

A Conversation Piece on
NARRATIVE CONCEPTUALISM:
Ed Kienholz and Ilya Kabakov

By David Colosi

**INTRODUCTION: Conceptual Art as a
Basis for Three-Dimensional Literature**

Margarita Tupitsyn opens a discussion of the origins of Moscow Conceptualism by citing an unlikely and antithetical source: Joseph Kosuth. Having come across a citation attributed to him, she remarks at the apparent common ground between the conditions for the emergence of Conceptualism in the Soviet Union and the United States but recognizes that the similarities sharply marked the differences. Kosuth wrote in 1969: "Because of the implied duality of perception and conception in earlier art, a middleman (critic) appeared useful...[Conceptual] art both annexes the functions of the critic and makes the middleman unnecessary." Tupitsyn observes, "In Moscow in the early 1970s, the interest in "art-as-idea" or "art-as-knowledge" emerged independently of Western art theory, but was also linked to the issue of the critical function of art. However, in Moscow, Conceptual Art was not based on an usurpation of the critic but on the prolonged absence of critics altogether." [Tupitsyn, 303]

While Joseph Kosuth, Donald Judd, and others in America wrote about their own work and that of other artists as a means to reclaim the act of contextualization from critics like Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried, Ilya Kabakov and artists and theorists in Moscow created discussion, context, and critical writing about their works in the absence of all of the above. Tupitsyn's point that Western Conceptualism reacted against a dominant critical history and Moscow Conceptualism grew out of the void seems logical at first. But on closer examination it overlooks the reality that both Conceptualisms grew as reactions to dominant critical ideologies, Greenburg's in the West and Stalin's in the East, and also that Conceptual practitioners on both sides 'invented' their own contexts out of voids since, previously, a capable critical authority hadn't existed for the art they were prepared to announce.

My opening of a comparative essay on the works of Ed Kienholz and Ilya Kabakov with the specter of Joseph Kosuth might seem as antithetical as Tupitsyn's doing so in an essay "On Some Sources of Soviet Conceptualism." Without question, Kosuth holds a significant place in the history of Conceptualism, but that place marks only a specific branch, that of *New York* Conceptualism, or more sharply Kosuthian Conceptualism. Sadly, some people still equate Conceptualism with these variants and take them to be the dominant form or origin. Originally, this may have been how it seemed (or Conceptualism may have gone by other names elsewhere), but it is commonly understood now that Conceptualism emerged at the same time in various continents for diverse cultural and national reasons. Even in the United States, Conceptualism grew from divergent practices before Kosuth set out to define the term for himself. Ed Kienholz began an idiosyncratic conceptual

program along narrative and literary lines a few years earlier than Kosuth with *Roxy's* in 1962. Adrian Piper also followed a different trajectory. While in Moscow we can't legitimately claim that artists reacted specifically for or against Kosuth, we can compare New York Conceptualism with the Conceptualism that emerged in Moscow around the same time in order to explore the other paths taken. We could do the same in Asia, Latin America, Africa, and Europe as did the organizers of *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950-1980* at the Queens Museum in 1999.

CONCEPTUALIZING ED KIENHOLZ

Some readers might also think that my bringing Ed Kienholz and Ilya Kabakov into a discussion of Conceptualism itself to be antithetical, thinking that neither of them belongs there. When Kienholz is included in art history, he is usually positioned regionally with the assemblage artists of Los Angeles like Wallace Berman and not with LA conceptualists, John Baldessari and Ed Ruscha. He is altogether left out of most written histories of Conceptual Art whether it is in the American or the global context, even though his *Concept Tableaux* appeared in 1963 well before Sol Lewitt popularized the term in 1967. Actually, by the time LeWitt and Kosuth began using this word, Kienholz had just completed his *Concept Tableaux* series with their culmination in *The Art Show* in 1967. It is no secret that he was averse to the art world, and *The Art Show* made that even clearer. He was disdainful of, if not indifferent to, Conceptualism's cerebral rhetoric and its admitted wish to not make objects. Robert L. Pincus makes this lucid distinc-

tion that separates Kienholz from Conceptualism as we know it. For many of the early conceptual artists, it didn't matter if their ideas were realized as physical artworks; the idea or the text explaining it was enough. For Kienholz, on the other hand, Pincus notes,

“These Concept Tableaux aspire to a condition of completion, for Kienholz’s sculptural scenes and rooms require the viewer’s immersion in them to activate the socially resonant drama each establishes. Ultimately, we might even see the aim of the Concept Tableaux to be a rather traditional one: Kienholz simply wanted to secure patronage for large works rather than submit himself to the whims of the art marketplace.”[Pincus, 60]

It seems accurate that Kienholz was not satisfied with allowing the written idea or concept to exist as the final piece. If he had the sponsor, he would have preferred to build all of his concepts no matter how outlandish or possible that may have been.

But *The Black Leather Chair*, 1966, poses an interesting challenge. The piece was meant to force the American viewer to confront the horrific history of the treatment of Africans and their descendents in this country. It would consist of a leather chair on a pedestal covered by a Lucite box with a hole in it so viewers could touch the chair. In the text he admits that he may never be able to realize the piece because the chair is not in his possession. Instead it is in the attic of a “Negro” (1966) family in Texas, and it is upholstered with their ancestor’s skin. The text also explains that he has been in communication with the family and that, one day, they might release it to him. Though Kienholz admits

the uncertainty of realizing this piece, for obvious reasons, he may have been happy with the complexity of the concept alone. Still, in his stipulations he tried to entice a sponsor into making it possible. In doing so, he reinforced his position to the difficult subject matter.

Normally in Parts 1, 2, and 3 Kienholz would name his price. Following his own protocol, for Part 1, a prospective buyer would purchase just the *Concept Tableau*: the plaque and the description of the project. This was always the most expensive part. In Part 2, if the buyer were interested further, Kienholz would realize the piece in a drawing for the listed sum. Finally, in Part 3, if the buyer wanted to realize the piece, Kienholz would charge him only for materials and wages.[Hopps, 110] The fact that the concept always had the highest monetary value demonstrates, first, that he placed high value on his concepts as art. The buyer who bought the *Concept Tableau* was not required to fund the realization of the project. That alone should strike us as an example of Conceptual Art. But Kienholz, always the shrewd businessman, made Parts 2 and 3 cheaper so that the buyer would be tempted to follow through, because, as Pincus suggests, making sculpture is his goal. In the case of *The Black Leather Chair*, understanding and sensitive to the subject matter, Kienholz stipulated in Part 1 that, in exchange for *The Black Leather Chair* concept tableau, the buyer would give \$10,000 to the Civil Liberties Union; in Part 2, in exchange for the drawing, he or she would give an additional \$1000 to the Civil Liberties Union; and in Part 3 Kienholz would be compensated only for his materials and labor.

The entire proposal is layered with concepts. If it were realized, as Kienholz's point is to immerse the viewer into a "socially resonant drama," this would certainly produce the

desired effect. It is dramatic to read, but imagine the complicated psychological and social confrontation of seeing the chair in-person in a commercial art gallery or an art museum. Is imagination enough? Is the expression of the concept enough to provoke in the way Kienholz would like to? The realization would be greater, but expression of the concept has some challenging properties. Whether we choose to call the concept alone "Art" is more to the point. During the time he was creating these, his viewers questioned the "Art" of much of his work. But isn't pushing the boundaries the fine line that Kienholz walked with his realized sculptures or not?

Always a provocateur, Kienholz would have made *The Black Leather Chair* if he could have, but of all the *Concept Tableaux*, this is the one he doubted ever realizing and maybe this is the one he was most comfortable leaving in the attic. Either way, this should pose a challenge to those who historicize Conceptual Art. The very fact that the piece was never realized, yet it still remains a work of art, collectable and eligible for sale at auction while also remaining deeply thought-provoking, should be enough to warrant consideration as Conceptual Art. It may be, as Robert L. Pincus says, "a mistake to see Kienholz as an early participant in this aesthetic arena. He was, in actuality, an inadvertent and unwitting precursor." [Pincus, 58] But even so, a stake should be planted reminding us this is so.

After 1967 Kienholz went on to make his own form of currency in a *Watercolor* series, which was again motivated by a final result. On 12 x 16 sheets of paper, he wrote "For Nine Screwdrivers," or "For \$50," and he would exchange these for the goods or financial value noted. This work, too, was conceptual in nature. His impetus was "Why can't an artist just trade for what he wants without running down-

town all the time to get it?”[Pincus, 74] In fact he traded some of these for their equivalents, but today most of them would go up for auction at levels far exceeding their stated value much like collectable coins could. Pincus comments on the conceptual nature of this project, too.

“This series depended entirely, of course, on the preestablished value of Kienholz’s name. If it spoofed the arbitrary nature of that value, it did so without subterfuge; the buyers were Kienholz’s willing victims. If this series was theoretical in nature, it was Conceptual Art as conceived by a “horse trader.”[Pincus, 74]

Horse trader or not, manipulating the value of works of art is the concept, and the difference in value in one work listed as “One Screwdriver” and another, physically identical to it as “\$10,000,” competes with much of the institutional critique work that canonized Conceptual artists exploited in the 1970s and competes also with the name-to-value ratio that many commercially motivated Pop artists manipulated in the 1980s. And similar to *The Black Leather Chair*, one can wonder if Kienholz ever thought he would sell “For \$10,000” when a much cheaper version was available to a buyer. In this respect we can say again that if Kienholz could have sold it for his asking price, he would have, but if he did not, then the import of his artwork or conceptual project remained intact. And even if he did sell the work, what would the buyer be receiving except a bank note drawn on a conceptually arbitrary and spurious value?

Kienholz carefully designed his position within the art world. If he had wanted to be part of the Conceptual Art club, he would have talked his way in. Because his work

had already accomplished what it would take so many theorists and artists another two decades to elaborate, he moved on and started something new not wasting time beating the dead horses he'd already traded.

CONCEPTUALIZING ILYA KABAKOV

Ilya Kabakov holds a similarly individual place in art history. There are few artists like him, and there are fewer who understand the breadth of his work – he is astonishingly prolific. Like Kienholz, when Kabakov is written into art history he is also regionalized, in his case in Moscow or the Soviet Union. Though the Soviet Union no longer exists and though he has lived and worked in the United States since 1988 and exhibits primarily in Europe, he cannot shake his Soviet label. Part of the reason is that his work – the early work especially – offers us a welcome reminder of the Soviet experience as a memo to the next millennium, to borrow a phrase from Italo Calvino. Kabakov is always considered within the category of Moscow Conceptualism, and he is the best known of the group. But what form of Conceptualism is it? Contrary to the space I just carved out for Kienholz within the Conceptual Art dialog, maybe Kabakov's work, on the other hand, gets *too much* play in that conversation. It is possible that his work found its way there because no other dialog could accommodate his idiosyncratic project. Never is his artwork effective only or primarily on the basis of the idea alone, and when his work operates primarily on the weight of its texts and words, these always come in the form of narratives. If these ideas are conceptual, then we may as well call *Pinocchio*, Edgar Allan Poe and the Brothers

Grimm conceptual, too. Like Kienholz, as Pincus pointed out, what the two of them share is the necessity of direct audience participation and immersion.

But maybe there is another way to think about the brand of Conceptualism that is applied to Kabakov, and this will lead us back to Joseph Kosuth. Both Kabakov and Kosuth became the theorists of their own practice, writing extensively about what, how and why they were making art. What distinguishes them from conceptualists like Sol LeWitt or the early Lawrence Weiner, is that for the latter their ideas could stand alone as cerebral art objects, but for the former they could not. With Kabakov, and arguably Kosuth, too, each individual piece is not the expression of an idea, but instead the body of their artistic production is a reflection *of* their theoretical ideas. And in this way their entire project is “Conceptual” regardless of what occurs within each piece. If that is the case, then it is necessary to make two clarifications. The first is that maybe a more proper term for their production would be Theoretical Art. But that sounds boring and derivative. The second would be to recognize the possibility and likelihood that the relationship was reciprocal – the theory informed the art product as much as the art product informed the theory. It is not only their ideas that *became* artworks in and of themselves, but rather and also, it was their *artworks* that *generated ideas* that could then be considered in isolation of their objects. And this reciprocity and simultaneity suits less the canon of Conceptual Art than it does my definition of Three-Dimensional Literature, whereby the texts and the objects are not illustrative in either direction but stand alone in their own rights while at the same time benefitting from their collision.

My point in this essay is not to carve out coveted seats for Kienholz and Kabakov within the canon of Conceptualism. Conceptualism, as we know it, ended in the 1970s, even if artists today still use its methods. Though in Kienholz's case, simply by his being excised from that record, there is some value in restoring his contribution. Instead my point is to take these two singularly idiosyncratic artists and compare them in terms of a particular kind of narrative conceptualism that has likewise influenced generations and will continue to do so. My particular investment in this comparison is to explore how the literary operates in their work. They are both story tellers and they both tell stories through a combination of objects and words and both have created environments or installations on, what Robert L. Pincus called, "a scale that competes with the world."

The purpose of this essay then is to illuminate the commonalities and differences between the works of Ed Kienholz and Ilya Kabakov – and also Ed and Nancy-Reddin Kienholz and Ilya and Emilia Kabakov – and to put them in a new place that could be considered at least Narrative Conceptualism or even better Three-Dimensional Literature. Whether or not you agree that they land there, or want to be placed there, is beside the point. The point is to put them together to see what happens. Typically, the first question an academic asks when someone compares two artists is, Why? What purpose do you have to compare them? To get passed this mundane question, the answer is simple – because such a comparison has never been made. When the comparison is so obvious, but it has yet to be made, this answer alone is sufficient. But I admit that something lurks behind my smug answer. Before now it is quite possible that this comparison may not have been as obvious

as it is today, and – more importantly – as it is to me. It only came into the light when I illuminated a territory for Three-Dimensional Literature. This “new” context, born from my understanding of Conceptualism, has brought them together for me in an obvious way. It is my job to show you how. And once I draw the parallels, it might surprise you too that no one thought of doing this before.

MAXIMALISM AND THE DISTANT AUTHOR

Amei Wallach, in her monograph on Ilya Kabakov, recognizes that “[Donald] Judd’s industrial utopian dream was to make art provable, to posit it as a theorem with givens, with immutable facts, to extract it from the welter of nonart...[while] Kabakov’s art is as inclusive as Judd’s is exclusive, as woven of stories, subplots, and metaphors as Judd’s is stripped of all three.”[Wallach, 93] We could similarly substitute Kosuth for Judd and Kienholz for Kabakov to make another valid case. While Kosuth and Judd focused on theorems and propositions (in Kosuth’s case, one per work, while in Judd’s, one and the same in every work); we could say that Kienholz and Kabakov presented *all* propositions in *every* work. Kosuth’s idea of representation and tautology isolated in *One and Three Chairs* is spelled out in every Kienholz and Kabakov work. If Kosuth and Judd are minimalists, then Kienholz and Kabakov are maximalists; if for Kosuth and Judd “less is more”, then for Kienholz and Kabakov “more is better”. Against Kosuth and Judd’s serious logical positivism and geometric Minimalism stand Kienholz and Kabakov’s comic social

satire and narrative metaphysics. Kosuth and Judd write propositions and equations; Kienholz and Kabakov write novels. Despite these extreme differences, one thing all four artists share is the importance of writing. Acts of literature figure into their practices.

Considering the role writing plays in Conceptualism, the position of authorship also takes on significance in both the West and the East, just as it also stresses the crack between Kosuth-Judd and Kienholz-Kabakov. While Judd's industrial boxes, made by machines, formulas, and assistants seemingly erased the hand of the artist, in the end we recognize these boxes only as signature "Judd boxes". Kosuth, although he took the position of nominating art as idea, subverted his own theory by demanding recognition as the author of *Art as Idea*. If art is idea, then – to quote Michel Foucault (as we did in the old days) – "What matter who is speaking?" Many theorists dismantled authorship to create more space for that which was said over he or she that was speaking. Judd and Kosuth utilized the figure of the modern author with the only exception that they were toting different goods. Meanwhile Kienholz, also in America, despite his constructed persona of the "Expert," blue collar, jack-of-all-trades, anti-theory, illiterate farm boy,¹ demonstrated a deep understanding of the 'death of the author' (without ever engaging in French theory) by the way in which his work addressed social issues. What was being said always outweighed the fact that he was the one saying it.

In Moscow, similar theoretical patterns of authorship had already developed in the work of Fyodor Dostoyevsky

¹ See Chapter II of Damon Willick's *Conceptualizing Kienholz* where he convincingly demonstrates how Kienholz's agency in constructing his public persona contradicts the very persona he constructs, 14-53.

and, in particular, Mikhail Bakhtin's reading of him. Ilya Kabakov's elision of authorship follows in this tradition as the dialogic voids the monologic. By saturating his artworks with opinions, commentaries and criticisms, Kabakov's own voice got lost in the crowd. He also creates characters to replace his own presence. Although these characters may resemble Kabakov and parallel his biography and actions in producing the work, this one-step-removed constructs Kabakov as a character — one is never sure how to divide traits between character and artist. Instead of the now historical question, "What matter who is speaking?", in looking at Kabakov's art, dangling from the wall or otherwise, the more pertinent question is, "Whose art is this?" The answer is either, a). uncertain, b). the name of a fictional character, or c). a non-sequitur. While in the West, Kosuth sought recognition as the father of Conceptualism, Kabakov, in the East, asked to be recognized as the, always anonymous, The Man Who..., The Untalented Artist, and, in the least, a fly.

Another author-effacing gesture that Kienholz and Kabakov share against Kosuth and Judd is the addition of collaborators to their practices. Authorship is diverted from the male genius to the male/female team leaving a contemplative gap in the attribution of ideas, decisions and works. In 1981, in the announcement to the exhibition *The Kienholz Women*, Kienholz retroactively named Nancy Reddin-Kienholz as coauthor of all of their works since 1972.[Hopps, 256] Kabakov began working collaboratively with Emilia Kabakov in 1989.

In grouping Kienholz and Kabakov against Kosuth and Judd my goal is not only to show resemblances between Kienholz and Kabakov, but, like Margarita Tupitsyn, it is to show how similarities clearly mark differences. Despite the

striking parallels between the two artists, in my research I only found one instance of the two names mentioned together. It appears in Wallach's book where she notes that when Kabakov arrived in Germany to begin his DAAD fellowship, it was Kienholz who greeted him. Again, it seems so obvious, yet it has never been done.

ON THE TOTAL INSTALLATION

The concept of the Total Installation would seem the first place where Ed Kienholz and Ilya Kabakov have common ground. But in Kabakov's treatise, *On the Total Installation*, where he discusses the emergence of installation art in the East and West, although he mentions Robert Rauschenberg, Jannis Kounellis, Mario Merz, Joseph Beuys, Allan Kaprow, and others, Kienholz is mysteriously absent. This absence ultimately becomes less mysterious than ironic. Following the list of artists he names, Kabakov characterized Western installation art as emerging from Happenings. For Kabakov, installation became "...what has remained after the action, what has already been discarded, the stationary remains, objects after the action has been completed and the actors and the public have dispersed." And he suggests that "the formation of the installation that occurred in the East was completely different." He cites Eastern, or at least Soviet, installation art as emerging from a triumvirate of a theatrical tradition especially that of stage design, Expopt, and as an enactment of the broken window of painting.[Kabakov, *Total Installation*, 321] Ironically, Kabakov's installation works tend to fit his Western category better than the Eastern since all of the spaces of his *Ten*

Characters, for example, are uninhabited spaces where actions have occurred and been abandoned. Kienholz's installations, on the other hand, fit Kabakov's Eastern category in their theatricality — the "actors" remain on the elaborately designed set — and their scene-scape quality makes them appear as if narrative paintings have burst from their frames. Most Kienholz installations represent the present moment, like a snapshot, inciting the viewer to narratively explore what led up to and what will inevitably follow the scene depicted. Kabakov's installations most often represent a past performance and seek to document, by narrative means, what had taken place. This confusion or crisscross of installation practices East and West not only complicates the definition of cultural differences, but further stresses the necessity for comparison.

Both artists are unquestionably products and witnesses of the times and places they grew up in. This distinction makes up for many of these differences and guides the thematics of their art. But beyond nationality, cultural milieu, and history, as they each tackle similar, if not identical, themes and strategies like a fiction writer might, they do so from different philosophical, spiritual, and political positions.

WITNESS TO NATIONS

Bear with me as I return once more to Joseph Kosuth. As an American artist, Ed Kienholz differs from Kosuth in another significant way, one that represents a more indicative split with American Conceptualism as it occurred in the 1960s and 70s. While Kosuth's Conceptualism stemmed from Ad Reinhardt's theory of Art-as-Art and

from Wittgenstein's proposition of "that which we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence," Kienholz's satire came out of social consciousness. Kienholz's conception of the moral duty of the artist sharply contrasted with Kosuth's ethics of Art. While Kosuth was nominating his version of silence in art, a huge part of the American population, including artists and intellectuals, was voicing opinions in protest of the war in Vietnam, against racial and sexual discrimination, and, generally against the repression of voice. In Kosuth's terminology, Kienholz was making "synthetic propositions" since his socially motivated art spoke of all that Kosuth believed should have been passed over in silence.

Kienholz's vocality was a byproduct of this American spirit in the 1960s and 70s. Despite its seeming dissidence, the exercise of his constitutional right to free speech was a thorough celebration of American patriotism. Kienholz was reared on the American dream. He remembered as a young man looking to the lights of Spokane Washington as a way out of his family farm. [Hopps, 249; Willick, 24] The dream to "Go West, young man," (he ended up in Los Angeles, avoiding New York throughout his life) and the incentive that success and voice in America were achieved by standing out, calling attention to oneself, and distinguishing oneself from others, egged him on. In America, the squeakiest wheel got the oil. Spurred on by what appeared to be hard-won results of such protest — voting rights for women and blacks and desegregation — and the hope behind Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream and Bob Dylan's call that "The Times They are a Changin'", Kienholz, like other artists, was optimistic that his work could contribute.

Meanwhile in the East, as Kienholz announced himself as political, Ilya Kabakov, in the 1960s and 70s, construct-

ed himself as neutral. Neutrality in the Soviet Union, though, cannot be understood as silence or "apoliticality" as such a position may have been understood in America at the time. Kabakov described his position this way:

"In the social situation of Soviet life, everyone who was in the "middle," in the "light" or near it...was swept away by a terrible broom...whereas those who sat it out in the corner remained unswept, they escaped destruction in the shadow, although, as is well-known, also not everyone...The corners aren't swept so often in our houses, only in the event of a major cleaning or major repairs. If you bend down, then you can see a great deal that is interesting and sad in such a corner..."[Wallach, 68-9]

In the Soviet Union, the squeakiest wheel was eliminated. Boris Groys reiterated this self-constructed position of neutrality when he noted:

"...in the 1970s a kind of allergic reaction developed in relation to the dissident pose that suggested access to a reality hidden to everyone else. Such an unreflective, oppositional stance was, incidentally, easily integrated within the world-view of official Soviet ideology, which reserved a special place for its enemies. Totalitarianism means not so much the homogeneity of society as its extreme division into friend or foe, excluding any neutral, analytical gaze aimed upon it from outside. One could be for this ideology and survive, or be against it and be destroyed, but a neutral atti-

tude was simply unthinkable, unimaginable, structurally impossible. Thus, some intellectuals and artists who wanted to escape the power of Soviet ideology felt an increasing displeasure at confirming, once again, the radical gulf that this ideology had dug through society, by their own oppositional attitude. They wanted, rather, to call the gulf into question, and to look at the whole Soviet cultural context with the neutral, descriptive, analytical eye of an outsider." [Groys, 39]

This condition of two alternatives — being for the Soviet ideology in order to survive or dissenting and suffering the consequences — which created a third, impossible, alternative that must be chosen recalls a position expressed by Victor Shklovsky half a century earlier:

"At the moment, there are two alternatives. To retreat, dig in, earn a living outside literature and write at home for oneself. The other alternative is to have a go at describing life, to conscientiously seek out the new society and the correct world view. There is no third alternative. Yet that is precisely the one that must be chosen." [Shklovsky, 51]

Amei Wallach sheds light on how Kabakov persevered with this alternative. In discussing how he worked with the censors and played the role of an official illustrator of children's books, Wallach notes that Kabakov grew up with the imposition of "not to stand out, not to call attention to oneself with some gesture of originality." [Wallach, 31] And, "It was Kabakov's inclination to fit in, not to make unnecessary waves. He believes he inherited from his mother an

instinct common to *homo sovieticus*, to live out of the spotlight, under a table, in any corner where politics cannot reach." [Ibid, 36] Kabakov's Jewish background as well, having grown up in World War II, would have been significant incentive to not stand out. "Within the Soviet Union, most kept silent and held their fingers up to the mercurial winds." [Ibid, 33] "To Kabakov the political climate [in Soviet Russia] was a kind of weather, like rain, like sun, so far above that no one can do anything about it." [Ibid, 37] In Kabakov's own words, "If you live in a country where it always rains you can't expect to fight the rain by organizing a demonstration." [Groys, 11]

This metaphor, in the American climate, would have been unacceptable. On the contrary, in a country where dissenting opinions were authorized, even if opposed, by the government, one's silence often meant complicity with the opposition. While artists like Adrian Piper and Kienholz seem good examples of political artists of the period, Felix Gonzales-Torres called Helen Frankenthaler the most political artist, not for what she said but for what she failed to say. By contrast, a neutral or "silent" position in the Soviet Union didn't necessarily comply with the Soviet ideology since it failed to choose it as either friend or foe. It was oppositional not by which side it chose, but by failing to choose and therefore failing to participate or contribute to the Union.²

²In an ironic twist, the hope that drove politically motivated American artists and intellectuals in the 1960s and 70s, not all that long after the Cold War, had the dream sucked out of it after September 11, 2001. With the forced ultimatum to be "with US or against US" drawing a sharp line in the sand along the "axis of evil" not only between the United States and Iraq and Afghanistan but also with Russia, France, and Germany, many artists and intellectuals found themselves in a similar position of having to take the third alternative which was not an option. As witness to the ineffectivity of the national and international protests against the US invasion

The outcome of this choice, made by Kabakov and the Moscow Conceptualists, proved to be both liberating and highly productive. Since they couldn't be harmed for making art and sharing it with their friends privately, the Moscow Conceptualists were able to grow as artists and as a group, without the conflict of censors, outside critics, or outside viewers. Collections of their works, writing, and documented unofficial actions, still coming West today, demonstrate the severity of their lack of stagnation and prove that neutrality can produce results under certain circumstances.

ANTI-ART AND COMIC CONVERSATION PIECES

Despite these national differences, Ed Kienholz and Ilya Kabakov share a psychosocial disposition toward anti-art, as well as a common Comic condition. Amei Wallach compares the difference:

of Iraq, as well as the inability to create change after no weapons of mass destruction had been found, one might conclude, echoing Groys, that – possibly having learned the lessons from the violent protests in the 1960s and 70s – 'such an oppositional stance was easily integrated within the world-view of official *American* ideology'. Bakhtin might have called the American right to peaceably assemble and freedom of speech, as it is used today, a release-valve, like Carnival, sanctioned by the government to prevent violent outbursts. This might explain NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg's strategy of encouraging marchers to collect city-sponsored 'protest pins' that would get them discounts in registered stores.

"The development of anti-art constructed out of the litter of life occurred simultaneously in Moscow and the West... With this difference: anti-art...surfaced in the United States in reaction to the commercialism and complacency of Eisenhower's military-industrial 1950s. In the Soviet Union it manifested the lunatic dislocations of Stalin's wounded, cornered, and dangerous dream." [Wallach, 39-40]

The Fluxus organizer George Maciunas put the definition of "anti-art" into perspective when he said, "...anti-art forms are primarily directed against art as a profession..." [Ibid, 40]. The unofficial work of Kabakov and the Moscow Conceptualists was anti-official Soviet art, while it was still consciously Art through-and-through in the same way every art movement rejected the one that came before it.

Kienholz's earliest anti-art statement came in an untitled painting from 1955 where he used a broom to apply paint to a board to try to "make something ugly in order to better understand beauty." [Hopps, 60] Arthur C. Danto pays special attention to this use of an "impoverished paintbrush" as an anti-art gesture in order to better understand art. Danto, with characteristic hyperbolic flourish, uses this painting to mark the end of the biographic history of beauty from Manet to Kienholz (with an Edouard and an Edward as convenient bookends). Although he sees this gesture with the broom as still Modernist, since it works in the service of beauty, Danto sees that Kienholz's commitment to anti-beauty has come about for other reasons. From this point forward, Kienholz becomes a committed moral critic. [Danto, 33] He is motivated more by the literary tradition

— that of Whitman, Twain, and the Beats — which knows the adage, "the pen is mightier than the sword," and he turns his back on the artistic tradition that followed the parallel sentiment that "the paintbrush is mightier than the hairbrush." Although he would still battle beauty, he no longer did so in order to damage or understand it for its own sake. Instead he sought to show the ugliness of the moral and political outrages that surrounded his daily life by pulling away the false face of beauty. From this point Kienholz would use a broom (or any found object) as a mighty sword.

Conversation Piece from 1959 demonstrates his early painterly approach to social subject matter when he mounted two "taxidermized" legs like a hunting trophy on a plaque-shape as the "...stuffed remains of an Indian girl raped and killed by frontiersman". The forearms and hands are mounted below as a rifle holder.[Hopps, 72] Painting and the object are used as a means to elicit conversation about and to understand the ugliness of American history.

Ilya Kabakov also used ugliness in paintings to demonstrate his position to beauty. In the early 1980s he affixed everyday kitchen utensils to painted surfaces and bracketed them by conversational quotations. In *Whose Mug is This?* a mug is affixed to a blue surface and above it reads: "Ekaterina Lvovna Soyka: Whose mug is this?; Fedyor Sergeevich Malanin: I don't know"; In another painting a grater: "Olga Ilinievna Zujko: Whose grater is this?; Anna Petrovna Zelenguk: Olga Markovna's". Amei Wallach summons the specters of both Duchamp and Dostoyevsky when she comments:

"The objects were ugly, dirty, completely and frustratingly familiar. They carried with them his-

tory, emotion, and more connotations than a well-turned couplet. Affixed to a painting, Kabakov's secondhand badly-mades induced ambivalence: ugliness enshrined as an icon, the everyday exposed like the unwanted sight of an unzipped fly exiting the communal toilet, at once ludicrous, intrusive, and intimating a terrible vulnerability." [Wallach, 69]

Although one does not appear in the documentation, a broom, too, could have been used to make one of these paintings ugly.

The dialogs in the corners of the paintings signal Kabakov's affinity for both the graphic arts and literature. They appear as cartoon captions creating a dialog between objects. The painting itself speaks to the object at the same moment that it speaks about it, trying to identify its existence. These works are "conversation pieces" as well. The speakers are absent yet the object is present, just as the author is absent and the object, the painting in this case, is present. The viewer is left not only to help identify the owner of the object – mug, grater, broom – but also the author/owner of the painting: whose painting is this?³

Although all of these paintings have a comic edge, the most self-reflexive is titled, *Whose Fly is This?* It reads: "Anna Evgenievna Koroleva: Whose fly is this?; Sergei Mikhailovich Khmelnitsky: That's Nikolai's fly". The ob-

³ According to the credits, Kosuth is the owner of *Whose Mug is This?* I should note that even though I put Kienholz and Kabakov against Kosuth and Judd, I don't suggest that they do this themselves. Kosuth's ownership of this painting and Judd's invitation to Kabakov to build *School No. 6* (1993) in Chinati suggests otherwise. Of the four of them, Kienholz seems to have been the least personally invested in the others and vice versa.

ject in this case is a painted representation of a fly. Just as a fly can belong to no one, or is so insignificant that no one would care to claim it (except apparently Nikolai), the painting belongs to no one. Its original owner has discarded it and only an anonymous Garbage Man, or a Man Who Never Threw Anything Away would think to try to identify its owner.

Comparing Kienholz's *Conversation Piece* and Kabakov's *Whose Fly is This?*, we can see how the Comic condition manifests itself in the two artists: in Kienholz, a stark dark satire; in Kabakov, a subtle ironic humor. The most significant difference between the works comes across in the concept of the public vs. the private. In Kienholz's work a hunting trophy, as well as an artwork, becomes a privately owned object, as do most objects in the United States. Private ownership is the bait of Capitalism. Yet the subject matter of Kienholz's *Conversation Piece* is a public problem, yet one which becomes repressed into privacy for fear of facing a tragic communal history. In mounting this work Kienholz conflates the dualism by exposing a public wound in a private setting. Kabakov's paintings, on the other hand, represent objects of public ownership in both the context of the communal kitchen and the Soviet Union. Public ownership is the bait of Communism. To beg the question "whose mug is this?" is futile in the Soviet context since the mug belongs to all. To beg the question "whose fly is this?" is just as ludicrous since, on the one hand, living creatures belong to no one, and, on the other, no one would claim a fly as a pet. Ironically, the characters in the mug painting cannot identify the owner of the mug, but those in the fly painting know that Nikolai owns the fly. Kabakov, in mounting his paintings conflates the dualism by exposing the failure of the dream to make everything public by

demonstrating that the most intimate, private, and unwanted things cannot be, or will not be, made public property. If the communal spirit claims that we must share our mugs, our successes, and our progress, then we must also share our failures and ugliness. We must share our flies. But if Nikolai owns the fly, then both the fly and Nikolai, (like the Jew for the Nazis and Stalin), must be eliminated because they stand outside of the communal Totalitarian program. In the case of both Unions (Soviet and the States) public ugliness is assigned to the private sector as a means to hide and ultimately eliminate it.

TALKING OBJECTS

In discussing his works with garbage, Kabakov has said, "I spent twenty-plus years...in...my studio, and I don't remember...taking out the garbage, and it accumulated over the years. It gave me great pleasure to examine and sort through each paper again and again, especially those that had really become old." [Wallach, 171] It should come as no surprise, then, that the paintings of this series reappear in a 1991-2 installation titled, *The Communal Kitchen*. Likewise, characters and stories from his 1970s albums appear later in installations like *Ten Characters*. This tendency to recycle, not only his own trash, but also his own artwork, plays a significant role in Kabakov's production. He combines early drawings, paintings, albums, and characters in later installations and often combines previous installations in later installations and eventually hopes to create one uber-installation combining all of his projects in a Chinati-like setting. [Wallach, 90]

In *The Communal Kitchen* we can see other characteristic marks made by a broom. Kabakov has said that he laid out this installation like a chapel. The installation has a museum-swept tidiness to it, and the subtle murmur of voices in dialog helps create this effect. The installation is clearly built by someone who, as Robert Storr recognized, treasures trash.[Wallach, 9] Along with the utensil paintings, which hang just below the ceiling, versions of Kabakov's earlier *16 Strings* series are strung across the ceiling; bits of dialogs are tied to bits of trash which are tied to strings of dialogs and trash which are tied from one wall to the other; at eye level for the viewer to read are fractions of dialogues written in accordion-fold album format; and an audio recording of conversations, inquiries, and complaints plays in the space. Just as each individual painting contains a dialog between absent characters, the chapel of *The Communal Kitchen* is likewise abuzz with dialog: between objects and characters, between the painting and the object, and between the viewer and the painting. Objects speak to objects such that "The howls and complaints of all those who lived there before and all those who live there now blend together beneath the ceiling." [Wallach, 224]

Ed Kienholz's *The State Hospital*, 1966, creates a similar condition of objects speaking to objects, but it does so according to different strategies. The first, most obvious, comparison between *The State Hospital* and Kabakov's early paintings as well as *The Communal Kitchen* is the use of a cartoon caption. Kienholz's tableau, one of few *Concept Tableaux* that he actually built, describes a man lying in a state hospital bunk bed, locked in his room, with his doppelganger lying in the bed above him. Surrounding the second version of the man is a pink neon tube in the shape of a cartoon bubble emanating from the head of the man in the

lower bunk. The Concept Tableau states that "...some kind of Lucite or plastic bubble (perhaps similar to a cartoon bubble), representing the old man's thoughts..." will encase the man in the upper bunk as a representation that the man's mind "can't think for himself past the present moment. He is committed there for the rest of his life."

In Kabakov's paintings, the cartoon captions signified conversations between two absent characters. In *The State Hospital*, the cartoon bubble signifies the conversation of one character, still present. The type of cartoon bubble Kienholz finally decided on, as he built the installation from his text, is not a thought bubble, as defined by comic book convention, but is instead a speech bubble. Despite a wealth of critical writing and even Kienholz's own writing which describes the creation of the doppelganger as a representation of the man's thoughts, the iconography of the installation shows us that it is instead the product of a speech act. The man in the lower bunk has spoken his double into existence, and by doing so he has created the only companion who could empathize with his condition, a direct copy of himself. He has created a circumstance that will allow him to remain trapped in his bleak existence, comforted by the company of himself. When he chooses to speak, he does not talk to or of some God asking to be freed from this condition, he does not dream of a way out; instead he talks to himself in despair whiling away his time since he is committed for the rest of his life.

Despite the Concept Tableau's suggestion that "there is no sound in the room," the sign of the speech bubble tells us otherwise. Sound is expressed by visual means such that we literally hear what we see. In this case, the viewer/reader witnesses a gap between the text and the objects. The text tells us that we are looking at one thing, but the

visual execution shows us that we are seeing another. This gap exists despite itself and despite Kienholz's asking us to see it otherwise. I don't intend this to be a criticism but instead a celebration of the different modes of expression of objects and words.

In another example, the language and the objects coincide because of the gap between them. In the *Concept Tableau*, the text reads, "He has been beaten on the stomach with a bar of soap wrapped in a towel (to hide the tell-tale bruises)." In the installation, the viewer does not see a bar of soap wrapped in a towel, and there are no bruises on his stomach. To render either the towel with soap or the bruises in three-dimensions would have denied the narrative its import: if the viewer could see the soap in a towel or the bruises they would be tell-tale signs of the beatings which are struck in order that they not be seen. The choice to name them in the text but not show them in the tableau demonstrates coherence in the concept. In this case, the gap between words and objects adds to the complexity of the translation. The text and objects give us different information and only together can we understand that which we cannot see or hear but know exists.

While Kienholz, in this work and in the other *Concept Tableaux*, always worked illustratively from a primary text to a secondary installation, Ilya Kabakov, the official children's book illustrator, chose to work from the installation to the text and back emphasizing the semiotic gaps and flows between the language and objects. Thematically, Kabakov deals with a similar theme in his installation *The Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment*. Like Kienholz's character, Kabakov's is also trapped in a bleak existence. He lives in the Soviet Union, in a communal apartment, oppressed in a psychological, social, and politi-

cal condition. Unlike Kienholz's character, Kabakov's Man, in his confined room with the walls covered in propaganda posters, concocts an elaborate plan of escape. He devises a way to eject himself into space from a chair attached to springs that will propel him through the ceiling and roof of his building (just after the gun powder he has laid blows these open) at the very moment when the jet stream is passing over his building at a rate that will carry him away. He dreams of a way to escape and follows his scientific and artistic energy to put his plan into action. In Kabakov's installation, the Man is no longer present. The viewer peers in his room only to find the hole blasted through the ceiling, the models and plans for escape, and the texts that explain what happened.

The comparison between Kienholz and Kabakov becomes interesting when we remember the conditions under which they made these characters. Kienholz, the radical American given the right and freedom of speech and the ability to act publicly on his political convictions, in a country and time brimming with hope, creates a character trapped in a bleak condition, unable and unmotivated to find a way out. Despite his rights and freedoms in the public sphere, when the man chooses to speak in the private sphere, he only repeats his suffering and despair. Psychologically, he oppresses himself. Kabakov, on the other hand, the neutrally positioned Soviet citizen, unable to announce his opposition to that which traps him, creates a character who dreams of, elaborates, and successfully executes an ambitious form of escape. Kabakov's Man, in a country locked in a totalitarian condition, unable to speak out in the public sphere, in his private sphere has the time and psychological space to research and plan an escape driven by hope and freedom.

In both installations, the viewer is forced into the position of the voyeur. In Kienholz's, the viewer witnesses the scene only through the barred window of the door to the installation. The character remains locked in his state. In Kabakov's installation, the viewer witnesses the scene only through the gaps in the boards that make up the exterior of the room. The character is no longer present; he has escaped. The texts offer the viewers/readers another angle from which to see. In *The State Hospital*, viewers can find out what ails the man and pity him through the window. In *The Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment*, viewers can read his notes, read the accounts of his neighbors, and ponder or celebrate the success of his liberation.

Since Kienholz represents a character in a state hospital, we can justify the locked-in nature of his condition: he may, in fact, have no way out. But in *Sollie 17, 1979-80*, Kienholz and Reddin-Kienholz explore a similar theme where the character is not housed in an institution but is instead merely in his room, just as *The Man Who Flew...* was. Sollie is represented three times in the same room, in different positions: one on the bed reading a pulp novel, playing with himself; one sitting in a chair playing solitaire, half-watching TV; and one gazing out the window. The viewer, who again is forced to peer only through the door which is opened a crack, gets the impression that Sollie, in his self-imposed solitary confinement, cycles from position to position, spinning in his boredom. Kienholz said that his inspiration for the piece came from a man he saw through a similarly slightly opened door of a room, which when he passed seemed to say simultaneously, "What the hell are you looking in here for? This is my place, and you just keep your goddamn nose out of it," and, "Oh God, I'm so lonely, why don't you stop and talk a little bit?" [Hopps, 263]

Sollie, like the man in *The State Hospital*, is trapped in his room, but Sollie can freely walk through the open door. He chooses not to. He remains in his room, spinning, idling his time away in his boredom. By contrast, Ilya Kabakov's characters make creative and constructive use of their confined spaces and boredom. Their rooms become documented museum-like spaces, and their products art works. Sollie's game of solitaire, on the other hand, is not treasured, nor is his masturbating "performance art". Kienholz's characters are always ordinary people. Kabakov's are always extraordinary.

THE DOUBLED INSTITUTION

The State Hospital, for Kienholz, becomes a place where the admitted man psychologically collapses into himself. His institution does not cure him but keeps him locked up to protect the healthy. In a more direct parallel, Kabakov's installation *Mental Institution, or Institute for Creative Research* (1991) offers another possibility for the 'patient' that mirrors the creative impulses of the man who flew into space. In this project, Kabakov equates mental illness with artistic production. The text to the installation reads: "At the basis of any mental illness or trauma lies heightened and continually active creativity..." Doctor Lublin, whose work the installation is based on, plans his institution as a laboratory for replacing the doctor-patient relationship with a collaborator-author relationship with the 'patient' as the author. The authors are encouraged to involve themselves in creative projects that motivate them. Dr. Lublin recognizes that in the outside world, family, so-

cial, and cultural restrictions prevent individuals from exploring their creative impulses, so, in his mental institution, he creates a space where those restrictions are lifted, and the people admitted can pursue their passions in peace and therefore overcome their trauma or mental illness. He discourages the use of drugs and other restraints to subdue his patients' impulses and sees the institution as a place where authors can contentedly and joyfully realize their dreams. This institution poignantly compares to the Soviet Union as both Kabakov and Boris Groys described it as a place where creativity could thrive contentedly through its position of neutrality. Unlike the state of the hospital that Kienholz depicts, Kabakov's and Lublin's institution invites visitors to encourage the 'patient' in his creative endeavors, as a means to prevent the dualism of an institutional inside and a real world outside.[Groys, 108-10]

As a Total Installation, *Mental Institution, or Institute for Creative Research* completely creates, from floor to ceiling the environment of the institute. Kabakov creates a series of rooms, one for each author, and the viewer encounters each room as a mini-museum displaying the products of each patient's labor. The individuals are not present, only the remains of their labor and texts describing their actions remain in the rooms. Each room has a museum-swept cleanliness to it, and a sterile presentational format, to the extent to which, even though Kabakov has completely transformed the space of the surrounding museum that the installation is housed in, he has essentially reproduced the same kind of museum space: his texts function in the same structural way as museum labels and text panels, the presentation of objects on the walls and in the space follows the codes of museum presentation as do the barriers that separate the viewer from the artwork. Although this presentation format may be charac-

teristic of Kabakov's installations as he defined his treatise in *On The Total Installation*, in this particular one, his reiteration of the doppelganger (the art institution within the art institution) is justified due to the equation of the mental institution with the institution for creativity. In every project, Kabakov is self-conscious about his presence in an art institution. His practice as an artist always parallels the practice of his protagonists.

Ed Kienholz, on the other hand, is rarely overtly reflexive about his art context. His disdain for the art establishment kept him out of it, while at the same time he knew it was the only place that would have him, so he bent it to his rules. One notable exception where he gets reflexive is *The Art Show* (1963-77). In this piece the art world is the subject of his satire. Like Kabakov's mental institution within an art institution, Kienholz's *The Art Show* doubles itself. Kienholz staged an exhibition by a fictional painter named Christian Carry and cast figures of his art world friends as the party guests. He asked each person he cast to select an art historical or critical text that he or she thought to be a good example of the writer "blowing hot air". To each cast figure he attached a car vent in the mouth position and an audio device in the chest position. When the viewer approached the figures, a sensor triggered the audio device to play a recording of the art text, and hot air would spew from the mouth. By creating a satirical art opening, Kienholz forced the viewers of the exhibition to question their place within *The Art Show*. Were they blowing hot air in discussing the works? Were they pretentious in drinking wine, rubbing elbows, making connections? While the viewer came expecting to encounter painted works on the wall, they were then confronted by the figures of the critics standing around the room. Finally they were confronted by

their own position in relation to both the art works on the wall and the critics, and their own commentary on the exhibition experience.

While this is one of the few meta-exhibition pieces for Kienholz, Ilya Kabakov used this motif often. In *Incident in a Museum, Water Music* he stages an exhibition by a fictional painter named Stepan Yakovlevich Koshelev, but his work is overshadowed by a flood or water catastrophe in the museum. The sanctuary setting for viewing paintings is transformed into a more impromptu site for those inclined to find music and poetry in chance circumstances. But in a way not unlike Kienholz's strategy of forcing the visitor to confront his or her own mirrored position, Kabakov confronts his viewer similarly in *Where is Our Place?* The visitor enters a museum to find various paintings by fictional artists. Cut off by the ceiling are paintings, dated by their frames, clearly from an older period, classical in relation to the photo-text pieces that occupy the 58-inch center line coinciding with the average viewer's eye level. The present day viewer also encounters the feet and legs of giant viewers, dressed in clothes from an earlier period. The other half of their bodies seemingly extends beyond the ceiling. In addition, down on the floor, the present day viewer also notices small scenes of another exhibition with smaller viewers below the floor. The viewer finds him/herself caught in the middle of the past and the future, in between both something physically larger and smaller than himself. The viewer is forced to question the importance of the works that are presented on the museum walls that correspond with his/her size against the importance of works from the past or future or made for a sub- or superhuman. By recognizing oneself within a larger cosmos of time and space, the viewer's perception of the mo-

ment reflects back on him/herself and forces a consideration of one's own significance.

Kienholz and Kabakov, in *The Art Show* and *Where Is Our Place?*, confront the viewer with his/her own position in relation to the art viewing experience. The artists have created mirrors for self-consciousness, virtual doppelgängers of the present time and place that speak to the viewer and that the viewer must speak back to. Only in engaging in this dialogue can the viewer begin to interpret the art they are confronted with and explore the possibilities of what the artist, the viewer, and the work of art can accomplish. And by engaging they can't help but feel small within something that exceeds them.

THE POLITICS OF TREASURING TRASH

Earlier I mentioned Robert Storr's remark that Kabakov treasures trash. We can say the same thing for the Kienholzes, but they treasure it in different ways. Kabakov's character in *The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away* spends his days looking through his own trash, documenting its provenance, recording it on bits of paper, and displays the trash with the written commentary around the room in a library or museum-like setting. Viewers and characters of the installation only understand the man's activity when fictional repairmen looking for the plumber who lives there inadvertently let them in. The narrative tells us the plumber is out. After the repairmen leave, the characters and viewers have access to the room and the man's personal effects and begin to read about and interpret the

meaning of his labor. Again, Kabakov represents a space after a performance has taken place.

The obsession with which the man treasures trash, by searching for its ownership, or originary use-value, by documenting its provenance, and by displaying it aesthetically as if it were art or an archeological find, again results in a museum-swept space where the ugliness of trash is valued in the highest regard. The value placed on trash by the character parallels the value placed on it by Kabakov.

This attitude toward trash, as well as the attitude toward the total installation (and inscribing himself within the installation), distinguishes him and his work from Kienholz. I can illuminate this by a comparison between *The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away* (1986-8; 1994) and *Five Car Stud*, (1969-72; 2012).

When Ed and Nancy Kienholz's *Five Car Stud* was first publicly shown at Documenta 5, in Kassel Germany in 1972 it was isolated under a large tent.⁴ The scene depicts six white men in the process of castrating a black man. Two white men pin the black man down by his arms, one with a rope tied to his ankles restrains a leg, two others casually hold shotguns and restrain him with the threat of firearms, while a lay-surgeon takes to cutting off the man's balls and penis with a metal instrument.[Pincus, 82] Four cars and a pickup truck representing the makes and models of the represented moment (1972) surround the scene, illuminating it in their headlights. In the pick-up truck (the odd car out, the

⁴ In January 2012 Nancy Reddin-Kienholz remounted this work - the first time in 40 years - co-sponsored by the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark and the Los Angeles County Museum. As a result of exhibitions in both museums, the piece changed hands from the Kawamura Memorial DIC Museum of Art and is now owned by The Fondazione Prada, in Milan.

face-down card in this hand of poker) a white woman who the narrative clues indicate is the black man's date, has her hand to her mouth gasping or holding back vomit. In one of the other cars a white boy, most likely the son of one of the attackers, watches the scene with impressionable innocence.

While the faces of the woman and child are rendered unmasked, the faces of the attackers are shrouded in gruesome costume masks – the signs of masking are not masked, reminding us that the KKK also wear hoods. The victim also has two faces, an inner one with a still expression encased in an outer plastic mask that depicts a scream. And as if to clarify any ambiguity over the racial motivations behind the scene, the victim's torso is made from an oil pan with letters floating in black water, which in one configuration, the only one we are intended to read, spell and misspell N-I-G-G-E-R.

Here we can witness the difference in how Kienholz and Kabakov treat trash and found objects. In several instances, Kabakov compares objects in the West with objects in the East. He characterizes the West as focused on objects themselves.

"Thanks to the principle of freedom...the space surrounding the object is virtually ignored, attention is being dissected and assembled, everyone is interested in how it functions, it is imbued with all inventiveness. The objects in their turn look beautiful, they are always new, clean, shining, brightly painted, each one has its own individuality, one could say they are almost animated, they have an independent life." [Kabakov, *Text as Basis*, 359]

In the West, "it's as though the space [surrounding objects] shouldn't exist at all." By contrast, in the East, Kabakov observes, "Items as real objects don't have any significance...they are old, dusty, broken, 'previously used', and if they are still new, they are poorly made, don't work, ugly, shapeless." Objects in Soviet Russia had symbolic goals rather than practical goals; they function only as indicators of the social membership of their owners. For Soviets, a thing didn't speak for itself but about the one who owned it and why he owned it. For this reason, Kabakov explains, the surrounding context of objects is more important in the East than in the West. And it is this attention to surrounding context for him that brings about installation art.[Ibid]

One can read Kabakov's use then of trash and objects, in *The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away*, as a direct reaction to this lack of attention to objects. The Man pays strict attention to objects including with them, for example, "...a note corresponding to a tram ticket, No. 8: 'I went to Maria Ignatievna's with the things. It was raining and I didn't have a raincoat, I left it at home;' A needle, glued, along with a thread, under 48: 'I found this on 17 February under a table, but I didn't need it any more...'; and also an old sponge, 'I don't know how I got it. Probably, it was meant to wash the bathtub. But I didn't use it — I just put it under the table so it wouldn't tip.'" [Groys, *Ilya Kabakov*, 101]. By obsessing over these objects and their ownership and history and forgetting the context, the Man focuses all of his attention on them. When the Man, or Kabakov, finds an object he treats it as itself. He attempts to restore its intrinsic value. The object itself determines his use of it, and he doesn't stray too far from what the object communicates to him of the context it was made for. And in doing so he treasures objects, failing to distinguish between trash and

works of art. His use of objects is strictly symbolic, as he said was an Eastern quality, but he inscribes a western quality to them by treasuring them.

On the other hand, when Kienholz finds an object he gives it a new yet still pragmatic use. He finds a broom and uses it as a paintbrush. He finds an oil pan and uses it as a man's chest. Like Kabakov's sponge which was meant to wash the bathtub, Kienholz uses a sponge for a different purpose. Kabakov's man, although he had used the sponge as a table wedge, he no longer does so. Now he uses it only as uniquely self-documenting its original intended use, and the practical use it had been put to. Kienholz finds objects and entitles himself to inscribe new uses to them according to the consumer American tenet of "finders keepers." An object changes owners when it is thrown out, and once it changes owners it can be put to a different purpose. "One man's trash is another man's treasure," as the saying goes.

These treatments of objects differ in phenomenological and a hermeneutic ways. In the phenomenological sense, Kienholz, the American, entitles himself to take an object and inscribe it with new meaning according to his rights as an owner. Kabakov, or the plumber, the Soviet, limits himself to treating objects in and of themselves archivally documenting their long lost ordinary use value. From a hermeneutic perspective, Kienholz entitles himself to find an object and beat it into a shape that he sees fit. In this way he can call an oil pan a chest. Kabakov limits himself to the internal coherence of the object and only uses or reads into the object that which we can read out of it. He treats the sponge as a Work and interprets it only according to its internal coherence. Following this comparison, one might suspect that Kienholz's art then might be open to multiple uses or interpretations: if he uses objects in this way, can

viewers use his artworks in the same way? At the same time, one might suspect that Kabakov's work might then be limited to certain interpretations and closed or unaccepting to others. But the opposite is the case with both artists.

In *Five Car Stud*, we can see how Kienholz gambles with interpretation. Every use of irony or satire is a gamble. The satirist has one reading in mind, the opposite of which renders the whole project a failure. If Kienholz is making a piece that is morally critical of racial violence, yet it is interpreted as a piece celebrating racial violence, it is better, for the artist, that the piece had not been made. A contradictory reading both voids the moral criticism and voids the piece. The ironic reading gambles with 'all or nothing' odds. So despite Kienholz's freedom to use objects for whatever purpose he sees fit, he doesn't grant his viewer the same freedom. When viewers encounter his objects, they have one option to read from (although there may be many interpretations within that option's parameters). In *Five Car Stud*, Kienholz gambles and wins.

Kabakov, on the other hand, while he focuses his lens solely on the object in question and documents its origin, he also writes multiple interpretations from multiple voices. Not only does he write these interpretations himself, but he also allows the viewer to make various and contradictory interpretations about the objects and the installation. Viewers can freely interpret his works, beating them into whatever shape that suits them, and it will not reflect negatively on the work. In this sense, Kabakov's installations are totalizing in that they hegemonically incorporate any interpretation as valid. Kienholz's works, on the contrary, are after didactic and morally poignant readings.

The comparisons continue. Both artists have built monuments to their mothers: the Kienholzes in *Mother With a*

Past Affixed, Also and Kabakov in both *The Toilet* and *The Corridor, My Mother's Album*. This latter piece could also be compared with the Kienholzes' *The Pedicord Apartments* which is a lobby inhabited by only the voices of those occupying the rooms. We could compare the political critiques between the Kienholzes' *The Ozymandias Parade* and *The Caddy Court* (both wagons of sorts) and Kabakov's *The Red Wagon*. The list continues and the two lines run parallel and then suddenly cross like an ice skater's feet as she accelerates and spins into tricks.

ANTI-MONUMENTS

I will conclude with one last comparison that will highlight their different sensibilities. Both artists have worked in monumental scale and both have created monuments with political implications. But they employ radically different strategies. Monuments are symbols of commemoration; sculptural documents standing for posterity to remind us of those moments in history that we should value most or those values that should endure the longest. There are The Washington Monument, The Lincoln Memorial, Maya Lin's Vietman War Memorial, and the Memorial Pools at the World Trade Center site. There are also those memorial sculptures of Joseph Stalin and Vladimir Lenin, Adolf Hitler and Saddam Hussein, the fascist Ozymandiases of time immemorial destined to fall once they run their course. And then there are the makeshift memorials that grow spontaneously in the street after a sudden death of a neighborhood child, a local character no one knew but everyone saw daily, or the victims of a mass shooting in a school. Some are

large, grandiose, permanent and overbearing in their message, while others are humble and ephemeral, as fleeting as “I was here,” written on a beach at low tide.

The Kienholzes have never been shy about their political statements or in sticking a mirror in the face of a corrupt political system. Many of their works express criticism in their characteristic form of cast figures and painted surfaces from as early as *Conversation Piece* (1959), *The Psycho-Vendetta Case* (1960) and *The Portable War Memorial* (1968) to *The Ozymandius Parade* (1985) and *My Country 'Tis of Thee*, (1991), to name just a few. And while they had a respect for and did not ridicule spirituality, they were proud of their atheist position and unafraid to point out the hypocrisies of religion. *76 J.C.s Led The Big Charade* (1992-94) is one such piece, but the earlier *The Big Double Cross* (1987-89) is their monument to the corrupt use of God to justify war.

The piece consists of a huge bronze bullet surrounded by an enlarged stainless steel cookie-cutter in the shape of a cross standing on a marble pedestal mimicking those memorial monuments one might find in Washington DC or Philadelphia. Their one-line summation of the piece went, “War in the name of religion is the big double cross.”[Hopps, 214] What they mean to express in their title, this one-liner, and the work are clear enough, but, when standing in front of the piece, the viewer doesn’t feel the same intense sense of uncomfortable “socially resonant drama” as one felt, say, standing inside *Five Car Stud* or contemplating the possibility of putting one’s hand on a chair upholstered in the flesh of an African-American man in *The Black Leather Chair*. Like *Five Car Stud*, *The Big Double Cross* gambles with satire, but unlike the earlier piece, the latter loses the bet. While the *The Big Double Cross* is meant to satirize the uni-

ty of God, religion and war, it could likewise be read in the context of the United States as a monument to the freedom of religion and the right to bear arms. It could easily stand proud in the headquarters of the NRA or the Smithsonian Museum without anyone feeling the bite of its criticism. Put a museum label with the first two amendments of the Constitution next to it, and, by God, people would salute it without any remorse. (We could say something hypothetically similar if the KKK acquired *Five Car Stud* or *The Black Leather Chair* for their headquarters, but the crucial difference is this: if the general public were invited to view it, those non-KKK members would immediately feel a deep sense of disgust, outrage and shame, all the more intense because of the location. On the other hand, the general public, just as hypothetically at the Smithsonian, could easily interpret *The Big Double Cross* as a monument of deep pride. The intended sense of disgust requires explanation). The hint of criticism only travels in the title and the artists' statement, and next to the sculptural statement, these paratexts don't carry much weight. They sting like a B.B. not a bomb as only a Kienholz piece can. Just as Kienholz wouldn't disrespect anyone's spirituality, he likewise, as a hunter, wouldn't deny her the right to bear arms. But if God is a Bullet – as in the Concrete Blonde lyric – and Jesus was a pacifist, well then the piece sends mixed messages. It monumentalizes the contradiction of the object subverting the artists' intention.

Ilya and Emilia Kabakov's *Monument to a Lost Glove* (1996) also monumentalizes contradiction, but this only benefits their poetics. Just as Kabakov had elevated the fly to a level of worship in his early painting and later in his museum dedicated to *The Life of Flies*, so too does he here monumentalize something minor, trivial and normally over-

looked. Following more in the tradition of the makeshift and ephemeral monuments to fallen neighborhood heroes, the Kabakovs start with the anti-monument of a lost glove and inflate it to the proportion of exaltation.

The piece consists of a cast red glove sitting directly on the pavement. Around it stand nine podiums that each contain a narrative about the glove, its owner, and how it came to be lost. Nine voices surround the glove, each submitting their theories, and each viewer reads them and either chooses the one she aligns closest to or he contributes his own narrative. The piece works in its openness to a variety of interpretations, inviting an infinite accumulation of stories. It celebrates multiplicity and includes everyone. True, theirs is not an overt grand memorial to fallen soldiers or the grand leaders of nations or the orators that moved the world with their tongues, but the metaphor, the poetry, comes across clearly. By elevating the lost glove, which remains abandoned on the street – those memorializers *come to it* as opposed to *bring it to* a shrine – they elevate something perceived as insignificant to the height of admiration. The metaphor is self-evident.

The Kienholzes and Kabakovs both use the motif of a monument. The Kienholzes satirically exalt the repulsive, and the Kabakovs sincerely dignify the trivial. Both of their works have imbedded narratives and history. The Kabakovs ask the viewers to choose their favorite interpretations, and the Kienholzes ask them to see the opposite of what is there. They intend to take the glove off and *slap* the viewer in the face with it, and usually they succeed – we are willing to face the hard hidden reality. But in this case, their glove is limp and their strike light. The Kabakovs, with the other hand and absent intention, *drop* a glove and leave the viewer to work it out.

DOPPELGANGERS AND ANTI-SELVES

In much of Kabakov's work, and in particular in *Ten Characters*, Robert Storr points out a consistency of self-deprecation: the artist doubles himself in every character — the actions of *The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away*, *The Man Who Flew Into His Painting*, *The Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment* and the characters in the *Mental Institution, or Institute for Creative Research* are identical to the actions of Kabakov, the artist. He creates a copy of himself behind every pseudonym. This defines the means of his practice: the multi-vocality in all of Kabakov's work is an elaborately staged dialogue between these doppelgangers such that he can be all characters and none at the same time.

Kienholz, on the other hand, never duplicates himself.⁵ Instead, his characters are always the anti-Kienholz or direct opposites of himself. The artist who builds *Sollie 17* and *The State Hospital* does not trap himself indoors; he is not the prostitutes in *Roxy's* or *The Hoerengracht*; he is not the racist white man who castrates the black victim in *Five Car Stud*; nor is he the president in *The Ozymandias Parade* or the judges in the *The Caddy Court*. Likewise, this creation of the anti-self defines Kienholz's practice: satire and irony are defined as exactly the use of words, characters, and/or objects to convey the opposite of their original

⁵ I should say "almost never" since there are at least three exceptions in *Backseat Dodge '38*; *First Car*; *First Date*; and *Mine Camp*.

meaning or expressions marked by a deliberate contrast between apparent and intended meaning.

From the point of view of their respective backgrounds, Kabakov, the neutral observer from an outside position, dreams of himself from the omniscient and posthumous point of view of his come-and-gone characters. Kienholz, from his politically active and vocal inside position creates characters who are trapped, beaten, beaters, bored, bordering death, down-and-out, and downtrodden. None of these characteristics could be used to describe Kienholz. In looking at the work of art itself, one can see that Kienholz's working practice stands in direct opposition to the practices of those he represents. In looking at Kabakov's work, one can just as easily see that his working practices coincide identically with those of his characters. Even though Kienholz represented a doppelganger in *The State Hospital*, he did not make one of himself. In *The Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment*, Kabakov, like the doppelganger he created, flew into space and landed in Western Europe and the United States where he could practice his unofficial art practices under official auspices. Without generalizing too much, one could say Kienholz always shined the light available to him on the dark side. And Kabakov, in a darker condition, always looked on the bright side.

Despite these apparent differences in practice, similarities reveal themselves if we switch contexts. I began this essay with two pairs of doppelgangers and posited each as the anti- of the other: Kosuth-Judd, on one hand, and Kienholz-Kabakov on the other. By way of their practices, both Kienholz and Kabakov demonstrate the effective use of a comic sensibility as a tool to elide authorship. Kosuth and Judd practice art from the serious sensibility of mathematical formulas and philosophical propositions but stake

claims to their authorship. All of these artists practice art seriously, and each of them concerns himself with art as a concept and the concepts of art. All of them are writers and each is the author of his own practice. But two suffer less from separation anxiety, welcoming the possibility that the wild vocality or the guarded quietude of the mental patient can be more graceful than the cold calculated reason of the doctor. The fool, whose death may be its consequence, is always one step ahead of the king.

OZYMANDIAS

I met a traveler from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them on the sand,
Half sunk, a shatter'd visage lies, whose frown
And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamp'd on these lifeless things,
The hand that mock'd them and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

-Percy Bysshe Shelley-

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