

Sophie Reinhold
Waste of the Actual

28.05. -
12.07.2025

I quite like rubbish. As a philosophy, it holds up.

Do you need a headache pill?

Nah, not at all. Best to avoid them, really. Too hard on the liver.

What I'm actually doing here is this: I'm reconstructing things – harder, more precise every time. It may seem like a copy, but it's basically a translation.

A bit like Constantin Constantius, the pseudonym Søren Kierkegaard used in *Repetition* (1843): an ironically over-intellectualised thinker who sets out to explore the idea of repetition as an existential-creative principle – by means of a trip to Berlin, which he wants to repeat exactly as one he took before. Well, he fails badly. It's the same with seeing; just when we think we're seeing something again, a different kind of faculty emerges – judgement. The only faculty that accrues, so to speak, when shared with others: not in a bank account, but in the mind, where it keeps earning interest.

Really, it's about how assets of a different kind get transferred.

When you realise what images might also be saying. Leonardo Sciascia once remarked that the best thing on translation was said by Cervantes: translation is the reverse side of a tapestry. It can reveal things about the internal anatomy of the original that you might miss just by looking at it..

Translation also involves a loss of control, which gives you time and perspective. Sometimes, the way something is phrased – or even what is phrased – doesn't really matter, because it's about the search: constantly sounding out the space between illusion and the question of truth within that illusion. 'Thinking doesn't free us from error, but it can save us from thoughtless action.' (Hannah Arendt) It's like a constant search for that shame-soaked, tipsy, wobbling humanity – a never-ending building site that somehow has a consciousness. As banal as it sounds: that you feel yourself in connection with loads of shit. And here we are again with trash. The waste of the actual.

Trash is never truly cleared. It's what is left when function fails, when meaning erodes, when systems collapse. Waste speaks and accumulates where the polished surfaces of ideology wear away – as rotting sediment, so to speak: memory in decay, history with no stage lighting.

The simulacrum lives on in the 2025 binge-watching hit Adolescence – not as a relic of dusty '80s theory, but as both a veil and a mirror through which the illusions of the present are fractured and can be understood. Not simply a copy of the real – but a representation that replaces and erases the real. An image or system that refers only to itself, detached from any origin. Removed from the original two-second watercolour, removed from my attempt at conservation, from the highly existential and pathos-laden moment of applying paint with my bare hands before the process of sanding, of eel-slick smoothing.

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'It is the reflection of a basic reality. It masks and perverts reality. It masks the absence of reality. It bears no relation to any reality,' whispers Baudrillard from the grave... one of the paintings is based on a distorted, zoomed-in illustration from René Descartes' physical-cosmological theories – the same Rationalist who shaped Western Eurocentric science like few others ever did. The depiction of the vortex theory of the universe from his treatise *Le Monde* (ca 1630–1633) shows vortices that touch and interlock – like the universe itself, continuously and seamlessly filled with motion. Even when, for example, a seemingly perfectly formed sunbeam shines through the window, you still see dust particles bouncing around in it.

Like the representing image itself – and yet liberated from this thinking about how it's being received. It is free. 'My space is a space where my behavior is not influenced by another living thing. That is the definition of my space.' Mike Kelley affirms this focus on the work. What happens when you become detached from your own work as an artist? So much so that you only feel it and articulate nothing else about it? Which is, in a way, an absolute state that almost redeems me. You know what I mean?

Yes. Mike Kelley's *Diagram for My Space Performance* (1978) as a conceptual model for a psychogrammatic space – an inner topography in which the self is dissected into a mesh of positions, actions, and meanings, and where image-formation emerges as score, conceptual sketch, and critical commentary on the codified structures of art. There's no settling for representation as reality's neatly groomed *doppelgänger* here. Here, thought inscribes itself directly into space.

And then there are these chairs – echoes of the fact that a chair is not merely a piece of furniture, but a sign that humans have made the world dwellable: long-term, together, visibly. What is inside a room – and what is outside it?

The chair lifts the human off the ground – both literally and symbolically.

It separates them from the dirt of the earth, from dog droppings and asphalt debris. As an object, it triggers a near primitive impulse to recognise... the chair in parliament, *The Artist Is Present*, the Chair of Saint Peter, the electric chair, the chair in the waiting room at the jobcentre, the chair at the gynaecologist's, the confessional chair. An empty chair somehow turns presence into potential – it always points to a relationship: closeness or distance, exclusion or inclusion.

*There's nothing better than when something you think becomes embodied. Every time I see these chairs, I think of Claes Oldenburg and his *Giant Fagends* (1967) and *Fagends Study* (1968). That hyperrealistic cigarette butt – cast in aluminum and hand-painted with enamel – elevates the everyday to the absurd, a cast-off symbol of urban neglect, showing just how deeply our world is embedded in objects. It also shows how dubious these objects really are, or as Oldenburg put it: 'I'm for an art that does something other than sit on its ass in a museum.'*

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Here, chairs transfer into cut-up bathtub parts. Mentally, you sit in the bathtub, which in its original version tends to sit closer to floor level – the submarine of the self, where the noise of the world quiets down. In the tub, the self may become itself; naked, alone, unmasked, it is where bodily boundaries blur. The bathtub is the whirlpool of the petite bourgeoisie, and in prefab flats in the GDR, having one's own bathtub was considered an achievement of socialist housing construction: progressive and modern. Until, in the early 1990s, it became the poverty-pool of the 'socially deprived'.

The tub – a presumptuous seating advantage.

Your version has room for two. A plurality of seating opportunities.

I can sit in it with you.

Now we're back to the split in visual perception: the mental cinema of opposites – presence and absence – that shapes all our seeing. The visible is always connected to a portion of the invisible that resists direct access: hierarchy vs. anarchy, high vs. low, comfort vs. discomfort, the class experience of social ascent vs. social decline – all the way to Freudian regression into early childhood stages, or even the prematurely rehearsed position of the coffin.

Ultimately, they also raise the question of the choice of HOW one sits. I cut up a bathtub and it becomes my throne, upon which everyone sits and bathes with their bare ass. And longs once more for a return to the fetal position. Not unlike urinals, which also double as puke troughs.

The ass – as a socially repressed site of excretion, control, and waste, but also because it's associated with non-reproductive sexual pleasure – was, for Mario Mieli, the 'villa of love'. Ultimately, it seems, truths that are excluded from the visible but are nonetheless necessary do find their way – through the drainpipe into the lavish depths of the sewer. Consider, for example, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven and Morton Livingston Schamberg's work *God* (ca. 1917) – barely 27 centimetres tall, consisting of an upside-down cast-iron drainpipe resting on a simple wooden box. An everyday piece of old plumbing, estranged and elevated – created the same year as Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917).

And still we speculate whether the 'R. Mutt' signature on the upper edge of the upside-down urinal is a pun on the German word "Armut" (poverty) – and whether it might actually be the handwriting of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven.

There's a nice song by the GDR band Schleim-Keim called "*Abfallprodukt der Gesellschaft*" (Waste product of society, 1993), about nonconformist life in times of conformity. After reunification, it was often co-opted for ideological purposes. It goes like this:

We have no goal and no honour, they said
because money isn't what we're after
because we don't give a shit about the – *their* – order

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they compare you to the Anti-Christ
(...)
And they say: *'You're a filthy swine!'*
And you're despised and hated
They say that to force you down
You're meant to jump off the moving train
You're meant to forget that people think for themselves
You're meant to realise: you're being controlled
You're being controlled!
You're being conned

- Elisa R. Linn & Sophie Reinhold
Translated by Philipp Rühr