

Painting 2.0

Expression
in the
Information
Age

Gesture and Spectacle
Eccentric Figuration
Social Networks

Edited by Manuela Ammer, Achim Hochdörfer, and David Joselit

Museum Brandhorst, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen
mumok – Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien
DeiMonico Books • Prestel Munich, London, New York

This book is published on the occasion of
the exhibition

“Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age”
Curated by Achim Hochdörfer and David Joselit with
Manuela Ammer
Assistant Curator: Tonio Kröner

Museum Brandhorst
Türkenstrasse 19
80333 Munich
www.museum-brandhorst.de
November 14, 2015–April 30, 2016

mumok – Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung
Ludwig Wien
Museumsplatz 1
1070 Wien
www.mumok.at
June 4–November 6, 2016



Marcel Duchamp, *Le Passage de la vierge à la mariée* (*The Passage from Virgin to Bride*), 1912. Oil on canvas, 23 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 21 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches (59.4 x 54 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase

Reassembling Painting

David Joselit

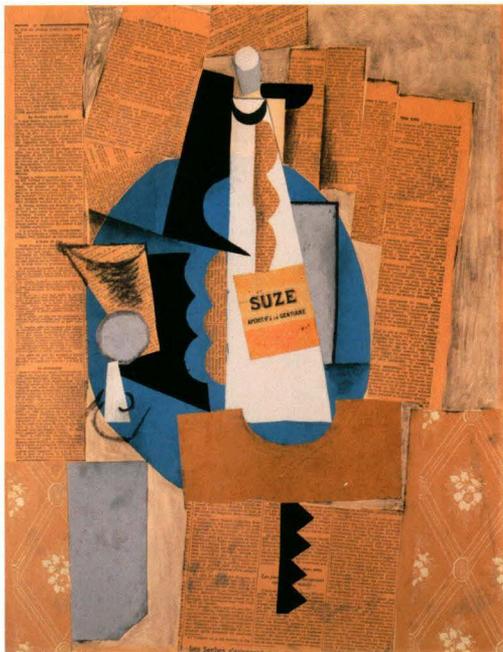
Passage and Picture

A mark in paint registers the passage of force through matter. Such trajectories evade mimetic representation: as Cy Twombly described it, “Each line . . . is the event of its own materialization.”¹ What kind of event is the line’s *own* materialization? Marcel Duchamp’s 1912 work *LE PASSAGE de la vierge à la mariée* (*THE PASSAGE from Virgin to Bride*) is an allegory of such an event. *LE PASSAGE* claims to enact the transformation of a virgin into a bride: a transaction by which an untouched subject (a virgin) becomes an object of exchange between men (a bride).² But Duchamp’s painting does not mimetically represent either virgin or bride, nor does its pocked, visceral surface achieve any transformation from one kind of object to another. While spidery stem forms may dilate into broader bulbs or facets of color, their composition fails to resolve into a stable object. They make up a continuous, organic infrastructure out of which any number of effects might emerge. In other words, the painting consists of pure relationality without beginning or end—i.e., *LE PASSAGE*.

The history of modern painting may be recounted as the staging of such passage. Painting from Impressionism onward represents a spirited investigation into how marks, or gestures, occupy the space between subjects and objects, or between persons and things. The historical and philosophical task of modern painting is to remap and reorder these relationships. Richard Shiff makes this point explicitly with regard to Impressionist painting. He writes, “The impression . . . is the embryo of both bodies of one’s knowledge, subjective knowledge of the self and objective knowledge of the world; it exists prior to the realization of the subject/object distinction.”³ An impression is a deposit of paint that simultaneously registers an objective optical sensation and a subjective temperament. Modern painters have explored multiple possibilities for creating what might be called *subject-object* marks, establishing points along a gradient running from ostensibly pure subjective expression to the

elaboration of objective formal systems. In this regard, one could compare Vassily Kandinsky as a painter of passionate impulse with Piet Mondrian as the inventor of an internally consistent nonobjective lexicon. Even though Kandinsky’s art is assumed to represent the height of subjectivity, he devoted himself to specifying the meanings of color and its extension in space in order to create a legible semantics; and though Mondrian used painstaking compositional procedures, the disposition of elements in his paintings always remained intuitive. Each artist, in his own way, worked with subjectobject marks. The difference lies in their relative emphasis on organic differentiation (as in Kandinsky) or standardization (as in Mondrian). No matter where an artist lies on this gradient, it is clear that any modern painter associated with abstraction made an effort to reconcile subject and object through the passage of paint.

Because the painterly mark—the subjectobject—robustly participates in modern art’s fundamental redistribution of subjectivity and objectivity, it deserves to be placed alongside the readymade, collage, and the monochrome as one of the fundamental inventions of the European historical avant-gardes. Readymades, such as Duchamp’s inscribed snow shovel, *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (1915), set a commodified object against the artist’s subjective intention to choose, or nominate, something as art.⁴ Here, aesthetic labor is aligned with making distinctions rather than making paintings or sculptures. In a collage, on the other hand, pictures—commodified signs, either photographic or typographic—replace hand-made compositional elements, sometimes displacing them altogether as in photomontage. For his pathbreaking *papiers collés* of 1912, Picasso’s aesthetic labor consisted in large part of collecting and arranging content rather than inventing it wholesale.⁵ Finally, with the monochrome, a single color covers an entire canvas, as though it were a kind of consumer product, thereby foreclosing painting’s presumed function to represent either mimetically or nonobjectively, in an operation converse to that of the readymade. In the case of Alexander Rodchenko’s famous



Pablo Picasso, *La bouteille de Suze* (*Bottle of Suze*), 1912. Pasted papers, gouache, and charcoal, 25¾ x 19¼ inches (65.4 x 50.16 cm). Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, Washington University in St. Louis, University purchase, Kende Sale Fund, 1946

triptych *Pure Red Color, Pure Yellow Color, Pure Blue Color* (1921), each canvas carries nothing but one of the three primary colors. Here artistic labor is conceptual: it defines painting as a set of conventions, or a discursive field, that the artist must visualize.

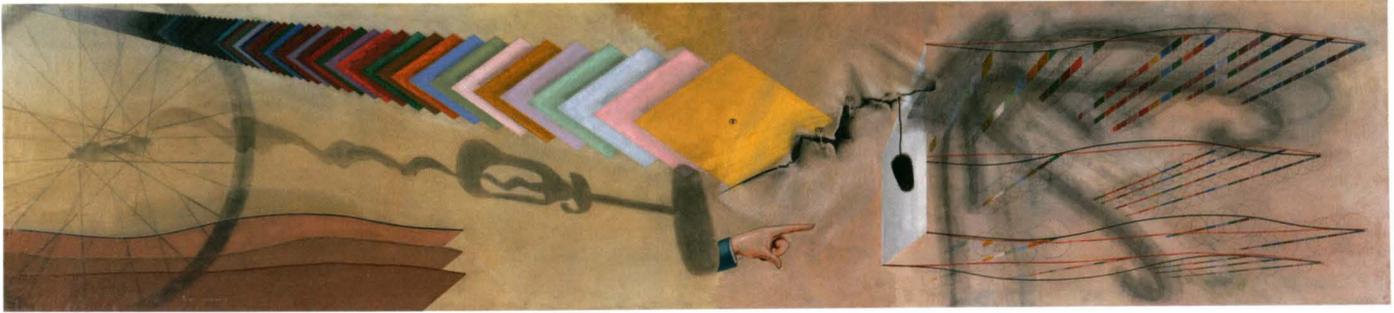
These three forms reorganize the artist's labor: the readymade prioritizes his or her capacity to choose, collage privileges the act of arranging such appropriated materials, and the monochrome reconceives painting as a degree zero consisting only of its necessary elements. Since each of these aesthetic actions displaces or occludes manual labor, it is not surprising that painterly gesture—which is ostensibly the most manual of art's devices—is seldom counted among them. On the contrary, the mark in modern painting—as a passage of force through matter—is typically situated within the domain of expressive subjectivity, where objects dissolve into a texture of pure human affect. And yet painterly marks, as subjectobjects, also reconceive artistic labor as a form of action rather than representation. In place of meaning, there is motion—the dynamic transition between persons and things.

Motion requires both direction and space to unfold, and so my account must now scale up from the single mark to the field of a painting (and, eventually, beyond). If the mark, as I have defined it, is a passage of force through matter, how does a field of marks behave? In his analysis of Henri Matisse's balance of color and surface area, art historian Yve-Alain Bois refers to the painterly field as a "relation of dynamic forces"⁶ in which

quantities of color may affect their qualities. Elsewhere in his work, Bois identifies another type of economy, which, instead of balancing color and surface area within an internally consistent aesthetic language, articulates contradictory semiotic systems. In describing what he calls Picasso's second semiological phase, Bois writes: "It is not by chance that also during this stay at Céret [in summer 1911] letters, numbers, and musical notations make their appearance in the Cubist image, as if the intrusion of these 'secondary' signs, those ideograms themselves referring to other systems of signs—speech and music—were made to check the level of abstraction of the sickle."⁷ What Bois sees occurring here at the threshold of one of modern painting's great achievements is an insufficiently recognized, even sometimes repressed, dynamic that has bedeviled painting for more than one hundred years: the opposition of passage, by way of the subjectobject, and secondary ideographic signs, or pictures.

This interaction between passage and picture has been treated in art history as an agonistic relation between semiotic registers: in his analysis, Bois asserts that the ideographic sign functions to check the abstraction of the sickle (a subjectobject gesture that in Picasso's Cubist lexicon held the capacity to create a consistent nonobjective system).⁸ Whether one valorizes the autonomy of painting (like a modernist) or its reliance on commodified mass culture, i.e., pictures (like a postmodernist), *passage and picture are not supposed to mingle*. There is an art-historical consensus that one will inevitably corrupt the other. But what Bois and virtually every other major theorist of modern painting sees as a conflict among semiotic registers is in fact a necessary complementarity. Modern painting is haunted by the alterity of the picture, and this alterity is fundamental to its becoming abstract.⁹

Immediately following the emergence of the subject-object, another kind of painterly action was invented—one properly called transitive in that it acts *on* objects, including the reified signs I call pictures. This transitivity came in two forms, one developed by Duchamp and the other by Picasso. The first is characterized by Duchamp's simulated exit from painting—what art historian Thierry de Duve describes as the artist's invention of the readymade as an act "of registering his abandonment of painting, of getting it on the record."¹⁰ That is, once painting is understood as little more than an object, it is unnecessary to continue making works on canvas. But, as de Duve has it, such a cessation must be explicitly marked—put *on the record*—as both an aesthetic and a philosophical gesture rather than appearing as a decision attributable to merely personal causes such as frustration, boredom, or lack of critical success. In other words, the readymade is painting beside itself: "all readymades are offsprings of painting, once painting has been abandoned for its objective uselessness and its subjective impossibility."¹¹ As brilliant as de Duve's account is, it downplays



Marcel Duchamp, *Tu m'*, 1918. Oil on canvas, with bottle brush, safety pins, and bolt, 27½ x 119⅝ inches (69.8 x 303 cm). Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven. Gift of the Estate of Katherine S. Dreier.

Duchamp's remarkable pictorialization of the readymade in his valedictory painting, *Tu m'* (1918), whose integration of appropriated objects into the field of the canvas was later profitably taken up by Robert Rauschenberg and, even more systematically, by Jasper Johns, not to mention a host of figures in Europe ranging from Yves Klein to Arman. In other words, if the initial deployment of the readymade suggested that the generic object of art had superseded the specific medium of painting, Duchamp completed a circuit by returning the readymade to painting: in *Tu m'* an actual bottle brush, a ready-made brushstroke, points out directly at the viewer,

allegorically poking her in the eye. Instead of abandoning painting, Duchamp set it beside itself; he pictorialized the readymade not only in *Tu m'* but also in his installation designs for various Surrealist exhibitions and, ultimately, in the diorama of *Etant donnés* (1946–66).

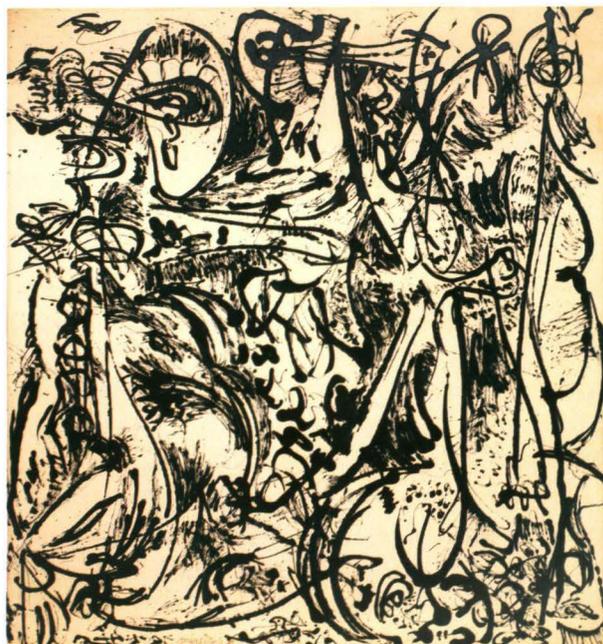
If Duchamp's type of transitivity, pivoting on the invention and pictorialization of the readymade, is spatial in nature, Picasso's is temporal. I am referring to his proliferation of styles, within individual works of both Analytic and Synthetic Cubism, as well as in the *papiers collés*. His collapse of multiple stylistic devices in a single work is matched by a second, serial mode of stylistic transitivity: a seemingly wild oscillation from Cubism to Divisionism to Ingres-esque drawing.

Not coincidentally, but nonetheless strikingly, both forms of transitivity—the spatial type centering on the readymade and the temporal one hinging on style—occur in exactly the same years: 1913 to 1918. Modern painting could not sustain itself without confronting the alterity of the picture. To survive, it had to move beside itself in space (through objects) and time (through styles).

Because Jackson Pollock's all-over compositions are the closest painting has ever come to establishing a standardized semiotic system consisting entirely of nonobjective gestural marks, his work offers a useful test of my assertion of the necessary coexistence of passage and picture. Clement Greenberg eloquently described the "energetic economy" of Pollock's "drip" paintings in the following terms: "the 'decentralized,' 'polyphonic,' all-over picture . . . with a surface knit together of a multiplicity of identical or similar elements repeats itself without strong variation from one end of the canvas to the other and dispenses, apparently, with beginning, middle, and ending."¹² Such lack of differentiation establishes pure passage, which, like acid, dissolves pictures.

The particular genius of Pollock's drip paintings is that their subject-object oscillation operates identically on the micro scale of an individual mark and the macro scale

Jackson Pollock, *Echo: Number 25*, 1951. Enamel paint on canvas, 91¼ x 86 inches (233.4 x 218.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest and the Mr. and Mrs. David Rockefeller Fund





Jackson Pollock, *Portrait and a Dream*, 1953. Oil and enamel on canvas, 58½ x 134¾ inches (148.6 x 342.3 cm). Dallas Museum of Art, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Algur H. Meadows and the Meadows Foundation, Incorporated

of the painting as a whole. Each of his gestures epitomizes the subjectobject: they famously purport to harness unconscious impulse as the animating force of paint itself, thus fusing subject and object. On the macro scale, a field of such marks exists in a perpetual state of coming into form and collapsing out of it: here the subjectobject aporia is rooted in the viewer's incapacity to make the work cohere as a picture. Indeed, at both scales, Pollock's elaboration of passage seems to exemplify Twombly's description of line as "the event of its own materialization." In short, Pollock's drip paintings, in their dynamic economy of passage, seem to be the antitheses of pictures, which are characterized by frozenness, or reification. Yet Greenberg famously fretted that Pollock's allover drip paintings come "closest of all to decoration—to wallpaper patterns capable of being extended indefinitely—and in so far as it still remains easel painting it infects the whole notion of this form with ambiguity."¹³ Wallpaper is an extreme example of a commodified, mass-produced picture. As Greenberg's anxiety makes clear, Pollock's allover paintings were *always* haunted by a return of the repressed: the eruption of one semiotic system—that of the picture—within another, the supposedly liberated "relation of dynamic forces" among Pollock's dripped and flung skeins of line.

And indeed, such a return to figuration—to a kind of vestigial picture—occurred in Pollock's black-and-white paintings of 1951, which were exhibited at Betty Parsons Gallery that year. In his 1952 review of this exhibition, Greenberg was again feeling defensive: "The references to

the human form in Pollock's latest paintings," he reassures his readers, "are symptoms of a new phase but not a reversal of direction." More remarkably, the threat of wallpaper was still on his mind: "The more explicit structure of the new work reveals much that was implicit in the preceding phase and should convince anyone that this artist is much, much more than a grandiose decorator."¹⁴ It seems that Greenberg sought to reconcile the proximity of pure painterly passage to what was clearly the threat of a resurgence of pictures. In a text for *Partisan Review* of the same year, he wrote of these works by Pollock: "Some recognizable images appear—figures, heads, and animal forms—and the composition is modulated in a more traditional way, no longer stating itself in one forthright piece. But everything Pollock acquired in the course of his 'all-over' period remains there to give the picture a kind of density orthodox easel painting has not known before. This is not an affair of packing and crowding, but of embodiment."¹⁵

This "density" or "embodiment" is what, according to Lee Krasner, Pollock understood as a form of veiling. In a 1969 interview, reflecting back on the black-and-white paintings, she stated: "The 1951 show seemed like monumental drawing, or maybe painting with the immediacy of drawing—some new category. . . . I saw his paintings evolve. Many of them, many of the most abstract began with more or less recognizable imagery—heads, parts of the body, fantastic creatures. Once I asked Jackson why he didn't stop the painting when a given image was exposed. He said, 'I choose to veil the imagery.' Well,

that was his painting. With the black-and-whites he chose mostly to expose the imagery.”¹⁶

It is notable that Greenberg and Pollock—as quoted by Krasner—use terms suggesting a second skin: *embodiment* and *veiling*. Both imply that something like a picture inhabits nonobjective form, and that by way of intimate contact pure passage nearly engulfs that underlying figuration. Collapsing the difference between such subjectobject marks and an armature of explicit imagery was critical for Greenberg if he were to sustain his theory of modernist painting. Yet, in one of Pollock’s last major works, *Portrait and a Dream* (1953), the veil (or skin) is sloughed off, resulting in two contradictory images set side by side—a dream composed of gestural marks and a portrait (or a mask). Pollock, who had fused the ideographic picture with an oneiric language of the unconscious just a few years earlier, cleaved them apart again in *Portrait and a Dream*; it is a poignant—even tragic—statement. While some might explain away such pathos through recourse to Pollock’s emotional decline near the end of his life, I assert instead that he had recognized the impossibility of sustaining an allover energetic economy in painting beyond a certain point—that, if not leading to wallpaper as Greenberg feared, it would nevertheless bring him back to the picture. Instead of hiding from this realization, he faced it head-on.

Between 1948 and 1953, Pollock negotiated the relations between subjectobject gesture and pictures in two ways; first, by veiling, or embodiment, wherein the picture “wears” gestural form (the subjectobject marks) like a textile that veils an underlying picture, and, second, by dichotomous juxtaposition, whereby the intimate adjacency of the veil is rendered as a contradiction so that body and dream are no longer fused but are set beside each other. Though Pollock was not exceptional in working under these conditions, he pressed the art of pure passage further than anyone else, before openly declaring a confrontation between passage and pictures.

Network Painting

What constitutes the relation between passage as a deobjectifying force and pictures as forms of reification? Passage, as manifest in the subjectobject painterly mark, captures a pure expanse of relationality resulting from an artist’s exertion of force onto paint in the absence of any representational intent or effect. The subjectobject quality of passage therefore might describe any continuous action that refuses to achieve its object, whether painted on canvas or not. Transitivity, on the other hand, denotes an action that carries onto an object—especially pictures (which must consequently have crystallized out of painterly passage, or otherwise entered the field of the work, as, for instance, Duchamp’s bottle brush enters into *Tu m*). By these definitions, a painting composed of pure

passage, such as Pollock’s allover drip paintings, cannot be considered transitive because there are no objects to act on—they capture only a perpetual state of subject-object flux.

If the project of modern art is to remap the relations between subjects and objects through reconceived models of aesthetic labor present in the readymade, collage, and the monochrome, something analogous happens in the phase of modern painting from 1960 to 2015 wherein passage and transitivity combine to form networks: the paradigmatic form of the information age. A “network painting” establishes a field in which the force encoded in subjectobject marks *passes over* onto objects, which, as in my examples of Duchamp’s and Picasso’s centrifugal modes of transitivity, appear either as readymades (including the subset of commodified pictures) or as a multiplication of styles. In network painting, aesthetic labor consists of carrying objects from one historical, topographic, or epistemological position to another (and back again). Instead of forming a neo-avant-garde, as art of this period is often condescendingly labeled, network painting continues modern art’s task of redefining the relation between subjects and objects through new modalities of aesthetic work. Here such labor consists of the circulation of images through successive thresholds of attention and distraction—arguably the most important new source of value in the postwar period, whose economic engines range from television to the Internet.¹⁷

Unlike the early-twentieth-century works in which Duchamp and Picasso established largely unilateral vectors—the former causing an object to move out of the painting and the latter initiating a successive chain of stylistic postures—network paintings are multilateral: a diagrammatic profusion of relations among pictures is established.¹⁸ Perhaps the best example of the transition from unilateral transitivity to multilateral networks lies in Robert Rauschenberg’s *Rebus* of 1955, a painting that seems to animate the dichotomous stand-off of Pollock’s “diptych,” *Portrait and a Dream*, as a fluent and polysemous “sentence of pictures”—literally a rebus—whose diacritical marks, as it were, are subjectobject painterly gestures. What was particularly new about network painting has more to do with scale than with structure: it demonstrates a proliferation of pathways on many registers—i.e., the diagrammatic condition.

The kind of painting I am describing renders the plasticity of networks visual and palpable. Unlike those uninformative images of networks that map the Internet by visualizing global connection as a kind of vapor—a cloud of interchangeable constituents with varying intensities—this kind of painting imagines heterogeneous articulations, embodying a wide variety of receivers, channels, and modes of connection. Such works correspond more accurately to the networks we actually inhabit, even if none proclaims itself to be a map—much less an illustration—of



Robert Rauschenberg, *Rebus*, 1955. Oil, synthetic polymer paint, pencil, crayon, pastel, cut-and-pasted printed and painted papers, and fabric on canvas mounted and stapled to fabric, three panels: 96 inches x 10 feet 11 1/4 inches (243.8 x 333.1 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Partial and promised gift of Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder and bequest of Virginia C. Field, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Peter A. Rübél, and gift of Jay R. Braus (all by exchange)

such territories. Rather, contemporary painting explores the affect of networks: notably, the experience of feeling alternatively like a subject and an object—a person and a picture—since one of the fundamental characteristics of actually existing networks is subjective and objective elements (humans and things) in motion.¹⁹

Throughout its history, the circulation of modern art has taken place at the intersection of the lifeworld of art production and the art market. While these dual networks may appear to stand in stark opposition to each other, there have always been multiple connections between them, especially following the exponential expansion of art sales after 1960.²⁰

Andy Warhol's studio of the early and mid-1960s, which he ironically dubbed his Factory, staged a mimetic circuit between the lifeworld of the artist and capitalist

production. The Factory was an assembly line of sorts, where a reproductive process (silkscreen and later cinema) took place on a relatively large scale. This workplace was perpetually populated by an effervescent crowd of glamorous participant-observers drawn from downtown gay communities, uptown society, and the worlds of fashion, music, and art. In a sense, these onlookers were the Factory's raw material, since, more than any artist before him, Warhol took as his subject both the "human picture" (i.e., the celebrity, whose fame derives from either stardom or mediagenic disaster) and the "object picture" (commodity packaging ranging from the "universal" commodity of cash to products, such as Brillo scouring pads and Coca-Cola, associated with the explosion of American consumption after World War II). Participants in the Factory's social world seemed to mimic

the celebrity machinery represented in Warhol's paintings, and they appeared regularly in his Screen Tests (see p. 184) and other cinematic work. Regardless of such indirect and direct connections, the strategy of seriality in his silkscreens, characterized by grids of pictorially identical images rendered unevenly on account of varying pressures and quantities of ink, themselves constituted a kind of crowd—a multitude of images that coexisted with Warhol's fantastically eclectic social scene. Commercial pictures, whether derived from celebrities or cleaning products, cannot claim to be unique—indeed, their very existence is predicated on the multiplication and reproduction of pictures. What is disruptive in Warhol's reification through multiplication is the countercurrent of passage he introduces through the unevenness of inking in the silkscreens. This visual noise establishes a particular kind of transitivity—or action on pictures—by suggesting a form of singularity that attaches onto even the most homogeneous mass-produced thing.

In 1963 in Düsseldorf, artists who identified themselves as Capitalist Realists staged an action that delineated the circuit between the artist's lifeworld and capitalist consumption, this time in the Berges furniture store rather than a "factory."²¹ *Living with Pop—A Demonstration for Capitalist Realism*, organized by Konrad Lueg and Gerhard Richter, consisted of three distinct spaces: an anteroom, whose atmosphere was enhanced through the inclusion of deer antlers and pine-needle scent, where visitors were handed a program and a number for admission into the second space; a main room, where the artists were "exhibited," ensconced in a living-room vignette raised on pedestals

and watching an evening news report on a television that was presumably for sale; and in the ordinary Berges showrooms, which were appropriated as galleries that presented four paintings each by Lueg and Richter, along with a set of Joseph Beuys's garments tagged with brown crosses. In this tripartite structure, Lueg and Richter thus established three kinds of passage of value across thresholds that were simultaneously spatial, ideological, and socioeconomic. First, the passage of an audience from the street into a store through which one set of expectations (shopping freely for ordinary goods) was interrupted by having, quite formally, to wait for entry into the next space, as though for a performance or special event. In the second, or main, space of the "demonstration," an ordinary living room was elevated to the status of art through its placement on pedestals, while simultaneously, by the same action, the artists who inhabited this scenario, Lueg and Richter, pass from the exotic lifeworld of artists to the prosaic, domestic world of the middle class. Finally, avant-garde works of art were recontextualized through their placement within a commercial display: the decorative or photomechanical qualities of Lueg's and Richter's art, which were perceived as avant-garde strategies within the art world, could here, in a down-market surrogate for the commerce of art, be read simply as decoration, as a cognate of Greenberg's wallpaper. And indeed paintings by both artists play on this shifting of value register or regime: Lueg, who, among other things, created patterns aligned with the pleasing designs of products, as in his Washcloth paintings (p. 190), and Richter, who blurred a photographic source both to

Andy Warhol filming *Screen Test: Kellie* at the Factory, New York, 1966. Photo by Nat Finkelstein



render it “aesthetic” and to cancel its status as “picture.” The works themselves, in other words, crystallize the actions of passage and transitivity that literally bring people off the street and into the presence of art. It is as though the paintings by Lueg and Richter spin out into the street through the filters of their demonstration, joining everyday commerce and art in a single integrated network.

Warhol’s Factory and Lueg and Richter’s store pursue a strategy of mimetic exaggeration: they stage a collapse, albeit an ironic and critical one, between the ostensibly separate and separable realms of the artists’ lifeworld, on the one hand, and art markets, on the other. Painting makes this near elision of art and commerce visible, and even palpable, by marking a physical distance between a commodified language of celebrity or domesticity, for instance, and an artist’s self-conscious citation of such codes. Passage inheres not only in the physical events of paint (as in Warhol’s uneven inking) but also in the dislocation of persons within painting’s overall life-market assemblage, as when Lueg and Richter’s ordinary domestic actions are placed on pedestals in the Berges furniture store. In other words, the passage of an image, like the actions of a person, is a kind of performance—a performance of citation—that renegotiates the relationship between persons and pictures, or subject and objects.

Rather than performing a mimetic circuit between life and market as Warhol, Lueg, and Richter had done, the

Gerhard Richter and Konrad Lueg, *Leben mit Pop—Eine Demonstration für den kapitalistischen Realismus (Living with Pop—A Demonstration for Capitalist Realism)*, 1963. Action at Berges furniture store, Düsseldorf, October 11, 1963. Photo by Reiner Ruthenbeck



Members of A.I.R. Gallery, 1973. Photo by Mary Beth Edelson

feminist A.I.R. Gallery, founded in 1972 in New York, refigured and occupied gaps between existing formations of art’s lifeworld and its commercial circulation in order to fashion new networks. A.I.R. addressed the glaring absence of opportunity for women in an art world whose sexism largely excluded them from exhibiting and selling their work. A.I.R.’s founding members invited women to join the gallery after extensive research, which was enabled in part by a slide registry compiled by critic Lucy Lippard that documented work by some six hundred women.²² Rather than A.I.R.’s conforming to a coherent aesthetic, the gallery’s priority was to include artists active in a range of media and idioms, united only by quality. In this sense, it was committed to the kind of rigorous judgment characteristic of the most prestigious institutions of the wider art world. As critic Daniela Palazzoli wrote in *Domus* in 1973, “By fostering this internal circulation of artistic dialogues and experiences this gallery founded and run by women artists is trying not simply to set up its own system of linguistic references and to develop a store of instruments of its own, but to escape from outside appropriation of its intellectual capital and its creative games.”²³

Palazzoli’s point is worth underlining. Not only did A.I.R. seek to initiate new networks of exhibition and discussion—new circuits of information—but it also sought to retain control of “its intellectual capital and

its creative games” rather than allowing the market to appropriate them, which would risk draining the work of its feminist content. By no means were all of its members painters; nonetheless A.I.R., during its early years, fostered at least two important discursive challenges to painting, both rooted in an implicit or explicit critique of the masculinist values traditionally associated with the medium. Nancy Spero’s frieze-like collage-drawings staging atavistic scenarios of historical and mythic violence interspersed with text, among many other things, critiqued heroic modes of oil painting. As critic Corinne Robins wrote in 1975, Spero “had begun to dislike the ‘importance of oil painting’ and found herself opposed to its ‘notion of progress and its fine art look.’ As a complete departure she started doing spontaneous works on paper.”²⁴ In a converse move, artists like Harmony Hammond, Howardena Pindell, and Mary Grigoriadis introduced into painting patterning and repetition that was derived from traditional “women’s work” like sewing and rug hooking. If the gender politics of avant-garde painting could be summarized by Duchamp’s implicitly sexist staging of the passage from virgin to bride, a different kind of passage and transitivity is enacted here, recognizing and honoring women’s work without turning women into objects.

On the face of it, the work of many artists associated with a group active in Cologne during the 1980s and 1990s was in direct opposition to the objectives of A.I.R. Indeed, several of its most prominent figures, such as Martin Kippenberger, were notorious for macho posturing, and their social world was known for extravagant partying and intricate infighting rather than collaboration and institution building. But like A.I.R., this circle of artists forestalled a collapse between lifeworld and market—in this case by emphasizing the former as a means of flouting, evading, and deriding the market’s conventions. Central to the ethos of Cologne during the 1980s and 1990s was what artist and critic Josef Strau has called the “non-productive attitude,”²⁵ or the capacity to be an artist without placing one’s emphasis on making objects for sale or even for wide circulation. As Jutta Koether has put it, “I understand Cologne as a place, as a very specific climate that had already produced and had been favorable to these kinds of personas, to these fictional or semi-fictional identities, to people who just showed up and tried to do something, and to other people who just laugh about it, or find it relevant.”²⁶

This mode of fictionalization was a fundamental means for the Cologne artists to deflect attention from the production of marketable objects, while retaining control over what Palazzoli called, with regard to A.I.R., the community’s “intellectual capital and its creative games,” through the semiprivate codes of the in-joke. Kippenberger’s *Heavy Burschi* (*Heavy Guy*) of 1989/1990



Martin Kippenberger, *Heavy Burschi* (*Heavy Guy*), 1989/1990. Installation view, “Martin Kippenberger,” Tate Modern, London, 2006

is exemplary in this regard. It consists of a “dumpster” holding the remains of fifty-one painted reproductions of works drawn from each of the artist’s catalogues, ordered from an assistant rather than executed by Kippenberger himself. Surrounding this pile of image refuse are photographs of the same fifty-one paintings, exposed before their destruction, then printed at the scale of the source paintings and hung in frames on the walls. Part of *Heavy Burschi*’s multilayered joke comes at the expense of Kippenberger’s assistant, whose work was deemed inadequate and destroyed; part of it is on Kippenberger himself, who is revealed as an imperious faker whose creative act is delegated to others; and part of it arises from a formal slippage between media: the transposition from painting to illustration to failed painted illustration to documentary photograph. In fact, the joke operates as a kind of perpetual passage; it moves rapidly through different states of the “same” pictures. Gregory H. Williams has likened Kippenberger’s work to “a joke without a punch line.” He writes: “The . . . slippages between distinct categories are funny in themselves; the viewer is caught in a stalled dialectic.”²⁷

Such a stalled dialectic is analogous to the subject-object mark, whose exertion of force onto paint indefinitely forestalled the appearance of an object. The stalled dialectic in *Heavy Burschi* unfolds not through the material of paint but in the migration of the viewer’s attention through chains of pictures, which never resolve into a stable, singular object. Kippenberger forecloses any possibility of an authentic form of painting by replacing the singular work (the actual source paintings) with secondhand representations cycling through several distinct registers. Painting cannot be reduced to any one of these states of form but rather denotes the unstable and perpetual circulation between them.

The practices of each of these examples—Warhol’s Factory, Lueg and Richter’s Capitalist Realism, the A.I.R. Gallery, and the Cologne group—can be located in that charged space between art’s lifeworld and its market. In each case, paintings, as discrete objects, assume meaning through their position in networks—complex assemblages of persons and things.

Reassembling Painting

I began by defining *passage* as a force exerted through paint, whose unfolding resists representation. I then specified that transitivity is a particular kind of passage acting on objects, particularly those paradigmatic modern objects, pictures. In a third move, I asserted that by 1913, Duchamp and Picasso had each already begun to set painting beside itself by spinning it out of its standard format into the realms of image circulation and performance. These extrapainterly strategies have continued to take place within the discourse of painting and under its name ever since. It can be argued that this discourse consists of four constituents: P.1) passage of force through paint (the subjectobject); P.2) passage of attention through pictures; T.1) transitive actions of subjectobject painterly marks on pictures; and T.2) transitive actions of human subjects onto pictures (including paintings).

When Picasso decentered Cubism through his anachronistic proliferation of styles in the teens and twenties, he linked the subjectobject marks invented in the Analytic phase of Cubism (type P.1) with a plurality of different sorts of pictures, or styles (type P.2). When with his readymades Duchamp set painting beside itself by marking its ostensible abandonment, he physically acted on commodities to relocate them (T.2), and when he reintegrated one of these readymades—the bottle brush—into *Tu m’* he situated the reified object in a diverse field of heterogeneous marks (T.1).

The moment of the mid-1950s, commonly accepted as a turning point in twentieth-century art, equally marks a transformation in the kind of assemblage articulated by the four-part field of passage and transitivity. This shift can be recognized in the difference between Pollock’s dichotomous *Portrait and a Dream*, which sets one painterly idiom squarely beside another in a kind of endgame standoff, and Rauschenberg’s more semantically complex *Rebus*, which expands into a diagrammatic network. Rauschenberg’s crucial accomplishment is to articulate all four elements—P.1, P.2, T.1, and T.2—within the same work. He integrates an economy of marks (P.1) with a circuit of pictures (P.2), and allows the former to punctuate the latter (T.1), which themselves are appropriated from various sources as ready-made pictures and relocated within the painting (T.2).

P.2, or the passage of attention through pictures, became a widespread and heterogeneous strategy

beginning with Pop art in the early 1960s and exponentially expanding after the widespread adoption of appropriation as a strategy in the wake of the so-called Pictures generation, which was active in the late 1970s.²⁸ *Heavy Burschi* represents one instance of such passage through pictures: as a whole, it sets in motion a perpetual circuit of images rendered in different substrates, or formats, some of which are virtual (only implicitly cited, like the initial source paintings) and others quite material like the destroyed painted copies. Sherrie Levine is another inventor of this type of passage: in works such as her *After Henri Michaux: 1–10* (1985, pp. 224–25), consisting of ten watercolor reproductions of Michaux’s series of dynamic ideograms titled *Mouvements* (1950–51), the viewer is enjoined to move from one piece to another, without ever being able to securely light upon a definitive representative of the whole. *After Henri Michaux: 1–10* is a particularly sophisticated layering of P.1 and P.2, for each of the *Mouvements* that Levine copied is a special kind of liberated mark—as Michaux himself put it, “I see in them a new language, spurning the verbal, and so I see them as *liberators*.”²⁹ Through her copies and re-presentation of these liberated marks as a group, Levine encloses the freedom of painterly passage (P.1) within the seriality of viewing a multitude of pictures (P.2): passage takes place in a complex network that imbricates the circulation of attention among discrete images with physical force passing through paint.

T.2—or the transitive actions of human subjects onto pictures—encompasses a wide range of performative actions that spin out from the work on canvas while feeding back into it. A prominent example of such a strategy is Andrea Fraser’s *May I Help You?* (1991), in which the artist gives a gallery tour, shifting seamlessly but hilariously from different personae

Andrea Fraser, *May I Help You?*, 1991/2013, performance in an installation of thirty Plaster Surrogates by Allan McCollum, Museum Ludwig Cologne, April 21, 2013





Still from Ei Arakawa and Shimon Minamikawa,
PARIS ADAPTED HOMELAND episode 6, 2013.
 Video, color, sound, 16:40 min.

with very different relations to the art world. Another is Ei Arakawa and Shimon Minamikawa's recent *PARIS ADAPTED HOMELAND episode 6* (2013), in which Arakawa balances paintings by Minamikawa in front of his face like a mask while running on a treadmill, in surroundings that are periodically transformed via the magic of a video green screen. There are many subtle and hybrid examples of P.2 and T.2, as when Thomas Eggerer integrates a vast world of "workers"—each of whom is also drawn from commercial pictures—into the fields of his *Grey Harvest* (2013, p. 230) and *Heavy Harvest* (2014, p. 231) and when Jutta Koether transports paintings in time and space via appropriation from earlier moments in art history and/or physically transports them through performance.

What this expansion of passage and transitivity allows us to see is painting's articulation of two dynamics: it sets pictures within circuits, and it negotiates the relation between persons (as agents and individuals) and pictures (as stereotypes or fictionalized personas). The subjectobject of painting, like other great modernist forms—the readymade, collage, and the monochrome—responded to modernity's tragicomic condition: the subject's transformation into an object, and her heroic (and sometimes ridiculous) efforts to find new spaces of agency within this dynamic of spectacularization and self-spectacularization. In short, painting may be defined as circuits of human action interlocking with, biting into, or embracing circuits of images.

Why Painting Now?

Modern painting's negotiation and remapping of subjectivity and objectivity—its mode of interweaving passage, which suspends the division between subject and object, with pictures, which conversely reify both persons and things—was closely linked to political revolution and subjective revolt in the early twentieth century. In association with radical politics, the historical avant-garde visualized utopias, as in Malevich's Suprematism, and it produced new forms of visual culture for revolutionary politics in Soviet Productivism. In the realm of affective experience, the Surrealists indexed psychic liberation through a wide variety of painterly techniques ranging from automatic drawing to dream works.³⁰ Such revolutionary projects are now considered obsolete. Yet, if painting's capacity for political engagement arises from its visualization of historically specific forms of incommensurability (which before World War II included the political vertigo dividing actually existing social conditions from revolutionary projections, as well as the affective disjunctions between a body and its unconscious impulses), then it is possible to claim that painting remains engaged with such representational struggles, albeit on different fronts.

Passage, as I have defined it, is a form of materialized time; it is duration lacking both a starting and an ending point but nonetheless unfolding in space. Transitivity is the action of dislocation, which can reanimate pictures drawn from anywhere and conjoin them diagrammatically in configurations that defy geometric

logic and geopolitics. Their combination into networks after the mid-twentieth century thus meets the definition of a chronotope—a culturally specific configuration of time and space.³¹ In the course of its long history, painting has joined the incommensurable in innumerable ways: it has allowed spectators to see gods and humans in the same space; it has vivified myths and realized dreams. In the information age—a period in which pictures have dramatically proliferated in space and accelerated in time—the discourse of painting remains uniquely relevant. It can visualize the imperative of networks to make everything into a consumable picture easily transmissible in time and space. Painting *embodies* dislocation, the affect of networks.

NOTES

1. Cy Twombly, quoted in Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Pleasure in Drawing*, trans. Philip Armstrong (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 42.
2. For an influential feminist account of marriage as an exchange of women, see Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review, 1975). I make a similar argument about *LE PASSAGE de la vierge à la mariée* in my “Painting Stripped Bare,” in Leah Dickerman, *Inventing Abstraction 1910–1925: How a Radical Idea Changed Modern Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012), 172–73.
3. Richard Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism: A Study of the Theory, Technique, and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 19. Shiff’s assertion of a moment beyond the subject-object distinction is similar to the claim made by Yve-Alain Bois that what he calls Matisse’s “arche-drawing” represents a collapse of the opposition between color and drawing: “Just as ‘arche-writing’ is ‘prior’ to the hierarchization of speech and writing [for Derrida], and, being productive of difference itself, forms their common ‘root’ (which goes for all the hierarchical oppositions out of which western metaphysics is woven, notably the opposition between sign and meaning), so ‘arche-drawing’ would be ‘prior’ to the drawing/color opposition.” Yve-Alain Bois, “Matisse and ‘Arche-Drawing,’” in *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 22.
4. On Duchamp’s Nominalism, see Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp’s Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).
5. In the context of contemporary art, I call this shift toward appropriation and arrangement of visual information (or pictures) the “epistemology of search.” See my *After Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 55–59.
6. Bois, “Matisse and ‘Arche-Drawing,’” 50.
7. Yve-Alain Bois, “The Semiology of Cubism,” in *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, ed. Lynn Zelevansky (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992), 183. Bois’s purpose in this essay is to give a genealogy of Cubism’s becoming scriptural or semiological, which culminates in the *papiers collés* of Picasso (and, to a much lesser extent if at all, those of Braque). He associates the first semiological phase with the estrangement effect of Picasso’s adoption of African motifs; the second phase has two parts, both defined by attempts to create what Pierre Daix called a “unitary system of notation.” The quote I am citing here is drawn from a second moment of this second phase in which the grid is “now devoted solely to the syntactic function of linking discrete elements, as a basic structure on which to hook up the various marks” (185).
8. According to Bois, Picasso’s *papiers collés* are a form of Cubist semiology because “most elements constantly shift their position, their function: the stability of interpretation can be only provisional, produced as a momentary stasis in an ever-flowing process.” *Ibid.*, 188. Whether this is a true form of semiology may or may not be the case and is not really my concern here. What interests me is something that Bois does not

dwell on—the fact that this differential economy of signs consists of an assemblage of pictures appropriated from commercial sources alongside fragments drawn by Picasso himself. In other words, what I’m pointing to as the encounter between pictures and subject/object marks characterizes the final semiological stage of Cubism according to Bois’s genealogy, as much as it did the earlier moments he recounts.

9. A return to figuration on several fronts in the late 1920s and 1930s revealed the precariousness of this achievement. The work of Devin Fore sees this return as an introjection or absorption of the principles and forms of mechanization into the supposedly natural body: “the reassertion of the human figure at this historical moment was a deeply conflicted proposal, since the seemingly natural body had by this time already become a thoroughly vexed construction.” Devin Fore, *Realism after Modernism: The Rehumanization of Art and Literature* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, in association with October Books, 2012), 3–4.
10. Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, in association with October Books, 1996), 150.
11. *Ibid.*, 165. See also my “Painting beside Itself,” *October*, no. 130 (Fall 2009): 125–34.
12. Clement Greenberg, “The Crisis of the Easel Picture,” originally published in *Partisan Review* 15, no. 4 (April 1948): 481–84, and revised for Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961); reprinted in Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 2, *Arrogant Purpose, 1945–1949*, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 222.
13. *Ibid.*, 223.
14. Clement Greenberg, “Jackson Pollock’s New Style,” *Harper’s Bazaar*, February 1952; reprinted in Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 3, *Affirmations and Refusals, 1950–1956*, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 106.
15. Clement Greenberg, “Feeling Is All,” reprinted in Greenberg, *Art and Culture* under the generic title “*Partisan Review* ‘Art Chronicle,’ 1952,” in *ibid.*, 105.
16. Lee Krasner Pollock, interview by B. H. Friedman, in *Jackson Pollock: Black and White* (New York: Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, 1969), quoted in B. H. Friedman, *Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible* (1972; repr., New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 182.
17. See Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, in association with October Books, 2001).
18. An exception to this general historical trend is the presence of multivalent diagrams in various Dada works, such as those of Francis Picabia. See my “Dada’s Diagrams,” in *The Dada Seminars*, ed. Leah Dickerman, with Matthew S. Witkovsky (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, in association with Distributed Art Publishers, 2005), 221–39.
19. This is, of course, the great insight of Bruno Latour’s work on actor-network theory. Now is the moment to acknowledge the reference to Latour in the title of my essay: in his book *Reassembling the Social*, Latour argues that instead of existing prior to the moment of analysis, “the social” is always assembled: “social does not designate a thing among other things, like a black sheep among other white sheep, but a type of connection between things that are not themselves social. . . . All those heterogeneous elements might be assembled anew in some given state of affairs.” Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5.
20. This is a position closely aligned with that of Isabelle Graw and the journal she founded, *Texte zur Kunst*. See, for example, Isabelle Graw, *High Price: Art between the Market and Celebrity Culture* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2009).
21. Manfred Kuttner, Konrad Lueg, Sigmar Polke, and Gerhard Richter coined the term Capitalist Realism in the press release for their self-organized exhibition in a vacant butcher’s shop in Düsseldorf in 1963. See *Leben mit Pop: Eine Reproduktion des Kapitalistischen Realismus* (Düsseldorf: Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, in association with Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2013), 46.
22. Barbara Zucker and Susan Williams had the initial idea to start the gallery. They contacted Lucy Lippard, and in the first meeting they were joined by Dotty Attie, Maude Boltz, Mary Grigoriadis, and Nancy Spero. They then chose fourteen additional members through extensive research including visits to fifty-five studios. For a full account of this

history, see Corinne Robins, "The A.I.R. Gallery: 1972–1978," in *A.I.R. Gallery Overview 1972–1978: An Exhibition in Two Parts* (New York: A.I.R. Gallery, 1978).

23. Daniela Palazzoli, "Meno per Meno Uguale a Più [Minus Times Minus Equals Plus]," *Domus*, March 1973, 49.

24. Corinne Robins, "Nancy Spero: 'Political' Artist of Poetry and the Nightmare," *Feminist Art Journal* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1975): 48.

25. See Josef Strau, "The Non-productive Attitude," in Bennett Simpson and Josef Strau, *Make Your Own Life: Artists In and Out of Cologne* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 2006), 28–31.

26. Jutta Koether, roundtable statement (2005), published in Simpson and Strau, *Make Your Own Life*, 38. Merlin Carpenter claims his painting *Fantasy of Cologne* (2006, p. 219) was made to protest this exhibition and the effort to package the Cologne scene: "My work *Fantasy of Cologne* is concerned with the situation in New York in 2006, not the situation in Cologne in 1990. . . . And that means it remains a criticism of those who market this fantasy now." (Merlin Carpenter, e-mail correspondence to Achim Hochdörfer, cc: to David Joselit, April 21, 2015.) One of the characteristics of the Cologne art world of the 1980s and 1990s is that it is notoriously opaque for outsiders (including myself). Therefore in my brief account I have tried to rely on participant-observers, but undoubtedly I can only know the flavor of Cologne from a distance. This distancing effect—the intentional creation of suspicion that some are in the know while most are without a clue—is, however, an important dimension to strategies practiced in Cologne of withholding art's lifeworld from the market.

27. Gregory H. Williams, *Permission to Laugh: Humor and Politics in Contemporary German Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 78.

28. The term *pictures* comes from Douglas Crimp. See his "Pictures," *October*, no. 8 (Spring 1979): 75–88. For an extensive history of the tendency, see Douglas Eklund, *The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984* (New Haven: Yale University Press, in association with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2009).

29. Henri Michaux, postface of *Mouvements* (Paris: Le Point du Jour, N.R.F., Éditions Gallimard, 1951); reprinted in *Henri Michaux* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1978), 71.

30. See Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Avon, 1965).

31. M. M. Bakhtin defines *chronotope* as follows: "Literally, 'time-space.' A unit of analysis for studying texts according to the ratio and nature of the temporal and spatial categories represented. The distinctiveness of this concept as opposed to most other uses of time and space in literary analysis lies in the fact that neither category is privileged; they are utterly interdependent." Bakhtin puts this concept to use in his "Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84–258, 425.