A photograph of two nude women in a dimly lit room. One woman is sitting on the floor, leaning back, while the other is lying on her side. A fireplace with a fire is visible on the left, and a lamp is on the right. The scene is intimate and artistic.

Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy  
Collaborative Works

Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy: Collaborative Works

Philip Monk with essays by Ann Goldstein, Timothy Martin and Martin Prinzhorn

**Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy  
Collaborative Works**

The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery  
18 March – 28 May 2000



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Contemporary Art Gallery at Harbourfront Centre  
231 Queens Quay West, Toronto, Canada M5J 2G8 (416) 973-4949

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Monk, Philip, 1950-  
Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy: Collaborative Works

Catalogue of an exhibition held at The Power Plant  
Contemporary Art Gallery at Harbourfront Centre  
Mar. 18 - May 28, 2000.

ISBN 0-921047-45-2

1. Kelley, Mike, 1954- -Exhibitions.
2. McCarthy, Paul 1945- -Exhibitions.

I. Kelley, Mike, 1954- . II. McCarthy, Paul, 1945- .  
III. Power Plant (Art Gallery). IV. Title.

N6537.K446A4 2000a 709'.73'074713541 C00-930479-7

**The Power Plant**  
Contemporary Art Gallery

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## Director's Foreword

We are proud to have organized the first North American exhibition of Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy's collaborative works. These complex and brilliant cultural satires take no prisoners; in some cases, the initial shock is not easily forgotten. The ability of this work to offend notwithstanding, everyone should ponder what it raises about how individuals are formed in an effort to sustain our societies and cultures. Cathartic and fortifying, Kelley and McCarthy's collaborations are also deeply funny — with art itself being most vulnerable to their outrageous barbs.

We are especially grateful to those who have made this exhibition possible by lending us the works that constitute it: Katerina Gregos, Curator, The Dakis Joannou Collection Foundation; Iwan Wirth, Galerie Hauser & Wirth; Marianne Torp Øckenholt, Curator of Contemporary Art, Statens Museum for Kunst; and, of course, Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy.

Like all our exhibitions, this important show was made possible by the support of agencies at all three levels of government: the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council and the Toronto Arts Council. We are grateful to them all.

We also extend our warm thanks to Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy's representative, Patrick Painter of Patrick Painter, Inc, and to the Director, Joe Reorda, for his invaluable help. Special thanks go to Catherine Sullivan, Karen McCarthy and Dave Muller.

Ann Goldstein, Timothy Martin and Martin Prinzhorn have contributed important essays to this publication and we thank them for their collaboration.

Finally, thanks are due to Philip Monk, curator of this and many other groundbreaking exhibitions.

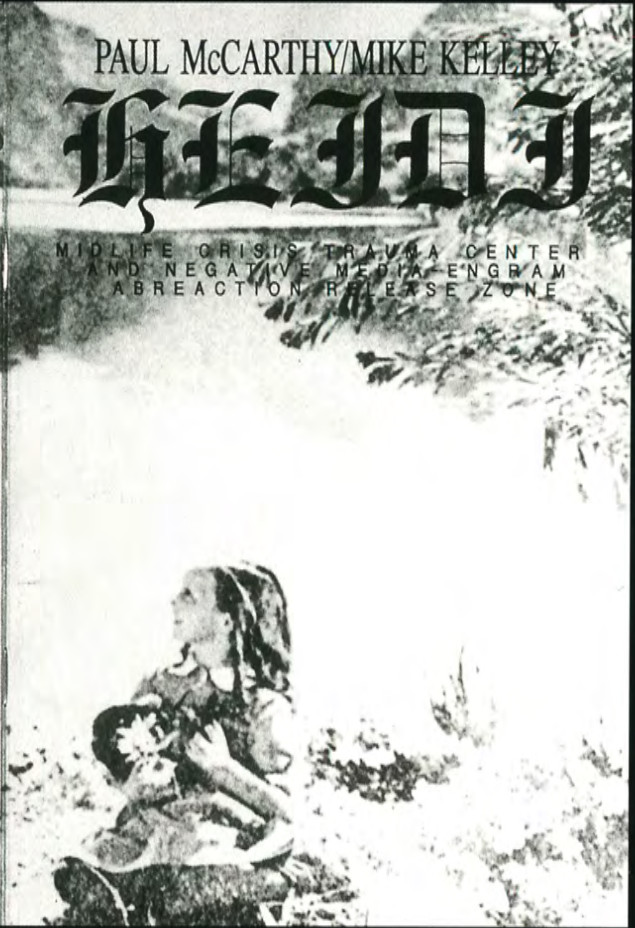
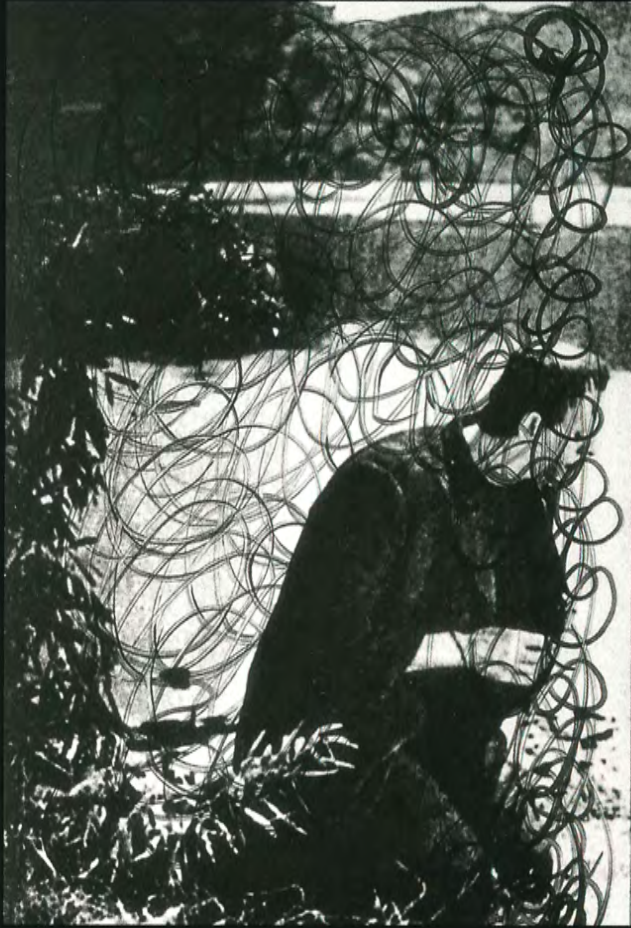
*Marc Mayer*



PAUL McCARTHY/MIKE KELLEY

# THE IDI

MIDLIFE CRISIS TRAUMA CENTER  
AND NEGATIVE MEDIA-ENGRAM  
ABREACTION RELEASE ZONE



# A Twisted Pedagogy

*Philip Monk*

I escaped to the open country, and fearfully took refuge in a low hovel, quite bare, and making a wretched appearance after the palaces I had beheld in the village. This hovel, however, joined a cottage of a neat and pleasant appearance...On examining my dwelling, I found that one of the windows of the cottage had formerly occupied a part of it, but the panes had been filled up with wood. In one of these was a small and almost imperceptible chink, through which the eye could just penetrate. Through this crevice a small room was visible, whitewashed and clean, but very bare of furniture...By degrees I made a discovery of still greater moment. I found that these people possessed a method of communicating their experience and feelings to one another by articulate sounds...I learned and applied the words, *fire*, *milk*, *bread*, and *wood*...I easily perceived that, although I eagerly longed to discover myself to the cottagers, I ought not to make the attempt until I had first become master of their language; which knowledge might enable me to make them overlook the deformity of my figure....

— Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

## **Europa/Amerika**

In the passage from Europe to America, many things are lost and some are gained. The immigrant leaves behind a culture of the word — more than just his or her native tongue but a moral authority embedded in a literary tradition — to enter a culture where the image predominates. Freedom has to be negotiated in this new terrain of visibility. The immigrant joins the New World as if entering a forest of signs. Yet most of these signs are actually not guideposts but commodities, or they signal commodities. (The settling of America generally coincided with the development of capitalism so that the structures of inhabitation, daily life and commerce here are marked by that system rather than any other traditional values.) Learning in this environment means first knowing how to respond to signs and signals, which is part of a process of adapting to rules of production and consumption.

Cover of *Heidi: Midlife Crisis Trauma Center and Negative Media-Engram Abreaction Release Zone*. Galerie Krinzinger, Vienna, 1992.

Social behaviour must conform to this regime. In America, freedom, as we know it, connotes freedom of choice. Thrown into the marketplace and unhinged from the care and tutelage of tradition, the individual is ostensibly free but offered no instruction in his or her liberty.

In passing from a literary to a visual culture, how does one pass on knowledge and transmit cultural inheritance? Or, given this seeming unfettering, how does one use what is left of tradition to maintain authority, either within the family or society? Society usually allocates these multiple roles to the public domain of education. In America, the entertainment industry has assumed the task of education. Returning to a classical ideal, it uses the popular arts to entertain *and* instruct. Socialization proceeds through seduction. This training contradictorily must repress certain instincts and liberate others for the proper functioning of capitalist society.

A cultural inheritance brought from Europe to America and transformed in the passage makes these lessons and losses clear. The transposition of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* from a Romantic literary text to a 1931 Hollywood movie deprives the monster of reasoned speech so that he is no more than an inarticulate child. What is lost in this translation is the humanizing project of instruction. The whole of Shelley's Godwinian tract argues against the autodidacticism of the obsessed, isolated individual — a task that the monster unwillingly must assume.<sup>1</sup> Both Victor Frankenstein and the narrator Robert Walton are willing exponents of the state into which the monster is unhappily born — that of the outcast. In America, instruction becomes indoctrination. Even the outcast is socialized and isolation is institutionalized. From corporate tower to prison cell, from television screen to hillbilly shack, America is a Skinner Box of behavioural manipulation.

Shelley's Frankenstein is not the psychopathic serial killer he becomes in America where his name is given to the monster. In America, Dr. Frankenstein and his monster become one: a body-obsessed dismemberer morphs with the child-monster. (The plot novelty of the Frankenstein film places the mind of a child in the brain of a criminal in the body of a monster. Such a type is embodied in the monstrous, butchering man-child of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*.) Here the quest for knowledge, creating life from death, is reversed. Bodies are not put together, but torn apart.<sup>2</sup>

Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy take up the subject of socializing the individ-

ual in America — which perhaps is *the* American project. At least the immigrant negotiates his or her entry into this culture as an adult, but what happens when a child is born into it, formless, America's "New Man?" This is the dilemma of Frankenstein's monster. Offsprings of the same culture, Kelley and McCarthy should be sympathetic to the monster's plight. They have, after all, been schooled (so to speak) in the reproduction of authority. However, instead of simply submitting, they show they have learned their lessons perhaps a little too well by assuming the masks of both submission *and* authority. In their collaborative works they practise a twisted pedagogy where teachers tend towards the socio-psychopathic, and the students are as outcast, unformed and forlorn as Frankenstein's foul offspring. They are, at the same time, dutiful and disobedient sons of their culture.

Since training for society starts in the family, and the subjection to authority begins with the submission of son to father, perhaps it should come as no surprise that their first performing collaboration is entitled *Family Tyranny: Modeling and Molding*. McCarthy asked Kelley to perform in his 1987 videotape with the only instructions being "I am the father, you are the son." The videotape opens with a written text stating, "The father begat the son. The son begat the father." This is not only a keyhole peek into a household where the reproduction of authority and the family's dirty secret are replayed and passed on in family (sexual) abuse. The videotape is modeled on a typical 1950s television fix-it, hobby show. (Those instructional programmes reinforced the idea that even recreation should sustain an obsessive work ethic.) In a wood-paneled television set/basement workshop, the father prepares a white concoction made out of processed foodstuffs. Using a makeshift styrofoam ball on a stick to stand in as a boy's head, he shows how to force the liquid through a funnel down the throat of this mock child, saying "My daddy made me do this; you can do this to your son, too."

As in Frankenstein's monster's low hovel, the windows of the set allow us to peer, as if through a camera lens, into a "workshop of filthy creation."<sup>3</sup> Architecture is both a hidden site of discipline and a surveillance device. As the latter, the set and the camera become one — a means through which society peers into the family, most effectively through the apparatus of television that instructs individuals as to society's dominant values. What was enacted there by Kelley and McCarthy became a prototype for their subsequent collaborations.<sup>4</sup>



If Kelley and McCarthy's mutual interest in repressive family structures brought them together, their subsequent collaborations extended this focus to society's conditioning of the individual through its institutions and cultural representations. In their installations and videotapes, architecture is used both as a model of these social formations and as a structural framework to incorporate the artists' analyses of contradictory cultural phenomena.

It is not fruitful to allocate authorship of individual components or themes to either artist. In some cases, their association entailed what the artists call a "collaborative compromise." For instance, the installation *An Architecture Composed of the Paintings of Richard M. Powers and Francis Picabia* (1997) derived from Kelley's interest in American science-fiction illustrator Richard Powers and McCarthy's interest in French Dadaist-Modernist painter Francis Picabia. This conjunction of names and images and the degraded or elevated practices they represent — one mass-media, the other museum-sanctioned — was a conjecture to be worked out in the resulting art work. We find there that each artist is in not-so-secret communication with the seemingly exclusionary tradition the other represents.

In other cases, Kelley and McCarthy recognized a mutual interest, such as in the comic book character Sad Sack, which was discovered during their collaboration on *Sod and Sodie Sock Comp O.S.O.* (1998).<sup>5</sup> *Sod and Sodie Sock Comp O.S.O.* is an army tent compound pitched in a former defeated Nazi country (it was first shown in Vienna). In this work, the artists link American military imperialism to the victorious formalism of the post-war period of American art critic Clement Greenberg and the modernist art he championed. His writings appear in a series of strung together, cut-up texts that are appended to the visual documentation of the catalogue spliced into those of Wilhelm Reich and Georges Bataille. The artists' use of Reich's and Bataille's writings on the authoritarian ideology of the family and the mass psychology of fascism not only serve to bring the hierarchies of modernist aesthetic ideals down low, they also unite the themes of Kelley and McCarthy's collaborative works — the army camp replicates and reinforces the authoritarian structure of the family where repression originates. A collusion whose social dimensions cannot be predetermined at the onset, their collaborations are far-ranging in their critiques. They mean much more than allying the resources of the artists' individual concerns to the ends of an aesthetic hybrid.

The complex interactions that take place between the artists in the collaborative process, as a dialogical relationship, inform the structure of the works themselves. For instance, the linkage between architecture and the body as mediated through video; the reciprocity between various institutions of culture that nonetheless hierarchically enforce the distinctions between high and low; and the dialogue between Europe and America as carried on in social theory, art practice and popular cultural memory are dominating themes that recur in their works.

### **Architecture, Discipline and Instruction**

Kelley and McCarthy's first true collaboration, *Heidi: Midlife Crisis Trauma Center and Negative Media-Engram Abreaction Release Zone* (1992), registers some of the complex contrarities they force together. Made for exhibition in Vienna, the work — an architectural construction and videotape — bases itself on Joanna Spyri's children's story *Heidi*, with its oppositions of city and country, culture and nature. "We chose to work with the novel *Heidi*," Kelley wrote, "because it offered many opportunities to work with doublings and polarities which seemed appropriate for a collaborative work."<sup>6</sup>

Like cultural anthropologists, the artists examined the structural dichotomies of the novel with its ideological underpinnings of nature standing for health and culture representing sickness.<sup>7</sup> But Kelley and McCarthy exacerbated this opposition by piling on further contrarities. In a single construction they combine the Alpine chalet and city house of Spyri's story. So to the contrasts of country/city, nature/culture, health/sickness, they added that of traditional kitsch/modernist art, since the architecture of Viennese modernist and author of "Ornament and Crime," Adolf Loos, was the model for part of the exterior and the Frankfurt bedroom of the Sick Girl (*Heidi*'s counterpart). With the incorporation of Loos and his anti-decoration dogma into this scenario, Kelley and McCarthy's *Heidi* also becomes more obviously "a lesson in aesthetics,"<sup>8</sup> situating itself, like all their collaborations, in a dialogue with other art movements and works of art.

With an "insistence on the role of beauty as correctness," we are still in the realm of instruction and, ultimately, discipline.<sup>9</sup> Lessons must be learned. Bodies, as well as art, must be subjected to corrective discipline. In keeping with the stripped-down puritanism of modernism, the tattooed, criminal and degenerate

body (Heidi receives a tattoo in the videotape) must be turned into a functional and disciplined body. According to Loos, ornament exists within the realm of children, primitives and criminals and must be eliminated from civilization. The tattooed body is a sign of collusion, the outward manifestation of an inner perversity whose imprint must then be erased by a teaching that is reinforced by physical gestures in which abuse frequently masquerades as discipline.

On the model of the misshapen body of the child, behaviour needs “orthopaedic” correction. *Heidi*’s Alm Mountain setting, representing nature itself, offers this curative power. But in the videotape, a sometimes irrational discipline must be imposed by the familial representative of authority, the Grandfather. One segment of the videotape is called, as a play on Loos’s title, “Ornament and Education.” The children Heidi and Peter need remedial instruction and rehabilitation but Peter endures more correction as he seems to be the degenerate product of inbreeding. As well, Grandfather and Heidi apparently have need of family counseling for some undisclosed but suspected perversion. Applied instead to this fictional family unit, Loos’s admonition of criminal degeneration suggests that the ornate Alpine chalet might as well be a disguised hillbilly shack, its decorative exterior hiding unwholesome and lewd behaviour — beatings, scopophilia, implied incest and bestiality.

The degeneration of ideals as they travel from the Alps to Appalachia is a theme that recurs throughout the installation and videotape as Kelley and McCarthy’s *Heidi* traces the vestiges of the Old World in American popular culture. These may take the shape of Disneyland’s Matterhorn or Hollywood’s Frankenstein. Yet, rather than memory, *Heidi* stages the fabrications of myth — here of childhood innocence — as nostalgic idealism sundered from and tainted by the shameful reality of the present. The image of the child imported from Europe to America is imbued by a knick-knack Hummel kitschiness. But the child in America, like Frankenstein, has become an untutored monster. “Heidi becomes Americanized in a sort of dysfunctional horror film,” McCarthy confirms.<sup>10</sup> Through reference to the horror genre, particularly to *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, the European origins of this ideal of childhood innocence are displaced by the nightmare of a dysfunctional American family.

This dialogue between Europe and America (as a servile obeisance to authority, that is, the persistent submission of a son to an idealized father) continues in *An*

*Architecture Composed of the Paintings of Richard M. Powers and Francis Picabia and Sod and Sodie Sock Comp O.S.O.* But if the former asserts the hierarchies of Old World aesthetics over New World commercial illustration, the avant-garde militarism of the latter forcibly reverses that authority. Yet this military vanguard of American culture is itself undermined by a debased corporeity.

### **Architecture, Optics and the Body**

Architecture is not only a test site for cultural diagnostics, it is a metaphor for the human body as well. The labyrinthine set-construction of stretched canvases in *An Architecture* becomes a mindscape through which the body of the spectator moves. Picabia's abstractions and girlie paintings and Powers' biomorphic, futuristic landscapes commissioned for book covers have been rendered in billboard scale by Los Angeles billboard painter Tony Joni. Both artists treat the body: one pornographically, the other displacing it metaphorically into the landscape. Yet, *An Architecture* intentionally reproduces the hierarchy between the two artistic practices. One walks through the corridors of Powers' landscape dioramas to reach the main event of Picabia's soft-core porn palace.

If Picabia's figurative oil paintings deny their mass media photographic sources, Kelley and McCarthy expose their origins by juxtaposing Picabia's practice to that of the illustrator Powers, whose images were conversely destined for mechanical reproduction. (Kelley and McCarthy's employment of a sign painter is a reminder of, and rejoinder to, Picabia's anti-hand-of-the-artist Dadaist origins, conveniently set aside in his figure paintings.) This suppression of sources, so necessary to the sublimations of creativity and the hierarchies of art, is reinforced by the location of the nudes in an inner sanctum. Although we must get there by means of our bodies, once there we obey a scopic regime — the paintings become windows through which we might peer. The ideals of art have their origins in this loss of bodiliness, even as they maintain a sublimated eroticism that Powers' landscapes also embody.

The sequestering of the body, nevertheless destined for the pornographic gaze, appears as well in the videotape *Fresh Acconci* (1995). Here in a Hollywood Hills mansion, a setting typically used in the pornography industry, a cast of nude Hollywood actors reenacts a number of Vito Acconci video performances from the



early 1970s. Kelley and McCarthy's videotape weds the genre of haunted house films to soft-core porn art direction while addressing the then-renewed interest in the (nude) body in performance art. According to the artists, "*Fresh Acconci* postulates that the body-art of today [such as that of Matthew Barney] performs the function of a specialized sub-cultural erotica for the artworld despite its deconstructive pretensions."<sup>11</sup> Thus the substitution of the buff bodies of Hollywood actors for that of the uncomely Acconci — the present instance of Kelley and McCarthy's recurrent dichotomy of the ideal and the object — seems to reinforce the elevation of art over the degraded genres of horror and porn. What appears as a joke on both Acconci and contemporary performance art has its own "deconstructive" aim. The translation of Acconci's performances into what we might take at first as strange erotic cult practices only equates art and pornography.

Throughout Kelley and McCarthy's collaborative work, the body that has been occluded from modernism resurfaces in all its unruly rudeness — unencumbered by society's constraints and art's sanitized representations: from the disciplined and abject body of *Family Tyranny* and the disciplined, fragmented, fetishized body of *Heidi* to the eroticized bodies of *Fresh Acconci* and *An Architecture* that are purveyed through art. All of these types are enlisted in *Sod and Sodie Sock Comp O.S.O.* Here the body is not freed; rather, it submits itself fully to a sadistic regime of discipline and indoctrination to authority. The military is the model of bodily regimentation.<sup>12</sup> In the ongoing social conditioning of the individual, the military initiates the rite of passage from adolescence to manhood.

The mock-up of military life in *Sod and Sodie Sock* joins Kelley and McCarthy's "myth analysis" of the abject comic book anti-hero Sad Sack<sup>13</sup> to a degraded bodily regime regulated by the strict order and hierarchy of the army. But what by "nature" escapes this regime is also what undermines the order of art as well. Kelley and McCarthy foreground the theme of ineptness exemplified in the genre of military comedy, including such television shows as *Hogan's Heroes* and *M\*A\*S\*H*. Presenting the installation in Vienna, the artists unite the aims of American art and military occupation. The work plays upon notions of a homogenous post-World War II male culture common to men's magazines and Abstract Expressionism. Military and aesthetic heroics are subverted by Sad Sackism. This is expressed through the symbolic opposition between the vertical and the horizontal — figured

as phallus and anus — which the artists use to reveal the essentialist core of European idealism that endures in American arts.

What the artists see as the phallic monumentality of the modernist sculptural tradition is brought low in the comic servility of the Sad Sack character. Represented by the sculpture of the European Constantin Brancusi and the American David Smith (their anthropometric sculptures are reproduced in the *Sod and Sodie Sock* catalogue along with fragments of Greenberg's texts on them), monolithic verticality is parodied by the guard tower. In the installation, the combination latrine-guard tower symbolically unites phallus and anus in a scopic surveillance apparatus. Verticality's heroism is opposed to the horizontal disposition of the body's actions, which are performed within the tent compound and subsequently edited for the videotape. From the scopic realm to the physical, prying is abundant in the compound's specialized enclosures; in the transsexual shower scenes, privacy is violated by spying and, in the infirmary, aliens conduct anal probes.

Not surprisingly, the child is latent within the Sad Sack character. And so the relationship between Sarge and Sad Sack not only reproduces that of mother and child but of teacher and student as well. In one of the tents, mess duty becomes children's art therapy. In a parody of both art education and modernist art, an enlisted group of art students made mock heroic monuments from oatmeal.

Through this symbol of military occupation, Kelley and McCarthy bring the dynamic found in *Heidi* back to Europe. The experimental communities of America's settlement reappear in the authoritarian hierarchies of an army compound. The failed issue of a transplanted experiment returns as alien spawn to its source. In this figure of formlessness, the eponymous Sack, an American Frankenstein comes back to haunt the Old World.

#### NOTES

1. Mary Shelley's text derives its social theories from the writings of her parents, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. For Godwin, "all forms of social institutions represent a corruption of the citizen and pervert his ability to form judgements, because they create prejudices...The central tragedy of human existence consists in the solitude that prejudices call forth, a solitude making it impossible to enjoy the happiness of friendship. For Godwin man is naturally good and potentially perfectible...What Mary borrows from her mother's

text is the idea that the evil and the desire to destroy is not innate but rather only engendered once a basically good creature is expelled from his family and his society.” Elisabeth Bronfen, “Rewriting the Family: Mary Shelley’s ‘Frankenstein’ in its Biographical/Textual Context,” Stephen Bann, ed., *Frankenstein, Creation and Monstrosity* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), pp. 25, 34.

2. A contemporary twist to the body-tinkerer is America’s obsession with alien abductions and probes, in themselves screen images for scenarios of sexual abuse or fears of the alien racial other. This theme surfaces in *Heidi: Midlife Crisis Trauma Center and Negative Media-Engram Abreaction Release Zone* and *Sod and Sodie Sock Comp O.S.O.*

3. Mary Shelley’s description of the monster’s birthplace.

4. In *Heidi: Midlife Crisis Trauma Center and Negative Media-Engram Abreaction Release Zone* and *Sod and Sodie Sock Comp O.S.O.*, architecture functions as a set in which a performance is improvised over a period of time, recorded and then edited as a videotape. The video accompanies the architectural installation, although not necessarily in the same space, so that the two are considered of equal value.

5. “We both had interest in ‘Sad Sack.’ But our interests are actually quite different. Mine had to do with the ‘Sad Sack’ book that was published in the Forties which is a compilation of comic strips done for GI’s during World War II. I saw in it a revealing of American racism and imperialism. Mike’s interest had to do with the characters’ transformation into a model of the family, for kids in the Sixties. There, the stories began to refer more to relationships in patriarchal family structures. We didn’t realize that we had similar interests, and all of a sudden we were working with the same material but from different points of view.” Paul McCarthy, transcript of panel discussion at Secession, Vienna, September 23, 1998.

For Kelley’s comments on Sad Sack, see Robert Storr, “An Interview with Mike Kelley,” *Art in America* 82: 6 (June 1994), p. 91.

6. Mike Kelley, with essays by John C. Welchman, Isabelle Graw, and Anthony Vidler, *Mike Kelley* (London: Phaidon Press, 1999), p. 130. This is an excerpt from Kelley, “Playing with Dead Things,” *The Uncanny* (Arnhem: Sonsbeek 93 and Gemeentemuseum Arnhem, and Los Angeles: Fred Hoffman, 1993), p. 4.

7. This structural analysis also involves the collection and classification of images which in *Heidi* was displayed as three billboards. “*Heidi* was the first work where we combined architecture, sculpture, videotape, the collection and categorization of images and the appropriation of a figure from popular culture. We have established this as a kind of methodology —

the construction of video-architecture and the collection and categorization of found images.” Paul McCarthy, transcript of panel discussion at Secession.

8. Paul McCarthy, with essays by Ralph Rugoff, Kristine Stiles and Giacinto Di Pietrantonio, *Paul McCarthy* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), p. 126.

9. *Paul McCarthy*, p. 126.

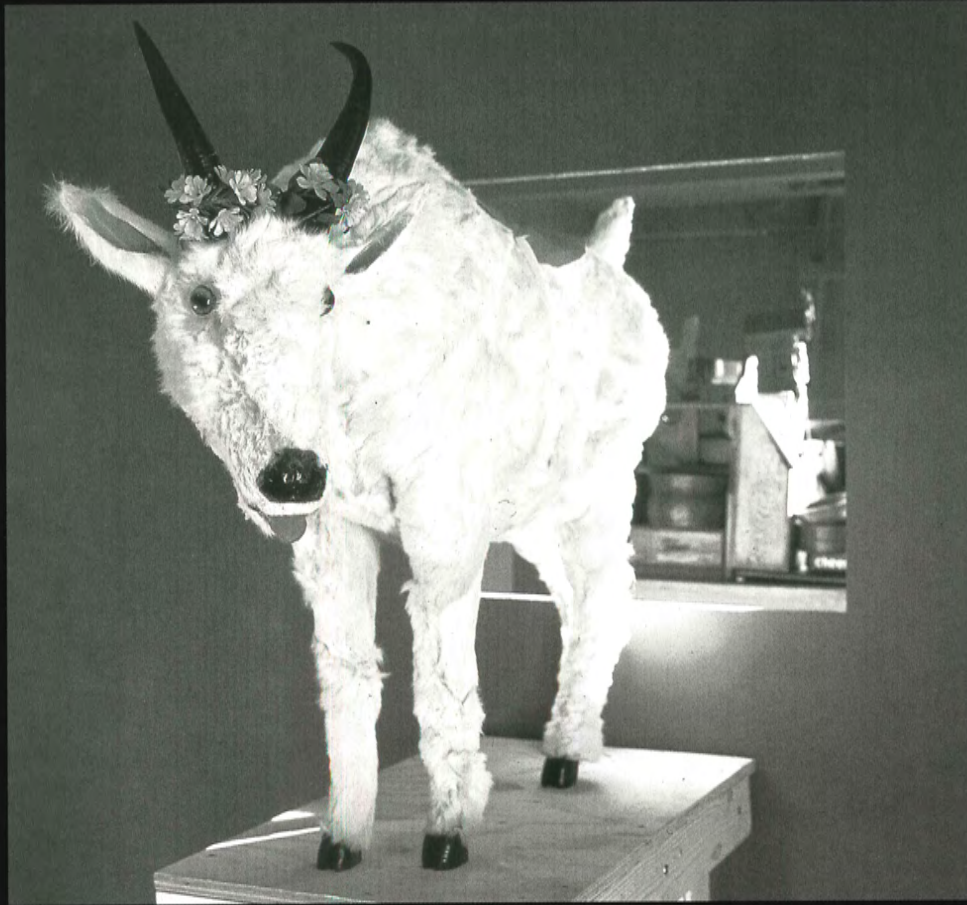
10. *Paul McCarthy*, p. 130. With its manipulation of body parts, reliance on props, doublings and reversals and inversions of roles, the videotape *Heidi* is itself a hybrid monster.

11. From an unpublished manuscript by the artists.

12. “The exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce effects of power, and in which, conversely, the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible...These ‘observatories’ had an almost ideal model: the military camp...The camp was to the rather shameful art of surveillance what the dark room was to the great science of optics.” Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), pp. 170–71, 172.

13. These take place through series of independent drawings by Kelley and McCarthy, (see pages 54–55).





# Heidi: The Wages of Neutrality

Timothy Martin

Orphaned at an early age and taken in by her youthful aunt, Heidi is soon in the way. The aunt is offered a new governess position where Heidi is not welcome, so the child is taken to live with her curmudgeonly grandfather high on the Alm Mountain in the Swiss Alps.

Known in the village as the Alm-Uncle because he never comes down from the mountain, even in the coldest of winters, Heidi's grandfather has earned a reputation as a mean and godless old hermit. But Heidi soon finds out that things are not always as others say they are, makes friends with her grandfather and happily runs wild in the glorious mountains with the young goatherd, Peter, and his goats.

Out of the blue, Heidi's aunt reappears and takes her to live in Frankfurt in a fashionable house, where she is expected to be companion to an invalid girl, Klara. This would be a great opportunity for Heidi, providing her with an education and polish. But, bitterly unhappy away from her grandfather and the outdoor life she has grown to love, Heidi is at last permitted to return to the Alm.

With Heidi's return, all on the mountain are cured of their respective malaise, and so are the Frankfurters when they eventually visit. The invalid Klara learns to walk again and her widower father is relieved of his terrible worry over her illness. In return, they shower generous gifts on all their mountain hosts.

An elemental naturalism distinguished Joanna Spyri's 1881 novel from its popular competition, particularly the moral tale widely read at the time. This genre had developed in part out of a reaction against the popularity of earlier fairy-tale collections, which had been condemned as merely fanciful and the product of superstition. The moral tale, however, had become increasingly didactic until it resembled the more primitive cautionary tale, a gory genre filled with dead bodies and criminals such as was parodied by Hilaire Belloc in his *Cautionary Tales for Children* (1907) about "Matilda, who told lies and was burned to death." *Heidi's*

*Heidi: Midlife Crisis Trauma Center and Negative Media-Engram Abreaction Release Zone, 1992.*

Painted wood, found objects, straw, cast latex, rubber figures, stuffed goat, acrylic on canvas.

Installation view, Galerie Krinzinger, Vienna.

Courtesy Dakis Joannou Collection, Athens.

unthreatening morality and salubrious naturalism set it apart from such heavy-handed genres. This, along with its blithe iconography of traditional Swiss life — culturally “neutral” by association — helped it to transcend cultural borders and take on a life of its own.

Naturalized into the American popular consciousness with the Shirley Temple film version of 1937 and others thereafter, the story became simplified and even more iconic, as befits the transformations of popular culture. Like an old hand-me-down, it is now forgotten and rediscovered in the perennial generational cycle that consumes all children’s stories once they have taken hold. Its imagery, however, has become more or less ubiquitous and, by the same token, somewhat generic in its meaning. *Heidi* has been transformed in the American popular consciousness into a chain of nostalgic signifiers. The image of a sunny Alpine landscape or Swiss chalet, the sound of a yodel or the “moo” of an alphorn are all that it takes to bring to mind an image of Heidi, up on the mountain with the goats, waving, calling, “Oh Grandfather! Oh Peter! Oh Klara!” This chain, which is at once both specific (foreign) and generic (domesticated), evokes a vague nostalgia of “the old country,” with its innocent charms and certainties, while tapping into some deep ambivalences. American nostalgia is forever uncertain about its embrace of European symbols of cultural or societal foundation. The condition comes from an ache for but disdain of origins, a national Oedipus complex regarding European traditions and motifs, particularly those pertaining to family life and individuality. Of course, this is a perfect fit with our commercial culture — architecture, television, movies, etc. — in that we can perpetually market these traditions and motifs to ourselves. We collect them, admire them, reject them, then collect them again: an ever-changing menagerie of origins. They in turn just sit there, watching us, haunting us; and we watch them, wonder about them. The tension builds up. It is time to play with them again, rearrange them, bring them into bed and roll around with them. It is time for a new beginning.

This general condition is the point of departure for Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy’s reanimation of *Heidi*, as it were, from body parts. The work consists of an installation — a “set” comprising various architectural elements and props, a group of partial and complete life-sized rubber figures, a collection of images extending over three bulletin boards and two painted backdrops — and a video

1. Shirley Temple in Allan Dwan, *Heidi*, 1937, film still.
2. Franz Schnyder, *Heidi*, 1954, film still.
3. Otto Dix, *Kleines Mädchen vor Gardine*, 1922.
4. Alpine décor bedroom.
5. Bedroom designed by Adolf Loos, Khumer Country House, 1930.
6. Adolf Loos, *American Bar*, 1907, Vienna.
7. Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy, *Model for Combination Heidi House, Adolf Loos Designed Bedroom and American Bar Façade*, 1992.



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performance recorded *in situ* (Galerie Krinzinger, Vienna, 1992).<sup>1</sup> The figures or characters are reduced to a minimum: Heidi, Grandfather, Peter (each identified by masks and other costume elements) and the so-called Sick Girl. This last figure, modeled on Otto Dix's 1922 painting *Kleines Mädchen vor Gardine* (referred to as the "sick girl" by some of Dix's contemporaries, hence Kelley and McCarthy's choice of nickname here), is the only complete figure in the work — except that of the full-sized nanny goat positioned outside of the cabin's side window. The story of *Heidi* as such has receded into the background, remaining tacit and unrepeatable, though called upon somewhat in the various scenarios of the video. Here, the character roles are not reduced but multiplied through a disjointed series of reversals, repetitions and flip-flops, never settling themselves into a stable relationship: the good Heidi, the disobedient Peter, the menacing Grandfather, the doting Grandfather, the bad Heidi, the clean Heidi, the dirty Peter, the pathetic Grandfather and so forth, like so many play-acting scenarios with Family Therapy puppets. The scenarios, performed by Kelley and McCarthy using the masks, costume elements, props and figures later gathered into the installation, range from simple domestic activities or movement studies to tightly composed sequences resembling a horror film or psychodrama — albeit of a weirdly fragmented sort, as befits the fragmented bodies improvised throughout the action. Edited into six parts reflecting the numerous subthemes of the work as a whole — "Rural Gothic," "Frankfurt Frankfurt," "Kinship Study (Tim)," "Ornament and Education," "Sickness and Decoration" and "Pickle Barrel" — the video is structured like an indexing machine for the complex network of motifs and associations Kelley and McCarthy have woven into or unraveled from their nominal subject.

This network begins with the design of the set itself, its props and related materials, such as the backdrop paintings and bulletin boards. The centrepiece is a combined structure representing Heidi and Grandfather's cabin on the Alm and the Sick Girl's house in Frankfurt, grafted together. The cabin, constructed like the set of a no-budget horror film, is modeled on a traditional Swiss chalet, with decorative flourishes here and there to make the point. The undecorated, modern interior of the Sick Girl's house, in which she lies draped in green chiffon, is based on an Adolf Loos design; the exterior, on the design of his American Bar in Vienna. Behind the Loos façade the backdrop of "Frankfurt" can be seen: an enlarged



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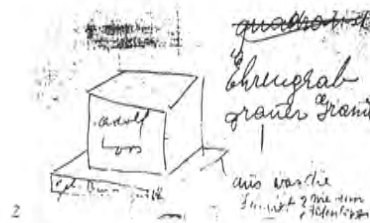
1930s-era illustration of a futuristic city à la Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*. Behind the cabin is an Alpine landscape. Yet, from outside and inside the set, the sightlines to the respective backdrops are crossed, giving the cabin a view of the futuristic city and so forth. Like the set itself, the backdrops are engaged in a kind of dialogue: a string of formal and thematic oppositions that picks up from the country-city, nature-culture cycle of the original story and soon becomes entangled in a network of broader references. The idea of the set as a place yields to a gradual realization that it is the site of accusation and argument.

The Sick Girl, who is sick by association with urban life in the story, is further stigmatized here with a connotation of degeneracy, given Dix’s well-known inclusion in the Nazi’s infamous “Degenerate Art” exhibition. She in turn stigmatizes Loos’s modernism with her sickness, making it seem literally sanatorium-like and sterile, the stock low-brow critique of modernist architecture. The folk critique is no less harsh, for in the logic of Grandfather and Heidi, modernity, like hospitals, *makes you sick*. On the other hand, the accusation implied in Loos’s modernism — and voiced in his famous essay “Ornament and Crime” (1908) — is that Grandfather’s aesthetic milieu, as defined by his ornamented chalet and bric-a-brac, is worse than primitive; it is criminal. As we can hear in the section of the video entitled “Ornament and Education,” Loos equates the decorating of architecture and utilitarian objects with tattooing, which he pompously associates with criminals: “Tattooed men who are not in prison are either latent criminals or degenerate aristocrats. When a tattooed man dies at liberty, it simply means that he hasn’t had time to commit his crime.” Grandfather and Heidi themselves take up the argument in this section. During a reading lesson at the kitchen table — intercut with a shot of a tattoo artist inscribing a rose and a cube onto the behind of a rubber Heidi figure — the two repeat short statements about Heidi and the Sick Girl’s (transgressing) tattoos, how the “ornate chalet ejected Heidi for getting ornamented” and the “white cube ejected the Sick Girl for getting ornamented.” Eroticism, particularly infantile eroticism such as scribbling, which Loos believes represents the hidden drive of decoration and proof of its regressiveness, thus enters the picture by way of the decoration argument — as well as through the charms of naked (rubber) flesh. Folk and modernist puritanism equally forbids such eroticism, supposedly for different “reasons,” but folk aesthetics profoundly

1. City of the Future, pulp magazine cover, 1930s.
2. Drawing by Adolf Loos: design for his own grave stone.
3. Swiss Alpine village.
4. Walt Disney Pictures, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, 1937.
5. John Collier, *The Death of Albin*, c. 1895.
6. Paul Thek, *The Tomb*, 1967.



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indulge it. This point is perhaps most resonant in a sculpture that is part of the installation. In it the figures of Heidi and the Sick Girl lay in bed together with their fleshy feet resting on two hand-decorated breadboards. The breadboard under the naked figure, being entirely covered with markings, eroticizes the figure all the more. Loos's formula thus instantiates itself in the sculpture, with our voyeuristic participation, which casts an erotic-transgressive shadow over everything else in the work.

His modernist conceits are inverted, however. The futuristic "Frankfurt" (backdrop painting) next to the American Bar is highly stylized, fanciful, non-essentialist: an illustrated spit in the eye of the International Style. Conversely, the Alpine peaks beside the chalet are primal forms representing purity and power, a kind of folk essentialism at the heart of Heidi and Grandfather's "old religion." This old religion is not hung up on aesthetic reduction, however, as evidenced in the quaint decorativeness of Grandfather's chalet and its folksy habiliments. Whereas Loos's modernism is reductive but not elemental, Grandfather's traditionalism is elemental but not reductive, for in its embrace of the decorative one discerns an inescapable carnality. Neither remains untainted by the presence of the other in Kelley and McCarthy's video and installation. The aesthetic battle lines just get more and more convoluted and confused. And it is well that they do, because it turns the problem of the work, to the extent that the work is presented as such, into one of negotiating images, the profusion of images that keeps spilling into the equation. This profusion sends us back time and again to a basic indeterminacy in Kelley and McCarthy's appropriation of Alpine and modernist iconographies: Whose are they? What do they represent? Where are they from?

The collections of small images covering the three bulletin boards in the installation detail the plurality of origins and range of associations among the many motifs of the work. One bulletin board contains nothing but images of buildings and mountains: a Los Angeles *hoffbrau* (German restaurant and bar), various traditional Swiss houses, an International Style skyscraper, the Matterhorn in the Alps, the Matterhorn in Disneyland, an Alpine village, the Alpine Village theme park and so on. Loos's modernism is present in Los Angeles, but has slid into an antiquarian obscurity. Richard Neutra, Loos's student, built prodigiously here, but what had been a rigorous style in his time now seems unthreateningly quaint and





old-country. Dwarfed by an endless (sub)urban sprawl of standardized boxes, his purist buildings are now testaments to the loss of modernist childhood. And the Matterhorn, with its imperial summit? All Americans know precisely where the Matterhorn is. It can be seen from the freeway, its dopey white head peeking above the sweltering flats of Anaheim, California — the only “geological” feature around. At its base is a little Swiss village where people in traditional garb scurry to and fro, posing for snapshots with tourists. Like all of Disneyland, the Swiss village is clean and safe, but do not misbehave. An “Alm-Uncle” will take you behind the nearest fiberglass snowdrift and *plop!*, you are in the parking lot. It is the ultimate punishment: they force you to break proscenium.

This is the bright and oppressive side of Alpine America, recapitulated in theme parks, ski resorts, neat country inns and real estate developments. The image is all about perfection or the imitation of perfection; and it is pure kitsch. The claustrophobia that comes with its preciousness is counterbalanced by its evocation of geological grandeur and sublimity. While this grandeur is highly familiar in the American self-image — through Thomas Cole, Albert Bierstadt, Ansel Adams, Coors Light, etc. — it is never quite so coupled with signs of cultural order as it is in the Alpine image proper. The dingy side of Alpine America is represented by the *hoffbrau* — loud, unruly and human — where you can drink beer from a glass boot and sing at the top of your lungs. The folksy motifs may indeed abound, but there is no image of perfection. The *hoffbrau* is freed from the “detrimental influence of the Alps,” to which Viennese Actionist Otto Mühl once waggishly attributed his countrymen’s fear of authority and incapacity for new thoughts.<sup>2</sup> Less sanitized, less authoritarian than the bright side, it is decidedly more erotic and transgressive. One may request the back room — redolent with the fragrances of lederhosen, maturely buxom Heidis and tattooed drunks — and drink one’s beer out of an SS helmet instead. But, tellingly, all of this only makes the *hoffbrau* seem more homey, more American.

The second bulletin board presses the point further. The images of perfection here involve children: hearty Swiss children in traditional dress, Hummel figurines and sundry illustrations of Heidi. In some of the images, such as the naked but realistic fairy, the sick girl of the Otto Dix painting and the swatch of skin bearing a rose tattoo, a picture of innocence is attained regardless of imperfection, thus grant-

1. Tobe Hooper, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, 1974, promotional photograph.
- 2–3. Tobe Hooper, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, 1974, film stills.
4. Contemporary *Heidi* book illustration, Grandfather and Heidi.
5. Madonna and Sandra Bernhard, 1980s.



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ing innocence a human body. But the presence in the collection of Leatherface, the murderous son from Tobe Hooper's gore classic *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, breaks the wholesome connection made in the Alpine images, as well as the story of *Heidi*, that childhood innocence is at home in the country. Leatherface indeed is a (overgrown) child, the youngest of the family, a loved one. Moreover, he is a "country boy," a version of the traditional hillbilly, with odd wiles and talents linked to the land. Yet, in spite of this link, or perhaps because of it, this poor country boy is virulent and insane. The country, of course, can produce monstrous childhoods and monstrous children, even those that appear innocent and natural on the surface. Those that do not, like Leatherface, serve as a reminder that the human body, so to speak, can be made out of anything. This is the subtext of the third bulletin board. Its images of uncanny bodies and body parts are all disturbingly life-like in one way or another. But they derive from such a mind-boggling multiplicity of processes that the idea of a common natural essence is rendered platitudinous. So one has to consider the possibility, as Kelley and McCarthy obviously have, that the children in the Alpine images are well-groomed, inbred hillbillies, or fiends, or that they are secretly living in terror. We cannot know from the images, but are certain that it is not an elemental connection with the land that would preclude this. By the same token, we are clearly fascinated with the other possibility that there may be something to these wholesome images. And *that* is the spiritual hook of the Alpine ideal: a latent belief in a cure.

Thus the ambivalence about European origins in the work as a whole is only part of a deeper ambivalence about innocence and childhood, particularly American childhood. In Kelley and McCarthy's first video collaboration, *Family Tyranny* (1987), this ambivalence took a form not unlike some of the domestic scenarios in the *Heidi* video, with McCarthy in the role of an ill-tempered (and lederhosen-clad) father and Kelley as his blithering ne'er-do-well son. The comic effect of this dysfunctional family duo is revisited somewhat in scenarios between Grandfather and Peter, although the introduction of rubber girl figures and masks into the general mix alters the psychology drastically. Heidi is identified throughout by a Halloween mask of the pop star Madonna, adorned with a braided blond wig: an image of premature and theatricalized sexuality, thus arrested childhood. In the section of the video entitled "Rural Gothic," figures of Heidi and Peter awkwardly





grope each other in the hayloft, while Grandfather stomps around the cabin demanding that they show themselves. Grandfather, alternately adorable and violent, later pounds Peter's head (two heads, actually) ritualistically into the floor in front of the Alpine backdrop. While poor Peter is clearly damaged and appears inbred — no less because his face is an Alfred E. Newman mask — the full-sized nanny goat, the most lifelike of all the bodily constructions, is beautiful and udderless and built for bugging. Between the two, the hint of hillbilly bestiality is impossible to ignore. Even Loos's modernism and Grandfather's traditionalism are tinged with spoiled innocence, for they have long since passed the ideal moment of purity that their beliefs would represent as eternal. Ironically, it is the Sick Girl who is identified by a naturalistic child's body, confounding wholeness with illness in a single eroticized package. Although this figure is the object of desire in the most voyeuristic section of the video, "Sickness and Decoration," and the only character role left unperformed by Kelley and McCarthy, thus denied in both cases an interior dimension or voice, it is the primary psychological refuge and reference point for the fragmented notion of embodiment evident throughout the work.

This notion is itself a mutation: a cross between the formal fragmentation of film language, the psychosocial fragmenting of the child and the common denominator of perceived bodily image and composition. Horror film is exemplary of all these forms of fragmentation in that its psychology (horror) often depends on their literal embodiment: the decomposition and recomposition of bodies (or threat thereof). It also depends on strict delineations of innocence and transgression in the setting up of its victims. Kelley and McCarthy draw on both of these aspects of horror film in the course of the video, although the effect is more playful than horrific. As in the installation itself, such evocations of bodily fragmentation and moral structure never stray too far from the sentimental subject at hand. For example, on the second bulletin board, among the images of childhood perfection, there is a photo of Frankenstein's monster kneeling together with the little village girl by the lake. This tender image, a production still from the classic Boris Karloff film version of 1931, was also selected by Kelley and McCarthy for the cover of the picture book/catalogue that accompanied the work's first exhibition in Vienna. Instead of bringing to mind any number of allegorical clichés about the European old country or the history of Romanticism — typical readings of *Frankenstein* in America — it

appears as a simple portrait: two irreconcilable images of childhood. The monster is one kind of child, a new and unsocialized “human” being (or experimentally regressed adult, if you prefer) and the girl is another, innocent and natural. The two are antithetical in composition, bodily and thematically. We see them in a moment of conversation just before he tosses her into the lake, mistaking her gesture to toss a flower. But, in this moment before the mistake, their innocence is equal.

To the extent that this image is emblematic of the work as a whole, we may regard it less as a study of irreconcilability and contrast than yet another instance of doubling, the kind of doubling — grafting, associating, cross-referencing — that occurs throughout Kelley and McCarthy’s project, though it is perhaps most pronounced in the identity confusion and bodily fragmentations of the video. The sentimentality lingering in even the most disturbing moments of the video and details of the installation is in part an effect of the subject itself, with its manifold sentimental touch points, and an effect of the aesthetic charms ingrained in the decorative. In every instance of charm and sentiment, however, there is a tinge of revulsion and disease. It is as though in their evocation of horror film and its grimly baroque accoutrements, Kelley and McCarthy coax from their nominal subject the horror, not of Horror *per se*, but of institutionalized sentimentality.

#### NOTES

1. The full title of the installation is as follows: *Heidi: Midlife Crisis Trauma Center and Negative Media-Engram Abreaction Release Zone*. The video is entitled simply *Heidi*.
2. “The incapacity [...] to have their own or new thoughts is the consequence of fear authority, which is probably due less to Kaiser Franz Joseph than to the detrimental influence of the Alps.”





# Fresh Acconci, Beautiful Acconci

*Timothy Martin*

Freshness, whether for the voyeur, détourneur, provocateur, or the local grocer, is one of those ideal qualities that, alas, one witnesses only in the course of its passing — that is, over time. Ideals aside, freshness is, one might say, context *par excellence*, for it is context instantiated in its moment. Outside of its context or moment, freshness returns to the realm of the ideal. The flippant, though biting, appearance of the word “fresh” (erstwhile hip-hop slang for new) in the title of Kelley and McCarthy’s videotape, *Fresh Acconci* (1995, 45 minutes), pulls in both directions at once: toward the ideal and the contextual. The way in which these two are specifically linked in the video, however, is itself a matter of context and moment, and bears some introduction beyond the obvious cultural touch points. *Fresh Acconci* is not merely an ironic pop-culture rehash of a faded avant-garde — though clearly it is dressed up as one for effect. Among Kelley and McCarthy’s collaborations to date, it is perhaps the most specific to its moment and by far the most editorializing regarding the cultural politics surrounding its conception.

These politics primarily involve questions of physical and artistic beauty. The conception of *Fresh Acconci* stems as much from the early-1990s video performances of New York-based artists Matthew Barney and Cheryl Donegan as it does from the early-1970s video performances of Vito Acconci, on which Kelley and McCarthy base the basic scenarios of their reconstruction. The emerging figures of Donegan and Barney (pre-*Cremaster* series’ exotic makeup) seemed at the time like the arrival of fashion-model good looks onto the New York art scene’s centre runway — it was well known that Barney had previously worked as a model — the suggestion being that this arrival and accompanying resurrection of video performance as a fashionable form were necessarily related. Would video performance (artists) now have to be as gorgeous as this? Would this mainstream gorgeousness permit video performance its masturbatory subtexts without critical apology, permit it to “sink” to the mechanisms of soft-core pornography while appearing to rise with the light-

*Fresh Acconci*, 1995.  
Video production still.



ness of a now-embraced beauty? Could, then, the historical “problem” of Acconci’s pimped backside — more on this shortly — be set aside quite simply by standardizing on more perfect human flesh?<sup>1</sup>

*Fresh Acconci* would appear to proceed from musings such as these. But there is, of course, more to its context than what could be culturally observed in the arrival of a few fresh faces in the art world. The word “gorgeous” resonates here in several respects. First, regarding show business, it is well understood that since the 1980s Hollywood has all but standardized the gorgeous face to the exclusion of all others, allowing the “interesting” (now historic) faces of the sixties and seventies to keep working, but not adding to their ranks. To be an actor today is to be a *de facto* beauty, that is, on-screen if not in person. Astoundingly, commercial pornographic film and video has followed a similar trend, particularly with regard to its female performers. The motley *demi-monde* of early hard-core porn has evolved into a population of world-class beauties, and porn stardom into an estimable form of celebrity in its own right, with several notable instances of actresses crossing over to “legitimate” film. Kelley and McCarthy’s selection of young and highly attractive actors and actresses to stand in for Acconci and his occasional female co-subject mimics these general cultural trends. Further, their employment in *Fresh Acconci* of complete nudity and tropes of both youth-oriented horror film and soft-core porn attests to an opinion that these trends toward standardized gorgeousness are inter-related. Indeed, they tend to blur the distinction between mainstream and marginal genres, sublimated and overt libidinal content. As a result, *Fresh Acconci* has acquired a peculiar capacity to desubliminate — or at least signify such an effect — the masturbatory dimension of Acconci’s video performances, which he himself frequently sought to embody in lieu of his audience.

The word “gorgeous” resonates more particularly here with the emerging discourse of beauty in the art world at the time of *Fresh Acconci*’s conception. It was a signature term of art critic Dave Hickey, whose influential *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty* (1994) marked the reintroduction of the issue into the agenda of popular art criticism. His main thesis concerned the disrepute into which the status of beauty had fallen in the “therapeutic” (his term) discourses of Conceptual and Postconceptual art, a disrepute he sought by example to reverse, asserting famously that beauty would become the “issue of the nineties.” Hickey’s passionate advo-

1. Vito Acconci, *Prying*, 1971, video still.
2. Vito Acconci, *Focal Point*, 1971, video still.
3. Vito Acconci, *Contacts*, 1971, video still.
4. Vito Acconci, *Theme Song*, 1973, video still.
5. Vito Acconci, *Claim*, 1971, video still.



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cacy of beauty for its own sake, however, involved a libidinal leap that the culture at large was already making. In his defense of Robert Mapplethorpe against the neopuritan and homophobic attacks of the far right he emphasized that it was the beauty of one of the photographs under attack — an explicit view of a penetrated ass — that made the image so threatening, thus crediting the attacker with the perception of this beauty. Without making a point of it, Hickey was both reaffirming the universality of the beautiful, outside of the politics or morality of the perceiver, and linking in populist terms the aesthetics of human beauty with that of the arts. A beautiful ass and a beautiful work of art must be respected as such, as beauty must be appreciated for its own sake, without a rationale of importance or goodness.

This aspect of the emerging beauty discourse dovetailed only too comfortably with the aforementioned trends of Hollywood film, commercial porn and video performance. Where would a figure such as Acconci factor into it? His is not the kind of art a critic like Hickey tends to write about, nor is his the kind of backside likely to appear in a Mapplethorpe. The hitch with Hickey's valorization of Mapplethorpe's beautiful images is their ideality and fashion sense. Mapplethorpe is as much a mainstream classicist as a transgressor; indeed, the key to his particular fame may lie in his merging of the two. Fittingly, his bodies are either classically beautiful or otherwise fabulous (*de facto* beautiful). In these terms, Acconci's body, that is, the body he presented in his early video performances, would have nary a place in the emerging regime of the beautiful and ideal except in its gaping blind spots. It would have to be replaced. *Fresh Acconci's* primary editorial jest of doing precisely that makes clear the main thrust of Kelley and McCarthy's cultural politics: a biting mockery of the conformist ideality lurking within the art world's revaluation of the beautiful. And there is no great leap of logic here, for the old yardstick of human beauty is already explicit in the discourse. The video merely (albeit disturbingly) underscores the point that the sociocultural tyranny of the beautiful can be a tyranny of the ideal in disguise, regardless of its embrace of transgression — which, not surprisingly, extends only to the beautiful or fabulous forms of it. An artistic *zeitgeist* oblivious to this might eventually conform itself out of its capacity to see at the margins of its culture, to see even a new beautiful thing, let alone anything else.



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This is not to say that Acconci's video performances are in some way reconcilable to the beauty discourse. *Fresh Acconci* flatly rules this out. As uncomfortable and disturbing as Acconci's performances could be, none are as excruciating as Kelley and McCarthy's glossy reconstructions, which disturb in an entirely different way, like a nightmarish anthology of Calvin Klein television commercials. Between the horror-film cliché of the video's opening tableaux — a foreboding house-on-the-hill shot accompanied by sounds of heartbeats and crackling thunder — and hackneyed techno-beat music of its end credits, *Fresh Acconci* cycles through five different scenarios, reprising each several times, changing actors and locations within the house as it proceeds. These scenarios consist of excerpted dialogue — only loosely adhered to by the performers — and basic direction from five of Acconci's early video performances: *Contacts* (1971, 30 minutes), *Theme Song* (1973, 33 minutes), *Claim Excerpts* (1971, 62 minutes, from a three-hour performance with live video), *Pryings* (1971, 17 minutes, also from a performance with live video) and *Focal Points* (1971, 33 minutes). The more familiar the individual viewer is with this source material the more excruciating the reconstructions can become. The cushy bourgeois setting, the actors' tanned and overgroomed physiques, naturalistic acting styles and attempts at characterization all conspire to infuse the material with an unctuous chemistry. Although viewers unfamiliar with the source material are unlikely to find *Fresh Acconci* particularly disturbing, its moody and peculiar soft-core titillations nonetheless possess an edge of perversity. In any case, the point-by-point reading of Acconci through his reconstruction and vice versa is not really the intention here. Kelley and McCarthy present a surface of substitutions so complete and slippery as to incline the viewer away from Acconci rather than back to him.

Still, a few points of comparison are required to understand how the problem of Acconci's pimped backside factors into the conception *Fresh Acconci* — which, granted, factors in only tacitly as an historical subtext. The problem, should we stoop to regard it as such — we already have — may be posed as a basic question: Why is it remarked upon so often in the criticism of Acconci's work from this period and what does this signify with regard to his reception? Firstly, as in essays by Lucy Lippard and Stephen Melville, it is mentioned in contexts where it becomes emblematic of a certain kind of seriousness.<sup>2</sup> For Lippard, Acconci's

1-5. Video stills from late 1990s Playboy soft-core erotica.



“less romantic image and pimply back” signifies that he is an artist as opposed to a narcissist which, she asserts, is what a female artist who presents her nude body in public is taken for granted to be. With Melville’s reference to “the man...on the operating table with his pimplesd ass in the air” (in *Reception Room*, 1973, one may presume), the emphasis is on what Acconci’s presentation of his body demands of his audience: a demand for decision, explicit and contractual, as to the relation between you and him and, for both parties, to the reason for being there. Acconci’s work is credited in both cases with a power of confrontation and social immediacy that challenges the viewer’s awareness of intersubjective space, which is indeed a primary aim of the artist. Yet references to his pimplesd backside also serve to reinforce a barrier in the reception of his work to its libidinal dimension, to draw a line over which the viewer is not pressured to step, as it were, with his or her awareness of this dimension. It is as if to say: Because the ass is pimplesd (unattractive), we may move on to more serious considerations than we would face if we were forced to admire it.

This is a problem because it conveniently short circuits the libidinal charge Acconci was deliberately plugging into his work at the time. With the exception of his agonistic *Claim Excerpts*, all of the video performances Kelley and McCarthy have chosen represent a period in which Acconci’s exercises in psychosocial proxemics transitioned to a more intimate domain. Sexual tension and seduction were crucial elements of this work. *Theme Song* is a full-bore romance with the camera lens and audience behind it, with Acconci’s rhythmic intonations serving as a manipulative come-on. Here, as in *Focal Points*, he regards his gaze and that of the audience as a kind of touch, one that could be felt on the surface of the skin and wielded by an act of will or fantasy. Although *Contacts* and *Pryings* are, with respect to the viewer, more voyeuristic in nature, the routines of Acconci and his co-subject experiment with a similar interrelation of vision, physical touch and proximity. The result is a tumescent series of rituals in which Acconci ties the gaze of the viewer, his own image, body and interior voice — the grain and meter of Acconci’s voice always evokes an interior — into a knot of sensual concurrence and commitment. One may not find this particularly arousing, as he famously did in the installation/performance *Seedbed* (1972), but the idea of foreclosing on arousal was not part of his plan.





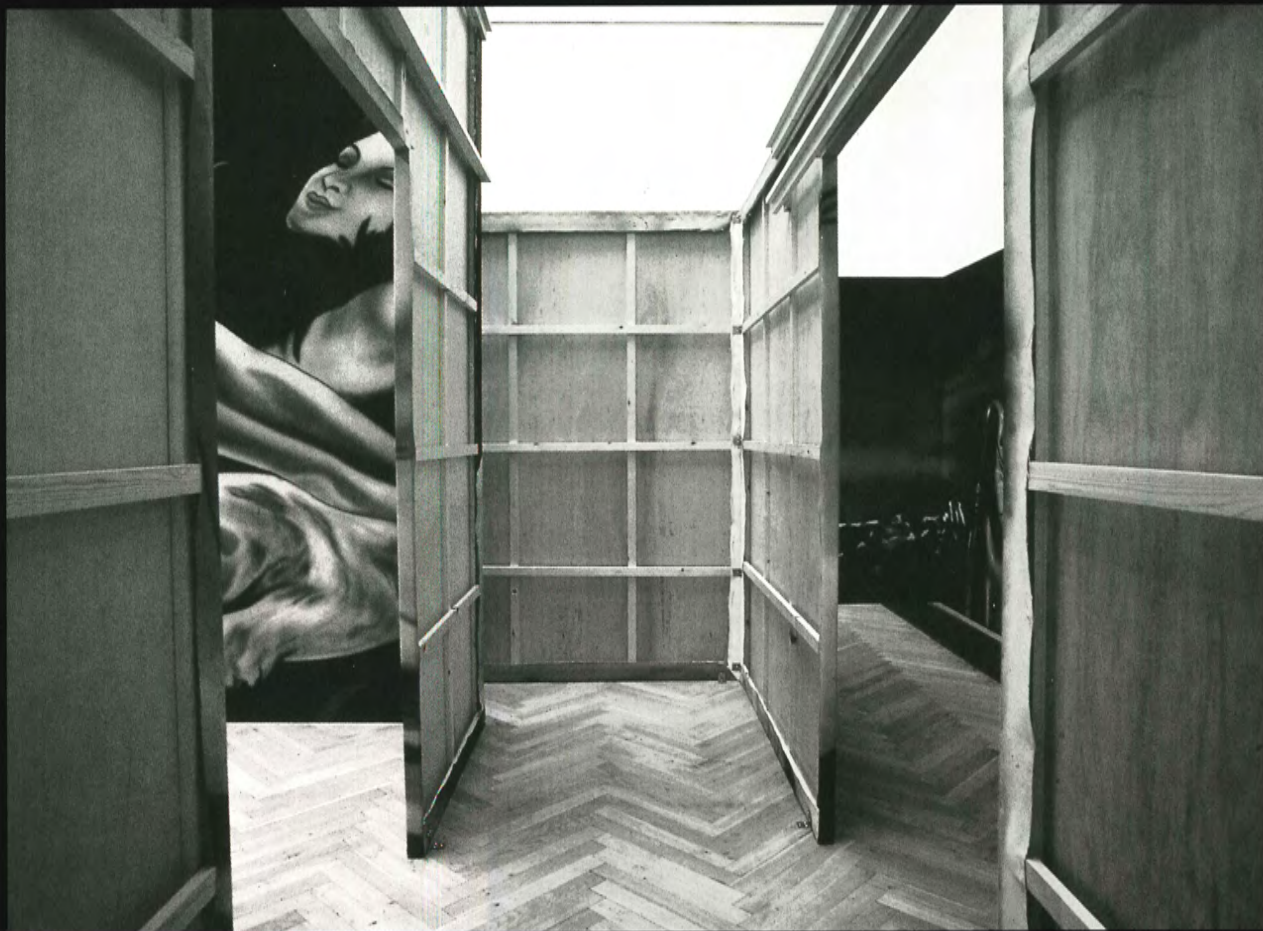
So when Kelley and McCarthy step up with their gorgeous soft-core reconstructions one can consider the source in all of its respects: Acconci's video performance work, the ass-demurring clause in its critical reception (not exclusive to critics, one imagines) and the contemporary beauty-smitten context in which the friction between the two takes on new meaning (or is it just the same?). *Fresh Acconci* mocks the historical problem of the pimpled backside with a surfeit of perfect ones, ones that the viewer can not help but admire. Moreover, its soft-core style is an open invitation to you-know-what, in effect, emulating Acconci's fantasy in *Seedbed* through a reversal of roles. Of course, few actors could deliver their lines like Acconci, and there is no interior or commitment in *Fresh Acconci* comparable to that of *Theme Song* or *Claim Excerpts*. This lack, however, reads like a kind of tribute, as though the absence of Acconci were an affirmative form of negative example which is certainly an implicit part of Kelley and McCarthy's conception of their work. Perhaps most implicit is *Fresh Acconci*'s intention to desubliminate the libidinal pressure (on both sides of the screen) of Acconci's video performances — again, a matter of signification, for it would be simultaneously resublimated in the video itself. In this limited respect, *Fresh Acconci* is more like an inflatable sex surrogate than a remake. It directly supplements Acconci's work while stimulating the desire to return to it.

If Acconci's departure from live performance — the supposed after-effect of *Ballroom* (1973), in which a viewer succumbed to his feigned sexual advances and entered the performance stage — has left with us the vague impression that he never quite intended to seduce his audience, then *Fresh Acconci* sets the record straight. For it reminds us that video was as obvious a prophylactic device for such occurrences when Acconci first turned to as it is today. The question is not whether he intended to seduce his audience, or whether he was aesthetically "equipped" to do so, but whether the device, so to speak, can become, through prevailing tastes or discourses, so prophylactic as to render non-ideal, non-beautiful, non-conformist modalities of seduction practically invisible. It is a rhetorical question, of course. *Fresh Acconci* is largely a rhetorical work. And it is a question that may have been fresh for only a moment, as would befit its precise nature as context and commentary. Still, it remains open.

NOTES

1. I deliberately exaggerate here, in the spirit of provocation, what would constitute a historical problem. Regarding Acconci's early video performances, the matter at hand would merely be a footnote concerning how certain aspects of his bodily presentation have been received or, more to the point, deflected.

2. See Lucy R. Lippard, "The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth: European and American Women's Body Art," in *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1976), p. 125; and Stephen Melville, "How Should Acconci Account for Us? Notes on a Retrospect," *October* no. 18 (Fall 1981), p. 80.





# Painting as Architecture

Ann Goldstein

While the painter and the architect are destined to meet on the surface they share, the meeting necessarily takes the form of a confrontation because of their different attitudes toward that surface. It is not that the architect provides the space and the painter provides the colored emphasis of that space. It is the color that provides the space. The “flatness” of architecture is seen as “space-restricting” while the modern painter’s reduction of “corporeality to flatness” is seen to produce “spatial relationship.” Space is produced by the painter’s “destruction” of the material forms that are produced by the architect, who is only able to think in terms of “construction.” The painter works color onto the surface in a way that changes the status of that surface, displacing the logic of “load and support,” opening up space rather than closing it down.

— Mark Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture*<sup>1</sup>

In his 1995 book, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture*, architectural theorist Mark Wigley reconsiders the white walls of modernist architecture and the “‘neutral,’ ‘pure,’ ‘silent,’ ‘plain,’ ‘blank,’ ‘ground,’ ‘essential,’ ‘stark,’”<sup>2</sup> space they construct. Wigley critiques the architect’s application of white paint on the surface of architecture as a sociopolitical “white wash:”

What is pathological, and by pathological I mean that which is sort of sexual and neurotic, about the architect’s obsession about the white wall is that the white wall is not transparent. It is a mask. It is the one surface that tells you the least about what it covers. This logic of transparency is actually built upon an opaqueness, a strategic opaqueness, an institutional opaqueness. The white wall silences the structure of the building and the institution. It is a white wash in a political sense.<sup>3</sup>

In challenging those assumptions in the discourse of modern architecture, Wigley locates the white wall as a confrontational space between the architect and the

*An Architecture Composed of the Paintings of  
Richard M. Powers and Francis Picabia, 1997.*

Installation view, Charlottenborg  
Exhibition Hall, Copenhagen. Courtesy  
Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen

painter. He refers to the architectural collaboration between architect Le Corbusier and artist Fernand Léger, and Léger's essays from 1924 until his death in 1955 that argued for a "polychrome architecture."<sup>4</sup> Wigley writes that Le Corbusier's incorporation of colour in his architecture reflected the influence of the painter's arguments for "a renegotiation of the relationship between white and color,"<sup>5</sup> and citing Léger, "The role of the painter is to 'unleash' color where it is needed to eliminate unwanted architectural elements, strategically deploying colors that are able to 'visually destroy' walls."<sup>6</sup>

It is for the "white walls" of the institutional exhibition space that Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy have conceived *An Architecture Composed of the Paintings of Richard M. Powers and Francis Picabia* (1997). A work about confronting architecture with a physically constructed pictorial space, it stems from the individual interests that Kelley and McCarthy have in the engagement of painting and architecture, and in the practices of an unlikely and seemingly disparate pairing of artists: the French painter Francis Picabia (1879–1953) and the American science-fiction illustrator Richard M. Powers (1921–1996). Further extending Léger's argument, Kelley and McCarthy "destroy" the "white walls" of a modernist discourse of both architecture and painting. By directly building their architecture out of stretched paintings, they blur the distinction between the two disciplines and challenge the identities and functions that have defined them.

This collaborative installation was first executed upon the occasion of the exhibition "Display," an international group exhibition of painting organized by Mikael Andersen at the Charlottenborg Exhibition Hall in Copenhagen in 1997, to which Kelley and McCarthy were each invited to make an individual contribution. Initially considering their invitations separately, the artists discussed their shared interest in making large-scale paintings. McCarthy was interested in surrounding the viewer in a virtual space created by Picabia paintings, while Kelley wanted to "make architecture with Powers."<sup>7</sup> *An Architecture Composed of the Paintings of Richard M. Powers and Francis Picabia* arose from that discussion and their experience of producing large canvases/backdrops for their earlier collaborative work, *Heidi* (1992), in which they attempted to stretch one of those canvases in order to make a painting out of a backdrop.

A façade that is also a space, *An Architecture* is a labyrinthine structure that

1. Richard M. Powers, book cover illustration to Arthur C. Clarke, *Reach for Tomorrow*, 1953.
2. Richard M. Powers, book cover illustration to Arthur C. Clarke, *Expedition to Earth*, 1953.
3. Richard M. Powers, book cover illustration to Graff Conklin, ed., *Science-Fiction Thinking Machines*, 1954.
4. Richard M. Powers, book cover illustration to Frederik Pohl, *Alternating Currents*, 1956.
5. Richard M. Powers, book cover illustration to Leo Margulies, ed., *Get Out of My Sky*, 1960.





resembles theatrical stage flats — as it constructs hallways leading to rooms, creating a confusion between interior and exterior space within the white-walled rooms of the existing museum architecture. A plan view of the Charlottenborg installation shows two entrances/exits into the work on either of its opposite sides, each with a distinctive vista. As Kelley has stated: “Entering from one side, the viewer is almost immediately plunged into the pictorial interior of the space. Entering from the other side, the viewer sees a view of several large simple architectural exteriors.”<sup>8</sup>

Upon entering the installation, the viewer is immediately faced with a set of planes in the space: a structure that is constructed within an existing space. Crossing through the first doorway, the spectator immediately passes through the first “wall” of the work, constructed only two feet from the museum’s architectural wall.<sup>9</sup> From the outside, that wall appears to be the back of a façade or stage set. Once inside, it becomes evident that it also functions as the support for a stretched painting composed of airbrushed biomorphic landscape images taken from the book-cover illustrations of Richard M. Powers. That wall, together with the Powers-derived painting that directly faces the viewer upon first entering the installation, constructs a six-foot wide hallway running both left and right. At each end, the hallway makes a sharp right angle turn and continues toward a white wall. Around the left corner and about halfway down the hallway is a doorway that is literally cut out of a Powers image, leading into a separate, taller room. Its walls are constructed of hand-painted enlargements of Francis Picabia’s so-called “kitsch” paintings pictures of nude women of the early 1940s. Around the other corner and through a similar portal in the hallway is a room composed of reproductions of Picabia’s abstractions of the late 1940s.

Just as one enters those respective spaces through a doorway that cuts directly into the Powers canvas, one exits through a doorway cut out of a Picabia painting. The process of viewing *An Architecture* is thus a process of encounters of reversals and blurred distinctions: entering through the ‘back’ of a painting that itself is a wall that constructs an interior space; that wall and others like it, in turn, making up a theatrical set-like object within the white walls of museum architecture; and the entire work leaving the conventional white wall, “itself a painting just like Powers and Picabia”<sup>10</sup> — empty.





If one were to enter the installation at the second entrance, the first view is of a discrete painting, traditionally hung on a wall, that is the back of another painting (a Picabia abstraction). The painting comprises an image of the reproduction in the October 25, 1920 issue of *Cannibale* of Picabia's destroyed work, *Portrait of Cézanne* (1920) — featuring a monkey surrounded by the phrases “Portrait of Rembrandt,” “Portrait of Cézanne,” “Portrait of Renoir,” and “Natures Mortes” — superimposed over the central figure in Powers' cover for Harold Livingston's book *The Climacticon*. Thus, the back of the Picabia abstraction becomes a “white wall” which displays a literal fusion of Powers and Picabia. As an index to *An Architecture*, the Powers and Picabia double-portrait image is unexpectedly cohesive as it collapses together the practices of these two seemingly unrelated figures through their overlapping, prickly engagement with surrealism and popular culture, and play with pictorial style.

Francis Picabia and Richard M. Powers both engaged in pictorialist practices that together shared a relationship to popular culture and art that challenged the formal innovations and decorum of their respective disciplines: painting and science-fiction illustration. They each rejected the existing protocol of pictorialism: Picabia using popular culture as a source image for his nudes and choosing to paint in a realist manner at a time when the avant-garde and politics called for modernism and abstraction; and Powers, initially emerging as a surrealist painter who channeled that work into a symbolic, biomorphic abstraction that revolutionized the field of science-fiction book illustration. Ultimately, their reversed actions — Picabia channeling popular culture into avant-garde painting and Powers channeling contemporary art into popular culture — prefigure the ideas of reversal (interior/exterior, front/back, popular culture/avant-garde painting) that Kelley and McCarthy use to inform *An Architecture*.

Living in the south of France in the early 1940s, Francis Picabia — an artist known particularly for his earlier work of the 1920s and 30s, as well as his relationship to Dada and such colleagues as Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray — made a body of paintings of female nudes from images drawn from such erotic magazines as *Paris Magazine* and *Mon Paris*. These “kitsch” paintings reflected Picabia's ironic relationship to pictorial style — one that he constructed outside of the current trends or the stylistic directions of modernism — as he shifted between figuration

1. Francis Picabia, *La brune et la blonde*, 1941–42.
2. Magazine source image for Picabia's *La brune et la blonde*, in *Paris Magazine*, January 1931.
3. Francis Picabia, *Femmes au bulldog*, 1941–42.
4. Source image for Picabia's *Femmes au bulldog*, in *Mon Paris*, No. 15, January 1937.
5. Francis Picabia, *Le reve de Suzanne*, 1949.
6. Source image for Picabia's *Le reve de Suzanne*, in *Paris Magazine*, No. 49, January 1935.



and abstraction, or worked in both manners at the same time. Writing about three distinct instances of kitsch, Roberto Ohrt discusses Picabia's work and its political context and implications: "Between 1939 and 1941, at exactly the time when the forces of Fascism were out to overwhelm Europe, three distinctly independent views of kitsch were being formulated in the Western world."<sup>11</sup> Ohrt goes on to describe these three instances as the publication in 1939 of Clement Greenberg's essay "The Avantgarde and Kitsch," which argues an antithesis between the two and linked kitsch to fascism; the publication in 1941 of a text by the Danish painter Asger Jorn, "Intimate Banalities," which argued the inspirations of kitsch on contemporary art ("Anyone who tries to oppose the production of lovely, gaudy, painstakingly made pictures is against the best of contemporary art"); and the "kitsch" paintings of Francis Picabia of 1941–42.<sup>12</sup>

First shown to a positive response locally in the French Riviera and in Algeria, the Picabia paintings were quickly rejected for several reasons including the association of realism with Fascism; as Sarah Cochran has written: "After the war, abstract art became the single most important means of artistic expression. Given the fact that the realist style was judged to be compromised because the Nazis had favoured it for propaganda reasons and that the Nazis had attacked the work of the avant-garde artists of the beginning of the century, abstract art was interpreted as a specifically anti-Nazi act. For this reason, the rejection of Picabia's realist paintings of the post-war period was heavily influenced by international politics. Indeed, he was not the only painter who saw the reputation of his figurative works suffer."<sup>13</sup> Cochran goes on to describe the nationalistic implications of these works: "After the revelation of the atrocities that had been committed during war, these paintings shocked their critics by their frivolous, erotic subject matter. Other artists of Picabia's age had also quietly continued working without making direct reference to the war but there is a decorum to the systematic research of a painter like Bonnard and a logical progression to the exuberant cut-outs of Matisse."<sup>14</sup> In his return to figurative painting and quotation, Picabia can also be considered among other artists whose work has been examined within a context of regression. As Benjamin H. D. Buchloh has written: "The Harlequins, Pierrots, Bajazzos, and Pulcinelles invading the work of Picasso, Beckmann, Severini, Derain, and others in the early twenties (and, in the mid-thirties, even the work of the former con-





structivist/productivist Rodchenko in Russia) can be identified as ciphers of an enforced regression. They serve as emblems for the melancholic infantilism of the avant-garde artist who as come to realize his historical failure.”<sup>15</sup>

The negativity and rejection that surrounded Picabia’s nudes and the suspicions about his political alliances during the war was seemingly affirmed when, upon his return to Paris from the south of France in January 1945, “he radically altered his style and started to paint abstractly.”<sup>16</sup> However, these abstractions comprised images that were often sexually charged with biomorphic forms and symbols that were accompanied by provocatively descriptive titles.

For the two “Picabia” rooms of *An Architecture*, Kelley and McCarthy selected four paintings for the room of nudes and four for the room of abstractions. Among the nudes are *Femmes au bull* (1941–42), *La brune et la blonde* (1941–42), *Femme nue devant la glace* (1941–42) and *La blonde avec un pavot* (1942). Included among the abstractions are *Ça m’est égal* (1947), *591* (1938), *Haschich* (1948) and *Le rêve de Suzanne* (1949). Hand-painted and adapted to a large-scale horizontal format, these newly rendered paintings each become a wall of the room wherein the morphed and stretched images connect at the corners and it becomes confusing to distinguish where the individual images begin and end.

Kelley and McCarthy’s quotation of the Picabia paintings echo their original construction and challenge to pictorialism; as Sarah Cochran has written: “In these paintings dating from the War, he attacks both the principals of modernism and the classical canon. Using the traditional technique of oil painting, the tenet of this work challenges the modern, progressive philosophy of art and the decorum of traditional, artistic expressions.”<sup>17</sup> In the original works, Picabia translated black-and-white photographic reproductions into polychromatic paintings, at once preserving the pose and distortions of the figures, while also replacing or adding elements to the composition. For example, in *Femmes au bull* he transforms a photograph of a nude woman whose outstretched arms reach into a pile of jewelry into an image of that woman now reaching over a bulldog with another nude woman and a window with a view to a winter landscape in the background. Cochran describes Picabia’s dialogue with the genre of painting and photography, noting that the apparent exaggeration of the length of the model’s arms is in fact in the original reference photo and that Picabia deliberately chose not to correct it:

- 1-2. View of work-in-progress, Tony Joni, Sun Valley, California.
3. Francis Picabia, *Haschich*, 1948.
4. Francis Picabia, *Ça m’est égal*, 1947.
5. Francis Picabia, *591*, 1938.



1



2



The discovery of his sources and their comparison to the paintings indicates that he deliberately chose these distorted photographs and then followed them exactly, despite their imperfections. Thus, this painting and other ones from this period work as an artistic dialogue, illustrating the fundamental difference between the genre of painting and photography.<sup>18</sup>

An interesting extension of Picabia's translation of the original image in his paintings is that in Kelley and McCarthy's translation of these images into architecture, the reproductions of the Picabia paintings are, in fact, strongly distorted as they have been stretched from their original vertical compositions into horizontal paintings/walls.

Just as Picabia's nudes were drawn from photographic reproductions found in popular culture, Richard M. Powers channeled art into popular culture. Born in Chicago in 1921, Powers was initially trained as a painter and later as an illustrator.<sup>19</sup> During World War II he was drafted and served in New York as a scenery and prop painter at Signal Corps film studios in Astoria, Queens. Following the war, he moved to New York working both as a painter, and beginning in 1948, as a book illustrator and soon a science-fiction illustrator. As a painter, Powers was influenced by the Surrealism of such artists as Matta and Yves Tanguy, and his work was exhibited at the Rehn Gallery in New York and, in the late 1940s, in a four-person exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art in New York. As a science-fiction illustrator, Powers entered a field "dominated by techno-realistic 'gadget illustration' on one hand, and classic pulp style (monsters and semi-clad women) on the other, to which Powers introduced a third style he called 'absurrealism' — surrealism plus abstraction with a touch of the absurd,"<sup>20</sup> and whose work dominated science-fiction illustration of the 1950s and 60s. Noted for its shift from "techno-realism" to abstraction, Powers produced covers for such paperback publishers as Avon, Crest, Berkley, Signet, and Dell — ultimately becoming "the virtual art director of Ballantine's science fiction line, creating not only the cover illustrations (front, back, and occasionally wraparound), but the entire design of the books including positioning of the title and other text, selecting and coloring the typefaces, and sometimes even handpainting the lettering."<sup>21</sup> During his career, Powers made hundreds of book-cover illustrations for books by such authors as Algis Burdrys,



Lester Del Rey, Paul Corey, Avram Davidson, Anthony Boucher, Theodore Sturgeon, Harold Livingston — and Arthur C. Clarke, for whom his sideways cover for *Reach for Tomorrow*, featuring an otherworldly cityscape, was particularly renowned. As Kelley has described it, “Powers’ work, unlike earlier science fiction illustration, which resembles technical illustration, is more ‘abstract’ and psychedelic. Instead of producing naturalistic depictions of ‘outer space’ he created symbolic representations of psychic, or perhaps biomorphic corporeal, ‘inner space’ (mindscape or gutscape).”<sup>22</sup> As C. Jerry Kutner has written, “Powers’ art, in turn, assimilated the styles of most of the major surrealists of this century, not only Dali and Tanguy, but Calder and De Chirico, Miró and Kandinsky, Klee and Ernst. Sometimes the homage is obvious, as on the cover of *Star Wormwood* (Berkley, 1959), a non-fiction work in which a watercolor of a man sitting in an electric chair resembles Francis Bacon’s *Screaming Pope*.”<sup>23</sup> And like Picabia, Powers also shifted in pictorial style from abstraction to figuration to a “beat” style in the late 1950s.

Kelley’s interest in Powers’ early work came out of his own interest in biomorphic abstraction (i.e. his egg-shaped paintings of 1994) and how Powers, among the biomorphic painters of the late 1940s, played with spatiality versus flatness. Just as Picabia’s use of figuration in the early 1940s was condemned in Europe, the figuration of Powers and other biomorphic painters of the 1940s was also outside of the Greenbergian call for materialist abstraction in New York. Interestingly, Powers shifted the genre of science-fiction illustration through his use of abstraction. Seeing in Powers’ work “an ambiguous spatiality that lent itself to horizontality and vistas,”<sup>24</sup> Kelley and McCarthy channeled Powers’ book-covers into the equally ambiguous airbrushed paintings that line the interior corridors of *An Architecture*. The cover images of fifteen books — including *Reach for Tomorrow* and *Expedition to Earth* by Arthur C. Clarke, *Get Out of My Sky*, selected by Leo Margulies, *Alternating Currents*, Frederik Pohl, *Preferred Risk*, by Edson McCann, *Science-Fiction Thinking Machines*, edited by Graff Conklin; and *Things with Claws*, edited by Whit and Hallie Burnett — have been digitally morphed with one another and stretched into a horizontal format. Powers’ compositions — occupied by otherworldly landscapes, cityscapes with red, yellow and black skies, and hovering with alien figure/personages and disembodied faces, eyes, planets and other orbs — resonate with the Picabia paintings, both abstract and figurative, and meld into an overall effect of a “sexual abstraction.”<sup>25</sup>

In *An Architecture*, Kelley and McCarthy's architecture of hallways, doors and windows, directly incorporates the concept of paintings as either "doors" or "windows," as metaphors for flatness and spatiality. Walking through it, the spectator becomes an active performer of a work that defies a stable locus of "inside" and "outside" and of inner space and outer space, as well as of illusion and reality — literally encountering all of those conditions at the same time as it is at once both referential and experiential. An overall environment, the work is, as McCarthy has stated, "Painting as virtual space. Surrounding virtual space."<sup>26</sup> As architecture, there are also allusions to the body as it becomes a "body scape — internal body metaphor — stomach, bloodstream, heart, lungs, etc."<sup>27</sup> While the structure of the two Picabia rooms and Powers hallways are clearly distinguished by their assigned subjects and heights (hallways are eight-feet high, whereas the rooms are twelve-feet high), the sharp right angles of the space contradict the biomorphic, organic "body" that it constructs through images that flow from one to another.

As architecture, *An Architecture* also participates in an historical dialogue around painting practices that directly engage and occupy the wall or room — including the "environmental" painting of Jackson Pollock, its literal translation into wallpaper in the work of Andy Warhol, a painting that becomes a room in James Rosenquist's *F-111* (1964–65), or Ed Ruscha's chocolate silkscreened sheets of paper that covered the walls of his *Chocolate Room* (1970). Their strategies also bear a relationship to such artists as Michael Asher, Niele Toroni, Blinky Palermo, Gunther Förg, Heimo Zobernig and Daniel Buren, among others, whose practices since the mid- 1960s have engaged with and confronted architecture through practices that directly incorporate the surface of the walls, ultimately challenging the identity and function of painting, sculpture and the architectural container.

Kelley and McCarthy extend this further as they construct their architecture through a pictorialism that displaces painting from the wall as it becomes its own wall. Walking through *An Architecture*, the spectator shifts back and forth between inside and outside, picture and wall, referential and experiential — in effect, performing the work as both painting and architecture.



NOTES

1. Mark Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995), p. 233.
2. Wigley, xiv.
3. Mark Wigley, from transcript of panel discussion, "Planned Obsolescence," The Renaissance Society at The University of Chicago, May 12, 1996, as published in *Heimo Zobernig* (Chicago: The Renaissance Society at The University of Chicago, 1998), p. 20.
4. Wigley, pp. 229–230.
5. Wigley, p. 230.
6. "... pure color, dynamically laid on, may visually destroy a wall," Fernand Léger, "The New Realism Goes On," translated by Samuel Putnam in *Art Front*, vol. 3 no. 1 (1937), p. 117, as quoted in Wigley, p. 232, note 17.
7. Conversation with the artists, November 22, 1999.
8. Mike Kelley, from statement in *Display* (Copenhagen: Charlottenborg Exhibition Hall, 1997), pp. 44–45.
9. The following description describes the initial presentation of *An Architecture* at the Charlottenborg Exhibition Hall in Copenhagen, where it was designed for that specific architectural context. Its layout, while retaining the same structure, is adaptable when presented in other spaces.
10. Conversation with the artists, November 22, 1999.
11. Roberto Ohrt, "Avant-Garde Wrinkles and Realist Artificial Light," in *Francis Picabia: The Late Works 1933–1953* (Hamburg, Germany: Deichtorhallen Hamburg, and Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen Rotterdam, 1998), p. 9.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Sarah Cochran, "Francis Picabia's Painting during the Second World War and His Use of Photography," in *Francis Picabia: The Late Works 1933–1953* (Hamburg, Germany: Deichtorhallen Hamburg, and Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen Rotterdam, 1998), p. 17.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression," *October* no. 16 (Spring 1981), p. 53.
16. Cochran, p. 18.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

18. Ibid., p. 21.

19. See C. Jerry Kutner, "Mirrors of Infinity," *Juxtapoz* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 80–81. I am indebted to this text and the author's website article, "About Richard M. Powers," (<http://home.earthlink.net/~cjk5/aboutpowers.html>) for the biographical information on Powers and his work.

20. Ibid., p. 81.

21. C. Jerry Kutner, "About Richard M. Powers," website article (<http://home.earthlink.net/~cjk5/aboutpowers.html>).

22. Kelley, "Display," p. 44.

23. Kutner, website article.

24. Kelley, conversation with the artists, November 22, 1999.

25. McCarthy, "Display," p. 45.

26. Ibid., p. 44.

27. Ibid., pp. 44–45.





# Fighting on Two Different Fronts: *Sod and Sodie Sock Comp O.S.O.*

Martin Prinzhorn

As a starting point, let us consider two of the basic fantasies of modernism: *Gesamtkunstwerk* and abstraction. At first sight, these two approaches seem to be in complete opposition: the former being about the inclusion of all different artistic forms, objects and concepts in order to bring to form the essential idea of art, the latter being about the reduction of artistic practice and language to a point where pure art has left the object behind. As well, *Gesamtkunstwerk* is assertively historic in its often opulent assemblage of different practices and ideas so that a new harmonious “wholeness” emerges, whereas abstraction is historic in a (at least formally) more teleological and critical way by trying to get rid of older means of artistic expression while at the same time inscribing itself as historical progress. Although the phenomenon of *Gesamtkunstwerk* is today seen from a certain historical distance and is often associated with restorative and romantic projects in theatre and opera from Wagner onwards, the basic dichotomy between it and abstraction plays an important role in the recent and current discussion around modernism and its possible alternatives. Michael Fried attacked Minimalism as being “theatrical” in order to protect the ideals of the New York School and, more recently, the issue has been revived through the identification of performativity with non-essentialism (since, of course, *Gesamtkunstwerk* is ultimately about theatre and performance). I’ve briefly outlined these two concepts because I want to suggest here that, in their work *Sod and Sodie Sock Comp O.S.O.*, Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy make use of them in a way that subverts both — showing that, as fantasies emerging from similar sources, they can at best replicate and thereby support but never change dominant views in the field of art discourse.

*Sod and Sodie Sock Comp O.S.O.* — originally done for the Secession in Vienna — is a complex work consisting of a military camp built up in a labyrinth-like fashion: the tents are arranged extremely narrowly; through them runs a tunnel whose end one can peek into to view the shower cabin; there is a stair that leads nowhere; and

*Sod and Sodie Sock Comp O.S.O.*, 1998.  
Performance photograph, Secession, Vienna.

a watchtower is erected in the middle next to it a mountain of margarine and buckets full of sawdust. Inside the tents there is a kitchen with piles of utensils and smelly oatmeal cakes in the form of excrement. A laboratory with strange instruments suggests sexual experiments.

Before and during the opening in Vienna, a series of activities and performances went on in this setting. A video was shot that also provided images for the catalogue: soldiers involved in all kinds of activities, transsexuals naked in the shower cabin, extraterrestrials, people with masks exhibiting or hiding their sexual organs, etc. Opening night, Paul McCarthy did a performance in which he wore a Ross Perot mask while he unpacked and piled huge bricks of margarine. The resulting sculpture makes clear references to classic modernist forms but the idea of clear geometrical organization of space is in opposition with the unstable character of the material and its alienated use. One part of the installation is a stage resembling a footbridge for a fashion show. The two artists used this for a sound performance together with the Japanese musician Violent Onsen Geisha.

When there is no performance or video documentation going on the general feeling is that of a deserted stage. On it are objects indicating things that have already happened and sculptures that are obviously intended for use in one way or another. A strong feeling of incompleteness is always present — there is no room for contemplative perception. Although the work triggers all kinds of fantasies one is never able to follow them continuously. The narrow spaces and the closely packed arrangement of the different parts do not seem to allow the work the distance around it that is necessary for the emergence of auratic power. Although no safe distance is possible, the spectator is not really taking part in the artwork as a performance stage since it is deserted and fragmented. The work maintains a floating state; because of its many allusions and contradictions, any grounding of symbols is impossible. As a shrine of modernist presentation, the white-cube quality of the Secession was made completely invisible by the *Sod and Sodie Sock* installation.

An important clue for the understanding of the work is given in the Secession catalogue. Instead of an essay, the theoretical reference is a collage of three different texts: one by Clement Greenberg on American art during and after World War II and two on the psychology of fascism by Georges Bataille and Wilhelm Reich. These last two texts — in which the authoritarian character of society is analyzed

1-6. Mike Kelley, Paul McCarthy and Violent Onsen Geisha, *Sod and Sodie Sock U.S.O. Party*, 1996, performance. P-House, Tokyo.



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with regards to sexual behavior, symbols and roles, and notions of homogeneity and heterogeneity are analyzed in relation to society — are merged with Greenberg's text on sculptural form defining the forms of modernity. The crucial meeting point of the different texts is the role of form in psychoanalytic texts; different forms are used as metaphors for different psychological states and relations while, in the art texts by Greenberg and other proponents of American Modernism, form is used as the defining moment for the modern artwork in a sense that the "true" form in art somehow erases itself, leaving only "pure" art. In this context, Bataille's linkage of homogeneous and clear form to authoritarian and fascist social structure and Reich's use of hierarchical, vertical order of symbols as symptoms of fascism cast new light on Greenberg's celebratory analysis of the erected modernist form.

The overall reference of the artwork to military (popular) culture in and after World War II creates a relation between the triumphant character of modernist art and the triumph of victory in post-war America. Military references suggest both the mass culture of a certain historical period as well as a repressive sexuality created in the context of an exclusively male social structure. In other words, all references used create a complicated web that relates social and artistic form with physical and symbolic form. However, the artists do not build up these relations in a linear and hierarchical manner with a clear start and end; their position is outside these different discourses, in spite of the density of the material, and their view remains distant and analytic about the totality and complexity of these relations.

In *Sod and Sodie Sock*, it is never possible to look at things from one angle. The intermingled and complex presentation forces a look from all possible positions, at the same time as they are never conflated or harmonized each position is in a fundamental way incomplete, yet all positions taken together are not complete in a harmonic way. The Actionist scenes and references in the work are not embedded in a utopian scenario that promises liberation from family structures or gender identity. Instead they take place in the suppressing environment of the military camp as sculpture. Culture, politics and art are not seen as systems with independent symbols in different domains. According to this logic, any artistic practice that is reductive with respect to such systems will only blur the picture and our understanding.

The two artists always insist on the possibility of viewing *Sod and Sodie Sock* as a sculpture but in this case the usual fantasy of sculpture as a pure object that is pro-



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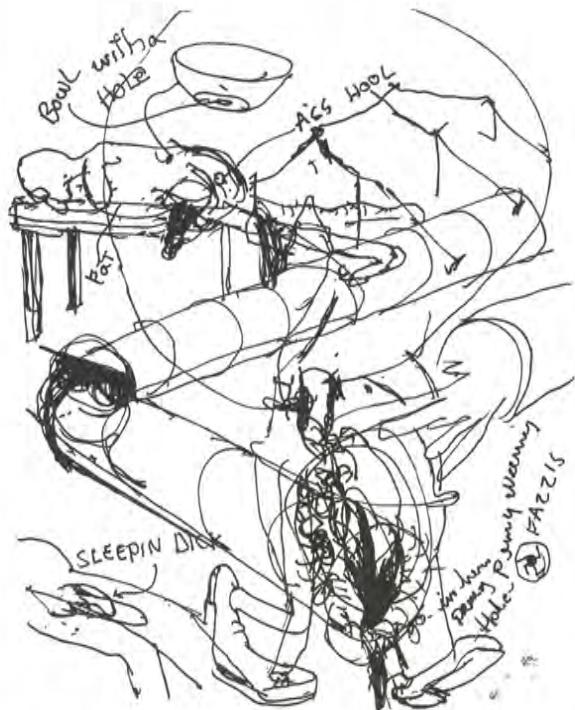


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Paul McCarthy, *Sod and Sodie Sock Installation, Theoretical Drawings*, 1998. Pen on paper, 61 x 48.3 cm.





ected from change by the view or the surrounding situation is contradicted. However, one can hardly argue that the work goes into the direction of “the condition of the theatre,” as Michael Fried has called this devilish alternative to modernist art. Here different objects are not situated in relation to the viewer to create tautological and opaque concepts, precisely because neither anthropomorphism nor any other extra-artistic meaning is possible. The non-specificity, vis-à-vis art, of which Fried accuses minimalism can never be true of this work since this discussion is also incorporated in it as an important part. As a consequence, the whole discussion in its historical perspective becomes almost naïve; the anti-psychological attitude of the theoretical proponents of the New York School is revealed as a social psychological symptom. The idea of a specificity that excludes the viewer and the context becomes an attempt to write a history of art by leaving history (and art history) all together. A core symptom of Postmodernism seems to pop up right in the middle of Modernist canon. *Sod and Sodie Sock* not only implies that art has to be put into a vaster context, at the same time it is implying that the context has to contain all the specificities, all the imaginary separations and boundaries that are there to create a closed and even identity.

At this point, it is interesting to look at the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* more closely. It could be described as an act of abstraction too, not in relation to form but in relation to content. The artistic idea becomes so pure that it is not bound and in fact cannot be bound to any specific (or concrete) medium. It is supposed to be so strong and total that it needs a whole orchestra of different media in order to be transported. In a way, *Gesamtkunstwerk* is also a fantasy about art leaving its objects behind — not by reduction but by accumulation of all kinds of different objects and non-physical media to the point where the non-specificity of the media somehow detaches itself from the content. No distance from the spectator is intended. Instead he or she is immersed in the totality of the spectacle.

Both Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy have alluded to such concepts in their work. In their earlier performance work, the ideas of Actionism are often used in a playful way, creating a certain critical distance that is missing in European versions of Actionism. But this work also focuses on the transgression of different media. Especially in McCarthy’s performance photos, the relation to painting or sculpture is always present in the combination of bodies, paint, ketchup, etc. In *Sod and Sodie*

1. Paul McCarthy during sound concert with Mike Kelley and Violent Onsen Geisha on opening night of *Sod and Sodie Sock Comp O.S.O.*, 1998, Secession, Vienna.
2. Mike Kelley during sound concert with Paul McCarthy and Violent Onsen Geisha on opening night, *Sod and Sodie Sock Comp O.S.O.*, 1998, Secession, Vienna.
3. Jim Shaw, painting in the manner of WWII men’s magazine commissioned by Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy. Published in *Der Standard*, 23 September 1998, pp. 26–27.
4. *Sad Sack and the Sarge* Harvey Comics cover, December 1976. No. 122.
5. Jerry Lewis in *The Sad Sack*, 1957, promotional photograph.
6. *Hogan’s Heroes*, promotional photograph.





*Sock*, there are also many references to performance — not only the act of piling bricks of margarine to build a sculpture that refers both to classical American works and Fluxus pieces and performances at the same time, but also the performances for the video, where sexual, anal allusions are combined with fantasies about extraterrestrials and military rituals. But the artists never try to harmonize all those different aspects; the whole work does not become a stage where the viewer is able to extract one underlying concept. The result is instead a maze-like construct with hidden places that could be a model of our unconscious. This is no fantasy world that we can visit and explore systematically. The different aspects always remain fragmented, the associations last only for a short moment; too many references are present at the same time.

One could almost claim that the overall structure of the work creates an anti-psychological attitude. The references to psychoanalytic theory, popular culture, social structure and formal aspects of art are arranged in a way that leaves no room for connecting them. Instead, they seem to force an act of suppression on the viewer's mind. The many hints come together to hint at nothing. So, the usual relation between art as a reduced object that stands for itself and art as an opulent multitude of forms, meaning and performativity that incorporates the viewer is completely subverted. "Pure" form is couched in a network of not only historical but also social and psychological conditions. On the other hand, this network, in its density, does not allow for space of the artwork in its totality and its function as a stage. In *Sod and Sodie Sock* certain ideas are rejected: not only the idea of art that leads to a pure essence by reduction but also the pure idea that can be staged as an independent entity on many different levels to create an entirety. And although these concepts seem so very different, this is done in the same work.



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## Heidi: Midlife Crisis Trauma Center and Negative Media-Engram Abreaction Release Zone

*Heidi: Midlife Crisis Trauma Center  
and Negative Media-Engram Abreaction  
Release Zone*, 1992. Painted wood,  
found objects, straw, cast latex,  
rubber figures, stuffed goat, acrylic  
on canvas. Installation view, The  
Power Plant. Courtesy The Dakis  
Joannou Collection, Athens. (p. 61)

*Heidi*, 1992. Video production still.  
(pp. 62-63)

*Heidi: Midlife Crisis Trauma Center  
and Negative Media-Engram Abreaction  
Release Zone*, 1992. (pp. 64-66)

*Heidi*, 1992. Video stills. (p. 67)









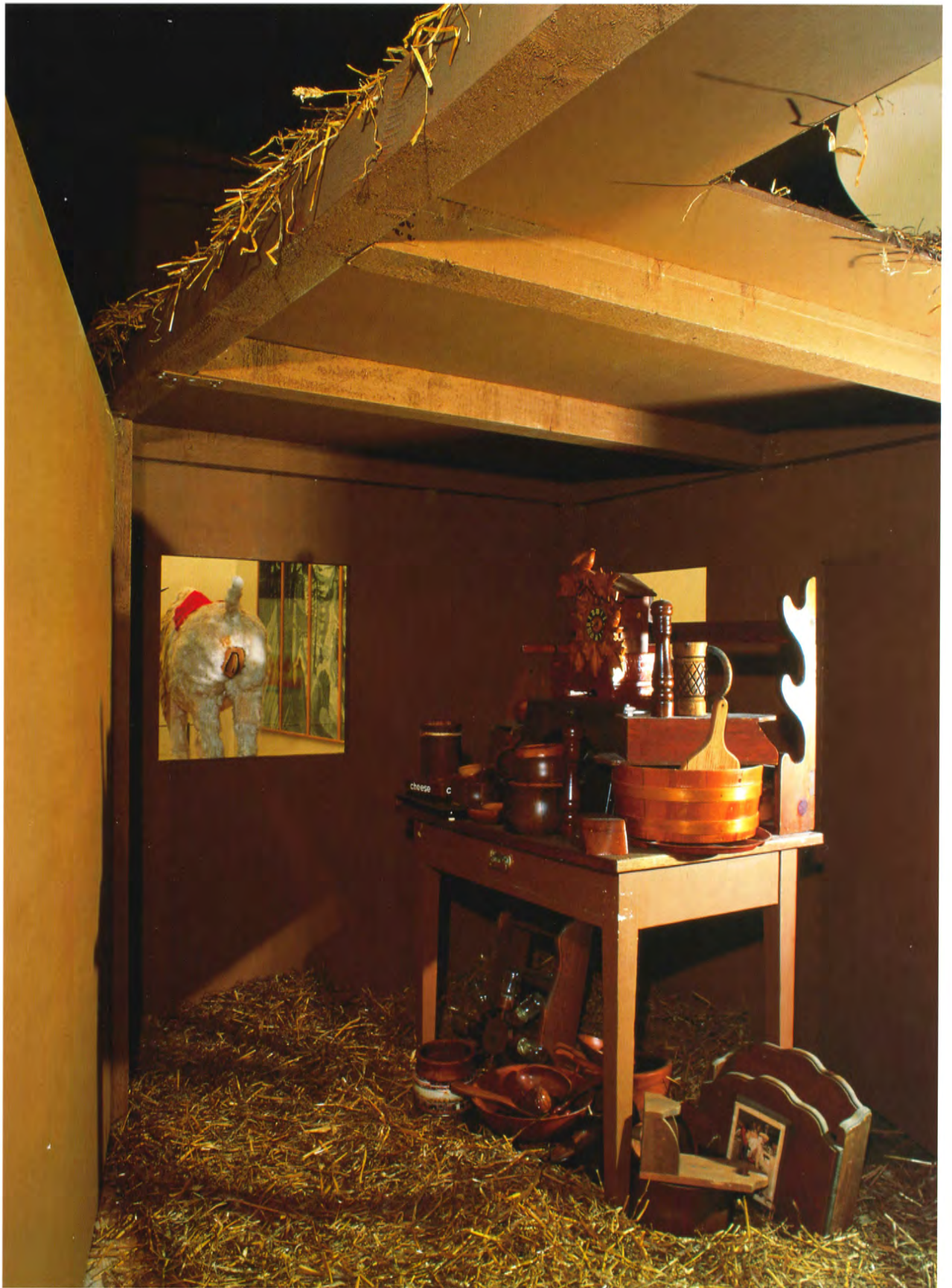






















## Fresh Acconci

*Fresh Acconci Portfolio*, 1995.  
Cibachrome on aluminum, 101.6 x 76.2  
cm each. Courtesy Galerie Hauser  
& Wirth, Zurich. (pp. 69-74)

*Fresh Acconci*, 1995. Video stills. (p. 75)

























# An Architecture Composed of the Paintings of Richard M. Powers and Francis Picabia

*An Architecture Composed of the Paintings  
of Richard M. Powers and Francis  
Picabia, 1997. Acrylic on canvas,  
wood panels. Installation view,  
Charlottenborg Exhibition Hall,  
Copenhagen. Courtesy Statens  
Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen.*











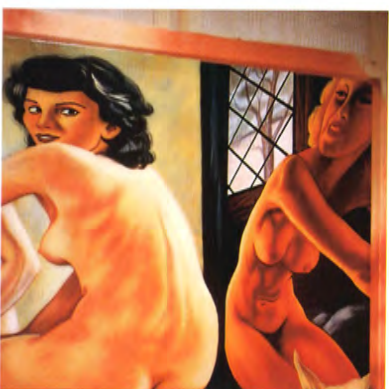












# Sod and Sodie Sock Comp O.S.O.

*Sod and Sodie Sock Comp O.S.O.*, 1998.  
Installation view and performance  
photographs, Secession, Vienna.







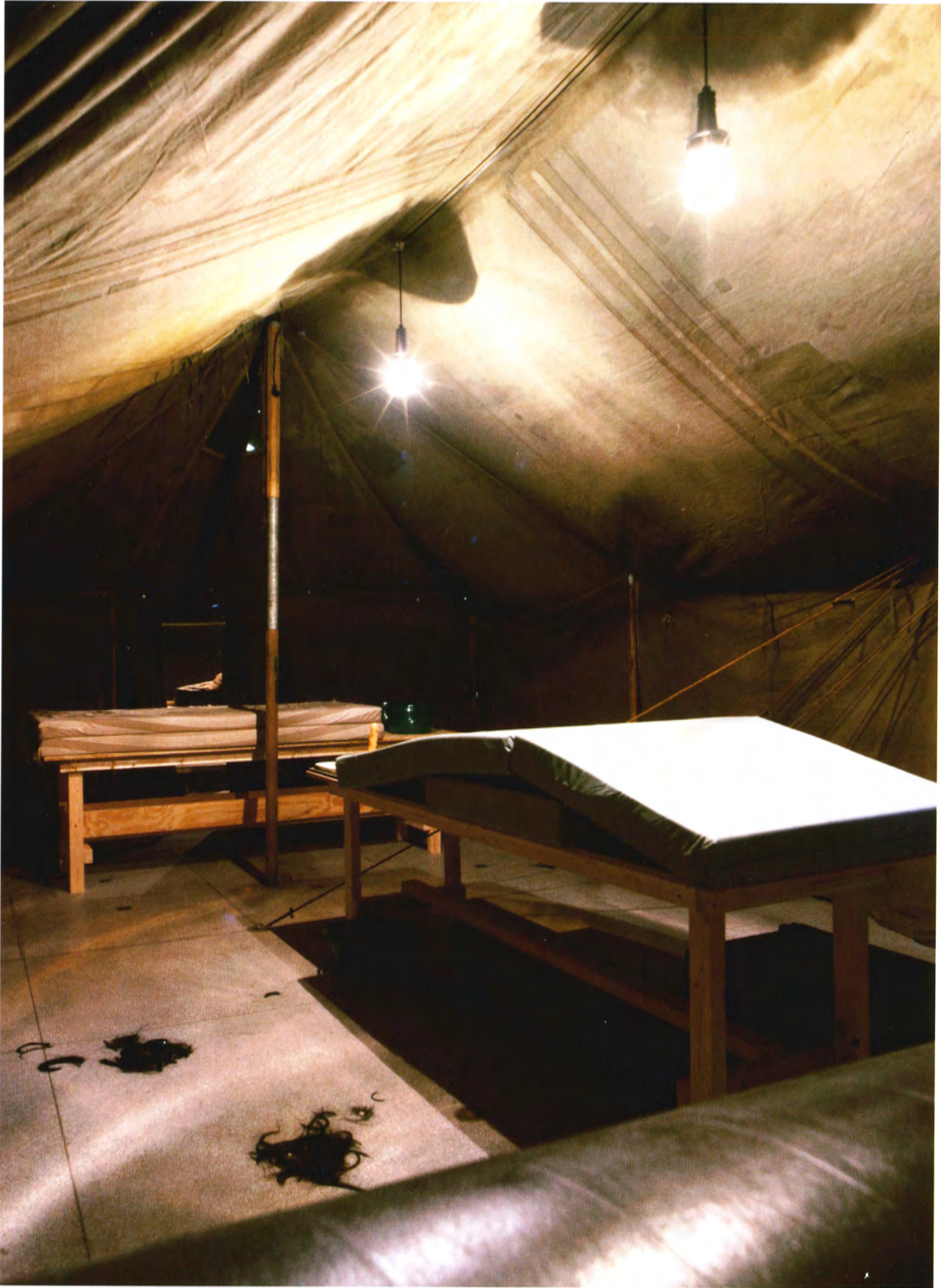




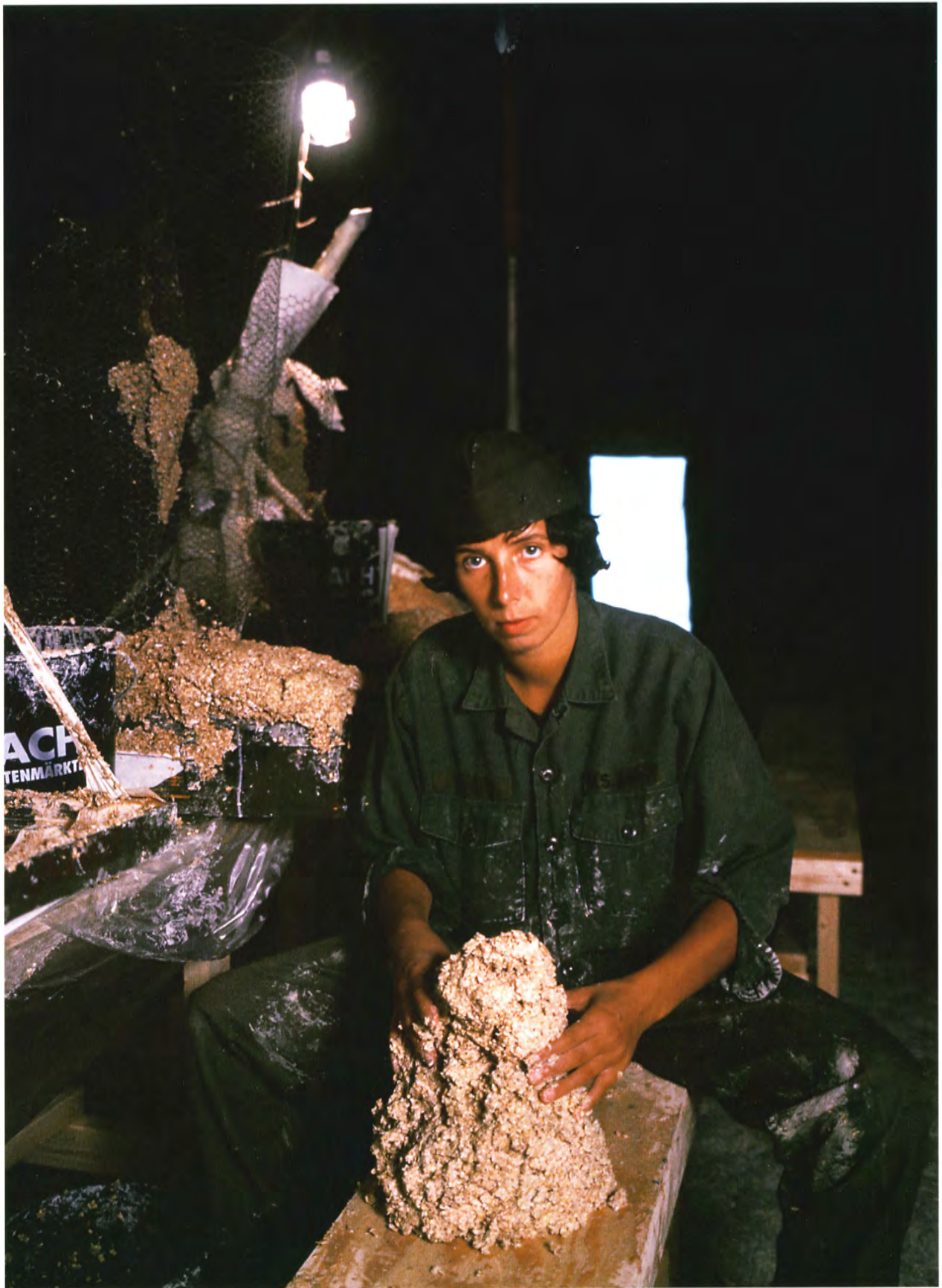


























## Exhibitions of Collaborative Work

2000

*Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy: Collaborative Works*,  
The Power Plant, Toronto

*Let's Entertain*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

1998

*Sod and Sodie Sock Comp O.S.O.*, Secession, Vienna

*Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979*, creation of "Visitors' Gallery as an alternative space" for performances by seven artists/artist collectives, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

*American Playhouse: The Theatre of Self-Presentation*,  
The Power Plant, Toronto

1997

*Display: International Exhibition of Painting*,  
Charlottenborg Exhibition Hall, Copenhagen

*Alpenblick*, Kunsthalle Vienna, Austria

1996

*Sad and Sadie Sack U.S.O. Party*, performance,  
P-House, Tokyo

1995

*Paul McCarthy/Mike Kelley*, Kunstverein, Hamburg

*Whitney Biennial*, Whitney Museum of American Art,  
New York

*Everything That's Interesting is New*, The Dakis  
Joannou Collection, Athens

1994

*Hors Limites*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée  
National d'Art Moderne, Paris

1992

*LAX*, Galerie Krinzinger, Vienna

## Bibliography of Collaborative Work

Avgikos, Jan. "Paul McCarthy – Mike Kelley: Heidi." *Artforum* 32 (September 1993): 156-7.

Dietch, Jeffrey. *Everything That's Interesting is New: The Dakis Joannou Collection*. Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: DESTE Foundation for Contemporary Art and Cantz Verlag, 1996.

*Display*. Copenhagen: Charlottenborg Exhibition Hall, 1997.

Duncan, Michael. "L.A.: The Dark Side." *Art in America* 81 (March 1993): 41-43.

Intra, Giovanni. "Repressionism is Dead." *Art/Text* 68 (February/April 2000).

Kelley, Mike with essays by Isabelle Graw, Anthony Vidler and John C. Welchman. *Mike Kelley*. London: Phaidon, 1999.

Kelley, Mike and Paul McCarthy. *Sod and Sodie Sock*. Vienna: Secession, 1998.

Kelley, Mike and Paul McCarthy, with an essay by Timothy Martin. *Heidi: Midlife Crisis Trauma Center and Negative Media – Engram Abreaction Release Zone*. Vienna: Galerie Krinzinger, 1992.

McCarthy, Paul with essays by Ralph Rugoff, Kristine Stiles and Giacinto Di Pietrantonio. *Paul McCarthy*. London: Phaidon, 1996.

Sussman, Elizabeth. *Mike Kelley: Catholic Tastes*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993.





## Biographies

### Mike Kelley

*Born 1954, Detroit, Michigan*

Mike Kelley lives and works in Los Angeles and has exhibited internationally since 1984. Solo exhibitions include Magasin-Centre National d'Art Contemporain, Grenoble (1999); Museu D'Art Contemporani, Barcelona (1997); Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (1997); a retrospective at The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1993); and Kunsthalle Basel (1992). Kelley collaborated with Tony Oursler for *The Poetics Project: 1977-1997* at *Documenta X*, Kassel (1997). Kelley established the music group *Destroy all Monsters* in Detroit in 1974 and the performance group *the Poetics* in 1977. He has also collaborated on videos with Bruce and Norman Yonemoto, Ericka Beckman and Raymond Pettibon. He teaches at Art Center College of Art and Design.

### Paul McCarthy

*Born 1945, Salt Lake City, Utah*

Paul McCarthy lives and works in Los Angeles and has exhibited internationally since 1977. The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, is organizing a survey exhibition of his work that opens at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2000/2001). Solo exhibitions include Hauser & Wirth Collection, St. Gallen (1999); Museum of Modern Art, New York (1995); Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin (1995); and Le Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain, Poitou-Charente, Angoulême (1994). McCarthy recently collaborated with Jason Rhoades for the 1999 *Venice Biennale* and with Benjamin Weissman at Christopher Grimes Gallery, Santa Monica (1997). He teaches at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy.  
*Out O' Actions*, 1998. Dual video  
projection.

## Works in the Exhibition

Paul McCarthy

*Family Tyranny; Modeling and Molding*, 1987

Video, 8:08 min

Courtesy the artist

*Heidi: Midlife Crisis Trauma Center and Negative Media-Engram Abreaction Release Zone*, 1992

Painted wood, found objects, straw, cast latex, rubber figures, stuffed goat, acrylic on canvas  
Approx. 396.2 x 609.6 x 457.2 cm

Courtesy The Dakis Joannou Collection, Athens

*Heidi*, 1992

Video, 62:40 min

Courtesy the artists

*Model for Combination Heidi House, Adolf Loos Designed Bedroom and American Bar Façade*, 1992

Foamcore, pen, pencil, 30 x 48.3 x 46.3 cm

Courtesy the artists and Patrick Painter, Inc, Santa Monica

*Fresh Acconci*, 1995

Video, 44:45 min

Courtesy the artists

*Fresh Acconci Portfolio*, 1996

Cibachrome on aluminum; edition  
15 parts, 101.6 x 76.2 cm each

Courtesy Galerie Hauser & Wirth, Zurich

*An Architecture Composed of the Paintings of Richard M. Powers and Francis Picabia*, 1997

Acrylic on canvas, wood panels  
426.7 x 1470.7 x 792.5 cm

Courtesy Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen

*Out O' Actions*, 1998

Dual video projection, 3:54 min

Courtesy the artists and

Patrick Painter, Inc, Santa Monica

*Sod and Sodie Sock Cut Up*, 1999

Pencil, pen, photocopies, 132 x 144 cm

Courtesy the artists and

Galerie Hauser & Wirth, Zurich

*Sod and Sodie Sock, short version 1*, 1998-99

Video, 17:37 min

Courtesy the artists and

Galerie Hauser & Wirth, Zurich

*Sod and Sodie Sock Portfolio*, 2000

Cibachrome; edition

20 parts, 76 x 101 cm each

Courtesy the artists, Patrick Painter, Inc,

Santa Monica and Galerie Hauser & Wirth, Zurich

# Acknowledgments

## Funding

The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery at Harbourfront Centre is a registered Canadian charitable organization supported by its membership, private donations and all levels of government. The Power Plant gratefully acknowledges assistance provided by The Canada Council for the Arts; the Ontario Arts Council; the City of Toronto through the Toronto Arts Council; and Harbourfront Centre.

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Harbourfront Centre provides support through the following:

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pp. 42-43 (figs. 1, 3, 5),  
pp. 45 (figs. 3-5);  
© Estate of Francis Picabia / ADAGP (Paris) / SODRAC (Montreal) 2000

## Catalogue

Edited by  
Lisa Gabrielle Mark

Designed by  
Hahn Smith Design  
Designers: Alison Hahn,  
Sara Soskolne

Typeset by Richard Hunt  
at Archetype in Helvetica  
Neue and Caslon 540

Printed in Canada by  
Arthurs-Jones Clarke  
on Potlatch Karma and  
Job Parilux Dull



