“Time is Now”
Paul Thek in the 1960s

by

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Class of 2015

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Wesleyan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Departmental Honors in Art History

Middletown, Connecticut
April, 2015
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Acknowledgements

My first thanks are to my thesis advisor Claire Grace. Your guidance and unwavering dedication helped make this an incredibly rewarding intellectual experience. I’ve likened the process to that movie Groundhog Day, every draft was a much-welcomed chance to experiment and learn. Your responsive and insightful feedback throughout this process pushed me to be a more sophisticated thinker and a clearer writer. Thank you for your generosity of time and spirit.

Thanks also to my major advisor Clare Rogan. Your assistance and comments on my early work on Paul Thek’s photo books, as well as your History of Photography course were invaluable throughout.

Thanks to my Mom for sending me to college and supporting me up to and throughout my time here. Thanks for allowing me to pursue my passions wherever they’ve taken me, and indulging my long-standing inability to drive with biannual trips to retrieve me from remote college towns. To my housemates, the nerds of 42 Miles Avenue, I could not have done it without you all. Who knows where I’d be without intermittent towel dance breaks, and an audience for my incoherent rants about the abject?
Introduction

“I met with Artforum yesterday and they were shocked that there are no works of mine in any public collection in this country, etc… I think ‘my time will come’ … If it wasn’t for the 60s or 70s maybe I’ll sneak a bit into the 80s and 90s! Anyway why not try”

- Letter from Paul Thek to Franz Deckwitz, May 1981

Paul Thek always struggled with success. In the late 1960s he fled his hard-earned renown in the New York art scene to Europe. He began to work expansively in installation and sculpture throughout the 1970s and gained widespread critical recognition. However upon his return to New York at the end of the 1970s, he found little interest in his work. In his letter to frequent collaborator Franz Deckwitz, the ever self-effacing Thek wonders when he will be recognized. Like so much of his work, Thek’s letter seems prescient. Although he remains absent from some of the critical art historical surveys of art in the 20th century, he has indeed managed to sneak into history. In truth, he never really vanished; his influence seems to arise again and again. From the scattered installation aesthetic of Jason Rhodes, to the 1990s rise of Relational Aesthetics, strains of Thek’s work are everywhere. This is largely a testament to his strident experimentalism, and an unwillingness to develop a signature visual style. Throughout his career, he revisited certain metaphors and personal tropes but always re-formed them in new ways.
This project will give close attention to three of Thek’s artistic projects from the 1960s. These were selected to give an introduction to the breadth of Thek’s work even within the short period of 1964 – 1969. While there has been an increasing amount of attention paid to Thek’s work in the scholarly literature, much of it is based in Europe where his influence and prominence remain strong. Consequently those scholars have focused on material that they have access to, largely related to Thek’s major installations from 1971 – 1975. American writers have focused on what they have access to, and what made Thek famous in the 1960s, namely his “meat piece” sculptures. Thek’s legacy in America is that of the rebellious artist, one willing to give aesthetic trends the proverbial finger, however Thek deserves more than such a cursory assessment.

The first chapter ("Reality plus," Paul Thek’s Meaty Time) analyzes the implications of the abject in several of those works and begins to assess the role of temporality as a central theme in Thek’s work. Theories of time and endlessness as they relate to Pop, Minimalism, and Robert Smithson’s brand of conceptually inflected Minimalism all arise as counterpoints to Thek’s irruptive gesture of juxtaposition. The second chapter describes Thek’s 1968 installation at Galerie ME Thelen in Essen, Germany. Usually considered his first installation work, Thek begins to explicitly address time and its effects on his spectators. Thek begins to align his works to the liturgical calendar, and incorporate performance and the live body (both his own and those of his viewers) into his work. The third chapter addresses a photobook created by Thek with one of his close collaborators, Edwin Klein. Published as a kind of alternative exhibition catalog for shows at the Stedelijk
Museum, Amsterdam, and the Moderna Museet, Stockholm, the work acts as a kind of skeleton key for much of Thek’s later work, particularly his infatuation with newspaper. Newspaper itself might be considered a kind of signature medium for Thek, and it offers a counterpoint to the densely flickering imagery of *A document*. It also presents Thek grappling with time through a variety of formal devices, from narrative structure, to an engagement with the boundaries of the photographic medium.
Chapter 1:
“Reality plus,” Paul Thek’s Meaty Time

“It was Reality plus. Perfectly done, insanely perverted and contrived”

-Lil Picard on Paul Thek, Das Kunstwerk, Fall 1964

In the fall of 1964, a group exhibition at Eleanor Ward’s Stable Gallery showed shocking sculptures of what appeared to be chunks of meat sealed in rectangular striped glass and metal vitrines (fig. 1). These apparently sadistic and violent works were the work of Paul Thek. Produced from 1963 to 1967, Thek’s “Meat Pieces” are his most written about work. This makes sense given that although fragile, these works make up the most cohesive extant portion of his oeuvre. The response to these works has become cliché, often citing one of several interviews where Thek lays out the Meat Pieces as antagonistic to the “’Modern Art’ materials” of the period, leading to the conclusion that these works “made a statement against what he saw as the emotional and spiritual bankruptcy of Minimalism, which was ascendant at the time”. Such writing proposes the bodily “heat” of the meat pieces as

2 These are also known as the “Technological Reliquaries”. According to Margrit Brehm the term “Technological Reliquaries” seems to have been coined by Suzanne Delehanty in the catalog for Thek’s ICA Philadelphia solo exhibition. Delehanty says that the term was derived from interviews with Thek although he never seems to have referred to the works as such. Margrit Brehm, “‘Keep trying to get IN not OUT’ Paul Thek in the Context of American Art, 1964-1970,” In Paul Thek: Artist’s Artist, ed. Harald Falckenberg and Peter Weibel, (Karlsruhe: Zentrum fur Kunstmedia, 2008), 80.
3 Richard Flood, “Paul Thek: Real Misunderstanding” in Paul Thek: The Wonderful World That Almost Was, ed. Louise Neri (Barcelona: Fundacio Antoni Tapies, 1995), 212-213. See also Lynn
a protest against the trending “cool” of Pop and Minimalism. The overtones of sadism and sexuality in these works were connected to a broader trend of artists revisiting Surrealism. Thek used the surreal to critique the affective detachment evidenced by Minimalism’s non-referential forms, and Pop’s obsession with replicating commercial imagery. This narrative of Thek as a provocateur eventually came to stand in for the countercultural impulses of the 1960s. The reductive binary logic applied to these works risks containing the impact of the meat pieces to the status of an inside joke directed to the art world. Thek’s own commentary on these works indicate the truth of this reading at its most basic level, but also complicate the works, suggesting that there is more there than a simple dissatisfaction with the dominant aesthetic forms of the 1960s. Thek himself commented that his works represented “real” content as a return of the repressed.

I was amused with the idea of meat under Plexiglas because I thought it made fun of the scene- where the name of the game seemed to be “how cool can you be” and “how refined”. Nobody ever mentioned anything that seemed real. The world was falling apart, anyone could see it. I was a wreck, the block was a wreck, the city was a wreck; and

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5 See Mike Kelley, “Death and Transfiguration – a Letter from America (1992),” in Paul Thek: Artist’s Artist, ed. Harald Falckenberg and Peter Weibel, (Karlsruhe, Zentrum fur Kunstmedia, 2008), 254-261. Kelley includes no references to Thek’s work after his 1969 Tomb which Kelley also unhelpfully misnames Death of a Hippie, a misnomer that bothered Thek immensely.
I’d go to a gallery and there would be a lot of fancy people looking at a lot of stuff that didn’t say anything about anything to anyone. Defined in opposition to the work the “cool”, “refined” work he saw in the galleries, the real for Thek referred to a return to figuration. He wanted to fight back against the absence found in the insistent formalist approaches of Minimalism and Pop. He makes it explicit that the audience for these works was the same art world he was criticizing, but also makes clear that through this critique he wanted his art to address a larger world, the city that was “falling apart” and a “wreck”.

The literature on the meat pieces has hinted at the politics of the real put forward by the meat pieces. Susanne Neubauer proposes that they operate as visual reminders of an mediated “real” not fit to be seen, and therefore simultaneously jarring and seductive. Neubauer argues that Thek’s boxes provide a glimpse of an uncensored real, yet by their Plexiglas vitrines ultimately cut off and protect the viewer from that encounter. Instead of meat representing the real and being screened to protect the viewer, I argue that these works render not the real but an index of the real as we imagine it. As the critic Lil Picard puts it, it is “Reality plus”. Thek plays with imagination by eliciting a shock reaction through the work’s verisimilitude, which is followed by a state of confusion. These sculptures slip between meat and flesh, playing with boundaries of interior and exterior, self and other, the forensic and

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7. Susanne Neubauer, “Framed Devices: Paul Thek’s Technological Reliquaries,” in Sculpture and the Vitrine, ed. John C. Welchman, (London: Ashgate, 2013), 143-158. Neubauer actually writes that the meat pieces are “modeled as replicas of ‘real’ objects… [that] stand for an illusion, pointing to a ‘real’” however she does not theorize the distinction between objects that stand for or signify something in relation to objects that simply are something (152).
the fictional. The meat registers not as meat but as “meaty”, something both more and less than meat itself.

This slippage, facilitated by the illegibility of the abject, imparts a temporality of urgency. The figuration of matter in a state of becoming abject provokes a temporal crisis; the object must be rescued lest it foul the clean spaces of the art world. Thek’s containers sheath their meaty goods in two ways. He shows the similarities between the repetitious time of the commodity, which is always already replicated and familiar, and the apparently infinite time of a dystopian technological future, in which the (compromised) body is carried into geological time. Thek’s meat pieces materialize the suspension of urgency; they appear to us like insects in amber, transmitting our latent fragility just below a translucent surface.

“Traumatic Realism” and Meat Piece with Warhol Brillo Box (1965)

Andy Warhol’s Brillo Boxes were first displayed at Stable Gallery in 1964, just one year before Paul Thek would exhibit his rendition of the box in the same space (fig. 2). When asked about Warhol’s Brill Boxes, Thek answered, “All that your Brillo Boxes need is a piece of meat inside”. Warhol offered him a box and Thek improved upon it as he said he would, turning it on its side and placing his wax flesh within (fig. 3). The Brillo Boxes are Warhol’s first sculptures. They form part of a larger series of sculptures replicating commercial packaging (including boxes of Del Monte Peaches, Heinz Ketchup, and Campbell Tomato Juice) displayed together.

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at Stable Gallery in 1964 (fig. 4). An outside company manufactured the wooden boxes, which were then screen-printed by production assistants at Warhol’s studio, aptly named The Factory. They take the image of a mundane consumer good and make it an objet d’art, a move that echoes Marcel Duchamp’s ready-mades from nearly 50 years before. This pushes against the Greenbergian divide between art and kitsch, between high and low culture, a divide Warhol also trespassed through his immersion in the commercial world as a window dresser and illustrator.

Although the Brillo Box is three-dimensional, its significance is reducible to the single repeated image of the logo and text. The Brillo Box is really nothing more than a collection of repeated surfaces designed to simulate the consistency of manufactured goods. For Warhol, the image is always already a copy that points toward its own ubiquity and lack of meaning. This image becomes the object itself. Roland Barthes’ essay on Pop notes that the Pop artist “is merely the surface of his pictures: no signified, no intention, anywhere”. Barthes highlights the rootless nature of meaning in an artistic form where techniques of industrial manufacturing and reproduction were being used in service of art. He identifies this rootlessness as a break between the signifier (or form) and signified (the concept or thing to which the signifier refers). Without form, not only is meaning is rendered useless, and vice versa. While the Marilyns and Jackie Kennedys demonstrate the reduction of people to icons, the Brillo Box is a literal abstraction of an object into a set of words and

10 Pop and Minimalism meet in their mutual insistence upon a blankness of surface albeit to different ends.
graphic designs. Although the referent of the Brillo pad remains in the world at large, the actual box is an empty wooden illusion. The commodity good is reduced to an elaborate effort to create a perfectly replicated surface appearance, generating a trompe l’oeil effect as close to the original as possible.

Thek’s placement of his meat-piece within Warhol’s *Brillo Box* is a move that distorts the stability of the simulacral image, suggesting a latent violence in the act of reproduction. The repetition of screen-printing on these boxes shows few if any of the inconsistencies occasionally visible in Warhol’s silkscreened paintings from the same period. Hal Foster’s essay “The Return of the Real” describes Pop (particularly Warhol’s silkscreened Death and Disaster series) as “traumatic realism” (fig. 5).\(^{12}\)

Taking Lacan’s definition of the “real” as “a missed encounter with the real”, Foster defines traumatic realism as that which repeats the real. Further borrowing Lacan’s useful distinction between reproduction and repetition; Foster insists that Warhol enacts the real instead of reproducing it. Foster observes the visual impact of repeating trauma in the blurs and streaks of the imperfect silkscreens of the Death and Disaster series. These effects are absent in Warhol’s *Brillo Box* and their absence suggests that Thek’s addition to the box demonstrates his identification of a latent “traumatic realism”.

The parallels and the differences between Warhol’s cube and Thek’s rendition contribute to the affective power of Foster’s “traumatic realism”. Its exterior features the expected cheery red, white and blue painted graphics of the Brillo logo. This image repeats on three of the five visible surfaces of the nearly cubic sculpture.

However, the orientation of the logos, which run sideways, indicates that Thek has

turned the box ninety degrees on its side; the side facing the viewer is the bottom of the sculpture. This simple inversion produces the prescient notion that something wrong or off has happened. The box is in effect showing its bottom, an improper gesture that complements the tone of the contents of the box. The surface facing the viewer is not wood but transparent Plexiglas. Within is a red wax sculpture crafted to take the appearance of meat. The wax flesh occupies a little more than half of the box and appears to consist of two layers. The upper layer is vertically oriented with sinewy strands of layered wax that evoke the structure of musculature; the lower strata has a granulated pattern with some of the same striations. Just barely visible is the pale epidermis of the meat, clumps of hair lie to the back of the box. This wax sculpture visualizes the kind of rupture Foster identifies in Warhol’s silkscreens, suggesting the compromised status of the reproduced image.

**The Meaty Abject**

The unstable divisions between these categories makes *Meat Piece with Warhol Brillo Box* a body that enacts and even “flashes” the psychoanalytic concept of the abject. Julia Kristeva outlines the position of the abject as being neither subject nor object. The abject is paradoxically most readily defined by the difficulties it poses to stable definitions. Its threat, exemplified by bodily fluids, lies in its very non-resolution, one that threatens to collapse the boundaries of the self and the other, the subject and the object. These subjects that slip through and across boundaries have a fraught relationship to representation, for if the abject is as Kristeva posits, something that calls attention to the fragility of the boundaries of selfhood, it may be precisely that which lies beyond representation. In lingering upon the boundaries of the familiar
(meat), the compromised legibility of the meat piece is partially an optical issue, and partially a contextual one. The appearance of the meat piece is such that its actual composition is hard to determine.

“Meat” and “flesh” are often used interchangeably in published descriptions of the wax objects in the series. The application of these two words epitomizes the troubling ambivalence these objects perform. Meat implies the possibility of consumption and therefore a mastery of the flesh in question; flesh implies the bodily in way that is closer to what must be respected as human and not subject to consumption. The cross-sectional appearance of the wax flesh in Thek’s *Meat Piece with Warhol Brillo Box* indicates an index of violence. A chopping motion seems to have revealed the inside of some unknown body (Robert Smithson describes these as “painful objects”) at the intersection of meat and flesh, yet it clearly appears contrived. The critic Lil Picard describes these works aptly as “Reality plus”. In Thek’s overt striving provide an excess of the real these works call attention to their ostentatious quality. The sculpture within the *Brillo Box* is too thick and too large to be something that could be cooked. The meat appears like nothing one would find in a supermarket or butcher shop, nothing consumable, this meat is clearly not food. Few could confirm or deny the anatomical accuracy of human flesh, and this indeterminacy is the science fictional aspect of the meat pieces, and the works lay just beyond the known. The work is certainly more “meaty” than meat. Illusionism or verisimilitude could not be the “real” that Thek alludes to; figuration of the definitive

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sort is not what he is aiming for. The result is a work that is physically and psychically alienating, neither “meat” nor “flesh”, neither “real” or “fictional.”

This collapsing of boundaries between meat and flesh, and between self and other endangers self-constitution, or as Kristeva asks, “How can I be without border”? Once outside the boundaries of the body, fluids and organs become signifiers of a fragile mortality. If the abject is represented it may also be constitutive of the self, reinforcing the boundaries it is meant to breach and therein not being truly abject. In several essays on the abject in relation to postwar art, Hal Foster addresses this by proposing that there is an opening between “to abject” and “to be abject” in which the condition of abjection can “be mimed in a way that calls out, in order to disturb, the operation of abjection”. The meat pieces enact a miming of the state of abjection, through two simultaneous effects, that of a repulsive figuration, and the paradoxical recognition of figuration’s impossibility for the abject. Although the meat pieces remain behind Plexiglas, they are not clearly contained. Instead Thek dramatizes the possibility of contamination, heightening the works’ unspecified danger.

Meat Piece with Brillo Box signals the possibility of physical contamination in a number of key respects. The wax flesh does not touch the Plexiglas surface but sits close to it. A small metal piece punctures the direct center of the Plexiglas panel surrounded by several concentric circles etched into the surface. A metal piece attached to the inside of this metal circle appears in some but not all exhibitions of the

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16 Ibid, 2
17 Foster, 115
work (fig. 6). It recalls other meat pieces with metal tubes that Robert Smithson describes as “tubes for drinking ‘blood cocktails’… inserted into some of [Thek’s] painful objects”.\textsuperscript{18} In the case of the Brillo Box, the metal protuberance signals the potential for the apparently unsafe contents of the box to leak into the public space of the gallery or museum. However the technological implications of such metal pieces also signify regulation, it threatens but remains in check. By sharing space with a noxious or poisoned object, the Brillo Box seems to take on some qualities of its contents. The Brillo logo is composed of only text and several curving shapes around the word Brillo. The curving red forms and bright red color of the graphics on the Brillo Box hint at the possibility of contamination either latent or \textit{in media res}. The redness of the wax-flesh seems to tint the bright logos on the exterior of the box, and the curving graphics of that logo suddenly echo muscled striations visible within. That there are no figurative elements on the painted wooden sides of the box heightens the alarming juxtaposition of the wax meat. That the color and shape of the box’s graphics could hint at the process of contamination (or a growth outward from the controlled meat) aligns with the expectation of meat’s bodily unruliness. The organic is unstable, the abject disrespects and disturbs “identity, system, order” and “does not respect borders, positions, rules.”\textsuperscript{19}

The miming of the state of abjection is an indirect reminder of the existence of the real. As in Foster’s “traumatic realism,” certain objects point towards the real by not being quite real enough, or in this case, too real. The \textit{Meat Piece with Warhol Brillo Box} effects a miming that probes the seams of representation of the abject. The

\textsuperscript{18} Smithson, 10-23
\textsuperscript{19} Kristeva, 4
contextual illegibility of the meat piece stems from the sense that the meat does not belong, and should not exist in the form it does outside of the body, much less within the Brillo Box structure. As Barthes’ essay insists, Pop art is not meaningless, but rather signifies a lack of meaning. The Pop object’s surface is completely flat and because it lacks inherent or original meaning, it becomes a reflective surface that denies us access to a dimensional world. The reflectivity of the surface also leaves a space for projection; a point Warhol himself expressed frequently emphasizing that there was nothing “behind” his work.\(^\text{20}\) There should be no bodily substances that such an object would have to abject in the first place. This is Thek’s contribution; he projects beyond the surface of Warhol’s sculpture, hijacking emptiness with a substance that he sees as the proper foil for Warhol’s lack. While Warhol’s silkscreens reveal the violent effects of repetition through pops and streaks, the *Brillo Box* maintains a façade of pure mimicry. Thek’s addition suggests that the empty sign is impossible, always already saddled with a latent return to the “real”. Instead Foster’s “traumatic realism” lays just below the surface, or within the object itself.

What George Baker describes as the parasitic logic of the *Meat Piece with Brillo Box* takes effect in several registers. Thek takes on the abstracted vacuum of the *Brillo Box* by confronting the viewer with the fact of its emptiness. Thek takes advantage of that emptiness, inserting the sculptural wax-flesh and presenting an indeterminate object that is antagonistic in its material indeterminacy to the solidity and stability of the *Brillo Box*.

\(^{20}\) Foster, 130
The Brillo pad itself is a consumer good meant to create clean surfaces that “shine”, as its packaging states. The contextual illegibility of the meat piece comes in part from the expectations of the Brillo pad as a product related to sanitation. Instead of sanitation the box contains something that appears to be a source of contamination. The top of the box tells the viewer that the Brillo pad “shines aluminum fast” and with this phrase Thek uses Warhol’s box as a sign of cleanliness (as well to allude to the shiny surfaces contemporaries like Larry Bell, Donald Judd and Billy Al Bengston were creating). The phrase “New!” appears on all three painted surfaces and creates several expectations, the expectation of an intact product, one that features improvements on its predecessors, and one something that is familiar (the Brillo brand) but different. The wax block housed within foils each of these expectations, of course. But it also has its own kind of newness. Its bright color shines in the light making the meat seem fresh and moist. While the meat is visually “neat” (unlike other works in the series, the tidy rectangular meat in this instance threatens no leakage), it still suggests decay, a temporal eventuality that lingers in spite of its “new” appearance. The irony of Thek’s objects is that unlike the bodies they mime, the wax flesh never “abjects” or takes on the verb form that Foster indicates as that which can only function to reinforce the symbolic order.\textsuperscript{21} That is, Thek has created a figurative representation of decay that does not decay.\textsuperscript{22} If it did decay it would risk performing a sort of horror show that could be too easily recuperated into a way to

\textsuperscript{21} Hal Foster asks “Is the abject, then, disruptive of subjective and social orders or foundational of them, a crisis in these orders or a confirmation of them? … abjection not a regulatory operation?” Hal Foster, “Obscene, Abject, Traumatic,” \textit{October} 78 (1996): 106-124.

police the boundaries of a normative social system. Despite appearances to the contrary, the wax flesh does not rot or melt in the same way that would a substance abjected from the body or for that matter a corpse. In this way it remains firmly within the framework of critique, never lapsing into a complicity that acts as a regulatory function for the existing symbolic order instead of a disruptive one.

**Minimalist Time and Biological Disorder**

The essence of this sculptural series is the deceptive control Thek consistently applies to his materials. He described his process in terms of an “absolute patience and control so that it became serene”. The meat pieces created in New York never spill out or breach their containers though the works themselves range from neatly sliced, like *Meat Piece with Warhol Brillo Box*, to other later iterations in which the bodily wax fragments appear to leak sludge. Thek does not need to allow the wax flesh to breach the boundaries of their cases. By implicating vulnerability and decay, but not using materials that actually decay, the viewers themselves animate the work. Thek does this by referring to the particularly science fictional imaginary that Robert Smithson identifies in his essay “Entropy and the New Monuments”.

The meat pieces hint at danger by evoking an imperceptible rate of change, signaling decay as a temporal activity beyond human visual perception. *Untitled* (1966) appears to show the spilling action of the abject, but is actually frozen in place (fig. 7). A neon rectangular Plexiglas case holds a pale cylindrical segment of an...

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23 Later works, such as the Fishman casts, in latex, would deteriorate substantially over time leaving considerable challenges for conservators.
24 Flood, 213
25 Other artists like Dieter Roth were famous for incorporating organic materials that shifted radically over time, and posed problems for conservators.
appendage that oozes shiny dark resin. The sculpture has a built in platform several inches deep banded by two pieces of silvered metal. The meat segment is nearly emptied of its fluid contents; they spill out and appear gelatinous. Kristeva describes an encounter with the abject in the experience of her lips touching the skin that develops on the surface of milk. The ooze creates a similar visual-haptic sensation of the curdling of a once viscous liquid.\textsuperscript{26} The narrow end of the case affords a cross sectional view of the appendage and exposes a variety of segmented interiors that range from a slick white surface that recalls fat, to densely packed reddish particles that recall ground meat. Covering the top surface of this wax flesh, nylon monofilaments painted in Day-Glo oranges reach towards the inside top face of the box and seem to attach to another series of nylon monofilaments on the exterior surface of the box. The work’s oozing innards implies a more active and explicit form of decay than other meat pieces. Warhol Brillo Box with Meat Piece with its bright freshness appears inert in comparison. While the latter responded to the physically and metaphorically empty signs of Pop art, \textit{Untitled} (1966) borrows and subverts the Minimal object’s geometric focus on industrial materials and surface quality. Thek uses the infinitely variegated unknowns of the organic body to shift our expectations of regularity and affectless, anonymous objects.

The petrified slow leakage of this particular work creates a melodramatic moment of biochemical excess within a meticulously sealed container. Thek has rendered a corpse or corpse like object, inhabiting the violently affectless position that Hal Foster calls the “radical nihility of the corpse”.\textsuperscript{27} This nihility is a position

\textsuperscript{26} Kristeva, 3
\textsuperscript{27} Foster, 122
beyond recuperation that comes about as an “impoverishment where power cannot penetrate” here rendered as an index of violent abjection rendered motionless but still chemically dangerous. The corpse rots and sags in a more explicit way than flesh. As with the *Warhol Brillo Box with Meat Piece*, any true contamination out of the work’s self-contained space is enacted only through the viewer’s application of their imaginative faculties. The ooze spilling out (even as it remains within) in such an overt way clearly signals death and a constituent breakdown of the symbolic order. The work creates the appearance of vulnerability and decay, but has in fact remained materially stable, retaining the visual effect it had decades ago. This is different from Thek’s (or Eva Hesse’s) works in latex that have disintegrated and appear only shells of what they were.28 The corpse vividly threatens order in *Untitled* (1966) and also remains within the framework that allows us to approach it. The action of spilling outwards creates the expectation of change over time; the work’s stasis denies this expectation for a physical change. Thek creates a mounting drama for his viewer. The work at first glance seems “real”, specifically too real for the art gallery.

This process of denial surprisingly re-aligns Thek’s meat pieces with the Minimal forms they critique, albeit through a different lens. Michael Fried’s seminal essay “Art and Objecthood” critiques what he deems “literalist objects” on the basis of their temporal demands. For Fried the effect of the literalist object is a heightened awareness of the phenomenological specificity and therefore fragility of perception (see fig. 8). This effect is predicated on the viewer’s presence. Susan Sontag similarly assesses Minimalist work as temporally problematic arguing that it “allows- at least in

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28 The Fishman sculptures are probably the most prominent of these large works in latex. Thek created four of these and they exist in the collection of the Hirshhorn Museum as well as several European institutions where they were used in his immersive installations of the 1970s.
principle-no release from attention, because there has never been any soliciting of it. A stare is perhaps as far from history, as close to eternity, as contemporary art can get". Minimalist objects like Donald Judd’s (fig. 8) go to extreme measures to conceal the artist’s hand, and remove all referential forms. They do so in the hope that the blankness of their objects enables a reflexive contemplation of the conditions of spectatorship. Fried and Sontag both note that regardless of those aspirations, many viewers are locked into a feeling of endlessness, a feeling of infinity that results from the stark lack of visual interest in these works. In Fried’s famous dictum “Presentness is grace”, the literalist object has voided itself leaving nothing to offer for the viewer’s time, wrapping that viewer into an infinite loop. Far from history, close to eternity, Judd’s “gestalt” objects seem at the opposite end of Thek’s meat pieces, which offer an immediate and unnerving effect. Instead of the temporality of flat affect, Thek’s work evokes the nastiness of rupture and discontinuity.

With a somewhat non-scientific notion of entropy as “energy-drain” Smithson’s essay “Entropy and the New Monuments” aligns Thek with Judd, Morris, and Flavin, suggesting that they are all participating in a denial of “time as decay or biological evolution” replaced in favor of “time as an infinity of surfaces or structures”. In the Minimalist sculptors Smithson observes the result of an art historical exhaustion that has led to the end of history in which “the artist gets ‘tired’ and settles for a monumental inaction”. Minimalism here is framed as a catatonic

30 Smithson, 10-23. It’s important to note that in the laws of thermodynamics, energy is required for control. The draining or loss of energy (marshaled to hold elements in certain configurations) is a slide towards disorder and chaos that is the baseline for matter.
31 Ibid.
blankness, a rhetorical use of infinity that echoes Fried and Sontag’s uses of time. However, on a chemical level inaction requires energy, so even Smithson’s inaction is not really an end, but the transformation of energy expenditure.\textsuperscript{32} If Morris’ sculptures have sunk into the “electrical numbing or torpor” that Smithson believes characterizes the new monument, this is a state that is in fact \textit{the opposite} of entropy because stillness belies the energy required for control. Smithson frames the creepiness of Thek’s “putrid finesse” alongside William Burroughs, and horror films. In the sequencing of the essay Smithson first describes the flatness that epitomizes entropy’s end point, and then backs up to cite Thek as an artist who shows the march towards entropy in process. And yet true flatness or stillness requires an energy input to tamp down entropy, to elicit form from disorder. Smithson implies the inevitable return to organic form. Even as art winds down into the blankness of Minimal forms, Smithson suggests that Thek’s art shows that such a state cannot remain for long, before returning to Thek’s bubbling chemical energy. Entropy can also engender the creative energy that produced Thek’s work.

\textbf{Thek Reproduced, “For Gregory”}

Over the years, Thek experimented with variations on the form of the Meat Piece that included increasingly ornate vitrines. It is these works with their clearly Minimalist casework that are reproduced most often and ironically they are the series in which the meat pieces themselves are hardest to see. Thek’s highly Minimalist meat pieces reached their apex in 1966 with his solo exhibition at Pace Gallery.

\textsuperscript{32} One need only think of the example of refrigeration. Heat is the motion of molecules, an enormous energy input is required to tamp down the chaos of molecular energy.
While the earlier works had incorporated meat in a variety of loosely related groupings (there were works with striped Plexiglas, wall mounted works, works with their own pedestals) this exhibition had the most coherent aesthetic presence. The Plexiglas cases took on increasingly complex and nested forms suggestive of Minimalist sculpture.

An untitled work from this series, from all appearances a columnar architectural structure, is reproduced in black and white at the very end of Gregory Battcock’s seminal anthology *Minimal Art* (1968). It is the second to last image in the book, wedged between shaped canvases from Frank Stella and Peter Tangen, and a geometric sculpture from Chris Wilmarth. Although Battcock would go on to write an essay on the meat pieces, none of the essays in the book refer to Thek. This omission seems to indicate that with the notable exception of Gene Swenson and several other critics who examined at the resurgence of a new Surrealism in the 1960s, Thek’s work posed many of the same generic problems art historians face today. That is to say that Thek’s work did not align clearly with any school of artists, or particular style. Without easy reference to a set of contemporaries, critics struggled to categorize Thek’s work (when he was fortunate enough to have their attention). Without textual explication or even a close-up image, Battcock’s publication offers no hint of the corporeal critique held within Thek’s sculpture, which is instead pulled in line with Minimalism without further explanation.

Further complicating Thek’s presentation in print, are the words “for Gregory” written in pencil in the corner of a preparatory drawing for a columnar meat piece sculpture. The 2010 Whitney catalog includes this work along with an untitled
meat piece that is most likely the one reproduced in *Minimal Art*. Each is graphite and colored pencil on paper and shows the use of straight edges to produce a perfectly centered geometrical object (fig. 9). Each side of the sculpture extends backwards into space. Horizontal metal bands run around the top, bottom and central elements. From the sketch it appeared that there would be two yellow Plexiglas portions at the top and bottom, both banded by metal, with a central portion that seems to float, below. These controlled exercises show off Thek’s architectural draftsmanship. The small script words “for Gregory,” suggest the possibility that this drawing was produced for Gregory Battcock. This suggests that Thek was aware of his precarious historical position. In order to be included in a collection like *Minimal Art*, his work had to fit in. Like the black and white reproduction in *Minimal Art*, this drawing excludes any visual representation of the wax-flesh that forms the center of the sculpture. Instead it is merely a vaguely futuristic architectural structure. This seems to be a de-fanging of the work, removing the provocative wax-flesh sculpture and rendering only the work’s clean linear external Plexiglas layers. The possibility that Thek sent Batcock a drawing for publication that emphasized the linear Minimalist elements of his work and excluded their “meat” suggests strangely that Thek was knowingly complicit in the presentation of his work sans its critical element.

These columnar works take the complexity of the meat pieces’ cases to new heights. Their nested forms give them the appearance of technological objects with mechanical components. With refined surfaces and a bodily shape, these works most strongly demonstrate the influence of Minimalist sculpture and that is why they were reproduced in *Minimal Art. Untitled* (1966, see fig. 10), the work closest to this
drawing and the sculpture illustrated in *Minimal Art*, is not exactly identical to the drawing. At nearly eight feet tall the work has a built in white pedestal banded by metal similar to the oozing *Untitled* (1966, see fig. 7). This work is less transparent: there are more Plexiglas and metal layers holding the meat in and holding the viewer out. The square column narrows in several steps about two-thirds from the bottom. When seen from a distance the wax-flesh within remains a dark abstraction, framed by the narrowing steps of the Plexiglas exterior. Within the neon Plexiglas layer is an interior structure, a metal column within steps inwards further framing the wax-flesh.

The stepped structure evokes classical architecture while the metal within adds a futuristic aspect. The matte shine of the interior column, with its own transparent stepped Plexiglas layer within, seems to have slid open. Like Russian nesting dolls being dis-assembled, the sculpture “opens” as the viewer approaches, and each layer of material reveals another layer. Several works in the exhibition include pink wooden hinged cases that enclose the Plexiglas structure along its contours, repeating the sense of opening or exposure. This work enacts a complex visual mechanics of mediation, delaying and concealing its effects. Relative to *Meat Piece with Warhol Brillo Box* (1965, fig. 3) and *Untitled* (1966, fig. 7), the proportion of wax-flesh to Plexiglas in the works exhibited at Pace Gallery in 1966 shifted radically in favor of the encasements. Sleek and subtle, they have a refinement that is more complicit with Minimalist aesthetics and in that sense, fit in well with the rest of the works Battcock reproduced. The abject is further submerged and mediated compared to Thek’s earlier sculptural production.
Breaking the *Gestalt*: Part 1, Minimalism and the Geological Metaphor

The works created for Pace Gallery form a corollary to Robert Smithson’s critical interests in entropy, time, and crystallography. Jennifer Roberts’ study *Mirror Travels: Robert Smithson and History* assesses Smithson’s complex relationship with time and history. In examining his Minimalist sculptural works she observes the influence of scientific texts particularly crystallography and a process called “screw dislocation”. For Roberts this interest in crystal and processes of deposition gave Smithson a chance to experiment with visually representing various forms of temporality and processes of history. Roberts notes that Smithson was engaging with notions of entropic time as not necessarily irregular or formless. This aligns with Smithson’s essay “Entropy and the New Monuments” and it’s reading of the entropy of history as inevitably leading to the neatness of Minimalist sculpture. Roberts sees a model of depositional time as not

an organic development emanating from a living “seed” or origin, but

an inert encrustation originating around a “slip,” a “fault”, or a dislocation. Time is an indifferent accretion obeying a crystalline matrix. It loses any connection to an animate origin or center and becomes something superficial, uninspired, belated, supplemental.

There is a sense of decadent ornamentalism about the entire affair. This model of temporality coexists somewhat uneasily with Smithson’s interest in entropy as an artistic motif. While entropy implies a winding down, the crystal is “growing” albeit inorganically.

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34 Ibid.

35 Roberts, 44
Thek’s works at Pace Gallery suggest a rejoinder to Smithson’s mirrored (crystalline) stack, *Mirrored Ziggurat* (1966, see fig. 11). Roberts reads that work as Smithson’s distinctly geological vision of entropy wherein the “governing characteristic of entropic systems is their equilibrium, or, in other words, their absolute regularity”.

As Roberts suggests, *Mirrored Ziggurat* conjures the model of single screw dislocation in which the growth of a crystal deposits occurs in a stepped fashion in a clockwise rectangular shape. The mirrors create floating spaces that can be imagined but are invisible to the viewer. This temporal model, which Roberts calls dislocation-deposition reflects Smithson’s relationship to cinema and cinematic vision in which motion (and therefore time) can be reduced to a series of frames separated by physical gaps. Viewed in the context of Roberts’ reading of Smithson, Thek’s totemic *Untitled* (1966) and the other works from his Pace Gallery exhibition might appear in their stepped regularity to be informed by Roberts’ reading of Smithson’s crystalline temporality as “superficial, uninspired, belated, supplemental… decadent ornamentalism”.

However, the facetted encrustations of the Pace Gallery works accumulate around not a geological mishap, but a *biological wound*. The violence of exposed flesh has been scabbed over by the crystalline forms that echo Minimalist sculpture. Exposure is figured as a model of dislocation that relies upon a process of deposition as protection. The temporality of the biological wound imparts a different sense of urgency to Thek’s work. He had felt at the time that the “block”, the “city”, the whole world was falling apart, but no one in the art world wanted to point it out,

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36 Ibid.  
37 Ibid.
or think about. The cool affectless conceptualism of Smithson’s work falls in line with the temporal infinity of Minimalism that so bothered Thek. The meat pieces demonstrate how the geological time scale of those works, seemed coldly incompatible with the human life span. Formalism and the allure of a clean and eternal beauty, a monumental beauty, were too tempting to pass up. Geological Minimal time always already guarantees a return to its opposite, in the meantime, Thek articulates that the two components need each other:

At first the physical vulnerability of the wax necessitated the cases; now the cases have grown to need the wax. The cases are calm; their precision is like numbers, reasonable. I don’t know if the cases hold out the viewer or hold in the wax-flesh.

By evoking the biological model of symbiosis, he implicates a growth model that can encompass both the geological time of Smithson, as well as a more urgent time of abjection.

As the viewer approaches the work, the repetition of the step form around the meat piece becomes clear. It repeats itself on a smaller scale in the clear Plexiglas within the work. This repetition is reminiscent of a fractal pattern that replicates itself regardless of scale. Regularity and a gestalt surface is the result of the inert growths around the slip. While Thek’s drawings only communicate a flat crystalline exterior, they conceal the wax sculpture’s bumpy incredibly detailed textures for which Thek became known. Sinews of muscle and even blood vessels and veins are visible. Thek

38 Flood, 212
viewed Minimalism’s aggressive emptying of content as an affront to the world at large. The winding down of time, and entropic post-history attitude that Smithson observes in “Entropy in the New Monuments” is for Thek, absolutely dangerously false. By re-inserting the “living ‘seed’” into his crystalline representations of Minimalism, Thek returns to an organic disorder, shedding and refuting Smithson’s geological/Minimalist entropy.

The disruptive “seed” of the meat piece also clearly interrupts the rhetoric of Robert Morris’ gestalt. For Morris, the parallel mission to painting’s reflexive quest for flatness, was the creation of structures that were so simplified that “one need not move around the object for the sense of the whole”.40 On two counts Thek’s Pace Gallery sculptures thwart this desire for objects that allow an intuitive spatial visualization. The abject disrupts the spatial extension and visualization of the gestalt. Thek’s addition of the highly irregular wax-flesh pieces derives its power from the fear of the unknown, in this case the irregularity of our bodies’ unfamiliar interiors. The multi-surfaced, multi-layered casework denies the gestalt essence that Morris privileged. As “complex regular” polyhedrons Thek’s sculptures from this series exhibit a resistance to visualization. For Morris “there is a weakening of visualization as the number of sides increases” and in this sense even Thek’s containers (and not just the wax within) depart from a Minimalist ethos.41 Instead they seem to take the opulence of the Minimal container to its florid and Baroque, yet uniquely futuristic logical extremity. This is the representation of the decadent opulence of crystallographic geological temporality proposed by Roberts. Thek’s

41 Morris, 830
wax-flesh ruptures the time of Minimalism with its form, even before what it stands for (meat/flesh).

**Breaking the Gestalt, Part 2: Scale and Visibility**

In his interview with Swenson, Thek mentions a different kind of illegibility than that of the wax-flesh, noting, “It’s almost impossible to tell what’s inside unless the viewer has his nose to the glass. They’re ambiguous; they can’t be seen all at once.” The scale of the columnar sculptures presents a challenge to visibility. Morris writes, “A larger object includes more of the space around itself... It is necessary literally to keep one’s distance from large objects in order to take the whole of any one view into one’s field of vision.” This was certainly true of the Pace Gallery sculptures that were displayed on extended plinths that also defined the paths and perspectives that they could be viewed from. By extending physically into space this tall sculpture required the viewer to stand back to see the entire effect of its size, but in doing so, the viewer would be unable to see the wax-flesh within. It is this effect that challenges not the intellectual legibility of the object, but the optical physical encounter with the constituent materials of the work.

Thek’s columnar sculptures clearly take on the characteristic of the Minimal object that requires a theatrical engagement of walking around the work. This temporal experience results not in a singular continuous encounter as in the gestalt but a broken and permanently fragmented encounter. The detail of the wax-flesh cannot be seen within the scale of the work. Dislocation-deposition becomes not only

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42 Swenson, 347
43 Morris, 831
a metaphor constructed around a material condition but rather one that operates on the level of the phenomenological difficulty of encountering the work in its entirety. The wax flesh as a rendering of biological dislocation draws the viewer in with its material indeterminacy, however the depositional process locks the viewer out. In this case the scale of the vitrine holds the viewer at a distance.

The Whitney catalog’s illustrations of the same or similar work displayed in Battcock’s anthology demonstrates this difficulty. Instead of displaying the work in just one image there are two. On one page there is an image of the sketch and the related sculpture in its entirety, on the opposite page is an enlarged close-up of the meat within that work. The catalog’s readers can simultaneously observe the work in its architectural wholeness, as well as in the fleshy details of veins and fat rendered within. This dual vision of the work gives the reader an account of the sculpture that rhymes with Battcock’s misleading presentation in Minimal Art. Battcock presents the work in black and white, backlit so that the meat appears to be only another opaque component of the sculpture. The Whitney catalog’s presentation of the same work attempts to circumvent the difficulty of seeing the work’s differently scaled components simultaneously. The scale of the work is an element of the Plexiglas that helps to “keep the viewer out”. While for Smithson, it is the unseen but present space between mirrors that produces a dislocation; scale serves a similar purpose for Thek. The untitled columnar work points towards the vexing difficulty of visualization, and offers an object that is on the verge of fracturing into divisibility.

The term Technological Reliquaries was not applied while Thek was making these sculptures. Instead it came from Thek through Suzanne Delehanty’s essay in the
ICA Philadelphia catalog for his 1977 solo exhibition *Paul Thek: Processions*. This term has been loosely applied retrospectively to all of the meat pieces, however it seems to apply most clearly to the works from the 1966 Pace Gallery show. The technological and the reliquary both have important implications as designations for this series. The reliquary was a critical notion for Thek, who was constantly nagged by a deeply ambivalent relationship to his Catholic upbringing. He was profoundly spiritual but equally conflicted about his attraction to the rituals and doctrine of Catholicism. The oft-repeated anecdote regarding the development of his meat pieces is their genesis in Thek’s encounter with the catacombs in Rome and Sicily. A frequently reproduced photograph by Peter Hujar shows a young and clean-cut Thek standing arms crossed in front of several skeletons laid out behind him in a crypt. Moved by this environment Thek noted that he wanted to make something “with the innocence of the Baroque crypt”. The excess of death, and the rendering of the body as a mere object, was for Thek a critical acknowledgement of our “thingness”. This objectivized vision of the body seems to play into a neatly Minimalist ethos in which even the realistic wax flesh is just another thing. However, even his controlled treatment of the subject, led to the inevitable return of the figurative organic form.

The juxtaposition of the technological and the reliquary is a good framework for the effects of these works marking the connotations of the works as simultaneously futuristic and fetishistic (in the sense of invoking objects with great power). Reliquaries are traditionally containers for holy relics. Relics can be any kind of object with an association with a sacred figure but its designation here seems to refer to the Catholic requirement of a holy relic (often the bones of saints) to sanctify
a cathedral. The fragmented visual encounter of the Pace Gallery sculptures, in which the viewer has difficulty fully seeing both the container and its contents, suggests the alignment of rupture and continuity. The biological abject with its ruptured urgency is crystallized by the seamless durational quality of a technological shell.

“Reality plus”

Thek’s meat pieces are more than snarky inside jokes. By confronting his viewers with the fragility of the body he pointed towards the real by giving us “reality plus”. Thek suggests that Reality is not sufficient. It is not sufficient to ironically reproduce or reclaim the status quo. Minimalist Formalism and the façade of the commodity, work overtime to produce an aesthetic of endlessness. Instead of locking the viewer in a staring match with an inanimate object, Thek reminds us of what we’ve left behind, the meat in the Brillo box.
Chapter 2:

Procession to Prosthetics: Paul Thek’s *A Procession...* (1968)

I want to do a crazy show a procession and do all the things that people carry and wear in a procession like jewelry and masks and shrines etc. and it could be a joy to do.

-Letter from Paul Thek to Peter Hujar, July 1968, Rome

Paul Thek’s exhibition at Galerie M.E. Thelen in 1968 entitled *A Procession in Honor of Aesthetic Progress: Objects to Theoretically Wear, Carry, Pull or Wave*, marks a transition between his early and middle period work. While still rife with meat and its abject implications, the sculptural work in this show shows Thek expanding his considerations of the body’s relationship to the work of art. His meat pieces, a series of sculptures that disturbed the *gestalt* forms of the New York avant-garde with the insertion of realistic painted wax-flesh had been exhibited in solo and group exhibitions around the world. These works disturbed and excited the art world in shows at Pace, and Stable Gallery among other institutions. Feeling trapped by his success and creatively stymied by the commercial atmosphere of the art world, Thek

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came to Rome in 1967 under a Fulbright award. While visiting the 1968 Venice Biennale, he met a gallerist from Galerie M.E. Thelen in Essen, Germany and agreed to produce work for an exhibition there. The resulting work would become the beginning of a new phase of production for Thek. Beginning in 1969, his work moved away from sculpture and discrete installations such as *The Tomb*, towards multi-room site-specific installations in collaboration with a team of artists and institutions across Europe.

*A Procession*... illustrates Thek’s use of movement and temporality to create social environments within the art museum and gallery. These spaces while nominally borrowing symbolism and form from Catholic traditions, also employ what curator of *Documenta* 5, Harold Szeeman called “Personal Mythologies”. By referring to the cyclical nature of time, through ritual and performance, Thek hijacks the museum or art institution alluding to the form of the Catholic procession to propose the revival of social collective subjectivities. While writers often take note of this exhibition because it is Thek’s first formal use of process and his first installation work, no writers attempt to read closely the iconography of the actual individual sculptures of beyond the obvious (such as the sedan chair as an object to be carried in a procession). Read closely these works seem sinister and violent, covered as they are in Thek’s signature wax-flesh. They contradict the atmosphere of celebration and freedom in the Italian Catholic processions that inspired Thek. A *Procession*... then

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offers an ambiguous proposition, it is not meant for actual usage, but instead figures its visitors as a sort of procession, a ritual not of Catholicism but of the art world.

In Thek’s biography, the story of the creation, destruction, and resurrection of this exhibition has become an origin story for much of his work in the 1970s. Gallerist Michael Nickel’s essay on *A Procession*... for the Whitney Museum of American Art catalog in 2010 describes the difficult process of assembling the exhibition.\(^\text{47}\) Thek told the gallery that he had arranged for the shipping of his work from Rome to Stuttgart, however when assistants were sent to pick up Thek and his work, the luggage car of his train had been re-routed. After convincing a closed customs office that the luggage in question was “perishable goods - live meat” Nickel’s partners were able to bring the objects back to the gallery just a day before the exhibition was to open.\(^\text{48}\) The illegibility of the wax-flesh sculptures facilitated the recovery of the works from customs. Unfortunately Thek had not properly packed his sculptures, when they were unboxed in the gallery, Thek’s wood and glass sculptures were splintered and shattered.

The works consisted of a series of related sculptural objects. As indicated in the title of the exhibition, the works had *theoretical* functions. Several were designed for people to wear. Others could be pulled, waved, or carried. There were several recognizable forms of sculptures in the exhibition; there were three chairs (see fig. 13), four “headboxes” (see fig. 14), a sedan chair, a tray, a pair of painted shoes (belonging to gallerist Michael Nickel), and a wooden box containing a meat piece


\(^\text{48}\) Ibid.
covered in butterfly wings hanging from a pole, and several steel cables with pieces of meat on them. The chairs were wooden and painted red, brown, or pink. They featured wooden supports with leather straps around cutout seats. Several had two pairs of supports and straps, both above, and below the holes in the seats of the chairs. Two taxidermy crows were mounted to the back of the chair, each holding a meat piece in either its claws or its beak. These chairs survived fairly intact. The headboxes were far more fragile and were badly damaged in transit.

After being removed from their boxes, the headboxes had lost their brackets, and most of their glass panels had shattered, with the pieces cutting through some of the related wax meat. Facing this damage gallery owner Michael Nickel grouped the sculptures into a small room of the side of the end of the L shaped gallery, placing intact sculptures closer to the long section of the space, and broken sculptures closer to the wall.49 When Thek came into the gallery, he created what Nickel calls a “studio atmosphere”, scattering newspaper on the floor and spilling pink paint over the newspaper (see fig. 15).50 Spotlights aimed at broken sculptures were covered with pink foil, and the larger room was left empty with the exception of scattered newspaper. The room holding most of the sculpture was roped off with pink silk cords, and each object in that room was tied with cord to the window (fig. 15). Thek explained to an art critic from the Swiss publication Art International that this was the first part of an exhibition entitled A Work in Progress wherein visitors to the gallery would see the artist at work as he completed his works and placed them on display in the gallery. Thus the exhibition would change over time. Some visitors would not

49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
only experience the gallery as studio, but also the artist performing his labor within the context of the studio space. Two phrases that Thek used to characterize the work, “procession” and “a work in progress” would appear in titles throughout his work in Europe through the mid 1970s.\(^5^1\)

Progress and process are two terms that are both linked and at odds with one another. Process and procession are linked to deeply religious forms of motion and theatricality that held deep appeal for Thek. Raised Catholic in Brooklyn and then living in Italy, Thek was certainly familiar with two kinds of religious procession. The weekly and daily mass is a formal and heavily structured series of processions of clergy and parishioners, interspersed with musical interludes and passages of speech and silence. Citations of these complex movements appear throughout his work in the 1970s, particularly in his creation of passageways and structures within his installations. In Sicily, Thek encountered the feast day processions taking note of “the piazza all decorated in its day-glo best, stands, games… the statue carrying routine… candles, yelling, porca-madonnas, in short it was by far the very best thing yet”.\(^5^2\)

This section from a letter to Peter Hujar shows Thek’s deep interest in celebration and procession. Thek took inspiration from Catholicism and its expressions wherever he saw fit. Many German art historians have embraced a largely uncritical view of the role of Catholic doctrine in Thek’s work.\(^5^3\) While motifs such as rebirth, ritual,\(^5^4\)

\(^5^2\) Wilson, 205
\(^5^3\) Friedhelm Winnekes, Paul Thek: Shrine, offers a reading of the four different stations that Thek set up at Galerie M.E. Thelen as related to the performance of the Corpus Christi procession, as well as the Stations of the Cross. I find these analogies problematic because Winnekes and other German authors make comparisons in content whereas Thek seemed primarily interested in the form of religion, i.e. procession, ritual, cycles of re-birth both of the body and of the earth (seasons, time, etc). Thek is not
procession, and sanctification are important to understanding Thek’s European period, many of his letters reveal a lax relationship to the religious meaning ascribed to *A Procession*… In a letter to Hujar in the summer of 1968, just before the opening of *A Procession*… Thek wrote, “I have spent the day sculpting a two headed baby in wax with circles under its eyes, I wonder why. It goes in a porcamadonna and then theoretical germans will carry it on their 8 shoulders. I really wonder why”. In Thek’s alignment of process and process art (the performance of the reconstruction of his work) and the act of procession (inspired by public feast day celebrations such as those in Sicily) he certainly posits connections between artistic and spiritual practice. The title of the exhibition also connects it to the shift from Minimalism to Post-Minimalism in art practices of the late 1960s.

The lengthy title of the exhibition jokingly offers the chance to “wear, carry, pull or wave” the objects on display, as part of a procession “in honor of aesthetic progress”. Thek’s title makes clear his irreverence towards time and the linear notion of “aesthetic progress” but also indicates a strong connection to the shift from Minimalism to Post-Minimalism. His list of verbs evokes Richard Serra’s *Verb List* (1967-1968, see fig. 16), a list of 84 infinitive forms such as “to drop, to split, to spread, to hang” and several genitives, “of gravity, of tension, of entropy, of simultaneity”. This verb list inspired a number of Serra’s works from the period, such as *To Lift* (1967, see fig. 17) a vulcanized rubber sheet, lifted off of the floor at its

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54 Paul Thek “‘Wish bon voyage’ Excerpts from Paul Thek’s Letters to Peter Hujar,” In *Paul Thek: Artist’s Artist*, ed. Harald Falckenberg and Peter Weibel, (Karlsruhe: Zentrum fur Kunstmedia, 2008), 324.
center to stand on its own. These simple material interventions are indicative of a moment when sculptors were moving away from the highly finished Minimalism that Thek had mocked for its perceived (and literal) emptiness. Instead of the rigid and preformed industrial materials that defined sculpture in the early and mid 1960s, artists like Serra and Robert Morris were reconsidering the role of process and materiality. Their emphasis on the *gestalt* object with its self-sufficient wholeness had neglected non-rigid materials and had no place for chance. These changes were described in Robert Morris’ essay “Anti-Form” wherein he details a new emphasis on chance and forces like gravity and time. Morris refers to Claes Oldenburg’s soft sculptures as forerunners of non-rigid sculptural materials in which

> “considerations of gravity become as important as those of space… The focus on matter and gravity as means results in forms that were not projected in advance. Considerations of ordering are necessarily casual and imprecise and unemphasized. Random piling, loose stacking, hanging, give passing form to the material. Chance is accepted and indeterminacy is implied”.

Morris’ observes that sculptors were giving as much priority to forces like gravity, as they had been to space in the 1960s. The new focus on process and material is apparent in the way that “forms… were not project in advance”. Artists like Serra experimented with different manipulations of form without any particular form as their pre-determined end point. The open-ended nature of this experimentation meant that works often changed over time (by their material nature, through decay or entropy), or were changed over time.

**Prosthetics on Parade**

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Thek’s list of verbs is fundamentally differs from Richard Serra’s. Serra’s list emphasizes the unidirectional effect of the artist manipulating a material. Thek’s verb list offers a mutualistic relationship between the object and the subject (or actor or artist). By signaling the necessity of physically interacting with objects, Thek’s chairs and headboxes make the object contiguous with the human body. By wearing these sculptures the subject is surrounded by the object, the subject is consumed by the sculpture. Considering these sculptures as prosthetics produces a dynamic play between the boundaries of the body and the self. The chairs and headboxes are external structures that can be bound to the body with their leather straps and holes for the head. While the result of Serra’s verbs is sculptural work that indexes the material effects of the artist’s application of physical forces, Thek proposes a sculptural paradigm that uses sculpture to reflexively test the limits of the body.

The mixing of bodily limits between internal and external is visible in Thek’s earlier meat pieces. The abject as a figurative subject already disturbs the constitution of the self by threatening to collapse the boundaries between self and other, and subject and object. Thek’s visions of the abject are violently disturbed bodily images sustained by technological extensions. The technological extension of the body is apparent in the label “technological reliquaries” an ill-defined term that seems to include those works that use nylon monofilaments, neon Plexiglas, and metal components (fig. 7). These components appear to be augmentations that suspend biological matter in time. Considering the prosthetic as an artificial body part, these works point towards a dystopian fragmented body that is unable to sustain itself and requires externalized structures to hold them in. Tiffany Funk in defining a
“prosthetic aesthetic” in the work of Thek and others, steps back from the technological cyborg discourse around the prosthetic to define the prosthetic at its most basic level as an extension of the body. Funk productively theorizes the role of the prosthetic as “a catalyst that begins a reflexive process that continuously transforms both its user and itself ad infinitum… the prosthetic relationship is fundamentally reflexive where both object and user continuously define each other”.

Funk applies this reading to Thek’s spilling untitled meat piece in neon Plexiglas (the second work discussed in the first chapter of this project) and reads the work as a mixing of the boundaries of technological and biological systems. While Thek’s New York meat pieces with their metallic interiors, and Plexiglas exoskeletons function as technological prosthetics, the wearable chairs and headboxes of A Procession… model another variety of prosthetic.

In everyday speech the prosthetic most commonly refers to things like artificial limbs, these extensions of the body are meant to repair and reconstitute a fractured body that is considered less than whole. Thek’s meat pieces depict a body in crisis, already fragmented and in need of their structures. Thek described the co-dependent relationship between these organic and inorganic materials in this work: “At first the physical vulnerability of the wax necessitated the cases; now the cases have grown to need the wax”. Thek’s description confirms Funk’s understanding of the prosthetic as a shifting process that can change both the object and the user. The headboxes and chairs of A Procession… are prosthetic because they extend the body.

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57 Funk, 6
58 Gene Swenson and Paul Thek, 347
Instead of reconstituting a broken body they fracture the sensory experience of a whole body.

**Disciplinary Prosthetics**

In adding a superstructure to the head, the headboxes and chairs nominally augment the body, however they also effectively disable the viewer by limiting the sensory capabilities of the head. In the case of the headboxes, this disabling effect would probably be something similar to wearing a motorcycle helmet. The headbox covers the ears, and heavily reduces peripheral vision. This phenomenological experience stands opposed to the effortless extended vision of the *gestalt* object and instead forces a fractured and limited experience of the world. In a contact sheet of photographs showing Thek wearing one of the headboxes, he stands in place while reaching out to touch three surface: his own chest, the wall beside him, and the wall in front of him. Thek also wears sunglasses further reducing his visual capabilities. His series of gestures make it seem that Thek has been blinded. He must confirm his own existence through touch since he cannot visually reconstitute the division between his head and his body forced by the headbox. In touching his own chest he appears to reassure himself that the box has not entirely dislocated his head from the rest of his body. Furthermore, Thek stands in a grey concrete space, and the entire series of images appears to have been shot in a staircase. As Thek wears the headbox he stands in a corner, hemmed in between the camera and the wall. The shoulder brackets also severely limit the range of motion of the head and neck, forcing them to stay primarily erect although the rest of the body could move to accommodate a
larger range of motion. This is in line with the head as subjected to display, or the shift towards the bodily subject becoming an object.

There is an irony to an object that appears to curtail social interaction, in the context of an exhibition that was inspired by the procession. Thek placed the Mass, as well as the outdoor feast day processions of Italian Catholic tradition, as examples of participatory rituals and spaces that informed his art in structure and content. His consideration of the procession as the oldest example of a richly symbolic, and affective public performance make him a fore-runner of the strains of participatory performance art that Nicholas Bourriaud would label “relational aesthetics” in the 1990s. The sensory, social, and physical restraints of the headboxes extend the violence implied in the earlier meat pieces. Even if Thek did not consider the works “mutilated”, the wax-flesh pieces remain bodily fragments, offered for display, and ostensibly tamed by their cases. The headboxes considered as part of a similar disciplinary form implicates other kinds of less joyous procession than the ones that Thek cites as inspiration. The clamp like shoulder mounts and leather straps of the headboxes and chairs’ evoke incarceration and the imprisonment and restraint of the body. The serial form of the headbox, varied but similar in its essential elements, recalls the kinds of images that Michel Foucault included in his landmark work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* as visual exemplars of the technologies of control that he argued rendered “docile bodies”. In that chapter Foucault describes the social regulatory function of institutions such as prisons,

hospitals, and schools, all of which are designed (spatially, through architecture and design, and conceptually, through exercises and pedagogy) to condition the production of compliant citizens. One image displays the “lecture on the evils of alcoholism in the auditorium of Fresnes prison”, wherein prisoners appear to be standing in wooden structures arranged in steps so that each person must stand facing the speaker at the bottom of the room (see fig. 18). The structure forces the viewer to passively receive instruction from the lecturer, the prisoner has been caught and subjected to a social intervention meant to discipline their behavior and rehabilitate them. The morphological similarity to Thek’s headboxes is striking. Considering the headboxes and their wearable chair counterparts as restrictive objects gives their leather straps and wooden brackets sinister connotations.

Foucault’s “Docile Bodies” describes the domination of the body by physical and ideological means of oppression. These systems break down body’s movements into a set of gestures that can be articulated in time and space in increasingly minute quantities. Thek’s headboxes and chairs seem to identify two oppositional conditions at work in the social form of the procession. Thek was inspired by the Italian Catholic procession, the unrestrained spectacle of collective celebration. However these sculptures create limitations on the body, and do not seem particularly festive. Writers have not read many of the objects in *A Procession*... closely. Friedrich Wennekes compares the steel cables with bits of wax-flesh to the garlands strung across the

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61 Michel Foucault, trans. Alan Sheridan, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Fig 8.
streets during festivals, this comparison seems facetious since strung up meat would certainly seem out of place as decoration at a procession or street festival.⁶²

Seen in context of their potential as wearable objects, the chairs and headboxes become less festive, and more like an absurdist carceral structure for the body. Considering these sculptures as architectural extensions of the body recalls the work of Thek’s Brazilian contemporary Helio Oiticica. Both artists experimented with materials and objects that probed the boundaries of the body to investigate individual and social conditions. Perhaps among Oiticica’s most famous works were his colorful parangolé. Taken from a Brazilian-Portuguese slang that describes an animated scene of sudden confusion in a group of people, the parangolé are capes, banners, and tents made from scraps of material ranging from fabric, plastic, ropes, and bags (see fig. 19). In late 1964, Oiticica began spending time with the samba community, many of whom lived in the shantytown of Mangueira Hills. Informed by the motion of samba and an interest in the physical engagement with color, the parangolé “requires direct corporal participation; beyond covering the body, it requires that the body move, that it dances”.⁶³ For Oiticica, the work was not the object itself. The parangolé required not only the activation of a performer but was related specifically to the samba, a culturally specific form of motion. Oiticica’s described the parangolé’s desired phenomenological effects on a wearer in architectural terms “the participant’s ‘shelter’, inviting him to participate in it also

and activate the elements within it always with the hand, or with the whole body”.64

Thek placed no such emphasis on any participatory aspects of the sculptures in A Procession… however both artists made reference to culturally specific forms of motion and created wearable objects (despite Oiticica’s insistence that the parangolé itself was not the work, it only became art when activated by a live body).65 Oiticica identifies two components to the action of parangolé. “Wearing” is the affective experience of one’s body being interior to a greater structure that transforms the body into the nucleus of the larger amorphous space of the parangolé. “Watching,” describes how the participant’s newly gained interior position gave them a privileged visual tactile experience of the parangolé’s kinetic extension of color into space.

If the wearable headboxes and chairs materialize the architecture of restraint, the parangolé seem to articulate one of mobility. The rhetoric of the parangolé emphasizes the joy of motion as the embodiment of individual and collective freedom. For Oiticica the wearable object heightens the agency of the individual, but also aspires to alter their perceptive experience beyond wearing the parangolé. Oiticica asks, “might [the parangolé] be an initiation into the creative-perceptive structures of environments?” indicating that the utopian possibilities of the parangolé.66 The social political connotations of these works are built into the history of their first institutional exhibition. Oiticica planned a demonstration of the parangolé with dancers from Mangueira, however the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro did not allow music or dancing in the galleries. Oiticica and his dancers were removed

64 Oiticica, 159
66 Oiticica, 159
from the museum but continued their planned demonstration on the street outside of the museum.\textsuperscript{67} This ideal of personal freedom of movement is linked to the collective nature of the samba and its non-hierarchical potential. Oiticica’s essay \textit{Notes on Dance} (1965) describes his interest in dance and sambas his reaction to “a vital need to de-intellectualization, from intellectual dis-inhibition, from the need for free expression… an experience of greater vitality, indispensable, mainly as a demolisher of prejudices, stereotypes, etc”.\textsuperscript{68} This essay positions the immanence of the body in motion as an antidote to an over-intellectualized art world. Oiticica’s writing on the \textit{parangolé} highlights the intense contradiction that Thek constructs and leaves unresolved in \textit{A Procession}… Upon close examination there remains a vast gap between the procession’s connotations of movement and celebration, and the unwieldy and restrictive reality of sculptural objects in the show.

\textbf{Viewer / Participant}

Thek’s interest in the art exhibition as a social gathering is clear in his insistence on showing his exhibitions during the Catholic holidays, particularly Christmas and Easter.\textsuperscript{69} He believed that audiences were most receptive to the themes of his work during those periods where there was already a heightened feeling of sociality. The time of procession is ultimately both linked to the immanent performing body (Thek as a priest-shaman preparing his work for usage) and to the repetition of a liturgical calendar that connects to old traditions. With \textit{A Procession}…

\textsuperscript{67} Figueiredo, 113
\textsuperscript{68} Oiticica, 161
Thek’s work begins to orient itself towards the engineering of collective experiences. Although he never explicitly described his work as participatory or interactive, Thek understood the reception of his work as tied to special times of the year when “all the men in the world, and apparently all cultures in all times, decided to at least present to bring the light back and renew their spirit. This is a collective activity”.70 Part of this collective act of revival would be conveyed in later work through acts of movement along prescribed paths. Unlike the samba, these structured routes were not improvisatory. Similarly, the Catholic mass is a regimented collective performance with pre-set songs and music, and interludes of sitting, standing, and lining up. Thek’s work was designed to offer contemplative emotional experience, as opposed to the dynamic exterior bodily experiments of Oiticica’s work. Thek’s work however, still expanded the relational field of the artwork. Instead of an artwork being contemplated by a singular viewer, and instance at just one point in time. Thek performs duration, a changing scene. In doing so, he offers a chance for people to be together, for better or for worse.

70 Ibid.
Chapter 3: 
Idiosyncratic Time: 


*A document made by Paul Thek and Edwin Klein* (1969, hereafter referred to as *A document*) is an artist book created by Paul Thek in collaboration with Dutch photographer Edwin Klein. *A document* measures sixteen by twenty-four inches and includes sixty-four black and white photographs, there is no margin and the images run to the edge of every page. The photographs are reproduced at a ratio that presents its subjects nearly at their original scale. Its dimensions also make the book an unwieldy object to hold upright, it insists on being laid flat and observed from above. The striking images are created in the visual mode of collage, each one capturing an accumulation of photographs and objects, from apple juice bottles and harmonicas, to an incredible variety of printed images including animals, pornography, and Polaroids of Thek’s studio and artworks (see figs. 20-26). These were all arranged and rearranged against the background of a single page from the *International Herald Tribune*. This page forms the ground nearly all of the photographs excepting several at the very end that deploy a pillowcase that similarly fills up the entirety of the picture frame. Most images include an issue of Time Magazine from 1968 that is opened to various pages and mostly obscured by photographs and other printed matter that are clipped and piled on.
Many of the strategies deployed in *A document* reoccur in Thek’s subsequent work. This early collaborative work reflects many of the larger themes that run throughout Thek’s work. *A document* plays with the model of the “flat-bed picture plane” an idea first described by Leo Steinberg in reference to Robert Rauschenberg’s work. In one of the few extended engagements with *A document*, George Baker argues that Thek’s images illustrate a fertile psychic space that grows like an organism, upwards from Steinberg’s flat-bed. Baker does not adequately bridge the temporal and spatial concerns of the work. *A document* is not simply a reiteration of the fecundity of the horizontal plane. It illustrates the possibility of representing verticality without returning to the Modernist vision of the work as an object that mirrors the viewer’s vertical orientation. By depicting the process of material sedimentation on the flat-bed picture plane Thek insists on the material status of the flat-bed’s contents.

It is to Thek’s great credit that he used such a wide variety of media to address his interests. He continued his lengthy engagement with temporality, using the newspaper as a potent symbol of the everyday, and the repressive linearity of time in the public sphere. Against that Thek and Klein orchestrated a world where printed matter is assembled into idiosyncratic forms. The sequencing of the images enact a model of temporality that builds on itself and eventually collapses, echoing cycles of life, death, and resurrection.

**More Than “A Document”**
The initial impression when opening *A Document* is the overwhelming sensation of density. The photographs present information in excess of visual comprehension, even in its opening pages. The images are sharp with a high contrast that renders all of the newsprint perfectly crisp and legible. Nested within the frame of a two page spread from the *International Herald Tribune* is a single issue of *Time Magazine* (November 22nd, 1968). The photograph on the front of the book shows *Time*’s cover and upon opening the book the viewer sees *Time* opened, but largely obscured by the photographs attached to the edges of the magazine with paperclips.

The very first page consists of the following: three photographs of the studio that show the creation of the massive chicken coop that would be installed at the Stedelijk within the year (two of those images are placed adjacent to one another forming a small panoramic view of the coop); a found photograph of a hyena; a close up image of a fish placed just above a photograph of a work by Thek entitled *Fishman,*; an image of a chimpanzee on a chair; and a blurry photograph of a table of photographs much like the one that would be installed at the Stedelijk as *Dwarf Parade Table.* This visual overload shows the complex but intuitive connections that Thek and Klein were constructing within each individual image. Meanwhile Thek has constructed a clear pun between the photograph of the fish and the many latex “fish” piled up on the *Fishman,* itself a latex cast of Thek’s own body. Thek treats the *Fishman* as a sort of plaything, and images of fish among other animals reappear throughout the book.

The original idea for *A document* came out of a desire to create an exhibition catalog that would record the studio in preparation for Thek’s exhibitions at the
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and the Moderna Museet, Stockholm planned for Spring 1969, and Fall/Winter 1971-1972, respectively.71 The images strongly resemble the assemblage-based logic that would become the visual signature of Thek’s large installations. *A document* has often described as a hybrid object that is both visual log of process and unconventional exhibition catalog that includes photographs of works in progress, and a sampling of the objects that would be assembled into Thek’s sprawling sculptural installations. 72 The free associative quality of the imagery and its arrangement are representative of Thek’s raw material, and a loose documentation of Thek’s mental process.

The presence of newspaper marks an early occurrence of what would become Thek’s signature material. Within the body of work published on Thek, *A document* has received surprisingly little attention given its position at a critical juncture between Thek’s early and mid-career work. This is surprising given the ubiquity of newspaper and photographic material in the installations immediately following *A Document*’s publication. He would continue to refine and expand their use throughout the 1970s and through to the end of his life. With its extensive use of print media as an index or catalog of process, the book cannot be understood outside of Thek’s earlier work in Europe. Thek was just beginning to work on a sequence of installation works at museums throughout northern Europe and had settled into a studio space on Prinseneiland in Amsterdam to prepare for a commissioned installation at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Klein would go on to join Thek’s nomadic band of


72 In Thek’s historiography this book is often mentioned as a mere footnote to his exhibition *A Procession / The Artist’s Co-op* at the Stedelijk Museum. The Stedelijk Museum published the first edition of the book.
collaborators known as The Artist’s Co-op who would assist in Thek’s many large-scale European projects. Because these installations were credited solely to Thek, or to Thek and the Artist’s Co-op, I consider Thek the primary creator of A document. A Fulbright Scholarship initially brought Thek from New York to Rome. There he began working on A Procession in Honor of Aesthetic Progress: Objects to Theoretically Wear, Carry, Pull or Wave, arguably his first installation work in 1968 at Galerie M.E. Thelen.73

In addition to a number of sculptural objects that he continuously adjusted and worked on throughout the course of that exhibition, Thek scattered newspaper across the floor of the gallery, concentrating it in the roped off space he created to work on his sculptures. The use of crumbled newspaper throughout the gallery space but particularly within the area that was used to fix his broken sculptures, marked Thek’s re-use of a discarded material. With his deployment of the newspaper Thek alerts the viewer that they are entering a space that is apart from the world, where meaning may not hold constant. It was also a way for him to sully the white cube of the gallery space. This early (perhaps his first) use of newspaper pre-figures a career-long engagement with newspaper as material.74


74 Kenny Schachter’s essay on Thek’s newspaper paintings (which use newspaper as their ground) points to the temporal dimension of this work as a form of “daily labor” which “obliterated history while simultaneously creating it”. Kenny Schachter, “Nothing but Time: The Newspaper Works of Paul Thek,” in Paul Thek: Artist’s Artist, ed. Harald Falckenberg and Peter Weibel (Karlsruhe and Cambridge, MA: Center for Art and Media and MIT Press, 2008), 121.
“Same Shit, Different Day,” Thek Plays with Newspaper

Newspaper’s fragility as well as its serialization appealed to Thek. While newspaper is not a long-lasting material, it is replaceable, produced anew everyday. This sense of newspaper as both renewable and finite appealed to Thek’s interest in cycles and rituals surrounding death and rebirth. In A Document the same two-page spread from the International Herald Tribune forms the backdrop to almost every image. As all kinds of objects and images literally circulate on and around it, this opened page remains fixed and stable, acting as a staging ground for the performance of objects above it. On the left side are cartoon strips and a crossword puzzle, on the opposite page one can make out bits of articles on protests at Berkeley, a power failure in Florida, debates over the U.S. minimum wage, and the daily television show time listings. This assortment displays text as both a medium of pure information, and one that can be ludic or organized for pleasure (as in the cartoons and the crossword). The use of newspaper also forms a backdrop that employs text as a kind of visual noise. As Yves-Alain Bois has argued, artists and writers since the poet Stéphane Mallarmé have responded to the standardization of typography and its layouts as an opportunity to examine and potentially subvert the banal serialization of language. This response is not just to newspaper but to the many commercialized forms of language that saturate the contemporary visual landscape. Thek’s A

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Document can be productively understood as a similar countermeasure against the homogenous character of printed matter. The scattered casual character of the images and objects are the opposite of the rigid array of text and images in the newspaper, reminding the viewer of the intimacy of each page.

While the first edition of A document was published in 1969 with the Stedelijk Museum, Thek was scattering newspaper each day over his work Artist’s Co-op (1969) a chicken coop built in the museum with live chickens, and a variety of sculptural and installation elements. Newspaper represented the consistent passing of time into irrelevance, a march that Suzanne Delehanty characterizes as “the modern anxiety and obsession with historical, linear time”. Against this obsession, Thek’s work incorporated symbols of what Delehanty characterizes as mythological time, a more cyclical model evoked in Judeo-Christian ritual and a complex personal iconography around narrative cycles of creation and destruction. In situating its materials among the daily newspaper, A document proposes an idiosyncratic temporality, and a space apart. The space of A document, not unlike Thek’s miniature studio at Galerie M.E. Thelen, or the Artist’s Co-op at the Stedelijk, uses the most public of materials as an opening into a realm of difference. What is often cited as a paradigm of public discourse and the broader public sphere is converted in its degraded state, into a signifier of the private space of the studio.

Challenging the Flatbed Picture Plane

79 Delehanty, 58
George Baker’s essay “Paul Thek: Notes from the Underground” considers multiple individual works and motifs across Thek’s oeuvre and is the most substantive critical engagement with *A document*. Baker reads the work in relation to Leo Steinberg’s notion of the “flat-bed picture plane” informed by Robert Rauschenberg’s work. Steinberg’s essay addresses Rauschenberg’s work as representative of a shift from a vertically oriented definition of flatness, to one that alludes to horizontally configured flat surfaces that collect visual material. These “surfaces on which objects are scattered… whether coherently or in confusion…” are clearly reminiscent of the visual effects of *A document*. The final products and visual effects of this operational process are significantly different for Rauschenberg and Thek.

Rauschenberg’s prints depict flatness as the inevitable result of an excess of visual intake, Baker points out that Thek’s photographs have a strong vertical dimension. Rauschenberg’s prints were usually silkscreen or lithography created from the early 1960s onwards with Universal Limited Artist Editions in Long Island. At ULAE Rauschenberg developed a transfer-printing technique that directly removed images from printed matter like newspaper and applied them directly to the lithographic stone. This method of reproduction led to some of Rauschenberg’s signature prints from the period that use the polychromatic capacity of lithography to create brightly jumbled accretions that like collage before them, evoke the overwhelming and attention deficit inducing experience of contemporary visual culture. In these prints, as in Warhol’s silkscreens, the reproduced image is degraded.

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80 George Baker, 195
JFK’s face, Apollo lifting off, all seem to be disintegrating at their edges, an image copied too many times. Steinberg describes Rauschenberg’s adherence to horizontality: “if some collage element, such as a pasted-down photograph, threatened to evoke a topical illusion of depth, the surface was casually strained or smeared with paint to recall its irreducible flatness”. Flatness becomes a unifying principle, equalizing the disparate elements transferred onto the screen.

In contrast, the crisp quality of Thek’s images allows the illusion of depth to remain. Photographs of the chicken coop in Thek’s studio (that would later be incorporated into the Stedelijk exhibition) open up the space behind or below the surface of both the book and the newspaper/magazine surface that it represents. The photographs of the coop essentially show a space within a space, in a photograph that has been photographed among other photographs. The spatial mise en abyme can be dizzying at times. An image of a table piled with photographs creates yet another image within an image, another space within a space.

Rauschenberg used the autographic mark of the painter or printer to degrade and transform the public images that float across his screens. Degradation signifies how “the painted surface is no longer the analogue of a visual experience of nature but of operational processes”. Further defined as “the shift from nature to culture”, Rauschenberg takes representation, perception, and our psychic experience of them as his subjects, as opposed to the things themselves. In his use of printed matter, Thek also deals with representation, and the image economy but retains the fundamental materiality of his content. Rauschenberg’s images take on the suspension of the

82 Steinberg, 32
83 Steinberg, 29
84 Ibid.
printing press; his images float together, tied by drips and splatters. If Thek’s images are suspended as well, the *International Herald Tribune* ties them together. Images or objects may obscure each other but these interactions are clearly visible. The fact that images cast shadows on the flat newspaper demonstrates the spatial relationships apparent among the images in each photograph. This is different from Rauschenberg’s floating world. In Rauschenberg’s work the operational processing of visual information requires the taming (flattening) application of the autographic mark. The effects of that mark are not limited to a literal marking but can be expanded to the flattening effects of the collage aesthetic that in common to many of Rauschenberg’s works. In the case of his Combines, the surreal juxtaposition of three-dimensional objects has a similar effect, imparting the uniqueness of Rauschenberg’s work as a direct product of his mind. The mind as a processing center required an emulsifying subjectivity that is lacking in Thek’s work.

In contrast to Rauschenberg’s autographic markings of public visual culture, Thek’s flatbed accepts the materiality of its subjects. Thek’s images emphasize the dual status of photography and printed matter as both images (representations) and material objects. The flat background of *A document* is the resolutely materialized newspaper that bends, curls, and tears. The tactile impression of the materiality of the image is more strongly felt in the first edition of the book, published in 1969. While the second edition of the book (2011) retains the dimensions and much of the visual punch of the photography, the images in the first edition are printed on slightly a lighter paper stock with noticeably less contrast. The result of Thek’s representation of materiality is the presentation of sedimentation as a spatial and temporal strategy.
To represent the processing field of the image bed, Rauschenberg commits to flatness, however Thek renders the materiality of the image-bed’s operational processes. In doing so he demonstrates how time extends outwards into space creating an organic narrative structure that emerges in the space and time of *A document*. The images were generated using a camera held above a flattened out newspaper page. This imposes a very specific orientation on the viewer, that of someone standing or sitting with their head over the page, looking down. This positioning clearly implicates the horizontal flatbed picture plane, the viewer may be standing, but they are staring at what is below them. It requires a reorientation of the newspaper that usually conspires to offer an annotated window into the world. The orientation of photographs and text make for a distinct top and bottom of the page. Although the newspaper and magazine themselves are certainly fundamentally flat, the images that appear to be windows into spaces within the image plane add a deep dimensionality to this flat plane.

The effect of printed matter in *A document* is different from the images floating in Rauschenberg’s work because of the projective spatial effects of depth. This dimensionality is not merely reverting back to the Renaissance perspectival systems in which the painting is vertically oriented window into another world. As much as certain photographs in *A document* include views of another space (into Thek’s studio, but also into the photographs in the photographs) they are less aligned with the “worldspace which reads the picture plane in correspondence with the erect

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85 Images by Klein of Thek in his Prinseneiland studio show the setup the pair used to produce *A Document*. It involved a camera mount rigged over the newspaper lying on the studio floor.
human posture” than one in which the viewer leans over them. In A document photographs extend beyond the limitations of their status as physical material. It is obvious that they are photographic images and therefore flat. Yet there is an inescapable sense of depth, as if each photograph was still a window into a world. Each image seems to add the third dimension to the flat plane of the layered papers. As much as heavily foreshortened vertical objects like bottles add depth by projecting outward, photographs within photographs add depth by opening downwards. The simultaneity of projection and recession continues throughout the work emphasizing a dynamic sense of the third dimension. The depth of the plane departs from the flatbed that Steinberg describes as “opaque”, Baker emphasizes that the image plane seems to be covering an underground, “a false surface stretched out over an immense chasm”.

Building Upwards and Outwards: Sedimenting the Flatbed Picture Plane

Thek uses the physicality of printed matter to bridge the status of image as representation, and image as material, depicting a process of sedimentation that irrupts from the flatness of the picture plane. The last third of the book is a sequence of images in which three-dimensional objects begin to stand erect. While much of the first two thirds of the book are devoted to emphasizing the “immense chasm” below the picture plane that Baker identifies, the last third contains a notable shift towards three-dimensional objects. This shift towards depicting verticality happens without changing the fundamental horizontality of the work, it remains a construction born from the studio floor, and its structure still forces the viewer to stand and observe

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86 Steinberg, 27
87 Baker, 196
from above. The only difference is that the optical effects begin to project more and more aggressively upwards towards the viewer, instead of projecting below them.

This last section of the book begins with four glass bottles (two apple juice bottles, and two Moet champagne bottles) lying on their sides. They circle the edges of several photographs, none have their caps, and in several images they surround pages torn from an anatomy book that shows the parts of human organs, as if there were a body lying (horizontally) on the floor for an operation. In one photograph two bottles were held up to the camera with one hand visible on the apple juice, the lens remained on the papers below so the bottles were slightly out of focus. The other two bottles were being shaken or moved, effecting a spectral presence, between horizontal and vertical orientations. Eventually the bottles stand erect, a bowl filled with button mushrooms and harmonicas appears in the center of the page, and the mushrooms are placed as caps on the bottles. In one striking image, the bottles were stood on top of an oval mirror that was placed on top of the papers on the floor. Edwin Klein focused the camera on the reflected image (himself taking the photograph), defocusing the papers and the bottles. He revealed the camera mount over the papers, his own authorial presence, and the viewer’s position as a vertically oriented body standing over a flat surface that is irrupting outwards. The signs of fecundity continue, George Baker described Thek’s approach to the image as “a growing organism, what has been called a ‘rhizome,’ multiplying and dividing from out of its own ruins and decay- even out of the lifeless cemetery of the newspaper’s prison- with the anarchic force of life itself”.88 Besides the false and real mushroom caps inserted into bottles, and the presence of real and fake flowers in the last few images of the book, an errant

88 Baker, 196
shoe seems an overt symbol of the move towards the representation of verticality. The shoe appears filled with the satin cord that falls down from the camera mount connecting the viewer to the scene with its foreshortened curving.

These last pages show how *A document* deploys not only the visual effect of collage, but also its sculptural nature. By representing objects piling onto one another Thek offers a model of emergent verticality that is not counter to but rather *emerges* from the horizontal flatbed. Crucially Thek never fully reverts to a vertical model of spectatorship (the book and its images remain flat) but offers a reconfiguration of Steinberg. Steinberg’s formulation that the switch from verticality to horizontality was also a shift from “nature to culture” seems to be forestalled by the emergence of a peculiar hybrid spectatorship. The change from a world space, to the flatness of a screen or a floor is evident in the fundamental structure of *A document*, however the re-assertion of the vertical *within* the horizontal shows that the flatbed is not a grave for the images of the public sphere. Thek’s proposition is that the re-constitution of the vertical subject (if not the vertical orientation of the viewer) through sedimentation is the inevitable result of the material qualities of the reproduced image. In Steinberg’s terms, Thek’s work envisions the return of nature as the logical extension of the flat-bed picture plane, the vertical subject was momentarily banished, but remains latent in the new horizontality.

For Steinberg, the essence of the flatbed picture plane was its operational nature as the “work surface stood for the mind itself- dump, reservoir, switching center, abundant with concrete references freely associated as in an internal monologue- the outward symbol of the mind as a running transformer of the external
world, constantly ingesting incoming unprocessed data to be mapped in an overcharged field”. In a psychic field, these elements lack weight, yet Thek reasserts their material reality. The flatbed picture plane as a reservoir or switching center lends *A document* a liminality appropriate to its understanding as a product unformed in relation to a specific final product (the Stedelijk exhibition). Baker identifies this extended field of the flatbed as “an image-bed... an oneiric field”. The book and its images very much do feel like a stage for dreams. The *International Herald Tribune*, and *Time* magazine still flowed into the studio on Prinseneiland. However their presence was an opportunity to slowly absorb raw information, and enrich it with the visual materials collected as byproducts of the creative process. Baker identifies this as a process of growth, an explosion of organic chaos expanding both downwards (as in a rhizome) and upwards (as in the bottles sprouting clay mushrooms that appear near the end of the book). The flatbed as a site for “ingesting incoming unprocessed data” seems to render the news (the Tribune and Time magazine) as both kind of blockage and opening. The ultimate effect of the flatbed in relation to Thek’s work here is not to simply place an unmediated representation of a deep psychological truth on the image plane (along the lines of Rosenbergian formalism’s interpretation of Jackson Pollock). Instead it shows the opposite, that the external visual and textual cultural fields that we are all thoroughly enmeshed in can act as a launching point for richly imagined worlds that draw from instead of eschewing the world at large. The act of sedimentation is Thek’s way of building up and out of the grid of the newspaper. This modification of the flat-bed is markedly spatial but also distinctly

89 Leo Steinberg, 32  
90 George Baker, 195  
91 George Baker, 196
temporal. The construction of the vertical takes place across pages that amount to a set of narrative cycles.

“TIME IS NOW”

While he makes a formidable contribution in offering *A document* as a work that evokes an organic model of emergence from the horizontal picture plane, George Baker describes the buildup of images as a scattered but linear process. While Baker focuses on growth as primarily a spatial project, *A document* also works within a specific temporal framework. Newspaper’s dual cyclical and linear connotations offer a clue to the complex connections between the spatial and temporal effects of *A document*. Thek’s interest in time is well established and became increasingly pronounced around the publication of *A document*. The exhibition poster for his Moderna Museet, Stockholm installation (Winter 1971-1972, the Moderna Museet co-published *A document*) contains a set of three pocket watches chained together. One has all of its numbers reversed, another has two sets of the numbers one to twelve, and two of the watches features four hands. The watches are above the words “TIME IS NOW” written backwards. This absurdist rendering of non-functional watches combined with their apparent caption is helpful for considering the ways that Thek’s relationship to time is not a systematic one. Unlike the work of On Kawara, or Hanne Darboven with their meticulously rendered serial gestures, Thek was not invested in a metronomic rendering of time.

The concept of sedimentation with its geological resonance recalls my earlier approach to the temporal dimension of Thek’s Meat Pieces. By understanding those
works within the context of Robert Smithson’s geological model of time, Thek’s work can be understood as the juxtaposition of the geological impulse of Minimalism against the biological urgency of the abject. The juxtaposition of two dissonant temporal modes links the Meat Pieces with *A document*. While the former placed the temporality of industrialism and geology, around the abject body, the latter connects the steadily repetitive public timekeeping of the newspaper, with the temporal idiosyncrasy of personal memory (photography and the snapshot) and the artistic process (as indicated by the studio floor).

The temporality of the photograph and the snapshot are enlisted as material for narrative cycles of construction and erasure. As materials are piled on the floor, they are continuously rearranged. The pages of *Time* magazine turn throughout the book, starting with the cover of the issue on the cover of *A document* and continuing onwards. This paging action echoes the viewers’ own interactions as they too proceed through the pages of *A document*. Not every image includes the magazine. Throughout the book photographs are attached to the edge of the magazine with paper clips. The paper clips reinforce the duality of the photographs as both material objects and representations, emphasizing the depth of the piles of paper. As each page of the magazine turns, the heap becomes thicker, accumulating page after page of visual annotation. However turning a page of *A document* is does not necessarily turn a page of *Time* magazine. Sometimes the same two pages of the magazine remain open across several pages of the book. Different images are clipped onto its edges, new objects may be piled onto its surface. While the *International Herald Tribune* remains constant throughout, repeating the same stories, *Time* progresses in fits and starts. It
lingers and remains as the variable surface for images and objects to circulate on and around.

The increasing physical density of *Time* magazine produces the impression of a mounting overload of visual content. Four times in *A document* the cumulative tendency of the book is abruptly ended by single images that dominate the page. Three of these dividers are images from a book of wallpaper samples, from a kitsch image of rabbits, to floral and forested scenes. These three images give a visual respite from the concentrated intensity of the surrounding photographs. The book of wallpaper samples is aligned so that the gutter of that book runs down the center of the photograph. This re-emphasizes the simultaneous status of the image as representation and physical object, as the shadow of the wallpaper samplers hovers above the newspaper in much the same way that *A document* also refuses to lay flat on a table. The wallpaper samples read as acts of willful erasure. Like the newspaper below them, the wallpaper is an industrial product. It is a visual relief but it is also readymade and generic, prominently featuring the repeated stamp of its manufacturer and product number. It obscures the messy sprawl below, if only temporarily.

The last sequence of photographs differs from the first three sections. After the shift towards the depiction of verticality emerging from the flat-bed picture plane, the last photographs of the book are of a striped pillow that occupies the entire image. In the center of the first image is a distinctly coffin shaped ashtray, with a stepped form that recalls Thek’s interest in pyramids. Across this final sequence of three photographs, the ashtray filled with cigarette butts moves across the field of the striped pillow until finally exiting the scene, leaving behind only an indentation.
marking where it had sat. If the book’s final third builds out and upward reaching towards the lens and the viewer, this volumetric reach is all erased and destroyed by the concluding three pages. This ending is prefigured by the wallpaper breaks but this final erasure escalates in a way that matches the physical escalation of the last section of the book. As the book increasingly traded images for objects, the materialized subjects shifted from representation (the paper-clipped horizontal printed matter) to the bottles and mushrooms that stand erect and point towards the camera. This physicality required an equally decisive break, instead of reduction to a single image (as with the wallpapers) the end pages of the book block out all figurative elements. Instead of a watercolor forest, or cartoon rabbits, there are the stripes of the pillow. All of the rearrangements and juxtapositions amount to nothing. Progress is reduced to another grid, moving from the newspaper, to the striped pillowcase with its implications of sleep and the horizontality of death. The pillowcase refers to the horizontality and lowness of the sleeper. The pillow with its associations of sleeping and dreaming is appropriate given Steinberg’s understanding of the flat-bed picture plane as the site of visual processing. With the placement of the pillow at the end of the book, the entire work might be considered a dream sequence run backwards. At its conclusion, the dreamer has awoken, leaving the imprint of their head on the page. However in place of a head, there is only a coffin shaped ashtray, suggesting that sleep is a kind of death, and waking, a resurrection.

The final page of the book, with its notable indent shows that even after the flattening of the flat-bed picture plane, depth re-forms itself from the center of the horizontal and the flat. On the left edge of the last page, newspaper just barely peeks
out from behind the pillow. After turning the last page and closing the book, the reader sees the back cover. The back cover is the left half of the first image of the book, half of the familiar International Herald Tribune spread, nearly unadorned except for a shadow extending across several inches of the upper left corner. With none of the recognizable piles of accumulated detritus, the back cover is a fresh start. The back cover of the book is also part of it’s beginning. In this fitting recursion, Thek ties the ending of the abstracted pillowcase from the last three pages, to the back cover that implies a new start (but not a new day).

Cycles of accumulation followed by a definitive end (that cycles backwards) show the erratic advance of A document’s artistic workflow against the backdrop of the continuous daily production of the newspaper. In the same way that the meat piece within Andy Warhol’s Brillo Box disrupts the complacent industrialized repetition of the object and its image, Thek’s insertions into the graphic field of printed matter reroute the production of endlessness. Pamela Lee describes Kawara and Warhol’s “temporal extensiveness, suggesting a peculiar projection into the future, through belaboring the present”.\textsuperscript{92} The belabored present is comparable to the continuing presence of the single spread of the International Herald Tribune beneath all of the complex interactions in A document. Lee goes on to note that “we could write volumes on conceptual art’s engagement with time: it is an obsession that is endless in itself”.\textsuperscript{93} When Lee confronts the question of the individual’s agency in the face of the endlessness of time and the insignificance of the individual actor, she takes a pessimistic position. Registering ones own insignificance, as Kawara does, is

\textsuperscript{92} Pamela Lee, Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 278.
\textsuperscript{93} Lee, 288
the only possibility Lee offers. This deeply depressing proposition is the “ethic of surviving, strategizing… to bear unflagging witness to [time’s] endlessly accelerating projections”. Everyday is rendered equal in its potential for another painting. This equalizing force extends backwards and forwards in time, all that one could expect from Kawara, is more of the same. A document is an alternative to the endless numbing sublime, or what Lee calls the “bad infinity” that plagues art in the 1960s.

“Bad Infinity” and the Everyday

Lee’s formulation of the “bad infinity” takes Hegel’s model of a failed dialecticism that oscillates between two poles, and applies it to the acceleration of time in the 1960s. As the popularity of forecasting the future reached a fever pitch, ideas of the future came to dominate the present. By merely recognizing and presenting the conditions of the present, the potential for a new future vanishes under the sign of the belabored present. The future as envisioned by artists like Andy Warhol, and On Kawara will simply be more of the same. Lee reads Warhol’s infamous Empire and Sleep (both 1963-1964) as using an aesthetic of boredom that eradicates the viewers’ expectations of the future as any significant departure from the present. Kawara’s Today Series ran for 48 years. From 1966 until his death Kawara created paintings with that day’s date in the format of whatever country he was in at the time. If the painting was not satisfactorily completed by midnight it was destroyed. A handmade box lined with a newspaper clipping from the day the painting was made accompanies each painting. Lee points out that calling these

94 Lee, 307
95 Lee, 288
paintings the *Today Series* seems like a joke. The essence of Kawara’s project is its continuity. It does not point to the singular moment of the present indicated by today, but to the sprawling quality of time. For Kawara, the category of “today” loses its meaning, subsuming every “yesterday”, and all the “tomorrows”. As much as the *Today Series* is the dispersal of the individual moment, it is also the dispersal of the individual. Lee’s “ethic of survival” suggests that Kawara steps back from time to see its vastness, and register his insignificance in the smallness of the day to day. As Lee explains it, belaboring the present, lingering in time only results in more time; specifically it produces more of the same. Thek too lingers in time, but manages to do so without conceding to the non-productive malaise of boredom and infinity.

Thek acknowledges the bad infinity and instead of paralleling or parodying it, *A document* shows an artist who slows down by lingering in the past. Time passes in the studio around the aging documents that are the *International Herald Tribune* and *Time* magazine. As objects and images accumulate, *A document* grows upwards above the repetitious newspaper. There may be older printed material, but in the context of the book’s narrative ecology, the newspaper is the site of origin. Thek chooses to operate constructively within the grid of time. Kawara’s *Today Series* is modeled off of the newspaper. The content differs each day, but the form remains constant. With the newspaper as his model, Kawara settles into the bad infinity with its failure to surpass the present moment. Kawara’s work accepts the documentary linear premise of the newspaper, appropriating it as an act of witnessing history. Kawara’s work ensures that no matter what section the newspaper is taken from or what language it is in, the viewer always knows instantly what date it is from.
However the date of the *International Herald Tribune* is just outside of the frame of the photographs. This exclusion reinforces the repetitive and unchanging nature of the news. If each new day bears such a strong resemblance to the one before it, if the future really is just more of the same, there is no point in changing the newspaper with the times. Thek suggests that pushing back against the onslaught of time and its pressures might be as simple as falling behind.

**Coda**

Thek adopts the newspaper not as his model, but as his base, attaching his work to the present as it recedes into the past. The newspaper becomes instantaneously obsolete. The moment it is printed the world moves on. Thek’s use of the newspaper as material base engages not only with time and history, but also as the productive use of disposability and obsolescence. Kenny Schachter notes that with his newspaper paintings, “Thek made painting immediately historical, affixing himself to his era like a leech or a parasite”. George Baker offers Thek’s productive image bed as an orgiastic model of promiscuity, a social space of exchange. A further step can be taken with Helen Molesworth’s observation that the newspaper has an anal-fecal dimension, “repetition and cycles of consumption and disposal have as much to do with anality as they do with newspapers”. The newspaper as a symbol of not only renewal and rebirth, but also disposal, re-frames *A document*’s use of news media as the abject. As a base, newspaper resembles compost or manure. It constitutes an

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96 Schachter, 120  
97 Baker, 196  
abject support system that allows the images transplanted above it, and grafted onto it to flourish and grow. With time and patience, the newspaper’s materiality promises fecundity.

In many ways A document takes on the appearance of a personal archive. Thék’s unruly archive models the functional recycling of society’s discards. On Kawara’s works including I Met, I Read, I Went, and I Got Up (1968-1979) present the individual life subjected to the aesthetics of bureaucratic administration. These works are presented as a series of binders containing pages and pages each representing a day in Kawara’s life, where he traveled, whom he saw, and postcards marking what time he had woken up. Life takes on the appearance of data, neatly assembled and pre-processed. These works at once reveal everything and nothing about Kawara himself. Similarly, the Today Series with its pre-set canvas sizes, and individual boxes, appear to be made especially for the archive. One imagines them piled up neatly, corner to corner, dutifully materializing time. A document as flat-bed reflects the processing system at work, like a dream it shows the mind at work sorting and reflecting. Through its serial nature (the same images, and newspaper repeating and reconfiguring) offering a sense of the passage of time. Countless snapshots of the studio and sculptures from different angles make it easy to imagine Thék endlessly pondering his daily work, scrutinizing it in every possible context to consider his next steps. The proliferation of printed matter, and the ease of photography and reproduction that enabled the creation of A document resembles Geoffrey Batchen’s proclamation that “history has become a matter of personal invention – a conjuring of

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talismans of the not now as a way of confirming our own fragile presence in time and space”. The snapshots of studio production, candid images of Thek and his sculptural alter-egos, and his friends and assistants all act as insertions of the artist and his life into the always already historical documents of the newspaper and the magazine. The sprawling halting action of the book calls the viewer to regard their current moment.

Regarding Now

To regard the current moment without losing sight of the historical flow of time all around us; this might be one iteration of the models Thek conveys throughout these works. Thek offers the possibility of a kind of bifocal lens on time. We can participate in social worlds; and enjoy the immanence of our bodies, while keeping one eye on the clocks of tradition, and history. Ultimately time is contingent upon change and fluctuation, even and especially what cannot be foreseen.

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Appendix

Figure 1:
Paul Thek, *Untitled*, 1964, from the series Technological Reliquaries. Wax, metal, wood, paint, hair, cord, resin, and glass 24 × 24 × 7 ½ in. (61 × 61 × 19.1 cm).
Watermill Center Collection © The Estate of George Paul Thek; courtesy of Alexander and Bonin, New York
Figure 2:
Andy Warhol, *Brillo Box (Soap Pads)*, 1964. Synthetic polymer paint and silkscreen ink on wood 17 1/8 x 17 x 14" (43.3 x 43.2 x 36.5 cm) Museum of Modern Art, New York Gift of Doris and Donald Fisher © 2015 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
Figure 3:
Wax, painted wood, and Plexiglas,
14 × 17 × 17 in. (35.6 × 43.2 × 43.2 cm).
Philadelphia Museum of Art; purchased with funds contributed by the Daniel W. Dietrich Foundation, 1990
© The Estate of George Paul Thek; courtesy of Alexander and Bonin, New York
Figure 4:
Andy Warhol, *Set of Four Boxes: Campbell's Tomato Juice; Del Monte Peach Halves; Brillo Soap Pads; Heinz Tomato Ketchup* (1964)
acrylic and silkscreen ink on wood in four parts
Campbell's: 10 x 19 x 19½ in. (25.4 x 48.3 x 49.5 cm.)
Del Monte: 9½ x 15 x 12 in. (24.1 x 38.1 x 49.5 cm.)
Brillo: 17 x 17 x 14 in. (43.2 x 43.2 x 35.6 cm.)
Heinz: 10 x 19 x 9½ in. (25.4 x 48.3 x 24.2 cm.)
Figure 5: Andy Warhol, *White Burning Car III* (1963)
Figure 6:
Paul Thek, *Meat Piece with Warhol Brillo Box*, 1965
On display at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, in 1970
Figure 7:
Paul Thek, *Untitled* (1966)
Wax, paint, polyester resin, nylon monofilament, wire, plaster, plywood, melamine laminate, rhodium plated bronze, and Plexiglas, 14 × 15 1/16 × 7 1/2 in. (35.6 × 38.3 × 19.1 cm).
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase with funds from the Painting and Sculpture Committee 93.14
© The Estate of George Paul Thek; courtesy of Alexander and Bonin, New York. Photograph by Geoffrey Clements
Figure 8:
Stainless steel and plexiglass
33 × 68 × 48 in. (83.8 × 172.7 × 121.9 cm)
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase with funds from the Howard and Jean Lipman Foundation Inc. 68.36
Figure 9:
Graphite and colored pencil on paper. Private Collection
Figure 10:
Paul Thek, *Untitled* (1966)
Wax, Plexiglas, paint, melamine laminate, and metal
Falckenberg Collection, Germany
Figure 11:
Figure 12:
Paul Thek, *Untitled* (1966)
Wax, Plexiglas, paint, melamine laminate, and metal
Falckenberg Collection, Germany
Figure 13:
Paul Thek, *Untitled (Chair with Crow and Meat)* (1968)
Wood, wax, paint, leather, and taxidermic crows
Kolumba, Cologne
Figure 14:
Paul Thek, *Untitled (Headboxes)* (1968)
Wood, wax, glass, leather, and paint
Kolumba, Cologne
Figure 15:
Installation view of *A Procession in Honor of Aesthetic Progress: Objects to Theoretically Wear, Carry, Pull or Wave* (1968)

Figure 16:
Figure 17:
Richard Serra, *To Lift* (1967)

Figure 18:
Fresnes Prison, Photograph from Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*
Figure 19: Helio Oiticica’s *Parangole*

Figure 20: *A document made by Paul Thek and Edwin Klein (1968)*
Figure 21:  
A document made by Paul Thek and Edwin Klein (1968)

Figure 22:  
A document made by Paul Thek and Edwin Klein (1968)
Figure 23:
A document made by Paul Thek and Edwin Klein (1968)

Figure 24:
A document made by Paul Thek and Edwin Klein (1968)
Figure 25:
*A document made by Paul Thek and Edwin Klein (1968)*

Figure 26:
*A document made by Paul Thek and Edwin Klein (1968)*
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