GOOD REPRESENTATION

by Ella Cattach and Elliot Yates

The philosophical conception of art as a domain of *exceptional, disobedient* or *problematic* freedom has found itself in tension with the growing contemporary demand for "good representation" and its new (but not altogether unrelated) sense of "the problematic." The normative concept of good representation enjoys a largely unquestioned and untheorised dominance in a mainstream culture increasingly inflected by liberal social justice discourses. This dominance has diffused into the field of contemporary art, where it now holds uncertain sway. In this paper, we consider the problematics of the problematic with respect to art's fundamental disobedience—its inability to conform to the schematic prescriptions and parameters of good representation. The unique bind of the contemporary artist, we find, is to make work that is at once aesthetically problematic and socially unproblematic—exceeding the existing parameters of representation while being contained by them.

In part I, we recall the older sense of the problematic: the exceptional status of the modern artwork with respect to the representational paradigm into which it intervenes. Via a critique of the essentially kitsch, commodified character of good representation and its auxiliary media chatter, and through close readings of the overlap, interplay, and interference of both senses of the problematic in the work of the late American artist Mike Kelley (part II) and contemporary Australian artist Matthew Griffin (part III), we make the case that the imperative for good representation is an obstacle art must wrangle in order to fulfil its problematic vocation.

GOOD REPRESENTATION
AND THE PROBLEMATIC IN ART AND MASS CULTURE

The imperative of philosophical aesthetics has been quite consistent: the work of art—if it aspires to "greatness"—must exceed, break from, break *open* the parameters of representation available at its inception. For Kant, the aesthetic idea is a presentation of the imagination "to which no determinate thought whatsoever, [...] no concept can be adequate, so that no language can express it completely and allow us to grasp it."[1] For Heidegger, "in the midst of what is, art breaks open an open place, in whose openness everything is other than usual."[2] For Deleuze, art's greatness inheres in its power to interrupt the "torpidity" of representational consciousness, elide the perpetuation of cliché, and awaken genuine thought.[3] The major moments of modern aesthetics have all stressed the essentially *problematic*—novel, excessive, rupturing, supra-schematic—character of the great (or, more modestly, *effective*) artwork.

Yet the problematic character of the modern artwork, and the social-institutional autonomy that authorises and underwrites it, can also be understood as the index of a "disaster." In the words of philosopher J. M. Bernstein, art's constitutive freedom carries within itself the implication of "art losing its place in the world, being excluded from its role in the reproduc[tion] of everyday life."[4] According to this account, works of art "can only attain their

worldly place, insinuating what a non-disenchanted thing would be" by operating precisely as an *excepted* and *exempted* category of social practice—by "becoming only art, mere art, a matter of taste"; by appearing "outside truth, reason and morality."[5] Modern art is dialectically coupled with the thoroughgoing disenchantment of modernity: the closure of knowledge around the authority of the scientific world picture; the codification of morality in the abstract individual rights and obligations regulated by the modern state; the dissolution of religious authority; the intensification of capitalist social relations; the universal dominance of technological-instrumental rationality. The interruptive, problematising character of the artwork has thus been held by modern aesthetics to disclose or restore a dimension of experience that modernity tends to dull, occlude or eliminate. "Problematic" is what slips from the commensurating logic of exchange value; that which is irreducibly particular or unassimilable to a conceptual schema; the sensuous beyond understanding; that which elides systematisation or operability; the miraculous, paradoxical, sublime, absurd, fantastic, pathological or irrational.

FIG. 1

Matthew Griffin, *The outernet*, 2018, two channel, high definition digital video, 33:34 mins.
Photograph: Andrew Curtis. Courtesy the artist and Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne.

By contrast, in contemporary discourses of "social justice" identity politics, especially as it directs its attentions to entertainment media and art, "problematic" has become a watchword for something apparently rather different: that which perpetuates harmful stereotypes, implicitly justifies structures of social oppression, and so on. In active opposition to the problematic, once valued highly in avant-garde and modernist art discourses, the aspiration for good representation arises as a normative counterforce. In mass culture entertainment and contemporary art alike, the good

representation imperative has gained and consolidated hegemony, successfully imposing *demand*—at the level of the market as much as politically—for greater diversity and sensitivity (and has, in doing so, incurred a significant reactionary backlash).[6] The projected diversity built into Phase 4 of the Marvel superhero movie franchise suffices to demonstrate the extent of good representation's commercial adoption.[7] With respect to the concrete aims of this industry, however, the ethical intent of good representation is incidental. In this connection, we would do well to recall the frank words of (Marvel parent company) Disney's former CEO, Michael Eisner: "The pursuit of making money is the only reason to make movies. We have no obligation to make history. We have no obligation to make art. We have no obligation to make a statement. Our obligation is to make money."[8] Capital, seeking no end beyond the maximisation of its own circuitous augmentation, has recently recognised in good representation a sensible, profitable logic for the assembly of entertainment commodities. Each marginalised identity becomes a potential basis for a new mainstream rapprochement; the rubric of reified identity categories thereby grounds a new round of iterative repetition of established—and hence culturally "validating"—franchises. Where the aspirations of social justice are translated into the logic of the market, and in particular the culture industry, they necessarily submit to a profound formal transformation. Identities harden into so many comparable, analytically determinate and geometrically combinable units, "segments"; the substantive social and political content of these identities, meanwhile, becomes abstract as they pass into the domain of the avatar, image or semblance. A representation esteemed as good or deplored as bad is judged more or less explicitly according to how well it stages its "imaginary resolution of a real contradiction."[9]

As Clement Greenberg and Theodor Adorno, each in their different contexts, pointed out, the field of kitsch or mass culture tends to differ from art proper precisely to the extent that the problematic, problematising, or "reflective" dimension that inheres in and characterises the form of the latter—that into which the work solicits the active "projection" or "sublimation" of the spectator's sensitivity and intellect—is delivered as an already achieved, "predigested," immediately receivable *effect* in the former.[10] Mass culture—as these modernist critics recognised in its nascence—is not just easy to comprehend and enjoy; it comprehends, interprets and even enjoys *itself* on the viewer's behalf.[11] In a curious development of the contemporary situation, the critical, political analysis of culture industry products has itself, in the form of a popularised cultural studies, become a significant integrated dimension of mass culture: MTV presenters weigh up whether Taylor Swift is an appropriator or ally of LGBT activism on train platform screens; think pieces lament the overt manliness of *Sgt. Pepper's*; listicles identify the pernicious "sexism, body-shaming and heteronormativity" in *Love Actually*.[12] This *lingua franca* cultural criticism, typically delivered with the salacious propriety of gossip, performs a reflective and political analysis of cultural products *as entertainment*. Good representation is hence not just an evaluative matrix by which cultural works are judged and a normative criterion explicitly deployed and signalled in their

creation and promotion, but also constitutes a subgenre of mass culture "content."

The think-piece writer or YouTube essayist to some extent acts as my agent or prosthesis, doing my cultural thinking for me, hence relieving me of this effort. If we wish to grasp the true significance of this genre, however, we should consider how—not unlike gossip—its basic appeal derives transitively from what it proscribes. The economy of good representation—which necessarily includes its problematic or bad taste transgression—implies, at a deeper level, the displacement of *transgression itself*. Herbert Marcuse observes that art—so intimately and fundamentally connected to fantasy—holds open that which, in accordance with the historically prevailing reality principle, the social field constitutively represses:

> this other dimension is represented not by the religious, spiritual, moral heroes (who often sustain the established order) but rather by such disruptive characters as the artist, the prostitute, the adulteress, the great criminal and outcast, the warrior, the rebel-poet, the devil, the fool.

Such illicit figures, insofar as they are conditioned by a "return of the repressed,"[13] become supports—like the scapegoat[14]—for the iniquities and transgressions that the reader or viewer, bound by the reality principle, has renounced. These imagined personae are screens or proxies onto which illicit enjoyment can be projected and thereby disavowed: I need not identify with these characters and their transgressive acts; it suffices that I locate enjoyment in the Other in order that I be relieved of experiencing it as my own.[15] It is significant that the artist and the poet are included in Marcuse's list: these producers of culture, in their (ideal) alienation "from the entire sphere of business and industry, and from its calculable and profitable order," themselves become figures of fantasy—figures who, precisely as operators of the aesthetic dimension, are afforded indeterminate license with respect to social codes and norms.[16] The figure of the artist as rebel or freak is replaced in the good representation imaginary with the more down-to-earth figure of the content producer, beholden not to muse or demon, but rather to audiences, communities and stakeholders. As the authority of the good representation imperative increasingly demands that artists and their works be more thoroughly integrated into the moral order—polarising the traditionally ambivalent aesthetic field into good and bad, relaying the evaluation of works through the moral character of their producers, valorising the specular resolution of social problems, recasting the history of art and its reception as ethically and politically naïve[17]—the transgressive function of art itself risks repression. Paradoxically, however, the libidinal satisfaction afforded by transgressive art is transferred into the apparatus of its appraisal: denunciation of harmful, bad aesthetic objects and problematic artists preserves the

enjoyment of transgression in the very process of containing, suppressing and
censuring it. What is lost in this process is not illicit enjoyment, but art's
freedom to reveal what discourse cannot.

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INVERSIONS, PERVERSIONS:
MIKE KELLEY AS "BAD BOY"
Allowable / Repressed

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Our disparate notions of the problematic are forced into stiflingly close
proximity in the work of Mike Kelley. Over the four decades of his artistic
career, Kelley worked prolifically across virtually every medium, producing
what we could term, quite technically, *mixed results*. Kelley may not be
regarded foremost as a painter, but painting is the unlikely medium through
which the particular coalescence of *problematics* is most sharply articulated in
his practice. Painting, for Kelley, is problematic in two senses: it is a site of both
sublimation and abuse.

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FIG. 2

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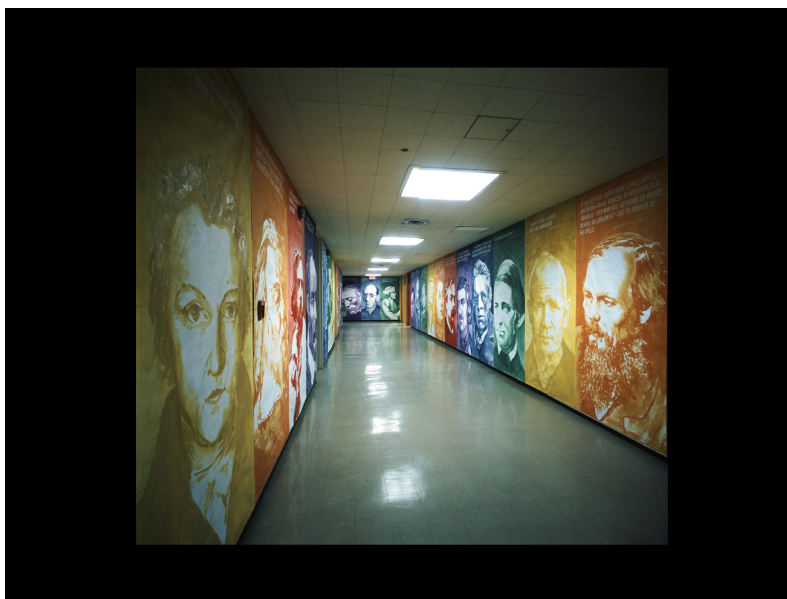
Installation view, *Mike Kelley: Pay for Your Pleasure*, 1988, The Renaissance Society at the University of
Chicago. Courtesy of the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, photographer Tom Van
Eynde © Mike Kelley Foundation for the Arts/ARS. Copyright Agency, 2020.

Through his iconic incorporation of mass-cultural objects and folk-art forms,
Kelley places kitsch on the same plane as the avant-garde (used here in its
aesthetically problematic high modernist sense) so that their relation to one
another is insistently material, not merely oppositional. Their formal languages
are relentlessly exploited and manipulated, mixed, repurposed and
reconstituted. Kelley's kitsch vernacular often speaks to modernist painting, so
that wall-hanging works of soft toys disfigured and sewn together into troubled
patchwork refer viewers at a distance to painterly gestural abstraction;[18]

mementos and trinkets gathered from thrift shops and made into abstract compositions using the folk art technique of "memory ware" evoke pointillism.[19] And after early references to "Abstract Expressionist 'masters'," Kelley went on, as George Baker summarises, "to explore the forms of the monochrome and the relational composition, the grid and the shaped canvas, geometric abstraction and biomorphic abstraction, simultaneously, persistently, and illogically."[20] Kelley undercuts the triumphal arc of high modernism through his haphazard sampling of its styles, and its thorough admixture with kitsch.

At stake in this project is nothing less than the "life" and "death" of the artwork. Kelley repeatedly goes home to kitsch, to the craft materials of his upbringing, his "social class," in order, Anne Pontégnie writes, "to charge the material he works with, to de-neutralize it."[21] Just as the institution of art can charge and de-neutralise, so too can it discharge and neutralise: "The museum drains meaning out of things," Kelley lamented in a 1992 interview with Julie Sylvester.[22] He addresses these ideas in "Goin' Home, Goin' Home," the textual accompaniment to his 1995 exhibition at Jablonka Galerie, *The Thirteen Seasons (Heavy on the Winter)*:

> When painting a painting, there comes the final period when you enter into struggle with it. It taunts you; it dares you to force it to behave, to make it be "right." A painting might be finished, that is, the support may be adequately covered with paint, the handling of the medium may display a proficiency with materials, yet the painting does not seem done. It calls out:

> "I have yet to confirm. That mysterious sense of order and balance has not yet been attained."

> But when this balance *is* found you instinctively know it. Then the painting becomes placid and ceases to cry out. Only then is it *good*.[23]

Douglas Fogle sees that for the artist, "going home meant a return to the practice of painting even after spending an entire career trying to burn its house down."[24] Modernist painting, for Kelley, is figured (at a formal rather than social level) as *good* representation. And yet by way of his ironic proclamations and repeated returns to it, painting is also figured as a site of trauma, such that good representation becomes, more or less explicitly, the repressed core of his practice. Kelley remarked to Sylvester, "I have a problem with the terms

'high' and 'low'—I prefer 'allowable' and 'repressed' as they refer to usage—that is, whether or not a power structure allows discussion—rather than to absolutes."[25] The good-taste-avant-garde deems what is "allowable" via its repression of kitsch forms. Kelley's bad taste—his compulsion towards those very forms—consciously represses (the contradiction in terms is key to Kelley's work) good representation. Despite his unrelenting irony, one senses a real ambivalence in Kelley's evocation of painting in "Goin' Home, Goin' Home." Beneath the artist's scepticism at the "mysterious sense of order and balance," we might hear an identification with the impulse towards the achievement of an "aura of completion."[26] Modern painting is *good* when it ceases to cry out. Its impulse, we might say, is something like the nirvana principle—an impulse towards its own death, the quietening of excitations.[27] It "comes off," says Kelley, "as pedantically technical, emotionally empty. The thing done correctly is the thing that assumes its own naturalness."[28] When a painting is correct, right, *good*, it goes limp. The effective work of art, contrarily, cries out: it fails to fail, but its wrongness—its prolongation of death-drive agitation—keeps it alive. On this point, Kelley is blunt about his own efforts: "I don't want my objects to read as being 'right'."[29] The sense of good representation that Kelley provides, like the socially unproblematic sense we have discussed, is at odds with the disruptive power of the artwork that *works*.

FIG. 3

Mike Kelley, *Abuse Report*, 1995/2007, Photograph mounted to Plexiglas, 42 x 32 1/2 x 1 in.
Edition of 5 and 2 APs

The bad paintings of the bad boy artist participate in the economy of good representation he seeks to transgress. "Yes," Kelley concedes, tongue-in-cheek,

I am the first to admit that my paintings are willful perversions of my training. They are full of ironic inversions and grotesque substitutions. All of these strategies are empty posturings; they are simply flimsy facades hung on a solid framework, but they do not diminish the truth of their interior structure [...]. Inversion and perversion serve only to reinscribe the law they seek to undermine.[30]

Kelley's suspicion of the truth of painting, its laws and transcendence, is comically cast in the terms of the trauma narratives he first fended off, then played off again and again in his work. Kelley hypothesises that "the painting's comfort, its sense of naturalness, comes only from repressed indoctrination covering up subjugation and abuse."[31] And he is willing to name a perpetrator. *Abuse Report*, 1995, a work included in *The Thirteen Seasons*, is an artwork that is also a legal document—a Suspected Child Abuse Report form. The Jablonka Galerie acts as Reporting Party, the alleged victim is Mike Kelley, and the apparent abuser is his parent, Hans Hofmann "REINCARNATED." By nominating "artist and art pedagogue Hans Hofmann as the suspected originator of the abuse," Diedrich Diederichsen writes, Kelley "links the two severed fragments of the discourse, the 'abuse discourse' and the 'institutional critique'."[32] The same fruitful year as the *Thirteen Seasons* exhibition yielded Kelley's pivotal work *Educational Complex*, 1995,[33] which Baker describes as "the functional equivalent" of "Duchamp's *The Large Glass*, the engine from which a larger host of projects will stem."[34] Like *Abuse Report*, *Educational Complex*—one of the first of Kelley's works to explicitly deal with the autobiographical—links abuse discourse and institutional critique. It is a large architectural model that comprises every school Kelley ever attended, as well as his childhood home. But "the interiors [...] are radically incomplete," indicating Kelley's inability to "remember what was there."[35] Reacting to persistent readings of his early work as traumatised and pathological, Kelley "responded to the inflation of self-victimization and the application of its logic to his own work by going on the offensive and recounting his own education at schools, colleges, and academies as a story of institutional abuse."[36] *Educational Complex* is the epicentre from which this offensive is mobilised.

Reflecting on one of the works to stem from it, *Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction #1 (A Domestic Scene)*, from 2000, Kelley proclaimed, "I want to create a grand public ritual, designed specifically for, and mimicking, 'victim culture,' yet unrepressed and ridiculous in nature." The work can be seen as the interior of *Educational Complex*, insofar as it aims to fill its "memory blanks with standardized abuse scenarios based on descriptions of the literature of Repressed Memory Syndrome. Details are provided by my own biography, intermixed with recollections of popular films, cartoons, and literature. Personal and 'mass cultural experience' are treated equally as 'true' experience."[37] Kelley frames his work in terms of fiction: "I'm often working 'in

character,' so if there is a psychology, it's a fractured, schizophrenic one. The heroic individual is replaced by a kind of multi-individual. I'm in there but I'm trying to make it difficult to tell who this person is." Kelley's work touches a nerve because it invokes the slipperiness of memory, of testimony. The artist's parodic treatment of sexual abuse, and his claims that his work is full of "blatant lies," refuses transparency and calls for viewers to doubt him: "The viewer must at least suspect that I am not the thing I claim to be."[38] And yet the sheer insistence of themes of abuse through his oeuvre, and their traumatic power, make it extremely difficult to take the artist's statements of disavowal at face value. Viewers thus find themselves being as vigilant about his claims that he is lying as they are about his truth telling.

<p align="center">Bad / Bad</p>

Kelley anticipates and mocks the "bad boy" artist label in *Pay for your pleasure*, 1988, a work of three parts produced for an exhibition at the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago. The first part consists of 42 brightly coloured large-scale banner portraits of famous aesthetes–philosophers, poets and painters–hung in rainbow spectral order and enveloping viewers on both sides of a corridor passage. Each portrait–rendered in oil paint on Tyvek for Kelley by "a professional sign painter"[39]–is "captioned with a quotation from that person linking art production and criminal activity in some way."[40] The final two parts of the work are site-specific inclusions: Kelley stipulates that *Pay for your pleasure*, wherever exhibited, must include an artwork by a local "violent criminal" as well as a donation box for local charities supporting victims of crime. Viewers can pay a penance for the pleasure of indulging their macabre fascination. Kelley puts the viewer in a bind, by forcing their participation in the spectacle. There is no non-choice: they must either choose *not* to donate to victims, or choose to donate what Kelley calls "a little 'guilt money'," acknowledging their participation, their pleasure.[41]

FIG. 4

Detail, *Mike Kelley: Pay for Your Pleasure*, 1988, The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago.
Courtesy of the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, photographer Tom Van Eynde ©
Mike Kelley Foundation for the Arts/ARS. Copyright Agency, 2020.

The viewer moves through the pithy abstractions of thinkers courting
criminality to the direct address of the local artist-criminal, clearly designed to
hit close to home. The exhibiting artist-criminal for the Renaissance Society
iteration was the Chicago-area serial killer John Wayne Gacy, who was
convicted in 1980 of raping and murdering thirty-three teenage boys, and who
took up painting during his fourteen years on death row. Kelley points the
unsuspecting viewer to Gacy as if to say: "here's a real bad boy." Gacy is bona
fide, ineligible for scapegoat status. Gacy's real, uncontained, extreme badness
throws out the economy of good representation that the bad boy artist works in.
And yet Kelley frames Gacy's painting practice as part of the art economy,
noting how for Gacy, painting is more trade than therapy: "In his letters to pen
pals, Gacy is quite blunt about the fact that his paintings are designed for sale.
They allow him to continue in his former role in the outside world as a
businessman."[42]

        Though not formally abject, Gacy's painting of "Pogo the clown" elicits a
kind of secondary disgust, as the viewer recoils from it upon realisation of its
artist. The painting is ostensibly a self-portrait of the artist-criminal in dress as
Pogo, a clown character he created and performed at events such as children's
parties. Kelley writes, "We are not interested in Gacy's brushwork or images
(usually bland depictions of clowns, landscapes, or Disney subjects), we are
interested in the man behind them, the person capable of incredible atrocities.
The paintings allow us to stare safely at the forbidden." Gacy's centrepiece
painting is "surrounded by obviously overdone rationalization systems."[43] Acting
as part of these systems, Howard Singerman figures himself as an apologist for
Kelley in his essay "Mike Kelley's Line": "I can pretend you have turned to this
catalogue to have Kelley's work explained, even apologized for, to have it made

alright." Rather than seeing the banner quotations as authorising Gacy's murderous acts, Singerman notes, "if Gacy is the true artist, it is, in Kelley's scenario, precisely not for his painting. For the faces that line the wall, that object is not the object of art but the image of restraint, of socialization, of sublimation."[44]

The point is made no more clearly than by contrast to a 2011 exhibition *Multiples: the Artwork of John Wayne Gacy* at the Arts Factory in Las Vegas, which offered a more comprehensive vision of Gacy's bland paintings stripped of the nuanced framing that allows *Pay for your pleasure* to tread the line that it does. The bad taste name of the exhibition *Multiples* refers both to the banal fact of the multiple works included, and to the awful fact of Gacy's multiple victims. Without apparent mention of Kelley's work, the exhibition also aimed to raise funds for victims' rights groups. Where Kelley's work is sensitive always to the economy of the work and the gift (as in *More love hours...*) and operates complexly, sentimentally, the charity premise of the *Multiples* exhibition was less palatable: acquiring Gacy's work as the way of donating to charities that support victims. The National Center for Victims of Crime, listed as a top beneficiary of the proceeds of the exhibition, "made a statement denouncing any involvement or connection with the event, sending a cease-and-desist letter to the gallery owner."[45] Another gallerist "who appraised the artwork and initially hung six pieces in her gallery" explained: "they thought it was blood money and in bad taste."[46]

MACHINE CREEP: MATTHEW GRIFFIN
That's not the point

Kelley observed that early in his career he was "dismissed" and "put in [his] place" by critics who took him for an anti-artist and anti-intellectual "bad boy." His practice appeared to them to be "raising up" low cultural forms—the rebellion of "a snotty teenager" compromising the sanctity of the modernist white cube with manifold mass-cultural forms.[47] In 2010, Kelley observed that within just fifteen years (from the mid-90s), the transgression of the artist incorporating a low "mass culture referent" was no longer transgressive, but institutional: "if I'm a bad boy there's a thousand times worse bad boys and girls ... it's an academy ... so I'm grandpa when it comes to that."[48] We might consider the comparatively obscure artist Matthew Griffin one of the grandkids, whose practice carries on Kelley's spirit of irreverence and critique by injecting the gallery space with the new low forms of social media. Griffin's practice too pivots on the interface between art and mass culture, but the culture has now, through the advent of the internet, mutated in important ways. Griffin's work is exemplary for—and self-conscious of—its contemporariness; since 2015, he has posted short video works on social media under the name "contemporaryary." A 2018 exhibition at Fine Arts, Sydney collected sixty-eight of these videos into a single work—pulling them from their easy accessibility on the internet for exclusive presentation "in person on a smartphone" in the gallery space.[49] Like Kelley, Griffin's work is informed by an acute sense of the complex of historical

factors that constitute the paradigm of representation into which he intervenes. Good representation is a significant aspect of this paradigm.

If Kelley stands as an exemplary technician of the posturing, subterfuge, indetermination, perversion and substitution characteristic of high postmodern distance, Griffin's work represents for us the struggle to exceed the parameters set up by postmodern discourses. Guy Debord cautioned that in the inverted world of spectacle, "truth is a moment of falsehood."[50] Where a critical aspect of postmodern art lay in a captious or aggressive identification with the false—as in Kelley's promotion of kitsch, or his admixture of autobiographical material with blatant lies—contemporary art arises at the point at which postmodern art's "involution," "absurdity," "sardonic fatigue" and "iconoclasm" had, as David Foster Wallace noted in 1993, already been wholly absorbed into the standard repertoire of advertising and mainstream commercial entertainment.[51] Thus, congealed in the ground state of contemporary art, the residues of modernism and postmodernism engender a reflexive, almost automatic self-disclamation. Not only particular contents, but also artistic form-giving itself, are submitted to a circuit of ironised negation and distanced reappropriation that—in hollowly reprising the once-radical gesture established by the modern readymade, transformed into a generic principle by Pop, and wielded as a technical implement by high postmodernism—integrates the very exhaustion of this gesture itself into the structure of the work's "positedness."[52]

In Griffin's work, we see that the advanced, networked spectacle of the twenty-first century not only further marginalises art and absorbs its techniques, but serves to further exclude and erode the legibility of the aesthetic domain of sensuous particularity as such. Griffin, like Kelley, electively inhabits representational positions repressed both by his art-historical inheritance and postmodern, spectacular culture at large—but he also shows the mechanisms of this repression in operation. His work short-circuits irony to arrive at a position that is *aesthetic* both in the sense that it feels (or indeed suffers) its content, but also in that it recaptures, through the cunning of form, some determinate (not merely abstract or reflexive) mastery over and distance from this passion.

Griffin's video works in the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art's summer 2018–19 exhibition *The Theatre is Lying* would appear at first blush to conform to the presupposed, standardised self-distance of the contemporary art "academy." The two television screens of *The outernet* are wall-mounted with a formal neutrality only slightly undercut by the un-trunked mess of wires spilling down the wall into a tangle by the gallery's skirting-board (affecting an unkemptness ambiently familiar from so many ARI and graduation shows). They solicit in initial overview only the dull compulsive attention demanded by the news-talk television from which Griffin draws both the work's aesthetic gestalt and much of its source footage. Several metres to the right, and at some distance from the wall, a single-channel video work, *Shallowest part*, is presented in an equally "ugly," but more formally ambitious contrivance: the 65" Sony UHD flatscreen rises from the top of the cardboard box it left the factory in; polystyrene packing pieces lay in front of the box as if the screen had hoisted itself into view and begun to display its video under some ineffable

compulsion and by means of some unaccountable internal motility. On the opposite side of the room, *Melbourne shuffling*[53] is displayed inside a closed Samsung TV box (a cut-out revealing the screen), with netted speakers suspended from the ceiling and cables disappearing into (and re-emerging from) neat apertures in the wall, while the vertically separated two channels of *Gums* are presented through an unexpectedly thick, suggestively irregular, quasi-organic conical peep-hole bored into the wall. The complementarity of the retreating or recessed pair (*Gums* and its oral/visual cavity; *Melbourne shuffling* and its rabbit warren raids) with the protrusive pair of *Shallowest part* and *The outernet* places each video's presentation and content into a reciprocal matrix of abstract formal relations. But these sculpturally indicated relations between the videos are, like almost every particular detail of these works, subsumed in a densely populated and heavily overdetermined network of signification–they are, to use *The outernet*'s oft-reiterated phrase, "not the point." *Shallowest part* and *The outernet*, while they maintain an essentially unsublimated aesthetic proximity to the most banal elements of contemporary spectacular visual culture–social media and network news–and while they seem superficially congruent with the familiar postmodern strategy of mere unprincipled rehearsal of key mass-cultural images, personages and notions–in this case the up-to-date concerns of fake news, deep fakes, Bitcoin, Instagram, Mark Zuckerberg, Cambridge Analytica, Donald Trump, etc.–are on closer inspection extremely formally precise, acutely dialectical meditations on the peculiar epistemic structure and aesthetic poverty of the contemporary situation. In these works, what is at stake is a complex of interrelated *projections*: in the Heideggerian sense–as an a priori, anticipatory, pre-shaping understanding of reality;[54] in the psychoanalytic sense–concerning the imputation of belief, interest, enjoyment;[55] and in a technological sense–the modes by which images, sense and judgement are distributed and made to appear (and appear *as received*) in new contexts.

FIG. 5
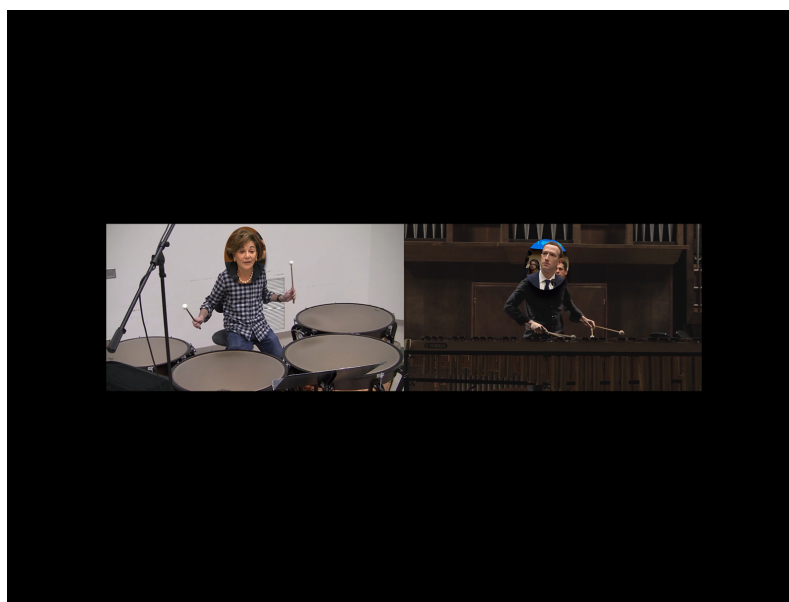
Matthew Griffin, *The outernet* (detail), 2018, two channel, high definition digital video, 33:34 mins.
Courtesy the artist.

The outernet is, at the most basic level, a half-hour monologue delivered by
Griffin in the form of a heinously distended cable news interview—as if the hosts
were afflicted by a Buñuelian incapacity to speak or in any way interrupt. The
monologue is regularly interspersed[56] by video collages splicing interviews and
testimony given by the likes of Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg and Sheryl
Sandberg, newly—highly controversially—appointed US Supreme Court Justice
Brett Kavanaugh and Trump advisor Stephen Miller (each, not incidentally,
representatives of the aestheticisation, "culturalisation" and
"hypernormalisation" of contemporary politics) onto bodies performing
incongruous and absurd physical actions: virtuosically playing tuned percussion
instruments, rhythmically clapping, doing yoga, throwing pottery, drunkenly
stumbling. These interstitial collages are bookended by an animated "Breaking
News" title card, in each case accompanied by the text "Siri is listening to your
private conversations" and a sample from the 2003 Britney Spears hit "Toxic."
As he speaks, Griffin's auditors, imprisoned and mute in appropriated
rectangles of footage in the video's left channel, are cycled through concerned,
neutral, rapt and wry "reactions" to the artist's wandering discourse. In the
right channel, these same would-be talking heads—most memorably that of
CNN anchor Chris Cuomo—are serially subjected to unflatteringly zoomed-in
high definition close-ups. In their forced silence, and in their screen-dominating
proportion, the small tremors, offbeat blinks, winces and grimaces that cross
these brightly-lit faces—somatised (yet often transparently *performed*) traces of
recognition, amusement, sadness, excitement, impatience, annoyance—register
with an uncomfortably intimate, vaguely obscene intensity. Griffin constructs
for himself a crank's fantasy: an audience seemingly unlimitedly interested; an
opportunity to say his piece, in full, and be heard.[57] But is *The outernet's* Griffin
a crank, precisely?

The satirical and formal crux of the video resides in the lower third graphics, appearing like a news ticker: the by-line, grab line and hashtag displayed at the bottom of the left channel, closely mimicking the visual design of CNN. Over the course of the video, the lower third "information" changes 128 times—a continually modulated interpretation of Griffin's monologue. The logic of this interpretation, as we come to understand through its many variations, is essentially that around which Griffin's meandering discursivity also circulates: the unnerving artificial interpretive capacities increasingly exhibited by major surveillance capitalist technology companies. The conjuncture of monologue and text with which the video commences flags this quite straightforwardly:

> Simply I think that ... um ... the Internet's just got too much power ... ah ... I believe that Siri is listening—now that's impossible to prove; I've done different checks and whatnot but I'm sure you've all had the same experience ...
>
> #SIRIISLISTENING
> THE INTERNET HAS TOO MUCH POWER
> Matthew Griffin Internet Guru

But as soon as Griffin begins to dwell on an incidental anecdotal detail, the lower third text responds as if this were now the essential subject at hand:

> ... I was coming home from a party the other night with my wife and I rarely would talk about, you know ... we were just talking about the sort of things you talk about ... we were talking about a ... um the friends of ours we visited—a lovely dinner we had ... ah ... just a roast, simple roast with a rocket salad, which was wonderful; sticky date pudding for dessert which I always love, so that was a bit of a treat ...
>
> #SIRIISLISTENING
> STICKY DATE PUDDING IS A TREAT
> Matthew Griffin Internet Guru / Food Critic
>
> ... but ah, one of the things my wife and I were talking about on the way home—as well as how lovely the meal was, and particularly that sticky date pudding—but one of the things we were talking about was ... the owners of the house, they had a cavoodle ...

As Griffin casually continues—the hashtag changing to #LITTLETEDDYBEARS, #LETDOGSBEDOGS, #BEMORELIKEADOG; his symbolic identification shortly becoming "Dog Hater / Conspiracy Theorist," then "Dog Expert / Wise Man"; the grab switching through "MASSIVE RISE IN CAVOODLE POPULARITY," "ALL DOGS HAVE EVOLVED FROM WOLVES," "PEOPLE TRYING TO MAKE DOGS LIKE THEMSELVES"—he eventually arrives at the point: "cavoodle ads are popping up in all my feeds" because, circulating back to his opening, "Siri is listening."[58] Griffin's fundamental message—though relayed through the dryly portrayed, frequently hilarious caricatural pose as a garrulous crank—remains a serious one. His authentic intent is underscored by the termination of the monologue:

> ... you end up having to buy back your own information which is what you end up doing anyway with the whole way that it works so ... this is where we're at now; it's an interesting time to be alive.
>
> [More than 20 seconds of silence; Griffin staring neutrally back at his still-attentive hosts.]

The objective structure of our technological environment, as Adam Greenfield writes, even in its most "literal and uninflected description," "sounds like nothing so much as the conspiracy theory of a paranoid schizophrenic":

> we're surrounded by invisible but powerful forces, monitoring us from devices scattered throughout our homes, even placed on our bodies, and those forces are busily compiling detailed dossiers on every last one of us. They pass the contents of these dossiers onto shadowy, unaccountable intermediaries, who use everything they learn to determine the structure of the opportunities extended to us.[59]

FIG. 6
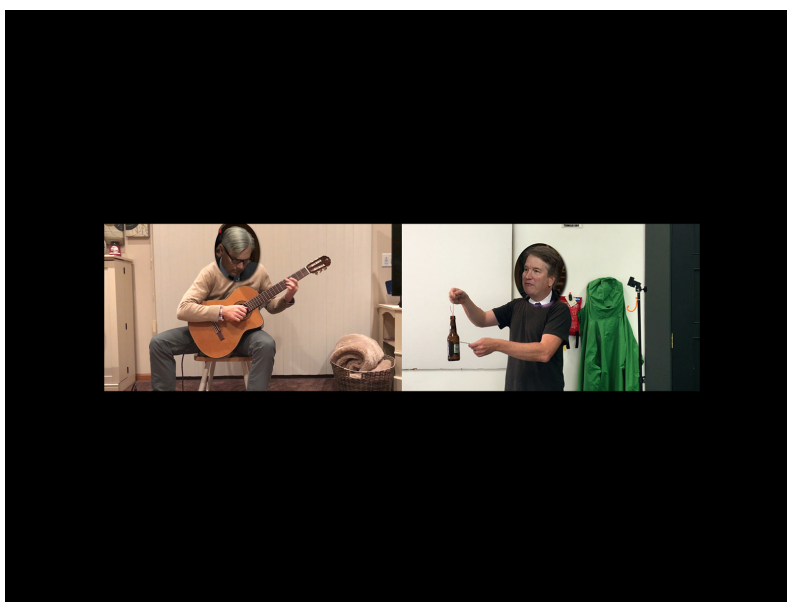
Matthew Griffin, *The outernet* (detail), 2018, two channel, high definition digital video, 33:34 mins.
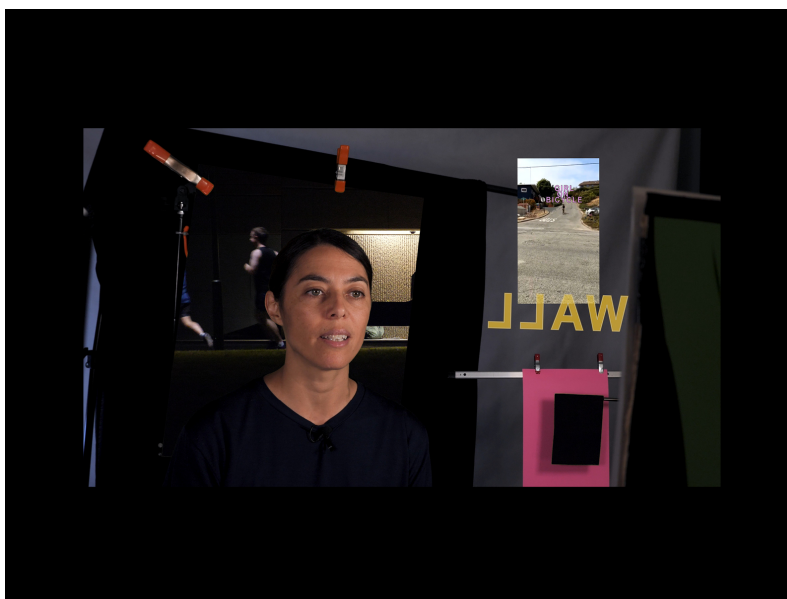Courtesy the artist.

By homoeopathically identifying himself in advance with the disqualifying, pathological, bad position of the crank—and by rather disarmingly elaborating his point in the vernacular context of scratched Teflon sharehouse woks and steak-and-four-veg, blockchain "peanuts" and "nipple-peeping" AI—the essential content of Griffin's "tough questions" concerning the way we "give up freedom for convenience" and how our "rights to privacy and to live [...] a meaningful life are getting frittered away," widely intellectually recognised and yet so deeply repressed at the level of practical action, are able to register in consciousness in a new way. The formal evacuation of moral seriousness doubly staged by the exempted space of art and by his humorous rhetorical pose—not unlike the dissimulated insight of the Shakespearean fool—dialectically allows a newly *concrete* sense of the experiential cost of our nihilistic embrace of and dependence upon surveillance capitalist intermediation. It is not the abstract juridical citizen or the subject in general who bears this cost: it is the particular toy breed-sceptical, cookware trend-theorising speaker before us whose remarks and identity we see subsumed, in real time—from some obscure, cloudy non-place offscreen; perhaps the "secret sub-basement" of the internet—under the concepts operationally required for the moment-to-moment maintenance of the networked spectacle. Though variously identified as a "Foodie," "Meme Expert," "Historian," "Internet Activist," "Deep Web Expert," "Peeper," "Porn Browsing Expert," "Deep Thinker," "Entrepreneur," "Motivational Speaker," "Music Critic," "Free Trade Advocate," "Creative," and so on, Griffin is never recognised by *The outernet*'s shadowy judging agency as "Artist": the latter, for Griffin, as for Kelley, is not so much a particular identity, position or vocation, but the negative, "dysfunctional" space where "normative conventions and assumptions" are suspended, perverted, or rendered inoperable.[60]

Opt in

The inherently problematic character of the artist returns in *Shallowest part*,
however, as a cause for explicit distrust. Another monologue—this time written
and delivered to camera by proxy—begins by outlining an unexpected social
difficulty encountered in the production of the work:

> I had hoped to get someone doing sign language for this video. I
> contacted a few people and they seemed suspicious of my
> intentions. One person asked —Is it solely for people to access
> information, for everyone to understand your artworks in sign
> language? Or is it solely for an aesthetic purpose in your artwork?
> It wasn't solely for anything.

FIG. 7

Matthew Griffin, *Shallowest part* (detail), 2018, high definition digital video presented in sculptural
installation, 12:05 mins. Courtesy the artist.

At this point, two interpolated text elements emerge in the frame: "WALL,"
"GIRL ON BICYCLE." Soon, these mobile words are revealed as tags
corresponding to a shaky video loop of—predictably enough—a girl riding a bike
down a hill towards a wall. The monologue continues:

> I said—I'm interested in translation and slippage within language;
> how there can be a different meaning between a sentence
> written, spoken, sung, signed, etc.; so I would like to include the
> signer in the artwork as a way to access the information as I
> understand sign would be generally used, but also to signify that
> there are other ways to access the information.

It turned out to be more complicated than I had assumed.

As he was (if we trust that the account given in the video is factually true) unable to procure the services of a signer because of their collective unwillingness to enter, in image, the dysfunctional space of art (and hence exit the pragmatic, controlled, normatively unambiguous space of good representation), Griffin very directly actualises Adorno's dictum that "unresolved antagonisms of reality return in artworks as immanent problems of form,"[61] introducing a substitutive video element:

> I intended to just film someone signing this monologue against a green screen and just drop them into the corner once the video was done. At the time of recording this, I haven't found anyone to do it. If I can't get anyone to do it, I'll just get someone who doesn't know sign language to stand there, not doing anything. So if there's someone standing in the bottom part of the video appearing to do nothing, they are there to remind you: there are other ways to access information.

A man promptly walks into the bottom right corner of the video and remains there, standing neutrally still, until the final twenty seconds. The monologue, reaching its climactic conclusion, explains that "even when you go looking for the deepest part of the deep web, you find yourself in the shallowest part. That sounds Shakespearean—like an invitation to leave. Shallowest part?"— whereupon our information-access reminder walks off—"It's motion capture. It's emotion capture. It's shallow emoticons. It's deep fakes. It's machine-assisted creativity. It's machine creep. Machine creep." As in *The outernet*, this conclusion is given space to hit home: the reader turns to look directly at the camera while a figure in the background—presumably Griffin, head replaced by a looped meme gif—descends a ladder.

FIG. 8
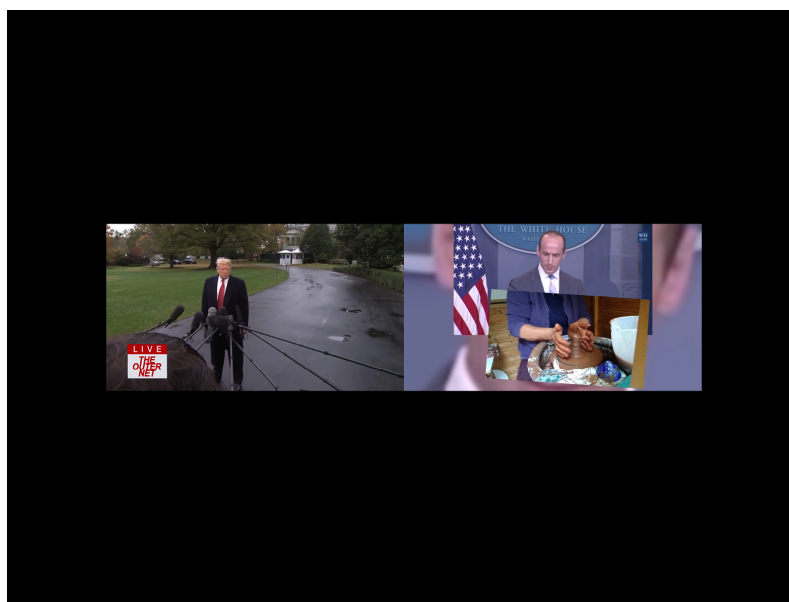
Matthew Griffin, *The outernet* (detail), 2018, two channel, high definition digital video, 33:34 mins.
Courtesy the artist.

In the resonance between these introductory and conclusive moments of *Shallowest part*, hinging around the "negative inclusion" of the non-signing placeholder figure, all three "projective" dimensions virtually coalesce. The "not doing anything" man—a signifier just as much of autonomous art's constitutive incompatibility with the good representation imperative as he is of "other ways to access information"—figuratively condenses the signers' suspicion of art as something that, in refusing univocal signification, "could be offensive or be seen as making fun."[62] The "WALL" / "GIRL ON BICYCLE" element, like the Chyrons of *The outernet*, renders explicit a logic of recognition—sheer, *unproblematic*, schematic judgement—that equally underpins, on the one hand, good representation in its spectacular, mass-cultural acceptation, and on the other, the "machine creep" of ubiquitous algorithmic surveillance. Both systems of representation presuppose a world constituted of discrete, in-principle universally *identi able* and *recognisable* elements: a world fundamentally amenable to technological apprehension, manipulation and control; exhaustively collapsable into a total system of instrumental and ethical rationality. Yet both systems are, at the same time, haunted by an outside, an irrepressible sense of omission. The creeping algorithmic understanding represented in *Shallowest part* by the blunt machinic cognitions "WALL" and "GIRL ON BICYCLE"—apprehending correctly and yet (when spelled out in such vulgar facticity) stupidly, meaninglessly—is in *The outernet* confronted with its really-existent *reductio ad absurdum*: a stock photo of a Businessman With a Tie Around His Head at an Office Party. This stock photo type is the perfect synecdoche of the latent idiocy of a representational world geometrically composed from schematised basic concepts. That the system of images presumes an operational need and consumer demand for such an image is at once an incredible and a jejune observation: we suppose—as the stock photo

companies do—that, though *we* find the existence of this image objectionable, some Other, some idiot, nonetheless requires and demands it.

We cannot meaningfully be said to, as *Shallowest part* contends, "opt in" to this world pre-saturated with images and pre-apprehended under anaesthetising operational categories any more than we "opt in to life." The work of art, however, if it is capable of orienting itself in and determinately negating the searing light of spectacle, can offer us an "invitation to leave."

The ideology of good representation proposes—and perhaps not entirely without hope of success—to influence social consciousness through the machinery of the establishment culture industry. It seeks to displace the Other's bad ideas, installing in their place schemata oriented to and regulated by an underlying image of social justice. By strategic rearrangements of the image-objects it supposes to be constitutive of culture—and, by extension, broader socio-political reality—it ventures to affirm and teach the good, to provide a properly diverse and inclusive supply of moral heroes and ideal ego images, and to ensure thereby that "consumption" of "media" first does no harm, and, beyond this, provides a positive benefit to society. Yet as Peggy Phelan observed of visibility politics in 1993, "The danger of staking all on representation is that one gains only re-presentation."[63]

We have found in Kelley and Griffin neither a spurning of spectacular culture and its techniques, nor a lack of relation to the economy of good representation. Rather, their work, operating at the limits of art's self-knowledge, explicitly determines and conditions itself with respect to these factors. We cannot precisely say that either artist's work sets about, as in Bernstein's characterisation of the general function of modern art, "insinuating what a non-disenchanted thing would be"; nor does the work of either artist "except" or "exempt" itself from the representational materials available in the wider culture, in "mass cultural experience." Instead, in both practices, the interaction of carefully cultivated bad taste with a slippery but palpable sense of moral seriousness functions as a second-order placeholder: an insinuation of an insinuation of something non-disenchanted. If this seems a bleakly and hopelessly meagre office for what was once "high" art, we may derive some consolation from observing that in its marginality, it has nonetheless subsumed and wholly assimilated the ghost of the culture industry.

1. Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgement, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987), 314. ↵

2. Martin Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper, 1971), 70. ↵

3. See, for instance, Gilles Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), xvi, 68; The Logic of Sense, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 71; Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation, trans. Daniel W. Smith (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 6, 63. ↵

4. J.M. Bernstein in Beyond the Aesthetic and the Anti-Aesthetic, ed. James Elkins and Harper Montgomery (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 29; Bernstein, The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 2. The critical tradition Bernstein draws from in this account is presaged by Hegel, inaugurated by Lukács, elaborated by Adorno, Marcuse and their Frankfurt School colleagues, and most prominently continued in the present by Fredric Jameson and Bernstein himself. ↵

5. Ibid. ↵

6. For an insightful assessment of the emerging prepotency of ethical—and specifically "representational"—considerations over aesthetic merit in mass culture discourse, see Wesley Morris, "The Morality Wars," The New York Times Magazine (October 3, 2018), [https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/10/03/magazine/morality-social-justice-art-entertainment.html/]. ↵

7. Neil Smith, "Marvel Phase 4: A new era for diversity in Hollywood?," BBC News (July 22, 2019), https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-49070232/. ↵

8. "Back-stabbing in the Dark: Disney and Hollywood," The Economist (February 26, 2005), 83–4. Eisner only confirms that, as Adorno wrote, the "cultural commodities of the industry are governed [...] by the principle of their realization as value and not by their own specific content and harmonious formation. The entire practice of the culture industry transfers the profit motive naked onto cultural forms." Theodor Adorno, The Culture Industry, ed. J. M. Bernstein, trans. Anson G. Rabinbach (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2001), 99. ↵

9. Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (London: Routledge, 2002), 62–3. ↵

10. Clement Greenberg, Art and Culture: Critical Essays (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1965), 15; Theodor Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 25; Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997), 124–5. ↵

11. Slavoj Žižek's interpretation that in the canned laughter of television sitcoms "the Other—embodied in the television set—is relieving us even of our duty to laugh—is laughing instead of us," is continuous with the "calculated," "prescribed fun" Adorno saw as characteristic of the culture industry. This is an enjoyment "meted out" as temporary relief for people, in Žižek's words, "tired from a hard day's stupid work." The automatic character of mass culture is dictated by the shadow that the work process casts across it. Žižek, The Sublime Object of Ideology (London: Verso, 2008), 33; Adorno, The Culture Industry, 103. ↵

12. Amanda Marcotte, "Against 'Sgt. Pepper': The Beatles classic made pop seem male, nerdy and 'important'—and that wasn't a good thing," Salon (May 29, 2017), [https://www.salon.com/2017/05/29/against-sgt-pepper-the-beatles-classic-made-pop-seem-male-nerdy-and-important-and-that-wasnt-a-good-thing/]; Flex Mami, "Is Taylor Swift an LGTB Ally?," MTV News (July 26, 2019), http://www.mtv.com.au/taylor-swift/videos/is-taylor-swift-an-lgbt-ally/; Ellie Woodward, "Which Movies Are Actually Really Problematic?, Buzzfeed (May 15, 2018), https://www.buzzfeed.com/elliewoodward/problematic-moments-in-movies/. ↵

13. Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society (London: Routledge, 2002), 62; Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry Into Freud (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1966), 144. ↵

14. Leviticus 16:7–26. ↵

15. For an in-depth analysis of delegated, "interpassive" enjoyment, see Slavoj Žižek, The Plague of Fantasies (London: Verso, 2008), 144–52; Robert Pfaller, Interpassivity: The Aesthetics of Delegated Enjoyment (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017). ↵

16. The "scandals" surrounding, for instance, the work of Melbourne artists Bill Henson and Paul Yore—both of whom were accused of creating child pornography; Henson was widely excoriated by the press and senior politicians but never charged, Yore's charges were eventually dropped—demonstrate both the precariousness of this license and the capriciousness with which state actors (from the police to the Prime Minister), often at the urging of the media, may revoke it. ↵

17. See Andrew McNamara's account of simplified, caricatural visions of modernism (qua "bad object") giving rise to iterated "surpassing quests"—of which good representation could be considered an oblique example—in Surpassing Modernity: Ambivalence in Art, Politics and Society (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 17–62. ↵

18. For example, More love hours than can ever be repaid, 1987. ↵

19. See the Memory ware (flat) series, begun in 2000. ↵

20. George Baker, "Mike Kelley: Death and Transfiguration," October 139 (2012), 189. ↵

21. Anne Pontégnie, Educational Complex Onwards: 1995–2008 (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2009), 2. ↵

22. Mike Kelley and Julie Sylvester, "Talking Failure," Parkett 31 (1992), 103. ↵

23. Mike Kelley, Minor Histories: Statements, Conversations, Proposals, ed. John C. Welchman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 76. ↵

24. Douglas Fogle, "You Don't Have to Go Home, But You Can't Stay Here," Mike Kelley—Fortress of Solitude (Amsterdam: Roma, 2018), 56. ↵

25. Kelley and Sylvester, "Talking Failure," 103. ↵

26. Kelley, Minor Histories, 77. ↵

27. Freud, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVIII, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), 29–39, 55–6. ↵

28. Kelley, Minor Histories, 76. ↵

29. Kelley and Sylvester, "Talking Failure," 103. ↵

30. Kelley, Minor Histories, 79. ↵

31. Ibid., 77. ↵

32. Diedrich Diederichsen, "Genealogy of the Victim," Educational Complex Onwards: 1995-2008, 331. ↵

33. Exhibited that year in Toward a Utopian Arts Complex at Metro Pictures in New York. ↵

34. Baker, "Mike Kelley: Death and Transfiguration," 187. ↵

35. Kelley, Minor Histories, 318. ↵

36. Diederichsen, "Genealogy of the Victim," 329. ↵

37. Kelley, Minor Histories, 241, 238. ↵

38. Kelley and Sylvester, "Talking Failure," 101. ↵

39. Howard Singerman, "Mike Kelley's Line," Mike Kelley: Three Projects: Half a Man, From My Institution to Yours, Pay for Your Pleasure, (Chicago: Renaissance Society, 1988), 9. ↵

40. Kelley, Minor Histories, 17. ↵

41. Ibid., 18. ↵

42. Ibid. ↵

43. Ibid. ↵

44. Singerman, "Mike Kelley's Line," 5, 9–10. ↵

45. Joshua Gurian, "The Controversy of Killer John Wayne Gacy's Artwork," The Culture Trip (November 26, 2016), https://theculturetrip.com/north-america/usa/illinois/articles/the-controversy-of-killer-john-wayne-gacys-artwork/. ↵

46. Steve Bornfeld, "Exhibition of Serial Killer Gacy's Artwork Comes to Quiet Close," Las Vegas Review-Journal (September 19, 2011), https://www.reviewjournal.com/entertainment/shows/exhibit-of-serial/. ↵

47. Art21, "Mike Kelley: Bad Boy | Art21 'Extended Play'," YouTube Video, 2:58, August 6, 2010, https://youtu.be/w3E0_C-y9ng. ↵

48. Ibid. ↵

49. Fine Arts, Sydney, "Matthew Griffin: 'contemporaryary' 11 October – 10 November 2018," [http://www.finearts.sydney/matthewgriffin_PR3.html]. ↵

50. Debord, Society of the Spectacle, 14; Comments on the Society of the Spectacle, 50. ↵

51. David Foster Wallace, A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again: Essays and Arguments (London: Abacus, 1998), 64, 81. ↵

52. It was Duchamp's Fountain (1917) that, in its porcelain facticity, embodied the reflux of the institutional structure of art's social regulation back into itself as a concrete, sensuous object—irrevocably exposing the "autonymy" (self-nomination) tacitly operative in the establishment of modern art as art (and not a mere object or image among so many others). Duchamp can thus be said to have brought the identity of the artwork to its point of "absolute deterritorialization"—the point at which no qualitative or sensuous distinction obtains between art and the realm of mundane objects. Art's transcendence of everyday objectivity has henceforth rested explicitly and self-consciously on the social (re-)production and projection of a distinct "aesthetic dimension" in which the pragmatic, reifying, appetitive or calculative attitude is suspended in favour of the "disinterest" and cognitive-imaginational free play of aesthetic comportment. The practical Hegelianism of Duchamp's prank-intervention has, over the last century, constructed the context for innumerable—often farcical or deflationary—repetitions: Manzoni, Kosuth, Emin, etc. The very concept of artistic form-giving is thus "ambiently" ironised; "anything whatever" now implicitly haunts all given aesthetic specificity. Ironic distance can be seen as a homeopathic integration of this spectral triviality. See Thierry de Duve, Kant After Duchamp (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 12–14, 77; Hegel, The Science of Logic, trans. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 378–80. ↵

53. Shot in black and white: a melancholic story of a man (portrayed by a shuffling cast of different actors in goth makeup, and apparently filmed in several different cities), his father and his boyhood ferret, re-mythologising the once-ubiquitous Nokia Type 7 ringtone as a "little theft" of an "old ferreter's tune." ↵

54. Martin Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper, 2013), 118–20. ↵

55. Freud, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), 136, 184; Lacan, Transference: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VIII, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2015), 196–219. ↵

56. Not interrupted; Griffin's steady stream of associations resumes wholly unperturbed. ↵

57. The outernet and Shallowest part are permeated by a sense of the low status of art and the artist in the contemporary world: Griffin worries that participation in his artworks is a "bother" for his friends; a synthol-injecting Brazilian bodybuilder "loses interest" in being part of a work and stops responding to his messages; the history of painting is speculatively requisitioned as the basis for a novelty restaurant in which still life ham hocks and seafood are materialised back into edible form. ↵

58. A rule-proving exception occurs a little later: the hashtag #WOKCHALLENGE appears a few moments before Griffin actually uses the word "challenge": algorithmic interpretation is not merely predictive, but reformative. ↵

59. Adam Greenfield, Radical Technologies: The Design of Everyday Life (London: Verso, 2017), 243–4. ↵

60. Mike Kelley, Foul Perfection: Essays and Criticism, ed. John C. Welchman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), xvii–xviii. Griffin's self-representation in the para-artistic, professional side of the contemporary art system—quite unlike Kelley's—is irreverently, "dysfunctionally" treated as an extension of his practice. In a 2010 interview, instead of discussing his work, he insists on demonstrating to "future employers" that he would be an "asset to their business" (but is pictured in construction PPE overalls embellished with penis, testicles and nipples in permanent marker). In a Bus Projects biographical statement he is described as a "slightly balding Artist/Raconteur whose works are held in EVERY major collection in Wangaratta" undertaking a "PhD in mime." Instead of straightforwardly providing "artist statements," he has contributed critical haikus and short fiction to exhibition catalogues. See Matthew Griffin and Melissa Loughnan, "Burly Griffin," The Blackmail (July 2010), [https://www.theblackmail.com.au/issue/2010/07/burly-griffin/]; Lily Hibberd, "The Griffin Conundrum," un Magazine 1.3 (2005), 20–1; Griffin, "Stages" in The Theatre is Lying, ed. Max Delany and Annika Kristensen (Melbourne: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 2018), 82–3. ↵

61. Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, 7. ↵

62. Far from a successful substitute, this element preserves the antagonism: in the form of the man's passivity, the video "cries out." ↵

63. Peggy Phelan, Unmarked: The Politics of Performance (London: Routledge, 1993), 10. ↵

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