



# COMPOSITION

AIR DC PAPERS

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**NEW YORK TWICE: AIR DE PARIS, PARIS**  
May 28–June 25, 2005 and June 28–July 24, 2005

Wade Guyton  
Mai-Thu Perret  
Seth Price  
Josh Smith  
Kelley Walker  
curator: Fabrice Stroun  
Xerox: edited by Bettina Funcke

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2	Bettina Funcke, <i>The Laughter Is on My Side</i> , exhibition invite
3	Fia Backström, <i>The Way We Talk</i>
5	Christophe Cherix, <i>To Josh / With the author's apologies</i>
6	Josh Smith, <i>Photographic Essay</i>
7	Gilbert and George, chosen by Josh Smith
8	Steven Parrino, from <i>The Return of the Creature: On Mai-Thu Perret</i>
9	Mai-Thu Perret, Lee Lozano
10	Virginia Woolf, <i>Orlando</i> , chosen by Mai-Thu Perret
11	Fia Backström, <i>Not Making Sense: On Seth Price</i>
12	Seth Price, <i>Unique Source: All Natural Suicide Gang</i>
15	Seth Price, <i>Law, Sex, and Christian Society</i> , press release for Richard Phillips, chosen by Seth Price
16	Johanna Burton, <i>Such Uneventful Events: Wade Guyton</i>
17	Wade Guyton/Josh Smith, <i>Photographic Essay</i>
18	Yves-Alain Bois, <i>Painting: The Task of Mourning, Part I</i> , chosen by Wade Guyton and Kelley Walker
23	Tim Griffin, <i>Please Recycle: On Kelley Walker</i>
27	Kelley Walker, <i>plexi housing</i> , email
28	Yves-Alain Bois, <i>Painting: The Task of Mourning, Part II</i> , chosen by Wade Guyton and Kelley Walker
32	<i>A Conversation</i> with Bettina Funcke, Ken Goble, Wade Guyton, Mai-Thu Perret, Seth Price, Josh Smith, and Kelley Walker, May 1, 2005; with footnotes by Mai-Thu Perret
38	Steven Parrino, <i>The No Texts</i> , chosen by Fabrice Stroun

AIR DE PARIS & Fabrice Stroun

Wade Guyton  
Bettina Funcke  
Mai-Thu Perret  
Seth Price  
Josh Smith  
Kelley Walker

NY TWICE

The original and the appropriated  
The serious and the hilarious  
The domestic and the discourse  
The designed and the dismantled  
The fixed and the elastic  
The iconic and the ephemeral  
The raw and the popular  
The conventional and the anarchic  
The aggressive and the skeptical  
The cynical and the ironic  
The smart and the obtuse  
The idea and the context  
The gesture and the concept  
The decorative and the formalist  
The distributed and the exclusive  
The produced and the reproduced  
The sexy and the morbid  
The forceful and thoughtful... Vulgarité.  
The intense and the intended  
The kitsch up and the designed down  
The useful and the useless  
The fetishized and the debased  
The valued and the revalued

Violence and beauty

Bettina Funcke, from *The Laughter Is on My Side*, 2004

MAY 28 - JUNE 25, 2005

AIR 2 PARIS  
Robert Devriendt  
Explosion et Sensualité

AIR DE PARIS & Fabrice Stroun

Wade Guyton  
Bettina Funcke  
Mai-Thu Perret  
Seth Price  
Josh Smith  
Kelley Walker

NY TWICE

Le sérieux et le désopilant  
Le stylisé et le démantelé  
Le figé et le malléable  
Le brut et le populaire  
Le conventionnel et l'anarchique  
Le cynique et l'ironique  
Le geste et le concept  
Le décoratif et le formaliste  
Le distribué et l'exclusif  
Le produit et le reproduit  
Le sexy et le morbide  
Le kitchifié et le peu designé  
Le fétichisé et l'avili  
L'énergique et le réfléchi... La vulgarité.  
L'utile et l'inutile  
L'évalué et le réévalué  
L'original et l'approprié  
L'intime et le discours  
L'agressif et le sceptique  
L'iconique et l'éphémère  
L'intelligent et l'obtus  
L'idée et le contexte  
L'intense et le délibéré

Violence et beauté

Bettina Funcke, extrait de *The Laughter Is on My Side*, 2004

28 JUIN - 24 JUILLET, 2005

AIR 2 PARIS  
Photographies spiritées  
vintage prints

In August 2004, New York City was appropriated by the Republican Party National Convention (RNC). One of the highlights was Laura Bush's appearance on the podium. She wore a turquoise colored skirt and jacket, reminiscent of a fifties cut. Her accent, that wholesome house-wifey southern one. The way she spoke of her husband, her family, of America—the fifties quotations are serving a purpose, for sure not a nostalgic one.

In Todd Haynes film *Far from Heaven* (2002), itself a take on Douglas Sirk's film *Imitation of Life* (1959), we find another supportive housewife with a successful husband and healthy kids. Abandoned by her homosexual husband, she starts seeing her black gardener, and brings him to the local museum's latest art-show. As she transitions from perfection and a status of prominence into a social outcast, her convictions of goodness safely stand. While

Haynes works with stereotypical values from the fifties to nuance preconceived societal ideas, the RNC co-opts the rhetoric of the tolerant home-maker, with an understanding of all kinds of social injustices, while visually suggesting a weave of Technicolor-ideology and the values an accent brings along.

Every generation is saying the same thing over and over, but in its own particular way. What if one generation would say exactly the same thing in the exact same way as a previous generation? What if this previous generation itself was already a copy of an earlier generation?



#### ULTRA-RELATIONAL AESTHETICS

Seth Price did exactly this. In 2004 he 're-appropriated' a Martha Rosler piece and titled it: *2 for 1* (2002). In his review of the exhibition "Notes on Renewed Appropriationism," (*Artforum*, May 2004) Bruce Hainley wrote in reference to the piece: "Better to recall Douglas Sirk, with his *Imitation of Life* (1959), itself a remake, which showed how imitation and 'appropriation' cause unruly ruptures in the structures of family, gender, sexuality, and race." The power of imitation or "appropriation" in both Price's work and the RNC's decision about how to frame Mrs. Bush, seems to lie elsewhere—in the reader's response. We are supposed to engrain Laura Bush's honest wholesome image with American family values of the fifties.

Hainley overlooks the actual gesture of the 're-frame' and goes straight in cage. Commenting on the content of Rosler's video, Hainley writes, "one might find the pleasure principle at work in Rosler's 'political' montage, but mass culture has long been sorting through such politico-aesthetic transferences, and the effect here is nostalgic rather than challenging." Looking like a review of Rosler's work from a strange

position in time, this symptom of nostalgia exposes a desire in the viewer. Who is nostalgic here, longing for a past, unfulfilled revolutionary potential? It is not the Republican Party. They are already home. Maybe Hainley is not so much into copies after all. The original is supposedly always better...

Hainley points out that curator Lauri Firstenberg does not succeed in articulating the idea of re-appropriation in her essay accompanying "Notes on Renewed Appropriationism". To him, she merely juxtaposes shiny objects and fails to highlight the political relevance. Looks more like formalism at play rather than a classic conceptual quality with hard-to-digest content. Having dumped the concept of appropriation into history's graveyard, this work is not simply about the medium. The power of formalism is used as a tool to revive sedimentary layers of signification. Formal distortions and an disrespectful play with the material and techniques are done in order to set loose a violent slipping of signification.

Rather than deconstructing advertisement's myths and semiotic analysis, common practice in the 1980s, the structural semantic glue is ripped open and exposed by the use of the audience, some twisted relational aesthetic. Participatory reactions of viewers are spit straight back in to our own faces. Shiny objects mirror the provoked, self-reflective readings, making the RNC manipulations feel almost innocent by comparison. Publicly subsidized violence was never high on the agenda of a winning political party.

Though Firstenberg may have lost her trace onto something good, it is all about shiny objects, just as much as it is about a turquoise dress. Something is let loose, the turquoise dress ended up fucking the gardener, but by then the limelight had shifted its spot to the California Governor, with his heavy Austrian accent, rambling on about girlie-men. We all knew who really was talking: The Terminator.

#### FORMALISM SIGNIFIES PLAY

Guyton/Walker's collaborative show "The Failover of Judgement Part III" in Spring 2005 felt oddly oppressive, almost deceitfully intoxicating. The mood is calypso. Ridiculous coconut lamps decorate the tops of one-gallon cans containing what could be toxic paint. Each can features labels of scanned juicy fruits, such as cut up kiwis and potent bananas, set against a black background (by default since the lid must be left open). They are erotically slick like crushed Hustler images passing unnoticed by any censorship. Other cans have labels with happy brands such as Energy Vitamin Water. What appears healthy on the surface is actually quite contaminated and degenerate. Surrounded by upbeat colors, like luminous orange and lime green, the room vibrates in a request: "Everybody happy!"—forcing a dentist-bleached smile onto the viewer. Those in attendance were offered Tequila, not "Ketel One" vodka, the brand name, which recurs throughout the exhibition—"Hello Ketel One"—adding another dimension of fake cordial friendliness.

The exhibition invites one to see double: the collaboration of two artists, replicated in the image of the balancing-chairs-act by two other collaborators (Fischli & Weiss). The so-called paintings, ink-jet printed, silk-screened, and treated visceral surfaces, were hung in a deadpan repetitive manner inside the larger enclosed space. The added partition prevented proper ventilation, which in turn created an unbearably tropical atmosphere. It also obfuscated a clear view from the outside through its two-way mirror. Only shadows of paintings and visitors were discernible, which added to the disorientation.

This is horrible graphic design. Imitational design of some avant-garde aesthetic—covered up information, distorted logos. Nothing is straight. The jet-set personage featured on the painting with the red, stained "Geneva" ad; the rehearsed smiles, really no smiles at all, speak rather of a 'life style'—a bloody life style at that. This 'canvas' cannot even stand alone. It is supported by two of the cans. These expressive, playful detonations are not without violence. Repeated imagery depicts knives in combination with the slogan 'Dear Ketel One Drinker,' printed in the brand's signature typeface. Too close for comfort to some Third Reich clad text, in shrieking red, matching techno colors. The 'happy' quality of the show returns, in a 'bad ass' way, via the Naziesque flags hung throughout the space, sneakily urging us to 'get together, get wasted, and celebrate some quite dissonant universe.'

Elaborate labor has gone into creating the visual "effects", a re-invented formalism (of sorts) emerges; the effect has been fused with the content. A few texts discussed the material aspects of this work in detail<sup>1</sup> along the lines of old-school formalist oriented art writing. The work plays with the idea of 'pure medium,' closer to 'pure' web-design, where the digital effect is structural to the medium, such as metallic font treatments and drop shadows. Early avant-garde graphics also operate along these lines.

Instead of erasing (the Rauschenberg/de Kooning move), here we have scanning and layering. Layers covering and uncovering, covering more or less, there is no attempt to control the spread of semination (as good advertisers might). Instead it is left open; eternally chain linking, killing off single horizon acts like the RNC. The result is a no result, an entropic contradiction. Stuck with the laugh in our throats, we already know how the act of the balancing chairs will end.

#### RE-USE IT – ABUSE IT

Content is not contained like an onion, which you peel layer after layer. The layers are Photoshop layers—opaque or transparent, virtual and very tangible. In Kelley Walker's case, a collector receives a Photoshop file with layers. The bottommost layer is the non-editable, white background, which provides no transcendence in any ordinary sense. In an allegorical reading<sup>2</sup>, one text is read through another, through a layer, shifting the location from which meaning is

related. Chronologically layered depth is used rather than making the text transparent.

Walker's piece *Schema: Aquafresh plus Crest with Tartar Control* (2003) uses race riot images from the 1960s combined with layers of toothpaste, squirted directly on the scanner. Reading them through Warhol's race riot pieces, which use similar imagery, does not let us into the unconscious realm of buried sense. Neither would his shiny Rorschach images. The depth is virtual (not even a quarter inch), making for surface readings of layers flattened for production. Rather we encounter our pseudo-conscious, mass-cultured consumer minds already thoroughly excavated. The literacy of the audience is exploited and abused to the point of ejaculating a proliferation of significations. Beneath the spurted toothpaste, the layers of the image rampage over layers of tropes and possibilities for meaning-production, suggesting no one will be THE one. There is no interest in approximating a closure—the issue lies elsewhere. More like speaking in "allergy"—the sense is expelled with the force of an allergic reaction like the toothpaste discharge.

One recycles a used item and so decides its path to dissolution. Walker's recycling of images and sense-making compromises the viewer (even if opting out of altering the image layers) by making them participate and by playing with the system's rules of circulation and distribution. Submitting us to re-enactment therapy as opposed to the happy gathering of '90s social relational works, meaning is re-use, wrong use, or any use. This eco-art looks like mock-play without hygienic Green Peace pieces. The work mimics 'it', echoing worn out representational strategies, without (like the former) affirming current cultural ideologies or being usurped by them, like a hyperventilating freak, re-circulating known sign-to-sign-relations. What may, at first glance, look like a nostalgic feel for appropriation, following all the correct visual rules, is rather an employed formalism, spreading allergens. It is not about mourning but about playing.

#### POLITICAL ART = TASTEFUL ART

The tools of appropriation morphed into political correctness in the '1990s, when political came to mean consciousness of any little rat hole of injustice on the globe. The work of Mai-Thu Perret and Wade Guyton goes into the opposite direction. Excluding the 'real', both utilize visuals and objects of design from the early avant-gardes. These items were originally used as propaganda for a new society and way of life, though these societal forms have long since been discarded as non-viable.

In Guyton's *Untitled Action Sculpture (Chair)* (2001), a shiny Breuer chair has been disfigured – violence to a form becomes violence to an ideology. The inoperative component does double duty as both 'form' and 'content', the hybrid being 'meaningful forms'. If, in Conceptual art content is to determine the form, a formalist approach is all about 'material' and 'process'. Subject matter, politics, and figuration are to be left out.

The action in this case is the subject matter: a cover of a Pollock attack, sneaking in subject matter, politics, via the figure of the unusable chair.

Consider Perret's *4 Sculptures of Pure Self-Expression (The Arts and Crafts Movement)*, (2003). What look like black, shiny, ceramic, everyday objects of the real world from a distance, become upon closer inspection similar shapes connected to each other in similar ways. Variations without any possible use. The mentioning in the title of the 19th century Arts and Craft Movement brings to mind the romantic vision for a new society by William Morris and John Ruskin. While crafts have served for centuries as a terrain of self-expression for women, they are not ordinarily assessed according to their expressive qualities. Instead the precious hand-made quality is here turned into formal, modular 're-takes'. It becomes a mechanical exercise with minimal expression. Reminiscent of the Bauhaus (where Breuer taught) with similar convictions on teaching color and form. These sculptures parasite off of worn-out models of visionary propaganda, the ideas a form can set in motion.

#### REPEAT IT – MAKE IT ORIGINAL

In 1979, Sherri Levine re-photographed photographs by Walker Evans. Some of the original photographs were of his sons. The appropriation resulted in a dismissed court case. Similarly, Michelangelo could not apply this logic to sue Evans, nor the many imitators of David since then. I was once at a panel where Douglas Crimp spoke of Levine's images. Upon admitting he owned these photographs and hung in his bedroom, Crimp told a story of a lover who took the images at face-value: naked young boys. Adding an eerie layer in the '90s PC era, while Levine 'captured' the boys, Crimp in turn 'caged' them. Today Price reverts the positions in his re-screening of the Rosler piece much the same way capitalism always adjusts to destabilizing tendencies.

Another piece by Price: palettes inscribed with various generically written signatures (only first names) of well-known female artists, such as *Martha* for Rosler, *Sherrie* for Levine, or *Lee Lee Lee* as in Krassner, Lozano and Bontecou. They are ambivalently hovering between a cheering salute and an informal familiarity verging on irreverence. Authenticity re-used. Is he aestheticizing a formerly potent weapon? Is it neo-feminism raising the stakes, or...?

Josh Smith has made a series of pieces from his palettes. They are 'paintings' made by looking the other way, surfaces for the making of others. How long can one keep up one's disinterest, leaving out intentionality and gesture as we know it? These are no surrogate images. They are secondary, made from use. The paint ended up where it ended up through the process of something else.

Prefabricated obsessional neurosis—Josh Smith repeatedly paints his name 'Josh Smith' on canvas after canvas, stuttering the idea of the signature. What would look by itself like the marker of authenticity, in this mechanized way starts to erode the fetishism

of originality while simultaneously reifying a kind of "difference"—a difference produced by the sameness in the imprint. Looking like lyrical attempts, the chronic indifference and mass production are forging painterly, expressionistic signs.

#### FORMALISM AS CRITICALITY

Craig Owens' "The Allegorical Impulse – Towards a Theory of Postmodernism – Part 2" discusses how the trope of the allegory functions as a distancing device: reading one text through another it highlights an irretrievably lost past. The image of the ruin is described as the ultimate nostalgic ideal of the allegory. Similar to irony it cultivates a distance between the work and the viewer. However allegory does so in a more static and general manner. It always points to the meta-textual level. One example from the same time, from Douglas Crimp's essay "Pictures"<sup>3</sup>, is Troy Brauntuch's installation pieces displaying "appropriated", enlarged, and staged images of Hitler sleeping in a car.

The classic image of Mussolini and his mistress hanging from a bridge toward the end of WWII is used in Adam McEwens piece *Untitled (A-line)* (2003). The grandiosity of the presentation encourages a fascistic reading similar to Brauntuch's piece. Is it an attempt to imitate? The gesture is different, the image seems new, it has been turned upside down—a twofold sacrilege or re-erection. The hanging corpses are doing the dance—a funny one. I am smiling at the twisted contortions, forced back to my reading of the piece. My smile reminds me of the smiles of the soldiers taking pictures in the Abu Ghraib Prison. Not stopping at the reading of cultural codes and representation as in the Brauntuch, here the participatory reading of the viewer discloses a co-dependency, where the viewer's take is part of the work—a formalist ultra-relational aesthetic.

What was once content became a look; a design, here (re)run as content, whether this act is called re-cycling, imitation, or cover-making. Techno-color nostalgia or retro-quality time—these are the subliminal ways of the best propaganda machine in history: The Republican Party. Now, we don't turn our leaders upside down. In pretty turquoise dresses and cowboy boots—more than just a look—we extended their turn-around time.

<sup>1</sup>See for example the essays of Fabrice Stroun and Johanna Burton in *The Failever Judgment*, Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2005.

<sup>2</sup>See for example Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism – Part 2," *October* 13 (Summer 1980) pp. 58-80.

<sup>3</sup>Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October* 8, (Spring 1979), pp. 75-88.

*Christophe Cherix*

*To Josh / With the author's apologies*

The moral life of man forms no part of the subject-matter of the artist, but the morality of art consists in the perfect use of an imperfect medium.

No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy is an artist in an unpardonable mannerism of style.

No artist is ever morbid. The artist can express everything.

Thought and language are the best instruments of an art.

Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art.

All art is at once surface and symbol.

Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril.

Those who read the symbols do so at their peril.

It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors.

Diversity of opinion about a work of art shows that the work is new, complex, and vital.

When critics disagree the artist is in accord with himself.

We can forgive a man for making a useful thing as long as he does not admire it. The only excuse for making a useless thing is that one admires it intensely.

All art is quite useless.

*Excerpted from the preface of « The Picture of Dorian Gray » by Oscar Wilde*



photo  
essay

Air de Paris

summer 2005

TO BE WITH ART IS ALL WE ASK..

GILBERT AND GEORGE THE SCULPTORS AUTUMN 1970

OH ART, WHAT ARE YOU? YOU ARE SO STRONG AND POWERFUL, SO BEAUTIFUL AND MOVING. YOU MAKE US WALK AROUND AND AROUND, PACING THE CITY AT ALL HOURS, IN AND OUT OF OUR ART FOR ALL ROOM. WE REALLY DO LOVE YOU AND WE REALLY DO HATE YOU. WHY DO YOU HAVE SO MANY FACES AND VOICES? YOU MAKE US THIRST FOR YOU AND THEN RUN FROM YOU ESCAPING COMPLETELY INTO NORMAL LIFE-: GETTING UP, HAVING BREAKFAST, GOING TO THE WORK-SHOP AND BEING SURE OF PUTTING OUR MIND AND ENERGY INTO MAKING OF A DOOR OR MAYBE A SIMPLE TABLE AND CHAIR. THE WHOLE LIFE WOULD SURELY BE SO EASEFUL, SO DRUNK WITH THE NORMALITY OF WORK AND THE SIMPLE PLEASURES OF LOVING AND HANGING AROUND FOR OUR LIFETIME. OH ART WHERE DID YOU COME FROM, WHO MOTHERED SUCH A STRANGE BEING. FOR WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE ARE YOU -: ARE YOU FOR THE FEEBLE OF MIND, ARE YOU FOR THE POOR-AT-HEART, ARE YOU FOR THOSE WITH NO SOUL. ARE YOU A BRANCH OF NATURE'S FANTASTIC NETWORK OR ARE YOU AN INVENTION OF SOME AMBITIOUS MAN? DO YOU COME FROM A LONG LINE OF ARTS? FOR EVERY ARTIST IS BORN IN THE USUAL WAY AND WE HAVE NEVER SEEN A YOUNG ARTIST. IS TO BECOME AN ARTIST TO BE REBORN, OR IS IT A CONDITION OF LIFE? COMING SLOWLY OVER A PERSON LIKE DAYBREAK. IT BRINGS THE ART-ABILITY TO DO THIS FUNNY THING AND SHOWS YOU NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR FEELINGS AND SCRATCHING AT ONESELF AND SURROUNDINGS, SETTING STANDARDS, MAKING YOU GO INTO EVERY SCENE AND EVERY CONTACT, EVERY TOUCHING NERVE AND ALL YOUR SENSES. AND ART WE ARE DRIVEN BY YOU AT INCREDIBLE SPEED, IGNORANT OF THE DANGER YOU ARE PUSHING AND DRAGGING US INTO. AND YET ART, THERE IS NO GOING BACK, ALL ROAD ONLY GO ON AND ON. WE ARE HAPPY FOR THE GOOD TIMES THAT YOU GIVE US AND WE WORK AND WAIT ONLY FOR THESE TIDBITS FROM YOUR TABLE. IF YOU ONLY KNEW HOW MUCH THESE MEAN TO US, TRANSPORTING FROM THE DEPTHS OF TRAGEDY AND BLACK DESPAIR TO A BEAUTIFUL LIFE OF HAPPINESS, TAKING US WHERE THE GOOD TIMES ARE. WHEN THIS HAPPENS WE ARE ABLE TO WALK AGAIN WITH ARE HEADS HELD HIGH. WE ARTISTS NEED ONLY TO SEE A LITTLE LIGHT THROUGH THE TREES OF THE FOREST, TO BE HAPPY AND WORKING AND BACK INTO GEAR AGAIN. AND YET, WE DON'T FORGET YOU. ART, WE CONTINUE TO DEDICATE OUR ARTIST-ART TO YOU ALONE, FOR YOU AND YOUR PLEASURE, FOR ART'S-SAKE. WE WOULD HONESTLY LIKE TO SAY TO YOU, ART, HOW HAPPY WE ARE TO BE YOUR SCULPTORS. WE THINK ABOUT YOU ALL THE TIME AND FEEL VERY SENTIMENTAL ABOUT YOU. WE DO REALIZE THAT YOU ARE WHAT WE REALLY CRAVE FOR, AND MANY TIMES WE MEET YOU IN OUR DREAMS. WE HAVE GLIMPSED YOU THROUGH THE ABSTRACT WORLD AND TASTED YOUR REALITY. ONE DAY WE THOUGHT WE SAW YOU IN A CROWDED STREET, YOU WERE DRESSED IN A LIGHT BROWN SUIT, WHITE SHIRT AND A CURIOUS BLUE TIE, YOU LOOKED VERY SMART BUT THERE WAS ABOUT YOUR DRESS A CURIOUS WORNNESS AND DRYNESS. YOU WERE WALKING ALONE, LIGHT OF STEP IN A VERY CONTROLLED SENSE. WE ARE FASCINATED BY THE LIGHTNESS OF YOUR FACE, YOUR ALMOST COLOURLESS EYES AND YOUR DUSTY-BLONDE HAIR. WE APPROACHED YOU NERVOUSLY AND THEN JUST AS WE NEARED YOU WENT OUT OF SIGHT FOR A SECOND AND THEN WE COULD NOT FIND YOU AGAIN. WE FELT SAD AND UNLUCKY AND AT THE SAME TIME HAPPY AND HOPEFUL TO HAVE SEEN YOUR REALITY. WE NOW FEEL VERY FAMILIAR WITH YOU, ART. WE HAVE LEARNED FROM MANY OF THE WAYS OF LIFE. IN OUR WORK OF DRAWINGS, SCULPTURES, LIVING-PIECES, PHOTO-MESSAGES, WRITTEN AND SPOKEN PIECES WE ARE ALWAYS TO BE SEEN, FROZEN INTO A GAZING FOR YOU. YOU WILL NEVER FIND US WORKING PHYSICALLY WITH OUR NERVES AND YET WE SHALL NOT CEASE TO POSE FOR YOU, ART. MANY TIMES WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW WHAT YOU WOULD LIKE OF US, YOUR MESSAGES TO US ARE NOT ALWAYS EASILY UNDERSTOOD. WE REALIZE THAT IT CANNOT BE TOO SIMPLE BECAUSE OF YOUR GREAT-COMPLEXITY AND ALL-MEANING. IF AT TIMES WE DO NOT MEASURE UP OR FULFIL YOUR WISHES YOU MUST BELIEVE THAT IT IS NOT BECAUSE WE ARE UNSERIOUS BUT ONLY BECAUSE WE ARE ARTISTS. WE ASK ALWAYS FOR YOUR HELP, ART, FOR WE NEED MUCH STRENGTH IN THIS MODERN TIME, TO BE ONLY ARTISTS OF A LIFE-TIME. WE KNOW THAT YOU ARE ABOVE THE PEOPLE OF OUR ARTISTWORLD BUT WE FEEL THAT WE SHOULD TELL YOU OF THE ORDINARINESS AND STRUGGLING THAT ABOUNDS AND WE ASK YOU IF THIS MUST BE. IS IT RIGHT THAT ARTISTS SHOULD ONLY BE ABLE TO WORK FOR YOU FOR ONLY THE DAYS WHEN THEY ARE NEW, FRESH AND CRISP. WHY CAN'T YOU LET THEM PAY HOMAGE TO YOU FOR ALL THEIR DAYS, GROWING STRONG IN YOUR COMPANY AND COMING TO KNOW YOU BETTER. OH ART, PLEASE LET US ALL RELAX WITH YOU. RECENTLY ART, WE THOUGHT TO SET OURSELVES THE TASK OF PAINTING A LARGE SET OF NARRATIVE VIEWS DESCRIPTIVE OF OUR LOOKING FOR YOU. WE LIKE VERY MUCH TO LOOK FORWARD TO DOING IT AND WE ARE SURE THAT WE ARE REALLY RIGHT FOR YOU.

TO BE WITH ART IS ALL WE ASK.

*Chosen by Josh Smith*





*From "The Return of the Creature",  
catalogue essay for the eponymous  
exhibition at Künstlerhaus Palais Thurn  
und Taxis, Bregenz, Austria.*

*Looking for yourself...the who you are... "finding yourself" in pulsing lights and fog... Are you looking at the night sky or the flash of neurons in peyote brain?... Vision quest of utopian cult...fact or fiction? Identity and radical politics found in utilitarian artifacts...props for outsider existence... The desert is a fictive place...Mai-Thu Perret composes fictions of a utopia...a commune of women, who locate themselves through phenomenon...locating themselves in virtual space...presenting objects of compressed time...working through quasi-situations, quasi-cinemas...ceramic chakras... sipping psychedelic tea from hand-thrown vessels...like a family...like "The Family"...art as a metaphorical fiction of mind expansion...in the time before death...storming heaven...dealing with the irrational/rational of our existence, and how to define that existence by mentally dropping out of the mainstream and returning to the old way of life...if only in our thoughts.*

*Steven Parrino, 2003.*

On the picture taken on the occasion of an exhibition organized by Seth Siegelaub in January 1969, Robert Barry, Lawrence Weiner, Douglas Huebler and Joseph Kosuth adopt the pose of the worker, both intellectual and manual. The picture inscribes them in a long lineage of guys who wore jeans and blue overalls, and are as comfortable fighting about definitions around a bar table drinking beer as they are lifting pieces of lumber and riding motorcycles across the country. Together, they make up the last installment in the history of art in New York City, circa 1969. They look both tough and reflexive, like they're really going on with something important. Looking at the picture I wonder what it would have been like to be one of them. I think of all the photographs I've seen of Soho in those days, how different it must have been then, when you could live in huge rundown lofts for 60 dollars a month. Back then the neighborhood was still a place for light industry, where things were made rather than sold, and walking through the wide and empty streets you could hear the clang of hammers, the sound of screws being driven in and of pieces of metal being cut apart. What was special about those guys was that they opted out of the game of "look here, my metal square is blacker and bigger than yours", and pushed reduction the other way instead, decreeing that statements could do away with the object altogether.

Lee Lozano was an artist who made conceptual pieces in the vein of the Weiner Kosuth gang, but also monochrome abstractions. She lived in New York at the same time than these people, was part of the same social scene, and took part in a number of the key exhibitions that would later define the "movement". Her output is full of riddles, inconsistencies, jumps and gaps, but what comes through is an all-consuming anger, dressed in a bitter irony that left nothing unscathed, least of all herself. Looking at what has survived of conceptual art through books and monographs in 2004, it's easy to forget how monolithic an obstacle gender was at the time. Lozano takes all that stuff and rubs it back in your face. Born Leonore Knaster in 1930, she changed her name to

the androgynous "Lee" after marrying a man called Adrian Lozano in 1956.

Today she's mostly remembered for taking conceptual reduction to its most uncompromising extreme and leaving the art world with Dropout Piece in 1971, and for the fact that the piece also entailed a boycott of women which apparently lasted until her death<sup>1</sup>.

Of all the conceptual artists, she was the one who took the idea of the dissolution of the border between art and life most seriously, and that's probably what makes her work so hard to deal with. Her conceptual pieces were direct extracts from her diaries and notebooks, where she jotted down illuminating quotes like Buckminster Fuller's "As soon as I complete the drawing of a circle I wish to be outside of it", or instructions like "Empty myself to receive cosmic info". In Grass Piece Lozano tried to stay stoned for as long as her supply lasted (one month), to "see what happened". In No-Grass piece she then weaned herself off the substance, and recorded the results. Masturbation Investigation<sup>2</sup> involved masturbating at regular intervals using various materials, such as pornographic magazines and objects from tools to carrots. About this attempt she wryly noted that the carrot was the best because it was the most organic, but that "balling with objects is the abyss." The works investigate what happens when you take the Rimbaud quote, "Je est un autre"<sup>3</sup> literally, and actually make it into a mantra for living<sup>4</sup>. Of course that sentence takes on a special ring if you're a woman, living in a place where agency is a masculine word. Agency is the building of things, and Lozano knew it. In the light of that predicament language games seem tame, disingenuous.

In conversations with friends about Lozano's work we all agree that what we most like about the woman is that she was difficult, a foul-mouthed punk and a pain in the ass. In actuality accounts from that time<sup>5</sup> recall her being a reserved and soft-spoken person, but then girls are used to this kind

of discrepancy between outside and inside. She was obsessed with sex, too, and by the kind of power dynamics that it radiates in all directions. This awareness seems to have always been there. Her sketches and paintings from the early 60s are huge, nasty things filled with tools, wrenches, hammers and nails that are strangely tumescent and personified. In one drawing you see a woman's legs drawn as a piggy bank, with a hand inserting a gleaming yellow coin in the slit of her cunt. In another drawing, the sign for "Canal Street" has the "C" crossed out, leaving the words "Anal Street." Canal is the place where you get all your hardware in New York, and it makes sense that if a hammer can look like a cock then "Canal" could become "anal".

Lozano's gradual self-erasure (since her name change was not actually an "artwork") began with the General Strike Piece, where she resolved to "gradually but determinedly avoid being present at official or public uptown functions or gatherings related to the art world to pursue investigation of total personal and public revolution", and culminated in the now proverbial Drop Out piece of 1971. She called that work "the hardest piece that I have ever done" and said she did it to "get over my habit of emotional dependency on love." It's morbid to take someone like Lozano for a heroine. When I read what I have written and think about her life, I can't escape feeling guilty for taking part in the kind of industry that specializes in the romantic hagiography of artists who had a hard time. Lozano's biography, by all accounts, was a colossal personal and societal failure. Of course you want to separate the two, but by virtue of the work's quality, and her intelligence, it's almost impossible to do. What I know, however, is that she was as good an artist as any of her conceptualists peers, and that no retrospective in a big museum with a big catalogue will ever right the wrongs that were inflicted upon her and which she inflicted upon herself.

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(Footnotes) art scene, cf.  
<sup>1</sup> According to Conversation  
the legend, Piece or Real  
she would Money Piece,  
even refuse but there is  
to be served little space to  
by female get into this  
waitresses. aspect here.  
<sup>2</sup> All the <sup>5</sup> cf. Seth  
Language pieces Siegelaub, "I  
described in have a memory  
this paragraph of Lee as a  
were made in sort of quiet,  
1969 soft-spoken,  
<sup>3</sup> trans. "I is shy person",  
another" or in Susanne  
"I is someone Neuburger  
else" and Hedwig  
<sup>4</sup> They also Saxenhuber  
form of a eds., Kurze  
kind of Karrieren  
ongoing social (Cologne:  
chronicle on Walther König,  
the New York 2004)

Turks rose against the Sultan, set fire to the town, and put every foreigner they could find, either to the sword or to the bastinado.<sup>13</sup> A few English managed to escape; but, as might have been expected, the gentlemen of the British Embassy preferred to die in defence of their red boxes,<sup>14</sup> or, in extreme cases, to swallow bunches of keys rather than let them fall into the hands of the Infidel. The rioters broke into Orlando's room, but seeing him stretched to all appearance dead they left him untouched, and only robbed him of his coronet and the robes of the Garter.

And now again obscurity descends, and would indeed that it were deeper! Would, we almost have it in our hearts to exclaim, that it were so deep that we could see nothing whatever through its opacity! Would that we might here take the pen and write *Finis* to our work! Would that we might spare the reader what is to come and say to him in so many words, Orlando died and was buried. But here, alas, Truth, Candour, and Honesty, the austere Gods who keep watch and ward by the inkpot of the biographer, cry No! Putting their silver trumpets to their lips they demand in one blast, Truth! And again they cry Truth! and sounding yet a third time in concert they peal forth, The Truth and nothing but the Truth!

At which – Heaven be praised! for it affords us a breathing space – the doors gently open, as if a breath of the gentlest and holiest zephyr had wafted them apart, and three figures enter.<sup>15</sup> First, comes our Lady of Purity; whose brows are bound with fillets of the whitest lamb's wool; whose hair is as an avalanche of the driven snow; and in whose hand reposes the white quill of a virgin goose. Following her, but with a statelier step, comes our Lady of Chastity; on whose brow is set like a turret of burning but unwasting fire a diadem of icicles; her eyes are pure stars, and her fingers, if they touch you, freeze you to the bone. Close behind her, sheltering indeed in the shadow of her more stately sisters, comes our Lady of Modesty, frailest and fairest of the three; whose face is only shown as the young moon shows when it is thin and sickle shaped and half hidden among clouds. Each advances towards the centre of the room where Orlando

still lies sleeping; and with gestures at once appealing and commanding, *Our Lady of Purity* speaks first:

'I am the guardian of the sleeping fawn; the snow is dear to me; and the moon rising; and the silver sea. With my robes I cover the speckled hen's eggs and the brindled sea shell; I cover vice and poverty. On all things frail or dark or doubtful, my veil descends. Wherefore, speak not, reveal not. Spare, O spare!'

Here the trumpets peal forth.

'Purity Avaunt! Begone Purity!'

Then *Our Lady Chastity* speaks:

'I am she whose touch freezes and whose glance turns to stone. I have stayed the star in its dancing, and the wave as it falls. The highest Alps are my dwelling place; and when I walk, the lightnings flash in my hair; where my eyes fall, they kill. Rather than let Orlando wake, I will freeze him to the bone. Spare, O spare!'

Here the trumpets peal forth.

'Chastity Avaunt! Begone Chastity!'

Then *Our Lady of Modesty* speaks, so low that one can hardly hear:

'I am she that men call Modesty. Virgin I am and ever shall be. Not for me the fruitful fields and the fertile vineyard. Increase is odious to me; and when the apples burgeon or the flocks breed, I run, I run; I let my mantle fall. My hair covers my eyes. I do not see. Spare, O spare!'

Again the trumpets peal forth:

'Modesty Avaunt! Begone Modesty!'

With gestures of grief and lamentation the three sisters now join hands and dance slowly, tossing their veils and singing as they go:

'Truth come not out from your horrid den. Hide deeper, fearful Truth. For you flaunt in the brutal gaze of the sun things that were better unknown and undone; you unveil the shameful; the dark you make clear, Hide! Hide! Hide!'

Here they make as if to cover Orlando with their draperies. The trumpets, meanwhile, still blare forth,

'The Truth and nothing but the Truth.'

At this the Sisters try to cast their veils over the mouths of the trumpets so as to muffle them, but in vain, for now all the trumpets blare forth together,

'Horrid Sisters, go!'

The sisters become distracted and wail in unison, still circling and flinging their veils up and down.

'It has not always been so! But men want us no longer; the women detest us. We go; we go. I (*Purity says this*) to the hen roost. I (*Chastity says this*) to the still unravished heights of Surrey. I (*Modesty says this*) to any cosy nook where there are ivy and curtains in plenty.'

'For there, not here (all speak together joining hands and making gestures of farewell and despair towards the bed where Orlando lies sleeping) dwell still in nest and boudoir, office and lawcourt those who love us; those who honour us, virgins and city men; lawyers and doctors; those who prohibit; those who deny; those who reverence without knowing why; those who praise without understanding; the still very numerous (Heaven be praised) tribe of the respectable; who prefer to see not; desire to know not; love the darkness; those still worship us, and with reason; for we have given them Wealth, Prosperity, Comfort, Ease. To them we go, you we leave. Come, Sisters, come! This is no place for us here.'

They retire in haste, waving their draperies over their heads, as if to shut out something that they dare not look upon and close the door behind them.

We are, therefore, now left entirely alone in the room with the sleeping Orlando and the trumpeters. The trumpeters, ranging themselves side by side in order, blow one terrific blast –

'THE TRUTH!'

at which Orlando woke.

He stretched himself. He rose. He stood upright in complete nakedness before us, and while the trumpets pealed Truth! Truth! Truth! we have no choice left but confess – he was a woman.

\*

It's 2004. Just as Iggy sang in '1969', there is nothing to do all across the USA. With a retro logic we could label this time the Fall of Diverted Information, or the Power of Oil. Looking for contemporary strategies, Seth Price's show at Reena Spaulings gallery doesn't operate in revival mode.

Upon entering the show, one sees several sheets of plastic hanging on the walls. Some sheets are blue with velvety flocking, like a late, misconceived flower-power contribution; others are gold, a sexy pearlescent skin color, or white, vacuum-formed under heat, all traces of production left intact. There are three recurring shapes on the sheets. One is the form of a single breast, reminiscent of Duchamp's *prier a toucher*. This hard, pliable plastic may be touched in the stack of sheets leaning by the gallery entrance, where their visual function has been eclipsed by their empty behinds on display. Other pieces show the form of a small encaged fist, bulging out in a feeble effort to burst through, no cries for justice can be heard. "2004" is embossed on several sheets in a straight Franklin Gothic-like typeface, not spray painted as with 'old school' political slogans, rather semi-elegant, sad, in a Warholesque repeat, without empowering the sign, no climax in sight.

The colors of the sheets and their relief shapes make one think of Yves Klein, whose 'trademark' blue has here morphed into a plastic surface with a vegetation pattern, French Revolution lily style. Klein staged his show *Le Vide* in 1958. His opening presented an empty gallery, with the surrounding circumstances considered all the way down to the drinks, which were blue: proposing to the audience to see what we

don't see and not see what we expect to see; an invisibility. In classic Klein spirit, Price's invite is purposefully considered as integral to the show. A gig poster to bring home as a souvenir: a direct, albeit black and white, take on Hipgnosis's classic cover for Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* album, the gray spectrum of which recurs in semi-transparent vinyl on the shop window (the gallery used to be a shop). Looking like an artificial, gray-striped sunset, this gradient bars, in increments, peeking in from the outside, sifting light to the inside, making all less or more visible.

How does one speak or circulate information with invisible Internet filters making our choices? It is a different mode than Kundera's ciphered postcards in the Prague spring of 1968. In the former Soviet Union, the coded way of omitting details was directly decodable if you knew how. Now, pushing of meaning and encoding in (post) capitalist information society, where nothing is what it seems (but it is nothing else either); an eternal circulation of rhetoric or ways of saying "it". The medium is not the message. Price uses references to art as if for rhetorical or political means, instead of using, as is customary in an art context, the outer world. The effect is a focus on the signification slides, rather than on societal issues.

In the far end of the room is a 'merchandise table', as if one were at a concert, with items such as books of lyrics, t-shirts silk-screened with the artist's and the gallery's names, as well as a 'logo' from a Jihad video on the internet, and a stack of black CDs. According to the checklist, the CDs contain downloaded footage depicting the 2004 beheading of an American

journalist by Pakistani fundamentalists, a file which the FBI had been trying to bar from flowing freely on the internet. To see what is not simply a black, circular, stacked, formalist shape, one has to purchase it, for the reasonable price of \$10 – a weak sales pitch by corporate standards – or be left believing we've been voluntarily filtered away.

Other stacked CDs support three flat, equally-sized glass panels, mounted on what looks like corporate, imitation marble, or maybe the surface of the moon. I am told the images are scans of bread. It looks moldy. The panels alter the function of the CDs, from information bearers into bearers of something altered that looks like something fake. Information collapses into material. On one of the panels is a transparent frozen puddle, like vertically positioned cum, which runs neither up nor down. It is liquid glass: see-through to see what you already think you see. Right next to it, sort of pouring over the old coat-rack structure inherent to the gallery, is a sheet of safety glass, broken but all clinging together. Not fully splintered, as in the accidentally-broken large glass by Duchamp – no release – yet not all together in its perfect original state. The title *Fuck You, You Fucking Fuck*, speaks of unreleased, misdirected or omnidirectional anger: impotently it doesn't go anywhere, like hanging glass too cracked to see through. Once the title – taken from a popular New York tourist tee – was circulated in print reviews it was switched to 'NTSC', the American video standard, creating a rip in the distribution of information.

On the floor, a video in which Richard Serra and Robert Smithson discuss their faith in the art market is screened on a

new Panasonic TV/DVD player still in its styrofoam packaging and box. Both merchandise and video have a virginal air around them, as they have never been seen before. Both have been diverted from their original function. The video has been altered with a digital video transition, created by Price, with the appearance of black opaque liquid, flowing like oil, sensually wiping the image in and out with no cuts. Like the perfect commercial: we are captured, remaining to see the next wipe of the scene – a discussion dragging on with no climax – while keeping our gaze on the product, prisoner in its styrofoam case, submissively inviting scrutiny from any angle from its upturned position on the floor.

We don't see what we see. The interface doesn't take us anywhere. Liquids don't flow well, black oil is turned into plastic, bread looks like the moon, and the spectral light has been drained of all color. The dark side of black shiny CDs is conceivable, but not visible. Transparency and opacity are not useful in understanding the information. The logic is warped, it is not making sense. This is not 'rebus art', although it may seem as if knowing that this is an image of bread and not 'fake' marble makes you feel sane and temporarily in control – more on the bright side of the moon – as if having ceased the circulation of possible significations. Here is a constant diversion of the channels of circulation of signs, barring possibilities for making sense. No satisfaction in sight, an infertile terrain, the original purpose or function of so many elements temporarily obstructed: this show is perverted. "It is 2004, baby."

## Unique Source *All Natural Suicide Gang* -Seth Price

**1** Here is an operation. In 1988, the composer Steve Reich, whom you might say was at one point a minimalist, used the relatively new technology of the sampler to create a work based on the digitized human voice. The composition employed entire phrases and sentences, the cadences of which dictated the melodies. Listen to what's being said: testimonials by Holocaust survivors, overburdened with meaning, unassailable. Then spin those stuttering voices into avant garde music... Well, a thing only really appears when it is turned into a weapon. "Ovens, showers, lampshades, soap": an innocuous group of words, unless we're told that the context is Germany in the 1940s.

Where to locate the power in this operation? Is the violence here inherent to sampling? In the realm of music, certainly, sampling is often viewed as a criminal act. According to this logic, an original is somehow violated by the creation of its double, and this process is symptomatic of a lamentable cultural slide from representation to repetition. Sampling, however, is not interested in repetition. Its sole purpose is the creation of new, discrete events. With the extension of the digital into every sphere of life, each reproduction is an original, each sample a new beginning, the first in an infinite sequence of beginnings. This is where the power of sampling is to be found, and this is why it is attended by cultural anxieties, anxieties widely mistaken as copyright-related, which is to say, money-motivated, but more likely arising from concerns about the implications of instrumentalizing human expression. In any case, there is no longer such a thing as a copy.

Artists, universally recognized as experts in the field of human expression, have naturally been quick to address these issues. If sampling may be understood as the process of using appropriated documents as raw material for context-abuse, might this not be true of all good art? Given the relatively early intrusion of the digital into the realm of music, the reaction of musicians to the introduction of the sampler makes for a good case study. However, it will be useful to first review music's own peculiar relationship to reproduction, seen through some historical anecdotes.<sup>1</sup> After all, one dreams all day just as in the night.

**2** "Intellectual property" as regards most written material was codified in Europe in the sixteenth century, a response to the new text-copying technology

of print. The old written laments about ephemerality, which measured no more than the distance between writing and sensuality, suddenly fell silent. It was almost a hundred years, however, before this notion took hold in the world of music, before a composer could actually *own* a particular musical composition. Previously, songs were understood to be common property, and, what's more, mutable, much in the way computer programs were first understood as communal efforts to be shared, re-worked, and re-released. Facts are, after all, opinions.

Although in this respect music initially lagged behind the printed word, it soon leapt ahead. Text-copying has aged gracefully since the dawn of intellectual property; after all these years of stately change, its main exponent remains the printed page. Music, on the other hand, has been subject all along to sudden shifts in the controlled reproduction and dissemination of recorded material.

Take the history of opera. Toscanini arrived at La Scala and wrought numerous changes, with the result that opera is now the consummate bourgeois form. Prior to his arrival the orchestra had played on the same level as the audience, which was a crowd with none of the docile characteristics of today's opera-goers, rather, a mob, talking, eating, jesting: "Let us meet at the opera and then decide whence to go...", "Well-met, friend, pray share this flagon...", "Indeed", "Scubberdegullion", etc. Of course, the time was right for these changes, for the bourgeoisie happened to be achieving its supreme moment of privatization and interiority, the goal of which was space for fantasy. Architecture, the model in Western metaphysics, is the necessary corollary to ritual, which would otherwise be heathen by definition. Toscanini aligned opera not simply with the house, but with a particular kind of space readily outfitted with the kinds of faux-aristocratic props necessary for bourgeois fantasy. These props, this whole process, may be seen as a kind of repetition and depletion. In that case, reproducing the signs or artifacts of the aristocracy perpetrates a thing made somehow poor in the process of reproduction. To denigrate something as a "copy" is to argue against this depletion of forms. On the other hand, it is true that aristocracies keep alive those endangered pleasures that repel the bourgeoisie, and it is possible that cultured people are merely the glittering scum which floats upon a deep river

of production. Toscanini's violent changes can be said to have preserved the opera form, for the empty gestures of ritual are a force of preservation, just as death is the romanticizing principle in life. This is the lumber of life.

**3** If architecture is the model in Western metaphysics, we are in some sense the inhabitants of older buildings, and ours is the business of living in a ruined house. It is useful to interrogate the use of the word *ruin*, a word which splits. On the one hand, it may refer to the sort of ancient structures cherished in the early nineteenth century: squalid, overgrown, graffiti-covered, surveyed at sunset for best effect. It may also, however, indicate those same ruins today: scrubbed free of graffiti, restored and conserved, made lucrative, seen only in the full daylight of "open hours".

In the first example, ruin implies benign decay, and in the other, active preservation, make-work, and industry<sup>2</sup>. Locating pleasure in benign decay is a perversion, as these structures are useless, and, moreover, wasteful: a spilling of seed, like gay sex. All that which is not made useful and which serves no profitable function can be seen as the unrecuperable waste of a society.

However, this waste is also a force that crystallizes society's blockages. Consider the Boston Museum of Science display of "petrified lightning", a lumpy brown rod which is composed of nothing but sand fused in an instant of extreme heat. The exhibit stands only for a fetish of damage, of waste material. A process is mystified, replaced by a ruin under glass.

In the era of the picturesquely crumbling abbey or castle, poetry was king of the arts, and it was this form that drew all the radical young dudes. A century later, on the other side of Modernism, in an age when any ancient scrap-heap is carefully made over according to an image of safety and security, music is the art toward which all the others aspire, and it is here that young romantics gather. What accounts for this change? As with the adoption of ideas of intellectual property, the schematic shifts in music lag behind those of the written word. This is the lake of our feeling.

The clearest way to trace the recent ascendance of the digital is by examining music, as this is where we now are able to locate picturesquely crumbling ruins. The Classical style, which is often said to stretch from Haydn to Beethoven, can be understood as a single unbroken lineage in which Brahms writes with

<sup>1</sup>These comparative examples will, however, only tell us so much, as the terms seem to bifurcate. For instance, take the term *History*. As a narrative of progress, it points to the future, but as a memory or memorial, it points to the past. So, then, is the Golden Age ahead of us, or behind us? To those who decry Utopia as a futile project, or, worse, one whose failures brought us the horrors of the last century, you might consider replying:

we are in a Utopian moment, each moment is a Golden Age, a new beginning, the first in an infinite series. Sampling as a resistance to fragmentation? Oh, the schemes that go through my consciousness, like wine through water, and alter the color of my mind!

<sup>2</sup>The French have a saying: *the consumer has only three basic needs, to be safe, to be loved, to be beautiful*. This is the desire of ruins today.

Beethoven lurking over his shoulder. A carefully organized sequence of events, preserved on paper and embodied in the concert hall. The twentieth century, however, supplements this lineage with an exponentially growing media-body based on the recorded signal, a manipulable archive open to any consumer. The digital copy crystallizes this development neatly, almost allegorically. It was not until the affront of the sampler that music really went to work anxiously mapping and itemizing the husks of metropolises constructed by earlier settlers: seeking a new Classicism, with all the hedonism that follows a period of calamity<sup>3</sup>.

In any case, everything is reused. Artists rummage through the toolkits of past artists for approaches they may make use of. The task is to take these instruments and with them fashion new tools. The object is to look for the use, not the meaning. You want a 'fine art' approach, you borrow the tool from commodity culture. If it's done wrong, no problem, there is produced a nostalgia for the done-right way. For all these reasons, the modern notion of the renovated ruin may be more relevant than the nineteenth century picturesque model of majestic decay.

#### 4 It still eludes me... what is so particular about the sampler?

Take a close look at the economic and technological particulars of this electronic tool. In 1979, the first commercial sampler was put on the market for around \$25,000. The *Fairlight*. What a name! Ha, ha, ha. The steep price was typical of these early machines, which were consequently purchased by institutions, mostly well-funded university composition labs. This was a brief period when the majority of people making sample-based music were classically-trained academic composers who recognized in the computer a spectacular means of testing their high-flying propositions.<sup>4</sup>

This moment must be considered the apogee of the Modern movement in music, which all along had a tendency, as with the abstruse proposals of Schoenberg or Webern, to prescribe advanced theoretical training as a prerequisite for participation. Now, however, it was expected of students that they not only cultivate a familiarity with the usual histories and methodologies, but rely entirely on the academy for their production tools. Many bourgeois homes possessed a piano, but none a computer workstation. This was a

natural endpoint to Modern music's evolutionary chain, which thrived on a particular combination of technology, money, and control.<sup>5</sup>

The situation was fleeting, however. Once you introduce commercial technology, you let in the market, and things slip from your hands. Ten years after the introduction of the Fairlight, any academic composer could buy a decent sampler for under \$1000, perhaps pairing it with a newly available personal computer to yield a versatile home studio. The same was of course true for any 20-year old making hip-hop<sup>6</sup>. The old model of the pyramid, the new model of the pancake. All this headlong change left a wake of wreckage and trauma, and, in academic computer music, a peculiar and un-repeatable niche, the equivalent of a geographically-isolated evolutionary zone where unique life forms emerge.

Around the same time sampling was introduced, the music industry developed "MIDI", essentially a universal language allowing electronic music machines to synchronize and exchange information. This was a new coin of the realm, a currency of loins and coins, designed for swift, industry-wide adoption, its features driven by commercial interests. The general concept had to be widely familiar rather than intelligible only to technicians or programmers. The public happens to be most comfortable with the piano, so MIDI was engineered to turn sounds on and off by pushing keys. Strike the key and trigger an event, which is immediately sequenced in a series of other events. A chain of control achieved through a simple depression. When I am depressed, there is power at work somewhere.

The combination of sampled sounds, MIDI, and digital manipulation in general promised all sorts of possibilities. However, many are interested in the idiom of a form, few in the grammar. It turns out that people don't want distinctive sounds or sounds that have never been heard, they want sounds that correspond to phenomena already existing in the world. None, after all, is worse shod than the shoe maker's wife<sup>7</sup>. Musicians wanted to emulate, to invoke reality at the touch of a finger, like paint straight from the tube. Brass, woodwinds, car crashes, breaking glass: invocations! The machine recalls events and dispatches them in a digital relay that is by nature simply on or off, making obsolete the weak frequency, the half-understood signal. A zero-sum spell.

5 Sampler-based music achieved its perfect expression early on, when it arrived at the idea of employing sampled human voice as an infinitely re-pitchable synth-sound. An electronic keyboard simulates a piano, often noting even the force with which its keys are struck: it wants you to believe that it is a percussion instrument. The voice-sample technique, then, is the process of generating limitless copies of a unique and resonant human utterance, refashioned as a sprawling kit of silicon-calibrated fake drums. The voice becomes a structural element under total control. It is made *useful*, as opposed to evocative or expressive. That which reliably promises communication becomes pure instrumentality, a move based on the notion that instruments give us what we want—predictability, security, control—rather than the confirmation of an accurate representation of the real. It goes to show you: when your desires become reality, you don't need fantasy any longer, nor art.

The technique was immediately popular among academic composers and pop producers alike<sup>8</sup>, but soon disappeared from both realms, possibly because it seemed dated or absurd, but more likely because sampled and repitched voice is disturbing, a speech terrible and inhuman, an emulation gone bad. The sampled word is the zero degree of the word, as found in the dictionary, or in poetry. Here, the communicative imperative, which depends on repetition and difference, is symbolically short-circuited, and, moreover, from within the cloak of language. It is not surprising that this production technique fell into disfavor. Man fall from a tree, that tree be felled, man fall in a well, that well be filled.

Samplers continue to offer one entirely new experience, at least on the level of consumption: the recognition, while listening to an unknown piece of music, of the basis for a sample employed in a familiar piece of music. As you look up with bewildered pleasure, the music charges on, perhaps diverging from the repetition you desired, a mental correlate to the phantom step at the top of the stairs. You briefly glimpsed a private, inaccessible field arising between two disparate experiences. Whatever pleasure you may sustain must rely on simultaneous presence and absence.<sup>9</sup>

6 Digital duplication was one of the twentieth century's few new schemas. Naturally, such a force draws the curtain on older powers. All forms of

<sup>3</sup>Historically, all new forms attack Classicism; it's a move characteristic of Romantic poetry, of course, but also of the Neo-Expressionist painting of the 1980s, a style for whom the darkest place was under the lamp.

<sup>4</sup>There were exceptions, like New York's "public access synthesizer studio", which contained a Fairlight on which was composed the soundtrack to the "underground" movie *Liquid Sky*.

<sup>5</sup>The nobility, here perhaps a nobility of letters, has always beckoned to musicians. As when Mozart wrote "That scoundrel Voltaire has died like a dog. Good riddance."

<sup>6</sup>This raises the question of amateur production. As with all strategies of appropriation, sampling cannot be conceived of in terms of amateur or professional roles.

This is a part of its violence. Collecting and illegally redistributing material has no professional dimension; the person who compiles a mix tape for a friend is not an amateur. The licit practice to come closest is that of the corporation that cheaply purchases rights to déclassé cultural material, such as old dance singles, from those now forced to part with it cheaply, thence to repackage these goods for re-consumption, either under the banner of nostalgia (the low-end approach), or for the archiving fetish of the would-be collector (the high end approach).<sup>7</sup> Likewise, recall that "personal computers" were originally intended to be programmed by their owners. It took nearly a decade before it became clear that consumers disliked this aspect.

<sup>8</sup>I once recalled someone standing by a keyboard, blurting

out "I don't know what to say!" The phrase belonged to a female character on an early 'Cosby' show, and was spoken into a brand new sampling keyboard demonstrated by Stevie Wonder, who appeared as himself. With some deft adjustments he multiplied her apparently random words across the span of the keyboard, repitched to electronic perfection, basso profundo to mezzo soprano, all subject to easy control through key depression. It was in fact Stevie Wonder, in 1981, who purchased the very first of the famous *Emulator* samplers, fresh off the assembly line. That is a quaint memory—*what a time I chose to be born!*

<sup>9</sup>This experience is utterly different from that of recognizing one composer's melodic quotation of another's work, as different as is the scan from the photograph.

depletion are heralded by the degradation of language, and, as the eclipse of Rome's power was contemporary with the decline of Latin, so the eclipse of avant garde music was indicated by its wish to transform embodied language into an instrument. A desire to be, rather than to seem. By the end of the 1980s, around the time when Reich completed his sample-based work, the configuration *avant garde music* was thoroughly depleted, a constellation made cold from forgetfulness.

You could argue that sampling poisoned the well. On the other hand, it is true that in homeopathic medicine, and sometimes in magic, you put a drop of the bad thing, the thing you fight, into water or another medium. You must fight something in order to understand it! Sampling may be invasive, negating repetition, disordering us, but then that's the wish of every man, to disorder, to mayhem.

This may be what links sampling to graffiti, apart from the shared implication of a color-threat. Each presents a text that is critical of reading. Graffiti is an effacement that must be incomplete, a symbolic erasure only, a gesture which has to preserve that which it destroys. Were it to entirely replace or obliterate, it lose its critique. It wields both an assertion of presence and a passive-aggressive absence.

The work of Broodthaers sometimes follows this logic, as with his piece *Un Coup de dès jamais n'abolira le hasard*, with its pleasantly incestuous abuse of the Francophone avant-garde. The publication of Mallarmé's poem *Un Coup de dès jamais n'abolira le hasard*, a work distinguished by its typography and disposition of the words upon the page, marked the first time that a poem's conception and meaning was determined through the mechanical printing process. A lyric automation of the design function. In 1969, Broodthaers made a series of pieces that reproduced the exact page layout of Mallarmé's poem, and the layout only, for he effaced each line of text with a solid black bar. This gesture, while it banished all communicative symbols, retained the striking look and feel of the work<sup>10</sup>. Mallarmé's piece was emptied-out, reduced to seductive packaging. This is a move typical of appropriation, which may be considered simply an advanced form of packaging.

These depleted forms were engraved onto aluminum plates, as if prepped for mass production, and presented as fine art. Broodthaers claims and

then augments Mallarmé's poem to produce a new, third body, a field that lies between the works. The whole is without novelty, save the spacing of ones reading; the blanks, in effect, assume importance. In the end, a self-annihilating nothing. This was to be expected, as Broodthaers was an imitation artist. It may be that the supreme triumph of such advanced art is to cast doubt on its own validity, mixing a deep scandalous laughter with the religious spirit. There is a violence in this turn, the same violence that attends graffiti: "don't think, look!"

7 "Graffiti"—employing here the common usage, which describes an urban decay-threat akin to mold—is pathological. Not because it is vandalism, but because it dreams of total saturation through an open-ended sequence of "tags", each a stuttering variation on the last. Total coverage is a futile and perverse premise, an infinite possibility wedded to perpetual disappointment. A sad pursuit, and therefore one ripe with violence. Like a poor man who sells his saucepan to buy something to put in it.

Then again, graffiti, like any human expression, is a search to find a style that makes further expression possible. Graffiti Culture (and why does it take so long for people to map a "culture" onto their violence?) represents the anarchic, expressive territory of those who have subverted painterly representation from the standpoint of cool alienation. Language is defaced by pictures. This is not simply the business of living in a ruined house, it's the business of representing a ruined house by repeating a ruined house. A person inscribing a visually coded word on the side of a bridge piling creates a text that is critical of reading: the traces of the pictogram's generative process disturb the traditional formal interpretation of such processes and their derivation from functional concerns. The art object is seen as an object of contemplation, not to be parsed, but to be puzzled over. Its secrets may have to do with art, but with something else as well, which hovers beyond, with no name forthcoming.

In the seventies, New York City tags like *Zephyr*, *Futura*, and *PhaseII* were bringing a wind of light and speed, inscribed backwards on a hard city. A lyric renunciation of the design function. By the end of the eighties, a visitor to Manhattan might see tags like *Sony*, *Seiko*, *Casio*: flattened personal

electronics tokens, the pan drippings of contemporary status symbols like Rolex, Nakamichi, Trump, fake trickle-downs, décor holes. Then, in the nineties, after the best letter combinations have been used up, you see apparently nonsensical tags: *Revs*, *Kuma*, *Sems*, *Naers*. An arc from poetry to consumer fetish to empty form.

8 It's refreshing to watch a form deplete itself. Ah, now it's far easier to see it as not a belief but a historical movement, a movement of thought. Easier to trace the social shift and extrapolate out as far as desired, to all design, all art, all packaging. Take vacuum-forming, an industrial process used to produce the ubiquitous plastic packaging of batteries, toys, and toothbrushes, as well as that of luxury items like boxed chocolates and cosmetics. Trace the use of this process in the plastic arts. The chief instances, which include Broodthaers' rectilinear plaques and Oyvind Fahlstrom's Esso/LSD reliefs, take the logic of the commercial sign as their model, which is not surprising, as it is a model congruent with a sustained twentieth century artistic investigation of advertising and display, from Rudy Burckhardt or Walter Benjamin's interest in the sloughed off detritus of commodity culture to a more recent fascination with corporate monograms. What would it mean to employ such a process for the purpose of reproducing not the structures of language and capitalist statuary and classical figuration, for art itself: a violent cough, as when the human voice is "repurposed" as an instrument.

What it means is, it shows how far we've come with our packaging. Full circle, the lowest shall be highest. In the evenings, you can stroll out to see how we are coming along with the construction of the temple.

<sup>10</sup> "Look and feel", a term popularized by the computer industry, is often used to describe the overall aesthetic of a particular operating system, which is to say, the shade of the seduction one paints on the information architecture. A well-known example is the Macintosh's successful graphic user interface, which was subsequently copied throughout the industry. The term was made notorious in

a series of lawsuits—Xerox against Apple, Apple against Microsoft and Hewlett-Packard—brought on the basis of whether or not it was legal to appropriate aesthetic qualities as crystallized in programming code. Look and feel, in its current sense, is a notion that did not really exist prior to the personal computer, but one which now affects all consumer realms based on digital technology.

Richard Phillips  
 “Law, Sex & Christian Society”

May 12-June 18, 2005  
 Opening Reception: Thursday, May 12, 6-9 pm

Friedrich Petzel Gallery is pleased to present “Law, Sex & Christian Society”, a solo exhibition by Richard Phillips. The exhibition will be comprised of seven new paintings.

*When you stop talking and doing, and close your eyes, what comes to mind? Voices? Images? Feelings? Like landscape seen from a plane, these phenomena hover on the sublime verge between fascinating and boring. Well, this may be true of anything viewed from a distance. The stars, the sea, mountains, the horizon... And social phenomena? Same. On any forgotten record, it's in the 'filler' songs that you find the blank, thoughtless strivings laid bare, the production patterns of another day, secrets of the ornaments.*

*Look further back, to a time when age 25 was referred to as 'the mid-point of life', to when cattle were the only capital. One senses something of the mesh of fear and regimentation and suffering and bloody sacrifice from which civilization was meant to escape. This is the coin of the realm, a currency of loins and coins. Consider, likewise, megaliths, dolmen, tumuli—all the brooding architecture of early man. It may be that this is not “architecture” at all, but faith embodied, which is to say, magic. Magic is a process that always uses the most advanced technologies at hand: in the stone age this meant fire, fur, bone, blood; in the middle ages, the crucible, the alembic, the chalk circle. Today it is images, a thickening web of images that amounts to a magic circle through which the citizens of this age have passed, never to return. What a time you chose to be born!*

*The question, then, is how to paint one's subjectivity in the codes of culture? In response, one would like to be able to curl up and go to sleep. After all, there's no such thing as culture, it won't be still, there's no “stand back, let me get a look at you!” And here lies the reason religion was invented by man: a system to remember for you. You have only to recall one thing, and know that there is a power that manages the rest in your stead. Do not mistake this for a throwback, a revival, or a regression. What is proposed here is every bit as modern as global capitalism and the information economy: a Utopia that stands abreast, yet apart. The fact is, over the course of her history America has become more religious, not less, despite the influences of science and government. Why should it be so? Because science may answer anything and everything, true, yet still it cannot tell us why there is something, rather than nothing. And the duty of government is to establish law, but other than that, government—arguably democracy itself—is a price to pay, an inefficiency, a hindrance to the market. “Labor and production”, those specters of the twentieth century, no longer have a thing to offer us.*

*Is man so perverse that he would continue to eat acorns after the discovery of grain? To those who decry Utopia as a futile project, or worse, one whose failures brought us the horrors of the last century, consider that we are in a Utopian moment, that each moment is a golden image. We no longer face the Fascist threat, the World War, all the dirty shadows of the last century. Much current public sentiment is based on an outraged sense that there has been committed a horrible, criminal insult, but the twist of the knife is that the entire bohemian twentieth century is itself the insult. Bohemianism thrives under a capitalism with a belief in its own future; hence the well-known, post-war Californian variety, perhaps also the European variants. But we have entered a new kind of nature, a nature composed of images. And there can be no criticism of nature; it is always taken just as it is.*

*Remember that most of your body lies on the inside, in utter darkness from birth to death, at least if your luck holds. It would be a death of sorts if, at some point in our future, we were to lose this idea of center, core, heart; if networks expanded to dissolve every community and tradition. The last day of all time would then be strangely comforting: finally, an end to all this. A calm whisper in parting: “Goodbye, Doctor”, a pulsing, regular rhythm, the time-lapse image of decay turning into birth. If one could tell an unborn child that it soon would be forced to leave its only world, the child might struggle frantically against the thought: birth must be a death. But of course it is the other way around.*

Seth Price

This is Richard Phillips' third solo exhibition at Friedrich Petzel Gallery. The exhibition will be on view from May 12 through June 18, 2005, with an opening reception on Thursday, May 12 from 6-9 pm. For further information, please contact the gallery at 212-680-9467 or [info@petzel.com](mailto:info@petzel.com).



SO EREIGNISLOSE EREIGNISSE:  
DIE ARBEITEN VON WADE GUYTON

„Bedeutung haftet dem Menschen an: Selbst wenn er Nicht-Bedeutung oder Sonder-Bedeutung erzeugen will, so wird er letztlich die bloße Bedeutung der Nicht-Bedeutung oder Sonder-Bedeutung erzeugen.“ (Roland Barthes)

I.

Roland Barthes beginnt seinen Text *Weisheit der Kunst* aus dem Jahr 1979 (ein Aufsatz, in dem letzten Endes Cy Twomblys Vorgehen mit Zen-Philosophie gleichgesetzt wird) mit der folgenden Spekulation: „Welches auch die Schicksale der Malerei sein mögen, welches ihr Träger und ihr Rahmen – die Frage ist immer: *Was passiert da?*“ Etwa ein Vierteljahrhundert, nachdem Harold Rosenberg die Leinwand des Abstrakten Expressionismus als „eine Arena, in der es zu agieren gilt“ bezeichnete, und fast ein Jahrzehnt, nachdem Michael Fried das, was er sah, als schleichendes Ergebnis einer solchen Vorstellung innerhalb der „literalistischen“ Körper minimalistischer Skulptur postulierte, bedient Barthes sich Twombly als einer Muse, die „zu entziffern, aber nicht zu interpretieren“ ist, und vergleicht sein Werk mit einem vollkommen anderen theatralischen „Ereignis“, dessen Grundlage weder aristotelischer noch phänomenologischer, sondern vielmehr textueller Natur ist.

In Twomblys Drama ist das Aufgeführte die Kultur selbst – oder besser die Gesten und Chiffren der Kultur, die ihrerseits offensichtlich nicht an mehr (oder weniger) als dem Zitiertwerden interessiert sind. Gekritzelte Piktogramme – hybride Textbilder – deuten in klassischer Weise auf Vorbilder wie Leonardo, Poussin und Valéry hin, allerdings nur hinsichtlich ihrer Darstellung struktureller Anspielungs-, Repräsentations- und Inhaltsfunktionen. Und diese sorgen dafür, dass die Betrachter/Leser sich, wenn auch nur zeitweise, damit zufrieden geben, sich in ihr eigenes umfangreiches Archiv des Wissens zu stürzen (das wiederum dem „abîme“ der Kultur entstammt). Barthes fordert uns auf, an dieser Stelle beispielsweise einmal Twomblys *Age of Alexander* zu betrachten, und zwar sowohl im Hinblick auf dessen Titel als auch auf die bildlichen Referenzen (bei denen es sich, wie er uns ins Gedächtnis ruft, nicht um Botschaften an sich, sondern um Botschafts-Gesten handelt). Die Anspielung auf (aber keinesfalls Einwilligung in) eine Bedeutung trägt ihre Last wie eine Schimäre, die gleichzeitig zu viel und doch nicht genug ausdrückt. Durch ein solch bewusstes Aufreißen des Vorhangs tritt wieder ein (bzw. auf), was Barthes als „das Vage“ bezeichnet: (jenes Poeten so vertraute Gefühl) zu wissen, dass man weiß, ohne zu wissen, was. Dies ist ein Ereignis.

II.

Was aber passiert hier? Wade Guytons jüngste Arbeiten – noch immer in ihrer Entstehung begriffen, fortwährend in ihrer Entstehung begriffen – hängen in seinem Atelier, und zwar unaufgespannt und aus räumlicher Notwendigkeit in Schichten übereinander gelagert (was einen spontanen formalen Dialog erzwingt, der dennoch gerechtfertigt erscheint). Hier handelt es sich dem Anschein nach um Gemälde, obgleich (in ihrem „Gemaltsein“ per Tintenstrahldrucker) nicht auf Farbe an sich rekuriert wird und der Bildträger zwar eingeständenermaßen Leinwand ist, sich aber ebenso als Tapete, Gardine, Tischdecke ausgibt: Das schlaffe Material verspottet jede übliche Vortäuschung von Hochkunst und offenbart sich statt dessen als peinlich ungeklärt,

SUCH UNEVENTFUL EVENTS:  
THE WORK OF WADE GUYTON

„Meaning sticks to man: even when he wants to create non-meaning or extra-meaning, he ends by producing the very meaning of non-meaning or of extra-meaning.“ (Roland Barthes)

I.

Roland Barthes begins his 1979 *The Wisdom of Art*, (an essay that ultimately equates Cy Twombly's procedures with Zen philosophies) with the following speculation: „Whatever the transformations of painting, whatever its substance and its context, the same question is always asked: *What is happening here?*“ Some twenty-five years after Harold Rosenberg had dubbed the Ab-Ex canvas „an arena in which to act“ and nearly a decade after Michael Fried posited what he saw as the insidious outcome of such a notion within the „literal“ bodies of minimalist sculpture, Barthes takes Twombly as a muse „decipherable but not interpretable“, likening his work to an altogether different theatrical „event“, for which the basis is neither Aristotelian nor phenomenological but, rather, textual.

In the Twomblian drama, what is performed is culture itself – or, rather, the gestures and ciphers of culture, themselves blatantly uninterested in passing for more (or less) than citation. Scrawled pictograms – hybrid text-images – call up classical references from Leonardo to Poussin to Valéry, but only to represent the structural functions of allusion, representation and content. And these let viewers/readers „content“ themselves, albeit momentarily, with falling into (and onto) their own vast personal archives of knowledge (these plucked from the „abîme“ of culture). But then really look at, say, Twombly's *Age of Alexander*, Barthes implores us, and considers its titular and pictorial references (which he reminds us, are not messages themselves but instead the gestures of message). The allusion (but never acquiescence) toward meaning bears its load like a chimera – at once delivering too much and not nearly enough. Such a conscious parting of the curtains re-installs what Barthes terms „vagueness“: (that feeling so familiar to poets) where one knows one knows but one does not know what. This is an Event.

II.

Now, what is happening here? Wade Guyton's most recent works – still in process, perpetually in process – hang in the studio, unstretched, layered out of spatial necessity (which forces a spontaneous formal dialogue between them that feels, nonetheless, warranted). These are, ostensibly, paintings, though there is no recourse to paint as such („painted“ as they are by ink-jet printer) and the support, while admittedly canvas, announces itself equally well as tapestry, fabric, tablecloth: the limp material denigrates any usual high-art pretexts and instead reveals itself as embarrassingly unaccounted for, failing to convert either to

so dass weder eine illusionistische Darstellung noch eine „reine“ Materialität gelingt. Auch die Ausführung ist vergleichsweise unbestimmt. So gibt es zum Beispiel kein Zeichen einer Autorenschaft – nicht einmal im Sinne der außerordentlich auktorialen Nicht-Autorenschaft, die sich in Farbtropfen, -flecken, -flüssen, -pfützen oder -feldern zeigt. Und doch lassen sich in diesen „linkischen“ Malerei-Annäherungen einige Randbemerkungen malerischer Art finden (Barthes erinnert daran, dass unser Wort für den Mangel an gesellschaftlichem Anstand sich etymologisch auf die mit dem linkshändigen Schreiben verbundene, unbeholfene Ästhetik zurückführen lässt. Vielleicht ist, wie Warhol belegt, die nicht-händige Produktion die linkischste überhaupt). Es gibt flache, glanzlose und doch unerwartet angenehme Formen und Farben, die unmittelbar identifizierbar, ja interpretierbar sind. Sie sind aber auf eine zu simple Weise allgemein, als dass sie sich einem einzigen Kontext zuschreiben ließen, und aus diesem Grund gehören sie natürlich überhaupt keinem Kontext an: Kreise, Quadrate, ausschließlich breite Streifen, oder solche, die sich netzartig überkreuzen, bzw. vereinzelt oder angehäufte Hufeisen, die erkennbar nur sich selbst darstellen und sich aus dem Brunnen der Sprache schöpfen – in Gestalt des Buchstaben „U“ in der Schriftart Blair ITC Medium Sans-Serif, der aus seiner semiotischen Verwendung herausgerissen und durch Eingabe lächerlich großer Schriftgradfaktoren (zwischen 500 und 1500) verschieden groß aufgeblasen wurde. Nach einer perversen Logik handelt es sich hier um Aussagen ohne jede Persönlichkeit.

Guytons „Drucker-Gemälde“ könnten paradoxerweise als erstaunlich langweilig beschrieben werden. Sie entstehen durch die Herstellung abstrakter, völlig ungegenständlicher Kompositionen am Computer und das anschließende Ausdrucken dieser Vorlagen auf maximal 112 cm breite Leinwandbahnen mittels eines Industriedruckers. Die daraus resultierenden Gemälde scheinen zunächst die Effekte und den Umstand ihrer eigenen, sich ihrer selbst bewussten Produktion zu zitieren und auf wenig anderes zu verweisen. Tatsächlich sind bestimmte Strukturprinzipien, welche die Gemälde prägen, durch ihre Beschränkungen bestimmt. Keine Arbeit kann das Maß der vom Drucker vorgegebenen Bildbreite überschreiten, während die Höhe eines Gemäldes theoretisch der Länge einer kompletten Leinwandrolle entsprechen kann (man kann sich vorstellen, wie Guyton die wieder aufgerollten Bahnen zu ortsspezifischen Ausstellungen schickt, damit sie wie eine Tapete zugeschnitten und an die Wand gekleistert werden, wie schon Warhol mit seinen Bahnen aus silberschwarzen Elvis-Siebdruckern vorgeht). Zusätzlich wählt Guyton trotz der unbegrenzten Möglichkeiten der Farbmischung beim Tintenstrahldrucker zur Umsetzung seiner Grundformen häufig Grundfarben.

Man könnte annehmen, dass es sich bei den „Drucker-Gemälden“ wie bei so vielen der aktuellen, mechanisch reproduzierten – und reproduzierbaren – formalen Kompositionen um Wiederbelebungen von Frank Stellas Willen zum „What You See Is What You See“ handelt. Stattdessen allerdings berufen sich Guytons Druckerbilder auf die notwendige Dialektik zwischen dem, was man sieht, und dem, was man nicht sieht, und zwischen dem, was reibungslos funktioniert, und dem, was unerwartet scheitert (die besten Ergebnisse zeigen buchstäblich die Spuren dieser Pannen – eingerissene bzw. verpfuschte Leinwände, Farben mit zu hoher oder zu niedriger Sättigung, verwaschene oder aneinander stoßende Ränder). Wenn es sich hier um Ereignisse im

representational illusion or „pure“ materiality. The execution is similarly unsettled; there is no sign of authorial mark – even by way of the deeply authorial non-authorship of the drip, stain, pour, puddle, or field. Still, there are painterly asides to be identified here, in these „gauche“ approximations of paintings (Barthes reminds us that our word for lack of social grace is etymologically traced to the awkward aesthetics associated with left-handed mark making. Perhaps, as Warhol illustrates, no-handed production is the most gauche of all). There are flat, lustreless, yet unexpectedly pleasing colours and shapes that are immediately recognizable, if not interpretable. They are too easily generalized to be attributed to any singular context and, because of this, are not naturally of any context at all: circles, squares, thick stripes alone or crisscrossed in grids and isolated or clustered horseshoes that are clearly themselves culled from the well of language – the letter „U“ in no-frills Blair ITC Medium font, snatched from semiotic utility and blown up to various scale by plugging in ridiculously large font-size numbers (anywhere from 500 to 1500). By perverse logic, these are personal statements devoid of personality.

Guyton's „printer paintings“ might be described, paradoxically enough, as surprisingly boring. They are made by plotting out abstract, if not entirely non-representational, compositions on the computer screen and then feeding lengths of 44-inch wide (maximum) canvas through an industrial printer. The resulting paintings seem, at first, to demurely cite the effects and condition of their own self-conscious production, with little reference to anything else. Indeed, the limitations of the printer determine certain structural principles, these writ large on the paintings. No work can exceed the dimension of the machine's width, but theoretically can be as long as an entire bolt of linen. (One can imagine Guyton sending re-rolled bolts of the stuff to be cut and hung like wallpaper in site-specific exhibitions, as Warhol did with his lengths of silk-screened silver-and-black Elvisses.) In addition, while there is no limit to the colour mixing capabilities of the enormous ink-jet, Guyton often chooses to pair his primary objects with primary colours.

One would assume the „printer paintings“, then, to be so many mechanically reproduced – and reproducible – contemporary formal arrangements, reviving Stella's will to „what you see is what you see“. Yet, Guyton's printer paintings instead invoke the necessary dialectic between what one sees and what one doesn't as well as what operates smoothly and what goes serendipitously wrong. (The best of the bunch bear the scars of literal malfunctions – snagged or muddled canvas, under- or over-saturated inks, blurred or bumped outlines.) If these are Events in the Barthesian sense (which I think they are), they are „slow“ events, nearly uneventful, but nonetheless dramatic. Similarly auspicious derailings have persistently defined Guyton's work, who has in the past built stages

Sinne Barthes' handelt (wovon ich ausgehe), so um „langsame“, nahezu ereignislose, aber dennoch dramatische Ereignisse. Ähnlich suspekten Entgleisungen bestimmen beharrlich das Werk von Guyton, der in der Vergangenheit Bühnen geschaffen hat, die zu groß für Objekte und zu klein für Menschen sind, aber gerade links genug, um eine bequeme Bewegung durch einen Raum zu behindern. Daneben entstanden schräge Klappskulpturen aus klebrigem, bronze-, silber- oder goldfarbenem bzw. schwarzem Acrylglas – Anspielungen auf ein Interieur, die sich allerdings schnell als plumpe Beispiele (buchstäblicher) bloßer Oberflächlichkeit entpuppen, als tief plissierte Minimal Art. Guyton hat außerdem den Totem des modernen Designs, den Marcel-Breuer-Stuhl, so de- und rekonstruiert, dass seine Glieder jenen soliden Gebrauchswert verhöhnern, für den er trotz seiner Unbrauchbarkeit weiterhin steht. Und seine Fassung eines Dan-Graham-Pavillons, reduziert auf eine Skelettstruktur ohne Oberflächen, verweigert passiv die Reflektivität (und Reflexivität) des Originals.

Weiterhin führt Guyton seine laufende Serie so genannter „Drucker-Zeichnungen“ fort, bei denen es sich um ausformuliertere Verwandte der an sie anschließenden „Drucker-Gemälde“ handelt. Indem er Seiten aus Design-, Architektur- und Kunstzeitschriften aus den zwanziger bis achtziger Jahren des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts herausreißt und sie durch seinen Drucker laufen lässt (ein durchschnittlich billiges Gerät, wie es sich in fast jedem privaten Büro befindet), kombiniert er Spuren mehrdeutiger Bezeichnungen aus Word und Photoshop mit Hochglanzseiten, auf denen die Geschichte gerade vergangener Ästhetik dargestellt ist. Geometrische Formen und Buchstaben, die qua Wiederholung auf stumpfe Weise dekorative Formen annehmen, ziehen sich über Abbildungen, die Skulpturen, großformatige Kunst im öffentlichen Raum, Innenarchitektur und Gebäude (von Fachwerkhäusern bis hin zu Farnsworth) zeigen. Eine Zeit lang war ein riesiges „X“ (ebenfalls in der Schriftart Blair) das Markenzeichen des Künstlers, aber als sich zeigte, dass ihm so allzu leicht eine analphabetische Intention angedichtet wurde (X steht für das gleichzeitige An- und Durchstreichen, so die allgemein übereinstimmende Interpretation der Kritiker), entschloss sich Guyton für einen anderen Buchstaben, nämlich das „U“, dem sich sowohl wesentlich schwerer als auch anscheinend leichter eine Bedeutung zuweisen lässt (im Sinne eines gleitenden Signifikanten, der sich auf alle und somit auf keinen im Besonderen anwenden lässt). Die „Drucker-Zeichnungen“ sind ein fortwährendes Experiment, in dem Palimpseste von Bild- und unbestimmten semiotischen Zeichen auf ihre buchstäbliche Elastizität der von ihr erzeugten Signifikation hin überprüft werden. Die „Drucker-Gemälde“ hingegen fungieren innerhalb dieses Experiments als Grenzfall, indem sie insgesamt die „referenziellen“ Bilder widerrufen, die in den Zeichnungen als ambivalenter Ort von Verwehruung und Entwertung angesehen werden.

Guytons „Drucker-Gemälde“ tun unterschiedenerweise nicht viel (tatsächlich gehen sie das Risiko des Peinlichen ein, indem sie so wenig tun) und dennoch ist es gerade jene delikate Vagheit, die den Impuls – und die Unzulänglichkeiten – einer Eins-zu-Eins-Bedeutungserzeugung entblöbt. Durch die Abschaffung der kodierten Bildwelt, die buchstäblich eine Grundlage für die Zeichnungen bildete, bleiben uns im Endeffekt Gemälde, bei denen es sich um Aussagen handelt, um schwebende, einseitige Dialoge zwischen einem Künstler

**too large to comfortably hold objects, too small to comfortably hold people, just awkward enough to impede easy movement through a room; and shoddy folding structures made of tacky bronze, silver, gold and black Plexiglas – works that allude to an interior but quickly reveal themselves to be dumb examples of (literally) sheer surface. Minimalism rendered as a deep pleat. The artist has de- and re-constructed that totem of Modernist design, the Breuer chair, so that its limbs flail toward the respectable utility it continues to signify even while disabled from proffering; and his own version of a Dan Graham pavilion, reduced to a surfaceless skeleton structure that passively refuses the reflectivity (and reflexivity) of the original.**

**In addition, Guyton has continued to produce literal realms of an ongoing series referred to as “printer drawings”, these the more outspoken cousins to the “printer paintings” that follow them. Ripping pages from design, architecture and art magazines from the 1920s to the 1980s and running them through his printer (this the unexceptional cheap model found in nearly every home-office), Guyton marries trails of ambiguous signification culled from Word and Photoshop to glossy pages representing just-past aesthetic histories. Geometric forms and letters rendered dully decorative through repetition are printed on top of images of sculptures, large-scale public art, interior design and buildings (timberframe to Farnsworth). For a time, the artist’s cipher of choice was an enormous “X” (also in Blair font), but when it became clear that the illiteracy of intention he strove for was too easily trumped (X= a simultaneous marking of and marking out was the overwhelmingly agreed upon critical interpretation), Guyton opted for another letter, “U” – this both much more difficult and yet seemingly simpler to assign meaning to (a sliding signifier applicable to everyone, and thus, to no one in particular). The “printer drawings” are an enduring experiment, in which palimpsests of image and indeterminate semiotic signs are tested for the literal elasticity of signification they produce. The ‘printer paintings’, then, perform as a limit case in this experiment, withdrawing altogether the “referential” images assumed to be ambivalent site of homage and defacement in the drawings.**

**Guyton’s “printer paintings” decidedly don’t do very much (in fact, they risk embarrassment to do so little) and yet it is precisely this delicious vagueness that lays bare the impulse – and the shortcomings – of same-same meaning making. Doing away with the coded imagery that literally provided a base for the drawings, Guyton effectively leaves us with paintings that are propositions, one-sided suspended dialogues between an artist and a withheld (though we can still accurately guess the contents) cultural archive. What is visible in the “printer paintings”, then, is a bare bones Morse code born of an acknowledgement that avant-garde and capitalist strategies spanning Gabo to Minimalism to suede couch modules, have all evolved into kitsch fetish goods equally well. Appropriated**

und einem unterschlagenen kulturellen Archiv (dessen Inhalt sich jedoch genau erraten lässt). Was also in den „Drucker-Gemälden“ sichtbar ist, ist ein grundlegender Morsecode jenes Eingeständnisses, dass avantgardistische und kapitalistische Strategien, die sowohl Gabo, Minimal Art, aber auch Wildleder-Sitzgruppenelemente betreffen, sich gleichermaßen zu Kitsch-Fetischwaren entwickelt haben. Angeeignete Objekte, so Guyton, gehen zuweilen das Risiko eines gegenständlichen Abhakens (und Rollenspiels) ein. Das Anspielen auf das „abime“ der Kultur ohne den Umweg über ihre Repräsentanten ist vielleicht eine Methode zur Nichtanerkennung des Sich-Begnügens<sup>1</sup> mit dem Inhalt<sup>2</sup>. Durch ein bewusstes Nichteinbeziehen solcher Referenzen in seinen jüngeren Arbeiten (trotz ihres Angesprochenseins) macht Guyton ironisch auf historische Kenntnisse aufmerksam – und auf unser Vertrauen in diese bei der bequemen Übernahme verkrusteter Deutungen. (Und doch musste ich unverzüglich meine erste (ablehnende) Reaktion auf die „Drucker-Gemälde“ überprüfen, die in einem schnellen Plündern meiner persönlichen Version des kunsthistorischen Archivs bestand – denn diese Arbeiten weisen ja zweifellos gewisse Ähnlichkeiten mit dem Konstruktivismus und dem Bauhaus auf... Dann aber rief ich mich in Erinnerung, wie wenig es einem bringt, sich die Frage „Was passiert da?“ zu stellen, wenn man davon überzeugt ist, die Antwort bereits zu kennen.)

Johanna Burton

<sup>1</sup> Engl. contentment (Anm. d. Übers.).

<sup>2</sup> Engl. content (Anm. d. Übers.).

**images, Guyton wagers, sometimes risks slipping into representational roll-call (and role-playing); alluding to the “abime” of culture without calling forward its representatives is perhaps one way to disallow the contentment of content. By decidedly not including such references in these recent works (while addressing them nonetheless), Guyton ironically calls attention to historical knowledges – and our reliance on them in performing comfortable acts of calcifying interpretation. (Even still, I had to quickly check the first (defensive) reaction I had to the “printer paintings”: a quick rifle through my version of the art history archive – surely these works bore useful similarities to Constructivism, to Bauhaus... Then I reminded myself. It’s hardly worth asking, “What is happening here?” if you’re convinced that you already know.)**

Johanna Burton



# Painting: The Task of Mourning

29

Y V E - A L A I N B O I S

*Nothing is more conservative than the apocalyptic genre*  
JACQUES DERRIDA

Nothing seems to be more common in our present situation than a millenarianist feeling of closure. Whether celebratory (what I will call manic) or melancholic one hears endless diagnoses of death: death of ideologies (Lyotard); of industrial society (Bell); of the real (Baudrillard); of authorship (Barthes); of man (Foucault); of history (Kojève) and, of course, of modernism (all of us when we use the word post-modern). Yet what does all of this mean? From what point of view are these affirmations of death being proclaimed? Should all of these voices be characterized as the voice of mystagogy, bearing the tone that Kant stigmatized in *About a Recently Raised Pretentiously Noble Tone in Philosophy* (1796)? Derrida writes, "Each time we ask ourselves uncompromisingly what they are driving at and to what end, the ones who declare the end of this or that, of man or of the subject, of consciousness, of history, of the Occident or of literature, and to the latest news of progress itself whose idea was never rated so low from the right to the left. Which effects do those nice prophets or eloquent visionaries want to achieve? For which immediate or postponed benefits? What do they do, what do we do by saying all that? To seduce or to subjugate whom, to intimidate whom, to give an orgasm to whom?"<sup>1</sup> Each time, which means that there is no generic answer to this question: there is no single paradigm of the apocalyptic, and no ontological inquiry about "its" tone. Because the tone of their writings is so different, it would be particularly misguided, and perverse, to connect Barthes to Baudrillard, Foucault to Bell, Lyotard to Kojève — but it is done in the theoretical pot-pourri one reads month after month in the flashy magazines of the art world. Derrida's proviso, *each time*, means that in each instance one must examine the tone of the apocalyptic discourse: its claim to be the pure revelation of truth, and the last word about the end.

*[My paintings] are about death in a way: the uneasy death of modernism.*  
SHERRIE LEVINE

ENDGAME

I will focus here on a specific claim: that of the death of painting, and more specifically, the death of abstract painting. The meaning of this claim is bounded by two historical circumstances: the first is that the whole history of abstract painting can be read as a longing for its death; and the second is the recent emergence of a group of neo-abstract painters who have been marketed as its official mourners (or should I say resurrectors? But we will see that it is the same). The first circumstance leads to the question: when did all of this start? Where can we locate the beginning of the end in modern painting — that is, the feeling of the end, the discourse about the end, and the representation of the end? The existence of a new generation of painters interested in these issues leads to the question: is abstract painting still possible? In turn, this question can be divided into at least two others: is (abstract, but also any other kind of) *painting* still possible? and is *abstract* (painting, but also sculpture, film, modes of thought, etc.) still possible? (a third thread of the question, specifically apocalyptic would be: is (abstract painting, but also anything, life, desire, etc.) still possible?)

The question about the beginning of the end and the question about the (still) possibility of painting are historically linked: it is the question about the (still) possibility of painting which is at the beginning of the end, and it is this beginning of the end which has been our history, namely what we are accustomed to name *modernism*. Indeed the whole enterprise of modernism, especially of abstract painting, which can be taken as its emblem, could not have functioned without an apocalyptic myth. Freed from all extrinsic conventions, abstract painting was meant to bring forth the pure *parousia* of its own essence, to tell the final truth and thereby terminate its course. The pure beginning, the liberation from tradition, the “zero degree” which was searched for by the first generation of abstract painters could not but function as an omen of the end. One did not have to wait for the “last painting” of Ad Reinhardt to be aware that through its historicism (its linear conception of history) and through its essentialism (its idea that something like the essence of painting existed, veiled somehow, and waiting to be unmasked), the enterprise of abstract painting could not but understand its birth as calling for its end. As Malevich wrote: “There can be no question of painting in Suprematism; painting was done for long ago, and the artist himself is a prejudice of the past.”<sup>2</sup> And Mondrian endlessly postulated that his painting was preparing for the end of painting — its dissolution in the all-encompassing sphere of life-as-art or environment-as-art — which would occur once the absolute essence of painting was “determined.” If one can take abstract painting as the emblem of modernism, however, one should not imagine that the feeling of the end is solely a function of its essentialism; rather it is necessary to interpret this essentialism as the effect of a larger historical crisis. This crisis is well known — it can be termed industrialization — and its impact on painting has been analyzed by the best critics, following a line of investigation begun half a century ago by Walter Benjamin.<sup>3</sup> This discourse centers around the appearance of photography, and of mass production, both of which were understood as causing the end of painting. Photography was perceived this way by even the least subtle practitioners (“*From today painting is dead*”: it is now nearly a century and a half since Paul Delaroche is said to have pronounced that sen-

tence in the face of the overwhelming evidence of Daguerre's invention”)<sup>4</sup> Mass production seemed to bode the end of painting through its most elaborate *mise-en-scène*, the invention of the readymade. Photography and mass production were also at the base of the essentialist urge of modernist painting. Challenged by the mechanical apparatus of photography, and by the mass-produced, painting had to redefine its status, to reclaim a specific domain (much in the way this was done during the Renaissance, when painting was posited as one of the “liberal arts” as opposed to the “mechanical arts”).

The beginnings of this agonistic struggle have been well described by Meyer Schapiro: the emphasis on the touch, on texture, and on gesture in modern painting is a consequence of the division of labor inherent in industrial production. Industrial capitalism banished the hand from the process of production; the work of art alone, as craft, still implied manual handling and therefore artists were compelled, by reaction, to demonstrate the exceptional nature of their mode of production.<sup>5</sup> From Courbet to Pollock one witnesses a practice of one-upmanship. In many ways the various “returns to painting” we are witnessing today seem like the farcical repetition of this historical progression. There were, it is true, simple negations: for instance, Van Doesburg's *Art Concret* (the dream of a geometric art which could be entirely programmed) and Moholy-Nagy's *Telephone-paintings*. But it is only with Robert Ryman that the theoretical demonstration of the historical position of painting as an exceptional realm of manual mastery has been carried to its full extent and, as it were, deconstructed. By his dissection of the gesture, or of the pictorial raw material, and by his (non-stylistic) analysis of the stroke, Ryman produces a kind of dissolution of the relationship between the trace and its organic referent. The body of the artist moves toward the condition of photography: the division of labor is interiorized. What is at stake for Ryman is no longer affirming the uniqueness of the pictorial mode of production vis-à-vis the general mode of production of commodities, but decomposing it mechanically. Ryman's deconstruction has nothing to do with a negation (contrary to what most of its readers think, what is called deconstruction has very little to do with negation per se. Instead, it elaborates a kind of negativity which is not trapped in the dialectical vector of affirmation, negation and sublation). Ryman's dissolution is posited, but endlessly restrained, amorously deferred; the process (which identifies the trace with its “subjective” origin) is endlessly stretched: the thread is never cut.

If I insist on Ryman, it is because in his art the feeling of an end is worked through in the most resolved way. Although he is claimed by some as a post-modernist, I would say he is more accurately the guardian of the tomb of modernist painting, at once knowing of the end and also knowing the impossibility of arriving at it without working it through. Asymptotically, his paintings get closer and closer to the condition of the photograph or of the readymade, yet remain at the threshold of a simple negation. His position is difficult to maintain, yet it is perhaps, historically, the most cogent one.<sup>6</sup> To understand this, we must look again at the historical development which preceded him. “If we could describe the art of this, the first half of the twentieth century, in a sentence, it would read as the search for something to paint;

just as, were we to do the same for modern art as a whole, it must read as the critical preoccupation of artists with solving the *technical* problems of the painting medium. Here is the dividing line of the history of art," writes Barnett Newman, reminding us of Schapiro's insistence on the importance of touch, texture and gesture.<sup>7</sup> But the paradox here, brilliantly enunciated by Thierry de Duve, is that the modernist opposition to both traditional painterly finish and the mechanical (which were fused by academic art of the late 19th century), bore within itself the stigmata of the mass-produced:

Although tin or copper tubes were already in use in England at the end of the 18th century for the preservation of watercolor, it was only around 1830–1840 that tubes of oil paints began to be available on the market. . . . For John Constable or the Barbizon painters to leave their studio and paint outside, directly from nature, the availability of tubes of paint was a prerequisite. One cannot imagine them carrying along the bulky equipment that the preparation of paint on the premises would involve. Certainly, pleinairism was one of the first episodes in the long struggle between craftsmanship and industrialization that underlies the history of "Modernist Painting." It was also one of the first instances of an avant-garde strategy, devised by artists who were aware that they could no longer compete, technically or economically, with industry; they sought to give their craft a reprieve by "internalizing" some of the features and processes of the technology threatening it, and by "mechanizing" their own body at work.<sup>8</sup>

It is this internalization of the mass-produced which led to Duchamp's disgust for paintings and his invention of the readymade ("Let's say you use a tube of paint; you didn't make it. You bought it and used it as a readymade. Even if you mix two vermillions together, it's still a mixing of two readymades. So man can never expect to start from scratch; he must start from readymade things like even his own mother and father."<sup>9</sup>) The historical condition of modern painting as a return of the repressed is also exposed in Seurat's art (Duchamp's favorite), and then deconstructed — not negated — in Ryman's. Industrialization first produced a reaction within modernist painting which led to the emphasis on process — but this reaction had only become possible through the incorporation of the mechanical within the realm of painting itself. Seurat's art marks the moment that this condition is recognized. After him, a long period of analytical decomposition followed — the strongest moment probably being Pollock — which culminated in a conscious incorporation of the mechanical in painting and a reversal of the original reaction to industrialization. Painting had reached the condition of photography. Ryman is the key figure in this historical development, but he has been backed up by a host of related practices in the 1970s.<sup>10</sup>

Even at the outset, industrialization meant much more for painting than the invention of photography and the incorporation of the mechanical into the artist's process through the readymade tube of paint. It also meant a threat of the collapse of art's special status into a fetish or a commodity. It is in reaction to this threat that the historicism and essentialism of modernism was

developed. There is a tendency in America to believe that Clement Greenberg was the first advocate of the modernist teleology. On the contrary, as I have mentioned, the work of the first abstract painters were guided by the same teleology. It therefore seems more telling here, no matter how eloquent Greenberg's discourse has been, to seek the absolute beginning of such a construct: in other words the "beginning of the end." It seems that the first proponent was Baudelaire who conceived history as a chain along which each individual art gradually approached its essence. Nobody has better perceived the function of the threat of industrialization in Baudelaire's work than Walter Benjamin. The greatness of Baudelaire, according to Benjamin, is to have recognized that the fetishistic nature of the commodity-form, (analyzed by Marx at the same time), was the threat which capitalism posed to the very existence of art. "When things are freed from the bondage of being useful," as in the typically fetishistic transubstantiation accomplished by the art collector, then the distinction between art and artifact becomes extremely tenuous. This tension lays, according to Benjamin, at the core of Baudelaire's poetry.

Except for the Italian essayist Giorgio Agamben, it has been little recognized how much the famous chapter of Marx's *Capital* on the fetishistic nature of the commodity, its "mystical" or "phantasmagoric character," owes to the German philosopher's visit to the Great Exhibition in London in 1851 where industrial products were given the kind of auratic presentation previously reserved for works of art<sup>11</sup>: "By means of this exhibition the bourgeoisie of the world is erecting in the modern Rome its Pantheon in which to exhibit with proud self-satisfaction the gods it has made to itself. . . . [It] is celebrating its greatest festival."<sup>12</sup> According to Marx, the fetishistic character of the commodity, what he called its "metaphysical subtlety," is grounded in the absolute repression of use value and of any reference to the process of production, or the materiality of the thing. And if Agamben is right in pointing at the connection between Marx's fundamental analysis and his visit to the London fair, then another connection brings us back to Baudelaire: Courbet's one-man show, in the bungalow he had built for this purpose next to the Beaux-Arts section of the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1855, which contained among other works his famous *Studio* where Baudelaire is portrayed. As is well known, eleven works by Courbet had been accepted by the exhibition committee — and not minor ones — but he was dissatisfied with the way they were displayed: not exhibited together, but dispersed among an undifferentiated mass of hundreds of paintings exactly as, in the next building, machines and machine-made products were exhibited, competing for the gold medal. "I conquer freedom, I save the independence of art"<sup>13</sup> are the words Courbet used to explain the motivation of his parasitic show of some forty works, which he managed to install only six weeks after the inauguration of the fair and to maintain until it closed five months later. With these words, Courbet characterized what is for me the first avant-garde act, an act of defiance against the ever-growing realm of the commodity.

The universal commodification under capitalism is what, according to Benjamin, Baudelaire's genius was to perceive as the terrifying and endless return of the same. I cannot go deeply into Benjamin's extraordinarily complex analysis in this essay, but only note that beginning with Baudelaire's star-

ting characterization of the writer as a prostitute, Benjamin sees the poet's successive identifications with the rag-picker, the flaneur, the bohemian, the dandy or the "apache," as the adoption of heroic roles bearing the stigmata of commodification: roles which were doomed by failure and which were superseded by Baudelaire's final phantasmagoria, his conception of the new. Benjamin writes, "This villification which things suffer by their ability to be taxed as commodities is counterbalanced in Baudelaire's conception by the inestimable value of novelty. Novelty represents an absolute which can neither be interpreted [as an allegory] nor compared [as a commodity]. It becomes the ultimate entrenchment of art."<sup>14</sup> The shock of the new, in other words, is an expression which derives from Baudelaire's aesthetics. But there is more to it: Baudelaire sees modernity, the value of novelty, as necessarily doomed by the inevitable process by which the novel becomes antique. The quest for the absolute new in art becomes a moment which can never stop, endangered as it is by its devolution into the realm of interpretation or comparison. "But once modernism has received its due," writes Benjamin, "its time has run out. Then it will be put to the test. After its end, it will become apparent whether it will be able to become antiquity."<sup>15</sup> This is the banal process which was called *recuperation* in the 1960s, but has been better analyzed since then as an effect of the simulacral.

This urge toward the new, which is at the core of the historicist teleology of Baudelaire is doubly a myth, both because of the immanent perishability of novelty, and because novelty is the very guise that the commodity adopts to fulfill its fetishistic transfiguration. Baudelaire indeed saw the connection between fashion and death, but he did not recognize that the absolute new he searched for all his life was made of the same stuff as the commodity, that it was governed by the same law as the market: the constant return of the same. Benjamin recognized this blind spot of Baudelaire's: "that the last defense of art coincided with the most advanced line of attack of the commodity, this remained hidden to Baudelaire."<sup>16</sup> Needless to say it also remained unseen by the numerous avant-garde movements that followed him. We must recognize however, that the insistence on the integrity of specific media which occurs in every art of the last quarter of the 19th century, has been a deliberate attempt to free art from its contamination by the forms of exchange produced by capitalism. Art had to be ontologically split not only from the mechanical, but also from the realm of information — it had to be distinguished from the immediate transitivity of information which amounted to a general leveling of every fact of life. Mallarmé is certainly the most articulate on this point, and his awareness formed the basis of his theory against the instrumentalization of language by the press. If he insisted on the materiality of language, if he claimed that the poet must remunerate language, if he spoke of the intransitivity of language, it was because he tried to advocate a mode of exchange which would not be abstract, or based on a universal interchangeability through the medium of a single general equivalent, nor reified in a mystifying fetish split off from the process of its production. I would say that although few artists were as consistent as Mallarmé and Baudelaire, one can certainly read the whole history of avant-garde art up to World War I as following in their wake.

There were many reasons for a shift in the situation of the art object to occur around World War I, and I would be a fool to claim one or two events as the origin of a complex set of transformations which were sometimes abrupt, and sometimes gradual. But to pursue my thread about the market, I would like to consider two pivotal events: the famous sale of the Peau d'Ours, which occurred on March 2, 1914; and Marcel Duchamp's invention of the ready-made which I have mentioned already, which happened at around the same time (I take his *Porte-bouteille* of the same year as more to the point than his *Roue de bicyclette* of 1913, which still involves, although ironically, a compositional procedure). The sale of the Peau d'Ours marked the astonishing discovery that far from being laughable, the avant-garde art of the past — novelty as antiquity — was highly profitable as an investment. Not only works by Gauguin, Vuillard or Redon were sold at very high prices, but also paintings by Matisse and Picasso. It was discovered, in short, that investment in contemporary painting was much more profitable than the typical investments of the time, including gold and real estate. Needless to say, the speculative logic which emerged from this sale (buy today the Van Goghs of tomorrow because the new will become antiquity) was to shape the entire history of the 20th-century art market.

Now Duchamp. His readymades were not only a negation of painting and a demonstration of the always-already mechanical nature of painting. They also demonstrated that within our culture the work of art is a fetish which must abolish all pretense to use value (i.e. the ready-made is an art object through its abstraction from the realm of utility). Furthermore, the ready-made demonstrated that the so-called autonomy of the art object was produced by a nominalist institution (the museum or art gallery) which constantly buried what Marx called the point of view of production under the point of view of consumption (as the ethnologist Marcel Mauss noted once, "a work of art is that which is recognized as such by a group."<sup>17</sup>) Finally, and more importantly, Duchamp's act presented the art object as a *special* kind of commodity — something which Marx had noted when he explained that "works of art properly speaking were not taken into consideration" in his account, "for they are of a special nature."<sup>18</sup> Having no use value the art object does not have any exchange value per se either — the exchange value being dependent on the quantum of social work necessary for its production (Seurat demonstrated this *ad absurdum* through his desire to be paid *by the hour*). What Duchamp was keen to observe is that works of art — as much as oyster pearls or great wines (other examples given by Marx) — are not exchanged according to the common law of the market, but according to a monopoly system maintained by the entire art network, whose keystone is the artist himself. This does not mean that the exchange of works of art is beyond competition or any other manifestation of the law of the market, but that their sometimes infinite price is a function of their lack of measurable value. Value in the art world is determined by the "psychological" mechanisms which are at the core of any monopoly system: rarity, authenticity, uniqueness and the law of supply and demand. In other words, art objects are absolute fetishes without a use value but also without an exchange value, fulfilling absolutely the collector's fantasy of a purely symbolic or ideal value, a supplement to his soul.

# PLEASE RECYCLE



or the right foot?" James Rosenquist makes a new painting and a relative unknown gives me this? It seems like a lot of nerve.

The small poster features an image that is, at first, a familiar enough example of its type: the collector posed at home with his family and a number of artworks. His wife stands beside him; the children are casually seated in the foreground (some are, in fact, neighbors visiting for a summertime pool party); on the walls are a few works, including a playful, untitled canvas from 2007 by Laura Owens, likely recognizable to anyone who follows contemporary art. However, if the poster's image slips quickly into the genre of portraiture, it slips just as quickly out. For set starkly into this scene is a large, white recycling symbol whose crudely cut-out form seems utterly incongruous with its context: Is it a work of art in the collection? Indeed, given that it looks almost digitally inserted into the image, one wonders if the thing is even in the room. Yet those already acquainted with Walker's work will recognize this ordinarily authorless symbol (found on plastics and paper products everywhere) as a recurring, even signature, motif—no matter how paradoxical—within the artist's often-hemietic formal repertoire. Of course, that doesn't make the sculpture's role in this particular photograph any clearer. By its very nature, the symbol implies circulation, directing the viewer somewhere beyond the edge of the photograph or to some moment before or after the image's making, in turn asking one to be conscious of networks of exchange, of distribution—out to what end? True, I was intrigued. But the "political" dimension of Walker's project was hardly less crept, eroded, or inscrutable to me than it had been when lying unnoticed in my office for weeks, lost amid stacks of mail.

I went back to the artist for an explanation. He replied via e-mail:

It is a little weird, but I think it works. One thing achieved is a lack of style, which plays off the art in the photo. . . . Also I think it will work well juxtaposed with ads and images throughout the mag. Maybe at the end of the portfolio next to an ad would illustrate this. . . . Structurally, the photo works like Weiner's photo of the rig with a square removed.

On the right: Kelley Walker, Untitled, 2004, digital print, 11 1/2 x 11 1/2 inches, Edition 1/1 + 17. The left: Cover of Kelley Walker, Bulletin, 2005, cover is a collage of the newspaper's front page of 4/4/2005 and 3/27/2005. Walker Photo, April 2005, Kelley Walker, Bulletin, 2005, cover is a collage of the newspaper's front page of 4/4/2005 and 3/27/2005. Walker Photo, April 2005, Kelley Walker, Bulletin, 2005, cover is a collage of the newspaper's front page of 4/4/2005 and 3/27/2005. Walker Photo, April 2005, Kelley Walker, Bulletin, 2005, cover is a collage of the newspaper's front page of 4/4/2005 and 3/27/2005. Walker Photo, April 2005, Kelley Walker, Bulletin, 2005, cover is a collage of the newspaper's front page of 4/4/2005 and 3/27/2005. Walker Photo, April 2005, Kelley Walker, Bulletin, 2005, cover is a collage of the newspaper's front page of 4/4/2005 and 3/27/2005.

## Looking ahead

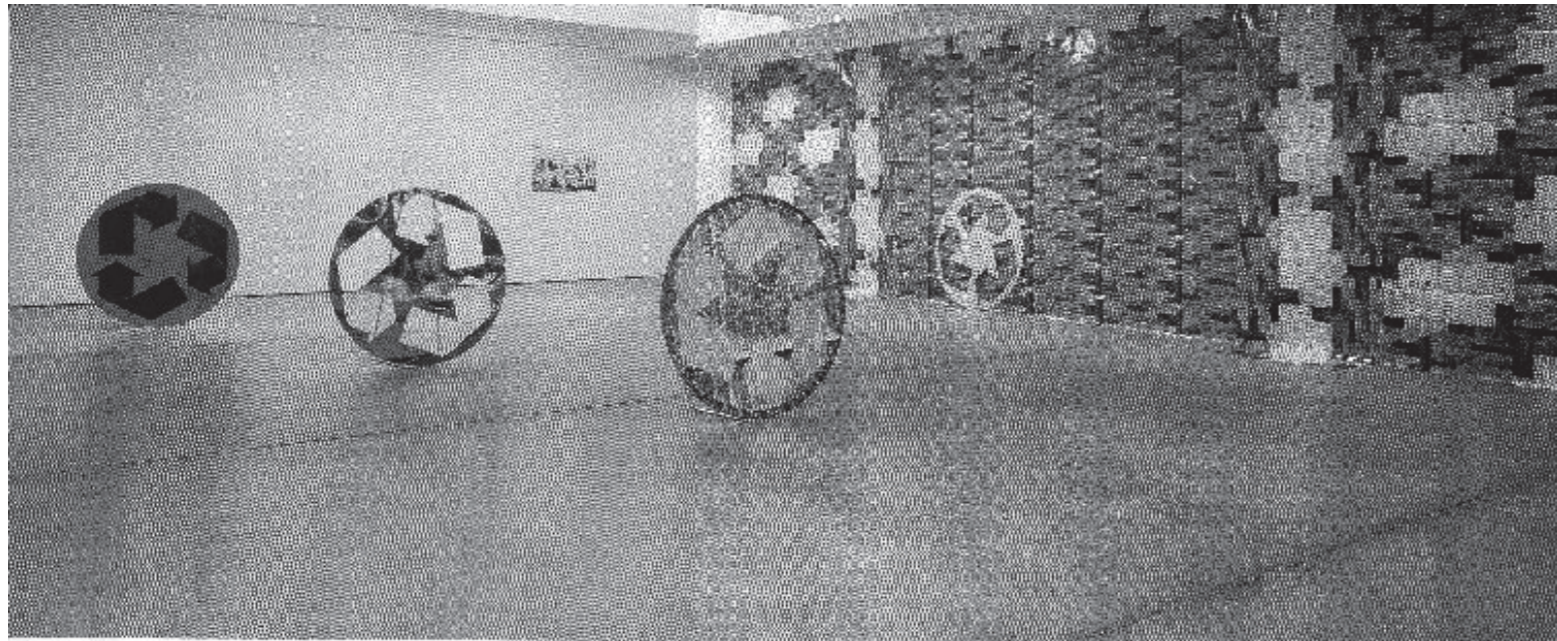
last summer to an issue of this magazine that would consider the theme of art and politics on the eve of the American presidential election, I asked Kelley Walker, a young New York-based artist, to contribute to a portfolio of original artwork reflecting on the cultural moment. Walker excitedly accepted the invitation over the phone and said he would have something ready immediately. A few days passed. Then a week. Then two. Barbara Kruger visited the office and executed her contribution in-house. James Rosenquist began and finished an entirely new painting, then shipped it out of town to be photographed before sending a transparency overnight from Florida. Walker? No word. Intriguingly mindful of a fast-approaching deadline, I called and left a message on the artist's cell phone. A few hours later an e-mail arrived: "Hello! Um . . . just checking to see if you got the post I sent. Afraid you might not recognize it as a post." While the suggestion that Walker had already completed his project was welcome, the implications were not: Lost somewhere amid hundreds (if not thousands) of press releases on a table near my desk was, hidden unbeknownst to me, the artist's work. Sifting more carefully through this anonymous correspondence, I finally came upon a relatively unremarkable folded-up poster from Continuous Project (a loose collaborative of New York artists and writers, including Wade Guyton, Seth Price, and Bettina Funckel). It could have been an announcement for almost any exhibition. One side was boldly marked KELLEY WALKER; the other featured what seemed to be a handwritten note to my attention: "Getting started"

bulletin 2

Kelley Walker

TIM GRIFFIN *on the art of* KELLEY WALKER





Walker's signs could be said to figure in three dimensions the kind of blank areas strategically used by modernist painters to open up a free space that allows viewers to consider an artwork (and their experience of it) at a thoughtful remove.

Bar the mailing of the note is pretty much On Kawara. . . . Finally, when I designed my show at Paula Cooper Gallery I was thinking of how the sculpture and wall works would operate outside of the gallery, in collector's homes and magazines.

I especially appreciated Walker's subsequent explanation of the handwritten "personal" note on the poster's verso, which I had not thought to question:

Wade and I were putting the bulletin together and photographing it to see how it would look reproduced and it seemed the front (part with text on it) needed another source of info., something that was added, coming from a different time and space. . . . Wade had a Star Trek book on his shelf called *Enterprise*, so I flipped it open and read the last line my eyes focused on, which didn't make sense, so I flipped more pages and read a passage which intuitively felt right. It was one where a crew member said to the captain, "Getting started on the right foot." I then asked Wade to write it (my handwriting is ugly) and we scanned it, then inserted it onto the back with a black dropped shadow to "tight" the jest.

As it turns out, these two elements, recycling symbol and scanned signature (itself a negation of the most common, intimate inscription of authenticity)—were the twin poles of Walker's first solo show, mounted in 2003 at Paula Cooper in New York. Indeed, to gain better insight into the "political" nature of Walker's *Arjuna* contribution, in all its density and dispersion, may require some crawling back—following the logic of his checker sign—to this earlier installation.

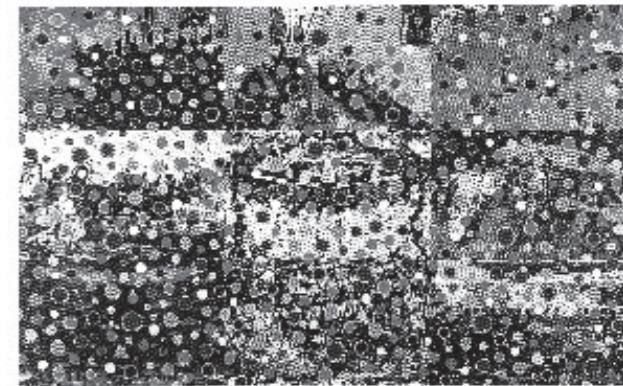
The show featured five recycling symbols, including three arranged along a single axis down the middle of the main gallery, a large and ritually flat, identical except for differences in their rotation and "packaging"; the various scanned and printed images—ranging from rough-been cardboard to slick, cereal-box graphics—that Walker attached flush to the objects' surfaces, thereby obscuring their laser-cut-steel supports. Given their applied imagery and emphatic two-dimensionality, the objects were more pictorial than sculptural, creating an illusory effect: made all the more disorienting on those occasions when the symbols' arrows were empty contours through which the space of the gallery was visible. This effect is, of course, only heightened when these symbols are reproduced photographically, since their flatness can seem totally unreal, suggesting that these sculptures are clearly designed to anticipate and problematize their own reproduction and circulation in other media. (Recall that Walker was photographing his project for *Arjuna* to see how it would reproduce.) But even when encountered physically, their effect strongly resembles that of the symbol in Walker's poster: something ambiguously cut out from the "rag" to borrow the artist's metaphor—a visual and experiential field, uncannily both present and absent, positive and negative, *in* but not *of* the space.

In this regard, Walker's signs could be said to figure in three dimensions the kind of blank areas strategically used by modernist painters to open up

The large view of "Batter Driven," Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, 2003. Photo: Johnathan Greenfield. (Left, top) Kelly Walker, site illustration (Photo: Kelly Greenfield). (Top right) San Fernando Valley Photojournalism Archive. (Middle) Los Angeles: TWA Flight 800, 2002. Photo: Kelly Walker. (Bottom) Kelly Walker, sculpture, Quartermaster John Crow with whiteface, 2003. Photo: Kelly Walker. (Bottom right) Kelly Walker.

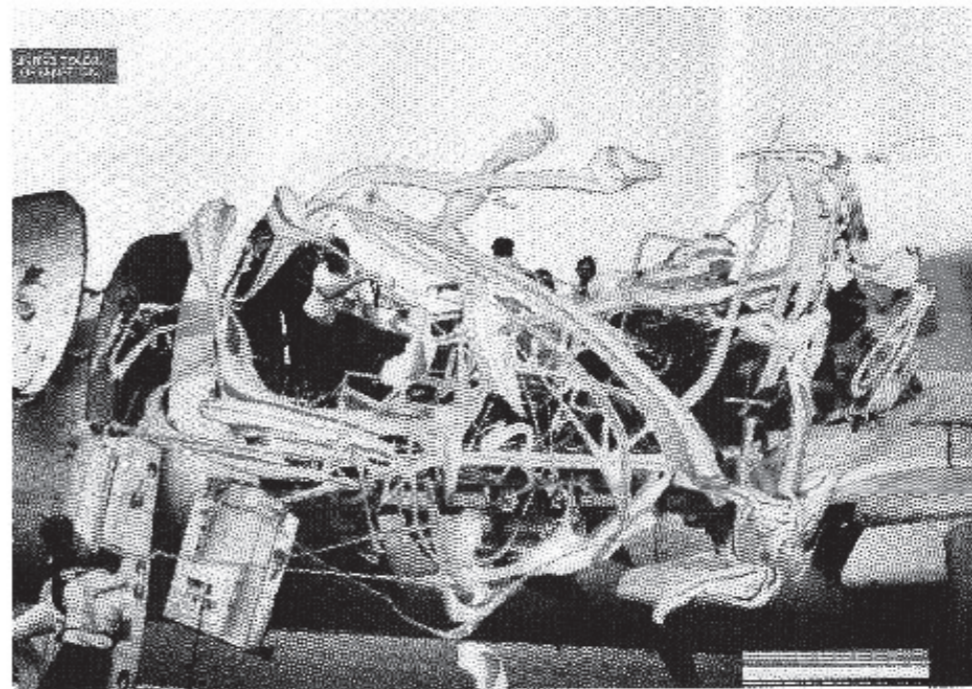
a free space that allows viewers to consider an artwork (and their experience of it) at a thoughtful remove. As Wassily Kandinsky writes: "I always find it advantageous in each work to leave an empty space; it has to do with our imposing. Don't you think that in this there rests an eternal law—but it's a law for tomorrow." Or, as Benjamin H. D. Buchloh explains further, responding to this specific mutation: "That 'empty space' . . . was conceived of as yet another strategy of *negation*, negating aesthetic imposition, functioning as a *spatial action* that allowed the viewer to situate himself or herself in a relationship of mutual dependence with the 'open' artistic construct. The empty space functioned equally as a space of hermetic *resistance*, rejecting the assignment of ideological meaning and the false comforts of convenient readings alike." Certainly, Walker's flat insignias set everything around them in relief, their contours creating a subtle sense of arrangement that not only heightens our experience of a given space but also animates his work as a whole. In the same way that his "styleless" recycling sign did not immediately announce itself as an artwork on the *Consciousness Project* poster, in the gallery it functions as a signature device that nevertheless manages to deflect our attention to the world beyond, an almost paradoxically self-erasing logo that suggests no unique creative identity behind it and perhaps even implies the implausibility of such a thing.

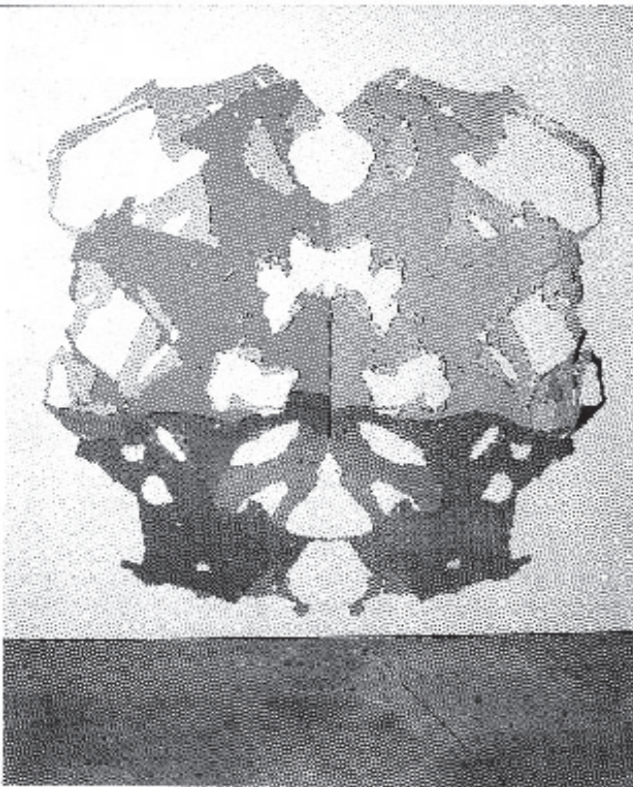
Walker's signs, then, provide a formal materialization of recycling as philosophy and phenomenology. Recycling, after all, relies on material, pointing to another "time and space," as Walker might put it (a "law for tomorrow," as Kandinsky *did*). It entails making objects from materials whose original uses are lost to the eye, so there is something always drained or "emptied" from the past, something always present and absent at once. But the recycling sign also points toward the slippery networks of



distribution and circulation to which Walker's work in general is both addressed and aspire, particularly when it comes to the ubiquity of visual imagery in our culture. Also on view in his Paula Cooper show were posters affixed to the walls—it's noteworthy that the exhibition operated as an installation, in essence framing the entire space—which featured images of building materials scanned from a book on architect Louis I. Kahn. These were, in fact, unlimited-edition posters available for a mere ten dollars to collectors, who are free to reproduce and distribute the image. (On numerous occasions, the artist has sold his work on CD-ROM, with the stipulation that purchasers may manipulate and alter the imagery as they wish using Photoshop, so that no work is ever really "finished." In this regard, it is tempting to consider Walker in terms of a "postproduction" model, one in which preexisting material is reused and removed into free-floating channels whose circulation mirrors the logic of such contemporary technologies as MP3. And, in fact, some of Walker's other effects provide overt visual metaphors for such a reading. One untitled piece from 2003 is a chunky gold-chain necklace and recycling medalion, pointedly recalling yesterday's rap mixes and style. Made of gold leaf over cardboard, the piece embodies the same material tensions as the larger recycling signs, while Walker's frequent return to that thinnest of precious metals (and to the trope of the collector's item as throwaway) summons Yves Klein's most skillful manipulations of aesthetic value and desire.

While current technology provides a context and even a structure for Walker's practice (where perpetual reproduction occurs within an ever-expanding network), his approach nevertheless demands comparison with art-historical models of appropriation—and, in turn, some consideration of the recent evolution of the very commercial sphere from which many of his images are drawn. Among the first photographic Walker usurped from the mass media were pictures in Time-Life photojournalism compendiums, which he used for his *same disasters* (*Florida City, Maui; Moscow; San Fernando Valley; Anchorage; Kobay Plaza; Los Angeles; TWA Flight 800*), 2002. This variable poster comprises nine images, each depicting the aftermath





and individuals in the "real world," taking up a provocative range of imagery, from saccharine scenes of interracial intimacy to images of death row. As one corporate strategy statement from the time reads: "Benetton believes that it is important for companies to take a stance in the real world instead of using their advertising budget to perpetuate the myth that they can make consumers happy through the mere purchase of their product." To every "real world" image, however, the company added one simple design element: a green rectangle with the corporate logo reversed out in white. This "spatial rupture," as it were, renders ambiguous both the photograph and the charged event depicted within it, the corporation in effect creating that unresolvable distance between the viewer and the image in order to brand it.

While this Benetton campaign is now often remembered for using scandalous imagery to sell sweaters—or, more accurately, for the scandal that attended the advertisements' deliberate ambiguity and rejection of "ideological meaning"—it must also be seen within the context of a general economic evolution in which branding and subjectivity have grown ever more intimately involved. A more vibrant formulation of such a corporate strategy was articulated in a seemingly paradoxical statement by Reinhold Messersmith regarding his projects for Prada, made around the time when his store in Lower Manhattan was completed in late 2004: "Our ambition is to capture attention and then, once we have it, to hand it back to the consumer." Thus the very creation of a space for the consumer's thoughtfulness—a farming of personal experience—itself becomes the commodity. As Virginia Postrel, a *New York Times* business columnist and author of the wordily titled *The Substance of Style: How the Rise of Aesthetic Value Is Reshaping Commerce, Culture, and Consciousness* (Harper Collins, 2003), wrote in the mid-'90s: "We are, in fact, living more and more in an intangible economy, in which the greatest sources of

wealth are not physical. We aren't yet used to an economy in which beauty, amusement, attention, learning, pleasure, even spiritual fulfillment are as real and economically valuable as steel or semiconductors."

With these market developments in mind, it should become immediately apparent that in Walker's work, the terms of "post-style" appropriation are reversed. Whereas, say, Richard Prince removes the brand name from Marlboro ads to reveal the mechanisms of their seductive fiction, Walker leaves the corporate logo intact within an image steeped in real life. More striking, however, is the realization that the artist now operates in the distance opened up by this commercial "structure," and so adds another "empty space," a double negative far more disquieting in the ambiguous visual experience it induces: He defines the image with expressionistic lines, strokes, and spots that are paradoxically frozen, precise, spectral, *mechanized* in their appearance. Walker achieves this effect by making these marks on the bed of a digital scanner before pasting the resultant composition onto the advertisement's visual field,

thereby replacing the gesture with its mere image, including in its replication. Within that already empty space produced by the ad, the value of the gesture is evacuated; it is, in effect, the gesture modeled in a totally controlled space. And in this branded space, freedom can only ever be a performance, if it can exist at all. Hence Walker's scanned gestures openly, even flagrantly perform their own inauthenticity, suggesting a kind of agency that is both expressive and controlled, immediate yet removed from the "creative" act. This sense of evacuation is only compounded by Walker's materials, whose mirror effulgences immediately reveals them to be derived products. (The chemical title, in fact, indicates precisely what the stuff is: *acetylene Agapifresh plus Crest with a bit more*, 2005.) These materials again implicate the body—but only to clean it, to render it hygienic. If the flat scanner and its drainage of the authorial impulse behind a given gesture recall the horizontality and free-form spray of Warhol's "piss" paintings, here the scatological mess of the master's works has been made peppermint fresh.

Numerous other projects within Walker's oeuvre pivot on commerce's deep reach into subjectivity and its rebarfing of experience. An ongoing series of Rorschach sculptures made of mirrored Plexiglas, for example, offers a direct analogy with this corporate scenario. Viewers of traditional Rorschach inkblots are "freelanced" in their own psychological projections, but here each mirrored blot literally

Left to right, top: Halley Walker, *Issue Series*, 2004, hand-cut Plexiglas, 91 x 97. Photo: G. James Cox/Extreme Digital Culture. On show until 12 Aug. 2005. In: CC BY-NC-SA license. Photo: G. James Cox. Top right: Halley Walker, *Agapifresh plus Crest with extra content*, 2005, digital print, 1.68 x 1.32 m, 2014 x 2014. Photo: Halley Walker. *Black Star Fashion Star Pinstrip Star, Black Star, Black Pinstrip*, 2004, 11 glass sculptures. Look at a screenshot of the art and look at the actual artwork. Photo: G. James Cox.



While we may literally circulate within the mirrored field of Walker's "Rorschachs," it is the mechanized gesture that circulates most provocatively throughout his work, implying branding's ubiquitous, multivalent mediation of our experience.

of a tragic incident, from earthquake damage to airplane wreckage. The work's title, subject matter, and even guided organization obviously invoke Warhol, a figure whose precedent can be felt throughout Walker's oeuvre, from the younger artist's implementation of serial strategies to his deployment of Rorschach blot. But Walker blanks his imagery with a Larry Poons-like all-over field of brightly colored dots that veils and even camouflages his sources. With this work, too, individual purchasers of the piece or CD-ROM are encouraged to change the constellation as they wish, and, in the meantime, the dots again provide "serial sutures," visual blades that render the images ambiguous almost to the point of illegibility.

For that first solo exhibition, Walker returned to one image from *nine disasters*, a 1983 picture of passengers evacuating the wreck of Aloha Flight 243 shortly after the miraculous conclusion of a journey during which the aircraft's fuselage had torn open at an altitude of some twenty-four thousand feet. The photographic source here, however, is no longer a Time-Life collection but a Benetton advertisement that had incorporated the same stunning image. During the '80s, the apparel giant famously moved away from advertising campaigns that featured the tangible merchandise they were engineered to sell in favor of photographs of events

and individuals in the "real world," taking up a provocative range of imagery, from saccharine scenes of interracial intimacy to images of death row. As one corporate strategy statement from the time reads: "Benetton believes that it is important for companies to take a stance in the real world instead of using their advertising budget to perpetuate the myth that they can make consumers happy through the mere purchase of their product."

With these market developments in mind, it should become immediately apparent that in Walker's work, the terms of "post-style" appropriation are reversed. Whereas, say, Richard Prince removes the brand name from Marlboro ads to reveal the mechanisms of their seductive fiction, Walker leaves the corporate logo intact within an image steeped in real life. More striking, however, is the realization that the artist now operates in the distance opened up by this commercial "structure," and so adds another "empty space," a double negative far more disquieting in the ambiguous visual experience it induces: He defines the image with expressionistic lines, strokes, and spots that are paradoxically frozen, precise, spectral, *mechanized* in their appearance. Walker achieves this effect by making these marks on the bed of a digital scanner before pasting the resultant composition onto the advertisement's visual field,



reflects the viewer in real time, replacing the subjective response of the infamous psychological test with a physical, experiential one. Audiences inevitably search for their own figures within mottled, curious areas that actually cast their images back at them, much as Koolhaas might wish to hand back the careful "attention" of Prada's consumers. Walker's colorful, smoothly finished objects point to the merchandising of subjectivity, and perhaps not coincidentally, these highly seductive, unique sculptures have become his most expensive works—shown in pieces that actually show the room in which they hang. (Walker also very recently collaborated with Guyton on a series of screen prints incorporating copy from the "Dear Keel Out Drinker" advertising campaign—for which the relatively new vodka brand presented a long history for itself, using gothic script to connote age and positing in the world a fraternity of individuals who identify with the label—such that the viewing subject of their work is at the same time overtly addressed as the consuming object.)

While we may literally circulate within the mirrored field of Walker's "Rorschachs," it is the mechanized gesture that circulates most provocatively throughout his work, implying branding's ubiquitous, multivalent mediation of our experience. In *acetylene Agapifresh plus Crest with extra content*, 2005, explosive source imagery from civil rights protests of 1964 reinscribes the same "empty" abstract strokes of toothpaste as the Benetton ad in *Agapifresh plus Crest with content*. Given that contemporary audiences are likely able to identify (and identify with) brand name oral hygiene products more easily than they can recall the particular protagonists and context of the image, Walker marks the inevitable distance between the depicted scene and us. Indeed, however familiar the image may seem in the collective unconscious, one wonders what specific details about the conflict actually remain available to audiences today. Who is the man? What ultimately happened to these people? We visit viewing the image, again culled from a Time Life book, as a bit of haunted "history"—passively, as *watchers*—and this conceptual distance is both signaled and even enacted by Walker's evacuated gesture, which renders the overall "schema" deeply resistant to interpretation in its apparent vandalism. Paradoxically, the distance introduced by Walker's

GRIFFIN/WALKER *Screened from page 16*

"angry" posture serves to bring the scene of the image closer—if only by making more acute, even dulling, our awareness of what specificity, detail, and *historical* *fact* is potentially lost in the image's circulation and eventual aestheticization. Walker elsewhere points to the aestheticizing of politics in a scammed collage of a banner and birds titled *Solidarity*, 2007, whose cartoonish quality would seem to underwrite any nostalgia for protests past.

The suggestion that politics can be reduced to a formal device is all the more significant in *Against the Great with some control* because the work, in fact, manipulates not with imagery already appropriated by a corporation but rather by the Factory. To those with ever the most basic familiarity with postwar American art, the piece is likely to evoke Warhol's *Race Riot* works of 1965–64, in which the same photographic image appears. Certainly, audiences are likely to recognize Warhol's name before that of the photographer who captured the original image of the riots: Charles Moore, a young white Southerner based at the time in Birmingham, Alabama, who was with the photo service *Black Star*. (As it happens, Walker himself hails from the South, from rural Tennessee.) The artist manipulates such layered references ever more effectively in one of his strongest works to date, *Black Star Press: Star Press Star, Black Star, Black Press*, 2004, among the first in a series of ink jet prints on canvas that he began last year using a single, similarly iconic picture from the civil rights movement: the charged image of a police officer struggling with an African American demonstrator who is being attacked by a German shepherd. Here again the image and its presentation would clearly seem to do Warhol's: Walker mimics the Pop master's technique for "emptying" the charged riot image, repeating it in three panels of a triptych. Atop each of these images, Walker has made apparently violent gestures and splatters in brown and white—yet these marks are not what they seem. Closer observation reveals formal repetitions,

since all these splatters are in fact made using over-aid screen prints. Gestures is again mechanized, controlled—the catch being that the material forced through the screen is not ink but rather melted white, milk, and dark chocolate, which solidified after its application (and, as with the toothpaste, there are also obvious scatological and sexual associations). But the beguiling sense of things not being what they seem grows even uncannier when we realize that Warhol never actually used this exact image. In fact, it was not even made by Moore but was taken during the same riots by Associated Press photographer Bill Hudson, ending up on the front page of the *New York Times* the next day.

Such references, repetitions, and evocations bring me, full circle, to Walker's project for *Artforum* and, in particular, to that project's own polemic recycling symbol and authentic signature. In fact, we are now better poised to appreciate the work's complicated passage from an announcement poster to a magazine page, which is marked with a message not from Walker to me but from one *Star Trek* character to another, written not in Walker's hand but someone else's, the text inscribed not in ink from a pen but rather by a printer fed information from a scanner. Recently Walker referred in an interview to "the potential for historical repetition, for historical stuttering, allowing us to seize on its structural logic and recycle it today." In fact, this strategy pervades Walker's practice as a

which, which is repetitive, cyclical, both dense and diffuse, its reruns turning back while moving ahead. Ironically, it is these jabs and doblings that create the possibility of legibility, providing the space for communication within circulation while also placing any meaningful exchange at the greatest risk of invisibility, or even of disappearance—just as I discovered that summer afternoon while scouring my office for Walker's hidden project. □

*The author is editor at large.*

DEITCHER/"HOW DO WE WANT . . ." *Screened from page 16*

province in order to generate a counterdiscourse that would expose as lies the propaganda issued by General Juan Carlos Onganía's dictatorship. Other members denounced their contempt for art's elite audience. The Miami show includes photographic documentation of an evening in November 1968 when artists attending the packed opening of an exhibition by TA member Graciela Carnevale left the event and locked the gallery door behind them, forcing patrons inside to smash windows in order to exit.

Small black-and-white photographs from Francesca Woodman's series "Space", Providence, RI, 1975–78, which show a cropped female figure in a sun-dappled interior, were curiously dispersed throughout the show. But given the programmatic nature of this text-heavy exhibition and Buerger's abiding interest in

THIS IS WHAT I WILL TRY TO DO FOR THE GROUP SHOW IN PARIS --- GHOST IS IT?

I REMEMBER THE GALLERY HAS A WALL OF WINDOWS. I HAVE HAD AN IDEA FOR A WHILE THAT I WANTED TO FABRICATE BROKEN WINDOWS AND PUT THEM ON TOP OF (OR IN FRONT OF) THE GOOD WINDOWS; SITE SPECIFIC. PROBABLY I WON'T BE ABLE TO APPROACH THIS DIRECTLY BECAUSE OF DANGER TO THE PUBLIC. HERE ANOTHER ASPECT MIGHT ENTER INTO THE WORK, WHICH IS OF INTEREST (OF MORE INTEREST TO ME THAN THE DIRECTNESS OF PLACING BROKEN WINDOWS ON TOP ON GOOD ONES). I IMAGINE SOME SORT OF PLEXI HOUSING THAT WILL HAVE TO BE CONSTRUCTED TO SEPARATE (AND PROTECT) THE VIEWER WHO IS OUTSIDE OF THE GALLERY AND WHO IS LOOKING AT THE SITE OF POTENTIALLY GETTING HURT. I HAVE BEEN THINKING A LOT ABOUT WHAT THE STRETCHER THAT SUPPORTS THE CANVAS OF A WARHOL MEANS (IN RELATION TO, LET'S SAY, A STRETCHER SUPPORTING A KELLY OR POLLOCK) OR A PLEXI HOUSING ENCASING A KOONS VACUUM CLEANER AS OPPOSED TO A PLEXI HOUSING THAT SHERRI LEVINE WANTED FOR HER PARROT SCULPTURE. SEEMS LIKE A GOOD OPPORTUNITY FOR ME TO START DEALING WITH THIS DIRECTLY. PLUS, AS I MENTIONED BEFORE, THE 'PROTECTIVE HOUSING' WOULD BE OUTSIDE OF THE GALLERY, IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN. I LIKE THIS PART. SO THIS IS WHERE MY THOUGHTS ARE. MAYBE IT MIGHT HELP IN WRITING THE ESSAY. KJ

Duchamp's discovery led him to a range of experiments meant to reveal the mechanisms of the art network: I only need mention his 1917 *Fountain*, his various appearances as a transvestite, and his *Chèque Tzank* of 1919, all of which pointed to authenticity as the central theoretical construct on which the art network is based. In Duchamp's wake, artists like Daniel Buren as well as Cindy Sherman and Sherrie Levine, have analyzed the nature of authenticity. This analytical strategy has often been characterized as the "deconstructive tendency" of post-modernism, yet I am not entirely confident with the labeling (which does not diminish at all the interest I have for such practices). In so far as I interpret Duchamp's art as a negation, I interpret his heirs as explicating and radicalizing his negation. Or rather, if one wants to stay with the term deconstruction, I would say that Duchamp and his heirs are deconstructing one aspect of what they negate (painting): specifically the imaginary aspect of painting, which these artists consistently associate with its fetishistic nature (deconstruction means also the sense of inescapability from closure). But there remains, if I am allowed to borrow *metaphorically* the Lacanian terminology, two other aspects of painting which must be considered: the real, and the symbolic.

Both the Peau d'Ours sale and Duchamp's invention of the readymade had the potential to spawn a kind of cynical conservatism: if the new was doomed to its transformation into gold by the market, and the work of art was by its very nature an absolute fetish, then it might seem that the avant-garde's ideology of resistance was obsolete. In fact, such a cynical position was undertaken by what is called the *return to order*, which started with Picasso's *Portrait of Max Jacob* in 1915 but which became a massive phenomenon in the 1920s with *Pittura Metafisica* in Italy and the *Neue Sachlichkeit* in Germany. These movements share a lot with the neo-conservative brand of post-modernism which has recently emerged (whether it's called new wild, neo-romantik, trans-avanguardia, or whatever) as Benjamin H.D. Buchloh brilliantly demonstrated in an article published five years ago.<sup>19</sup> The market itself induces this kind of cynicism.<sup>20</sup> The cynical attitude however, was not the only one available. The feeling of the end could also be reclaimed by a revolutionary aesthetics. This is what happened in Russia, where artists immediately responded to the situation created by the events of October, 1917. In a revolutionary situation, art cannot but sever its ties with the market and its dependence upon the art institution: it seeks to reestablish its use value and to invent new relationships of production and consumption: it breaks with the linear, cumulative conception of history and emphasizes discontinuity. In other words, in such situations art can open up a new paradigm, something which was eloquently advocated by El Lissitzky in the brilliant lecture he delivered in Berlin, in 1922, about "The New Russian Art."<sup>21</sup>

Of all of these gestures of the soviet avant-garde, one of the most significant is Rodchenko's exhibition, in 1921, of three monochrome panels, which he later described with these words, "I reduced painting to its logical conclusion and exhibited three canvases: red, blue and yellow. I affirmed: It's all over. Basic colors. Every plane is a plane, and there is to be no more representation."<sup>22</sup> If Rodchenko's gesture is important, it is not because it was the "first" monochrome — it was not the "first" nor the "last," — and not because it was

the first "last picture" (not only does Duchamp's readymade better deserve this title, but as we have seen in a way all modernist abstract paintings had to claim to be the last picture). If Rodchenko's gesture was so important, as Tarabukin saw when he analyzed it in *From the Easel to the Machine*, it was because it showed that painting could have a real existence only if it claimed its end; Rodchenko's "meaningless, dumb and blind wall...convincing us that painting was and remains, a representational art and that it cannot escape from these limits of the representational."<sup>23</sup> Rodchenko's painting needed to attain the status of a real (non-imaginary) object, which meant its end as art. Again we are confronted with a negation — not a deconstruction — which accounts, according to me, for what must be called the failure of the productivist program in painting which followed Rodchenko's gesture logically (the dissolution of the artist's activity into industrial production). Or, to use again the terminology I borrowed before, Rodchenko deconstructed only one aspect of painting: its pretense to reach the realm of the real — a deconstruction which was carried out again, and further elaborated, by minimalism in the 1960s.

Rodchenko's was still not the only alternative to Duchamp's negation, or to cynicism. In August 1924, shortly before he broke with the Dutch movement, Mondrian published his last article in the magazine *De Stijl*. Entitled "Blown with the Wind," it is a denunciation of the *return to order* which was invading the galleries and had almost led him, three years earlier, to abandon painting altogether. He writes, "if artists reject the new conception, critics and dealers do so even more strongly because they are more directly influenced by the public. They openly assert that abstract art served only to raise naturalistic art to a higher level; therefore, that the new was a *means* and not an *end*; [and here I intervene to mention Picasso's remark to a baffled Kahnweiler that his neo-classical works of the *return to order* period were *better* than those of his pre-cubist naturalistic period]. Back to Mondrian's text: "Thus," he writes, "they openly deny that the essence of the new was the displacement and annihilation of the old. They too are blown with the wind and follow the public. This is very understandable — but temporarily disastrous to the new whose essential nature is thus *denied*." I give you this long quote for its insistence on the momentary nature of the *return to order* phenomenon: the whole article is suffused with a kind of optimism which would sound utterly incomprehensible if the role of the new were not laid down at the end of the article: "Abstract art can evolve only by being *developed* consistently. In this way it can attain the *purely plastic*, which is achieved by neo-plasticism. The consistent development of this "art" expression [the quotation marks are Mondrian's] can result in nothing other than its realization in our tangible environment. For the time will come when, because of the changed demands of life, "painting" will lose itself in life [again, the quotation marks are Mondrian's]."<sup>24</sup>

For anyone who is familiar with the voluminous writings of Mondrian, this sounds typical, and indeed, as I already noted, the myth of the future dissolution of art into life is one of his most frequent themes. Far from being a compulsive quest of the absolute new, structurally doomed to failure, as in Baudelaire's formal teleology, Mondrian's affirmation of the new is geared towards a definite *telos*, that of the advent of a classless society, where social

relationships would be transparent and not reified, and where there would be no difference between artists and non-artists, art and life. The new art must be, within itself, the model and augury of such a liberation: this future liberation, or socialist state, is envisioned through the principle of neo-plasticism, of which neo-plastic art can only be a "pale reflection," albeit the most advanced possible at the time. This principle, which Mondrian also called the "general principle of plastic equivalence," is a sort of dialectic whose action is to dissolve any particularity, any center, any hierarchy. Any entity which is not split or constituted by an opposition, is a mere appearance. Anything which is not determined by its contrary is vague, particular, individual, tragic: it is a cipher of authoritarianism, and it does not take part in the process of emancipation set forth by the "general principle of equivalence." Hence the complicated task which Mondrian assigns the painter is the destruction of all the elements on which the particularity of his art is based: the destruction of colored planes by lines; of lines by repetition; and of the optical illusion of depth by the sculptural weave of the painterly surface. Each destructive act follows the previous one and amounts to the abolition of the figure/ground opposition which is the perceptual limitation at the base of our imprisoned vision, and of the whole enterprise of painting. There is no doubt that Mondrian sets a task of the highest order for art: he prescribes a propaedeutic role. Painting was for him a theoretical model which provided concepts and invented procedures which dealt with reality: it is not merely an interpretation of the world, but the plastic manifestation of a certain logic which he found at the root of all the phenomena of life. In an article he wrote under the shock of the Nazi-Soviet Mutual Non-Aggression Pact, Mondrian says: "the function of plastic art is not descriptive. . . . It can reveal the evil of oppression and show the way to combat it. . . . It cannot reveal more than life teaches, but it can evoke in us the conviction of existent truth. . . . It shows that real freedom requires mutual equivalence."<sup>25</sup>

Arthur Lehning, an anarcho-syndicalist leader of the 1920s, said that his friend Mondrian was a child in politics, and nothing could be more evident.<sup>26</sup> However, this naiveté, which appears to have been the only possible alternative to Duchamp's negation and to the cynical strategies of the *return to order* in Western Europe, should not blind us to Mondrian's remarkable position. One is struck by the fact that he never felt any compulsion toward the monochrome, which could have easily provided, so it seems, the kind of absolute flatness he was striving for. But as an iconoclast readymade, the monochrome could not have functioned for him as a tool to deconstruct painting or more specifically to deconstruct the order of the symbolic in painting (of tradition, of the law, of history). Mondrian felt that within the economic abstraction engendered by capitalism, painting could only be deconstructed abstractly, by analyzing, one after the other, one against the other, all of the elements which (historically) ground its symbolic order (form, color, figure/ground opposition, frame, etc.). This painstaking formal analysis was for him the only way painting could reach its own end. Because it was conceived of as an abstract model, painting could resist the abstract commodification which is the fate of every (art) object; it had to postpone its own dissolution into the real until the symbolic order on which it is grounded had been "neutralized." Painting was therefore

engaged in the necessarily interminable task of this neutralization. It might seem strange to speak of Mondrian, whose system of thought owed so much to Hegel's dialectic, in terms of deconstruction, yet unlike any dialectician he never expected any leap, never paid any tribute to the modern ideology of the *tabula rasa*: he knew that the end of painting had to be gained by hard labor.

But is the end ever to be gained? Duchamp (the imaginary), Rodchenko (the real) and Mondrian (the symbolic), among others, all believed in the end — they all had the final truth, all spoke apocalyptically. Yet has the end come? To say no (painting is still alive, just look at the galleries) is undoubtedly an act of denial, for it has never been more evident that most paintings one sees have abandoned the task which historically belonged to modern painting (that, precisely, of working through the end of painting) and are simply artifacts created for the market and by the market (absolutely interchangeable artifacts created by interchangeable producers). To say yes, however, that the end has come, is to give in to an historicist conception of history as both linear and total (i.e. one cannot paint after Duchamp, Rodchenko, Mondrian; their work has rendered paintings unnecessary, or: one cannot paint anymore in the era of the mass media, computer games and the simulacrum).

How are we to escape this double bind? Benjamin once noted that the easel painting was born in the Middle Ages, and that nothing guarantees that it should remain forever. But are we left with these alternatives: either a denial of the end, or an affirmation of the end of the end (it's all over, the end is over)? The theory of games, used recently by Hubert Damisch, can help us overcome this paralyzing trap. This theory of strategy dissociates the generic *game* (like chess) from the specific performance of the game (the Spassky/Fisher match, for example), which I will call the *play*. Let us suppose that Newman and Pollock were opposing partners in the development of Abstract Expressionism. How can we determine what in their exchange is in the order of *play* (which is unique, but can be repeated by simulation) and what is in the order of the *game* (with a definite set of rules)? It seems clear that this type of question transforms the problem of historical repetitions, which had worried Wölfflin so much: "It is certain that through the problematic of abstraction, the American painters [of the generation of Abstract Expressionism], as already in the 1920s the advocates of suprematism, neo-plasticism, purism, etc. could entertain the illusion that, far from being engaged in a specific play which would take part in the succession or the set of plays which would define the *game* "Painting," they were indeed returning to the foundations of the game, its immediate, constitutive given. The American episode would then represent less an unprecedented development in the history of abstraction than a new departure, a revival, but at a deeper level and with more powerful practical and theoretical means, of the play which had begun, thirty of forty years before, under the title of abstraction."<sup>27</sup> This strategic interpretation is rigorously anti-historicist: it is not premised on the exhaustion of things and the linear genealogy of which art criticism is so fond, always ready, consciously or not, to follow the requirements of the market in quest of new products. But the theory of games does not propose an homogeneous time either (the time without ruptures of art history). The question becomes: "what is the status which must be ascribed to the *play* "Painting," as it is *seen*

played at a given moment in a given situation, in relationship with the *game* which bears the same name."<sup>28</sup> Such a question has the immediate merit of casting doubt on assumptions which seem obvious: does the convention of depth, for example which, according to Greenberg, has been rejected as "unnecessary" by the pictorial art of this century participate more appropriately in the order of the play or that of the game? Or rather, should we speak of a modification of this convention within the game? Without becoming a theoretical machine producing indifference (since one is obliged to take a side), this strategic approach deciphers painting as an agonistic field where nothing is ever terminated, or decided *once and for all*. It reinvests the analysis of painting with a type of historicity which, under the pressure of the market, has been neglected — the history of the *longue durée*. In other words, it dismisses all certitudes about the absolute truth upon which the apocalyptic discourse is based. Rather, the fiction of the end of art (or of painting) is understood as a "confusion between the end of the game itself (as if a game could really have an end) and that of such and such a play (or suite of plays)."<sup>29</sup>

One can conclude then, that, if the play "modernist painting" is finished, it does not necessarily mean that the game "painting" is finished: many years to come are ahead for this art. But the situation is even more complicated: for the play "modernist painting" was the play of the end of painting; it was both a response to the feeling of the end, and a working through of the end. And this play was historically determined — by the fact of industrialization (photography, the commodity, etc.). To claim that the "end of painting" is finished is to claim that this historical situation is no longer ours and who would be naive enough to make this claim when it appears that reproducibility and fetishization have permeated all aspects of life: have become our "natural" world?

Obviously, this is not the claim of the latest group of "abstract" painters whose work as Hal Foster has rightly remarked, has been presented as either a development of appropriation art (which is supported by the presence of Sherrie Levine in the group) or as a swing of the pendulum (the market having tired of neo-expressionism was ripe for a neoclassical and architectonic movement: the "style" after the "shout," to make use of an old metaphor which art criticism proposed to distinguish between two tendencies within the realm of abstract art: one whose emblem was Mondrian and the other, Pollock.<sup>30</sup>) The work of this recent group of painters wishes to respond to our simulacral era, yet paradoxically in their very reliance upon Jean Baudrillard, emphasized by Peter Halley who frequently writes critically about these issues, they all admit that the end has come, that the end of the end is over (hence that we can start again on another play; that we can paint without the feeling of the end but only with its simulacrum). As Foster writes, "in this new abstract painting, simulation has penetrated the very art form that... resisted it most."<sup>31</sup> Starting with a critique of the economy of the sign in late capitalism, Baudrillard was driven, by the very nature of his millenarianist feeling, to a fascination for the age of the simulacrum, a glorification of our own impotence disguised as nihilism. It seems to me that although the young artists in question address the issue of the simulacral — of the abstract simulation produced by capital — they have similarly abandoned themselves to the seduction of what they claim

to denounce: either perversely (as in the case of Philip Taaffe who refers to Newman's sublime while he empties it of its content); or unconsciously (as in the case of Halley who seems to believe that an iconological rendering of simulacra — through his pictorial rhetoric of "cells" and "conduits" — could function as a critique of them). Like Baudrillard, I would call them manic mourners. Their return to painting, as though it were an appropriate medium for what they want to address, as though the age of the simulacral could be represented, comes from the feeling that since the end has come, since it's all over, we can rejoice at the killing of the dead. That is, we can forget that the end has to be endlessly worked through, and start all over again. But this, of course, is not so, and it is in flagrant contradiction with the very analysis of the simulacral as the latest abstraction produced by capitalism (perhaps this illusion is rooted in the abuse of the term post-industrialism, whose inveterate inadequacy to describe the latest development of capitalism has been exposed by Frederic Jameson).<sup>32</sup> Appropriation art, — the "orgy of cannibalism" proper to manic mourning — of which this movement is obviously a part,<sup>33</sup> can then be understood as a pathological mourning (it has also its melancholic side, as noted by Hal Foster about Ross Bleckner and Taaffe in their fascination for the "failure" of Op art.<sup>34</sup>) Bleckner writes about Taaffe: "Dead issues are reopened by this changed subjectivity: artists become transvestites and viewers voyeurs watching history become less alien, less authoritarian."<sup>35</sup> I would correct the latter assertion this way: "... viewers watching oblivion become more alien, more enslaved." For "simulation, together with the old regime of disciplinary surveillance, constitutes a principal means of deterrence in our society (for how can one intervene politically in events when they are so often simulated or immediately replaced by pseudo-events?)."<sup>36</sup>

Yet mourning has been the activity of painting throughout this century. "To be modern is to know *that which is not possible any more*," Roland Barthes once wrote.<sup>37</sup> But the work of mourning does not necessarily become pathological: the feeling of the end, after all, did produce a cogent history of painting, modernist painting, which we have probably been too prompt to bury. Painting might not be dead. Its vitality will only be tested once we are cured of our mania and our melancholy, and we believe again in our ability to act in history: accepting our project of working through the end again, rather than evading it through increasingly elaborate mechanisms of defense (this is what mania and melancholy are about) and settling our historical task: the difficult task of mourning. It will not be easier than before, but my bet is that the potential for painting will emerge in the conjunctive deconstruction of the three instances which modernist painting has dissociated (the imaginary, the real and the symbolic), but predictions are made to be wrong. Let us simply say that the desire for painting remains, and that this desire is not entirely programmed or subsumed by the market: this desire is the sole factor of a future possibility of painting, that is, of a non-pathological mourning. At any rate, as observed by Robert Musil fifty years ago, if some painting is still to come, if painters are still to come, they will not come from where we expect them to.<sup>38</sup>

1. Jacques Derrida, *D'un ton apocalyptique adopté naguère en philosophie*, Paris: Galilée, 1983, p. 65. This small book is a reading of Kant's pamphlet mentioned above.
2. Kasimir Malevich, *Suprematism. 34 Drawings* (Vitebsk, 1920), English trans. in Malevich, *Essays on Art* ed. Troels Andersen, vol. I, New York: Wittenborn, 1971, p. 127.
3. I refer here to the critical work accomplished in the magazine *October* by Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp and Benjamin H.D. Buchloh; but also to Hal Foster's recent anthology of articles, *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, Port Townsend (Wash.): Bay Press, 1985 and to various articles by Thierry de Duve.
4. Douglas Crimp, "The End of Painting," *October* (number 16, Spring 1981), p. 75.
5. See Meyer Schapiro, "Recent Abstract Painting," in *Modern Art, 19th and 20th Century (Collected Papers)*, New York: Braziller, 1978, pp. 217–219. The text appeared first under the title "The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art" in *Art News* during the summer of 1957.
6. I take the liberty to refer to my article, "Ryman's Tact," published in *October* (number 19, Winter 1981). See also the excellent article by Thierry de Duve, "Ryman irréproductible," *Parachute* (number 20, Fall 1980), which deals explicitly with Ryman's relationship with modernism and with photography.
7. Barnett Newman, "The Problem of Subject Matter," circa 1944, as quoted by Tom Hess in *Barnett Newman*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1971, pp. 39–40.
8. Thierry de Duve, "The Readymade and the Tube of Paint," *Artforum*, (May 1986), pp. 115–116.
9. Marcel Duchamp to Katherine Kuh (1961), quoted in *Ibid.* p. 113.
10. See Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index" (1977), reprinted in *Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1984.
11. Giorgio Agamben, *Stanza* (1977); French trans. Christian Bourgois, Paris, 1980, part two ("Dans le monde d'Odradek — Oeuvre d'art et marchandise"), p. 75.
12. Karl Max and Friedrich Engels, "Review — May to October [1850]," in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 10, New York International publishers, 1978, p. 500. The original text was published, although not in its entirety in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, number 5–6, 1850. The editors of the *Collected Works* ascribe the text to Marx (see *idem.* p. 695, note 348).
13. *Lettres de Gustave Courbet à Alfred Bruyas*, ed. Pierre Borel, Genève: Editions Pierre Cailler, 1951, p. 87.
14. Walter Benjamin, "Paris, capital of the XIXth Century," second version (1939), *Das Passagen-Werk, Gesammelten Schriften*, Vol. V.1, p. 71.
15. Walter Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" (1938). English trans. in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, London: New Left Books, 1973, p. 81.
16. Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, op. cit., pp. 71–72.
17. Marcel Mauss, *Manuel d'ethnographie* (1947), second edition, Paris: Payot 1967, p. 89.
18. Karl Marx, *Oeuvres*, coll. La Pléiade, Paris: Gallimard, 1968, book II, p. 1871.
19. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression," *October* number 16, (Spring 1981).
20. See "Mythologies: Art and the Market," Jeffrey Deitch interviewed by Matthew Collings, *Art-scribe International* (April–May 1986), pp. 23–26. Almost any assertion made in this interview with Deitch, a corporate art advisor, would require a commentary, starting with his denial of having a cynical position. Nevertheless, it provides valuable information on the present situation: while Marcel Duchamp could say in 1966 that "The museums are run more or less, by the dealers" and that "In New York, the Museum of Modern Art is completely in the hands of the dealers" (Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett, New York: The Viking Press, 1971), we are now confronted by the omnipotence of the collector. He has made the dealer into a mere appendage of his own body: this is the situation which is well described in Deitch's interview.

21. Reprinted in Sophie Lissitzky-Kuppers, *El Lissitzky*, London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1968, pp. 330–340.
22. Alexander Rodchenko, from the manuscript "Working with Maiakovsky" (1939) quoted in *From Painting to Design: Russian Constructivist Art of the Twenties*, Cologne: Galerie Gmurzynska, 1981, p. 191. On Rodchenko see also Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, *Niele Toroni — Lindex de la peinture*, Bruxelles: Editions Daled, 1985, pp. 40–42 (unpublished in English).
23. Nikolai Tarabukin, *From the Easel to the Machine* (1923), English trans. in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Francis Francina and Charles Harrison, New York: Harper and Row, 1982, p. 139. It is worth noting that Tarabukin was totally immersed in millenarianism: his major reference in *Spengler's Decline of the West*.
24. Piet Mondrian, "De Huif naar den Wind," *De Stijl*, (vol. VI, n 6/7, 1924), p. 88.
25. Piet Mondrian, "Liberation from Oppression in Art and Life" (1941), in *Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art*, New York: Wittenborn, 1945, p. 39.
26. See Yve-Alain Bois, *Arthur Lehning en Mondriaan — Hun vriendschap en correspondentie*, Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 1984, p. 28.
27. Hubert Damisch, *Fenêtre jaune cadmium ou les dessous de la peinture*, Seuil: Paris, 1984, p. 167.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 170.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 171.
30. One remembers the book by Michel Seuphor, *Le Style et le Cri*, which helped to vulgarize such a critical distinction.
31. Hal Foster, "Signs Taken for Wonders," *Art in America*, (June, 1986), p. 90.
32. See Frederic Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, (July–August 1984), pp. 53–92.
33. "Orgy of Cannibalism" is an expression of Karl Abraham to characterize the manic state in "Esquisse d'une histoire du développement de la libido basée sur la psychoanalyse des troubles mentaux" (1924). In this article, Abraham completes the famous but very short text by Freud on "Mourning and Melancholia." See Abraham, *Développement de la libido, Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 2, Paris: Payot, 1973, p. 293.  
Dwelling on the early essays of Freud and Abraham, Melanie Klein shows how the feeling of triumph and omnipotence which characterize manic mourning prevents the *working through* of mourning (See "Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States," in *Contributions to Psychoanalysis 1921–1945*, London: The Hogarth Press, 1950. See particularly pp. 322 and 336).
34. Hal Foster, op. cit., p. 83.
35. Ross Bleckner, *Philip Taaffe*, New York: Pat Hearn Gallery, January 1986, p. 7.
36. Hal Foster, op. cit., p. 91. Peter Halley is perfectly aware of this, as is shown by most of his texts and particularly by his brilliant article entitled "The Crisis in Geometry," *Arts* (Summer 1984). But he believes that this state of affairs can be represented, and through representation, criticized. Both of these claims are dubious (and contradictory with his Baudrillardian theory).
37. Roland Barthes, "Réquichot et son corps," in *Lobvie et l'obtus, Essais Critiques III*, Paris: Seuil, 1982, p. 211.
38. Robert Musil, "Consideration Désobligeantes," *Oeuvres préposthumes* (1936), French trans., Seuil: Paris, 1965, p. 87.



## A Conversation

**Bettina Funcke, Ken Gobel, Wade Guyton, Seth Price, Josh Smith, and Kelley Walker; with notes by Mai-Thu Perret at Holiday Cocktail Lounge, New York, May 1, 2005**

*The artists in the show "New York Twice" use scanners, printers, and Xerox machines, all technologies widely available on the consumer market. In following their work over the last few years, it's become clear how the limitations of available equipment shapes this art: they play with the equipment and with ideas of what reproduction can be, they work within the technology's limits and with its mistakes; this process yields the work. On the occasion of this exhibition, in which Wade Guyton, Mai-Thu Perret, Seth Price, Josh Smith, and Kelley Walker show all at once for the first time (though they have all worked with one another in smaller constellations), I thought it would be interesting to bring them together with a printing industry professional for an informal conversation. In opposing radically different approaches to the same sorts of tools, I hoped to provoke a discussion that is both technical and indicative of formal potentials and larger ideas about cultural change.*  
*Bettina Funcke*

KEN GOBEL: I work in the industry but haven't really been a technician for about 20 years, but nonetheless I'll give you a brief history. We're going to talk about color separation? How much do you want to know? Do you understand color? CMYK? RGB?

SETH PRICE: I don't think I do...

JOSH SMITH: Do you have to separate things yourself? Or does the computer do it?

KG: Well, a computer doesn't do it. It's all optical, it's still optical. A computer records data in a digitized form so that you can manipulate them. But it is still an optical problem. It's about light and physics. You have your basic colors and if you are a painter, you know how you mix your basic colors. You are using colors on surfaces and that is called subtractive color, we call it CMYK, opaque color on surfaces, unlike light colors, called RGB. But painters call it red, blue, and yellow. What happens is this: An object is a color. Light hits that object and it absorbs all the color except for that wavelength and it sends that wavelength right back to you. White in this case absorbs all the colors. There are three wavelengths of light, and in the spectrum you can add these up to get all of the visible colors.

BF: Is that the basis of scanning or of printing?

KG: Well, it's the basis of color. When you print, you are printing these three colors, CMY: cyan, a sky blue, yellow, and magenta, a kind of a pinkish red. When you take red and mix it with yellow, you get an orange color, which we actually call red. You go from this pinkish magenta and yellow to a more fire-engine red. And when you add cyan and magenta, you get what we call a blue, but it's more of a violet color. When you take sky blue and add red you get a royal blue, a king's robe is really very red. And cyan and yellow is green.

SP: Does this mean that RGB as a system comes from CYM?

KG: One is projected light and one is reflected light.

JS: Are inks not opaque?

KG: Printing inks are transparent, the light passes through the ink, hits the white paper behind it, and reflects off the white, comes back through and is the color you see.

You actually make these colors then darker by adding the opposite color. In an ideal physics, that is, the color doesn't shift. Really by adding up the color you just make it darker.

SP: Wait, what are the opposites? What are the color opposites?

KG: There is a real color wheel where green is here, and this is your red, and this is your blue, which is really violet. This wheel then is your spectrum of color. The opposite of yellow is blue, or violet, which is the combination of these two. You can see the combination then makes this darker. If you add the opposite, it's a

darkening ingredient, not a hue changing ingredient.

WADE GUYTON: So this is similar or different from when you are doing photography, when you are in the dark room?

KG: Photography is a mixed bag. Some of photography is RGB, and some of it isn't. If you are making prints, it is subtractive. The way you color-correct a slide would be the opposite from the way you correct a printed, a reflected material.

WG: Is the scan reflected? A slide ...? The light goes right through and then....

KG: See, a scan is a process of taking a RGB image, which is a chrome, or a painting, or a piece of fabric, or anything that has color in it, and separating out these three colors, such that when we print them on white paper, they reproduce the spectrum of color. Does that make sense?

BF: How does the scanner then relate to the Xerox machine? The scanning of the scanner is the same process as the Xerox machine only the Xerox machine does it quicker and rougher?

KG: Yeah, it's all the same.

SP: That's the same technology, the Xerox machine and the scanner?

KG: The original technology was all done with filters and film. If you had a color image—a printed photograph (not a chrome), or a painting, or drawing of some kind—you mounted it into a camera, then in the lens. If I wanted to subtract out the yellow color in that painting I would use a blue filter. Do you know how printing works?

WG: I'm not sure...

KG: In a printing press—and the Xerox machine works the same, although it is a more complex thing—you actually have a unit that prints yellow, a unit that prints magenta, and a unit that prints cyan. And then you have black, which is just to make it prettier. You would print magenta, the ink transfers through rollers and lands on the paper. And then you have cyan and it lays down a layer of cyan and recreates the whole spectrum that was in the original picture. The beauty of those three colors is you can print an entire spectrum. Before CMYK was perfected there were various techniques to use 8, 9, 10 different colors to put this whole spectrum on a piece of paper. With these three dyes we can create a big enough spectrum that you are fooled into thinking you get the whole spectrum. And that's where it gets a little bit kooky, because you get used to it. There are about 20.000 or 30.000 colors out in the universe that your eye can distinguish and categorize. I don't remember the real number but it's huge. The number of colors you can find in a slide go way down to less than half of what is out there, it gets drastically reduced.

KW: So the printed images are simply more flat than we think they are?

KG: Right, they are amazingly flat. And the only reason we think that is acceptable is that we are used to it.

BF: When you see old printed materials, they always look like they are from a certain time, from a particular decade when the whole palette was different.

SP: Is that process going to continue indefinitely? Will printing technology keep advancing so that the colors we are looking at today will look aged in 20 years?

KG: Definitely. The problem is, once again the price, because it is a commercial operation. The amount of colors you get in a slide are much greater than you see on a printed page. Right now we have six-color-separation, a technique that adds green and orange to fill the gaps where CMYK doesn't really cover the spectrum, But it is more expensive, so there are printers that do it, but it's not really becoming commercially standardized.

WG: We have an Epson printer that has seven inks, we have light cyan, light magenta, and a couple blacks. How is that different from CMYK? Is it just trying to make more colors by adding those lighter colors and the blacks?

KG: These mass-market printers are trying to make the color really appealing by giving you colors that aren't

realistic but bright and dramatic. You'll have a really fluorescent blue and a lighter blue. They use those two blues to increase the blue spectrum so when you get a piece, it's really appealing, it's really dramatic. Printing is trying to be accurate to reality. Your laser image is really bright and dramatic, a kind of printed separation from that would be dull and flat. They are using a set of dyes on their appeal value versus their accuracy value. Printers also can make colors more appealing, but the biggest part of the business is trying to reproduce the color-accuracy.

BF: You once proposed for a book we did to use neon colors because it would brighten it.

KG: Yes, that's the same thing. If you're trying to or have the opportunity to be dramatic you can add dyes. You are saying: ok, CMYK, and the dyes leave a big hole in reds, and there is a big gap in the blue because the cyan is a very sky-blue color. There are dyes in the world that are really complex. There are incredible colors out there and we can't reproduce all of those because that richness just isn't available in this spectrum.

SP: You mean that there are some paints that can't be reproduced?

KG: That can't be reproduced CMYK. Rich blues and rich reds.

KELLEY WALKER: You can also think in terms of warmer and cooler variations. So if the red is cool already, you will have a hard time making warm colors with that red. What would be needed then is another type of red to emerge. If you want to make a warm purple, for instance, you would have a hard time if the reds were cool. For instance, if you are using oil paints you have the choice of warm red and cool red. If you mix the warm red with the warm yellow you have the primal orange. However, if you have a cool yellow and a warm red, suddenly it starts turning greenish, murky. These three colors that printers use are primarily cool in the spectrum. And they mix together but they are the cool versions. So then there is a whole line, tons of colors that can't be printed accurately. A super-hot red, for instance, since we're starting with a pink; pinks are already cooler than a red-red.

KG: There are red dyes out there, brilliant red dyes, and you can't reproduce that. Yellow actually is what warms up the red, but the magenta is such a weak, pissy color that it really can't...

KW: But it has blue in it already—blue, cool color—so it would mix better with blue. You can make a nice purple. If you want to make a purple, for instance, you would have a cool red and a cool blue and you mix those two colors together to make a purple. It is amazing that it can be reduced down to three colors and still produce such amazing amount of colors. It would be amazing if those colors would be really precise to begin with.

KG: There are dyes, there are magentas out there that are closer to the precise wavelength that give you the whole spectrum. But they are much more expensive. We use what is available.

BF: When you go to Japan to print something you have different dyes to begin with and you get an entirely different palette, right?

KG: To get a really nice magenta costs a lot of money, so we tend to fake it in lots of different ways. Yellow is really cheap dye; it's just available in the universe and you can get it. Cyans are similar. You're creating a whole rainbow of colors—but dyes are imperfect and it becomes stylistic. Today, you don't notice it quite as much but 20 years ago, printing Japanese was dramatically different. Do you remember how pinky it all was? It was always pink and bright.

WG: Hmm, right.

KG: It had nothing to do with the dyes necessarily, it had to do with style, what was appealing to them. Americans like really warm colors. They are printing really fleshy, warm, sweet; that's what we like. All scanning was kind of bias to that. Europeans were in general cooler and the Japanese were often that freaky cartoon-color thing, which is still part of their culture and has nothing to do with dyes or even scanning. It has to do with how they scan and what they like.

BF: What do you mean by how they scan? What are the options of scanning there? Do you scan with a brighter filter?

KG: We are separating out the colors. That's what the separation is. So to get the yellow—it's an old-fashioned problem—you add a blue filter that the yellow goes through and it knocks out the other colors, and to get the

magenta you use a green filter and the magenta passes through.

WG: To get the kind of yellow that you see is dependent on the kind of blue filter you use?

KG: It could depend on the filter, and then there are all kinds of photographic techniques that you can use to make things bluer or less blue, blue in certain spectrums. The first thing to do is to separate the colors. Then there are kinds of manipulations in exposure and filter originally. Now you do them in Photoshop: you increase the amount of blue and now you can even increase the blue selectively in a curve, it either hits the high-lines or mid-tones. If you do a straight curve, which would divide it up evenly, or you can curve it so that the highlights get more change. You know what a curve is, right?

WG: I've used it, yeah.

KW: We all use this stuff.

KG: You're selectively adding blue to different portions of the picture and that's how you create contrast. You create color contrast and you create black and white contrast.

The different kinds of fashion are all layered here. You have fashions where certain colors are hip, like pastels or what you find in clothing—fashion colors. And I guess you have them in the art world as well. But what we are talking about is a slightly different thing. You also have a fashion in the commercial reproduction world, color that we accept as real. When we reproduce a picture of the Empire State Building and a Japanese printer does the same, they will be biased to lighter and brighter colors, cleaner colors. And we like dark and warmer colors. We are not that far away from the Europeans. We do have a color fashion, the colors that people like. And then there's a fashion of color that we perceive as representing reality the most appropriate ways.

SP: It's not perceived as a fashion.

KG: You're right, it's not perceived as a fashion, it's perceived like the right thing to be. And now what's happening is really funny, with the computer you can manipulate things much greater. People hate depth-of-field in a photograph. If you go through old pictures you can see the depth-of-field because you see where the focus is and where it's drifting. If you are going through a magazine now, there is no depth-of-field.

BF: It's just all sharp.

KG: The thing is totally focused because we can manipulate it. That's what people want. They want to see things totally in focus. Now we can do it, we sharpen it. There is this fashion now to have things totally in focus.

KW: But is it really fashion or is it just that it is evolving like that so? Bettina and I were talking about schizophrenia and it seems like this idea that everything is in focus at once plays into it. It sort of flattens everything, all space becomes flat and equal. Whereas in the beginning, where the model was in focus and everything else was out of focus, you knew what you were seeing.

KG: Actually, in the beginning everything was totally in focus because it was done with film and very large amounts of time, like pinhole-cameras. All the civil war pictures of that time were totally in focus. The depth-of-field happened with cheaper lenses and smaller film. You also see depth-of-field in your vision. If I'm looking over there at the TV, I kind of look at Bettina peripherally. She is completely out of focus. So depth-of-field is not a product of photography, it's a real thing.

KW: ...that can be affected as well.

KG: Right. It can be affected, sort of how much you will allow... I mean, look at the picture at the wall with Bettina's hair in your peripheral vision. Her hair is out of focus.

SP: But that's a totally different kind of experience than looking at a blurred image or a photograph. Something in your peripheral vision is a different kind of vision than perceptual experience.

BF: A different blur, it's not static...

SP: You can never look at it directly and have it be blurry in actual vision the way that you can in a photograph.

WG: I think it's like what you were saying earlier about photography: that the lenses actually worked closer to the way our eyes work.

KG: Your eye has a huge depth-of-field, you can see things in focus 20 yards from you. If I look that way, everything from this table up to the sign in the window is in fact in focus. If I take a 35mm camera, I either focus it on the window or the table and everything else is incredibly blurry. So the 35mm has a very small depth-of-field.

SP: When I'm looking at you right now, the spot that I'm looking at, that I'm fixating on, is in focus and theoretically I have a depth-of-field that could include whatever is behind you. But it's purely theoretical because everything around... I can sense that there are people here, there are two people in the background, but it's neither blurry nor in focus, it's just not, it's a different kind of perceptual experience than looking at something directly and I can only look at something directly, one thing at a time, basically like one small circle.

JS: It's enough, Seth...

WG: Maybe, if you were to...

KG: Well, when you are looking at something, you are using your mind. It's not just the blank image, so your mind is concentrating on what's in focus. It's hard for you to look at something and then use your mind to see what isn't in focus.

BF: Oh, I can do that...

KG: So your mind is forcing you to see what's in focus. Whereas when you get at a photograph your mind is looking at the whole thing, so you don't have a choice of focusing on something in particular. In many ways the current sharpening of everything and the elimination of the depth-of-field is getting closer to the way your mind and eye work. It's not something that's radically untrue.

SP: But that's the way the scanner works, right? Because you cannot scan a landscape.

KW: If you took this room, you took a photo, and you scanned it and brought everything totally in focus, that's not how you would see a thing. You do focus on a bottle when you're drinking. Here, I focus on the bottle and I'm ignoring everything that's not the bottle. It seems to me that photographing does the reverse: If everything in the room is totally on the same plane and in focus, and is the subject, then it's not like picking up the bottle and...

BF: Your differentiation is gone...

KW: Yeah, it's gone, so then, I sort of disappear in a way, actually. When I look at the bottle and everything around me sort of blurs out or is not in focus, that's when I become also the subject, but not quite.

KG: That's a good way to put it: Photography is forcing you to look at a whole area whereas your mind would normally look at something and focus. And that's not really scanning. Scanning used to be the focus of color printing. Scanning machines used to be giant machines with all kind of dials, so all the curves, all the manipulation of color was done in the scan. Those machines were incredibly expensive and you would scan an image three or four times to get it right. Now you do a rudimentary scan. You try to capture everything that's in the picture. You don't have to capture it correctly. You just have to capture a digital image, an image area, and then you take it on your desktop in Photoshop and you fix it.

WG: How does the scanner work? What are the mechanics of the scanner compared to the way a camera works?

KG: It's exactly the same. Instead of doing a large image that goes through a lens and onto a big piece of film, it does tiny little areas and adds them all up into one image. It's faster and more accurate and it's much sharper. Scanning came up in the mid-70s, if you go back to printing before the mid-70s everything was kind of soft, it was kind of pretty. I remember when I came into the industry in the early 70s, there was this big shift from photographic color reproduction to scanning and running these machines and there was a whole group of people that couldn't handle the shift. It took the art out of it, they couldn't think in dials and numbers and curves. Their art was in lenses and exposures and developing the film. When the computer came in, I felt it was so stupid and it robs you of all the craft and it robbed people of all the intuition that you used to make something, and all the kind of crafty-arty stuff, the stuff that couldn't be calibrated, calculated. But now you can do so much more. Now the crazy thing is not what you can't do but how do you make what you can do into a reasonable thing.

SP: You said that the scanner works exactly like the camera, but that's only insofar as you're talking about capturing an image.

KG: The basic physics of it.

SP: Because the capturing of the image is optical in both cases. It's electronic in the case of the scanner. But wouldn't you draw the line there, because photography then enters the chemical area, and scanning becomes totally digital?

KW: But you also could even get to that point to begin with, actually... Let's say in Japan at a certain point, the color preference moved a bit more towards a pink. A certain preference, cultural preference, came into play, a sort of code of what we're seeing as closest to representation. So when Epson comes along, designing us a scanner in some sort of post-lineage after the camera, and the Xerox machine, they are already shifting that language into what they perceive as most marketable. So already it shifted from the beginning. It continues through and into another state, but it shifted from the beginning. The color preference is effected by the scanner and then it is effected again because it is like recording images into a computer and not a dark room, which is another space, so it then enters Photoshop, which is again already sort of dictated by parameters to guarantee a certain code.

WG: There must be some physical or structural, mechanical difference in the way that a camera records something. It records a hole, whereas a scanner reads left to right and top to bottom, the movement is different.

KG: The scanner is more accurate. Going through a camera and a filter and onto a piece of film made everything soft. The big problem there was creating contrast and creating detail and sharpness. The really good scanner has added a level of sharpness and detail that was never before possible.

SP: But only for surface, right? The scanner can't handle anything beyond surface. You can't scan your ceiling from 10 feet away.

JS: You take a digital photograph of it.

WG: That would be soft.

JS: A raw, digital photograph is a scan, right? It has taken all the information it can.

WG: How does the digital camera work?

BF: Is it the same as a scanner in that it has many little areas it takes a picture of and it makes it into a larger image?

JS: It's like a raw photo. The camera opens up and takes all the information it can, just sucks it in and then it's up to you to sort it out and make it look like what you want.

KG: There were always two processes and now, because of the digitization of the information, you can manipulate the information more. You used to make an image, which was photography. You used the light to create an image. Then you took the image and you scanned it. So you took the light and you put it all together to create an image and then you took that image and you took the light and you separated it out again. With a digital camera you can do that all in one: All the information in such a form that, by using a button, a very simple computer program, it can separate out, it can add the colors into an image, and then it can separate them into CMYK. That used to be two steps, now it is embedded in one image.

SP: Does that mean a loss of control?

KG: No, it's more control. It's easier, you don't have to separate any more. It's all done for you. The minute you take a picture it is essentially separated.

SP: But if it is done for you, it *is* kind of a loss of control.

BF: But then you have all the material and you can do with it whatever you want.

JS: You can always control.

KG: No, really, it's much more control. People get very sentimental about the scans that were done in the camera: they are soft and they are pretty. You can think of painting genres that were like that, impressionistic. People, craftsmen took that style to its limit and they were very beautiful, but that was all you could do. With the scanner you could still make it soft, but you could also make it sharp. Now with digital you can make it soft, you make it sharp, you can put a check pattern in it, you have an infinite variety of things that you can add to the image. You're not really restricted.

SP: You lose a certain regime of errors.

KG: You lose a regime, period, because there is no regime.

BF: It's a digital regime.

KW: Twenty years from now, what you're talking about will not be a regime because new technology will have created new ways of producing...suddenly you can add an object into a program.

SP: What do you think is the future of scanning, from your perspective? Where is it going? You can look back to the seventies

KG: There are two things going on: One is the future of scanning, scanning is almost inconsequential. Now it's all manipulation of Photoshop because the scan can be done quickly with rudimentary equipment. The way you produce a picture that in our business sells is in Photoshop. And then you have to be tuned into what people want, either from Art Directors or from the public, or whatever it is. Now the world is no longer dictated by the material that you are using. You now have a new method where the spectrum of what you can do is incredible. When handwriting was the only thing you could do, people had really beautiful handwriting.

BF: *There* is a loss.

KG: And then handwriting became kind of stupid, right? A more simple way is type. You used to be limited by the machinery that could reproduce type so your design was corralled into a certain area. A lot of beautiful stuff could be done in that area and those kinds of techniques could be pushed to their limits. But now you're not really restricted. Now you have to find something beautiful in a totally open field, which is almost more difficult. Also the industry is less focused. Back when everybody used letter press, which had a rather small range from good to bad, everything looked the same: It either looked good or it looked bad. Now, we have a huge range, so we have various places in the spectrum of looking cool. How do you even decide if something looks good or not. It's a problem. Does that make any sense?

KW: Yeah, it does.

JS: I feel though that people are running around like chickens without heads. Everyone, even children now know how to do everything in the computer, to take photos, they have cameras, they send photos around. I don't think people look at stuff the same way they used to. People used to look at a photograph and it was a precious thing, it was expensive, now everything is very cursory and everyone knows exactly how everything is done. Except us, probably! Every time I learn something, it makes me think so hard about other stuff you could do. But I guess the thing is to do stuff, you know you have this huge range of stuff, but then, once you have your product you have to think what else you could do. The finished product is just a little piece of what you're doing. You have to deliver the goods, I guess. I don't know what I'm saying, necessarily. But you have to, you can only make something... everything looks the same. Everybody knows exactly how to do stuff because the computer does it all.

BF: So is it about deciding what you don't do?

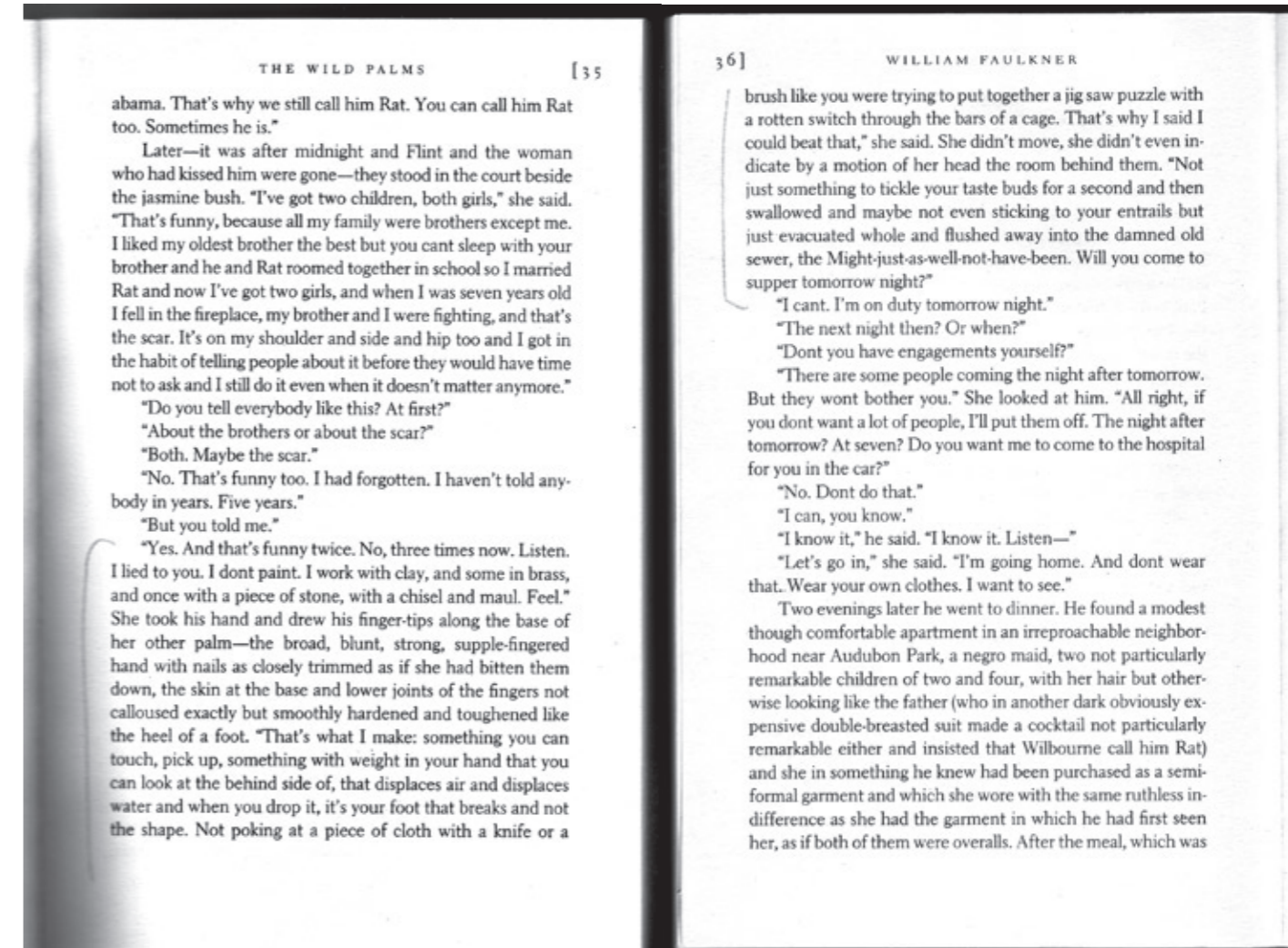
JS: That's how I would think.

KW: You have a set of tools, and there tends to be constantly something new and the nostalgia for something old. If it wasn't handwriting, then it was a certain use of old types of fonts. There is always a sense of something that we've lost. Now we look at Photoshop but in 20 years, they are just tools. And tools are very similar to make things. They don't dictate us. There are limitations, but there are always limitations.

JS: They have become like an industry standard.

KW: So are all things. You don't have all the colors represented in the world. They are already dictated for you. It's just this nostalgia. And then you look at what has been produced and you romanticize this or you romanticize some artists', like Kippenberger's production. It somehow was so much freer, but, I mean, it's just, it wasn't. He painted it and he had certain limitations of what he could paint with and he made them work well enough to be Kippenbergers. But I think, it is just that holding on to the past or romanticizing it. Let's say it's a digital print in comparison to a painting from the 1950s, say Morris Louis, well, the Morris Louis is better because it was hand-painted, for instance. This digital print can never be as good as the Louis, it seems watered down. It's just different, you know, the digital print, too, will become the past. The thing is that it needs to be different and then there is this whole fear about it becoming outdated or past, so why do anything at all? Because obviously the scanner is going to be outdated, it is just a tool of the present. And it's interesting because it's cheap, you can take it home, you can replace it easily, you can experiment with it, pick it up—in contrast, a Xerox machine is huge, it's heavy—so it is fun to play with. But it should in a way be that. Sometimes things you produce are really nice using these tools and sometimes there is a lot of shit, too. That's the way it's always been. So when the stuff will be good a hundred years from now, it is just as good as anything before and a lot won't be.

MAI-THU PERRET :



JS: What about color halftone? What's color halftone?

KG: In printing you can use CMYK, or you can print colors. You have a PMS spectrum of colors. And those are colors that are done from dyes, so your orange is really beautiful. Those are like your oil paints versus your water color.

JS: How is it like oil?

KG: If you're doing a colored halftone you can do a halftone where you are mixing an orange color plate with, let's say, a blue plate, a violet plate, so you're creating orange and violet, and the combination of the two, which is some kind of a weirdo red deep blue. A lot of the Andy Warhol stuff is color halftones.

KW: It is a little like a rainbow. You remember rainbow-rolls, Josh? They were like that. You lay out your two colors of paints and then roll it and it slightly blends in the middle and it goes from a pure to a blend and back to another pure.

KG: You can use individual colors to produce images in different, bizarre ways. Or you can use CMYK. The whole reason for CMYK is to try with some kind of degree of accuracy to reproduce what you actually see. That's how we use it, and then that's layered with what is physically practical and what is sort of a current style or fashion by the designers who are using it and then what's currently considered accurate.

SP: You know, what's interesting is that a lot of what you have been talking about has to do with accuracy because it makes sense, as you said, to print something you are reproducing, an image, and there has to be an agreement about what it looks like here and what it looks like here. And that's a question which doesn't usually occur to me, the idea of accuracy and representation. And maybe not anybody else at this table, I don't know...

KG: It's a commercial thing because we're hired to be accurate.

SP: But once you take that out of the equation that changes things a little bit because it's a pretty important part of the equation, in terms of how the color theory is expressed in production, and how the machines work, and which way the technology works. When you said how magenta and yellow mix and why, they are not actually pure representations. And that's something that people are probably working on, trying to solve?

KG: That's correct and the problem is that there is no dye that anybody knows of that is really perfect magenta. So you can use cooler magentas or warmer magentas, or you can do various fanciful techniques to create other reds. I can't remember, what was the guts of your question?

SP: Well, just that if we were to try to have a discussion without talking about accuracy, what that discussion would become. You mentioned something earlier about that theory of scanning.

KG: Once you remove accuracy, you kind of remove... then you're in the art world and not in a commercial world. See, I'm in the commercial one. I'm doing a job for someone who says: this is what I want.

KW: Accuracy is also contingent, so that seems to always be remembered. There is no real accuracy.

KG: That's the fun part. Accuracy is only what is in style, we have already been through it. You have styles that are acceptable and then you have styles that are dictated by the technology that become acceptable or that become obsolete when the technology becomes better, like the depth-of-field thing. You guys have a more difficult... See, I have a much easier life, because I have to do what somebody wants me to do within the limits of what technology will do and within the standards that are reigning as for what's real.

KW: It's interesting that how much you can pay also affects accuracy.

KG: There are six-color-separations, but they are not really taking over because they are more expensive. People are willing to compromise the accuracy instead of paying more.

SP: But the funny thing is that sometimes, maybe, the client and the printer can agree that we are going to compromise and make this less accurate. But then the question is whether anybody who looks at that book is going to necessarily think of accuracy. They might think, well, I'm not sure that people think much about the way things are printed on that kind of conscious level.

JS: I do.

SP: Yeah, but you're an artist.

JS: If I buy a 70\$ book and you look through it and you can tell that... you know, you can tell where things aren't right.

KG: You either know what the colors ought to be or you can see it's crappy, the colors are soft or weak, too little contrast. You have two things: One is to have accuracy to the product and two is you have all the stylistic things that make you feel like it's good, like weight and contrast.

SP: That's talking about a book of fine art reproductions, and if you're talking about a culture where people mostly read magazines...

KG: Yeah, but it's the same thing as with magazines, it's just on a slightly different level. I mean, car companies want their pictures to look stunning, because they want you to fall in love with their product.

SP: But doesn't that drop the accuracy discussion? Then it is simply about looking stunning. It's a whole different question, obviously it's just as stylized but...

BF: But then you might have an Art Director who has an idea that you should meet ...

KG: There are complicated things. We are not allowed to do an Epson print. If you take a red Chevy and you do an Epson print, it looks like the thing is on fire. Well, a car doesn't look like that. The car may be an incredibly luminous red but it's not this kind of neon-type color that is popular in basic laser printers. We have to find some kind of middle ground between being accurate to the car itself and still being really exciting.

What the digital world has done is sort of—it's universal for all forms—that the information that you manipulate is no longer related to the solid object. Does that make any sense?

You get all these digital images you could do anything to. You are not restricted by, before you were restricted by filters, filters determined the colors you could get. You used film and you created contrast with film techniques to create contrast. Then the initial scanners were much more dramatic, they could create much better color, they could create much more focused images, much more contrast. But the scanning was then limited by what film could handle. You could only do so much with the film itself. Now, like you were saying, in Photoshop you can do curves that don't exist in the real world.

JS: The filters have a whole different meaning than Photoshop. In Photoshop you have a filter, you can take your image and make it chrome. Now it's like chrome or charcoal.

KG: We have something now that is both more real but it's also more fantastic.

KW: Which in a way is interesting because you think of the idea of fantasizing and how to sort of play the same lines. There was always a result outside of the logic. That's actually the very thing, it's the very commercial apparatus that shapes things. So it's really interesting to switch. The seduction of the computer is this space that at one point would have been seen as insane, hysterical or... now it shapes everything. The way we perceive so much around us.

KG: I think you're right. The possibilities of the computer are now shaping everything.

BF: If you speak about accuracy you are fooling yourself, because accuracy relates to something real, but really it's an accuracy that relates to something fantastic or imaginary, much more than a representation of something that relates to what our eyes see directly.

SP: I think that's been true for a long time, before the computer. It has to do with modernity and what happens in the nineteenth century with film, photography, the gramophone. It all comes in and all of a sudden you have things like the wide circulation cartoons...

BF: But then it was about consumption. Now you have the tools with which everyone can make these things. You used to have the devices that everyone could consume but now the tools have advanced and have become producing tools.

KG: But that is not an accuracy problem, that's the availability of things.

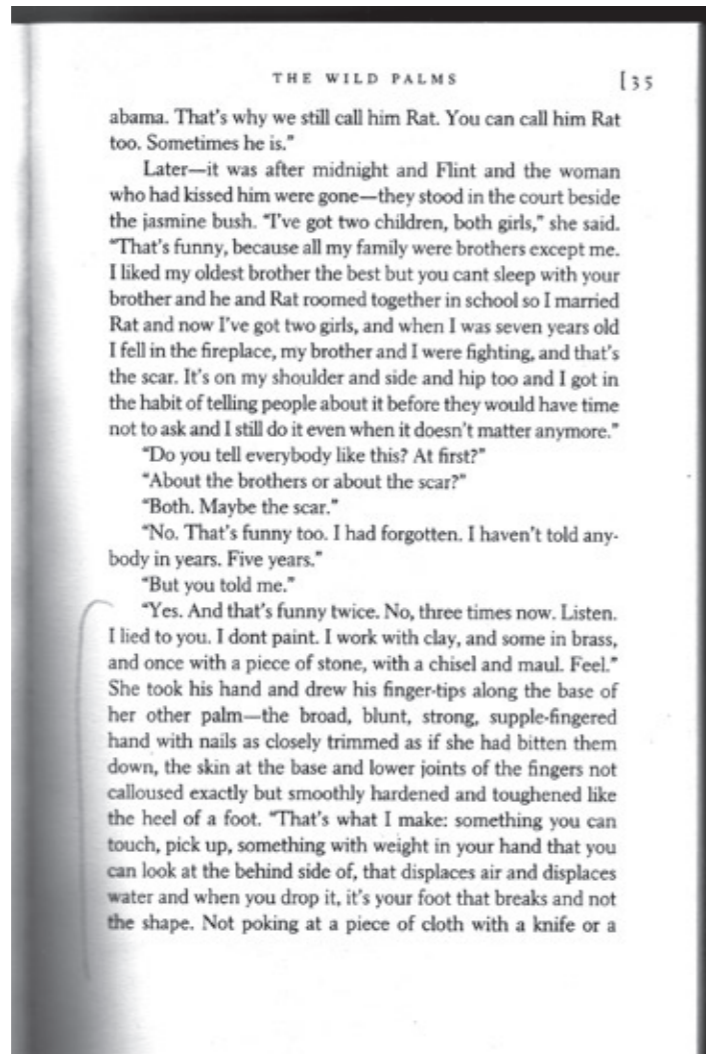
KW: It was also distinguished, Seth. Let's say if this sort of stuff was happening in film and advertisement, what you got was portrayal of the real that didn't happen.

SP: When are you talking about?

KW: The 1930s and 1940s. You had a representation, let's say of America, as real, ideal-real. Now, America would be like the glowing flag of impossible colors and warped space with an eagle emerging somehow, that's totally impossible. Then that would be the hyper-sort of real. But those would have been like a Hitchcock film as opposed

to... Does that make sense? There was a space that, a cultural space where, the space, let's say, that Photoshop allows for now. And although, some of the, what would be equivalent, let's say, what some of the techniques of Photoshop can do today, what would have been equivalent in printing-making or printing at the time wasn't seen as such. It was just seen as part of the process to have the advertisements made. It wasn't seen as an actual real. You can fantasize your Chevy being fire-red, how you would want it printed from the Epson. And actually you want that, because what you want is the difference. But you just wouldn't have that. The you would have the car represented closer to what the car really looked like at the time, and that would have been enough.

M-T P:



magazine. Or they have the equipment to load their own image online and to interact within this field as, let's say, a model. I think that's different. And I think that's why in advertisement you have a tendency either to go for a hyper-fantastic real, like you would find in Diesel ads, which are sort of mimicking the art world that is so hyper, to sort of make yourself stand out. Or you have the instance where the people in the ad have the things look like the things you do actually have, or a way that you could look, or... Does that make sense? That's similar to, let's say, 1950s house-wives and the house-wife mimic, but the house-wife mimic because that was what was given to her. Now, the two are reverse. The advertisements actually take from street-life as where the street culture has been represented in the advertisements. So they become sort of synonymous, in some ways.

WG: But that's not true. Advertising from the 1950s, all those colors were so un-naturalistic.

KW: They were un-naturalistic, but it wasn't seen the same way.

WG: You think those colors were seen as naturalistic?

KW: I think they were seen as sort of...

SP: I think that is true that they were probably seen as real or representational in the same way they are seen today. But it's always fantasy.

KG: I think the fantasy is that they are true.

KW: I think it's totally different. I think you have various things that break that down. For instance, the fact that most people, or a lot of people in America have home computers and they do play with Photoshop and they can literally have the tools to reshape their body, the way they would have themselves seen as if they were in a

## THE NO TEXTS

- A catastrophic systemic failure.
- The Decline is Post-Modern, the mannerist expanding mirror of modernism's build-up.
- Works that are an attack on painting. The attack manifests as a visual and mental strobe (chaos, disturbance).
- "With so-called advanced painting, for example, you should drop composition. That would be terrifically avant-garde. That could be a really good idea."  
(Frank Stella. 'Questions to Stella and Judd,' interview with Bruce Glaser, edited by Lucy R. Lippard, *Art News*, September 1966)
- The reluctant elegance of the gesture (denied).
- Life is a theater of cruelty.
- Works against the absolute (thus Satanic).
- Works that partake in Black Ops.
- Works that are the fly in the soup.
- The entropic manifests as spectacular object.
- Art on the other side of the blank Warholian stare-at modernism, caught in the mirror's reflection: Alice through the looking-glass.
- Think of surrealism as the interior, and DADA as the exterior of the same body.
- The paintings have a stealth capability that gives access to "multibility." This may be a trait of the viability of post-modernism.

- Caught between action and nullification.
- Nihilism is love.
- I went to see Raymond Pettibon's work, and I was thinking about Ad Reinhardt.
- "The picture appropriates the image, and the painting disappropriates the structure."  
(Collins & Milazzo. 'Steven Parrino: Designerly Violence,' 1984)
- Appropriate: 1. To set apart for a particular use.  
2. To take; seize.
- Appropriate and Nullify.
- Collapsing image ... collapsing picture ... collapsing monochrome ...  
collapsing abstractions ... collapsing history ... collapsing meaning ...  
collapsing structures ... collapsing ideas ...
- Nullification of the structure is the New Order.
- Weirdocumentary
- "I'm Against It."  
(The Ramones, *Road to Ruin*, 1978)
- These works are situationist, rather than simulationist.
- These works are not about me. The making denies my presence. I exist  
as a shadow figure in this pursuit. These works are engaged in chance  
and the automatic ... with free association.
- Public Image Limited.

- Extremists are shadow figures, or maybe they are forced to be, in  
order to maintain a severe, uncompromising, free position.
- God is your license to kill.
- There is no such thing as EVIL. There is fear, obsession, delusion,  
confusion. There is a prime motivating drive: SURVIVAL. Your view  
of survival may not be their view of survival.
- "The most contemporary aspect of the kaleidoscopic image draws  
from a direct comparison between delinquency on the one hand and  
failure or inadequacy on the other. Delinquents are regarded either as  
failures as people or as failures as members of society, or both. There  
is no satisfactory definition of personal failure, and any attempt to  
arrive at a definition involves a high degree of conceit.  
"A female delinquent is very much part and parcel of society - at times  
she reflects its sick values, at other times here action is a positive  
rebellion against the values of society. The question of who is, or what  
constitutes, a female delinquent is (outside the strictly legal sphere) a  
ridiculous one and should not have been the subject of so much  
thought and effort."  
(Sally Anne. 'Four Studies of Women and Crime: 1. To Be or Not to  
Be a Female Delinquent,' *ANARCHY 113*, July 1970)
- Works that stand in the face of oblivion.
- Strike a blow for the self-determined.
- Works that are obstinate in their discord.
- Works that are compelled to search and destroy.
- Works that implode mythologies within the Goetic Circle of Pacts.
- Time compression.  
Time collapses.  
Space is in question.



- Playing the lead in the Misfit theater.
- The Red and The Black.  
The inversion of signs.  
The Infernal Texts.
- The dissenting voice is Satanic.
- Stand and deliver.
- Live Free or Die.
- All creation hinges on destruction.
- An artist should not feel content sitting in utopian armchairs, lounging in the mindlessness of geometric gymnastics, mesmerized by technology, reaping the benefits of band-wagoning. Self-righteous and ineffective, the new court artists serving the master capital: Your only worry is your only comfort. You are a performing monkey in designer clothes, fiddling while Rome burns. When did thinking become as disposable as fashion?
- You can live life in protest. Alone you affect change.
- The artist does not have to waste time sitting content in the backwash of modernism with no questions asked, regressive.
- Your focus should not be on maternal fetish and how to generate a supply of mindlessness for a society that largely does not care. Your job is to be the exposed nerve, the mirror.
- There may be no comfort in the truth.
- REFLECTION DIVERSION DISTRACTION EVASION CONFUSION

- In the deck of Tarot, Death represents change, for better or worse, not an end.
- When those two buildings came down it was a spectacle of strange, dark beauty; the same with the fatal descent of Columbia. Nature is merciless and captivating. Humanity is of nature, although we are always shocked by this fact. We try to use technology with the fantasy that it sets us above nature. Humanity is not above existence. We have technology to defy nature. We are of nature. What we produce is of nature. Technology is of nature. We must recognize the fact of nature within in order to survive. Nature does not care if humanity survives.
- Belief in ANY GOD or leader is giving in to Fascism. Do you want to live free, or do you want to be your master's submissive?
- Hitler was a utopian idealist, a purist: the ultimate modernist.
- These paintings can be considered as Satanic in that they are the sublime destruction of systemic absolutes.
- When I started making paintings, the word on painting was PAINTING IS DEAD. I saw this as an interesting place for painting ... death can be refreshing, so I started engaging in necrophilia ... approaching history in the same way that Dr. Frankenstein approaches body parts ... Nature Morte ... my contemporaries were NO WAVERS ... BLACK FLAG-ERS ... and this death painting thing led to a sex and death painting thing ... that became an existence thing ... that became a "Cease to Exist" thing ... a kind of post-punk existentialism. I am still concerned with "art about art," but I am also aware that "art about art" still reflects the time in which it was made.
- Content is not denied ...  
Content is not obvious ...  
Content is sustained in the air or vibe of the work.

CREDITS

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