambivalent. As has been shown, the documents and works do not fit into a supposedly neutral, objective discourse. Their collage-like, interruptive, and discontinuous arrangement reveals contradictory positions while integrating them in a display that mimics the institutional conventions of the gallery exhibition and the art fair booth. This ambivalence of affirmation and critique entails other contradictions, including the problematic relationship between the subjective position of the artist and the place attributed to them within the official discourses and institutions of art and the conflict between aesthetic pleasure and intellectual critique.[4] Around 2000, Fraser explicitly broached these questions of the psychical, subjective engagement of the artist. In her 2004 essay "Why Does Fred Sandback's Work Make Me Cry?" Fraser asked: "What kind of aesthetic experience can be admitted by a hardcore, uncompromising, materialist, sociologically informed 'institutional critic' such as myself?" (Fraser, 2005: 37) Three years earlier, in 2001, she had conceived her performance *Official Welcome* as "an attempt to engage one of [the] artist's most pervasive contradictions: to be loved and admired and supported even while we critique and transgress." (Breitwieser, 2015: 172)

At the turn of the millennium, this ambivalence was unambiguously what fascinated Fraser about Martin Kippenberger. But when she had her show at Galerie Christian Nagel in 1990, she was not interested in Kippenberger whatsoever. Since her artistic education in New York was fueled by conceptualism and feminist performance art, as well as materialist and post-structuralist theories, she was deeply repelled by Kippenberger's excessive painting and self-performing lifestyle, around which a true personality cult emerged within Cologne's art scene. (Simpson, 2006: 16) It cannot have been easy for a young American institutional critic to find her way through the complicated, cliquish Cologne art world, constantly shifting between the global and the very local (the so-called *Kölner Klüngel* [Cologne Clique]), simultaneously generously cosmopolitan and profoundly folkloric. Jutta Koether described this particular mix as a culture of "laissez-faire" based on Catholicism, carnival, and the entertainment industry. (Simpson, 2006: 38) On a gallery walk through Cologne around 1990, one could go to Galerie Werner to see such Neo-expressionist artists as Georg Baselitz and Jörg Immendorff, denounced by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, one of Fraser's intellectual mentors, as the "ciphers of regression" (Buchloh, 1981), then stop by Galerie Max Hetzler to see works of the group around Kippenberger (for example, works by Albert Oehlen, Georg Herold, or even Kippenberger himself), and end with Galerie Christian

Nagel, which was showing conceptually inspired and politically engaged young artists, such as Cosima von Bonin, Christian Philipp Müller, and, of course, Andrea Fraser.

Yet, the distinction that has been drawn between the Hetzler group around Kippenberger and the theoretically oriented artists promoted by Nagel is rather artificial. In effect, the boundaries were fluid. Kippenberger was friends with Nagel and regularly visited the gallery representing Michael Krebber, his former assistant, with whom he shared the dream of becoming an actor during their Berlin years. (Simpson, 2006: 40) Kippenberger also showed up at the opening of Fraser's exhibition at Nagel and spontaneously bought the video *Museum Highlights* and the six Smileys and Frownys aluminum disks. Some years later, when Fraser met Kippenberger again, the German artist pointed his finger at her and laconically reprimanded her with the words "Kunst muss hängen" (art must hang). (Dziewior, 2003: 210) The reason for this remark was that the aluminum disks were difficult to hang on a wall due to their polished, hard surfaces. Consequently, they systematically fell whenever Kippenberger tried to affix them at Berlin's Paris Bar to display them among other works from his collection.

Kippenberger's utterance eventually became the title of Fraser's second exhibition at Nagel, in 2001. Between the shows of 1990 and 2001, Fraser's view on Kippenberger substantially changed. On the one hand, this is because she realized that Kippenberger was not (or not only) the narcissistic, misogynist, macho artist that he occasionally appeared to be. For example, he was very supportive of young artists, such as Zoe Leonhard, Louise Lawler, and Andrea Fraser herself, who developed a critical stance toward traditional structures of the male-dominated art world. (Diederichsen, 2007: 57) On the other hand, Fraser became increasingly fascinated by the attention Kippenberger paid to context, acting, and performance. In fact, Kippenberger was acutely conscious of the conditions under which art was produced, shown, and circulated. A statement he released in 1991 perfectly encompassed what Fraser did at Galerie Christian Nagel the year before:

> "Simply to hang a painting on the wall and say that it's art is dreadful; The whole network is important! […] When you say art, then everything possible belongs to it. In a gallery that is also the floor, the architecture, the color of the walls." (Simpson, 2006: 12)

As was mentioned above, in around 2000, Fraser became increasingly attentive to the ambivalent position of artists simultaneously courting and disdaining the art system of which they are part. The shift in Fraser's work from questions of art mediation and artistic practice as service provision to the more psychological issue of the love–hate

relationship that artists have with the institutional framework—on which, ultimately, they depend—was correlated to a move to "performance as live art" and an interest in the recent media phenomenon of celebrity cult around artists as sparked by a wholly impassioned market. In this regard, Fraser candidly remarked, "of course, I thought of Martin Kippenberger." (Fraser, 2006) In fact, Kippenberger possessed a sense of fulfilling the expectations of bourgeois society of an artist as an eccentric, provocative, and transgressive figure, while undermining these expectations in his narcissistic self-performances by propelling them to an extreme degree of grotesque exaggeration. Fraser perceived this attitude "as a profoundly ambivalent acting out of artistic archetypes, right down to drinking himself to death." (Simpson, 2006: 44) In other words, Kippenberger's contradictory behavior perfectly matched Fraser's above-mentioned perception of the ambivalent attitude of the artist—herself included—toward the art institutions and the art market.

If Kippenberger's volition consisted of exaggerating the bourgeois stereotypes of the artist as a tragic enfant terrible, Fraser exaggerated this exaggeration. At the opening of her 2001 exhibition at Galerie Christian Nagel, she performed one of the infamous speeches Kippenberger gave at the occasion of dinners and openings.[5] (fig. 3) Fraser reenacted the dinner speech Kippenberger gave in 1995 at the Club an der Grenze in Austria, at the opening of the first exhibition of his friend Michel Würthle, the owner of the Paris Bar in Berlin. Instead

Fig. 3.
Andrea Fraser, *Kunst muss hängen*, Performance, Galerie Christian Nagel, Cologne, 2001. Courtesy: Andrea Fraser and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/ Cologne/ Munich.

of rendering homage to the exhibiting artist by praising his artistic work, as is generally expected of an opening speech, the drunken Kippenberger insulted the audience, ridiculed the art of his friend, and told some of his notorious jokes, which were often without real punchline but peppered with misogynist, xenophobic, and homophobic insinuations. Yet, this sort of transgression of the social and institutional conventions was expected of him as the unpredictable, excessive, shocking artist that he devoted years to inventing and self-promoting. Denying expectations while fulfilling others, Kippenberger staged himself as a living contradiction. Retrospectively, Fraser described her ambivalent attitude toward Kippenberger as follows:

> My interpretation, as I developed *Kunst muss hängen*, is that, yes, he was the drunken, macho, sexist, racist, homophobic, and possibly anti-Semitic artist that he appears to be in the speech that I found. I think he knew that he was, and I think he hated himself for all that and probably more. But instead of covering it all over, he performed it to an extreme, performing, as I've said elsewhere, the inseparability of that terribly seductive freedom represented by and enjoyed by artists and our enslavement by those very archetypes of freedom, which have often added up to the freedom to destroy ourselves, above all. (Simpson, 2006: 45)

For her performance, Fraser used a video recording of the event to rehearse the German text of the speech as well as Kippenberger's gestures, intonation, and movements. The result can unquestionably be labeled as grotesque: an American feminist and institution-critical artist who does not speak German mimics the behavior of a German artist who seems to fulfill every cliché of the macho, narcissistic, and sometimes racist self-performer. In doing so, Fraser deliberately exposed herself to the risk of ridicule. Considering that Kippenberger was a legend in Cologne, she suspected "most people anticipated that it was going to be a total disaster." (Fraser, 2006) Isabelle Graw described the mood in the audience at the beginning of the performance as "rather embarrassed."[6] The performance was recorded and then projected onto a wall for the duration of the exhibition, where it completely or partially covered two of the eight oil paintings on display. (fig. 4) If one compares Kippenberger's original speech with Fraser's reconstruction, it quickly becomes clear that it is by no means a word-for-word memorized rendition. Not only are there omissions and cuts, but the various elements of the speech are arranged differently. Additionally, some transcription errors render the already grotesque content even more nonsensical: "gastronomischer Betrieb" (gastronomic establishment) becomes "komischer Betrieb" (comical establishment), "Durchbruchsausstellung"

Fig. 4.

Andrea Fraser, *Kunst muss hängen*, Installation View, Galerie Christian Nagel, Cologne, 2001. Photo: Simon Vogel. Courtesy: Andrea Fraser and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/ Cologne/ Munich.

(breakthrough exhibition) becomes "Dummbrustausstellung" (stupid boobs exhibition), "Strohhalm" (drinking straw) becomes "Sprudel" (fizzy water). Most importantly, Fraser systematically replaced the name of the exhibited friend with the neutral term "artist" and made other generalizations (the Club an der Grenze simply became "the gallery"). Kippenberger's attack on a specific exhibition taking place in a particular context metamorphoses into a general parable of the modern artist's position, between affirmation and transgression, institutional dependence, and artistic freedom.

The paintings are of particular interest because they establish an ironic link between Kippenberger's art and his public appearances. Whereas the sloppiness of these white-grayish abstract paintings might evoke Kippenberger's work, the titles and inscriptions explicitly quote the dinner speech, thus posing questions about the relationship between work and life, representation and (self-)performance. Take *Keine eigene Darstellung* [Not (re)presenting oneself], a barely perceptible white cube on a white background. (fig. 5) The title is a quote from the beginning of the speech, where Kippenberger points out that he would not "represent himself" (Fraser, 2013: 41), while what he does in the following is nothing but an unrestrained, provocative self-representation. Another canvas

covered with vehement horizontal white brushstrokes, *Eine abstrakte Darstellung* [An abstract representation], refers to a passage toward the end of the speech in which Kippenberger answers his own question "What is fine art?" with the assertion "It's abstract art!" simply adding that the latter has been repeated and pushed through to the point of being unbearable. (Fraser, 2013: 48) Relating these two paintings might suggest that it is in the very white cube as exhibition space—where abstract painting has been exhibited *ad nauseam*—that Kippenberger now performs his egocentric attack on the art world's conventions, which then becomes the subject of Fraser's ironic comment about Kippenberger's ambivalent position within the institutional framework of art. Viewed in this light, Fraser's performance can be described as a meta-performance, a kind of mise en abyme or palimpsest, where one representation layer displays and comments on another.[7]

Fig. 5.

Andrea Fraser, *Keine eigene Darstellung*, 2001, oil and graphite on canvas, 70x70 cm, Installation component of *Kunst muss hängen*, Galerie Christian Nagel, 2001. Photo: Simon Vogel. Courtesy: Andrea Fraser and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/ Cologne/ Munich.

Jetzt kommt ein Künstlerwitz [Now it's time for an artist's joke] and *Schildkrötenwitz* [Turtle joke] allude to Kippenberger's habit of sprinkling weird, often racist and misogynistic jokes into his speeches. (fig. 6) *Jetzt kommt ein Künstlerwitz* refers to the fact that Kippenberger

Fig. 6.
Andrea Fraser, *Jetzt kommt ein Künstlerwitz*, 2001, oil and graphite on canvas, 65x65 cm, Installation component of *Kunst muss hängen*, Galerie Christian Nagel, 2001. Photo: Simon Vogel. Courtesy: Andrea Fraser and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/ Cologne/ Munich.

constantly announced jokes—one of which being the *Schildkrötenwitz*—but always deviated and leaped from one subject to another before actually telling two somewhat tasteless and discriminatory jokes. Fraser painted the sentence in white letters on a smudgy grayish background evoking a blackboard after the teacher has negligently wiped away the chalk writing. Thus, the painting humorously highlights the fact that the joke has disappeared (or never was there), while at the same time quoting Kippenberger's white paintings of the early 1990s, in which the artist asked a nine-year-old boy to write concise descriptions of his earlier works in white color on white canvas, invariably including the remark "very good." (Kippenberger 2016: 343) (fig. 7 and fig. 8) As Manfred Hermes pointed out, in these works Kippenberger "both addressed and out[did] the paradox that fairly grandiose assertions can be made on the basis of next to nothing." (Hermes, 2013: 35) Undoubtably, Fraser was intrigued by Kippenberger's critical mockery of abstract painting and the mechanisms whereby aesthetic and economic values are attributed to an artwork. This becomes even more explicit in *Ein Wettbewerb* [A competition]. The title evokes Kippenberger's comparison of the art world with the Olympic Games as a competition based on the principle

Fig. 7.
Martin Kippenberger, *Untitled (Weiße Bilder/ White Paintings)*, 1991, Varnish on canvas. 11 parts, Installationsansicht in der/ Installation view at Galerie Bärbel Grässlin, Frankfurt, 2003. © Estate of Martin Kippenberger, Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne. Photo: Courtesy Galerie Bärbel Grässlin, Frankfurt.

of a winner, a second-placed, and a third-placed.[8] Fraser recycled the motif of the yellow circle surrounded by a white ring from *Schildkröte*, which is reminiscent of the abstracted shape of a turtle. Now, the exclamation "TRY AGAIN!" inscribed in the yellow circle, transforms the abstract turtle into a badge encouraging the reader to be the winner next time. (fig. 9) In 1987 and 1994, Kippenberger produced his *Preisbilder* [Prize pictures], in which a numerical rank is added to the word *Preis*. Playing with the polysemic character of this word meaning both "cost" and "award," Kippenberger questioned the impact that rankings are having on the market value and the institutional success of paintings. Including a half prize (*1/2 Preis*), a consolation prize (*Trostpreis*), and even a painting without a prize (*preislos*), the *Preisbilder* reveal the arbitrariness of artistic hierarchies and "undermine the rankings they themselves postulate." (Kippenberger, 2016: 53) (fig. 10)

In addition, the six Smileys and Frownys, purchased by Kippenberger on the occasion of Fraser's first exhibition at Galerie Nagel, were distributed across the exhibition walls. In a sense, they commented on the exhibition's thoroughly ambivalent character: the ambivalence of Kippenberger himself, which is both revealed and taken to extremes by Fraser's performance, but also the ambivalence of the paintings, which, oscillating between formal minimalism and Kippenbergerian gestures, simultaneously ironically reflect and confirm the commodity character of art.[9]

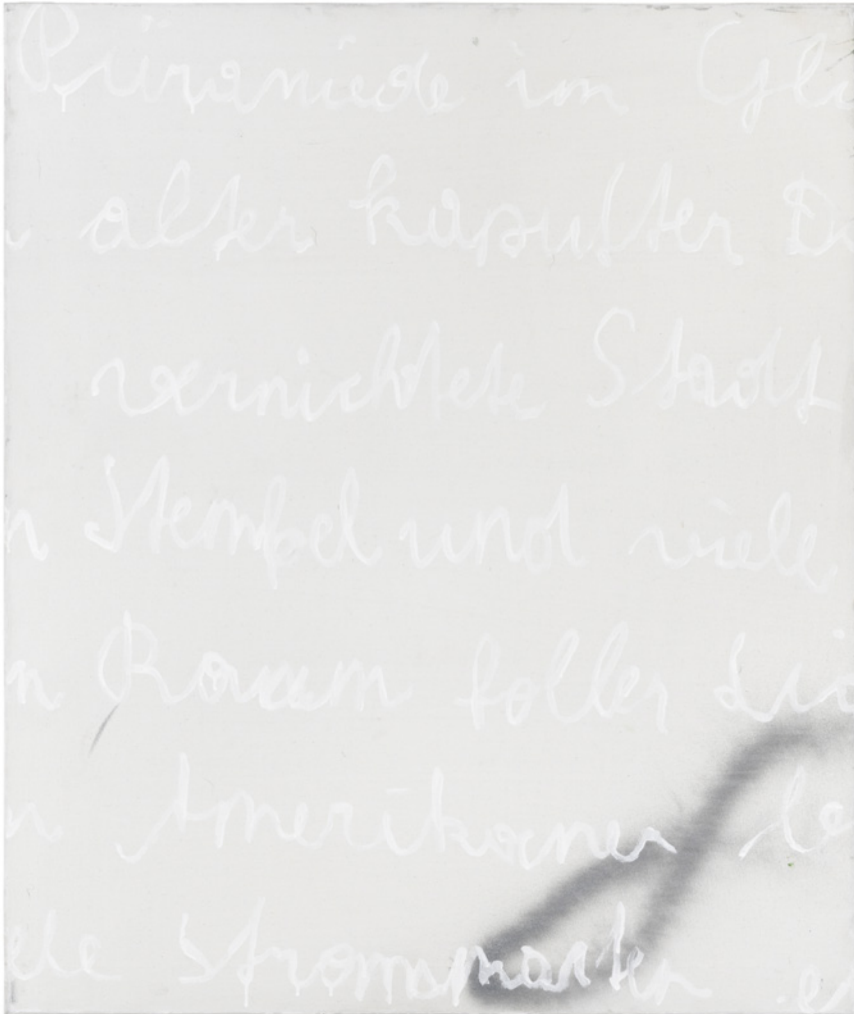

Fig. 8.

Martin Kippenberger, *Ohne Titel/Untitled (Weiße Bilder/White Paintings)*, 1991, Varnish on canvas, Detail of the 11-part installation, 120×100 cm. © Estate of Martin Kippenberger, Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne. Photo: Lothar Schnepf, Cologne.

Fig. 9.

Andrea Fraser, *Ein Wettbewerb*, 2001, oil and graphite on canvas, 65x65 cm, Installation component of *Kunst muss hängen*, Galerie Christian Nagel, 2001. Photo: Simon Vogel. Courtesy: Andrea Fraser and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/ Cologne/ Munich.
See also Plate 3.

Fig. 10.

Martin Kippenberger, *1/2 Preis /1/2 Price*, 1994. Oil on canvas. 120×100 cm. © Estate of Martin Kippenberger, Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne. Photo: Wolfgang Günzel, Offenbach, Courtesy Galerie Bärbel Grässlin, Frankfurt.
See also Plate 4.

Interjecting and Enacting

As Alexander Alberro rightly observed, Fraser's re-performance of Kippenberger's speech recalls strategies of appropriation art of the late 1970s and early 1980s putting into question "ideologies of authorship, originality, and subjectivity." (Alberro, 2007: 175) Alberro further parenthetically introduced the term introjection to describe Fraser's act of mimicry, thus opening up a psychological dimension of the performance. (Alberro, 2007: 175) Indeed, the deviations from Kippenberger's original speech, the semantic inconsistencies, and the defective pronunciation suggest that Fraser interpreted Kippenberger's performance as an enactment in the psychoanalytical sense.[10] According to Jacques Lacan, hesitations, bungled actions, slips of the tongue, and inaccuracies of the narrative are part of the analytic experience, for they are symptoms of unconscious formations of the subject. (Lacan, 1966/2006: 65, 84, 713) While such irregularities already frequently occurred in Kippenberger's speech, Fraser's reenactment overplayed them and thus revealed their grotesque and ambivalent nature. In psychoanalysis, enactment is defined as the partly unconscious living out of behaviors, conflicts, and fantasies within the boundaries of the analytic frame.[11] In Kippenberger's case, the boundaries were defined by the institutional environment within which he acted as an artist. Kippenberger was not intellectualizing or reflecting on his behavior inside a given social and psychological framework, but he was living it out as an affective experience that was, unlike the enactment in a psychoanalytical session, of course, also staged and controlled by himself. If Fraser reenacted Kippenberger's enactment, she ultimately performed a psychological act of introjection by adopting the thoughts, forms of behavior, or personality traits of another person. Yet, she did so as somebody who, within the art scene and discourse, occupied the exact opposite position of the German artist: first as an American artist who did not speak German, then as a woman involved in feminism, and, finally, as an institutional critic who tried to analyze and transform the very attitudes and behaviors that Kippenberger has carried to extremes.

Unlike Alberro, who compared Fraser's reenactment with Louise Lawler and Sherrie Levine's appropriational approaches, I would, rather, argue that *Kunst muss hängen*, as exhibition, is more akin to the above-discussed concept of de-propriation. If we understand the video not as an autonomous work, but as part of a multi-media installation, it appears as what I termed, concerning the 1990 exhibition, a critical montage based on the techniques of Verfremdung, decontextualization, and recontextualization of diverging representational formats and contexts—comprising actions, paintings, words, and aluminum disks. One of the most salient threads of Fraser's practice of critical montage

is the reflection on—and the acting out of—the ambivalences of the artist's position in the field of art. In the first Cologne exhibition in 1990, Fraser addressed the ambiguities of the conflicting interests on the cultural, political, and economic levels in the relationships between the USA and Germany since World War II. She, further, related these historical conflicts with her own "fishy" position as a young American artist of the institutional critique who was being discovered and promoted in Cologne, one of the most powerful art markets of the era. In *Kunst muss hängen*, Fraser stressed the psychological implications of artistic (self-)performance. Therefore, she linked the question of the artist's problematic position between freedom and determination to Martin Kippenberger, who, "as self-staging contradiction" (Simpson, 2006: 16) acted out an excessive version of artistic freedom that dialectically revealed itself as the very product of the social and institutional frameworks it endeavored to transgress. From this perspective, Fraser's aesthetics of critical ambivalence owes a lot to Kippenberger, of whom she said:

> The most difficult thing to do as an artist is to perform the inseparability of freedom and determination: to perform that contradiction without forgetting that you can't escape it through an act of will or reflection or a gesture of transgression. It's what I'm always trying to do but fear I'm failing. But I do think Kippenberger succeeded. (Fraser, 2003: 103)

Notes

1. I would like to express my warmest thanks to Galerie Christian Nagel Draxler and Galerie Gisela Capitain for giving me access to their archives, databases, and libraries. Special thanks go to Cornelia Zinken-Reinhardt and Maja Funke of Galerie Christian Nagel Draxler and to Lena Ipsen and Lisa Franzen of Galerie Gisela Capitain, for their availability, their kindness, and their skilful support. I also want to thank the collaborators of the library of Museum Ludwig, Cologne, who were of great help in finding documents about Fraser's exhibitions in Cologne. Finally, I thank Paula Cook for the careful proofreading of the text.
2. Germany was invited to join NATO in 1954 but only entered the organisation on May 5, 1955.
3. During the opening of the exhibition *Neue Realisten & Pop Art*, Block distributed handouts asking: "Please count how many German artists are missing from this exhibition." (Weier, 2015: 4)
4. This conflict between aesthetic pleasure and critical distanciation has been extensively discussed as part of the feminist discourse of the 1970s and 1980s by such writers as Mary Kelly, Griselda Pollock, Stephen Heath, and Victor Burgin (see Streitberger, 2020: 118–119). Fraser, who repeatedly acknowledged the influence of feminist theory and art on her work, was well aware of these discussions. (Alberro, 2005: xix)
5. In 1991, at a dinner following an exhibition by Kippenberger at the Kölnischer Kunstverein, Fraser witnessed one of the artist's infamous, never-ending speeches, which she

subsequently described as "a highly ritualized sadomasochistic enactment in which he alternately charmed and insulted, titillated and abused his supporters, all the while denying them food." (Simpson, 2006: 44)

6. Graw describes the audience's reactions in the following terms: "Most of those present looked down to the floor in embarrassment or secretly hoped that it would soon be over. Fraser tried to look like Kippenberger, wearing a suit in the style of the eighties with a white shirt, typical for Kippenberger, but in this clothing she also seemed a little lost. Her attempt to imitate the typical Kippenberger gestures was equally unconvincing. It was unmistakably Fraser who made a great effort to play Kippenberger. But it was precisely the intolerability of this gap that made the action so overbearing. It was only after Fraser had proved her tenacity and convincingly acted out a Kippenberger joke that relief and genuine amusement spread. People began to concede Fraser's presumptuousness, partly because exaggerated claims of this kind would probably have been entirely in the sense of Kippenberger, who for his part liked to violate sacrosanct values." (Graw, 2003: 78)

7. I am referring here to W. J. T. Michell's concept of metapicture (Mitchell, 1994).

8. At the commencement of his speech, Kippenberger declares: "*Olympic* competition. *Olympic Games*. The first, the second, the third. So, what we have here is a competition, of the most intimate kind, at the end of the world." (Fraser, 2013: 41)

9. Incidentally, these were sold individually, along with a copy of the performance on DVD.

10. In an interview, Fraser emphasizes that she prefers the term enactment rather than performance, due to its psychoanalytical implications. (Breitwieser, 2015: 15)

11. Hirsch defined enactment as "a living out of affective experience, usually by both parties in the analytic dyad, within the strict boundaries of the analytic frame." (Hirsch, 1994: 172) According to Douglas Frayn, "the action, in the enactment, has unconscious determinants and replaces remembering or reflection on the impulse." (Frayn, 1996: 194) Finally, Levine and Friedman define enactments as "constructed dramas that are jointly lived out rather than only spoken of." (Levine and Friedman, 2000: 73) Although there is no joint experience between a therapist and a patient in Kippenberger's or Fraser's performances, they correspond to the psychoanalytical definition of enactment as constructed drama enabling the living out of an impulsive, affective experience inside the boundaries of a strictly defined frame (the institution).

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Think-Crazy. Charles Simonds's Exhibition at Jürgen Schweinebraden's EP Galerie in East Berlin

Notes on a Cooperation Between a Private Art Institution in the GDR and the DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Program in West Berlin

Nóra Lukács

The current essay centers a case study of Charles Simonds's exhibition in 1978 in Jürgen Schweinebraden's (1938–2022) EP Galerie in East Berlin, challenging the notion of the impermeability of the Berlin Wall and highlighting the complexity of the entanglement of artistic activities among East and West Germany and the USA in the late 1970s. By reconstructing the context, networks, and modes of operation of this private, international, and thus atypical art platform in the GDR, along with Simonds's activities as an accomplished US artist within this context, the essay offers a micro-history providing additional substantiation for an under-recognized interconnectedness of the East Berlin art scene. It counters the dominant perception that artists in East Berlin were completely cut off from the West and thus uninformed—or that this was the case more generally with art from state-Socialist Eastern Europe—and sheds light on the particular way in which artworks and information were made accessible by Schweinebraden and diffused within an autonomous art scene under state-Socialist rule. By considering the lived realities in East Berlin, this text nuances these Cold War stereotypes, still rooted in part in the figurative terms of the official political communication of the era, such as the continued use of Winston Churchill's metaphor of an Iron Curtain in today's texts referring to state-Socialist Eastern Europe.

In 1977, New York sculptor Charles Simonds received a fellowship from the Berliner Künstlerprogramm des DAAD [Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst; German Academic Exchange Program] to live and work in West Berlin for a year. This international residency

program of the FRG operating in West Berlin is known in German by its acronym as BKP and in English as the DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Program. During and after his stay, he participated in *documenta 6* in Kassel; created ephemeral clay interventions, called *Dwellings,* in urban spaces in Kreuzberg, West Berlin and Bonn; and realized several institutional presentations in Münster, Bonn, Cologne, and West Berlin. In addition, he had an exhibition in a private apartment gallery run by self-taught gallerist Jürgen Schweinebraden in East Berlin. Just like the other institutional presentations in the West, this exhibition was also facilitated through networks of the BKP.

The trope of artistic isolation and measures to overcome it is found in (institutional) initiatives on both sides of the Berlin Wall in the 1970s, as is apparent from the archive of the BKP. The residency program that would later become known as BKP was founded in 1963 as Artists-in-Residence Program by the Ford Foundation, a private philanthropic organization in the United States, as an "instrument against cultural isolation" of West Berlin following the erection of the Wall (cf. BKP archive *Stichwortkatalog zum Berliner Künstlerprogramm des DAAD*, 1977). In 1967, this cultural exchange program was taken over by the Bonn-based DAAD, whose declared role was that of West German stimulator and financer of international approaches to the West Berlin art scene. In the climate of the Cold War, the politically determined aspiration of internationalizing the cultural scene in West Berlin meant not only presenting Western and US art movements, but also promoting nonconformist artistic practices, such as Conceptualism, performance art, and video from state-Socialist countries of Eastern Europe.

Between 1974 and 1980, Jürgen Schweinebraden, a psychologist with a day job as the head of the marriage, family, and sexual counseling center in Berlin-Treptow, ran an art gallery in an apartment at Dunkerstraße 17 in Prenzlauer Berg. The EP in the gallery's name may be an acronym for *erste private* (first private) or *einzige privat* (only private). The name refers to the condition in state-Socialist countries whereby the private sector, and especially the private art sector, was suppressed in favor of a centralized cultural policy. According to the gallerist, he established an exhibition space to foster communication among GDR artists and the public, providing a forum for self-expression and discourse for those who did not have regular access to the "Socialist public sphere." (Schweinebraden, 1996: 705) His self-appointed task was to spread information about art and to give his activities an international scope. In doing so, he made no distinction between Western international art and tendencies underrepresented in state institutions in Eastern European countries, such as the Eastern European neo-avant-garde. He first squatted the exhibition space by occupying a vacant apartment in an old, unrenovated rental building, where he and his partner, guitarist Barbara

von Wichmann-Eichhorn, had been assigned a one-room ground-floor flat in the second rear courtyard. They later legalized this second flat by paying rent for it, too. The flat the gallery was in was on the second floor of the building, accessible to the public but not visible from the street. (fig. 1) To activate the local alternative scene, EP Galerie simultaneously provided a platform for artists and musicians from the GDR, from fellow state-Socialist countries, and also from the West. Schweinebraden's gallery was characterized by a consciously enforced regularity and thus by the professionalism and institutional character of its program: every four weeks, a new presentation opened on white walls in the approximately 45 m2 space. The exhibitions were promoted through printed or stamped invitation cards and inaugurated by an opening event with an introductory speech by Schweinebraden, in accordance with his goal of disseminating information about various tendencies in contemporary art in the GDR. A jazz enthusiast, he also organized concerts in the exhibition space, primarily jazz and blues, and sometimes international acts, too, such as Terry Cooper or Lou Blackburn from the USA. But chamber music and new music were also present in the gallery, including some premieres by contemporary East German composers, such as Hans-Karsten Raecke (fig. 2), Paul-Heinz Dittrich, and Hermann Keller.

Fig. 1.

Hungarian artist Gyula Gulyás working on sculptures of paving stones in the courtyard of the EP Galerie building. Private archive / estate Jürgen Schweinebraden. Photo: Michael A. Klenner.

Fig. 2a.

Performing *Temperamenta* by Hans-Karsten Raecke in the exhibition Franz Anatol Wyss: *Printmaking* [Druckgrafik], in the EP Galerie, 1976. Private archive / estate Jürgen Schweinebraden, Photo: unkown.

Fig. 2b.

Concert *Blues in the Gallery* [Blues in der Galerie] of Terry Cooper, Texas, USA in the exhibition *Documents of Modern Art of Socialist Countries: 26 Slovak Artists* [Dokumente moderner Kunst sozialistischer Länder: 26 slowakische Künstler], 1977, Private archive / estate Jürgen Schweinebraden, Photo: unkown.

The Combination of Sources

The literature on the GDR's independent art scene notes EP Galerie's international orientation and its influential role in subsequent gallery projects; however, the precise implementation of creating a private institution has not been considered thus far. (Fiedler, 2013; Kaiser, 2016) My research draws from the archives of the BKP and the Stasi-Unterlagen-Archiv [Stasi Records Archive]—as Schweinebraden was under surveillance by the Ministerium für Staatssicherheit [Ministry for State Security] of the GDR. Additionally, I consulted private archives and legacies of artists and the gallerist to reconstruct the gallery program and to highlight the circumstances of its implementation against the backdrop of a restrictive art scene, shielded from external influences by the regime. I compare previously published statements by the gallerist (Schweinebraden, 1996, 1998a, 1998b; Schweinebraden and Leuthäußer, 2016) and Simonds (Simonds, 2015), as well as my recent interview series conducted with gallery participants (Jürgen Schweinebraden, Charles Simonds, László Beke, Dóra Maurer, István Haász, and Stephen Willats), with a combination of institutional archival sources—Stasi and BKP archives. Material and works regarding the EP Galerie were included in the 2023 exhibition *If the Berlin Wind Blows My Flag: Art and Internationalism Before the Fall of the Berlin Wall*, curated by the author and Melanie Roumiguière at Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, daadgalerie, Galerie im Körnerpark, and Akademie der Künste Berlin. Images in this text are party sourced from the exhibition.

The Exhibition: *Dwellings for Little People* in the EP Galerie

Simonds's exhibition *Wohnstätte für kleine Leute* [Dwellings for Little People] was on display at the EP Galerie from June 21–July 30, 1978. (fig. 3) Although various sources are available, such as the opening speech by Schweinebraden (Simonds private archive), the curatorial text displayed at the exhibition (Schweinebraden private archive), and the printed invitation postcard (Stasi records archive), no installation views exist. Therefore this exhibit cannot be reconstructed with complete accuracy. It most likely included photomontages from Simonds's latest project, *Floating Cities*, a utopian housing, economic, and societal model of seaborne architectural units conceived on the example of cellular organic systems, which Simonds worked on during his BKP fellowship and had first presented earlier that year at the Westfälischer Kunstverein, in Münster. The exhibition also featured photographs documenting Simonds's long-term concept of the *Little People* and the habitations he built in public, urban and institutional

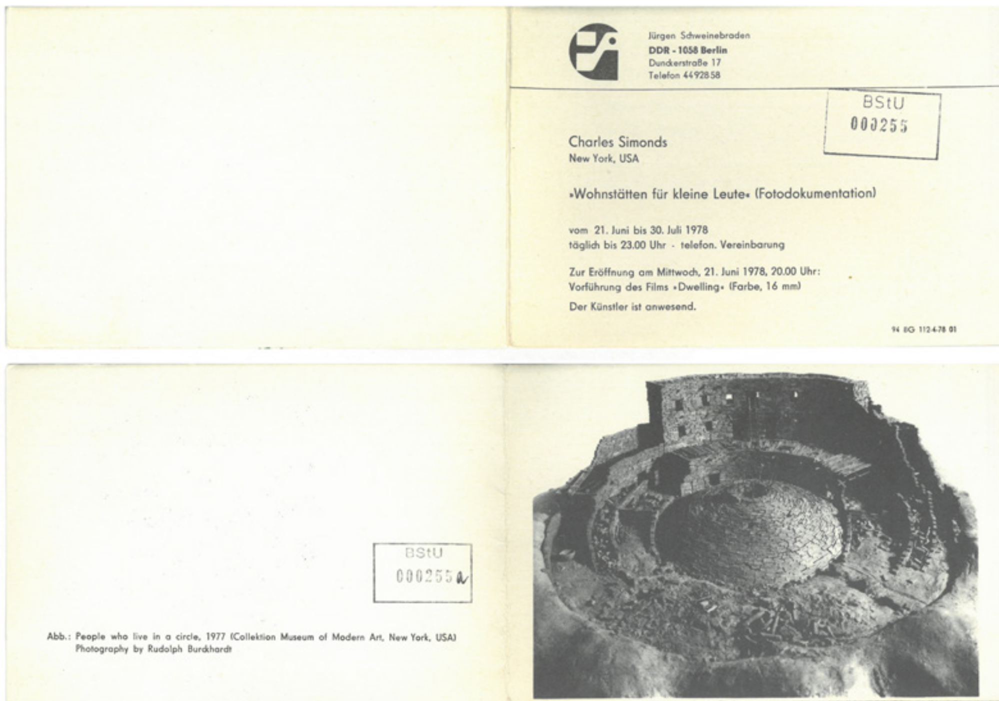

Fig. 3
Invitation card of Charles Simonds's exhibition at EP Galerie. *Stasi-Unterlagen-Archiv,* MfS AOP 7030-82 Bd.1.Seite 255-255a.

spaces for this imaginary civilization migrating through urban space and time, as outlined in the artist's accompanying narrative. Drawings were also on display, probably *Growth House* and *Proposal for Stanley Tankel Memorial Hanging Gardens* (1976, today in the collection of Frac Centre-Val de Loire, France). This latter proposal envisioned the transformation of two skeletal high-rise structures in Breezy Point, New York—abandoned during construction due to citizen efforts leading to permit revocation and the creation of a national park in the area—into a green living memorial, by covering them with wisteria rooted around the base and using them as a youth camp. Simonds's presentation in East Berlin occurred in the context of the rise of the GDR environmental movement in the late 1970s, and it coincided with Schweinebraden's personal focus on nature preservation issues and exploration of the relationship of individuals and society with their natural and built environment in his curatorial projects. These include the international mail art exhibitions *Umwelt & Gesellschaft* (1979) and *Individuum &Umwelt* (1980), as well as the graphic portfolio *Landschaft 1980*, which the gallerist realized with the participation of several international artists from his network, including British conceptual artist Stephen Willats and West Berlin figurative painter Maina-Miriam Munsky. (fig. 5) The idealist nature and exploration of alternatives to existing contemporary

social models and architectural conventions, based on his fantasies of the archaic, were an aspect of Simonds's work that was also likely to appeal to the program of this alternative gallery in a Socialist context. Films by the artist were also projected (fig. 4)—according to the invitation card, *Dwellings* (1972), the same five 16 mm films that had

Fig. 4.

Charles Simonds: *Landscape<–>Body<–>Dwelling,* 1973, filmed by Rudy Burckhardt, edited by Charles Simonds, 16mm film (digitized), color, sound, exhibited at *If the Berlin Wind Blows My Flag,* Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, 2023. Photo: Jens Ziehe / n.b.k.
See also Plate 5.

Fig. 5.

The graphic portfolios of the EP Galerie: *Grafik der DDR* (with works by Tomas Schmit, A. R. Penck, Robert Rehfeldt, Bernhard Blume) and *Landschaft 1980* (with works by Bettina von Arnim, Stephen Willats, Simona Runcan, Guillermo Deisler) exhibited at *If the Berlin Wind Blows my Flag,* Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, 2023. Photo: Nóra Lukács.
See also Plate 6.

been part of the supporting program at *documenta 6* the previous year (ct. *documenta* archive). An important component of the exhibition was Simonds's presence in East Berlin and his exchange with the audience about the films and his socially engaged practices in New York and, presumably, also the work he realized in West Berlin (author's unpublished oral history interview with Schweinebraden [2020/2022]). The creation of *Dwellings*, ephemeral structures realized on site on the street from small, unfired clay bricks in the architectural niches of the city, usually offered Simonds the opportunity to enter into conversation with the inhabitants of the neighborhood—on New York's Lower East Side or in West Berlin's Kreuzberg. Both were neglected residential areas with unrenovated rental buildings, often home to communities with experiences of migration. Kreuzberg, in the immediate vicinity of the Berlin Wall, became home throughout the 1970s to many families who had come from abroad to work in German factories. In the private mythology of the artist, which served as grounds for conversations about the pieces and beyond, the *Dwellings* were created for *Little People*, who migrate through the streets of different cities in the world, each *Dwelling* representing a different time and place in the history of their lives. In Kreuzberg, in autumn 1977, Simonds created *Dwellings* with the spontaneous support of children from the district. (Hohmeyer, 1977: 228–230) *Dwellings,* hiding in the architectural cracks of the city, present a particular way to transform human-made space and challenge traditional ownership of and access to art. Instead of working solely for the context of the art world, Simonds aimed to attract the people living in the neighborhood, whose imagination (and political awareness) the *Dwellings* might trigger. (Simonds cited in Molderings, 1978: 24) Unlike in Kreuzberg, in Prenzlauer Berg such *Dwellings* were not realized; the exchange took place in the gallery space, with an intentional art audience. As Schweinebraden said in his opening speech,

> The intention here becomes communication: not an artistic activity as a production for the deadhouse museum [Totenhaus Museum], but the association of a historical and social condition in which artistic activity was once a natural part of the practical-spiritual life of a collective. (Transcribed speech by Schweinebraden, 1978, Simonds private archive)

The term "deadhouse museum"—referring to Herbert Molderings's text on Simonds in the catalog of the Westfälischer Kunstverein—speaks simultaneously to Schweinebraden's dissatisfaction with the cultural institutional system of the GDR and with the program of its museums, which motivated his own urge for alternatives. This expression also correlates with theories and projects of institutional

critique predominant in the work of conceptual artists abroad, and with Schweinebraden's apparent awareness of it. A few years earlier, for example, Daniel Buren, as a fellow of the BKP, had staged a regatta on the Wannsee in West Berlin, placing striped fabric as sails for the boats. By employing the same prefabricated material (with equal-width stipes of white and a single color) since the late 1960s and painting over the stripes near the borders of the canvas in white paint, Buren's works related to their physical surroundings and call attention to the social and political dimensions of the contexts in which they were displayed. His Berlin project, *Sail/Canvas: Canvas/Sail,* framed by the artist as institutional critique with the statement, "Art hides in a museum. These canvases breathe fresh air. Et voilà." (Buren, 1975: n.p.), culminated in the exhibition of the striped works at the Akademie der Künste Berlin (West) as painted canvases.

Schweinebraden's particular interest in Simonds among many US BKP fellows and his call for art in his speech at Simonds's exhibition as "a self-evident component of the practical-spiritual life of a collective," which he saw realized in Simonds's works, testify to a leftist critique of contemporary society in actually existing socialism (and beyond).

Rather than further evaluate the GDR cultural agents' image of the US artist, I seek to focus on the inverse: the way Charles Simonds describes his experience in East Germany. A close look at the context and practical circumstances of Simonds's exhibition at the EP Galerie reveals a complication in the dominant perception of cultural exchange between East European state socialisms and the West. Although it has shifted through exhibitions and publications in recent years (Eisman, 2015), the perception of East German art before 1989 is often shaped by the image of a cultural embargo on tendencies outside the country (e.g., Mesch, 2007, Tannert, 2000). This suggests not only a lack of information about Western styles in the East, but also that Western (or in particular West German) artists would have had little interest in and no opportunity for exhibiting in the East. Simonds's recollection of his first meeting in Schweinebraden's apartment gallery in preparation for his exhibition disrupts this narrative:

> On a wall, just over a desk—in chartreuse fluorescent cursive script—there was a small plastic moiré panel with a single word embedded in it: 'THINK.' As I moved past, 'THINK' flicked to become 'CRAZY.' So, I went back and forth a few more times: Think-Crazy, Crazy-Think, Think-Crazy. It looked like the latest Los Angeles conceptual artwork. 'Think Crazy' also seemed a good dictum, necessary in the context of East Berlin, and it fit well with Jurgen's dedication to improving on Socialist ideas in East Germany by bringing in information from the West. (Charles Simonds, 'My First Memory of Jurgen,'

text presented in the exhibition *If the Berlin Wind Blows My Flag: Art and Internationalization Before the Fall of the Wall*, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, 2023)

The text object to which Simonds refers—a polished sign with an inscription and most likely covered with artificial leopard skin—is the work of Polish artist Marek Konieczny, exhibited as part of his solo show at the EP Galerie in 1976. A Conceptual, installation, and performance artist, as well as a mail art practitioner, Konieczny has since 1974 pursued the *Think-Crazy* idiom, "an artistic strategy aimed at experiencing the non-standard forms of behavior, emotions, intuitive reactions, corporeality and eroticism hidden under the guise of rationality." (Brewińska 2012). Without being aware of the author, Simonds compares the work of a colleague from the Eastern Bloc with works of US West Coast Conceptualism, offering a rare perception and comparison of art created in the context of state socialism.

Western and Eastern European Internationalism in the Context of the EP Galerie

In an expansion of the discursive framework of contemporary art in East Berlin, Schweinebraden collaborated multiple times with A. R. Penck (Ralf Winkler) and Robert Rehfeldt and worked together with artists from various cities in East Germany, including Hans Borsch, Eberhard Göschel, Peter Graf, Günther Hornig, Peter Makolies, and Gottfried Reinhard from Dresden; Dirk Burkholder, Brigitte Handschick, Manfred Kempfer, Harald Metzkes, Hans Ticha, Helmut Zielke, and Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt from Berlin; Dagmar Ranft-Schinke and Gerhard Klampäckel from Karl-Marx-Stadt (today Chemnitz); and TERK (Steffen Kuhnert) and Gil Schlesinger from Leipzig, among others.

In addition to solo shows, thematic group exhibitions, concerts, and discursive or artistic events, from 1975 onwards, Schweinebraden also produced printed matter for the gallery: offset-printed artist postcards and graphic portfolios with fine art print compilations by several artists. Selling these editions, such as the series *Graphic Art of the GDR I–VI* [Grafik der DDR I–VI], or thematic graphic portfolios, could contribute to covering the expenses of the gallery, while providing another means of disseminating art. For each portfolio, Schweinebraden invited approximately 15–17 artists from his network, including those in international positions. The participating artists produced works with different printmaking techniques, but in the specified format of 30×27 cm, which were then compiled into a portfolio by Schweinebraden, and all participants received copies of the collaborative work.

The annually published portfolio, *Grafik der DDR,* however, included not only prints by artists from the GDR, but also by those from West Germany. *Grafik der DDR II,* for example, featured Günther Uecker, Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt, and Helmut Zielke, while another portfolio from 1976 included works by Georg Baselitz, Johannes Blume, A. R. Penck, Robert Rehfeldt, and Tomas Schmit, and others (fig. 6). Following a lead in the Stasi Archive Records, two such portfolios of EP Galerie were identified in the collection of the Kupferstichkabinett [Museum of Prints and Drawings[of the Staatliche Museen [State Museums] Berlin (East), acquired in 1977. The museum, however, now part of the reunited Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, was previously unaware of these holdings. It is recorded in the *Findbuch* of the state-run institution that *Grafik der DDR II* and a portfolio titled *East-West-Mappe* were purchased directly from Schweinebraden, containing works by both West and East German artists —this was contrary to the usual acquisition policy of public institutions in the GDR. Several conceptual drawings by Hungarian artist Dóra Maurer, from her exhibition at EP Galerie, were also acquired in 1979, through “Galerie Jürgen Schweinebraden” [the Jürgen Schweinebraden Gallery] by the Kupferstichkabinett of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen [State Art Collections] Dresden, another public collection of the GDR (Findbuch zum Kupferstich-Kabinett, 02/ KK 0236). These acquisitions demonstrate that the transitions between “official” and “unofficial,” between nonconformist (and potentially subversive) and acceptable (possibly affirmative) art in the context of state-Socialist autocracies were more fluid than the formative narratives—both in art history and in the reflections of actors at the time—have so far suggested.

Fig. 6.
The cover of the portfolio *Grafik der DDR.* Photo: Nóra Lukács

Schweinebraden’s efforts in integrating not only inter-German, but also international perspectives into his gallery program and in promoting exchange parallel the motivations of the BKP in internationalizing the West Berlin scene, countering the sense of isolation due to its separation from the rest of West Germany. In 1975, shortly after its establishment, the EP Gallerie extended invitations to artists from Warsaw (e.g., Marek Konieczny), Bratislava, and Prague to exhibit their work in East Berlin.

Later, artists from Budapest were also invited. Based on the advice of local experts whom Schweinebraden had met during his touristic trips to fellow state-Socialist countries, such as László Beke in Budapest, or of colleagues who visited his gallery, such as Jiří Valoch from Brno, EP Galerie organized exhibitions and discursive-artistic events, featuring prominent nonconformist artists from Eastern European countries, including Petr Štembera, Dóra Maurer, Tibor Gáyor, KwieKulik (Przemysław Kwiek, Zofia Kulik), Jozef Jankovič, Gyula Gulyás, István Haász, Gusztáv Hámos, Dalibor Chatrný, and Jiří Valoch, among others. These artists traveled to East Berlin to participate in the exhibitions and events.

Sometime later, West German artists not only participated in the graphic portfolios, but also realized exhibitions and performances at EP Galerie, including Marcel Odenbach, Ulrich Erben, Otto Dreßler, Bernd and Hilla Becher, and Raffael Rheinsberg—as did artists from the West Berlin scene, including Wolf Kahlen, Tomas Schmit, and Dietmar Kirves (fig. 7). Cologne media artist Odenbach intended to work with video for his performance *Ich glaube, ich bin mir selbst verlorengegangen* [I Think I Have Lost Myself] at the EP Galerie in 1979, but as Schweinebraden stated to Odenbach, "Unfortunately, video isn't an option at my gallery. We lack almost all the prerequisites to do this and, of course, the resources." (Kacunko, 1999: 159) This changed in 1980. Since video technology could not be transported across the border from West Berlin, and since the necessary equipment in the GDR was only

Fig. 7.
Preparation for A. R. Penck (Ralf Winkler) exhibition *Übermalungen* within the exhibition Bernd and Hilla Becher: *Winding Towers* [Fördertürme], 1979. Private archive / estate Jürgen Schweinebraden.

available for institutional, not for private use, Schweinbraden leveraged his contacts as a state-employed psychologist to public institutions to obtain video technology. During his exhibition *Licht-Be-Zeichnungen/ Licht-Be-Schreibungen* [Light-Be-drawings/Light-Be-descriptions], West Berlin artists Wohl Kahlen organized a video performance together with Dresden artist A. R. Penck entitled *Attention, Recording* [Achtung, Aufnahme], addressing video surveillance. Penck and fellow artists, such as Jürgen Böttcher (also known as Strawalde), Thomas Ranft, and Erhard Monden improvised free jazz, while Kahlen observed the gallery space with a camera. The images of their surroundings were transferred to a TV screen, which Penck and others painted over with black, yellow, and red. Their use of the colors of the flags of both Germanies might suggest a wish for unity during a collaborative project between East and West German artists (fig. 8). From this cooperation, a video work by Kahlen (1991) and a graphic portfolio by Schweinebraden (1980) were released.

Fig. 8.

Photo documentation of the video performance *Attention, Recording* [Achtung, Aufnahme] by Wolf Kahlen with A. R. Penck and others in the EP Galerie, 1980. Private archive Wolf Kahlen. Photo: Jochen Melzian.

As can be read in parallel in the archives of the BKP and in the Stasi files, not only artists, but also gallerists, curators, and the general public visited Schweinebraden's openings regularly from West Berlin, including Lothar and Eva Poll, Ursula Block, Armin Hundertmark, BKP staff member Thomas Deecke, and Cologne gallerist Michael Werner, and others (ct. also Schweinebraden and Leuthäußer, 2016).

In addition to Simonds, other Western, international artists presented solo exhibitions, performances, and lectures at the EP Galerie, including Anna Banana and Lee Gaglione, also from the US, the Madrid-based artist's group *Equipo Crónicas,* as well as Robert Filliou, Roman Opałka, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Stephen Willats, and Armando. These latter artists were fellows of the BKP in West Berlin, either in the same year or in the previous year of their East Berlin gallery exhibition, so their exhibition at the EP Galerie was directly connected to their participation in the residency in West Berlin. Using institutional networks and resources, BKP staff organized exhibitions for their fellows in West Berlin and West Germany, providing them with institutional visibility and integrating them into the local discourse. Although only a few, rather cryptic written documents point to a direct cooperation between the BKP and Schweinebraden's gallery over the years, the BKP was in fact involved in arranging for fellows to exhibit there.

The Network

The Berlin Wall significantly slowed the flow of ideas, (art) objects, and artists across the internal German border, but it was not a hermetic barrier. Simonds visited East Berlin several times during his BKP stay, with a one-day transit visa subject to a fee. To obtain such a one-day visa, a minimum amount of Deutschmark had to be exchanged for GDR marks at the standard rate of 1:1, supporting the procurement of foreign currency for the GDR. Simonds arrived on a one-day visa for his first meeting with Schweinebraden, for the preliminary discussion of his exhibition. The situation on site and the gallerist's knowledge about Western trends and media did not match Simonds's assumptions about the seclusion of East Berlin:

> As a house gift, I had brought a copy of *Der Spiegel.* Recently an article had run about documenta VI, and the photo spread featured me and Joseph Beuys; I thought it would be a useful offering, since I imagined that Jurgen would have limited access to contemporary Western art. So, I was stunned to see on the sunlit floor a peacock-like display of the latest editions of *Artforum, Art in America, Art News,* etc.—laid out as if to prove to me he was totally au courant. (Simonds, 2023: n.p.)

The works for the exhibition, however—photos, drawings, and 16 mm films—were not transported from West to East Berlin by the artist himself, but by an employee of the Ständige Vertretung [Permanent mission] of the FRG in the GDR, in his diplomatic vehicle. The artist took the subway via the border crossing point in Friedrichstraße Station and again obtained a one-day visa. In 1972, due to the FRG not recognizing the GDR as a foreign country, instead of embassies, permanent representations were established in Bonn and East Berlin for diplomatic affairs. This so-called Ständige Vertretung commenced diplomatic activities in East Berlin in 1974 under the leadership of Günter Gaus. Soon a lively contact between Schweinebraden and the Permanent Representation was established through the initial mediation of artists and the BKP.

Already the fifth exhibition of EP Galerie was created in collaboration with an internationally renowned artist associated with Fluxus, Robert Filliou, in 1975. He was also well known in the Eastern European alternative scene for his promotion of mail art as an "eternal network." Filliou was a fellow of the BKP at the time. He was introduced to Schweinebraden by mutual friends in East Berlin, presumably Ruth and Robert Rehfeldt, who were active mail art artists. During the time Filliou lived in West Berlin, roughly coinciding with the founding of Schweinebraden's gallery, he was a regular visitor at Dunckerstraße 17 and, through his network, helped make the gallery known in the West. According to Schweinebraden, this international interest in turn resulted in recognition from the local scene (author's unpublished interview with Schweinebraden 2020/2022). The 1975 group exhibition in which Filliou participated at the EP Galerie, entitled *Homage to Robert Filliou*, featured his 9 m lithography edition *Research on the Origin*, along with works by local East Berlin artists Karlheinz Schäfer, Hans Brosch, Hartmut Bonk, A. R. Penck, and Robert Rehfeldt (ct. super8 film by Robert Rehfeldt: *Hommage für Robert Filliou*, 1975). In parallel with this collaborative presentation in East Berlin, Filliou inaugurated a solo show at the Akademie der Künste Berlin (West) featuring the same work, *Research on the Origin,* as a monumental textile installation. Consequently, the identical work was simultaneously on view in East and in West Berlin in the winter of 1975.

A closer look at Robert Filliou's fellow records in the BKP archive shows that he was the one who brought Thomas Deecke—an employee of the BKP under director Karl Ruhrberg and responsible for the visual arts program—into contact with Schweinebraden, in 1975. Deecke had asked for the contact on behalf of an acquaintance:

> A friend of […] mine, who joined West Germany's standing representation in East Berlin (it is something like a West German embassy in East Germany) a short time ago, is very interested in making

> contact in East Berlin with private people interested in art. I've told him that you have arranged a small private exhibition of your catalogue [the edition] in East Berlin. I would be very grateful if you could let me have the addresses of your acquaintances in East Berlin […]. Apart from that, I would be interested in the addresses, so that I could perhaps pass them on to one or other of our guests. (Letter from Thomas Deecke to Robert Filliou, May 7, 1975. Archiv BKP)

This letter shows the interest of other international artists ("guests," as BKP fellows were referred to by the institution back then) in visits to the independent scene in East Berlin. Unlike the Ständige Vertretung, the BKP, being a cultural institution, was rather careful and did not get directly involved in this politically sensitive matter of organizing exhibitions for its fellows in East Berlin, the way that they organized and subsidized the institutional projects of the fellows in West Berlin and West Germany. To return to Simonds, it was an employee of the Permanent Mission, probably Christian Nakonz, who was introduced to the artist by BKP director Karl Ruhrberg at a reception in West Berlin. This diplomat was the one who later established the contact between the artist and gallerist Schweinebraden. Nakonz was Gaus's personal adviser and, like Schweinebraden, a jazz lover, and he developed a friendly relationship with the gallerist. Not only visiting artists or colleagues, but also diplomats often brought and smuggled books and print media for Schweinebraden from the West. Schweinebraden claims that he was in a position to inform his audience in the GDR about international artistic phenomena and styles because he had a "certain knowledge advantage," which he had acquired for himself through books, exhibition catalogs, art magazines, etc., which he obtained from various sources, but probably mainly through the diplomatic immunity of his diplomat friend at the internal German border control. How Simonds's exhibition, and especially the projection of his films about his performances and building *Dwellings* in New York, came about was also documented in Schweinebraden's Stasi files: the 16 mm film projector was sourced from the US Embassy in East Berlin, and arrived at EP Galerie through the mediation of Nakonz and Schweinebraden's partners.

Think-Crazy

Numerous further examples from the context and the archive of the BKP demonstrate that the Berlin Wall and the so-called Iron Curtain, instead of being a hermetic barrier, can, rather, be perceived as a membrane: They represented a political and military divide but remained permeable to ideas, culture, and even artworks and individuals. On the other

hand, just as the Wall was facilitated by political power, overcoming its obstacles in the arts was also, to a certain extent, due to politics, emphasizing the inextricable nature of the two. While Schweinebraden maintained a private gallery with an international scope over seven years, he cooperated with official institutions in both the GDR and the FRG. While he occasionally sold works to public collections in the GDR, he also collaborated with the Permanent Mission of FRG and with artists and employees from the BKP through the realization of international exhibitions in East Berlin.

By November 1980, Schweinebraden was forced by the authorities to leave the GDR, and he relocated to the West Germany, but the example of Simonds demonstrates, in a two-way exchange of ideas across the Wall, that state-Socialist authorities were not completely able to withhold information from the public and control culture. As Simonds remembers, his opening at Schweinebraden's gallery "was the most enthusiastically attended of any that I have ever done. I had to push my way up a packed stairway, trying to point out that I was the artist." (Simonds, 2015: 67) Other exhibiting artists, such as Dóra Maurer, and the photos from the Schweinebraden archive, also attest to high attendance. (D. Maurer, personal communication, 2020) This shows that although the gallery operated semi-underground, on the edge of legality, its international content reached a significant audience and thus constituted a public sphere.

The necessity to *Think-Crazy* can still be read as a credo: not only for the independent art scenes operating under totalitarian, repressive, and underfinanced conditions, but also for later research and scholarship dealing with it. What impact the transport of information from the West to the East, and vice versa, had on the local scenes in Berlin, or how Schweinebraden's translation of the West German discourse and his connection to the East European neo-avant-garde informed his curatorial practice, might be the subject of further research based on this micro-history.

All translations from German by the author.

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Charles Simonds private archive.

Jürgen Schweinebraden private archive/estate.

Robert Rehfeldt, *Hommage für Robert Filliou*, 1975, Super 8 films (digitized), color, sound, 4:05, The Mail Art Archive of Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt and Robert Rehfeldt, Courtesy ChertLüdde, Berlin.

Belated Recognition: Critical Reception of East German Art in the United States Around 1990

Gregory H. Williams

Writing for *Artforum* in 1982, New York critic and art historian Donald Kuspit assessed the potential for the development of a contemporary art audience that could support an avant-garde art practice in a moment when the market threatened to turn art into mere entertainment: "The real audience, of course, is the truly critical audience—the audience which neither unequivocally accepts nor unequivocally rejects an art, and questions all myths it invents in its defense as well as interpretations that predispose it to a fixed meaning." (Kuspit, 1988: 500) Kuspit believed that such an engaged audience could be cultivated, and that artists retained sufficient belief in what he called "avant-garde criticality." (Kuspit, 1988: 496) Kuspit's optimism about the potential for radical, progressive art practices in early 1980s New York was not shared by other critics, including Benjamin Buchloh, who had already published an essay in *October* the previous year attacking what he argued was the authoritarian impulse behind the then-recent "return" to figurative painting in Europe. Buchloh worried that the Postmodern embrace of repetition might be tied to a historical tendency, one that recurred throughout the 20th century, to "cynically generate a cultural climate of authoritarianism to familiarize us with the political realities to come." (Buchloh, 1981: 40) Both critics, like many others at the start of the 1980s, sought to understand the political implications of painting's contemporaneous resurgence, but they came to radically different conclusions regarding the medium's capacity to stimulate critical public debate during the early years of President Ronald Reagan's conservative revolution in the United States.

A different but related set of debates unfolded almost a decade later, albeit against a more broadly transformative geopolitical backdrop. In September 1989, an exhibition of work by East German artists opened at the Busch-Reisinger Museum, at Harvard University, in Cambridge,

Massachusetts. Titled *Twelve Artists from the German Democratic Republic*, the show closed on November 5, four days before East German citizens demanded to cross the border into the West, ultimately ushering in a new era in US–German cultural exchange, not to mention the global ramifications of this transition. (fig. 1) Though Peter Nisbet, the exhibition curator and catalog editor, could not have known it when writing his catalog introduction, the show opened on the very cusp of these major geopolitical transformations: "We must surely look forward to a time when it will seem quite natural and expected for a museum to present the work of living artists from the German Democratic Republic, just as it would search out interesting work from any part of the world." (Nisbet, 1989: 11) The essay includes several such qualifying remarks,

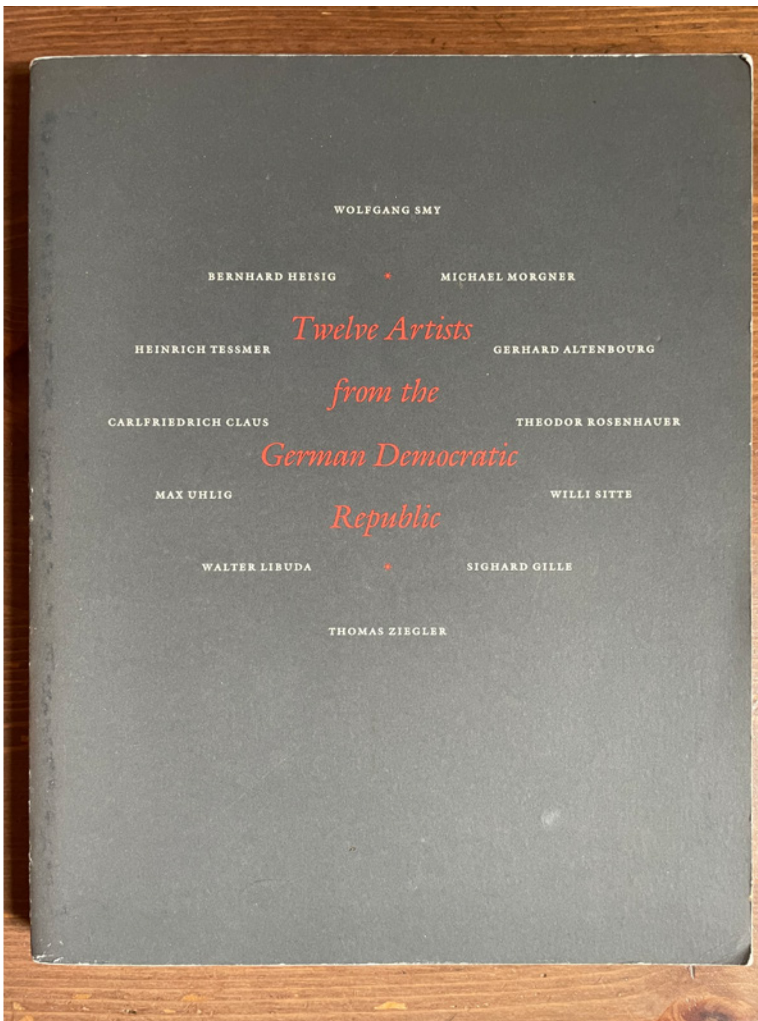

Fig. 1.

Cover of exhibition catalogue, *Twelve Artists from the German Democratic Republic*, ed. Peter Nisbet (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1989).

testifying to the fact that art institutions in the United States had an uneasy relationship with contemporary East German art right up to the moment of the country's dissolution, an event that transpired suddenly and far more rapidly than most people could have imagined.[1] Looking back on it today, the phrasing implied that the exhibition was an attempt by a museum in a Western, democratic country to grapple seriously—in the face of anticipated skepticism in the USA—with works produced by artists living in a Communist, authoritarian system on the other side of the Iron Curtain. The exhibition subsequently traveled to three additional venues across the USA during the first half of 1990, a period when the GDR was in the process of being dismantled before merging with the Federal Republic of Germany under the conservative chancellorship of Helmut Kohl.[2]

By 1991, a new debate had emerged in the unified Germany as (West) German artists and critics took conflicting positions toward the work of artists from the former East Germany who up to that point had had only limited visibility outside of the GDR. The so-called *deutsch-deutscher Bilderstreit* (the German–German painting controversy, which reflected continung East-West divisions in Germany after unification) revealed complex layers of disagreement and resentment within both the art press and the mainstream media.[3] Collusion with the East German state culture apparatus was among the primary suspicions directed toward artists who had stayed (whether by choice or not) in the GDR until the dismantling of the Berlin Wall. Some artists, most notably Georg Baselitz, who had left the East for the West in 1957, were vocal in their dismissal of artists such as Bernard Heisig, Wolfgang Mattheuer, and Werner Tübke as mere hacks (Baselitz called them *Propagandisten*, or propagandists [Hecht and Welti, 1990: 70]) who had pursued careers in the GDR that tacitly, or even directly, supported the repressive East German government. These two debates about the relations between painting and politics bookended the long 1980s: one a US-based argument regarding the politically progressive potential for European (primarily West German and Italian) figurative painting, and the other a dispute internal to the newly united Germany that nevertheless recalled critical positions articulated across the Atlantic a decade earlier. In both instances, writers, curators, and artists reacted, in both positive and negative terms, to the powers and dangers of myth and ideology in prompting the public to think critically about contemporary art and politics.

In an effort to tease out unexpected connections between these critical exchanges, this essay will explore the *Twelve Artists* exhibition and its accompanying catalog as productive points of departure in taking a wider look at the reception of art from the GDR by critics and curators in the United States during the 1980s. Two of the catalog's essays were

written by prominent American art historians Dore Ashton and Peter Selz, who, in their respective accounts, identified experimental tendencies and argued for the "survival" of Expressionist approaches in the work of East German artists. A third essay was written by a GDR "insider," Hermann Raum, who elucidated the challenge involved in conveying the working context of artists in East Germany to an audience more familiar with Western conditions. The conflicting temporal structures that emerge in these essays—on the one hand, artists looked ahead as they charted new terrain and, on the other, they revived old paradigms as they sought past models for the present—also marks much US critical coverage in the 1980s of work by contemporary West German artists. Of course, the Cold War context made it challenging for US-based critics to develop nuanced interpretive models for East German art that few had seen. Critical responses in the USA to *Twelve Artists* demonstrate that, perhaps unsurprisingly, the American audience was more predisposed to give the GDR artists the benefit of the doubt in comparison with the skepticism and outright dismissal of their work as it began to be exhibited more regularly in Germany during the early 1990s.[4] At the same time, the critical terms used by both the catalog contributors and the critics responding to the four iterations of the traveling show suggest that opinions were split along related lines on both sides of the Atlantic.

Given the timing of the exhibition's opening, it is worth noting that the Busch-Reisinger collaborated with several East German state institutions to bring the paintings and works on paper to Cambridge.[5] Edgar Peters Bowron, then the Director of the Harvard University Art Museums, mentioned in the catalog preface that in the late 1980s the Busch-Reisinger Museum had been "expanding its contacts with the German Democratic Republic." (Bowron, 1989: 7) Any US-based critics who were inherently skeptical about the idea of direct collaboration with the GDR cultural authorities might have been alarmed by Bowron's earnest praise of his museum's cooperation with several organizations, including the Zentrum für Kunstausstellungen [Center for Art Exhibitions] of the GDR and individual academics and curators in East Germany. Indeed, the consistent tone throughout the catalog is one of respect toward their GDR counterparts, even taking account of the acknowledgment by Nisbet that colleagues in the USA expressed "skepticism," but also "much curiosity," as he and his team prepared the exhibition. (Nisbet, 1989: 11) They also enlisted the expertise of Hermann Raum, who represented the artists' union of the GDR, an institution that served as just the kind of gatekeeper for artists' careers that Western figures such as Baselitz saw as entirely compromised. Raum would be invited to contribute an essay to the catalog, signaling that the Busch-Reisinger team felt it important to tap into local expertise in making their artist selections. Of course, it is also possible

that Raum blocked access to certain artists, favoring those who aligned with government priorities, or at least did not actively undermine them. However, when assessing the works in the exhibition from today's perspective, one can see that the selections present a broad spectrum of styles, from abstraction to figuration, that countered the notion that artists in the GDR of the late 1980s were still only producing renditions of state-mandated Socialist Realism.

Fig. 2.

View of gallery installation for "Twelve Artists from the German Democratic Republic," Warburg Hall, Fogg Museum and Arthur M. Sackler Museum, September 16-November 5, 1989. Photographs of the Harvard Art Museums (HC 22), folder 4.7. Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Pictured are works by Heinrich Tessmer, with one image by Wolfgang Smy in the background. See also Plate 7.

Installed in two separate buildings of the Harvard University Art Museums (within the Busch-Reisinger Museum galleries of the Fogg Art Museum and in the Arthur M. Sackler Museum), the exhibition consisted entirely of two-dimensional works (paintings, prints, watercolors, etc.). (fig. 2) Visitors unfamiliar with contemporary East German art would likely have been surprised by the variety of formal approaches represented by the invited artists, all of whom were actively producing work at the time. The curators included images by Bernhard Heisig, one of three artists cited caustically by Baselitz in 1990 as an example of someone who has "worked on reproductions, on reconstructions, but has not invented anything" [my translation]. (Hecht and Welti, 1990: 70) But they also selected works by Gerhard Altenbourg and Carlfriedrich Claus, two artists who have been rightfully treated by critics and scholars over the past several decades as being, in the words of Sarah E. James, "animated by the most radical legacies of the interwar avant-gardes." (James, 2022: 15–16) Several other artists included in the show do not have substantial reputations outside of (or even inside of) Germany today. At the time, though, when considered collectively, the works on view presented an unexpectedly diverse range of methods and motifs.[6] Slightly predating the outright rejection of the work of East German artists by some of their West German neighbors during the period of the GDR's collapse, the *Twelve Artists* exhibition offered a template for taking these artists seriously while remaining alert to the possibility of compromise under state repression. As the growing scholarship on art of the GDR published since 1990 has shown, it was always too simplistic to write off the work of so many artists as mere government propaganda or facile copying of Modernist tropes. And yet the terms used to describe the art's specific qualities and the artists' relationship with the GDR political structures were still up for debate in 1989.

It is instructive to look closely at the three main essays in the *Twelve Artists* catalog. Written by Hermann Raum, Dore Ashton, and Peter Selz, each offers a set of perspectives that reveal an attempt to find common interpretive ground while acknowledging difference. Nisbet,

Ashton, and Selz traveled to the GDR to visit studios and select works in preparation for the exhibition. Raum, who notes in his essay that he had first met Ashton in 1986, in Lisbon, at the Conference of the International Society of Art Critics, speaks directly to the inevitability of compromised understandings of East German art by US-based curators and art historians who only gain access to the artists and their work during short research trips: "I saw first-hand how this selection came about through previous knowledge, maybe even bias, through surprises, discoveries, disappointments, disagreements, and mutual persuasion." (Raum, 1989: 41) Raum was known as a caricaturist, with a notable practice of mocking West German culture, and he had published regularly on art in the West from his position as Vice President of the Verband Bildender Künstler [Association of Visual Artists] of the GDR from 1977 to 1988. He also taught art history, between 1962 and 1989, at the Universität Rostock [University of Rostock], Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst Leipzig [Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig], and the Weißensee Kunsthochschule Berlin [Weißensee Academy of Art Berlin], in addition to having served as director of the Kunstmuseum Moritzburg Halle (Saale) [Art Museum Moritzburg Halle (Saale)], making him a valuable guide to contemporary East German art but also a figure with close connections to the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands [German Communist Party] cultural apparatus. To the extent that the American curators brought preconceptions to their East German studio visits, one must also assume that Raum had his own agenda, though he at least appeared capable of self-reflection in his catalog contribution.

Raum was skeptical that his American colleagues would be capable of comprehending the social, political, and cultural context of the GDR in the 1980s. This lack of awareness would only be more pronounced among viewers of *Twelve Artists*, leading Raum to claim that the selection of works could not have been driven by a desire to shed light in the USA on East German everyday life and political culture. He wrote, "a description of the contextual factors and functions of the current state of the arts in the GDR would stand *beside* the exhibition and would not actually aid in the act of interpreting it." (Raum, 1989: 42) From our perspective today, at a time when museums are so attuned to providing educational resources for their audiences and enhancing accessibility, such an outlook seems unrealistic. How could the curators of *Twelve Artists* bring works by a group of almost unknown artists to the USA and then leave the audience in the dark about the sociopolitical context in which they operated? For Raum, the works chosen by the curators would be most productively analyzed for their formal qualities, thereby allowing for commonalities to be found between images made under two opposed political systems.

Fig. 3.

View of gallery installation for “Twelve Artists from the German Democratic Republic,” Warburg Hall, Fogg Museum and Arthur M. Sackler Museum, September 16-November 5, 1989. Photographs of the Harvard Art Museums (HC 22), folder 4.7. Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Pictured are works by Michael Morgner (L) and Carlfriedrich Claus (R).

Fig. 4.

View of gallery installation for “Twelve Artists from the German Democratic Republic,” Warburg Hall, Fogg Museum and Arthur M. Sackler Museum, September 16-November 5, 1989. Photographs of the Harvard Art Museums (HC 22), folder 4.7. Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Pictured are works by (L to R) Max Uhlig, Gerhard Altenbourg, and Michael Morgner

Raum was tasked with offering a local perspective on the artists included in the exhibition, and he opted to group them according to their stylistic affinities. However, he did so with the caveat that it is important “to avoid the professional bad habits typical of the critic and art historian, ever ready to classify the artist according to school and stylistic mold.” (Raum, 1989: 42) He suggested that several artists—Altenbourg, Claus, Michael Morgner, Heinrich Tessmer, and Max Uhlig—could be discussed together due to their shared interest in “graphic structures” and “a language of gestures and transformations of the material world,” but he declared any overlap with Western styles, such as Abstract Expressionism or *Informel,* to be superfluous, stating instead that these works of art each possess their own distinctive *Inhaltlichkeit* (translated, somewhat awkwardly, in the catalog as “thematicism”). (fig. 3 and fig. 4) Raum walks a conceptual tightrope here: he wants to avoid reducing the works to mere illustrations of their sociopolitical environment, but he also declines to make direct comparisons between them, preferring to see each artist as “unique not only among their peers, but among all the other countless possibilities as well.” (Raum, 1989: 43) Placing such a premium on uniqueness calls to mind one of the core tenets of Western Modernism in its embrace of aesthetic autonomy. Raum’s essay thus speaks to the US audience in two specific ways: it eschews contextual explanation that might give the impression that East German artists’ formal options were in any way limited, and it makes the work seem more relatable to the Harvard museum’s public through a loose appeal to Western individualism. Whether this strategy cultivated the kind of critical audience that Donald Kuspit had called for in the early 1980s seems doubtful, though it certainly allowed visitors to draw their own conclusions about the works’ significance.

Less uncomfortable making stylistic connections with past art forms, the art historian Peter Selz took the opposite approach in his catalog essay. Selz, who had been widely known since the late 1950s as a proponent of modern art both in his teaching (at Pomona College, in Claremont, California, and later at the University of California at Berkeley) and in his curatorial work (he was a curator of painting and sculpture at MoMA in New York from 1958 to 1965), argued that the unfamiliar art of East Germany could be understood by comparison with earlier forms of German Expressionism. Born in Germany to Jewish parents in 1919 and having fled Nazi Germany to the United States at the age of 17, Selz did not harbor the same suspicions toward figurative painting that Buchloh did in the early 1980s. For Selz, the artists in the Busch-Reisinger exhibition evoked earlier modes of Expressionist painting not for lack of ideas or due to formal conservatism, but because their "attitude to the usable past is not post-modern in the sense of replication, appropriation, or simulation." Instead, they treated "earlier Expressionist art as an appropriate vehicle on which to construct their own formulations." (Selz, 1989: 24) Here we can note a partial convergence between the essays by Raum and Selz: both writers foregrounded individuality as key features of East German painting, as they carefully avoided suggesting that the artists were censored or otherwise coerced by the GDR cultural authorities. However, Selz was more willing to address the everyday context in which the artists worked, although he focused on pedagogy and academic training rather than on any subject-matter or content restrictions imposed by the government.

Selz presented a historical lineage of GDR art that established a direct connection with German Expressionists of the early Weimar Republic, some of whom "allied themselves to the revolutionary Spartacists in opposition to the newly established Republic." (Selz, 1989: 26) In particular, he saw Dresden as a primary location for politically progressive painting during the 1920s, when New Objectivity artists such as Karl Völker, Otto Griebel, Otto Grundig, and Curt Querner developed themes that supported "revolutionary solidarity." (Selz, 1989: 29) Though he acknowledges that Expressionism was denigrated during the early years of the GDR, when the new regime promoted realist visual languages that spoke to a public presumably uninitiated in modern art, by the mid-to late 1960s, artists were able to experiment with a wider range of styles. This phase had already benefited several of the artists included in the Busch-Reisinger exhibition. Selz notes that Berlin's Nationalgalerie purchased six of Theodor Rosenhauer's paintings in the 1960s. One of them, *View of Cemetery Court in Winter, East Radebeul* (1965), on view in the *Twelve Artists* exhibition, would seem to accord with a state directive following the well-known series of conferences on culture held in the East German city of Bitterfeld (giving the name *Bitterfelder Weg* to

this phase of the late 1950s and early 1960s) to encourage the incorporation of more everyday scenes in literature, theater, and the arts, with the aim of educating the proletariat. Here a traditional village scene is rendered with loose paint handling, and the earth tones are livened up with the yellow of the figure's coat and the stripe on the church in an image that would appear to leave behind the overtly propagandistic aims of Socialist Realism.

In his essay, Selz also notes that a younger artist such as Carlfriedrich Claus (born in 1930, almost thirty years after Rosenhauer) made works that celebrated Communism, but that he did so in a semi-abstract visual idiom that supported his own utopian hope for a future Communism that had little to do with the state-enforced version he had grown up with. Selz points out the long-winded and evocative title of the print—*Conjunctions, Unity and Struggle of Oppositions in Landscape, related to the Communist Problem of the Future, Naturalization of the Human Being, Humanization of Nature* (1976/1982)—and states, "These messages are not decipherable in any conventional sense, not even by means of the codes of modernism." (Selz, 1989: 43) He thus concluded his essay by placing final emphasis on the singularity of art from East Germany, whose artists, he claims, "remain molded by the great sensual, realist, and moral traditions peculiar to the art history of the GDR." (Selz, 1989: 50) Taken together, these two quotations capture what can only be described as the exhibition organizers' fervent hope that art from the GDR would not only be taken seriously by an American audience, but would also possibly offer aesthetic models that could counter some of the cynicism associated with the market-oriented output of many figurative painters operating in West Germany and in the USA during the 1980s.

In her catalog essay, which took the more casual form of a series of personal recollections about her relatively recent acquaintance with art from the GDR, Dore Ashton wrote about the experience of being a "cultural tourist" in East Germany. (Ashton, 1989: 15) Ashton, who had already published widely on Abstract Expressionism as well as more recent painting styles, noted that her initial impression upon seeing works of art from the GDR for the first time in an exhibition in London in the mid-1980s was that they compared favorably with images by New York–based Neo-Expressionists: "In the London show, I sensed that the acts of retrieval were, as the philosophers might say, *lived*. When I finally got to the GDR and saw a wider selection of works, I had no reason to modify my initial reaction."[7] (Ashton, 1989: 16) During studio visits on subsequent trips to East Germany, she encountered paintings such as those by the relatively young Walter Libuda (born in 1950, he was a student of Bernard Heisig's in Leipzig), which gave "a great impression of confident, lusty aesthetic freedom." (Ashton, 1989: 17) And while she made note of the artists' awareness of Communist doctrine (she

met with Willi Sitte shortly after he had returned from a visit to a congress in the Soviet Union), she placed far greater emphasis on the vitality and experimentation that she witnessed than on any overriding concerns about the artists being influenced by official dictates. As a "cultural tourist," Ashton may have been taking a diplomatic position, especially since she, Nesbit, and Selz had received support from GDR state cultural authorities, but her enthusiasm still reads as genuine today. Ashton's account seems to be driven by an earnest sense of discovery of relatively unknown work that had been mostly inaccessible outside of the GDR. It is also clear that she felt welcome during her visits to these unfamiliar cities and studios. The numerous clippings from exhibition reviews of *Twelve Artists* at the four museums held today in the Harvard Art Museums Archives generally share Ashton's open-minded attitude toward this unfamiliar art, with Robert Taylor writing in *The Boston Globe* that the exhibition "discovers creative embers still smoldering beneath the ashen history of the last 40 years." It is noteworthy that in his review, published in September 1989, a mere six weeks before the Berlin Wall was breached, Taylor already refers to East Germans leaving their country "by the thousands." (Taylor, 1989: 56) As the exhibition toured the country after completing its run at Harvard, critics would be able to point to the far more consequential process of cultural and existential displacement that unfolded in the GDR over the following months.

In a recent essay discussing exhibitions of East German art in the USA between 1989 and 1991, German art historian Christian Saehrendt aptly describes *Twelve Artists from the German Democratic Republic* as "the first and last representative exhibition of contemporary art from the GDR in the United States." (Saehrendt, 2021: 186) The simple truth of this statement suggests that curators and critics in the West missed an opportunity to engage more extensively with these artists, while the international art audience might have benefited from a clearer picture of both connections and oppositions between image-making practices across the political divide. Perhaps such an awareness would have led to a more critical art public, at least in the West. The late critic and art historian Stefan Germer wrote in 1994 that the history of art from the GDR only really began to be written after the country had ceased to exist. In other words, this history was, in the first half of the 1990s, being established by the "victors." Germer concluded his essay by writing, "Because of course the history of the Western gaze belongs to a history of art in the GDR" [my translation].[8] (Germer, 1999: 193) The past thirty years have borne this claim out: we have a much stronger awareness today of the range of artistic activities that were possible during the existence of the German Democratic Republic. At the same time, it is still easy to fall back on outdated binaries that linger from the Cold War, or to support the nostalgia (whether it was ironic or not) for the

East (*Ostalgie*) that began to emerge in the West in the late 1990s. Then again, one does not want to ignore the vastly different working conditions in the East and the West. Without knowing that they were planning their show during the waning days of the GDR, the curators of the *Twelve Artists* exhibition made a first attempt, despite many limitations, to start writing this history.

Notes

1. For a compelling account of the political developments leading up to the fall of the Berlin Wall, see Sarotte, 2009: 11–47.
2. After its run at the Harvard University Art Museums, from September 16 to November 5, 1989, the exhibition appeared at the following institutions: Frederick S. Wight Art Gallery, University of California, Los Angeles, December 5, 1989, to January 21, 1990; University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor, February 9 to March 25, 1990; Albuquerque Museum, New Mexico, April 8 to June 17, 1990.
3. A good source for texts, both primary and secondary, about the *Bilderstreit* is Rehberg and Kaiser, eds, 2013.
4. A typical headline from the local US press read, "Light from Behind the Iron Curtain: East German Artists Show Free Spirits." (Clark, 1990: G1)
5. The exhibition also received financial support in the United States from the National Endowment for the Arts and from the European Friends of the Busch-Reisinger Museum.
6. The full list of artists is as follows: Gerhard Altenbourg, Carlfriedrich Claus, Sighard Gille, Bernhard Heisig, Walter Libuda, Michael Morgner, Theodor Rosenhauer, Willi Sitte, Wolfgang Smy, Heinrich Tessmer, Max Uhlig, and Thomas Ziegler. Only in recent years have art historians begun to acknowledge the many important contributions made by women artists to the East German art scene.
7. The London exhibition was *Tradition and Renewal: Contemporary Art in the German Democratic Republic*, which originated at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, United Kingdom, in 1984.
8. In Germer's original German text, the sentence reads: "Denn natürlich gehört zu einer Geschichte der Kunst in der DDR auch die Geschichte des westlichen Blicks."

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Franz Erhard Walther in New York

Erik Verhagen

Franz Erhard Walther was the first student in his class at Düsseldorf's Kunstakademie to try the New York adventure. He lived in the city full-time between 1967 and 1970. His stays became more sporadic between 1970 and 1973, although he kept a workspace there until 1986. The fact that he decided to make his first journey in 1967 may seem surprising, considering that this was when his work gained greater visibility in his native Germany, where his career spanned from the second part of the 1950s. In January 1967, Heiner Friedrich offered Walther a solo show at his Munich gallery. Walther had met Friedrich a few months prior through Sigmar and Karin Polke. He selected some pieces from his ongoing project *Der erste Werksatz* [The first workset] for the exhibition. In May 1967, with the help of Sigmar Polke and others, the artist "activated" some twenty of these pieces in the auditorium of Düsseldorf's Kunstakademie before an audience that included Blinky Palermo and Joseph Beuys. This took place a mere month before he left Germany. It is worth noting that, in the 1960s, very few German artists of his generation moved to New York at least not those intent on "making a career" of their art. Hans Haacke is one such exception. Eva Hesse and Hanne Darboven, artists from Hamburg—a city that would also play an essential role in Walther's career—are two others.

But since Hesse's personal and family destiny was linked to the Third Reich and the migratory flows it generated in the 1930s, she cannot be considered a German artist living in the United States. In contrast, Darboven traveled to the United States in 1966 at age twenty-five and stayed there until 1968. We should note that since Darboven came from a wealthy bourgeois family, any risk inherent to her New York exile was somewhat less significant than the risk to Walther, who was raised in a middle-class family of bakers in the remote town of Fulda. These two artists are brought together because both crossed paths with Walther but did not socialize with him during their concordant New York years. Walther only came into contact with Darboven in Hamburg in the mid-1970s. Walther met Hesse in 1964, before his New York stay, on the occasion of her visit to Düsseldorf's Kunstakademie.

However, he did not try to contact her while he was in the United States. According to Walther, who recalls the 1964 encounter in his graphic novel *Sternenstaub*, Hesse was too "inspired" by the works seen during her visit: "takes a long, long look at my works/asks me about my intentions/Wants to know how I arrived at the forms/tell her my story […] then to my great astonishment in 1968 at an exhibition in New York at the 'Fishbach Gallery' I see just how influenced Hesse had been by the works she saw in Düsseldorf."[1] (Walther, 2011: 199)

It is essential to clarify the type of work Walther was engaged in when he met Hesse and what pieces he produced during his New York stay, closely linked to his aforementioned magnum opus: *The First Workset*. Including fifty-eight items made between 1963 and 1969 by the artist's first wife, Johanna (née Friess), who remains active by his side to this day, these fabric-based pieces embody the kind of participatory and practicable aesthetic that blossomed in the 1960s in the northern and southern hemispheres and which entails that "activators" are used to put the objects into action. In other words, artworks only become artworks once they have been physically activated, even if Walther's aesthetic also enables us to focus on a "mental" projection, the specifics of which will not be detailed here. Notably, twenty-one of the fifty-eight pieces were made between 1963 and 1966 and thirty-seven between 1967 and 1969. While we cannot precisely determine which of the twenty pieces dated 1967 were designed in New York, it is safe to say that more than half of the *Workset* was created in the USA. Hence, for the most part, this is a New York undertaking that was completed in that city. In New York, the artist also conceived one of *Workset*'s most significant extensions and expansions: the *New York Book,* part of the *Werkzeichnungen* [Work drawings] family. Numbering in the thousands, presented in double-sided format, and often produced in two stages, in parallel with the elaboration of the ensemble of the pieces or subsequently, these drawings convey the artist's sensations regarding the "objects" of the *Workset* and their use(s). Out of approximately 5000 drawings in this family—their diffusion would render any precise enumeration almost impossible—1000 materialize in the *New York Book*. This further demonstrates Walther's work ethos and capacity during his stay, considering he produced other drawings alongside those included in the book.

The purpose of this essay is not to embark on a reading of Walther's work and its sub-families but, rather, to question the motivations that spurred him to settle in the United States, the repercussions of his stay, and the benefits he derived from it. Indeed, what could have driven a "provincial" artist such as Walther to move to New York in the last third of the 1960s? Before answering this question, we should look back at the place occupied by the United States in the artist's intellectual sphere. During his youth and the early years of his career, Walther showed

little interest in American culture. Unquestionably, like many German artists of his generation, he was impacted by the 1959 *documenta* (which was the second edition) and the Abstract Expressionist and Colorfield artists featured in the show. Walther's references in his formative years were primarily European, ranging from German informal painting to Piero Manzoni and, more unexpectedly, Bernard Buffet, whose work and personality fascinated him. We also know that the young Walther had already been immersed in American art since 1958 through Galerie Junger Kunst in Fulda, which was directed by an art instructor in an American military barracks who supplied art magazines imported from the United States to his protégés. There is little doubt that Walther must have continued browsing these magazines during his studies in Düsseldorf. However, unlike Gerhard Richter or Sigmar Polke who were also students in Karl Otto Götz's class at the time, Walther was not particularly close to Konrad Lueg, the group's "informer" in terms of American references. Nonetheless, some of his early works evoke or refer to the United States without the latter really being an influence.[2] (fig. 1)

Fig. 1.
Franz Erhard Walther, *New York*, 1958. Pencil and tempera on thin cardboard, 59,2×83,9 cm © Franz Erhard Walther. See also Plate 8.

So why New York in 1967? It should be noted that the artist had envisaged this migration as early as 1964–1965. However, the trip was delayed due to his family circumstances, i.e., his son Lehmann's birth. According to the artist, his chances of breaking through in Europe were minimal at the time. This may have been true for 1964–1965, but his 1967 exhibition at Friedrich's Gallery partly challenged this view. Come what may, at that time, the "practicable" dimension of his work was, in his view,

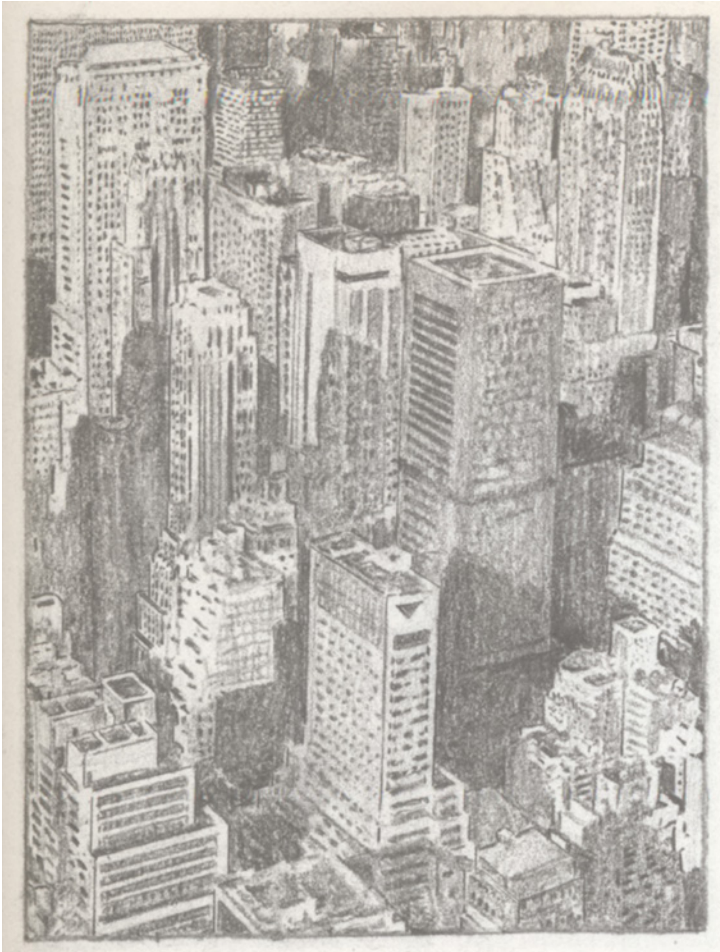

Fig. 2.
Page 787 from Franz Erhard Walther, *Sternenstaub*, 2009, Pencil on paper Courtesy Archive Franz Erhard Walther Foundation © Franz Erhard Walther.

totally misunderstood. (Bianchini and Verhagen, 2016: 569–581) Paris was no longer on the agenda, and for Walther, the only city capable in the second half of the 1960s of responding favorably to the aesthetic established a few years earlier was New York. Without being able to justify this intuition, Walther also claims that the impetus for his move came from Barnett Newman's two paintings that the artist "experimented with" in Kassel in 1959. In an (unpublished) interview I undertook with Walther during the summer of 2023, he described them as "generous, experimental, radical, and daring." Most importantly, he felt that these two paintings were engendered by a New York context that was more "open" than that of the different European art centers. It is worth noting that he had the opportunity to meet the Colorfield painter in 1969, a few months before Newman's death. One thing is certain: According to the artist, it was not the art of his generation that encouraged him

to migrate to the United States, although Walther claims to have witnessed the birth of Minimal art. While he had heard about Kynastone McShine's *Primary Structures* exhibition at the Jewish Museum in 1966, in his eyes, the much-publicized incipient Minimal art was nothing more and nothing less than "ein aufgeblasener Konstruktivismus" (puffed-up constructivism).[3]

Whatever his true motivations were, Walther knew almost no one when he set foot in New York City in 1967. (fig. 2) His only access to a green card was Götz's letter of recommendation stating that Walther would make an excellent art teacher. Still ill at ease in English and affected by a particularly unfavorable exchange rate with the Deutschmark, the artist experienced a difficult adjustment period marked by almost extreme isolation for the first few weeks. That is, until his old classmate, Konrad Lueg (Fischer)—to whom he was not particularly close—came to visit him as he was prospecting before launching his gallery. Fischer reportedly gave Walther's contact details to Kasper König, who was already living in New York, with the following introduction: "I saw a guy from Düsseldorf again, a nutcase, who makes stuff out of long fabrics that you have to put around your neck. He claims it's art." "What does he do for a living?" König asked. "He decorates pies in a pastry shop," was the answer—which was the case. "Well, that's interesting"[4] came the reply. Thus, König contacted Walther, demonstrating that art history is sometimes based on unlikely criteria and arguments. During their first meeting, at the end of two hours of discussion and a few work activations, notably of the *Elfmeterbahn* [Eleven meter path] or *Rolle* [Roll] (the titles have evolved) (fig. 3)—the long fabrics—the overenthusiastic König suggested publishing a book about his work. Walther gave a different version of events of the genesis of his meeting with König in a cross-interview with König and Peter Weibel, on July 12, 2012, more than ten years before our discussion, asserting that he had met his future publisher through a young curator who will be discussed later, Jennifer Licht. (Weibel, 2014: 31) Ultimately, whether the meeting occurred through Fischer or Licht is irrelevant. Still, the hypothesis that Walther's career was consolidated in New York partly via German contemporary art figures and networks is concurrently ironic and seductive. "I had no expectations at all," remembers König,

> when I got to know the works. I was very taken aback by Walther's workset and enthusiastic about the idea of action emerging and reflecting on itself [...] The spontaneous decision to publish a book was only possible because my brother Walther had opened his first bookshop, and we had decided to get involved in publishing together. Walther studied law and then decided to become a bookseller. So, the first book published by the publishing house was OBJEKTE, *benutzen*.

Fig. 3.

Franz Erhard Walther and Kasper König activate *Elfmeterbahn* (Eleven-Meter Path), 1964, no. 5 from *1. Werksatz* (First Work Set), 1963–69, on a roof in New York, 1967. Courtesy Archive Franz Erhard Walther Foundation © Franz Erhard Walther. Photo: Barbara Brown.

> That's why 'Cologne–New York.' That's how the publishing house got off the ground. I remember taking the manuscript of *OBJEKTE, benutzen* with me on the plane. There was no e-mail or fax, and traveling to New York was a trip around the world. So, the only cheap option was to fly with Icelandic Airlines via Luxembourg. I then made a stopover in Reykjavik. I stayed there for four days and visited Dieter Roth, the great champion of artist books. But it was crazy back then, such an undertaking. (Weibel, 2014: 32)

According to Peter Weibel, *OBJEKTE, benutzen* is "one of the most important artist's books" and an "Incunabulum of art history." (Weibel, 2014: 8) The title is difficult to translate. Literally, it means "objects, use"—not objects *to* use (which would be Objekte *zu* benutzen), but objects, use, with that enigmatic comma in the middle. Once again, the book is linked to the *Workset* and offers a kind of vade mecum. And once again, we should stress that some two-thirds of the ensemble had been completed when the book was published. Commenting on forty of the fifty-eight pieces, it includes "diagrams" and photographs taken by Barbara Brown, Kasper König's companion at the time. The pieces are invariably photographed in inert and activated mode. The most frequent presentation mode combines photographs of the piece folded, unfolded, activated, and complemented by a commentary. Almost every piece is the subject of at least three photographs tracing its "evolution" from an inert state to one of use. Mostly taken in König and Brown's New York loft on East Broadway, which Walther eventually took over, they feature the artist and/or his associates, including Kasper König, Robert Ryman (fig. 4), Paul Thek, and James Lee Byars. The "diagrams" are based on constantly renewed page layouts and typographical variations. In this respect, the significant difference between the first draft and the final result in terms of graphic design is worth noting. Handwritten by Walther, the draft texts were eventually typed and redesigned for the final layout, which used a typography inspired by the graphic style of New York dailies (*New York Daily News*, *New York Post,* and *The New York Times*). Undoubtedly, the original version was deemed too subjective and not in keeping with a "Conceptual" neutrality.

As such, the book obviously had no resonance in the United States when it was published in 1968. Written and published in German, it had little chance of success and was exclusively and discreetly distributed in George Wittenborn's art bookshop on Madison Avenue. We shall soon address its reception in Germany. But first, we shall look at the local impact of the encounter with König, which allowed Walther to integrate into the New York art scene at last. This integration was unquestionably done through the intermediary of the well-connected Brown, who was friends with Sol LeWitt, with whom she had collaborated in 1964 on

Fig. 4.
Robert Ryman activates Franz Erhard Walther, *Nachtstück* (Night Piece), 1965, no. 8 from *1. Werksatz* (First Work Set), 1963–69, at Walther's Loft on East Broadway, New York 1968. Courtesy Archive Franz Erhard Walther Foundation © Franz Erhard Walther. Photo Barbara Brown.

his Muybridge piece.[5] She was also close to John Copley, through whom Marcel Duchamp discovered Walther's work before calling his young colleague to arrange a meeting, which did not, in the end, occur, because Duchamp passed away in France in early October 1968. The cast of the activations is in itself representative of Brown's spectrum of networks, the presence of Robert Ryman, Paul Thek, and James Lee Byars at the photo shoots having obviously and ultimately served as a guarantee for and endorsement of Walther's undertaking. Byars probably took this endorsement a little too far, as he did not hesitate to openly draw inspiration from Walther's pieces for his *Four in a Hat*, on which Walther stumbled, not without dismay, in *The New York Times* in September 1968. (Glueck, 1968) Through Brown, Walther finally met Richard Artschwager, Donald Judd, Dennis Oppenheim, Walter de Maria, and Willoughby Sharp. It is worth recollecting that the work activations staged by the artist for this photographic campaign were only the third significant occasion, after Aachen in 1966 and Düsseldorf in 1967, during which the artist publicly put his *Workset* into perspective.

Although the book not widely circulated in the United States when it was first published, its loft-like atmosphere, inevitably exotic to a European readership, greatly impacted the German art community.[6] Launched with great fanfare by König in Cologne, with the support of Rudolf Zwirner, the work quickly aroused the interest of various institutions—such as that of Paul Wember in Krefeld—and the national press, as attested by an article by Bazon Brock published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in February 1969, which helped propel the artist onto the German scene. (Brock, 1969: 32)

After König and *OBJEKTE, benutzen*, we now turn to the role played by Jennifer Licht in Walther's American years. As a young curator at New York's MoMA, Licht had already had the opportunity to meet him at Düsseldorf's Kunstakademie, in 1966, via Zero artist Heinz Mack. Through Rudolf Zwirner, Licht learned that Walther had moved to New York. They struck up a friendship, and, in 1969, she invited him to participate in the *Spaces* exhibition, which she curated.[7] Inaugurated on December 30, 1969, the false collective exhibition—where each artist had his own independent space—featured works by Larry Bell, Robert Morris, Dan Flavin, Michael Asher, and the Pulsa group, as well as Walther's *Workset*. In other words, with the exception of Walther, the show exclusively featured artists from the East and West Coasts of America. Walther was the first German artist of his generation to be given such a high profile at this prestigious museum. (fig. 5) Indeed, many of his peers from Kunstakademie Düsseldorf had to wait several years before seeing their work on the walls at MoMA and even then were often included in large group shows. This was the case for Gerhard Richter, Blinky Palermo, and Sigmar Polke. The only German artist (of his generation) exhibited before Walther—once in 1962 and once in 1964—was Hans Haacke, who showed some pieces in prominent group exhibitions dedicated to prints. *Spaces* was obviously an excellent calling card for the young Walther. After *OBJEKTE, benutzen*, the artist reaped the reward in Germany. For instance, the diary he drew from this experience, *Tagebuch, Museum of Modern Art*, was published by Heiner Friedrich in Munich, in 1971. (Walther, 1971)

Fig. 5.

Activation of Franz Erhard Walther, *Zehn Sockel (Ort Distanz Richtung)* [Ten Pedestals (Place Distance Direction)], 1969, no. 57 from *1. Werksatz* (First Work Set), 1963–69, at the Museum of Modern Art New York, 1970. Courtesy Archive Franz Erhard Walther Foundation © Franz Erhard Walther.

But *Spaces* did not lead to a royal road for Walther in New York. It is also possible that the artist paid the price for some opportunities he had missed before participating in the MoMA exhibition. For example, he reportedly snubbed Ivan Karp, who wanted him to integrate Leo Castelli's gallery. According to Walther, Karp did not understand his work. Most significantly, he refused to participate in Robert Morris's December 1968 exhibition in Castelli's warehouse. Walther's rebuttal was driven by a double dispute. First, Walther criticized Morris for using the invited artists for self-promotional purposes. Second, as had been the case with Hesse, Morris was, according to Walther, too greatly "inspired" by a visit to his studio in Düsseldorf in 1964 on the occasion of an exhibition at the Schmela Gallery.[8] Yet Walther was most impressed by the dance performance of Robert Morris and Yvonne Rainer organized by the Kunstakademie on October 24 1964, which prompted scholar Luisa Fink to affirm that the openness of the new dance discovered by the artist that evening contributed to encouraging him to move to New York. (Fink, 2024: 105)

What conclusions can we draw from the New York years? Once again, in the short term, the artist's sojourn in the United States did not enable him to exploit locally—at the time or in the immediate future—the opportunities and networks he built between 1967 and 1969. But from 1968 onwards, following the publication of *OBJEKTE, benutzen*, Walther's name circulated in Germany, and his works sold. Moreover, curators and heads of institutions flocked to meet him in New York or Fulda, where he had to return every summer with Johanna to produce his pieces, deeming the quality and availability of fabrics in the United States unsatisfactory. In 1969, Walther had many opportunities to present his *Workset* pieces in Europe in monographic presentations—such as at the Museum Haus Lange in Krefeld—or in group shows, such as *When Attitudes Become Form*.[9] He was no mere beginner when Jennifer Licht invited him to take part in *Spaces*, a major event if only for one reason: It was the first time the *Workset* had been presented in its entirety, although some of the pieces—which were folded since they had been produced for the outdoors—could not be activated. It was an opportunity for Walther to revel in meeting Robert Motherwell, Mark Rothko, and Barnett Newman at the opening. It was mainly Newman who seemed to take a genuine interest in his work. But Walther's smugness also stems from the fact that many of his contemporaries came, taking part in or attending the activations organized almost every day of the exhibition: Steinbach, Tuttle, Serra, Schapiro, and—above all—Walter de Maria, with whom he would become close friends. However, his American stay gradually came to an end. In his *Sternenstaub*, after the last significant "American" pages devoted to *Spaces*, New York evocations became increasingly rare after 1970.

Following the MoMA highpoint, the Hochschule für Bildende Künste invited the artist to Hamburg, initially as a guest lecturer. He eventually joined the school as a full professor in 1973, after having faced strong objections from extreme left-wing groups, who originally accused him of being a CIA agent. As had been the case with the MoMA exhibition, this first educational experience coincides with the end of a chapter: that of the *First Workset*. The ensemble, a multiple, was eventually acquired in 1973 by the Kaiser Wilhelm Museum, Krefeld, and by the Landesmuseum, Darmstadt, via the legendary collector Karl Ströher. An incomplete version was acquired only much later in the United States, in 1978, by the DiaArt Foundation via Heiner Friedrich (it was completed in 2010). The initial intention was to set up a site specifically dedicated to the work in New York. But the idea was abandoned, and the *Workset* was put into storage.

Thirty years after acquiring the (incomplete) set, Yasmil Raymond, who had been introduced to the work by Thomas Hirschhorn, exhumed it for presentation at the Dia Beacon Museum between 2010 and 2012. It was only then, thanks to the interest of a new generation of art historians and curators in the United States, such as Christian Rattemeyer, that Walther's work was shown again in a monographic institutional context in New York. This took place forty years after the first complete presentation of the ensemble at MoMA. It should be noted that at the time, in 1970, there was almost no critical response to the *Spaces* presentation of the *Workset*. The only (late) exception to this critical misfortune was a feature on the artist in issue 4 of the magazine *Avalanche,* in 1972. (Walther, 1972) Finally, it should be stressed that on one of the rare occasions when this work was commented on in the United States in the early 1970s—in Phyliss Tuchman's article on American art in Germany in *Artforum*—it was abridged to a restrictive "political" dimension. (Tuchman, 1970) Could this have something to do with the highly ironic— and since renamed—*Politisches Objekt*, which is part of the *Workset*?

How can we justify the poor critical reception of Walther's work in the USA in the 1960s and 1970s? The answer may be found in the supposedly "European" character of the works evoked by at least two commentators, both artists. The first is Joseph Kosuth, who is quoted as saying of the *Workdrawings* that they were "too private, too European, it smells too much." (Verhagen, 2014: 64) The second is Peter Halley, author of several stimulating texts on Walther. In a 2014 review for *Artforum*, Halley noted that

> Franz Erhard Walther's 1960s work with the body hasn't received the same critical attention as that of Chris Burden or Bruce Nauman, perhaps because it never engaged issues of popular culture. What's

> more, Walther himself was seldom the protagonist. Instead, he choreographed other bodies in scenarios akin to the experimental dance of Trisha Brown and Yvonne Rainer. His sensibility is emphatically European, and the photographs of these performances recall the brooding existentialist films of Ingmar Bergman. Walther's work eerily evokes the diametrically opposed experiences of phenomenological awareness and Foucauldian control. (Halley, 2014)

Halley refers in this review to Timm Rautert's early 1970s photographs of German landscapes "staged" by Walther for the activation of his pieces. These images witness an atmosphere that is perhaps not so much Bergmanian as Antonionian. Most importantly, they reflect the infinite spaces more suited to the *Workset* than the photographs taken in the East Broadway loft, with its host of guest stars.

To summarize, despite the exceptional presentation during the winter of 1969–1970 at New York's MoMA, Walther's life in New York initially yielded results in Germany. In time, the reception and dissemination of his work would prove more "balanced" on both sides of the Atlantic—once again through the intermediary of European and German figures, though not exclusively. Whether it be through Heiner Friedrich, who made sure that the *Workset* became part of the DiaArt Foundation; Thomas Hirschhorn, who introduced Yasmil Raymond to the ensemble; or Christian Rattemeyer, who ensured that it was once again shown at MoMA, in 2012. Conversely, American curator Elena Filipovic organized an exhibition of Walther's work at the Wiels, in Brussels, in 2014. In retrospect, no one can predict what would have become of this work, in Germany and eventually in the United States, if Konrad Fischer had not piqued Kasper König's curiosity by telling him about the "nutcase who decorates pies" in a New York pastry shop.

I wish to thank Paula Cook for her careful copyediting.

Notes

1. *Sternenstaub* was originally published in 2009 by Ritter Verlag, in Klagenfurt. This translation is taken from a 2011 publication devoted to *Sternenstaub*.
2. This is the case for some of his early *Wortbilder* from the late 1950s. For example *New York* (1958).
3. Franz Erhard Walther, unpublished interview with the author, summer 2023.
4. Franz Erhard Walther, unpublished interview with the author, summer 2023.
5. Sol LeWitt, *Muybridge I and II (Schematic Representations of Interior View)*, 1964.
6. We also find this exotic dimension in many of the photographs of activations taken on New York rooftops. This is particularly true of the *Eleven Meter Path* activation of 1967, by König and Walther.
7. *Spaces*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, December 30, 1969–March 1, 1970.
8. Franz Erhard Walther, unpublished interview with the author, summer 2023.

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Schütte's *Amerika* (1975)

A Nietzschean Critique of US Conceptualism in Düsseldorf

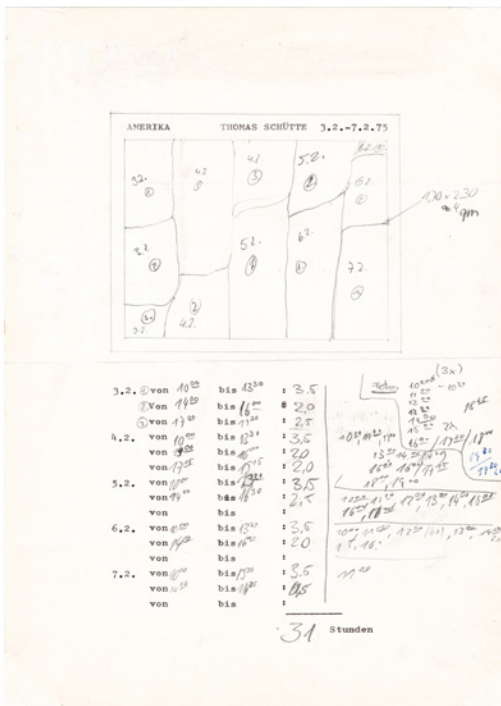
Stefaan Vervoort

In early 1975, Thomas Schütte, then a student at Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, filled in with pencil a rectangle outlined on a large sheet of drawing paper. Working from the upper left to the lower right, Schütte, for five days straight, blackened amorphous areas of the rectangular surface until it was fully covered. Above it, in stencil type font, he drew his name, the production dates, and the work's title, *Amerika*, which alluded to the pencil brand used to make the work and to the travel grants awarded as a proof of excellence to academy students (Schütte did not get the grant that year but received one later, in 1978). During the biyearly presentation of student work, or *Rundgang*, the young artist staged the work's production for his peers, teachers, and the interested public to see, and he photographed the process systematically—often portraying himself in the act of penciling, taking a rest, or casually smoking. (fig. 1) The result was presented alongside an A4 typescript showing the areas penciled in and a plastic bag holding used pencil stubs. (fig. 2) Another A4 listed the hours spent drawing and the materials used, and it held a Friedrich Nietzsche quote as well as a statement by the artist (fig. 3):

> AMERICA = an emotive term, irritation, a deliberately created ambiguity to provoke questions!
> To discover AMERICA anew
> EVERYTHING needs discovered anew: PAINTING, 'ART,'
> ONESELF foremost!
> To become a machine, in order to free one's head.
> Not WANTING to paint pictures, but just PAINT!
> Pictures always emerge.
> No ART SKILLS; they only veil everything.
> To begin from the very start: CURIOUSLY AND VACUOUSLY STUBBORN!
> To destroy all pictures, especially those in the HEAD.
> To examine and transgress limits.
> The discovery, uncovering, experience as ends in themselves.
> After the discovery, the sadness, because everything always needs to be discovered anew! [my translation] (Schütte, 1975a: n.p.)

Fig. 1.

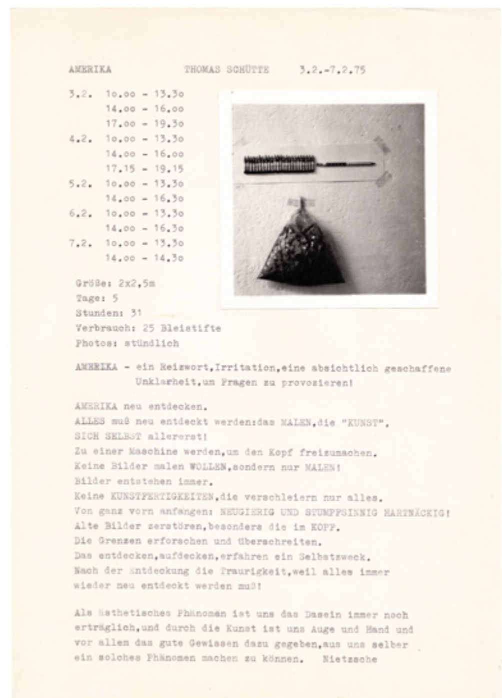
Thomas Schütte, *Amerika*, 1975. Pencil on paper, 210 × 240 cm. Photograph at the *Rundgang* at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, February 1975. © SABAM, Belgium (2024).



AMERIKA THOMAS SCHÜTTE 3.2.-7.2.75

3.2.	von 10.00	bis 13.30	: 3.5
	Von 14.00	bis 16.00	: 2.0
	von 17.00	bis 19.30	: 2.5
4.2.	von 10.00	bis 13.30	: 3.5
	von 14.00	bis 16.00	: 2.0
	von 17.15	bis 19.15	: 2.0
5.2.	von 10.00	bis 13.30	: 3.5
	von 14.00	bis 16.30	: 2.5
	von	bis	:
6.2.	von 10.00	bis 13.30	: 3.5
	von 14.00	bis 16.00	: 2.0
	von	bis	:
7.2.	von 10.00	bis 13.30	: 3.5
	von 14.00	bis 14.30	: 0.5
	von	bis	:

31 Stunden



AMERIKA THOMAS SCHÜTTE 3.2.-7.2.75

3.2. 10.00 - 13.30
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14.00 - 16.00
17.15 - 19.15
5.2. 10.00 - 13.30
14.00 - 16.30
6.2. 10.00 - 13.30
14.00 - 16.30
7.2. 10.00 - 13.30
14.00 - 14.30

Größe: 2x2,5m
Tage: 5
Stunden: 31
Verbrauch: 25 Bleistifte
Photos: stündlich

AMERIKA - ein Reizwort,Irritation,eine absichtlich geschaffene Unklarheit,um Fragen zu provozieren!

AMERIKA neu entdecken.
ALLES muß neu entdeckt werden:das MALEN,die "KUNST".
SICH SELBST allererst!
Zu einer Maschine werden,um den Kopf freizumachen.
Keine Bilder malen WOLLEN,sondern nur MALEN!
Bilder entstehen immer.
Keine KUNSTFERTIGKEITEN,die verschleiern nur alles.
Von ganz vorn anfangen: NEUGIERIG UND STUMPFSINNIG HARTNÄCKIG!
Alte Bilder zerstören,besonders die im KOPF.
Die Grenzen erforschen und überschreiten.
Das entdecken,aufdecken,erfahren ein Selbstzweck.
Nach der Entdeckung die Traurigkeit,weil alles immer wieder neu entdeckt werden muß!

Als ästhetisches Phänomen ist uns das Dasein immer noch erträglich,und durch die Kunst ist uns Auge und Hand und vor allem das gute Gewissen dazu gegeben,aus uns selber ein solches Phänomen machen zu können. Nietzsche

Fig. 2.

Thomas Schütte, *Amerika*, 1975. Typescript and pencil on paper, 21 × 29,7 cm (8.3 × 11.7") . © SABAM, Belgium (2024).

Fig. 3.

Thomas Schütte, *Amerika*, 1975. Typescript and photo on paper, 21 × 29,7 cm (8.3 × 11.7") . © SABAM, Belgium (2024).

Schütte's statement is ambivalent. On the one hand, it calls for a mode of art and painting in the lineage of the historical avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde. To paint, Schütte claims, is to reject tradition and to rethink painting from the start; it is to endeavor for the new, to problematize craftsmanship, and to challenge the image as a copy of nature. The statement brings to mind Marcel Duchamp's deskilling ("No ART SKILLS"), the variegated lineage of painterly abstraction ("Not WANTING to paint pictures, but just PAINT!"), and Andy Warhol's promotion of a devoid, deskilled subject ("To become a machine, in order to free one's head"). More clearly still, Schütte's covering of the pictorial field and his pre-ordained working process hint at the systematic and methodical art of Frank Stella, Robert Ryman, and Sol LeWitt in the 1960s and 1970s, artists who redefined painting (and drawing) as a scripted activity devoid of expression, composition, and symbolical meaning.

On the other hand, the first and last sentence envelop this same call in irony or even sarcasm, as do several of the work's features that alter or contradict the avant-gardism referenced. Schütte hints at the compulsive nature of the systemic drawing staged and the dogma of its ideology of experiment and the new: "After the discovery, the sadness, because everything always needs to be discovered anew!" While he pays homage to the de-subjectivized and self-reflexive strategies of abstract drawing and paintings, at the same time he revives these strategies in a laconic and deliberately unruly manner. Not only is *Amerika* hand-made, countering the division of labor and deskilling followed by such artists as LeWitt, but the amorphous, arbitrarily chosen areas filled in with pencil imply a playful disobedience toward the rigidity and self-imposed rules characteristic of Conceptual art. Equally telling is that Schütte publicly staged the work's production as predictable and tenuous; the text, too, frames the drawing as expressing repetitiveness, emptiness, entrapment, and ennui. Last, the title, which is included in the drawing, counters the untitled works of Minimalism and the procedural titles of Conceptualism. Rather, it raises any number of associations, from the American art presented in Düsseldorf galleries at the time, to the travel grants awarded at the academy, to Franz Kafka's synonymous novel, in which a young German travels to America only to be caught in bureaucratic systems and oppressive logics. "America," the typescript explains, is meant as a "stimulus word [*Reizwort*], an irritation, a purposely created unclarity to provoke questions!" [my translation] (Schütte, 1975a: n.p.)

What is at stake, this essay asks, in Schütte's ambivalence? My claim is that the young artist responded to the neo-avant-garde and, notably, to Conceptualism at a time when the former was seen as rehearsing the avant-garde and as canceling the primacy of experiment and the latter was criticized as a normative and academic aesthetic bathing

in neo-Positivism. Furthermore, I hold that Schütte, in "enacting" Conceptualism and relating it to America, reflected on Conceptualism as an allegedly post-national lingua franca, which, however, was still imported to Germany from the USA. In doing so, I will analyze *Amerika* as a key to understanding not just Schütte's work in the years of his early formation but wider German–American relationships in Düsseldorf in the 1970s as well.

Klaus Rinke and Student–Teacher Relationships at the Academy

In 1975, Schütte was finishing his "orientation" years, a period in anticipation of the later academy studios taught by single artists. (see Cragg, 2014) He was under the tutelage of Fritz Schwegler but closely followed the work of other academy staff members as well, including that of his later teacher and mentor Gerhard Richter, who had led a painting studio since 1971, and of the performance, photography, and installation artist Klaus Rinke. In fall 1974, following Joseph Beuys's opening of his class to all interested students and his ensuing dismissal as a tutor, Rinke joined the academy to teach a sculpture class in a building situated off campus, close to the train station. Yet more than versing his pupils in the practice of sculpture, Rinke familiarized students with modes of abstract painting and drawing, instructing exercises inspired by the groundwork courses he had himself enjoyed at the Bauhaus-inspired school of Folkwang. For example, for his initial exercise at the academy, Rinke bought a large roll of wrapping paper, cut it up, and ordered students to outline rectangular areas using pencil. Students were asked to fill these areas with black, white, and gray paint, engendering varied mono- and duo-chromatic solutions. (fig. 4) In Rinke's words, students were to put aside biases and "start from scratch" [my translation], signaling an abandonment of any prejudice and of tradition, a kind of zero hour of art making—"Ganz von vorne anfangen" was his credo, a turn of phrase rehearsed, at times jocularly, by students as well. (Eisenbach and Wiese, 1997: 13) The monochromatic painting made in Rinke's class was exhibited during the *Rundgang* of February 1975, as was *Amerika*. There, Rinke's systematic approach and rigid teaching methods appealed to students who would join his class in the following years, including Schütte's close peers Harald Klingelhöller, Wolfgang Luy, and Reinhard Mucha.

At the time, Rinke's fame extended from the Federal Republic of Germany to the art scenes in the UK and the USA. In May 1975, the Kunstverein and Kunsthalle Düsseldorf held an overview of his objects, drawings, and photographs. The exhibition included demonstrations of the *Lot* series, made by filling surfaces on sheets of paper with *Lot*

Fig. 4.
The newly established class of Klaus Rinke in the academy's off-site space at the Karl-Anton-Straße 16, Düsseldorf, 1974. With (from right to left) Klaus Rinke, Reiner Zillgens, Eva-Maria Schön, Wolfgang Luy, Klaus Jung, Isolde Wawrin, and Ulf Rungenhagen. © Bernd Jansen.

(graphite), like the groundwork done in the classroom, or by laboriously drawing lines on walls or floors to generate geometrical shapes. Also featured in the show and its catalog were photographs showing the artist and his partner in geometric poses, what Rinke called "primary demonstrations," as well as photo series showing the artist performing a sequence of gestural acts or holding a pose sequentially captured by the camera. Using walls and floors and playing with duration and clocks, and, above all, never failing to describe the type and quantity of material used in the work's title—for example, 3 kg of *Lot*—Rinke set out to objectively and self-reflexively map the artwork and by extension his body onto "real" time and space. In a rigid and systematic but also neo-Positivist manner, his art engages processes, materials, and systems as a way to cancel subjective expression and symbolic values.

In experimenting with time and space and in staging his own body as a "primary," if gendered, form, Rinke was an important figure within both the European and American Conceptual art scenes. In 1969, he was among the first artists to show at Düsseldorf's Galerie Konrad Fischer, the archway gallery promoting such artists as Carl Andre and Richard Long, to whom we will return later. He participated in group exhibitions focusing on analytical and systemic painting and Conceptual art, including *Pläne und Projekte als Kunst* (Kunsthalle Bern, 1969), *Information* (Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1970), *Prospekt 71: Projection* (Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf, 1971), and *documenta 5*

(Kassel, 1972). In New York, Rinke received solo exhibitions, at Reese Palley Gallery (1972) and MoMA's Project Space (1973), before showing twice at the Institute for Art and Urban Resources, in 1974 and 1975. In fact, it was Rinke who, through his ties with Alana Heiss, director of the Institute for Art and Urban Resources, secured residency spaces for Düsseldorf students at P.S.1 in New York—which resulted in the aforementioned travel grants given to promising students at the *Rundgänge*.

By filling a rectangle with pencil and by staging the drawing as a performance, Schütte made an intuitive, if cutting, reflection on Rinke's work and teaching. "Von ganz vorne anfangen," and "Keine Bilder malen WOLLEN, sondern nur MALEN!"—these imperatives indeed hint at Rinke's position and strategies as passed down to his students. However, more than emulating the exercise taught by his elder and Rinke's own, pencil-based and time-captured work, *Amerika* demonstrates a cunning disobedience. After all, Schütte performed his penciling as mindless, tedious labor, and by staging the work's making during the *Rundgang*, the young artist, moreover, mocked the travel grants awarded to students who diligently followed their teacher's instructions. As Linda Miesen writes in her master's thesis on Rinke as a pedagogue, a "psychological pressure existed for students to adopt their teacher's views of artists and attitude toward art," since "the teacher's signature alone determined whether a student continues to the next semester or is thrown out of the class." [my translation] (Miesen, 2016: 39–40) Students developed different strategies to mitigate this double bind, from identification and criticism to counteraction. In Reinhard Mucha's *The Clever Servant* [Der kluge Knecht], 1981/2002, for example, the position of a male student disobeying his teacher is allegorized through a custom vitrine holding Mucha's student diploma, a photo of his teacher Rinke, and two screen displays showing videos of a boy performing summersaults. (fig. 5) Like the Grimm tale referenced in the title, the work explores a hierarchy among student and teacher and indebtedness of student to teacher and tries to dismantle that hierarchy all the same. Schütte's work and text explore a similar type of student–teacher relationship and offer a comparable critique of authority. The systematic, performance drawing and the use of textual prescriptions demonstrate a genuine interest in language, processes, and materials as promoted by Rinke, but they disavow all claims to reality, the objective, and the new. Instead, the statement reads as the reciting of a mantra, an internalization of a teacher's commandments by a student. Infinitives and exclamation marks as well as the personal, near-emotional phrase at the end—"After the discovery, the sadness, because everything always needs to be discovered anew!"—are indicative of a sardonic over-identification with Rinke's work and the Conceptualism that, for Schütte, was preached in and beyond the academy. At the same time,

Amerika—which, we noted, is one of the earliest works by the artist—is delightfully naive. As Schütte recalls:

> I didn't want to imitate Rinke, but of course he came over immediately. […] I didn't even know about Conceptual art. I typed it all out neatly, the ideas, a concept, which hung next to it. Conceptual art was really simple. [my translation] (Vischer, 2013: 172)

Fig. 5.

Reinhard Mucha, *Der kluge Knecht (Ohne Titel - Staatliche Kunstakademie - Düsseldorf - 1981)*, 2002. Aluminum profiles, etched glass, framed archival print, 5 framed photocopies, felt, blockboards, video-animated photographs on DVD, 2 video-monitors, 2 audio-monitors, 2 DVD-players, soundtrack on CD, CD player, audio amplifier, electric cable with couplings and plugs, cable drum, step stool, 205,7 × 400,2 × 48,6 cm (81 × 157.6 × 19.1"). © SABAM, Belgium (2024).

Schütte's Nietzsche

Schütte's referencing of Nietzsche, a philosopher associated with the critique of authority issued by either the state or traditional institutions, such as religion and morality, allows us to further specify and theorize the young artist's position. In January 1975, anticipating *Amerika*, Schütte made a trial version of the work, testing a day-long filling of surfaces with pencil and explaining his "ideas" in a text. This earlier

typescript contrasts two categories: *Gedanken* (thought), which the young artist associated with depth and meaning, but also with boredom; and *Kunst* (art), which he allied with appearances, the fake, and the insubstantial. If thought, for Schütte, cancels an enjoyable semantic or existential emptiness, art, conversely, allows for suspending meanings and picturing the world anew. He elucidated the contrast by listing aphorisms per category. I quote here four selected lines:

> THOUGHT:
> , THOUGHT, again destroying the SOOTHING EMPTINESS
> , THOUGHT, born from the soil of boredom and stupor
> […]
> 'ART':
> – 'ART'—to indulge in nonsensical sophistries, in order to be able to REMAIN SUPERFICIAL about the important things and to STAY EMPTY/ALIVE
> – 'ART'—to REMAIN HEALTHY, to DIVERT, to FORGET, to CHANGE COURSE—and, finally, to BECOME MAD [my translation]
> (Schütte, 1975b: n.p.)

As announced by the allusion to a madman, Schütte then quoted twice from *Aus dem Nachlass der achtziger Jahre* (1901), the posthumously published notes and correspondence of Nietzsche:

> The deeper one looks, the more our valuations disappear—meaninglessness approaches! We have created the world that possesses values!
>
> The whole apparatus of knowledge is an apparatus for abstraction and simplification—directed not towards knowledge, but towards obtaining power over things. (Nietzsche, 1901/1967: 326, 274)

Later, in the typescript shown alongside *Amerika*, another Nietzsche quote appears, this one excerpted from *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882–1887), translated into English as *The Gay Science:* "As an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still bearable to us, and art furnishes us with the eye and hand and above all the good conscience to be able to make such a phenomenon of ourselves." (Nietzsche, 1882–1887/2001: 107)

With Nietzsche, Schütte rejects reason as leading to objective "truths" and hence as exposing the "reality" of things. In *The Gay Science,* in a part titled "To the Realists," Nietzsche wrote: "those sober people who feel armed against passion and fantastical conceptions" and which "insinuate that the world really is the way it appears to you, aren't you too in your unveiled condition still most passionate and dark creatures, compared to fish, and still all too similar to an artist in love?" (Nietzsche,

1882–1887/2001: 69) For Nietzsche, and for Schütte, art does not expose "truth" nor does it pertain to "reality"; rather, it makes understandable and visible the fact that our knowledge of the world and hence the values by which we live are inevitably tainted by subjective positions and perspectives. What art can do—to cite Nietzsche again—is to create "new names and valuations and appearances of truth," to invent a "cult of the untrue." (Nietzsche, 1882–1887/2001: 70, 104)

By opposing *Gedanken* and *Kunst*, Schütte put forward his own Nietzscheanism as a mixture of light-spirited creation and a self-relativizing type of knowledge. Unlike Rinke, the young artist found claims to "reality" and "truth" the most deluded of all. With Nietzsche, he targeted, first and foremost, the promotion of art as shunning appearances and occupying "real" space and time. What is more, the young artist challenged the authority and self-evidence of such art, that is, the belief in avant-gardism and Conceptualism as "objective" (and, as we will see, post-national) categories of art making. In doing so, he questioned not only the position and practice of his tutors at the academy, but also Conceptualism as a movement promoted in and beyond the Rhineland. When, in 1998, Schütte was asked about his convictions, he wryly said (in the only known interview mentioning Nietzsche):

> I am not an idealist. I would be happy if I was, but I am not. I'm strictly a pragmatist. […] I never read any idealistic philosophy. The only thing I read was Nietzsche when I was about eighteen, and most of the anarchist writers, but after that it was impossible for me to follow big theoretical constructions or all-embracing ideological views of the world. (Lingwood, 1998: 15)

German–American Relationships in 1970s Düsseldorf

How does Schütte's Nietzscheanism compare with the perspective of transatlantic exchange? Here I want to zoom out and inspect German–American relationships in mid-1970s Düsseldorf. For Schütte, key points of reference were German artists as different as Joseph Beuys, Blinky Palermo, Sigmar Polke, and Gerhard Richter, and American artists including Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, Bruce Nauman, and Dan Graham. While these US artists exhibited widely in West Germany (exhibitions that, in Graham and Nauman's case, significantly shaped their careers), the engagement with US art and culture of the German artists inspiring the young Schütte ran along different lines. For his *I Like America and America Likes Me* (1974), Beuys cohabited with a coyote for several days in René Block's newfound New York gallery. The gallery space, led by a European gallerist, was staged as cut off from its

surroundings and explored as a site where the American soul—severely tarnished by the Vietnam War, capitalism, etc.—was symbolically cleansed or saved, not least by a German artist. In Blinky Palermo's cycle of abstract metal paintings, *To the People of New York City* (1976), hints at postwar American painting, the German flag, and Native American culture come together. Most inspiring for Schütte were, arguably, artists in the Capitalist Realism group—Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke, Konrad Lueg, and Manfred Kuttner—whose works jokingly probe the Americanization of postwar Germany, from the surge of consumer culture and modernization of the German household to the promotion, display, and collecting of Abstract Expressionist painting imported to West Germany from the USA. (see Mehring, 2009) For example, Polke's painting *Higher Beings Command: Paint the Upper Right Corner Black!* [Höhere Wesen befahlen: rechte obere Ecke schwarz malen!] (1969) conjoins text and monochromatic abstraction to suggest how a deity—the Americans? his precursors? members of a jury?—ordered the artist to paint the upper right corner black. Likewise, Schütte's *Amerika* comments on the imposition of a neo-avant-garde vocabulary by his teachers and elders—indeed, by "higher beings"—through a mix of abstraction, text in the work (the artist's name, the title, and the dates), and the accompanying typescript. The young artist regularly revisited Polke's critique of and homage to abstraction, experimenting, such as Polke's *Stripe Paintings* [Streifenbilder] (1968) or *Strokes* [Striche] (1968), with laconically hand-drawn *Lines* [Linien] (c. 1975–1976). (fig. 6)

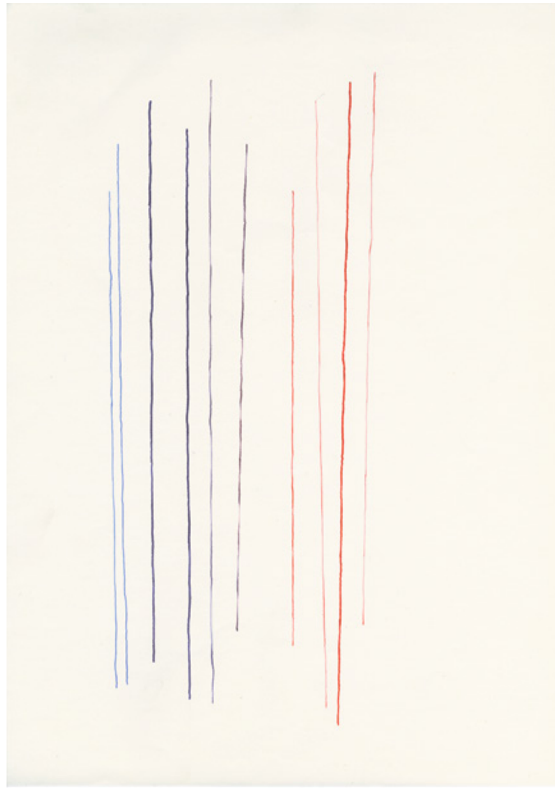

Fig. 6.
Thomas Schütte, *Linien*, c. 1975-1976. Drawing on paper. © SABAM, Belgium (2024).

By 1975, however, German artists engaging America no longer targeted abstract painting or pop art, but the then long-established movements of Minimal and Conceptual Art. (see e.g., Buschmann, 2015; Dossin, 2015) In Düsseldorf, both movements were chiefly promoted by Konrad Fischer, a former painter and member of the Capitalist Realists who had turned gallerist in 1967. In a former archway at the Neubrückstraße and, later, in his Platanenstraße venue, Fischer organized the first exhibitions

in Europe by American Minimal and Conceptual artists, including Carl Andre, Sol LeWitt, Robert Ryman, and Lawrence Weiner, and he organized shows by different German artists (of whom several taught at the academy), such as Rinke, Richter, Polke, and Bernd and Hilla Becher. Despite the ostensibly coherent roster, however, Fischer's program was fraught with contradiction. On the one hand, Minimal and Conceptual Art were showcased as a lingua franca, unbound by borders and holding up a utopian image of transatlantic interchange. Rinke's position is a case in point: for him, Conceptual art speaks to all cultures and cuts across space and time—like his works, art is just there, in the world, as an obstacle. In contrast to Beuys's performances, which explore the cultural, national, or historical identity of (West) Germany, often in relation to the USA, Rinke's probings of system, material, and structure reject all but primary meanings. His Conceptualism sets out to efface identity, like the sequential obliteration of the artist's portrait in a photo series. (Later, in the context of the 1993 Venice Biennale and at the height of the racial war in Yugoslavia, Rinke described his nationalism as infinitely plural: "I am German, Bavarian, Saxon, […] Belgian, Flemish, Walloon, […] Armenian, Hungarian, Yugoslavian" [my translation] and so on.) (Rinke, 1997: 54) Not unlike Rinke's promotion of a geometric, universal, or international subject, Fischer's curated exhibition titles often have the term "international" in them, and in interviews and statements, the gallerist emphasized the post-national scope of his gallery:

> It doesn't matter to me whether an artist lives in New York or Düsseldorf. New York is not a hallmark of quality—but many artists live in New York, and some are outstanding. […] I don't see anything uniquely American about many of the American artists I'm interested in. These artists, who make clear and simple art, exist in America as well as in Europe. They form almost a unit and are well acquainted with each other. This generation of artists is without chauvinism, and they are collectively promoting their art and ideas internationally. (Fischer, 1976: 147–148)

However, this idea of an international, post-national art form was still imported from the USA. Ryman's and LeWitt's painting, Joseph Kosuth's dictionary definitions, Lawrence Weiner's and Robert Barry's sentences, Andre's sculptures, and Dan Flavin's light works—these were the works populating Fischer's gallery and other Rhineland venues at the time. The much-discussed and disputed dominance of US art in the West German art scene continued, yet now it was cloaked in a rhetoric of both identity- and value-free exchange—a cloak some loathed as being monocultural. In a retrospective comment, art critic and historian—and short-term tutor of Schütte at the academy—Benjamin H. D. Buchloh,

who regularly collaborated with Fischer, explained how his moving from West Germany to North America in 1977 was motivated by an aim "to escape from the strictures of the highly overdetermined cultural identity of postwar Germany" and a "hope of finding a situation in which the model of a post-national cultural identity seemed to have been historically achieved at least in its initial stages." (Buchloh, 2000: xvii) (Elsewhere, Mucha, who followed Buchloh's seminar together with Schütte and other peers, wrote that "the Americans" lauded by Buchloh "have this academic approach that ended up being too narrow: ten rules, Ten Commandments, which were not to be broken. It was so self-consistent and fundamental that all you could really say—a typical Rinke sentence—was: 'You have to know, and then quickly forget, everything.'" [my translation]) (Miesen, 2016: 71) Similarly, Fischer exhibited American Conceptual artists as effecting a critique of (national) subjectivity and hence as demonstrating an internationalism. Yet this stress on US art and culture irritated artists associated with the gallery. Asked about the reasons for ending their collaboration with Fischer, the UK duo Gilbert & George noted in hindsight:

> Gilbert: We stopped showing with him in 1980 because he felt so American, so Minimal-oriented.
>
> *Did you find this too dogmatic?*
>
> George: Yes. For us, America is normal. I have family there. But Konrad always talked about America as if it was the moon. 'You can't imagine, if you drink Coca-Cola in New York, the taste is fantastic!'—like the Coca-Cola is different. It was too exaggerated for us. […] It was always America, America, and America. Even if you had dinner and you said: 'Could you pass the salt, please,' he would say, 'Carl does not like Sol, eeh …'—it was always related to Carl and Sol, everything. (Kölle, 2007a: 212)

For Schütte, Fischer was a guide to the experimental art shown across the Rhineland, and a yardstick for evaluating the Conceptualism taught at the academy. In the mid-1970s, Schütte worked as an intern in the gallery, and in interviews he has referred to Fischer as his "mentor." (Kölle, 2007b: 237) In fact, before intensively exhibiting at the Konrad Fischer Gallery from the early 1980s on, Schütte, still a student, received no fewer than two exhibitions at Fischer's, one at each venue. In August 1979, he painted two hallway doors at the Platanenstraße gallery yellow, echoing the painting of objects and spaces with industrial lacquer done in Rinke's class at the time. Alongside the intervention, he exhibited a technical sheet detailing the qualities of the industrial paint, which recalls

the used pencil stubs and the document listing the hours spent on producing the drawing that he showed alongside *Amerika*. At the Neubrückstraße, Schütte realized a wall drawing of a fat, single line crossed like a bowtie, evoking a giant fish in a glass tank. (fig. 7) The reference is to systematic painting, notably to LeWitt's wall drawings, which in Schütte's hands receive a pop art-like, figurative makeover. Also reflected in the work is Fischer—*Fisch* meaning fish—and the architectural features of his glad-covered archway (like a fishbowl). Above all, the work recalls the gaiety of Nietzsche, his idea that, despite our search for objectivity and truth, we, like fish, are dark and emotional creatures.

Fig. 7.
Thomas Schütte, *Fisch*, 1979. In-situ wall painting at the Konrad Fischer Galerie, Neubrückstraße Düsseldorf, 3,8 × 10 m (12,47 × 32,81'). © SABAM, Belgium (2024).
See also Plate 9.

I would argue, then, that we can interpret *Amerika*—and with it Schütte's work from his earliest student days to the early 1990s, and possibly even up until today—along two related lines. The first is that the artist, in a responsive, one could argue provoking way, refused to partake in experiments with dematerialization of his elders. At a time when neo-avant-garde art was challenged and plainly dismissed as an empty rehearsal of the historical avant-garde—I am thinking of Peter Bürger's 1974 *Theorie der Avantgarde*, whose provocative arguments anticipated debates on "the end of the avant-garde," including at Düsseldorf's academy, later that decade—Schütte staged Conceptualism as an academic repetition, a bland rehearsal. (see Beaucamp, 1977; Bürger, 1984) In interviews, Schütte has noted this emptiness, saying: "I only see the official tendency, which for a hundred years has been tabula rasa. Always without subject, the empty table, on which nothing is set. Art as science, as discourse, as analysis, reduced to its bare bones." [my translation] (Jocks, 1993: 249) Nietzscheanism, that is, intimates the artist's disbelief in Conceptual art's values and beliefs, in its dogmatic idealism and normativity, its claims to objectivity, transparency, and truth. Further, Nietzsche illuminates Schütte's antagonism to theory. Throughout his career, the artist has proven skeptical of overarching statements, refusing to explain his work or disclose which theories he feels affiliated with. If he confessed to having read books by Claude Lévi-Strauss and Michel Foucault, he also said that "to supply the philosophy along with the concrete things is too much to ask." [my translation] (Jocks, 1993: 245)

The second, in this context most pertinent way to interpret Schütte's Nietzscheanism is as a strategy for mediating German–American intersections. As an alternative to both an identity-bound, nationalist American art in Düsseldorf and claims to internationalist and identity-free creativity by Conceptual artists and their advocates, the artist from his earliest days onwards set out to examine the geographic and historical anchoring of his persona, work, and practice. In contrast to practices defined within a post-traditional model of identity, which for Schütte end up in a vacuous style, the artist set out to anchor his work and practice (and culture at large) within the specificity of the region and reassert a national identity in a project comparable to what architecture critic Kenneth Frampton once called "critical regionalism." (Frampton, 1983; also referenced by Buchloh, 2000: xviii) Schütte responded to the pedagogical context at the academy, and to what he has elsewhere called the "Düsseldorf situation" [my translation], shaped by the academy and its teacher, by Fischer's gallery program and by exhibitions of both German and international artists associated with "so-called Minimal and Conceptual Art." [my translation] (Hentschell, 1985: 10) In staging himself while drawing, the artist, moreover, underlined how the work's production is embedded within a local and historical context mediated by the artist-subject—namely, Schütte's encounter with teachers and elders, and the emotions felt when engaging with these precursors' work as an inspiration or a restriction (the sadness, the joy, and so on). Last but not least, the use of German language and references, as alluding to the national context in which the artist came to formation, is important. An expression of locus and, possibly, of a refusal to translate, *Amerika* is not the English but the German word for the United States. Also significant is that Schütte's typescript—also in German—cites Nietzsche, a milestone in German philosophy, and two German novels by Austrian author Thomas Bernhard, *Frost* (1963) and *Gehen* [Walking] (1971).

In fact, one can argue that this perspectivist *Selbstdarstellung,* this theatricalization of the self and art practice, as being embedded within a locally and historically specific situation, runs through Schütte's entire oeuvre. In advance of the small-scale models of museums, studios, and miniature scenes made by the artist, works that typically stage Schütte himself, his friends, or the sites where he works and exhibits, the picturing of own's own position in images and metaphors gave rise to wall paintings, sketches, and photography works. Consider, for example, *Big Wall* [Große Mauer] of 1977, a grid of hundreds of abstract panel paintings placed on nails on the walls of the academy's first-floor hallway. (fig. 8) The work created a trompe l'oeil of a brick wall, echoing the group of *Inpaintings* [Vermalung] (1972) by Schütte's then-teacher Richter and expressing entrapment as felt by the young

Fig. 8.

Thomas Schütte, *Große Mauer*, 1977. Oil paint on wood, c. 1200 elements, bricks 10 × 20 cm (4 × 8"), half bricks 10 × 10 cm (4 × 4"). Installation view at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. © SABAM, Belgium (2024).

artist at the academy, a site where systematic modes of painting were favored over figuration. (That Schütte used his own, now cut-up canvases from earlier figurative paintings is telling in this respect.) The work pays homage to Richter, who himself explored conflations of abstraction and figuration, and it symbolizes a sentiment of being trapped at the academy as well as in a historical situation geared toward Conceptualism. And yet, if *Big Wall* is a picture of blockage, symbolizing the absence of freedom, in visualizing the blockage as an image, Schütte also tackled it. Moreover, Schütte's wall establishes a link to the academy as a site and a school, to Düsseldorf, and to Germany at large. In 1983 the artist explained this ambition:

> When I began my studies, everyone had to go to America. Everyone had the same records and wore the same pants. But there is, in the meanwhile at least, an awareness that Europe has a history and has accomplished something, even if some of it was a long time ago. […] You have the feeling that there is no identity anymore, that everything is junk. There is nothing you said 3 years ago that still holds true today. That's an absolute loss of a foundation. My difficulty is definitely having an identity with something. […] I live here in Germany and have to face it somehow. [my translation] (Johnen, 1983: 3)

For the young Schütte, neither institutional mechanisms nor the Americanization of postwar Germany per se warranted critique, but, rather, the felt hegemony of America now cloaked in the lingua franca of Conceptualism. Schütte came to understand Conceptualism—to use David Joselit's apt term—as an "international style," a generic vocabulary imported from the United States to Germany that ignored art's historical and geographical specificity. (Joselit, 2016: 54) To mitigate the situation, Schütte adapted Conceptualist vocabulary to local enunciations and inscribed it into a personified "setting of a scene." *Amerika*, I argue, is an early demonstration of this approach. In the staging of Rinke's methods in the Kunstakademie, in the citing of Nietzsche, and, most evidently, in the usage of a German title, Schütte sought to fuse US Conceptualism with his own, local dialect.

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Between Rhine–Ruhr and Rust Belt

Industrial Transnationalism in Reinhard Mucha's *The Wirtschaftswunder, To the People of Pittsburgh*

Althea Ruoppo

Born in Düsseldorf, Germany, in 1950, Reinhard Mucha trained as a blacksmith before attending the famous Düsseldorf Art Academy in the mid-1970s and early 1980s. His sculptural assemblages and installations are rooted in the cultural origins and industrial activities associated with the Rhine–Ruhr metropolitan region, which includes the manufacturing Ruhrgebiet (Ruhr area) cities of Dortmund, Duisburg, and Essen, and the Rhine River axis service cities of Bonn, Cologne, and Düsseldorf. This densely populated area in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia was a major center of coal, steel, weapons, and chemical production beginning in the mid-19th century. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Rhine–Ruhr would begin to experience a steady, two-decade decline in its operations as a result of several factors: soaring energy costs; growing interest in coal substitutes; increasing crude oil imports from low-cost international suppliers; and decreasing demand for steel that had been used by the automobile, shipbuilding, and construction industries.[1]

The manufacturing heritage of this now-interconnected metropolitan region and its extensive railway system are a constant presence in Mucha's oeuvre.[2] Works dating from the early 1980s to the present take up the remnants of Germany's pre- and postwar culture: vintage wooden furniture, heating pipes, faux-linoleum floor coverings, copies of the bimonthly German magazine *Der Aufstieg: Ansporn für Vorwärtsstrebende* [The rise: Incentive for striving forward], and boxes of Brandt *Markenzwieback* (rusk bread), to name just a handful of examples. The artist continues to title many of his pieces after six-letter German train station names that appear in a 1948 reissue of a 1943 freight train fare directory (Der Deutscher Eisenbahn—Güter und Tiertarif [German Railway—Freight and Animal Tariff]) that he acquired in the 1970s. (Wolf, 2022: 23) Many of Mucha's sculptures from the past few decades deal with national events or distinctly German topics, as indicated by their titles alone: *Four-Power Status* [Viermächte-Status] (2007),

Before the Wall Came Down (2008), and *Freedom for Berlin* [Freiheit für Berlin] (2008), among others. The artist's loyalty to such specific material and regional references conveys an intimate narrative about a unique set of cultural conditions and circumstances, foregrounding biography, national identity, German history, and collective memory. Understandably, art historians, curators, and critics have concentrated on Mucha's Germanness. Some scholars have suggested that the artist's sculptures are nostalgic and sentimental monuments to his own middle-class upbringing and generational values. His works' rich semantics, they claim, may only be truly understood by those who directly experienced, as Mucha did, living in the Rhine–Ruhr Valley of the Federal Republic of Germany during the Cold War years.[3] While this assessment of the sculptures' provincialism may be true, numerous private collectors outside of West Germany showed a keen interest in Mucha's work throughout the 1980s. By the early 1990s, his sculptures could already be found across Europe (in Amsterdam, Antwerp, Barcelona, London, Paris, and Vienna) and in the United States (in Boston and New York).

I would argue that Mucha has occasionally drawn upon a set of references outside of the German context. His works are marked by deeply subjective, autobiographical content and geographical and historical specificity, while the forms and their embedded references cross national borders. Throughout his long career, Mucha's consistent, overall set of intentions has been to illustrate sculpture's duality of place. An in-depth visual and historical analysis of how the local and the global are intertwined in his sculptural practice is clearly lacking in the relevant literature on Mucha's work. Rather than seeking to identify a definitive "German" aesthetic in Mucha's sculpture, I aim to evaluate his work in terms of its national *and* international character. James Hodkinson and Benedict Schofield have demonstrated that the question of how one can define and evaluate the local particularities and qualities of a specifically German-language culture within a globalized public sphere is inevitably fraught. (Hodkinson and Schofield, 2020) Still, Elisabeth Herrmann, Carrie Smith-Prei, and Stuart Taberner have argued that we can avoid what Ulrich Beck has termed "methodological nationalism" by holding nation and world in tension with one another. (Herrmann et al., 2015: 2)

Even in an era in which a high percentage of contemporary artists explore, in one way or the other, the national/international dynamic, Mucha stands out in terms of the value and visibility that he grants to industrial and cultural relations between countries. In my dissertation work on the artist, I trace Mucha's development of a German transnational sculptural aesthetic that is marked by his deep interest in industrial heritage.[4] I deliberately combine the terms German, which designates artworks that specifically refer to the history and culture of Germany,

and transnational, which is used to describe sculptures that bring together identifiable forms and subject matter that relate to two or more nations. I analyze how various national cultures and societies are inextricably linked and mutually implicated in the artist's practice.[5] Mucha's mode of artmaking is a result of the medium and strategy of assemblage: a three-dimensional artwork comprised of a variety of seemingly incompatible elements that are drawn from diverse contexts.[6] His specific interdisciplinary approach is what I call industrial transnationalism, a sculptural strategy in which he juxtaposes disparate everyday objects, industrial and commercial materials, and/or cultural references and titles from divergent national contexts to draw parallels between two countries' industrial cities or regions.

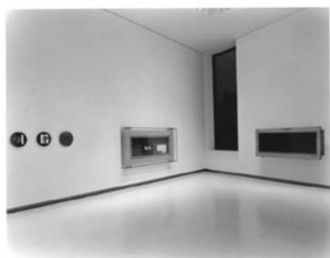

Fig. 1.

Reinhard Mucha, **The Wirtschaftswunder**: To the People of Pittsburgh **I**, 1991. Installation view: *51st Carnegie International*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, October 19, 1991–February 16, 1992. Photo: Richard Stoner, courtesy Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh. © mucha*Archive* / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, 2025

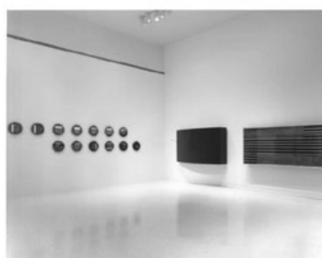

Fig. 2.

Reinhard Mucha, **The Wirtschaftswunder**: To the People of Pittsburgh **I**, 1991. Installation view: *51st Carnegie International*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, October 19, 1991–February 16, 1992. Photo: Richard Stoner, courtesy Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh. © mucha*Archive* / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, 2025

Many of Mucha's sculptures over the past thirty-five years interlock references to some of the most important former manufacturing regions in the industrialized West, including Germany's Rhine–Ruhr; northern Italy's Piedmont, Veneto, and Lombardy regions; and the so-called American Rust Belt. This essay examines Mucha's *The Economic Miracle* [The Wirtschaftswunder], *To the People of Pittsburgh I* (1991), one of the artist's first engagements with the sculptural strategy of industrial transnationalism.[7] (fig. 1 and fig. 2) The work displays the artist's profound reverence for the common manufacturing history and heritage of his native city, region, and country and an interest in finding common ground with another post-industrial society, in the Midwestern state of Pennsylvania, that experienced a period of economic change in the 1970s and 1980s. Mucha aims to present his audiences with a transnational view of former industrial landscapes from a holistic and comparative

perspective of two distinct but related regions of the world. The study of industrial heritage and deindustrialization processes in the late 20th century in global perspective is a relatively new field. My analysis is aided by recent work by scholars of urban and environmental studies and social history, including Alice Mah, Donald K. Carter, Stefan Berger, Christian Wicke, Jana Golombek, and Stefano Musso.

The Economic Miracle, *To the People of Pittsburgh I* debuted at the 51st Carnegie International (October 19, 1991–February 16, 1992) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Initiated in 1896 at the behest of Andrew Carnegie, a Pennsylvania Railroad executive turned steel magnate and philanthropist, and organized every three to four years by the Carnegie Museum of Art (formerly the Carnegie Institute), the Carnegie International is the longest-running North American survey of international contemporary art. The organizers of the 51st edition, Mark Francis (the Carnegie's curator of contemporary art) and Lynne Cooke (a critic and independent curator) were aided by a three-member advisory committee consisting of three curators and critics from a wide geographical range: Kasper König, founder and director of Kunsthalle Portikus and rector of the Städelschule in Frankfurt; Fumio Nanjo, an art critic and independent curator and former director of the Institute of Contemporary Art in Nagoya, Japan; and David Ross, director of the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. Together they selected forty-three artists from the United States, Canada, China, Belgium, England, France, Germany, Japan, Russia, and Spain. Writing in the accompanying catalog, Nanjo observed what he called a new, untethered, Postmodern "transcultural" or "metacultural" world view emerging in global contemporary art since the late 1970s, as a direct consequence of increasing international travel, expositions, exhibitions, and flow of information. (Nanjo, 1991: 38) Citing a "fracturing of cultural boundaries," Nanjo explained that many artists' works were being derived from either their specific experiences of seeing the world or informed by a new consciousness and wider understanding of foreign cultures, histories, and philosophies. (Nanjo, 1991: 37) This pluralistic, transcultural attitude of artmaking addressed different ways of thinking and aesthetics and served as a kind of reaction against the 19th-century ideal of the nation-state. Artists including Lothar Baumgarten, Sophie Calle, Katharina Fritsch, Thomas Struth, and Christopher Williams, Nanjo argued, were "broadening their bases and diversifying their options, drawing upon their own cultures while deliberately acknowledging, incorporating, or addressing issues of other cultures through their choice of imagery, medium, or creative approach." (Nanjo, 1991: 39) Though Mucha was not referenced by name in Nanjo's essay, such a pluralistic working method was also thought to have been practiced by Mucha by virtue of his inclusion in the Carnegie International.

In her catalog entry on the artist, Cooke suggested that Mucha may have accepted the offer to participate in the 1991 Carnegie International "in part by its location in Pittsburgh—once one of the world's largest steel centers, until recently the site of a heavy industrial complex, and still greatly reliant on the vast transportation system of rivers, canals, railroads, and roads that encompasses it." (Cooke, 1991: 110) Although Mucha did not manage to visit the city before making his work—despite plans to the contrary—he still created, specifically for its triennial exhibition, a sixteen-part, wall-mounted sculpture that references its original location.[8] Indeed, some artists who participated in the Carnegie International prominently drew on Pittsburgh as a resource, even presenting their work in off-site locations around the city, bringing the exhibition outside the museum's galleries. Mucha's work is conceptually split between German and American references. The title partly refers to the German *Wirtschaftswunder*, or "Miracle on the Rhine" (1948–1973), the rapid revival of West Germany's economy after World War II. The rebuilding effort under the United States Marshall Plan (1947/1948) and resistance by European leaders, mainly in Britain and the Netherlands, to the Morgenthau Plan (1944)—which had called for the removal or destruction of all steel- and armaments-producing plants in the Rhine–Ruhr—enabled the reconstruction of the war-torn region. (Tagliabue, 1983) The *Wirtschaftswunder* was also brought on by minister of economic affairs Ludwig Erhard's reforms and by his introduction of a new currency, the Deutsche Mark. As art critic Martin Herbert has recently suggested, the country's new social market economy "rehabilitated those supposed qualities of 'Germanness' (rigid discipline and willing subordination, an obsession with precision and order) that Nazism had grotesquely fetishized." (Herbert, 2023) The *Wirtschaftswunder* of the 1950s and 1960s brought West Germany into a leading position among the world's economic powers, a position that Germany has maintained.

Mucha's *The Economic Miracle, To the People of Pittsburgh I* celebrates postwar prosperity in the Rhine–Ruhr at the same time as it memorializes early industrial fervor in the region during the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. Fifteen of the round, pictorial objects consist of found pages from a bound catalog of products that Mucha found in the basement of his studio building at Kölner Straße [Cologne Street] 170, in Düsseldorf, where he has been working since 1981. Each element contains a historical black-and-white illustration depicting metal tubes, pipes, fittings, and workers from the Düsseldorfer Eisenbahnbedarf AG [Düsseldorf Railway Equipment Corp.], formerly Carl Weyer & Co. Waggonfabrik [Carl Weyer & Co. Carriage Factory] (1882–1927), a railroad supply factory that occupied the four-story stone- and brick-clad building from 1861 to 1939. (Ostendorf, 1979: 259) Most

of the tondi have frontal glass panes with blue stripes or spattered drops made of synthetic resin lacquer. The colored lines correspond to the blue of the printed descriptive captions which accompany most of the images in three languages: German, English, and French. (fig. 3) For example:

> Flanschenrohre für Preßwasser 300 atū/Flanged pipes for power water 4260 lb./sq. in./Tuyaux à brides pour eau de 300 kg/cm² eff […] Dampfverteiler für 55 atū, 475°C in einem Zechenkraftwerk/Steam distributor for 782 lb./sq. in. at 475°C in a colliery power station/ Distributeur de vapeur pour 55 kg/cm² eff, 475°C dans une centrale d'énergie d'une mine

Presented with the clarity of scientific illustrations, the sharply focused industrial equipment recalls the aesthetic style of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) that flourished in the arts in Germany during the Weimar Republic. One thinks of Germaine Krull's seminal portfolio *Metal* [Métal] (1928) and its poetic treatment of machine parts, cranes, railways, power generators, and iron icons of the industrial era, from Rotterdam's Koningshavenbrug to Paris's Eiffel Tower. The found imagery in Mucha's wall sculpture also reminds one of Albert Renger-Patzsch's technically precise images of the Rhine–Ruhr's coal mines, factories, and machines, which he photographed from 1927 to 1935.

Removed from the Düsseldorfer Eisenbahnbedarf AG's product brochure, presented without identifying descriptive text that locate them to a specific place, and appearing as tightly cropped images on each page, these metal objects and anonymous workers might be attributed to any manufacturing production plant. In his review of Mucha's 2016 solo exhibition at Kunstmuseum Basel, Jan Verwoert argued:

> In his art, the world is in the objects and it speaks the language of materials. It speaks Thing—both as a universally understood lingua franca and as a local dialect. On the one hand, his sculptures are about materials that bear witness to the transformation of work in industry and administration. This happened worldwide, in Sheffield, Essen, Nowa Huta, and Detroit, in workshops, factories, offices, and museums. The materials in question will have been present in all of these places as the world changed, and they know how it changed. They were there and they saw it happen. […] this causes [the object] to start speaking, both about the transformation of the world in general and about the special flavor of this transformation in specific places. (Verwoert, 2016: n.p.)

According to Verwoert, Mucha's use of forms and materials that appear universal and recognizable always testifies to the fact that what

was happening at a certain time and place was analogous to what was happening around the world. Through his use of industrial ephemera, the artist drew attention to a striking parallel between the long manufacturing histories of two industrial centers: his native Rhine–Ruhr—the "Pittsburgh" region of Western Germany—and America's steel capital in western Pennsylvania. The former's coal and steel production grew in the years following World War II; was hit hard with closures, layoffs, and unemployment in the decade after the oil crisis of 1958; and then suffered rapid decline in the mid- to later 1980s. Pittsburgh's glass, aluminum, and steel industries, established in the late 18th and 19th centuries, peaked in the late 1950s and continued to expand throughout the 1960s. They collapsed in the late 1970s and early 1980s as the result of foreign competition, outmoded facilities, and expensive labor contracts. This led to mill closures, massive layoffs, and a loss of more than 133,000 manufacturing positions. By the mid-1980s, unemployment in Pittsburgh reached more than 18 percent, comparable to national levels during the Great Depression of the 1930s. One-third of the city's population left the region for manufacturing jobs in more prosperous areas of the country. (Carter, 2016)

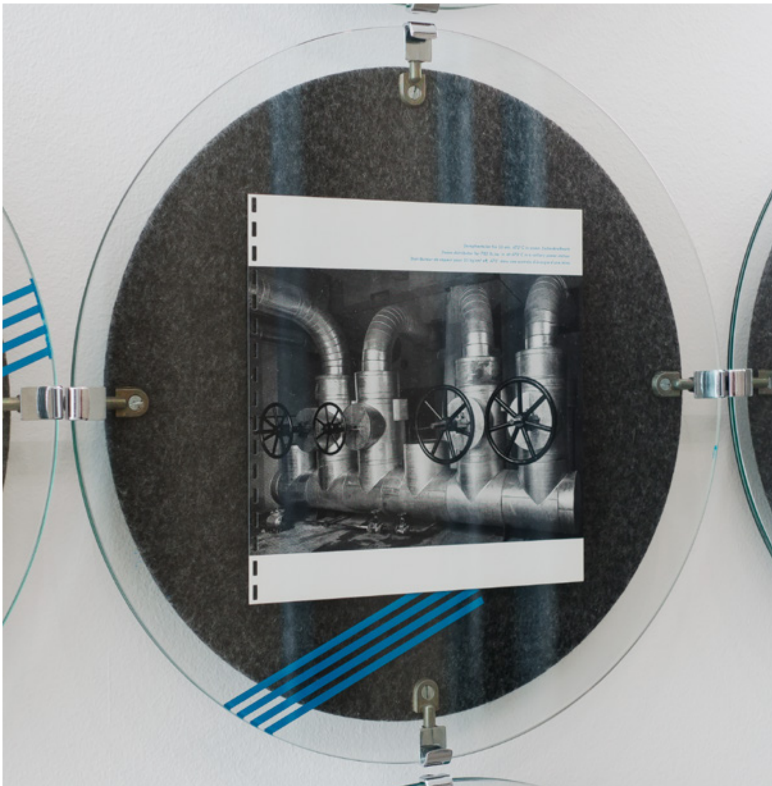

Fig. 3.
Reinhard Mucha, **The Wirtschaftswunder**, To the People of Pittsburgh, **III** [2016] 1991 (detail). 17 tondi. Metal shoulder clamps, round float glass panes, alkyd enamel painted on reverse of float glass, *16 book pages* offset print recto and verso *(found objects)*, felt, aluminum discs, fluorescent lamp, electrical cord, right-angle plug with rocker switch, 3 zip ties, extension cord with female and male plugs. 16 tondi each ø 15.16 in. × 1.81 in. 1 tondo ø 15.75 in. × 3.94 in. Courtesy the Artist. Photo Mucha. © mucha*Archive* / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, 2025

Writing in the catalog that accompanied Mucha's 1997 exhibition at the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen [Institute for Foreign Relations] in Stuttgart, Martin Bochynek saw *The Economic Miracle*, *To the People of Pittsburgh I* as a "quasi-ironic address of international solidarity to the 'colleagues' of Pennsylvania's heavy industry, which had now also been suffering for a long time." [my translation] (Bochynek, 1997: 9) These "colleagues" may also have been fellow Germans. Beginning in the mid-17th century, Pittsburgh took on a large influx of German immigrants who were looking for religious freedom and refuge from the devastation of the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648). The "Pennsylvania Germans"—those who settled in the state before the Revolutionary War—came from the southwestern region of Germany, the areas known as the Rhineland, the Palatinate, Württemberg, Baden, and German Switzerland. (Glatfelter, 1999) The unambiguous title that Mucha gave to his work makes a direct and literal connection between the Rhine–Ruhr and one of the most pivotal cities of the North American Rust Belt, a former industrial heartland stretching from New York through the American Midwest that experienced devastating mill and factory closures, job loss, and population decline in the 1970s.[9] This impression of the work's nod to an uncanny regional resemblance is also shared by artist and art critic Stanton Taylor, who recently argued that Mucha was "well attentive to the bleak prospects facing factory workers in the de-industrializing West." (Taylor, 2022) The artist could self-identify with industrial labor in Pittsburgh, and even possess a keen sense of camaraderie with workers there, as someone who had previously trained as a metalsmith and witnessed the industrial Rhine–Ruhr region's rapid transfiguration. As an evocation of German and American craftsmanship, technical achievements, and steady industriousness, *The Economic Miracle*, *To the People of Pittsburgh I* places Mucha's biography within a parallel universe, showcasing the equivalence of cultural values.

A lesser-known photocopy drawing from the same year is akin to *The Economic Miracle*, *To the People of Pittsburgh I* in terms of its title and homage to the citizens of another US industrial city. (fig. 4) *Untitled (To the people of Birmingham)* depicts Mucha in three frames wearing a white sweatshirt with the letters "USA." The English phrase "The Heat Is On"—a reference to a song written by Harold Faltermeyer and Keith Forsey and recorded by Glenn Frey for the American film *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984)—surrounds the entire image. In the decades after the American Civil War, Birmingham, Alabama, and its surrounding area became the South's foremost industrial center and one of the nation's leading iron, steel, and rail producers, growing as rapidly in the last two decades of the 19th century as Pittsburgh and Chicago. In the Birmingham industrial district's heyday, Woodward Iron; the Sloss Sheffield Steel and Iron Company; Thomas Works; and the Tennessee

Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company dominated the region. By the second half of the 20th century, however, the iron and steel industry began to decline. Increasingly stringent air-quality requirements, foreign competition, and the rise of ductile iron in the early 1970s resulted in the forced closure of Birmingham's coal and ore mines, blast furnaces, and other manufacturing facilities.[10] While Mucha's *Untitled (To the people of Birmingham)* does not illustrate factory workers or machinery, as *The Economic Miracle*, *To the People of Pittsburgh I* does, its self-portraits and related subtitle imply that the artist was again empathizing with an American city's industrial heritage on account of his personal connection to the Rhine–Ruhr's past and linking individual experiences with collective ones. Mucha's drawing and sculpture reinforce the notion that a work of art could merge historical and industrial landscapes, speak to global industrial economies, and produce a kind of leveling effect between cultures and nations.

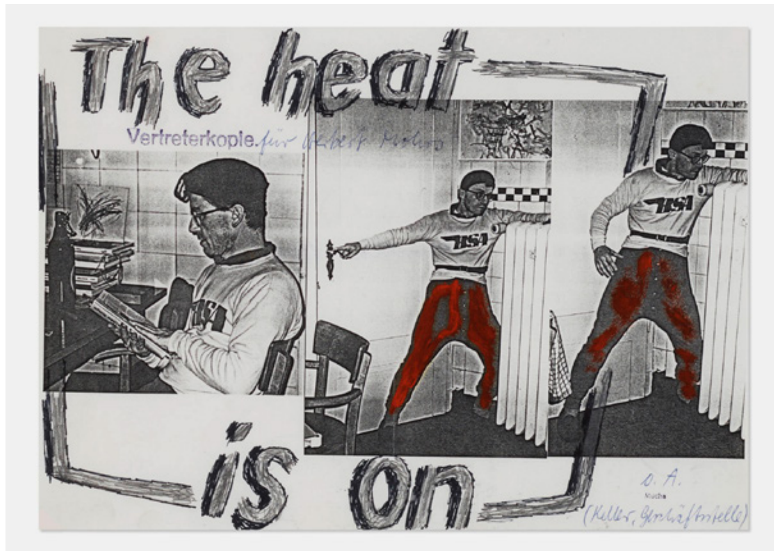

Fig. 4.

Reinhard Mucha, **Untitled** (To the people of Birmingham), 1991. Photocopy, oil paint, ink, pencil, paper, 8 ¼ × 11 ½ in. (21×29.7 cm). © mucha*Archive* / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, 2025

Beyond visualizing complex socioeconomic entanglements in Germany and the United States, the artist's work also illuminates the transnational and transatlantic interactions that took place between the Rhineland and New York art scenes during the 1970s and 1980s. Mucha's work would seem to confirm his introduction to, and confrontation with, American art, both in West Germany and in the United States. As a student at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, he was introduced to Minimalist trends, especially through the German art historian Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, who taught there in 1978. (Wolf, 2022: 27) Galerie Rudolf Zwirner, Galerie Heiner Friedrich, Konrad

Fischer Galerie, and Galerie Max Hetzler—four important spaces of cross-cultural dialogue and interchange in Cologne and Düsseldorf, then the artistic centers of Germany—played an extraordinarily important role for the development, reputation, and international orientation of the West German art world. These influential galleries, among many other art institutions in the Rhineland, exposed Mucha to the work of some of the most significant German and American artists of his generation, with whom he even exhibited at times in the 1980s. In the remainder of this essay, I want to consider *The Economic Miracle*, *To the People of Pittsburgh I* specifically in relation to Dan Flavin and Blinky Palermo, whose works were exhibited extensively by Rudolf Zwirner, Heiner Friedrich, and Konrad Fischer in the mid- to late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, while Mucha was a student.

Mucha's work from the early to mid-1980s would seem to suggest that Flavin's integration of commonplace, off-the-shelf fluorescent tubes had an impact on the young artist. Mucha experimented with standardized, industrially manufactured lighting in a handful of works from this period, including *Untitled (Bonn)* and *Untitled (Oberhausen)*, both from 1983. (fig. 5) These wall-mounted and freestanding sculptures noticeably balance American Minimalism with German geopolitics. Consisting of cool-white, fluorescent lighting and individual pieces of float glass with the words "Bonn" and "Oberhausen" painted on the reverse in alkyd enamel, they evoke the former German capital of the Federal Republic of Germany before the country's formal reunification in 1990 and a city on the river Emscher in the Rhine–Ruhr Area between Duisburg and Essen, respectively.

Fig. 5.

Reinhard Mucha, **Ohne Titel** (Bonn), 1983. 4 shelf brackets, filament tape, 2 profiled wood sections, alkyd enamel painted on reverse of float glass, 24 fluorescent lamps, electrical cords with male plugs and 2 female plugs, cable reel, *door leaf with fittings* lacquer, wood *(found object)*, 44.49×106.3×12.2 in. Herbert Foundation, Ghent, Belgium. Installation view: **Alleingang**, Galerie Max Hetzler, Cologne, Germany, October 22–November 19, 1983. Photo by Reiner Lautwein, Raas van Gaverestraat, Ghent, 1989. Collection Herbert Foundation, Ghent. © mucha*Archive* / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, 2025

Known for his custom of dedication—to friends, to artists, to victims—Flavin produced works that move beyond pure abstraction by pushing against the Minimalist rejection of narrative as well. *Untitled (to the citizens of the Swiss cantons)*, which was first exhibited at Annemarie Verna Galerie, in Zurich, Switzerland, from May to September 1987, consists of three light fixtures in red, and one in either cool white, soft white, daylight, or warm white, alluding to the colors of the Swiss flag. Two years later, Flavin would continue this theme, creating sculptural tributes to a European city and country. The first, *untitled (to the people of Baden-Baden, respectfully)*, now a long-term, site-specific installation, was created on the occasion of his solo show at the Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden from February to April 1989. On the right wing of the neo-classical building the artist extended a greeting to the West German city, with which he felt a bond because of his family history, via five vertical columns of light in yellow and red: the colors of the Baden-Baden flag.[11] That same spring, for his show at Leo Castelli Gallery, in New York, Flavin debuted his installation, *Untitled (to the citizens of the Republic of France on the 200th anniversary of their revolution*), again using the symbolic colors of the country's flag as a salute to France and its inhabitants. Together, the dedications in Flavin's titles convey an obvious memorial intention that is also found in Mucha's *The Economic Miracle*, *To the People of Pittsburgh I*.

The third version of Mucha's sculpture, which was modified in 2016 and has since been displayed in a circular format, seems to underscore the enduring effect of Flavin on the artist.[12] (fig. 6) This iteration of his wall sculpture, titled *The Economic Miracle* [The Wirtschaftswunder], *To the People of Pittsburgh III* [2016] 1991, features a round fluorescent lamp encircling the edge of one of the float glass and aluminum disks, and a seventeenth tondo with another found book page. The circle-shaped light that Mucha added in 2016 calls to mind the round tubing that Flavin introduced into his own practice in 1972, placing these cool and warm white coils in the corners of Leo Castelli's downtown Manhattan gallery in triangular formations increasing from one to ten, so as to flood the space with light. *The Economic Miracle*, *To the People of Pittsburgh III* takes on a similar grid-like system, in which the glowing fluorescent tubing joins a series of self-contained elements within an exterior circle and interior cross.[13]

Mucha's wall sculpture also bears a specific relationship to the essential properties of Blinky Palermo's work and is in certain respects an homage to the German artist. According to Mucha's longtime dealer Lia Rumma, who gave him an important solo show in her Naples gallery in 1989, the second part of the work's title is due to the visual affinity with some of Palermo's final paintings, *To the People of New York City* (1976).

Fig. 6.
Reinhard Mucha, **The Wirtschaftswunder**, To the People of Pittsburgh, **III** [2016] 1991. 17 tondi. Metal shoulder clamps, round float glass panes, alkyd enamel painted on reverse of float glass, *16 book pages* offset print recto and verso *(found objects)*, felt, aluminum discs, fluorescent lamp, electrical cord, right-angle plug with rocker switch, 3 zip ties, extension cord with female and male plugs. 16 tondi each ø 15.16 in. × 1.81 in. 1 tondo ø 15.75 in. × 3.94 in. Installation view: ***# Mucha® Milano*** – *Schneller werden ohne Zeitverlust*, Galleria Lia Rumma, Milan, Italy, November 24, 2016–June 1, 2017. Courtesy the Artist. Photo Mucha. © mucha*Archive* / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, 2025. See also Plate 10.

Mucha knew the German painter through their shared association with the Düsseldorf Art Academy. Palermo, then Peter Heisterkamp, entered Joseph Beuys's class in 1964 and quickly assumed the name of an American mobster and boxing manager. He became friends with Imi Knoebel, Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke, and Klaus Rinke, with whom Mucha studied in 1972 and then again from 1975 through 1982. As an impressionable young student, Mucha would have been familiar with Palermo's *Metallbilder* [Metal pictures], which Heiner Friedrich showed

in his gallery in Cologne in September and October 1976. This series of acrylic paintings on metal culminated with his most substantial work, *To the People of New York City*, a room-scaled, fifteen-part work comprising forty aluminum panels that are meant to be arranged in subseries of various sizes. Painted following Palermo's two-and-a-half-year residence in Manhattan, it is considered the magnum opus of his career.[14]

An early sketch on blue airmail paper from mid-1976 suggests that Palermo conceived of *To the People of New York City* on a transatlantic flight between the United States and Europe. (Gottschaller, 2009: 133) The monumental cycle was executed in Richter's former Düsseldorf studio in late 1976. (Mehring, 2009: 77) Discovered in Düsseldorf after Palermo's untimely death in February 1977, *To the People of New York City* was titled posthumously, after a dedication he had written on the backs of the panels. (Cooke, 2009: 174)[15] Palermo had emphasized the object-like quality of the individual components and favored their serial presentation and spatial sequencing in a row format. Painted in rhythmic variations of black, cadmium red, and cadmium yellow, together these panels simultaneously beckon the flags of both East and West Germany, as well as American postwar abstract painting, jazz music, Beat Generation literature, and Native American visual culture, suggesting that Palermo both acknowledged and attempted to collapse national and cultural boundaries. (Mehring, 2009: 77)

Just a few months after Palermo's death, the *To the People of New York City* paintings were shown publicly for the first time, at 141 Wooster Street, in a new gallery that Heiner Friedrich opened in New York's SoHo in 1973.[16] Palermo's works debuted to great fanfare. Writing in *Artforum* in 2002, Christine Mehring explained:

> *To the People* was the talk of the town when Palermo's longtime dealer and friend Heiner Friedrich showed it in his New York gallery soon after the artist's premature death, [at just thirty-three] in 1977—every painter who lived in the city then seems to remember the show as a refreshing surprise. (Mehring, 2002: 139)

It is unclear if Mucha was in New York during the run of the show. He had visited the city for the first time that year, an opportunity made possible through Klaus Rinke. Like Palermo, Mucha was inspired by New York, attracted at first by the sight of the desolate but not yet demolished Westside Elevated Highway of Lower Manhattan (1937–1973). In October 1977, he used the roadway as a canvas for a twenty-foot-long aluminum painting, or shadow portrait, of the twin towers of the then newly constructed World Trade Center. (Clines, 1977) Nearly a decade later, for his solo show *Pearl Paint* (November 1998–January 1999)—a reference to the Canal Street art supply store

(1933–2014)—at Murray Guy Gallery, Mucha exhibited a wall vitrine containing four black-and-white images of his 1977 street painting, which he photographed at ground level and from the top of the World Trade Center.[17] He also painted a silver rectangle on one of the gallery walls with the same paint he had used on the former Westside Elevated Highway. (Eccles, 1999: 171)

Through its ostensible links to Mucha's contemporaries, *The Economic Miracle*, *To the People of Pittsburgh I* is a significant example of the artistic transatlantic dialogue that occurred between Germany and the United States from the 1960s to the 1980s. At the same time that Mucha's sculpture serves as a homage to both Dan Flavin and Blinky Palermo—where all three artists' works constitute an extension and interpretation of the others'—it also functions on a sociocultural and economic level as a tribute to former industrial regions at home and abroad.

"Mucha's autarchic works do not talk about the world, nor are they metaphors for its events," wrote art critic Christoph Schenker in a 1987 article for *Flash Art International.* (Schenker, 2008: 161) Early assessments like this have distorted the greater contextual aspect of Mucha's oeuvre. Two years before Schenker's writing, Germano Celant more accurately described Mucha's sculptural assemblages as "carrier[s] capable of crossing all frontiers, linguistic and geographic." (Celant, 1985: 79) Mucha views Germany's Rhine–Ruhr as a mirror of changes afflicting the manufacturing areas of developed nations that struggled to salvage their heavy industries in the later decades of the 20th century and that continue to grapple with economic transition in the 21st century global economy. In select assemblage sculptures, the artist makes a claim for industrialization and deindustrialization as transnational phenomena that have affected the Rhine–Ruhr, parts of northern Italy, and the US Rust Belt. *The Economic Miracle*, *To the People of Pittsburgh I* reflects on Mucha's own socio-historical situation, but it also points far beyond this immediate context, illuminating his cultural sensitivity to the shared manufacturing heritage of familiar and foreign places.

Notes

1. Coal mines in Germany's Rhine–Ruhr industrial region turned out 130 million metric tons of coal per year in the early years of World War II, compared with 67 million tons in 1978. Steel mills owned by Thyssen in Essen and Krupp in Duisburg (now ThyssenKrupp AG)—two of the region's major steel producers—produced 53 million tons of raw steel in 1974 and barely 30 million tons in 1983. Between 1961 and 1985, 480,000 residents left the Rhine–Ruhr region. Between August 1979 and November 1983, the area's unemployment rate grew from 5.7% to more than 13%, nearly twice the national average. See Tagliabue, 2023.

2. In recent decades, the Rhine–Ruhr has strived to reinvent itself post-deindustrialization, developing its service economy with significant sectors in health, information technology, logistics, and transport. However, the area's deep-seated manufacturing background remains a fundamental component of regional identity. Between 1989 and 1999, the Internationale Bauausstellung (International Building Exhibition) Emscher Park Project worked to conserve the region's obsolete factories, mines, and chemical plants as cultural assets, commissioning artists and architects to repurpose industrial structures in the form of community centers, museums, art installations, and venues for music and performance. The Rhine–Ruhr was named Europe's cultural capital in 2010 and European Green Capital in 2017. See Reicher, 2022: 251–270.

3. I am grateful to Prof. Dr. Christian Spies, Kunsthistorisches Institut, Universität zu Köln, for his discussion of this aspect of Mucha's work with me. Max Wechsler briefly suggested problems of interpretation in 1994: "His work is inexorable, because [of] its technical and intellectual precision, its dedicated anchoring in one's own reality of life […]" [my translation]. See Wechsler, 1994: 55.

4. Under my advisor, Gregory H. Williams, I earned my Ph.D. in the Department of History of Art and Architecture at Boston University in summer 2025.

5. When Caroline Jones coined the notion of "trans-objects" to describe global artworks created since the 1960s by artists who are acutely aware of polarities between their national/cultural identity and universalist ambitions, she used the term almost exclusively in relation to Brazilian artists Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica. See Jones, 2017: 155.

6. Following the Hirshhorn Museum's 2006 exhibition *The Uncertainty of Objects and Ideas: Recent Sculpture* and the New Museum's *Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century* a year later, several scholars have emphasized the centrality of sculptural assemblage in the work of international artists.

7. Mucha's complex titles often contain multiple dates. The artist's stylistic format for *The Economic Miracle*, *To the People of Pittsburgh* is [2016] 1991. No brackets around the year indicate when an artwork was first made, while square brackets indicate when it was revised or adapted. Occasionally, an artwork title will reference the work's exhibition contexts. Meanwhile, Mucha's media descriptions precisely define the objects used and from where they came.

8. Mucha also exhibited five other wall sculptures at the Carnegie International in 1991: *Untitled (Wand)* (1985), *Eslohe* (1986), *Flinger Broich* (1986), *Oberbilker Markt (OBM)* (1986), and *Norden* (1991).

9. The name "Rust Belt" was largely popularized in 1984 by former United States vice president Walter Mondale (1928–2021) to describe the industrial Midwest. See High, 2003.

10. See Lewis, 2011.

11. Writing in the exhibition catalog, Flavin noted, "Oh, by the way, some members of my mother's family—she being Viola Marian Bernzott Flavin—left the newly emerging Germany, in the very late 1870's from Baden-Baden. (And what an especially beautiful place to be able to claim as homeland is our Baden-Baden.) Therefore, this distant 'son' that I am, has returned 'home' a celebrity to celebrate through some joyously illuminating arts. From them all, please enjoy your share." See Poetter, 1989.

12. Mucha's *The Economic Miracle*, *To the People of Pittsburgh III* was most recently exhibited in a circular formation at the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, in his solo show *Der Mucha: Ein Anfangsverdacht,* September 3, 2022–January 22, 2023.

13. Flavin's use of fluorescent tubes also appears as a reference in Mucha's later sculptures: *Wismar* (2006), *Uelzen* (2014), and *Ebnath* (2014).

14. Palermo traveled with Richter to New York for the first time in mid-November 1970, then again in spring 1973, with his wife, Kristin Heisterkamp. For details on these trips, see Mehring, 2009: 65–66; Reed, 2009: 114–115.

15. Palermo's inscriptions identified each panel and its place in the series, plus the name of the work: "to the people of N.Y.C."

16. For a history of Galerie Heiner Friedrich's activities in Munich, Cologne, and New York, see Holtmann, 2013.

17. British-born photographer and gallerist Janice Guy had come to Germany on a German Academic Exchange Grant (DAAD) and studied with Klaus Rinke, Bernd and Hilla Becher, and Nam June Paik at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf from summer semester 1976 through summer semester 1979. In our email correspondence from December 30, 2022, Guy explained her relationship to Mucha: "Reinhard and I had been students of Klaus Rinke at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in the late 1970s (where he was known as Schmied). We were also neighbors and friends." See also Lewallen, 2015.

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Charles W. White in East Berlin

Progressive Art History and the Limits of Socialist Solidarity in the German Democratic Republic, 1951–1978

Claudia Mesch

This essay considers the African American artist Charles Wilbert White's activities in what was then the German Democratic Republic, a frequent destination for the artist in the years 1951 to 1978. Known for his skill as a draftsman and his work in graphic art, White used his artwork to celebrate positive images of prominent African Americans throughout American history and to critique slavery in the USA and its legacies. White's visits to East Germany followed those of the civil rights icon Angela Davis, a Black intellectual of a younger generation who was given an official state reception in September 1972. Davis was highly feted by the GDR state, and her visit set a precedent for Charles White's art-related travels in the later 1970s.

White's experience evidences the singular impact of an African American artist on the arts in the former German Democratic Republic, but also that this influence flowed in reverse: GDR art politics seem to have impacted White's decades-long refining of his own variant of Realism in exploring African American history—which at points ebbed and flowed from social Realism into what conformed to a GDR-defined Socialist Realism and then, by the 1970s, into something else. Along with the various practices of the Popular Front in the US and related American publishing concerns, such as the Marxist newspaper *Masses & Mainstream*, the GDR art scene was formative in encouraging White's focus on graphic art over the course of his oeuvre. Because he battled tuberculosis all his life, his poor health is often given as a reason for his shift away from mural painting, but East German publishing concerns may also have played a role. This dialectic of influence ended as in his work of the 1970s White broke with Comintern and

Zhadnovian Socialist Realism, and with traditional leftist concerns. As we will see, both White and his official GDR hosts and commentators navigated the tricky question of the specificity of Black identity and its relation to the whole idea of liberation as it was articulated by the New Left.

It seems that it was pragmatic for White to continue his association with GDR officials since he benefited from it in various ways, though the economic benefits were modest at best. By 1974, White's art had evolved to move beyond the traditional Comintern directives that were the foundation of GDR policy (and arguably still were in the mid-1970s). These had first been articulated around what was termed the "Negro question" and were posed in its 1928 resolution, which understood that the party was to support African Americans in their struggle for equality and that people of color be encouraged to understand their interrelation with the international proletariat and all colonized peoples. As Andrew Hemingway notes, this concern only grew in importance after 1945, when the party understood that it needed to confront southern US racism, which formed both the foundation for conservative US politics and a major obstacle to progressive political goals in the US. (Hemingway, 2002: 260)

White officially trained at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and became active in Works Progress Administration (WPA) projects. White appears to have discovered the links between socialism and the struggle against racism during these WPA years of the 1930s. It has been argued that his leftist and Popular Front connections grew from an entire constellation of cultural associations in Chicago, New York, and Mexico (as was the case with his friend the artist Jacob Lawrence), more so than any allegiance to the Communist Party of the United States of America.

During his marriage to the artist Elizabeth Catlett, whom he met at the South Side Community Art Center in Chicago and to whom he was married from 1941 to 1947, both artists worked with the Taller de Gráfica Popular [Popular Graphic Art Workshop or TGP] in Mexico City, while staying with David Siquieros. A 1951 background or informant report on White by a GDR official in the Akademie der Künste (AdK) [Academy of Arts] archives in Berlin notes that he had studied with Leopoldo Méndez in the TGP, a colleague of Siquieros's and a major figure in Mexican art, and also an advocate of collaborative, anonymous graphic art that was tied to leftist, Mexican-Revolutionary goals. The populist and leftist leanings of the TGP impressed White, who soon after shifted more of his artistic output to the mediums of drawing and graphic art, the means that, the TGP had concluded, most effectively brought a progressive message in art to the people, or the "masses," the term used in the US at the time.

In New York, after his return to the USA from Mexico, White became a member of Robeson's Committee for the Negro in the Arts, founded in New York in 1947, where he met the most dedicated future collectors of his art, Harry Belafonte and Sidney Poitier. Along with Robeson, all were soon blacklisted, as Mary Helen Washington recounts, since the Committee for the Negro in the Arts was already investigated as a "subversive organization" in 1948. (Washington, 2014: 93) White's friend the sociologist Edmund Gordon perhaps best articulated White's survival tactics amid McCarthyism: "In those days you didn't go around talking about being in the Party. I never saw a so-called Party card, but it was no secret that his politics were Left, and in his more candid moments, I'm sure that he would say he believed in socialism. He certainly was grateful to the Left for their support." (Washington, 81) Perhaps Gordon's observations point to a kind of compartmentalized thinking on White's part, who may have considered these leftist gigs or engagements as transactional (in our current parlance) or as sources of financial support that were separate from any ideological strings that may have been attached to them. Regarding his political sympathies and alliances, White seems to have either been careful to position them a non-partisan manner or managed not to mention them at all, which appears to have helped him achieve later recognition in the US, or at least to avoid the blacklisting which crippled and ended the careers of American friends and colleagues, such as Paul Robeson. This is remarkable given White's exhibitions and publications in the GDR in the 1950s. It is perhaps for this reason that White had no major exhibitions or travel to the GDR in the following decade and did not return to the GDR until 1974.

The GDR art bureaucracy—coordinated beginning in 1950 through the AdK and the Verband Bildender Künstler der DDR [Association of Visual Artists of the GDR]—began to actively court White after a critical event: his attendance at the well-funded and heavily promoted August 1951 World Festival of Youth and Students in East Berlin, part of a coordinated "Friendship Tour" that began in Paris and included side trips for the Whites to Poland and Moscow. White's participation serves as another indicator of his ties to socialism and his involvement and exploitation in the Cold War culture wars. Similar to its World Congress of Peace events, which began in 1948 (arguably in reaction to the formation of NATO), the World Festivals were mass events organized by the Soviet World Peace Council, and were supported by major artists such as Pablo Picasso, whose lithographs became an emblem of the World Peace Council. He created a second design for the 1951 festival, which decorated souvenir scarves in East Berlin.

The Weltfestspiele der Jugend und Studenten [World Festival of Youth and Students] offered a number of VIP events for delegates, who were treated to nice accommodation; meals; and visits to the Bolshoi

ballet, galleries, farms, and factories. (Horowitz, 1967: 24; Washington, 2014: 94) White's 1951 visit was coordinated through his association with the Committee for the Negro in the Arts and with the Communist Party USA newspapers *The Daily Worker* and *Masses & Mainstream*, to which he contributed in New York. During the trip, White was able to mount exhibitions of his recent prints, perhaps from the time of his association with the Workshop for Graphic Art (New York) and from *Masses & Mainstream,* at each of the travel venues. He was asked to jury several exhibitions and to speak at different functions during the trip as well. As mentioned, the informant's report in the AdK archives, prepared during his visit and described as a "report assigned by the Academy, conversation with delegates for World Festival" and dated September 15, 1951, presents details of his biography, exhibition, and his teaching and lecturing career, concluding, "White is very interested in the frequent and regular exchange of work results with the academy in Berlin and has indicated his complete support" (AdK Archives, Berlin). White's art was consistently described as graphic art of the "other America," a term the GDR press associated with the artist throughout their engagement. Well into the 1970s, White regularly entered works in the graphic arts competition of the international Leipziger Buchmesse [Leipzig Book Fair] and frequently won distinctions, including the gold medal in 1965.

Arguably as a result of the positive first contacts during the 1951 East Berlin World Festival of Youth and Students and the informant's assurances of reliability, White was recruited by the publisher VEB Verlag der Kunst in Dresden for a monograph on his art as part of the series Artists of the Present,[1] the first publication dedicated to White's artistic work and which was to include an autobiographical essay. The Charles W. White Papers in the Archives of American Art contain records of a royalty advance and subsequent payments from the publisher from 1956 through at least 1961, with a tax cost that increased considerably in the final few years.

Published in Dresden in 1955, *Charles White ein Künstler Amerikas* opens with *Masses & Mainstream* art and music critic Sidney Finkelstein's essay "The Artist Charles White," which outlines African American history in broad strokes, recounting the major events of the resistance to enslavement in the US, and how resistance continues in Black culture—in music traditions such as spirituals and jazz, as well as in the visual arts—and comprises the "history and common culture of the Negro nation taking shape." (Finkelstein and White, 1955: 8) Despite its dated ethnic and racial terminology, the essay emphasizes *African* American art and history, and the *African* American struggle for equality, that grew from the diaspora and institutional slavery in the US South and various post-Civil War economic developments, such as the Great Betrayal of

1877. Finkelstein reviews the historical revolts against enslavement by Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner, and Harriet Tubman, since White depicted these figures repeatedly. Finkelstein catalogs the resilience shown by Black Americans in terms of stories of exceptional achievement in American arts and letters by figures such as Frederick Douglass; the 19th century singer Elizabeth Greenfield; W. E. B. DuBois; artist Robert M. Douglass Jr.; and the Harlem Renaissance artists Aaron Douglas, Hale Woodruff, Jacob Lawrence, and Horace Pippin.

At times, Finkelstein frames his narrative with Stalinist or Zhadanovian language that is dismissive of abstraction and points instead to a traditional, ethnically universalistic notion of Marxist class struggle that was to remain a constant goal and subject for art, approached through the legibility of a naturalistic Realism. Yet this drumbeat of Realism-linked-to-Soviet-Socialist-Realism is a tough sell in Finkelstein's essay since the book includes a number of White's pre-Friendship Tour murals and drawings that are clearly Modernist in terms of his treatment of portraiture and the figure, particularly in his more geometrically oriented drawings, such as *Defense Worker* and even the activist work *The Trenton Six*. For these latter works, Finkelstein offers close readings that admit to finding "stylization of the human head and body" that is "lingering as an element in the artist's style," but assures that this aspect is "on the point of being sloughed off."[2] There is a focused critique of the Harlem Renaissance, which Finkelstein characterizes as "the 'discovery' of the art of the Negro people by white patrons and critics" who also put forward the related notion of "primitivism"—which Finkelstein notes is a "strange atavism" that imputes essentializing "'Negro' characteristics."[3] Interestingly his critique focuses on the Harlem Renaissance-era commodification on the art market and not on these artists' Modernist forms, which he later describes specifically and approvingly.[4] But he also notes that the Modernist bending of form presents a "contradiction" that "make[s] it more difficult to disclose the inner sensitivity and psychological depth of the human beings who are the subject."[5]

Finkelstein gamely tries to keep a foot in both camps on the other issue, moving between a specific postcolonialist notion of African American liberation in visual art while also arguing for its universalism within international socialism. His essay begins and ends with a discussion of class struggle that is otherwise not distinguished as to location or ethnicity and that is strangely unrelated to the rest of the essay, which it brackets. It appears that Charles White straddled this same tension, since the first plate featured in the VEB Verlag book has been retitled. The print, a 1951 linocut originally titled *Exodus I: Black Moses (Harriet Tubman)* (fig. 1), appears in the book with the title *A Female Revolutionary of the Workers Movement* (Plate 1 and p. 66), and is thus

made to correspond to a universalizing notion of class struggle most familiar to GDR readers of the time. As there is in the archives a copy of a 1955 list of illustrations that is annotated with a number of individual comments by the artist, it seems likely that White himself agreed to this title change, though it certainly seems to contradict the dynamics of his earlier work and its focus on icons of African American history.[6]

Fig. 1.
Charles W. White, *Exodus I: Black Moses (Harriet Tubman),* 1951; Alternate Title: *A Female Revolutionary of the Workers Movement* (1955; Plate 1 and p. 66 in *Charles White, ein Künstler Amerikas*) © The Charles White Archives (not finalized).

Undeniably White's post-Friendship Tour works (that is, post-1951), evidence a "new transformation and qualitative leap to a completely realistic style" that Finkelstein trumpets toward the end of his essay.[7] Mary Helen Washington notes the disappointment on the part of White's Modernist students and colleagues about this change: his student John Biggers stated, "It was almost as if he was working backward into the future […] the early work with its marvelous abstract qualities […] was so magnificent, he left that and went back into Realism. I don't know what caused this." (Washington, 2014: 107) Washington identifies White's 1950s turn away from Modernism as a crisis, in which one might also include the tensions in his work between the depiction of a struggle specific to African Americans while simultaneously adhering to a notion of universal (leftist) class conflict, which, I believe, further contributed to this crisis. (Washington, 2014: 74)

After the book's publication there followed ceaseless attempts to recruit Charles White for exhibitions of his art in the GDR and many entreaties to send artwork or, otherwise, to visit. White was made a corresponding member of the East German art academy in 1961 and would be invited to attend every subsequent plenary session of the organization; he finally did so in 1978. In some cases White agreed to other invitations: there was for instance the already-mentioned 1959 White exhibition that toured the GDR for almost ten years. Archival correspondence reveals constant planning on the part of GDR officials for further exhibitions of new work, beginning with one planned for 1964 that was to have featured White along with David Siquieros and Rockwell Kent—planning that was suspended due to a lack of state funds available to the academy. At the time of his death, further letters from the GDR to White detailed plans for an upcoming academy exhibition in 1979–1980.

As is reflected in archival correspondence, after literally a decade of repeated invitations, delays, and protracted negotiation around getting Charles White and his art back to East Berlin, in late 1973, persistent GDR art market managers finally got White and his dealer Benjamin Horowitz to agree to his participation in a group exhibition.[8] This event and his related travel to the GDR marks the culmination of White's contributions to the GDR, as in 1978 his travel was limited to his attendance at the academy plenary. In spring 1974, White traveled with a state entourage throughout the GDR with his wife, with an itinerary that included studio visits with the prominent official artists Walter Womacka, Theo Balden, and others; lectures; a luncheon with representatives from the ministry of culture; side trips to Weimar, Erfurt, Chemnitz and likely other destinations (Müller, 1974); and meetings with the editor of the leading GDR art journal *Bildende Kunst*.

On March 1, 1974, the *Exhibition of American Artists Anton Refregier, Tecla Selnick, and Charles White*, sponsored by the Verband Bildender Künstler artists' union, opened at the Ausstellungszentrum Fernsehturm at the Alexanderplatz with White in attendance at the vernissage. Lea Grundig, the honorary president of the Verband Bildender Künstler, delivered a formal address, noting that each of the participating American artists "makes us better understand the other America that lives in the slums, being hunted, persecuted, and socially discriminated, that working and fighting America in the brotherhood of white and colored people."[9] In later correspondence, Horst Weiss of the artists union mentions that 20,000 people visited this exhibition.

Of these artists, White easily had the greatest artistic stature or renown, and Grundig commented most extensively on his art. Refregier, a Russian American painter who had, like White, advanced in the WPA as a muralist, completed a controversial (and ultimately destroyed) mural for the San Francisco Rincon Center. Selnick, a Moldovan American,

lived in Harlem and was known for folksy line-drawing portraits of her neighbors of color there; she showed her work not just in galleries but at fairs, street exhibitions, and union strikes. (Lang, 1974) The illustrated catalog of the exhibition featured an introductory essay and brief profiles of the artists. It appears that for each leg of White's visit, great effort was made to fill almost every moment of the artist's time with official activities, presumably to avoid serendipitous encounters or revelations with members of the public. Asked in a radio interview broadcast on Rundfunk der DDR on March 23, 1974 whether he discussed his art with exhibition visitors, White offhandedly reveals, "It's the case that your hospitality is such that it's kept us from that, we have such a full program, there's been no opportunity to actually visit the exhibition and talk to people in it."[10]

The challenges put forward in White's contributions are, however, more significant than is revealed in many of these official comments that framed the exhibition. White's changes in style and technique are closely registered in Lothar Lang's startled review. In the figures of the large-scale drawings *Harriet* and *Mississippi*, both from 1972 (fig. 2 and fig. 3), White withholds or shrouds the African American body from the viewer's gaze. The drawings have no specific setting, and White reveals only the figures' faces. *Mississippi* also conceals gender behind the textured rolls of fabric that envelop the figure. "His figures," Grundig explained in 1974, "wrapped in big shawls and marked by an extraordinary plasticity, often in front of nearly vacant backgrounds, have the monumentality of statues. […] [A]n excellent personification of the negro people."[11] Lang declares, "There are some almost monochromatic paintings [*sic*] which almost pain the onlooker. […] In spite of the accuracy of their motifs, they are symbols and want to be taken as such." (Lang, 1974: n.p.) Likely offered in the spirit of critical generosity toward White's newer work, these comments are unusually tone-deaf even in the GDR at that moment, in that both German Socialist viewers pointedly refuse to engage with the new ground White covers in this work and with new evidence of White's final break with GDR Realism.

White's monumental drawings of 1972 in the exhibition recall the first of his *J'Accuse* series of 1965, where a similarly cloaked and gloved figure, perhaps blind, stares ahead mutely, as an icon of resilience. (As an aside: I have concluded that the figure depicted in this drawing is blind, since his 1950s-era photo of a blind woman on a street in Harlem seems to be the likely model for the drawing.) Here White references the urban poor of color with a posture and heft that is otherwise found in Michaelangelo's depictions of the prophets and sibyls on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. The heavily textured fabric that White uses to cocoon his 1972 figures underscores this tie to Renaissance-era mythological and sacred figures, as does a similar mastery of the rendering of folds of garment.

Fig. 2.

Charles W. White, *Harriet*, 1972 © The Charles White Archives (not finalized). See also Plate 11.

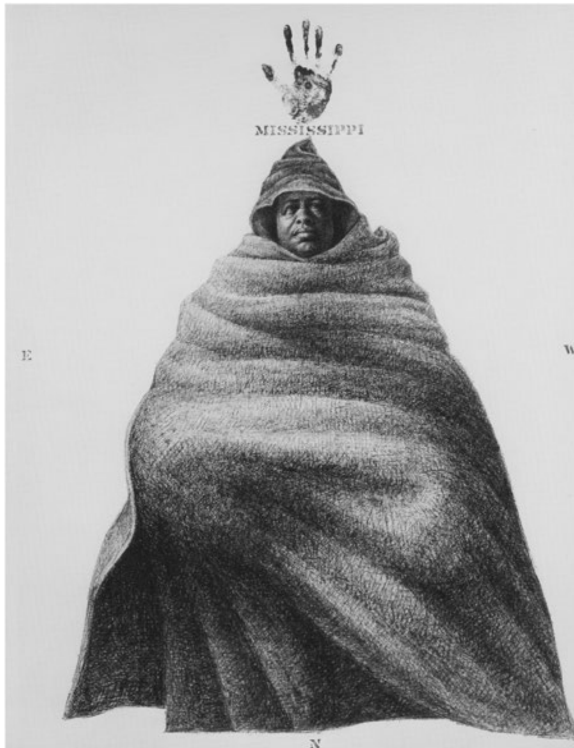

Fig. 3.

Charles W. White, *Mississippi*, 1972 © The Charles White Archives (not finalized).

The drawings *Harriet* (fig. 2) and *Mississippi* (fig. 3) emphasize not so much symbolic, but rather indexical qualities that point to Black identity: of the physical body of a specific ethnicity which marks at a particular point in time the paper ground of the drawing— by means of White's own handprint in tones of red, positioned above the stenciled text "Mississippi" and, in *Harriet,* in a possible reference to bodily fluid or a bloody stain, the interior or abject material of that physical body. Both are referents that register the Black body as an indexical print, marking a reaction to physical violence by means of its own substance and materiality.

In *Harriet* (fig. 2), the stain takes on the shape of an embodied compass rose. White also foregrounds a compass motif in *Mississippi*, including the cardinal directions on the page, marking them with the usual letters of N, E, and W, but that he inverts and reverses (which, furthermore, suggests the typical reversals of a mirror surface and image). The cloaked figure of *Mississippi* (fig. 3) becomes a directional hand of a four-point compass rose, pointing to the stenciled letter "S" and to the (American) South, an origin site of white racism and the primary historical place of slavery in the US. The figure also becomes a (reverse) mapping of White's own history: the family migration from Mississippi to Chicago and his artistic activities in West (Los Angeles) and East (New York), but also, farther east, his work in the GDR. He furthermore positions his migrations and travel between past, present, and future, since a compass is a means of orientation that remains consistent over time. Thus Harriet Tubman and other key figures of African American history and culture, as well as African Americans leading everyday lives—and White worked tirelessly to center both in his art—become the mechanisms that White puts forward to be used by global citizens of African descent to align themselves in the direction of genuine liberation and equity, in the US and abroad.

Yet even as White introduced the specificity of Black identity into his art in 1972, putting forward a new subject for leftist notions of history, he nonetheless continued to assert, in interviews and publications during the trip to the GDR in 1974, and even to American audiences, that he concerned himself with a universal subject of liberation for all peoples, including Anglos. This tempering language might indicate White's own lingering doubt around whether GDR and Anglo viewers of his work might not otherwise accept its premise of centering not just African American history but the Black American experience, and his necessary privileging of the latter as a deliberate act of integrating American art. In his last years, White became more revealing, as when he stated to an astute interviewer in 1978: "We've forged a bond of universal brotherhood, which is the direct result of a commonly defined enemy—white racism. [...] It's amazing what oppression does to you.

In a strange way, it can almost become a positive force. It has certainly nourished my sensitivities as an artist." (Eliott, 1978: 63) White did then acknowledge that the most acute social, political, and cultural struggle was that for civil rights and Black equality, above and beyond a focus on a universal class-based struggle, though the two might at times share a common foundation.

Did Charles White's ascendance in the GDR artworld offer a mutual benefit to the two parties? We must acknowledge the more exploitative aspects of the GDR art world that come to light in researching White's dealings with it over these years: the network- and collection-creating corresponding memberships offered by the GDR Academy; state publishers' tax-heavy royalty agreements and casual requests for free art; and its subtle yet aggressive pursuit of artworks through exhibitions or donation. However, the groundbreaking role of the GDR artworld in publishing Sidney Finkelstein's distinctive mid-1950s essay on White's art must be acknowledged, even if we can find pockets of Zhadnovian apparachnik-speak in it. Published by East German art bureaucrats in the 1950s, the book *Charles White, ein Künstler Amerikas*— even as we read it well into the 21st century—remains a unique example of what a progressive, integrated American history of art might look like.

For a time, Charles White fashioned his art so it had stylistic proximity to GDR Socialist Realism, which made it more understandable within Soviet-sphere aesthetic debates. This compliance led to the first monograph on his art, a publication which seemed to affect White deeply. Perhaps the support and admiration of GDR art bureaucrats provided him with a measure of full public support and recognition—in a book-length monograph on his art, in long-running exhibitions, in the press throughout the GDR, and, later, on GDR radio—that he did not receive in the US until the very end of his life. White's close ties to traditional Socialist discourse around Realism in the GDR allowed him to better articulate the specificity of his own experiences and of the Black experience generally. White also appears to have realized that even within Socialist discourse, the Black subject remained at best hidden in the margins. But I would venture that his success in the early 1970s—with his "Wanted Poster" series of 1969–1970 and in his large-scale drawings of 1972—happened not because of his newfound confidence as an artist but, rather, resulted from his interrupting of expectations around conventional notions of Realism in using Modernist techniques, as in placing his figures against a cubistic and self-reflexive ground (which characterizes the "Wanted Poster" series), and in the indexical marks found in the drawings *Harriet* and *Mississippi*. This final interruption of naturalistic representation privileged a specifically Black subject in his art. And, as his dealer Horowitz made clear to GDR contacts after 1974, the established international artist would no longer gift his work to the

cause of the domestic and international politics of a Socialist nation that seemed unaware that their actual and attempted exploitations of the artist simply echoed old colonialist relations toward the colonized. In the end, the progressive aspects of White's acceptance and promotion in the GDR should not be confused with any act of actual decolonization. In defining the process of decolonization, Rafael Cardoso notes that it "means listening to the colonized. […] The core issues of decolonization revolve around the unevenness of power between regions of the globe, as well as the systems of oppression this imbalance engenders, often based on ethnic and cultural difference." (Cardoso, 2022) While they offered White a national stage for his art during the Cold War, GDR artists and bureaucrats conveniently misunderstood his work. The GDR press pronounced for twenty years that Socialist solidarity joined the African American artist to the East German populace, but both consistently talked past each other in order to maintain their transactions—which both may have mistaken for a type of Socialist bond. Charles White likely realized that his obligations as an artist were committed to a different notion of emancipation. His resulting return to Modernism in his later art allowed him to crystallize a new and decolonized Black subject of great visual and political power.

Notes

1. Letter from unnamed "manager" and "submanager," VEB Verlag der Kunst, August 31, 1954, Charles W. White Papers, Archives of American Art, "Professional Activities 1953–1955."

2. Untitled and anonymous manuscript, Charles W. White Papers, Archives of American Art, 29. My citations and pagination refer to the untitled, edited, anonymous manuscript on deposit under the Series Title "Writings" in the Charles W. White papers, Archives of American Art. I have verified that this manuscript is the original English text featured in German translation in the book *Charles White, ein Künstler Amerikas* (Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1955) and that it is by Sidney Finkelstein.

3. Untitled and anonymous manuscript, Charles W. White Papers, Archives of American Art, 13.

4. For instance, in discussing Hale Woodruff, Finkelstein notes that he "applied some of the techniques of abstraction and expressionism"; he also notes that Jacob Lawrence "working in a flat style with simplified outlines created a number of powerful narrative series of paintings [sic]." Untitled and anonymous manuscript, Charles W. White Papers, Archives of American Art, 17.

5. Untitled and anonymous manuscript, Charles W. White Papers, Archives of American Art, 24.

6. Charles W. White Papers, Archives of American Art.

7. Untitled and anonymous manuscript, Charles W. White Papers, Archives of American Art, 29.

8. This correspondence is in both the Akademie der Künste (AdK) [Academy of Arts] Archives and in the Charles W. White Papers, Archives of American Art.

9. Address delivered by Prof. Lea Grundig, Honorary President of the Sculptors' and Painters' Association of the GDR, on the occasion of the opening of the Exhibition of American Artists on March 1, 1974; manuscript, Charles W. White Papers, Archives of American Art.

10. Radio interview with Lucie Schütze, Rundfunk der DDR, March 23, 1974, my translation. Deutsches Rundfunk Archiv, Berlin.

11. Manuscript of March 1, 1974, address by Lea Grundig; Charles W. White Papers, Archives of American Art.

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Network as an Expansion Strategy

Robert Barry and the Development of Artist Relations of Galerie Paul Maenz in Cologne

Stefano Agresti

Galerie Paul Maenz in Cologne, which opened in January 1971 with Hans Haacke's solo show, was, until its closing in January 1990, one of the reference venues for the exhibition, diffusion, and divulgation of contemporary art in West Germany. During the 1970s, before Paul Maenz developed his interest in the "new painting" and the "return to the image," the gallery was one of the European centers of conceptualism, identifying its presence in the nascent contemporary art market with the analytical and "de-materialized" avant-garde artistic trends. (Faust, 1991b: 90–98; Richard, 2009: 119)

It is in this framework that Robert Barry, who was already part of Seth Siegelaub's New York group, decided to collaborate with the gallery—the first one with which he established a constant partnership in West Germany. The earliest contacts with Maenz and his partner Gerd De Vries occurred in the second half of 1970, before the official launch of the gallery, and the cooperation continued throughout the decades, with eight solo shows and many other group exhibitions. The artist's last project conceived with Maenz, the *Art Cologne Wall Piece*, dates to 1988.

As confirmed by Barry himself in a recent interview with the Italian gallerist Massimo Minini, the affiliation with Maenz was relevant for the acknowledgment of his work. For this, he says, his innate talent as a dealer was fundamental, especially for the placement of his artworks in high-profile collections. (Minini, 2020) It is important to note that this partnership began while West Germany was establishing itself as a crucial region for the reception and propagation of international Conceptual art. I am speaking of a phenomenon which has already been

individuated by some contemporary observers, underlined by Barry himself in the 1978 interview with Robin White, and discussed with new methodologies in recent studies. (Kudielka, 1970: 206; McConathy, 1971: 68; Barry and White, 1978: 20; Dossin, 2015: 189–220; Messina, 2020: 29–38)

In relation to the collaboration between Barry and Maenz, the development of which is an interesting research topic in itself, I want to focus on its very first moment, that is, the period between Maenz's discovery of the work of Robert Barry and the artist's conception of the *Invitation Piece*, between 1972 and 1973. This last project affirmed not only the relevance of the artist in the Western-European scene, but it also formalized the participation of Galerie Paul Maenz in what Sophie Richard named the international network of Conceptual art. (Richard, 2009: 37–40) In this regard, my research looks at a series of events and documents that show an original aspect of their dialogue. My aim is to reconstruct how Barry promoted both his work and Galerie Paul Maenz in the first half of the 1970s by implementing and using the network of contacts of the nascent gallery.

The networking between artists and contemporary galleries in the Western art world (in the USA and Western Europe) between the end of the 1960s and the 1970s is undoubtedly a primary topic. Its relevance is intertwined with the creative processes of the time, expressing a a complexity that goes beyond the early interpretations given by such authors as Lawrence Alloway. (Alloway, 1972: 28–32) Books such as *Unconcealed* (2009), by the already quoted Sophie Richard, have begun to illustrate the importance of this mobile constellation in conveying people and ideas, and in the shaping of the contemporary art world. However, to be understood in all its complexity, the phenomenon needs further exploration and new interpretative tools.

In the case of Robert Barry, his connections were part of his artistic dimension. As a matter of fact, he considered the relations between people and places in space and time to be an essential part of his creative thinking. (Morgan, 2003: 71–78; Paoletti, 2003: 21–57; Wulffen, 2003: 97–109) Recent contributions, such as the monograph written by Birgit Eusterschulte, who explored the relationship between materiality and immateriality, and the research on the Galleria Sperone circle conducted by the Italian scholar Francesco Guzzetti, have provided further considerations on historic projects, such as the *Closed Gallery Piece* (1969) and the *Invitation Piece* (1972–1973), whose story and language implications are quite well known. (Faust, 1991a: 24; Paoletti, 2003: 33–37; Wulffen, 2003: 97–108; Eusterschulte, 2020; Guzzetti, 2021) A critical insight into the dimension of Barry as networker is, nevertheless, still missing. My purpose with this research is to start to shed light on this area, trying to deal with the topics that arise from Barry's "relational" works.

Concerning the Barry-Maenz collaboration, I drew up some questions, which oriented my study:

- How did Robert Barry's ideas and *modus operandi* contribute to the placement of Galerie Paul Maenz in the international contemporary art network, in a West German panorama already characterized by the existence of such influential galleries as Konrad Fischer's?
- What was the relationship between Galerie Paul Maenz's international acknowledgment and Robert Barry's strategy of presentation, diffusion, and preservation of his own work in the West German contemporary art space?
- What was the role of the gallerist in relation to that of the artist? How did the artist view the gallerist in their collaboration?

In trying to answer these questions, my inquiry adopts a methodology centered on the idea of "art politics." With this term, I do not mean ideological postures or party positions, nor the interference with politics or identity issues touched on by Stefano Chiodi in some of his writings on Italian contemporary art. (Chiodi, 2010: 157–195) On the contrary, I embrace the substance of the dialectics emerging in the space between the different players (artists, gallerists, art critics, museum directors, etc.) and which influence or contribute to the artwork's conception, production, communication, and "management." Above all, it is through this "political" lens that I interpret the interweaving of ideation, formalization, and strategy, whose reciprocal overlap lies at the core of the new Conceptual languages. This idea moves on from and expands the idea expressed in Alexander Alberro's pivotal book *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*. (Alberro, 2003) Here, I will re-examine Alberro's thesis under new geo-cultural terms (the Transatlantic dialogue between two figures) and in relation to the presence of a European dealer (Paul Maenz) who starts to work with a US Conceptual artist. On a more general level, I look at the interaction between the players through the concept of *croisement*, as it is described by Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, which acts in the background as an orienting principle. (Werner and Zimmermann, 2006: 30–50) Following this perspective, Galerie Paul Maenz, understood as a geo-artistic place, is taken as a topological "political" referent and as artistic material.

My study, based on an overview of Robert Barry's artistic journey in West Germany since 1969, was made possible principally by the use of oral sources. In my case, the conversation with Maenz in Berlin in 2018 was fundamental. The research is then supported by a series of unedited documents (mainly correspondence) from Galerie Paul

Maenz's records, now at the Getty Research Center in Los Angeles. Even though they do not give a complete picture of the situation, these files provide information necessary to piece together the web of times, relations, and exchanges. I will look at the files as bricks to some extent as sources for a philological reconstruction, but mainly as sources for a discourse of geo-cultural artistic strategy, elaborating a line of thought that has its roots in the specificity of this case study. According to my aim, I will not stress the materiality of the documents. Although sometimes interesting in their visuality, they are part of a bigger and fuller artistic operation, whose proper identity resides in the immaterial relationships among words, people, and places.

The Beginning of the Collaboration Between Galerie Paul Maenz and Robert Barry

Paul Maenz came up with the idea of a gallery after the conclusion of a series of experiences and projects involving avant-garde art that he had engaged in together with the artist Peter Roehr, in Frankfurt am Main. (Maenz, 1989: 283–284; Leuthäußer and Maenz, 2018; Messina, 2020: 29–32) The beginning of Maenz's correspondence with artists with the aim of creating a gallery community dates back to December 1969, with an exchange of letters with Hans Haacke. The correspondence became more intense during spring 1970, when Maenz wrote to the Fluxus artist Dick Higgins and to Sol LeWitt, among others. At the time, LeWitt was already represented in West Germany by Galerie Konrad Fischer, in Düsseldorf, which had opened in September 1967 with a Carl Andre solo show. In 1969 and 1970, despite some initial diffidence, US Conceptual art was becoming appealing for certain German art collectors, and most of the concept-artists were already collaborating with German gallerists. Maenz himself, in a retrospective text published in *Kunstforum International* in December 1989, reports the difficulty at the time in creating a sphere of autonomy and finding free artists of the generation he was interested in to involve in his own work. He clearly writes: "the cake that appealed to me was small" [my translation]. (Maenz, 1989: 285)

Paul Maenz wrote his first letter to Robert Barry on October 29, 1970. The German dealer invited the artist to be part of the gallery and participate in his project, which was taking shape with the collaboration of Gerd De Vries. The idea expressed by Maenz is "not only to regularly put up shows, but also represent the artist in Germany." (Maenz, letter to R. Barry, October 29, 1970—Getty Research Institute, Galerie Paul Maenz Records, Box 15 Folder 3) The letter confirms the singularity of Robert Barry's case. In fall 1970, he was indeed among the "top"

US Conceptual artists not yet represented by a German gallery, a fate shared with Joseph Kosuth, who would also shortly start working with Galerie Paul Maenz, with his first solo show happening in February 1971. (Richard, 2009: 119) However, Barry was not entirely new to the Rheinland. His work had first appeared in the group exhibitions *Op Losse Schroeven* (Essen, Museum Folkwang) and *Vorstellungen nehmen Form an* (Krefeld, Museum Haus Lange) in May–June 1969. A few months later, in September 1969, his work was shown to the German art audience again as part of the *Prospect 69* exhibition at the Düsseldorfer Kunsthalle. On this occasion, he conceived *Interview Piece*, a written catalog page in Seth Siegelaub's section of the publication. In October 1969, as part of the Siegelaub circle, Barry was then invited to the collective exhibition *Konzeption-Conception*, curated by Konrad Fischer and Rolf Wedewer at the Museum Schloss Morsbroich, in Leverkusen. For this event, he realized "5 individual works" which exist only in the exhibition catalog. (Malz, 2016: 217) As he wrote in a letter-artwork to Wedewer on August 20, 1969, there was no necessity "to display any documentation on the museum walls." (Barry, letter to R. Wedewer, August 20, 1969—UC Berkeley, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Museum purchase: Bequest of Thérèse Bonney, Class of 1916, by exchange) The exhibition *Konzeption-Conception*, a crucial initiative for the introduction of Conceptual art in West Germany, was also the occasion on which Maenz first encountered the work of Robert Barry, as he stated in his letter from October 29, 1970. (Maenz, letter to R. Barry, October 29, 1970—Getty Research Institute, Galerie Paul Maenz Records, Box 15 Folder 3)

During the year 1969, Barry started to collaborate, simultaneously, with two of the most prominent European galleries engaged in Conceptual art. The official announcement was made by the *Closed Gallery Piece* (December 1969), in which Barry involved Art&Project in Amsterdam and then Galleria Sperone in Turin. As testified to by a group of letters starting from November 9, 1969, now in the Archiv Dorothee und Konrad Fischer at Kunstsammlung NRW in Düsseldorf, Barry invited Fischer to take part in the project, too. In a letter from November 28, 1969, quoted by Maria Müller-Scharek in her 2016 essay on the Düsseldorf dealer, Barry states that his "proposition for a 'show'" was a demand for "a larger work of art." "The more galleries I can use," he says "the richer and fuller the concept." (Müller-Scharek, 2016: 41) However, despite Fischer's interest in conceptualism, the cooperation did not go ahead.

The absence of a German reference gallery for Barry and his growing presence in Europe, boosted by the participation in the *Conceptual Art Arte Povera Land Art* exhibition at Galleria d'Arte Moderna in Turin, in June 1970, were maybe central to Maenz's decision to establish contact

with him. Maenz's interest in having a protagonist of Conceptual art is highly likely to have coincided with Barry's desire to expand his own network in Europe. The intentions converge in a meeting in person in Cologne in mid-December 1970. The rendez-vous was arranged through a series of letters, the first of which already lays the groundwork for the network.

The Italian Connection

On November 11, 1970, Barry replied to Maenz, expressing his interest in working with him and De Vries and in "showing work in Germany," but asking to talk with him in person. (Barry, letter to P. Maenz, November 11, 1970—Getty Research Institute, Galerie Paul Maenz Records, Box 15 Folder 3) In the same letter, Barry also writes about his further plans in Europe, and he specifically names Galleria Sperone in Turin, where the artist would present the *Marcuse Piece*. Reading this part of the letter, one gets the impression that he wanted not only to confirm his Italian referent but also to give his new interlocutor a potential direction for networking outside Germany's borders. It is important to remember that Gianenzo Sperone was at the time one of the most important figures in the promotion of Conceptual art and one of the most direct continental partners of Leo Castelli. Barry's direction is corroborated by the letter he sent to Maenz and De Vries after their meeting in Cologne, dated December 31, when he says that he has spoken with Sperone, who "is anxious to meet and to speak" with him. (Barry, letter to P. Maenz, December 31, 1970—Getty Research Institute, Galerie Paul Maenz Records, Box 15 Folder 3) The interaction with Sperone, which would unfold in the years to come on both the "political" and the commercial level, was formalized with the participation of Galerie Paul Maenz in one of the first of Barry's "chain" works. This is the *Marcuse Piece*, which coincided with the artist's first solo show in Cologne (and in Germany), which opened on March 30, 1971.

After this, the letter of December 31, 1970, offers further information. Barry recalls that Maenz asked him for the names of some interesting artists "who hadn't shown in Germany" yet. (Barry, letter to P. Maenz, December 31, 1970—Getty Research Institute, Galerie Paul Maenz Records, Box 15 Folder 3) In the text, we can read the names of Dan Graham and Robert Huot, neither of whom would go on to exhibit in Cologne. However, other sources tell us that Barry and Maenz spoke in person about other contemporary artists to be invited to exhibit in Cologne. One documented case—confirmed by Maenz's oral testimony—is that of the Italian, Turin-based artist Salvo, who received a letter from the German dealer on January 8, 1971. (Maenz, letter to Salvo,

January 8, 1971—Turin, Archivio Salvo) In this letter, Maenz begins by explicitly saying that he is writing to him "at the suggestion of Robert Barry" and that the address was given to him by Françoise Lambert. Salvo's invitation has already been reported in the art-historical literature. (Leuthäußer and Maenz, 2018; De Chiara, 2022: 613–615) However, there are two aspects that still need to be examined. The first aspect has to do with the language of the Italian artist. Even though his work can be considered Conceptual for his use of photography and written words with the aim of mediating his *persona*, Salvo's oeuvre in 1969 and 1970 has its own specificity and is far from Barry's artistic profile. (Ammann, 1970) His art is also very different from that of the other continental and US Conceptual artists, as it is characterized by manifest references to the Italian culture and art history of the past. (Lippert, 1976) It is in this sense that Maenz describes him as "more than a conceptual artist" [my translation]. (Maenz, 1989: 287)

The second aspect regards the nationality of the artist. Salvo's provenance demonstrates that Barry's vision is not limited to the USA and confirms the freedom of some avant-garde artists in tackling the artistic geopolitical issues of the time. Salvo's inclusion in Maenz's gallery circle seems to confirm that Barry, when giving information to the German dealer, mainly looked at the quality of the work of an artist, also going a little against the current—in the 2018 conversation Maenz said that many artists with whom he was dealing looked at Salvo as an "outsider," speaking of him as a difficult figure to collaborate with. Another point seems to be the positive consideration of the linguistic distance between his work and that of the others. In this light, difference would appear as something that could enrich the "environment" of the Cologne gallery but also stress Barry's specificity in a context that was still in progress. The recommendation to Maenz can, then, be interpreted as a diplomatic act, that is, a consolidation of the relationship between Maenz and Sperone. In fact, Barry brings to the Cologne gallery, and therefore to Germany, one of the artists the Italian dealer was focusing on at the time, as confirmed by the solo show organized at Yvon Lambert in Paris, in early 1971. More generally, Barry reinforces the Italian connection, promoting a concrete link between Maenz and one of the most active geo-artistic spaces of the time. Konrad Fischer was already working in this direction, by collaborating with Ileana Sonnabend and Sperone and managing the individual shows of the Arte Povera artists Mario Merz (March 1970) and Alighiero Boetti (February 1971) in his Düsseldorf gallery.

Salvo's first solo exhibition in Cologne opened on June 5, 1971. In the forthcoming years, not only would Salvo become one of the gallery's representative artists, he would soon be followed by other Italians, such as Giulio Paolini and Giuseppe Penone, who would shape a significant part of Maenz's story as a gallerist.

Leo Castelli and Barry's Transatlantic Autonomy

The aforementioned letter from Robert Barry to Paul Maenz from December 31, 1970, introduces another character: Leo Castelli. In the letter, Barry announces the planning of a complete solo show in New York for April 1971, the first one in the Castelli gallery. (Barry, letter to P. Maenz, December 31, 1970—Getty Research Institute, Galerie Paul Maenz Records, Box 15 Folder 3) The news prompts Maenz to postpone the date of Barry's show in Cologne to the end of March. (Maenz, letter to R. Barry, January 8, 1971—Getty Research Institute, Galerie Paul Maenz Records, Box 15 Folder 3)

This passage not only underlines the presence of Castelli in the background, but also recalls what Barry said in the interview at Crownpoint Press in 1978. Speaking about Castelli, he said that the New York gallerist was giving him a "show through his European gallery connections." (Barry and White, 1978: 20) In this regard, it is useful to come back to the interview with Massimo Minini, in which Barry remembered Castelli as a "transit" dealer for him—someone who made it possible for him to move in the other players' circles. (Minini, 2020)

Although Castelli was involved only indirectly, it is hard to ignore his agency in paving the way for Barry's expansion in Europe and West Germany. However, for what concerns the situation of Galerie Paul Maenz, the correspondence between Barry and the German gallerist shows how the artist himself took on the role of intermediary with New York, promoting an exchange that was mainly based on the circulation of information, books, and documents. Those aspects help to demonstrate that Barry's actions were not a mere reflection of Castelli's transatlantic strategies but that, on the contrary, the artist played an autonomous role in establishing his own network throughout Europe creating partnerships which were hard to manage in the USA at that time.

"Placement" and "Enclosure": The Gallery in the Network

Robert Barry's externality in the galleries' relational space is exemplified, on the side of Galerie Paul Maenz, by his first solo show in Cologne, entitled *Some Places to Which We Can Come, and for a While, "Be Free to Think About What We Are Going to Do"* (March 30–April 8, 1971). While the gallery space was left empty for the duration of the exhibition, the artist ordered the production of mailings necessary for the circulation of the artist's name and the information. There Galerie Paul Maenz appeared in the sequence of European and US art galleries which made the piece possible as "mediums." The Cologne gallery, which Barry intended as a specific individual point on the artistic map of the time, found

itself enclosed as site n. 5 in a transatlantic "chain" of galleries, together with Sperone in Turin, Galleria San Fedele in Milan, Art&Project in Amsterdam, Yvon Lambert in Paris, and Eugenia Butler in Los Angeles. From its actual geographic extent, this "chain" projected itself in space and time as an objectified "form" for which Barry played the role of the external activator and "shape maker." His position was granted not only by the grouping concept which informs part of the piece, but also by the explicitly requested written uniformity of "all the mailers from the various galleries." (Barry, letter to P. Maenz, March 31, 1971—Getty Research Institute, Galerie Paul Maenz Records, Box 15 Folder 3) While the artist promoted himself and his work on a vast scale, galleries were advertised and advertised themselves as centers for the dissemination of the avant-garde. The two movements were united by a reciprocal relationship.

The "placement" and "enclosure" of Galerie Paul Maenz in the "chain" testifies to the necessity for the artist to insert his new German partner in a net of "allied" players. The purpose was to fortify the gallery's profile in a national context and also, on a broader level, to "institutionalize" a transnational structure that could ensure existence and visibility for his work. Of course, this structure also had a commercial nature, which, as emerges from the correspondence with Maenz between 1971 and 1972, was not immediately effective in the very first stages of their collaboration: "[N]o sales up to now," Maenz wrote to Barry after the closing of the artist's first solo show in Cologne. (Maenz, letter to R. Barry, April 13, 1971—Getty Research Institute, Galerie Paul Maenz Records, Box 15 Folder 3) Furthermore, the Italian scholar Maria Grazia Messina has pointed out some of the problems emerging in the commercial relations of the early years. (Messina, 2020: 34–36) In fact, the artist's distribution of works among the partners of the "chain" sometimes made the management difficult for Maenz, for example in the case of the sixty slides from the piece *It is…* documented in a letter from November 8, 1971. (Maenz, letter to R. Barry, November 8, 1971—Getty Research Institute, Galerie Paul Maenz Records, Box 15 Folder 3) I nevertheless suggest interpreting those situations as another aspect of the strategy developed by the artist. In fact, Barry privileges the diffusion and the affirmation of his work and artistic presence, consciously behaving with a certain autonomy and "ease" toward the internal dynamics of individual galleries.

Despite these situations in 1971 and 1972, Galerie Paul Maenz became one of the most relevant reference points for Barry. In particular, Maenz represented a fundamental bridge for what Germany was also considered relevant for. I refer to his presence at the Kölner Kunstmarkt, which was growing internationally after its inauguration in 1967, and the connection with the public institutions. (Richard, 2009: 128–129) As a matter of fact, in this phase, the collaboration with Barry was marked

by a series of relevant events: the participation in *Prospect 71 Projection* in Düsseldorf (October 8–17, 1971); the inclusion in Klaus Honnef's 1971 book on Conceptual art; the invitation to *documenta 5* in Kassel (June 30–October 8, 1972); and the cooperation with the *Konzept Kunst* exhibition at the Kunsmuseum Basel (March 18–April 23, 1972), which Maenz had been responsible for since October 1971. "We are talking about a show of Conceptual Art at the Basel Museum early next year," the gallerist informed Barry. (Maenz, letter to R. Barry, October 11, 1971—Getty Research Institute, Galerie Paul Maenz Records, Box 15 Folder 3) Furthermore, in October 1972 (October 3–8, 1972), Barry's work was presented at the Kölner Kunstmarkt. It is interesting to note that Maenz and De Vries chose a photo of the Cologne gallery when it was completely empty to represent it in the fair exhibition catalog. (*Kölner Kunstmarkt 72*, 1972: n.p.) In the readers' eyes, the photo would recall the black-and-white picture with the two chairs which was selected to identify Barry's first solo show in the venue, in 1971. In this respect, the photo emphasizes the connection between the image of itself that the gallery wanted to show publicly and the highly Conceptual trends it was representing at the time, including Barry's work.

In this expansion conjuncture, the strategic role of Galerie Paul Maenz was formally affirmed in the later months of 1972 with the *Invitation Piece*, a "relational" work with which each gallery produced an invitation for an exhibition by Barry in another gallery. (fig. 1) No artworks by Barry were exhibited in the venues. This large project was announced to Maenz during one of their summer meetings after the opening of *documenta*, and it was confirmed to him in a letter dated September 1, 1972. (Barry, letter to P. Maenz, September 1, 1972—Getty Research Institute, Galerie Paul Maenz Records, Box 15 Folder 3) The official call, in a standardized, formulaic format which aimed "to be fair to all the galleries," was sent to Maenz on October 6, 1972. The Cologne gallery was officially designated to be both the starting venue (October 1972) and the ending venue (June 1973) of an extended "chain" constituted by Art&Project in Amsterdam (November 1972), Jack Wendler in London (December 1972), Leo Castelli in New York (January 1973), Yvon Lambert in Paris (February 1973), M.T.L. in Brussels (March 1973), Toselli in Milan (April 1973), and Sperone in Turin (May 1973). This action underlined Paul Maenz's position in the Western avant-garde artworld and also formalized the link with Castelli. Furthermore, Barry's action puts Maenz and the other already "networked" galleries in touch with new partners—not only Jack Wendler, but also M.T.L. The latter had already invited Barry, in the fall of 1971, but Maenz had only agreed with this interest in the US artist with a certain detachment and under certain conditions. (Maenz, letter to R. Barry, October 11, 1971—Getty Research Institute, Galerie Paul Maenz Records, Box 15 Folder 3)

PAUL MAENZ, COLOGNE
INVITES YOU TO AN
EXHIBITION BY ROBERT BARRY
AT ART & PROJECT, AMSTERDAM
DURING THE MONTH OF
NOVEMBER 1972

Fig. 1.
Robert Barry, *Invitation Project*, Paul Maenz, Cologne invites to art & project, Amsterdam November 1972 (Invitation); Sammlung Marzona, Kunstbibliothek – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. © Sammlung Marzona, Kunstbibliothek – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

In all its complexity, *Invitation Piece* is a crucial work for the beginning of a new phase for Galerie Paul Maenz. Around 1972–1973 the gallery confirmed itself as a leading venue for Conceptual art in West Germany and Europe, as the growing number of top-tier artists from West Germany, the USA, Great Britain, Italy, and other countries in the yearly gallery reports (*Jahresberichte*) clearly show. At the same time, it also inaugurates an extension of the gallery's activities, culminating with the opening of a new space in Brussels in 1973 and the organization of such institutional projects as the historical *Projekt '74*, held in Cologne in 1974 (June 4–30). Thanks in part to the *Invitation Piece*, Galerie Paul Maenz's international reputation and attractiveness thus became stronger and more wide reaching, as did Barry in confirming himself as a protagonist of Conceptual art in Europe.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the first aspect I want to outline is that Barry included Galerie Paul Maenz both as a participant and as a core player in his projects. In this way, the gallery is not merely the location of a cycle of exhibitions, such as in Joseph Kosuth's project of 1968–1969 *Art as*

Idea as Idea. To quote what Barry said in a conversation with Benjamin Buchloh in 1988, the gallery is, rather, the "medium" the artist uses to formalize his concept, offering a non-material declination of the idea of the "gallery as gesture" explained by Brian O'Doherty. (O'Doherty, 1981: 27–34; Buchloh and Barry, 2017: 134) Probably also referring to this situation, Maenz confirmed in his 1991 interview that he and Gerd De Vries, as representatives of the gallery, "functioned as *participants*, not as public." (Maenz, 1991: 238, original emphasis)

This kind of involvement also presents itself as an opportunity of placement on the geo-artistic map. It can be considered a bridging act with relevant local situations that implements the visibility of the gallery and, consequently, that of the artist who initiated and promoted the network.

In the case of Galerie Paul Maenz, Barry ensured for himself a contact in the continental epicenter of the art market and of the diffusion of Conceptual art. To synthetize:

- The Partnership with Maenz was decisive for the process that led Robert Barry to his first museum exhibition, at Kunstmuseum Luzern, in March 1974, followed by a second solo show at the Stedelijk Museum, in Amsterdam, in the same year;
- Contributed more than other artists to consolidating the public identity of Galerie Paul Maenz as a Conceptual art avant-garde venue and to Maenz's relationships with the other relevant European and US dealers who were supporting his art. He formally introduced the Cologne gallery to a global network that was part of both his artistic project and his strategy of promotion and defense of his work. In a second phase, at the time of the *Invitation project*, Barry confirmed and underlined the role of Galerie Paul Maenz in West Germany and, more generally, in Western Europe;
- Contributed also to strengthening Maenz's bond with Italy, Sperone, and the Italian artists close to Arte Povera, which would constitute a consistent part of the gallery's identity throughout the decades, even after the inclusion of the Italian Transavanguardia in the exhibition programs. At this point, in addition to the collaboration and friendship with Salvo, I want to mention the decision to invite Giulio Paolini for one of two last gallery shows in January 1990, the ones which concluded the story of Galerie Paul Maenz.

As a final reflection, I note that, although it had no immediate consequences in the commercial field, the meeting and the cooperation with Barry was for Maenz an opportunity for the internationalization of his

gallery and undoubtedly contributed to his recognizability and emergence as an influential figure in the avant-garde world. As a matter of fact, Barry's projects acted as circular systems in which the benefits in terms of visibility gained by one party (the artist) also involved the other (the gallery), and vice versa.

In addition, the collaboration between Barry and Maenz was a step that gave an impulse for the German art world to be "global" in the very first moment of transatlantic development. The collaboration participated in the building of the modern art market, offering an interesting example of how promotional strategies can fulfil a vision of intellectual transnational dialogue rooted in people and ideas, independent from geopolitical conditionings.

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Infrastructural Economies in Post-Conceptual Film Practices of the 1970s and 1980s

The Example of the Neo-Narrative Essay Film

Sabeth Buchmann

There is a remarkable passage in Theodor W. Adorno's *Essay as Form*, published in 1958, in which the philosopher equates the experimental nature of this genre of writing with the "behavior of a man who is obliged, in a foreign country, to speak that country's language instead of patching it together from its elements, as he did in school." (Adorno, 1984: 161) Adorno's idea of learning by doing is characterized by repeatedly looking at the same word in different contexts—a practice that would sensitize oneself to the "nuances that the context establishes in every individual case." (Adorno, 1984: 161) Accordingly, the essayist is a researcher who is not afraid of making mistakes and is therefore prepared to accept uncertainties, failures, and errors. That is exactly what enables him/her/them to circumvent the "norm of established thought" and achieve an "open intellectual experience." (Adorno, 1984: 166, 161)

When I set out to read Yvonne Rainer's 1980 film *Journeys from Berlin/1971* with Adorno's concept of the essay, it is because his idea is instrumental to precisely describe the form in which the US-American choreographer, dancer, and filmmaker reviews her stay in Berlin in 1976 as part of a scholarship granted by the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst [German Academic Exchange Service]. The work, described by US film and gender scholar B. Ruby Rich as the riskiest work in her filmography (Rich, 1994: 31), challenges nothing less than Rainer and her Left-liberal New York art milieu's political self-understanding, which the artist reconsiders through her trip to West Berlin at a time of political radicalization of the so-called Red Army Fraction and their systematic persecution by the West German state.

Her filmic investigation is framed by repeated glances at streets, from and within apartments and lofts in Berlin, New York, Berkeley and London, as well as by views from the train and of shipping routes, factories, churches, rental houses, and pharmacies. Another repeated perspective is that of an aerial view, which depicts the dissection of the landscape around Berlin by the then-existing border between the GDR and the West Germany, as well as the separation of the city into East and West by the Berlin Wall. The shifting topographical, found footage-based images correspond to the circular movement of a camera shot from an airplane that slowly approaches Stonehenge in southern England, the prehistoric megalithic construction from the Neolithic period. (fig. 1) Remarkably, both types of areal views frame and structure Rainer's essayistic montage of pictureless sound sequences, scrolling text pictures, traveling shots, and plan sequences, as well as the documentary, fictional, and performance scenes. The viewer becomes attuned to the traveler's contrapuntal perspectives as she acquaints herself with the foreign city: from the moving, technical, bird's-eye view to the fixed, vertical gaze from windows onto streets, houses, and traffic. These are further complicated by the shifting, disruptive horizontal perspectives of vehicles and walkers. The aerial views are echoed by the train's passing shots of suburbs and industrial landscapes. Strikingly, the restricted window view from her musty Berlin apartment corresponds with the gridded window view from her Berkeley flat. The topographies of the two cities, on either side of the Atlantic, appear to merge before our eyes, as the repeated observation of the assembled images evoke exactly those nuances that Adorno attributed to the

Fig. 1.

Yvonne Rainer, *Journeys from Berlin/1971*, 1980, © Yvonne Rainer/photo courtesy of Zeitgeist Films in Association with Kino Lorber.

behavior of foreigners. The sometimes audible, sometimes subdued traffic noise simultaneously addresses and dissolves the inside–outside dichotomy between private and public spaces. This results in the impression that the public and domestic spheres are interconnected and that infrastructures of the public sphere are interconnected with the infrastructures of the domestic sphere. Camera work and editing thus form a spatial sensorium in order to evoke palpable (inter)relationships within and between images and sounds. As such, these elements serve both as material documentation and as the invention of narrative infrastructures, which, in the words of the US-American anthropologist Brian Larkin, may be characterized as "concrete aesthetic and semiotic vehicles." (Larkin, 2013: 329)

Fig. 2.
Chantal Akerman, *News from Home*, 1976.

It is probably no coincidence that the focus on infrastructures is reminiscent of Chantal Akerman's film *News from Home*, which was produced in 1977, three years before *Journeys from Berlin/1971*, since both artists worked repeatedly with the French photographer, filmmaker, and camera operator Babette Mangolte.[1] *News from Home* similarly exhibits a constant flow of local and long-distance traffic—shot from and focusing on cars, as well as subways and ships—while the invisible filmmaker reads out letters from her mother in Brussels. (fig. 2) As we know from Akerman's film *No Home Movie* (2016), her mother was a Polish Jew, who survived Auschwitz and refused to talk about her trauma during her entire life. Similarly, Rainer's film concludes with her own appearance in a video letter addressing her mother, who was a Polish Jew as well and who died in 1975, and expressing her shock about a film that

shows Berlin before its bombardment in World War II. Rainer edited this scene by inserting quotes from a letter Ulrike Meinhof had written to her fellow prisoner Hanna Krabbe. Significantly, Meinhof—a former journalist and screenwriter who, alongside Andreas Baader, was one of the founders of the Red Army Fraction—is the pivotal figure of *Journeys from Berlin/1971*, a choice that may have been influenced by biographical correspondences between the two women. Meinhof, born the same year as Rainer (b. 1934), lived in Berlin in 1970 and 1971 and committed suicide in Justizvollzugsanstalt [correctional facility] Stuttgart-Stammheim the same year Rainer began her DAAD fellowship in Berlin and five years after her own suicide attempt, which is addressed in the course of the film. As the US art historian Claudia Mesch accurately notes, "Rainer uses Ulrike Meinhof as a foil for ruminations on the artist's own identity and on the possibilities, personal risks, and limits of political engagement." (Mesch, 2010: 136)

As both films suggest, infrastructures embody and symbolize not only transportation and exchange, but also restriction and isolation. Rather than evoking a neutral idea of a network, they invite reflection on the functionality and dysfunctionality of relationships between concrete geographies and performers, i.e., between the traveling daughters and the migrant mothers, between the cultural and the political Left, or between historical and contemporary actors. The entangled threads consequently testify to the hidden and/or broken connections between the essayist and the subject(s) of her investigation. These individuals are primarily persecuted and imprisoned, exiled, or murdered anarchists and revolutionaries in West Germany, Russia, and the USA. We learn about their stories through repeated voice-overs, and their literal and metaphorical journeys resonate in the images and sounds of infrastructure, which embody both the growth of industrialization, its role in exploitative systems, and the devastation and modernization that followed World War II. Especially the aerial view of Berlin stands for the postwar networking between West Germany and the USA, epitomized by the so-called Candy Bombers that supplied West Berliners with food, medicine, and other goods as a result of the blockade of land, railway, and sea routes ordered by the Soviets from summer 1948 to the end of September 1949. Conversely, people and goods were also transported out of the city this way. The interruption of infrastructures—such as streets or train and subway tracks—paralleled the Iron Curtain dividing NATO countries and member states of the Warsaw Pact.

As I explore further with reference to Lauren Berlant's 2016 essay "The commons: Infrastructures for troubling times,"[2] the formal construction of *Journeys from Berlin/1971* corresponds to the "movement or pattering of social form," which the US-American cultural theorist defines as infrastructure. I utilize this idea in order to characterize Rainer's

film as a "living mediation of what organizes life: the lifeworld of structures. Roads, bridges, schools, food chains, finance systems, prisons, families, districts, norms all the systems that link ongoing proximity to being in a world-sustained relation." (Berlant, 2016: 393)

Rainer portrays Berlin in extremely troubling times, when many on the Left—initially drawn here by cheap housing costs, the political milieu, and the prospect of avoiding military service—were directly impacted by the effects of the political reaction in West Germany. As B. Ruby Rich notes, Rainer lived in the apartment of a woman who had been forced to leave Berlin because of the ban on public sector employment as part of the so-called radical decree (*Radikalenerlass*) against anyone considered to be a left-wing radical. (Rich, 1994: 36) A recurring scene of a music teacher and a flute player practicing in a private apartment may therefore be understood as both bitterly ironic and humorously reflective of everyday life, with its apparently threadbare normality being mirrored in the images of mechanical street life. We literally feel the "leaden time" (*die bleierne Zeit*),[3] "marking a historical present by casting it as a crisis." (Berlant, 2011: 27)

Meinhof thus emerges as a focal point on three distinct levels: First of all, she embodies both the state crisis and the crises on the Left during that period. The publication of her manifest *Das Konzept Stadtguerilla* [The Urban Guerrilla Concept], in 1971, coincided with the year Rainer transitioned from dance to film in order to replace the abstract language of Minimalist dance with the social experiences that shaped the political climate of the post-1968 era, ultimately culminating in her embrace of feminism. (fig. 3) This temporal overlap may explain the significance of the mention of the year in the film's title. Second, Meinhof serves as a case study for an examination of the possibility of female subjectivation beyond positions of victimhood and powerlessness. Significantly, the well-known photograph of her shot in the moment of her arrest is shown several times: At one point, it appears when Rainer, performing as a psychoanalyst, sits with her back to the audience as she converses with a patient— played by the renowned US-American art and film critic Annette Michelson— while simultaneously looking at the photo before placing it in a desk drawer. The same photograph later reappears during tracking shots along a fireplace

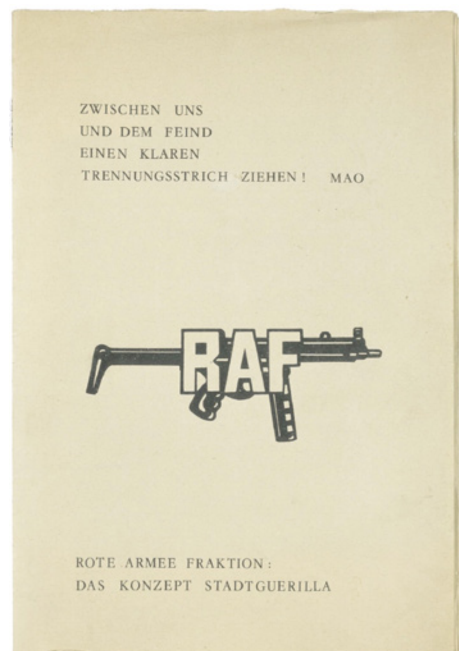

Fig. 3.

Ulrike Meinhof, *Das Konzept Stadtguerilla (The Urban Guerilla Concept)*, 1971, © Ulrike Meinhof.

mantel. Meinhof's expression, her hands raised while she gazes into the camera, makes her seem victim and perpetrator at the same time. The press photo is juxtaposed in changing combinations with photographic portraits of historical female revolutionaries, such as Angelica Balabanoff, Rosa Luxemburg, and Vera Figner (Rich, 1994: 33; Mesch, 2010: 141), and of iconic Hollywood actresses (which reminds us of Laura Mulvey's analysis of the "male gaze"). These images are interwoven with repeated rearrangements of knick-knacks, mussel shells, an archaeological fragment, bread, pasta, and series of meaningful objects related to the armed revolution, such as a knife, a paving stone, a Molotov cocktail, and a revolver. (fig. 4) Third, Meinhof's (re)presentation as a node within this contingent yet meaningful configuration of objects invites the viewer to reflect on filming and film editing as both a subjective and a systemic procedure of choice and omission, of presence and absence, of visibility and invisibility. A procedure, which, in turn, corresponds once again with Adorno's idea of the foreigner who examines the same word in different contexts in order to study its variations and nuances.

Fig. 4.

Yvonne Rainer, *Journeys from Berlin/1971*, 1980, © Yvonne Rainer/photo courtesy of Zeitgeist Films in Association with Kino Lorber.

Furthermore, we gain insight into the connotations of the bricolage through scrolling texts that run vertically, similar to film credits, between each sequence. These texts reference Sebastian Cobler's study *Law, Order, and Politics in West Germany*, which was published by Penguin Press in 1978. Emphasizing the film's essay character, they inform us of significant events that happened in West Germany, such as its remilitarization and the ban on the German Communist party in 1956, the founding of the Bundeswehr [German Armed Forces], as well as

the country's accession to NATO in 1955—a date that coincided with the beginning of the Vietnam War. Additionally, a viewer fond of reading also learns not only about the rise of the SDS [Socialist German Student Union] in the aftermath of the revolts of 1968, but also about the brutal attacks on two of its members: the shooting of Benno Ohnesorg during the Shah's visit and the attempted assassination of Rudi Dutschke, two catalytic events that eventually led to the founding of the Red Army Fraction as the militant arm of the extra-parliamentary opposition. The text, further, recounts Baader's dramatic escape from his imprisonment in Berlin-Tegel as well as Meinhof's brief stint underground, including the bombings of two department stores in Frankfurt/Main and various US military bases in West Germany, events that culminated in the subsequent arrests of numerous Red Army Fraction members.

According to Mesch,

> Rainer's film […] situates Meinhof's radicalization within the context of communist anarchism and political violence practiced by women since the 19th century. *Journeys from Berlin/1971* also marks Rainer's shift from an exclusive concern with the crisis of the (female) self to consider how the self forges connections with 'social formations' in times of severe state repression. (Mesch, 2010: 137)

The author suggests that Rainer attempts to integrate an autobiographical narrative into a "formalist reflection on the psychic mechanism of identification within cinema, and on the specific dynamic of (ambivalent) identification between the artist and Meinhof" (Mesch, 2010: 138)—an attempt that aligns with contemporaneous Marxist, psychoanalytical, feminist, and film-theoretical explorations of possible interventions into processes of identification as part of subject formation.

Thus, the constitution of the subject comes to the fore in a political and theoretical climate in which feminists simultaneously sought to deconstruct and (re)claim it. Mesch points to the dilemma that Rainer allegedly recognized in Meinhof's erasure of the "ego" in favor of the political revolution. (Mesch, 2010: 141) Accordingly, I assume that the author of *Journeys from Berlin/1971* acts like Adorno's foreigner, who explores and exercises the biographical as a social self by repeatedly testing its relationships with contemporary and historical figures and events that are at once close and distant. In other words, *Journeys from Berlin/1971* performs a subject-in-the-making, which is constituted by the infrastructures it literally and metaphorically moves through. By focusing on female or feminist anarchists and revolutionaries, whom Rainer relates to slavery and colonialism, she intertwines the experience of class-based exploitation and oppression with categories of race and gender.

The form of practice manifested in infrastructures of traffic and travel eludes identification not only with individual and fixed sites and nationalities, but also with images and patterns, figures and roles, as well as narrations and plots. Referring to the ideas of political scientist Bini Adamczak, we might add that Rainer's cinematic practice implies an entanglement of material and affective relationships beyond the dichotomy of separation and identification. Instead, her film incites us to work on relationships in a way that is both conflict-conscious and caring. (cf. Adamczak, 2017: 12–23)

Two acousmatic sequences dissociate image from sound: the first captures a conversation between two New York friends, the film critic Amy Taubin and the performer Vito Acconci, as they cook, eat, and wash dishes in the kitchen of a downtown apartment. The other features the voice of a young women reading passages from Rainer's diary. The occasionally enumerative character of sentences and terms are reminiscent of Samuel Beckett, whose additive (anti-)narration is explicitly mentioned in the film. The same applies to the cutting technique which allows Rainer to bridge her own cultural milieu and her intimate thoughts with the political scene in West-Berlin and a therapy session in London, staged in the Whitechapel Gallery. The assembled fragments reveal the blind spots of the cultural Left regarding the history of female resistance, e.g., the work of feminist and pacifist Emma Goldman, who in the late 19th century fled with anarchist Alexander Berkman from Russia to the US. In this instance, too, images of transport infrastructures refer to the internationalization of the left-wing struggle for workers and women's rights: Whereas Taubin reads from Vera Zuselich's memoir about an attempted assassination of a brutal police chief in St. Petersburg, Acconci quotes Berkman's account of his failed attack on the art patron and US industrialist—as well as Carnegie Steel Co. chair—Henry Clay Frick, as a retaliation for his violent suppression of the steelworkers' strike in Pittsburgh, which we recognize in the train rides. In response to these historical facts, Rainer's recurring shots from a moving train of partly dilapidated and abandoned industrial landscapes evoke the interwoven processes of industrialization and environmental destruction.

We observe in the nexus of industrial infrastructures and film editing an artistic manifestation of what Larkin calls system formation. It corresponds with the way Rainer incorporates the history of the class struggle, the women's movement, and Socialist anarchism into reflections on processes of subjectification, which appears to be the central motif of the previously mentioned, extensive psychoanalysis sessions. Performed by Annette Michelson, the patient becomes the medium of different voices that resonates with feminist awareness-raising criticism of misogynistic structures, in society and her own cultural milieu

as well as in historiography and in psychoanalysis. For example, at one point she declaims: “My cunt is not a castrated cock. If anything, it’s a heartless asshole.”

Michelson’s monologue notably contains quotes from Meinhof’s 1971 book on the urban guerrilla concept, allowing us to project the revolutionary struggle onto ordinary urban landscapes. The psychoanalytic talking cure works through the forms of subjectivities that Adamczak examines in her study of the failed revolutions of 1917 and 1968—failures attributable to the missed transformation in social relations, which fell victim to the respective party doctrines and the brutal harshness of the internal strife among revolutionaries. (Adamczak, 2017: 12–23)

Against this background, it seems striking to me how Rainer mediates social relations through and within the spatio-temporal positions and movements of her performers. Their diverging perspectives mirror the broken relationships epitomized by the divided city and country, as well as the disconnected lifestyles of activists and artists. Everyday infrastructures appear as both connections and interruptions between the social zones that the film essay composes. It is also here that Rainer’s cinematic procedure can be compared to Adorno’s description of the traveler, who practices a foreign language by repeating the same words (respectively the same images and sounds) in different contexts. *Journeys from Berlin/1971* draws our attention to this “behavior” as the New York filmmaker explores the life and work of a West German terrorist through an intricate web of technical, social, and emotional infrastructures. This happens, for instance, through the way the gallery space in which the psychoanalysis sessions take place blends with a rehearsal room, in which a carpet is spread out that transforms the performers in the background into immanent observers of the scene. (fig. 5) This means that initially unconnected actions, movements, and speech acts are assembled into pictures montages and thus forge new relationships between the spaces and actors—almost as if they were rehearsing for a different socio-aesthetic order.

I am reminded here again of the traveling shots from moving trains as well as the plan sequences from apartment and loft windows in Berlin, Berkeley, and London, which connect urban views of streets, houses, and car traffic to the interior life of its inhabitants: The cinematographic assembly of infrastructures goes hand in hand with the reciprocal permeation of separated spaces and actors. As such, Rainer’s film fuses the disparate places and actions through a mechanism that merges the individual psyche with the cinematic apparatus. It is exactly this nexus that splits our mode of aesthetic perception between the present and the history of modern infrastructures in a way that is comparable to Akerman’s films.

Fig. 5.

Yvonne Rainer, *Journeys from Berlin/1971,* 1980, © Yvonne Rainer/photo courtesy of Zeitgeist Films in Association with Kino Lorber.
See also Plate 12.

While *News from Home* shows the arrival and departure from Staten Island by ferry, evoking infrastructures of emigration and immigration between Europe and the USA, the aerial photos of Berlin are reminiscent of the geopolitical effects of World War II. Furthermore, in *Journeys from Berlin/1971,* a boat intrudes into an apartment and turns it into the stage, in a scene that refers to the “boat people” who fled from Vietnam and Cambodia to Europe and the USA since 1975. Berlant’s “architecture of the ordinary” is therefore imbued with images of escape and thus with the image of catastrophe, which shaped the political idea and militant affectivity of the 1968 generation.

The motif of the boat also carries a self-referential quality. In 1970, Rainer organized her performance *M-Walk* based on the monotonous marches of the workers in Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*, in which forty performers demonstrated against the American invasion of Cambodia. The iconic piece finds an echo in the walks that Cynthia Beatt and Antonio Skármeta, two New York artist friends, enacted in front of Berlin’s Kreuzkirche. These rehearsals, which explore the intersections between physical and mechanical movements, i.e., human locomotion and camera animation reminding us of Samuel Beckett’s minimalist TV play *Square* (1980), shift the question of political subjectivity toward questions of how to work on and with one’s own body. Significantly, the walking tests correspond to the repetitive navigational-spatial measurements observed in the montaged perspectives of and on various places, suggesting that times and spaces might intersect, dissolving their continuity and boundaries.

Finally, the technique of montage reveals an ambivalent procedure of disrupting and (re)constructing temporal relationships (Berlant, 2016: 394) through the lens of a traveler investigating various sites. As such, the cracks and reconnections link the film to its material conditions, i.e., the shared history of the railway system and early cinema. Invented by the Lumière brothers at the end of the 19th century, the so-called cinematographs combined a mobile film camera, a copy machine, and a projector, which allowed the operators to travel to different cities in order to document them. This media-historical context is relevant to Rainer's film insofar as the mentioned revolutionaries epitomize the meaning of modern infrastructures for the emergence of the international Left—infrastructures that Rainer (and Akerman) translate into "semiotic and aesthetic vehicles." (Larkin, 2013)

In *Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure*, Larkin draws on Walter Benjamin's notion of the "dialectical image," a concept he shared with Adorno. Benjamin noted that those who grew up with the railway can never analyze the technical artifact itself. Instead, they must confront the past and thus the temporality of their own memories, desires, and fantasies, which act as a filter for the way we perceive an object such as a railway. Larkin concludes that the movement of history is embedded in the material infrastructures of goods, buildings, and streets. Infrastructural objects are therefore embodiments of objective historical forces that enter the collective imagination. (Larkin, 2013: 333) In Rainer's film, the narrative structure, formed from a network of linear and circular movements, refers to topoi of flow and navigation, which are reminiscent of the art of helmsmanship that was crucial for ancient cybernetics. It meant the successful steering of ships and vehicles to a desired destination. Developed as part of military research in the 1940s, modern cybernetics deal with circular processes in dynamic systems—a method that probably explains the circularity of Rainer's narrative in order to connect disconnected figures and places, as well as the present with the past.

Cybernetic thinking also applies to the performative practice of the language in psychoanalysis, which, as Rich writes, revolves around transference and resistance, demonstrating the inconsistency and unreliability of the speech act, which (dis)connects the (auto)biography and the narrative plot. (Rich, 1994: 34) Since the mono- and dialogues in Rainers's essay film are accompanied by an acousmatic voice-over montage of audio tracks, we recognize their feedback in the infrastructures of communication that correspond to the mixed techniques of human and technical articulation. As such, they reveal the ability of voices and sounds not only to express intentions and moods, but also to orchestrate spatial environments and temporal sequences. The central idea of the topos of infrastructure obviously lies in its ability to steer

and control our abilities to perceive, act, and move. Accordingly, the core of *Journeys from Berlin/1971* seems to be the use of infrastructures in a feedback-based way, which is characteristic for the political essay film around and after 1968.

A glance at Harun Farocki's *Nicht löschbares Feuer* [Inextinguishable fire],[4] from 1969, reveals how the essay film of that era embodies the cybernetic idea of reciprocity and resonance in an exemplary way. This is particularly evident in the way sensory and cognitive feedback mechanisms are evoked between film and audience through frontal directionality. The German filmmaker begins by reading the testimony of Tai Bin Danh, a napalm survivor, before the Stockholm Vietnam Tribunal. (fig. 6) He talks about the sound of an airplane that the witness heard shortly before an exploding napalm bomb burned his skin. When Farocki asks the audience, "How can we show you napalm in action and how can we show you napalm injuries?" he suggests reflecting less on what we see, but on *how* we see. Elsewhere, Farocki lists the mistakes of one-way communication, underscoring that the film seeks to build affective infrastructures between distant phenomena and consumption patterns:

> If we show you the pictures of napalm injuries, you will close your eyes, […] If we show you a person with napalm injuries, we will hurt your feelings. […] We can only give you a faint idea of how napalm works.

After Farocki extinguishes a lit cigarette on his left forearm, a voice-over explains: "If the audience has nothing to do with the consequences of napalm operations, then you have to investigate what they have to do with the causes of napalm deployments." (fig. 7)

We observe that, comparable to Farocki's model of the cybernetic teaching film, Rainer's film shows a feedback-based investigation of the modes of representation that result from the variation of perception experiments. For example, she repeats tracking shots along the fireplace mantel, the landscapes, and the streets in montages of shop facades taken from a moving camera, with pharmacies serving as repetitive motifs linked to the pills exchanged between patient and therapist. Like Farocki's film essay, *Journeys from Berlin/1971* animates us, the viewers, to discover infrastructural relations in the sheer addition of seemingly unconnected phenomena. This form of cybernetic narrative leads us back to Berlant's question of "how we create forms and modalities within relation" that, at the same time, allow "disidentification"[5] with discriminatory forms of subject formation:

because we are in the room together does not mean that we belong to the room or each other: belonging is a specific genre of affect, history, and political mediation that cannot be presumed and is, indeed, a relation whose evidence and terms are always being contested. (Berlant, 2016: 395)

Fig. 6.

Harun Farocki, *Nicht löschbares Feuer*, 1969, © Harun Farocki GbR.

Fig. 7.

Harun Farocki, *Nicht löschbares Feuer,* 1969, © Harun Farocki GbR.

With regard to the "glitch of the present," the author believes that "[t]he crowded but disjointed propinquity of the social calls for proxemics, the study of sociality as proximity quite distinct from the possessive attachment languages of belonging." (Berlant, 2016: 395)

Accordingly, I would like to claim that Rainer's disidentifying montage evokes a cybernetic relation of proximity between her own persona and that of a dead female terrorist, who is, obviously, related to her work and biography by coincidence. Tellingly, Meinhof was the screenwriter of *Bambule* (1970–1971), a film about a repressive educational institution for allegedly unruly young women that was censored after she went underground. Meinhof's research into the institution's history documents the brutal suppression of an attempt at emancipation by one of the inmates. This means that *Journeys from Berlin/1971* resonates with Meinhof's drama of female subjectification, which Rainer narrates as a drama about the transition from the position of powerless victim to that of self-empowering perpetrator. The cinematic engagement with the biography of the West German militant, who, among other things, addressed the repression of the Holocaust in the German postwar-generation before expressing solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for liberation, also reflects on the reciprocity between historical conditions and political requirements for psycho-emotional subjectification.

Journeys from Berlin/1971, therefore, in my eyes does not presuppose a fixed subject of knowledge. Rather, the film allows us to experience the infrastructures of the faulty and incomplete process of human subjectification—be it through the fictive dialogue between daughter and mother, which documents both persistent and broken relations, or be it through the psychoanalytic talking cure about the conditions and limitations of agency, which seems more like a rehearsal. The patient's never-ending monologue reflects on the way in which children learn language and academics exercise theoretical jargon. Rainer does this facing an Oedipal trio of a silent man, a communicating woman, and a barking boy, situated with their backs to the camera, who *alternately* assume the position of analyst, each in and with different perspectives that represent the viewer as well as the social counterpart constitutive for feedback-based subject formation. It is no surprise that the talking cure is the common thread in the film and that it corresponds to cybernetic thinking about interdependent power relationships, which resonate in every single image, word, and sound. In this way, the film's repetitive montages work as "semiotic and aesthetic vehicles," literally enabling simultaneous journeys to and from Berlin. As the decade came to a close, filmmakers such as Rainer and Akerman revealed the topos of entanglement in resonance with the cybernetic concept of dynamic infrastructures: a phenomenon that obviously testifies

to the perception of the world as an ongoing crisis and the resulting desire for new, solidarity-based relationships between initially unconnected actors. Here one may recognize a resonance with a statement that Rainer quotes from Cobler's study at the beginning of her film: "In 1950 a draft for a political law in the Federal Republic of Germany contained a following sentence: 'The danger for the community comes from organized people.'"

Notes

1. Mangolte participated as camera operator in Yvonne Rainer's *Lives of Performers* (1972) and *A Film About a Woman Who* (1974), but not in *Journeys from Berlin/1971*.
2. Berlant's essay is based on a 2015 paper presented at the annual meeting of the US Geographical Society in Chicago, under the title "Environment and Planning D: Society and Space."
3. With reference to Margarethe von Trotta's famous film *Die bleierne Zeit*, about the sisters Christiane and Gudrun Ensslin; the latter was one of the Red Army Fraction members who died together with Andreas Baader and Jan-Carl Raspe 1 year after Ulrike Meinhof, also in the prison of Stuttgart-Stammheim.
4. The original German title is *Nicht löschbares Feuer.*
5. Berlant appropriates the notion of disidentification from Cuban American theorist José Esteban Muñoz.

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Post-Gulf War Specifications in the German–US Art Exchange from a Munich Perspective, 1996–2001

Dirk Snauwaert

Opting for the descriptive, ostensibly theoretically unmotivated facts is a method of avoiding schemes of statistical foundations or gross simplifications. This is particularly true when thinking beyond the economic dynamics between the (West) German art world and the USA of the post-war era. With its appeal to dominant market narratives and the attraction of pop culture vitalism following reconstruction, when austerity formed the horizon, between a Communist, unfree East, and a hedonistic West. Other narratives of an ethnocultural typology focus on familiarities resulting from the historical consecutive German migrations and their demographical presence in the US frontier colonial expansionism. Economic and culture-historical influences play a dominant role in public opinion, in contrast to the avant-garde and critical art practice, where the critique of their respective societies and systems forms the conjuncture where the prioritarian subject matter is deconstructed to make way—and space—for exceptions and deviant existences instead of the affirmation of the generic patterns and the normative conventions.

Contexts

To permit an evaluation of specific exhibition projects, a number of the (subjective) contexts leading up to the decisions that led to the realization of these choices must be outlined. Here, we discuss a modest institution with a long tradition but a turbulent relationship with the idea of avant-garde internationalist programs. The Kunstverein München is often referred to in the academic literature for its programmatic line, which regularly includes several artists and discourses originating from US-American critical theory. It is never clearly stated that this programmatic line of exhibitions alternates with those of local or German artists in order to increase their successful reception on the other side of the Atlantic. Helmut Draxler and Hedwig Saxenhuber headed the institution between 1992 and 1995, when the most discourse-driven

program was developed, as frequently discussed in academic papers.[1] Before their tenure, the directorship was held by Zdenek Felix, equally very inclined to an up-to-date assessment of current developments in the US-American art world, albeit with a more stylistic or generational prism, basically in the continuation of pop and commodity aesthetics.[2]

The complicit, embedded, subjective points of view of programmers cannot be compared to those of an objectifying academic observer. A curator or institutional programmer stands too close to current events to be able to dissociate the hazardous, accidental, and sometimes opportunistic nature of how things come into being with the deliberate, rational, and evaluative intentional role of choices in evaluations. Historical criticism methods can help study the relationships and circulation of the art production and its discourses, even when we are looking at an era that seems so tense with ideological and geopolitical competition as the period leading up to and the immediate aftermath of the post-Glasnost dismantling of the Iron Curtain and dissolution of the Soviet colonial expansion in central and Eastern Europe.

The most prominent effect of the shift from multiple art centers in Germany (Hamburg, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt, Cologne, and Munich) to the installation of a single, centralized center—Berlin, the capital of a newly reunited Germany—resulted in the disappearance of the second world art market hotspot, Cologne. in a broader geo-cultural sphere, the attention shifted from a fixation on the former Soviet influence zone of the East European states behind the Iron Curtain to a fixation on Munich's position as the largest city near the (former) Iron Curtain. Otherwise, Munich also represents a symbolic stronghold of deep European tradition and conservative liberalism. The implosion of the Soviet influence zone was seen as an upbeat for unlimited economic and financial growth. In contrast, the advent of this "post-historical" era was upheld or postponed for a decade by the incisive rupture in this libidinal economy of cultural exchange caused by the Gulf War. The disruptiveness of this conflict and the consecutive polemic Iran–Iraq War of the USA and its allies in Western Asia triggered the collapse of the art market, quashing all lucrative transatlantic operations and leaving almost open ground to the critical actors in place. For a short decade, alternative galleries and institutional and socio-critical voices benefited from their prominence over an absent market economy. This rupture of 1990–1991 and its influence on the financial economies are described and commented on extensively.

In contrast, its coincidence with the dismantlement of the former Soviet colonial zone in Eastern Europe and of its associated ideological legitimacy, in parallel with the reunification process of East and West Germany, is mainly examined as two singular, unrelated theaters of operation. For a contemporary art world, this territory of collectivist

economies still represented a vital alternative to the market economy. Many spaces left vacant were occupied by critical practices and discourses from critical theory imported from the USA, which recalibrated the nature of the cultural exchanges, forming one of the main drivers behind the higher intensity in German institutional and semi-public art spaces of artists with a critical and institutional-critical practice, as well as that of greater interest on the part of programmers and curators in the system-critical practitioners.

As commodity and auratic art practices saw their conjunctures stall, the vacant spaces for theoretical and discursive-oriented practices were occupied by what was commonly designated as Context Art, a definition that marked the renewal of situational and relational aesthetic practices from the 1970s, occurring in the early to mid-1990s. Many of these practices operated within institutional and semi-institutional alternative spaces in Germany, marking another layer of difference between the social-democratic European cultural support model and the Anglo-Saxon private donorship model. The relatively swift and regular reception of this new generation of artists in Germany encouraged many scholars to examine the specifications of the aesthetic and theoretical implications in the field of the arts, but these scholars barely questioned why German territories proved such fertile ground for the reception of institutional critical and situated practices compared with other countries with a legacy of avant-garde, politicized, and socially critical art.

In the genealogy of this reception, the focus is often on single projects at the Munich Kunstverein—or projects associated with its directorship. Indeed, the fertile ground and zeal of its social sphere inclined to and receptive to analytical, deconstructive, indexical aesthetics, had been prepared for several decades.

Munich's dominant critical context stems from the dark heritage of the Hauptstadt der Bewegung (a term that refers to the capital of the Nazi movement), an incessant catalysator for historians and critical artists (literature, theater, and film authors) questioning the exceptionalism and lasting effects of the "German problem." The Kunstverein is automatically connected to this horizon because its (postwar) exhibition spaces hosted the 1937 Degenerate Art Exhibition and because of the ensuing consequences and questions deriving thereof in terms of art, ideological constructions, and society. The questioning of a different "institutional basis" for the "entanglement" between the USA and Germany from that provided by the usual cultural influence provided by pop culture was transformed under the directorship of Helmut Draxler and Hedwig Saxenhuber, with the discourse/theory and sociopolitical reflection–driven programming which imported, translated, and connected the New York Anglo-Saxon theoretical debates with the debates of the reunified Germany.

Projects

Acknowledging these and introducing other threads, the context-specific exhibition project PARTS (1997), by Fareed Armaly (fig. 1)—one of the main protagonists of the Conceptual, critical deconstruction—diagrammed the magnified spaces and history of the Kunstverein from its early days as part of a bourgeois Aufklärungs-milieu [Enlightment-social environment] and Gesellschaft des Geschmacks [Society of Good Taste cfr title by Andrea Fraser], leading to the postwar relocation and the re-foundation of society, up to the post-totalitarianism utopian projections. From the introduction of a national television network, to the tensegrity structures of Frei Otto and its landscaped roofs for the 1972 Olympic stadium, to that of the reception and distribution of German electronic music, Armaly drew patterns of correlations. Armaly's previous knowledge of the local art world through his and Michael Krebber's input in the Buck-Nagel Galerie (which later mutated into Christian Nagel Galerie)—a space considered as a formative for a renewed methodology associated with the institutional critique of American Fine Arts Gallery in New York—stemmed from this reflection on relations and aspirations. The information on the multitude of relations was printed onto cardboard sheets and folded into empty containers that formed building blocks, creating the shape of a monumental column mimicking the neoclassical arcade below. The formal continuity and technological discontinuity allegorized the aversions to ruptures with the past and the aspirations of continuity of traditional forms for future generations.

Fig. 1.
Fareed Armaly, *Parts*, Installation Views, Kunstverein München 1997. Courtesy of Fareed Armaly, Wilfried Petzi, and Kunstverein München.

This longing for historical continuity after the 15-year usurpation of the public sphere also marks a skeptical attitude toward genuine disruption, a concept of philosophy of history that Armaly's project formulates in a completely different form from that of Rüdiger Schöttle's legendary *Theatergarten Bestiarium*, which associated Bavarian rococo delusions with the Postmodern simulacra theory.

A very different take on the magnified, sublime conception of spatiality can be seen against the backdrop of Munich's legacy of introducing land art, monumental landscape, and architectonic gestures in the late 1960s. Built during the preparatory excitement around the Munich Olympics of 1972, Michael Heizer's *Munich Depression* constitutes a genuinely

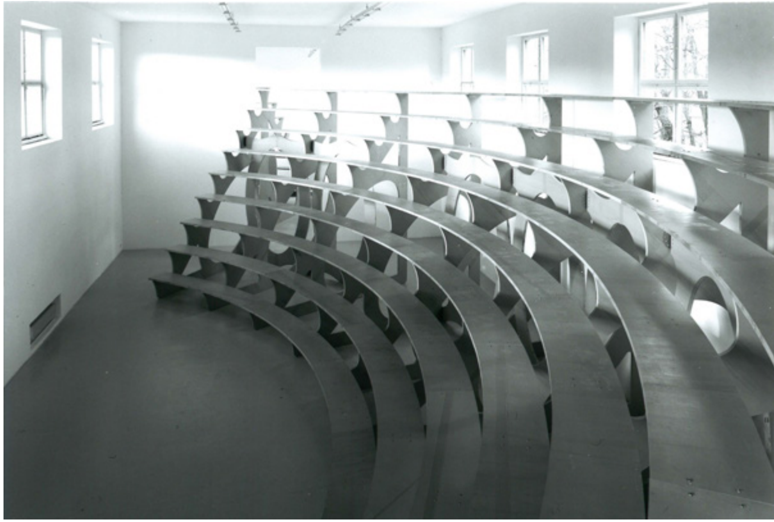


Fig. 2.
Rita McBride, *Arena*, Installation View, Kunstverein München 1998. Courtesy of Rita McBride, Wilfried Petzi, and Kunstverein München.

iconic moment. Heiner Friedrich, whose Munich gallery boasted many Reductionist and Minimalist artists, also set up the land art project for the Olympics. After this, he became a founding figure and pivot of the Dia Art Foundation land art commissions. Their ascetic aestheticism promoted starkly contrasted with Rita McBride's architectonic sculpture *Arena* (1997), shown at Rotterdam's Witte de With Centrum voor Hedendaagse Kunst. (fig. 2) The modular, prefabricated, monumental architecture-sculpture should be envisaged from the perspective of the legacies of large-scale experiential public structures, which McBride shifted indoors to encompass a reflection on the standardized, desolate institutional art spaces, thereby rearticulating the relations between institutional investigations and the "other spaces" of land arts. McBride's *Arena* effortlessly transforms the space of individual perception into a public sphere where events and social and discursive gatherings can be organized. Intended as an object for observation, it reverses the logic of perception, whereby the artwork becomes the device for observation and the institutional device becomes the locus of contemplation.

In more than half a decade, the orientation of retrospective survey exhibitions with which institutions charted—sometimes re-excavated—influential artistic contributions to the histories of Conceptual art revoked by the art-historical doxa or the art market attention span focused on contributors working on the West Coast of North America (California and Vancouver). As such, their methodologies do not follow the scheme of the progressive stylistic reduction but, instead, rather respond to questions of genre, parody, and pastiche related to the detournement/misappropriation of mass media and montage and collage aesthetics.

In the mid-70s, when David Lamelas left Europe to make feature films in LA, the artist built a reputation with narrative films instead of analytic diagrammatic ones. This led him to the Californian pastiche video film legacy with Latino references with which Lamelas challenged his methodology of the diagrammatic textual language and signs approach by introducing questions of place, site, and context by technological media. The survey *A New Refutation of Time* (1997), coproduced with Witte de With Centrum voor Hedendaagse Kunst, Rotterdam, included Lamelas's groundbreaking Argentinian, British, and continental European work, which strongly contrasts with his LA narrative films. In many ways, the video pastiche clip aesthetics announced the deconstructive practices of parody and pastiche of mass media in the USA of the 1990s onwards.

On a similar impetus, the Bas Jan Ader *Implosion* exhibition (2000), curated by Christopher Muller in collaboration with Kunstverein Braunschweig, mapped out all his performative video registrations in combination with photo diagrams, printworks, and protocols for works/actions of the West Coast Conceptualist of Dutch origin. Ader's work frontally questions processualism and the artwork's irreversibility, completeness, and failure. His self-representation—or body performativity—questions and subverts mass media and cinematographic stereotypes of heroic masculinity, confronting it with romantic tropes of doubt, failure, fragility, and transience. As a precursor with a tragic ending, Ader rephrased the definition of transgressing the boundaries of perception and pushing direct bodily experience to its limits, thus casting a different interpretation on the pursuit of extreme and excessive perceptions of the performative practices of LA and other US-American artists.

Constructed on a more conventional academic chronological principle—as a coproduction with Illinois State University and DAAD gallery implies—Allan Sekula's survey exhibition *Dismal Science* (1998) explored the evolution of Californian Conceptual photographic and media-critical practice, departing from the questioning of documentary and reportage photography to investigate patterns and phenomena of late capitalist society. Sekula had introduced popular and genre-specific parodistic forms into a documentary photo–text-based model. Sekula was then still relatively unknown in Europe. This exhibition reevaluated works such as *Untitled Slide Sequence* and *Aerospace Folktales* and situated his later photo essayistic forms about the claim of objectivity and indexicality of many photographic Conceptual and documentary practices since the 1980s. (fig. 3)

Rodney Graham's 2000 survey *Some Other Experimental Works* was more schematic. (fig. 4) It sketched a trajectory from the 1970s filmic investigations into the cinematic apparatus and the regimes of sublime

Fig. 3.

Allan Sekula, *Dismal Science*, 1991-1996, Installation Views of *Aerospace Folktales* (1973), Kunstverein München 1997. Courtesy of Wilfried Petzi, and Kunstverein München.

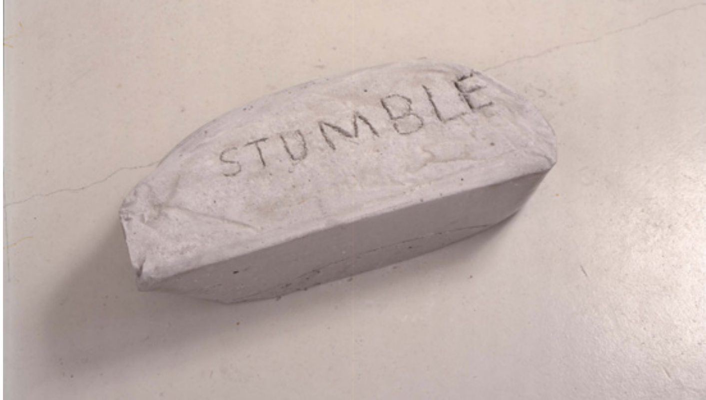
Fig. 4.

Rodney Graham, *Some Other Experimental Works*, Installation View, Courtesy of Wilfried Petzi, and Kunstverein München, 2000.

visuality of undomesticated nature and landscapes. Graham linked these with psychoanalytic questions of complications in exchanges and communication, as exemplified by Freud's debt-ridden publishing curriculum as an analytic case into the motivation of authorship. This Vancouver-conceptual artist's intricate research and theoretically based practice exemplify the questioning of the mechanisms of cinematic media in relation to spectatorship and the libidinal economy of image production and authorship. Graham's hypothetical consideration of the importance of financial debt on the production and promotion of Freud's theories by his publications had taken on the form of an *ex cathedra* lecture performance. Another media appropriation is the pastiche, a standardized commercial slide embodying a popular and early mass mediatic form. An unlimited multiple in the form of a cinematographic slide carousel projecting a repetition of an anamorphosis of the image of Ludwig's second childhood sleigh, featured in Visconti's legendary feature film, links psychoanalytical questions of childhood memories with those of film spectatorship. Graham's inversions of role-playing questioning authorship, self, and image of others also led to the writing, playing, and recording of their first long-play vinyl record as a singer–songwriter of pop rock songs. In this case, Graham, who produced large, backlit Cibachrome photomurals depicting self-parodies of stereotypical roles, independently created and released a second album, which opened up new possibilities for acting out the promise of the hedonistic self-realization in arts or pop culture of the postwar youth culture.

With Jimmie Durham's 1998 monographic exhibition *Between the Furniture and the Building (Between a Rock and a Hard Place)*, in collaboration with DAAD Berlin, the Cherokee American artist carried on working on his Eurasian project, charting a trajectory of self-education and site investigation in each of the venues where he was invited. (fig. 5) Durham combined this form of site and cultural specificity with his sculptural-feral assemblage practice, emphasizing the deconstruction of signs and their shift in meanings when transported from one cultural sphere into another. In retrospect, Durham's installation focused on several works dedicated—albeit in an inverse, ethnographic way—to Bavarian and German cultural practices, including the snack and beer rituals of the *Imbiss* or the productivity ethos. In the majestic main hall, Durham performed interventions of frottages of clothes soaked in murky fluids, splashing the pristine walls with abject bodily marks. The presence of a stumbling block and a space-spanning cable led the progression of a narrative through the entire space onto a laconic dot, the final point. (fig. 6 and fig. 7)

In Glenn Ligon's 2001 solo exhibition *Portraits and Not Portraits* (in collaboration with DAAD Berlin), he introduced most of the work that had owed him his reputation in the United States from the 1980s for



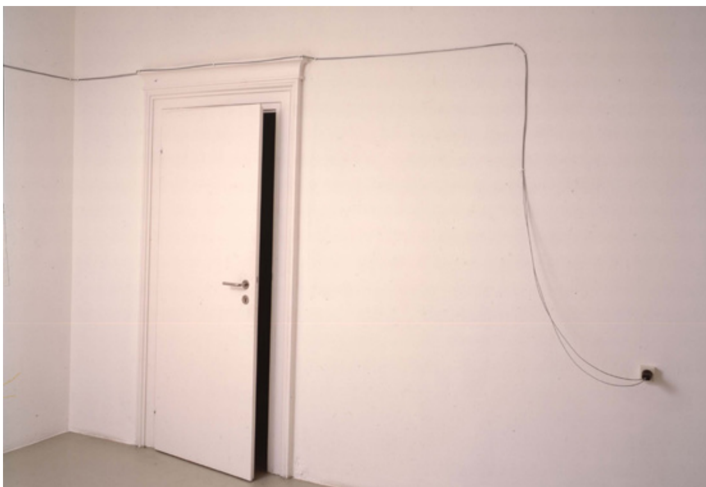


Fig. 5–7.

Jimmie Durham, *Between the Furniture and the Building (Between a Rock and a Hard Place)*, 1998, Installation Views, Kunstverein München 1997. Courtesy of Wilfried Petzi, and Kunstverein München.

questioning color and race in the artistic and public opinions and media apparatuses. (fig. 8 and fig. 9) Adding painterly and graphic new materials and signifiers, Ligon reconsiders iconic images drawn from the racial conflicts in the USA, going as far back as slavery and abolitionism, the Jim Crow laws, and the Civil Rights Movement by appropriating and altering them from historical distance into actuality. At the time, German public opinion was still largely unaware of the repression surrounding racial politics in the United States. This blind-spot syndrome formed the backdrop for the visibility of his persona and this work in Munich,

Fig. 8–9.

Glenn Ligon, *Portraits And Not Portraits*, 2001, Installation Views, Kunstverein München 1997. Courtesy of Glenn Ligon, Wilfried Petzi, and Kunstverein München. See also Plate 13

which was, in effect, a phenomenon that questioned the occultation of racial politics in Germany. Ligon also researched the underrepresentation of Black subjects in Munich's historical representations.

This focus on artists from the USA or the wider Americas must be considered against the backdrop of the exhibition programming within which these artists were presented in alternation with artists of other geographical and sensitive orientations beyond national origin, as it is characteristic of most German contemporary art spaces. While the long-standing exchange between the USA and Germany remains an almost tangible fact, it differs from that of Anglo-Saxon countries. Following the suppression of the ideological dyad of Communism versus capitalism, it progressively adopts the same exchange model as in the post Cold War ideological-economical model of cultural exchange in line with an import–export logic. As it gradually evolved toward a more dialogical model, where ideological and institutional considerations are less prominent, considerations on perspectives and perceptions developed by artists from minority and excluded or discriminated against groups gained space and attention in the programs. The relative prominence of US art informed by critical theory—which also did not follow that of the US geo-cultural models for soft power, such as mass media entertainment and entrepreneurial market development—was not the exclusive result of a unilateral importation of academic theoretical models by the continental European critical elites, who revendicated at the same time the origin of critical attitudes in the Frankfurt School and structuralist/post-structuralist thought. The reality of intense exchanges can be interpreted as resulting from a mutual fascination between similar, albeit different, critical art practices in the USA and Germany.

Notes

1. Cf. the contribution in this volume by Alexander Alberro.
2. For further study into the contemporary transatlantic exchanges in Munich, we should add the continuation of the program directors to today, whose choices may have confirmed or contradicted these patterns. The successive directors of the Kunstverein München are Maria Lind, Stefan Kalmar, Chris Fitzpatrick, Bart Vanderheyden, and, most recently, Mauren Dietrich and Gloria Hasnay.

Plates

Plate 1.

Martin Kippenberger, *Untitled* (from the series *Heavy Burschi* [Heavy Lad]), 1989/90. Colour photograph, 240×200 cm.
© Estate of Martin Kippenberger, Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne Photo: Lothar Schnepf.
See also fig. 1, p. 19.

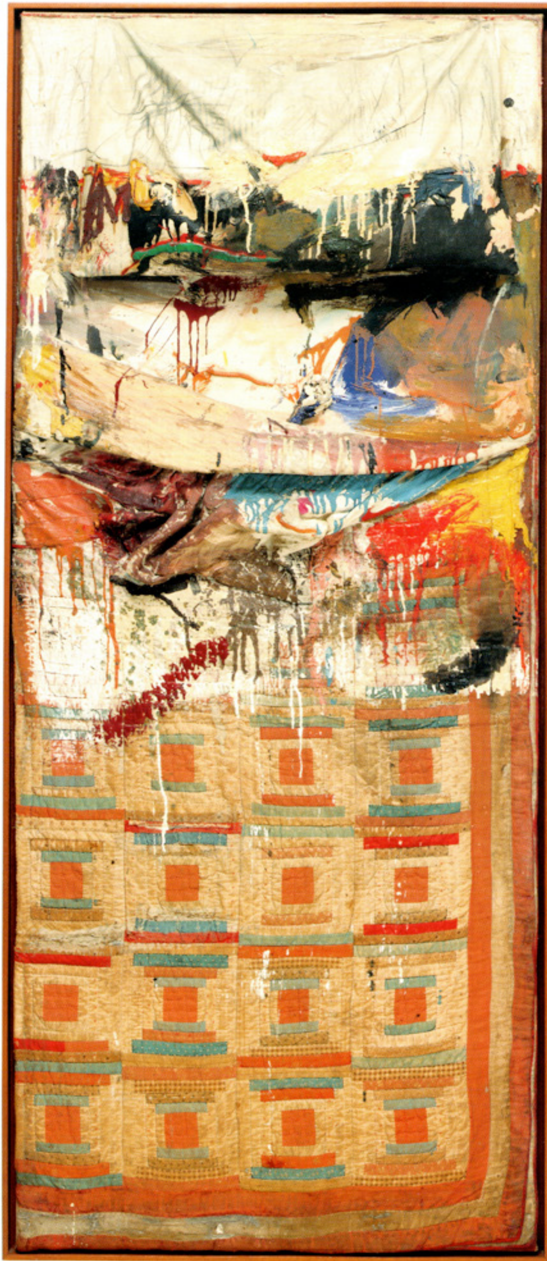


Plate 2.

Robert Rauschenberg: *Bed*, 1955, 191.1×80 x 20.3 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, New York
See also Fig. 3, p. 29.

Plate 3.

Andrea Fraser, *Ein Wettbewerb*, 2001, oil and graphite on canvas, 65x65 cm, Installation component of *Kunst muss hängen*, Galerie Christian Nagel, 2001. Photo: Simon Vogel. Courtesy: Andrea Fraser and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/ Cologne/ Munich.
See also fig. 9, p. 97.

Plate 4.

Martin Kippenberger, *1/2 Preis /1/2 Price*, 1994. Oil on canvas. 120×100 cm. © Estate of Martin Kippenberger, Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne. Photo: Wolfgang Günzel, Offenbach, Courtesy Galerie Bärbel Grässlin, Frankfurt.
See also fig. 10, p. 97.

Plate 5.

Charles Simonds: *Landscape*<–>*Body*<–>*Dwelling,* 1973, filmed by Rudy Burckhardt, edited by Charles Simonds, 16mm film (digitized), color, sound, exhibited at *If the Berlin Wind Blows My Flag,* Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, 2023. Photo: Jens Ziehe / n.b.k.
See also fig. 4, p. 109.

Plate 6.

The graphic portfolios of the EP Galerie: *Grafik der DDR* (with works by Tomas Schmit, A. R. Penck, Robert Rehfeldt, Bernhard Blume) and *Landschaft 1980* (with works by Bettina von Arnim, Stephen Willats, Simona Runcan, Guillermo Deisler) exhibited at *If the Berlin Wind Blows my Flag,* Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, 2023. Photo: Nóra Lukács.
See also fig. 5, p. 109.

Plate 7.

View of gallery installation for “Twelve Artists from the German Democratic Republic,” Warburg Hall, Fogg Museum and Arthur M. Sackler Museum, September 16-November 5, 1989. Photographs of the Harvard Art Museums (HC 22), folder 4.7. Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Pictured are works by Heinrich Tessmer, with one image by Wolfgang Smy in the background.
See also fig. 2, p. 125.

Plate 8.

Franz Erhard Walther, *New York*, 1958. Pencil and tempera on thin cardboard, 59,2×83,9 cm © Franz Erhard Walther.
See also fig. 1, p. 135.

Plate 9.

Thomas Schütte, *Fisch*, 1979. In-situ wall painting at the Konrad Fischer Galerie, Neubrückstraße Düsseldorf, 3,8 × 10 m (12,47 × 32,81'). © SABAM, Belgium (2024).
See also fig. 7, p. 159.

Plate 10.

Reinhard Mucha, **The Wirtschaftswunder**, To the People of Pittsburgh, **III** [2016] 1991. 17 tondi. Metal shoulder clamps, round float glass panes, alkyd enamel painted on reverse of float glass, *16 book pages* offset print recto and verso *(found objects)*, felt, aluminum discs, fluorescent lamp, electrical cord, right-angle plug with rocker switch, 3 zip ties, extension cord with female and male plugs. 16 tondi each ø 15.16 in. × 1.81 in. 1 tondo ø 15.75 in. × 3.94 in. Installation view: ***# Mucha® Milano*** *– Schneller werden ohne Zeitverlust*, Galleria Lia Rumma, Milan, Italy, November 24, 2016–June 1, 2017. Courtesy the Artist. Photo Mucha. © mucha*Archive* / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, 2025
See also fig. 6, p. 176.

Plate 11.

Charles W. White, *Harriet*, 1972 Ó The Charles White Archives (not finalized).
See also fig. 2, p. 191.

Plate 12.

Yvonne Rainer, *Journeys from Berlin/1971*, 1980, © Yvonne Rainer/photo courtesy of Zeitgeist Films in Association with Kino Lorber. See also fig. 5, p. 222.

Plate 13.

Glenn Ligon, *Portraits And Not Portraits*, 2001, Installation Views, Kunstverein München 1997. Courtesy of Glenn Ligon, Wilfried Petzi, and Kunstverein München.
See also fig. 9, p. 238.

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Colophon

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