Graduate Symposium Compendium

2019

Nasher Prize
Nasher Sculpture Center

COVER:
Isa Genzken, Installation view, *Fuck the Bauhaus, New Buildings for New York*, 2000. AC Project Room, New York. Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne/New York

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The 2019 Nasher Prize Dialogues series is sponsored by Janelle and Alden Pinnell/The Pinnell Foundation and Stephen Friedman Gallery.

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Nasher Sculpture Center

Nasher Sculpture Center is home to the Raymond and Patsy Nasher Collection, one of the finest collections of modern and contemporary sculpture in the world, featuring more than 300 masterpieces by the likes of Calder, Giacometti, Matisse, Picasso, Rodin, and Hepworth. In addition to highlighting the permanent collection in the Renzo Piano–designed museum, the Nasher is host to rotating installations by celebrated modern masters as well as leading contemporary artists. In dialogue with these exhibitions and other sculptural themes, the Nasher hosts lectures and symposia that enrich the museum experience and highlight the Nasher as a catalyst for the study, installation, conservation, and appreciation of modern and contemporary sculpture.

Nasher Prize

In April 2015, the Nasher Sculpture Center announced the creation of the Nasher Prize, the most significant award in the world dedicated exclusively to contemporary sculpture. It is presented annually to a living artist who has had an extraordinary impact on the understanding of the art form. Each winner is chosen by a jury of renowned museum directors, curators, artists, and art historians who have an expertise in the field and varying perspectives on the subject, and the chosen Laureate receives a $100,000 prize, conferred in April of each year. In addition, each winner receives an award object designed by the architect of the Nasher Sculpture Center, Renzo Piano. The Nasher Sculpture Center is one of a few institutions worldwide dedicated exclusively to the exhibition and

study of modern and contemporary sculpture. As such, the Prize is an apt extension of the museum's mission and its commitment to advancing developments in the field.

Attendant with the award aspect of the Nasher Prize is a series of public programs called Nasher Prize Dialogues. These panel discussions, lectures, and symposia are intended to foster international awareness of sculpture and to stimulate discussion and debate. Nasher Prize Dialogues are held yearly in cities around the world, offering engagement with various audiences and providing myriad perspectives and insight into the ever-expanding field of sculpture.

Past Nasher Prize Laureates include artists Doris Salcedo (2016), Pierre Huyghe (2017), and Theaster Gates (2018).

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Foreword

Over the past three years, the Nasher Sculpture Center's Nasher Prize Graduate Symposium has garnered a collection of new research and scholarship about past Laureates Pierre Huyghe and Theaster Gates by a group of international students from around the world. Together with keynote presentations—by Nicolas Bourriaud, notable French curator and critic, and Matthew Jesse Jackson, writer, curator, critic, and Associate Professor of Art History, Department of Visual Arts at the University of Chicago—the papers delivered from these enriching days have since been proudly published in two beautifully designed compendiums and shared with scholars and libraries around the globe.

One of the chief aims of Nasher Prize is to further scholarship on contemporary sculpture, through both a careful look at the work of each Laureate as well as worldwide conversations held about sculptural practice in general. The Graduate Symposium is a leading way we are holding fast to that mission.

The 2019 Nasher Prize Laureate selection of Isa Genzken is unique. The improvisational quality of her work—the near-constant reinvention of her practice, especially through assemblage—has a special ability to respond to contemporary life. Genzken has an uncanny way of taking the pulse of every moment, changing her methods of sculpture-making in order to best describe the energy of the time. Because of that, when looking back over her career of the past 40 years, one is able to get a sense of each decade's spirit and see how she has shaped subsequent generations of artists through her creative disruption of traditional approaches and forms.

Given the ever-changing nature of Genzken's oeuvre, offering a chance for students to present scholarship on it was especially exciting, and we were thrilled to receive submissions from students all over the world on a range of themes related to her practice, from the influence of architecture to the subversive ways she challenges the history of formal sculptural techniques.

The compendium features essays by five students who each presented new research on Genzken at the Nasher Sculpture Center on April 4, 2019. The student presentations were followed by a presentation by Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, keynote speaker, art historian, and Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Modern Art at Harvard University. The event was skillfully moderated by Stephen Lapthisophon, artist, educator, and professor at the University of Texas at Dallas School of the Arts and Humanities.

I want to offer many thanks to the Nasher Prize sponsors who made the Nasher Prize Graduate Symposium possible, especially: JPMorgan Chase & Co., the Eugene McDermott Foundation, Nancy A. Nasher and David J. Haemisegger, Gagosian, The Donna Wilhelm Family Fund, Lee Cobb and Lucilo Peña, Lisa Dawson and Thomas Maurstad, and Martha and Max Wells.

Finally, our sincere thanks and best wishes to each of the students who presented papers this year—we look forward to your continued growth as thinkers and scholars—as well as to Nasher Assistant Curator Dr. Leigh Arnold for steering the program and the many Nasher staff members who contributed to the event's success.

Jeremy Strick
Director, Nasher Sculpture Center

Opening Remarks

Stephen Lapthisophon

Artist, Educator, and Professor at the University of Texas at Dallas School of the Arts and Humanities

This text has been adapted from the transcript of Lapthisophon's opening remarks presented at the Nasher Sculpture Center on April 4, 2019.

Welcome, thanks for the nice introduction, thanks to the Nasher for asking me to do this. I'm very much looking forward to hearing from everybody today, and all of the conversation we have with all of you attending. I'm going to keep my opening remarks very brief. Although I spent a fair amount of time in scholarly research and things like that, it's been a long, long time. And really, my day-to-day life is spent as an artist, so it's been a really great opportunity to go and study the works of Isa Genzken from the perspective of an art historian rather than the way artists see exhibitions.

I thought I would just briefly mention a few things about what I feel draws me to her work. I've known about the work for a long time, and seen scattered pieces here and there, but really was only able to see her exhibition at the Dallas Museum of Art across the street about six years ago. That was my main exposure to seeing the works in person, and over the last week or so I've really been thinking about what lasted with me. I think it's funny the way artists' responses are very personal. It's something about the way I see an aspect of hers in a friend's work, or I see another exhibition, and I start to make those connections. As I was making connections, I was really seeing a lot of my own ways of working reflected in her pieces. I was thinking about the things I was drawn to, and one is this kind of restlessness of the scope of her work, in terms of sculpture, the use of photographs, the early performance things, the installation ideas. This mirrors a lot of what I do, including the films she's made, that probably—most of you know—there will be a film presentation of the not-very-often-seen films in Oak Cliff at the Texas Theatre. That's another great treat.

The kind of wide-ranging, restless, wandering drift that happens in a lot of her work is something that really appealed to me. I like the interweaving of her personal history that she greatly infuses in the work, and that is something that's important to me as well. I

was very much drawn to the use of materials, but also just the way in which the materials are used. Her embracing of trash; of refuse; ruined things; things that are going to be falling apart. As a teacher of younger artists, many of whom are very focused on making "product" at this time, I like the way that some of these things seem so ad hoc, and so do-it-yourself, and so thrown together. I feel very encouraged by that, and it's something that I can see in a lot of my students and in my younger colleagues who are embracing that kind of thing. They are seeing their work being guided by sensibility, rather than making something that is the product side of things. It's been a really great thing to see the work reflected in some of my younger colleagues, as I was saying, as well as that spirit of recklessness that's going through it.

I also, going through Genzken's exhibitions and reviewing things, have been drawn to both the melancholy of the work occasionally, as well as the irreverence of it. After all, how many times in a scholarly, academic setting does one legitimately get to say "Fuck the Bauhaus"? I'm drawn to aspects of that. Regarding things like the Bauhaus, which is being marked as the hundredth year since the founding in 1919, I began to notice in her personal story a lot of ways in which she's chronicling our times. And I was looking back on some ways that, as I read the papers for the presentation, there were markers for my own life, of just seeing the same things, and then being able to see it through the insightful ways of both the scholars this afternoon who will be presenting their ideas; but then seeing it presented through her eyes, in the time she was living in, and I was very drawn to that.

I was struck by the fact that the accounts list 1977 as the year she first went to New York, and that was the first year I went to New York, so it was one of those things where I just kept thinking, *I wonder if we were ever in the same place?* I like some of those aspects

of being able to mark the timeliness of so many aspects of her life, and the way her experiences are reflected through her work, her sculpture, her installations. And use that as a sort of touch point for the things I was experiencing and comparing how we took that same experience.

As I've reflected over the ideas that we are going to be talking about today, I've been seeing her so much as a chronicler, as a record of our shared times. As well as her taking in what happened at the time, got poured out in a different way, through her own kind of personal politics. And while the work can be elusive and sometimes hard to grasp all of the references, kind of all put together in a neat fashion, I've been struck by how much her work really does address things that are significant to our moment. Just in real ways to talk about aspects of the guises we all wear in this virtual world that's popped up, the way that persona is reflected in her work. That kind of invasion of popular culture that is seen in what she does. The way in which celebrity intrudes into the network of things we think about in daily life, as well as things that are brought up indirectly through things that are involved within terms of her own personal life. Some of the bodies and mannequins that, I think, get to issues of disability and what an able body does now in our time, questions of mental illness; these are things that pop up when people really address the interweaving of her own personal biography with the work and the way that all those things are so at the forefront of our moment.

I've been thinking a lot, as I reread the papers and reflected on my experience with her work, on the ways she talks about bodies in general and how these holders of our being manifest themselves in the ways we interact with each other. Issues of urban space are so foregrounded in her work, so I feel like there's so many things that are important in our moment that are talked about in her

own idiosyncratic, very personal, very filtered way. I think it's very timely in that way, in terms of her being a chronicler.

I'll end with a quick note to say—while we'll have references and rich quotations from great thinkers and theorists, like Bourdieu, Adorno, and Habermas, to our very honored keynote speaker, all mentioning important, complex thinking—I wanted to end with a less highfalutin reference, that I'm also likening to certain coincidences. I had some music going while I was reading some of the papers, and the song "American Tune" by Paul Simon came on, and it just filtered through as I was reading. It's a short little chronicle itself of encountering New York—which is so important to Genzken—the idea of flying, which is part of the song, the idea of flying past the Statue of Liberty, as this kind of crazy symbol used in all the various ways that it manifests, but there's just something about the melancholy of the song that seemed to strike me as fitting. As I kept reading about issues of ruin and decay and precariousness and other aspects that are in Genzken's work, stuck in my head were the lines of the song that said "I don't know a soul who's not been battered, I don't have a friend who is at ease, I don't know a dream that's not been shattered or driven to its knees." There was something about that aspect of the song, as well as the fact that it was prompted by an observation of New York, that seemed to be fitting in terms of the ruin and decay that's exemplified in a lot of her work. Which is both the sort of thing that can be gleeful and wonderful in its celebration of ruin, but then, of course, sometimes very melancholy. I'm really excited to share with you, all of the presenters, I've had the great opportunity to read the papers, and I think there's some really wonderful ideas, some challenging thinking. The great part of Genzken's work is that there are five presenters who did some very deep, serious, complex study of the work, and there's still so much more to say about all of her work. It's such a rich body

of thinking and sculpture. Thanks very much for everything; we will start working and thinking together. The first presenter is one of our two jetlagged contributors. The presenter is from the Courtauld Institute in London, Isabel Parkes, who will be talking about precariousness in the work of Isa Genzken. Welcome. Thanks very much.

Isa Genzken's Precarious Position

Isabel Parkes

The Courtauld Institute

Unstable, fluid, destructive, fragile—these words have been used to describe both Isa Genzken's protean work and her personality. Genzken creates a site of possibility at the very intersection of form and feeling, an unfixed border she has investigated for much of her career. Recognizing precarity as a quality in both artwork and artist, I begin with Genzken's 1973 performance of Bruce Nauman's *Instructions for a Mental Exercise* and trace how she subsequently reflects the porosity of the phenomenological experiment in three key series of works: Ellipsoids, Säulen, and Schauspieler. Scholars like Sarah Ahmed and Jennifer Doyle encourage this emphasis on lived experience and emotional intentionality in effective criticism. As Doyle writes in her 2013 book *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art*:

> "The attempt to disarticulate emotion and expression poses a specific kind of difficulty in art. It leaves us in a strange place when we attempt to talk about the experience such works generate, as we struggle with the question of what a nonexpressive model of emotion looks like."[1]

I make a case for the emotional and expressive—and particularly the precarious—qualities of Genzken's work. I emphasize Genzken's engagement with related issues of perception, consciousness, and subjectivity over her 50-year career, considering the psychological as much as the aesthetic qualities of her work. I avoid political and economic notions of the term, including *précarité*, which critics such as Hal Foster and Lisa Lee

1 Jennifer Doyle, *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2013), pp. 111–112.

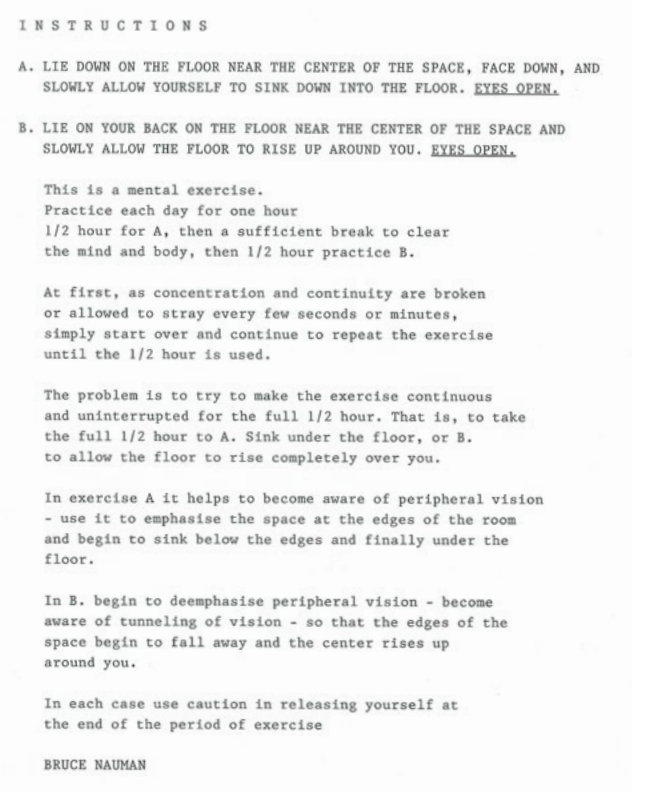
have already addressed.[2] The precariousness I identify as central to Genzken's practice is a condition of instability and slippage, vulnerability and fluidity. It is as unnerving as it is intimate, at once visceral and analytical, ambiguous and precise.

Notoriously reticent to speak about her work, Genzken lets her oeuvre communicate for her. It has won her multiple retrospectives at major museums, international fame, and fortune. Silence, however, has not ensured privacy, and Genzken's fraught personal life—her struggle with depression, bipolar disorder, and substance abuse, as well as her public relationship with, marriage to, and subsequent divorce from Gerhard Richter—is an inevitable part of the reception and valuation of her artistic production. The triumph of her precarity, particularly as a female artist, has also been a trial.

I select work from early, mid-, and late stages of Genzken's career in order to focus on her enduring interest in the nonlinear, unstable qualities of perception (and her conscious refusal to avoid that instability). As Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes in *Phenomenology of Perception*, a text Benjamin Buchloh confirms Genzken was familiar with early in her career, "Experience of phenomena is not … that of a reality of which we are ignorant and leading to which there is no methodical bridge—it is the making explicit … of consciousness … It is not an irrational conversation, but an intentional analysis."[3] Merleau-Ponty helps us recognize

2 Hal Foster, "Toward a Grammar of Emergency," in *Thomas Hirschhorn: Establishing a Critical Corpus*, Claire Bishop, et al. (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2011), pp. 162–181; and Lisa Lee, "Sculpture's Condition / Conditions of Publicness: Isa Genzken and Thomas Hirschhorn" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2012).

3 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald Landes (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 68. Benjamin Buchloh references Genzken's familiarity with this text in his essay "The Fragment as Model," in *October Files 17: Isa Genzken*, p. 27.



INSTRUCTIONS

A. LIE DOWN ON THE FLOOR NEAR THE CENTER OF THE SPACE, FACE DOWN, AND SLOWLY ALLOW YOURSELF TO SINK DOWN INTO THE FLOOR. EYES OPEN.

B. LIE ON YOUR BACK ON THE FLOOR NEAR THE CENTER OF THE SPACE AND SLOWLY ALLOW THE FLOOR TO RISE UP AROUND YOU. EYES OPEN.

This is a mental exercise.
Practice each day for one hour
1/2 hour for A, then a sufficient break to clear
the mind and body, then 1/2 hour practice B.

At first, as concentration and continuity are broken
or allowed to stray every few seconds or minutes,
simply start over and continue to repeat the exercise
until the 1/2 hour is used.

The problem is to try to make the exercise continuous
and uninterrupted for the full 1/2 hour. That is, to take
the full 1/2 hour to A. Sink under the floor, or B.
to allow the floor to rise completely over you.

In exercise A it helps to become aware of peripheral vision
- use it to emphasise the space at the edges of the room
and begin to sink below the edges and finally under the
floor.

In B. begin to deemphasise peripheral vision - become
aware of tunneling of vision - so that the edges of the
space begin to fall away and the center rises up
around you.

In each case use caution in releasing yourself at
the end of the period of exercise

BRUCE NAUMAN

Figure 1.1.
Bruce Nauman, *Instructions for a Mental Exercise*, 1974. © 2019 Bruce Nauman / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

how Genzken's work analyzes the phenomenal and reflects on the psychological, as well as how she employs lived experience (her subjective reality) as source material. Sara Ahmed's queer rereading of Merleau-Ponty helps us link body with orientation. Crucially, in making explicit the objective as well as the constituted,

immediately present quality of experience, Genzken starts with herself. Her body provides her with perspective.[4]

In late July 1973, a 25-year-old Genzken performed Bruce Nauman's *Instructions for a Mental Exercise* at Konrad Fischer's Düsseldorf gallery (fig 1.1). No audience watched as Genzken lay on the floor facedown for 30 minutes, then face up for another 30 minutes, every day for seven days. The intention, as Nauman instructed, was to "SLOWLY ALLOW YOURSELF TO SINK DOWN INTO THE FLOOR" and then "SLOWLY ALLOW THE FLOOR TO RISE UP AROUND YOU."[5] Genzken's notes on the exercise affirm an early interest in parsing reality, a fragile co-creation of observer and observed.

From day one:

> Lying on my stomach with my chin on my hands so that I had the widest possible view.
>
> When I tried to concentrate on the exercise I felt a sense of resistance and fear, so I had to break off and start again ...
>
> The first impression was that the perspective of the room was getting lost ... I always broke the exercise off at this point because I was afraid of losing consciousness.[6]

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4 As Sara Ahmed writes, "The body provides us with a perspective: the body is 'here' as a point from which we begin, and from which the world unfolds, as being both more and less over there." *Queer Phenomenology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 8.

5 Nauman's instructions more recently appeared in Bruce Nauman and Janet Kraynak, *Please Pay Attention Please: Bruce Nauman's Words* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), p. 76.

6 Genzken's notes are reprinted in English in Isa Genzken, "Two Exercises, 1973," trans. Michael Robinson, in *October Files 17: Isa Genzken*, pp. 1–6.

Genzken expresses the contiguity of thought with sensation and subject with environment. She comments on the fickle nature of consciousness, an elusive object of study which by its nature resists analysis except, as seen here, in the description of objects as they appear in the immediate present.[7] According to her account, Genzken ends the exercise afraid, at the brink of a precarious moment tipping into danger. On day three, she can't deal with the exercise. On day four, she drinks champagne before beginning. She is not precious with herself. In this deceptively simple exploration of mind and body, Genzken exaggerates the logic of phenomenology. She is, I believe, investigating the possibility of what Merleau-Ponty calls "a 'real' beyond appearance, the 'true' beyond illusion."[8]

The referential nature of Genzken's sculpture takes root as she finds success in both absorbing and being absorbed by her environment. Note the contrast from day six to day seven: "I had no results from either of the exercises." Then: "I had no difficulty starting the exercise. The same sensations I had on day five got more intense after I had sunk into the floor, to the extent that my ego merged into this three-dimensional space." Genzken ends the notes by describing how she is "part of the floor, or that the floor was going through [her]."[9] Feeling "concentrated in two dimensions," she performs precariousness and in so doing, orients herself. In plain language, she describes what she sees, which, as Merleau-Ponty points out, is the most difficult aspect of perception to grasp.[10]

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7 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 69.

8 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 45.

9 Genzken, "Two Exercises, 1973," p. 6.

10 "Nothing is more difficult than to know precisely what we see." Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 67; italics author's own.

Figure 1.2.
Isa Genzken, *Gelbes Ellipsoid*, 1976. Wood, lacquer, 3½ x 3 ½ x 191 in. (9 x 9 x 486 cm) Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne/New York © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn)

Genzken creates a vehicle for this precarious perception with her first Ellipsoid sculpture in 1976 (fig 1.2). Each of the 13 sculptures in the series—completed with six additional Hyperbolo sculptures—is an elongated, meticulously carved and painted three-dimensional curve, as difficult to grasp in person as it is in photographs. Pointed at either end, the Ellipsoids seem to hurtle in either direction while remaining immaculately still, touching the ground at a single point. Genzken's effective dematerialization of being and body in *Two Exercises* imbues the objects with a feeling of precarity that is essential to their form. Recall Genzken's notes from the first day of her exercise, describing how the room's perspective was "lost" and "the line of the floor … became a single horizontal with

the end wall."[11] The Ellipsoids echo Merleau-Ponty's discussion of perception as "an 'interpretation' of the signs that our senses provide in accordance with bodily stimuli, a 'hypothesis' that the mind evolves to 'explain its impressions to itself.'"[12] Despite their sharp forms, the Ellipsoids destabilize perception, offering an interpretation of the signs Genzken's senses had provided her just a few years prior. But because the body is neither unequivocally the Ellipsoids' reference point nor entirely out of the picture, Genzken refutes the body as material and instead proposes it as experience. In the sketches Bruce Nauman included alongside his printed Instructions in Interfunktionen (fig 1.3) one finds another link between his draft and Genzken's sculptures. The circle Nauman places on his line could be read as the middle point at which an ellipsoid touches the ground. It could also be interpreted as a body lying down, with just head and shoulders visible. This connection emphasizes the corporeal discipline of both artists' work. Yet linking Genzken's bodily exercise to these formally minimalist objects seems contradictory. Allowing it, the success of contradiction brings us closer to Genzken's person. The Ellipsoids' expanded notion of corporeality and suggestion of both subject and object contrasts with the minimalism of their forms while clearly relating to Genzken's performance.

In her 1979 analysis of the series, Birgit Pelzer commented, "Although these three-dimensional bodies … rely on what appear to be the simplest facts of spatial perception, their clarity and stringency generate a zone of uncertainty. This paradoxical outcome could be described as a crisis of perception."[13] Returning

11 Genzken, "Two Exercises, 1973," p. 1.

12 Genzken, "Two Exercises, 1973," pp. 38–39.

13 Birgit Pelzer, "Axiomatics Subject to Withdrawal," in *October Files 17: Isa Genzken*, p. 7–12.

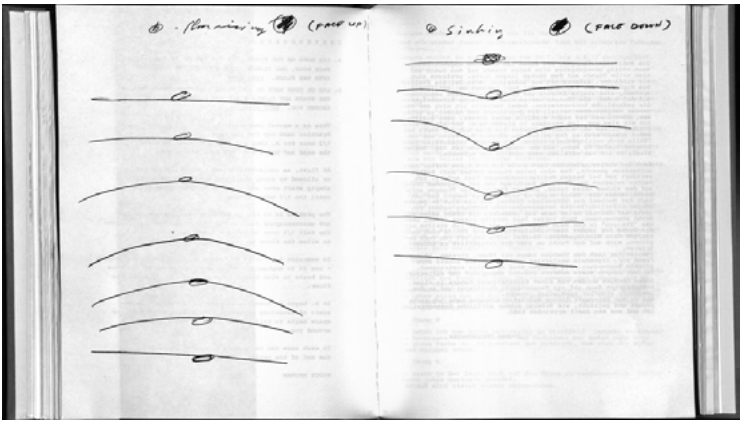

Figure 1.3.
Bruce Nauman, *Instructions for a Mental Exercise*, 1969. © 2019 Bruce Nauman / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

to her notes, Genzken writes how she sank "completely" into the floor: "I felt I was floating in high, mobile layers ... The impression of their three-dimensional quality was extraordinarily strong."[14] In allowing herself to be taken up by her surroundings, Genzken's precariousness finds shape (not resolution) in crisis. In this earliest and perhaps most influential stage of her career, Genzken concretizes something abstract, seeking to give form to perception and apply parameters to a process of transformation. The Ellipsoids stabilize instability, find a precarious balance, and resist closure.

In 1977, Genzken visited New York for the first time as an adult and found a city with which she felt an immediate affinity.[15] From

14 Genzken, "Two Exercises, 1973," p. 3.

15 Editor's note: Genzken first visited New York as a high school student in the mid-1960s, with her mother to see her aunt, who worked as a flight attendant and lived in midtown Manhattan. See Sabine Breitwieser, "The Characters of Isa Genzken: Between the Personal and the Constructive," in *Isa Genzken: Retrospective*, Breitwieser, et al. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2013), p. 18.

Figure 1.4.
Installation view of Säulen, portrait columns in *Isa Genzken*, Sie sind mein Glück, Kunstverein Braunschweig, Germany, June 11–August 27, 2000, Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne/New York © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2019

that year on, Genzken would visit New York annually and live there intermittently, nurturing an urban obsession encapsulated in three sculptural scrapbooks, *I Love New York, Crazy City* (1996).[16] Her work during the 1980s and 1990s visibly incorporated New York's "crazy" and countless contradictions. The heightened contrasts of the place intensified her search for precarious zones of possibility. Through her ongoing relationship with New York, Genzken evolved into a flaneuse and magpie, collecting shiny scraps and collating them into a vivid reflection of the highs and lows of her experience.

16 Genzken articulates precisely what she intends with the book's title in an unusually long and personal interview with Germany's *Der Tagesspiegel*. When asked about her relationship to the city, Genzken answered, "In New York, *habe ich noch nie Depressionen gehabt*" ("I have never been depressed in New York"). "Künstlerin Isa Genzken im Interview: 'Zu Tokio Hotel tanze ich wie ein Teenager,'" interview by Nicola Kuhn and Ulf Lippertz, *Der Tagesspiegel*, September 29, 2016, https://www.tagesspiegel.de/gesellschaft/kuenstlerin-isa-genzken-im-interview-in-new-york-habe-ich-noch-nie-depressionen-gehabt/13621180-3.html (accessed November 14, 2018).

Reflections are everywhere in Genzken's work, first and most noticeably in Säulen (fig 1.4) (1998–2003), which appear perhaps first as unspecific, unmonumental columns. At the same time, these freestanding totemic forms, covered in mirrors, photographs, and tape, also resemble miniature skyscrapers (resoundingly the Twin Towers) and are titled with names of Genzken's real, often famous friends. For someone who has traipsed down Madison Avenue, they replay a familiar, if isolating, urban experience of Modernist architecture. Reflections are fundamentally phenomenological, affirming both authentic personhood and illusion. Genzken taps into both qualities, even how one informs the other. In her work, reflections emphasize how we create and distort reality as much as it creates and distorts us.

As Diedrich Diederichsen writes, "The dynamics of making real and making unreal, of making functional and making non-functional, have never moved in one single direction for Isa Genzken."[17] When one stands among the columns or in front of her flat, foil-covered *Soziale Fassaden* (2002), a sense of the individual's precarity shifts to the collective. While Merleau-Ponty suggests that a shape is nothing but "the sum of limited views" and "the consciousness of a shape is a collective entity," Genzken invites us to find consciousness and shape in the columns' and facades' associative titles, materials, and forms.[18] Our experience of looking reveals fragments from which we nonetheless imagine wholes, illusory blurs or names from which we interpret personhood. And while both series introduce a glam, slapdash club aesthetic, these are also affective, apotropaic works from an artist at this point in her 50s,

17 Diedrich Diederichsen, "The Poetics of the Psychocities," in *Isa Genzken: 1992–2003, Exhibitions, Works, Catalogue Raisonne*, eds. Isa Genzken and Beatrix Ruf (Cologne: Walther König, 2003), p. 28.

18 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 16.

on the other side of a publicized divorce from one of Germany's most famous artists. As Juliane Rebentisch comments on Säulen, "Their stage presence unfolds out of an experience of absence." She continues, "Instead of attempting in vain to represent it, these works record subjectivity at the site of its absence—but precisely thus does this art succeed in developing a nonsubjective expressive quality that draws its force from deeply human sources: the logic of expectation, the not-yet of desire is mobilized, as is, in the dialectical countermove, the logic of remembrance."[19] Rebentisch stresses Genzken's ability to use nonsubjective materials matter-of-factly and coax out personal expression. Realism for Genzken is not real enough to express what she sees and feels.

Genzken was in Manhattan on September 11, 2001. She recalled her experience in a 2016 interview with *Der Tagesspiegel*:

> I found myself in the elevator of the Hilton Hotel, which had a livestream of what was going on. I could not believe what I saw. It was like a Spielberg film. That evening I went to the World Trade Center and was horrified. There was still smoke in the air, people were gathering remains, chairs, furniture. It was Hell.[20]

The "remains, chairs, furniture" that Genzken recalls at Ground Zero are all materials that would soon appear in her sculpture.[21]

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19 Juliane Rebentisch, "The Dialectic of Beauty: On the Work of Isa Genzken," in *October Files 17: Isa Genzken*, pp. 149–161.

20 Originally in German: "*Ich befand mich im Fahrstuhl des Hilton Hotel, in dem es eine Direktübertragung der Ereignisse auf einen Bildschirm gab. Ich konnte gar nicht glauben, was ich da sah. Für mich wirkte das wie ein Spielberg-Film. Ich ging abends zum World Trade Center und war entsetzt. Da war noch der Rauch am Himmel, die Menschen haben die Reste aufgesammelt, Stühle, Möbel, das war die Hölle.*" Genzken, interview, *Der Tagesspiegel*; author's translation.

21 Most clearly in her early-2000s series Empire/Vampire (Who Kills Death) (2002–03).

Figure 1.5.
Installation view, *Isa Genzken*, David Zwirner, New York, 2015. © Isa Genzken / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner

Genzken's orientation toward materials is psychological and physical. She pushes the expressive possibilities of objective and material form to express a singular, subjective, and phenomenal experience.

It makes sense then, that the precariousness of today's post-9/11, hyper-consumerist, euphemistically named "global community" captured from every iPhone angle possible and shared ad absurdum on social media finds expression in Genzken's *Schauspieler* (fig 1.5). Since 2013, Genzken has adorned adult and child mannequins with clothes and accessories, frequently her own. She splatters some with paint, stands some in groups, and leaves others alone, staring blankly into the white cubes in which her work is today almost exclusively exhibited. Her actors are both free—wackily outfitted in a parody of self-expression—and imprisoned, by shop windows

or the galleries in which they stand. As sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello observe in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (1999), "Capitalism attracts actors who realize that they have hitherto been oppressed by offering them a certain form of liberation that masks new types of oppression." Capitalism, they explain, "'recuperates' the autonomy it extends by implementing new modes of control," which are again critiqued and transformed, continually offering new "liberation."[22] The totalizing logic Boltanski and Chiapello map between autonomous expression, the transformative power of goods, and cultural critique parallels Genzken's enactment of individuals who achieve their originality through recycling the by-products of the world around them.

This logic also applies to the paradox of Genzken's brand, embodied in recent work that makes trash into treasure and treasure into trash. Genzken's compulsion to perceiving and communicating the world around her—this precarious sensitivity—has become a Midas-touch trademark. Boltanski's latest book, co-authored with Arnaud Esquerre, explores how the story of an object guarantees its authenticity and market price.[23] What the authors call "enrichment objects" can be capitalized on like financial assets but are no longer exchanged only in specialized markets. They often possess aesthetic and historic value, and many—they cite luggage produced by Louis Vuitton as an example—are linked to cultural institutions.[24] That Schauspieler wear Genzken's actual possessions ensures that her persona

22 Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The Spirit of New Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2005), p. 425.

23 Luc Boltanski, Arnaud Esquerre, *Enrichissement: Une critique de la marchandise* (Paris: Gallimard, 2017).

24 Luc Boltanski, "ISA World Congress of Sociology, 2014." International Sociological Association, World Congress of Sociology, June 22, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VcVbtjUeIbw (accessed February 7, 2019).

is integral to their story. The works are enriched by the artist's nonlinear perception as much as by her personal instability and by the institutions that display them. They are precarious and precious in their reliance on artistic marks of Genzken's zany originality and perhaps too because one day we'll realize they're just mannequins wearing old clothes. Genzken, I believe, invites each of these perspectives. She deftly and impishly enriches objects as she has long done, from her lived experience.

Despite social and art-historical norms about art's autonomy, Schauspieler also engage in a biographical discourse. As critics, we remain more willing to apply a lens of psychoanalysis than discuss feelings of loss and abandonment, childhood or motherhood, even as they may be right at hand for Genzken. Considering her precariousness as a single, childless female artist, at this point in her late 60s, offers an opportunity to understand these works in a context where the political and personal carry equal weight. Allowing oneself to react to seeing tape over a child mannequin's mouth or one clad in nothing but an oversize T-shirt makes space for the idea that these are fewer kids in "Neverland" than those an errant parent forgot. Another more obvious challenge posed by Schauspieler is the anxieties they spark in us: that we do overconsume, buy things, as Olivia Parkes describes, "not because of what they do but for what they signify"; we stand at a party among friends only to scroll through our phones; and even at the peak of success, we might still feel like we're acting.[25] In this, Schauspieler help us question a capitalist order disenchanted with individuality, aware of its own oppression, and still somehow subjugated by an opportunistic search for authenticity. They attune our senses to the surreal world we've

25 Olivia Parkes, "HyperNovelization," in *The Baffler*, January 30, 2019, https://thebaffler.com/latest/hypernovelization-parkes (accessed February 4, 2019).

created, liked, and shared into existence, and our own precarity within that matrix.

As a woman, an artist, and a curator operating at a time when precarious seems to describe our politics, our ecology, and our identities, I see potential in work that expresses the fragility as much as the possibility of a world we co-create. Genzken is herself a *Weltempfänger*, a world receiver whose porosity and sensitivity to the psychological and physical conditions of life makes her communicate. Experiencing her work as a continual process of orientation offers a radical chance to consider what waves of consciousness we tune in or out. I have focused on three moments in her career in order to stress the consistency of her inconstancy and the certitude of her uncertainty, but I could have chosen various others to demonstrate her engagement with the precarity of perception, the person, and the material world we continuously bring into being. In doing so, my goal is to show Isa Genzken's willingness to take risks and push the limits of both feeling and form, and to examine the effect of this engagement. I hope I have adequately emphasized her courage, which continues to inspire my own.

“You Jump, I Jump, Jack”: Leo, Isa, and the *Spielautomat*

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Figure 2.1.
Isa Genzken, *Spielautomat*, 1999–2000. Slot machine, paper, chromogenic color prints, tape, plastic foil, 63 x 26 x 20 in. (160 x 65 x 50 cm). Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne/New York © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn)

> You like a man with a future,
> you like a woman with a past.
> —Fleetwood Mac, "Paper Doll"

What is there to look at in Isa Genzken's *Spielautomat* (fig. 2.1) (1999–2000)? Possibly too many photographs. A stymying

crowd of images paper a slot machine, mutating its daunting, implacable, physical form like awesome scales, feathers, or whimsical shingles curled by the passage of time. Some of the images are quickly read for subject matter, the bodies—human and otherwise—that they capture. Scanning its paper skin, one sees an airplane in flight, tulips in a planter, Andy Warhol with his camera, a hand applying eyeliner to an androgynous face, a man with a robust beard, as well as many pictures of Genzken herself, the most prominent crowning its top. Some identities are obvious, others legible only to those in the know—that's Lawrence Weiner, not Santa Claus. As such, *Spielautomat* is some kind of litmus test, subtly distinguishing, image by image, those who know from those who don't.

Less immediately legible are fragments of skyscrapers, New York's Grand Central Station, urban exteriors and interiors, all cropped and cut, haphazardly captured within the rectangle of the camera's viewfinder. The most recognizable face one picks out among this maddening crowd is that of Leonardo DiCaprio (fig. 2.2). Two large-format photographs of "Leo" are attached prominently to the front of the machine. Catch *Spielautomat* from the side, and you discover a third Leo tucked away, almost hidden beneath a primping pretty boy, Genzken's friend and fellow artist Kai Althoff. And if you're bold enough to crouch, another tiny Leo in a tux down below turns toward the wall, as if embarrassed by all this attention. DiCaprio's presence becomes second only to that of Genzken herself, visualized many times over upon *Spielautomat*'s surface, leading one to wonder what part, so to speak, he's playing here.

Such a question, which not only acknowledges DiCaprio but puzzles over him, feels almost taboo, possibly immature, especially as much previous description of *Spielautomat* glosses over DiCaprio's inclusion with little comment or explanation. Maybe

because that immaturity feels like a slippery slope, a descent toward admitting *Spielautomat*'s echo of the DIY, crafty shrines of teenage bedrooms, charged with the weird sexuality and unbridled screams of fanatic thrill? And yet, even if only for his repeated inclusion if not his stardom, DiCaprio's presence in *Spielautomat* demands our attention, and maybe even asks us to obsess and adore him as *Spielautomat* and Genzken by proxy seems to too. Leo appears repeatedly in Genzken's scrapbooks, particularly those contemporaneous to *Spielautomat*, which have since been reproduced as books and prints more recently, indicating that the affair between them continues, at least from her end.

Besides Genzken, *Spielautomat* introduces us only to men, surrounding the artist reigning atop it with a heterosexual charge, an adoring male flock and site of boy-girl flirtation. Whereas Warhol, Weiner, and Althoff appear only once, the repetition of DiCaprio positions him so that, at least within this image population, the society of *Spielautomat*, he outpaces all these other men. This imbalance feels natural, as DiCaprio is a brighter star in not only this tide pool but also the worldwide market of circulating pictures, where he is one of the brightest. Beyond this tiny arena, his image is both profligate and profitable. The prominent inclusion of a movie star as a point of comparison on *Spielautomat* marks Genzken as someone knowingly profiting off of imagery, but in a market that ultimately seems humble in the shadow of the Hollywood movie industry.

At the moment of *Spielautomat*'s assembly (1999–2000), the "real" DiCaprio would have loomed large across the cultural landscape. As Jack Dawson, the male lead in the epic romance disaster film *Titanic* (fig. 2.3) (1997), the projected image of DiCaprio as a charming dreamer had filled screens across the world, lingering in North American theaters for close to 10

Figure 2.2.
Isa Genzken, *Mach dich hübsch!*, c. 2000 (detail). Collaged artist book, 88 p., cardboard, printed paper, newsprint, photographs, transparent foil, stamps, stickers, adhesive tape, fabric tape, felt pen, ballpoint pen, 17 x 12 x 2 in. (open: 17 x 25 in.) 42 x 31 x 5 cm (open: 42 x 63 cm). Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne/New York © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn)

Figure 2.3.
Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet in *Titanic*, 1997. AP Images

months as the film became the first to gross more than a billion dollars in revenue.[1] The central Leo in Spielautomat captures DiCaprio right around this moment, 22 years old and looking even younger thanks to his boyish long blond hair and clear blue eyes, palpable even despite the yellow acetate that transfigures them. The lower image pictures a significantly younger DiCaprio, where he appears not so much boyish as simply a boy. Chin raised eagerly with an earnest, half-toothed smile, he conveys an unadulterated naivete in front of the camera. The younger DiCaprio marks a sharp contrast between this persona and the extremely self-aware, "Who, me?" posturing of the image anchored above it.

Titanic, both as a vehicle for narrative content and as a cultural event, is a parable of intense amounts of economic capital. Jack, like Genzken, is an artist, memorably drawing the wealthy Rose in the nude. From the movie's internal content, particularly the extreme luxury of the ill-fated ocean liner and especially the Gilded Age upper classes aboard, to the movie's colossal capacity to accumulate historic ticket sales in the real world at the other end of the century, *Titanic* laid bare the only increasingly sophisticated ability of the Hollywood culture industry to garner massive amounts of both domestic and international currency, not to mention the attention of millions of paying viewers. As such, DiCaprio's image echoes the thematic associations introduced by the sculpture's base, a slot machine not unlike the roulette wheel of film production, an industry where investment pours in but only a fraction of films ever strike it rich.

1 "Titanic," *Box Office Mojo*, http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=titanic.htm (accessed March 12, 2014).

Though apparently equally attentive to the portrayal of the haves as the have-nots, balancing the comparative mobility of Leo's Jack against the wealthy Rose, we all know how the story ends. Although it pictures and flirts with a fleeting sense of self-determination and mobility for the young Jack, *Titanic*'s resolution is ultimately an economically deterministic one. The poor Everyman always goes down with the ship.

What relationship can contemporary sculpture, and the bulwark of *Spielautomat* in particular, have with a cultural colossus like *Titanic*, and DiCaprio, whose image at 22—which divergently indexes both the deeply underprivileged Jack as well as the astronomically compensated DiCaprio—encapsulates in one body the class conflict and persistent inequality that fuels our eternal return to such familiar dollars-and-cents narratives of class immobility; what Simon Schama has dubbed "cultural necrophilia."[2]

Titanic's inheritance of the "disaster" film as genre provides a language for understanding Genzken's sculpture beyond *Spielautomat*, as that of a 'disaster artist.' Firstly in the sense that her sculptures often look like disasters of material and construction, piles of junk held together by precarious tape, glue, epoxy, or other low-brow fasteners and colored by haphazard splashes, sprays, and bleeds of paint. They also often address or represent actual cataclysms, such as the cement blocks evocative of bombed postwar Berlin like *Door* (*Tür*) (1988), bloody dioramas flanked by post-9/11 skyscrapers in the *Empire/Vampire* series (2004), or the ecological and geopolitical crisis marked by *Oil* (2007). Disaster also echoes a camp or gay diction (a register I

2 Simon Schama, "Why Americans Have Fallen for Snobby 'Downton Abbey,'" *Newsweek*, January 16, 2012, https://www.newsweek.com/why-americans-have-fallen-snobby-downton-abbey-64157 (accessed July 22, 2019).

will return to later in exploring *Spielautomat*'s queer potential) as in "that outfit is a disaster," a fair response to Genzken's often maximalist, flamboyant, multi-patterned, fabric, disco ball reflective, or brightly colored surfaces. To be clear, I offer this term appreciatively, to value Genzken's unique ability to give form to the terror that has become a cultural constant but also as a theoretical framework to evaluate others courting disaster as style—like Rachel Harrison, Jessica Stockholder, or Stewart Uoo.

The inclusion of DiCaprio doubles down on *Spielautomat* as an object about "value," both monetary and otherwise, within various markets and contexts. Genzken was prescient to see DiCaprio as a strong signifier in the Leo-obsessed world of the late '90s, because *Spielautomat* feels even smarter now. It "bet," so to speak, on DiCaprio's continued association with immense cultural and economic capital—and won big.

Since then, DiCaprio has continued to embody roles more than usually obsessed with money. From Baz Luhrmann's version of Jay Gatsby (*The Great Gatsby*, 2013) to the titular character *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013) to the eccentric billionaire Howard Hughes in *The Aviator* (2004) and the protagonist con man of *Catch Me If You Can* (2002): They are all men who seem, especially when projected to the movie theater's scale of 40 feet tall, the very personification of Guy Debord's formulation of spectacle, as "capital accumulated to such a degree that it becomes an image."[3]

Speculating on DiCaprio as capitalist spectacle atop a real slot machine, what I have called Genzken and *Spielautomat*'s prescient

3 "The spectacle is *capital* accumulated to such a degree that it becomes an image": Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983), part 34.

Figure 2.4.
Robert Rauschenberg, *Untitled*, c. 1954/1958. Combine: oil, pencil, crayon, paper, canvas, fabric, newspaper, photographs, wood, glass, mirror, tin, cork, and found painting with pair of painted leather shoes, dried grass, and Dominique hen on wood structure mounted on five casters, 86 ½ x 37 x 26 ¼ inches (219.7 x 94 x 66.7 cm). The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, The Panza Collection © 2019 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY)

"bet," recalls the motif and motives surrounding Marcel Duchamp's *Monte Carlo Bonds*, similarly artworks that collaged a portrait of the artist into the imagery of a gambling parlor. Both of the defining images that crown *Monte Carlo Bond* and *Spielautomat*, respectively, are also not self-portraits but rather collaborations with photographer friends, a sudsy Duchamp with devilish goat horns by Man Ray and a stoic Genzken by Wolfgang Tillmans. This connection to Duchamp, as the conceptualist of capitalist exchange and chance procedures, underscores the work's more obvious 'debt' to continue the monetary analogy, to his precedent as inventor of the assisted readymade.

Acknowledging this sculptural trajectory, and particularly the discovery of the almost hidden DiCaprio reminds one to ask, as Yve-Alain Bois does of Rauschenberg's Combine surfaces (another

heir to Duchamp), "Where does it stop? Is it, as Dr. Seuss would say, turtles all the way down?" In Genzken's *Spielautomat*, as Bois describes in Rauschenberg's Combines, "Again and again, the peekaboo trap is laid, leaving us always to wonder what lies beneath."[4] Like Rauschenberg's Combines, such as *Untitled* (c. 1954), *Spielautomat* engages objects of both public and private legibility, references meaningful to uninitiated viewers, and others, at the other end of the spectrum, only to Genzken herself, or to no one at all.

Unlike Rauschenberg, though, who, when departing on his Combines had shaky gallery representation in a New York art world that offered a comparatively smaller audience than today's rush, Genzken could easily expect a more 'public' public for mid-career pieces like *Spielautomat*. Thus, as often as *Spielautomat* has been called a self-portrait, it is a self-portrait most self-consciously composed, with the insistence of a late Rembrandt, aware of the artist, Genzken, as a recognizable figure, a kind of celebrity like DiCaprio. While Duchamp too may have crafted himself as a kind of celebrity or icon, glamorized as a performative persona as in his alias Rrose Sélavy, his version of celebrity was more obscure and precious, more the exception than the rule. As Isabelle Graw has shown in *High Price: Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture*, the fetishization of the artist as another fixture of celebrity, lacquered into the glamour and detail-oriented attention of lifestyle magazines, has now become a defining norm, part and parcel of what's expected of artists today. This meditation makes the image of Warhol photographing himself especially logical, as he embodies art-world celebrity far more exuberantly and intently than Duchamp. By laminating this dynamic atop a slot machine, it underscores the market value of

4 Yve-Alain Bois, "Eye to the Ground," *Artforum* 44, no. 7 (2006), p. 317.

this recognition and its accumulation for Genzken and DiCaprio alike. As not only a desiring but desired subject, the artist profits from turning herself into a circulating image, a token of mass-market value and affective exchange, a theme drawn out by the moments where Genzken photographs herself shirtless in a vanity or mirror, anticipating the sexy selfie or "nude" that has become a normalized token of casual exchange via smartphone dating apps. Warhol too modeled this duality, ultimately performing its inversion, first fetishizing celebrities like Marilyn Monroe as a fellow fanatic, one among a crowd of adoring fans, but then later becoming a celebrity himself, as if the desire of the fan is a kind of gateway drug, how the cult of celebrity inculcates and seduces its future scions.

Spielautomat traces one irony of celebrity in particular, that the discrete form that is the embodied self must exceed its own embodiment in order to be celebritized, possibly as the indexical imprint as in a photograph, the impress of a finger depressing a slot machine's button, or as something even further out, apparently immaterial. This dispersed, disembodied matrix of subjectivity is well described by Virginia Woolf's Clarissa Dalloway in her novel *Mrs. Dalloway*:

> somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb
> and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter
> survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was
> positive, of the trees at home; of the house there,
> ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was; part of
> people she had never met; being laid out like a mist
> between the people she knew best, who lifted her on
> their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist,
> but it spread ever so far, her life, herself.[5]

5 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (Broadview Press, 2012), p. 51.

If *Spielautomat* imagines Genzken's self-portrait, like Clarissa it believes in a self that stretches far beyond the limits of one body, that crosses vast distances of time and space, to become "part of people she had never met," buttressed by "the people she knew best." Thus, Spielautomat speculates and tests for this immaterial, misty network by assembling pictures of Genzken herself, but also her friends Kai Althoff (the man applying eyeliner) and Lawrence Weiner, as well as more remote human points where Genzken's "self" may (to use Woolf's term) "survive" without the armature of her body or even any real historical intersection. They are affective rather than social or material connections. These more improbable points include the image of Warhol (a friend who has since passed) and of course Leo, someone Genzken has "never met," but clearly puts forth as a desirable target, an obsession. To return to Rauschenberg's example as now a point of contrast, particularly works that feature autobiographical allusions, such as *Untitled* (fig. 2.4) and *Canyon*, which feature his sister left behind in the Gulf Coast of Texas and his infant son Christopher, the figures Genzken includes are not biological relatives. Instead, in the diction of queer theory, they are what we might call an elective family rather than a biological one. As such, in *Spielautomat*, we see the self defined and perpetuated through choice and desire as opposed to reproduction or biological fate.

By animating these networks and analogies, *Spielautomat* speculates not only on the value and performance of the artist as celebrity, a both desired and desiring body, but also as a subjectivity that transcends the logic of any physical body, a kind of queer subject. Here, the comparison to Warhol extends, as his love for Marilyn was not one that mapped neatly onto his sexual identity as a gay man and yet did not contradict it either.

Like Warhol, who claimed to desire, among other things, to be "a machine,"[6] *Spielautomat*'s slot machine conjures the specter of the human subject mapped on to the mechanical automaton or perhaps Donna Haraway's cyborg. To return to Duchamp, the machine was also an appropriate vehicle for self-portraiture in the vein of Dada mechano-morphic portraits, à la Duchamp or Picabia.[7] *Spielautomat* tests out in sculpture what Picabia's portraits of himself or Stieglitz toyed with in *291*, playing with the diagram's ability to process three-dimensional objects into maps for interpersonal relationships and social networks. Even in their most mechanic diagrams, the bawdy sexual body and its desires are never denied. Likewise, one can make a crude pun of *Spielautomat*, likening the "slot" of this machine to female genitalia.

Just before *Spielautomat*, in Genzken's *Hemd (Shirt)* (1998), she pasted two photographs of DiCaprio below the breast pockets of a men's cowboy-style dress shirt, painted with drips and slings of red, green, and white, like sprays of spit or semen, unmistakable riffs on Jackson Pollock. Particularly legible amid this mess are pairs of white circles precisely dripped to fall under each DiCaprio head. They read as both voluptuous breasts and ejaculating testicles, with Leo's alert head or torso standing in as a phallic extension. By giving him breasts, Genzken casts Leo as a kind of drag queen, albeit one predicated upon the substrate of a relatively masculine article of clothing. The transformative power of drag to radically re-present the supposedly fixed body is made clear in

6 For an analysis of the interview that generated this much-quoted provocation informed by queer theory, see Jennifer Sichel, "'Do you think Pop Art's queer?' Gene Swenson and Andy Warhol," *Oxford Art Journal* 41, no. 1 (March 2018), pp. 59–83.

7 Pepe Karmel, "Francis Picabia, 1915: The Sex of a New Machine," in *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2000), p. 214.

Figure 2.5.
Isa Genzken, *Hemd* (*shirt*), 1998. Fabric, buttons, paint, paper, adhesive tape, sticker, shirt, size L. Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne/New York © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn)

the assembled images of *Spielautomat* too. A similar androgyny to that which allows the central Leo to be read as both masculine and nonthreatening by young female moviegoers allows Kai Althoff to slip from a comparatively conservative, reserved school-boy self-presentation, gendered "male," to the smoky-eyed, seductive image of him in *Spielautomat*, which could inversely be easily read as female, especially by those unfamiliar with Althoff or otherwise exterior to Genzken's private life.

Genzken herself wears another "work" in the Hemd series in *Isa Mona Lisa*, a portrait by Wolfgang Tillmans from 1999. What if Genzken wore the Leo *Hemd* (fig. 2.5) as well, maybe as fitting attire for a night out at one of Berlin's very-late-night clubs, like the infamous Berghain, where not only does Tillsmans hang out but his photography hangs too? Papered with images of Leo, to wear *Hemd* would be to bring something like *Spielautomat* to life, engendering an exponential or fractal drag effect, where Leo appears as ejaculatory queen, atop Genzken as Pollock-y cowboy. Here, we return to Duchamp, as Rrose Sélavy, although Genzken appropriates a real rather than a fictional identity for her drag. Distinctly from where I began, Leo's role within her work now appears to be not that of an erotic fixation but of a surrogate, alternative, imagined body, one that morphs according to a transgender logic. Unlike the largely abstract sculptures at the heart of David Getsy's recent *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender* (Yale, 2015), *Spielautomat* is committedly figurative, and Hemd posits a transitional object between Pollock's abstraction and *Spielautomat*'s spectacle of representation. Recent publications like Getsy's and the New Museum's *Trigger: Gender as a Tool and Weapon* (2018), have reconceived gender's presence in contemporary art, especially its potential to resist the traditional binary of male/female and imagine more transgender subjectivities. *Spielautomat*

models what transgender sculpture might look like by offering an inanimate proxy for meditating on our experience of inter-subjectivity, what philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy has called "being singular plural," a fulcrum between Getsy's 1960s, typified by minimalism and abstraction, and our present, tracked by *Trigger*, where lens-based media and figuration predominate. Importantly, *Spielautomat* defies not only binary gender but also the morphological essentialism to which we continue to subject real human bodies (trans or otherwise), especially when they become subject to the camera. Indeed, the best thing about *Spielautomat* is that they are largely heads without bodies. *Spielautomat*'s photos assemble a plural subject, not one body but an intimate clique. Meanwhile, exposed as we are to their edges, curls, and backsides as much as their faces, the photographs emphasize flatness and surface as they open portals onto spatial depth, reminding us that these bodies are only shadows.

Turn back to the central Leo of *Spielautomat* and you will find that he has been captured at a decisive moment, with his index finger raised to his left ear, a gesture Genzken makes as well in the piece, albeit from another angle. The ear is a touchstone in Genzken's encyclopedia of images, concretized by the *Ohren* (*Ears*) series, which features cropped images of female ears, largely unidentifiable but known to include musician Kim Gordon and the artist herself.[8] Through the capture of this gesture, and a bit of magical thinking, the distinction, gendered or otherwise, between Isa and Leo fades, if only slightly or just for a moment, dissolving them together as Leo poses to join Genzken's cult of the ear. The central Leo then is a near-perfect condensation of

8 Tyler Coburn and Hannah Black, "On Affectionate Sabotage and Exemplary Suffering: An Audio Guide to Isa Genzken," *Rhizome*, February 5, 2014, https://rhizome.org/editorial/2014/feb/05/isa-genzken/ (accessed July 22, 2019).

Spielautomat's defiant body that this paper has tried to trace: Not too old or too young, both male and female, and as a celebrity, not confined to any one body but rather liberated by its plurality as image.

Obstructed Vision: Re-Viewing Isa Genzken's Airplane-Window Panels

Althea Ruoppo

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Mounted a slight distance from the gallery wall, four actual airplane-window panels, three unmodified and one splattered with synthetic polymer paint in a range of colors—teal, blue, orange, red, green, and white—made their debut at Berlin's neugerriemschneider gallery in fall 2003. *Da Vinci* (fig. 3.1), an homage to the Renaissance artist and inventor's flying machines, is the first work in Isa Genzken's ongoing series of curved, molded-plastic panels of passenger-jet interiors obtained by the artist from Deutsche Lufthansa.[1] Given its display two years after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, still fresh in public memory, viewers of this sculptural installation may be reminded of the horrific hijacking of four American airliners by the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda.[2] Yet those familiar with the subtle complexities of Genzken's conceptually rigorous practice should generally be careful not to take such loaded and recognizable vernacular forms as they appear.

1 In a 2013 interview for *The New York Times*, Genzken explained that her mother, who was in her 90s at the time, helped her acquire these decommissioned airplane-window panels. In 2016, Genzken told the German newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel* that she flew to New York for the first time at the age of 16, when her mother's two half-sisters, who worked as flight attendants, invited them to visit their apartment on Lexington Avenue in midtown Manhattan. Randy Kennedy, "No, It Isn't Supposed to Be Easy," *The New York Times*, November 24, 2013, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/24/arts/design/no-it-isnt-supposed-to-be-easy.html (accessed May 14, 2018); and "Künstlerin Isa Genzken im Interview: 'Zu Tokio Hotel tanze ich wie ein Teenager,'" interview by Nicola Kuhn and Ulf Lippertz, *Der Tagesspiegel*, September 29, 2016, https://www.tagesspiegel.de/gesellschaft/kuenstlerin-isa-genzken-im-interview-in-new-york-habe-ich-noch-nie-depressionen-gehabt/13621180-3.html (accessed April 1, 2019).

2 Shortly after *Da Vinci* was shown at neugerriemschneider, Jörg Heiser wrote, "It almost goes without saying that the combination of tall buildings and aircraft has become disturbing, that a deep crack has opened up in the shiny smooth surface of the hypermodern." Heiser, "Drei Dekaden, eine Rekonstruktion/Three Decades, a Reconstruction," *Parkett* no. 69 (2003), p. 73.

Figure 3.1.
Isa Genzken, *Da Vinci*, 2003. Four parts, synthetic polymer paint on airplane windows, each 50 4/5 × 41 3/10 × 20 ½ in. (129 × 105 × 52 cm). Sammlung Hoffmann, Berlin. Installation view: *Isa Genzken: Retrospective*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, November 23, 2013–March 10, 2014. Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne/New York © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn)

The Flugzeugfenster (Airplane Windows) have received very little attention compared with the rest of the artist's oeuvre. Previously, Hal Foster argued that Genzken's gestural application of paint on *Da Vinci*'s fourth panel suggested an "exploded body." "Here," he explained, "the dream of flying machines in Leonardo collapses into the nightmare of weaponized jets on 9/11."[3] Lisa Lee and Jörg Heiser assigned anthropomorphic qualities to the series, likening the sculptural airplane windows, with their sliding shades, to human eyes.[4] I want to emphasize aspects of the work that have not been sufficiently discussed, including their structural and metaphorical ambiguity. These assemblages of diverse and contrasting objects and materials are timely because

3 Hal Foster, "Fantastic Destruction," in *October Files 17: Isa Genzken*, ed. Lisa Lee (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015), p. 194.

4 Lisa Lee, *Isa Genzken: Sculpture as World Receiver* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. 133; Heiser, "Drei Dekaden," p. 73.

they aptly capture the teeming messiness of modern life. Through them, Genzken unsettles the traditional status of the art object as a stable and discrete visual and physical entity. This paper addresses the Flugzeugfenster as complex, multivalent sculptural accumulations of found objects that toe the line between reality and representation. Like much of Genzken's practice, these works are in dialogue with the era in which we live: post-9/11. I argue that the Flugzeugfenster should be seen as objects that meditate on the unsuitability of referential means to visualize contemporary airplane travel in the wake of terror.

Many have attempted to describe, explain, and commemorate the traumatic events of 9/11—a day that has been indelibly etched on the collective consciousness. One of the most controversial comments came from the avant-garde German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, who claimed that the attacks on New York and Washington were "the greatest work of art that exists for the whole Cosmos," suggesting that they rivaled his own musical compositions.[5] Contemporary cultural theorists Jean Baudrillard and Slavoj Žižek suggested that the bombing of the World Trade Center in particular constituted a symbolic destruction of America's hitherto false version of reality—a simulated reality that bears only an external and deceptive resemblance to the real under late capitalism.

In his essay "L'esprit du terrorisme" ("The Spirit of Terrorism"), originally published in the French newspaper *Le Monde* on November 3, 2011, Baudrillard claimed that the power of the terrorists lay in the symbolism of the destruction of the Twin Towers, not merely in the reality of the deaths of almost 3,000 people:

5 Karlheinz Stockhausen, "'Huuuh!' Das Pressegespräch am 16. September 2001 im Senatszimmer des Hotel Atlantic in Hamburg," *MusikTexte* no. 91 (2002), pp. 69–77.

> The terrorist violence here is not, then, a blowback of reality, any more than it is a blowback of history. It is not "real." In a sense, it is worse: it is symbolic. Violence in itself may be perfectly banal and inoffensive. Only symbolic violence is generative of singularity. And in this singular event, in this Manhattan disaster movie, the twentieth century's two elements of mass fascination are combined: the white magic of the cinema and the black magic of terrorism; the white light of the image and the black light of terrorism.[6]

Writing for the democratic socialist monthly magazine *In These Times*, Žižek similarly perceived that the United States, which was formerly separated from reality by a "fantasmatic screen," had suddenly arrived in the "desert of the real."[7] September 11th, he claimed, was only a replication of the destruction that America had "fantasized about" in countless Hollywood disaster films. Prior to the attacks, our collective perception of reality was only a virtual reality. The actual effect of the events of 9/11 was symbolic:

> One should therefore turn around the standard reading according to which, the WTC explosions were the intrusion of the Real which shattered our illusory Sphere: quite on the contrary … It is not that reality entered our image: the image entered and shattered our reality (i.e., the symbolic

6 Jean Baudrillard, "The Spirit of Terrorism," *Le Monde*, November 3, 2001, trans. Chris Turner, http://insomnia.ac/essays/the_spirit_of_terrorism/ (accessed May 14, 2018).

7 Slavoj Žižek, "The Desert of the Real," *In These Times*, October 29, 2001. The essay's title refers to an ironic quote delivered by the resistance leader Morpheus in the 1999 film *The Matrix* and to a phrase in Baudrillard's 1981 publication *Simulacres et Simulation* (Paris: Galilée).

> coordinates which determine what we experience as reality).[8]

Baudrillard's and Žižek's commentaries allow us to reflect on the erasure of the distinction between empirical reality and the media world that we inhabit. The impending breakdown of these boundaries is the point of origin of Genzken's *Flugzeugfenster* and serves as an invitation to reevaluate our way of seeing. With these sculptures, the familiar is rendered unfamiliar, and the unfamiliar suddenly seems very familiar.

Genzken witnessed the events of 9/11 firsthand during one of many visits to New York.[9] In an interview with the German newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel* in 2016, she recalled:

> I was in the elevator of the Hilton Hotel, where there was a live broadcast of events on one screen. I could not believe what I saw. For me, it seemed like a [Steven] Spielberg film. I went to the World Trade Center in the evening and was horrified. There was still smoke in the sky, people gathering the remnants—chairs, furniture. It was hell.[10]

Genzken's observation of this horrific event reflects how our reactions to tragedy are stilted by the oversaturation of cinematic images of death and destruction. She responded to the attacks and the subsequent "War on Terror" with three works that straddle the

8 Slavoj Žižek, "Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Reflections on WTC, Third Version," *The Symptom* no. 2 (2002), http://lacan.com/desertsymf.htm (accessed May 14, 2018).

9 Having first visited New York in the 1960s to visit her two aunts, Genzken has since visited the city once a year, sometimes staying for periods of several months.

10 Interview by Kuhn and Lippertz, *Der Tagesspiegel*, author's translation.

line between reality and representation. *Empire/Vampire* (*Who Kills Death*) (2003) consists of 22 individual sculptures or diorama-like assemblages of catastrophic scenes that she compares to movie sets. *Oil XI* (2007), whose title invokes America's oil interests, was her multipart installation for the German Pavilion at the 2007 Venice Biennial; it includes abandoned suitcases, stuffed owls, posters, and three mannequins in NASA spacesuits. The installation *Ground Zero* (2008) comprises seven freestanding assemblages and a wall work, which represent a building proposal for the former site of the World Trade Center. Her *Memorial Tower* is made of stacked transparent Kartell Optic storage cubes resting on two dollies. One stack is topped with two red tubes, signifying the antenna spires of the North Tower; film negatives unfurl down the vertical boxes, representing the South Tower.

Along with Genzken's Flugzeugfenster, this group of sculptures joins a growing number of works that symbolize the haunting aftermath of 9/11, the afterimage that has shaped our collective imagination of disaster. The public memory of that event continues to be informed by pictures of planes, burning towers, and people—for example, the iconic, memorably arresting press photographs of 9/11 by Thomas Hoepker and Richard Drew—through which ideas about the threat of global terrorism are evoked and manipulated. In some ways, the documentary capabilities of the photographic medium seem to have undermined the artistic response. As with World War I, the Holocaust, and similar mass atrocities, visual artists attempted to provide a sense of the magnitude of 9/11, yet this traumatic event was so monumental in scale that it still defies representation.

Questions of literalness or symbolism in Genzken's work have a direct relationship with materiality. Benjamin Buchloh has argued that the overwhelming accumulations of objects and materials

in the 21st century have made the individual lose contact with external reality.[11] For Genzken, sculpture always constitutes a potential readymade.[12] Note that we would normally switch this sentence around, as in: "The readymade always constitutes a potential sculpture." However, Genzken is interested not in readymades but rather the diverse array of potential meanings that come from bringing together disparate things.[13]

Although the Flugzeugfenster consist of found and commodity objects, only rarely do they remain unmodified. Since 2003, Genzken has transformed a number of decommissioned airplane-window panels through the spraying or splashing of colorful synthetic polymer paint and/or the addition of tape, photographs, and other ephemera, which complicate readings that find comparisons with Minimalist sculptural reliefs,[14] demonstrating that the presence of abstract imagery is almost always set in opposition to documentation, figuration, and realism. This juxtaposition is observed in Genzken's *Flugzeugfenster* (*Medusa*) from 2011 (fig. 3.2). Genzken poured green paint onto the surface, allowing it to trickle down to the bottom edge, and she completely obfuscated the elongated ovals of the airplane windows with two posters, blocking the view to an ostensible outside. Purple reproductions of Caravaggio's *Medusa* (c. 1598) partly mask the faces of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* (1503–06) and an image of Genzken herself. Lisa Lee claims that such figurative

11 Benjamin Buchloh, "All Things Being Equal," in Benjamin Buchloh and David Bussel, *Ground Zero: Isa Genzken* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2008), pp. 16–17.

12 "Isa Genzken: A Conversation with Wolfgang Tillmans," trans. Richard Watts, *Camera Austria*, no. 81 (2003), pp. 7–18.

13 Nicolaus Schafhausen, "A Conversation with Isa Genzken and Nicolaus Schafhausen," in *Isa Genzken: Oil: German Pavilion, Venice Biennale 2007*, ed. Nicolaus Schafhausen and Isa Genzken (Cologne: DuMont, 2007), p. 156.

14 Lee, *Isa Genzken: Sculpture as World Receiver*, p. 133.

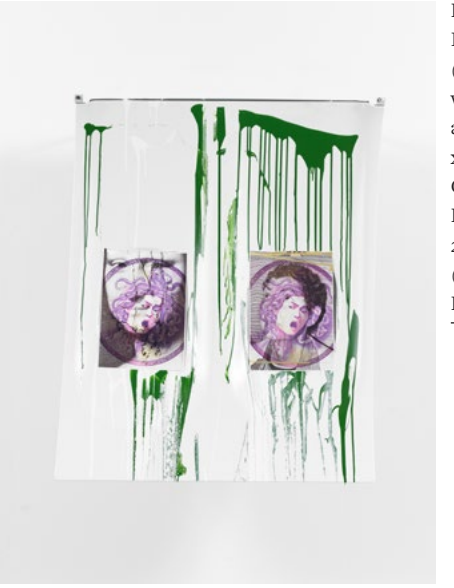

Figure 3.2.
Isa Genzken, *Flugzeugfenster* (*Medusa*), 2011. Airplane window, prints on paper, adhesive tape, lacquer, 51 x 43 x 14 in. (130 x 105 x 35 cm). Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne/New York © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn)

elements allow the airplane windows to "return the subject's gaze unblinkingly. This reciprocation is all the more explicit and terrifying in *Flugzeugfenster* (*Medusa*) ... the implicit gaze turns deadly."[15] Just as the Greek mythological hero Perseus cleverly fended off the gorgon's lethal gaze using Athena's mirrored shield, Genzken intends to "animate the viewer, hold a mirror up to them."[16] I would argue, then, that *Flugzeugfenster* (*Medusa*) serves as a metaphorical mirror that she holds up to visitors as they encounter it in the museum or gallery, seemingly asking them to reflect upon themselves and the work before them, in the same way that air travel often prompts existential thoughts. In his essay

15 Ibid.

16 Emily Wasik, "Isa Genzken, the Artist Who Doesn't Do Interviews," *Interview Magazine*, May 15, 2014, https://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/isa-genzken-retrospective (accessed May 14, 2018).

"Views Out, In, and Through: A Brief History of the Window Up to the Modern Era," Rolf Selbmann writes:

> Thinking in mirror images corresponds to being thrown back on oneself, to reflection, and to reflective insight; by contrast, the more advanced form of a manipulation of the gaze befits the window. The mirror indicates a self-reference of the object (and thus faces backward in this sense); the window stands for the self-reference of the process of perception (and thus points forward).[17]

The model for Caravaggio's *Medusa* is portrayed in the very moment of their self-recognition. In Genzken's *Flugzeugfenster* (*Medusa*), the obstruction to transparency heightens the psychological intensity of reflection, such that observers catch sight of themselves and their surroundings. While Caravaggio painted the gorgon's head directly onto a round, convex wooden shield, Genzken flattens this image to make it fit the concave airplane-window panel. Like the mirror, her sculpture offers a space of shallow depth rather than a literal, transparent window onto the world; as soon as the viewer's gaze has penetrated the surface, it is abruptly stopped and sent back to its point of departure.[18]

For other works in the Flugzeugfenster series, Genzken uses mundane household materials, including "speed tape"—sometimes called aircraft tape or aluminum-foil tape—adhesive tape, and duct tape, demonstrating the slippage between the sculptural form and

17 Rolf Selbmann, "Views Out, In, and Through: A Brief History of the Window up to the Modern Era," in Maria Müller-Schareck, *Fresh Widow: The Window in Art Since Matisse and Duchamp* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2012), p. 38.

18 Selbmann, "Views Out, In, and Through," p. 30.

the world of mundane materiality. Although speed tape bears a physical resemblance to simple duct tape, for which it is sometimes mistaken, it is often used to patch superficial, noncritical aircraft and racing-car components until more substantive repairs can be made.[19] If high-tech tape can withstand the challenging conditions to which an aircraft fuselage is exposed during flight, standard duct tape on Genzken's airplane-window panels might more generally represent insulation or protection from the unpredictability of the outside world. *Flugzeugfenster* (fig. 3.3) from 2015 captures the feeling that being in a plane is like being in a bubble or a cocoon, outside of real time, but we are simultaneously isolated and constricted. Underneath the right window shade, Genzken attaches cautionary packing tape, which, along with the inclusion of her own nude body, alludes to the vulnerability of passengers during contemporary airplane travel. It reads: "*Vorsicht Glas, nicht fallen lassen, nicht werfen*" ("Caution glass, do not drop, do not throw")—a visual pun, as if the window were itself made of glass. Visibly crinkled blue plastic foil at the bottom of both shades represents a small yet significant indication of Genzken's skillful deception. The work also includes three chromogenic prints: on the left, a self-portrait of the nude artist, seen showering; a picture of one giant, upstretched middle finger against a blue background, perhaps showing contempt for American imperialism, or rather, a reference to the Freedom Tower and a triumphant affirmation of America's resilience in the face of terror; and, on the right, a photograph of Wilhelm "Bill" Schnell, a close friend of the artist's.[20]

Genzken's use of photographs reflects her early interest in technological and aesthetic possibilities. The Ellipsoids (1976–82)

19 Patrick Smith, "Elements of Unease: Turbulence, Windshear, Weather, and Worry," in *Cockpit Confidential: Everything You Need to Know about Air Travel: Questions, Answers & Reflections* (Naperville, Illinois: Sourcebooks, 2013), p. 47.

20 Email correspondence with Hanna Schouwink, David Zwirner, 525 West 19th Street, New York, March 20, 2018.

Figure 3.3.
Isa Genzken, *Flugzeugfenster*, 2015. Aluminum foil tape, adhesive tape, duct tape, three chromogenic prints and one cardstock print on aircraft panel, metal rods, 50 ¾ × 41 ½ × 20 ½ in. (128.9 × 105.4 × 52.1 cm). Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne/New York © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn)

and Hyperbolo sculptures (1979–83), her first mature works, consist of mathematically precise, elongated wooden-floor sculptures made from drawings she plotted on a computer with the design assistance of scientists, carpenters, and technical specialists.[21] For the production of *Grau-schwarzes Hyperbolo 'MBB'* (*Gray-Black Hyperbolo "MBB"*), Genzken collaborated with the German aerospace company Messerschmidtt-Bölkow-Blohm (MBB).[22] Known primarily for manufacturing helicopters and airliner components, MBB was bought by DASA (Deutsche Aerospace AG) in 1989, which is now part of Airbus. Indeed, Genzken's elongated floor sculptures even resemble actual aircraft, suspended as they are within space as exact stereometric forms that only touch their support surface at one or two singular tangential points.

Genzken next explored the airplane as a technological influence in her little-known audio work titled *Tri-Star* (1979/81), a two-hour-and-12-minute soundtrack of an airplane flight culled from an audio database. Featuring noises recorded by Genzken of a Lockheed Tri-Star airplane motor at Düsseldorf Airport, the sounds of takeoff and landing, as well as the chatter of pilots, the original vinyl record was released in 1979 in 40 copies. In 1981, it was reissued in a further edition of 77 copies, each painted with grey enamel, signed, and dated in black ink by Genzken's then-partner Gerhard Richter.[23]

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21 "*Isa Genzken Retrospective*, Selected Biography, 1974–1988," The Museum of Modern Art, https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2013/isagenzken/works/ (accessed April 22, 2018).

22 "*Isa Genzken Retrospective*, Selected Biography, 1974–1988."

23 Michael Darling, "Isa Genzken: Himmel und Erde (Heaven and Earth)," in Sabine Breitwieser, Laura J. Hoptman, Michael Darling, et al., *Isa Genzken: Retrospective* (New York: Museum of Modern Art in collaboration with Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago and Dallas Museum of Art, 2013), pp. 275–276.

The image of an actual airplane first appears in Genzken's oeuvre in 1992, in photographs titled *Flugzeugfenster*. The airplane motif recurs later in additional images titled *New York, N.Y.* (1998/2000) and in a series of sculptural works including *Spielautomat* (*Slot Machine*) (1999), a self-portrait of the artist as a slot machine, onto which Genzken collaged various photographic elements, such as images of New York street scenes and storefronts, as well as a photograph of herself taken by Wolfgang Tillmans, which was overlaid by an image of an airplane. This persistent use of images reflects Genzken's fascination with photography's relationship to external reality; she conceives of the photograph as a ready-made symbol of our relations with the world. In a 2003 interview with Tillmans, Genzken explained, "I think that photography has a lot to do with sculpture—because it is three-dimensional and because it depicts reality. For example, I have always been able to relate to photography more than to painting."[24] Like a photograph, then, sculpture is, according to Genzken, always linked to the time and space in which it is created. It is connected with the real but is merely a representation of lived experience. In the Flugzeugfenster sculptures, the photograph is often used to obfuscate our vision; we see and understand the world through the filtered medium of photography.

A recent series of figurative assemblages, Schauspieler (Actors) (2013–ongoing), also suggests Genzken's desire to connect her art within the context of reality, but by titling the work as such, she acknowledges its constructed artifice. Lisa Lee's studio view of *Schauspieler II, 1* (*Actor II, 1*) (fig. 3.4), taken from the airplane passenger's perspective, addresses the shifting nature of visual perception—an issue intrinsic to the experience of flight itself—by bringing together the perceptual problems of seeing (its structure) with the actual experience of seeing. Dressed in the artist's own

24 "Isa Genzken: A Conversation with Wolfgang Tillmans," pp. 7–18.

Figure 3.4.
Studio view of *Schauspieler II, 1*
Photo: Lisa Lee

clothing, an isolated, mass-produced mannequin—a proxy for Genzken herself— wears a red, white, and black bomber jacket emblazoned with the letters "N.Y." spray-painted in blue (fig. 4). The mannequin is positioned on a shiny, reflective metal stand facing a corner of the room and away from the viewer, before a hookah and two unmodified airplane-window panels.

The encounter between the mannequin and the airplane windows, and between the viewer and the overall installation, functions as a stimulus to look. In her review of Genzken's 2013 MoMA retrospective, Natasha Kurchanova explained that the artist's actors compel viewers to enter into dialogue with the work and with the surrounding space of the gallery, "invit[ing] us to 'move around them' to feel as if 'we, too, are actors in a theatre or film

set.'"[25] The scale of the mannequins is one-to-one vis-à-vis their human referents, reflecting their mimetic relationship to the real. Yet Genzken's Flugzeugfenster always reveal their status as art objects: They are purposefully hung low on the wall, too low, in fact, for the viewer to actually look out the windows as if they were components of a functional airplane. They may, on the other hand, be hung at the height for a seated viewer, as if in an actual flight situation. While it is unclear if Genzken ever intends to publicly exhibit *Actor II, 1* in this way, it should be noted that the mannequin and two airplane panels are positioned in a corner, an art-installation faux pas, in a way that contradicts airplane-seating arrangements. Again, Genzken simply refers to the experience of looking, as in gazing out an airplane window during flight. The panels hold the viewer at a physical distance—a result of the fact that museum or gallery visitors are typically standing—an important mechanism that highlights the difference between viewing the objects on display and looking through the window of an actual airplane.

The overall effect of *Actor II, 1* most obviously relates to that of Caspar David Friedrich's celebrated Romantic landscape painting *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1817). Indeed, in an interview with Diedrich Diederichsen, Genzken explained that she was "quite explicitly playing with … a kind of Caspar David Friedrich kind of mood" when she made her cast concrete-and-steel sculptures from the late 1980s.[26] Friedrich's *Rückenfigur*, a figure seen from behind, is intended to invite the viewer to look at the world

25 Natasha Kurchanova, "Isa Genzken's Objects: Life into Art," *Studio International*, December 12, 2013, http://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/isa-genzken-s-objects-life-into-art (accessed May 14, 2018).

26 "Diedrich Diederichsen in Conversation with Isa Genzken," trans. Matthew Gaskins, in *October Files 17: Isa Genzken*, p. 194.

through the lens of the artist's own perception.[27] He gazes at an almost impenetrable sea of fog in the midst of an inhospitable, impenetrable expanse of rocky cliffs and haze. Genzken's *Actor II, 1* replaces Friedrich's Burkean natural sublime with its evocation of the post-9/11 technological sublime. Positioned next to two airplane-window panels, *Actor II, 1* portrays a sense of alienation and longing for home, feelings that are occasionally experienced when one is a passenger on a tightly packed metal tube 30,000 feet in the sky, complete with total strangers, chatty seatmates, crying babies, and unnerving turbulence.

Like Friedrich's painting, Genzken's *Actor II, 1* frames a private view outward; it draws us in, prompting us to follow the gaze of the mannequin. Our gaze, however, is always blocked by artifice. Both opened and closed and sometimes covered in blue plastic foil, Genzken's airplane windows simultaneously draw our attention and obstruct our vision. The external world lies beyond the limits of comprehension, and Genzken's sculptures, like Friedrich's sublime landscape, demonstrate that traditional artistic tropes no longer seem adequate to express what is actually seen and experienced.

Based in reality but removed from it, Genzken's Flugzeugfenster reveal the limits of our grasp of the magnitude of an event like 9/11 and, more broadly, art's struggle to depict real acts of mass violence. By dressing the mannequin in a "N.Y." bomber jacket and placing it before a hookah, a water pipe with origins deeply rooted in Middle Eastern cultures, Genzken may allude to the terrorist attacks, but again, she does so indirectly. For her solo exhibition at David

27 Laure Cahen-Maurel, "The Simplicity of the Sublime: A New Picturing of Nature in Caspar David Friedrich," in Dalia Nassar, ed., *The Relevance of Romanticism: Essays on German Romantic Philosophy* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 5.

Figure 3.5.
Installation view, *Isa Genzken*, David Zwirner, New York, 2015. © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn). Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner

Zwirner New York in 2015, Genzken positioned *Actor II, 1* near two large-scale architectonic structures made out of medium-density fiberboard and collaged with tiled mirror foil and photographic

elements (fig. 3.5). These highly charged, untitled forms teeter on the boundary between the explicit and the implicit, the overt and the covert, with their powerful allusions to the twin towers of the former World Trade Center. In both studio and gallery installations, Genzken offers suggestions, rather than literal depictions, of violence, making it easy for her to produce a narrative in the mind of the viewer but also to cast doubt on the possibility of representation. In my view, the Flugzeugfenster series represents the artist's self-reflective awareness of the impossibility of representing 9/11, whose incommensurability precludes adequate depiction.

The panels themselves are readymades, but we read these decommissioned, manipulated airplane parts as sculptural assemblages comprising materials that never fully leave reality behind. In the conversation with Tillmans that I mentioned earlier, Genzken explained the relationship between found objects or images and aestheticization in her work:

> I have always said that, with any sculpture, you have to be able to say, 'Although this is not a ready-made, it could be one.' That's what a sculpture has to look like. It must have a certain relation to reality.... A sculpture is really a photo — although it can be shifted, it must still always have an aspect that reality has too.[28]

For me, the enduring attraction of Genzken's Flugzeugfenster lies in these sculptures' varying degrees of material literalness and the seemingly ever-present possibility of reversion to their original forms, mediating between fixity and flux.

28 "Isa Genzken: A Conversation with Wolfgang Tillmans," pp. 7–18.

Ruining History Since 1986: The Concrete Sculpture of Isa Genzken

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Figure 4.1.
Isa Genzken, *Galerie* (*Gallery*), 1987, Concrete and steel, 89 × 27 ½ × 19 ½ in. (226 × 70 × 50 cm). Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. Gift of Mary and Earle Ludgin by exchange. Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago. Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne/New York © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn)

A gray slab of concrete—one that seems cool to the touch and smooth on the fingertips—is incised with striated fissures, punctuated with accretions of white. Peel *Galerie* (*Gallery*) (1987) (fig. 4.1) apart, and the layers reveal themselves to be beds for nebulous patches of blue pigment. Lying just beneath the surface, these pockets of color dwell within the material itself. Concrete's sponge-like porosity allows it to bear the marks of age easily, the scarring effects of entropy keeping time in its gray mass. But these pockets of blue are not the result of wind, water, or weathering; instead, they are consequences of Isa Genzken's method of production. *Galerie* is one of a body of works produced by the artist between 1986 and 1990. Common in scale, fragmentary in nature, and each marked by similar ruptures in the slab, they are formally

united within a visual language of both ruins and architectural models. These temporally promiscuous works break with a discourse of the ruin as atonement for a National Socialist past and offer an opening up of futurity. Through an engagement with notions of the ruinous and the materiality of concrete, Genzken's sculptures insist upon a diachrony that counters the stagnation of history in the face of the Berlin Wall.

The dominant narrative around this body of work is likewise concerned with their unique temporality. Genzken herself claimed her works in concrete looked "like churches, ruins, and bombed-out buildings" and that she was "also quite explicitly playing with the idea of ruins and a Caspar David Friedrich kind of mood."[1] Her harkening upon both the Romantic ruin and those of World War II demonstrates a distinctly past-oriented temporality. The scholarship on these works takes up several alternative stances. Perhaps the earliest scholarly case comes from Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, whose essay "Isa Genzken: The Fragment As Model" denies any "false reconciliation with the past or the future" in these works and makes the case for their consideration of the distinct presentness of existing in architecture.[2] In more recent scholarship, Lisa Lee has carefully treated these works in a number of publications, and my consideration runs parallel to hers in many respects. But she, like Sabine Breitwieser, relies on

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1 "Diedrich Diederichsen in Conversation with Isa Genzken," in *October Files 17: Isa Genzken*, ed. Lisa Lee (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015), p. 123. I would like to express my gratitude to Shiben Banerji for his invaluable advice, as well as Graham Feyl and Chava Krivchenia for their patient reading and generous feedback on this paper. Additionally, I would like to thank Sampada Aranke and Rachel Jans for their guidance while this idea was in its early stages. And lastly, my thanks to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago for graciously opening their collection to me.

2 Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Isa Genzken: The Fragment as Model," in *Isa Genzken* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 1992), p. 141.

the works' formal similarity to the architectural model as a means of conveying potentiality or feasibility.[3] Not reiterating Genzken's assertion, these and other scholars nonetheless stake the claim that the ruinous quality of her work offers a component of pastness, countered by some other force of presentness or futurity. In this paper, I revise the dominant interpretation of ruination in Genzken's sculpture as past-facing and elaborate on how ruination in her work of the late 1980s offers a glimpse of futurity.

Materiality is an ideal way into this analysis. Above all other unifying elements, the common material of concrete is what binds these works together. Moreover, it opens up Genzken's structures to comparison with a number of other works in concrete that share an investment in kinds of spatialized temporality. The material of modernity and its failure, of utopian architectural projects and postwar reconstruction, concrete is as much associated with Le Corbusier as with the *Plattenbauten* of German reconstruction public housing. Given Genzken's position in postwar Berlin, I set aside the multifarious referents of her work in favor of a close consideration of one thread: the concrete ruin.[4] In Andreas Huyssen's essay "Authentic Ruins: Products of Modernity," he makes the point that the ruin, by virtue of its longevity and palimpsestic nature, "is the imagined present of a past that can now

3 Sabine Breitwieser, "The Characters of Isa Genzken: Between the Personal and the Constructive, 1970–1996," in *Isa Genzken: Retrospective* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2013), p. 40. Emphasis hers. See also Lisa Lee, "Isa Genzken, Model Citizen," in *Isa Genzken: Retrospective*, p. 260.

4 "In Genzken's works the same stony face of concrete reads variously as Smithsonian ruins in reverse, Brutalist Je-m'en-foutisme, Corbusian harmony and airiness, Neubau drab, and Giedionesque technological optimism. The suggestive power of her sculptural practice lies precisely in its richness of reference irreducible to a single position." Lisa Lee, "Make Life Beautiful!" in *Isa Genzken: Sculpture as World Receiver* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. 64.

be grasped only in its decay."[5] The genuine ruin bears a temporal formation between past and present in which the ruin is an index *in* the present *of* the past. But Genzken's ruinous sculptures are not made weathered through the passage of time and the role of entropy but formed so that the past in that formation is supplanted by the present. Rising into ruins (to borrow a turn of phrase from Robert Smithson[6]), Genzken's works collapse the past/present formation of such temporally touched structures. I have no choice but to stand before them in the present, but given the necessarily diachronic formation I adopt from Huyssen, I propose that Genzken's sculptures are an index *of* the present *for* the future; or, more exactly, for a set of pluralistic potential futures.

Varied in texture across its surface, *Galerie* bears patches of pockmarks and eruptions at which the aggregate of the concrete pokes through. Beyond the Brutalist sensibility to reveal the truth of materials, Genzken's concrete sculptures reveal the chemistry and materiality of their process. Poured into a wooden mold, each layer is cured separately and coated with varnish before the next is poured, resulting in the rings of concrete that define their form.[7] This procedure was necessitated by the material qualities of concrete: Its immense weight required that the sculptures be cast in layers. Subsequently, the ruptures in the works' surfaces are consequences of the material. On the one hand, the division of vertical space on *Galerie*'s "facade" connotes the terms of

5 Andreas Huyssen, "Authentic Ruins: Products of Modernity," in *Ruins of Modernity*, ed. Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 20.

6 Robert Smithson, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey," in *Ruins*, ed. Brian Dillon, Documents of Contemporary Art (London: Whitechapel Gallery, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2011), p. 49.

7 Dieter Schwarz, "World Band Receiver," in *Isa Genzken* (Munich: Verlag Silke Schreiber, 1988), p. 89.

residential architecture, making its internal structure visible externally. On the other, the breaks in the surface are the points at which the concrete begins to crumble. They are both an immaterial and substantive compositional element, guiding the eye around the form. Although Genzkens's forms were determined by material limitations, Breitwieser assures us that the artist "did not feel as if the crumbling of concrete elements was a negative aspect of these works but rather something crucial. The production process is never actually complete; the art meets its fate as a ruin."[8]

The inevitability of ruination was elaborated by Albert Speer half a century before Genzken began working in concrete. An architect of the Third Reich, Speer developed his "Theory of Ruin Value" to meet Hitler's expectation of a "'bridge of tradition' to future generations."[9] He planned his buildings to crumble into Romanesque ruins, triumphal markers of National Socialism for the future. That being said, none of Speer's buildings remain in Berlin, except for the *Schwerbelastungskörper* (heavy load-bearing body), a concrete cylinder meant to test the feasibility of its site for a triumphal arch[10] (fig. 4.2). Monumental in scale, the structure reveals its age: The color has turned to beige, and one can note the erosion disrupting what would be an otherwise smooth surface.

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8 Breitwieser, "The Characters of Isa Genzken: Between the Personal and the Constructive, 1970–1996," p. 40.

9 Albert Speer, "Architectural Megalomania," in *Inside the Third Reich*, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston (New York: Bonanza Books, 1980), p. 56. The interior quotation is from Adolf Hitler.

10 It is noteworthy that Speer did not consider concrete an acceptable material for his buildings on this ruin track. Not only would "such materials not produce aesthetically acceptable ruins," but he also favored *German* natural stone, attributing nationalism to material. Alex Scobie, "Albert Speer's Theory of Ruin Value," in *Hitler's State Architecture: The Impact of Classical Antiquity* (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, for College Art Association, 1990), p. 94.

Figure 4.2.
Schwerbelastungskörper, architect Albert Speer, Berlin, Germany. Constructed 1941–42

The circular façade is disrupted by pale-gray tracks marking cracks and the meeting of elements. Particularly toward the top of the structure, those marks reveal a stacking of segments not unlike Genzken's concrete works. Although not meant for heroic decay, the *Schwerbelastungskörper* has arrived in the future but finds itself a stranger in a strange land. That is to say, it succeeded as a bridge to the future but to a future for which it was never intended. Genzken's work, on the other hand, is for and of a future that has yet to occur and that in many cases may not.

This potential lack of realization is due to the plurality of futures Genzken's work points toward. A comparison with another postwar German artist working with concrete and its unique temporality is useful here. In 1970, Wolf Vostell staged an exhibition at the art intermedia gallery in Cologne titled *Utopische Betonierungen* (Utopian Concretizations) at which he displayed "models for visions of actual concretizations of entire cities (Paris, Basel,

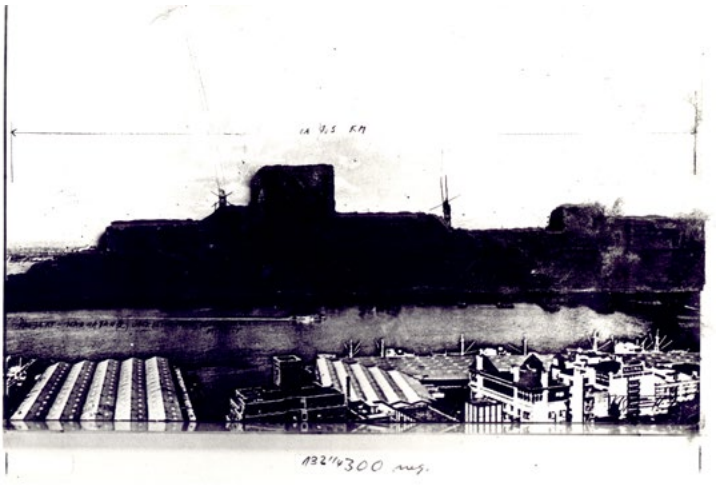

Figure 4.3.
Wolf Vostell Projekt *Manhattan II Einbetonierung*, 1970. Archivo Happening Vostell. Junta de Extremadura © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn)

New York, and Chicago) and even an entire country (the Federal Republic of Germany)."[11] His *Projekt Manhattan II* (*Einbetonierung*) (Project Manhattan II [Concretization]) (1970) is a print of the city's skyline painted over with plaster in the guise of concrete, forming a dark-gray silhouette so heavy it is a wonder it doesn't sink (fig. 4.3). The nebulous gradation of tone—shared on the surface of Genzken's work—gives the plaster a wet appearance, as though the would-be concrete had yet to cure, offering the form an open-ended malleability. Christine Mehring mediates his notion of *Betonierungen*, as "a 'new method of avant-garde archaeological prospection,' offering, it appears, the mere presentation of his present as the past it will be in the future."[12] The term *archaeological prospection* is

11 Christine Mehring, "Car Culture: Christine Mehring on Wolf Vostell's Concrete Traffic," *Artforum* 55, no. 5 (January 2017), p. 174.

12 Mehring, "Car Culture," p. 174. The internal quotation is from Wolf Vostell.

especially helpful for understanding the formation between present and future in Genzken's ruinous sculpture, leaning particularly on the term *archaeological*. We can think of that term as tied not just to the material ruin but also, in a reverse Foucauldian sense, to the idea of not what could have been but what might be.[13]

Besides their material similarity, Genzken's and Vostell's work share the scale of the model. Raised on narrow legs to extend above the viewer, Genzken's works fall at a variety of heights, but the bases of the sculptures nearly always fall around the viewer's eye level. The effect is a monumentality despite the forms' relatively small scale. This mode of display also places the work within a dialogue of the architectural model. The model alone disrupts the notion of pastness so often associated with the ruin; as Vanessa Joan Müller puts it, "Models can be understood to be visualizations of things that do not (yet) exist in reality, as tangible presentations of an abstract construct. They are, as it were, conceptions of reality en miniature that, as test cases of reality, lend a preliminary outward form to ideas."[14] Both Lisa Lee and Breitwieser go further to suggest that by elevating the structures to eye level, the monumentalizing effect (and sometimes placement of small figurines) "suggest[s] the feasibility of it all."[15] But unlike Vostell's concretizations, Genzken's concrete sculptures are almost always presented in groups and in their earliest displays took up entire rooms (fig. 4.4).

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13 I draw specifically on archaeology's conditions of possibility and simultaneity. Michel Foucault, "Preface," in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), pp. xxiii–xxv.

14 Vanessa Joan Müller, "Allegory and the Everyday," in *Isa Genzken: Oil*, ed. Nicolaus Schafhausen (Cologne: DuMont Literatur und Kunst Verlag, 2007), p. 165.

15 Breitwieser, "The Characters of Isa Genzken: Between the Personal and the Constructive, 1970–1996," p. 40. Emphasis hers. See also Lee, "Isa Genzken, Model Citizen," p. 260.

Figure 4.4.
Isa Genzken, installation view of *Isa Genzken* at the Goethe-Institut, Rotterdam, April 30–June 18, 1989. Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne/New York © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn)

The effect is the positing of potentiality. Were the conditions of display such that the sculptures read as autonomous from one another, they would connote a representational relationship to an architectural subject; by displaying them in groups, the sculptures exist in a realm of uncertainty, as hypothetical representations of any number of subjects—including subjects yet unrealized. In the plurality of display, the sculptures capture not just the feasibility of a future but that of many futures.

Beyond the work of Speer and Vostell, the Berlin Wall serves as the most clear referent for this body of work. Created in the years leading up to 1989, it is easy to point to a premonitory aspect at play in Genzken's concrete sculptures. However, I contend that

it is the dissolution of history and memory in the face of the Wall against which Genzken reacts. Writing in the months prior to its fall in 1989, Jean Baudrillard considers those "who in two thousand years might view" the Berlin Wall.[16] The material's most recognizable postwar expression, the Mauer was lent a sense of longevity and timelessness by the durability of concrete. As Klaus Honnef points out, "Buildings of concrete are meant for eternity. But as one now knows, the human being in his irresistible drive towards self-destruction can destroy even these structures which were meant for an eternity."[17] Baudrillard clarifies that it "will have only historical significance" to those far in the future, as it would no doubt be ruined at that point whether from decay or the conditions of its actual demise.[18] His account would smack of Speer were it not for his clear characterization of the structure's atemporality. Baudrillard notes the erasure of memory ("I no longer manage to remember anything"[19]) and the stagnation of history ("the meters measuring history have come to a standstill in the east with communism; in the west, with a 'liberal' society discomfited by its own excess"[20]) in the face of the Wall. Genzken's sculpture, in reaction, serves as a diachronic anchor—one that spans past in form, present ontologically, and future in prospection—to counter that hollowing out of temporality. Facing the torpor of history at, in, and around the Berlin Wall, the ruin formation of "present pasts" is a reminder of the movement of

16 Jean Baudrillard, "The Anorexic Ruins," in *Looking Back on the End of the World*, Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), p. 36.

17 Klaus Honnef, "The Artistic World of Isa Genzken," in *Isa Genzken* (Munich: Verlag Silke Schreiber, 1988), p. 67. Published in a 1988 catalogue, Honnef's words serve as an uncanny premonition for the Wall's fall in 1989.

18 Baudrillard, "The Anorexic Ruins," p. 36.

19 Baudrillard, "The Anorexic Ruins," p. 36.

20 Baudrillard, "The Anorexic Ruins," p. 40.

time.[21] Genzken shifts that formation through the collapsing of present and past toward a distinct future-oriented formation that is hopeful, like the sowing of seeds to be reaped.

But the future is here. One need only look at the ruined remains of the Berlin Wall to recognize the realization of Genzken's prospection. But Genzken provided a plethora of potential futures; there are certainly those like Speer's structure that find themselves out of their time. Post-1989, one must question the status of these works today and if they have realized only the kind of impotence of Speer's *Schwerbelastungskörper*. Speer planned for material decay, but have Genzken's sculptures fallen (or will they fall) into an inevitable obsolescence? That might explain her turn away from concrete in the 1990s toward materials less imbued with timekeeping properties. The glass and plastic of her later sculptures in the guise of architectural models shrug off the weight of tethering temporality and certainly avoid being implicated in the formations of ruins. But the saving grace of Genzken's concrete sculptures might just be their lack of autonomy: Any one future realized enfolds all those that never came to be.

21 I borrow the term *present pasts* from Andreas Huyssen. He is self-critical about a reading of buildings and sculptures as palimpsests but makes the case that "an urban imaginary in its temporal reach may well put different things in one place: memories of what there was before, imagined alternatives to what there is. The strong marks of present space merge in the imaginary with traces of the past, erasures, losses, and heterotopias. The center of Berlin and its reconstruction after unification provide a key example for the workings of such an imaginary." Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 11.

Isa Genzken: Reconciliation and its Discontents

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In a review on Isa Genzken's exhibition *Mach Dich hübsch!* at the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin,[1] the art critic Philipp Kleinmichel claimed that Genzken would be one of the few artists working today who are literally contemporary.[2] Unless this ascription is rather unspecified at first sight, it is fruitful to have a closer look at it. Many authors have highlighted that over the past decades, Genzken has achieved an immense variety and diversity within her practice, making her an exemplary contemporary artist in different aspects. But regarding the fact that the contemporary not only draws on the present state of affairs but also appears as an ambiguous expression of the past, it is obvious that Genzken would be contemporary at least in a twofold way: She relates to contemporary consumer cultures and their critique, but she also refers to the contemporary through a revaluation of the historical legacies of the past, namely of Modernism and the avant-garde. Nevertheless, how is it that Genzken would be one of the few artists working today that are contemporary in the first place?

In fact, Kleinmichel claimed that Genzken's work would be exemplary in a peculiar sense. It would not only be situated in the contemporary as an inevitable condition of the historical present but also internalize the very principle of contemporary art as such. The review reads as follows: "As we know, that principle consists in the critical movement of negation, whereby this movement not only visualizes all the images and forms that are already recognized within history, but rather gives us a contemporary expression of the disappointed utopian hopes of modernity and the avant-garde."[3]

1 *Isa Genzken: Mach Dich hübsch!*, Martin-Gropius-Bau Berlin (April 9–June 26, 2016).

2 Philipp Kleinmichel, "Simulierte Musealisierung. Philipp Kleinmichel über Isa Genzken im Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin," in *Texte zur Kunst*, vol. 103 (September 2016), p. 238.

3 Kleinmichel, "Simulierte Musealisierung," p. 238.

Kleinmichel's observation seems pretentious and deeply true at once. Ever since Genzken started her career in the 1970s, the artist was concerned with a transformation of the political and aesthetic ideals expressed in Modernism and the historical avant-garde. As Benjamin Buchloh famously noted in his seminal essay from 1992, Genzken's early sculptural works, e.g. the Ellipsoids and Hyperbolos, attempted to re-appropriate the logic of autonomy embedded in high Modernism while at the same time incorporating the experiential models prompted by Minimalism, turning them into a reflection of the social conditions of the actual beholder.[4] Right from the beginning, her work was also concerned with the logic of heteronomy prompted by the historical avant-garde, and more precisely with the utopian ambitions of constructivism and the Bauhaus. Genzken's work can thus be read as an attempt to deal with heterogeneous strands of a politically ambitious aesthetic modernity: She reconsiders the failed utopian legacies of constructivism which tried to make art the model for a construction of liberated collective spaces, and she revalues the Modernist attempts for a liberated experience of autonomy with regard to the formal logic of the aesthetic work of modern art.

Regarding such a dichotomous perspective on the 20th century's art history, it is precisely Genzken's attempt to transform the modern discourses on autonomy and heteronomy into a more complex contemporary framework which renders her work extremely interesting for a reflection on the condition of the contemporary. Leaping into the history of a utopian modernity is thus performed in a twofold sense: Genzken situates herself in relation to a utopian past, but she also expresses this utopian past

4 Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Isa Genzken. The Fragment as a Model," in *Isa Genzken: Everybody Needs at Least One Window* (Chicago and Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 1992), p. 135.

as a dialectical movement that still holds true to the political and aesthetic promises of the past by saving the best of modernity's emancipatory ideals. Even though it might be plausible to attribute this logic to Genzken's own practice, it should still be described more in-depth what it actually means to revalue history in such a way. In other words: If Modernism and the historical avant-garde ultimately failed within their utopian framework, how does the artist reconsider the structural gap between a utopian modernity and a contemporary condition that gives expression to the failures of the past?

If one looks back at the history of modern aesthetic thinking, one aspect remains striking: the notion of utopian reconciliation had been at the very core of many attempts to strive for a political dimension of art. Regardless of whether one thinks of the historical avant-garde and its promise of a supersession of art into a revolutionary life or the Modernist conception of autonomy which, precisely because of arts' distance from life, would define the work of art as the site of a reconciled subject which is blocked in real life – in either way, art and aesthetic experience would be defined as an anticipation of a reconciled subject or the construction of collective spaces that would enable more liberated forms of intersubjectivity. Roughly speaking, the very essence of what liberation and emancipation had meant was projected onto the utopian ideal of a reconciliatory function of art.[5]

It was precisely Jacques Rancière who referred to this "politics of aesthetics" in terms of a utopian horizon of Modernism and

5 This utopian line in modern aesthetic theory can be traced from Schiller to Marcuse and Adorno, the latter attributing the reconciliatory promise to art as its supposed lightheartedness. See Theodor W. Adorno, "Is Art Lighthearted," in *Notes to Literature*, vol. II (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 247–253.

the avant-garde.[6] Whether or not art's reconciliatory promise would be realized or not—de-sublimed by breaking open the vessels of aesthetic appearance, as Habermas famously noted[7]—was one of the most contentious questions of aesthetic modernity which precisely split up here into the strands of Modernism and avant-garde. But the promise itself remained untouched, defining the very idea of liberation as the effect of an aesthetically reconciled subject.

I would argue that while Genzken articulates a critique of the reconciliatory allusions of Modernism and the avant-garde, her work is consciously situated within a post-utopian experience. The highlighting of the shortcomings of both Modernist and avant-garde developments would point toward not only her reconsideration of the ambitious utopian projects of the past but also to a form of actualization through critical negation. This is, as we learn from the aforementioned exhibition review, the very principle of contemporary art as such, namely the dialectical process of an "aesthetic negativity" that is performed by the artist.[8] However, the question remains: How does contemporary art relate to its historically compromised function as a site for utopian reconciliation—which was the Modernist and avant-garde idea—while at the same time holding true to the emancipatory claims of modernity by referring to the contemporary principle of aesthetic negativity that structurally overcomes the Modernist allusions of a reconciliatory dimension of art?

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6 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London and New York: Verso, 2004).

7 "If one were to break open the vessels of the aesthetic … [its] contents would have to melt away—there could be no liberating effect from desublimated sense and destructured form." Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity. Twelve Lectures* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), p. 50.

8 Kleinmichel, "Simulierte Musealisierung," p. 238.

Many authors have highlighted that Genzken had been interested in the fate and failure of modern architecture and its relation to sculpture, as both offered possibilities to reflect on the liberating potentials of spatial experience. It is no coincidence that the artist followed the interstices of sculptural experience and urban space on the historical paths of Constructivism, which ultimately lead her to the actual forms of failed utopian promises within the present. It is more precisely the experience of the city—mainly New York and Berlin—which has evolved as a conceptual background for many of Genzken's works, while at the same time these suggest an ambiguous reading of the actual fate of the avant-garde legacy and Modernist abstraction. The contemporary city is at once the site of an ultimate abstraction, transforming the expression of aesthetic form into capital, but at once it keeps alive many counter-models of resistance and difference as well, thus regarding the city, as Christiane Schneider pointed out, as the actual site of a "constant adherence of a critical condition, a system of extended counter-representation, reconsideration and questioning."[9]

However, the common readings of the fate of Modernism often remain informed by narratives that still try to reconnect its utopian implications back to promises of a past at which we look at either with disenchantment or nostalgia. But the idea to expand a utopian potential of liberation into the realm of common life, in order to expand art's reconciliatory function beyond the conventional confines of the aesthetic—by breaking free with arts' autonomy—has not only failed, it has also ambiguously succeeded. It remains alive in the aestheticized zones of the shopping mall, co-opted by contemporary aesthetic capitalism.[10] Trauma follows a dream:

9 Christiane Schneider, "Isa Genzken," in *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* no. 2 (2000), pp. 27–37, here: p. 34.

10 Gernot Böhme, *Ästhetischer Kapitalismus* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2016).

The actualization of the radical hopes for aesthetic liberation is a twofold process that ended up with ever more sophisticated forms of domination.[11]

Genzken's work, however, helps us to leap out of a purely pessimistic vision. The artist not only reflects on the shortcomings of Modernist discourses on aesthetic autonomy and avant-garde ideals of a supersession of art into life, but she also bridges them to precisely step out of a pessimistic deadlock. As Buchloh pointed out, Genzken's work is an attempt to transform the notions of constructivist sculpture being the "model" for the construction of new life-worlds into a contemporary "fragment" of its historically lost visions.[12] But she also conceives a perspective that consciously elaborates a more ambiguous dialectics of autonomy and heteronomy to display the actual tensions which remain alive when we think about the potentials of aesthetic experience. Whereas the constructivists were to conceive sculpture as a way-station toward architecture, Genzken reverses this model. She de-scales and re-scales the sculptural object to prompt a different form of its reception. Whereas Tatlin conceived of his *Monument to the Third International* (fig. 5.1) to be a provisional model to be realized at a much larger scale, Genzken does it the other way around: Her *Rose* (fig. 5.2), installed at the convention center in Leipzig and more recently in Zuccotti Park, New York, re-scales the sculptural object in relation to the space of the beholder in order to conceive an experience within the urban environment that reclaims potentials of an autonomous aesthetic experience.

11 The ambiguous process of co-optation has been prominently described by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2005).

12 Buchloh, "The Fragment as a Model," p. 135.

Figure 5.1.
Vladimir Tatlin, Model for *Monument to the Third International*, 1920, wood and metal, Height: 165 in. (420 cm), diameter 118 in. (300 cm), base: 35 in. (80 cm) © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA /Art Resource, NY

Figure 5.2.
Isa Genzken, *Rose III*, 2016, steel, aluminum, enamel, 315 in. (800 cm). New York, Zuccotti Park (since 2018) Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne/New York © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn)

However, this reversion suggests that the entire relationship between utopian reconciliation, aesthetic experience and autonomy should yet be revised in another way. Genzken's more recent series of sculptures, e.g., the *New Buildings for Berlin* (fig. 5.3) or the *Soziale Fassaden* (fig. 5.4), showcase elaborate attempts to critically downscale the global ambitions of the historical avant-garde. They can thus be read as attempts to recollect a historical memory of utopian forms while referring to some of its formal vocabularies. But the artist remains concerned with the problem of aesthetic experience as well. How can it be reframed under conventional conditions of the exhibition space? The supposed model of a liberated experience is literally transformed back here into the gallery room. But this again refers to the problem of how the overall idea of aesthetic reconciliation can be transformed into a valuable concept for the understanding of freedom and emancipation in a contemporary perspective. In other words: Is Genzken merely interested in the reworking of historical utopian models in order to restage their failure and inscribe them into a contemporary project, giving expression to the past, or is she structurally involved in the process of transforming the emancipatory claims of a utopian modernity into a post-utopian condition that ultimately aligns the artist with an ambitious project of critique and actual emancipation?

As I will suggest, a model of aesthetic experience that impartially spells out the experience of the aesthetic as a simulation of a reconciled subjectivity would be a misleading ideal. Genzken expresses this indirectly. Her work prompts an idea of aesthetic freedom that breaks free from the category of aesthetic reconciliation. Both, aesthetic experience and the motif of autonomy are reconstructed in her work as sites for operations of negativity and critique which take part in a post-utopian understanding of freedom and emancipation.

Figure 5.3.
Isa Genzken, *New Buildings for Berlin*, 2004, four parts, glass, epoxy resin, wooden pedestals, each 87 x 24 x 18 in. (220 x 60 x 45 cm). Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne/New York © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn)

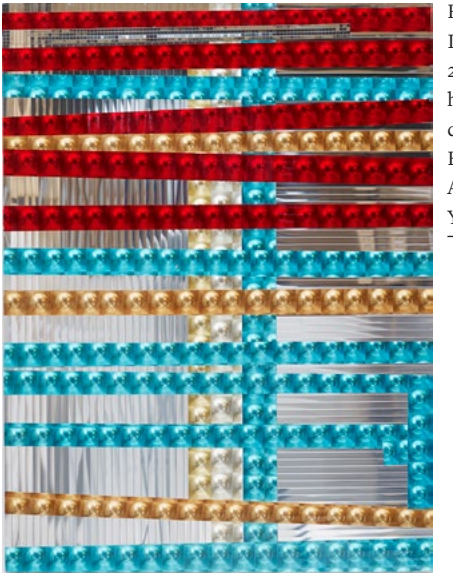

Figure 5.4.
Isa Genzken, *Soziale Fassade*, 2002, metal, wood, mirror foil, holograph foil, 31 x 24 in. (80 x 60 cm). Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne/New York © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn)

More than any other author, it is precisely Theodor W. Adorno against whom such a shift is directed. Adorno famously insisted on the relation of the categories of aesthetic autonomy, experience, and utopian reconciliation. In his notes on the "Artist as Deputy," Adorno gave an expression of what utopian reconciliation means. It is the reconciled subject, this "undivided human being, whose capacities and modes of response have not been ripped apart, alienated from one another and congealed into valorizable functions in accordance with the schema of the social division of labor."[13] As Adorno further argued, it is the aesthetic experience of the modern work of art which precisely anticipates this reconciliation. Adorno thinks of a reconciled subject that is anticipated in the aesthetic forms of the work of art.[14] As Adorno notes, it would be the ultimate "representative of the total social subject."[15]

However, it is mostly common sense that Adorno's dialectical accounts have provoked much disagreement long since. As diverse as the critique on Adorno's aesthetics already had been, one of the main points of critique was the overall compensatory logic of his aesthetic accounts. Thus, art became the residual for a utopian other precisely because Adorno was convinced that reality as such could not be a place for reconciliation anymore. His *Aesthetic Theory* eventually depends on the *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, namely on the critique of a ubiquitous instrumental reason. Yet Habermas, who transformed the

13 Theodor W. Adorno, "The Artist as Deputy," in *Notes to Literature*, vol. I (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 102.

14 For art to be the site of a utopian other, the work of art itself must thus bear a spark of subjectivity. Juliane Rebentisch has pointed out that herein lies Adorno's idea of a "truly autonomous art." It resembles "another subject rather than a material object." Rebentisch, "Die Liebe zur Kunst und deren Verkennung. Adornos Modernismus," in *Texte zur Kunst*, vol. 52 (December 2003), p. 79.

15 Adorno, "The Artist as Deputy," p. 107.

categories of critical theory, made the convincing point that conceptual thought includes not only the objectification of reality in the context of instrumental action but also the intersubjectivity of understanding—that is, the possibility for a mimetically open relationship between different subjects in the social sphere.[16] Following Habermas, there would be a possibility to reintroduce a utopian perspective into the sphere of discursive reason itself, which is now called non-hierarchical or coercion-free discourse.

Yet this political utopia would actually be associated with a critique of the real existing communication structures being distorted by power relations. But still, it would point toward the possibility of a communicatively reconciled state, or final consensus—as political utopia. One could certainly put into question whether this adequately represents what democracy actually means. Following Habermas's critics, a notion of democracy would eventually depend on the understanding of the locus of political power being an "empty place" rather than a coercion-free discourse.[17] But regardless of this critique, the interesting point is the structural shift itself: The perspective of utopian reconciliation inevitably leaves the confines of the aesthetic in order to become a notion of political theory. It was the German philosopher Martin Seel who ultimately argued

16 Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, vol. 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), p. 364. See also Albrecht Wellmer, *Zur Dialektik von Moderne und Postmoderne*. Vernunftkritik nach Adorno (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), pp. 48–114.

17 This notion of democracy had been defended by many theories of Radical Democracy and most prominently by Claude Lefort: "The locus of power is an empty space, it cannot be occupied—it is such that no individual and no group can be consubstantial with it—and it cannot be represented." Lefort, "The Question of Democracy," in *Democracy and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), p. 17.

that this actual transformation of utopian thought should further be criticized. From the standpoint of a theory of rationality, the notion of a communicatively reconciled state would be a misleading ideal. Following Seel, a dynamic understanding of human freedom would rather acknowledge the fundamental difference and autonomy of the diverse spheres of rationality and experience. Seel states: "The preservation, renewal and expansion of individual and social freedom in the form of a communicatively diversified critique is precisely incompatible with the regulative idea of a state of reconciliation. Freedom and reconciliation are not conceptually complementary."[18] Hence, this implies a fundamental critique of the utopian horizon of reconciliation as well. Thus, neither form of experience should anticipate a state of reconciliation within the different registers of human experience. The overall idea of one singular form of experience being a unifier of our different spheres of rationality and experience—in order to provide an experience of completeness of the human subject—does not lead to freedom but to constraint. Thus, the end of reconciliation would not lead to a state of resignation but rather to the very beginning of a post-utopian understanding of human freedom and emancipation.

Looking back at Genzken's work, one could thus relate Seel's account to the notion of critical negation as well. In the review of her Berlin exhibition, it was suggested that the movement of critical negation would be the guiding aesthetic principle of the artists' work. It would correspond with an understanding of the aesthetic being a site for operations of negativity and critique, its experience being a part within a cluster of mutual critique. It could be seen as a space that not only puts our forms of experience and

18 Martin Seel, *Die Kunst der Entzweiung: Zum Begriff der ästhetischen Rationalität* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), p. 324.

rationality into perspective but also reciprocally criticizes the other's conditions and effects. This is precisely what Seel calls a communicatively diversified critique. Isa Genzken indirectly works on that. But at the same time, she identifies our contemporary forms of experience as fundamentally marked and distorted, her work is thus not post-utopian in a cheerful sense. It rather insists on the contestation of the given power relations and commodified experiences, breaking free from the reified status quo. Any false redemptions are to be redeemed. But that doesn't mean that the ongoing project of critique goes blind. It continues by being redirected, against the false utopias of our past as much as against the actual specters of the present state of affairs.

Keynote Address

Benjamin H.D. Buchloh

Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Modern Art at
Harvard University

This text has been adapted from the transcript of Buchloh's keynote address presented at the Nasher Sculpture Center on April 4, 2019.

Thank you, Stephen, for your nice words and thank you to the Nasher family for inviting us all and not only giving the Prize to—in our mind, or many of ours here—an amazing figure in the history of sculpture, but also, which I think is quite remarkable, for organizing a symposium around the Prize winner. That I have never heard of [being done], and it is quite a wonderful invention to do this, and I think it's great to bring a number of younger scholars into the focus, so this is a particularly great advantage of being here in the company of young scholars who write about the work. I also thank Jeremy Strick for having us here, and Dr. Leigh Arnold, for having organized all of this, in the most impeccable way. I should give a trigger warning; we art historians don't have many opportunities to speak like this, but if the artist gives the work a title such as *Fuck the Bauhaus*, we are forced to cite it a few times, so I will have to do that.

Here is Isa Genzken's self-portrait called *My Brain* (fig. 6.1), it's a work that demarcates the transition from the early work, about which we have heard quite wonderful observations this morning, to the second phase of her work, the concrete sculptures. And I'm showing it in lieu of another work which I unfortunately cannot reproduce because it doesn't exist anymore, called *Kurtchen*, "Kurtchen" meaning the diminutive of the German first name Kurt, and I will talk about this in a moment, who this Kurt is. So, *My Brain* is, of course, a wonderful object that still exists. It has both the disintegration and the amorphous, formless materiality of the work that is to follow, but it is also already anticipating the nevertheless upright utopian aspiration that the World Receivers, for example, will formulate in this otherwise rather frightful diminution of the subject. Genzken's most famous, if notorious, title, and undoubtedly one of her most stringent groups of sculpture in the second half of her multifarious career, is called *Fuck the Bauhaus* (fig. 6.2). And we have read precise, complex, and compelling interpretations of this series in the writings of Laura Hoptman and Lisa Lee, among

Figure 6.1.
Isa Genzken, *Mein Gehirn* (*My Brain*), 1984, plaster, metal, and paint, 9 x 8 x 7 in. (24 x 20 x 18 cm). Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne/New York © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn)

others. Nevertheless, I will start my paper today with an attempt to shift this title into a slightly different historical perspective—not to contest the previous readings but to complement them with a historical dimension that proves that the clarion call to Fuck the Bauhaus was in fact voiced as early as the foundation of the Bauhaus

Figure 6.2.
Isa Genzken, *Fuck the Bauhaus #2*, 2000, plywood, plastic, paper, cardboard, pizza box, plastic flowers, stones, tape, model trees, and toy car, 83 x 28 x 20 in. (210 x 70 x 51 cm). Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne/New York © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn)

itself by artists who were profoundly skeptical of utopian Bauhaus promises right from the start, in 1919. And I will claim that these are, in fact, some of the major historical precursors of the radically

anti-utopian, the melancholic mentality, that has defined the second phase of Genzken's oeuvre since the early 1990s. I'm showing you, of course, Lyonel Feininger's woodcut, that accompanied Gropius's manifesto of the Bauhaus in 1919, *The Cathedral*. And then there is the second phase of an opposition to the Bauhaus, which I will also very briefly sketch out, from within the very ranks of the Bauhaus masters. And while there are many examples where all principles of Bauhaus ethics and aesthetics were portrayed by the Bauhaus figures themselves, I will only point to one very prominent one, that for some reason had had tremendous attraction to Genzken during her regular visits and sojourns in New York. Namely, Gropius's architectural monster-masterpiece: the Pan Am building.[1]

But before I go there, I want to show you why *Kurtchen* is important. This is Kurt Schwitters's manifest, or manuscript, or pamphlet, or small portfolio of prints called the Cathedral, published immediately after 1919, and you can see in the wonderful design on the middle left, what he thought the cathedral should look like, right? So quite clearly, in Schwitters's vision, an opposition to the concept of utopian architecture that would transform society was met with a greater skepticism—immediately. And here, also in 1919, at the very moment, Schwitters forms the first column that will eventually become the *Merzbau*, it's actually called a *Merz* column, which incorporates not only the death mask of his

1 Designed by architects Walter Gropius, a founder of the Bauhaus in Germany, and Pietro Belluschi, designer of the Equitable Building in Portland, Oregon, and later the Juilliard School at Lincoln Center, the Pan Am building in midtown Manhattan was completed in 1963. The 57-story-tall building, now called the MetLife Building, was "to many critics one of the biggest and ugliest things on the Manhattan skyline." Christopher Gray, "Streetscapes/The MetLife Building, Originally the Pan Am Building; Critics Once Called It Ugly; Now They're Not Sure," *The New York Times*, October 7, 2001, https://www.nytimes.com/2001/10/07/realestate/streetscapes-metlife-building-originally-pan-am-building-critics-once-called-it.html (accessed July 3, 2019).

Figure 6.3.
Kurt Schwitters, *Merzbau in Hanover* [view: "Blue window"], 1933. Installation, c. 155 x 228 x 181 in. (393 x 580 x 460 cm)Photo: Wilhelm Redeman © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn)

recently deceased first son, but it also incorporates, as you can see, a number of papers, newspapers, and daily pamphlets at the bottom of the column itself. And as much as this is also just as important a model of sculpture, as a column—which will be important later on in the development of Genzken's focus on the column as well—the column is, of course, neither architecture nor sculpture, and Schwitters's conception of sculpture as "in-between everything," he actually called all of the elements of the *Merzbau* (fig. 6.3) "columns,", which is clearly articulated here. This is for those of you who might not have seen this in a while, of course, one of the final phases of the *Merzbau* as it was finished in the years from 1919 to 1926, or even later. And the third example from that first initial opposition to the Bauhaus we can see in 1920, in the Dada-Merz-ism in Berlin, in the work by Johannes Baargeld, as you can see once again, not only is there a column or a structure or a monument or an undefinable sculpture, because it is completely constituted

by mass cultural pamphlets and mass cultural papers, but it is also already incorporating shop-window mannequins as one of its integral elements that confronts us with the question: What is the readymade when it becomes a figure? Which is one of the key questions of which I will engage in the second part of this paper. From the same exhibition, again a very important example, of where mass sculpture effaces anthropomorphic identity, or physiognomic identity, which is one of the key confrontations at that time is Raoul Hausmann's 1920 *Spirit of Our Time*. And lastly, equally from that exhibition in 1920, once again, John Heartfield and George Grosz's portrait of the wild Philistine, or *Spiesberger*. Heartfield, in a clear citation of numerous traumatic conditions or experiences; namely, the cripple, the prosthetic and the totally deindividuated subject of post–World War I individuality.

So, the second moment of "Fuck the Bauhaus," as I said, emerges from the masters of the Bauhaus themselves. Here we have Walter Gropius, accompanied by Emery Roth, who is the co-architect of the Pan Am building, as it was built from 1959 to 1963, accompanied by the commissioner of the City of New York, Mr. Wolfson, photographed by Andreas Feininger. So we have a Bauhaus group, in the most peculiar sense together: Andreas Feininger is, of course, the son of Lyonel Feininger, and they're standing in front of the model of the building that was at the time widely perceived as a scandal because it was disrupting the view of Manhattan; it was built over Grand Central Station, and it was widely perceived as a typical monstrosity of Modernist architecture. It traversed and it traveled Manhattan. If there ever had been any doubt that the Bauhaus would provide legitimization for new forms of gigantic corporate architecture that would not just correspond to the ever-expanding demands of late-capitalist forms of exploitation of human labor and ecological resources, it would be Gropius's late style and late oeuvre—a quintessential example of architecture

exclusively determined to following economic necessities of profit maximization to the detriment of any concern of urban dwellings, urban communities, or ecologies. So, there's an ever-greater irony in the fact that Gropius's gesture of solidarity with one of his less fortunate colleagues at the Bauhaus, Josef Albers, who had immigrated like him to the United States in the first years after the Nazi fascists came to power, commissioned a major glass mural for the Pan Am building. In fact, it was one of the largest and most important glass works that Josef Albers ever produced. In 2010, the owners of the MetLife building, as it's now called, decided to destroy the mural—fuck the Bauhaus one more time. This work by the artist disappeared completely. It doesn't seem appropriate anymore in New York because it seemed to have really outlived its historical promises as a utopian space of democratic egalitarian experience.

These are three sketches, or two sketches, rather, to be followed by the third one, namely the various stances with which one can look back at the impact of the Bauhaus and understand Genzken's skepticism with regard to its legacy. Quite clearly, the initial stance of Schwitters, and Dada artists, is part of her opposition as much as the recognition that the Bauhaus as a utopian model has failed, so that is not necessarily a polemical position. And lastly, there is a certain degree of critical reflection on the Bauhaus from Genzken's perspective when she famously says, "the Bauhaus had to fail because it did not recognize the beauty of flowers."[2] Extraordinary statement, isn't it? So, if the first one, which links Genzken to the artist of the 20th century with whom we would claim she was most deeply bonded with, such as Kurt Schwitters, it was precisely Schwitters's inimitable sense of the decay and disqualification of materials, as carriers of utopian future social

2 Sabine Breitwieser, Laura Hoptman, Michael Darling, Jeffrey Grove, and Lisa Lee, *Isa Genzken: Retrospective*. Exh. cat. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2013

bliss that would be equated with Genzken's rage for the affinity of artificial colors, textures, and surfaces in the second phase of her sculptural production; that is, after the ruinous concrete cast that had already unsettled her early magisterial, Modernist sculptures. The Modernist line, which ranged from Brancusi to Judd in her early work, the Modernist line in which sculpture serves as a metonymy of the subject's spatial and social conditions, which concretizes the subject's groundedness, intactility, and phenomenological experience. It offers the subject a model of future possibility, of spatial location, where the subject could relate to morphologies, materials, and masterly perfection as warranties that guarantee the historical presence and accessibility of the subject's groundedness in space.

Having written, on various occasions, on the earlier phases of Genzken's—by now—astonishingly extensive and extremely diverse sculptural production, it seems plausible that I would finally address the more recent work culminating for the time being in the series of the so-called "actors." Prefigurations for these citational figures appear perhaps for the first time with astronauts in Genzken's installation in the Venice Biennale. Since then, Genzken has incorporated an increasing number of mannequin figures in her sculpture constructs, of the type that are usually deployed in common shop-window displays, and it was precisely her incorporation of these figures, unlike the work that featured increasingly banal or drastic objects such as parasols, strollers, or wheelchairs, that challenged my initial comprehension to the degree when I saw them for the first time, they left me with some serious doubts about the actual status and the possible future reception and place of Genzken's oeuvre within the discourse of information we call the Modernist history of 20th-century sculpture. Finally, it was the renewed and more extensive encounter with the actors in her retrospective exhibition at MoMA in New York in 2013

and ‘14—here’s the entrance to the exhibition *shows picture*—that triggered my admittedly belated understanding of the work, I think. And the realization that this group might in fact be yet another major and fundamentally different, yet central and complex, in Genzken’s already extremely heterogeneous oeuvre. Several features of Genzken’s apparent variation on the age-old, anti-Modernist promises of a return to figuration had initially offended me, and offended my more or less Modernist doxa.

First of all, her work seemed gaudy, repulsively vulgar, becoming at the same time, paradoxically, evermore glamorous, and in that manner, even more perplexing than her rather outlandish connections of the wildest possible variety of found objects and material citations. Second, Genzken’s figurations appear to introduce a heretofore almost unthinkable narrative dimension into late-20th- and early-21st-century sculpture. If not a representation of literalism into what had been previously, from Carl Andre to Richard Serra, from Bruce Nauman to Dan Graham, appeared as purely phenomenological reflections of the subject’s position and function in the public social space. Thirdly, Genzken’s actors not only seem to signal a return to figuration, but worse, they appear to have abolished the readymade. Its original dialectic between subject and object, decisively turning the subject itself into a model of reified objectivity while displaying a deceptive conflation of the two terms; a false realism in my mind, as it seemed. It also seemed, and very distressingly so for me, that Genzken’s work had reached a precarious proximity to a category of anti-Modernist figurative sculpture, which had emerged more or less at the same period, slightly earlier, in work such as the work of Charles Ray or Jeff Koons. Or, worse yet for me, in works such as socialist-realist artists like Duane Hanson. These had not exactly been among the model figures in my sculptural pantheon; after all, Genzken herself had always prided herself in the relationship to the work

of Bruce Nauman, Dan Graham, and Lawrence Weiner. But most problematic of all was, perhaps, the fact that her work, once it had become figurative, inevitably confronted us with a crucial historical and theoretical question: How could the formal radicality of a readymade aesthetic that had ruled Genzken's work now accommodate a shift in figurative representation?

To answer this question, we will have to clarify some of the deeper implications of the contradictions between the episteme of the readymade and that of the anthropomorphic figure. And inevitably, we will have to reflect on some earlier moments in sculptural history where a comparable confrontation between the readymade object and figuration might have occurred, such as here in the exhibition that was curated by Andre Breton and Marcel Duchamp in 1938 in Paris *shows picture*. Last, I will briefly sketch out some scenes from the long and complex history of 20th-century art when the dialectics of readymade and figuration had become articulated. To my knowledge, very few, if any, comments have recognized that the discovery of Giorgio de Chirico and his preoccupation with the mannequin, in all its forms, from studio prop to exhibition object, and Marcel Duchamp's urinal, made in the same year, the Fountain, dates from 1917. And while the deeper connections that link these two foundational epistemes of Modernism and anti-Modernism in the 20th century might have yet to be explored, we can hypothetically state, at least for the purposes of this lecture, that a deeply dialectical bond links these supposedly incompatible models to begin with. I can only give the crudest sketch of how these historical oppositions played out in the history following de Chirico and Duchamp's initial definition. As is well known, the early impact of de Chirico on German artists of the post-World War generation was immense. Quite unlike the relative, if not total, absence of the impact of the Duchampian readymade, which nobody in Germany seemed to have understood at the time.

Therefore, it might be worthwhile to start by briefly recounting the various models of the German de Chirico reception, which were as fundamentally different from each other as from de Chirico's original mannequin itself. De Chirico's mannequins, originally derived from the shop-window figure, the tailor's dummy, the studio model; would generate an enormously complex program and progeny in the German reception, specifically in the process of de Chirico's reception in Berlin Dada. It would be reconfigured, in particular, in post–World War I German preoccupations, as the figure of the cripple, of the prosthetic subject, as much as within the increasingly apt image of the new man as a robot, as an automaton, under the advanced forms of capitalism.

And if de Chirico's figurines had originated in a possibly reactionary response to the radicality of Cubism's deconstruction of the human figure, his mannequins only deplored painting's putative foundations in mimetic figuration. But they also mourned the disappearance of painting's historical capacity to depict the human subject altogether. Thus, de Chirico's proposition to mourn the loss of figurative representation triggered this new and contradictory spectrum of substitutional figures in various subsequent cultural contexts. And third, a paradoxically different response to de Chirico's mannequin, would be gender-specific, and it would become increasingly prominent in the subsequent development, namely the reading of the studio figure or the tailor's dummy, which would now return as the Dada doll, in the work of Hanna Hirsch for example.

Even if relatively disregarded for the longest time, these hybrids of what we would call an anthropomorphic readymade, had a particular history, paradoxically, even a specifically German history, before it might have become a French—or even universal—history. And that history obviously culminated in 1920 at the Dada Fair as I have shown in the beginning. All of

these citations form the first truly mixed-media sculptures of the 20th century, or as some would argue, they embodied the first successful fusion of a return to figuration and the readymade. Which would obviously become a complex system for future references, unacknowledged until recently, and only evident in the work of Genzken in the most programmatic way. So, we would have to situate Genzken's Actors on a fundamentally different historical stage, obviously, utterly new and incomparable to these historical predecessors. And even if we could convincingly argue that a link between the two formations exists, we would still have to distinguish these figures separated by almost 100 years. And we would have to answer whether it is the dimension of the robotic, the dimension of the traumatic, the dimension of feminist derision, or a totally different dimension that drives Genzken's actors to wear what they wear and to find themselves compounded in these uncanny collectives on the stage of the museum. And if we actually could establish such a productive comparison and differentiation between the legacies of German Dada and Genzken's new figurations, an even more difficult question would have to be asked; namely, whether and to what extent is Genzken's return to figuration—if that is in fact what we are confronting—consciously or unconsciously, unknowingly, taking part in the historical and critical attempt to refigure the subject-object relationship according to the principles of a fusion of de Chirico and Duchamp. Among the sheer infinity of the experiential and perceptual conditions that Marcel Duchamp's classical readymade would address in 1917, one was the condition of inextricable de-subjectivation, the anonymity of production, and the reception that focused on collectively produced industrial objects. This had been foundational. Inevitably, therefore, the anti-aesthetic of the readymade had, from the very beginning, reflected critically on the existential and perceptual conditions of collective reification and alienation. Mimetically assimilating

itself to these conditions, the readymade aesthetic had addressed them both on the level of artistic production as much as on the level of aesthetic reception. Duchamp's metonymy of the particular object had perhaps been one of the readymade's most important features. Since in an exemplary aesthetic dialectic, it had precisely articulated the very condition of the subject's dual deprivation. From the perspective of an alienated industrial producer, the subject found itself deprived from a self-determining productivity. From the perspective of an alienated consumer, the subject found itself deprived from the gratifying object experience delivered by traditional forms of individual artistic production. By contrast, in the subsequent development, with the processes of consumption having reached, by the late 1920s, an initial proto-telic totalitarian dimension, the minimum of critical distance that the Duchampian insistence on the metonymic character of the readymade had still attempted to sustain had been destroyed. And we will witness the emergence of what we would now call the first instances of the readymade figuration, with the acceleration of an exclusively consumption-oriented cultural economy. A collective condition vastly intensified with the arrival of the post-World War II regimes, that dialectic between subject and object could no longer be maintained. But it was already clearly anticipated in Duchamp's exhibition in 1938. Therefore, from now on, to trace the expansion of a totally reified subjectivity meant that the readymade had to encompass the actual human figure as well as reification itself. Reification had to become figuration, precisely, human figuration—precisely, the episteme of the socially induced self-constitution of subjectivity. Duchamp's insertion of Man Ray's portrait of his alter ego Rrose Sélavy, in 1921 would be only the beginning of that tendency.

Yet this historical dialectic would obviously culminate only quite a bit later in Duchamp's somewhat belated adaptation of de Chirico's

mannequins in the design for the *L'Exposition surrealiste* in Paris in 1938. Both his own self-portrait as an androgynous model-actor, as well as the instruction to his fellow artists to design their own individual grotesque models displaying the conditions of desire under advanced conditions of enforced consumption. If Duchamp and his surrealist cohorts, under his instruction, had initiated in the passageway—the street, that they constructed—a new sculptural paradigm of materials and of sculptural reflection of production in 1938, we could call it the "detritus principle" of sculpture. There was a beautiful term this morning, which was identifying Genzken as a sculptor of calamity and catastrophe, and I thought that was quite accurate too. Fashion culture's perpetual principle of forced and planned obsolescence is also the very principle that now has become the principle in Genzken's fundamental transformation of sculptural materials. After all, her trajectory tells us quite a bit about these dramatic changes that her work has performed over the past forty years, and one would have to be very naïve to assume these changes are deliberate or dependent on the whim and desire of the artist to alter the pursuits of her oeuvre and projects at large. Clearly, quite the opposite is true. The choices of increasingly dismissing the traditional sculptural materials and morphologies from her practice to such an extent that the work almost seemed to become illegible, if not outright unpalatable for most of her former admiring spectators like myself. It undoubtedly speaks for the inevitability of these changes and the power of externally determining factors. If in the earlier Duchampian readymade, subject and object could still be distinguished in a situation in which the manufactured world had increasingly displaced the residual spaces of the subject's self-determination, let alone the remnants of the public spaces of a former bourgeoisie autonomy, this dialectical dimension had disappeared by now. What would take its place would be the travesties of the universal reign of the fashion industry, as the emerging domain where commodity

production, socially produced regimes of compulsive distinction, and regulated narcissism, would now rule in all matters of subject formation. And the final erosion of traditional models of bourgeoisie subjectivity would be induced for the purposes of evermore advancing and evermore invasive forms of substituting the constitution of the subject, according to the principles of the acquisition of the fashion object.

Thus, we could argue that the human figure re-inserts itself within the aesthetics of the readymade in Genzken's work, when the subject itself has acquired all the features of a fully reified figure. It seems to be at that moment in history, as we can currently recognize once more, when the sense that even within the aesthetic structure, with ever-intensifying totality, the minimal differences have been collapsed or erased. Those differences that had heretofore still distinguished the artistic object from the fashion object, that had separated the phenomenology of perception from the phenomenology of possession and acquisition, that had differentiated the materiality of critical opposition from a material of blind and bland, random and perpetual exchangeability. Could we thus say, that the readymade as figuration in Genzken's work, emerges at the very moment when it becomes compellingly evident that the aspirations for the subject-object relationship to sustain a dialectical opposition are no longer tenable? At that moment, when it has become obvious that the conditions of total reification have encroached on the former concept of a subjective autonomy in aesthetic terms. To such an extent, that there is no longer any deception possible which would claim that there are still social and subjective spaces, where residual forms of aesthetic autonomy can be experienced. And would we not have to recognize that Genzken's work entered precisely those spaces, initiating the process that has now culminated with a series of actors? For the time being, the last and most recent break in Genzken's eternally breaking continuity of artistic and sculptural categories.

Biographies

2019 Nasher Prize Laureate Isa Genzken

Isa Genzken was born in 1948 in Bad Oldesloe, Germany, and lives and works in Berlin. She studied fine arts, art history, and philosophy in Hamburg, Berlin, and Cologne, before completing her studies at Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in 1977. Genzken's work has been the subject of major museum exhibitions, including traveling surveys organized by the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago (1992–93) and Whitechapel Gallery, London (2009). She has also been featured in solo exhibitions at Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2002); Camden Arts Centre, London (2006); Secession, Vienna (2006); and Museion, Bolzano, Italy (2010). Her work has been prominently featured in international biennials and group exhibitions including documenta 7, 9, and 11 (1982, 1992, and 2002), Skulptur Projekte Münster (1987, 1997, and 2007), and the Venice Biennale (1982, 1993, 2003, 2007, and 2015). In 2013, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in collaboration with the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago and the Dallas Museum of Art, presented Genzken's first American museum survey, *Retrospective*. The artist is represented in museum and public collections worldwide, including the Dallas Museum of Art; Gemeentemuseum, the Hague; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; and Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

Keynote Speaker, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh
Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Modern Art at Harvard University

Benjamin H.D. Buchloh is the Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Modern Art at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, teaching courses on the history of Weimar culture and post-WWII American and European art history. Buchloh is the author of the

seminal 1992 essay on Isa Genzken's work "Isa Genzken: The Fragment as a Model," published on the occasion of her exhibition *Everybody Needs at Least One Window* at the Renaissance Society of Art in Chicago (May 14 to June 28, 1992). A selection of his essays on American and European artists of the post–WWII period has been published in two volumes, *Neo Avantgarde and Culture Industry* (MIT Press, 2006) and *Formalism and Historicity* (MIT Press, 2016). A third volume, *Refuse and Refuge*, is currently being prepared for publication. With Rosalind Krauss, Hal Foster, Yve-Alain Bois, and David Joselit, Buchloh is the editor of the two-volume history of the arts of the 20th century *Art Since 1900* (Thames & Hudson).

As a co-curator of the retrospective exhibition of the work of Gerhard Richter at the Metropolitan Museum/Met Breuer, New York, in 2020, Buchloh will publish his forthcoming monograph on the artist on that occasion.

Buchloh was awarded the Golden Lion for Contemporary Art History and Criticism at the Venice Biennale in 2007.

Moderator, Stephen Lapthisophon
Artist, Educator, and Professor at the University of Texas at Dallas School of the Arts and Humanities

Stephen Lapthisophon is an artist and educator working in the field of conceptual art, critical theory, and disability studies. His early work combined poetry, performance, sound art, and visual art with postmodern philosophical concerns.

Lapthisophon received his MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1979 and a BFA from the University of Texas at Austin. He also studied comparative literature and theory at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. He has

exhibited extensively across the United States, including at the Nasher Sculpture Center Garden and Goss Michael Foundation in Dallas. In 2013, Lapthisophon was the subject of a solo exhibition at the Dallas Museum of Art. He has been included in international exhibitions in Sweden, Germany, Spain, France, and the UK. Lapthisophon has been the recipient of several grants and residencies. He currently teaches art and art history at the University of Texas at Arlington and is an adjunct professor at the University of Texas Dallas in the School of Arts and Humanities.

Editor, Leigh Arnold, Ph.D.
Assistant Curator, Nasher Sculpture Center
Leigh Arnold organized the inaugural Nasher Prize Graduate Symposium in 2017 and serves as editor for the *Graduate Symposium Compendium*. In addition, at the Nasher she has curated exhibitions with such artists as Kathryn Andrews, Nathan Carter, Piero Golia, Sheila Hicks, Roni Horn, Ana Mendieta, Mai-Thu Perret, and Richard Serra. Dr. Arnold is currently working on the first U.S. presentation of sculpture by Elmgreen & Dragset, as well as a historical reinterpretation of Land art that focuses on women who were involved in the movement. She received her doctoral degree in aesthetic studies from the University of Texas at Dallas, where she wrote on Robert Smithson's unfinished projects in Texas.

Presenter, Jenny Dally
School of the Art Institute of Chicago
Jenny Dally (she/her) is a master's candidate in the department of Modern and Contemporary Art History at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She received her BA in art history from Occidental College in Los Angeles. In addition to her academic endeavors, she also holds a position as a graduate curatorial assistant at the school's Sullivan Galleries. Her research centers on sculpture and performance and the intersection between them,

with a particular interest in materiality and phenomenology. She focuses predominantly on the work of women artists.

Presenter, Grant Klarich Johnson
University of Southern California

Grant Klarich Johnson is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Art History at the University of Southern California, where his research focuses on contemporary art, fashion, and performance. His dissertation, *Sheila Hicks: Weaving to the World*, presents the first monographic, critical history of the prolific weaver and pioneer of global contemporary art. Based in New York, he is currently a Joan Tisch Teaching Fellow at the Whitney Museum of American Art and was recently awarded a Jane and Morgan Whitney Fellowship from the Metropolitan Museum of Art for the 2019–20 year. In 2016, he curated *Lita Albuquerque: 20/20 Accelerando*, a film installation and performance commissioned by the USC Fisher Museum of Art, and he produced a performance salon and symposium inspired by the work of Senga Nengudi in 2018. An active critic and writer, his work has appeared in *Artforum*, *Garage*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *The Journal of Modern Craft*, and *Fashion Theory*, among other publications. A graduate of Kenyon College, he is a former associate of *The Kenyon Review*.

Presenter, Dr. des. Sebastian Mühl
Alpen-Adria-Universität Klagenfurt

Sebastian Mühl is a post-doctoral researcher and artist based in Berlin and Klagenfurt, Austria. His work focuses on the political dimensions of contemporary practices and on the politico-aesthetic implications of artistic perceptions of modernity. Mühl finished a Ph.D. on the revival of utopian thought in contemporary art (*Utopien der Gegenwartskunst. Geschichte und Kritik des utopischen Denkens in der Kunst nach 1989*; forthcoming 2019). His work is situated at the intersection of critical theory, aesthetics, and

political theory and discusses modernological, participatory, and art-activist strategies since the early 1990s. Mühl's films and film-based visual-art projects reconsider the politico-aesthetic utopias of modernity and have been exhibited and screened internationally. From 2013 to 2017, Mühl was the research assistant to Juliane Rebentisch at Offenbach Academy of Art and Design. Currently, he works as a senior scientist at Alpen-Adria-University Klagenfurt. He is preparing a postdoc project related to post-cinema and contemporary art. Further research interests include visual culture, post-socialism, artistic research, aesthetic epistemologies.

Presenter, Isabel Parkes
The Courtauld Institute of Art

Isabel Parkes is a curator and artist manager currently living in London, where she is completing her MA at the Courtauld. In recent years, she has worked with Performance Space New York, Creative Time, and Lincoln Center to realize a variety of projects with artists including Sophie Calle, Phil Collins, Sarah Ortmeyer, and Leilah Weinraub. During this time, she also ran an in-home gallery called 2C, which focused on artists' solo presentations. Before that, Isabel worked for the Sammlung Hoffmann in Berlin as an educator and editor and directed a project space called FLEX. She is the author of *Interviews* (Doppell, 2015) and a forthcoming book about the Sammlung Hoffmann (SKD and Hatje Cantz, 2020).

Presenter, Althea Ruoppo
Boston University

Althea Ruoppo is a Ph.D. student in the Department of History of Art & Architecture at Boston University, where she also earned an MA. She completed her BA in art history at Providence College. Ruoppo studies postwar and contemporary art, with a particular interest in German art, collective memory and memorialization, and artworks that reflect notions of precariousness and destablize

visual perception. In October 2018, she presented a paper titled "Windows to the World: Isa Genzken's *Holocaust Denkmal* (1991), an Unrealized Design Proposal for the New England Holocaust Memorial" at the 44th Annual Cleveland Symposium. Althea was one of three presenters awarded the Cleveland Symposium Paper Prize by the Museum's Friends of Art. Prior to returning to Boston University in 2017, she was curatorial assistant, contemporary art and special projects, at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Ruoppo has also held positions at the Princeton University Art Museum, the McNay Art Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Worcester Art Museum.

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