



MICHAEL NEWMAN

Seth Price's Operations

“Here is an operation . . .” Seth Price, *Was ist los?*

The walls of several of Seth Price's exhibitions since 2007 have featured kite-shaped panels in what appears to be a yellow metal—“gold keys,” as the artist likes to call them—with an embossed area in black, white, or various colors, somewhat resembling a leaping figure, which in each picks out the negative shape of a hand dropping keys into another hand. These may be placed high, and are sometimes grouped to form horizontal or vertical friezes.¹ The image of passing keys is an everyday gesture raised to the power of a logo, representing an interaction, which may be an exchange, the outcome of a sale or a mortgage, the loan of a car or an apartment—intimating security, freedom, a place of one's own. A key also has the metaphorical significance of something that unlocks and opens, lays bare, suggesting the process of interpretation that is applied to the work of art, or a body of work. But is there any meaning, anything hidden that needs unlocking? In much contemporary art and culture, the intensive concept of a “deep” meaning has been replaced by the extensive concept of networks, nodes that link to other nodes in all directions. The images in the “diamonds” come from tiny GIFs downloaded from the Internet, so the origin is a digital file obtained through a link.

In the way that he explores different articulations across various mediums between source, object, and redistribution, Price has developed in an exemplary manner the experience of an artist born in 1973, and based in New York. He and his peers are working under unprecedented conditions, including the digitalization of image and sound, the Internet as both source and network of distribution, and a global art world in which information circulates very fast. Price's multifarious practice—which to date includes video and video installation, music, wall works using laminate, vacuum-formed plastic, and plastic-covered metal panels which could be considered somewhere between sculpture and painting, drawing, writing, and performance—contains reference to both popular culture and the art of the not-so-distant past, in particular the period from the 1960s to the 1980s spanning Pop, Conceptual, and appropriation art.² If his predecessors are a source of inspiration, he also approaches them both in terms of the disparities between then and now: the present as a future unanticipated by the past; and the past as containing possibilities which were not able to be realized, but for which present conditions provide a chance, unfinished business that may be continued. As well as being a taking-over of that which has already happened, the appropriation of history necessarily includes a dimension of anticipation, of showing or redistributing something for the sake of a future, including one that may counter the extrapolations of the present.

Installation view, Kunsthalle Zürich, 2008.
Gold Key, 2008. Inkjet on dibond, 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ x
15 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (40 x 40 cm)

In particular, Price's approach to what it is to be an artist today responds to the shift from art co-existing with mass media based on formats of reproduction in which the consumer is a receiver, to fragmented and heterotopic subcultures within a technological framework that allows for an exchange between consumption and production. Consumption itself becomes, in effect, new production and redistribution, for example on YouTube and social network websites: this has transformed the media and audiences with which artists can engage—while at times disappearing altogether as artists—as well as the relations between artistic and social labor.

In the “gold keys” as well as other works by Price, three kinds of labor or action are juxtaposed in both the image and the way the object is produced: the work of the hand; factory production that generates objects in series; and the labor that has been described as “immaterial,” for which the computer and its software have become the primary medium both of production and of distribution. In the series of “gold keys” as a whole, six different key motifs have been picked out in negative, and printed in five colors directly onto the brushed metal surface of Dibond, which is a composite of polyethylene and aluminum, usually used for mounting photographs. While they look mass-produced, each is in fact unique, thus providing a reflection on the relation of the production of the unique work of art to other kinds of production.³ Price's interest in the relation between art and different kinds of labor is shown in the audio work *8-4, 9-5, 10-6, 11-7* (2007–), a compilation that correlates the 8-hour track to the working day of a blue-collar worker, office worker, art gallery worker, and shop worker respectively, and touches on the creeping predominance of music as soundtrack to spheres of life related to production and consumption. Price's compilation itself serves as an example of a work of “immaterial labor”: various kinds of dance music from the 1970s to the present—already existing and available—are rerecorded or downloaded and redistributed, consumption thereby becoming production, creating in the process a network of distribution and communication.

According to the argument of certain philosophers who were associated with the Italian *Autonomia* group, the global world is experiencing a new so-called creative economy that depends upon “immaterial labor.”⁴ In our society, communication itself has become a source of commodity value. Communication becomes part of the creation of the commodity, and the attempt is made to generate value from communication itself, for example through advertising related to social networking sites. By contrast, with the serial production of discrete objects associated with the factory—which is paralleled in repetitive serial structures in works of art—the form of production of immaterial labor

is open-ended and unpredictable. What is produced is continuously altered, directed toward fragmented and particularized audiences rather than homogeneous mass-markets. The Internet makes possible the extension of this model until it becomes the dominant social form of production, with a further complication, in that rather than creating products for a market to meet a demand that has been generated by advertising, the question of the Internet as a market is how to generate value from what is already there and available, whether as music and images to download, or self-expression in social networking sites to exploit.

I do not mean to imply that Price's work is a simple reflection of the social form of immaterial labor. Indeed he is meticulously engaged with material qualities in work that has a physical presence, as evinced by the “gold keys,” the laminated “silhouettes,” and the vacuum-formed plastic panels, among other works: however, material is conceived not as something underlying, to be shaped into an object, but rather as something that contributes “look and feel,” as in the case of a product designed for the market, or even a computer game or web page. Thus the very conception of materiality has been changed by new modes and media of consumption and redistribution. Price's generation of artists have had to come to terms with the relation of their work to immaterial labor, both as potential for new approaches to art—often based on and quickly being overtaken by network culture—and new forms of production and exploitation of surplus value. Indeed, rather than simply following in the wake of these changes, artists anticipated the role immaterial labor would play in society, and served as R&D for the creative industries—this has been the case at least since Andy Warhol's Factory. The difference in the first decade of the 21st century is twofold, and both aspects affect Price's work: on the one hand, contemporary artists are now relative latecomers in this role, allowing for the historical self-consciousness we find in Price's work; but on the other hand, circumstances have fundamentally changed as a result of digitalization and the Internet, transforming production, communication, and the relation to audiences. One effect of digitalization and the Internet is an open-ended approach toward producing different versions. In Price's practice, the “same” work may be realized in different mediums (although this is not always in practice the case). For example, *Dispersion* (2002–)—which serves as both an illustrated critical text to be read of reflections on the contemporary condition of art and a work of art—is itself dispersed as a web page, as a series of molded plastic panels on the wall, and as a book with a hand-printed geometric motif in different colors on the cover.

COUNTER-PRODUCTIONS

In *Dispersion*, Price confronts the situation of the artist working after Conceptual art and the subsequent appropriation art of the 1970s and 1980s.⁵ He argues for an approach that takes into account the lessons of the transformation of production and distribution in approaches associated with Conceptual art—such as Seth Siegelaub and Jack Wendler’s *Xeroxbook* (1968), where the object, the book, is the direct expression of its process of production—as well as the use of the page by artists.⁶ Since then, for many artists “market mechanisms of circulation, distribution, and dissemination become a crucial part of the work.” However, “one must use not simply the delivery mechanisms of popular culture, but also its generic forms,” as is the case when Rodney Graham makes a CD of pop songs. The possibilities for a distribution practice changed dramatically with the advent of the Internet.

With more and more media readily available through this unruly archive, the task becomes one of packaging, producing, reframing, and distributing; a mode of production analogous not to the creation of material goods, but to the production of social contexts, using existing material. Anything on the Internet is a fragment, provisional, pointing elsewhere. Nothing is finished.⁷

The Internet transforms the relation of distribution to production, as well as the mode of being of the work, which may migrate across different platforms and material realizations. Ironically, this “global” medium has turned everything into a fragment without a whole, where the perpetually transformable “version” replaces the bounded “object.” In this medium, “packaging”—and what would have been called in relation to art “framing”—is transformed from a way of containing and protecting an object, delimiting it as a unified and finite thing, into a way of “producing social contexts,” as Price puts it. One might think here of networks, blogs, and groups formed around websites. Price argues that the notion of what is “public” has shifted from the idea of a shared physical space as a specific location in space and time—which tends to monumentalize public art—to a publicness based on distribution media:

We should recognize that collective experience is now based on simultaneous private experiences, distributed across the field of media culture, knit together by ongoing debate, publicity, promotion, and discussion. Publicness today has as much do with sites of production and reproduction as it does with any supposed physical commons, so a popular album could be regarded as a more successful instance of public art than a monument tucked away in an urban plaza.⁸

The question here is whether publicness and publicity can any longer be distinguished? Is public space—whether we think of it in terms of a physical



Essay with Knots, 2008. Screenprint on polystyrene vacuum-formed over rope, 168 x 312 inches (427 x 792 cm)

following pages: Essay with Knots, pp. 16–17, 2008. Screenprint on polystyrene vacuum-formed over rope, 122 x 96 inches (310 x 244 cm)

commons or the Internet—entirely saturated by Capital? Or is it possible to create, within the space of publicity, pockets of publicness—in the sense of the German word *Öffentlichkeit*, “openness”? Or networks that duplicate the functions of both virtual public space and publicity (Facebook, where the social network becomes a latter-day online mailing list, might be a recent case in point). Price’s work raises further questions in relation to the media of distribution: Is it possible for artists to actually transform media as *distribution* media in the wider social sense? Or is the only possibility for artists to parasite on existing media? If these media become in effect the mediums for the work, what is to prevent the work from simply disappearing into media, in a dystopian realization of the avant-garde’s dissolution of art into life? If that is the case, is there any possibility for art to negate, or at least set itself apart from, the status quo?¹⁰ The point may be not the loss of a function for art but the loss of a space in which it is possible for something to have no function.

A similar strain of disbelief greeted the construction of his own house, produced for an exhibition with a good deal of the exhibitor's money. It seems that the avant-garde can still shock, if only on the level of economic valorization. This work does not simply address the codes of mass culture, it embraces these codes as form, in a possibly quixotic pursuit of an unmediated critique of cultural conventions.

An argument against art that addresses contemporary issues and topical culture rests on the virtue of slowness, often cast aside due to the urgency with which ones work must appear. Slowness works against all of our prevailing urges and requirements: it is a resistance to the contemporary mandate of speed. Moving with the times places you in a blind spot; if you're part of the general tenor, it's difficult to add a dissonant note. But the way in which media culture feeds on its own leavings indicates the paradoxical slowness of archived media, which, like a sleeper cell, will always rear its head at a later date. The rear-guard often has the upper hand, and sometimes delay, to use Duchamp's term, will return the investment with massive interest.



Michael Green, *From Elm and Oak*, 1970

Let's not overreach. The question is whether everything is always the same, whether it is in fact possible that by the age of forty a person has seen all that has been and will ever be. Must I consult art to understand that identity is, against all power exploits, resistance is predetermined, all is shift?

To recognize...the relative insurmountability of these discursive artistic genres, institutional structures, and distribution forms as obstacles that are ultimately persistent (if not insurmountable) marks the most profound crisis for the artist identified with a model of avant-garde practice.

So the thread leads from Duchamp to Pop to Conceptualism, but beyond that we must turn out backs: a resignation, in contrast to Pop's affirmation and Conceptualism's interrogation. Such a project is an incomplete and perhaps futile proposition, and since one can only adopt the degree of precision appropriate to the subject, this essay is written in a provisional and exploratory spirit. An art that attempts to tackle the expanded field, encompassing arenas other than the standard gallery and art world-circuit, sounds utopian at best,

and possibly naïve and undeveloped; this essay may itself be a disjointed series of naive propositions lacking a thesis. Complete enclosure means that one cannot write a novel, compose music, produce television, and still retain the status of Artist. What's more, artist as a social role is somewhat embarrassing, in that it's taken to be a useless position, if not a reactionary one; the practitioner is dismissed as either the producer of over-valued decor, or as part of an arrogant, parasitical, self-styled elite.

But hasn't the artistic impulse always been utopian, with all the hope and futility that implies? To those of you who decry the Utopian impulse as futile, or worse, responsible for the horrible excesses of the last century, recall that each moment is a Golden Age (of course the Soviet experiment was wildly wrong-headed, but let us pretend—and it is not so hard—that a kind of social Dispersion was its aim). The last hundred years of work indicate that it's demonstrably impossible to destroy or dematerialize Art, whether it is or not, can only gradually expand, voraciously synthesizing every aspect of life. Meanwhile, we can take up the redemptive circulation of allegory through design, obsolete forms and historical moments, genre and the vernacular, the social memory woven into popular culture: a private, secular, and profane consumption of media. Production, after all, is the excretory phase in a process of appropriation.



Adriano Diotti, *Melancholia*, 1514

The problem for Price is to simultaneously close and to open the gap between his own activity as an artist, and the general processes of production, consumption, and the creation of value in society. If for a previous, post-Conceptual generation the solution was “institutional critique,” what happens when the institution has become completely porous, as artists increasingly function in relation to non-art social networks? Mass culture (Hollywood, broadcast TV, newspapers, etc.) has itself become marginal: what would it mean to say that art has been taken over by the culture industry when the culture industry in the old sense of totalized mass culture has splintered into fragments? If Price speaks of the fragment, the fragment is no longer a part of a whole, nor does it allude to or depend upon an absent whole: markets, for example, are now “fragmented” as such, advertising is targeted at individuals, based on algorithms applied to mined data, so that advertising specific to the person’s interests and previous searches and purchases will appear when they log on to Amazon or Facebook. But the Web has also enabled widely geographically distributed but small special interest and hobbyist groups to come together and share information and material.

The “delay” in consumption or reception that Price—citing Duchamp—discusses in *Dispersion*, as that which distinguishes art from other cycles of production and consumption, becomes not only the relation of past to present in obsolescence, but also the relation of present to future in the slowed reception of the artist’s work when it is not easily consumed initially. The work becomes not only about the object—although there is that too—but also about the gap that is opened up between the different forms of reception, and the possibility of establishing new relations between art and non-art forms of production and reception. In *Dispersion*, Price attributes the idea of “counter-productions” to Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge in *Public Sphere and Experience*, where they write that, “A mode of production that is as self-sufficient as television can be critiqued only by an alternative type of production,” and that “proletarian forms of experience” are “not based upon control over products but upon the experience of production itself.” If the “one-sidedness of the products of the media can only be defeated by counter-products,”¹¹ it follows that these counter-products, rather than being fetishized, would need to be folded back into the experience of production so that the product would become the manifestation and expression of that experience along with its social relations.

Price’s *Title Variable* (2001–) works—to date a group of five audio compilations, each accompanied by a text—may be considered as a series of counter-products in this sense. They exist in various forms: as downloadable files, but also in different cases as a CD, or vinyl record, or cassette tape. While involving

the same compilation of material, for consumers, record collectors, and for that matter art historians, they are also distinct. Price’s approach here parallels the growth of the collectors market for vinyl records, which in part has a basis in sound quality, but also involves resistance to the dematerialization of “content.” He reflects not only upon both the new mode of being that the digital represents, with its possibilities of distribution and redistribution, and the new social spaces that it opens up, but also the popular—rather than high

art—resistance to the kinds of abstraction and alienation involved. Price sometimes issues the same content in different forms or containers, and at other times, different “versions” in the same form. The compilations have consisted of music

that is obsolete, transitional, or hard to define: early video game soundtracks, “New Jack Swing,” the first years of the sampler, and industrial music as it was consolidated into a popular genre. Each compilation is accompanied by a text in a different style, including a theoretical essay and music journalism. The latest text, “For a Friend,” which accompanies 8–4, 9–5, 10–6, 11–7, is written in the back and forth bursts of casual, adolescent language, mixed with educated references, often oriented around products and consumption, used by adults trying to be young, hip, and clever in the new public space of blogs and online chat—the invention of a new genre. Resistance may also take the form of a mimesis of the social forms—modes of speech, design, look, and feel—produced by the conditions in question. An excerpt of the text was issued in a printed-out, stapled version with a picture of a hand with index finger pointing, recalling the pointing hand painted by a commercial sign-painter and signed “A. Klang” in Duchamp’s painting *Tum* (1918), which is also about products, the readymade (a real bottle brush protrudes from a painted rip repaired with real safety pins), and the vernacular—the title, personal pronouns of a phrase to be completed by the viewer, suggests a rhetoric of familiar address. While Duchamp’s “painting” disrupts the Albertian model of the picture as a perspective window and the ontological status of the art



Akademische Graffiti, 2005. Vinyl LP, facsimile booklet, screenprinted jacket and sleeve.

Installation view, Kunsthalle Zürich, 2008. Digital Video Effect: "Holes", 2003. DVD and TV/DVD player in its own packaging. 32 x 25 x 29 inches (81 x 64 x 74 cm).

object, Price—anticipated by Duchamp's own use of his work as provocation for publicity and speculation, but under entirely new technological and media conditions—throws into question the "location" of his work in every sense. Price distributes his compilations in different ways: as a CD, on a website to download, self-duplicated, or as a limited edition publication.¹² The different receptions—hobbyist groups, music aficionados, the art world—will occur at different speeds, and may or may not intersect. Rather than appropriating from one sphere into another—as is the case with appropriation art that draws on the model of the readymade—a number of contemporary artists, including Price, now conduct parallel practices in which the same work is distributed along different pathways and networks.

INSIDE OUT

A note in Price's *Notes on This Show* (2006) reads: "The role of packaging versus that of storage."¹³ Packaging normally both protects the object as it is distributed and, when it forms part of a display, carries advertising and helps to stimulate desire for the object, thus assisting in its sale. At the Kunsthalle Zürich, Price ran a transparent strip of Mylar at eye-height around the exhibition, the work-as-package (vacuum-formed panels with molds of body parts or clothing, which recall store packaging made for things like electronic goods) was doubled by the package-as-work (the video players still in their boxes on their backs playing Price's videos)—a logical next step to Bruce Nauman's use of the cardboard boxes in which the players come as bases, the package-as-base becomes the base-as-package. Packaging, rather than simply protecting the object, enters into it as design. Does the work, then, become identical with its packaging? Is there a way to maintain a difference other than by recourse to the autonomy of the work of art? The response to packaging could go in two directions: toward an apotropaic self-packaging, and toward an idea of the "unpackageable." The latter could be not so much a resistance to packaging—for example through the abject or the formless—but also an exceeding of containment of the package through an indefinite displacement of contextualizations or the hybridization of contexts. The movement of distribution crossing with that of desire at the point at which the packaging-as-object renders the "packaged" as a void. Amid technologies of ultra-mobility, the task becomes to generate friction: the exhibition as where things stall.

If we consider installation as originating in exhibition design as a dimension of packaging, Price's installation at the Kunsthalle Zürich evoked two different, highly contradictory sources: the articulation of the space through the display of elements at different levels, especially in the room with the laminated



“silhouettes,” recalls El Lissitzky’s *Proun Room* (1923), an abstract modernist environment that anticipates a total, revolutionary transformation of space; and the Mylar sheet running over works right through the exhibition is reminiscent of the supposed mile of string, which Duchamp wound through the *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition that he devised in New York in 1942. While Duchamp’s mile of string functions as at once obstacle and trap, Price’s operation, by presenting transparency itself as the link between the works, implies that meaning is no longer something “in” the individual works to which access might be barred or concealed by their physical form—that is, no longer the outcome of a process of revelation and concealment—but rather a function of nothing other than the process of linking from one thing, point, or piece of information to another.

The ways in which Seth Price’s installation folds the frame into the work and makes the work itself a kind of frame, recalls Derrida’s discussion of the frame and passe-partout in *The Truth in Painting*. Derrida focuses on a word derived from the Greek for subordinate or secondary work, that he finds in Kant—“parergon”—of which he writes that it is

*neither work [ergon] nor outside the work [hors d’oeuvre], neither inside nor outside, neither above nor below, it disconcerts any opposition but does not remain indeterminate and it gives rise to the work. It is no longer merely around the work. That which it puts in place—the instances of the frame, the title, the signature, the legend, etc.—does not stop disturbing the internal order of discourse on painting, its works, its commerce, its evaluations, its surplus-values, its speculation, its law, and its hierarchies.*¹⁴

The parergon functions as what Derrida also calls a “supplement”: the supplement appears to come after that which it supplements, to be outside it, nonetheless it only does its work as supplement with respect to an internal lack, something originally missing, that it supplements. What seems to exist within clear borders, marking the division between inclusion and exclusion, is shown to depend upon what it excludes, not in a derivative but in a fundamental and constitutive way.

We might recall the transparent Mylar strip around Price’s Zurich exhibition when we read Derrida’s description of the parerga in Cranach’s painting *Lucretia* (1533), among them “a light band of transparent veil in front of her sex,”¹⁵ and he asks, what is lacking that it needs such a supplement? We could also see the Mylar strip—doubling as it does the glass or Perspex over paintings, drawings, and prints—as a supplement of the supplement, in that it functions as an in-between, a kind of frame or package that at the same time doubles or re-marks the very structure of framing and packaging. The acrylic-covered



Installation view, Kunsthalle Zurich, 2008. *Marriage Stencil*, 2008. Enamel on Dibond, 41 x 69½ inches (104 x 177 cm)

opposite: Installation view, Kunsthalle Zurich, 2008. *Twine*, 2008. Inkjet on protective packing foil over iridescent mirrored acrylic. 48 x 96 inches (122 x 244 cm).



Untitled, 2008. Vavona Redwood and diamond acrylic, 70 x 83½ (178 x 212)



wood veneer panels of the “silhouette” pieces could also be understood as *parerga*, since they are made of the very material that normally frames and protects a picture—the “lack” of the inside that calls for supplementation has become quite explicit, since in the case of the “silhouettes” it is a purely negative image. All these *parerga* have the same structure in common: they separate, and simultaneously connect, an inside and an outside, both of which may be understood in literal and metaphorical terms. The distinction between them is thrown into question: the structure becomes one not of a border between inside and outside but an articulation, both based on and generative of the difference. The frame creates a space within itself, which defines and protects a work that may also be understood as an autonomous interiority. However, insofar as it is the frame that does this, this interiority must always depend upon that which is heterogeneous to it. With respect to the work that it frames, the *parergon* merges with the wall, and in general terms with the context, “the whole field of historical, economic, political inscription in which the drive to signature is produced”¹⁶; conversely, with respect to the background, it merges with the work that stands out against it. In that respect, the *parergon* is neither figure nor ground, though partaking of both, and making their difference possible. What would it be, then, to make of the frame itself a figure? In the book *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida illustrates some elaborate *cartouches* around empty apertures; Price’s “silhouettes” could be understood as *cartouches* around empty figures, which may themselves revert into being ground. And the transparent Mylar in the Zurich exhibition could be considered both a framing device added to the work—indeed, the equivalent of plastic wrap used to re-package food—and as itself constituting a work, the work as an installation, or the exhibition as a whole, to which, by a strange inversion, the individual works that it covers become supplementary.

Inversions of figure and ground are also a feature of the “silhouettes” in which negative images are outlined by wood laminate or metal panels. These show hands and other poses of human interactions, such as lighting a cigarette, passing a cup, holding each other. The motifs of contact and dexterity are derived from images that result from Internet searches using terms such as “eating,” “drinking,” “writing,” “touching,” “mother,” etc.¹⁷ The source-image is downloaded as a tiny GIF file but, rather than representing the image directly, the negative space around the interaction is extracted and magnified immensely, which reveals the image’s tremendous compression and erosion, the effect and condition of possibility for the digital medium of transmission. This negative image is turned into a template and supplied to a computer-controlled router that cuts it out of sheets of wood veneer that have been adhered to a thick layer of transparent acrylic.

Images of intimate moments have been reduced to a digital file—“squeezed through the eye of a needle” as the press release for his show at Friedrich Petzel gallery puts it—and then reproduced not only negatively, but also by an industrial process—the result of a combination of immaterial and very material labor. We might be reminded of László Moholy-Nagy’s *Telephone Pictures* (1922), where he specified abstract paintings by telephone, using a grid and standard colors, which were then produced by a sign factory in porcelain enamel on steel; or Donald Judd’s outsourcing from 1966 of the production of his sheer, minimalist objects, as well as his furniture designs; or Nancy Dwyer’s *Cardz* (1980), generic gestures from magazine clippings reproduced in outline and silkscreened on leatherette paper like playing or tarot cards.¹⁸ Price’s “silhouette” pieces combine the appropriated image—we might be reminded of Sherrie Levine’s 1979 collages of found images of mothers with children or glamorous models within silhouette outlines, some of which are of early American presidents—with Minimalism’s tendency to include the viewer’s experience of the space surrounding the object as an aspect of the work: by an inversion of figure-ground relations, the “object” becomes the ground for the negative or absent figure, the space of which is extended to include the viewer, paralleling the phenomenological role of hollowness in Judd’s sculpture.¹⁹ The “silhouette” panels give the impression of being at once fake—a simulated surface—and on closer inspection real—they are made of real wood—Cherry Burl, Burled Carpathian Elm, Vavona Redwood among them—wafer-thin compared to the acrylic. Reminiscent of the finish of furniture of the 1970s and 1980s, they use materials that normally frame a painting, print, or photograph—the wood surround and the protective surface through which it is viewed; together the frame and glass or Perspex form the “packaging” of the painting. The process of lamination is also typically used to mount photographs. The “silhouettes” thus include in themselves as works the processes of framing, mounting, and covering that are usually considered as supplementary, and that fall to the background in the process of viewing. In the experience of the “silhouettes,” when you look at the wood veneer object it is hard at the same time to envisage the image, and conversely, when you “see” the image, the object disappears, like the frame of a painting, or else vanishes into its own slick finish. In Price’s “silhouette” pieces, this “frame” invites the viewer to project an image into the emptiness, and this emptiness bleeds into the surrounding space of the wall with an extension that is potentially infinite.

If the image from a gif file is conceived as a readymade of sorts, the “silhouettes” may be conceived as assisted readymades that draw on mechanized labor for their production, and refer to things with a non-artistic life, like



Untitled, 2008. Burled Carpathian elm, burled olive ash, burled walnut and diamond acrylic, 230 x 65 inches (584 x 165 cm)

following pages: Installation view, Friedrich Petzel Gallery, 2008.

furniture. Marcel Duchamp’s readymades established a connection between artistic technique and general social technique: the product of alienated factory labor is presented within the world of the supposedly unalienated labor of the artist. In moving from the unassisted to the assisted readymade Duchamp demonstrates, according to John Roberts, that “reproducibility is subject to the intervention of the hand, and therefore to artistic subjectivity.”²⁰ Like Duchamp’s assisted readymade, Price’s appropriations involved the transformation into an artwork of that which has been produced by the social labor of others, or—as is the case with many artists—the involvement of the social labor of others in the production of his objects. However, between the time of Duchamp and that of Price and his generation, the social relations of labor in the West have to a large extent changed, as have the relations between mental and physical labor. The switching between the positive and negative readings of the “silhouette” pieces parallels the relation—and interdependence—between the mental and physical labor, and the artistic and social technique in their making. The alternation between figure and ground itself enacts the alternating visibility and invisibility of these aspects. The clear film that covered these and other works in Zurich evokes transparency as a value of that which is public, in the sense of open to scrutiny and critical consciousness, and at the same time to exhibition as a means of the works becoming publicity, self-packaging, or advertisements of themselves.





Untitled, 2008. Autobody enamel on vacuum-formed polystyrene, 48 x 96 inches (122 x 244 cm)



Installation view, P.S.1, 2005.

opposite: *Vintage Bomber*, 2008. Autobody enamel on vacuum-formed polystyrene, 48 x 96 inches (122 x 244 cm)

Seth Price's vacuum-formed panels add another aspect of packaging to the mix. A number of artists have made vacuum-formed plastic works, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s.²¹ Some, like Iain Baxter and Les Levine, emphasized the combination of plastic as a new medium, with its reference to packaging and disposability, as a spin off from Pop art, while others, like Luis Camnitzer and Marcel Broodthaers, drew on the use of such panels as signage. Price's vacuum-form version of *Dispersion* includes pieces of rope under the plastic—Iain Baxter also made empty, transparent vacuum forms involving rope, including *Still Life, Tangled Rope (clear)* (1965).²² By combining the rope with text panels, Price implies a visual analog for tangles of thought or conundrums. The use of vacuum-formed plastic panels as signs had been extended as a way of exploring the relation of the museum to its public—including implicit forms of control and exclusion—by Marcel Broodthaers in his *Industrial Poems* (1968–1970), plaques made of vacuum-formed plastic bearing text, for example the positive and negative versions of the one bearing the words “MUSEUM/ enfants non admis” [children not admitted]. Text panels remind us that vacuum-forming is a type of stamping or printing. Whereas Broodthaers' vacuum-formed plaques create an anomic form of advertising or signage, Price refers more often to the transparent packaging molded around consumer products, especially electronic goods.²³ With the *Vintage Bombers* (from 2005), rather than protecting the inviolate, shiny newness of the object, however, Price's vacuum forms render the already generic object abject: crumpled and fallen, it looks as if it has been dropped on the ground, somewhat like the meters of string in Duchamp's *Three Standard Stoppages* (1913–1914). Price's vacuum-form molds of breasts and fists—Duchamp also presented life casts in his work²⁴—suggest both an efficient form of figurative representation, and an uncanny, ghostly absence.²⁵ Whereas in the 1960s vacuum-formed plastic as a medium would have implied newness, serial mass production, disposability, to make vacuum-formed panels now is to revive a medium that, although still used in factory and workshop, has, in art, a dated feeling. This draws attention to the way in which the vacuum-form process—during the 1960s the epitome of sleek modernity—now carries the taint of obsolescence, and refers to both the optimism and reflexive critique involved in a moment of art that has passed.

Comparing Price's installation with Broodthaers' various departments of the “Musée d'Art Moderne,” we can see both the similarities and the differences. Broodthaers was not the first artist to engage in the presentation—whether of his own work or that of others, or non-art objects—in the form of an exhibition. What is distinctive about his project is that it took the mimetic or parodic form of a fully-blown museum as the form arose in the 18th to



19th-century nation-state. This becomes explicit with the *Département des Aigles* (1972)²⁶—the exhibition of items in the form of, or bearing, eagles gathered from museum collections and ephemera accumulated by the artist. For the French word for eagle, *aigle*, is homophonic with “Hegel” pronounced in a French (or Francophone-Belgian) accent, the name of the philosopher who formulated a progressive logic of history that encompasses both the 19th-century historicism that governs the periodization of the museum, and the historical logic of the avant-garde. The finale of the museum at Documenta V in 1972 was the *Musée d’Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section Publicité*, including vitrines of illustrations, slide projections, and a vacuum-form sign for the “Service Publicité,” the publicity service of the museum. The work of art has become nothing other than its own publicity. Price borrows for the epigraph of *Dispersion*, Broodthaers’ dictum that “The definition of artistic activity occurs, first of all, in the field of distribution.”²⁷ This “field of distribution”—that what would appear as the consequence or aftermath of the work of art is its very condition—is both the potential for the constitution of a political public sphere, by opening up paths for intersubjective communication and discourse, and its closure as commodity and administered culture.

If the trajectory of Broodthaers’ project is from the avant-garde to the acknowledgement of its administration, commodification, and archivization in the museum, Price’s installations suggest a converse movement. As if to ask: Where can we go starting from art as commodified publicity and museum/gallery object? The title of his “manifesto” is not “circulation”—as in the third sphere between production and consumption, which implies a circular return, with everything, including expropriated surplus value, accounted for—but *Dispersion*. I take “dispersion” to include the sense of Derrida’s term “dissemination,” which concerns both a dispersion that is not controlled by nor returns to a putative “origin” (such as authorial intention), and the potential of any term to be cited or redistributed in an open-ended number of contexts without being limited by them.²⁸

At the exhibition in Zurich’s Kunsthalle, in the room before the artist’s talk video, the Mylar sheet appears scrunched into baroque folds: it is not quite possible to discern whether it has made a twist, like a Möbius strip, inverting inside and outside in a continuous loop. Price is working at a time when there is no longer any outside to appeal to as a basis for critique and value: no use value outside the economy of capitalist exchange, no nature outside culture and the effects of human production, no openness outside publicity.²⁹ Any outside that there might be, therefore, has to be generated by operations of topological inversion, twists on the frame. If the *pas-se-partout* as *parergon* is the structural



Installation View, Kunsthalle Zürich, 2008.

condition of this operation, it is here that Price’s work is situated. The eroded edge of the “silhouettes,” one of the places where this inversion takes occurs, connects the space in which the object is shown to the virtual space of the Internet archive from which the much-magnified negative image comes.

DATABASE AS FORM

During Seth Price’s formative years as an artist, the primary locus of the archive moved from the museum to the Internet. In drawing images for use in his work and sources for his objects from the Internet, he confronts what media theorist Lev Manovich has called “the database as a new symbolic form of the computer age”—as perspective, for Erwin Panofsky, was the symbolic form of the Renaissance.³⁰ Databases comprise “collections of items on which the user can perform various operations.” Normally we search, view, and navigate these items, but we can also download, transform by applying software, and upload, thus transforming the database from which the items were derived. When

the database is the web, it is open-ended, in a continuous state of becoming. Manovich writes,

*websites never have to be complete; and they rarely are. The sites always grow. New links are being added to what is already there. It is as easy to add new elements to the end of a list as it is to insert them anywhere in it.*³¹

The connection to the database is most obvious in Price's texts and in *Title Variable*. The "mix-tape" format of the compilation amounts in effect to the creation of a compilation from an archive that takes the form of a data-

base. The texts—such as the influential *Dispersion*—appear in various forms, sometimes extracted to make new works, in an open-ended process of transformation that mimics that of the typical website. And when *Dispersion* appears as a physical booklet, this serves as a negation of its virtual manifestations, and therefore has its meaning as a form determined by the latter.

The database logic is also evident in Seth Price's videos. In 2000–2001 he produced "*Painting*" *Sites*, where images found by means of a Web search under the word "painting" were combined in a kind of slide-show with a voice-over that recounts the life of a woodcutter named Ludwig Tieck, a German Romantic writer known for his stories in the genre of folk tales. What becomes apparent

as high-art painting appears with kitsch and calendar art, as well as with images that wouldn't normally count as art at all, is the leveling effect of the database that in itself involves no apparent order. The database as a cultural form seems to match Jacques Rancière's "aesthetic regime" that follows the hierarchies of the "representative regime" with an "equality of indifference" which "destroys all the hierarchies of representation"³²—the database as cultural form could be seen as the consummation of a development begun in the 19th century. In the Flaubertian novel, contingent micro-descriptions come to stall narrative progression. Narrative and database are, according to Manovich, contrasting forms:

*As a cultural form, the database represents the world as a list of items that it refuses to order. In contrast, a narrative creates a cause-and-effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items (events). Therefore, database and narrative are natural "enemies."*³³



"Painting" *Sites*, 2000–2001. Video still

Manovich sees the typical strategy of new media art as an attempt to reconcile these enemies by creating a narrative trajectory through a database. This, he claims, inverts the standard account of the relationship between paradigm (the choices from which a narrative is constructed) and syntagm (the actual narrative), since in the database it is the paradigmatic dimension that has material existence, while the syntagmatic narrative is virtual—the traces of the path of the narrative remain as a set of links stored in the database.

We look to the voice-over of Price's "*Painting*" *Sites* to resolve the "chaos" of the images—which breaks with both hierarchy and historical teleology—into a linear story. The ideology of the artist as genius privileges the biography of the artist as the source of the work's meaning; this is itself an attempt to resolve the aporia of originality, where the work is the production of a singular artist, yet as "inspired" by something beyond cognition, opaque in its origin. Furthermore, much of the appropriation art of the late 1970s and early 1980s took the deconstruction of the Romantic conception of the author/artist as genius and origin as its task. It can therefore be no coincidence that Price chooses a figure from early German Romanticism as the subject for the voice-over of a video that is concerned with a rethinking of appropriation in relation to both the Internet database and the possibilities of authorship in such a context. The cultural privileging of voice as self-presence and origin to which Jacques Derrida draws attention, invites us to look for the meaning of what we see in what we hear, even more so if we know that the voice is that of the artist himself insofar as we assume a privileged relation of the artist's voice with the intentionality of the work.³⁴ However, what we are given is a maze of tales about Tieck, which take on the character of the very fairy tales of which he was an early collector. What happens is that the "fabula"—the story of the life as a series of events—disappears into a seemingly endless process of ever-more fantastical narrativization, all pronounced in an earnest, slightly sing-song voice. The viewer is subject to a nonsensical parody of a slide talk. If we try to plot out the narrative of "*Painting*" *Sites* we find that it has no coherence: the spoken narrative does not solve the problem of the chaos of images produced by the database—indeed, with its nonsensical leaps it is in the end equally chaotic. If the voice seemed to offer an escape from the incoherence of the database, in the end it entangles us all the more completely in its maze.

The epistemological status and authority of the artist's voice is also at issue in the video *Redistribution* (2007–) presented as part of Price's installation in Zurich. Is the screened artists' talk—which is presented in the genre of didactic documentary—an explanation of the work, or part of it; inside, or outside the exhibition; packaging, or packaged?³⁵ The viewer is left uncertain

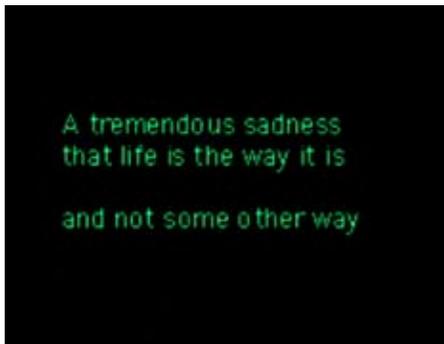


how to take the artist's statements. When he describes how the universally transmutable substance of plastic—echoing Roland Barthes' famous essay on the subject in *Mythologies* where, "The hierarchy of substances is abolished: a single one replaces them all: the whole world *can* be plasticized"³⁶—anticipates the digital, and talks about vacuum-formed packaging, do we see this as an elucidation of the use of plastic in the exhibition that makes a truth claim, or a theatrical performance? Indeed, the use of the transparent plastic "package" effectively puts the whole exhibition into quotation marks.

VIDEO DESIGN

In *Notes on This Show* Price writes, "Art as a system of model making. distinction b/w model and an argument."³⁷ In the "post-medium condition" we cannot separate Price's videos from his other work. We could, rather, approach his project in terms of models or paradigms. Currently, much art making is shifting from an object-based paradigm to a music-based paradigm.³⁸ Today the meeting of rock video, digital audio files and the associated software, distribution through YouTube, and the identification of "post-production"³⁹ as an approach to art making, combined with artists whose youth was spent listening to and making music, has resulted in music becoming a paradigm for art making, literally when it comes to time-based art, and analogically in painting and sculpture, where the object may be conceived as the equivalent of a song (this goes at least as far back as the equation of Pollock's paint pouring to jazz improvisation).

Can we infer a paradigm shift from Price's work?⁴⁰ Music composition, often combined with the appropriation of other music and sound, is subject to processing, which takes it into the area of design as filtered through video editing (an important source here is Dara Birnbaum's TV videos). Video understood as an electronic signal anticipates the equation of mediums in the digital, thanks to which techniques—from music composition, video editing, and graphic design—can be cross-applied.⁴¹ The Internet adds the possibility of a work that is open at both ends: its origin may be composition, appropriation, or a combination of the two; and it is open-ended as distributed versions may be transformed as easily as a web-site. This practice of "versioning" then gets extended to both objects and texts. Rock musicians have also distributed different versions of the same number: single, LP, disco mix etc. In cinema, the "director's cut" has become a way of re-marketing movies, especially in DVD. Price's video *Digital Video Effect: "Editions"* (2006) is an unlimited distribution "sampler" of his edited videos to that date, produced for a three-part exhibition at Friedrich Petzel Gallery, Reena Spaulings Fine Art, and Electronic Arts



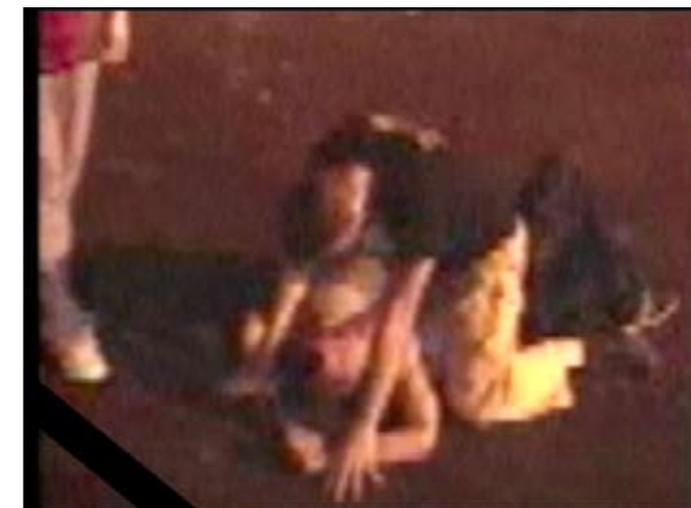
opposite top: *Rejected or Unused Clips, Arranged in Order of Importance*, 2003. Video stills

opposite bottom: *Industrial Synth*, 2000–2001. Video stills

Intermix in New York. As a "sampler" the principle of its montage cannot be inferred: are the decisions to do with meaning, purely formal, or arbitrary?

In Price's work, the design paradigm is applied across different mediums, from painting in his series of calendar paintings (2003–2004), to video. This is evident in *Industrial Synth* (2000–2001), which, like "Painting" Sites of the same period, negates narrative, now through the emphatic use of graphics together with animations and charts in a meditation on technology, obsolescence, and death. The sequence of performances included a shower scene, inevitably evocative of Hitchcock, which only serves to emphasize, by contrast with the rest, the extent to which the model for artist's video has been displaced from cinema and documentation to graphic design and PowerPoint-type presentation. Another case in point concerning the relation of argument to model is *Rejected or Unused Clips, Arranged in Order of Importance* (2003), a video assembled from unused pieces of earlier audio and video projects—in effect, the obverse of *Editions* which re-distributed previously used clips. *Rejected or Unused Clips* seems to contain an argument, coupling a slightly ponderous voice-over that pronounces on religion, history, and communications technology with various images including a stealth bomber, a fight in the military, on a soccer pitch, and between cats, the Twin Towers, and downloaded images, combined with digital design effects. In one sequence the voice says, against images of babies suckling at breasts, "science can answer everything, yes, except its logic, and reason cannot tell us why there is something rather than nothing,"

which sounds like Heidegger on Leibnitz's principle of sufficient reason, and appears in several other texts and versions by Price.⁴² One of them, "Grey Flags," mutated from being publicity for a show to being a work in its own right, a sliding that renders the status of his statements unstable, as meaning and register are not so much determined in relation to the individual context in which the statement appears, but rather by the way that the repetition of the "same" statement in different contexts creates uncertainty. For example, is the statement concerning "something rather than nothing" philosophy, publicity, or artwork? Are we to take it as being a truth-claim, a sales-pitch, or a performance for its own sake? This sequence in the video is followed by surveillance footage of two young men fighting in contest on a piece of waste ground,

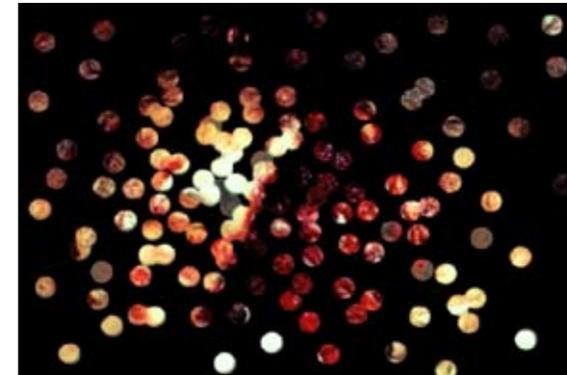
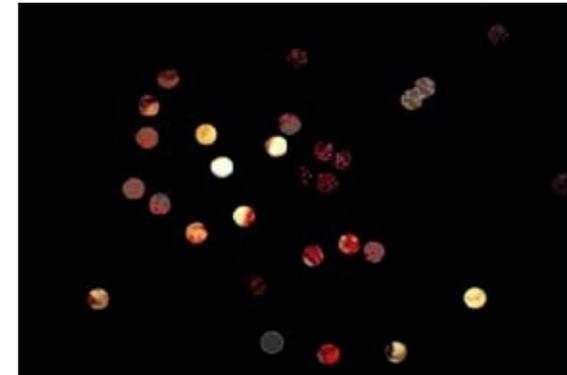


Rejected or Unused Clips, Arranged in Order of Importance, 2003. Video still

with the voice going on about a "personal gift that can bring tears to the eyes." Philosophical argument segues into meaningless cliché. It could be taken as a

parody of an artist's essay film (a genre itself facilitated by video). Are we to try to figure out the meaning of its montage, or is the ordering arbitrary? What is the basis of the "Order of Importance"? Logical? Aesthetic? The logical order of argument is subverted by free play, which re-introduces a space for aesthetic decision-making, which doesn't need any justification at the level of argument. Rather like in *"Painting" Sites*, the voice is in quotation marks: a persona.

In the "artist's talk" video for Zurich, Price discusses how he sees art video dividing into two threads: a performance tradition from the early 1970s, and a thread that refracts video through the structure of cinema that comes into its own in the 1990s; rather than in these approaches, both of which are based around the lens, Price's interest lay in getting rid of the camera, appropriating moving and still images, and subjecting them to digital editing techniques. The emphasis is shifted from shooting to design. This is evident in *Digital Video Effect: "Holes"* (2003) and *Digital Video Effect: "Spills"* (2004). In *"Holes"* Price applies an effect that opens the surface to representation with holes in a black screen, or fills it in with the image fractured into dots, to photographs of bodies from autopsies and executions, including ones from the Jenin massacre of 2002. The soundtrack is sampled voices, which seems to match the graphic effect in its rhythm, ceasing for example when the screen goes black. In his text "Was ist Los?" Price writes, "Here is an operation," and goes on to describe how in 1988 the composer Steve Reich used the then new technology of the sampler to process human voices. These happened to be testimonials from Holocaust survivors. In such testimony the trace of the voice becomes witness, "overburdened with meaning, unassailable," as Price puts it. "Where to locate the power in this operation?" he asks, and replies that it is the removal of the material from its "native context," a violation of the original "through the creation of its double," part of a "lamentable cultural slide from representation to repetition."⁴⁵ This phrase recalls Warhol's *Death and Disaster* paintings of the 1960s where a photograph from photojournalism—of a car accident with corpses, an incident from a civil rights demonstration, the electric chair—is repeated over a color field. The "critical" voice is itself a kind of citation that duplicates the very appropriation that it accuses. Just as the sampler seems to expropriate the voice from the body and give it to a machine, so the design effect seems to reduce the corpse to decor, a form of mediation that becomes a defense for the viewer who might have found the image difficult to look at in the first place. Aesthetization becomes a numbing duplication of atrocity. Again what comes across is the entwinement of publicity and publicness: the internet as both a means to fetishize the image—to the point of atrocity porn—and as a global political space in which people who are victimized can draw attention to their plight.



If in *Digital Video Effect: "Holes"* publicly available images take on a disturbing intimacy, in *Digital Video Effect: "Spills"* private home video takes on a public significance. Price re-uses documentary footage shot by Joan Jonas of Richard Serra, Robert Smithson, and the dealer Joseph Helman discussing the economics of the art world, in a living room where a child is heard in the background. This footage is subject to an effect in which the image is opened up in a black screen by what appears to be a liquid pouring, which may allude to Smithson's *Glue Pour* (1970). "*Spills*" confronts the aesthetic of documentation in the earlier artists' use of video, with Price's approach of making films without a camera, but appropriating footage and subjecting it to design operations. This has become a common way in which video material from YouTube is used, downloaded, altered, and re-posted.

If appropriation has two senses—taking something and also internalizing it—the processing of the image in these videos works against the second appropriation of the appropriated image. Thus, paradoxically, the image's status as grist to the mill (raw material for an operation, subjected to banal transformations) prevents it becoming merely grist to the mill (assigned to its category and presuppositions). "*Holes*" and "*Spills*" become what Rancière has called "pensive images": pensiveness as a quality of the image itself rather than of the author of the image, a state of indetermination between activity and passivity, thinking and non-thinking, art and non-art.⁴⁴ Both these videos allude to the indexical—the home movie, the photograph as sheer evidence of death—without their "pensiveness" deriving from it (as in the Barthesian "punctum" criticized by Rancière), but rather from an internal stalling or process of indetermination that takes place in the image.

Whereas an earlier appropriation artist like Sherrie Levine in her series *After Walker Evans* (1981) re-photographed good reproductions of the photographers' photographs (which might of course already be considered reproductions in their "original" state) with minimal intervention—which means that if one were not aware that they were appropriations, one may take them to be original prints—Price, in addition to appropriating and altering found material, will make what is in fact an original creation look as if it is appropriated, as if "post-production" processes were applied to material sourced from elsewhere. Thus in the calendar works, the reproduced paintings are surrounded with original digital "painting" that looks as if it is appropriated from already-existing kitsch design. This is similar to the soundtrack to *Modern Suite* (2002), which sounds like manipulated fragments of Darmstadt avant-garde experimental music from the 1950s and 1960s, but is in fact an original composition by Price: it accompanies a sequence of still images of children's playgrounds—

some futuristic in design, and most deserted—grabbed from the Internet, a combination of image and sound that bespeaks a ruined modernism.

As with YouTube and various social network and aggregator sites on the Web, so in Price's work, rather than its meaning being determined by the relation to a single context—credibility being attributed to photojournalism in newspapers, art value to images and objects in galleries, and so on—the context is multiplied for a vast and extremely heterogeneous quantity of imagery of which we may have no idea of the source or meaning. It is up to the individual to construct a meaning and their own context for this material, by making a personal archive, linking, re-editing, and redistributing it on the Web, using image editing and design software. In this way the use of imagery, including photographs, is no longer to provide an accurate and credible documentation, but rather to create alterations or re-designs, while the "original"—the source material—may well disappear if it is removed from the Web. Together with a number of his contemporaries, Price explores in his work this new relation to the image. Similarly to the moment of 1970s and 1980s appropriation, but under different conditions, just as the image takes on a different valency, so the role of the artist changes. Appropriation, arising out of the meeting of Pop and Conceptual art, threw into question the role of the artist as source of the artwork and its meaning. The next step, it now appears, has been the emergence of a co-existing gallery art practice with a dispersed production. On the one hand artists' re-designing, re-editing, and re-distribution of visual and sonic material merges with a general consumption-production process that has become aesthetic; and on the other hand, a parallel practice that has as its destination the art gallery, collection, and museum reflects on the mediation of the object—which may now take the form of a version, a platform, or a unique materialization of a file of computer code—in this new digital economy.

DATING WORK

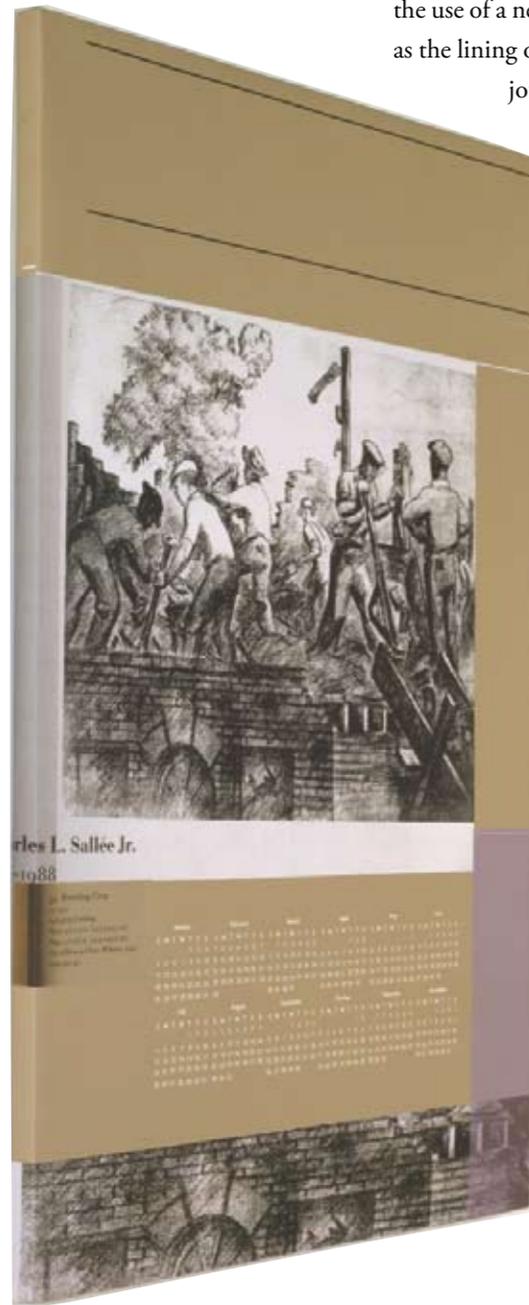
The calendar is one way in which images from art exist in a non-art world context. In reproduction, Price's calendar paintings, made from 2003 to 2004, could pass as products or posters not made or designed by an artist; as images circulating on the Web, perhaps, they might well be invisible as works by an artist, although, like popular calendars, incorporating works of art. Insofar as they combine dates with the picture of a work of art on a work of art, Price's calendar paintings also provoke a reflection on the way in which the meaning of the date placed on a painting has changed historically. In an essay on On Kawara's *Date Paintings*—which were painted on the day of the date and stored in a box lined with a newspaper from that day—Jeff Wall has written of the

date in painting, specifically of the significance of the shift from the date of the event represented in a history painting, to the date of the making of the painting as itself the event in question.⁴⁵ This shift is marked by Kawara in the use of a newspaper from the same day the painting was made and presented as the lining of the box that contains it. Through the literal inclusion of photojournalism, Kawara shows what painting can no longer represent.

When seen first-hand—that is, not as reproductions—Price’s calendar paintings are discernibly three-dimensional objects, since the printed image on the canvas wraps around the edges of the stretcher. When applying the image manipulation software Photoshop, unused elements tend to be pushed to the edge, outside the frame of what will be visible in the “flat” image. Price has allowed these elements to be printed, and to show on the side of the stretcher. This raises the question of what is included as a part of the work, and what not. Is that which appears on the edge a part of the painting, or is it outside? In addition, the paintings are slightly beveled toward the edges; this effect, invisible in reproduction and therefore having to do with the peculiarity of the painting as a physical thing, is hardly noticeable, almost a matter of subliminal perception. Employing reproduced images, digitally processed using design software, yet having a particular physical existence that almost eludes notice, Price’s calendar paintings pose the question of how perceptual experience of physical objects is mediated by the digital: that is, they posit perception itself as “dated,” mediated by technologies in the process of transformation. Are not all paintings henceforth “calendar paintings”? Paintings of the past present themselves together with their temporal register: the calendar paintings present their temporal register as their explicit subject.

The calendar paintings have the paradoxical status of being original (because composed by the artist) versions of reproductions (because prints) without any original (because based on digital files) that are themselves original (because unique physical objects). Thus they re-materialize as

unique objects the kind of paintings that have formed the basis for the reproductions typically used in the mass-produced calendars. By emphasizing the way in which these paintings are framed by the calendar, they pose a question



opposite: *Beige Wrecking Crew*, 2004. Inkjet on canvas, 28 x 40 inches (71 x 102 cm)

below: *Windmill Gradient*, 2004. Inkjet on canvas, 29 1/2 x 43 inches (75 x 110 cm)

right: *Big Pink Screw*, 2004. Inkjet on canvas, 28 x 41 inches (71 x 104 cm)

following pages: *Installation View*, Kölnischer Kunstverein, 2008.



concerning the relation between astronomical time, history, and fashion. In mid-19th-century Paris, Charles Baudelaire reflects on the relation between history and fashion in his essay “The Painter of Modern Life” (1863, written 1859–1860), where as the exemplar of such a painter

he chose not the obvious person, his friend Edouard Manet, but rather a graphic illustrator—in effect a proto-photojournalist without photography—Constantin Guys. Baudelaire begins his essay by considering how artworks from the Louvre have been popularized by engravings—reproductions—and telling the reader that they have before themselves out-of-date fashion plates from the period of the Revolution to the Consulate. Of these he writes:

These costumes, which seem laughable to many thoughtless people—people who are grave without true gravity—have double-natured charm, one both artistic and historical. They are often very beautiful and drawn with wit; but what to me is every bit as important, and what I am happy to find in all, or almost all of them, is the moral and aesthetic feeling of their time. . . . These engravings can be translated either into beauty or ugliness; in one direction, they become caricatures, in the other, antique statues.⁴⁶

Just as Baudelaire’s out-of-date fashion plates no longer function to sell contemporary styles of clothing, so Price’s calendar paintings no longer function to tell the date. Had they been calendars, they would by now have lost their use-value. Just as people often leave a calendar up after the year has passed because they like the picture, so, however, these works offer themselves for another kind of looking. Yet as calendars they remain haunted by their datedness. If they remind us of the scenario of the fashion plates in Baudelaire’s essay, which leads him to think of beauty as something historical, and divided into that which passes, the “relative, circumstantial element” and “an eternal, invariable element,”⁴⁷ this induces us to consider, not simply the historical character of beauty, but the historical character of history itself. What



is history for us, in this era of globalization and the total presence of the digital archive? Are, in fact, the paintings in Price's calendar paintings "dated," or are they a part of a perpetual present or endless return of the same?

A calendar past its year can no longer be used as a calendar—but then part of the use of a wall-calendar is decoration, and it is in any case hard to know what the use of a calendar is in the first place, as it does not have the functionality of a diary or PDA. The historical source for the illustrated calendar is probably the medieval *Book of Hours*, which shows the seasons and the activities associated with them, such as sowing the fields and harvest. Price's calendar paintings appear highly stylized and artificial, the result of graphic manipulation and processing—therefore at a distance from nature associated with calendar time. They are a part, rather, of the "second nature" of the commodity, where relations between people are converted into relations between things, and indeed of the loss of nature as an "outside" of society, to which we might appeal as a repository of value, as was the case in the 18th and 19th centuries. The disappearance of nature as an outside is related to the loss of use value as a "natural" basis for the critique of the commodity. Price has included the works of Thomas Hart Benton, Charles Sheeler, Arthur Dove, as well as the less well-known Charles Sallée and John C. Atherton in the calendar paintings.⁴⁸ The paintings could be taken as from the last moment when "history painting" was possible before the domination of Abstract Expressionism, which absorbed the communitarianism of mural painting and social realism, via primitivism and a psychoanalytic interpretation of myth, into an abstract art making universalist claims: henceforth history would in effect become unrepresentable in art. However, abstract paintings tend to become representations of themselves, thus losing their abstract character. The calendar paintings also draw on a banalized version of the design aesthetic that grew out of Pop art and geometric abstraction. In effect, the two sources for the calendar paintings bracket the moment of American high modernist abstract art, which is invisible in them. The combination of Depression era realist painting with somewhat outmoded "kitsch" graphics relates two past times to each other and to the present. The graphics belong to a time of rapid technological progress and economic boom; the paintings to a time of economic depression. Yet the realism of the paintings—associated with the New Deal and the WPA—predominantly brown as it is in its tonality, bespeaks an optimism. Thus two kinds of progress—political/utopian and economic/technological—are juxtaposed as objects of reflection from our present situation. The installations of the calendar paintings, first at the Kölner Kunstverein (2008) and then at Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York (2009), involved hanging a number of the paintings on temporary



Installation View, Kölner Kunstverein, 2008.

partitions raised off the ground at the bottom, reminiscent both of trade fairs, and of art exhibitions before the "white cube" became almost ubiquitous. Like the calendar paintings, this mode of display refers both to commerce, and to the historical period of art before high modernism, which is itself hinted at by the calendar paintings' abstraction.

At both the exhibitions of the calendar paintings, Price included works comprising vacuum-formed masks. The process involves a variety of stamping or, in effect, printing. Georges Didi-Huberman argues that the role of the imprint in the production of resemblances is suppressed from the Renaissance to Duchamp, since it doesn't accord with the idea of the artist as creator-genius, as well as because of the primacy of the optical and intellectual distance of mimesis over the technique of contact that produces the imprint or cast.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, techniques of casting from life continued to be practiced in a subterranean way from Masaccio and Donatello into the 19th century. The paradigm of the imprint and cast returns to the light of day with Duchamp—like Duchamp's nine "malic molds" for the *Large Glass*, which are supposed to be inflated with gas, Price's molds are left empty, manifesting in the object the condition of the image as the negation of the thing, at the same time as they continue to allude to packaging. For his *Masks* (2006), Price leaves the



Installation View, Kölnischer Kunstverein, 2008.

surrounding plastic left by the vacuum-form process, which would normally be cut away, so that it becomes a surplus that functions as a frame or passe-partout. Their form is reminiscent of Mycenaean funerary masks molded from a sheet of gold, and suggests also the death mask used to produce likenesses. The uncanny effect of the vacuum-form mask has been manifested in popular culture: in 1970 an album appeared on the cover of which was a picture of the musician's head enveloped in a transparent vacuum-form mask—the eyes cut out to emphasize the artists' blank stare—the forehead of which bore the words "John Cale Vintage Violence," like a brand.⁵⁰ The vacuum-formed mask is both image—with the emptiness and absence that implies—as well as a resemblance produced by contact, like life- or death-masks, therefore a blind, tactile production opposed to the image. The *Masks* evoke the paradigm of the artwork as incarnation, a living embodiment, while at the same time emptying it out in their blankness and repetition. What is left is the husk or shell, the same operation as is found in Marcel Broodthaers in his use of mussel shells, applied to vacuum-forming as a technique he also drew on. However, whereas with Broodthaers it is as if we are in an art that is concerned with the end of art and its living on after its end, in Price's work we seem to be on the hinge between two—perhaps entirely different—models or paradigms of art: a "vertical" one that is incarnational, involving a relation between physical embodiment and idea, which in the masks is shown to be empty, literally vacuous; and another that is "horizontal" and dispersive.

THE EDGE OF DISAPPEARANCE

A number of contemporary works of art occupy a condition on the edge of disappearance, as if seeking to answer the question Duchamp posed himself in 1913, and which Price cites in *Dispersion*: "How to make a work of art that is not 'of art'?"⁵¹ If Pop and 1970s and 1980s appropriation art transferred images from mass culture into the gallery, contemporary appropriation-based art moves in the opposite direction: taking the cue from certain experiments of Conceptual art, like placing ads in magazines, such practices court disappearance into existing systems of distribution and communication. Whereas in Conceptual art it was the disappearance of the artwork as object that was at issue, based on a concern to evade reification and commodification, today the disappearance of the artwork, dispersed into social networks, verges on the disappearance of the artist him- or herself. However, disappearance is being espoused by art at precisely the moment when in social terms it is becoming practically impossible for people to disappear due to new technologies of surveillance, as well as the increasing reliance on credit cards and cell phones which can be tracked.



How to Disappear in America. New York: Leopard Press, 2008.

Seth Price's book *How to Disappear in America* (2008)⁵² is composed in part from appropriated survivalist and libertarian writings about how to free oneself from the federal government, and also advice to people trying to escape from abusive relationships. Its montage takes a form somewhere between aphorisms and a how-to-do-it instructional manual. The concern of the book seems not so much with the presentation of a political view—whether libertarian or new age—but rather with the possibility, or not, of disappearing, of not leaving traces. The book gives an American inflection to Walter Benjamin's text "Experience and Poverty" (1933), in which he argues that the revolutionary is less likely to leave traces in the modern architecture of glass—which has "no 'aura'"—than in Victorian plush. Benjamin cites the watchword from the refrain of the first poem of Bertolt Brecht's *Reader for City-Dwellers* [*Lesebuch für Städtebewohner*], "Erase the traces!"⁵³ The ability to disappear, to take to the road and start a new life, is an aspect of the American fantasy, the counterpart of the success story of the person who rises from nothing, who disappears and reappears with a new identity, transformed

from a loser to a success.⁵⁴ This is, however, a fantasy that is increasingly at odds with the reality of falling social mobility and the tracking of people from birth in every aspect of their lives. As the possibility of disappearing diminishes, identity theft is on the increase: the only way of disappearing may well be not so much to vanish, as to assume someone else's identity, to leave traces that are not your own.

The role of the reader of *How to Disappear in America* is rather like that of the viewer of the negative shapes in the "silhouette" pieces. We construct a protagonist in the gaps or spaces between the fragments or positive elements, completing the work. Appearing and disappearing are also a matter of figure and ground. To disappear is to merge with the ground. This is what camouflage attempts to achieve. Roger Caillois discusses this merging into space in "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia":

*a butterfly, in order to make itself invisible, may do nothing more than use the tactics of the Satyrus asiaticus, whose flattened wings in repose appear simply as a line almost without thickness, imperceptible, perpendicular to the flower where it has alighted, and which turns simultaneously with the observer so that it is only this minimum surface that is always seen.*⁵⁵

Price's work is to quite a large extent governed not by representation or mimesis, but by "mimicry" in Caillois' sense. To make something that will "pass"—as



Business Envelope, 2008. Inkjet on protective film over mirrored acrylic, 48 x 96 inches (122 x 244 cm)

Double Hunt, 2006. Highway ink screened on PETG, grommets, 48 x 24 inches (122 x 61 cm)



a didactic text, as a kitsch calendar, as a "real" compilation album—is to make something that will merge into its surroundings, something that will effectively "disappear" by appearing as something already there or "always seen," rather than being picked out. A precedent is the *Nesting Bookcases* of Joe Scanlan (1989–), an unlimited multiple of bookcases, which may appear stacked, erected and empty, or simply be employed as bookcases, in which the artwork might disappear into its use.⁵⁶ This serves to remind us of the problem of the avant-garde: that the fusion of art

into life amounts to the disappearance of art. Theodor W. Adorno described this as *Ent-kunstung*, literally "de-artisting," which might happen in two ways: either avant-garde art achieves its end in the transformation of society; or art is absorbed into administered mass-culture.⁵⁷ The latter fate forms the basis for

his argument for the political necessity of the autonomy of art as critique of society. Autonomous art needs to stand out against the "background" of a society based on means-end relationships and administered culture. An alternative strategy, which takes the same circumstances as given, is that formulated by Benjamin Buchloh in institutional critique: in a number of his projects, Michael Asher, one of his principal models, rather than creating a new sculptural object to be placed in the gallery, works by exposing the institutional space of art through the displacement of an already existing object, or works on the architecture of the space to make its conditions manifest.⁵⁸ Whereas Asher reveals the ground, the architectural and institutional context, Price's tendency is to "disperse" his work into it: both imply the extension of the figure-ground relationship from representation within a

picture to the relation of the artwork to its circumstances. The shift in emphasis from reflection to dispersion suggests, however, a change in the artist's relationship to critique. The alternative that was posed by Adorno was either negative critique, for example the negation of means-end relationships by autonomous art, or affirmation of the status quo. The end of critique may also mean the end of that opposition. Price's *Dispersion* amounts to an attempt to consider the role of art in this situation. It is a Janus-faced text. On the one hand, Price affirms a new model of the artist as a switching-point or operator in a network,

a site of the continuous, endless transformation of the already existing. On the other hand, he betrays an anxiety about the dissolution of critique through the emphasis on the Duchampian category of “delay” as introducing a gap—a non-contemporaneity—between that which art re-uses, and the given of its time, for example in Price’s own use of out-of-date techno and disco music in his 8-hour audio file mix-tape *8-4, 9-5, 10-6, 11-7*, or the use of pre-Second World War American painting in the calendar paintings. His conclusion of *Dispersion* with an illustration of Albrecht Dürer’s *Melancholia I* can only recall Walter Benjamin’s *Origin of the Play of Mourning*,⁵⁹ and the use made of Benjamin’s writings by art critics in the formulation of an “allegorical” reading of the appropriation work of the late 1970s and 1980s.

Price, together with other artists of his generation, has moved the place of art from being that of figure on ground (as it still is in the period of critique, whether autonomous figure on mass-culture ground in Adorno, or making the institutional ground into a figure in Buchloh’s “institutional critique”), to occupying the edge between figure and ground, flickering between the two. That this dance of figure and ground is, in so many of Price’s “silhouette works,” performed by hands, serves to draw our attention, again, to the relation between the found and the made, between the tangible and the immaterial, and between the virtual and the actual. As well as offering things to gather around and think about, as the Kunsthalle Zürich exhibition shows, Price is interested in tracing trajectories. His work is mobile, and, combined with his other activities as a writer of texts in various genres and compiler of music, tends to move through different networks and habitats into which it sometimes vanishes, whether by becoming anonymous or simply ceasing to be recognized as art.⁶⁰

To make a book of a combination of appropriated text seamlessly merged with passages written by himself places the artist on the edge between authorship and disappearance. So in this respect the title could refer both to the book and to the content. If one way to disappear would be to leave no traces, another would be to occupy the traces that already exist, to become a part of the flow of information. As a counterpoint to this, the book is published in a conventional format, with beautifully patterned endpapers (based on the scan of a dishcloth), and the author’s name on the spine, although not on the front cover. Under the title on the dust jacket is one of Price’s negative images of a hand dropping keys into another hand, which has become something of a logo for him: not only does it play with the way in which a figure disappears into the ground, it also suggests that meaning is a transaction or link rather than a content.



Gold Key, 2007. Inkjet on Dibond, 48 x 48 inches (122 x 122 cm)

NOTES

1. The first showing of the “gold keys” was in the exhibition *Tricks* at Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne, October 27–December 22, 2007. They were shown together with negative images in transparent acrylic plastic-covered wood laminate, together with a drawing of hands making a configuration for a hand-shadow, at Friedrich Petzel, New York, February 9–March 8, 2008.
2. For overviews of Price’s oeuvre, see Elizabeth Schambelan, “Openings: Seth Price,” *Artforum*, vol. LXIII, no. 9, May 2005, pp. 236–237; Johanna Burton, “Seth Price: A Human Interest Story,” in *Guyton, Price, Smith, Walker*, exh. cat. (New York: 38th St. Publishers, 2008), pp. 73–85; Polly Staple, “The Producer,” *Frieze*, no. 118, October 2008, pp. 244–251; and Tim Griffin, “The Personal Effects of Seth Price,” *Artforum*, vol. XLVII, no. 10 (Summer 2009), pp. 284–293. For Price’s involvement in performance at The Kitchen with Kelly Walker, see Tan Lin, “Less Creative Anachronism: On *Freelance Stenographer*,” *Artforum*, vol. XLV, no. 10 (Summer 2007), pp. 199–200: the performance involved its own mediation through the use of a stenographer and photocopying.
3. The use of permutations of elements to produce unique objects in the form of what looks like a serially produced multiple is similar to Allan McCollum’s *Plaster Surrogates* (series begun in 1982), where the casts made from the *Surrogate Paintings* (series begun in 1978) with black centers are in different sizes with different colored mats and frames, allowing for potentially thousands of unique works. See *Alan McCollum* (Los Angeles: A.R.T. Press, 1996), p. 39.
4. See Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor,” in Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (eds.), *Radical Thought in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 133–148, and at <http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcimmateriallabour3.htm>.
5. For an account of appropriation art in the USA, see Douglas Eklund, *The Pictures* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and New York and London: Yale University Press, 2009). I discuss some of the implications of appropriation in Michael Newman, *Richard Prince: Untitled (couple)* (London: Afterall Books, 2006).
6. Price mentions Robert Smithson, Mel Bochner, Dan Graham, Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, Stephen Kaltenbach, and Adrian Piper.
7. Seth Price, *Dispersion*, 2002—, at <http://www.distributedhistory.com/Dispersion08.pdf>; first print publication in *The 25th Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts*, ed. Christophe Chérix (Geneva: JRP Ringier, 2003) p. 239.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 249.
9. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* [Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit] (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1989), pp. 89–117, chapter 12: “Public Opinion—Opinion Publique—Öffentliche Meinung: On the Prehistory of the Phrase,” and chapter 13: “Publicity as the Bridging Principle between Politics and Morality (Kant).”
10. The rapidity with which art is taken up in advertising may be seen in the ad for the HBO vampire series *True Blood*, which Asher Penn convincingly argues in an interview with Seth Price is based on Price’s “silhouette” work—possibly even a specific one, reproduced in the blog “Seth Price’s Vampires,” *Interview* (April 27, 2009), <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/blogs/culture/2009-04-27/seth-price-true-blood/>. The *True Blood* ad may be seen at <http://www.hbo.com/trueblood/>.
11. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 127, 128, 143.
12. See Daniel Bauman, “Seth Price: Real Cheating,” *Parkett*, no. 75, 2006, and the description on UbuWeb at <http://ubu.cwvu.edu/sound/price.html>.

13. Price, *Notes on This Show*, self-published on the occasion of the simultaneous shows at Friedrich Petzel Gallery, Reena Spaulings, and Electronic Arts Intermix, New York, 2006, p. 11.

14. Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 9.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

17. See the press release for Seth Price's exhibition at Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York, February 9–March 8, 2008, at www.petzels.com/exhibitions/2008-02-09-seth-price/.

18. Reproduced and discussed in Eklund, *The Pictures Generation*, pp. 142–143.

19. For a discussion of hollowness and illusion in Judd's sculpture, see Rosalind E. Krauss, "The Material Uncanny," in *Donald Judd: Early Fabricated Work* (New York: PaceWildenstein, 1998), pp. 7–13; also David Raskin, "The Shiny Illusionism of Krauss and Judd," *Art Journal*, vol. 65, no. 1, Spring 2006, pp. 7–21.

20. John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade* (London and New York: Verso, 2007), p. 56.

21. For a discussion of artists' uses of vacuum-form plastic, see Christophe Cherix and John Tremblay, *Plastic* (Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2007).

22. *Still Life, Tangled Rope (clear)* is illustrated in The Canadian Art Database of the Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art at York University at http://www.ccca.ca/artists/work_detail.html?languagePref=en&mke_y=16358&link_id=844. For a discussion of Iain Baxter's work using the vacuum-form process and plastic packaging, see Christophe Domino, "Iain Baxter: The Qualities of Plastic for an Art Without Quality," *Parachute*, 117 (January/February/March 2005), pp. 64–82.

23. For a brilliant account of Broodthaers' vacuum-formed panels, see Benjamin H.D.

Buchloh, "Open Letters, Industrial Poems," in *October*, no. 42, special issue *Broodthaers: Writings, Interviews, Photographs* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988), pp. 67–100.

24. Including *With my Tongue in my Cheek* (1959) and the female torso in the installation *Étant donnés* (1946–1966).

25. Allan McCollum's *The Dog from Pompei* (1990–), made from a cast of the taken from a mold of the "chained dog" plaster cast in the Vesuvius Museum in Pompei, and his *Lost Objects* (1991–), made from fossil bones, themselves casts or "natural copies," are precedents for the production of an object by molding where the "origin" is absent.

26. The full title is *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section des Figures (Der Adler vom Oligozän bis heute)*, and it was held at the Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf.

27. Price, *Dispersion*, p. 4.

28. See Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

29. I am referring to the condition of "real subsumption" in Antonio Negri, *Time for Revolution* (New York and London: Continuum, 2003), pp. 25–29. On p. 26 Negri writes in relation to time that "the capitalist drive toward the limitless working day and the worker's exertion toward its limitation remains always unresolved," which might be applied to Price's 8–4, 9–5, 10–6, 11–7 (2007).

30. Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), p. 219.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 220–221.

32. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), p. 14.

33. Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, p. 225.

34. Jacques Derrida's argument that the philosophical tradition since Plato has privileged speech over writing is traced in *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973) and

Writing and Difference (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

35. Precedents for the artist's talk, documentary, or essay video as artwork include Robert Smithson's slide lecture *Hotel Palenque* (1969) and Dan Graham's film *Rock my Religion* (1982–84).

36. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1970), p. 99. For a history of plastic, see Jeffrey L. Meikle, *American Plastic: A Cultural History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

37. Price, *Notes on This Show*, p. 31.

38. John Cage is an important model for this, as is Andy Warhol and The Velvet Underground's *Exploding Plastic Inevitable*, and it is anticipated and developed by the role of scratch disco in the 1980s, and the intersection of musician/artists like Glenn Branca with groups with art connections and interests like Sonic Youth, or artists like Jutta Koether who has produced work in both areas, and collaborated with Kim Gordon of Sonic Youth.

39. See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction. Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World* (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2000, ed. with new preface 2005).

40. For the idea of "paradigm shift," see Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

41. For a discussion of video as electronic signal, see Yvonne Spielmann, *Video: The Reflexive Medium* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008). She states: "The musicalization demonstrated in electronic media, therefore, reinforces the structural characteristics of video and computers in abstraction and there simultaneously supports the argument for needing to differentiate more rigorously between film and video within the system of analog recording media. In this case, the optional modulation of electronic forms of presentation behaves differently from the categories of optical inscription valid for film and photography" (p. 41).

42. Some of the voice-over is reproduced in a text called "Grey Flags," which appeared as a

press release for Richard Phillips' exhibition *Law, Sex & Christian Society* at Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York, May 12–June 18, 2005, on <<http://www.kunstaspekte.de/index.php?tid=12158&action=termin>>. It subsequently appeared as a work in its own right at the exhibition *Grey Flags* at Friedrich Petzel Gallery, July 1–August 12, 2005, and at *Make It Now* at the Sculpture Center, Long Island City, NY, 2006. For the iterability and the illimitability of meaning by context, see Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in *Limited Inc*, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), pp. 1–23.

43. Price, "Was ist los?" 2005, unpaginated. First published as "Decor Holes," available to download from http://www.galerie-capitain.com/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF/11_albumbookletversion.pdf. As an indication of the rapid shift of context of an image, and the appropriation by the culture industry of an artist's idea, Asher Penn noticed that the ad for HBO's vampire series "True Blood" comprises a "pour" of a sticky, red, blood-like liquid which assumes a shape remarkably like a "silhouette" cut-out by Price. See his interview with Price in the blog at <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/blogs/culture/2009-04-27/seth-price-true-blood/>.

44. "The Pensive Image" was the title of a paper given by Jacques Rancière at the symposium "Undoing the Aesthetic Image" at Tate Britain, January 24, 2009.

45. Jeff Wall, "Monochrome and Photojournalism in On Kawara's Today Paintings," in *Robert Lehman Lectures on Contemporary Art*, ed. Lynne Cooke and Karen Kelly (New York: Dia Center for the Arts, 1996), pp. 135–156.

46. Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. Jonathan Mayne (New York: Da Capo, 1964), p. 2.

47. *Ibid.* p. 3.

48. Michael Asher used Thomas Hart Benton's painting *The Kentuckian* (1954) in his untitled contribution to the exhibition *The Museum as Site* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1981. For a discussion see Buchloh, "Allegorical

Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art," *Artforum*, vol. 21, no. 1 (September 1982), pp. 50–53.

49. Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'empreinte*, ex. cat. (Paris: Centre George Pompidou, 1997), p. 60.

50. Gillian Wearing's *Sleeping Mask* (2004) is a transparent vacuum form over a face, painted, with the framing edge of plastic left on—as in Price's masks—running through which is a knotted cord, illustrated in Cherix and Tremblay, *Plastic*, p. 37.

51. See also Susan Kelly, "The Transversal and the Invisible: How do you really make a work of art that is not a work of art?" http://www.republicart.net/disc/mundial/kelly01_en.htm.

52. Seth Price, *How to Disappear in America* (New York: The Leopard Press, 2008).

53. Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 2: 1927–1934* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 734.

54. Notably, Franz Kafka may have given his last book, unfinished and posthumously published in 1927, set in the USA—which he never visited—published in 1946 in English (translated by Edwin Muir) as *Amerika*, the title *Der Verschollene*, "The Man Who Disappeared."

55. Roger Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," trans. John Shipley, *October* 31 (Winter 1984), pp. 17–32 (originally published in *Minatoure*, no. 7, 1935).

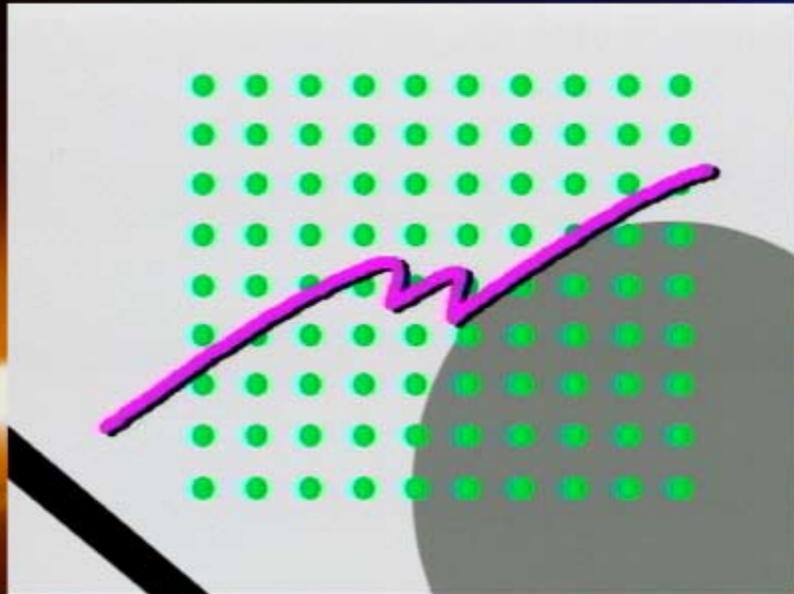
56. See Michael Newman, "Joe Scanlan's Nesting Bookcases: Duchamp, Design and the Impossibility of Disappearing," in Newman and Jon Bird (eds.), *Rewriting Conceptual Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), pp. 206–211.

57. See Alexander García Düttmann, "Entkunstung," *L'esprit créateur*, vol. 35 (Fall 1995), special issue *Beyond Aesthetics*, ed. Rodolphe Gasché, pp. 53–56.

58. See "Michael Asher and the Conclusion of Modernist Sculpture" (1980), in Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), pp. 1–39.

59. To correct the title of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* [Der Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels] (London: New Left Books, 1977).

60. In an excellent essay published as this book was going to press, Tim Griffin also discusses disappearance in Price's work, in terms of compression, loss, and depletion. He uses the idea that the compression of a JPEG or TIFF file based on an algorithm serves as a model for Price's practice insofar as it facilitates the mobility of images, creating the conditions for "proliferation and mutability" while turning the image from a copy to an "effect" that is actually full of holes. On this basis Griffin distinguishes between Price and his predecessor "appropriation" artists: "Whereas they forced the question of meaning's creation by deconstructing the image within a specific context, Price looks at and mimics the ways in which meaning is both lost and produced with any change of context. He behaves as a kind of filter, continually reintroducing a sense of this loss in this work, this emptying of memory, in order to mime the effects and affects of such depletion." Griffin, "The Personal Effects of Seth Price," p. 292. The compression of JPEG files and why they look the way they do is discussed in the article by artist Cory Arcangel—which functions as cultural criticism, math treatise, and artwork—"On C" (2007–2008), originally published in Cory Arcangel et al., *This is a couple thousand short films about Glenn Gould* (London: Film and Video Umbrella, 2008), pp. 220–232, and available as a pdf on Arcangel's website at http://www.beigerecords.com/cory/Things_I_Made/OnC. Like Price, Arcangel considers these matters with historical self-consciousness: "If the 80s gave us 'hot' colors and 'rad' graphics, and the 90s gave us slick vector design, then the 00s are giving us compressed blocky images" (pp. 221–222).



Teal, Lavender
Pastels
Hard Edges
Geometrics
Diagonals
Neons
Fluorescent Pink
Plastics
Synthetics
Sharp Angles