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Ohio State University

Globalization is an event that simultaneously cannot and must have an aesthetics. Yet when it comes to globalization our attention, channeled by the media, is occupied by the political, economic, and social conditions of this restructuring process that will dissolve the modern nation state in many of its aspects. An aesthetics of globalization, however, is so very difficult to conceptualize and even more difficult to practice because of the fundamental tension within the aesthetic between the sensual and the imaginary. Taking aesthetics in its original meaning of sense perception, it is clear that all aesthetics ties us to the present moment and the locale which we inhabit right now. In this sense, aesthetics is by definition circumscribed within narrow spacial boundaries (unless we include those experiences gained by the aid of technical instruments which still depend on our sensual evaluation and the perspectival point of the viewer in the present locale). Being dependent on the sensual element, aesthetics cannot overcome its ties to the present in both spacial and temporal terms. Yet aesthetics is not restricted to sense perception, but it includes the moment of the imaginary. Aesthetics as a theory of art turns precisely toward these imaginary moments that liberate the viewer from his or her vantage point in time and space and allow for the reception of that which is not present in the here and now. Visual arts generally situate themselves right in the gap opened up by this tension between the sensual and the imaginary, the present and the absent. Figurative or representational visual arts fall within the same space that is opened up by the interplay of sensual perception and imaginary elsewhere. This tension has always proven a source of creative inspiration for the visual arts. Yet in the age of globalization it runs up against a problem that requires much imagination and conceptual restructuring in order to be solved. The crux of the problem is that in traditional arts the tension has always existed between two very circumscribed locales, namely that of perception and the one presented as its distant counterpart. It is important to stress that this traditional aesthetic tension was built between two distinct locales and times only. Initially, even theater was restricted to the representation of just one foreign place

within one play. The Aristotelian prescription for the unity of place, time, and action was meant to guarantee that the aesthetic tension wouldn't be suffused by a multiplication of reference points elsewhere. It eventually turned out that the audience was very well capable of adjusting its horizon of reception to several times and places within one performance and hence Aristotle's model was put aside as unnecessarily restrictive. Painting, however, due to its a-temporal nature was for the most part restricted to the duality of places from which this basic aesthetic tension emerges. (Needless to say, painters have always tried to overcome this restriction by incorporating events from different moments in time within one panel and so on.) Globalization, though, is an event that by its very nature must rupture the model of aesthetic representation. Globalization cannot be aesthetically captured within the tension of a very concrete here and now and an equally concrete elsewhere that changes with time. The global is precisely that which forces a multitude of places into simultaneous presence. The very model of additive change, first this place, then that, then the third, counteracts globalization with its emphasis on the subversion of the local. Ideally, globalization conjures up all places all at once. Yet the very concept of ubiquity seem to belong to that category of concepts that Kant called *indemonstrabel*. We would be left with a concept to which no experiential reality can aspire. But this is not only counterintuitive, it would also result in the abdication of the aesthetic at a time when globalization forces economic and social changes very much into our quotidian reality. So how can the aesthetic possibly overcome its dilemma of the seemingly antiquated restriction to the mere doubling of localities within its modes of representation? Obviously, the answer to the question will not be theoretical but aesthetic. It will emerge from the practical work of artists who tackle this problem and who suggest to us ways of thinking about the ongoing global restructuring based not upon conceptual analysis but rather on aesthetic awareness. What follows is an interpretation of a work by the German artist Martin Kippenberger that succeeds in exemplary fashion in the solution of this very problem. As such, the aesthetic becomes political by insisting on the experiential element within globalization without which an essential viewpoint from which to analyze these epochal changes in our communal structuring would be eliminated.

The oeuvre of Martin Kippenberger is largely devoid of political references. Rather, he situates himself within the discourse of the art world, referencing styles and topics in the playful, distanced, and non-committal fashion that flourished in the 80s under the spell of postmodernism.[1] There is vulgarity and garishness, humor, sometimes subtle, sometimes crude, some banality, lots of in-jokes, loudness, joyfulness, childishness and much obscurity in the output of Kippenberger, and if any one tradition looms large in his oeuvre it is that of dadaism. As one critic argues, his paintings "offend [. . .] every kind of good, bad, and indifferent taste."[2] He deliberately seems to turn his back on the political impetus of the German *über*-artist of the postwar era Joseph

Beuys whose shamanistic aesthetic practice aimed at both the individual and collective revival of crippled capacities and the unblocking of clotted energy channels for the benefit of the nation and the individual.[3] Distancing himself from Beuys' polit-incantations[4] as much as from the *Aufarbeitungskunst* of an Anselm Kiefer, Kippenberger's work seems to include political elements barely on the margins, if at all. True, there are some paintings with overt political motifs or titles: Two paintings of 1983 both titled *Krieg böse*, one of them showing Santa Claus on board of a battleship, threatening to spank the (invisible) officer or crew, the other depicting a canon in an idyllic landscape and part of the series *8 Bilder zum Nachdenken, ob's so weitergeht*. Here either the absurdity of the motif or the hyper-didactic and grammatically incorrect title reminiscent of a child's undeveloped linguistic capacities undermine the supposed seriousness of the political content and accuse the pacifist movement of the 80s of silliness and naivete. Some paintings of the mid-80s poke fun at socialist realism by juxtaposing a Chinese boy in communist youth uniform with a can of Coca-Cola that he is drinking *(Aus der Serie "Fliegender Tanga"*, 1982/83), or turn the image into a spoof by means of the title as in *Zwei proletarische Erfinderinnen auf dem Weg zum Erfinderkongress* (1984) or *Kulturbäuerin bei der Reparatur ihres Traktors* (1985). There is another painting showing a raised arm in a cast as if to salute, entitled *Heil Hitler, Ihr Fetischisten*, and one painting of an ATM with the same title (both 1984). All these are hardly serious political works, at best they can be read as dadaistic political interventions or satirical comments on the political engagement of art. Even the seemingly serious 1985 painting *Stammheim* is turned into a joke by being integrated into a tripartite mini-series with the title *Drei Häuser mit Schlitzen* in which next to the Stammheim prison the Betty Ford clinic and a Jewish elementary school are depicted. Using the Corbusian strip-window as a similarity that unites the three buildings, the criticism here is leveled against a modernist architecture unable to distinguish fundamentally different functions like healing, educating, and punishing in its edifices. Stammheim, the emblem of Germany's struggle against the terrorists of the *Rote Armee Fraktion*, is reduced to a sample of misguided architectural modernism. In short, where political moments surface in the paintings of Kippenberger, they are quickly emptied of their political content and turned into occasions for satirical comment or snipes against artistic and architectural fashions.

It is all the more surprising to find that toward the end of his life Kippenberger set up an ambitious project of literally global scale that is clearly marked by its political dimension. Between 1995 and 1997, the year of Kippenberger's death, the artist installed elements of his *Metro-Net* project in several cities in different parts of the world. The critic Roberto Ohrt sums up the *Metro-Net* initiative:

> A few kilometres inland, in the garden of some private grounds, the entrance to another project can be found, the "*Metro-Net*," which formally opened the

day before MOMAS.[5] An out-of-place subway entrance from Buster Keaton's 1922 film "The Frozen North" had been preformulated as the backdrop. Like the street lamps mentioned earlier, it was the sign of an impossible rendevous and for that very reason something right up Martin Kippenberger's street. It was a joke too, linked to the question of transport, simplicity itself. The *Metro-Net* cried out for Kippenberger to create it — and that he did. It links the Syros garden to Dawson City, a former Canadian gold diggers' town and the Leipzig Trade Fair. The vital ventilation shafts are projected for Tokyo and Münster. And the *Metro-Net* moves, because a transportable subway entrance was also built. It was supposed to have been launched at documenta X, dropping anchor in the middle of the river, but the dictates of the utterly humourless safety regulations were against the idea. Which is why it lay by the bank in the river meadows — a piece of flotsam, the remnant of what might have been.[6]

Syros, Dawson City, Leipzig, Tokyo, Münster, Kassel. If we believe a website map that documents Kippenberger's *Metro-Net*, other locations were meant to follow. (www.centreimage.ch/metronet/metronet.htm) The *Metro-Net* is a net indeed. Its elements are not gathered in one location, but they are dispersed all over the world. Even if we went on a trip to visit each one of them, we would never be able to encounter the work in its physical presence. Rather, our perception would be limited to fragments of the work which all hint at the complete structure, but which simultaneously emphasize the absence of all other elements. Thus, *Metro-Net* challenges basic aesthetic assumptions about the work of art as a singular entity that can be comprehended aesthetically, i.e. by means of the senses, because it presents itself in one location only and thus is open to prolonged sensual scrutiny only in one small segment at any given time. *Metro-Net* is hence always largely elsewhere. Whatever part we encounter, it is a small part only that receives its meaning, true for all structural elements, precisely from all the parts that are absent but which need to be kept in mind. Hence the viewer who encounters a part of the *Metro-Net* must necessarily transcend the local conditions of perception in order to comprehend the work: All parts of the *Metro-Net* project insist on an elsewhere and include the global within the local, the absent within the present, and the conceptual within the sensual. The title *Metro-Net* is therefore somewhat redundant: A single metro station is as impossible as a language consisting of only one word. Every metro is a net. This mapping of the local onto the global scale presents us with images of globalization and a global network that overcomes all regional separation. In fact, by situating his subway entrances in both remote rural areas, cities of moderate size, and metropolitan environments Kippenberger undermines traditional distinctions of urban, suburban, and rural living situations which become meaningless in a globally connected network that transports information, goods, and travelers. By incorporating a floating element, namely the mobile subway entrance conceived for documenta X, Kippenberger radicalizes the notion of placelessness and ubiquity even

more.[7] The local loses all fixity and all grounding—regionalism can no longer claim a special relation to the earth—and turns into a floating presence.

Needless to say, Kippenberger's vision is utopian.[8] He presents a version of globalization unconcerned with all material resistance and free from all serious considerations of practicality. In fact, the subway seems to be an almost anachronistic image of global connectedness compared to the hypersonic jet. Yet while the airplane clearly announces itself as a means of transportation, it is self-sufficient and doesn't require counterparts elsewhere in the world. The subway, however, evokes the image of the net, a structure of elements all interdependent and relational. No entrance without an exit elsewhere, no here without a there, no local without the distance that defines the region. Yet even the jetplane seems to belong to a pre-global age as the recent retirement of the Concorde indicates. Ideally, globalization dispenses with all need for travel as electronic communication is instantaneous. Hence, globalization carries with it the utopia or dystopia of de-materialization and spacelessness. Motion will no longer be a category of operation. Directionality will then be superfluous, replaced by the almost instantaneous AC/DC of the electronic net. Yet while this vision or specter of dematerialized hyperreality à la Baudrillard and Virilio haunts globalization, an element of resistance against this de-materialization might be written into Kippenberger's choice of the subway as a high modernist symbol of transportation. *Metro-Net* is a celebration of globalization, a joyous floating of the fixity of the present and the local, it refuses to dispense with the aesthetic. Material presence remains a requirement for aesthetics.

Yet as soon as we want to join the celebratory presentation of Kippenberger's take on globalization, we run up against the contradictions built into these seemingly inviting structures. The stations, we quickly realize, are non-functional. The subway station in Leipzig is locked with a large metal gate; in Dawson City you can descend the steps of the station entrance only to find yourself in front of a closed double door that is chained together with a heavy metal chain and a forbidding lock. The station that was conceptualized as a floating element of the *Metro-Net* at the 1997 Kassel documenta would have been inaccessible for all visitors due to its location in the middle of the river. In other words, the stations are non-functional, locked, chained, closed to all business. As all doors and gates, they invite, even incite, but only to produce frustration. The anticipated travel, the suspension of the local in the global does not only not happen. Instead, it is precisely the frustration which follows the desire that then anchors the viewer all the more strongly in his or her present location. After having been invited to leave, the impossibility to do so hurts all the more. The viewer experiences his or her inevitably local position only because an alternative had been presented. We are *here* more intensively than before because we had wanted to be *elsewhere*. All of a sudden Kippenberger's universal utopia seems to reverse its message radically. Rather than advocating a non-locale (utopia), a perpetual elsewhere, it comes across

as a ploy to emphasize our local existence by means of frustrating fantasies of escape. Not the desirability of the global but rather its impossibility seems to be the content of the *Metro-Net* project. Advocacy of globalization would be nothing but a ruse to get the gullible viewer to accept the inevitability of place and our fixation in it. Globalization emerges as an impossibility, the only reality is local. The pinnacle of frustration is reached in one element of the *Metro-Net* project that was exhibited only posthumously and which consists of a subway entrance fabricated from aluminum and subsequently crushed. We can recognize it for what it was and thus attach our desire to transcend the local to it, but its state of disfunctionality disavows all attempts to realize such plans.

Which reading should the viewer adopt? *Metro-Net* as a celebration of globalization or as its critique? Subway entrances and air shafts as emblems of universality or as monuments of impossibility? Fixity or ubiquity, place or placelessness, location or free floatation? There are good reasons for either position, yet as soon as we adopt one, the other emerges again with its claims. We are left with undecidable contradictory claims. Willing to consider one, we block out the other only to see it reemerge and take over our attention. Such inability to settle for one of two polar opposites produces an infinite back and forth and thus renews a well-known aesthetic strategy first theorized by romantic artists and philosophers. In order for this aesthetic position to emerge, though, both readings of *Metro-Net* must be kept in mind simultaneously. Every interpretation that settles for either the celebratory or the critical aspect misses the fundamental ambiguity of the project and hence its conceptual basis. To claim, as Paul Sztulman does in his presentation of Kippenberger's documenta entry that this subway station "partakes of a larger project which parodies the networks of globalization" means to reduce *Metro-Net* to yet another dadaist mockery.[9] Pitching two finite and mutually exclusive positions against each other and thus establishing the necessity of a permanent back and forth between them, romantic irony aims at that kind of infinity or universality that cannot be achieved directly. Only the cancellation of all finite positions allows for the infinite to emerge. Only by striking through the local as a multiplicity of points that reference each other can a truly global position (or non-position) emerge. Friedrich Schlegel describes the movement of irony thus:

> In ihr soll alles Scherz und alles Ernst sein, alles treuherzig offen, und alles tief verstellt. Sie entspringt aus der Vereinigung von Lebenskunstsinn und wissenschaftlichem Geist, aus dem Zusammentreffen vollendeter Naturphilosophie und vollendeter Kunstphilosophie. Sie enthält und erregt ein Gefühl von dem unauflöslichen Widerstreit des Bedingten und des Unbedingten, der Unmöglichkeit und Notwendigkeit einer vollständigen Mitteilung. Sie ist die freieste aller Lizenzen, denn durch sie setzt man sich über sich selbst weg; und doch auch die gesetzlichste, denn sie ist unbedingt notwendig.[10]

The locus of romantic irony, however, is the work of art. Artistic compentence achieves what remains an impossibility within theoretical disourse which by necessity is limited to one position only. Art thus emerges as the higher form of theory as it and it alone is capable of the unification of the sensual and the cerebral, the aesthetic and the philosophical, nature and artifice, finite and infinite. Yet in order to achieve this unity art must first establish and then contain within it the finite positions it aims to overcome. Romantic irony is not dialectics as the movement between the mutually exclusive finite positions is never halted and never leads to any real development. The achievement of irony is not that finite positions are overcome in the establishment of an infinite position, a *contradictio in adjecto*, because irony doesn't establish anything. Irony is the *intimation* of infinity only, just as poetry is the intimation of immortality for Wordsworth.

Kippenberger's *Metro-Net* can be understood as a romantic commentary on globalization. As we are thrown back and forth between reading the work, or its parts, as the advocacy of a utopian globalization and its critique and subsequent reenforcement of regionalism, a third position emerges as the infinite at which both untenable finite positions hint. Kippenberger actualizes the romantic notion of irony and updates if for the age of globalization by utilizing its strategy to complete within the work of art that which must remain forever incomplete in reality. Globalization as an event in the social and political sphere will never reach an end-point and stasis. As an event it has its telos inscribed in itself, yet it must content itself with an infinite approximation. Kippenberger's *Metro-Net* project is both an artistic comment on political and social globalization and its aesthetic completion. Kippenberger presents an aesthetics of globalization that overcomes the duality of presence and absence, the interplay of only two locations. Rather, through the strategic use of irony, he transcends duality toward ubiquity. Romantic irony becomes a tool for the creation of an aesthetics of globalization which anticipates social and political globalization, takes into account the frustrations of latter processes, and achieves aesthetically, precisely through its refusal to ever achieve one single sensually or theoretically tenable position, what must remain a political utopia. True globalization lies in the hands of the artists rather than with the corporations and international organizations. Kippenberger's *Metro-Net* ironically locates and dislocates itself within space and within spacelessness. Its aesthetic achieves globalization as a measure and a critique of political action. It contains both the enthusiasm and the frustrations that characterize the process of globalization which draws more and more regions, peoples, and also aesthetic traditions into its vortex. Yet Kippenberger demonstrates that only the creative and conscious updating of local traditions, demonstrated through his use of romantic irony, can contribute to a version of globalization that we can embrace. It is the prerogative and obligation of the artist to create images that haunt us by inserting themselves into the perception of our quo-

tidian reality. Thus he insists on the disturbing and frustrating moments of a process which often disappear in the glib pronouncements of the political and corporate world. *Metro-Net* reclaims art's role to celebrate a utopian content and to guide by its means, exactly because it can continue to emphasize the experiential and the quotidian, the local and the material all of which must not be forgotten in society's struggle to achieve political globalization. Most of all, Kippenberger actualizes Friedrich Schlegel in this project as much as in pretty much all of his artistic work by reminding us that no matter how serious the political events may be, they cannot be completed without a sense of play: alles Scherz und alles Ernst.

[1] Götz Adriani writes in his preface to the catalogue of the 2003 Kippenberger retrospective at *Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie* in Karlsruhe: "Kippenberger, der sich in seiner Arbeit immer und immer wieder mit den Möglichkeiten der Kunst nach den Wechselfällen der Moderne und Postmoderne auseinandergesetzt hat und schon deshalb zu den bedeutenden Impulsgebern des aktuellen Kunstgeschehens gehört, beschäftigte sich aber vor allem mit seiner eigenen Identität als Künstler." ("Vorwort" in Götz Adriani (ed.), *Martin Kippenberger. Das 2. Sein*. Cologne: Dumont, 2003) In his essay in the same catalogue, Ralph Melcher concurs: "Dabei oszillierte Kippenbergers künstlerische Äußerung zwischen manischem Ringen nach der endgültigen Formulierung und einer wilden Lust daran, einfach alles machen zu können. Die Fragestellung, die dahinter verborgen liegt, kreist um das Thema des Künstlertums und der kreativen Arbeit an sich. Was kann, was soll der Künstler tun, nachdem eigentlich alles gesagt ist und das Künstlertum sich allzuleicht in der schieren Pose verliert." (Ibid., 25/7) It is, however, very hard to see how Peter Sztulman wants to substantiate his statement that Kippenberger's engagement with the art world is driven by a political motivation as Sztulman writes in the *Documenta X* guide: "He [Kippenberger] engaged in an all-out exploration of the models and underlying stakes of modern art history, interrogating the field of art from the perspective of politics." (*Documenta X Short Guide*, 118) Unfortunately, Sztulman doesn't offer any arguments for his speculation.

[2] Wilfried Dickhoff, "Martin Kippenberger: Art's Filthy Lesson" *After Nihilism. Essays on Contemporary Art.* (Cambridge/New York City: Cambridge UP, 2000), 142.

[3] Beuys stated in an interview once: "Nur die Kunst, das heißt Kunst gleichzeitig als kreative Selbstbestimmung und als ein Prozeß verstanden, der Kreationen hervorbringt, kann uns befreien und zu einer alternativen Gesellschaft führen." Quoted in Alain Borer, "Beweinung des Joseph Beuys" *Joseph Beuys. Eine Werkübersicht.* Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 1996/2001, 28.

[4] "Beuys als Schamane musste zwangsläufig zu einer Witzfigur für Kippenberger werden, da der Anspruch, selbst Mythos zu sein oder mythologisch handeln zu können, für Kippenberger eine unmögliche Aufgabe und ein unerfüllbares Ziel darstellte, wo doch schon längst alle Zeichen gesetzt sind." Robert Melcher, "Martin Kippenberger—Das 2. Sein" in G. Adriani (ed.), *Das 2. Sein*, 31.

[5] MOMAS stands for Museum of Modern Art, Syros. MOMAS is an unfinished and abandoned slaughterhouse in the hills of this Cycladean island that Kippenberger together with friends redesignated as a museum under the condition that the building itself must not serve as exhibition space and that the structure itself must remain architecturally unaltered. Kippenberger served as the director of the museum and sent out invitations to other artist to present their work there.

[6] Roberto Ohrt, "Introduction" In: Anglika Taschen, Burkhard Riemenschneider (eds.), *Kippenberger*. Cologne etc: Taschen, 2003. 26.

[7] While the safety regulations of the Documenta X sabotaged the floating entrance and banned it to the riverbank, digitally manipulated images of the entrance surrounded by water can be found on the *Metro-Net* webpage.

[8] This utopian moment is strengthened further by the decorative elements that Kippenberger uses on at least some of this subway stations. The Dawson City, Leipzig, and Kassel entrances are all decorated with the emblem of the fictional "Lord Jim Lodge" (a hammer within

a sun partly covered by a spider web and with two large female breasts attached) and its motto "Niemand Hilft Niemand," abbreviated as NHN. While ironizing secret societies, Kippenberger also emphasizes the utopian element inherent in the set-up of lodges.

[9] *Documenta X Short Guide*, 118.

[10] Friedrich Schlegel, "Kritische Fragmente" In: *Schriften zur Literatur*. Munich: Hanser, 1970, 21.