BURIAL OF THE WHITE MAN

SternbergPress

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BY ERIK NIEDLING

WITH TEXTS BY
INGO NIERMANN,
ANN COTTEN,
AND JAKOB NOLTE

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Erik Niedling with Ingo Niermann
Burial of the White Man

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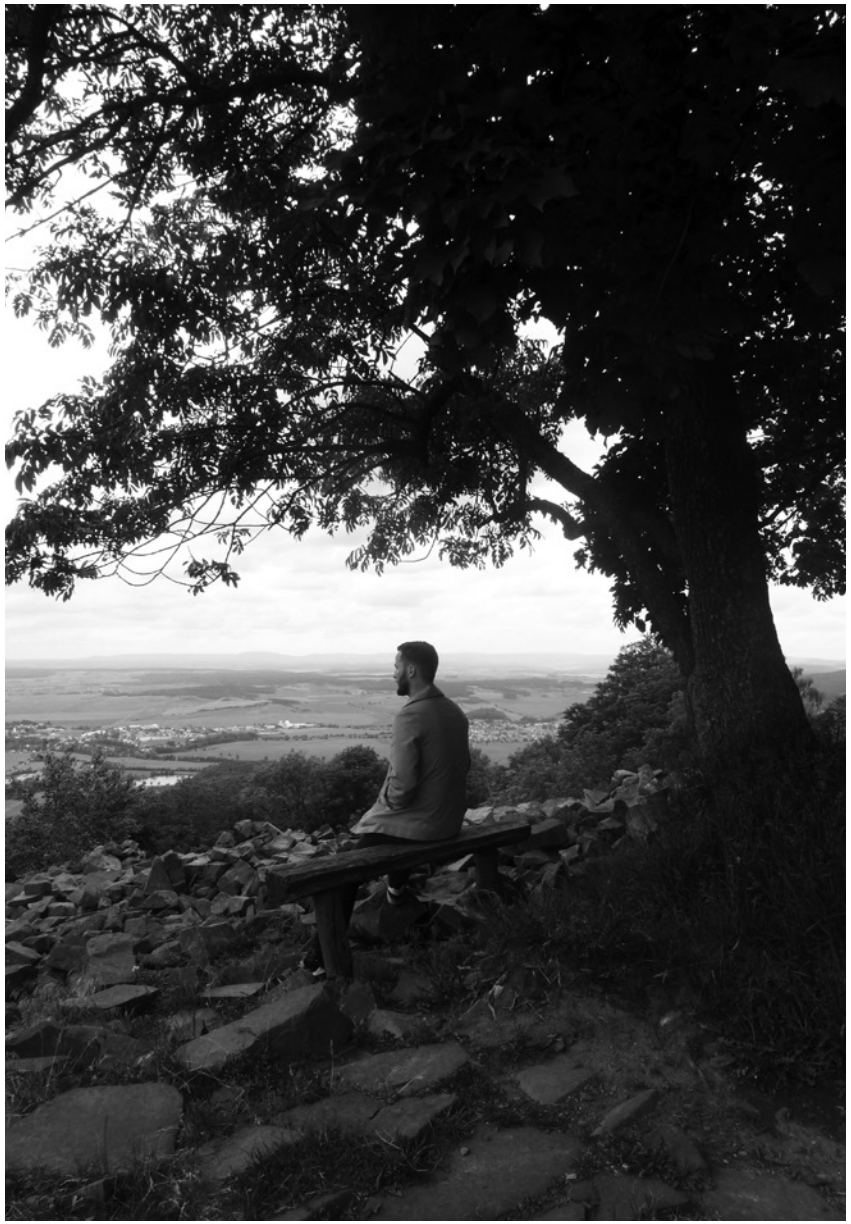
For Rosa

“Nothing lives long. Only the earth and the mountains.”
Death song of Chief White Antelope, Sand Creek,
Colorado Territory, November 29, 1864





The Great Pyramid

The battery had died, that was all. I took a seat on the curb in front of the auto repair shop, next to the man with the bowl cut. I had met Ingo Niermann for the first time the day before at a reading for his book *Minusvisionen*, and his reticent manner reminded me of one of the young monks in the film of *The Name of the Rose*. My neighbor and friend Jens Thiel was a protagonist in his book of conversations with failed entrepreneurs, and we had organized the reading together at the gallery in Erfurt that represented me. Our guest's run-down Volkswagen Golf went on strike in front of our doorstep the morning after the moderately attended event. With drooping shoulders and a dirty pink tote bag in hand, Ingo gave me an open look. He had placed a note under the right windshield wiper of his illegally parked car: "Dear Police, unfortunately the ignition gave out here of all places. We are making every effort to see to

its speedy repair." Protective instincts stirred within me. For all his seeming helplessness, Ingo had an air of clarity and serenity about him, as though he harbored secret knowledge. Looking down, Ingo swayed slightly back and forth and with barely audible words accepted my offer to help. Jens and I pushed the car and got it going again. Ingo sat in the front passenger seat while I drove it to the auto shop. I had exchanged few words with him until then. Now, in a whisper, he asked me what I did. I told him about my current projects and the problems I was having with small Erfurt as a place of residence. Ingo listened to me attentively but said very little himself.

I was a little-noticed artist in the provinces. After a few years working as a photo assistant in Cologne, I freelanced in Thuringia until the late 1990s. It wasn't until a violent drug-fueled Christmas Eve in 1998 sowed discord and scattered my circle of friends that I began to rethink my life. Rather than continue staying up all night partying, I started to immerse myself in art history, taking out books from the library and reading magazines. I was in my mid-twenties and a new world was opening up—everything I had done before seemed bleak and meaningless by comparison.

I hadn't had much contact with the art world until then, a circumstance that changed with a chance encounter soon after that Christmas Eve. A car battery was to blame in that instance as well, only this time it was my own. One bitterly cold morning, I got into my beat-up Jeep Cherokee. The temperature had dropped to minus twenty degrees Celsius overnight and the battery had not withstood the shock. Looking out the fogged-up side window, I saw a man step out of an inconspicuous door. He rubbed his palms together and blew into his hands. Seizing the opportunity, I hurriedly lowered the window to ask him if he could give me a jump start. "I need a jump start myself!" he replied. It turns out he was referring to his business. Jörk Rothamel had recently opened a gallery in Erfurt. After studying art history in Saint Petersburg, and an intermezzo as director of the local Angermuseum, Rothamel was now trying his

luck as a gallery owner. He helped me bring my car back to life with a jumper cable, and we arranged to meet for tea in his new space. I had no art to show him, but Rothamel and I would meet from time to time and I would update him on the development of my work.

Since the early noughties I lived with my girlfriend Kitty and our Doberman Butch in a cheaply rented former factory floor. We split the 250-square-meter space in two, with a large sliding door in the middle. One side served as our sparsely furnished living area and the other was my studio, which I also used as a gym. Kitty pursued her studies in education and worked the bar at a club in town. Every morning we were gently awakened by Butch pushing his cold snout under our covers. Our love was still new, but I was sure I had found the woman I would spend my life with. Ten days after we got together on New Year's Eve 2000, I had a black rectangle tattooed between my shoulder blades, leaving bare skin in the shape of the letters K I T T Y.

In my youth I'd practiced judo, and I'd recently discovered boxing. I set up regular meetings with friends and acquaintances to fight in my studio-gym. Inspired by the movie *Fight Club*, we followed one simple rule: We fight one on one until someone gives up or gets knocked out. My assistant at the time stood out for his extreme toughness. His face was so blood-smeared after one of our fistfights; his glittering eyes stood out in stark contrast to the slick red. I set up my large-format camera and light for our next fight. The portrait of bloody Thilo became the cornerstone of my first creative phase as an artist.

After almost two years executing a photographic series of masked and maltreated faces, Rothamel invited me to exhibit in his gallery in May 2001. I gave the exhibition the loaded title "Produkt verschiedener Faktoren"—product of various factors. The opening was well attended and Rothamel sold two of my photographs. My ego exploded, and from then on I believed I would go down in art history. Totally clueless, I imagined an artist's success as a long staircase that you had to climb step by step. As though it

were a law of nature: all you had to do was consistently develop your work and at some point you would inevitably reach your goal. I made a handshake agreement with Rothamel that he would represent me as an artist from then on. In the fall of that year, he took the large-format photograph of Thilo's bloody face to the Art Forum Berlin art fair and sold it to a Colombian collector.

In the meantime, Jens Thiel had taken up residence one floor below us, having sought refuge in his hometown of Erfurt after the first internet bubble burst. He had been a shareholder in a Berlin start-up that tried to establish American coffee culture in Germany. After quarreling with his partners, he sold off his shares and used the money to build a little hipster paradise with a huge central living area and attached rooms for him and his rotating student subtenants.

Jens was a lanky man with cropped blond hair and a slightly hunched, swinging gait. He had moved to the West shortly before German reunification and completed an economics degree in London. He was well read and kept up with the international press; his loft was piled high with books and magazines like *Wallpaper* and *Architectural Digest* and old issues of *Tempo*, the legendary German lifestyle rag. My interest in fashion, design, architecture, and literature had been sparked by devouring Bret Easton Ellis novels with my childhood friend Boris Lochthofen in the nineties, but after falling out with Boris over matters of the heart, I didn't have anyone to share those interests with. Jens and I developed a lively friendship.

My day-to-day life was uncomplicated and the cost of living in Erfurt was low. It was a fairly happy and carefree time. But something was missing. I wanted to create something really relevant that would also make me successful. This led me to frequent conversations about art and architecture with Jens and Heiko Holzberger, a civil engineer. We drew up lofty plans, such as the construction of two monumental towers made from concrete building blocks that would move toward one another, block by block, in a nonstop rhythm, constantly switching places.

Much later, Ingo told me that he had felt sorry for me that day in front of the mechanic's shop since I stood almost no chance of being a successful artist with my work, which resembled the already canonized Düsseldorf School of Photography, no matter how hard I tried. He already knew that then. I did not. His VW Golf fitted with a new battery, Ingo drove me back to my studio and we said goodbye. It would be four years before we met again.

Over the next years I worked on various photo series, and showing the large-format prints at institutions, galleries, and art fairs—in hopes that the next series would finally bring my big breakthrough. Rothamel would sell things from time to time, though I mostly made a living producing album covers, posters, and music videos. My art career ran in parallel with 1st Decade Records, an electronic music label I cofounded with Sebastian Bohn and Andreas Kubat. I was in charge of the label's image as well as that of band Northern Lite, which consisted of Bohn, Kubat, and alternating guitarists. Defying expectations, the label became successful after a short start-up phase, and we put out one record after the other. The first edition of our CD compilation series *Neo.Pop* encapsulated the club sound of the time and secured us a small place in the electronic music landscape. Soon after, major labels took notice of 1st Decade—we collaborated with Warner Music, and later with Universal. However, I still saw a future for myself in art, and I worked with Jens on various ideas. Among other things, we produced a series of camouflage-patterned Monobloc chairs that we exhibited at Art Cologne, and together with Heiko we kept searching for ways to realize the towers.

After Kitty gave birth to our daughter Rosa on a cold and sunny November day in 2005, my sense that I was fighting a losing battle in Erfurt and had to move to Berlin grew stronger. I knew that many artists, especially women, decided not to have children in order not to jeopardize their careers. In no way did I want to end up a bitter artist who spent his days blaming others for his failure. I never

doubted that I would have a family. I was sure I could do both: have a family and be a successful artist.

I fell out with Jens that same year. We had argued about our respective part in some idea or another. Jens was highly intelligent but was regularly overcome by fits of rage. He had tasted success once and was often angry about his current situation. A few weeks before our argument, Jens had told me about a new project of Ingo's. His blog with Ingo, *Minusvisionen*, had put out a call for ideas on how to save Germany from its current state of high unemployment and economic stagnation for Ingo's next book, *Umbauland*:

Ingo Niermann, Sunday, June 5, 2005, 1:03 p.m.

Who Will Save Germany?

When we watch television, we open ourselves to stories that we avoid in real life because they would scare or bore us too much. Television is noncommittal—we tune in and out as we like. It's always on. Watching it is the only way to face the desperate question "who will save Germany?" even if we harbor no patriotic sentiment. The proposals need only convince, fascinate, or shock us for a few minutes. A proposal could be an appeal to the government or to the people. Finding ten willing participants might be enough. An invention might be exclusively offered to a national corporation or auctioned internationally to see whether any national firm is prepared to make the best bid.

One thing is certain: those who want to save their own country should at least want to save people around the world. But the path leads through national television. It can't be an international "Who Will Save the World?" show. The participants can be international, but the show has to make use of the country's own, homegrown pessimism. Rancor, despair, or schadenfreude over one's own demise can easily create a sense of superiority: we are proud of our special sensitivity that alone can save the word.

The idea for this program came to me more than two years ago in a conversation with film director Frauke Finsterwalder. There have been number of calls to rescue Germany since then, and the situation has only grown more desperate. But we were afraid that the idea would either be stolen or that TV channels were ill prepared to understand them. Worst-case scenario, the idea would be stolen without being understood. Now we know we just have to do it. If you have any suggestions as to how to save Germany or the whole world, please write to mail@ingoniermann.com.

Speaking to Jens one morning about the open call, I suddenly had an idea: what we needed was a large concerted effort, like the building of the autobahn system in the 1930s. Why not build a huge pyramid and oblige every unemployed person to participate? This would not only create a world-class attraction, but also unemployment would be at zero in no time. Jens liked my idea, but it sank into oblivion for the time being.

It was only a year later that I remembered that morning with Jens. My friend Maik Bluhm told me that Jens had cofounded Friends of the Great Pyramid (a registered association dedicated to building a giant pyramid) along with Ingo, Heiko, and the writer Christian Kracht—and they had received 89,000 euros in funding from the German Federal Cultural Foundation. I was thunderstruck. I had struggled for years, and now a huge rocket of attention had gone off but I wasn't part of it.

After months of not speaking, I rang Jens's doorbell and asked him about my proposal. Did he tell Ingo about my idea but fail to mention the tiny detail of my authorship? Jens's reaction was immediate and aggressive. Large red spots formed on his head. He huffed and puffed that

Ingo had already had the idea of placing the ashes of every human being in a pyramid in a group exhibition he'd cocurated two years earlier, "Atomkrieg," at Kunsthaus Dresden. Their project had absolutely nothing to do with my idea. I went back to my studio and looked for the handout Ingo had distributed in Dresden. The volume depicted was a giant cuboid, not a pyramid.

What was I supposed to do? Disputing it seemed pointless. I could not claim the idea of building a pyramid as my own, there had already been too many of them in human history. Also, Ingo had expanded the concept to include an essential element: unlike the Egyptian tombs, it would not be a burial place for only one person, but each stone in the pyramid would serve as an urn for the ashes of a single individual. It would grow with every internment.

As the occupant below me worked diligently on plans for the pyramid and gave relentless interviews to international press outlets about the progress of the project, I worked in the studio on a new photo series, *Formation*, with my assistant Thomas Schulze. In an attic of the Erfurt plant nursery Haage I had retrieved an archive of three thousand glass negatives from the 1930s depicting cacti, flowers, and selective-breeding methods. I selected thirty motifs that I reproduced on color film using a large-format camera and then enlarged.

The pyramid association announced an architectural competition involving international architecture firms. Miuccia Prada and Rem Koolhaas chaired the jury. But I had worked with Jens long enough to know that sooner or later there would be conflict between him and his colleagues. For years I had a yellow Post-it note with my current motto stuck inside the old gray tin cabinet where I kept my cameras. Until October 18, 2006, my thirty-third birthday, "humility" was jotted on the faded note. Now, to reflect a new status, it had been replaced by "patience."

In January 2007, I moved into a spotless new studio in Berlin. After a long search I found a suitable place on Heidestraße. By then Rosa was over a year old, and Kitty and I agreed that I would spend half the week in Erfurt and the other half in Berlin. This would allow me to pursue my work in Berlin without restriction and devote the time in Erfurt to my family. Kitty had accepted a position as an elementary-school teacher after finishing her studies and trusted that I wouldn't get up to nonsense in Berlin. The birth of Rosa had welded us even tighter together, and Kitty's one condition was that I not hire an attractive female assistant. Soon after, we abandoned our original plan to make the complete move to Berlin. I became accustomed to commuting between worlds, and the new constellation offered too many benefits. In Erfurt we could count on support from our parents, and the small city seemed an ideal place for our daughter to grow up.

Heidestraße was located along a large fallow near the new Berlin Central Station. There were many artists on the premises, and more and more galleries were opening there as well. I soon made contact with the other artists in my neighborhood, and together we decided to open our own exhibition space. The first attempt failed due to overly different ideas. A second one led to cofounding the project space ZERN in my studio with the sculptor Axel Anklam and my old friend Boris. Rothamel, who could not bring himself to open a gallery in Berlin, eyed my activities with suspicion. A few months after ZERN opened, he presented me with an exclusivity agreement that would bind me to him for all eternity and he also demanded that he receive a portion of any earnings ZERN made. The situation came to a head, and our once cordial relationship cooled noticeably. I felt as though my spouse had presented me with a rigid prenuptial agreement after years of living together, and so I decided to break free of the poisoned relationship.

I had always dreaded being without gallery representation and losing touch with the art market. Now the situation had changed. My immediate neighborhood was teeming with galleries. Hamish Morrison had a spectacular space, and his program was a good fit as well. I had met

him in the courtyard many times, and I liked his unpretentious, friendly style. After one of the gallerist meetings, I asked him if he would like to see my new work. Hamish came to my studio the same day. I showed him *Formation*. He thought the work was good, and I asked him if he would represent me. Hamish pointed out that he had little experience when it came to selling photography, but he would be open to acquiring some. We arranged an exhibition date for the coming spring. I was exhilarated and felt that I was taking a decisive step forward.

Meanwhile, Jens's and Ingo's ideas about the direction of their association drifted further and further apart. Jens had completely worn himself out with the project, and he saw short-term commercialization as his only chance to create a carefree future for himself. Ingo also wanted to make the pyramid a reality, but he had a different time frame in mind and had little use for people who were trying to freeload off the project. Christian Kracht left the association the day after the symbolic laying of the foundation stone for the Great Pyramid in Streetz, near Dessau. He announced his resignation without notice in front of a rolling camera, stating, "I do not see myself as part of the real thing. I was always in love with the idea, but for me the reality is so …"

Ingo and Jens had a complete break some months later. Jens, who was on the verge of a nervous breakdown and sensed treachery everywhere, felt compelled to defend the fruits of his labor and found the ideal scapegoat in Ingo, who, in his view, benefited much more from the attention their project was attracting. The attention the media lavished on the new wonder of the world and the disappointment of having failed again deeply wounded Jens.

Jens and I had been back in regular contact since the laying of the cornerstone. His mental state oscillated between hysterical euphoria and gloomy affliction. He lived in his loft among huge quantities of empty wine bottles. Laundry, documents, and newspapers piled up around him. His roommates asked me to intervene after they found Jens,

rope in hand, in the basement. Jens was smart enough to admit that he was in dire need of help.

Jens and Ingo, who had since learned of my original pyramid idea from Heiko, both called me independently of one another. They needed me to act as mediator because they could no longer communicate substantively. Jens's severe depression rendered him unable to file paperwork for the Federal Cultural Foundation, but he refused to allow Ingo or Heiko access to the association's documents. While I regretted that I had not been part of the project from the beginning, I also saw it as a fortuitous twist of fate that the pyramid had found its way back to me.

I arranged a conciliatory meeting with Ingo and Jens at Prater Biergarten in Berlin. A few minutes after we sat down it became clear that my attempt to mediate between Ingo and Jens was going to fail. Jens accused Ingo of having cast him out and he waved his arms around. He stormed off, and I stayed behind with Ingo. As we got to the street, instead of parting ways we started strolling around the city together. An oppressive heat hung over the city, and the streets were deserted. Everything around us seemed frozen with inertia. But the words poured out between us, never abating. I was well past the age of naive enthusiasm, but I felt a tenderness flowering in my heart nonetheless.

Spurred by Jens's tantrum, we compiled a list of items we would give to a person who was struggling with life to take on an adventure hike. These included, among other things, a video camera, cash, and a rope. At the end of the trip the person would have either found themselves or ended their existence once and for all. Either/or. We never went through with our plan, but the process of developing it was, as he told me later, Ingo's barometer for my resolution.

In June 2008, I exhibited the large-format prints of *Formation* at Hamish Morrison, and Hatje Cantz published an accompanying catalogue with a text by Ingo. It was the first time I was able to live solely from income generated by my

art. I invited Ingo to curate something at ZERN. I assumed he would invite artist friends or hold a reading, but he had something else in mind. Visiting me (a short time later) in my studio, to my astonishment he told me that he himself intended to exhibit. He wanted to set up an office to recruit soldiers for a new U.S. Army and already had a precise idea of how every detail should play out: an initiation with free alcohol to make applicants compliant, forms to collect all the necessary data, and wooden rifles to arm the recruits.

The only thing he was unclear about was how to accomplish it all. Ingo was a bold thinker, but he was dubious about the practical aspects of being an artist. He took for granted that the gallery would make all the necessary arrangements to carry out his proposal. We did so, even though Boris and Axel were initially perplexed by the fact that Ingo would simply deliver the idea and we were supposed to take care of everything else ourselves. We built wooden guns shaped like the American M16 assault rifle and a wall rack to go with them, and set up a recruiting office.

We drove to Kreuzberg to shoot an exhibition trailer. Ingo walked around the neighborhood with the exhibition poster around his neck: a large US flag with the slogan "Join the U.S. Army with Ingo Niermann—Free Drinks." Like when John McClane is forced to stand in the Bronx with a sign reading "I Hate Niggers" around his neck in *Die Hard with a Vengeance*, Ingo strolled through the leftist district passing out invitations to his exhibition. I accompanied him along with Nana Rebhan, a director who had been documenting Ingo's work for many years, to film him and the reactions of others, and to intervene if need be. But there were no confrontations. His peaceful demeanor led most people to take him for a harmless nutjob who posed no real danger. We spent the evening before the opening pasting the exhibition posters between Berlin Central Station and Rosenthaler Platz, including two on the gate of the Hamburger Bahnhof, the contemporary art museum. Everything was prepared down to the last detail: office, recruiters, US flag, posters, flyers, trailer, wooden rifles,

forms, date stamp, ink pad, boxes of vodka, a measuring tape to determine head circumference, and red lipstick to mark the foreheads of recruits with the letters U S A.

Ingo Niermann
Join the U.S. Army
October 31–November 15, 2008

At 6 p.m. on October 31, Ingo Niermann will open a U.S. Army recruiting office at ZERN in his first solo exhibition. Armed recruits will march at 8:30 p.m.

Free drinks.

Once a year on the Pacific island of Tanna in Vanuatu, followers of the John Frum cult—equipped with wooden rifles and with the letters USA painted on their chests—deploy to pay homage to a country in whose wealth they would like to magically participate. Even in Europe the United States was highly revered for its affluence, values, and culture after the Second World War. Little of that remains today. With its aggressive foreign policy and licentious squandering of money and energy, the US has become the most hated country in the world; its citizens are persecuted by terrorists the world over. Today any citizen on Earth can join its coalitions, assuming the correct ideological orientation. The U.S. Army is also active worldwide, but to join it you have to be a US citizen. The intervention "Join the U.S. Army" will change that.

The opening had a different character than others at ZERN. The audience was more international and the atmosphere livelier. Visitors were eager to be recruited, and we equipped them with the dummy rifles. Once enough volunteers had committed to service, we lined them up in

the courtyard. We marched around the premises, led by a former East German military officer who happened to be attending. It turned out to be a terrific party.

A board meeting of Friends of the Great Pyramid took place at my studio the next day. Heiko was elected the new chairman and Ingo remained deputy. I had meanwhile joined the association and was elected treasurer. Jens did not attend despite an announcement to the contrary and was eliminated from the board. We decided that once the waves of attention had subsided, we would secure all material and put the pyramid on ice for the time being. The next day, Jens called me on iChat to explain his absence at the meeting. In the middle of the conversation he went off the rails again and started hurling wild insults, and I reflexively shut my laptop in the middle of his cannonade. After all those years I couldn't stand his tirades anymore.

Three days later, ZERN hosted an election party as part of Ingo's exhibition with the slogan "My Country, Right or Wrong." Barack Obama was elected president of the United States of America and change was in the air. Ingo and I spent a lot of time together preparing his exhibition, and I had the invigorating feeling of having found a companion for future adventures, a person who shared my penchant for gigantomania and who offered friction for my ideas. He did not just want to write books: in the tradition of Daniel Defoe, he was an uncompromising project-maker who wanted his plans to reach people the world over. Despite the seeming impossibility of the goal, Ingo's activities were assertive ways to produce unimagined insights and trigger fundamental developments. And the pursuit of greatness proved to be an anthropological constant that assured Ingo attention from the art world as well as architects and philosophers.

In April 2009, Ingo suggested that we carry out a public intervention in response to a failed competition entry for a unity monument in Berlin, which he had designed with the architect Ralf Pflugfelder. This would be a good opportunity to test our clout.

The Great Flag

What is to become of the long-awaited Monument to Freedom and Unity? The jury for the first round of the competition convened on April 27 and 28, 2009, and unanimously canceled the session because none of the 532 submissions could "fulfill the special and high standards of such a monument."

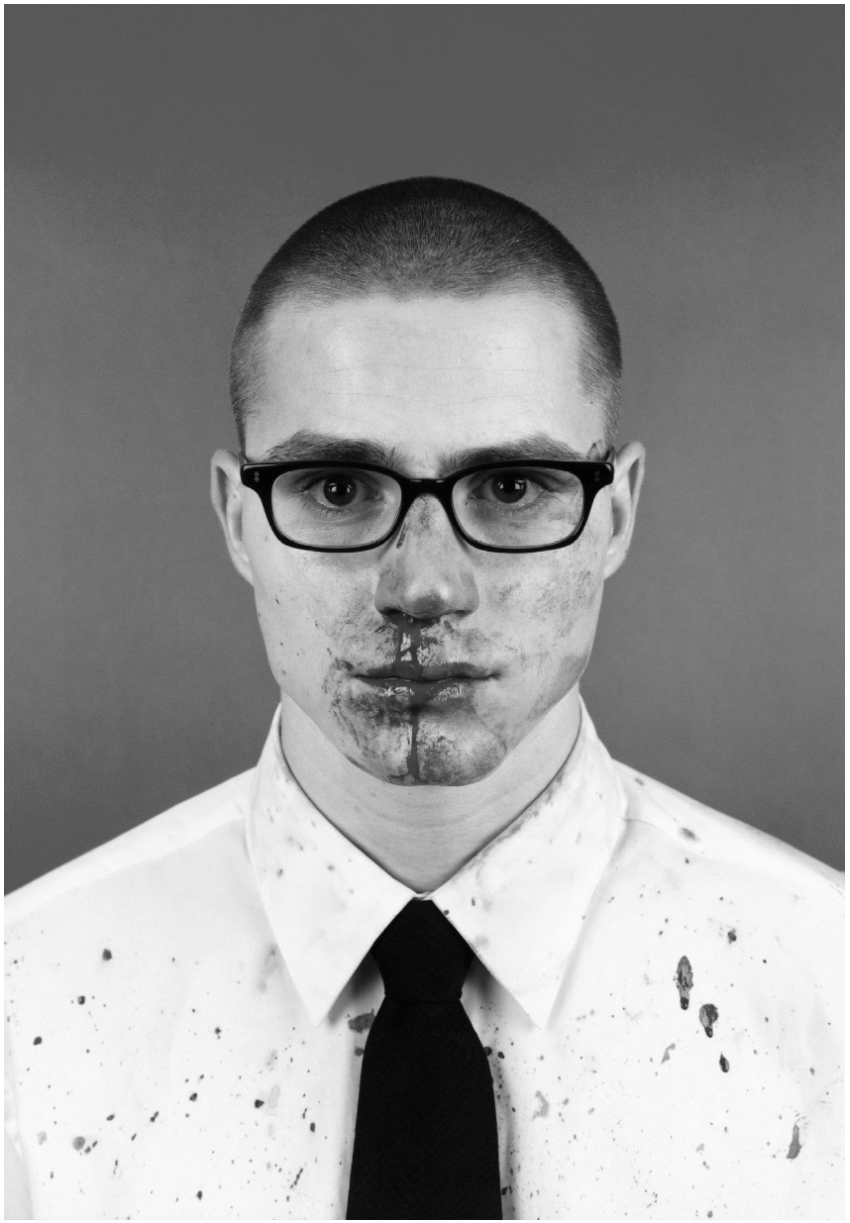
Yet our idea for the monument is high indeed: the construction of Germany's tallest flagpole. This is the only way to outshine the planned neighboring City Palace while simultaneously leaving room for demonstrations of all kinds on the historical pedestal of the sculpture of Kaiser Wilhelm astride a horse. Our Monument to Freedom and Unity cannot only be seen; anyone can step on the pedestal and complete it, pursuant to the motto for the East German "Monday demonstrations" in Leipzig: "Wir sind das Volk"—we are the people. Our Monument to Freedom and Unity should become a place of and for the citizens. A speakers' corner where people can meet, debate, and agitate, or on whose steps they can rest. The people celebrate themselves rather than commemorate a dead emperor.

Ingo Niermann, Ralf Pflugfelder, Erik Niedling

We sent out the press release, and Ingo acquired a mobile flagpole along with a German flag. On May 4 we erected the mast in the space reserved for the monument and hoisted the flag. No one came except for April Lamm of *ArtReview* and an editor for the left-leaning newspaper *Der Freitag*. Still, my assistant Tommy took some compelling pictures that ended up getting published in several national newspapers. The response to our intervention was remarkable considering its straightforwardness and the relatively small amount of effort involved.

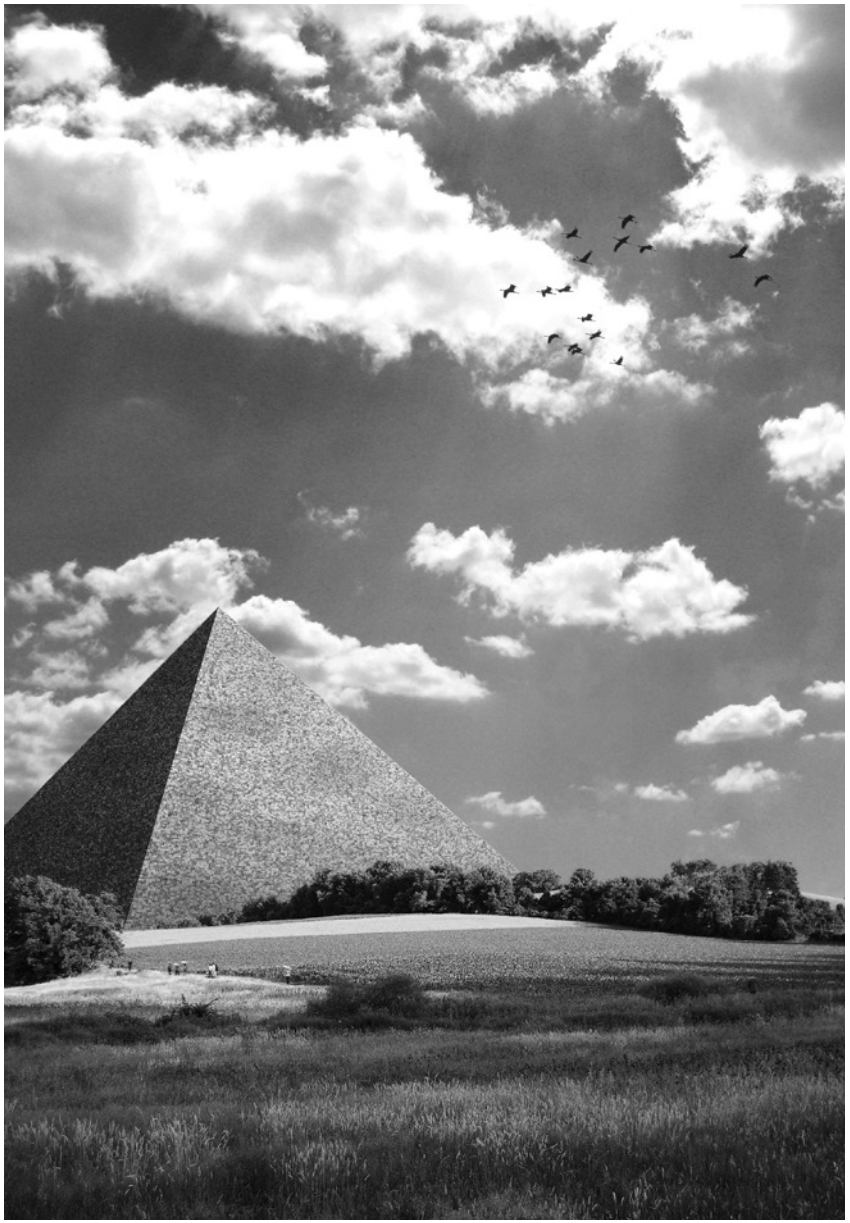
Ingo and I had found a method for efficiently working together: whenever we could not find a solution to a problem despite a long period of deliberation and were about to give up, we would concentrate again beyond the point of exhaustion, and by doing so would often arrive at solutions of particular beauty. When that happened, we'd jump around jubilantly arm in arm through my studio like children. The two of us were completely different, but together we were like a loaded rifle.












IKON
Sicherheit für's Haus
JOIN THE
U.S. ARMY
WITH INGO NIERMANN
FREE DRINKS
FRIDAY OCTOBER 31ST 2008 10:00
ZERN HEIDESTRASSE 10557 BERLIN











The Future of Art

In the fall of 2008 my financial situation changed. Until then I had still managed to make a good living with my work for 1st Decade Records, but when Northern Lite's new album flopped and I fell out with Sebastian Bohn, it was over. Damien Hirst auctioned off his own works at Sotheby's, Lehman Brothers collapsed the following day, and the world plunged into financial crisis. Art, as usual, was the first expense to be cut in times of economic distress, or at least it was in my case.

My intense dialogue with Ingo was affecting my own work as well. I wanted to work in media other than photography in the future, and so I planned a final series of photos that would mark this break and depict the rapidly digitizing world. At the time I was reading the work of Ernst Jünger in chronological order and had reached *Strahlungen I* (Radiance I). There are two entries in Jünger's Second

World War–era diaries where he mentions his "old plan" to "work on black and white," yet he writes that he still lacks the tools for this "masterpiece." I couldn't find any indication that he had ever put his plan into action. I got in touch with Tobias Wimbauer, an indexer of Jünger's work, but he also hadn't heard of any such text.

I took this as an opportunity to "work on black and white" with photography as a medium. On June 3, 2009, I bought all the national and international daily newspapers I could find at Berlin Central Station and divided them by section in my studio: front page, Opinion, Politics, Economy, Business, Sports, and Culture. I burned the stacks of newspaper one by one in the courtyard, in an oil drum punctured with holes for ventilation.

The smoke found its way into the gallery Haunch of Venison. The gallery manager came out to complain. I could understand her reaction, but the smoke would eventually disperse, leaving new art in its wake. I scooped the fragile residue of the incineration into shoeboxes. The writing on the charred paper was still visible after the combustion process, which created a fine texture of different languages and characters in a flowerlike structure of flocculent ash.

My next show at Hamish Morrison was not scheduled until spring of the following year. In the meantime I was looking for ways to make money. I had made some good contacts in the music industry over the years, so what could be better than using them to produce a real hit? The first thing that came to mind was a Scandinavian-style black-metal band. I envisioned an extreme version of Rammstein, faces smeared with corpse paint, singing in German to catchy music. This aesthetic had often appeared in the art context, so Ingo and I came up with a new approach.

A few years back, Ingo had been in Maputo with Christian Kracht, where he'd seen a public toilet on which someone had painted a large German flag and the words "Base Central Madgermany." Ingo told me that workers from

Mozambique formerly employed in East Germany were still waiting to receive half of their salary. The state withheld this money and has not paid the promised disbursement to this day. These people, called "Madgermanes" in their home country, demonstrated regularly for their rights in front of this public toilet. We decided to start the band Madgermany —a group that would produce hits as a means of giving these defrauded people their rightful wages while assuring financial flexibility for ourselves. Ingo wrote a manifesto.

MADGERMANY

All rocked out? Hedonism is the single greatest motif in rock. Rock is the music of common (especially adolescent) people who, in a daily routine of school, work, and financial difficulties, want to let loose and run riot. Rock benefits from the lure of the forbidden in Christian-bourgeois society. And yet hedonism is a systemically necessary part of consumer capitalism. It's not enough that the masses work to ensure their survival. They have to strive for the superfluous in order to either compensate for rationalizations through more consumption or pass their increasing leisure hours in a socially harmless way. After 9/11, US President George W. Bush pleaded with his citizens not to stop buying, and he did not mean canned foods and global radio receivers. The land of plenty, that's where welfare recipients atrophy.

Satanism unflinchingly asserts that affluent society is doomed to destruction. But its own magical circus does nothing to accelerate this downfall. Politicians and bankers manage it on their own, if at all. Hip-hop, by contrast, tried to outstrip consumer capitalism with camp—sex is only good if it costs a lot. This actually did make a number of kids from the ghetto rich and famous. Hip-hop is cargo cult made real. Right away the people whom it works for are no longer in a position to demand wealth, they can only promote it.

Yet as system stabilizing as hedonism may be, ecstasy—its most pronounced form—enables a detachment from the everyday world that could otherwise only be experienced in sleep. While dreaming, we usually passively succumb to this state, and we have to wake up to even notice it. Dozing is more reliable. And the effect can be exponentially greater in conjunction with being high.

Previous rock hedonisms had no interest in these moments of unreality. Instead, they emphasized hedonism as a way of penetrating authentic real life. This is impossible, according to philosophical common knowledge today, but even the epistemological arts envision it only intellectually. As though humans could fly to the moon and blow up the earth, here they would be subject to an evolutionarily predetermined barrier. Even Buddhist meditation acknowledges the world perceptible to the senses to be unreal, but only in order to overcome it completely. By contrast, intoxication and dozing allow us to be happy in this life and deny its existence at the same time. In negative mysticism, we recognize the non-reality of the factual without penetrating another truth.

The greatest antithesis to this somnambulistic rock is the straight-edge movement, which touts sobriety as the one true fun. And yet what both have in common is that at a time when illegal drugs are readily available everywhere, they make the path to ecstasy difficult again. Somnambulistic rock is, in this regard, the elevation of straight-edge to minus-edge, since it uses intoxication-retardant drugs. The handicapped hedonists give others a head start to eventually overtake them. As Valeries, they only use herbal sleep aids such as valerian or hops; as Quilies, synthetic non-prescription sleep aids like NyQuil. In any case, they avoid drugs like Valium or Xanax, which not only have a dampening effect, but comfortably lull the user (as well). To get intoxicated, they recklessly accelerate out

of the dozing state—remaining half-asleep or exhausting themselves until they doze off again. In order to accomplish such acrobatic achievements on more than a chance basis, they use hypnosis and drill.

The first movement to propagate this new rock is MADGERMANY. It takes its name from a public toilet in Maputo. Painted on its side is a German flag with the words BASE CENTRAL MADGERMANY above it in red letters. Mozambicans who were guest workers in the GDR and deprived of a large part of their wages in order to repay Mozambique's debt to East Germany call themselves "Madgermanes." The Madgermanes picket every day in front of the toilet in hopes of finally receiving these lost wages.

To profess oneself a member of MADGERMANY as a German is to say: we are also only guests in our own country. Because Germany is a construct that is reinvented again and again. Rather than glorifying or damning it, and ultimately only expressing your own powerlessness, you could also reinvent Germany itself—immeasurably larger and more magnificent than ever before. Nearly seven billion people live on Earth, and all of them can be drilled and initiated through music and hypnosis. Even animals and plants—they just have to want it. MADGERMANY is a country without borders; it can be everywhere and nowhere.

First, MADGERMANY conquers the night and the forest, then it appears in public places, in offices and in schools, and flies its flag. MADGERMANY travels eastward and southward; where the track becomes impassable, it continues on foot. Always on the lookout for what lies along the way. The fabled Nazi treasure may have been excavated or have decayed long ago, but the even bigger GDR treasure is still concealed somewhere: a billion gold ostmarks. The Madgermanes in Mozambique will get their share.

Now all we needed were people to be in our band, because Ingo and I had no musical talent. I suggested a group of young men from Erfurt. They were well known in the city for their sprawling parties and excessive lifestyles. The fully tattooed Ronny Mutschmann (known to everyone as Mutsch) was the singer in the hardcore band Druckwelle and consumed any party booster he could get hold of, but when sober he was a quiet and sensitive guy.

We drove to Erfurt, and I introduced Ingo to the boys at one of their parties. They were thrilled when we told them about our plans. I started by taking pictures of the group in a earthen hollow in Erfurt's municipal forest. Ingo wrote the song lyrics. Northern Lite guitarist Frithjof Rödel was willing to join the project as producer, and we went to his studio to record the first songs. Mutsch initially saw the lyrics as an imposition. They subverted all his ideas of serious Anglophone rock music, but he eventually sang with abandon:

"Germany's Growing"	*"Deutschland wächst"*
Our breads and our sleds *Are twice as big* *Our wits and our tits* *Are twice as big*	*Unsere Brote und unsere Boote* *sind doppelt so groß* *Unsere Schlitten und unsere Titten* *sind doppelt so groß*
Roads wide as Africa *Pimples big as paprika* *Everyone a monument* *Fuck the cement*	*Die Straßen breit wie Afrika* *Die Pickel groß wie Paprika* *Jeder Mensch ein Monument* *Fick den Zement*
Germany's growing	*Deutschland wächst*

Our mansions and cannons *Are four times as big* *Our rowdies and our Audis* *Are four times as big*	*Unsere Schablonen und Kanonen* *sind viermal so groß* *Unsere Rowdies und unsere Audis* *sind viermal so groß*
Roads wide as Africa *Pimples big as paprika* *Every human being a monument* *Fuck the cement*	*Die Straßen breit wie Afrika* *Die Pickel groß wie Paprika* *Jeder Mensch ein Monument* *Fick den Zement*
Germany's growing	*Deutschland wächst*
Our bunnies and our honeys *Are eight times as big* *Our mountains and our fountains* *Are eight times as big*	*Unsere Hasen und unsere Nasen* *sind achtmal so groß* *Unsere Berge und unsere Zwerge* *sind achtmal so groß*
Roads wide as Africa *Pimples big as paprika* *Every human being a monument* *Fuck the cement*	*Die Straßen breit wie Afrika* *Die Pickel groß wie Paprika* *Jeder Mensch ein Monument* *Fick den Zement*
Germany's growing	*Deutschland wächst*

"Germany Germany"	*"Deutschland Deutschland"*
We drive faster	*Wir fahren schneller*
We burn brighter	*Wir brennen greller*
Our eyes big as plates	*Unsere Augen groß wie Teller*
Give it ten thousand calories	*Gib zehntausend Kalorien*
A hundred liters of gasoline	*Gib hundert Liter Benzin*
We're making adrenaline	*Wir machen Adrenalin*
From Maputo to Pluto	*Von Maputo bis zum Pluto*
We steamroll you flat	*Wir walzen euch platt*
Germany Germany smooth as glass	*Deutschland Deutschland spiegelglatt*
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We recorded four songs and planned to approach my friend Markus Bruns with the demos. Markus had worked in the music industry for many years, and we hoped he could put us in touch with a major label. Unfortunately we never got that far. In late summer 2009, I received a call from Mutsch's girlfriend that put an immediate end to our musical activities. After a night of partying Mutsch got into a brawl that left him seriously injured. He suffered a skull fracture and was admitted to the intensive-care unit. His brain was dangerously swollen, and to reduce the pressure doctors had removed a large part of his skull and induced an artificial coma. It took two weeks before he was out of danger. A career as a singer in our band was out of the question. The erstwhile super-dude now avoided noise and stress of any kind. We decided to let Madgermany rest for the time being.

A few weeks later, I ran into an old acquaintance at an opening at ZERN. Bastian Asdonk was once part of Neonman, a band that had released two records on 1st Decade. Since ending his music career he had worked on business models for Deutsche Telekom, and now he dreamed of making his debut as a writer. Bastian had the idea to write a novel about the art world and asked me to provide him with details. We met regularly in my studio and I gave him information about my life as an artist, designed an oeuvre for his artist protagonist, and read his drafts.

Bastian's primary job was building the video platform 3min, intended to feature short videos devoted to music, art, and culture. What he still lacked in his portfolio was a compelling format on art. He asked me if I had an idea, and mentioned there was an ample financial framework. I called Ingo, who at that point had been writing an interview column for the art magazine *Monopol* for several years. Ingo was a practiced hand at in-depth interviews and it was not easy to convince him of the short format, but after some back-and-forth he had a concept that could fuse Bastian's ideas with our own. We wrote a short treatment and sent it to Bastian, who signaled interest.

The Next Big Thing

Art has experienced an unprecedented boom in the past two decades. That boom ended with the onset of the global financial crisis. Models that have proved successful are under scrutiny. Under these circumstances, author Ingo Niermann decides to become an artist. In each episode he meets one of the greats of the art scene: well-known artists, powerful gallery owners, influential critics, big-time collectors, and museum directors. They tell him what he has to do to succeed as an artist. How should he dress, how should he act, which circles should he mingle in, and last but not least, what art does he have to make to become the first proper international art star of the twenty-first century? After each meeting, Niermann implements the advice given to him and brings it up for discussion in the following meeting. At the end of the season, Ingo Niermann presents his results to the public. Can he succeed in launching the Next Big Thing?

The first formal talks with Telekom revealed that we were expected to get by on a smaller budget than Bastian had previously promised. Still, we could count on a semi-comfortable funding situation. After lengthy negotiations between our lawyer and the lawyer for the production company, I signed the contract in early 2010. Telekom deviated from the norm and agreed to give us carte blanche in creating the series. The first thing we did was change the title to *The Future of Art*.

During preproduction we wondered if I should appear in the series as well—and if so, how. Ingo did not want to do the interviews in tandem with me, and not just because of my modest English skills. He had developed his own methodology for his interviews. I was also well aware of my awkwardness whenever a camera was pointed at me. I had always

kept a low personal profile throughout my artistic career and felt that my works should speak for themselves. Even creating an artist portrait was uncomfortable for me. I was unsure of how I would come off, so as shock therapy I made a short video and posted it on YouTube. Following the example of *Andy Warhol Eating a Hamburger* I filmed myself trying to look as unimpressed as possible while consuming a Knoppers wafer sandwich in a single take. The result was imperfect but good enough to allow myself to appear in the series with an easy conscience. The opportunity was too tempting to let pass: the mere fact that we were casting our series with international stars of the art world would ensure an audience. We agreed that I would also develop a work of art of the future during filming and present it to Ingo at the end.

I lacked any practical experience in filmmaking. So I came up with a plan early on: no cinematic experimentation. The most important thing was flawless documentation of the discussions, which would be combined with footage of us traveling between locations. Our tasks were clearly divided: Ingo coordinated the interviews and prepared them, and I saw to technical matters, equipment, and logistics. I put together a small team that included camera operator Christian Görmer, editor David Adlhoch, and musician Katrin Vellrath, rented the gear, and bought Ingo his first suit to help him define his persona. In early May 2010 we began shooting at Schlachtensee, the Berlin lake in whose cold waters Ingo took a ritual bath. After an introductory conversation between Ingo and myself, we spent the following weeks meeting Olafur Eliasson, Gabriel von Loebell, Philomene Magers, Harald Falckenberg, Antje Majewski, Damien Hirst, Gregor Jansen, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Thomas Olbricht, Marina Abramović, Olaf Breuning, Terence Koh, Genesis P-Orridge, Friedrich Petzel, Marcos Lutyens, Boris Groys, Tobias Rehberger, Thomas Bayrle, and Hans Georg Wagner, owner of Wachsenburg Castle in Thuringia.

The basic problem of our endeavor became apparent when Ingo conducted an interview with me for the series. Ingo

was taking an excursion into the art world as a writer, and I accompanied him to seek my own future as an artist. In contrast to Ingo, who could go back to writing books if his artistic ambitions failed, I could not retreat to my accustomed terrain. I was already there. I had spent over ten years claiming a position in contemporary photography, and now I was putting it on the line. I threw caution to the wind, ignoring all the warnings from Hamish and my friends. They were afraid that my collaboration with Ingo endangered my other accomplishments. Almost no one around me "got" him, and some even thought Ingo had a diabolical streak. It was clear that Ingo was pursuing his own goals in addition to our common goals—I was doing no different. I was not satisfied with the achievable, I willingly accepted the risk of being left empty-handed in the end. The fruits that I had already tasted were too sweet.

As our journey began, I slid into what was for me a hitherto unknown state. Every one of my actions, every word I spoke, my whole existence became part of a performance in which I was a director, an extra, and a spectator all at once. I experienced each of our encounters and absorbed everything I heard as if in a fever dream. My previous world lost its meaning, my views of authorship, art, and the conditions under which they can emerge were turned upside down.

While the first interviews were still about the ideal requirements for a great career as an artist, Ingo's conversation with Gregor Jansen, director of Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, was the first discussion about the kind of art that Ingo would have to produce for lasting success. Ingo told Jansen about his plans: "What I came up with is that I'll have to think of a really big conundrum for me to solve [...]. And that is to create an artwork that will continue to be relevant beyond the twenty-first century. Just like Michelangelo's *David* will probably still be there and still be appreciated the same way it is today, even by people that have long been optimized and are much, much smarter than we are. One that can still somehow be appreciated

as a kind of primitive art form handed down from their ancestors."

Jansen countered that Ingo had already created a work that met all the criteria with the Great Pyramid, but for lasting fame he would have to initiate more pyramid projects and consider whom he collaborates with, where he exhibits, and who should write about it. That was the only way to make fertile ground for long-term success. While a purely analytic approach might be conceptually relevant for a certain period of time, it would not be enough to still be significant in one hundred years. Jansen was more interested in letting the pyramid go than leaving it as a visible symbol. Why not let it disappear again?

Without realizing it, Jansen had played perfectly into his interviewer's hands. Weeks before filming, Ingo had developed a possible idea for his artwork and had discussed it with me. As a complement to the Great Pyramid, which would continue to grow forever, there could be a second pyramid that would disappear after its erection. The Great Pyramid was ill-suited for the art market because it would never be complete and was therefore uncollectable. Ingo's idea for a second pyramid was as simple as it was plausible: every mountain contains a potential pyramid. Depending on the shape and volume, all anyone would have to do is remove superfluous material to reveal the desired shape inside. The principle was similar to constructing a dugout canoe: chip away all the wood that does not belong to the desired boat.

Ingo's idea recalled Bruno Taut's post–First World War plan to carve crystalline forms from Alpine peaks and balance pyramids on their tips. Taut saw the sheer joy in the beauty of such an "Alpine architecture" as a means of fostering universal understanding among nations. The motto for his artist community was "Only great mirth will prevail." But Ingo felt that the pyramid should disappear under the material that had been carved away once its collector and his collection were interned inside. Any changes made can be undone, turning the pyramid back

into a mountain. Two hundred meters tall at least, *Pyramid Mountain* could flatter its owner's ego while considering from the outset their own impending oblivion.

Ingo conducted each interview with *Pyramid Mountain* in mind. He wove the idea into conversations, and his interlocutors joined him in fantasizing about its significance as the greatest work of art in human history. I could hardly believe it: each interviewee contributed more and more conceptual substance to *Pyramid Mountain*. I could often read it on their faces—the precise moment they opened up to the idea after some initial skepticism.

Hans Ulrich Obrist, amid his crammed archive in Berlin, was speechless when Ingo told him about *Pyramid Mountain*, a work of art that could survive centuries, millennia even, without the protection of a museum. But after a few moments of reflection, he too had integrated it into his palace of ideas: "Do you mean a postapocalyptic situation? That would be the end of time. […] So it's like Peter Smithson: as found. The found pyramid. Wonderful. Let's do it."

Before long, these discussions with notable art-world figures gave me the deceptive feeling that construction of *Pyramid Mountain* was imminent. Just as Honoré de Balzac invented abstract painting in his story "The Unknown Masterpiece," it seemed Ingo had successfully designed the art of the future and already maneuvered it into the heart of the art world.

In Manhattan, after interviewing Boris Groys at New York University, my body throbbed as if I'd plunged into ice water. Groys explained that these days the artist's identity is the real art and works of art are only their relics. Fragments from previous meetings scurried through my head: Damien Hirst had greeted us with a giddy smile and a Hitler salute, only to show us his bare butt once the interview was over; Terence Koh lived in an all-white house in Chinatown with his cat Hans Mayer, and longed to travel back to the Baroque; Olafur Eliasson in his huge art factory

seemed to enchant the world with new tricks like an artist David Copperfield, without knowing where it was supposed to lead. Each conversation partner had more or less successfully found their place. It was during the conversation with Groys in a windowless seminar room that I realized that everything going on inside me would not be visible in the series, and the plan to show my development along the way was going to fail.

That same day we took a trip to Coney Island. Ingo bathed in the cold Atlantic, then we made a huge mountain of sand and jumped over the pile, over and over again, until the police came to check if we were drunk and breaking a law forbidding alcohol on the beach. On the boardwalk I discovered a brightly colored stand in a vacant lot with the words "Shoot the Freak" strung over it in large letters. Magically drawn to the sign, I headed over to the bald-headed carny who, bullhorn in hand, loudly solicited passersby to shoot at a human target with a paintball rifle. To top it all off, the grinning man wore a Pink Floyd *Dark Side of the Moon* T-shirt. I paid and he gave me a gun loaded with fifty paintballs. The open range contained a number of wooden defenses covered in thousands of colored dots. The whole place looked like the studio of a rowdy painter. A helmeted man flitted back and forth between the palisades, holding a protective shield. As if in a trance, I took aim and fired. The first shots missed their target, but after a few moments they struck with a dry clap, first on the shield, then on the helmet and body. I went through the fifty shots in no time.

Toward the end of our stay in New York, we filmed a conversation in Ingo's hotel room about the state of our endeavor. The tiny room at the Jane Hotel was made to look like a ship's cabin and offered little more space. Survivors of the *Titanic* disaster had been housed here in 1912, and not much had changed since. We sat on the bed and I positioned the camera by the window, which I had closed on account of the omnipresent street noise. We also switched off the roaring air conditioner despite the oppressive heat.

After some initial banter, Ingo hit on the essence of my problem. "The biggest question mark in the project right now is you." "Yes. I dipped under the ice and still don't know where I'll come up." I had concealed myself as a person until then. That would end now. Following Groys's line of thinking, I had to make myself the focus of my artistic considerations.

But who was I? What picture of myself did I want to draw? Ever since childhood I'd had an eccentric view of the world. Kindergarten teachers prophesied a great future for me as a scientist in the name of socialism, but problems arose shortly after I started elementary school. On one of my first days at school, everyone was supposed to say something about their family. When it was my turn, I reported that my mother worked in the office at the Industrial Association for Vehicle Construction, my father was a student at Humboldt University in Berlin, and my great-grandfather was the emperor of Germany. I did not back down from my story, even after much persuasion, and my parents were summoned to school. My father quickly cleared things up: hanging for ages in my grandparents' garage was a First World War souvenir picture of Kaiser Wilhelm like the one every soldier had received after his service, only the emperor's face was pasted over with a portrait of my great-grandfather Wilhelm. I received different answers when I asked who was in the picture. There was talk of the emperor of Germany, sometimes my great-grandfather Willy. It was a tremendous disappointment to learn that I was not the emperor's great-grandson.

I read books about the buccaneer Jan Kuna, the knight-errant Ilya Muromets, and Alexander the Great. I spent a lot of time looking for old things in attics and village junkyards and restoring them. My room had piles of old leather-bound books, historical household wares, medals, batons, and stabbing weapons. Ordinary life seemed unattractive to me even then, and I saw my future as a hunter of hidden treasures.

I decided to live as an artist because its promise of freedom seemed the best way to live out this urge. But my

previous work, based on an obsolete concept of art, had unnecessarily reined it in. In the future I wanted to make my experiences the center of my work and in doing so eliminate the gap between art and life. I said to Ingo, "I'm the one who boxed his assistant to a bloody pulp over ten years ago to take a picture of him. But I'm also the one who breaks open boxes in attics and tears down walls to get hold of old archival material. I'm actually Indiana Jones."

Beads of sweat were forming on my skin. I felt a tingle, like the breath of history was beginning to cool the heat rising in me. Ingo smiled, and everything shone in a golden light. I felt like Hercules when he learned he was a demigod, not subject to the same rules as everybody else. Other laws applied to me, dictated by a higher being … At that moment there was a knock on the door. Christian came into the room and tore me out of my sparkling world: "You guys have to let some air in here, there isn't any. You're going to kick the bucket." Christian opened the window, and the air returned an adequate supply of oxygen to my brain.

After landing in Berlin we headed to Frankfurt am Main to meet Tobias Rehberger in his studio. Rehberger sipped a white-wine spritzer during the interview and smoked one cigarette after another. I could make out in his eyes the precise moment he integrated *Pyramid Mountain* into his artistic thinking. When Ingo sketched out the idea with a felt-tip pen, Rehberger first asked in surprise, "And what do you like about that?" But then he recalled that he had once planted a potato field and ostensibly hidden a solid gold nugget in it. To this day no one knows if the golden potato is buried in the field or not.

That afternoon Ingo gave a lecture at the Städelschule with the title "How to Be Relevant." The auditorium was packed, and Ingo introduced the spectators to the plan to build both pyramids. But the words came out of his mouth in a viscous mass as he struggled with jet lag. I sat in the back and feared that the mood could tip at any moment, but it never did. Ingo managed to captivate the audience despite his fatigue.

After a recuperative night's rest, we spent the next afternoon outside Frankfurt at the summerhouse of Thomas and Helke Bayrle. While Ingo slumbered in the grass in the shade of an apple tree, I set about chopping wood for a fire. The ax broke on my first blow, and I was not sure if it was because of my enthusiasm or a weakness in the material. To me everything was charged with meaning at that point, so I asked Thomas if I could keep the pieces of the destroyed ax, and he said yes.

Thomas spoke with Ingo for a long time about his development as an artist and was equally fascinated by the idea of having a pyramid disappear once it had been built: "After some time no one is sure if there really is a pyramid under there. I think that's very important, this uncertainty. That we become uncertain of reality in a way. […] And then suddenly it's a hill where people have parties and so forth […]. In other words, a place that simply switches the imagination on."

Four weeks had passed since the beginning of our journey, and we'd had no delays in our shooting schedule. Everything interlocked with everything else as if predestined. After I returned to Erfurt I tried artist Marcos Lutyens's hypnosis on myself. Ingo had already submitted to it in Times Square. Sitting cross-legged with headphones on amid incredible commotion, he listened to Lutyens's spoken text as it instructed him, as an artist, to have only the best ideas.

I lay down on a Le Corbusier LC4 chaise longue replica and listened to Lutyens's gentle words. I was not sure to what extent the hypnosis hit me, but afterward I felt fresh, washed clean from the inside. I felt a new clarity, every thought found its place as if in a switching yard, a secret timetable ensured that all ran smoothly. That same day I developed my artwork for the future.

I planned to investigate the events of the night of December 24, 1998, the night that changed my life, and to develop work from the collected material. Interviews with

the people involved, documents, photographs, artifacts, and the resulting work would be placed inside a large container and travel from exhibition to exhibition—constantly growing as new information was acquired. The research would never stop, not even after my death. I was interested not only in what I had experienced, but everything else that happened that night. I wanted to reverse the process I had gone through with *Redox*, the incinerated newspapers. Just as I had destroyed information about a random day in that case, the new work would re-create the day without which I would not exist as an artist. Surprised by the immediate effects of the hypnosis, I told Kitty my idea. I didn't want to tell Ingo about it until the end of the shoot, as agreed. For that we drove to the Thuringian Forest to take LSD in a secluded meadow.

The ground was still covered in morning mist when we arrived, the tops of the surrounding trees illuminated by the morning sun. A hawk circled in the sky, otherwise no one was around. We spread a checkered blanket on the dew-dampened grass. Christian set up the camera and equipped us with wireless microphones. Ingo had some colorful LSD blotters. He took a seat on the blanket, carefully dividing one of them and handing half to me. At this point the sun was above us, enveloping the entire ground in bright light. I put the snippet on the tip of my tongue and felt a light burning sensation. After curling it into a small ball with my tongue, I spat it out. I started to worry about losing control under the influence of the drug and tried to lessen the effect. It was our final day of shooting and my last chance to get my idea for an artwork for the future into the series, and I did not want a rush of exuberance let it slip through my fingers. I had the uneasy feeling that I had betrayed Ingo, but in the next moment I could feel that my attempt was unsuccessful. It was not my first trip, so I recognized its harbingers all too well. An increasingly intense tingling sensation seized my body, and my consciousness was flooded with impressions from the surroundings.

Before the LSD took full effect I told Ingo about my plan to meticulously reconstruct a day in my past.

Ingo liked the idea of researching a day in my life with a zeal that is usually reserved for major historical events like 9/11. The only thing he had a problem with was the container as a repository, because I would not know the dimensions of my work. So he offered *Pyramid Mountain* as a place to store my chamber: "You could be the collector who buys my pyramid. And when you're dead, you put everything in there."

The LSD's effect reached its first peak. It was clear that Ingo's offer had solved a major problem with *Pyramid Mountain*—that it was complete only when it had found a collector. Its realization was up to the owner. I sensed that Ingo's offer promised me eternal success, but that I was also exposing myself to incalculable risks. Because in order to make *Pyramid Mountain* a reality, I would have to become a superstar. Otherwise, I would never be able to mobilize the necessary resources. Still, I was tempted to accept the offer. I thought of the recent conversations with all the different figures of the art world and their reactions to *Pyramid Mountain*. Would the pyramid be my destiny? The first impetus to build a pyramid in former East Germany came from me, years ago. Now I was presented with an opportunity to possess one, from Ingo. He tried to dispel my misgivings and offered to help me become the "star" that would be in a position to realize this monumental endeavor. Uncertain if I should accept his offer, I withdrew and went for a little walk. Little rivulets traversed the ground not far from our campsite. My shoes made a deeper morass with every step across the soft ground. The valley looked like the end of a funnel where all experiences come together.

Ingo followed me, and together we explored the terrain. The LSD had hit us full force. I had the feeling that I was taking everything into my body with every breath: the air, the trees, the water of the creek, the animals hidden in the thicket. The colors of the grass and Ingo's face changed in quick succession, but I felt no fear. On our path—which

only made a small radius around the campsite but felt like discovering a new world—I spotted a large beetle on a blade of grass. I leaned down and let it crawl on my hand. The beetle lost its balance and landed carapace-down on my palm. I implored it to stand up on its own initiative. After it succeeded in flipping itself over, it tried with all its might to climb up my hand, which I now held pointing up. I urged it on: "Come on, go up. Come on, to the top! Nobody can stop you." Ingo crouched beside me in the grass and we watched the beetle's attempt for the summit in its sparkling armor. Just before it could reach my fingertips, it lost its footing and plummeted. My new friend, so dear to my heart, disappeared into the thick grass.

We crawled more than walked back to our blanket, thoughts of an imperial future haunting our minds. If I built the pyramid as a repository for my work and Ingo helped me achieve that goal, then all our efforts would mesh. The fusion of our ideas for a future-oriented work of art was not only one of the best ideas of all time, but also the logical consequence of our actions.

At the height of intoxication I felt an urge to bestow Ingo with something. I still had the feeling of having to protect him, from himself if need be. That's why, before we left for the meadow, I had thought of a gift that could really be of use to him. Although he offered me his help to become an internationally successful artist, he openly assumed that his name would be placed above everything else. In the event that he miscalculated and everything turned out differently, I drew up a kind of life insurance for him: "As a gift, I offer you a pension. Completely independent of what happens here, my offer to you is that I will always ensure your livelihood for the rest of your life. That is, whenever your finances go into the red, whenever you are facing fundamental existential points in the future that could topple everything you've done so far, then I'll compensate for that—I'll at least bring your debts to zero."

Ingo seemed surprised. He had no children to look after him when he was old, and my offer not only seemed

to move him but also to alleviate a subconscious concern. After accepting my gift, he was back: "Yes, and for that, you bought the pyramid." I cast all concerns aside and accepted his offer.

After three seemingly endless months of editing in which Ingo, David, and I condensed the huge mountain of material into a two-and-a-half-hour-long documentary, *The Future of Art* had its premiere on November 10, 2010, in Berlin. We showed the film at ZERN before it was broadcast in individual episodes on 3min. The *Monopol* website published a scathing review the evening of the premiere. More followed. The critic Kito Nedo compared the film to watching two kittens playing. He was no less merciful in a second article for the digital-culture magazine *De:Bug* that appeared a little later.

Our actual intention of developing a viable work of art for the future was not addressed in these reviews. It was almost a year before we published the interview series as a book and DVD, *The Future of Art: A Manual*, and made it accessible on YouTube. International interest and reactions to the project came slowly, mainly from artists, art students, and curators. The film was shown at universities, art institutions, and museums, and there was a lively discussion about what our real intentions with the film had been. Did we make a movie about the future of art or a promotional film for *Pyramid Mountain*?

We didn't see the two as mutually exclusive: we had set out to look for the future of art as well as our own future, and found both. But unfortunately we hadn't managed to integrate our conversation on the meadow into the film, since it had dragged on for hours and at crucial moments Christian had filmed flowers in the wind instead of us. Every attempt to cinematically portray the pyramid's handover to me had failed. Instead, the documentary ended as it had begun: with a ritual bath. Only this time with both of us—in the muddy water of a large puddle.

In January 2011, we showed the film at the Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst in Leipzig. At the panel discussion afterward, I was asked what my appearance in the movie was all about. Only a viewer of good faith could infer my role by watching the film. I indicated what had happened in the meadow and that I was now the owner and builder of *Pyramid Mountain*.

After the screening, I went with Ingo to spend the night at the apartment of Tobias Naehring, a young gallerist who had curated an exhibition at ZERN and exhibited some of my early photographs in his Leipzig apartment-gallery. My mood took a rapid nosedive on the way there. Ingo had neatly solved his problem of not having found a collector for *Pyramid Mountain*. I suddenly realized that it was now time for me to rise to the major challenge ahead. But how?

I had the growing feeling that I might have catapulted myself into a dead end instead of the future. Where to begin? Should I get to work investing all my energy in research for my burial chamber, or should I be looking for a crazy collector willing to invest in our megalomaniacal project? I had avoided thinking about this problem for a while, but on this cold winter night it rushed to the center of my thoughts.

In Tobais's small kitchen we started talking about a solution to my problem. We quickly agreed that it needed a ritual that would put me into a kind of state of shock. We ran through all sorts of variants until the wee hours, but none of our ideas caught fire. We had almost given up when Ingo began reading from older texts he'd written, including an article he published a few years back as part of his Games for Adults column in the handicrafts magazine *Luna*. The column described a drill in which a person lives for one year as though it were their last. In contrast to Seneca's "Live every day as if it were your last," you would still have enough time to make a difference. "That's what I'll do!" I shouted, before Ingo had finished reading. That and nothing else would enable me to separate the important from the unimportant.

Unlike a terminally ill person who spends their days thinking about how to prolong the life they have left or why they had to suffer this fate, I would concentrate fully on the time available to me. I could procrastinate nothing, because my last day would be fixed. I would live for a year as though it were my last to realize my chamber, put things in order, and lay the foundation for constructing *Pyramid Mountain*. The fact that I would bring an idea of Ingo's to life with this method—in order to advance his concept for *Pyramid Mountain*—seemed completely logical. He built the rocket and I flew it to the moon.

Ingo was surprised that I wanted to expose myself to such an endeavor since I had a family. But then he realized that was precisely what would cushion the biggest danger of the drill: internalizing the idea of living for only a year could result in the risk of somehow actually dying.

I had once been directly confronted with the finite nature of my existence. In December 1997, entering my photo studio one Sunday, I noticed broken glass under my feet before seeing two figures tampering with my photographic equipment. Registering my presence, they fled through the open window. Without thinking, I ran after them and got hold of one. As I bent down to pin him to the ground, I saw something flash in the corner of my eye. Cold steel penetrated me. The other fugitive had hurried to his accomplice's aid and rammed a knife into my right side. I felt no pain, only the surreal sensation that someone was trying to kill me. I looked the attacker in the eyes and yelled, "Are you crazy?" He pulled out the blade and tried to stab me again. I barely managed to ward off the second attack, and the two disappeared into the darkness. Full of adrenaline, I went back to my studio, took off my sweater, pulled up my blood-soaked shirt, and looked at the gaping stab wound between my hip and lower ribs where dark-red blood was pulsing out. The flow of time seemed to slow and the intensity of my perception skyrocketed. With the last of my strength I called an ambulance and my roommate Christoph, and a few minutes later the room was filled with

medical staff, policemen, and friends. When I was on the operating table, the doctor pressed her forefinger on the fist-sized bump that had formed under my wound. A stream of blood spurted out in a high arc, applying a red ribbon on the doctor from her shoulder to her knees. I had lost a lot of blood, but despite the worried looks of the doctors I felt strangely alive.

The idea of voluntarily submitting myself to an exceptional circumstance—and for a much longer period of time—was irresistible to me. By sunrise I had chosen the period of time for the drill. I planned to start the project on March 1, 2011, and February 29, 2012, was to be my last day. One year to do what to me seemed most important. Three hundred sixty-six days to immortalize myself and solve all my problems in one fell swoop. In preparation I wrote a bucket list:

1. *Compose an overview of my plans.*
2. *Come up with a timeline.*
3. *Document the project in the form of text/audio/images/marginalia.*
4. *Select an archive of works.*
5. *Back up my work (analog/digital).*
6. *Make a will.*
7. *Create a catalogue raisonné.*
8. *Name an executor.*
9. *Insurance arrangement for Ingo.*
10. *Finish book/DVD* The Future of Art: A Manual.
11. *Allow myself to be interviewed extensively by Ingo (about my life from 1973 to 2011).*
12. *Research events from the night of December 24–25, 1998.*
13. *Plan my last exhibition.*
14. *Exercise.*
15. *Experiment with drugs.*
16. *Record a video message for Rosa.*
17. *Have an adventure with Rosa and bury a treasure.*

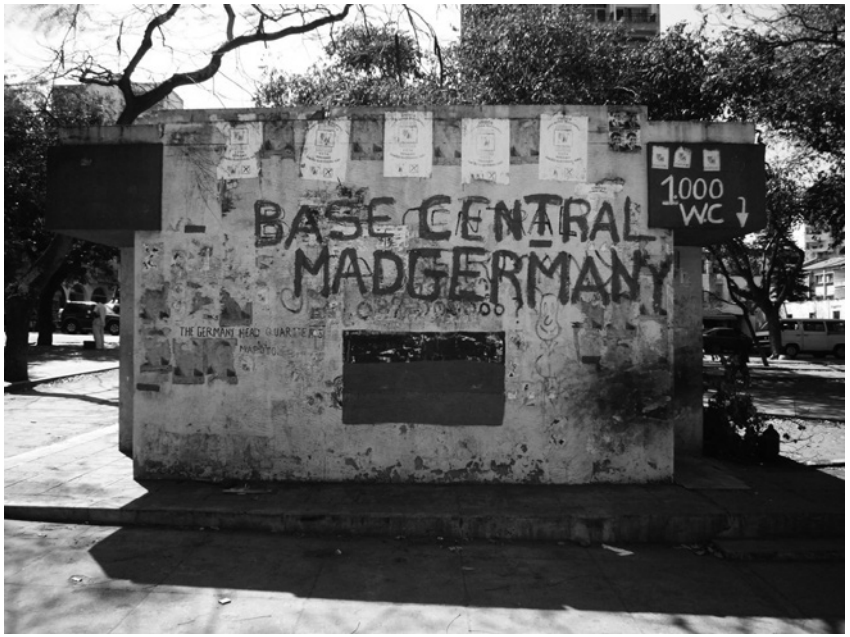
18. Go on a long trip with Kitty and Rosa.
19. Go to Paris with Kitty (sex).
20. Make a photo album and library for Rosa.
21. Visit the Baltic Sea with my mother.
22. Go to Niedling with my father.
23. Get a BahnCard 100.
24. Travel all over Germany by train.
25. Go on an Eastern European safari with Ingo.
26. Live in the forest.
27. Have a party.
28. Play the lottery.
29. Go to the casino with 1,000 euros.
30. Go hunting.
31. Produce a pop hit.
32. Visit WWI battlefields.
33. Surf in LA.

On Ingo's recommendation, I read Tom McCarthy's novel *Remainder* to get a sense of how intensively one can devote oneself to an artistic task. Its nameless narrator is struck in the head by "something" that falls from the sky. Upon release from the hospital he tries to compensate for the neurological damage he suffered with extremely complex, detail-obsessed reconstructions of his remaining memories.

Over the next few weeks I managed to convince the collectors Sebastian Lück and Sebastian Papenbreer to support me financially during the year. We agreed that their investment would be paid in art, depending on the amount of the loan. I also informed my family about the project. Anticipating the burden that would fall on Kitty specifically, I expressly asked for her permission. She gave it—a decision she would later curse. The only person I did not let in on my plans was Rosa, who was only five years old at the time.

Ingo and I met with the director of the Neues Museum in Weimar. I had gotten to know Ulrike Bestgen at an exhibition of Thuringia fellowship holders where I had shown work from *Redox*. She was alert, calm, and open-minded. We presented my project to her, and that same day she offered me an exhibition at the Neues Museum. Four months after the end of my Last Year, the results of my experiment would be displayed in ten rooms across the entire top floor of the museum.

On February 28, 2011, I boarded a plane to Malta to start my drill alone and supplement my rudimentary English skills at one of the many language schools there. My deficit in that regard had often gotten in the way. After landing, I took a taxi to where I was staying in the old town of Valletta. My room was in the top of a tower, with windows overlooking the sea on one side and the old town on the other. I drank wine in big swallows, smoked self-rolled cigarettes, and felt … nothing. Like a runner at the starting line, I was confronted with a great void. Just before midnight I went back to my room, sat on my bed, and commenced a self-hypnosis procedure that I had prepared for that very moment. I internalized the image of a white curtain that fell over my mind's eye whenever I thought about the time after February 29, 2012. No planning beyond that date. Everything would have to be done by then, my family would have to be provided for, the items on my list ticked off, and the exhibition in Weimar prepared to the smallest detail. February 29—curtain. February 29—curtain. White noise. Empty diary still in hand, I fell into a restless sleep.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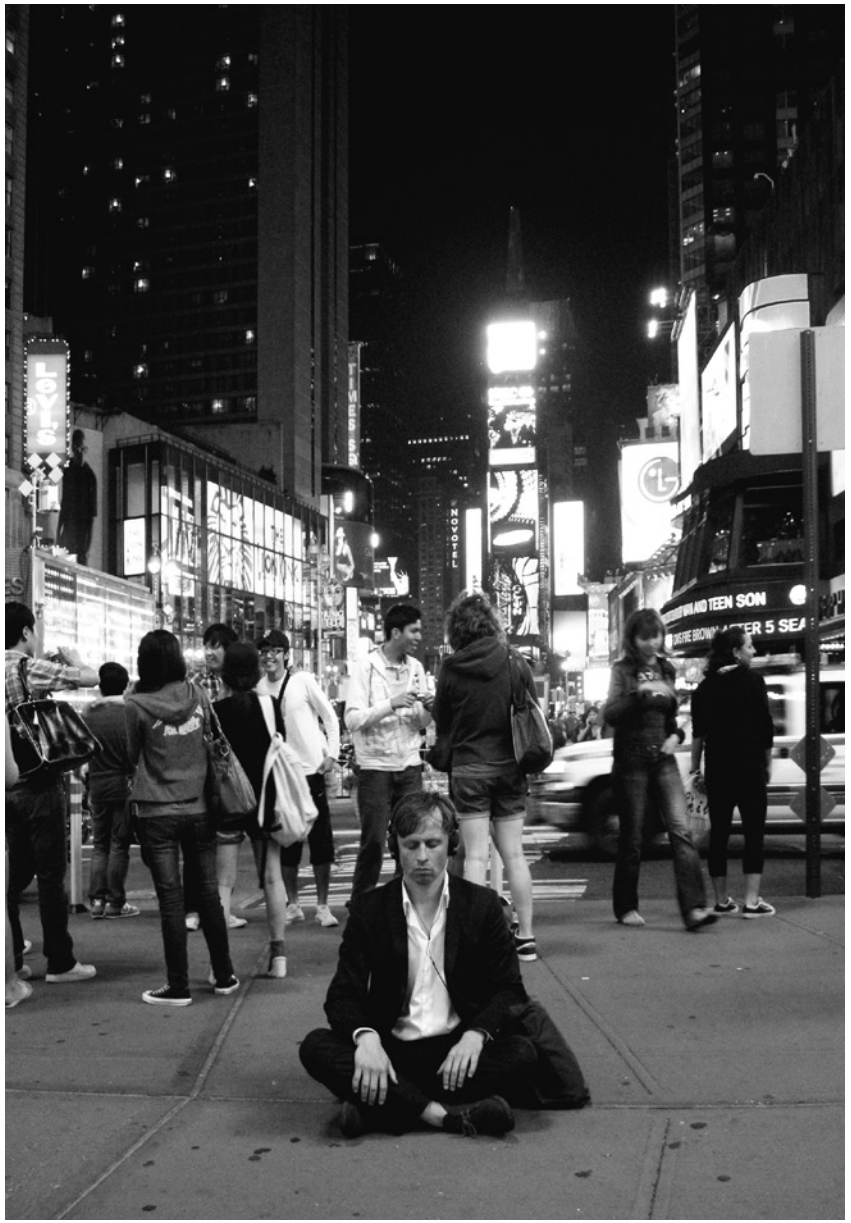

NOVOTEL


SHOOT
FREAK
THE WORLD
SCREAMIN
FREAK



















My Last Year

On the morning of March 1, the dull emptiness of the day before yielded to joyful anticipation. I strolled through the narrow streets of the old town to the bus terminal, which was arranged around a stone fountain, taking in the hustle and bustle of street vendors. There were lots of foreigners on the island: tourists visiting the sights, Libyans seeking refuge from the civil war in their homeland, professional poker players availing themselves of Malta's tax haven.

At a bistro I snagged my sleeve on a button of my Burberry coat, tearing a hand-sized triangle in the outer fabric and ruining my afternoon. I looked for a tailor to fix the damage, and found one in a dark side street on the edge of the old town. In the middle of a small shop barely lit by two neon lights was an old tailor with a gentle smile. I showed him the problem. His tone was friendly, and he

expressed surprise at the inferior fabric of such a well-known manufacturer. I noticed the old pieces of clothing hanging on the walls. The man told me that in the 1970s he himself had been a successful tailor of men's clothing. In fact, his suits, jackets, and coats were masterfully made. The materials used were excellent, and his cuts and sewing work were second to none. The designs were behind the times, but you could still see their former elegance. Now he had to make a living repairing textiles that fell far short of the standards he once set. Following the logic of my project, I would be spared such a fate. My life in old age—even aging itself—was of no consequence to me anymore, and yet I still had to reach the zenith of my creative life.

I picked up my coat the next day. The hole was repaired, and the tailor had also taken the precautionary measure of reinforcing the fabric in weak spots he saw possibly causing problems in the future.

At first, the effect of my new way of life on daily matters was barely noticeable. I concentrated on setting a schedule for the year, taking notes in my journal, and attending my English course. It felt odd to spend the limited time I had left sitting in a classroom, but I was soon glad to give my days on the island structure with regular lessons and devote myself to something I hadn't found time to do before. I was in good spirits and convinced I was doing the right thing: giving new order to my life and delving into uncharted territory.

One morning, as my trip was nearing its end, I turned the TV to CNN and saw a brown wave of sludge and debris barreling across the Japanese mainland. A seaquake had triggered a tsunami. Two nuclear reactors in Fukushima had also been affected and threatened to explode. Thousands of people died, but the dangers posed by the nuclear power plant soon dominated the coverage. There was a meltdown, the worst-case scenario, and the fear of this unseen threat spread around the world. The pale light in the apartment and the repeated images of Japan flickering across the screen created a gloomy veil.

Before dawn on March 13, I took a taxi to the airport. Light from the streetlamps reflected off the rain-soaked asphalt. I sat in an airport bistro until takeoff, sipping coffee from a paper cup and watching a group of Japanese tourists stare blankly at a small TV set showing images from Japan. Their return journey would take them to the heart of the chaos. I would also leave this transitional space and head straight for the problems and challenges that awaited me at home.

The sun was just rising as the plane lifted off the runway and into the sky. Looking down, I realized that I hadn't visited Malta's most beautiful spots. Below were wild cliffs that bounded Malta's northern coast. The ocean broke meter-high waves against gigantic rock formations, creating a riotous surf. I was sad to be missing this spectacle but glad to leave the island after two weeks. I had a lot ahead of me, and I was eager to see my family again.

From Berlin I took the train to Erfurt. I had purchased a BahnCard 100 especially for my project, and this was the first time I could put it to use. The unlimited rail pass was valid for the exact duration of my Last Year.

That evening I talked to Kitty about my trip and smoked weed for the first time in over two weeks. The effect seemed more intense than usual, and I was overcome with dizziness. I went to the bathroom to throw water on my face and felt a strange sensation in my legs. I puzzled at my greenish complexion in the mirror.

The next thing I could perceive was a distant knocking sound that grew louder and louder. I didn't know where I was and I couldn't explain the thumping that seemed to penetrate its way in from another world. Then I realized that I was lying on the cold bathroom floor. There was a stabbing pain in my head. I had fainted and hit my head on the rim of the shower basin. After a few minutes my absence began to worry Kitty and now she was pounding on the door. I reached to unlock it with the last of my strength.

I had never lost consciousness before. I could not pull myself up on my own, and I collapsed again in the hall. Kitty propped up my legs and cooled my forehead with a damp cloth. Shivering on the ground, for the first time in my life I felt a total loss of control. It seemed an eternity before I could manage the staircase to our bedroom, half crawling on my knees, half pulled by Kitty. Once in bed, it took a while before I could fall asleep. I awoke the next morning with the cut on my head and a feeling of utter weakness.

Two days later, I took the train to Berlin to meet the gallerist Philomene Magers and get her advice on my Last Year project. I was a little nervous since I hadn't seen her since we interviewed her for our film. At the time, her presence had given me a reassuring feeling; she radiated the kind of warmth that I longed for as an artist.

Before the meeting, I shaved the beard hair on my neck only to realize that I had no aftershave on hand. This led to an unsightly reddening of my skin. To make matters worse, I tore the sleeve of my shirt while trying to roll it over my elbow. I started to panic because I had no substitute. That second my phone rang, and Philomene asked if we could postpone the meeting.

Later that day, Ingo and I headed off to Graal-Müritz, a seaside town where we could record him interviewing me about my life. We first went to the beach, which was just a few meters from where we were staying. It was bitterly cold. Tiny ice crystals covered the sand. This did nothing to deter Ingo from taking a dip in the Baltic. Training my video camera on the spectacle, I felt the cold on my fingers, intensified by the cutting wind. Other beachgoers were stunned by what Ingo was up to. A passerby asked if this was *Candid Camera*. Ingo ran shivering to the shore after the brief bath. It took some time before he could speak coherently.

We recorded over twenty-two hours of conversation over the following three days. Never had I given anyone such detailed information about my life. It was like being

catapulted back in time. Often long-buried feelings were brought up: my childhood, past loves, broken friendships, successes achieved, defeats suffered. Ingo listened attentively and followed up with questions whenever he felt like I was omitting something or paying too little attention to certain episodes. It became impossible for me to whitewash or skip things, I was too deeply immersed in my innermost material. By the end of the interview sessions, I had talked so much my voice was gone. I could only communicate in a whisper, and we had only reached December 25, 1998. We wouldn't tackle the second part of the interview until closer to the end of my Last Year.

Within a few weeks I had completely internalized my new mode. My family felt it most keenly. Kitty and my parents realized that my project had a profound impact not only on my livelihood as an artist but on my private life as well. I refused to create a private space where my self-imposed conditions would not apply. When it was necessary to talk about my drill, I did so. Gradually, what had so often embarrassed me at first came naturally. This drew some puzzled reactions. When an employee from my mobile carrier contacted me to suggest an early extension of my contract, I told him why it wouldn't be necessary. After a moment of confusion, he switched from standardized call-center language to a more personal tone to tell me that he wouldn't work a single day of his Last Year. An insurance broker who called to entice me to sign up for a life-insurance policy responded similarly and, at the end of our conversation, offered me a variant with a much shorter term. Almost everyone I spoke with was slightly shocked at first, but after a few moments they'd apply the Last Year to themselves.

All life's questions take on a new character when viewed within the premise of spending only a short time on earth. In full possession of my physical and mental faculties, it was the ideal moment to put everything to the test. There was no time for procrastination. I thought carefully about what would really be worth doing. Sure, I wanted

to carve a pyramid out of a mountain and be buried in it. Objectively, there was not enough time for that. But I wanted to make sure the idea was implemented in the world so that others could continue my work when I was gone.

David Dröge started work as my assistant. He made a good impression at our first meeting, though I subconsciously feared that his last name (which in German means "dry," "boring," "stodgy") might be portentous. I tasked him with researching events that took place around the world on the night of December 24, 1998, and was surprised by his single-minded commitment.

Meanwhile I experienced financial woes. I had rejected an offer to produce another internet program on art right before Sebastian Lück trimmed his almost unlimited credit line for my project to thirty thousand euros. The new number shocked me at first, but I was glad he didn't bail completely. With my income from art sales, support from my two most loyal collectors, and funding that the Neues Museum hoped to get, I was set to be financially secure. That the production and travel expenses would balloon just as my income collapsed was not foreseeable at the time.

In late March, I took a train from Berlin to Marbach, near Stuttgart, to see the exhibition "Ernst Jünger: Worker on the Abyss" at the Museum of Modern Literature. I gazed out the window of the restaurant car at a desolate rain-soaked landscape. Thick drops of water pushed by the airstream traveled over the glass panes in as if in slow motion, each one reflecting the dull countenance of old West Germany.

The literature museum's modernist building is situated on a plateau facing a sprawling valley. At the exhibition entrance was a colorful striped umbrella. I recognized the umbrella from a photograph and from Jünger's descriptions in his diary of his technique for catching beetles by hurling the umbrella. On the floor of the exhibition's first room was Jünger's steel helmet encased in glass, a gaping shrapnel hole in its side. The exhibition traced Jünger's life and work in innumerable glass vitrines containing photo-

graphs, diaries, documents, and objects. I recognized many of the exhibits from his writings and was impressed to see the originals. His diaries from the First World War, which he drew from to write *Storm of Steel*, had a particularly mystical aura about them, since they had always been at the center of the action and thus in the greatest danger. Jünger bequeathed his estate to the German Literature Archive a year before his death, but not without first selecting what it would constitute. Just as he had repeatedly revised his writings over the decades, he also considered how posterity would remember his texts when he was gone.

In his lifetime of over one hundred years, Jünger underwent a transformation from warrior to forest-stroller, but he always drew from his existential experiences during battle. Between the steel helmet and the umbrella lay endless expanses of adventure and boredom, courage and fear, mistakes and knowledge, rejection and fame, sobriety and ecstasy. What would have remained of Jünger if shrapnel had taken off his head at the age of twenty? What would remain of me if February 29, 2012, were the last day of my life?

On the train back to Erfurt, I purchased an AEG Olympia Traveller Deluxe for twenty euros on eBay. It was the kind of typewriter Jünger had used. And, inspired by the vitrines in the exhibition, I decided to document my life with artifacts from my archive and incorporate them into the burial chamber in Weimar. I spent the next few days compiling my archive and bringing it to my studio in Berlin for a rough sorting. I had been collecting evidence of my existence and particles from my surroundings since childhood. In one box I even came across the note Ingo had stuck under the windshield wiper of his broken Golf around the time we first met. I didn't have much time left to decide what in my estate should be preserved. Should I retouch my archive, adapt it to my inner situation? I resolved, for the time being, only to sift through the existing material and arrange it in chronological order. I wanted to decide later what I would destroy and what I would keep.

The first thirty days of my experiment were over. I kept busy designing new works for the Weimar exhibition, planning upcoming trips, and seeing to my family's well-being. Everything felt good. The artificial shortening of my life span made perception denser: contrary to the common complaint, I felt that time was going slower and slower, not faster. Concentrating on the essential and each moment sharpened my senses.

On the last day of March, I traveled with my friend Axel to Bad Freienwalde, northeast of Berlin. He ran a forge on the site of what had been his parents' metalworking company, and used it to produce sculptures. Axel's artistic approach was very different from mine, but we had a close relationship. Like me, Axel had grown up in East Germany and had come to art relatively late. After years working as a top-level wrought-iron craftsman, Axel went to art school in Halle and Berlin, and now he used his skills to create sculptures. Axel was skeptical of my project at first but agreed to help nevertheless.

For one of my new works referencing the clashes on the night of December 24, 1998, I wanted to clench a steel rod at both ends using a simple forging technique. Axel took me across the expansive grounds and let me choose from an endless supply of scrap metal. I pulled out a virtually perfect workpiece from the metal heap. Demonstrating on another piece of iron, Axel introduced me to the rudimentary techniques of forging so that I could do the job. I pounded on the glowing metal with all my strength, sparks flying in every direction. I felt the fiery splinters on my forearms and my nose picked up the smell of burnt hair. After a few minutes of steady smashing, the power had drained from my right arm. I put the cooling iron back into the embers and fanned the fire with a bellows, watching with childlike ecstasy as the color of the metal changed from dark red to a white glow the more I exposed it to the heat. When I resumed work on the metal I realized that iron could also burn if exposed to the fire too long. Nothing remained of its elastic quality. The mass had charred and became coarse ash.

After cutting the steel rod, I heated one end in the forge's firebed until it glowed bright red. Pulling it out at the right moment, I then lowered the bar into a hole in the floor and rhythmically struck the glowing tip with a heavy hammer. Without much resistance, the steel buckled and assumed the intended conical shape. I dipped the dark-red end into a tub of water and repeated the procedure with the other end. I inspected my work and felt a deep sense of contentment. The result was as I had pictured it, down to the last detail.

Spring arrived. One evening in Erfurt, after a day spent picnicking with friends on the blossom-lined shore of a stream, Rosa complained of severe stomach pain. We took her to the hospital and Kitty spent the night at her side. Over the next few days, doctors tried to find the cause of her pain and could not settle on a diagnosis. Kitty stayed at the clinic with Rosa and I visited her several times a day. When Rosa's condition did not improve, Kitty expressed fear that my Last Year had conjured a bad omen. I had a hard time putting her mind at ease.

Ingo came to Erfurt as planned in order to research the night of Christmas Eve 1998. In between my hospital visits we went to places where the events had taken place, and Ingo interviewed those involved. In the evening we lay on the living room floor, considering how the chamber inside of *Pyramid Mountain* would be composed. I had the idea to design its floor plan based on the upper floor of the Neues Museum Weimar: two connected main halls would contain new artworks as well as reconstructions of the events of that night and my casket, while a ribbon of long, surrounding corridors would have glass showcases with objects showing crucial stages of my life from birth to February 29, 2012.

Early the next morning, Kitty called from the hospital to tell me Rosa was being released. The pain had disappeared as quickly as it had come. From that point on, the dubious nature of my endeavor never left my mind. I was

conscious of my selfishness and didn't want to leave a mess behind under any circumstances.

I spent the last night of April at the Kickerkeller. Some friends had rebuilt the club as a fully equipped apartment using thrown-out furniture and all sorts of household items. Sebastian Lück provided bottles of his vodka and, at my request, one hundred cans of whipped cream. It wasn't long before the mock apartment was bursting at the seams. Everyone was jumping on the tables, giggling and rolling on the beds, dancing and shrieking euphorically. At first my friends didn't get why I wanted the dessert topping, but after a few drinks they grabbed the cans to spatter fellow partygoers and lick the cream off each other. Everywhere I looked I saw greased-up and entangled bodies moving throughout the rooms.

The consequences of the night hit me the next day. I caught a bad cold and had to spend the next several days working from my sickbed. Before I had fully recovered I made my way to Berlin to finally meet with Philomene. I met Ingo at a café in Mitte to psych myself up for the conversation. He brought Aspirin Complex to get me in shape. I felt like a boxer with his coach before the big fight. We didn't talk much, but there was no doubt about the importance of the task ahead. Ingo walked me to Sprüth Magers and went on his way.

My cold had momentarily gone. I rang at the gallery entrance and a young staffer opened the door and led me back to Philomene's office. She received me cordially. She wore elegant flat shoes and no makeup. Her reddish, shimmering hair was tied into a loose knot and she radiated, as on our first encounter, a warmth that promised safety. I was offered tea and we talked about our children. Then I showed her the list of things I had planned for my Last Year.

She looked at the list and after a dreamy moment of silence we talked about what I would have to consider when naming an estate trustee and creating my catalogue raisonné. She asked if she could keep the list, and I felt that

she too was applying the idea of living for just one more year to herself. At the end of the meeting, when she inquired if there was anything else she could do for me, I asked if she could advise me on future matters throughout the course of the project. She agreed without hesitation.

Yet my request was only half the story. I had made it this far but failed to get the crucial question past my lips: "Will you represent me as an artist in my Last Year?" I knew it would be difficult, if not impossible, to find a collector for *Pyramid Mountain* without the power of an international gallery behind me, or to sell the chamber work for a proper profit. She made no move in that direction, and I was afraid to overreach. I didn't want to push anything that day, which turned out to be a mistake, because I wouldn't see Philomene again in my Last Year.

The next weeks were devoted to work in the studio. I made good progress: sorting my archive, researching the night, developing new works for the chamber. Plans for the pyramid gradually took shape, and I recorded each day's experiences and impressions in a diary.

Besides achieving my lofty artistic goals, it was also crucial to spend time with the people I loved. I hadn't always given everyone the attention they deserved, and it was time to change that. In early July, I traveled to Bavaria with my father to visit the village of Niedling for the first time. My dad, unlike me, is rational to the core. After studies at Humboldt University in East Berlin and a career as a criminologist, he founded and ran a successful private-investigation agency after reunification. He was less concerned with aspiring to utopian goals than securing his family's basic needs.

There was no church or cemetery in Niedling, only a collection of farmsteads. We drove at a crawl along a narrow path leading to a ravine where there was a silver barn. Everything seemed uncannily familiar to me, especially the ravine. The overgrown trees on both sides formed a semicircular roof. It reminded me of pictures of my child-

hood. We decided that this was where our family roots lay, though we could find no real proof.

My mother, who had patiently endured my antics since childhood, was able to lessen her worries about my Last Year during a trip we took to the Baltic Sea. At first she was unsure why her only child was so stubbornly preoccupied with his own demise. After a long conversation about her youth and aspirations, she ended up writing her own list of things she still wanted to do. I was surprised to see piano lessons—which she had taken for years as a child—right at the top of the list, followed by a trip to New York that my father, despite their many travels together, could not be persuaded to take.

In early July, Ingo and I went on a hike in Hainich National Park in Thuringia. I wasn't able to find any information about fresh water sources in Hainich, so we had no choice but to make provisions in the event of an emergency. My best friend Christoph dropped us off at the edge of the forest and we forged our way in, hiking a few kilometers toward the forest interior. The sun shone down through the treetops and the fifteen-liter water canister felt like lead in my backpack. Our sole purpose was to find a campsite before nightfall, something far enough away from the next settlement to keep us from being discovered.

The pack was heavier on my shoulders with each step, but I felt lighthearted. All the pressure that had been weighing on me was replaced by the actual weight on my shoulders. Demands on humans are simple and inexorable in the forest; every challenge there can be met with will, skill, and muscle power.

After several hours of roaming through the thicket, we found a clearing that offered enough space for a camp. We cleared a space between two large trees and I stretched a rope between the trunks to which I attached our olive-green tarpaulin. Next to the shelter I dug a hole for a hearth, which we fortified with large rocks. I kindled a fire and we made our first hot meal. Soon darkness descended. Ingo

lay down to sleep without the two of us having exchanged many words. I sat smoking by the fire until late in the night, then also lay down on the uneven ground to sleep.

I woke at sunrise after a restless night, feeling absolutely shattered. The clearing was shrouded in morning mist. I rekindled our fire to boil water for coffee and tea and bake flatbread on a hot stone. After breakfast, we extinguished the fire and started down a narrow path to the western edge of Hainich to explore the surroundings. A wide, hilly landscape opened up before us. Emerging from the forest, we hiked along meadows and fields to a small hilltop covered with birch trees that rustled in the wind. We lay down on the warm grass and looked up at the sky. Though the next village was only a few kilometers away, we felt disassociated from the goings-on of the world.

Back at the camp we discussed the basic parameters for the exhibition, and I read Ingo some entries from my Last Year diary. I was writing it as a way to ground myself in day-to-day life. But Ingo was so taken with my notes that he suggested making my diary the core of the planned exhibition catalogue: *The Future of Art: A Diary*.

As the day drew to an end, we sat by the fire and smoked opium, something I'd never done before. I didn't know what to make of its effects at first, but then I managed to descend into deeper, hidden layers of my consciousness. Yet I still had a sense of clarity. I plunged again and again into a bottomless pit before my mind's eye, but every time I threatened to disappear into the infinite, I was able to pull myself back up to the edge of the dark abyss. There was no fear—only me and the warming flames of the fire; everything else disappeared into the dark of the night.

The next day I didn't wake up until the sun was high in the sky. I felt like I had never slept deeper in my life. Unlike the days before, a stifling heat was quickly settling over our clearing. There was a sinister silence, only the monotonous chirping of insects swelled to a threatening song. I set off alone to ramble through the forest. Nearby I found an enigmatic construction of small branches on the forest

floor. Behind our shelter, I carved the letter *N* two times into the bark of a beech tree and above it a triangle, marking the spot as ours.

It started raining in the afternoon and we retreated to dry cover. The rain did not let up and we went to bed early. In contrast to the previous night, I found no peace. The forest was full of loud howls, and I keep thinking that animals were tampering with our camp. I finally managed to fall into a dreamless sleep.

After sunrise, we dismantled our camp and walked through the sunny morning to Beringen. Arriving back in Erfurt, Ingo met with one of the participants from the night for a penultimate interview. The last person on our list could not be found, so I hired a detective agency to track him down.

That summer I took over as chairman of the Friends of the Great Pyramid association, worked on the pyramid blueprint and my digital archive, and commuted regularly between Berlin and Erfurt. I had never had so much information to process at once. I could feel a vibration inside me, very slight at first but becoming more dominant with each day.

In mid-July I leased a Land Rover Defender 110, well aware of how unreasonable it was in my tight financial situation. But pure reason was no longer a compelling argument in my Last Year. The dark-green boxy off-road vehicle with the white roof emitted the allure of adventure that I now wanted, and it was able to roll over any obstacle. Rosa beamed when I showed her the car. Our last family car had also been all-terrain, and Rosa had had a blast riding across muddy slopes and through deep puddles.

The next morning I bought a steel box at the hardware store and, with Rosa's help, filled it with memorabilia from her life to make a time capsule. I waterproofed it and we made our way to Wachsenburg to bury it in a suitable spot. First we looked at the castle, and Rosa climbed onto a cast-iron cannon. She put her hand into the barrel and scratched her finger on its sharp ridge. The wound was not

deep but it bled heavily. Her eyes welled with tears when she saw the blood dripping from her finger, but she suppressed the childish reflex to cry. I felt she sensed it was not the time to give in to the pain. She bravely held her finger out to me and I put it in my mouth to stop the bleeding. Back at the car I disinfected the wound and put a bandage on it. I hoisted the box onto my shoulder and we set off together to bury it.

A tree at the edge of a meadow down the hill from the castle appeared to be a good place. But the ground was rock hard and Rosa wasn't able to dig with her bandaged hand. She couldn't hold back her tears and let out a heartbreaking sob. I took her in my arms to comfort her. After she calmed down I tried digging further, but the stony ground made it impossible. I also had the uneasy feeling that we were being watched from a distance, so I decided to take Rosa back to the car without completing the mission. I planned instead to hide the box somewhere and instruct my lawyer to tell her its precise location on her eighteenth birthday.

The path back was steep, so Rosa sat on my shoulders and I carried her and the box to the top of the hill. As I rested on our ascent, she snuggled close to me. I felt her unwavering trust in my ability to protect her from harm. I shuddered at the thought that I would soon be unable to do this most important of tasks, but hid the tears in my eyes.

We continued on our journey and set up our camp near a mill. After cooking sausages over a fire and telling her stories from my childhood, I made a sleeping spot for her in the back of our car. Overcome with excitement and tormented by mosquitoes, Rosa could not sleep. We decided to drive home that night. The drive through the dark forest was no less adventurous for Rosa, and she shared her last piece of chocolate with me.

In late July, Kitty, Rosa, and I set off for Verdun, a stop on the way to our vacation in Portugal. I was familiar with Jünger's descriptions of the French landscape, and the im-

ages I had pictured now began to take shape. At our first stop, close to the WWI battlefields, I discovered the remains of a bunker on the wayside. I took a few steps into the forest. A network of trenches and walkways opened up before me. The wartime structures were still recognizable, though they were overgrown with shrubs.

A few kilometers farther there was a museum near an old fortress. In the exhibition's dioramas, the German soldiers appeared only as a frightening shadow. Everything was dimly lit, and there were vast quantities of war equipment, uniforms, and soldiers' personal belongings. Only one German was given his own section: Ernst Jünger.

Jünger has had a less controversial status in France than in Germany, and his war diaries were published in the legendary Pléiade canon. Although the French did not make the mistake of shortening the reception of his work to his martial-minded phase as a conservative-intellectual flag-bearer, the exhibits pointed only to Jünger's dandyesque attitude toward the war. Alongside an edition of *Storm of Steel*, a collection of beetles, and photographs, there was an audio interview. A journalist asked the elderly Jünger about his worst war experience. "That we lost!" he replied, and gave a mischievous laugh.

The battlefields were covered in fog. The wind blew fine drizzle into our faces, and we looked out over a cratered landscape. This view was far more impressive than anything in the museum. Grotesquely twisted, reinforced steel protruded from the hills. Many concrete bunkers were well preserved while others were crushed to their foundations. On our tour of the huge area, I deviated from the path and stepped into the young forest. Traces of the fighting were everywhere. I wondered how the area had looked right after the war. Travel companies offered tours of the former battlefields as early as the 1920s. It must have been decades before nature could reclaim the battered earth.

I lay down on the damp grass. Bowled over by the power of this place, I experienced a feeling of great happiness and deep regret. I was spared the existential experi-

ences of war. As if in a trance, I drilled my fingers into the soft ground and felt the cold of a metal object brush the tip of my right index finger. I pulled a piece of rusty steel out of the ground and kept it as a souvenir.

After a three-day drive over rainy French highways and through the dust-dry landscape of Spain and Portugal, we reached our rental house in Esposende. We spent the first days on the beach and Rosa and I surfed on bodyboards. The days passed in a dreamy idleness. I began typing out my handwritten diary. This caused friction because I was neglecting Rosa and Kitty, so we agreed that I would work only in the evenings and devote daytimes to the family.

The consequences for my family of publishing my diary were becoming clear. In the diary I described sex with Kitty and all our arguments. I gave Kitty the typewritten pages so that she could catch any discrepancies, but since I got no response, to avoid any confrontation I asked no further questions.

A parallel world developed alongside my already complex universe. I wrote my impressions in pencil and soon had my entries regularly typed up by a professional clerk so that I could immediately pass them on to Ingo, who subjected them to a first copyedit. As I was putting my day-to-day experience to paper, I was already confronted with the reflection of my immediate past. This created a kind of reality feedback loop from which there was no escape. I now evaluated every experience, positive or negative, for its usability in the diary.

Shortly after our return from Portugal, Ingo and I set off to Bosnia. Our destination was a small town in the mountains where a pyramid cult had developed years ago. In 2005, the Bosnian American esoteric Sam Osmanagich claimed that the largest pyramid in the world was buried under a mountain near the town of Visoko. The Visočica Hill, he said, is actually the Pyramid of the Sun, mother of all pyramids, and it contains hidden messages for future

generations. With a flock of supporters, Osmanagich began excavations on Visocica Hill and threw the region into a pyramid frenzy. Desþite the protests of archaeologists, the site became a prosperous attraction for tourists, conspiracy theorists, and seekers of the meaning of life. There were proposals by a foundation to restore the supposed tip of the pyramid, expand transport connections in the region, and launch a marketing campaign. They wanted the area recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site by 2010. The ambitious plans came to nothing, despite receiving support from some authorities.

I wanted to build the largest pyramid in the world and then have it disappear under a mountain. In my case, too, future generations might wonder if there really was a pyramid hidden under their feet, as foreseen by Thomas Bayrle. Perhaps this would even be a wise place to build my pyramid.

We decided to cover the entire distance in the Defender taking the most direct route possible, including side roads and unpaved paths wherever necessary. Our route took us through a wild landscape, past hundreds of houses destroyed by the war. After three days of slow, difficult driving, we reached Visoko. We could see the pyramid-shaped mountains even from a distance. At the city limits was a sun-faded billboard advertising the new wonder of the world.

We parked the Defender at the foot of Visočica and continued on foot under the blazing midday sun. We were the only ones there. We could see the well-trodden paths where crowds had once climbed the mountain to inspect what was supposedly the exposed remains of a pyramid wall. But it was obviously just a mountain that vaguely resembled a pyramid.

Pyramid mania had gripped the entire area. Homemade pyramids and T-shirts were on sale at makeshift stalls and the former Hotel Hollywood in the town center had been renamed the Pyramid Hotel. We parked the car in its deserted underground parking lot. The building was a

brutalist structure with a steel plate on its facade covering up a crater from a grenade explosion. Our room offered an excellent view of the surrounding area. I saw a plateau opposite the mountain that seemed an ideal spot from which to set up my large-format camera and take a photo for the Weimar exhibition.

The next day we drove to the plateau, but the view of the mountain was not as emblematic as I had hoped. On the way back I saw a red sign on the side of the road warning that landmines still lay in the ground from the days of the last war. I got out of the car to take the sign as a souvenir. When I reached it, I saw a number of similar warnings in the undergrowth around me. I stood rooted to the spot, thinking about the likelihood of stepping on a mine on my way back to the car. I quickly tiptoed to the path with the sign tucked under my arm.

Rather than photograph the mountain, I decided to take my Last Photo from the mountain itself. We drove back to the Pyramid of the Sun and I positioned my camera on a flank of the mountain and framed a composition that looked through the bushes and into the expanse of the Bosnian landscape.

That day we drove to nearby Sarajevo. Along the endless freeways were new constructions and innumerable war-torn buildings covered in billboards promoting a life of luxury. Hardly a building had been spared traces of the carnage. Most of the men we saw had the dark, glowering air of soldiers who had temporarily switched to civilian life. Everything was covered with a fine layer of ocher-colored dust.

We ordered burgers at a fast-food restaurant on the outskirts of a weathered housing estate and, in the most inhospitable place conceivable given the blistering heat, devised a plan to generate sufficient funds to finish my year and fully implement the exhibition. Our idea was rather unrealistic. We would convince German TV personality Charlotte Roche to live one year as if it were her last and regularly report her experiences on Harald Schmidt's late-

night TV show. We envisioned using the attention generated to create a My Last Year movement. I could just picture it: all over the world people would do the drill, drawing new energy from it and using their time more effectively. No matter how absurd our plan was, for the moment it gave me the feeling that I was still able to act and control my own destiny. Ingo sent an email proposal to Roche's manager.

Back in the hotel room, the humidity was oppressive. Ingo lay on the bed beside me, typing away on his laptop. Suddenly he closed it and said, "Done!" He had just finished *Da*, a novel he had been working on for ten years. A few seconds later he opened the laptop again to start his next one, *Complete Love*.

Ingo called a few days after our return to Berlin. Months ago dOCUMENTA (13) had invited him to write a text with various drills as part of their publication project. He addressed the Last Year in his contribution but didn't mention that I was in the process of living it. I understood why—my drill's outcome was still completely uncertain—but it felt strange nonetheless. I wouldn't get any closer to participating in the exhibition, and it felt like a carrot was being dangled in front of me. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, the artistic director, didn't get Ingo's ideas at first, so her cocurator Chus Martínez wrote an introduction to his contribution. Ingo told her that I was in the middle of my Last Year. After reading my list, she asked why I hadn't written anything about unfulfilled sexual fantasies. I had no pat answer to give.

That evening I planned a trip to Paris with Kitty. Not that we didn't have a fulfilling sex life—on the contrary, sex with Kitty was the only time during my Last Year in which I felt free and at ease. But planning this had a special allure.

I had a lot of ground to cover first. I continued to navigate a swarm of tasks on a daily basis. I still believed I was in control. My archive had been selected, and I burned the material that wasn't included, coating seven glass panes with the soot for my work *Particles*. I entrenched myself in

my Last Year as though it were a bunker, but I heard the rumble of approaching detonations. Whenever I thought of the end, the white curtain fell across my mind's eye.

Fall came, and with it problems. Philomene canceled our second meeting for health reasons, so I had no chance to ask her the crucial question. Dr. Bestgen informed me that the grant application she had submitted to the Federal Art Foundation for my exhibition had been rejected.

For the first time in my Last Year I felt utterly empty and listless. I had to channel all my energy into my own grant applications with institutions in Thuringia. I also asked Friedrich Petzel, whom we had met in New York for our film, for a meeting at his gallery in Berlin. His positive reply came within minutes.

February 29 was like a dam, and the water was rising steadily. It felt like a hot lump of metal was pulsing in my chest. The uncertainty around the funding for my exhibition and getting help from an international gallery were only part of my worries. My financial resources for my family were running dry as well. I had pushed everything and everyone to the limit. Although I worked to the point of exhaustion every day, my activities generated little income. I was able to cobble together a music video for Northern Lite from footage I'd shot on the trip to Bosnia, but the proceeds were just the proverbial drop in the ocean. Other short-term fund-raising efforts (in which I invested far more energy) met with little enthusiasm.

With Ingo I developed a performance that was to take place as part of a promotional party for a tobacco company at Watergate, a riverside club in Berlin. I didn't want the seven-thousand-euro budget to pass me by. Our plan was to dock Axel's motorboat at Watergate shortly before midnight, carry a suitcase inside the club, and open the suitcase in the middle of the dance floor exactly at midnight. We planned to fit the suitcase with a thousand-watt light and blind the audience for a moment, only to disappear into the crowd a second later. This was not the kind

of art entertainment our clients had in mind. Instead, they paid a Berlin painter to spend the evening painting giant canvases in front of an audience.

But my life tolerated no delay. In late October Kitty and I boarded an express train to France. Traveling along the battlefields of the Great War, I watched as the sun bathed Kitty's still youthful face in a warm light, and I thought I could detect a kind of giddy anticipation in her fine features. Arriving in Paris, we took a taxi to our hotel. I ordered wine to our suite. We took a tiny bit of cocaine and talked at length about what sexual fantasies we wanted to fulfill, which was a treat in itself. Then I dissolved a heaping knife tip of MDMA in water and Kitty and I shared the drink. Our mouths were almost too dry from the drug to produce the necessary viscosity, yet we realized our fantasies with exuberance and love.

At sunrise, I went onto our room's balcony and looked out over the city, drinking from a carton of apple juice that had bread crumbs floating in it. The city shone with the onset of rain, and our bodies ached from the effort of the night.

My life had taken on a propulsive rhythm and everything came together as if guided by an invisible hand. I set up my will, appointed my father and Ingo administrators of my estate, drafted a "purchase agreement" with my lawyer to regulate the acquisition of work for my burial chamber, wrote my catalogue raisonné with the help of Tobias Naehring and his assistent Johannes Gebhardt, and chose artifacts for the vitrines in Weimar.

Since I had not yet found a suitable mountain, much less purchased one, I had to make sure that my corpse could be properly stored after my death and transported to the pyramid once it was complete. I visited a coffin factory with Christoph, who was watching over me like a benevolent spirit. The owner showed us all sorts of coffins. When I explained my criteria to him, he clarified the legal regulations for transporting dead people across

national borders. The body had to be transported in a soldered zinc coffin that would be contained in a second coffin made of wood.

I ordered the necessary items. The sober design of the zinc coffin and raw appearance of its wooden shell came much closer to my aesthetic ideas than the models I'd seen in the catalogues at funeral homes. I placed the coffin in my storage unit next to the other finished work for the chamber. The room filled with the scent of fresh spruce.

By the end of November, Ingo hadn't received a reply from Charlotte Roche, and my meeting with Friedrich Petzel hadn't come to anything. None of my efforts to raise large amounts of money had been fruitful. Now the time had come: all of my reserves were spent. I was forty-eight hours away from bankruptcy.

I huddled on Rosa's chair in our kitchen, completely deflated and ready to throw in the towel. I looked out the window—the sun was shining and the branches of a maple tree noiselessly freed themselves from a burden of snow. The next moment I got up, gave my limbs a good stretch, and decided to try to sell shares in *Pyramid Mountain*. Despite Ingo's objection that a sale would limit options for realizing the project, I saw this as a last hope. For ten thousand euros I would offer a share of 25 percent in the largest artwork in human history.

The first potential investor I contacted was my father. Although he had no interest whatsoever in becoming a co-owner of *Pyramid Mountain*, he didn't want to see me fall into the abyss. On the condition that I find at least one other buyer, he agreed to purchase a quarter share. By evening I had spoken with three other potential buyers. No one confirmed or refused right away; instead, they asked for time to think. After a sleepless night, only Sebastian Lück signaled interest. The three of us founded the Pyramid Mountain Consortium, and my lawyer put together a contract governing the terms of our joint ownership. I'd pulled my head out of the noose at the last minute.

Shortly before Christmas I traveled with Ingo to the Uckermark, north of Berlin, to finish the interview about my life and summarize my research about the night of December 24, 1998. A few months prior Ingo had bought a small house in Lychen next to a lake. The previous inhabitant was a one-legged man who had amassed thousands of items over the decades until his death, though he had kept the house in good shape. Every room, every corner was packed with doodads. Ingo hadn't had the time to clear out the house, but he had made paths to get through the rooms.

We spent the next three days working at the small kitchen table and the nights in a wooden double bed. My thousand-page interview and the more than 180 pages of interviews with those involved in the night's events would be shown in the exhibition as a stack of paper on a pedestal under a glass case. To read them you would have to buy the works, since their controversial content, the personal rights of the parties involved, and documented criminal activities made them unsuited for broader public consumption.

A stroke of luck came when I returned to my studio: a grant application had been approved. Everything felt light and wonderful, and I was convinced that nothing could stop me now.

Ingo sent me the first part of his new novel, *Complete Love*. As I was reading the manuscript—bizarre even by Ingo's standards, it included an Army of Love that fulfills the sexual fantasies of old, ugly, and disabled people—a woman by the name of Ava contacted me via Skype. The disturbing thing was that the same thing happens in Ingo's novel: a woman named Ava contacts the male protagonist seemingly randomly via Skype. The Ava in the novel has only three hours left to live and wants to spend the rest of her life in a rather unusual way with her new acquaintance.

I understood that Ingo had condensed the "last year" to "last hours" in his book. But could Ava's call really be a coincidence, as Ingo claimed? I had opened up to him as to no one else in my life, and now I had the uneasy feeling that I was

unknowingly participating in a performance. Was I mistaken about Ingo? Had he planned everything out long beforehand, only to give me the script for the end of my drill by sending me his novel? Was I the protagonist in an insane writer's fantasy?

The situation with Ava did turn out to be a coincidence. She was a screenwriter and had seen our film, which is how she found out about my Last Year. She wanted to schedule an appointment with me for the day after the year was over to see how I felt. I told her that I could not make any appointments for after the year.

The mere fact that I had thought Ingo capable of imposing another test without my knowledge worried me. My confidence in Ingo was shaken, and everything was thrown into question. I decided to follow my intuition and banish all dark thoughts from my mind, because doubt only got in the way.

After spending Christmas and New Year's with family and friends, I was now in the home stretch. The end was near, and each day was monumental. Fifty-nine days lay ahead. Half an eternity.

I invited the main protagonists of the night of Christmas Eve 1998 (except one, who refused to take part) to a "reconciliation tribunal" at the Max Planck Institute in Leipzig. While I read out a summary of the research everyone's brain activity would be measured. Dr. Jonas Obleser —a psychologist who had already been involved with the Great Pyramid—welcomed our small group and led us into a laboratory. He explained the procedure and assistants attached wired sensors to us, one on each head, neck, and back. Then I read the chronology of events aloud:

Reconstruction of the Events of December 24, 1998, 8 p.m., to December 25, 1998, 10 a.m.

1. *Daniel H., Sebastian K., Christoph L., Alexandra M., Michael R., and others visit Paul F., Ina H., and*

Erik N. at a shared flat at Theaterstraße 4 in Erfurt, Germany. Together they consume alcohol, cannabis, LSD, and Hawaiian Baby Woodrose. Daniel H., Ina H., Christoph L., Alexandra M., and Erik N. decamp to a party at the Predigerkeller. Approx. 9 p.m. to 11 p.m.

2. *At the entrance to the Predigerkeller, Steffen C. directs a laser pointer at Erik N.'s eyes, which, after a brief verbal confrontation with Erik N., results in Steffen C. being knocked down by a well-aimed punch to the face, followed by another one for good measure. Steffen C. suffers a broken nose, briefly loses consciousness, and is brought to the hospital in an ambulance. Approx. 12 a.m.*

3. *Erik N. has verbal confrontations with Steffen C.'s intervening friends along with René K.'s group of friends. Christoph L. asks Erik N. to leave the scene and come with him.*

4. *Christoph L. and Erik N. separate. Erik N. starts to make his way home. Christoph L. turns back in the direction of the Predigerkeller.*

5. *Erik N. is overtaken by Steffen C.'s friends. They hit and kick him. Erik N. is able to free himself and escape.*

6. *Christoph L. is simultaneously attacked by another group of young men. When he attempts to flee, René K. hits him over the head with a full bottle of Cinzano. He suffers a major laceration, puts up a fight, and beats the pursuers in flight.*

7. *Christoph L. and Erik N. meet again and look at each others' injuries. Christoph L. exposes his torso and rubs blood from the laceration on it.*

8. *At a construction site, Christoph L. takes an iron rod and Erik N. tears a slat from a wooden fence. Thus armed, the two intend to return to the Predigerkeller.*

9. *Christoph L. and Erik N. make their way back to the Predigerkeller. Further verbal confrontations follow, which a friend of René K.'s ends with a shot from a blank-firing pistol. Following this, Erik N. and Christoph L. go back to the shared flat on Theaterstraße. Daniel H., Ina H., and Alexandra M. head there as well, independent of Erik N. and Christoph L.*

10. *Christoph L. and Erik N. discuss the events of the evening with Paul F., Daniel H., Ina H., Sebastian K., Alexandra M., and Michael R. Further consumption of cannabis and alcohol. Approx. 1:30 a.m. to approx. 2:30 a.m.*

11. *Daniel H., Ina H., and Alexandra M. engage in sexual acts together. These are interrupted by a loud shriek emitted by Ina H., Daniel H.'s girlfriend, resulting in violent verbal and physical confrontations between Paul F., Daniel H., Ina H., Christoph L., and Erik N. Approx. 2:30 a.m. to 8 a.m.*

12. *Ina H. strikes Daniel H. with a broomstick.*

13. *Paul F. lunges at Daniel H.; Erik N. separates the two. Afterward Paul F. throws an aluminum bong at Daniel H., but misses.*

14. *After several futile attempts to deescalate the situation, Christoph L. and Erik N. give up and smoke cannabis together. Approx. 6 a.m. to 7 a.m.*

15. *Everyone present leaves the apartment independently of one another, with the exception of Erik N. Approx. 7 a.m. to 10 a.m.*

As I read, a measuring device recorded our brain waves and converted them into sound signals. Each person's memories differed when it came to the events in question, and each of us sent diverging signals. I wanted to use the soundtrack, which combined all the reactions, for one of the main works in Weimar. I was overjoyed that my teenage friends had agreed to reunite and support me.

I got a call from Kitty on the way back. She asked when I would be home, and I could sense that something was wrong. Arriving at the house, I saw her sitting amid pages of my diary with tears streaming down her face. She had found the time to read my entries, and her confidence in me was shaken. She said I had only discussed our arguments and that the many moments of happiness and her efforts for me and our family went unmentioned. She also despaired at a passage in which I described a young Bosnian woman who had given us the keys to our room at the hotel in Visoko. She was inconsolable. She had the feeling that I was slipping away from her. All my assurances that she did not need to worry went unheard. After a night in separate beds, the next morning the mood was still at zero. I had not expected such a reaction and everything else faded into the background. Time stood still.

It took several days before we finally made up. The thought of losing the other showed us how unconditionally we loved one another. As we lay silently in the dark on the living-room carpet, the pent-up tension erupted and a rush of emotions poured out. Our turmoil washed away and our love was rekindled.

Toward the end of my Last Year, the structure of the planning took on a unique beauty. A feeling of satisfaction flowed through me as I saw how the individual parts intertwined. But much was still unfinished and needed my undivided attention. For months I'd been working with my former assistant Eike Wesenberg to write a hit song. But our efforts did not bear fruit. When we played our potential hit "V.I.P." to Markus Bruns and an A&R representative

of a major record label, my fantasy of storming the charts was dashed. Although the song was catchy and danceable and fit seamlessly in the current charts, it was also utterly replaceable.

It seemed unlikely that our work, or any other collaboration, would achieve the intended result by the end of February. Ingo and I spontaneously tried to solve the problem with another problem, a strategy that had served us well in the past, since a negative times a negative equals a positive. Maybe there was a way to roll the still-lacking attention for *Pyramid Mountain* and my ambition to land a hit into one. "Why don't you sing?" Ingo asked me. The answer was obvious: I couldn't even carry a tune. But then again I thought, why not, what did I have to lose? That night, after a jolt of inspiration from Ingo, we rewrote Volker Lechtenbrinck's sing-along hit "Ich mag" (I Like) into a song about my preferences and plans, and my love for Kitty.

I tossed away my inhibitions, and the singing exercises became my work's constant companion. For hours I belted out the song in my studio, full of ardor, over and over again. Embarrassment was no longer a criterion. I recorded the song with Frithjof in his music studio, leaving all masculine pretense behind and putting as much emotion into the lines as possible.

I like the sun that warms me,
Living in places that aren't noisy.
Dogs that don't bark,
Nice high waves.
I like sparkling juice with no ice,
Ingo, who knows so much.
Food rashly got,

Ich mag Sonne, die mich wärmt,
wohnen, wo's nicht lärmt.
Hunde, die nicht bell'n,
schöne hohe Well'n.
Ich mag Schorle ohne Eis,
Ingo, der soviel weiß.
Essen überstürzt,
gern auch ungewürzt.
Ich mag Dschungelcamp

unspiced is nice.
I like I'm a Celebrity *and Schmidt,*
Kati Witt's accent.
Walking in strange cities, winds with stiff breezes.

All of this I like—and most especially you.

I like Ali and his game,
Jens Thiel's glasses.
Friends with sense,
Soil in my hand.
I like Jünger, Prince, and Groys,
Sleighing and Beuys.
Opium for nights on end,
Fidelity without coercion.
I like tenderness and lust,
Women with confidence.
Laughing 'bout a joke,
Critics with heart.

All of this I like—and most especially you.

I like giving without thanks,
Days without squabble.
Your shaved leg,
To be a razor for once.

All of this I like—and most especially you.

und Schmidt,
den Akzent von Kati Witt
Durch fremde Städte geh'n,
Winde, die stark weh'n.

All das mag ich – und ganz doll dich.

Ich mag Ali und sein Spiel,
die Brille von Jens Thiel.
Freunde mit Verstand,
Erde in der Hand.
Ich mag Jünger, Prince und Groys,
Schlittenfahr'n und Beuys.
Opium nächtelang,
Treue ohne Zwang.
Ich mag Zärtlichkeit und Lust,
Frauen selbstbewusst.
Lachen über'n Scherz,
Kritiker mit Herz.

All das mag ich – und ganz doll dich.

Ich mag schenken ohne Dank,
Tage ohne Zank.
Dein rasiertes Bein,
mal Rasierer sein.

All das mag ich – und ganz doll dich.

I like deep, dark craters,
My mother, my father.
Buildin' a pyramid,
Stowin' it under a mountain.
I like hatching big plans,
Sometimes over the top.
The sun when it burns me,
My daughter when she runs.
A collector with lots of money,
Who does as I like.
A world at peace,
And that everyone loves each other.

All of this I like—and most especially you.

Ich mag tiefe, dunkle Krater,
meine Mutter, meinen Vater.
Eine Pyramide bau'n,
sie unterm Berg verstau'n.
Ich mag große Pläne schmieden,
manchmal übertrieben.
Sonne, wenn sie brennt,
meine Tochter, wenn sie rennt.
Einen Sammler mit viel Geld,
der tut, was mir gefällt.
Eine Welt in Frieden,
Und dass sich alle lieben.

All das mag ich – und ganz doll dich.

While some of my plans came to nothing, others didn't seem important enough anymore. Instead of surfing in Los Angeles, it was enough for me to have plowed through the waves of the Atlantic with Rosa. My limited resources were too precious for a fate-tempting visit to a casino. But I realized that I had never seen the Egyptian pyramids with my own eyes, which, given the fact that I wanted to be buried in a pyramid myself, I absolutely had to do.

On January 31, Ingo and I flew to Cairo. Our accommodation was located in a huge building near Tahrir Square. A wooden mailbox with "Lotus Hotel" painted on it was fixed near the entrance to a narrow elevator. On the seventh floor we entered a long corridor, and a porter greeted us at its end. Our rooms had a rustic charm, and

in the evening we walked to Tahrir Square, where there was still an anarchic mood after the first wave of revolution. The dirt ground in the huge square was compacted to a solid surface. There were a few dusty bushes among the dozens of tents and a dense throng of speakers, protesters, and onlookers, with stalls selling souvenirs, food, and drinks.

We circled the camp. As I was photographing a doll dangling from a gallows, a group of young Egyptians came up to us and painted the colors of the Egyptian flag on the backs of our hands. A conversation started about the current political situation and the distribution of power in the square, which—according to the apparently Western-minded young people—had turned into a gathering point for Islamists.

The next morning we made our way to the Giza Plateau to visit the pyramids. The otherwise tourist-clogged site was empty on account of the uncertain political situation. Although I had already seen hundreds of pictures of these monuments, the sight of them impressed me deeply. They have defied time for four thousand years and will eventually disintegrate into dust.

At the edge of the premises we met a small group of Bedouins who were preparing tea. They invited us to join them and we sat down, silently watching the pharaoh's graves in front of us and drinking hot sweet tea from tin cups. They offered to bring us into the desert on horseback so we could see the pyramids from a distance. A guide took us to a higher plateau that offered a magnificent view of the tomb before we went inside. We went down a steep corridor into the interior of the Pyramid of Menkaure. The burial chamber was perfectly carved in granite. I stroked the smooth walls with my palms, thinking of my hubris in wanting to be buried in a pyramid myself.

By the time we resurfaced, the setting sun had cast its red veil over the desert. As we climbed over the remains of a ramp that had once allowed the pyramid to be built, one of the Bedouins from earlier offered to take us back to

town on a different route, and on camelback. The path led us along the garbage-strewn city limit that bordered the desert. From the back of my mount, I could see archaeologists in excavation sites far off in the desert sand next to goat stables and mountains of trash.

Our destination was a small house in a village-like Cairo suburb, where I bought a lump of hashish from our companion's brother. We walked through a jumble of low buildings and saw proud riders everywhere, apparently preparing their fine horses for an upcoming race. We were the only foreigners here. There was a heavy, sweetish smell in the air, and everything was covered with a thick layer of soot.

Over the next days we visited the deserted Egyptian Museum and strolled through the necropolis on the eastern edge of Cairo. On the eve of our departure, we walked into a large demonstration in Tahrir Square voicing outrage over a massacre committed by the police during a soccer game that left over seventy dead. Suddenly the demonstrators dispersed and shopkeepers barricaded their shops. We climbed onto a ledge and saw policemen in full gear march on the crowd.

Plumes of smoke rose out of a side street, and more and more injured people were brought out to waiting ambulances by young men on motorcycles. As we turned onto a street that had been secured with concrete barricades and barbed wire, two tear-gas grenades exploded near us. When the smoke cleared, Ingo was gone. I went looking for him in the confusion.

It was like a battlefield. The street was littered with rubble, cars burned brightly, tear-gas projectiles sounded a dull thud before arcing into the crowd. The air was heavy with acrid smoke, my eyes watered and my tongue burned. I sought cover behind a barricade piled up by the demonstrators and tried to call Ingo's phone. No luck. More and more demonstrators pushed into the street, bringing protective masks and neutralizing liquid for the tear gas. A young Egyptian gave me a neutralizer and mask and

advised me to leave the area as soon as possible. He said this was no place for a foreign reporter, which he apparently took me for—there were too many crazies.

I squatted alone in a doorway, watching the scenery shrouded in warm light from the fires. Despite the confusion, most of those involved seemed focused and enthusiastic. I tried to call Ingo again and worried that something had happened to him. I was on the way to the spot where I had last seen him when he called. He had gotten caught up in the tear gas and made it to a side street, struggling for breath and afraid for his life. In great distress and contemplating his own demise, he was handed neutralizing fluid. Once he had regained his vision and could breathe freely, he took side streets back to the hotel, where he'd left his phone.

Reunited amid the chaos we visited a restaurant a few streets down, a place Ingo remembered from his last stay in Cairo, and ate the best fish I'd ever tasted. Back at the hotel, I dug the resinous lump of hashish out of my pocket, smoking while looking out at the raging city from the balcony of my room.

Three days after our return, I drove from Erfurt to Berlin. At a rest stop in Köckern, an older man with a lot of luggage asked if I could give him a ride. My car was loaded to full capacity, but I sat down with him. He told me that he had only a few weeks left to live—bone cancer in the final stages. On his head he wore a red cap that concealed a tumor the size of a tennis ball. He was on his way to Oslo to offer his handwritten autobiography to a publisher. After that he would travel to Zurich to receive active euthanasia. I asked him about his last wishes, and he replied that he would like to sleep in a hotel that night but didn't have the money. I gave him money for the night and told him about my project in order to find out how a truly terminally ill person would react. He thought it was interesting because it would confront people with their own finitude, which they usually repressed. As a farewell he gave me a poem he wrote:

He who knows not the goal, cannot know the way.
He will run in circles his whole life,
ending there from whence he came,
only to have trampled the bounteous meaning.

When I told my assistant David about the meeting, he told me that he too had met that man at a rest stop and heard the same story. He had only a few weeks left to live almost a year ago, and the poem was by Christian Morgenstern. His story was a lucrative business model, along with the extremely convincing lump on his head.

Our breath sketched clouds in the cold room and condensed on the windows of the former barracks. Wrapped in layers of ratty woolen blankets, I fell into a deep sleep after breakfast. When I woke up in the late afternoon, Ingo was still lying on the narrow bed opposite me, as he had hours before. It was some time before I regained my senses and realized that what I thought was a dream was reality.

Hunting an animal seemed pointless to me now. Instead I had resolved to open a one-room hotel here in the Thuringian hinterland. Two weeks after returning from Cairo, with permission from Angela Abe, proprietor of the guesthouse in Kaltenwestheim, we redecorated an empty room with furniture we had collected throughout the building. It was now equipped with two beds, a Persian carpet, desk, reading corner, bar, and bookshelf. In addition to volumes we had found in the in-house library, we stocked the shelf with some of our own titles. We agreed with Abe that the room, which we named "The Future of Art: A Room," would remain unchanged and be rented to travelers in search of a retreat. I felt right at home.

Almost everything I'd set out to do was done. I had posted the video for "Ich mag" on Valentine's Day as a tribute to Kitty and my supporters, made a photo album for Rosa with images of her first six years, and created a library of over forty books I thought Rosa would find useful one day. I

now had the feeling of being able to let go, of not having to achieve anything more, of finally creating order. My mind was so conditioned that it was hard for me to escape the thought that I might really disappear. I almost longed for the kiss of death. But even if it could guarantee a place in art history, the existence of my daughter kept me from such considerations.

I decided to experience the end of my year where it had began. I bought a ticket to Malta for February 29. I made sure that all my emails were forwarded to Ingo and Sebastian as of March 1, granted Sebastian power of attorney to use the funding, and authorized both to communicate with the museum and all funders on my behalf. Then the time came for me to say goodbye to those close to me, strange as it felt. Not everyone was willing to submit to the dictate of my drill, but many seemed convinced that they would never see me again. Dr. Bestgen hugged me tightly and whispered in my ear that she was helping me to let go. The evening before my departure, Kitty and I lay on the soft carpet in our living room and smoked in silence. The scent of her hair rose into my nostrils as we fell asleep, and I felt safer than ever.

It was dark and quiet when I opened my eyes in the early morning of February 29. I sat alone in the kitchen until Kitty and Rosa woke up. Little rings spread on the surface of my coffee, caused by my own barely perceptible trembling. The Last Year had gripped me more than I had imagined. The white curtain was now very close. I even wondered if my brain could be so conditioned that it would really quit working at the end of the day.

I packed, then kissed Rosa goodbye, telling her that I would be away for a while. She smiled and wished me happy travels. Kitty and I bid a short and painless farewell at the train station. I kissed her soft lips and got on the train to Berlin. Upon arrival, I met with Ingo in my studio to finalize the details for publishing my diary and executing the exhibition.

It was done, and I told Ingo that I'd really had enough. It was terrifying to think the Last Year would go on even one more day. I'd had enough of grappling with my own life. I was sick of myself, and I was sick of Ingo too. As my mentor he was obsolete, and whether there was a future for us was uncertain.

I closed the door to my studio, and Ingo drove me to Tegel Airport. We stopped at a Turkish grill house on the way and spent a last hour together without exchanging many words. Everything had been said and there was nothing left to do. As we reached the airport, a flock of starlings flew in precise formation above us. We embraced, and I sensed that Ingo had succumbed to the power of suggestion as much as I had. Somehow convinced I would never see him again, I turned around to wave several times on my way to the gate.

On the plane my heart was in my mouth. The moment that had shaped my life for almost 366 days was now within reach. The plane touched down at half past ten. I hailed a taxi and made my way to the hotel. On the drive, a dog jumped out of the darkness and froze in the headlights. The driver sharply turned the wheel and the car lurched off the road. Once we were driving again I had to grin at the idea of meeting my end in a Maltese ditch just before reaching my destination.

At the hotel I wrote my last diary entry and went out onto the balcony. I set up the video camera to film myself in the final minutes of my Last Year. As the hand of my watch announced the last second there was a dull thud. Everything around me was plunged into total darkness. Terror ran through my body and my eyes searched for a point of orientation. It's only when I saw the recording light on the video camera that I was sure I was alive. The power had gone out. A moment later, the lights returned. My Last Year was over.

When I cracked open my eyes, all I could see was a needle-thin sunbeam that had found its way between the heavy

curtains. I lay curled up and fully clothed in bed and felt as if reborn, despite my aching body. Unable to think clearly, I left my room and wandered through endless hallways. After struggling to open a set of double doors at the end of a corridor, I peered into a hall. A panoramic window flooded the room with honey-colored light. Against the backlight I saw silhouettes walking to and fro, as if on the bridge of a spaceship. When I got closer I could see they were guests bustling around a breakfast buffet. The glass front of the hall opened to a view of the peaceful sea under a bright blue sky. After three cups of coffee, I tentatively went outside and sat down on a bench, where I stayed for hours, staring at the sea.

Back in my room, I slept until the next day, when I flew back to Germany and retreated to the Baltic Sea for a few days to collect myself. This was easier said than done since I still was caught up in Last Year mode. I made a list of things I thought I had to do: find a mountain, find a collector for *Pyramid Mountain* and the burial chamber … It took me several days to get used to the idea that I had nothing to do but find a new place in life.

Kitty and Rosa greeted me joyfully upon my arrival in Erfurt. All signs pointed to a new beginning, and my main concern was getting my feet back on safe ground so that I could make a future for my family. The opening of my exhibition in Weimar was four months away and I had done everything I could to ensure that it could take place without any further assistance from me. I wanted to stay below the radar until the opening, gather new strength and consider whether I wanted to appear as an artist again, or devote myself to other things.

My ghostly drifting between worlds was short lived. Ingo contacted me a little later under the threadbare pretense of having to discuss a detail on the map of the events of Christmas Eve 1998. Whether it was worry or longing, I couldn't tell. My idea of watching everything from afar shattered the moment I read his message. With a heavy heart I wrote back, and was on the front lines again in no

time. Four weeks later, the day before Easter, I received a message from the director of the Klassik Stiftung Weimar informing me that Dr. Bestgen had become ill and that my exhibition would have to be postponed indefinitely.

Stunned, I dialed her cell phone to inquire about her condition. She answered my call from a hospital bed and told me, slightly dazed, that she had just awoken from anesthesia. I was embarrassed to bother her with my problems, but she was glad to hear my voice again despite her condition. When I told her about the foundation's message, she was no less shocked than I was. We agreed to do everything we could to avoid the exhibition's postponement. I visited her in the clinic a few days later. She was still weak and on the road to recovery. We strolled through the nearby park and I felt a sincere bond between us. But she seemed concerned that I exposed myself to too much risk with my experiment and was putting my photography work on the line.

In the meantime, the Klassik Stiftung appointed the curator Ellen Bierwisch as interim director of the museum. Canceling the exhibition would be more problematic than letting it proceed as planned. Too many people and institutions had invested in it.

The tide had turned again, and I decided to continue with my art. With an adventurous heart still beating in my chest, my Last Year was to be a springboard into the future, and I would take back the reins, beginning with the installation of the exhibition. When I arrived at the museum, all the work from my storage unit, the museum depot, and the framer's was there in wooden transport boxes. My almost manic preparation had paid off. In three days, with the help of the museum technicians, I had installed the ten works as planned and equipped each of the nineteen showcases with selected artifacts from my life.

What I needed now was a mountain. Some research led me to Kleiner Gleichberg near the village of Römhild. Everything about its location and condition seemed ideally suited to my plans: a Thuringian landmark that was visible

from afar and had been used as a natural stronghold by the Celts as well as the East German army. In the morning of the day of the opening, I picked up Ingo, Sebastian, Joachim Bessing, Tobias Naehring, Amy Patton, and Jonas Weber Herrera from the train station, and we drove to the designated mountain for a ground-breaking ceremony. Our hike to the summit took us through a fairy-tale forest along the moss-covered remains of Celtic fortifications.

On the way I had my first lengthy chat with Joachim, who at first had seemed wary of me, like several of Ingo's friends. I learned that we shared a passion for Ernst Jünger's work. At the top we came to a stone plateau, and we could see to the horizon. The mountain was under a pale-blue sky and the sun had already passed its zenith. I took out a chisel I had brought along, carved two *N*s and a triangle into a rock, and, shovel in hand, posed with Ingo for a photograph at the highest point. We all sat under a tree, and Ingo read a text he had written:

Today the Neues Museum Weimar will open "18.10.1973–29.02.2012," an exhibition showing the design of Erik Niedling's burial chamber in Pyramid Mountain*, which was conceived by Ingo Niermann. An integral part of it is a collection of artifacts from the course of Niedling's life, beginning with his childhood in East Germany, youth around the time of German reunification, with typical self-discovery phases such as anarchism and clubbing, all the way to starting a family and an artistic career. Far from a heroic self-staging, Niedling's life presents itself in all its coincidences, dead ends, and erroneous ways.*

First, Niedling and Niermann will present their preferred location for Pyramid Mountain*, Kleiner Gleichberg in Niedling's home state of Thuringia, where they will break ground. The mountain, which is also known as Steinsburg because of its Celtic use as a fortification, rises two hundred meters above a plateau*

about four hundred meters high (mountain peak 650 meters above sea level) and is impressive due to its fairly straight rise on all sides.

Like King Midas, prevailing nature and monument protection laws—in their attempt to preserve the past authentically—freeze ever-larger parts of the world in time. By contrast, Niedling and Niermann demand that everything be allowed to change so long as it can be restored to its previous state, and they ask: Wouldn't the Celts have liked Pyramid Mountain *as well?*

Pyramid Mountain *graces Thuringia with a world-class cultural attraction for hundreds of years, and, despite a gross estimated cost in the tens of millions, it is already cheaper than a small-to-medium-sized museum in the medium term, because no ongoing overhead costs will be incurred. In fact, its woodland can even be used for forestry purposes.* Pyramid Mountain *is visited not only by art lovers, but also by curious bystanders and esoterics who presume pyramids to hold special powers.*

Funding could come from an individual, a group of rich collectors, or a network of patrons who want to give Thuringia an international and cultural profile beyond Weimar Classicism. Another variant is the issuance of a Pyramid Dollar, which promises symbolic participation, but can also be monetized should the completed Pyramid Mountain *be sold.*

Before the pyramid can be carved out of the mountain, its surface and flora must be fully mapped. Soil and rock shall be removed in thin layers using shovels, hoes, stone saws, and bare hands in order to precisely gauge the depth of the mountain as well—a special opportunity for geologists, biologists, and archaeologists. Large homogeneous layers of rock will be removed with excavators and explosive devices. Volunteers enthusiastic about the project will live in caves surrounding the mountain—an invisible architecture that anticipates the disappearance of both the pyramid and one's own life.

Once the pyramid is uncovered, the amount of time it remains to be seen depends on how long Erik Niedling lives. The Thuringia Tourist Board shall offer him a comfortable lifetime annuity so long as he is not overweight, does not smoke, and does not take drugs. Transhumanists will want to make him one of the first human beings to become immortal. The unfinished Pyramid Mountain *would become a monument to eternal life. If Niedling does die, then people will suspect that conservationists have murdered him to accelerate the reforestation of the mountain. Meanwhile, esoterics will protest the poring over of this unique center of power and try to make Niedling's corpse disappear so that it cannot be buried. Riots between esoterics and conservationists will break out at the pyramid.*

My presence at the opening seemed right and wrong at the same time. I was not the person I had been during my Last Year, and I hadn't gotten used to my new life yet. Ingo gave me Gottfried Benn's book *Altern als Problem für Künstler* (Aging as a problem for artists) as a gift, and gave himself and Joachim LSD to ensure that the expected reality of the opening wouldn't be the only one. I declined the portion offered since my reality was already surreal enough.

I vaguely perceived the official part of the opening. My body was present, but the words of the speakers and the congratulations rolled off me. I could see Ingo and Joachim, who were already in another world, cowering on a ledge behind the lectern. Dr. Bestgen opened the show. I was reluctant to accompany visitors through an exhibition that was meant to be posthumous. I had mined my psyche for a year, now the exhibition was supposed to speak for itself.

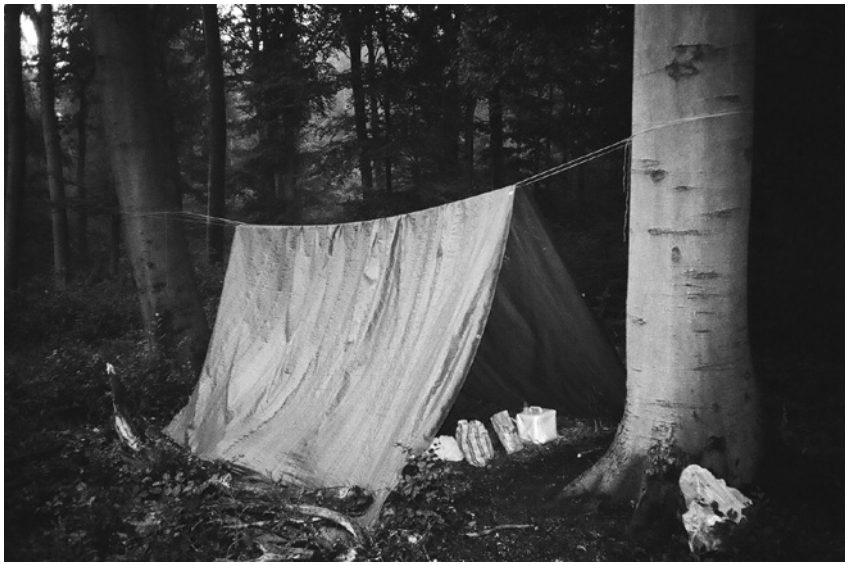
Outside it was warm. I sat on the steps in front of the huge Classicist building. Ingo and Joachim had joined Rosa in somersaulting on the grass in front of the Gauforum and seemed to be having a good time. My friends had set up a bar in front of the museum and Sebastian offered vodka to

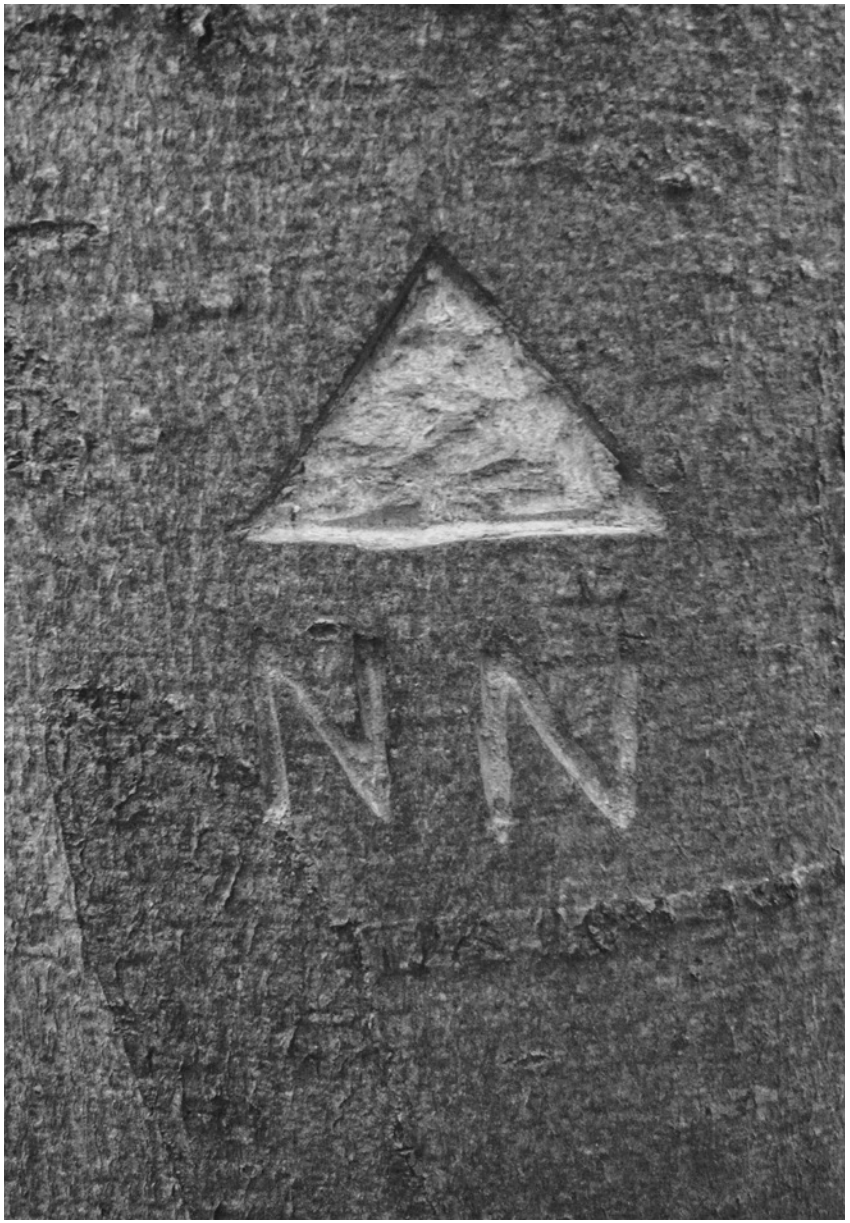
the visitors, as I had wished at the end of my Last Year. Other wishes went unfulfilled, which was understandable given what I had already expected of those around me, but it still hit me hard. Boris had canceled his recitation of "On Point" by House of Pain owing to an "internal reshuffle" at his company, Tommy had not managed to organize a burnout in front of the museum even though a monster-truck show was scheduled in Weimar that same day, and Philomene didn't show up with a rich collector. Even the laser pyramid Matthias Schüller wanted to project over the museum did not materialize because, despite having gotten hold of the high-powered lasers, Christian did not have the patience to wait for the forecasted clouds to appear.

I was used to exhibition openings falling short of my optimistic expectations. This time I was well prepared for it, since the opening could not do justice to the immense pressure weighing on it. For that reason, and satisfied with my work and its presentation, I felt the absurdity of being present at my own supposedly posthumous exhibition.

The remaining visitors danced around Museumsplatz until late in the summer night, taking turns looking after Ingo and Joachim, and finished off the vodka. Joachim, who was spending his last days in Germany before moving to Ethiopia, lost his shoes while crawling through the park with Ingo. They buzzed around for hours like two crazed bumblebees until Joachim, lying on his back, fell head over heels for Axel's wife.

Ingo, Sebastian, and I were the last ones there. Ingo crouched on the steps of the museum lost in thought, and Sebastian could barely stand up. It was up to me to clean the place up. Shortly before sunrise, I grabbed a broom and left a neatly swept pile of broken glass under the light of a street lamp.








BECK'S



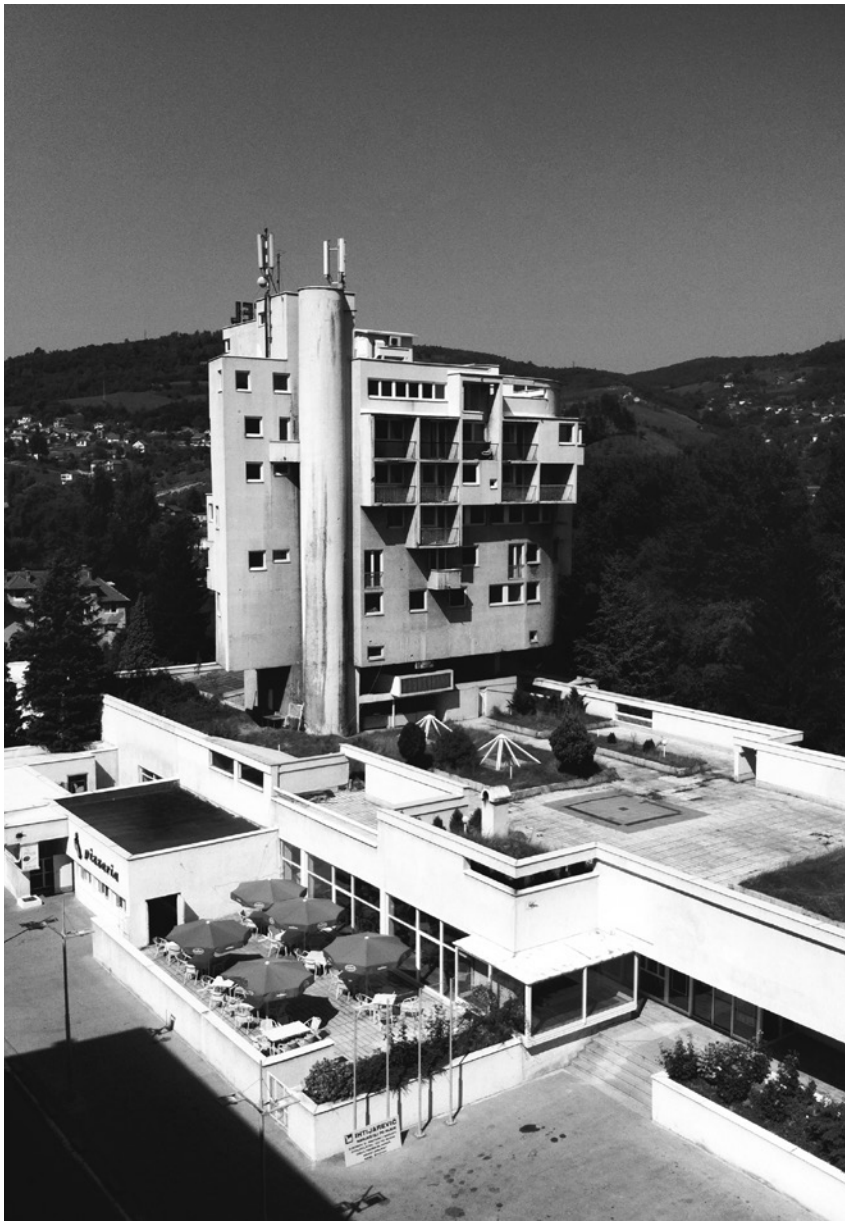


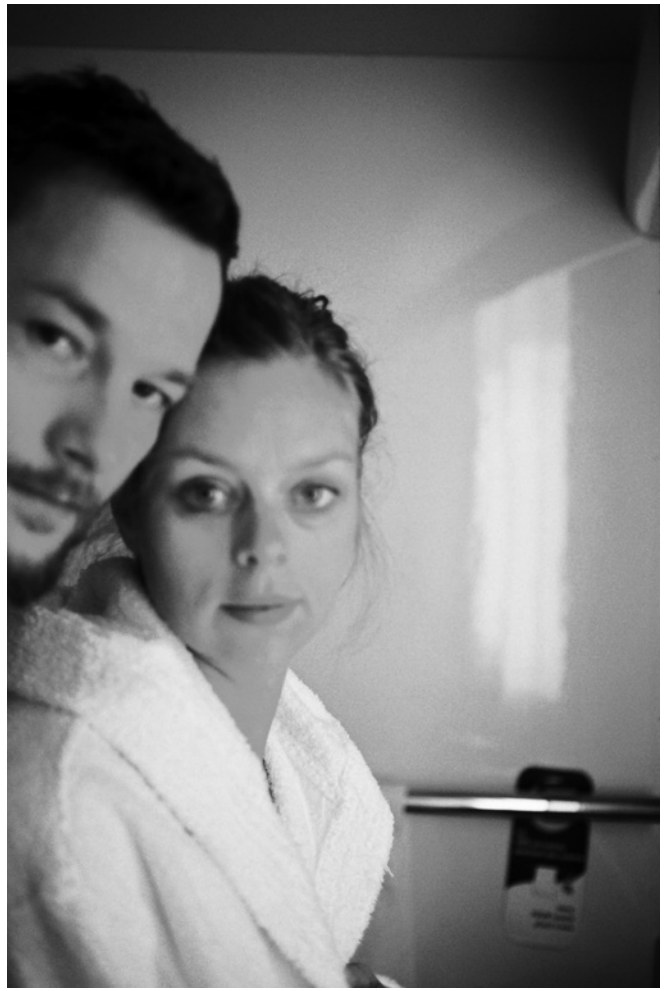






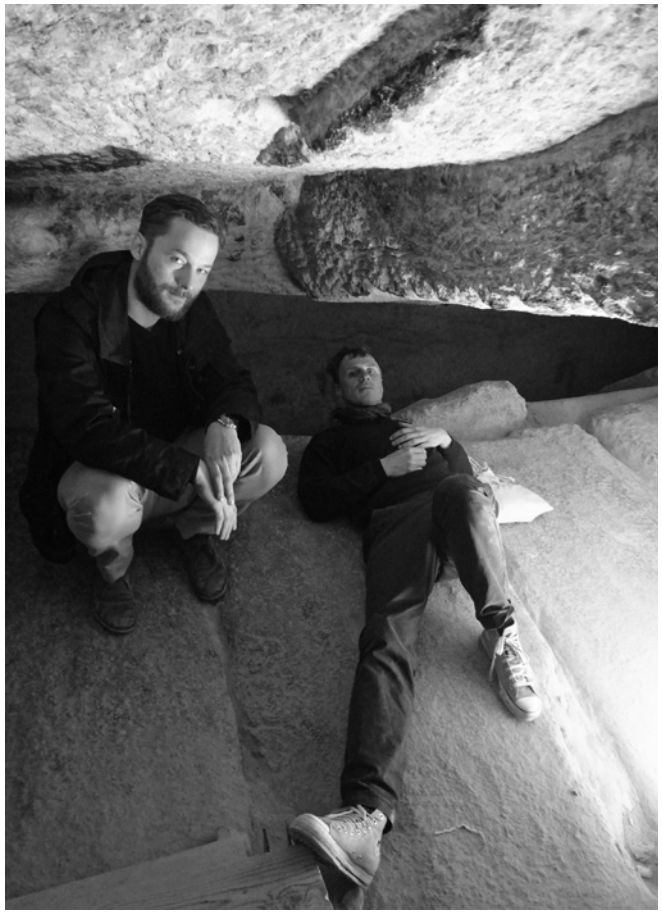

MINE !
ZABRANJEN PROLAZ !






فندق لوتس
الدور السابع
Lotus Hotel
FLOOR







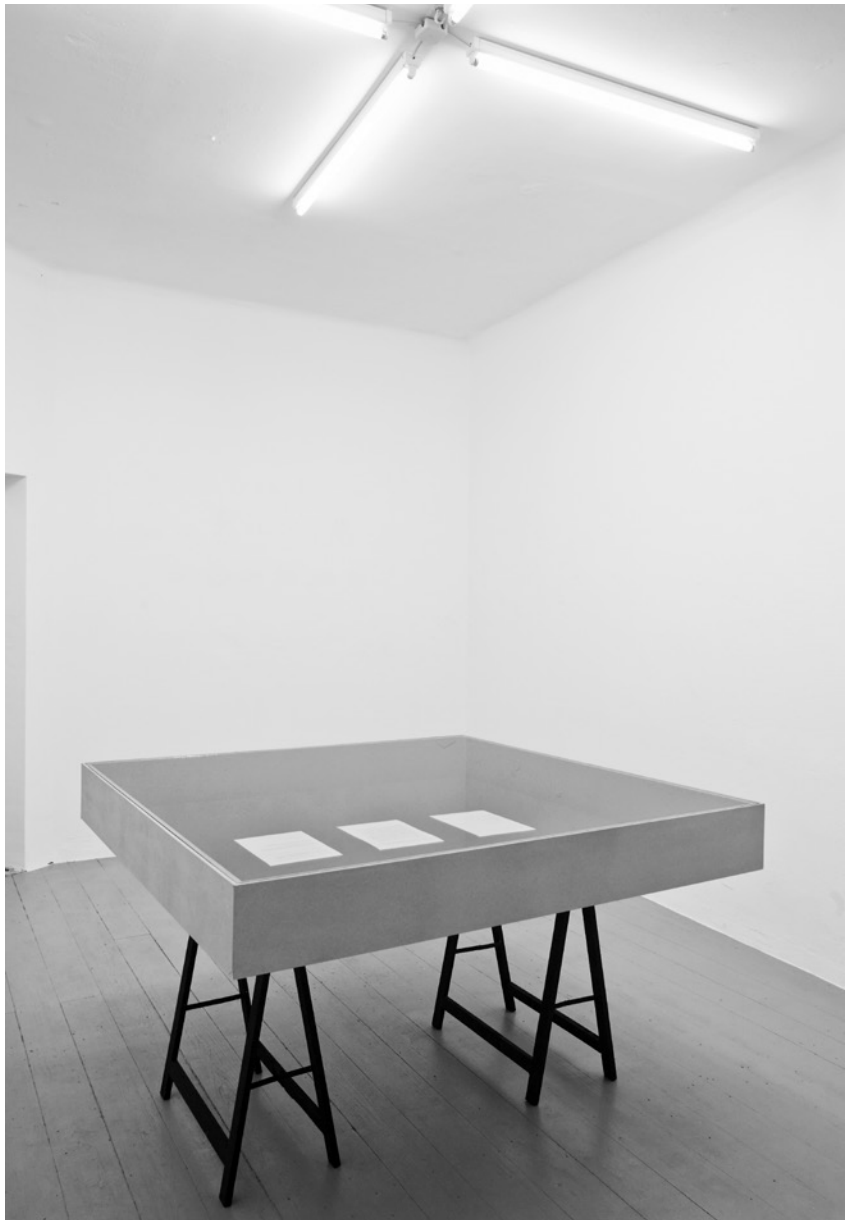








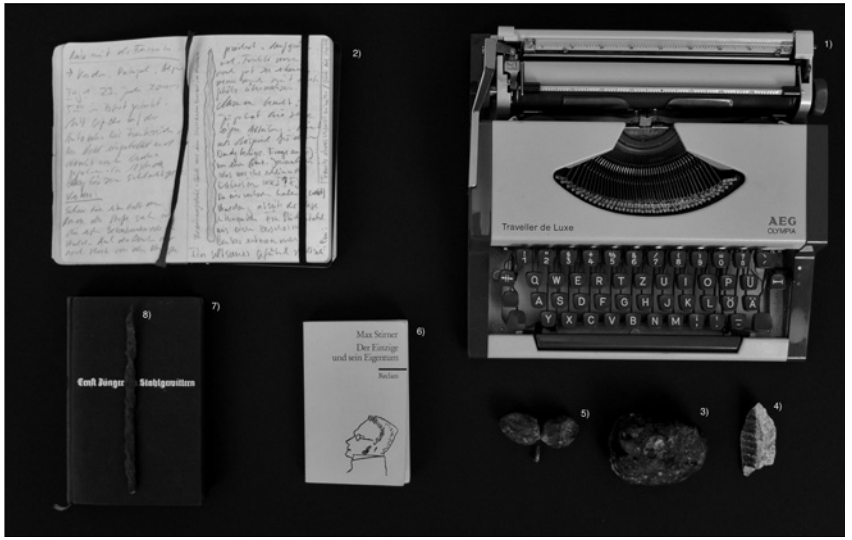

GOLDEN
PFEFFERMINZ







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Traveller de Luxe
AEG
OLYMPIA
Max Stirner
Der Einzige
und sein Eigentum
Reclam
Ernst Jünger
Stahlgewittern







My Fitness Years

The bucket list for my Last Year contained thirty-three things. I'd reported in my diary and interviews that I had implemented all but the two that had become unimportant to me: I had replaced "hunt an animal" and "take 1,000 euros to a casino" with "open a hotel" and "spend a weekend with Kitty in a luxury hotel." This was not quite true; when it came to my "exercise" resolution, I had simply failed.

I was all too aware of the importance of physical fitness given the expected stress of my project, but I wasn't able to follow the training plan that my friend Daniel Homes had prepared especially for me. Too many other things seemed more urgent, and now I wanted to make up for that. A strong physical constitution was all the more necessary since my new life was first and foremost a hard confrontation with facts. I had neglected my relationships with potential funding sources for over a year. Not only had I

not prepared for any future, I had also vanished from the radar of many of my friends, patrons, and partners. Even my relationship with Hamish was clouded: his brother had been diagnosed with an incurable disease at the start of my Last Year, and died at its end.

No one understood me anymore, least of all myself. I often wished I could go back to the Last Year, which, though dominated by a permanent state of emergency, had at least made things clear. I'd had firm goals and a set task. Now I was back to being one of many; the exceptional had yielded to normalcy. I was in debt and once again my future was hanging in the balance.

Just before my exhibition in Weimar ended, Ingo put me in touch with Christian Siekmeier, who ran Exile Gallery in Berlin with an extremely ambitious program. We met at his modest space located in a courtyard in Kreuzberg. Christian was a tall man in his early forties with a slim build and friendly nature. Unlike Hamish, he was instantly taken with my Last Year and the plan to build *Pyramid Mountain*. We arranged a trip to Weimar to visit the exhibition together. Afterward, in front of the museum, he asked if he could represent me as an artist, and I agreed. More than impressive gallery spaces, I needed fellow combatants who believed in my future as an artist with absolute conviction. In Christian I hoped to have found such a comrade, and I also liked him as a person. That same day, we planned an exhibition at his gallery for the coming year. This was the first grappling hook I managed to lodge for my future life. Just a few days later, a prospective buyer contacted me about one of the works in the Weimar exhibition, and Christian was able to sell my installation *ST37* for ten thousand euros. For a moment I felt a flicker of hope.

My first exhibition at Exile, "The Chamber," took place in March 2013. I showed all the work from Weimar in a close space, a kind of storage installation. The Weimar exhibition had already attracted some attention. Kito Nedo wrote a favorable article for *frieze*, the regional press marveled at my "questionable experiment," and the *taz* newspaper published an article, set in pyramid-shaped typography, with a full-page photo of me and Ingo at the symbolic ground-breaking of the future *Pyramid Mountain*. Now, half a year later, I had two long interviews on Berlin radio stations, and I finally felt that my work was reaching a larger audience. The conversations electrified the interviewers, as they applied the hypothesis of having only one more year to live to themselves. For a while I had the feeling that everything was about to take a turn for the better, but for the time being I didn't sell another artwork, and there were also no new opportunities for realizing the pyramid.

By summer I had made no progress with my work, nor had I been able to integrate exercise into my life. The daily struggle to keep everything going sapped my strength. Instead of profiting artistically from my drastic experiences, I was plagued with financial worries every day. Meeting my family's basic needs was my priority.

My disorientation also caused tension with Ingo, who routinely subjected my attempts to develop a new artistic practice to harsh critique. I was looking for a way to achieve great results with frugal means, which sometimes led to ridiculous results. When I sent Ingo a photo of a canvas bedecked with pyramid studs, he stopped responding altogether. Our relationship had also changed in late 2012 when Ingo moved to New York with Chus, his new partner. Although we were in contact on a near-daily basis, the lack of new collaborative projects was discomfiting. Ingo began to lose faith that I would be able to propel myself to new things, and I was annoyed at Ingo's brusque way of expressing himself. When I learned that Ingo had married Chus in New York without telling me, I was stunned. The bond that had held us together was threatening to break completely. Our relationship hovered in a kind of in-between zone for months.

My financial misery left me no choice but to earn money by hook or by crook. I first offered my services to my old friend Marco Kerber, who had joined me on a bicy-

cle trip from Erfurt to Prague shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and whom I had run into again in Berlin over twenty years later. Marco had set up his own business as a sales trainer after stints in the Bundeswehr and car sales. He let me devise a strategy to boost his business with targeted online marketing. I had only recently read up on how to do such a thing, but it was sufficient to do the job and offer my consulting services to other companies as well. These jobs helped alleviate the most pressing money worries, but they also made me feel like a complete failure. I had just been busy promoting the biggest artwork in history, and now I was hiring myself out as a marketing consultant. I urgently needed a more suitable solution.

In July, I traveled to Lychen to mull over the future. I walked around the lake, and drank two bottles of wine in the evening. I thought about the events of recent years, and I designed a plan that would enable me to continue working on my art while making myself financially independent of short-term art-market success. My plan was to reactivate my old contacts in the music industry and divide my work into two spheres. I had considered non-art-related work a necessary evil in the past, but in the future I wanted to work in both fields with the same level of intensity. I was an artist and an entrepreneur at the same time. This was not only closer to my reality, it also fit my self-image as an "owner" in the sense of philosopher Max Stirner.

The next opportunity to put my new plan into action came a short time later when I met with the politician Carsten Schneider. I knew him from Erfurt and we often met on the Erfurt–Berlin train. We had visited my exhibition in Weimar together, so he was well acquainted with my current work. Carsten had read in my diary about how I'd handled the problems with my project, so he asked me if I wanted to help him solve his current problems—specifically, designing a campaign for the 2013 election to attract first-time voters. I had never considered the positions of

his party, the Social Democrats (SPD), particularly worthy of support before, but I felt Carsten had integrity, and his political goals were understandable and honorable. Not only had his commitment set a new ICE route in motion (a route that would shorten my travel time between Erfurt and Berlin by almost an hour), but he had also played a major role in helping me find funding for the Weimar exhibition. Nothing spoke against getting involved here, though I declined his suggestion of becoming a party member.

I set to work developing a small campaign for Carsten that would playfully underscore his authenticity and gain points with young voters. The result was a ten-part photo series that showed Carsten in everyday situations, each paired with bits of text. One image showed him shouldering a box of beer with the accompanying slogan "Your beer is my beer"—a play on a German phrase that means something like "Your business is my business." For another I had Carsten pose in front of an election poster for the neoliberal Free Democratic Party, with the abbreviation "WTF." I set up a Tumblr blog for the campaign and trained his team to do online marketing. The promotional push was well received, even by Carsten's social-democrat comrades, though my favorite motif—a picture showing Carsten in a kebab shop in front of a reproduced painting of a Kurdish landscape, coupled with the text "No Picasso, baby?"—unfortunately didn't make the cut. Too cryptic for what SPD had in mind.

As a result of our work together, Carsten invited me to an SPD event at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin. The SPD candidate for chancellor, Peer Steinbrück, wanted to motivate his party just before the election. The party's prospects did not look good. The campaign was as good as over, and the gloomy mood was made worse by the onset of drizzle. Little groups huddled under sunshades and discussed the situation. I took a spot near the apparently untroubled Carsten, and we listened to Steinbrück's speech. The buffet opened afterward, sending all the guests scrambling to find a dry place to eat.

Steinbrück joined us under our umbrella. Carsten introduced me to the "boss" as an artist. Steinbrück seemed intrigued and we chatted about my work for a bit. In the end, he asked me what I thought about his election campaign. Given that he had recently cried in public and the popular *Süddeutsche Zeitung* magazine had printed a picture of him on the cover giving the middle finger, I said, "Once you've ruined your reputation, you have nothing left to lose. You can run an election campaign however you want. Maybe now's the time to really live it up." Steinbrück looked at me in surprise, took a deep drag from his cigarette, and said, "Live it up, I like that! Send me your ideas when you have them, Carsten has my address."

That evening I told Ingo about my encounter with Steinbrück and we spent half the night skyping about how the SPD might still manage to curry favor with voters. Ingo wrote a short text with two ideas that we sent to Carsten and Peer.

Who Will Save Europe?

Situation: Germany under Chancellor Angela Merkel is a country governed by highly maneuverable functionaries. The political camps are no longer left/progressive and right/conservative, but long-term/sustainable and short-term/opportunistic. Western democracies are increasingly seeing changes of government between those who sow and those who reap. But now is not the time to complain that the SPD has assumed the thankless role of pushing major reforms forward (Agenda 2010, nuclear phaseout, etc.), while the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Free Democratic Party (FDP) reap the benefits. Rising interest rates show the Euro crisis entering a new, even more dramatic phase as reserves are depleted. If the SPD loses the election in September, it is not enough to sit back and twiddle your thumbs while smugly awaiting the end of the parliamentary term. Europe is in far too much trouble for that.

Strategy: The SPD is committed to taking responsibility for the future of Germany and Europe regardless of whether it wins or loses the election, doing what not even Angela Merkel can contest (rent control, nuclear phaseout, minimum wage…). That is, it has good ideas. The SPD's election platform is about Germany. Unfortunately, the next legislative period will most likely be dominated by the European crisis again. Both the CDU and the SPD have avoided directly addressing this issue for tactical reasons (growing Euroskepticism; the far-right Alternative for Germany party, or AfD). At the same time, Germany's size and relative economic stability make it a key player in coping with the European crisis. The SPD's polling numbers are so abysmal that only they can afford to openly think about Europe's future. An ad hoc think tank of manageable size will be formed of visionaries from within and without the SPD. By the end of July, the think tank will present three to ten concise concepts that will lead Europe and thus Germany to a social-democratic future. Whoever implements these ideas in the end—be it a government with or without SPD participation—is of secondary importance. The SPD's ideas are good for everyone.

SPD: A Gift for Germany

And the second:

Fairness

Why does the average person pay the same fuel tax, broadcasting fee, and VAT as a millionaire? This is a glaring injustice that the SPD no longer tolerates. German tax revenue amounted to 620 billion euros in 2012. The proportion of taxes for which a progressive income- and property-dependent tax rate applies has

been falling for years. The payroll tax, at 130 billion euros, accounts for only 21 percent of total tax revenue. The question of whether higher incomes and wealth should be taxed more heavily must finally also take into account sales tax, excise taxes, and, in a next step, regulatory fines. This is the only way to halt the growing gap between rich and poor.

SPD: Consistently Fair

But these were too radical for the SPD's taste. The first would have to explore the future strategies of Jürgen Habermas, which would not have worked so well, and Carsten told me that the second was unconstitutional. The SPD refused our help, steering the party straight into disaster and Peer Steinbrück back to the life of a private citizen.

The election loss in September did not end my relationship with Carsten. Our bond came from our big ambitions and mutual love for Thuringia. If we could not save the SPD and Europe, Ingo and I at least wanted to catapult Thuringia into the future. So we devised a plan to make Thuringia a major player in the twenty-first century—while promoting the construction of *Pyramid Mountain*. Ingo put it into words:

Thuringian Ambition: On Thuringia's Role in the Twenty-First Century

Think of Thuringia, and Goethe, Schiller, Bauhaus, technology, and nature come to mind. Yet the region has hardly any world-class or even nationally significant contemporary culture. There is a dearth of new, forward-looking ideas. The question as to how Thuringia can become an attractive location for national and international creative industries is key to the German state's overall repositioning in the twenty-first century.

Countries, cities, and regions have mostly promoted themselves with tangible economic offers. Yet people and corporations are increasingly considering cultural climate as a factor in choosing where to settle. This is where Thuringian Ambition comes in.

An interdisciplinary think tank consisting of well-known figures from architecture, art, literature, and brand communication take a candid look at Thuringia's potential to develop an ambitious, groundbreaking plan for its cultural landscape.

Where can Thuringia be in ten, twenty, thirty years? What is Thuringian Ambition?

Project Duration: Twelve months
Management: Erik Niedling and Ingo Niermann
Team of Experts: Rem Koolhaas/OMA, Martti Kalliala, Ai Weiwei, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Emily Segal
Communication: Henriette Gallus

Unfortunately, Thuringia's economic-affairs minister stumbled into a salary scandal before Carsten had the opportunity to present our concept to him. Moreover, the state, unbeknownst to us, had already awarded the McKinsey consulting firm a contract to create an economic-cultural forecast for Thuringia. So our "ambition" was shelved for the time being.

When I was working with Carsten on his election campaign, I accompanied him to his fitness training on one occasion. The gym was operated by Olympic gold medalist Nils Schumann. Nils and I had first met fifteen years ago, but unlike me, he couldn't remember the encounter. The *Frankfurter Rundschau* newspaper had hired me to take portraits of the newly medaled Olympic 800-meter champion. At the time Nils was a twenty-two-year-old professional athlete with a slight attitude—he tolerated our appointment

with a mixture of professionalism and boredom before speeding off in his black Audi S4 Avant.

Nils had changed a lot since then; the blond youth had become a bald bearded man running a gym in an industrial area in Erfurt. All the airs he'd had during our first meeting were gone. He was kind and spoke in a calm, steady voice. We talked about the Olympics and his new life after his career as an athlete. At the end of our meeting he handed me a voucher for three EMS training sessions.

These tickets to the fitness world went ignored at first, but two months later my fortieth birthday motivated me to start exercising regularly again. In contrast to my Last Year, aging and the long-term maintenance of my body were again factors in my life. Although I was not overweight and still cut a passable figure in a suit, I had started to notice fat deposits here and there along with the loss of my once athletic silhouette. I was often plagued with backaches, and my strength and stamina weren't great. I used my first fitness coupon on November 11, 2013. Nils gave me a skin-tight black synthetic suit that showed my problem areas more clearly than my benevolent mirror at home. EMS uses electrodes to send electric impulses all over the body in thirty-second intervals. The trainer can heighten or lessen the intensity of the impulses. During the intervals you are encouraged to perform various exercises against the force of the electric current.

What initially seemed like an oversized belly-burner belt from the home shopping network turned out to be a merciless workout machine. After the first session I could hardly make it up a flight of steps. My body throbbed, and walking was like wading through water. After the third session, my organism felt revitalized. That day I signed up to spend half an hour each week in EMS training. My muscle mass increased rapidly despite the little time invested, and the backaches disappeared. But my fat deposits remained, and I felt bulkier than before. So, after Christmas, I radically changed my diet. I abstained from sugar, and my meals consisted almost entirely of vegetables, beans, beef, and fish. I

had porridge in the morning and consumed a maximum of 1,500 calories a day in the first weeks. I stuck to my half-hour stint, switching from EMS to functional fitness training. I did additional exercises at home—pull-ups on the doorframes, dips on the kitchen counter, spontaneous push-ups—often after smoking marijuana in the evening. When I was stoned I could clearly feel the blood coursing through my body.

Three and a half months later, I had lost over ten kilograms and had a body-fat percentage of less than 9 percent. I had to have my suits altered and get new clothes. Kitty was taken with my new figure and said it felt like she was having sex with another man. Our bodies fit together differently. Areas of skin that had previously touched opened up new vistas. I felt like I was in a superhero costume made of muscle, free of superfluous fat and enveloped by well-circulated tissue. Spurred on by the success, exercise became my new ritual. I was physically and mentally prepared to shape my future.

I spent the following summer buying East German pottery from 1953 to 1971 at flea markets, estate sales, and on eBay with the goal of exporting them to the United States, and I designed the world's best suit with an Erfurt tailor. However, I fell so in love with my ceramics collection that I couldn't bear to part with it, and I had a falling out with the tailor over using horsehair in the suits.

I concentrated next on making huge abstract paintings from works burned on the roof of my studio, calling them the *Pyramid Paintings*. For *Particles*, I'd applied the soot of the burned works to glass plates; for the *Pyramid Paintings* I rubbed the soot on unprimed canvas. In contrast to *Particles*, I kept generating soot from discarded works until I produced pictures I was completely satisfied with. I understood this, my first series of paintings, as a pause before the massive challenge of realizing *Pyramid Mountain*. My newly wrought endurance and strength came in handy, since I spent hours stripped to the waist folding the large canvases over and over again in order to place the soot. One day, euphoric from the effort, I took a

selfie of my soot-smeared body and sent it to Christian for fun. He was so thrilled with it that he used it for an ad in *Cura.* magazine to promote my next exhibition at Haus am Lützowplatz in Berlin. Fit for pyramid.

Before the ad came out, I attended an event at KW in Berlin with Ingo and Chus. I talked with Chus about fitness in the art world. She said that although everyone wants to be in shape, nobody takes people seriously who are too fit, since everybody suspects that they spend more time on their body than art. Although convincing, Chus's argument did not deter me from putting fitness at the center of my thoughts—less as an artistic means of expression than as a potential source of money for *Pyramid Mountain*.

I knew Nils rather well by then. I was aware of his financial problems from after his Olympic victory to the present—another *Minusvision*. Little was left of his former glory and the millions of dollars he'd earned, but Nils was a happy-go-lucky guy and radiated a natural competence. So on October 7, 2014, I emailed Ingo asking if he would be interested in writing a fitness bible with Nils as a figurehead and putting it out with a major publisher. This would allow us to bring the drill idea to wider audience and hopefully earn enough money to buy a suitable mountain. The book would be called *Normfit* and develop a universal fitness standard. But the title bothered Ingo, and he was slow to come around to my idea.

On 10/09/2014 at 2:26 p.m., Erik Niedling wrote: What bothers you about #normfit? Is it the proximity to #normcore? No one in the exercise world knows what #normcore is.

On 10/09/2014 at 5:41 p.m., Ingo Niermann wrote: The name only fits if you're actually claiming a universal fitness standard. Maybe it's something like: "Hey, I have no idea what I should be doing."—"Then read Normfit*!"*

Sounds a little like good old manageable East Germany. Rule-of-thumb body-fat measurement or something.

On 10/09/2014 at 6:43 p.m., Erik Niedling wrote: Right, only the universal fitness norm isn't just about exercise.

On 10/09/2014 at 7:13 p.m., Ingo Niermann wrote: It would take a lot of well-dosed humor. As a Thuringian he should be able to manage that. But I would have to get a look at him first anyway …

On 10/09/2014 at 7:20 p.m., Erik Niedling wrote: www.nilsschumann.com (it's just a Tumblr with old and new pictures). He has some television experience (was also on Harald Schmidt's show). But he's more the buddy type.

On 10/09/2014 at 11:41 p.m., Ingo Niermann wrote:
Normfit—hale a n d hearty.
Normfit—how we stay hale and hearty.
Enough is enough. Background: A lot of people overextend themselves while exercising and do more harm than good. This is especially true of joggers, women in particular.

On 10/10/2014 at 8:37 a.m., Erik Niedling wrote: hale&hearty! I like it …

On 10/10/2014 at 10:53 a.m., Ingo Niermann wrote: I envision it as an image-heavy book that doesn't have too much text. The two big things at the book fair: children's books and cookbooks. And children's books are the only ones that still look good.

On 10/10/2014 at 10:57 a.m., Erik Niedling wrote: Right. A lot of pictures, recipes, shopping lists, training plans, etc. Everything you need …

On 10/10/2014 at 10:58 a.m., Ingo Niermann wrote: And with a very clear design.

We met in my Berlin studio and sketched out the contents of the book. Our plan was to develop our own training system and drill it into everyday life. Exercise, according to Ingo's maxim, should come as naturally as brushing your teeth. The whole thing would be embedded in an excursus on the history of exercise, its role in society, and the early fitness movements around the "father of gymnastics," Friedrich Ludwig Jahn. What we had in mind was a successor to his 1816 treatise on the German gymnastic arts.

THE CRUX OF FITNESS: WHY BE FIT ANYWAY? / HISTORY / "FATHER OF GYMNASTICS" JAHN / SOCIETY / SCHOOL SPORTS / OBLIGATORY FITNESS? WHAT IS YOUR NORM? HOW CAN YOU ACHIEVE IT? / EXERCISES / DAILY RHYTHM & SLEEP / PROS AND CONS / SELF-HYPNOSIS / HELPFUL RESOURCES—CHECK FOR FITNESS STUDIO, CLOTHING / AGING AND FINITUDE (DEATH)

Nils was thrilled with the prospect of being back in the limelight and rebooting his career. Ingo came to Erfurt, got to know Nils personally, and was likewise impressed with his friendly nature. By then we were convinced: we would make Nils the ambassador of a fit society. Hale and hearty!

Before we could start on the book, I had my exhibition at Haus am Lützowplatz. Its new artistic director, Marc Wellmann, had curated an exhibition at my project space ZERN eight years before. I'd run into him the previous year—he had just heard one of my radio interviews about the exhibition at Exile. Marc hadn't been particularly interested in my work in the past, but he was excited about *Pyramid Mountain*, my Last Year, and the *Chamber* cycle, and after a visit to my studio, invited me to exhibit at his institution. He asked me to write an artist statement, also describing my relationship with Ingo. I thought this was unnecessary since I'd often reported about my intentions in detail, and they hadn't changed much since. So I sent Marc two poems to gently remind him to take a closer look at the work himself.

"Trees and Stones"

Toiling for ages
You were to be my prize.
I finally found you
and now you are mine.

Boughs hacked away
Stony surface trawled.
Seeing your peak
gives me the gall.

To entomb myself in you
that's my game.
Only I can save myself
that's my aim.

"Bäume und Gestein"

Mich ewig geschunden
Mein Preis sollst du sein.
Dich endlich gefunden
und jetzt bist du mein.

Geäst abgeschlagen
Gestein weggeschafft.
Deine Spitze zu sehen
das gibt mir Kraft.

Mich in dir zu betten
das ist mein Spiel.
Nur ich kann mich retten
das ist mein Ziel.

"The Adventurous Heart"

Detected out of many
the throbbing felt.
Travels aplenty
forever abducted.

There was no turning back
never again from here.
It's often hard

"Das abenteuerliche Herz"

Erkannt aus sehr vielen
das Pochen gespürt.
Auf Reisen gegangen
für immer entführt.

Es gab kein Zurück
von hieraus nie mehr.
Immer weiter zu gehen

to keep pressing on.
But together with you
my thoughts are so free.
Much greater together
than each to his own.

oft fällt es schwer.
Doch mit dir zusammen
sind die Gedanken so frei.
Zusammen viel größer
als einer allein.

The exhibition opened on November 13 and was titled "A Pyramid for Me." I initially wanted to show mainly new work, but Marc insisted on tracing a broader arc. From *The Future of Art* to my current search for a mountain, the exhibition lived up to the institutional mandate Marc had been tasked with. As a result, my Last Year was again the focus of press coverage. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* printed a long interview with me, and Deutschlandradio aired interview sequences and passages from my diary.

Listening to the radio feature with Kitty and Rosa, the past efforts, anguish, and burdens I had imposed on my family came flooding back, and I was overwhelmed with emotion. An inner tension that had built up over the last few years erupted, and tears welled up in my eyes. Hearing someone read from my diary for the first time, I felt infinite gratitude that Kitty had been willing to go so far and that my family had survived intact. At that moment, I felt that I really came back to life.

Ingo and I were still trying to attract investors for *Pyramid Mountain*. To that end, we set out to implement a currency of our own. We printed shares on fine paper, called them Pyramid Dollars, and linked their value to the current price of gold. Ingo's concept also provided for an annual doubling of the conversion rate to guarantee an increase in value:

Pyramid Dollars: The Better Gold

The art market has been booming for twenty years without any major setbacks. Important works of art promise

to appreciate at a rate and with a dependability that by far surpass gold, property, and nearly all stocks. Regardless of how much work artists make, production ceases at the latest with their death. Art is also ideally suited to money laundering, since its value is not recorded in a central register. Art would be the better gold if it weren't for the problems of storage, insurance, and conservation that come with it. Buying and selling are also difficult because they require you to negotiate the opaque behavior of galleries and auction houses.

Banks have tried again and again to set up funds to circumvent the hassle that comes with individual art ownership. Their successes have been limited, however, since established artists and galleries are unwilling to see their works go to buyers who openly seek to use them for financial speculation. The only people lining their pockets in this game are the art advisers hawking mediocre wares for the funds.

The launch of the Pyramid Dollar (P$) marks the first time that shares in a single artwork, Pyramid Mountain*, are being issued. This work, which was conceived by Ingo Niermann in 2010 and subsequently transferred to Erik Niedling, is a concept for the largest burial site and pyramid of all time: a pyramid, chiseled from a mountain and at least two hundred meters high, within which Niedling will be interred, after which the pyramid itself will be buried under the excavated material and the mountain restored to its original shape. The Pyramid Dollar offers unrivaled advantages compared to a conventional art investment fund:*

—There are no costs associated with the storage or conservation of Pyramid Mountain*, either in the form of an idea or as a finished work.*

—Internationally renowned art-world figures praised Pyramid Mountain *in the book* The Future of Art: A Manual *(Sternberg Press, 2011):*

"Yeah, okay, that's Egypt as a quick run, so to speak. […] And that is somewhat consistent with our time, for sure."
Boris Groys, professor at New York University

"It's like Peter Smithson: as found. The found pyramid. Wonderful. Let's do it."
Hans Ulrich Obrist, codirector of the Serpentine Galleries

"It's a motor for the imagination. In other words, reviving the imagination as a productive force. It's like this Hans Christian Andersen story where a man's shadow suddenly breaks free of the man—which is horrifying enough—and then the shadow becomes independent and even starts to fight and compete with the man."
Thomas Bayrle, artist

—As the biggest burial site and pyramid in the world, Pyramid Mountain *will, throughout the various stages of its construction, be not only a unique artwork but one of the top global tourist attractions. Proceeds from the creation of the Pyramid Dollar will be used solely for the planning and construction of* Pyramid Mountain. *Should* Pyramid Mountain *be resold, all Pyramid Dollars can be exchanged back into gold at a rate determined by the net proceeds of the sale divided by the number of Pyramid Dollars sold. Pyramid Dollars are also suitable for use as a non-state-backed currency.*

The Pyramid Dollar's issue price doubles with each passing year. In the first year (AD 2015) it is 1 P$ for 1 g gold, in the second (AD 2016) 1 P$ for 2 g gold, in the third (AD 2017) 1 P$ for 4 g gold, etc.

Mid-January proved to be a bad time for our promotional campaign. About fifty visitors showed up to the event at Haus am Lützowplatz, and we sold only thirty Pyramid

Dollars. We took in only a little more money than it cost to print the bills and create a website.

Although my exhibition had received a good amount of attention, I hadn't been able to segue it into a rosy future. I did not sell any art, nor did investors approach me to help build *Pyramid Mountain*. It wasn't until months later that the first *Pyramid Painting* sold to an American collector at a charity auction at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis. Although Christian had dropped by for the exhibition install and opening, he was mainly preoccupied with running an Exile branch in Manhattan. After de-installing, Marc asked me what I wanted to do next. "I'm going to do a fitness book," I replied.

In February we began compiling material. Ingo drafted an outline for the book. Our lawyer set up a cooperation agreement with Nils, which we all promptly signed. I started to interview Nils once a week and send the video footage to Ingo. The conversations created a sense of familiarity between us, and we spoke openly in the following months about his life as a competitive athlete, doping in sports, training methods, the failure of his first marriage, and his financial fiasco. We slowly made progress without having in mind a realistic schedule for completing the book.

In May, Nils suffered a torn meniscus a few days after participating, inadequately prepared, in a marathon. We decided to start the book at this point: lying in his hospital bed, Nils wonders what he could do better in the future. We were persuaded to change, or at least have him reconsider, some of his habits. It started with naps, computer work lying down, and walking his children to kindergarten rather than taking the car, all the way to a text on self-hypnosis written especially for Nils.

I saw a splendid future before us: Germany, and soon the whole world, would be drilled to be better, inspired by sports-brother Nils. Nils would publish one book after another, and I would have enough financial resources to

work on *Pyramid Mountain* without restriction. Art and fitness would meet in an unprecedented way.

Reality intruded on my fantasy. Herder Verlag, a German publishing house, contacted Nils to ask if he had any interest in writing a book. The company had recently installed Jens Schadendorf as program manager of the new Life and Society nonfiction department. Schadendorf was a runner himself who thought it was a great idea to publish a book with his former idol about "running against depression." Nils told Schadendorf that he was already working on a book with us, and after several lengthy phone conversations, the four of us met in my Berlin studio.

At the meeting we realized that a cooperation with Herder could bring momentum to our project since the book could be published as early as the coming spring. But we were dealing with a slippery publisher type who had his own ideas about the book. Afterward, I offered to drive him to his next appointment. It wasn't a long way away, but our route was detoured around construction sites and blocked streets. Schadendorf's tension level rose and he tried to guide me through the traffic with his navigation app. After I ignored his directions several times (I had taken the route a few days prior and was sure I knew the fastest way) Schadendorf lost his cool. His head turned scarlet, his facial muscles cramped, and he bellowed at me, "Mr. Niedling! We'll never get there on time like this! I told you, go straight!" Although he quickly recomposed himself, I felt I'd caught a first glimpse of his true nature: a mix of bossiness and shiftiness. Had I reported this experience to Ingo when I returned to my studio, we might not have considered working with him. Unfortunately I did so only later, when we were already in the middle of the collaboration and the problems with Schadendorf were obvious.

Several weeks after our meeting in Berlin, after we had already been working at full speed, we received an offer from Herder. My eyes scanned the email for the amount of the advance. This was important to us since it could provide information about the publisher's ambitions. The sum

was miles away from what we'd been thinking, and the royalties and other basic parameters of the contract were not worth discussing either. We decided to end the cooperation immediately without further negotiations.

Schadendorf called in the late afternoon. Rarely have I felt so little desire to speak to someone. Determined to stick to our refusal, I answered. "Schadi"—as we lovingly called him in internal communication—deserved to be dealt with in a respectful way; after all, he had been closely involved in the project for weeks. He was totally shocked and repeated the words "this has never happened to me" over and over. Bemused by our reaction to the lowball offer, he stammered on about "industry custom" and the "difficult situation" in the publishing world. After half an hour Schadendorf realized that we were serious and did not intend to negotiate a better offer. We wished each other all the best for the future.

That evening, Schadendorf called again and asked for some time to consult with the publisher and see if he could increase his offer. He contacted us a few days later and tripled it. He also conceded on the royalties. Since we had no promising alternative at hand, Herder was back on the table. We had to work vigorously on everything at once: interviews, research, photos, trailers, coming up with a title, working on the text, and negotiating the contract. There was friction between me and Ingo about my style of interviewing and the quality of my research. We also realized that, contrary to our initial, naive expectations, there are only a few absolute fitness tips, and even our favored body-weight exercises were already on everyone's lips thanks to the mega-bestseller *You Are Your Own Gym*. A fitness primer full of simple exercises and recipes was becoming an autobiographical novel in which Nils learns from his own mistakes as an athlete and shares with readers his insights about everyday fitness and life in general.

I helped Nils internalize his role as a book author and spoke on the phone with Ingo, Schadendorf, and our lawyer. All in all, a daily struggle. I also continued to train

several times a week and follow my nutrition plan. Until—in a moment of absolute calm, under an apple tree in Lychen—I felt my heart begin to race and turn somersaults. Panic-stricken, I held my thumb and forefinger to my carotid arteries. I felt a violent, uneven throb, and suddenly nothing. I reflexively hit my chest three times in quick succession and my heartbeat started again. What remained was a fear that something was fundamentally wrong. Was I ruining my health by working on a fitness book? Even though I was working out and eating better, it seemed as though my body was starting to revolt after the way I had treated it for so long. For years I had smoked heavily and hardly moved more than necessary. My diet was unbalanced, consisting mainly of whatever was at hand throughout the day. I often only drank coffee in the morning, forgot to eat lunch, and compensated for the built-up hunger with huge portions of pasta, potato dishes, and sweets in the evening.

My doctor in Erfurt diagnosed me with cardiac arrhythmia. Endless examinations followed: stress ECG, twenty-four-hour ambulatory blood-pressure monitoring, twenty-four-hour ECG, heart CT scan, kidney scan. All came back clean. I was basically healthy, but my heart was still stumbling along. For the first time in my life I was seriously worried about my health. I spent the days careful not to overexert myself, always on the lookout for stress. Often I would just be sitting around, and for no apparent reason my heart would start to race and flip over. This was not how I imagined my new life to be. Three years after living for one year as though it were my last, my body was emphasizing its own finiteness.

In June I traveled to Basel, where Ingo and Chus had meanwhile moved, with a feeling of insecurity I hadn't known before. I wanted to visit the Liste art fair, where Christian was showing one of my *Pyramid Paintings*. I felt weak and fragile. I had an athlete's physique, but all my strength and vitality had drained away. I shuttled between the hustle and bustle of the art fair and Chus and Ingo's apartment, completely exhausted. I was struggling for

recognition in the art world while simultaneously trying to figure out how to continue with the fitness book.

As was so often the case, the problem was also the solution. I just had to stick to the insights we had gathered for our book. That meant figuring out how to moderate my exercise and life. After commuting back and forth between Erfurt and Berlin on a weekly basis for the past ten years, I spent nearly three solid months in Erfurt. It was summer, and my work consisted mainly of research for the book, communicating with the publisher, and interviewing Nils. My life was no longer dominated by the rhythm of my weekly train rides; instead, I restructured it to suit my needs. Morning rituals, such as short exercises after getting up, work, exercise, family, and summer idleness soon had enough space to harmonize with each other. By summer's end my symptoms were gone and work on the book was progressing well.

The only thing that was giving us a hard time was the title. After tough negotiations with Herder, we now had the last word on the text, but the publisher remained unenthusiastic about the title ideas we had spent months coming up with, and we were also never really convinced by any of them:

Movement Manual—Volkssport—Then I'll Be Fit—Fundamentals of Movement—Practice—No-Frills Fitness—Body Tralala—Fitland—Hunger for Movement—Autofit—Work, Exercise, and Play—The Body Calls—The Wolf in the Lazybones—Practice Practice—Charley Horse Eats Couch Potato—The Will to Fitness—The Athletic Heart—Normpower—Will and Action—The Daily Triumph—The Art of Fitness—The Art of Self-Movement—Heartbeat—Elemental—Your Own Track—Where the Heart Beats—The Lord of Sport—Strength and How to Get It—The Ground under My Feet—Fundamental—Fundamentals of Fitness—Our Movement—In Good Shape—Bestform—Willpower—

Fitness Atlas—Victory Wreath—Victory Run—Purpose of Movement—Movement as Inner Experience—At the Finish Line—Riot in Lactate Heaven—Stepped Up to Win—The Drill Effect—The Penguin Effect—On Movement—At the Center of Movement—Source of Strength—Just Live Fit—Personal Path to Fitness—Getting Fit from Your Own Strength—How We Mobilize Our Own Forces—The One and His Body—The Individual and His Body—Rethinking Fitness—Fit like Never Before—Fit like Magic—The Discovery of Fitness—Fitness—Fitness Starts in Your Head—Self-Motivated Fitness—Fit without Pressure—Fit of Your Own Volition—Easy Game—Everything Moves—Everything Is in Motion—Physis—On the Essence of Fitness—The Fit-Maker—Tumbling without Grumbling—Your Capital—Fitness Know-How Saves Energy—The Future of Exercise: A Manual—How I Learned to Love Achy Muscles—Exercise, the New Sex—Trim: Get Yourself in Order—Astral Total—1,000 Legal Fitness Tips—Fitropolis—Get off Your Duff—Fit Bits—Jock—New German Gymnastics—How We Get and Stay Fit—Thus Spoke Nils: A Book for Everyone and No One—The Power Primer—Stamina—The Art of Living Well—Be Friends with Yourself—Sports-Brother Nils

It might have ended there if Chus hadn't intervened. After my last proposal, *Selbstläufer*,* was rejected by the publisher after they'd initially approved it, Schadendorf sent us his new idea: *Lebenstempo* (Pace of life). Ingo and I wanted to reject it, just as we had resisted Herder's previous suggestions, *Medium-Distance* and *Running and Living*, whereupon Chus asked if we'd lost our minds. The proposal was the first mass-market-friendly title she had

* *Selbstläufer* is a German play on words that implies running automatically or something that is self-sustaining, but it also means "sure-fire success."—Trans.

heard so far. She advised us to accept it and have it settled. We took her advice.

Reaching consensus on the cover design was even more grueling. Every one of the publisher's designs was terrifying. We had pictured a cover showing Nils looking playful: resting on a haystack or practicing sports with his family. We wanted the cover to strike a clear contrast to existing fitness books. Herder insisted on a smiling, running Nils. All our objections were rebutted with the same justifications: "In our experience…," "After speaking with the sales agents…," "Statistics tell us…"

Even as our project threatened daily to fail, and Schadendorf's opaque behavior forced us into an energy-draining battle over every detail of the contract, we continued working. I was now spending a lot of time in Lychen, where I found the necessary peace and quiet to devote myself to research. Morning to afternoon, I trawled the web for information about fitness. In the evening, I worked on a new series of sculptures. I melted pewter and lead ingots in a copper crucible, seasoned each alloy with a handful of tin soldiers I had owned since childhood, and poured the molten metal (not unlike the New Year's Eve lead-pouring custom in Germany, but with much more material) into the shallow water by the lakeshore. It solidified instantly upon coming into contact with the water, and took on a variety of complex shapes depending on the angle of entry and the force employed. If the result didn't satisfy me, I melted it again and started over. The ancient Egyptians gave their loved ones pewter figures as burial objects to accompany them on their final journey, and I also liked the idea of furnishing my burial chamber with these objects.

We finally signed the contract with Herder in the beginning of November. After about sixty hours of interviews, hundreds of pages of research material, and a six-month-long slog to write 320 pages of text on Ingo's part, we submitted the manuscript for editing on November 8. Mobilizing the last remaining nerves of everyone involved, the book was published on February 15, 2016, under the

title *Lebenstempo: In Alltag und Sport den eigenen Rhythmus finden* (Pace of life: Finding your own rhythm in everyday life and fitness).

The first brutal full-page review appeared in *Der Spiegel* the day before publication. A sports editor railed against a passage in the book where we made an analogy between the controlled legalization of doping and the legalization of recreational drugs. Other topics never even came up. The sports editor of the *taz* was even more incensed and equated Nils's liberal position on doping in the book with a declaration of sympathy for North Korea. Many articles followed, all focusing on doping and Nils's financial problems at the end of his career. The German press agency dpa issued a newswire and more than seventy articles on doping and Nils Schumann were published in a single day.

This did not sell copies. Our main objective of a fit society never materialized. I wondered why no journalist was interested in the actually radical theses in our book—after all, Nils also demanded a basic income related to fitness and denounced the growing divide between rich and fit and poor and unfit. Apparently none of the reviewers had actually read the book. Nor did we manage to get Nils to give a concise account of the book in interviews. Nils often got caught up in platitudes and prattled on from his point of view as a former competitive athlete. The spark just didn't catch.

Disappointed by the presales—a few hundred copies—Herder didn't promote *Lebenstempo* in any way. But when we least expected it, two appearances on prominent TV talk shows presented themselves—Nils was invited to talk about the book on *Riverboat* and *Markus Lanz*. We decided to use these opportunities to make the core content of our book accessible to a wider audience. The appearance on *Riverboat* went badly right off the bat. Surrounded by old East German warhorses, Nils sat in the glare of a spotlight and seemed slightly insecure. The moderator gave him ample opportunity to raise our talking points, but Nils let one after the other go by. In fact, he relativized the main dramatic arc of the book when answering questions about his bankruptcy, claiming that everything hadn't been so bad.

The *Markus Lanz* taping was several weeks away, and we wanted to prepare Nils as much as possible. So we formulated precise answers to the questions that might be asked and practiced them with Nils. We researched the biographies of the other guests and watched countless old episodes. Everything was planned to a T: this is where I'm coming from, those were my problems, and this is how I solved them. A little exercise here, a great story there, and always back to the book. Ingo came to Erfurt to help psych Nils up, and I'd accompany Nils to the television studio.

We set off for Hamburg on April 13. We went through our notes again on the train ride. For every imaginable turn of the conversation, we had practiced a method by which Nils could quickly convey the central aspects of the book. According to our plan, there were three things he should communicate during his appearance, no matter what:

1. *The book is about fitness, and fit doesn't mean perfect, it means appropriate.*
2. *A little fat and the odd beer doesn't hurt. (Briefly show his own belly.)*
3. *Push-ups before bed for good sex.*

When we arrived in Hamburg, a man holding a sign saying "Lanz" drove us to our hotel. In his room, Nils tried out various sweaters to see how his paunch would emerge in each. Days before, I had argued with Ingo about the right clothes for Nils's appearance. We discussed the pros and cons of different variations. My first thought was a dark-blue suit with a light-blue shirt, and Ingo favored a red sweater and casual pants. Nils was less than thrilled with the idea that we would be choosing his clothes. In consultation with Ingo

we decided on a dark-blue sweater. I had Nils practice flashing his belly one more time before I returned to my room.

There was still an hour and a half left before we would be picked up. I lay in the bathtub. A thousand thoughts were shooting through my head. I was unsettled by my powerlessness when it came to influencing how the program would go. Once again I had set myself a tremendous task and could only sit by to see if it would succeed. As an artist, I had taken a winding path, and ended up in a narrow lane with Markus Lanz standing at the end. I was flooded with waves of hope and fear, the future of art—or at least my art—in the hands of a TV presenter and a fitness trainer.

We met in the hotel lobby at 8 p.m. and a van took us to the studio. With us were former soccer presenter Gerd Rubenbauer, former soccer player Michael Rummenigge, and Rummenigge's companion. After a short greeting, the person accompanying Rummenigge asked about the soccer preferences of those present. I didn't have the faintest idea about the codes spoken here. To avoid flagging myself as an outsider, I ignored the question by looking out the window. Rubenbauer and Rummenigge spoke confidently, swapping anecdotes and business cards. Then Rubenbauer asked Nils about his call to make doping legal. Nils was reserved in his response, and I had a bad feeling about how the evening would go. Hesitating at first, I then joined in the conversation. Nils found his footing, and soon Rummenigge was engaged, and both opened up to our arguments and were eager to continue the conversation in a larger group. They might not have been convinced yet, but our reasoning had piqued their interest.

Upon arrival we were brought to the greenroom. It was a bright room with a large balcony. Brown leather sofas formed a U, and there was a long table equipped with chairs. Food and drinks stood ready on the table, and the mood was unagitated. Everything in the room was oriented toward a large screen where the soccer match would be shown. We took a seat at the long table and started debating soccer.

Soccer was obviously an important topic for those present, including the production crew. I'd never cared about soccer. I didn't have a favorite team or know the important players. In fact I loathed the sport as a kid because I had to play it with my judo group after the hated weekly 3,000-meter run, after I was already completely exhausted.

The next guest to show up was comedian Matze Knop. He greeted everyone with a friendly handshake and made his way to the buffet. He tossed well-timed soccer jokes that I didn't understand into the group. Everyone except Nils and I laughed at Knop's comments, especially Rummenigge, whose laugh was especially terrifying. Everyone was in his role, professionals among themselves. Nils sat at one end of the table, not participating and obviously uncomfortable. I spoke to him softly, trying to cheer him up and cracking jokes.

The game was already in full swing when the actor Heino Ferch stormed in. He knocked a greeting on the table and jumped onto a couch, ordered a large Red Bull, and started tapping messages on his phone while watching the game. Last but not least, the model Alena Gerber, her hair in curlers, joined us and nibbled on her vegetables.

Someone scored a goal, but for the wrong team. More and more agitated soccer speak was thrown around. The game ended, the favored team winning, and everyone was satisfied. A producer asked me if I wanted to sit in the audience or if I preferred to watch the show from backstage. Since I was there I wanted to observe the scene up close. It would also give me the opportunity to communicate with Nils by coughing or something. And if things went badly, I wanted to use the opportunity to communicate directly with the camera using facial expressions and gestures to generate material for a future video work.

The producer put me in the front row. The audience was behind the guests, in the picture almost the entire time. An emcee warmed up the audience by practicing clapping and telling jokes for about half an hour. I tried not to attract attention so that the cameramen did not pick me out as a

potential shot-ruiner before the show began. Shortly before the broadcast, Markus Lanz came out and welcomed the audience. He headed straight toward me and leaned in to ask whom I was accompanying. When I answered he gave me a warm handshake and a sincere welcome.

Nils was the first guest announced, and he cast a timid look into the camera. The group proceeded to talk for almost an hour about soccer and the game they had just watched. I kept looking at my watch, growing more and more restless. Nils smoothed his beard, lost in thought. I could feel the heat in me rising. I tried to calculate how much time would be left for the one-on-one interviews with each guest. Nils's window narrowed with each passing minute of soccer talk.

Nils said almost nothing; he looked tired and absent. I had a view of one of the monitors and could see when I was on screen. I tried to look as directly as possible into the relevant camera, to send made-up Morse-code signals by tapping my index finger on my face. Nils was last in line to speak. Lanz indicated that there would not be much time left. But they had more than ten minutes. They showed Nils's Olympic race and everyone applauded their approval. It was an almost solemn moment. As anticipated, Lanz asked about the Olympics and bankruptcy and read out lines from our book. Nils's first reply stuck to our plan—he pivoted from the Olympic victory to the problems that came with his success. I was hopeful that everything would turn out alright. But for all the negative things I'd heard about Lanz's interviewing style, it wasn't his fault that Nils didn't follow the script. No word about the book or fitness, no belly flashing—he brought up none of what we'd discussed. Nils had veered completely off track. I sensed how uncomfortable he felt, but I couldn't reach him. I coughed several times as loudly as possible. No reaction.

Lanz praised Nils for getting back on his feet. "People like things like that" was one of his last lines. After Lanz said goodbye to his guests and the audience, I rose from my

seat in a daze and walked through the studio as if in slow motion. Nils stood in a dissolving formation of spectators, guests, and crew. His hands in his pockets, he tried to make eye contact with me. We silently walked toward the exit. On the way Nils gave a fat man in a grotesquely long green-striped shirt his autograph and I took a picture of the two of them. Backstage, all the guests on the show talked to Nils and patted him on the back for his Olympic gold win. Everyone seemed to feel a little sorry for him, since they'd mainly talked about his failure after the great victory. Snapshots were taken and addresses exchanged. After Nils gave Rubenbauer a copy of *Lebenstempo*, Rubenbauer took me aside to tell me to get Nils off the doping topic. Otherwise he'll be standing in that corner forever, he said. Apparently he assumed I was Nils's manager.

I just wanted to get out of there. But when we started to leave, a producer asked us to wait because Markus Lanz wanted to talk to Nils. We entered Lanz's dressing room, which was barely lit by the white neon light of his makeup mirror. Knop and Ferch were also in the room. Knop asked me to take a picture, and just as the group was about to position themselves in front of the illuminated mirror, Lanz advised me not to photograph against the light, otherwise the shot wouldn't come out. He knew a thing or two about it, he said.

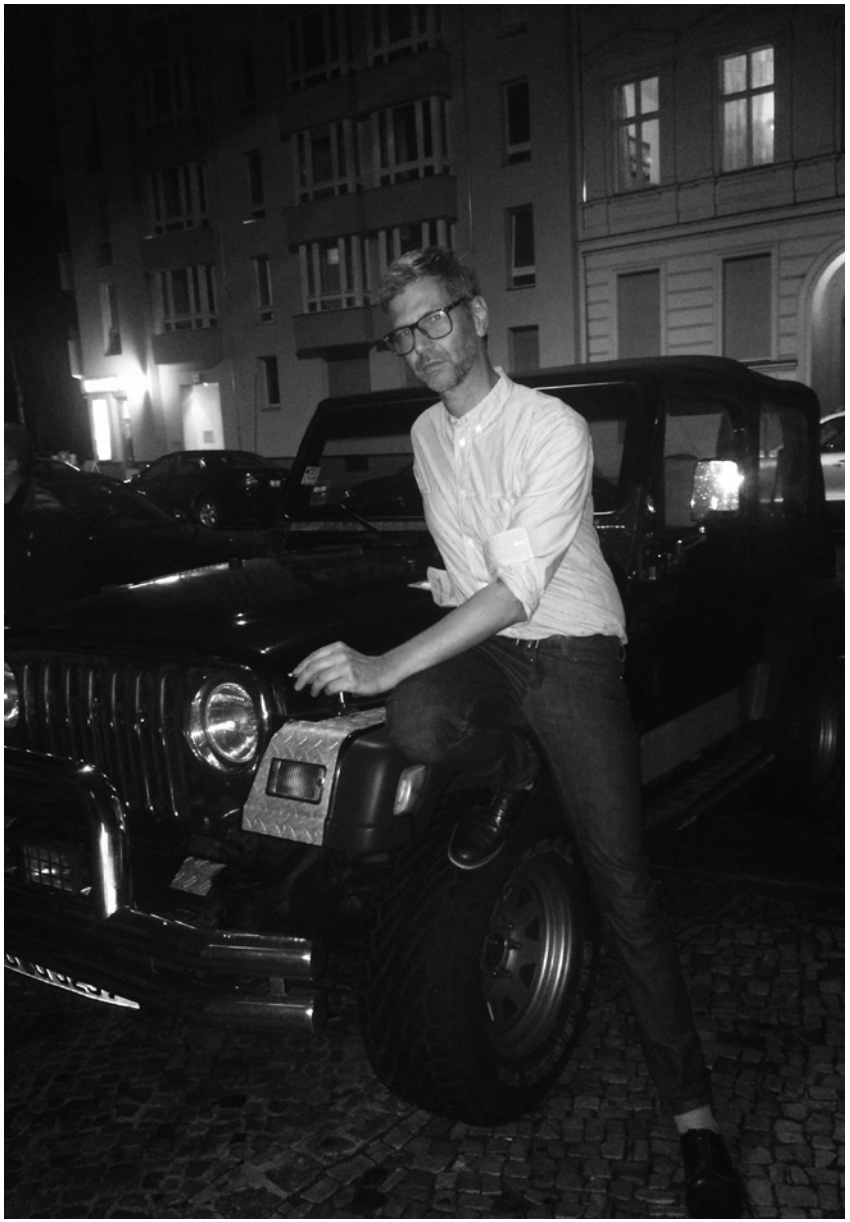
I heeded his advice and took a picture of the troupe. After we said goodbye to Knop and Ferch, Lanz asked if we had some time left. He wanted to shoot some portraits of Nils. He does that with a lot of his guests, he said. Lanz sat Nils in his makeup chair, because the light was supposedly so good there. Photographing Nils with a huge lens and great dedication, Lanz advised him to accept his fate. He noticed how uncomfortable Nils felt when they showed the footage of his Olympics win, and he compared it to a one-hit wonder. You could live on that for a lifetime, there were plenty of examples, he said. You have to reconcile yourself with fate—one hit was better than none. Lanz spoke to Nils almost lovingly, with a hint of concern in his voice.

He shouldn't worry, he said, an appearance on his show would certainly lead to others. I watched the scene from the couch and took several pictures with my phone. Then it was time to go. We rode wordlessly through rainy Hamburg back to our hotel. Back in my room, I opened a bottle of red wine and rolled a joint. We drank the wine, smoked, but had little desire to go over events of the evening. Our failure was all too obvious and we said good night.

After some hesitation I opened my computer and navigated to the show on the ZDF website. Nils seemed nice in the broadcast, but not like someone who had a message he wanted to get across, and certainly not like the mastermind of a fit society. I felt like an idiot. That night I skyped with Ingo, who just said, "That's it."

Our book was the product of a bad mixture. My only consolation was that the text was spared intervention by third parties. Still convinced of the book's content, I had secretly not given up hope that it would eventually seep into society. The book would accompany Nils his entire life and hopefully prove useful. In the end, Ingo and I had overestimated ourselves. We had attempted to win on foreign terrain. The next morning Nils and I took the train back to Erfurt, and we never spoke about what happened again.





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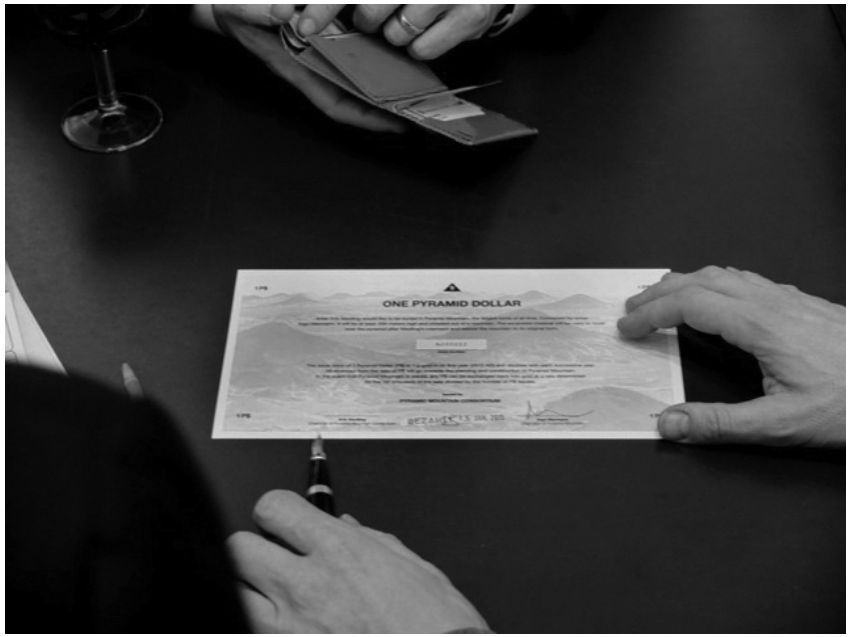
ONE PYRAMID DOLLAR











Pyramid Mountain

Depression due to our failure pinned me to the ground. But for all the disappointment, work on *Lebenstempo* had brought me back on track. I didn't want to fall into the hole I tumbled into after my Last Year. Rather, I wanted to use the momentum to find a suitable mountain. But I kept running into the same problem I encountered with Kleiner Gleichberg: all the mountains that came into consideration were either in a nature reserve or under monument protection. Even the Mansfeld Pyramids, man-made slag heaps in Saxony-Anhalt, were "technical monuments."

I had pictured the construction of *Pyramid Mountain* as the work of an army of workers who attacked the mountain with an armada of heavy machinery. A gigantic, costly, and protracted undertaking hemmed in by the constraints of democracy. There had to be a more elegant solution.

I went to Lychen to think about the future. Brooding, I prepared a trout for dinner in the kitchen where Ingo had interviewed me about my life over five years ago. As I was rubbing it with salt, a report came on Deutschlandradio about a robbery from June 2015. Investigators had found DNA traces of members of the former Red Army Faction, a West German far-left militant organization, in the vehicles of the perpetrators. Though the RAF had dissolved in 1998, some of its former members were still in hiding.

The robbery had occurred near Bremen. Two masked attackers had blocked the route of an armored cash transporter with a VW bus and threatened the couriers with guns. A third perpetrator with a bazooka joined them, and three shots were fired: one bullet struck a tire, one hit the bulletproof glass, and a third went through the armored body of the cash transporter. No one was injured, and the attackers didn't even get to the loot. After a few minutes they backed off, got into a Ford, and drove off.

The DNA found in the abandoned VW bus belonged to Daniela Klette, Ernst-Volker Staub, and Burkhard Garweg, all last-generation RAF members. The act showed similarities to a raid in Duisburg in 1999, where the perpetrators made off with one million deutsche marks. The DNA of Klette and Staub had been found in the perpetrators' vehicles then, too. Sixteen years later, their looted million apparently spent, the gray-haired combatants risked robbery once again. I imagined them driving back to their hideout after the unsuccessful holdup. Nothing remained of their former glory. It was all about survival in isolation.

Klette and Staub had also been linked to a dramatic attack on the Weiterstadt prison in 1993—the RAF's last act before its dissolution. Inmates hadn't yet been housed in the brand-new prison, but there were ten security guards inside when four masked individuals climbed over the prison wall on the night of March 26. The intruders, armed with submachine guns, overwhelmed the two officers on duty and surprised the eight other guards in their sleep. They locked their hostages in a delivery van

and parked it in a field without harming anyone. Then they planted two hundred kilograms of explosives in the building, detonating them at 5:12 a.m. The entire facility was destroyed.

I remembered the attack well. I had been part of left-wing circles after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and at sixteen founded the Anarchistische Fraktion (AF), a group that wanted to smash the system. The demolition of the new prison held enormous symbolic power for me at the time. No one had been injured, and the action's greatest effect came through its saturation in the media afterward.

Why not just blow the pyramid out of a mountain with a controlled explosion and raise the necessary money with robberies? I liked the idea of shaping *Pyramid Mountain* with a blast and immediately reburying it under the blown-away debris. A cloak-and-dagger operation like that would certainly preserve the hearsay about the pyramid that Tobias Rehberger and Thomas Bayrle spoke about in *The Future of Art*. The risk of having to spend a long time behind bars was easy to circumvent, as the demolition and fund-raising (illegal if necessary) would only be carried out when I was much older. This would allow me time to find a suitable mountain and prepare for the blast with the greatest precision possible. I would not have to worry about my pension because I could either blow myself up with the mountain or, if convicted, be looked after in a prison with the best medical care.

A few weeks later, Joachim Bessing got in touch to invite me on an excursion to the home of Götz Kubitschek in Schnellroda. He had learned that leading thinkers of the Neue Rechte (New Right) movement had published a book of interviews whose title was based on his collection of conversations with friends, *Tristesse Royale*. Joachim wanted to follow up on this unexpected response, and asked me to take photos of the encounter. I agreed to come along. This trip into the heart of darkness seemed like a good opportunity to get a picture of extremists on the other side of the

spectrum. I had read how in 1998 Kubitschek had organized a reading of Ernst Jünger's works in a military camp on the occasion of Jünger's death, and how he had been discharged from the German military in 2001 for right-wing extremist aspirations that endangered the military and the safety of the troops. Over the last fifteen years he had become a star of the New Right. I had never met a member of the far right who shared my interest in Jünger.

On May 25, Joachim and I drove through the northern Thuringian lowlands to Saxony-Anhalt. We parked in Schnellroda and took a walk around. At the edge of the village, Joachim plucked a bundle of young ears of grain. Before us, a panorama of dreary agricultural land opened up. In the distance, a long row of wind turbines stood above a windswept landscape of grain and shrubs, all under a gray sky.

We went to the village tavern. The other guests registered the two strangers but didn't let it get in the way of their schnitzel eating. We sat down at a wooden table, ordered beer, and leafed through a photo book on the counter that showed all the inhabitants of Schnellroda, including the Kubitschek family with their seven children, Yelka, Alruna, Undine, Wieland, Ingeborg, Eleonore, and Brunhilde. The village was not unaccustomed to strangers, since hundreds of people came to attend conservative conferences here every year. When no one in the room responded to our guarded attempts to make conversation, we got back on the road.

The manor was at the end of a cobblestone path that cut off the main road. Next to the main house stood a barn with stables. We were welcomed by the host. Götz Kubitschek was a sturdy man in his mid-forties with close-cropped, graying black hair, dressed in a gray shirt, sleeves rolled up to his elbows, and a pair of black trousers that showed traces of farmwork. He led us through a dark vestibule and up a staircase to the library where he introduced us to his wife and Nils Wegner. His wife, Ellen Kositza, was a tall, sinewy woman with long dyed-blonde hair. She had

angular cheekbones and wore a red-and-green patterned blouse with a black skirt. Around her neck was a silver chain with a pendant in the shape of a coiled snake, the symbol of the publishing house she ran with her husband. Wegner was introduced to us as its editor. He kept himself in the background and made a hand signal whenever he couldn't suppress his urge to contribute to the conversation. Unlike his master, he still had the wrath of youth. On one side of the library was a single bookshelf, and in the middle stood a large wooden table surrounded by chairs. In a corner of the room hung a banner with a quotation from Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*: "A book is a loaded gun in the house next door."

After some small talk, I asked our hosts if they ride motorcycles. I had seen a banner on the barn that said "EinProzent.de," which I thought was a reference to one-percenter biker gangs, the most violent contingent of motorcyclists. No, Wegner replied, it referred to something else: they wanted to resist the dissolution of the state and win over one percent of the population to start a revolutionary movement.

I positioned the couple for a portrait: Kositza sitting on a heavy chair in front of the bookshelf flanked by a brooding Kubitschek gazing into the distance. Keen to use what was left of the daylight, I went down to the grounds to photograph there as well. The property lay in an overgrown garden. Children's toys and old equipment were strewn about. Standing in the midst of flowerbeds and a hare enclosure was a flagpole with a limp, sun-bleached flag with a black-and-white cross against a red background. The adjacent buildings reminded me of Lychen; "Brunhilde" was scrawled in paint on a rain barrel.

I went back up to the library. Kubitschek was saying that he considers the final chapter of Joachim's book, in which Joachim and Christian Kracht travel to Phnom Penh, far more dangerous than anything his publishing house has put out: "There's a genuinely apocalyptic mood. That privileged, self-inflicted case of emergency." Joachim

let out an abrupt laugh but did not ask him to elaborate. But Kubitschek's meaning was clear: where the dandy ventures to confront hardship out of adventurousness, ordinary people are left to face their fate.

I drank the wine they offered and listened to Kubitschek and Kositza. They talked about their family, their life in the country, the wisdom of ordinary people. Jünger was their central point of reference, and Kubitschek apparently saw himself as his revenant. He too considered himself an "owner," or Jüngerian "Anarch," with an adventurous heart. His "inclination to not want to be like the others" who only took "paved roads through life" was close to my own disposition.

As the conversation went on, their arguments focused more and more on Germany. Kubitschek felt that "the river of history had stopped flowing." He wanted to get it moving again by falling back on the tried and true. Now is the time not for experimenting, he said, but for cautious development: the conservative revolution in the belly of Europe. For Kubitschek and Kositza, Germany was "timeless, and not completely explainable." "This is our country," Kubitschek said, "this is not the land of other people." He regarded Germany as a closed space. "Socialism needs limits," he said, "that's a law."

Although I can also have a totalitarian twist, this is where our opinions fundamentally diverged. I can love people, animals, an idea, a landscape, but not a nation. Morality, as I understood it, applied to everyone or to no one. I did not want to live in Kubitschek's ideal world. In a state of emergency, something he mentioned again and again, we'd clearly be hostile to one another.

Joachim asked questions throughout and argued intelligently against their proposed construct. At the end he asked, "Where is all this supposed to lead?" After a moment's hesitation, Kubitschek replied, "I'm not exactly sure, but it will definitely be better than it is now. Or are you worried that the AfD will immediately open concentration camps after taking power?" "Certainly not," Joachim countered,

"but I get extremely uneasy when I think about how conditions would become even more unstable if their dream comes true. I believe they really want to protect what's dear to them, but if their political goals become reality it will be the ultimate end to their small genteel world."

Afterward we said our goodbyes and drove the empty highway to Berlin. We smoked on the balcony at Joachim's apartment and looked at the pictures I had taken. In front of us was the dark Wannsee, behind us a rendezvous with the dark side of the Force. Kubitschek and Kositza had failed to find recognition in the established intelligentsia, so they created a separate cosmos and staged themselves in their manor as fighters for a new order. A life plan like that was out of the question for me. I didn't want to turn *Pyramid Mountain* into a cult. I didn't want to risk my newly found inner and economic stability.

In Lychen, sitting in the middle of the overgrown garden, I sipped sparkling apple juice while pondering the idea of creating *Pyramid Mountain* with a gigantic explosion. Two butterflies landed on my knee. I tried to sit still so as not to disturb them. After a while they beat their wings and flew to a red tulip. The setting sun struck a glowing wedge in the garden. Swarms of young mosquitoes danced in the reddish light. I went into the house and took a copy of *The Future of Art: A Diary* from the bookshelf. Lying on the bed, I flipped through the pages until I came across the entry from October 6, 2011:

In another life, writing would be a pleasure. I wouldn't have to do without images. I wouldn't have to talk about my work and projects. The act would not get in the way of basic work.

A few days earlier I had read Ingo's text "Literature's Victory," which notes:

Fiction has become a panacea enabling us to better cope with our lives and our work. […] Like painting and sculpture, fiction is by nature not a reproductive medium; it is capable of describing the fictitious just as effectively as the real. But when what it describes becomes too divorced from reality, our interest wanes. Alternate-history fiction is increasingly ruthlessly knocked down by the stores of knowledge freely available on the Internet, and the real and the fictitious can very quickly be told apart.

When it comes to the future, things are different. What is written about the future can only become reality (more quickly) precisely because it has been written about: lunar landings, atom bombs, mobile telephones, exoskeletons, and Leninism all existed first as fiction. Fictitious inventions became real ones.

I had never written a lengthy text except for my Last Year diary, but the idea of continuing the story of *Pyramid Mountain* in the form of an autofictional novel free of all practical constraints instantly fired up my imagination. Nothing would stand in my way except for the limits of my own mind. I told Ingo about my idea, and he said, "Well get to it then. When you have the first fifty pages I'll be happy to look at them."

I began by creating a future timeline: in the next thirteen years, a fierce power struggle would flare up between the Central European Union and the Russia-led Eastern European Alliance. Ten years after the outbreak of the conflict, a large wall would be built around Central Europe. In 2048 I would finally excavate *Pyramid Mountain* from a mountain via a precisely planned and detailed commando operation. It soon became apparent that I had to begin the story in the past to explain the events in any comprehensible way. So I decided to start with the first time I met Ingo.

The first thirty pages flowed from my fingertips rather easily. I got up every morning at 4:30 a.m. and wrote until Rosa and Kitty woke up. In the evening, I revised the passages from that morning. It was a good feeling, making progress word by word and page by page. Since I did not have to think of the plot for the time being, all I had to do was activate my memory to put myself back in each scene. Though due to my lack of experience I'd often stare at the last thing I wrote or my notes for ages with no idea of how to go on. Even with an optimistic estimate, the novel would need more than a year of concentrated work.

Ingo was merciless in his criticism. He pointed out mistakes and inaccuracies that still lingered after several revisions: errors in the chronology, skewed metaphors, and repetitive passages that said the same thing again in different words. What Ingo called my "Jüngering around"—the presumptuous style dripping from the text at every turn—also found no leniency.

Despite all efforts, my writing lacked consistent quality. A good passage did not mean that the next would succeed. I wasn't sure if I could learn from Ingo's comments quickly enough to finish without overstraining our relationship. This much was clear: without advice, I was lost. At the same time, my advice-giver was one of the main characters in my text. I was writing not only my own but also our common history and I wasn't sure I could adequately describe both our views of past events. I reworked the first chapter, and when Ingo replied that the new version "sashayed" better, I resolved to finish the project.

Writing became a new routine. I sat at my desk in the morning with earplugs to shield myself from traffic noise. I also made regular trips to Lychen to work on the text for a few days at a time. I sent the finished chapters to Ingo and he returned them with countless notes. I frequently spoke with Ingo about our shared experiences, crises, and unrealized ideas. We relived events from the last twelve years.

The more I wrote, the closer I came to the present. In January 2017, after almost a year of writing, I reached the point in my story where I was starting to write my autofiction. My initial concern that Ingo and I would fall out over differences in the content turned out to be unfounded. Diverging memories of past events could always be cleared up from our frequent email correspondence or my diary entries. Once I asked him why he continued to assist me over such a long period of time, and he replied, "Because I believe that right now, your book is the best way to push *Pyramid Mountain* forward." World events surpassed us once again in terms of megalomania. Donald Trump had been elected US president, and anything seemed possible. I seized the propitious moment to set new rules. I understood that only those who are prepared for confrontation will achieve their goal.

Last summer I had been approached by a man at Erfurt's outdoor swimming pool, where I often wrote in the shade of a linden tree. He told me he had been on "my mountain" and showed me a photo on his cell phone of the two *N*s and triangle I had carved into the rock on Kleiner Gleichberg on the day of the Weimar exhibition opening. He took for granted that the location of *Pyramid Mountain* had long since been decided. But authorities had quickly intervened after reports of our first ground-breaking were published. In an interview with the *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung*, the director of the environmental agency in the district office of Hildburghausen vented about the project:

"Nobody can just dig around like that," he says tersely but clearly. He takes a deep breath and lists the obstacles: the mountain is the second largest nature reserve in Thuringia, the local "Steinburg," an ancient Celtic fortress, the largest registered monument in eastern Germany. And if that's not enough: the site is located in the middle of a nature reserve of European importance. An excavation permit? "Forget it. That's impossible."

But why should I keep struggling to find a suitable mountain only to have to buy it for an exorbitant amount of money? Kleiner Gleichberg was perfectly suited to the project. I had to make it mine as the future location of *Pyramid Mountain*.

Determined to shape the future as I willed it to be, I told Robert Hausmann about my idea. I had invested a lot of time and effort in budding artists over the years, and Robert was the most consistent of all. We first met during my Last Year. At a family party, a relative was complaining about her sister's youngest son. She called him the black sheep of the family. A head full of nonsense, a hopeless case. I felt sympathy for the unknown young man. He had no one to encourage him to live out his nonsense. I got his contact and invited him to visit my studio.

Robert was a tall, slightly overweight ex-swimmer with an unkempt hairdo, baggy shorts, and an embroidered Tibetan jacket. He played drums in a band but was otherwise reserved. His first visit left no lasting impression on me, but he showed up unannounced at my opening in Weimar, and from then on visited me regularly. We talked about his plans for the future and I introduced him to the concept of drill. Our regular meetings culminated in his enrolling in music studies with a focus on jazz drumming at a conservatory in Groningen. He moved into a tiny dorm room and spent his time improving his drumming skills, reading the books I'd suggested, and working out.

Robert visited me whenever he could. One day, he reported that he had decided to stop studying music and instead wanted to study art. The chubby rogue had become a slim ascetic in tailored suits and a precise haircut. Regimented drumming was too tight a corset; he wanted to leave the jazz world behind. I offered to help him apply to art school and suggested that he prepare for it with a focused action, which consisted of creating an artist character and carrying out interventions at galleries, museums, and other symbolic places. We named the character Ursus Haussmann after the hero of the Italian adventure-film

Ursus and Baron Haussmann, the urban planner of modern Paris. He slept on the floor of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, did pull-ups on the window frames of the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, reconstructed a photo of Hitler's visit to Napoleon's tomb in Paris, and bent an iron rod into a triangle in front of the Gagosian Gallery in New York, which he then played.

After seven such interventions, he compiled the documentation and applied to the University of the Arts in Berlin, where he was accepted. For a first exhibition, where newly admitted students showed the work they had applied with, he burned all the works he had done so far and used an old recipe to make toothpaste out of the ashes, which he exhibited in aluminum tubes. Shortly thereafter he turned the procedures in his class upside down by establishing a compulsory game in which students received ratings and the losers were thrown out of class and had their work burned. He became the school's most controversial student.

On February 17, my exhibition "Conquest" opened at Exile. After much deliberation, I presented the *Futures* on mirrors atop MDF pedestals, along with a framed photograph of a knight in shining armor astride a horse, which I had bought years ago at a flea market in Erfurt. For the first time I felt completely relaxed at my own opening. Not that my exhibition didn't matter to me; it looked good and was coherent. But what could happen? At best Christian would sell some of the new work and the usual art blogs would publish a few pictures. My exhibition was the product of real existing capitalism. I did not possess sufficient means of production and I did not have the proper distribution channels. But that didn't depress me. After years of uncertainty, I was back on solid ground and no longer had to worry if my art would sell quickly or not. I was primarily interested in living in harmony with my family, finishing my book, and pushing ahead with the realization of *Pyramid Mountain*.

I planned to seize Kleiner Gleichberg with a ritual in the spring. Full implementation was difficult under the current circumstances, but who said they couldn't change? I could make a whole series of books out of it: the building of *Pyramid Mountain* as a series of infinite variations. The possibilities for imagining a future in the most dazzling colors were endless. No matter how unlikely a scenario might seem at the moment, all that mattered was that it could really happen one day.

At dawn on May 8, Victory in Europe Day, Robert and I shouldered our equipment at the foot of Kleiner Gleichberg and made the ascent. After more than an hour marching past the remains of Celtic defenses, drenched in sweat, we reached the peak. The cloud cover was low and penetrated only by a bleak violet light. My head throbbed.

By noon we had piled up a sizable pyramid of rocks. In a mountain hut we installed a permanent exhibition with some of my planned chamber goods. I hoisted a flag with a black triangle on a white background as a sign of my claim. No one else was around. The sun broke through the clouds and the mountain shone in the bright light. The pain in my head was gone.

Robert piled dry twigs in a circle of stones he'd laid in front of the shelter. I knelt down, lit a piece of cardboard, and held it to the branches. Flames leaped out and set the twigs on fire. I took off my shirt and felt the warmth of the sun at its zenith. A cool breeze blew across my skin. I took a deep breath and closed my eyes, stretching my arms, legs, neck, and torso, then tensing my muscles as hard as I could. I crouched by the fire and grabbed a piece of burned wood, crushing it between my palms and then rubbing the black soot on my skin. I inhaled deeply and was enveloped by serenity.

Soon after, my financial situation changed completely. My limitations became a thing of the past thanks to a chain of incredible coincidences, which started with the Australian actor Travis Fimmel. Before he got famous, Fimmel worked

as a tourist guide in London. One September morning, exhausted and broke, he went to the Regency Cafe in Westminster. While he sat in front of his coffee, a fly settled on his thumb and fussed over the little bits of ketchup still clinging to his skin. The owner had set up a TV to watch the 2000 Summer Olympics. It was the live broadcast of the men's 800-meter final. Slipping through an opening in the last turn, a blond kid powered to the head of the pack. The runner collapsed after crossing the finish line, overwhelmed. Wrapped in a German flag, he took his victory lap beaming with joy. Fimmel was struck by how the runner had seized that opportunity to take the lead. He couldn't help comparing himself to the guy on TV: two athletic guys with blond hair around the same age … one an Olympic champion, the other a nobody.

The next spring, Fimmel moved to Los Angeles to become an actor. He applied to agencies and ended up appearing in music videos for Jennifer Lopez and Janet Jackson. Calvin Klein hired him as a model for an ad campaign. In 2003, Fimmel broke into the acting business, getting picked to be lead in the series *Tarzan*. Every time a gap opened up for Fimmel to slip through, he thought of the blond runner. Time had replaced the sweet charm of his youthful face with a masculine hardness. His first major Hollywood job was in the *World of Warcraft* film adaptation.

One afternoon in 2017, on a day off from filming at Studio Babelsberg outside of Berlin, Fimmel and his costar Samuel L. Jackson were visiting the parks of Sanssouci Palace in Potsdam. At the foot of the long stairway in front of the palace, Jackson and Fimmel were chatting about the unusual life of Georg Wenzeslaus von Knobelsdorff, the estate's architect, from soldier to artist to royal architect for Frederick the Great, when they saw a tall and bearded bald man chase after a smaller man and tackle him. Fimmel ran over and jumped on the bearded man, pinning him to the ground. The small fellow ran off, and the bald man gaped at Fimmel in bewilderment. That's when Fimmel

noticed the purse in his hands. He hadn't hurried to the victim's aid; he'd rather manhandled the pursuer of a thief. Fimmel helped the man up, apologizing profusely.

Jackson came over and burst into laughter when he realized what had happened. After Jackson calmed down, Fimmel and Jackson introduced themselves to the confused man, who replied, "My name is Nils Schumann." Fimmel felt a strong tingling sensation climb from his neck over his skull to just above the nose. He asked, his voice cracking, "Nils Schumann … the Olympic champion?" Nils nodded and raised an eyebrow. Fimmel, jaw agape, had to take a seat. He told Nils and Jackson about that morning in London, and how it lead to him moving to LA. At that point Nils's wife Doreen caught up with them and was glad to see her husband was okay and to have her purse back in her possession.

Nils and Fimmel exchanged email contacts and agreed to meet again. They went their separate ways and the episode was soon forgotten, at least by Nils and Doreen. Not so for Fimmel. When he was a guest on the late-night talk show *Jimmy Kimmel Live* to promote the latest season of *Vikings*, he told the story of his time as a tour guide in London and his encounter with the Olympian years later. Kimmel was taken with the story and invited both Nils and Fimmel to appear on the show together.

Nils was flown out to Los Angeles to appear on the show. He told his version of their meeting and talked about his problems after the Olympics, how he bounced back, and how everyone can figure out what amount of exercise is right for them. Nils, Fimmel, and Kimmel finished the segment by running a race on an obstacle course in garishly colored sportswear. The audience went wild. Nils had struck a chord with audiences thanks to his friendly manner and (to American ears) awkward yet cute-sounding English. In contrast to his appearance on *Markus Lanz*, he now seemed to have become one with the Nils in our book. No trace of insecurity. He radiated natural competence to herald the message: "Fitness is easy."

Clips from the program had been shared millions of times before Nils was back from the United States. By the time his plane touched down at Berlin Brandenburg Airport, our book *Lebenstempo* had soared to the top of the amazon.de charts, where it stayed for weeks. We earned money from the book for the first time since Herder's advance, and the publisher released a second edition with a cover showing Nils playing with his two sons.

Nils's name was on everyone's lips. Leonardo DiCaprio had seen his *Kimmel* appearance while he was in Germany visiting his grandmother's grave, bought a copy of our book at Frankfurt Airport, and read it on his flight back to Los Angeles. That summer DiCaprio was going to be in a film about the Battle of Varus in the Teutoburg Forest. For the role he had to lose a considerable amount of fat and put on muscle. Hoping to benefit from the simple and painless methods of our book, he contacted Nils and hired him as a personal trainer to prepare for his role as Hermann the Cherusci.

Nils became the ambassador for a new understanding of fitness. Rather than despair at the ebb and flow of their own motivation, Nils's disciples reached a state where exercise became a daily ritual. Penguin Books, which had published the English translation of Ingo's book about drugs years before, contacted us with an offer for the English version of *Lebenstempo.* The book was released the following spring.

The years of advising Robert paid off as well. Not only did he contribute to preparations for the realization of *Pyramid Mountain*, he had become a darling of the art world thanks to a beguiling formal language as well as the consistency of his work. He published theoretical texts, exhibited all over the world, and fetched peak prices with his monumental sculptures made of titanium foam. According to a verbal agreement dating back to his student years, every year he transferred 20 percent of the revenue from his art sales to me.

Rosa parked the rusty Defender next to our cabin on the southern side of the mountain. It had taken three days to move everything we needed into the pit underneath the hut. The mobilization of the AMROB3 units was planned for the next morning. By nightfall we had gathered with Kitty, Ingo, Christoph, and Heiko around the fire I had lit in front of the hut. Silently we looked into the flames. Only the crack of embers could be heard. I put my arm around Kitty's shoulder and hugged her tightly. No one thought it necessary to go over the plan again. Everyone knew what to do. For years we had meticulously prepared everything and slowed down the aging process of our bodies through regular transfusions of gene-edited plasma from our own blood.

We had a ploy to avoid being discovered during preparations. We—or rather, the heirs of beer baron Christian Heurich—had announced an international architectural competition for the Museum of Modern Military History three years earlier. Rem Koolhaas had won the commission. Heurich had grown up close to the Gleichberge mountain range, immigrated to America in 1866, and became one of the largest landowners and brewery moguls of his time. In 1929 he founded the Steinsburgmuseum on the southern flank of Kleiner Gleichberg. Across from it, the new museum was to be hammered into the slope like a huge, shiny black wedge. Koolhaas hadn't designed a building of this size for a long time, but the idea of drawing on unlimited resources again at the age of 103 held too much appeal for him.

The planned location did not seem predestined for such a costly undertaking. But when a large donation from the "heirs" landed in the regional administration's bank account, all doubters fell silent and a permit was granted to build in the middle of the nature reserve. Nobody wanted to block a museum of such international importance.

My burial objects were already stored deep inside the mountain after having been shown at documenta XIX. One year before, Robert began digging the pit under our hut—right next to the designated site for the museum—

using an autonomous boring robot that resembled a steel lindworm, creating a nineteen-meter-long tunnel that culminated in a chamber.

I'd decided against the chamber's original layout since the excavated material would have sufficed to pile up to form another conspicuous mountain. Rather than recreate the enormous space inside the Neues Museum Weimar, I designed a cuboid burial chamber three meters high, four meters wide, and nine meters deep, allowing just enough space for my *Chamber* cycle.

Robert arranged the excavated material into a Japanese rock garden on the fenced-in property that surrounded the hut, using the rest to form a ramp to the building site when he ran out of room. His actions did not go unnoticed for long, despite the thinly scattered population in the area. When asked about the purpose of the work, Robert replied that he was from the environmental agency and was carrying out geological surveys. A major construction project was in the works, he said. Although we'd set up an information board about the planned museum at the entrance to the property and the relevant authorities had approved the building application, rumors soon spread. There was talk of a secret treasure chamber or underground housing for migrants from California's Silicon Valley.

"Anyone want tea?" Christoph asked the group the next morning. Everyone nodded but me. I made myself coffee from soluble granules like I had always done in Lychen. Holding his mug, Heiko switched on the three-legged climbing robots. We had abandoned our original plan to first perforate the mountain and then fill the holes with explosives. It would have taken too long, and our activities would undoubtedly have been exposed. Instead, we decided to program five hundred robots to each lay an explosive device on the mountain's surface.

The mine that Heiko and Christoph came up with was a thin-walled stainless-steel cylinder, five centimeters thick and thirty-nine centimeters long, with an attached steel tip that would detonate a hollow charge. A penetrator would then enter the hole and plow through the rock to explode at target depth. Heiko calculated that carving a pyramid from the mountain would require placing mines of varying intensities on its flanks to trigger a chain of explosions. Consulting an old textbook for demolition experts, Heiko and Christoph had mixed, filtered, and crystallized a highly explosive substance made of nitric acid, sulfuric acid, and pentaerythritol. They accumulated more than six hundred and fifty kilograms of the substance before compacting the crystals into dense molds to fill the mines.

Ingo lay curled up on a cot, scraping a razor across his sweat-covered scalp. He had lost most of his hair since being awarded the Nobel Prize. He had found an answer to almost all the questions he'd asked in life, and now he was anxious to answer this one as well: "Will six hundred and fifty kilograms of pentaerythritol tetranitrate really suffice to blow a pyramid out of this mountain?" He went over our letter claiming responsibility:

Burial of the White Man

We hereby apologize to all those in the immediate vicinity of Kleiner Gleichberg who were frightened or disturbed by a chain of loud explosions and subsequent shower of dust, today, May 8, 2048, at 12 o'clock local time. We hope that nobody was physically or mentally harmed on account of the underlying event—the realization of Pyramid Mountain.

After countless unsuccessful attempts to legally realize this artwork—designed thirty-eight years ago by Ingo Niermann and given over to Erik Niedling—we have conspired to blow a pyramid with a height of two hundred meters from Kleiner Gleichberg and have it reburied under the excavated material immediately afterward. A newly created cavity inside the mountain

holds Niedling's Chamber*, a cycle of artworks realized between 2011 and 2048.*

Pyramid Mountain*, according to Niermann's original concept, is a monument that dramatizes the futile quest for immortality in the creation and collection of art. Like a supernova,* Pyramid Mountain *expands this quest into the gigantomaniacal and then implodes it by providing an artist with a museum that is larger and more stable than any other museum in the world, though it cannot be entered. Its only visitor is the deceased artist.*

Immortality has meanwhile come within reach and every concrete work of art can be perfectly reproduced. Because of this, Pyramid Mountain *no longer buries a single human being and their treasures, it rather buries an entire epoch shaped by the pursuit of symbolic immortality. It was a cruel time, for when the pursuit of immortality manifested itself in ideas such as race, nation, or class, we saw great oppression, plunder, and murder.*

Many thinkers have considered the quest for symbolic immortality as that which distinguishes humans from animals, since humans are the only living beings to anticipate their own dying. Today we know that other animals also foresee their own demise (just as they also abstract, calculate, and make and use implements). Such striving seems to have emerged in human beings after they became the first earthly creatures that could store beyond the annual cycle.

No one has taken collecting and destroying as far as the white man. Besides destroying countless other species, he almost destroyed humanity as a whole, but also taught it to overcome itself peacefully. Pyramid Mountain *is where we bury the white man.*

Robert Hausmann, Kitty Heckert, Heiko Holzberger, Christoph Löschau, Erik Niedling, Rosa Niedling, and Ingo Niermann

The last phase was in full swing. A crowd of people had gathered behind a barrier to watch from a distance as the explosion opened a crag where the new museum was to be built, or so they thought. I climbed to the summit of the adjacent mountain, Großer Gleichberg, and looked down into the valley. The forest looked like green foam nestling among gray rocks. The landscape gleamed in the sunlight. After a brief pause I gave the signal, and the munitioned robots marched in single file into the open, fanned out, and headed to their respective positions.

At noon, Rosa, who had joined me on Großer Gleichberg along with Kitty, Ingo, Christoph, Heiko, and Robert, sounded one long siren blast followed by two short ones. Then absolute silence. The animals had left the mountain, and time seemed to stand still. I reached for the detonator in my trouser pocket, thumbed open the safety clip, and took a deep breath.




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ANARCHISTISCHE
FRAKTION




The
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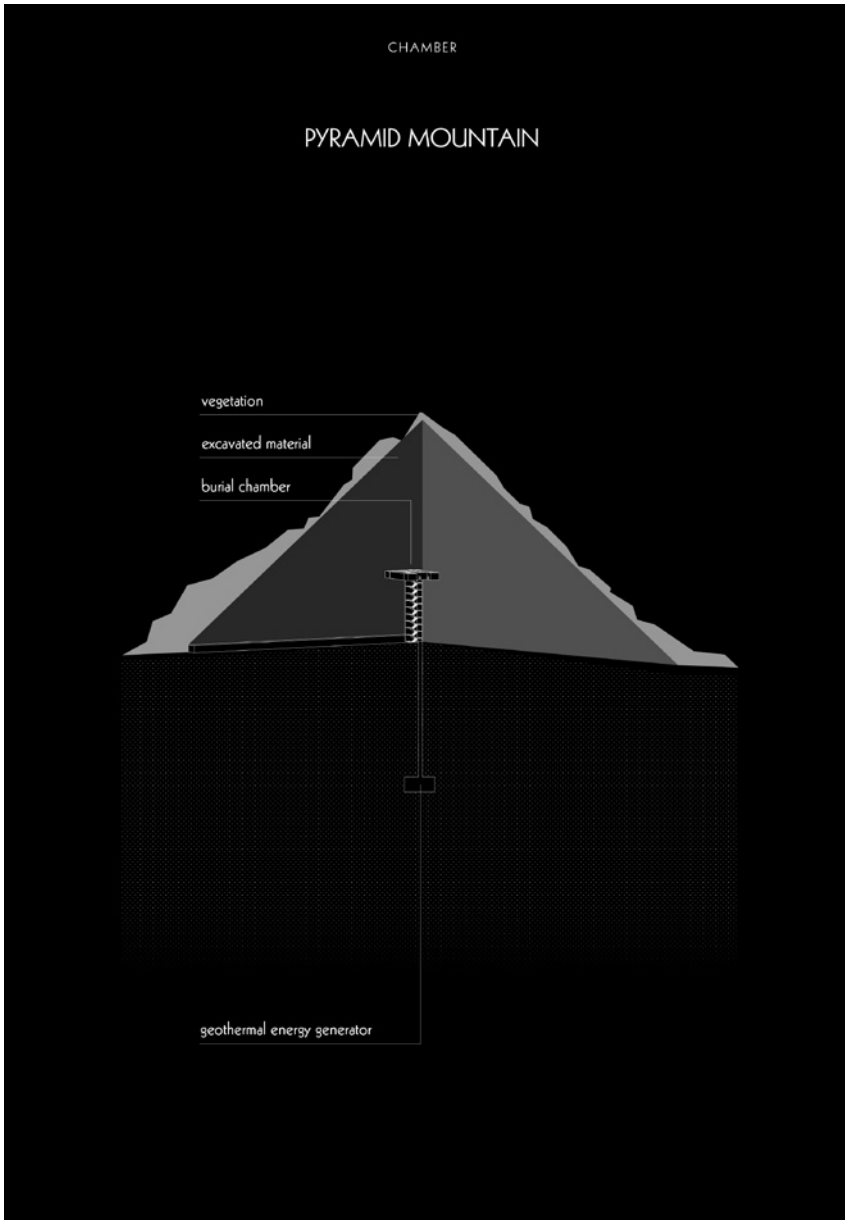
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PYRAMID MOUNTAIN
vegetation
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burial chamber
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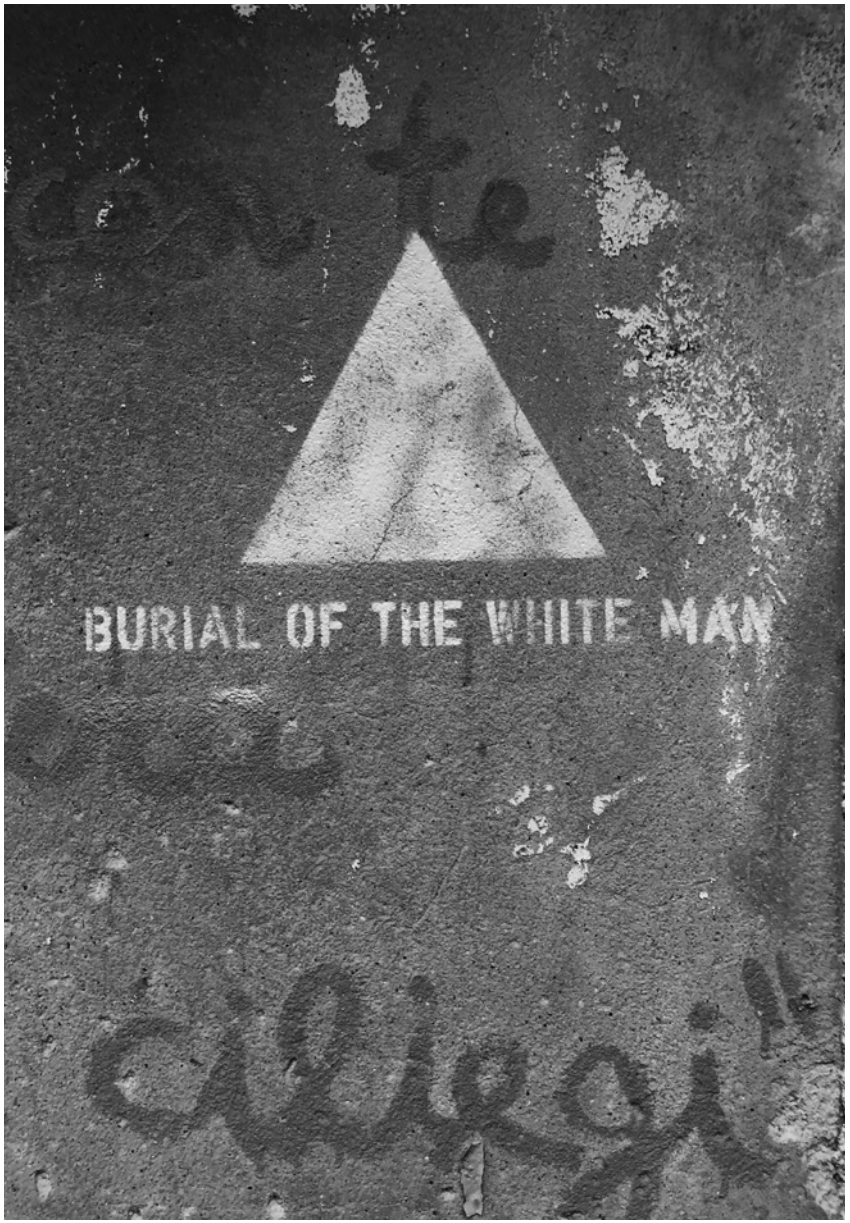
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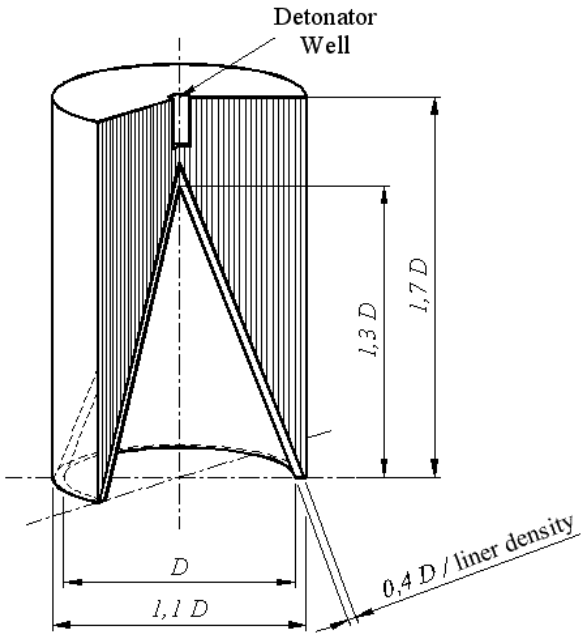


Conical shaped charge







Ingo Niermann

Life as a Novel / Life as a Film

Together with her mother, Marlene had managed to exit from socialist East Germany to capitalist West Germany, ending up in my provincial hometown of Bielefeld. Marlene was an observant and outgoing girl with curious blue eyes, curly blonde hair, and a charming smile. I got to know her when I was seventeen. She was one and a half years younger than me but three grades below due to the change of regimes and terribly bored by her childish classmates. Soon she had selected me as the most interesting boy (relatively speaking) at our suburban gymnasium. When she sought

contact I was first reluctant because of the grade difference of three years. On top of that, a friend already had an eye on her. But since she rejected him, and since I didn't have any other female friends, Marlene and I ended up hanging out together, discussing all sorts of things that we didn't know much about, and finally making out on the floor of her bedroom. It was one of my first times; I was terribly shy and overwhelmed, and she was obviously way more experienced. Since she was already involved with some older guys, and I didn't insist on us becoming a couple, I became her male fallback to meet up with and kiss whenever she had boy trouble.

When I finished school and moved to Berlin to study philosophy, Marlene went to the United States for an exchange year. For a while we kept contact via mail. What I sent her was a terrible palaver about my insufficiencies in dealing with the injustices and mysteries of the universe and daily life, and I photocopied each letter only to destroy it soon after. She would describe her experiences in some American town as intense, as if she were "living in a film." It's this phrase that stuck in my head as a clear sign that we had lost touch. To me, life and its great questions required hard work on every level, while to live in a film meant to be carried away by accident or fate. I imagined it like sitting in a car: the landscape is moving by itself—all you have to do is push the gas pedal and steer the wheel. Living in the fast lane, with its sudden moves, is risky, and usually ends up in quick disaster. Or you end up staying a moron.

After school, Marlene moved to Berlin to become an actress. Every couple years we would run into each other and bring each other up to date: me about my slow progress in writing and getting published, she about her first proper theater gig in a play by Heiner Müller, her first big TV commercial for a painkiller, and, finally, her role as a lead character in a TV series about an ambulance. From what I understood, her career had also been hard work and not like a film. But would it be worth being turned into a novel? A novel that could be turned into a successful film?

Words reproduce life less directly than images; words can also describe the invisible and the inaudible. The kind of life that would work in a novel is less apparent than what would make a good film. The scenic density of a few days or even just a single night might immediately seem like a film, while people in retrospect recognize episodes of their life, if not their whole life, as worthy of a novel.

With an increasing sense for self-design, more and more people seem to adapt their life as a novel or at least play with the idea—either because they find their life worth it or because it adds worth to it. I have no idea how many are actually trying this, since you can keep it a secret until the moment the book gets published. But in the world of literature, autofiction has become so ubiquitous that in France novels that, for a change, are not about the author (but still largely biographical) have become their own genre: *exofiction*.

To adapt your life into a film is socially and economically more demanding than to adapt it into a novel. You have to divulge your ambition from the beginning in order to find support—unless you manage to not reenact your life but film it right away. But even though it's a common practice to keep a diary, it took more than twenty years since Marlene's letter for me to hear someone claiming in the present to be living in a novel, not just in retrospect. My friend Joachim was writing his second novel as it was happening. Of course, it's likely that he designed his life accordingly, just as a writer of fiction makes up or alters events to trigger the plot. But I wouldn't nail him down. Like with every good novel I bought all the twists of the story: how he continued to be infatuated by a mainly platonic love, how he recklessly lost his job, how one night he mysteriously fell off his bike, how he gave up his apartment and all his belongings and moved to Ethiopia to become extremely skinny. I couldn't tell what came first: the urge to live a grotesquely dramatic life or the urge to see his life as an early adaptation (probably more of an epic TV series than a single movie) of his next novel. Once he had

published the book he moved back to Berlin, gained some weight, and returned to a less drastic life.

About the same time as Joachim's novel—2011 to 2012—my friend Erik (from Thuringia, like Marlene) lived one year as though it were his last, following a drill I had originally devised as a "game for adults" for a German family magazine. Erik wrote a diary that I encouraged him to publish in his next and supposedly final catalogue (*The Future of Art: A Diary*, 2012). I created autofiction in a new sense: instead of a fiction "about myself," it was one that got written "by itself." All I had to do was design an exciting time for my main character who would then report it himself. This came even more true with Erik's next big effort, *Burial of the White Man*, in which he retells his life from the moment that I came into it in 2004: how we became close, how I shook things up at his project space, how he turned himself into an eager scholar during my interviews in search of an epochal new artwork (*The Future of Art: A Manual*, 2011), how our collaboration peaked with me imposing my concept for the greatest tomb, *Pyramid Mountain*, onto him, and how his Last Year worked out as an effort to activate himself for such a massive endeavor. Since then we had continued to develop a bunch of projects together, but our success was moderate and did not really push Erik's career. It was clear from the beginning that this autofiction would only make sense if Erik continued the story about his quest into the future, thereby turning it into what I envisioned as an eventually self-fulfilling auto–*science* fiction.

But the future scenario that Erik came up with felt like a daydream in which, due to sheer luck, all financial and political obstacles disappear. Therefore, I proposed to ask other writers to continue Erik's story. We would lay Erik's future not just in his, but in many hands. Mine included? When Erik had finished his part of the story, I didn't know if I should once again take over what I had started in the first place. The editing of Erik's part had already been a hell of a lot of work, and what could I even come up with? I had already handed all my ideas of the last years to Erik.

They were basically four: make a decent amount of money (the one-million-dollar drill); if you don't manage to earn the money, create the money yourself (issue a Pyramid Dollar); find the easiest and cheapest place to carve a gigantic pyramid out of a mountain (for instance, in Visoko, where people already believed that a partly pyramid-shaped mountain contained the biggest ancient pyramid); declare *Pyramid Mountain* not just the tomb of yourself, but of the white man.

To some of Erik's friends I appeared as a kind of Mephisto who had traded Erik's soul for his fulfillment as an artist. But unlike Mephisto, I'm not able to do any wonders, and I never promised that I could. From my own perspective, I rather resemble a classic detective character like Sherlock Holmes or Miss Marple who compulsively tries to solve all open cases with only a human brain and the help of some eccentric freedoms (mine are to be social only when I feel like it and to lie down most of the day and fall asleep whenever it suits me).

Eventually I realized that the case of Erik and *Pyramid Mountain* might be easier to solve than I had thought. Erik was eager to be regularly judged by me and by his father. But both of our authority combined wasn't enough. Erik had made the most remarkable progress as an artist during the production of *The Future of Art* and his Last Year, when he had obliged himself to make public how his art practice would develop over a certain period of time. What if we made his exposure permanent? Instead of telling the whole story in one go, Erik could tell it as it happened. Every month, if not every week, he would have to report the latest progress of *Pyramid Mountain*. He would have to put it online immediately or feel ashamed if he got stuck again. More than blog entries, video messages would prevent him from manipulating the story in retrospect. Erik would continue to document his life, not because it was exciting, but to make it exciting. The film would only end with his death or when his pyramid would actually be carved out of a mountain.



Ann Cotten

In a Pub in a Far Corner of the Universe

Ok, you use your letters to tell your thing to put up signs telling you it understood what you told it.

So you mean you sit around staring at a screen that is giving you feedback about the messages you gave it, all the time?

I had to nod.

Who designed this shit?

The same people who designed the pidgin you and I are using. They call them nerds. They helped us solve a lot of problems through systems of isolation, logic, friendship resonance, echo chambers.

??

Well, you have to understand, because of the colonialization history of our planet, there is a lot of pressure for people to feel superior. That is one of the main goals of our upbringing.

Everyone?

No, I guess not everyone. But the pressure is rising. It's more and more like, either you on top, or you fucked. Everyone can learn to talk superior. Then the next question is you need an army to prove it, so you belong to a nation or something … obwiously this cannot be indiwidually produced for each so you choin an eksisting army—

ok ok
but I get you right, so millions of people are communicating with feedback screens and pretending to be superior.

Yep.

So that would be the main function of the screens.

No!

Then what?

Well, a lot of things, but mostly communication.

You just said communication was the place this superiority game is played.

You are right to call it a game. It is played alongside the more important issues.

Like?

Well, optimizing

hehe

optimizing the crops, tuning logistics, that is transportation of goods and people to where they are needed
or I guess I should say wanted
or maybe, where a want can be seeded

right

and also I must admit there is war, so there is a lot going on there. Destruction products. Safety products and control products.

Hm, I mean, up to now all of it has sounded a bit like war, right?

War?

War…

Well …

First of all, most of the time we are just playing with these things.

We?

Not those who produce them, obviously. But the technology is really fun. Drones, man. We like to play with seeing ourselves from outside. AI also is very delightful. Some people are scared but it is a tickle like public opinion. Why do you think

we are sitting in a real-time room with candles that burn down, in this real corner of the universe, and not chatting?

Because our conversation has no point?

Just we like formulating things.

Yeah. Cheers.

Cheers.

…

I don't like how Amerikan view of things have been wandering around the universe looking at things and describing things.

Yeah.

…

They should stay at home.

Yeah.

…

Is beer a superiority drug?

I guess, maybe.

We can say very submissive things and still feel superior, thanks to beer.

Doesn't that make it a device for stabilizing dual vision?

Since the dual vision is a given, all we perceive is the stabilizing.

…

It's funny, you are the ones with the chance to play with all this technology you are having your slaves make. But you are the ones who don't know how to play.

It is a little bit of a problem to make things, you know? You cannot play and make at the same time.

I can play and make out at the same time.

Let me see.

…

Uff, let's go see some art.

… (hand the barkeeper their credit cards, which are laid in slots behind the bar. The barkeeper says: Number Violet Red. They take off their shoes and go to the designated back room.)

It really turns me on. This whole procedure.

Shh.

Shall we watch some art?

What channel do you like best?

I dunno. Something with black lesbian dickchicks.

I like Asian performance artists.

Can we order some eggs and plaster?

…

Room service: Here's the plaster and a box of ten eggs. Which card may I put it on?

I'll take it. That's Nakamura Seiji.

We need more eggs I think.

Room service: Well just ring again if you run out. You know how to mix the plaster?

It's washable temporary, right?

Room service: Of course.

Are there any interesting neighbors?

Room service: I'm sorry, I am not allowed to give you any information about the neighbors. But you are free to knock at their doors if you like. You could try Orange Green. (leaves)

Orange Green? It doesn't sound …

Come on, they don't choose their colors any more than we did.

…

(orgiastic plastering with Orange Green. Orange Green leave after a small quarrel about boob size and cultural differences, but mostly about how much water to put in the plaster. Orange Green take the rest of the eggs in a dastardly move making use of fake reconciliation to assert: "If you don't need those eggs …" forcing our two to agree: "Of course not, go ahead." After Orange Green have left, for a while our two stare at the hardening plaster in the bathtub.)

It's temporary, but you can't use it twice as a customer.

No, it takes a chemical key.

…

Fucking Anglos.

No, they don't fuck. We don't play, but they don't fuck. They just talk shit.

(Hands begin.)

…
…

,,,
..

(Postcoital chatty mood:) (one-sided)

It seems, the bigger the universe gets, the less we want to go outside.

Hm.

It makes little difference whether we are in a deep vault or way out in the sky.

Hm.

Or both.

m.

Do people still dream about the night sky, do you think?

(The other one seems to be asleep.)

The next hours are cheap, so it's ok, we can sleep here.

(Sleeps also.)



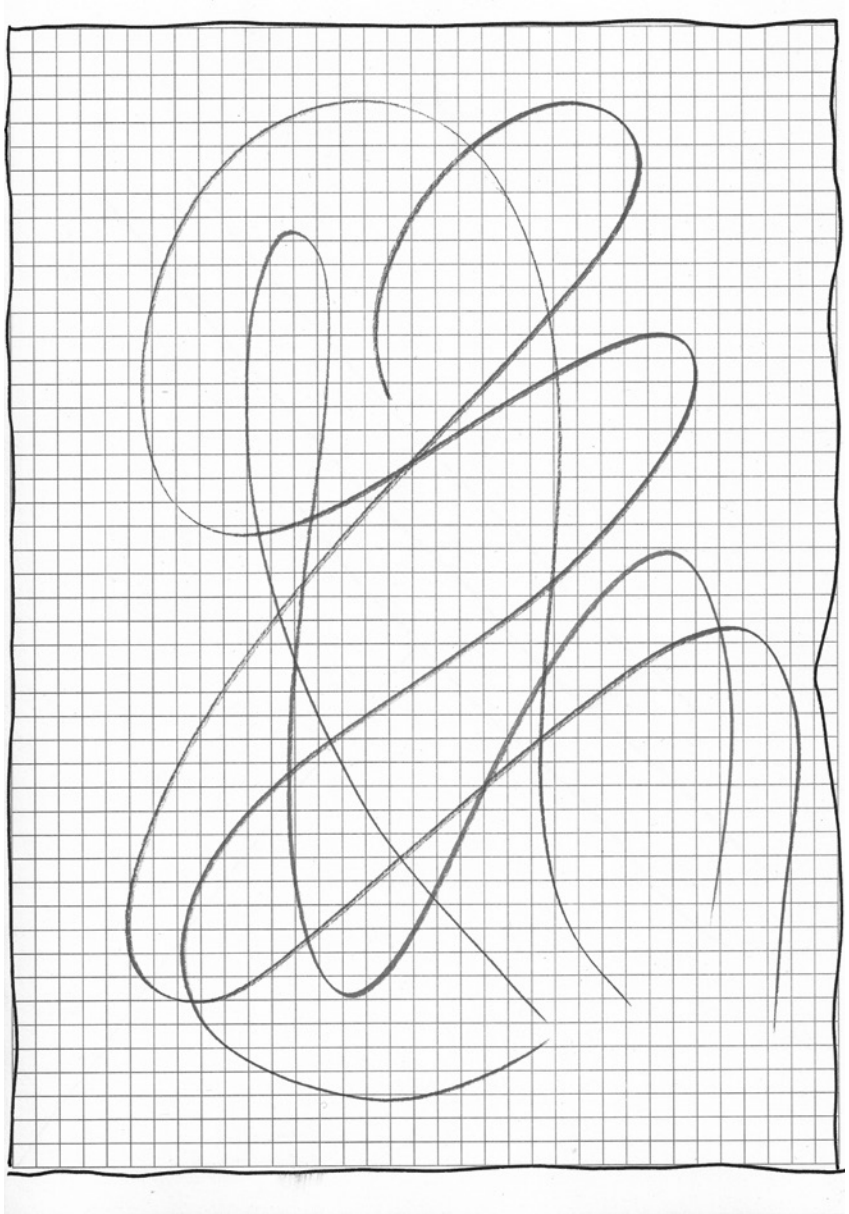
Jakob Nolte
Mysterious Scribbles

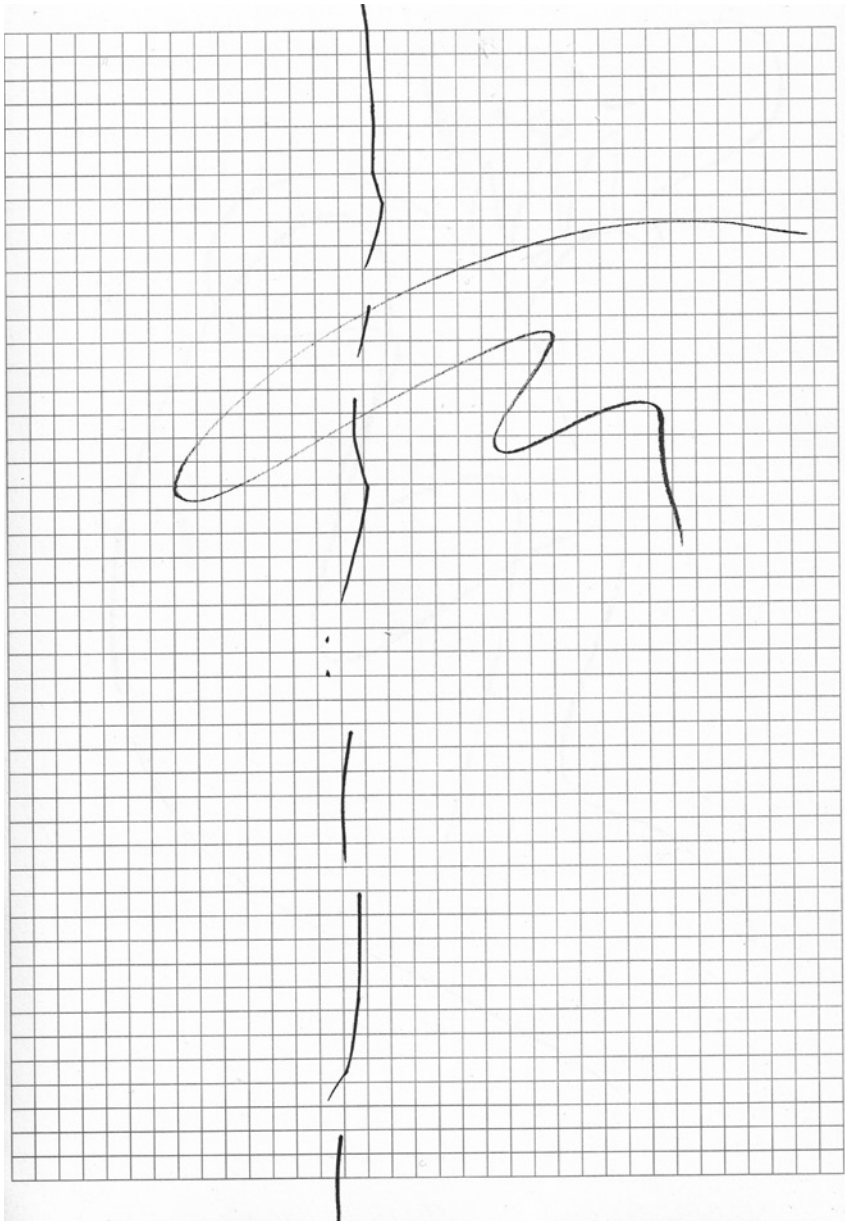
from *Art Esquire Abeba*, no. 42 (3711)

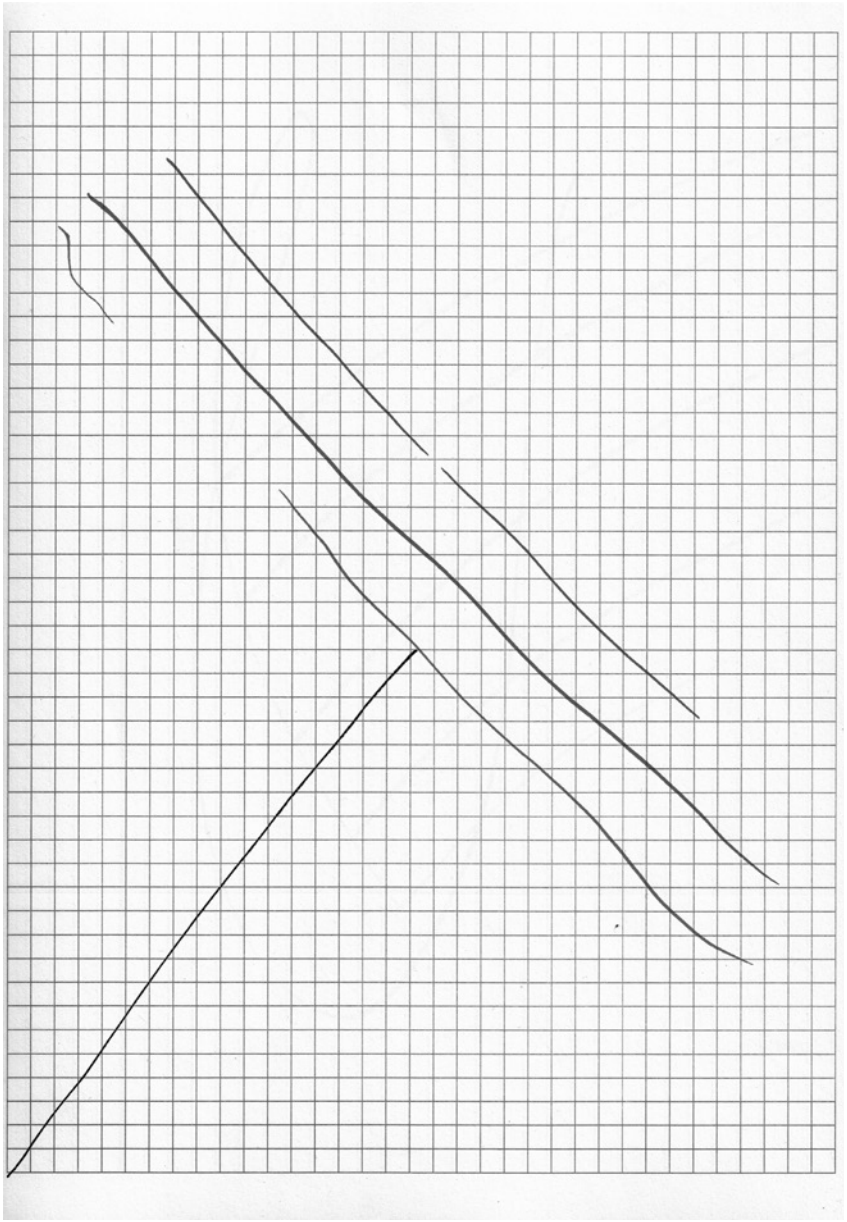
Excavations of the so-called "mountain pyramid" in central-northern Europe, which have been in full swing since early this week (see *AEA*, no. 41, 3711), have yielded a strange find. A graph-paper notebook with colorful sketches in felt-tip pen has been located among the works by "Erik Niedling," an artist from the area then known as "Germany" who interred himself in a burial chamber at the bottom of the mountain along with a manageable oeuvre of sculptures and photographs. The style of these drawings is rather childlike, or reminiscent of the abstract approach

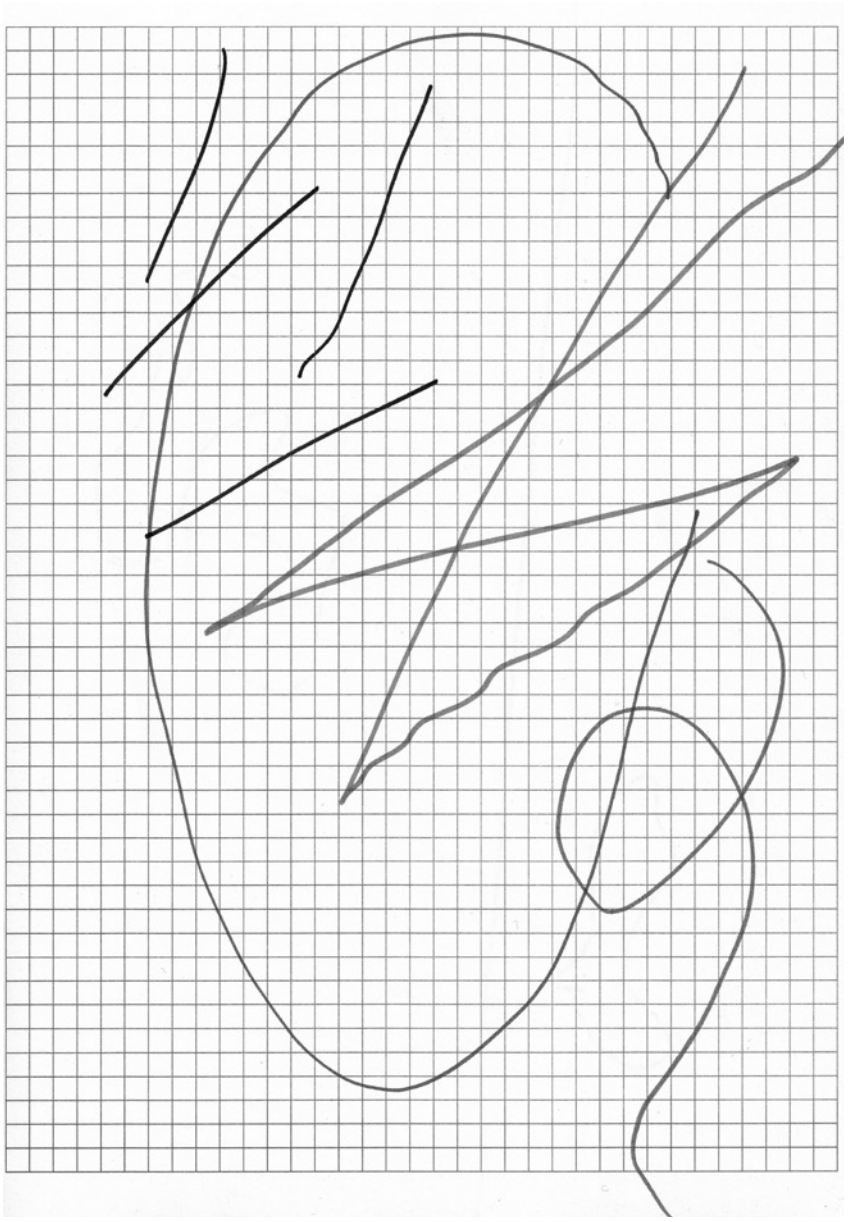
to painting for which twentieth-century art in the Northern Hemisphere is known, and stands in stark contrast to "Niedling's" aesthetic. The pyramid's construction has been dated to approximately 2048 and is characterized by a rigor and hermetism typical of this epoch: it speaks to a discernable need for control owing to "social" as well as "personal" insecurities befitting circumstances at that time. The graph-paper notebook has now perplexed the art world—not the quality of the work, but the question as to how it could have ended up in the burial chamber in the first place. The drawings are presumably not by "Erik Niedling," as such an indiscriminate break in style would be inconsistent with his other works. Moreover, the drawings are not mentioned anywhere in the artist's meticulously prepared records or catalogue raisonné. Despite theories that "Erik Niedling" is in fact two people (and that the part of "Erik Niedling" sometimes referred to as "Ingo Niermann" kept secret access to the burial chamber, then surreptitiously hid the scribbles there to ironically disrupt the "monumentally" conceived artwork at the last moment), one outrageous detail belies that theory as well: it isn't just the amateurish style that sets this graph-paper notebook apart, but also the fact that it withstood 1,600 years in the chamber with no sign of aging. The colors are not faded and the paper is not yellowed. Some say that an anarchist could have planted the artifact among the excavations finds, but how could anyone procure a "BKS Bank" (as noted on the cover) spiral-bound notebook today? Chemical tests have proved that the paper is at least 1,500 years old. A number of pages have been hastily pulled out of the notebook and some have nothing more than a pink line. Even notes written in German, such as "Ich liebe das Geräusch von Filzern" (I love the sound of felt-tip markers), "ROT ORANGE PINK" (RED ORANGE PINK), or "(Nahaufnahme)" ([Close-up]), have no easily discernable meaning or agenda. Are these images the work of a ghost? Did "Erik Niedling" rise from his grave to make naive doodles? Or did someone break into the burial site after its completion to immortalize

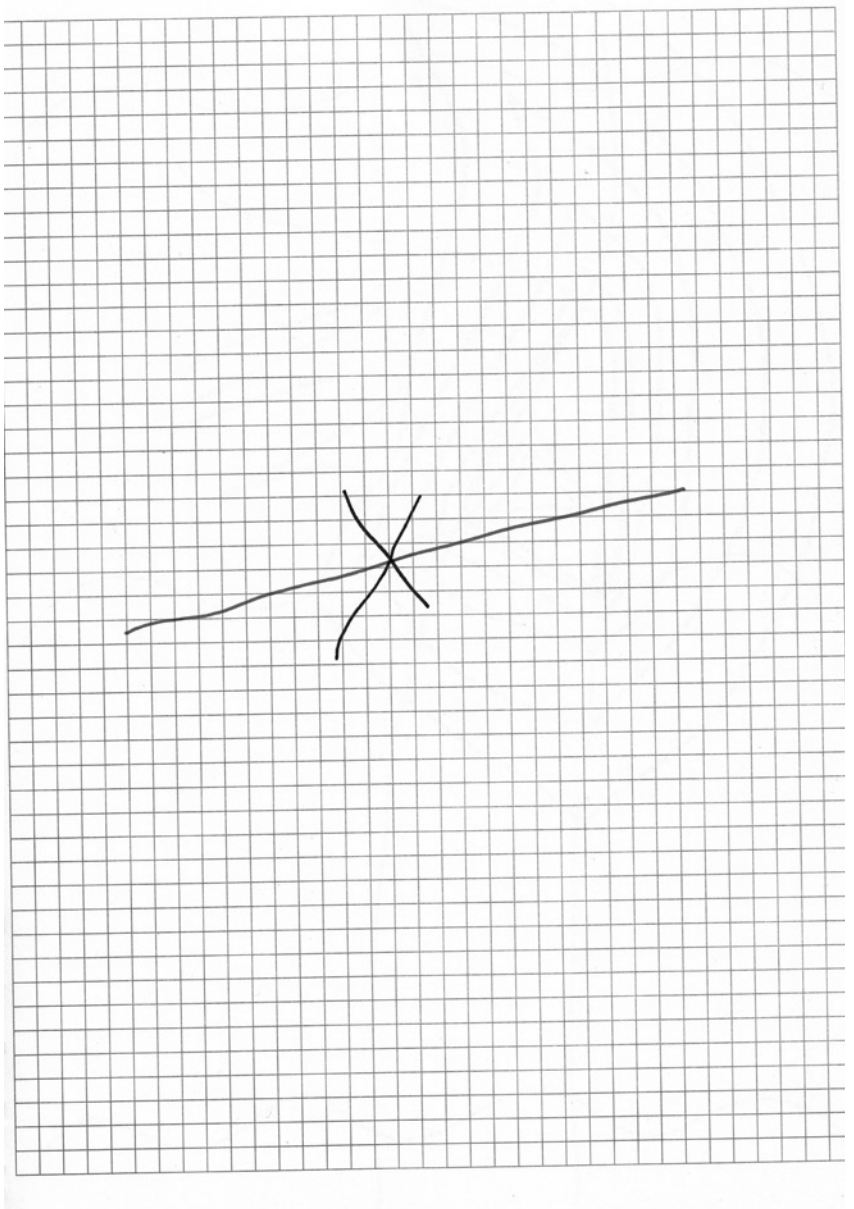
their own person, parasitically inscribing themselves into the ambitious Gesamtkunstwerk? Such questions have yet to be answered, but will hopefully be clarified in the coming hours.











All images by Erik Niedling except the following pages:
13, Ingo Niermann; 32, Kitty Heckert; 37, René Eisfeld;
38–43, Thomas Schulze; 73–74, Ingo Niermann; 78, Ingo Niermann;
85, unknown; 89, Christian Görmer; 90, DIS; 140, unknown;
153, Ingo Niermann; 154–55, Erik Niedling & Ingo Niermann;
156, 158, Ingo Niermann; 160, unknown; 161, Galerie Tobias Naehring;
163, Jonas Weber Herrera; 165, Thomas Schulze; 167, Joachim Bessing;
169, Ingo Niermann; 204, Robert Hausmann; 207, Exile Gallery;
209, Robert Hausmann; 213, Kitty Heckert; 241, Ursus Haussmann;
244, Erik Niedling & Ingo Niermann; 246, Wikimedia Commons;
249, Robert Hausmann; 270–75, unknown

MY NOTES ON HOW TO REALIZE THE BURIAL OF THE WHITE MAN



INGO NIERMANN WITH ERIK NIEDLING

THE FUTURE OF ART: A MANUAL

In 1831 Honoré de Balzac wrote a short story, "The Unknown Masterpiece," in which he invented the abstract painting. Almost 200 years later, writer Ingo Niermann tries to follow in his footsteps to imagine a new epoch-making artwork. Together with the artist Erik Niedling he starts searching for the future of art and, seeking advice, meets key figures of the art world.

With guidance by Thomas Bayrle, Olaf Breuning, Genesis and Lady Jaye Breyer P-Orridge, Olafur Eliasson, Harald Falckenberg, Boris Groys, Damien Hirst, Gregor Jansen, Terence Koh, Gabriel von Loebell, Marcos Lutyens, Philomene Magers, Antje Majewski, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Thomas Olbricht, Friedrich Petzel, and Tobias Rehberger; and commentary by Chus Martínez.

Ingo Niermann, *The Future of Art: A Manual*. 320 pages, b/w photos, and illustrations. Including the DVD *The Future of Art* by Erik Niedling and Ingo Niermann (HD, 157 min.). Sternberg Press, 2011



ERIK NIEDLING WITH INGO NIERMANN

THE FUTURE OF ART: A DIARY

Artist Erik Niedling would like to be buried in *Pyramid Mountain*, the largest tomb of all time, conceived by writer Ingo Niermann. To make this goal a reality, Niedling lives one year as though it were his last. *The Future of Art: A Diary* recounts the joys and horrors of that year. A response by Tom McCarthy examines the social and philosophical implications.

Erik Niedling with Ingo Niermann, *The Future of Art: A Diary*. 256 pages, b/w photos, and illustrations.
Sternberg Press, 2012

BURIAL OF THE WHITE MAN IS A BILDUNGSROMAN ABOUT THE FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN ARTIST ERIK NIEDLING AND WRITER INGO NIERMANN. WHILE IN THEIR THIRTIES, THEY BEGIN COLLABORATING ON A SERIES OF PROJECTS OF EVER-INCREASING AMBITION AND SCOPE: A TOMB FOR ALL HUMANS, A DISSIDENT REPLICA OF THE U.S. ARMY, A GERMAN-MOZAMBICAN LIBERATION MOVEMENT, A RITUAL OF LIVING ONE YEAR LIKE IT'S YOUR LAST, A GLOBAL FITNESS CULT… EACH FAILURE IS ANSWERED WITH AN EVEN MORE OUTRAGEOUS ENDEAVOR—CULMINATING IN THE BURIAL NOT ONLY OF THEMSELVES, BUT OF THE ENTIRE SUBSPECIES OF THE WHITE MAN.



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