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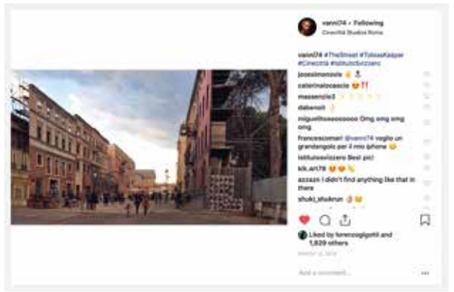

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fig. 1
Stills from *Boarding School*, 2009

fig. 2
Screenshot of an Instagram post featuring Tobias Kaspar's "The Street" by vanni74 on March 12, 2016

fig. 3
Photo used for the invitation to the show "In the Middle of Affairs" (2010) at Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, taken in the early 1980s in Ghislain Mollet Viéville's apartment depicting a model in a Sol LeWitt cube and, in the background, a projection by the collective IFP

fig. 4
Billboard curated by Markus Dreßen in front of Jochen Hempel Gallery in Leipzig, September 2017. Image courtesy Jochen Hempel Gallery, Leipzig

fig. 5
Spread from Tobias Kaspar's unpublished book *Notes on American Performance*, 2016

fig. 6
Poster designed by HIT for "Toby's Tristram Shandy Shop" at Margherita Hohenlohe's Udolpho in Berlin, 2015

Roundtable

The Present Conditions of Being Tobias Kaspar aka Luxury Drag

AD Anke Dyes
TK Tobias Kaspar
VK Valérie Knoll
HL Hannes Loichinger
JS Jakob Schillinger

HL I'd like to start with a section from Tobias Kaspar's current CV: "Tobias Kaspar's practice [1] raises questions on how to act in the mainstream of today's society; how, when, and under what circumstances one can carve out a space of one's own, and thus question that very ambition itself. Kaspar's work exemplifies the strategy of appearing and partaking in different economies so as to reflect and question the artist's own position and the position we are in at large. Through juxtaposition, the emergence in various fields offers insight into how different systems of value production function. Kaspar's practice is informed by an interest in how object, image, text, form, and content relate to each other. Kaspar's artworks are an ongoing investigation into the semantic connotations of images and objects. Fabric and garments are recurrent motifs along with issues concerning identity-building and so-called 'subjectivity' in our society."[1] As I see it, there are at least two reasons for putting this quote at the beginning of our exchange. For one thing, playing through different roles and functions—Tobias' work *as* fashion designer, *as* curator, *as* editor of a whole string of publications, *as* initiator of "The Street," [2] and with it a retrospective/blockbuster event/theater play hybrid—permits the assumption that none of the communicative forms connected to his work cannot also be viewed as part of his work, and all these elements stand in a specific relationship to one another, right down to his CV. For another thing, a show he organized with Egija Inzule and Axel Wieder at Künstlerhaus Stuttgart called "In the Middle of Affairs" (2010) [3] already articulated an interest in "loopholes" that has since been accompanying Tobias' work for years and was conceived first and foremost as at least temporarily functional ways out of the art field, and also as a way of permanently importing and translating various positions, practices, and aesthetics into the art field and out of it.

These obfuscations and juxtapositions turn his pieces, shows, and collaborations, many of which are developed in several iterations, into backdrops, and the visitors, or actors, into protagonists in a process marked by tactical and strategic maneuvers, jeopardizing the boundaries of the contexts and economies referenced, as well as their respective mediatization strategies. By the same token, a social network becomes visible that permanently calls into question who is working or laboring "with, as, via"[2] or even "for" TOBIAS KASPAR and circulates the outcome of those collaborations. I'm thinking of a (re)presentation of Tobias' life and work as proposed by the 2017 publication *New Address* [4], just to name one example.

That approach doesn't seem entirely unproblematic, seeing as how it is connected to various claims like being performative, working through entanglements, or bringing them to the stage—while it can equally be read as reproductive mimicry appropriating strategies and competencies of other cultural producers, or else their symbolic capital and, in a roundabout way, skimming off surplus value in every conceivable form. That is one potential criticism partly found in articles and reviews from the past few years. But ultimately it is Tobias Kaspar, not TOBIAS KASPAR, who is invited to shows and represented by galleries, and who, despite any tendencies to expand and collapse boundaries, is primarily perceived in the field of art.

So I see a string of questions here. With which discourses can Tobias' artistic practice be productively connected? In what is it merely participating or confined to an (in)visible reference? How did the work and strategies change in the past years—in reaction to more general, external developments as much as through the inclusion of third-party reactions and/or newly tapped contexts? And how can this artistic practice be situated historically, considering how Tobias put countless references associated with his work—from Ghislain Mollet-Viéville to the magazine *The Gentlewoman* [5] to Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* [6]—into circulation himself?

JS I see four key moments in Tobias' work. First, an appropriation of terminology, forms, stylistic devices, and formats from brand development or marketing of (non-artistic) lifestyle and luxury products. Second, an overlap with procedures familiar from institutional critique, plus direct references to selected exponents of the latter, who have themselves already appropriated branding and fashion—as in Ghislain Mollet-Viéville, whom you just mentioned, or an artist like John Knight [7]. Third, the handling of these canonical institution-critical forms is governed by an ostentatiously formulaic, generic method of production that underlines the artificiality of the TOBIAS KASPAR-brand [8]. Fourth, uppercase letters, stand-ins, and hide-and-seek games mark a difference between brand and hypostatized actor "behind" it.

This approach is surely compatible with a host of established discourses: commodification and the allegorical depletion of the work of art, Post-Conceptual critique of authenticity, fashion as post-modern play with signs and codes. And then the one I find most productive for your question of historicization: the problematization of authorship by artificial artists in the 2000s, even though in the case of Tobias there's no longer any suggestion of anarchist bohemian singularities "behind" the generic brand, but a hedonist lifestyle consumer instead.

To situate Tobias' work historically I would suggest using the question of its criticality. That question plays a crucial role in discourse surrounding Tobias. On the one hand, critics like Julia Moritz want to see something you could, with Hal Foster, call "mimetic exacerbation."[3] On the other hand, Sam Pulitzer notes the same thing as Tobias himself/Amalia does in the *BOMB* magazine interview[4] [9], if in a different tone: a "pantomime" of the culture industry and the collapse of difference (or critical distance) between the culture industry and art.[5] There are two forms of reaction here, where the one side automatically speaks of distance, nearly as a reflex, and sees a critical moment, and the other—as in Sam or also Tobias via Amalia—assumes there is no more distance to be had. But, instead of asking about the status of Tobias' criticality, i.e. instead of operating with the critical/affirmative distinction ourselves, I'd suggest we observe that distinction and the way people operate with it. The question would then be whether the problematization of criticality in connection with Tobias' work points toward a larger cluster of problems in the early 2010's.

The hypothesis would be that critical/affirmative and, along with it, distinctions like neo avant-garde/culture industry or avant-garde/kitsch are the code by means of which the art system reproduces itself and its boundaries, and makes sure that art communications can connect to further art communications.

HL Are you making a systems-theoretical argument? Maybe we can come back to that later.

JS One could also put it differently: criticality is the highest value in art discourse. One could see in Sam's review an attempt at re-introducing, by way of aggression, difference, where the master difference, the highest value in art discourse, namely criticality, and with it all the differences between individual artistic positions derived therefrom, have become precarious. A feverish reaction, if you will, to a crisis in criticality—think of Hal Foster's "Post-Critical" (2012). Following my hypothesis, in the early 2010s, a generation of artists "critically" socialized by art schools and discourse-setting magazines hardly sees any more ways to be critical and starts worrying about entropy: without criticality, no differences that make a difference—nothing but noise. One prominent reaction is a rehashed Post-Conceptual or ironic turn to painting, Merlin Carpenter being one important model for that. Criticality is hereby precisely not being given up as a value, but shifted to a higher order. That is to say: critical art is naive and corrupt, so you critically mark your own difference from that critical art. In a somewhat old-fashioned—and not systems-theoretical—manner of speaking, one could go with Peter Sloterdijk and call that the stance of an "aufgeklärtes falsches Bewusstsein" (enlightened false consciousness). Or in our case, perhaps better, an "abgeklärtes falsches Bewusstsein" (cool false consciousness).

One question would then be, to what extent can Tobias be counted among that paradigm, and what difference does it make not to turn to painting, but instead to fashion and lifestyle marketing, which are similarly charged? Furthermore, what was the reason for that shift in taste ca. 2010? There are a variety of propositions. Socioeconomic: the symbolic significance of an art market boom driven by the financial crisis? Or media-historic, in keeping with the recent trend: the rise of digital distribution channels that transfer images and metadata instead of discourse? On that point: I noticed that Tobias has been very present on contemporaryartdaily.org from the beginning. Finally, and this would be my last question, whether and how the taste or tone has once again changed since then, and if so, how that registers in Tobias' practice.

AD In the invitation to this discussion, Hannes, you added this "for" to my earlier description of working "with, via, as" Tobias Kaspar—who works for Tobias Kaspar? And I'd like to take that question up when we come back to how Tobias' work is also about exhibiting these "collaborations," that extend to exhibiting constellations and groups of friends.

For a second, I thought the show reflects on making labor visible and invisible quite precisely, such as when AIBO the robot dog takes pictures that get posted on Instagram [10], and that constitute much of the show's online presence. Which points toward a further shift, that being where the mechanisms of distinction we know from art are taking place at the moment. This is where we can observe the "art logic" far better. A friend of mine claims that, watching Balenciaga's Instagram account, it's mostly a matter of reading the comments and seeing who truly "gets" the images posted there.

But, to come back to labor: Whoever is working for whomever here remains hidden in a way and cannot get paid. This is work on getting a certain attention and significance, which would be translatable in monetary terms. It's just that it isn't called work; it's called something like participation or interaction. This is what also interests me about AIBO, and also about the teddy bears—and in a way, this is at the core of this practice of involving other people: in it lies a reflection on a capitalism that exploits liveliness. The show is quasi-animated by elements like AIBO and all the teddy bears and their "actions." Everything is performing, not to mention whoever comes in to have a look and gets their picture taken; there's almost a sort of "live feeling," this strong impression of being at something that's happening, proceeding in real time.

Another detail I liked seeing the show yesterday is that, on the back of one picture in the piece *Why Sex Now* [11], two now-defunct galleries that used to represent Tobias get "courtesy" mentions. There's something very similar in the most recent issue of *PROVENCE* magazine, the "REPORT AW18/19": a list of shuttered galleries and their closing statements. Both comment on the economic channels of artistic production, their failure and collapse, and so they also touch on whether thinking art in these channels still makes sense. In Tobias' work it becomes quite clear that marketing strategies, so as to establish a label for instance, in fact do not have to take place in brick and mortar exhibition spaces.

Basically, I doubt these strategies are about "loopholes," as you said earlier, that this is about exiting art. These strategies are too integrated in the channels and circuits of art, too cleverly equipped with different forms of capital, etc. At the same time, details like the defunct galleries do indicate that perhaps there has to be another way. Further, these forms that keep cropping up in Tobias' pieces, forms I'd like to call "luxury drag," also mark a distance from that way of producing, showing, and dealing art. By that I mean certain elements that elsewhere are a means of distinction, don't have the same meaning in the context of Tobias' work, not least because they never completely fulfill their formal and economical promise, or else are unable to do so. Not long ago, someone told me this anecdote about how Alex Zachary Gallery went broke because there were always too many luxurious dinners with oysters and champagne [12].

I wanted to touch on the name that appears or does not appear, too. Then as now, I find it odd to try to get rid of yourself in art of all places—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari were famously proposing BDSM or drugs to that effect, admitting that these, too, might not necessarily prove effective. There is a lot of criticism of that strategy in your introductory statement, Hannes: saying that no matter how much you try to disguise it as an artificial figure, a brand, or a fictitious collective being, in the end it is the artist Tobias Kaspar who is being invited. Which is true, but at the same time, not only pieces, but also references are being attributed to an author [13] according to your statement. Things Tobias apparently put into circulation as carriers of meaning; linking words or references to an author who may not have invented them, but supposedly imbued them with new meaning for the here and now. I don't see that supposed


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fig. 7
Exhibition curated by Egija Inzule at Café Hammer in Basel (2009) on the occasion of the release of *PROVENCE*'s Issue P, with two vitrines, one containing a full set of John Knight's *Journals Series* and the other printed matter by/on *agent d'art* Ghislain Mollet-Viéville. Photographer: PROVENCE

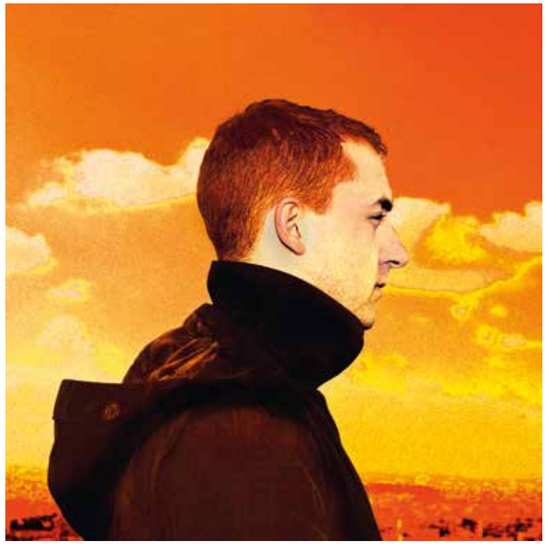
fig. 8
Tobias Kaspar, *Off-Broadway, NB, SF*, 2015, in "Off-Broadway" at the Wattis Institute in San Francisco (2015), curated by Nairy Baghramian

fig. 9
Page from *Notes on American Performance*, 2016. Collage including an excerpt from "Tobias Kaspar by Daniel Horn. An almost interview," published in *BOMB* magazine in 2014

fig. 10
AIBO (*21.9.2018) takes photographs on command as well as of his own accord, which are then uploaded to an app directly linked to social media channels. AIBO's camera can also be accessed through the app at any time and allows the app user a direct view of AIBO's whereabouts, just like a security camera, but now camouflaged as a cute robot-dog. All photos were taken in the exhibtion "Independence" at Kunsthalle Bern (2018). Photographer: AIBO

fig. 11
Back side of one of the framed photographs from the series *Why Sex Now*, 2011, with labels of the now permanently closed galleries Alex Zachary, New York and Silberkuppe, Berlin

fig. 12
Street view of of Alex Zachary Gallery in New York, winter 2011



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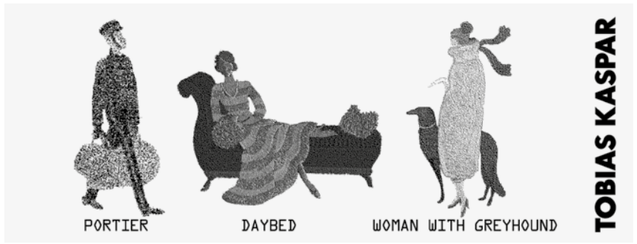

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fig. 13
Portrait de l'artiste (David Bowie), 2012
Photographer: Aurélien Mole, art direction Marcelle Alix

figs. 14–15
Label for *Harlequin Teddy*, 2018

fig. 16
Portrait de l'artiste (David Bowie), 2012
Photographer: Aurélien Mole, art direction Marcelle Alix

fig. 17
Exhibition view of "The Complete" at Archiv, Zurich (2018), curated by Christoph Schifferli and Geraldine Tedder
Photographer: Paul Brunner

attempt to bind meanings to authors, to register clear mappings of references displayed in the work itself. That is actually antithetical to what Tobias usually does.

TK I find this term Anke introduced, "luxury drag," interesting … When a vogue/drag show starts, there's an announcement at the beginning, like "the category is: postman" or "business man" or "secretary." [14–15] And then you have to act that out.

AD I was thinking that, in his shows, and here in Bern as well, Tobias picks up certain elements people could maybe read as "exclusive," or just perceive as "definitely expensive," and he performs them as *forms*—but with a certain distance. That's "drag" to the extent that you can never, or never want to completely adhere to these forms. Like the invitation card to this show looks like it's been personally signed, and this swirly signature is printed in gold just like the rest of the text. So, the card affects some of the not-so-subtle ways of representing luxury or wealth—and also how invitations that look like this would be desirable objects that guarantee access to something special or individual, or at least limited. But this card grants access to an exhibition opening at a public art institution. Everyone is invited, and there are no champagne and oysters. That's what I mean by distance, and it's what I would describe as the Drag Moment.

VK I'm actually interested in the drag and pantomime techniques getting brought into play in Tobias' modus operandi since they both tie in with theatrical tactics, which frequently play a role in Tobias' work. As in "all the world's a stage." [16] Pantomime and drag are based on the principle of imitation through poses, gestures, costumes, and masks. Drag can artificially overplay clichés, take a preconceived notion and turn it into a fearsome caricature. People think of pantomime as quiet and mysterious, but it can also entail clownish elements. I see a lot of those things flickering in Tobias' practice. Theatricality surfaces very directly in "The Street," where everyone present becomes an extra in a sort of living theater on a real-life set. A lot of your projects have the character of "events." To an attendee, it feels like getting caught up in something, you end up playing an extra, doing something that surpasses viewing, regardless of whether you want to or not. Of course, people can feel like staffage in a stage-like situation at any exhibition opening, but in Tobias' case, those kinds of situations are, to some extent, more controlled. You weigh in on who's putting in an appearance, writing an article, etc. The role you play seems more like that of an impresario to me. Even the objects in your shows—and this still kind of bothers me now, too—you call them "props." And they turn into part of a total production. That bothered me because it strips the individual work of art of value. Everything becomes decor and props—support structures. My question would then be: for what statement? What is the piece and who's playing the main character? For a second, everything appears to be nothing more than the framework for something that never really becomes manifest. So, despite the abundance of things and people, that carries with it a sense of emptiness. I don't mean this to be negative. All these things saying something about taste, the refinement or flattening thereof, about refined lifestyle concepts and the fabrication of self-images—all that harbors something simultaneously euphoric and melancholic. For me.

HL That would be a totally different reading from the *Artforum* review Jakob cited, which in some respects seem to be paradigmatic. There: emptiness and spectacle. A simple "no" would be better than regurgitating all the "art as a culture industry" talk and (re)producing undifferentiated forms that look like the new clothes of the "consumer-oriented lifestyle economies."[6] Here: theatrical total production with "props," delegated performance, and moments of alienation. "Luxury drag" … Maybe we can also read the void declared a lack by the review but positively construed by Valérie as a refusal to stand for an unequivocally identifiable artistic position incessantly directing eyes to whatever positions that position? In the press release for the show in Bern, this was also phrased as a problem: they who withdraw are open to any and every interpellation.

JS The minute you say "drag," you're re-introducing difference or critical distance in new wording. What does the operation we're talking about consist of? I would say to use terms like "drag" when we're talking about art generates a difference from an original model, in this case from mass culture, consumer culture, or whatever you want to call it. Whereas my question was whether—in both Tobias' ventriloquistic interview and Sam's critique—it might have been about ascertaining: there's no distance there. The new distinction would then consist of marking a difference from these people who think you could still adopt critical distance.

AD I don't believe "drag" has to be about intentional critique at first. I think it's more of a shifting performance which, for a variety of reasons, botches the portrayal, or at the very least doesn't entirely fill its role, only plays it with little credibility, and in so doing also questions the credibility of the original performance.

HL Those may be two opposed discourses. Anke is stressing "drag" in an attempt to question the difference so important to systems theory between system and environment, norm and deviation, and—coming back to Jakob's point—critical and non-critical. And by that means the very operation, the difference you are then talking about, Jakob, gets subverted. Perhaps it would help to talk about concrete pieces in the show?

JS Maybe we don't have to get bogged down on that at all. If we shift our focus and talk about the work itself, I intuitively like the term "luxury drag" as a description. That corresponds to the feeling I myself had when I looked at the show. It was as if the works were aiming at a certain luxury—unproductive expenditure, idleness, haughty composure—but somehow misses the mark.

AD That falling short is exactly what makes some of the pieces. That the white rug laying in front of the *Hydra Life* video keeps getting filthier is the good thing about the piece; that it gets downright disgusting in this place that used to look like a cosmetic fair booth with luxury carpeting. The performance of this luxury care of the self is somehow broken.

JS The same thing—"luxury drag"—happens in the video itself, because Inka Meißner's skin, the skin we see in the video, isn't that of someone who has all kinds of people doing face masks and whatever for her or him for two hours each day. But I'd like to come back to Anke's and Hannes' question about work or labor:

who produces with, as, via, or even for Tobias and puts the outcome of that work into circulation?

TK I don't find work interesting. Punk. I do all my jeans with different designers, and the initial stage of that collaboration is a conversation. I might arrive with a mood board, but fashion designers handle the design and the cut, because they are also the people who have those skills, and I don't see myself as a fashion designer. So, at a certain point, it becomes a commission, although "Tobias × The Other Person" gets communicated. Whereas publications like *The Street Cards* take months—the conception is usually the hardest part, and then finding the right form. *The Street Cards* are modeled after Charles and Ray Eames' *House of Cards* [17]. Same format, the cards, the box, etc. … I pick up a narrative only to continue it differently, or rewrite it, or else to just decode it in the first place and then see what happens next.

I've been doing the jeans since 2012, and they're slowly starting to acquire a life of their own. They're in fashion stores, developing an economy of their own. But that did take several years. Like the jeans *Independence* (2018) for Bern, they only used to be available via whatever show, were only visible within the art economy and could only be purchased via that economy. And *PROVENCE* has actually taken on a life of its own too, irrespective of how difficult the economy is. Maybe Hannes can say more about that.

JS One thing I noticed about *PROVENCE* is you're explicitly rejecting legal responsibility for the content. It's the opposite to what's usual: the authors are entirely responsible themselves. There are a lot of little signals like this "nicht V.i.S.d.P."[7] which suggest a modus operandi that is ultimately geared above all toward creating the least possible work for yourself. That might go in the direction Anke brought up: exhibiting or staging certain forms of collaboration that, Anke, if I've understood you correctly, are situated in the vicinity of what is generally referred to as "platform capitalism."

TK I'd rather discuss this less via the term work than via the term control, since I don't control all outputs. There's actually a lot I don't control. It's rather something like composition.

HL As Valérie already noted, you yourself are often the person making sure texts get written about your shows, sometimes even by your "friends, lovers, and financiers." To say that there's a lot you don't control—I seriously doubt that. What seems connected to this is how your own life circumstances always show up in your work too. And as I see it, those circumstances have had a downright decisive influence on your work and your projects: Where are you living at the moment? With whom are you spending time? And then people get selected—maybe you had an interesting conversation with them and now assume some interest in cooperation exists, an interest in taking on this or that task, maybe there is even a desire to do that. Another moment of a slightly different nature, but still tied in with this process, occurred on the occasion of your move from Rome to Riga. Via a newsletter by the institution Kim?, you didn't only publicly communicate your relocation, you also declared the focus on art hubs obsolete and the periphery the new place to be.

VK Composition is a helpful keyword. Your practice spans different forms of expression and spheres. It came as no surprise that you also had a hand in designing the invitation card for your show "Independence," to the extent that your card had a completely different feel from those of the last four years here. Designing ephemera is also part and parcel of your practice. Fashion, painting, readymade, sculpture, ephemera, video, teddy bears, Instagram—all that and then some constitutes one big additive composition. For the show in Bern, we ran with that, anticipated an abundant selection, and ended up with an intentional excess. It was a gamble because historically the Kunsthalle has been known for its Minimalist shows, where some artists follow one single unifying principle.

As far as this show goes, no one can exactly claim that you only have other people work for you—you don't even have any assistants. Those thousand teddy bears and their details, the jeans uniforms made in collaboration with FFIXXED STUDIOS, you planned it all down to the details. You developed the photographs with the embroidery you tracked down after several stays at a textile archive. But you have a feeling for the point in time when you wade through something alone, and when you pull in support from experts and would like to delegate tasks and work [18]. Ultimately we're just talking about an understandably typical practice in art, to delegate part of the production. I do find the question of who does what percent of the work mildly interesting. Another question would pertain to paying people working with or for you. But, as to your own input: it's an art to make your pieces and your practice look nimble, and that's something you do well. What you, Hannes, probably also mean is how deft it can come across, how Tobias integrates a thing or person that crosses his path in a certain living situation into his production. You stay overnight at someone's place where Peggy Guggenheim's autobiography happens to be laying by the bed, and the contents might trigger an entire show. For me, the way you work is also in no way strategic, but quick and artistic, since a whole lot arises from the material in the broadest sense of the word.

HL I didn't just bring up these questions on work and collaboration because I'm interested in what this "work" makes an issue of or would like to make an issue of, what effects it produces, or how it shows outwardly. I'm also interested in what its own premises are. And how what it says relates to what it does. So, a very classic question about its social and material conditions, which still seem important to me: who provides what in what situation, and how does that present itself to the world.

AD But in that guise, collaboration also has definite drawbacks. Not just because—as previously stated—labor becomes invisible, but also because different product lines still might not get "independent" enough. I was disappointed with the *PROVENCE* relaunch at first, for instance, because I felt like you guys don't really step up and make it the new art/politics/design/critique magazine from Switzerland. Instead, the whole thing operates insider-like within a certain circle again, and that circle is also tied to Tobias' art production.

HL Interestingly, we got treated to the inverse of your critique by that very same circle: "*PROVENCE* has gotten random [19]—it's no longer defined by a certain group of people." For the first issues of the magazine,

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fig. 18
Hans-Christian Lotz during the production of PROVENCE Noire, Berlin, 2012
Photographer: PROVENCE

fig. 19
PROVENCE SS 20, 2020
Photographer: Marc Jauss

fig. 20
Screenshot of a newsletter by Bruil & van der Staaij, sent on October 4, 2018

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fig. 21 156–157
Concert, cocktail reception, and launch of *PROVENCE*'s Issue R in Tbilisi (2009), in the framework of the group exhibition "Never On Sundays" curated by Daniel Baumann

fig. 22
Screenshot of an Instagram post by _fabioquaranta_motelsalieri on October 20, 2018

fig. 23
The book *New Address* depicted on FFIXXED STUDIOS collection by Tobias Kaspar, screenshot of an Instagram post by masahiro_kubo on July 26, 2018

friends did the layout and we gathered photocopied manuscripts.[8] It was relatively hard to even write an editorial, because it was never quite clear what the point actually was, and various interests overlapped. Most recently, for "REPORT AW18/19", we had a relatively precisely defined approach running along various questions on work, collaboration, and service—in more than one way there's quite a difference to when we started. Working with Bruil & van de Staaij [20]/Spector Books led us to another operating structure, which is unfortunately no less precarious, but does spread out more expansively, though still within a specific group. To the extent that the magazine's latest development requires Conceptual underpinnings, I'd refer to Craig Owens' remarks on his switch from *October* to *Art in America* in an interview with Lyn Blumenthal in 1984: to work in a less isolated niche … Maybe we should get back to the show in Bern.

VK Tobias and I noticed that one of the technicians working on installing "Independence" was arranging teddy bears in the Kunsthalle and coming up with his own scenes on the sly. We liked that. Tobias entrusted him with setting up a portion of the bears, and the technician derived no small pleasure from that. It's also a matter of valuing the abilities and experiences of your counterpart. This particular technician, who's been installing shows at the Kunsthalle for twenty years, was fully aware that viewers would end up thinking Tobias had done everything all by himself. And in the end, the vast majority of the teddy bears was in fact arranged by Tobias.

AD And then the author of whatever comes out of that and this can't be anyone but Tobias Kaspar, regardless of how little Tobias Kaspar is in there.

JS But hasn't that actually been the paradigm followed by all artists for 100 years? The paradigm by which people describe the workings of capitalism, or at least industrial capitalism, in general? A giant production apparatus consisting of art handlers, curatorial assistants, interns, etc. producing works of art in a complex collaboration in which everyone gets enough salary to reproduce their labor power, while the surplus value gets skimmed off. Actually—isn't that ultimately the readymade procedure? The separation of production and authorization. I thought you were identifying the formation of a new paradigm.

AD I was thinking of an interactive format that controls and authorizes interaction, something we're frequently confronted with today—like in the guise of Amazon reviews or O2 customer service—ways people currently work together, discuss things, get advice. Looks like community, but it's service. And that service comes from other people who've already read the book in advance and hand you a summary. Not from the company that sells it to you.

HL In the case of the teddy bears at Kunsthalle Bern, that would then be the work of employees getting paid, let's say, as technicians and not as co-producers? And not being named as such? And also visitors rearranging the teddy bears or posting photos of the show?

AD You'd have to make a distinction there. I'm not talking about a form of exploitation behind Tobias Kaspar's production dynamics. Otherwise we'd have to talk about "fair pay," and that wouldn't even be going far enough. This removal, or even just an apparent removal of himself as an author and producer mirrors something which is happening in other places too right now. And perhaps it's—as with other forms of alternative economies—simply the important distinction that you do it yourself (and not Amazon or the banks). Maybe AIBO is an even better example for that than the teddy bears and who arranges them. But of course, the person who earns the money in the end stays the same, even with the AI dog.

TK Transparency? [21] Like in another culture industry—in film, they lay it all out in the credits, down to the cable grips. You don't see that very much in art, nor in fashion. We did consider doing something like a credits list for this show. Now there's classic thank-yous. Then every single person is named on the back of the leaflet: the makers of the teddy bears, the sprayers who did the spray paintings, the people who poured the bronze …

AD But transparency is another easily misunderstood concept and only conceals even larger, in this case, economic interdependencies. With transparency your production can be, to some extent, *clean*, and your money too—which isn't all that bad for a start. It's surely better for everyone who sets up the teddy bears or whatever, or even the people sitting here at this table. But that doesn't supply a "loophole" or a different way of handling the resources in art.

HL Another anecdote on Tobias' and my collaboration: Early on in our acquaintance, Tobias told me Mark Twain's short story "Whitewashing the Fence" (1876). Tom's Aunt Polly hires him to paint a fence. Some friends of his come along on their way to the lake and other summer activities. Instead of subjecting himself to their predictable mockery, Tom turns the tables and pitches painting the fence as a privileged task not everyone is capable of doing. At the end of the day, the fence had been painted several times over … by the other kids. Like, work is only that which a person doesn't want to do.

AD Now it certainly seems exciting. More like something you *get to* participate in.

TK I want to get back to the notion of critique Jakob touched on. Like, in the early 2000s, critique with a capital C has been eliminated and declared over. As Hannes has mentioned, Egjia Inzule, Axel Wieder, and I curated the show "In the Middle of Affairs" at Künstlerhaus Stuttgart in 2010. Since then, I've been actively using terms like "hack" and "loopholes." And I conceive of them as tactics. Although I do think the CV Hannes read from is in dire need of an overhaul, because those strategies are completely obsolete now. Every company is talking about hacks and loopholes today, so that attempt at critique has run up against a brick wall, or already—as usual—just gotten sucked up by capitalism in ever shorter intervals. Why create something new, when it's only going to get made use of ever faster by giant mechanisms and potentially wielded against you? One time, in *PROVENCE*, we printed this quote, "As a preventive move, we have been working with classics from the beginning—to avoid being the inventive one starting to establish."

HL Anke was asking about the suitability of the economic channels in which art circulates. Not that long ago,

you set up a website called “Tobias Kaspar Store.” Are you circumventing the classic operating structures in the art field by offering your “products” for sale yourself, no longer relying on galleries to sell them?

TK Is the teddy bear art or are the *Reflector Paintings*? Jeans [22], teddy bears, publications, and other merchandise are for sale in the online shop at tobias-kaspar.com—or via tagged products in social media. I’m not taking any financial leeway away from galleries. The website came out of the book *New Address* [23]. A lot of the images from it are online. There was interest in doing a homepage, just not one with CV, works, projects, etc., but something that would kind of showcase the work … A shop felt fitting, as an extreme form.

HL There at least is the beginning of an answer on the internal dynamics between the individual “media.” The question whether the teddy bears or the *Reflector Paintings* are art is something I don’t find especially interesting, personally. The far more decisive factors are how and where those pieces get put into circulation and juxtaposed with one another. And with you, merchandising even becomes a product in its own right, and the teddy bear becomes the perfect attention-grabber in the gift economy of the art field.

JS If I may, I’d like to follow that up with a question. If I’ve understood you correctly, Tobias, you wondered how useful it is to make anything new [24] at all, if it’s only going to get recuperated anyway. I’d like to send the question back to you, inverted: Why should you make anything if it weren’t going to get recuperated? You’re a professional artist, so don’t you make art so that it will get picked up by an art world that happens to be a commercial context?

HL From my point of view it would be necessary to be more precise here. What processes are we talking about? Commercialization, recuperation, re-working, translation, appropriation … I think the very splintering of one’s own work into different economies and their circuits of value production can be viewed as a way of circumventing processes of co-optation and disambiguation. That looks like a contradiction to me now, or like an all too neoliberal idea, but I’m not sure it really is one.

TK In the train on the way here, I wondered what happens when you produce something, in my case a piece or a show, and it no longer aligns with your own aesthetic preferences. The question being, what that would be—or what that would mean, and whether a particular person can be separated from their particular aesthetics. So, of course it’s possible. But what happens when you produce something and actually think it’s good, it’s internally coherent, but it doesn’t go with your own aesthetics?

AD Doesn’t that happen in every art production all the time? That you made this weird thing, and now it’s laying around like an abject pile … Because even if, like you said before, your strategies get sucked up, your practice is also sucking up or even co-opting things all the time: people’s expertise, terms, perspectives. Perhaps they go against you at times, so then an art show comes out that actually does not appeal to you at all, despite it still being you.

TK The term “drag” goes with that again. Take Walter van Beirendonck and his line dance runway: an aesthetics gets done to death, then a completely different look and style is introduced in the next collection … There’s still a signature style—people can say “that’s Galliano.” But even so, I’m doing medieval now, and then a spaceship collection.

AD You can’t do that equally well, being an artist? Do fashion designers have to back their collections less with their personality than artists have to?

TK The strategy of working like that can probably become your signature style. Look at Elaine Sturtevant. I find it interesting to work with different industries, although I don’t really work in them, but, for example, I use the same textile producer that major fashion brands use, and analyze them, because it helps me understand my own industry better. You can draw parallels, make comparisons …

HL Coming back to Jakob’s comments on difference again, to make distinctions, where does the distinction come in when your exploration of other fields generates forms and strategies you then transpose into the field of art? Where and through what mechanisms does—aside from the fact that people are suddenly communicating about “art,” which would also be my objection to a systems-theoretical line of argumentation—a comment come into the picture, or a translation, or a transformation of the structures of designation, which then for its part enables other insights and modalities that aren’t present in the referenced contexts? Or at least aren’t visible?

TK As for the jeans, I think: zero distinction. It’s even more extreme with Kunsthalle Bern, because the Kunsthalle already decided to have a fashion line and has specifically invited artists to design clothes. Then there’s this practically inconvenient overlap because actually … someone prints his painting on a sweatshirt or writes something on a cap. So, merchandise in a classic sense. And then there’s my jeans. Where you’ve got a collaboration with a designer and something gets made from nil. Like in *Bouvard and Pécuchet* (1881; first published in English in 1896).

AD Maybe it is not primarily a matter of understanding art through fashion, but actually a matter of standards of the respective industry. And maybe this particular kind of fast-paced mutability—so, thinking about yourself and your own production in time frames of collections in temporary fields of interest, rather than characteristics of a body of work that accumulate over a lifetime, presents a possibility? Meaning it could require another, lesser form of coherence on the side of the artist.

TK Perhaps that take is a bit old school. These days you could really do a collection worthy of the runways in Paris working with these production mechanisms alone. So, not doing an article of clothing yourself, but just buying a cheap sweatshirt, printing a picture on it … and sending it out on the runway. [25–27]

VK At the same time, you did a standard, a classic. Jeans are here to stay, and their styles will just keep cycling though variations. You made a product that won’t go out of style, presumably. By contrast, the cut you chose for the Kunsthalle jeans recalls the recent trend of high-rise clam-diggers—they’ve already sort of fallen

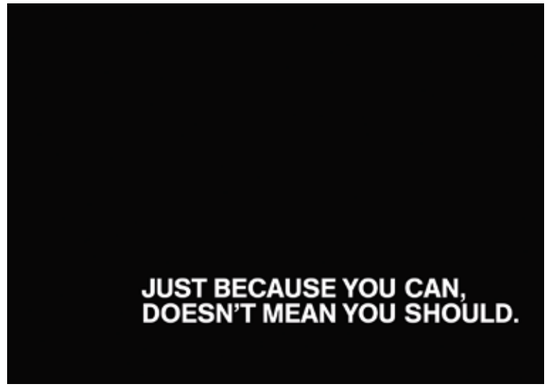

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fig. 24
Unused text slide from *Boarding School*, 2009

figs. 25–27
Runway choreography and concept by Tobias Kaspar for FFIXXED STUDIOS’ 2018 Shanghai Fashion Week presentation

fig. 28
Harlequin Teddy, 2018
Photographer: Stefan Burger

fig. 29
Still from *Boarding School*, 2009

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fig. 30
Lecture at the Estonian Academy of Arts by Tobias Kaspar in November 2018. The lecture was announced as having a dress code: black — if not dressed accordingly, access was not granted.

figs. 31–35
Lectures and performances by Alexander Hempel in Frankfurt (Städelschule, 2016), Geneva (HEAD, 2013), Milan (Gasconade, 2012), Munich (LOVAAS, 2016), and Rome (Art Fair, 2012)

fig. 36
Script card by Tobias Kaspar for a performance by Alexander Hempel

figs. 37–40
Exhibition views of "From Avenue George V to 542 W 22nd St Back to Via Borgognona" at Longtang, Zurich (2018–19). 15-channel video installation with photographs from Poste 9's (Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Martial Vieille/Galfione, and Benoit Lalloz) store design for Balenciaga

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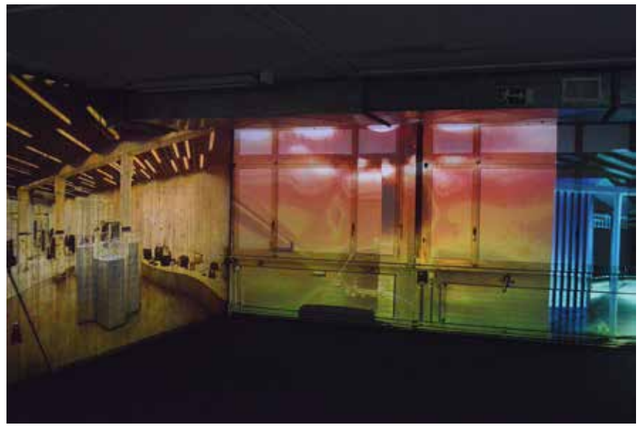
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back out of style. You frequently start with a standard and add a "TK twist" that marks the fine distinction. Like the teddy bear [28] being a stuffed animal classic—even though this one looks like something we bought a thousand times online, it's not. Instead, it's a teddy bear design Tobias, for the most part, conceived himself. Where you got the ideas for the design is a different question. The *Reflector Paintings* are in essence sophisticated high-tech fabrics available on the market, but you did determine the composition of stripes and rectangles yourself, and they have this seductive reflection when light hits them. In works like those, the border with the readymade progresses nearly imperceptibly. The principle of fine distinctions, the specialization of taste, where the progressions between bland and refined are hard to figure out when viewed from outside, that's another recurrent theme in your art.

TK It's hard to sell jeans [29]. Pants in general. People are going to want to try them on. So you need fitting rooms. Making t-shirts, sweatshirts—that would be way better for business.

VK Editions are always a long-winded affair. The sole distinctive feature of the jeans *Independence* is this piece of fabric hanging out of the back pocket with the text and the signature from the "Independence" invitation card on it. Those pants will be forever associated with your show at Kunsthalle Bern. Regardless of where they pop up in the future.

TK The label comes across sort of like a handkerchief code.

JS After reading the *BOMB* interview and hearing the anecdotes about delegated artist talks Hannes passed around in preparation for our discussion, I was wondering earlier this morning whether you would even show up at this roundtable today, Tobias. How did it come about that you're sitting here now, answering these kinds of questions?

TK Six months ago, I gave a talk [30] at Hochschule für bildende Künste in Hamburg and, once again, I sent Alexander Hempel to do it for me [31–36]. As I've already done five times or so before. In Hamburg, that prompted a mass exodus. And I got e-mail complaints afterwards from professors working there. I'm still not sure what exactly happened. The performance, apparently, wasn't good. So Alexander didn't put on a good performance. But that's just how it is with Alexander—sometimes it goes well, sometimes it doesn't. And a bad Hempel performance can still be a good one.

VK How did the staff and audience react?

TK Total frustration. "Studied here, now he turns up and there's no material. Nothing. No images. No questions. No answers. Nothing." The extension of my practice to the lecture hall didn't get any credit. And it was deemed uninteresting.

Last night, Dominique Gonzales-Foerster [37–40] played in Longtang—that's where my studio in Zurich is—and we didn't have anyone for her makeup. Usually she takes on different characters for her Exotourisme music project. And so she said to me, "today I'll go on as myself," like raw and unplugged. But after having gone on ten times in different characters, basically nobody knows who she is anymore anyway—well, kind of.

HL *PROVENCE* got invited to participate in "The Art Review: Most Wanted, Most Neglected," a conference at Kunsthalle Zurich in 2017. I couldn't make it to Zurich that day, so you ended up pretending you were giving a lecture based on my script without prior consultation, which was brought to my attention via somewhat perplexed text messages from the audience. To this day, I've never found out entirely what happened there … at least, I don't remember having prepared a script.

TK I think people can only operate with a certain percentage of strategy. The rest is personal aptitude, and intuition on top of that. I'm not into interviews, never given one so far.[9] [41] It's good not to do certain things, however few they may be—it's almost easier to define yourself through that than the inverse. Negative sculpture. I don't like talks either and will do anything to get out of them. In retrospect, I found most artist talks boring as a student and still do. It doesn't have to be like that.

VK It's often more elegant to not do something. But you don't just excuse yourself or fail to appear, and this case is a prime example. You commit to talks although you'd get one problem off your chest by declining. Or you turn your appearances into playful spoofs by sending someone else.

We were talking about Isa Genzken over dinner yesterday, and now I'm thinking about her piece *Why I Don't Give Interviews*, from 2003. It's a ten-minute video with Kai Althoff actually doing an interview with her, although she does give them very rarely. Why doesn't she like giving interviews? It's like a straightjacket, having to answer these questions, she has trouble speaking freely, and an interview, or explaining oneself in an interview, is the antithesis of making art. I can see where she's coming from. What are your reasons for avoiding them?

TK It's almost more worthwhile to have good enemies than good friends. Andy Warhol. But mainly I have a problem with the supposed authenticity of interviews and talks. This promise of "now we're going to get some real insight." In fashion—again!—makings-of and behind the scenes have long since been part of the official production. They're just as important as the runway or a fashion editorial. Everything is always part of the show. There is no backstage, off is off.

JS This reminds me of an argument by Slavoj Žižek, that it's not the people who simply say "I love you" who are naive; it's the people who feel obliged to mark a statement like that as a convention with deconstructivist disclaimers or some sort of rhetorical quotation marks when they utter it. The disclaimers, according to this argument, are always implied in the everyday use of language, and the sole naive thing is to want to make them explicit.

HL But even if it's a convention to posit something as authentic, "authenticity" obviously still exists—I mean in the construct, or even what's already been deconstructed—as that which is, in a functional sense, considered authentic or a sign of (in)authenticity in the respective field. Even if the assumption of a supposed authenticity is considered naive within many discourses, there is something like an "authentic inauthenticity." More importantly, integrating and staging "makings-of" and "behind the scenes" does not eliminate what people call "off" or the backstage. It simply gets shifted, sometimes even concealed.

TK Jakob, you brought up hide-and-seek. Very plainly I can point out some pictures in the show "Independence" that connect to this thought. Like *Why Sex Now* (2011), where you've got a lot of white and just a little remnant of a photograph. Or refer to "cropping" in photography, which is when you sort of make a cut-out of some kind. A lot of the time I'm actually interested in what's not being shown. So the picture is like some kind of placeholder, and there's this white all around it. And perhaps the interview in *BOMB* magazine could be an attempt to translate that kind of a strategy.

HL You can never transcribe the silences …

VK This game between showing something and hiding it at the same time often comes up in your work when you zoom in on images, blow up a section dramatically, or even shrink it. That way you isolate it and in so doing, you render a motif or material beyond recognition or over-accentuate it, while simultaneously making something disappear—or much more to the point, something else can surface. For me, that game is a characteristic of your work precisely through which I can see you. The point where you become visible in your decisions is in the sense of humor. I think that, behind a certain cool and distance inherent to some of your pieces and gestures, there's also a joke hiding in different pieces that I connect with you very strongly and in those instances, you just don't elude me. Humor is a delicate thing, particularly in art, and some people are not amused—they feel like someone's pulling their leg, like they're being manipulated. The bears in every possible corner of the building giving everyone this crazed sideways look, like scenically posed gremlins, probably fails to tickle a lot of people's funny bone.

JS What I had in mind when I mentioned hide-and-seek at the beginning was actually how Tobias handles the interview format and the entire situation in the *BOMB* discussion. But also the invitation to an anonymous show with a hand-written personal greeting. [42]

AD The—what one might call—"retrospective" format is something Tobias handles similarly. Meaning, with a strategy that runs counter to the overview promised by that kind of exhibition. The show lumps together various ideas, pieces, techniques, and references to such an extent that they dissolve into each other, blur, even to the point of illegibility. I'm only able to understand some pieces or quotes from pieces because I've already seen them somewhere else before. Things seem to have been installed with a similar intent, as attested to by how you delegated setting up the bears. And content is handled very similarly. The stage set might have gotten put in because it's visually attractive, more than anything [43]. We can read it as a concrete reference, but the show does do quite a lot to suggest it's some random set.

VK That's not true. No information has been held back. In the press text, I lay open which film the set pieces are referencing. As is to be expected, not everyone has a recollection of *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. For those who aren't familiar with the premise, the press text gives several indications and offers one possible narrative the set can imply within the show. The actual story is about the strict structures of an insane asylum and how the protagonists operate within that closed power structure—how much freedom they still manage to assert for themselves. That's in reference to the title of the show. And those are issues that drive Tobias.

AD OK. But still—the exhibition does a lot to make specific things unspecific by pulling them apart. The stage consists of elements that spread out into every room of the exhibition, and other elements, too, are split between rooms, there's virtually no attempt to distinguish between pieces, groups of works, pursuits. That does make these references, if not insignificant, then really very—let's say: wide open. Which is of course not criticism of the show at all. On the contrary. I wouldn't be interested in the distinction between something like "early Kaspar" and "later collaborations." Besides, those distinctions aren't that easy to pinpoint in the work anyway, no matter what show we're talking about.

HL As I recall, when Tobias' work was just starting to get a wider reception—I'd say somewhere around 2010, 2011, and *Lumpy Blue Sweater*—that very im/precise, wide open aggregation of references was interpreted in an absolutely positive way: Guy de Maupassant's novel *Bel Ami* (1885), a *Barre de bois rond* by André Cadere, the activities of *agent d'art* Ghislain Mollet-Viéville, and a text passage from the film *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006). In the catalog for the show "That's the Way We Do It" (2011) at Kunsthaus Bregenz, for instance, Axel Wieder argues that it isn't a matter of aggregating references or arriving at a statement with them, neither in that particular work nor Tobias Kaspar's work in general—although a narrative does unfold through the combination of phony social climbing, works of art left behind at shows, a queer figure like Mollet-Viéville, and the knowledge of field-specific codes.[10] As Wieder sees it, however, especially the mechanisms by means of which meaning arises between objects and referential systems, and therefore also authorship, occupy the work's core.

VK In Bern, different lines of flight open up for narratives and themes Tobias has being working with in the last ten years. The show's additive principle puts a selection of older pieces into play with new work, something that can provoke some sense of a concentration deficit, but it still works as one whole cosmos. Each piece, each series opens up a limited range of readings. Limited but not random. Tobias was also intent on creating access points, hence the teddy bears and AIBO, the robot dog. The show was the first-ever outing for AIBO's latest version in Europe and could be expected to draw an audience motivated to see this little sensation. According to the guards, visitors had read about him in the paper and made a bee-line for the room he was "living" in. Does the dog end up kind of stealing the show in the last room? Either way, there's no advanced knowledge required. We got a lot of emotional response from visitors, more emotional than is generally the case in exhibition spaces.

HL We still have three topics on the list. (1) The title "Independence" and (temporarily) refraining from naming the artist by name, (2) references to forms of practice informed by institutional critique, and (3) questions of authorship and the fictionalization of artists in the 2000s.

My comment on "Independence" is the following. The show wasn't attributed to an artist in any communication in advance but was, at the same time,

Yes: "Performing the system, performing the self!" Who said that? Jack Bankowsky? Alison Gingeras? During the first site visit in Minneapolis, Tobias sent me a text message from a dinner he was attending. The scene must have been more or less as following: Him sitting next to a young collector/investment banker who was constantly bubbling, next to a, as usual, deadly silent Tobias Kaspar, probably jet-lagged. Or, at least, that is how I imagine the scenario. What he texted me and then later in the night followed up with a longer e-mail was the collector telling him within five minutes how many artist "friends" they have in common—meaning people whose work he purchased—and how well he knows Berlin, and the bar Tobias always hangs out at, and so on. He went on talking about his Saturday afternoon activity of cutting his lawn as a pleasure activity, instead of letting the gardener do it. Then he asked Tobias how he took care of his lawn. I think that's what interested Tobias—this gap, this miscommunication. Lawn? Having a lawn? In Berlin? With whose resources to finance? Not only this gap, but also sitting in Minnesota talking about Berlin; or being in LA and talking about friends in Rome—constantly wanting to be somewhere else, just not in the here and now. This constant mediation and being able to always seemingly follow and be well informed about someone's practice across entire continents and oceans, completely unaware of a certain loss—but also this privilege—through this kind of perception.

—Amalia in Daniel Horn, "Tobias Kaspar by Daniel Horn: An almost interview," *BOMB*, June 17, 2014, https://bombmagazine.org/articles/tobias-kaspar/.

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fig. 41
Excerpt of "Tobias Kaspar by Daniel Horn: An Almost Interview," *BOMB*, June 17, 2014

fig. 42
Envelopes and invitation cards for "Independence" at Kunsthalle Bern, 2018

fig. 43
Exhibition view of "Independence" at Kunsthalle Bern, 2018
Photographer: Gunnar Meier

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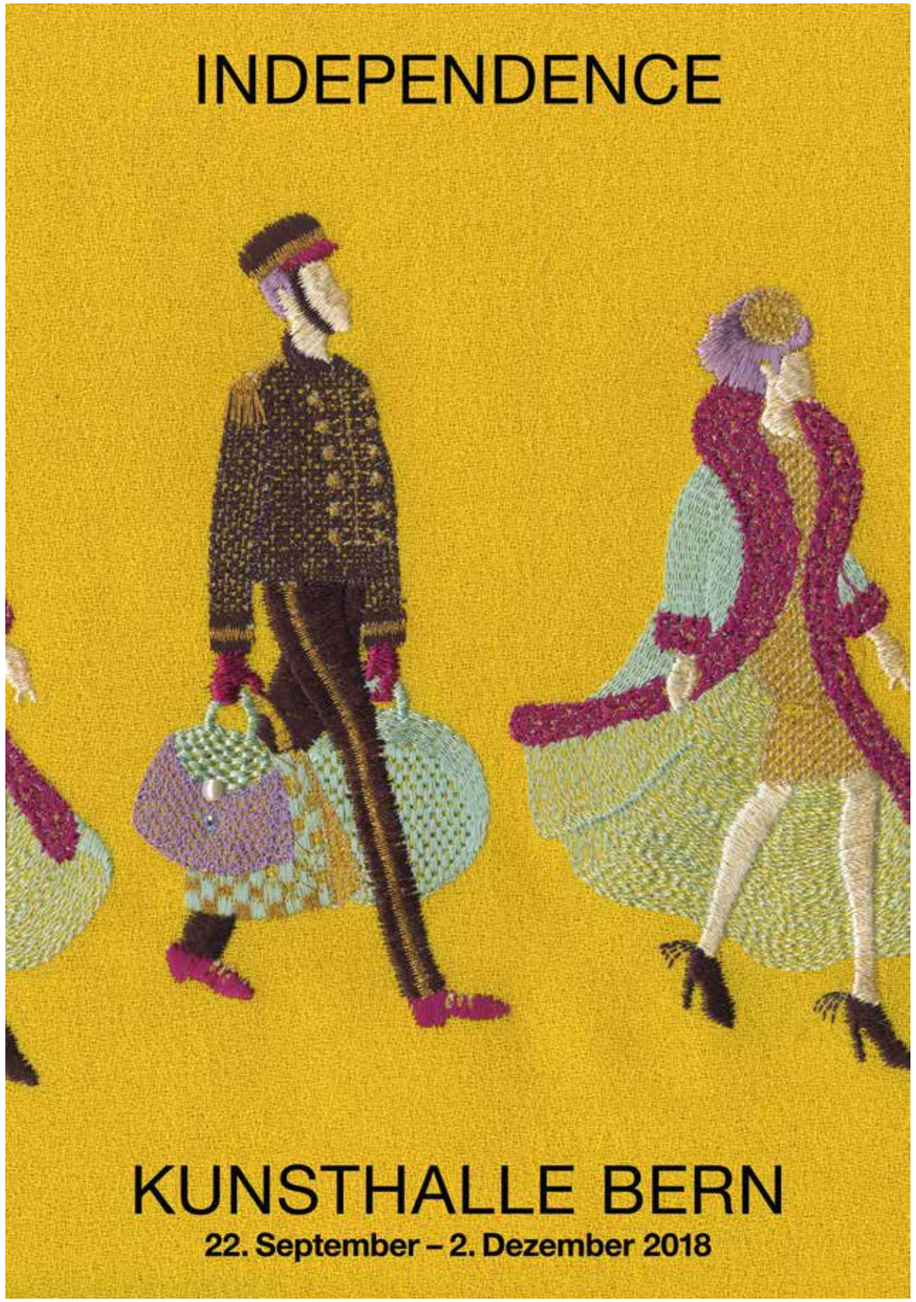

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fig. 44
Poster designed by HIT for "Independence" at Kunsthalle Bern, 2018

advertised by way of targeted gossip, and is now up on the Kunsthalle Bern website as a show under the artist's name. That procedure reminds me of "anarchist gestures" as they are known in art history from Christopher D'Arcangelo, but it also reminds me of a campaign by E.ON corporation. About twenty years ago, E.ON had plain red posters hung, then, at some delay, had its company name written on them, and then eventually additional information about the product. Tobias' temporary anonymity was accompanied by a press text by Kunsthalle Bern, pronouncing the end of "paid critique" and passing off refraining from naming the artist as an interrogation of visitor expectations. To me, it almost felt like you're pronouncing "independence" the substitute or heir to the widely discussed term of autonomy. What kind of thoughts went into all that?

VK You named a lot of thoughts that went into our course of action. We weren't sure how it would all work—the outcome was uncertain. Would curiosity-inspiring rumors materialize in the run-up to the show? Or would the game go by more or less unnoticed and get mired in disinterest? Would the opening be attended mainly by our own crowd? Would it stay a "one-liner" or would some kind of discussion develop around it? In the end, we got quite diverse reactions. Some people felt it was bold, others overblown. One curator who came to the show, I thought she'd long since known who was behind it. But that turned out not to be the case. She hung around for a long time and afterwards told me she had tried to understand the structure of this bizarre group show that allowed one artist's work to be so over-represented. She found this jolting process interesting, and how she eventually got it upon closer inspection of the work. We got some reactions to the invitation card. A lot of people found the announcement mysterious. Shockingly, some people even thought it was for a party. So the initial anonymization also worked by seduction, which made an audience stop and take notice.

JS So, the E.ON effect Hannes described?

VK What's the product? The name "Tobias Kaspar" or his work? Sure, in a way the promotion did work as you, Hannes, sketched it out. But Tobias also staged his own self-mystification in all lack of seriousness. You've barely stepped into the exhibition space, and his name grins up at you from the rumps of a thousand bears and on labels for galleries that no longer exist. That's not geared toward melodrama.

JS This "anonymity" also marks another difference. This time between the brand and the work. That's not the same thing as spelling Tobias Kaspar in all-caps or sending Alexander Hempel to a talk. Perhaps it's also more gimmicky, but I still see a similar thrust. Tobias, could you go ahead and respond to Anke's previous question about wanting to get rid of yourself and transcend the self in art, this time more in-depth? Because you too, Tobias, put this question on the table yourself: What happens when your own art no longer aligns with your own taste? This question of how you can mark a difference from your own artist brand comes up again and again. I'd be interested in how you see that.

TK Anke, you said it's particularly difficult in art, didn't you? It's particularly difficult to transcend the self in art. As an author.

AD It would be one of the least likely places to disappear, to transcend the self, yes. Unlike in other fields, in art the success of what you produce hinges on your actual person. Not just whether it's bad or good, relevant or expensive art etc., but also whether it's art at all. Of course the author isn't the only factor, but they are key, and so it's probably simpler to eliminate yourself as boss of your start-up, as you don't have to "stand for your product with your name" anymore.

TK I'd object to calling the thing with "Independence" gimmicky. It is a marketing strategy but on the other hand, it's an open-ended experiment that has an uncertainty quotient that is definitely bigger than if you sent out a standard invitation card. That uncertainty quotient, and not being able to calculate exactly what will happen are two things I find interesting. There are artists writing about how they met me at the show … but I never met them. There have been totally absurd reactions. Like, the whole independence/anonymity idea got attributed to the Kunsthalle, and one artist just went along with it and played out the part of the artist on commission. It was definitely a stress test for the institution. I got commentary from curators at other institutions asking how you floated that past the board, Valérie. Stuff like that.

VK A lot of visitors probably leave the show feeling slightly disturbed, not knowing who or what they just looked at. I'm only privy to so many visitor reactions behind the scenes. But what our reception team and guards pass on is quite positive. I think that's because the show offers something for just about anybody. And it also gathers accessible work alongside unwieldy pieces.

TK The CI, poster, and the website of Kunsthalle Bern also have to be mentioned here. The website is a very banal example, but it clearly demonstrates the stumbling blocks of anonymity or not naming names. The website's whole structure centers around the artist's name, which is definitely telling … The Kunsthalle Bern website had to be partly rewritten to make "Independence," the title, the defining or load-bearing element, not the artist.

HL Despite the numerous fictitious and artificial artists in recent years, omitting or shifting the position of the author seems to constitute a lesser problem for registration in the art archive than not naming the name, paradoxically. Structurally, that reminds me of how the "artist" Jay Chiat got listed as a participant in the 1990 Venice Bienniale on several platforms.

VK Three weeks after the opening of "Independence," Matthew Linde's show "Passageways. On Fashion's Runway" opened. Both shows were announced simultaneously, which is standard practice at the Kunsthalle. Tobias' show kind of went under because, as Tobias mentioned, the Kunsthalle's website is structured around names, and the show fell by the wayside. So, a lot of people assumed that I was just showing a fashion exhibition in the fall and nothing else. Your YouTube screensaver with meditation music we uploaded instead of the usual picture of a piece by the artist stayed up for over one month, but hardly anyone got it.

TK Corporate identity. The Kunsthalle had a Harald Szeemann show right before, and we looked at the poster from Szeemann's time with Markus Dreßen.

Something like Gerard Hadders' "pink whale" for the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg in 1993—the museum as a corporate museum for a company like Volkswagen, with CI—was absolutely not usual for the time. When you look at the Harald Szeeman shows … the posters are completely different every time. A lot of artists painted or designed the posters themselves. For "Independence," I dropped HIT's graphic concept for the invitation [44] and brought in my own format plus a specially produced envelope, and that initially prompted some irritation at HIT. Why not conform with the existing CI? At every step you had to prod yourself and everyone else involved to depart from the normative routine, for one moment, to break out of the institutional rut.

JS Just to clarify, to me it seemed slightly gimmicky, because I was getting an invitation to an anonymous show, but there was a hand-written greeting from Tobias on it. But I was actually going for something else, which is why I asked for more detail on this point Anke made about self-dissolution. It has to do with what I was saying at the very beginning of our discussion, namely that, as far as I can tell, these fake artists of the 2010s offer themselves up as an art historical point of reference. With Reena Spaulings, Claire Fontaine, and co. there is always this implication that anarchistic or in some way defiant people are behind the allegorically hollowed works of art. Anke described that as "getting rid of yourself," as self-transcendence. But when you say, "what happens when I do this show but keep my true aesthetic preferences out," then that's different, as far as I can tell. That's less a postmodern dissolution of the self than a modern game with masks to protect the self behind them.

TK But those are definitely different models. Claire Fontaine is strongly influenced by Philippe Thomas from the anonymous collective IFP, who went on to work under a label called *readymades belong to everyone*.

JS In both cases—artificial artists of the 2000s like Reena Spaulings and Claire Fontaine on the one hand and Tobias Kaspar and others emerging in the 2010s on the other—the authentic player behind the label or mask is staged as such precisely through that mask. Yet I still see a difference here, as do you. The one position suggests something like—and this is also why I was talking about the enlightened false consciousness earlier: "We've completely written off art anyway, and we show that too. We don't actually have anything to do with that anymore. We may do it, but actually we're, for instance, anarchists writing about political issues, gentrification, etc. Or even a commune in the countryside sabotaging the TGV." And then Tobias Kaspar says: "I may make works of art, but my actual lifestyle preferences …" There's a difference between the two! Isn't it a step further when you're no longer saying "I'm making this depleted art, but it draws legitimacy and significance from the fact that I'm actually an anarchist or Marxist or bohemian ultimately pursuing a political project." Now you say, "I'm making his depleted art because I like buying Yves Saint Laurent sweaters or whatever." In both cases, it's a staged backstage: here the mask and there something more behind it.

AD I think, the YSL sweater [45] resides somewhere between preference, strategy, and resignation as much as the didactic texts on other people's consumer behavior one might write when not making art.

JS Isn't the question really whether what is suggested behind the mask differs in each case, and whether that makes any difference? The model of Claire Fontaine etc. seems to hinge on a stark contrast between on- and backstage. What about Tobias Kaspar?

AD Exactly. Tobias Kaspar can be italicized, capitalized, spelled backwards, and the sweater can hang in the show, but it can also be a matter of being able to afford that sweater.

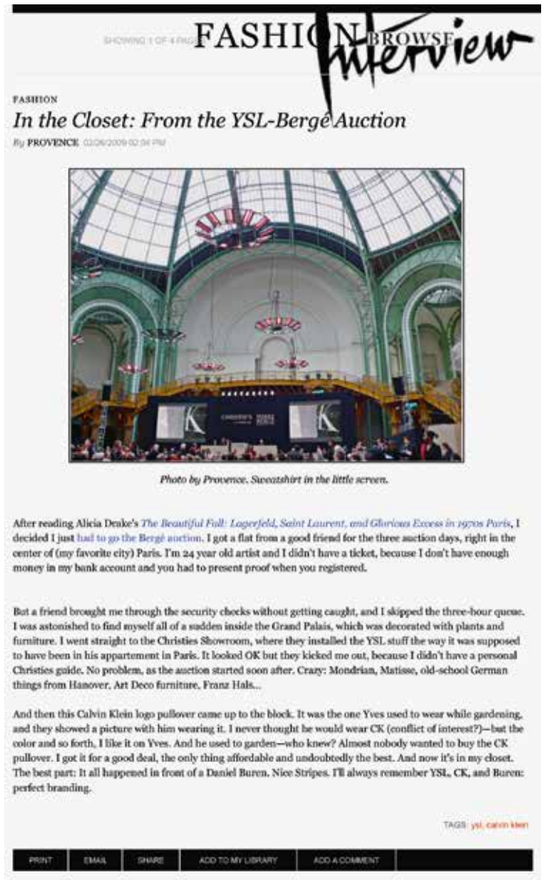
TK I wanted to make another comment on a point from the beginning. Jakob, you asked why do anything that doesn't want to be seen or perceived. As Hannes said, the question is actually: perceived by whom, where, and how. And I do find it irritating when you do something and it comes across perfect, like a supersmooth operation. There's no friction. Doesn't trigger any questions. What are you doing it for, then? Then you really just … then you're really not doing anything but making art so you can buy yourself an Yves Saint Laurent sweater. And the art isn't anything but the Yves Saint Laurent sweater anymore. Even though an Yves Saint Laurent sweater is nice, of course.

JS Hannes, could you perhaps elaborate your observation at the very beginning about how Tobias handles historical references? Or in what way that's specific to him?

HL Whether his handling is specific or symptomatic isn't something I've wondered about per se. I've been preoccupied with how proven strategies and aesthetics from artists, or more general cultural producers—and oftentimes ones Tobias himself thinks are relevant—appear relatively frequently in his work. In numerous cases unidentified or not otherwise made known. More than a few times, I've wondered very generally whether it's a purely aesthetic, formalist reference that ultimately leads to what you, Jakob, were talking about—to a generic aesthetic or a referential production. Or whether it's an attempt to inscribe oneself into certain lineages and attractive genealogies for the sake of legitimacy? That was interesting for me in connection with the question of who or what is doing the job here. Where do these references made "on credit" become productive, where does their "loan rhetoric," as Eve Kalyva detailed on (Post-)Conceptual art, lead to a moderation of plurality? *Jogging* (2010), and those John Knight monograms—or *The Incomplete Aesop* (2018) [46], reminiscent of Stephen Prina's index of Édouard Manet's paintings in *Exquisite Corpse* (1988–present), or quotes from books like Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1878) in *Anna K* (2017) … For me, there are countless such moments, and it used to seem like Tobias was "stealing" these things, today that process is made more and more visible.

TK This roundtable almost has a Drag Moment … Why is there such an interest in thinking about these things regarding my work, when other people write texts for other artists, too? And magazines also ask them if they can suggest an author? Maybe due to certain transparency mechanisms that signal a preoccupation with surplus value?

Before Bern, there was a small show at Christoph Schifferli's space Archiv—the book collector—in Zurich. I showed ephemera there. My own and stuff I collected. Six tables covered with packing or wrapping paper imprinted with the Tobias Kaspar font,



45

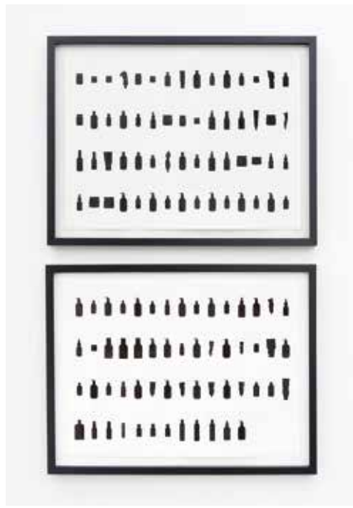


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fig. 45
PROVENCE, "In the Closet: From the YSL-Bergé Auction," *Interview*, February 26, 2009

fig. 46
Detail of *The Complete Aesop*, 2018
Photographer: Viktor Kolibál

fig. 47
Screenshot of an Instagram post by stedelijkmuseumlibrary on November 20, 2018, depicting *The Street Cards* (2018)

fig. 48
Exhibition view of "The Complete" at Archiv, Zurich, 2018
Photographer: Paul Brunner

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fig. 49
Opening of Merlin Carpenter's exhibition "Au Café" (2012) organized by PROVENCE at Bar de la Victoire and Bureau Capan-Bordes, Nice, which functioned as PROVENCE's HQ from 2009 to 2017

fig. 50
Tobi Maier sewing TOBIAS KASPAR labels into clothes for "Two Cities–Two Lives" at SOLO SHOWS, São Paulo and Frey Kalioubi, Rio de Janeiro, 2015

fig. 51
Detail of the exhibition "Service is My Business" at CCS Skopje, 2008

designed by Pascal Storz. Things like a set of *The Street Cards* [47] were laying on it next to Eames' *Giant House of Cards*. Then the Dolce & Gabbana ads my costumes for Adam Linder's ballet *Parade* [48] were modeled after. But there were also simple match boxes, hotel napkins, and lots of other printed matter. And you really see where things got taken from. Is that what you meant? That references are now shown in all clarity and disclosed?

HL Yes. That's exactly what I'm talking about. I think your work makes an issue of these things, and they're worth making an issue of regarding your work, because you go to any lengths to decenter the gaze directed at you—be it Tobias Kaspar or TOBIAS KASPAR, or whomever—and your work. In this monograph, one instance would be commissioning the graphic designer Markus Dreßen, to quote his own graphic designs from the late 1990s, which laid him bare as graphic designer and not you. Unfortunately, that collaboration didn't happen in the end.

I find it very decisive what you reference, what historical meanings these references have accumulated, and how you're perceived or want to be perceived in different situations, not solely based on Axel Wieder's reading of *Lumpy Blue Sweater*. Also in what social contexts you place the work and references through that positioning. [49] That's why these questions suggest themselves—at least for me. What are you referring to here? In what way? What questions and problems are you processing?

Surely that could be cleared up more specifically looking at individual pieces. I read your book *New Address*, for instance, against that backdrop—this is admittedly somewhat idiosyncratic—as a productive appropriation of Merlin Carpenter's *The Opening* (2011) publication, also as the ongoing development of a question on how the production of (surplus) value works in the field of art. But at the same time, you use that model and its analytic thought process developed in the context of a series of shows, a string of texts, and the previously mentioned book *The Opening* in an affirmative way, effectively with profit for your own artistic production. This "hustling" could also be a tactical and logistic necessity … yet, it's precisely this ambivalence you practically never resolve that seems problematic to me. On the one side, "painting as a cover story," but what's on the other side? A bit like what Valérie asked earlier: decor and props, but what is the statement?

AD But why shouldn't you receive these things—and the critique they contain, too—and then take all of it over yourself? You don't have to describe it as a circuit of mutual co-optation and therefore hollowing. Taking over a form or technique or strategy can also generate a structure of your own that doesn't just mark a distance from what already exists. It can also continue something. It can be a support or a reinforcement, or point to a problem within that form. Even then, nothing speaks against taking over a form, maybe even just to see if and how that form still works now, how it's received at a distance after several years.

HL I basically agree with that. Nevertheless, there are ongoing discussions if and how unpaid, value-generating labor is done by, for example, attending openings; or about the historic development of the relationship between art and leisure, work and friendship; or where the skimming off of surplus value takes place and to whose benefit. These issues are neutralized in a certain way in *New Address*, though they have implications far beyond the field of art. The text by Mikael Brkic contained in that book declares with verve the end of the distinguishability between private and public life, and Daniel Horn imagines the possibility of an end to a materialist line of critique.[11] To not let go of such distinctions and possibilities can be prompted by a certain partisanship. Simultaneously, the book does something completely different from what its texts claim. It shows how Tobias' art is made: sewing in labels at the kitchen table with the help of curators who are also your friends, between moving, family making, and research. [50]

This roundtable has been edited and abridged. [51]

1 The passage here is taken from a revised version of the artist's CV from late 2018.
2 Anke Dyes, "Therapy? Anke Dyes über Tobias Kaspar bei Kim? Contemporary Art Center, Riga," *Texte zur Kunst*, September 19, 2017, https://www.textezurkunst.de/articles/tobias-kaspar-bei-kim/.
3 Hal Foster, *Bad New Days* (London: Verso Books, 2015), 95. Moritz speaks of "critique via over-affirmation, a deadly embrace." Julia Moritz, "Scene of a Scene. Fact and Fiction in the Art of Tobias Kaspar," *Flash Art*, no. 322 (September–October 2018): 60–67, here 67.
4 Daniel Horn. "Tobias Kaspar by Daniel Horn; An Almost Interview," *BOMB*, June 17, 2014, https://bombmagazine.org/articles/tobias-kaspar/.
5 Sam Pulitzer, "Tobias Kaspar at Midway Contemporary Art," *Artforum*, vol. 52, no. 5 (January 2014): 218.
6 Ibid.
7 Translator's note: V.i.S.d.P. is a German acronym standing for "responsible in the spirit of the press law." German publications including websites are required by law to identify in print a human being responsible for content (as opposed to a corporate entity), rendering anonymous and pseudonymous publications illegal.
8 PROVENCE, Est. 2009 in Nice, France, see *PROVENCE*, AW 19/20 (autumn/winter 2019/2020): 6.
9 Editor's note: In April 2019, the online journal *The Seen* published an interview with Tobias Kaspar conducted by Carter Mull and Laura Dennis, and in May 2019, the fashion magazine *Numéro* included an interview held by Nicolas Trembley. Both conversations focused, amongst other things, on Kaspar's childhood and youth growing up in an artistic milieu in Basel, on his artistic influences, and on his family. In the interview for *The Seen*, an unspecified person called Dasha was introduced, who answered Mull's and Dennis' questions, claiming that "he, Tobi, as a person, has nothing to do with this 'Tobias Kaspar' anymore." Allegedly, it is the latter "Kaspar" giving the answers in *Numéro*. See Carter Mull and Laura Dennis, "An Interview with Tobias Kaspar," *THE SEEN, Chicago's International Journal of Contemporary & Modern Art*, April 18, 2019, https://theseenjournal.org/an-interview-with-tobias-kaspar/; Nicolas Trembley, "Tobias Kaspar, an Ever-Changing and Mischievous Artist," *Numéro*, May 14, 2019, https://www.numero.com/en/art/tobias-kaspar-swiss-the-category-is-the-japan-collection-numero-magazine-203.
10 See reprint in this publication, pp. 26–27.
11 See reprint in this publication, pp. 98–99.