

MAY

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Participation, Penetration, and Phoniness

Andrea Legiehn

"Life and Lies"

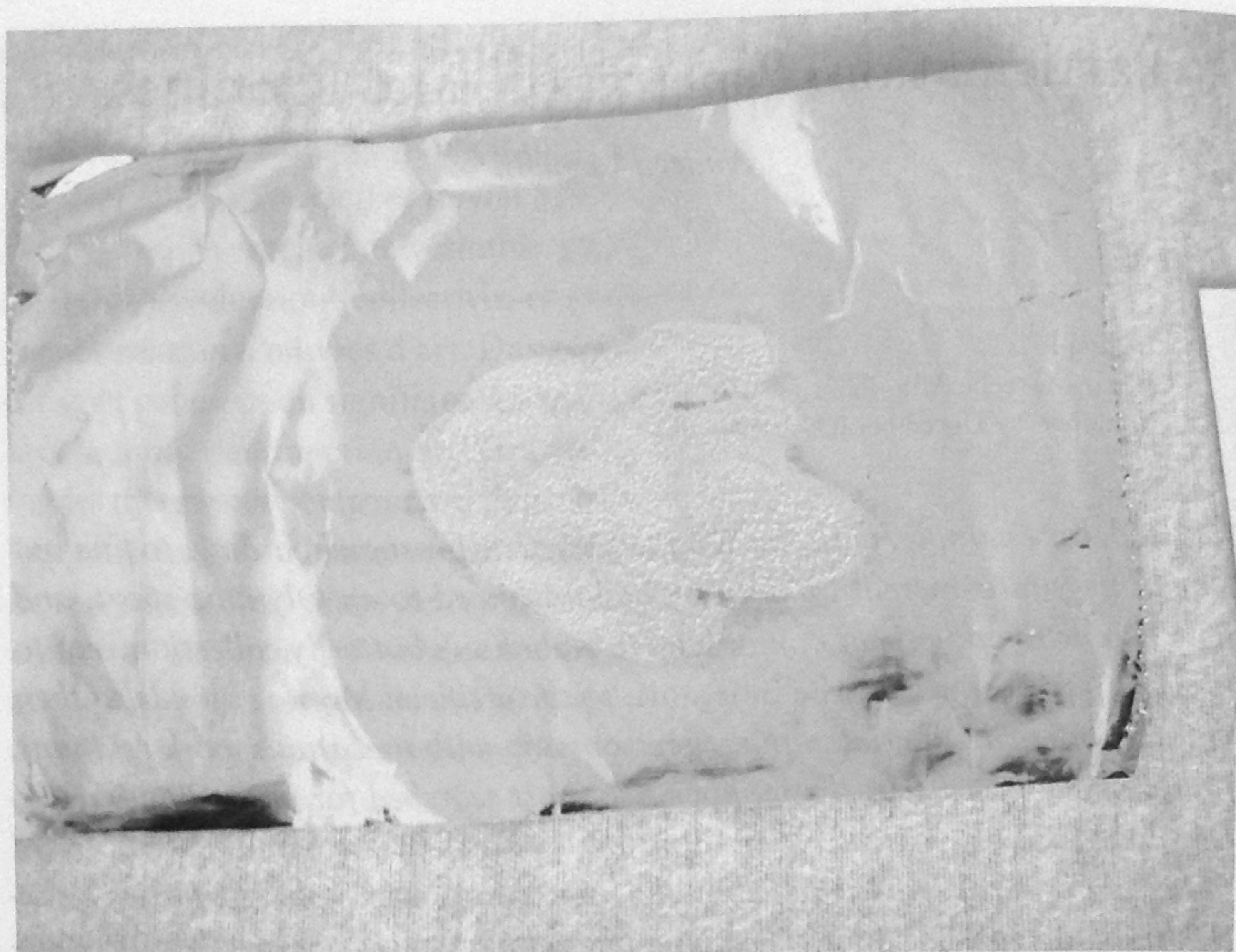
Galerie Marcelle Alix, Paris

November 9 – December 22, 2012

I started, for example, with the Wikipedia article for snowboarding, to find out when this youth-recreation activity had advanced to an Olympic sport, and then I come to adolescent homophilia to Nabokov's butterfly collection, and to Perniola's Sex Appeal of the Inorganic, to the artificial Monroe blonde to then quickly short circuit contemporary retromania with precarious work relations. I am not surprised that the number two most searched for music (music ricercata) is by György Ligeti, that "dont-do-womens-just-raf-simons.tumblr" is linked with a YouTube video showing an excerpt from Stanley Kubrick's sexual drama Eyes Wide Shut. The piano piece dreamily weaves together its reductive three tones with film images showing Tom Cruise walking in his well-fitting Chesterfield through the empty, rainy streets of an artificial-seeming New York. The music stops abruptly, when Tom Cruise enters the yellow taxi. I scroll through the YouTube comments and linger at one comment by lumpyluks: "I want to have a catcher in the rye/eyes wide shut experience one day, just walking at night through the streets of new york not knowing what's going on."

One might experience a similar feeling, yet with the reverse symptoms, when visiting the Tobias Kaspar exhibition "Life and Lies" at Marcelle Alix in Paris. On the long side of the small event room of the second lower level, fragments of a Raf Simon's menswear show from the summer of 2010 are projected as a video loop, filling the entire wall. Not Tom Cruise but the androgynous models strut here with motionless faces along an open-air catwalk, flanked by a notorious audience from the "world of glossy paper".¹ The agitated images make it easy to recognize that the photographer, artist Tobias Kaspar, is among them. Sometimes, the meticulously shaved neck of the seated neighbor blocks the view, then the dark cellar space is illuminated by a cigarette lighter, held ostensibly in the picture; a quick camera movement pans the night-blue sky, resting on a broadleaf tree saturated in digital-green, and finally focussing on a neoclassical house façade in the background. The formal randomness of the images is consistent with tourist-like evidence: "I was there," and shows the privileged view of a maximally aestheticized experience of reality: "I am a part." Simultaneously, the original, nervous soundscape comprising of audience noises (voices, laughter) and classical

1. Press release, Galerie Marcelle Alix.



music (Ligeti, Brahms, Bach) creates a dense atmosphere of live effects, which one can hardly escape in the cavernous room. And I, too, the art observer, play an unasked part in this “fictionalized reality.”² As much as my critical understanding tries to distance itself, one floor above me the hard, rhythmic keys playing Ligeti’s *Musica Ricercata* No. 2 can still be heard well.

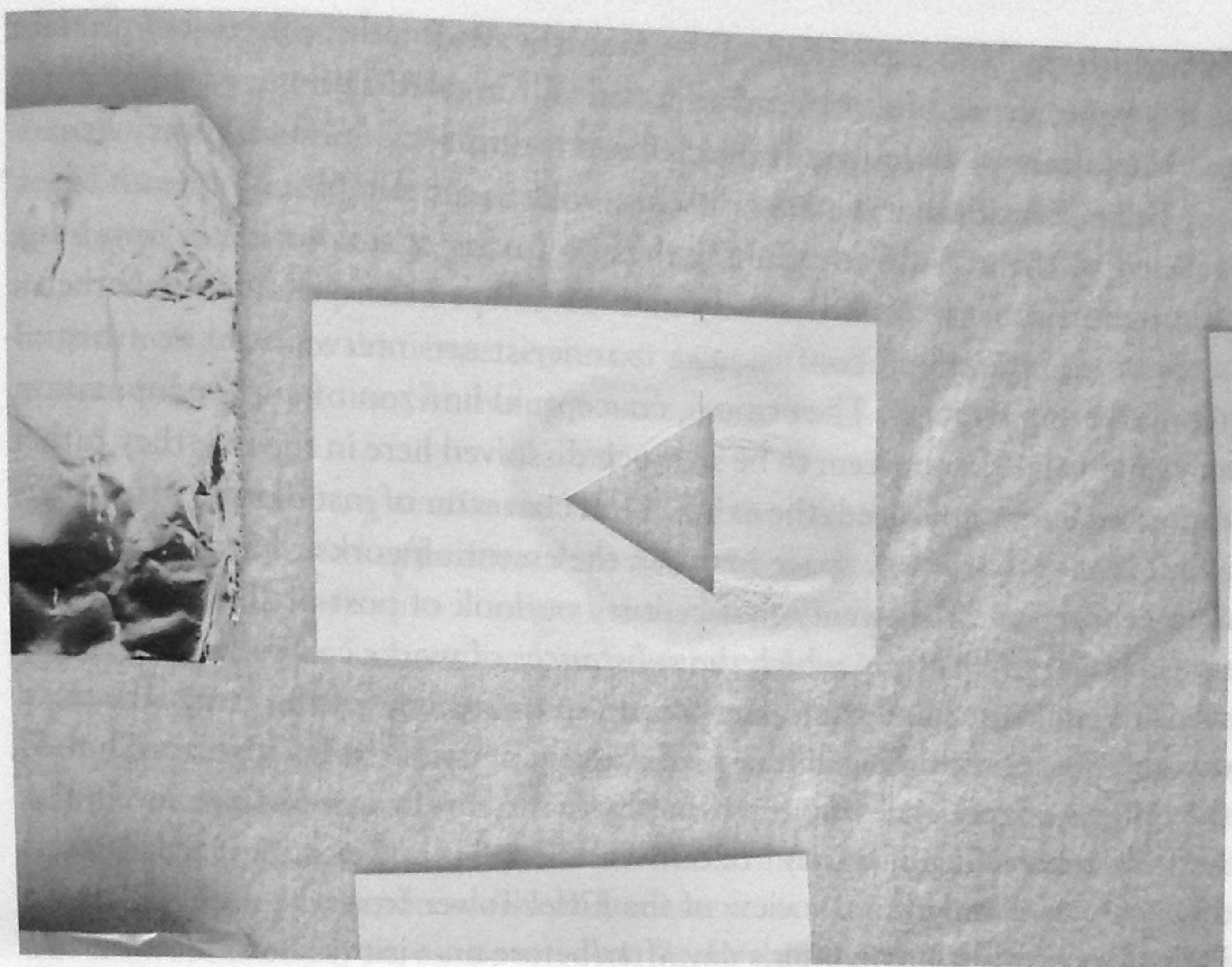
In contrast to the suggestive video installation, the bright room appears sober and concentrated. On a table amidst the gallery’s warehouse goods (packaged art, print results, tools) there is a television with a video *Blonde, (Making of)* from 2010/2012. The material was recorded in a hair salon in Frankfurt and shows how geometric forms can be “inserted” into blonde hair extensions of every length, which were originally—as the press release explains—worn by the Raf Simons model. The video length of twenty minutes stands in strange disproportion to the actual informational content of the documentation, and the crediting of participants in the blonde hair application and film process at the end of the video is weirdly asymmetrical to the result. When one ascends the small staircase to the top, past the small office area and into the actual exhibition space, the hair pieces are hanging there with the blonde triangles and rectangles, arranged in two Plexiglas cases (*Blonde*, 2012). The separation of a hair piece enclosed in the smaller case emphasizes the equal relation of the hair pieces to one another: the selection is not based on visible criteria. In front of the black velvet material, the collection seems like an awkward or ambitious advertisement display of a (hip) hair salon in Neukölln or Belleville and the processed relicts seem like scalps from the metrosexual look

2. Ibid.

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3. Ibid.



Tobias Kaspar, *Blonde Production*, 2012, bleach, pencil on paper, tin foil

of the early twenty-first-century. In retrospect, the documentation in the first lower level transforms the banal fashion accessories into objects with an “uncertain, changing, dubious, status.”³ It underscores the impression that primarily the hair pieces are not the fetish objects here, but rather the hairdressers’ active hands that meticulously perform each individual step in the work process, for the heads of the models have been consistently left out or simply cut out in post-production.

In the front of the exhibition hall, seven black-and-white photographs hang in a loose, decorative rhythm. They show Tobias Kaspar snowboarding in a snow-fogged landscape—taking a jump, sitting in the snow, climbing back up the mountain—an allegory for romantic failure in the 1990s. The elegiac mood is counteracted by the amateurish photos and the titles *Approx (Bail)*, *Approx (Beige)*, *Approx (Again)*, etc. In snowboard terminology “bail” means something like making a feint; “beige,” bad style; and “again” refers directly to the sportiness of the opportunity. A portrait shot by the artist breaks through the Muybridge-like movement sequence. The view that Tobias Kaspar guides through ski goggles, directly at the observer, holds something concrete. (Approx: Marcelle Alix, how do I look? A reaction to the photographic staging on the gallery’s homepage?) The irony of this self-staging seems not to be in questioning the actual business of being an artist, or in the remorse for being thus compromised, but essentially in the embodiment of it. The artist’s reification is passively constituted and directed and sharpened through the sex appeal of youthful wastefulness. Tobias Kaspar presents himself as manager of his own brand, a self-production that is expressed

3. Ibid.

through the stubborn assertion of the pose always at a distance to the product. In this logic, the careful material selection (silver gelatin prints, passe-partouts and black frames) undoubtedly proclaims a legitimate value as a luxury item.

The insecurity that the material can evoke in the exhibition "Life and Lies" is based in the artistic vocabulary that no longer wants to mean anything; although it wants to look that way and leaves open the question—whether it is about an intentional confusion, a mannerist art-intervention, or a beguiling marketing strategy. The critical, conceptual horizon of authorship, autonomy, and value do not seem to be so much dissolved here in the fog; they rather appear veiled by it. Indeed, the exhibition's character of installation also opens on all levels a transitory space between the essential works of art in the twentieth century and the twenty-first-century outlook of post-art indifferent relations between objects, in which the *substances* of works can collide: the silver static of analogue handprints, the pseudo-intimate view of the artist, the dead organic-ness of the artificial hair pieces, the activity of the hairdressers' hands, the reflexive experience of one's own physicality in the lowest floor level. The "fictionalized feeling of reality" of our world configuration shows itself here as a *horror vacui* and even the view of the Eiffel Tower from the nearby Parc de Belleville on this sunny winter's day after/before my visit to the exhibition can not really (re-)assure me. "Why Sex Now" (Alex Zachary, New York, 2011) puts the "Bodies in the Backdrop" (Peter Kilchmann, Zürich, 2012)?

Translated from German by Charlotte Eckler

Pénétration, participation et inauthenticité

Andrea Legiehn

Life and Lies

Galerie Marcelle Alix, Paris

9 novembre 2012 – 22 décembre 2012

Je commence par exemple par une entrée Wikipedia sur le snowboard pour découvrir quand ce divertissement de jeunesse est devenu un sport olympique, puis je pars de l'homophilie adolescente pour aboutir à la collection de papillons de Nabokov et au Sex-appeal de l'inorganique de Perniola¹, pour provoquer enfin, avec la blondeur artificielle de Marilyn Monroe, une collision entre l'obsession contemporaine du rétro et la réalité néolibérale du travail.

Il n'est pas surprenant que ce soit le n° 2 de la Musica Ricercata de György Ligeti qui crée un lien entre <dont-do-womens-just-raf-simons.tumblr.com> et une vidéo sur YouTube qui montre un extrait du drame sexuel Eyes Wide

1. Ouvrage publié en 2003 par les éditions Lignes dans une traduction de Catherine Siné.

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