



# CHEYNEY THOMPSON | PASSAGES

CHRISTIAN SCHAERNACK TRANSLATED BY BEN CATON



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Known for its radically forward-looking intellectualism and formal rigor, Cheyney Thompson's (b. 1975) work responds to a long history of debates about how art depicts the world, and about how we come to know the world visually. In these meditations on the artist's work, Christian Schaernack shows that for Thompson, reality is something that can be known only in terms of probabilities, not absolutes. Thompson often produces work that explores contingency at the formal level, sometimes in his artistic process (as Jackson Pollock once did), and sometimes through the use of external constraints such as computer algorithms, which he subverts as often as he follows.

The meaning of observation has changed time and again in the history of art, just as it has in the history of science. Delving into art history, intellectual history, and contemporary continental philosophy, Schaernack offers a multifaceted study of an artist who challenges our assumptions about how the world is ordered. From Thompson's early "black paintings" to his *Chronochromes* to his *Stochastic Process Paintings*, which engage with the algorithms that govern our digital lives, Schaernack presents a contemporary artist whose work embraces chance and responds to the shifting conditions of the present. This is art that reimagines artwork itself.

Christian Schaernack is a Berlin-based journalist who has covered the arts since the mid-1990s, including extensive writing for the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*.

Front cover art: Cheyney Thompson, *Stochastic Process Painting 12*, 2014 (detail). Courtesy of Paul Leong, New York and Campoli Presti, Paris/London.



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THE MIT PRESS CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS LONDON, ENGLAND

WESTREICH WAGNER PUBLICATIONS NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK

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The MIT Press would like to thank the anonymous peer reviewers who provided comments on drafts of this book. The generous work of academic experts is essential for establishing the authority and quality of our publications. We acknowledge with gratitude the contributions of these otherwise uncredited readers.

This book was set in Garamond Premier Pro and Nexa by The MIT Press.

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Schaernack, Christian, author. | Caton, Ben, translator.

Title: Cheyney Thompson : passages / Christian Schaernack ; translated by Ben Caton.

Description: Cambridge, Massachusetts : The MIT Press, [2023] | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022017650 (print) | LCCN 2022017651 (ebook) | ISBN 9780262047272 (hardcover) | ISBN 9780262373692 (epub) | ISBN 9780262373708 (pdf)

Subjects: LCSH: Thompson, Cheyney, 1975--Criticism and interpretation.

Classification: LCC N6537.T4756 S33 2023 (print) | LCC N6537.T4756 (ebook) | DDC 709.2--dc23/eng/20220926

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022017650>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022017651>

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



To my parents

It was at first a study. I wrote out silences and the nights. I recorded the inexpressible. I described frenzies.<sup>1</sup> Arthur Rimbaud, *Alchemy of the Word*

For the image is always material: it is the matter of the distinct, its mass and its density, its weight, its edges and its brilliance, its timbre and its specter, its pace and step, its gold. Jean-Luc Nancy

The future ain't what it used to be! Lawrence P. "Yogi" Berra



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## PREFACE

The German director Rainer Werner Fassbinder once compared creating his body of work to erecting a house. The numerous films he would produce throughout his career could, he argued, be equated with windows, walls, and doors; and at the end of it all, he hoped, a whole building would emerge. A comparable approach can be recognized in the work of Cheyney Thompson. What Fassbinder sought to achieve with cinema—by using its entire toolbox and drawing upon its many various genres—finds its equivalent in Thompson’s use of the means and forms of painting, and in his examination of the medium’s fundamental problems. In this respect, the American artist’s work also presents itself as a collection of rooms, each of them different in its size, lighting, and furnishings. While these might appear eclectic when viewed as isolated details, and the transitions between them almost abrupt when not considered in context, they nonetheless form a robust whole over time. Despite the inherent stability of the building’s logical foundations, its multistory layout bears more resemblance to a labyrinth than to the blueprints of a rationalist architect, with various entrances and exits, stairwells, and hallways; any map of existing pathways is therefore of limited use in navigating (i.e., analyzing) it.

Against this background, this book is itself meant as merely one possible path—as a wandering line across richly sedimented terrain, passing through seventeen “passages” that each offer the reader valuable insights into Cheyney Thompson’s branching practice, and his still-unfinished house.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the text has been designed to be as expansive as possible; the richness of its “architecture” allows for numerous points of connection to other disciplines that reach far beyond the realm of painting—from the natural and social sciences to literature—and that take up ideas from both Galileo and quantum physics or economics. Particular significance shall be ascribed to demonstrating its context within the humanities; here, the German philosopher Hans Blumenberg will serve as a repeated reference, along with Giorgio Agamben, Aby Warburg, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and the French philosopher Anne Sauvagnargues. The explicitly art historical references,

meanwhile, cover an equally broad spectrum, ranging from the writings of Erwin Panofsky to Clement Greenberg, Yve-Alain Bois, and David Joselit.

The aim of this text is to provide a map whose own coordinates are not locatable in any predetermined system; its various “passages” correspondingly attempt to mirror the approach of the artist himself. It therefore follows that this book must deviate from many other recent art historical texts in its methodology. It is in this respect, especially, that the author hopes to act in the spirit of the artist, who has himself described his work as being somewhat akin to a detective story—a mystery that asks to be unriddled. Ultimately, the point is not so much to firmly position Thompson within a coherent “order” of contemporary art discourse and its own formal demands (even if he has, since the 2000s, been an active member of the New York art community); rather, the interest is in “opening up” his world of ideas to existent spaces of thought and in raising fundamental philosophical questions. For this reason, I have largely omitted comparative analyses examining Thompson’s work in relation to that of his contemporaries—such as Laura Owens, R. H. Quaytman, Blake Rayne, or Wade Guyton; the same is true of Jutta Koether, with whom Thompson shared a studio in Brooklyn for many years.

Each of the presented “passages” draws upon what are, at times, very different references, like a series of rooms whose furnishings range in style from the baroque to the Bauhaus. Multiple readings are offered in places, at times even looping back to previous pages and references in the search for alternative routes. The basic thrust of the argument remains the same, however, with the aim of exposing the central, even existential contradictions of artistic production, and of documenting both the critical resonance of the artist’s work and its forward-looking sense of openness.

I am well aware that certain argumentative freedoms are claimed in what follows, as in the case of what is here termed “probabilistic representation”—itself a seemingly paradoxical term—which is taken from Giorgio Agamben and transferred to the context at hand. This is equally true of other analyses posited throughout—those of Hans Blumenberg or the art historian Amy Knight Powell, for example—which extend beyond Thompson’s practice as a contemporary painter but are understood as starting points for further explorations. In drawing upon such disparate analyses, I have been encouraged by the fact that the artist himself consciously resists appropriation by interpretations that may be too narrowly conceived; indeed, the character of his practice—and the principal nature of the questions it raises—do seem to actively invite precisely such detours and digressions. By embracing a partly speculative approach, I resist the temptation to rashly subject certain aspects of his

work (such as institutional critique) to overly obvious interpretive or analytical frameworks.

While Thompson's working processes seem themselves to be characterized by a high degree of systematization, it is not least his own meanderings through deep echelons of thought and personal obsessions—leaving a trail of clues (and the odd red herring) along the way—that make his practice possible in the first place. The passages in this book therefore stand under a double sign in their attempt to follow this same path: laid out with a certain stringency in the service of general understanding and the expectation that the text will be “readable,” while equally obeying the author's own impulse for expansive references and explorations. Ultimately, however, the fundamentally skeptical and anti-authoritarian position Thompson's work takes toward traditional systems of interpretation and/or representation—in imagery and language alike—translates into a desire that it should itself not be “interpreted,” and certainly not unambiguously or conclusively. And it is this aspect, especially, that should be seen as providing the methodological background for what can only be an attempt at analysis.

Thompson's overall practice can be said to have the character of an experiment, with rules, parameters, and processes; the same shall be true of the following text. Correspondingly, my aim is in part to establish a “test arrangement” whose concrete expression is to be found in the sequence of the various passages (I to XVII): the second of these sees the artist's critical stance toward corrupted structures of knowledge generation (here, perspectival sight) come into focus—an aspect that finds complex and consolidated form in passage V (and, alternatively, in passage XVI), in what I refer to as the *Black Paintings*, from 2008. The network-like arrangement of the “experiment” itself, meanwhile, becomes apparent in passage III. The material conditions of painting play the central role in the so-called *Chromachromes* (passage VI), while economic parameters—here in the form of the factor of labor—are foregrounded in the *Chronochromes* (passage VII). A critical view of “authorship” (passages VIII and IX) then leads to questions of “signature style” (or style in general), for which I employ a particular understanding of metaphor that draws on Blumenberg (passage X). Thompson's use of probability theory subsequently pushes the attempt to systematize (arbitrary) artistic decisions and the “ordering principle” of randomness in general to the center (passages XI and XII), with all of the different (and deeply contradictory) interpretations this implies (passage XVII). Structural aspects of painting are discussed in passage XIV, while a critical consideration of the function of mimesis (or recognition) can be found in passage XV; it is here, too—picking up on passage II—that a decidedly historical

dimension of the work emerges. Finally, the role of the artist once again comes to the fore, thought and embedded within a wide terrain of intersubjective sociocultural networks (passage XVI). Here, it is the body of the artist himself—as a physically restricted organ that (indirectly) executes rules and implements systems—that, as in passage VII, once again takes center stage.

The focus of this text is on the years 2004 to 2019. Within this timeframe, the so-called *Stochastic Process Paintings* (passage XII) receive particularly close attention throughout. It clearly remains to be seen how individual groups of works such as these will eventually fit into the overall context of what is—at the time of writing—still an evolving practice. The speed at which Thompson’s work develops (thereby potentially recalibrating its internal relationships) can be seen from the artist’s most recent paintings; these were last presented to the public in Paris in October 2021, and so their influence on this text is, naturally, limited (see passage XVI).

Even if the widely branching references of certain passages—but, first and foremost, of the works themselves—mean they could require repeated engagement, the reader is encouraged (in the name of painting!) to be patient, and to give free rein to both image and word alike. For while Cheyney Thompson might be a difficult artist, he is certainly not a hermetic.<sup>2</sup>

Christian Schaernack

Berlin, Spring 2022



## PASSAGE I

### In the /Name/ of Painting

The first merit of a picture is to be a feast for the eye. That is not to say that reason is not needed in it.<sup>1</sup> Eugène Delacroix

The work of the American artist Cheyney Thompson (born 1975) examines the history and condition of painting. In addition to a wide range of formal questions and an interest in the influences exerted by particular socioeconomic contexts, his focus is also and not least on the procedures through which images are generated and processed. An undercurrent of deeply critical evaluation runs throughout his practice—of hierarchies, authority, and the structural parameters (and conditionalities) of traditional forms of representation and economic mechanisms of control and domination. Painting is itself exposed as a set of rules and instructions that functions within similar systemic parameters—might even its “surplus,” its mystically “inexplicable” element, itself be explained away and systematized? Is there still any place for painting in a world as saturated by mass media and economically efficient as our own, or only for handicraft, industrialized and sold by the meter? And might the artist’s ultimate aim actually be to turn himself into a machine, while still masquerading as a body? Thompson’s practice will serve here as a vehicle for a general exploration of the reality of these constrictions, for the human mind and body alike. But as we shall see, this practice might have some possibilities of its own to offer. For all the intellectual rigor and complexity of Thompson’s work, then, and for all the skeptical distance it displays, the painted image—presented to us by him in the spirit of a scientific experiment—will prove itself still capable of beguiling us (even if only unintentionally).

And so it is that viewers first find themselves ensnared by the delicate veils of color in the *Chronochromes*, which float on the canvas like abstract musical scores; then gripped,

almost irritated, by the power of his gestural *Quantity Paintings*, which seem entirely in keeping with the supposed style of the so-called New York School; only to finally be left under the spell of the shimmering *Stochastic Process Paintings*—hundreds or even thousands (depending on the format) of chromatic squares arranged in mosaic-like rows, like pixelated clouds of color. Viewed from a distance, one might even be tempted to see them as coagulating into continents on an imagined atlas. There are no sublimely shimmering horizons to be found here separating heaven from earth, however. For the world of Cheyney Thompson, as we can surmise, shall reveal itself beyond the usual patterns of recognition or pathos formulas (*Pathosformeln*). On the other hand, it is precisely this seemingly fragmented stylistic diversity of the different work groups (gestural-abstract, figurative, minimalist)—in addition to the abundance of interwoven references—that quickly clarifies why a possible rationale (a reason or *raison*, in Delacroix’s terms) of his practice can be assembled only over time, and in a process mimicking an open-ended cartography.

The philosophical problem is evident: How can an analysis of an individualized form of subjectivity proceed in the face of postmodernism’s skeptical stance toward any and all structures of knowledge formation, any *reason*? The method of the French philosopher Anne Sauvagargues proves to be helpful here: “[She] positions any individuation, human or otherwise, as transitory and as occurring on a plane of actualisation that is always set in relation to a virtual plane of immanence. This has the implication of making us see that any individuation is dynamic, provisional and subject to time and becoming.”<sup>2</sup>

This context allows for the (preliminary) view that Cheyney Thompson, in the course of his evolving artistic project, has formulated the preconditions of a category of (potentially) nonhierarchical representation, one not based on selective recognition. In practical terms, this idiomatic innovation may be termed “probabilistic representation.”<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the artist uses the means of painting in order to devise a pictorial system for understanding not just individual images but *history* and its (re)construction<sup>4</sup> (or art historical processes), as clearly governed by the laws of probability and chance. Thompson therefore depicts a world that reveals itself to him through methods of the former, and in acceptance of the principle of the latter—and not through an understanding of “reality” (*Wirklichkeit*) as something that is underpinned by perception and thus contingent on the changing *appearances* of natural forms. Correspondingly, the wider ongoing analysis of the broad spectrum of human perception must itself eventually give way to an altered understanding of the formation and function of images.

Not only does the conventional pictorial order (including the convention of perspectival sight)<sup>5</sup> experience its definitive and programmatic negation in Thompson’s work (see

passage II); beyond this, it is replaced by a taxonomy that follows a fundamentally different organizing principle—namely, that of the allocation and occurrence of probabilities (see passage XII). That any given “order” is “impure” is therefore not just due to its inherently porous borders. Its very foundation is a case of calculating probabilities, its construction an aleatory operation; order comes and goes, is itself contingent and only ever one of many possibilities. It is also subject to a process of decay, with the potential consequence of imminent disorder. In other words: “There is nothing more tentative than an established order.”<sup>6</sup>

Thinking in probabilities—in the form of explaining events as occurring through chance, for example—is an intrinsic societal principle in our speculation-based market economy, as with share trading, insurance policies against future events, or forecasts of the possible ongoing development of a pandemic. T. J. Clark has stated that “modernity means contingency . . . : the turning from past to future, the acceptance of risk, the omnipresence of change, the malleability of time and space.”<sup>7</sup> For him, it is in Jackson Pollock’s “great walls of accident and necessity” that modern art has until now come closest to the notion of internalizing contingency as a structural principle, instead of merely incorporating it as a formal element of artistic expression. (Clark himself implies this is a form of “symbolic order.”)<sup>8</sup> The work of Cheyney Thompson systematizes this same project and grounds it within a historical context. And while his system includes a broad variety of technical aspects and material constraints, it is his efforts to rationalize the uncertainties of artistic decisions—indeed, the inherently opaque nature of artistic creation in general when mediated through a body—that lie at the heart of his practice to date (see passage XVI).

It is not just in today’s popular discourse that great value is placed on the concept of contingency, but also within contemporary continental philosophy and the branch known as speculative materialism. In line with the thinking of one of its main proponents, the French philosopher Quentin Meillassoux (see passage V), not only are the classical *grand récits* long obsolete, but the promised futures offered up by the modern, secular era—from Marxism to globalization—have by now also proved themselves to be nothing but a series of unworkable narratives. Meillassoux’s radical approach to history even goes so far as to question the notion that there is any determinacy to world events.

But it is especially within the field of the natural sciences that the principle of probability is set to experience its transformation to a fundamental hypothesis, for only through its application can the consequences of the quantum-mechanical insights of our age for our understanding of nature finally reveal themselves. Even if quantum physics (which brings

parts of classical physics into question) might, after decades of research, still be in its relative infancy, for all its inconsistencies, and despite the wealth of various scientific approaches it encompasses, its most fundamental insight seems to be indisputable: if the effects of the laws of nature are to be penetrated, focus must be shifted away from the macro and toward the micro, to the level of the subatomic. This subsequently means that relevant events elude direct human perception, on top of which we must also be satisfied with being able to describe their occurrence as merely more or less *likely*, all while navigating the serious problems faced in taking reliable measurements in the course of such scientific experiments (see passages III and XVII).

If one accepts the notion of the artistic *ur*-impulse as representing the need to make ideas visible—using pictorial means, for instance—then Cheyney Thompson both seeks and *devises* relations that lie hidden from human view. “The image is the web of a threadless weave,” the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy writes. “Sense requires the image in order to emerge from its meager material, its inaudibility and its invisibility.”<sup>9</sup> And if one thinks of quantum physics as a discipline of natural philosophy—as *philosophia naturalis*—then Thompson’s practice could even be read as belonging to an epistemological tradition. Using his own means, the painter not only models a (symbolic) system of “order” that is subject to the *discrete*—i.e., *discontinuous*—occurrence of probabilities (and must therefore subsequently break with a *continuous* time regime);<sup>10</sup> at the same time, he lends artistic form to something that generally evades perception by the eye (and this without having to invoke anything like the “sublime”).<sup>11</sup> Through the use of probabilities in calculating nonobservable phenomena, *thinking* in possibilities replaces orientation around (and recognition of) the visible, and so forces us to a different understanding of the “thingly” (*dinglich*) world. This is precisely what the *Stochastic Process Paintings* (see passage XII) so exemplarily represent. They are more thought experiments, facilitated through the use of computerized algorithms, and less products of a consciousness that arises from human perception and presumes that the world of matter really does present itself in any determined way.

In this respect, Thompson’s practice touches on fundamental questions regarding the nature of the artwork and its relationship to the world of pure ideas, as well as the traditional notion that it has to be “executed, enacted,” and so could never be virtual.<sup>12</sup> While this view would seem to have been refuted since Marcel Duchamp at the latest, it nonetheless seems deserving of further consideration against the backdrop of today’s computer-generated “virtual realities.”

It is in any case Duchamp's groundbreaking work that is further developed by Thompson, as a systematic clarification of painting as a canvas-based medium. With his rejection of central perspective, Duchamp attacked the very foundations of Western painting. His scientific reference system circled around the mathematician Henri Poincaré's thoughts on a fourth dimension, which would go on to play a decisive role in the work of Duchamp's contemporaries, such as Piet Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg. It was in these ideas that the artists hoped to find the "hyperspace" that would resonate with their own thoughts on overcoming three-dimensionality. But what was for Poincaré a demonstrable exercise in mathematical reasoning proved almost impossible to realize on the pictorial level. Duchamp was ultimately forced to concede that a fourth dimension has "no sensory expression" (as Herbert Molderings has called it),<sup>13</sup> and it was to be artists as different as Robert Smithson and Lucio Fontana who would eventually return to the subject in later years.<sup>14</sup> Duchamp himself never reached the point of formulating a coherent alternative to the perspectival system of order, either in three-dimensional space or on the two-dimensional surface. It is therefore no surprise that his final large-scale painting, *Tu m'* (1918), with its wide array of pictorial elements, might be interpreted less as a conclusively programmatic statement and more as a sort of humorous capriccio.

With this in mind, the French artist's decision to turn his back on painting seems an entirely logical one. For him, a viable solution was to be found in the "readymade," which he saw as "shifting" pictorial representation back to the thing itself, while most of his later public life was devoted to the game of chess. What seemed to many at the time to be an enigmatic exit strategy—although Duchamp remained actively involved in the avant-garde art world<sup>15</sup>—can also be interpreted as a uniquely consistent extension of the artist's persona into the wide space of possibility offered by the game; after all, thinking in hypotheses and attempts to model an "as if" can be found threaded throughout his entire artistic biography. In this context, Duchamp's work can be read variously as a project, an experiment in game theory, or a construct aimed at conceiving what may legitimately be termed the "aesthetics of chance."<sup>16</sup> In this approach, it is the experiment itself—even if it is entirely theoretical—that counts, far more than the actual result.<sup>17</sup>

Thompson's painting concretizes Duchamp's radical ideas, by employing mathematical algorithms that are usually applied in processes of stochastics or probability calculation. Consequently, it is tempting to state that Thompson now proposes a painterly solution where his predecessor did not: through the occurrence of probabilities, possibilities are not

only considered but also realized (that is, made visible), finding their expression on the material substrate of the canvas.

Like diagrams, the *Stochastic Process Paintings* embody the systematized results of this probability-based approach in abstracted basic form. Thompson subsequently presented further possible applications, such as the so-called *Metal Paintings* (passage XII), before eventually creating his *Bellonas*, which take Paul Cézanne's works based on the Roman goddess as their templates (see passage XV). The point of the *Bellonas* is clearly not to make this line of argument an end in itself; rather, it is a means of undercutting the classical function of mimesis. The notion that an artwork comes into existence through an outpouring of artistic will, aimed at producing a recognizable likeness—as abstract as this might be—is subsequently replaced by a process of computer-aided image generation; one that strikingly rests not on comparative perceptions, but on the occurrence of *mathematically possible* alternatives.

Let us return to Giorgio Agamben, however—to the question of reality, and his ideas on “probabilistic representation.” In his short text on probability calculation and quantum physics, the Italian philosopher brings Aristotle into play: while the latter's notion of *energeia* (act, realization) is in fact incompatible with any idea of a possible “science of the accidental,” his concept of *dynamis* (Lat. *potentia*, capability) does most likely represent a workable foundation for such a line of thinking.<sup>18</sup> In *De anima*, for example, Aristotle compares human intellect—“a being whose nature is potential being”—with a wax tablet that wishes to be filled. From this metaphor, Agamben then infers that “what happened in modern statistics and quantum physics is that the writing tablet—pure possibility—replaced reality.”<sup>19</sup>

Despite Thompson's obvious awareness of the structural conditions surrounding the generation of knowledge (see passage V), the analogy stands up entirely: in his *Stochastic Process Paintings*, the artist ultimately appropriates Aristotle's tablet, but as a material canvas. His work both spells out and inflects, but also and above all, it “places the world in the subjunctive”<sup>20</sup>—and does so using pictorial means rather than writing. It describes painting and the pictorial surface it inherits as a knowledge-based but abstract form of thinking that establishes itself in the face of a matrix of possible alternatives. In turn, the allocation of concrete probabilities creates a random system of order. And in the course of the artistic *implementation* (as defined by Francastel; see note 12), an independent category of “probabilistic representation” is applied that rests on an understanding of reality as a space of possibilities, and so makes only limited recourse to what is actually visible.

This specific understanding of the “real” was central to the thinking of the German philosopher Hans Blumenberg: “It makes a crucial difference whether we *put up with* reality as unchangeable or if we rediscover it as the core of what is evident in the free play of the infinite possibilities and are able to consent freely to *recognize* it—if we are capable, finally, of making the accidental essential.”<sup>21</sup> Thompson takes a further decisive step in this respect, however. Ultimately, his interest is less in recognizing *a* reality and more in providing alternatives, which are not selected on the basis of patterns derived from our own experience but are instead intended to stand alongside one another with equal validity (see passages X and XV).

The inherently “essentializing” nature of painting, understood as an “art of the visible” (in Jean Clair’s words),<sup>22</sup> becomes even more contoured in the context of its structural parameters. It is in this sense that Duchamp’s works from the second and third decades of the twentieth century have been described as “dream catchers” (or “nets for dreams”),<sup>23</sup> with the metaphor of the net, or the spider’s web, implying in turn the existence of a larger system that might even point to an underlying epistemological model. And so it can be said that what comes into visibility must always also be contingent on its particular structural conditions (see passage XIV).

Thompson’s own method, established over a period of almost twenty years, can be equated with a process of interlinking different groups of works that are in fact chronologically ordered, but whose relations to each other are, by contrast, laid out multidimensionally and laterally. This approach creates its own loose network of references whose permeability serves not least to submit the conventional borders of painting to a critical inspection.

This image, which is more akin to a rhizome, is relevant in two respects: first, as a methodological infrastructure for Thompson’s own practice, and second, as an allegory of the historical processes of development of the medium itself; indeed, as an idea, it carries implications that extend beyond our understanding of history in general. It is within such a rhizome, somewhat anarchic in its organization, that the artist nonetheless makes consistent use of the proven epistemological instruments of analysis and synthesis (or, in more practical terminology: tearing down one house, only to replace it with a different one altogether).<sup>24</sup> The means of painting are therefore at once both an object of inspection and a tool, with painting undergoing a sort of “vivisection” along the lines of such varying characteristics as facture, format, color, style, signature, “network,” or modes of display and distribution. The

*preliminary* result, then, is a reconfiguration—not only under the conditions of a new principle of “order,” but also on the basis of an alternative, nonchronological model of time.

Numerous artists, particularly since the second half on the nineteenth century, have made painting and its means a direct object of their practices, from Edouard Manet to Alexander Rodchenko, and from Martin Barré, Sigmar Polke, and Robert Ryman to contemporaries of Thompson, such as Laura Owens or Michael Krebber.<sup>25</sup> The latter’s work has been described as the exact opposite of the “big dumb painting” of yore (or “painting per se”). The following statement could therefore be applied with equal justification to Cheyney Thompson: “Krebber’s ‘sidestepping’ incorporated not only material, pictorial, and semiotic aspects of painting . . . but also elements of its presentation. . . . Painting appeared as a matrix here, in which Krebber acted as an artist. This offered a perspective on painting that promised to get over the established dichotomy of form and content by making form content.”<sup>26</sup> It is precisely this “sidestepping,” itself an act of displacement, that will also become a defining feature of Thompson’s practice.

Rarely has what might equally be described as a deterritorialization of the painted image been pursued so consistently and with such unsparing rigor as by Thompson, however. For the target of his radically systematic approach to exposing painting’s processual aspects is not limited to breaking down formal borders—to overcoming or dissolving the individual image, both as a physical entity and in temporal terms. The Brazilian painter Lygia Clark (see passage IV) devoted herself to a similar project in the 1950s but subsequently shifted her practice entirely toward participatory art forms, such as dance and performance; Thompson, by contrast, has remained true to the canvas to this day, despite his forays into “sculpture.”<sup>27</sup> Beyond this, the American artist’s wider interest is in examining fundamental epistemological questions, including his desire to expose the parameters of the creative process. And so when the art theorist Hubert Damisch retrospectively asks, “What is thinking in painting, in forms and through means proper to it? And what are the implications of such ‘thinking’ for the history of thought in general?,”<sup>28</sup> the answer, the epistemological core, may lie hidden behind the classical metaphor of Aristotle’s tablet. It is in this context that Thompson’s work presents itself as both an alternative (and future-oriented) understanding of what it means to think and an allegory in the conventional sense: not as a window on the world, but as a palimpsest that demonstrates its ordering principle and possible forms. Located beyond our normal use of language and the meanings it ascribes, this world has functional foundations—analogue to Schrödinger’s cat,<sup>29</sup> that classic thought



experiment of quantum physics—that still firmly elude the eye (and parts of our understanding!) today. Since it is based on pure possibility that escapes our perception, it does not “turn on” mimesis—at least not in the conventional sense (see passage XVII).

At the same time, to make even a fleeting distinction between Michael Krebber and Cheyney Thompson reveals that what serves as a working hypothesis for the former is put forward for (re)consideration in the analyses of the latter—namely, “painting’s impossibility.”<sup>30</sup> And so it seems as if the dandy-esque resistance by the German artist (born 1954) against the possibility of painting now finds further possibilities in the work of a representative of the second generation to have grown up in the age of the postmedium condition. Faced with very different technologies and an omnipresent set of (economic) parameters, and “restricted” by his own self-imposed rules, Thompson confronts painting—per sidestep—as a still-vital form of expression.

Thompson, then, utilizes painting with all its inherent contradictions as a model art form, a dynamic *dispositif* whose potential for communicating complex ideas still to this day extends far beyond the narrow borders of art historical interpretations. The thoroughness with which the artist interrogates the production and distribution of images in the digital age holds equal significance for media-theoretical considerations and our understanding of the processes of feedback that occur within the mechanisms of modern financial markets, for example—as a blatantly concrete expression of a societal model based on pure speculation (see passage XIII). Underpinning it all, however, is the question of how the human—with all its irrationalities, and as contingent as it is on its own rhythms—might still find a place in a world as rationalized as our own.

Not only do Thompson’s individual work groups interlock over extended periods of time, like teeth on gears; with almost detective-like finesse, traces are left in the exhibitions, too, that provide clues to the short-term further trajectory of his practice.<sup>31</sup> This was the case with the presentation of his very first *Displacement Paintings*, in Hong Kong in 2019, where the concept of “entropy”—which itself indicates a state of increasing disorder within a (closed) system (see passage XVI)—was introduced into his fast-moving project. But it is a look back, deep into the nineteenth century, and to the years before the July Revolution in France, that will lead us to the next passage—and to a historical painting with its own deficit of “recognition value” for today’s viewers.



# Notes

## Epigraph

1. “Ce fut d’abord une étude. J’écrivais des silences, des nuits, je notais l’inexprimable. Je fixais des vertiges.” Arthur Rimbaud, “Alchimie du verbe” / “Alchemy of the Word” (French and English), in *Complete Works, Selected Letters*, trans. Wallace Fowlie (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 192–193.

## Preface

1. I would like to thank Pia Gottschaller here for her valuable insights, and for pointing out this metaphor.

2. While clearly not wanting to compare the two artists (and thus invite misunderstandings), I am paraphrasing Jacques Rancière’s statement about the long and winding reception history of Stephan Mallarmé, still an enigma to many: “Mallarmé is not a hermetic, he is a difficult author.” See Rancière, *Mallarmé: The Politics of the Siren*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2011), xiv.

## Passage I

1. *The Journal of Eugène Delacroix*, trans. Walter Pach (New York: Friede Publishers, 1937), 700.

2. Suzanne Verderber, translator’s preface to Anne Sauvagnargues, *Armmachines: Deleuze, Guattari, Simondon*, trans. Suzanne Verderber (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), xi.

3. In using this term, I refer to Giorgio Agamben, *What Is Real?*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 26ff.

4. “Reconstruction” should be understood here and throughout in the wider sense of *reconfiguration*.

5. On the ordering *dispositif* of classical Renaissance perspective, see Erwin Panofsky’s foundational text “Die Perspektive als ‘symbolische Form’” (1927), later published in English translation as *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, trans. Christopher S. Wood (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

6. Robert Smithson, “A Cinematic Atopia” (1971), in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 140.

7. T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 12.
8. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, 7.
9. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 67.
10. Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Surviving Image: Phantoms of Time and Time of Phantoms: Aby Warburg's History of Art*, trans. Harvey Mendelsohn (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016); see chap. 3, sec. 4, "Stirrings, Repetitions, Repressions, and Delayed Actions," 202–215.
11. T. J. Clark offers a pithy formulation of this idea: "Modernism turns on the impossibility of transcendence." See Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, 22.
12. See, for example, Pierre Francastel's statement, made in the 1950s, that the artwork is "by definition . . . executed, enacted, [and not] virtual," in Francastel, *Art and Technology*, trans. Randall Cherry (New York: Zone Books, 2000), 254. While Francastel was not able to anticipate the digital revolution, he appears to have sought to comprehend contemporary art in light of the changed understanding of reality as informed by modern science. See his comment later on in the same book that "In these times of the wireless . . . it is possible to imagine acts that affect the molecular and wave structure of the world" (263).
13. "keine sensorische Apparenz": See Herbert Molderings, *Über Marcel Duchamp und die Ästhetik des Möglichen* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2019), 39 (trans. Ben Caton). See also Gladys C. Fabre, "Style Is the Man," in *Theo van Doesburg* (Brussels: Bozar Books and Mercatorfonds, 2016), 26–28.
14. For an introduction to this subject, see Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).
15. See Elena Filipovic, *The Apparently Marginal Activities of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016).
16. See Herbert Molderings, *Duchamp and the Aesthetics of Chance: Art as Experiment*, trans. John Brogden (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
17. Here, an alternative view is advanced by Hans Blumenberg, who states that it was André Breton who established the "ontological formula" for surrealism, according to which the nonexistent is every bit as real (intense) as the existent. See Blumenberg, "Imitation of Nature': Toward a Pre-history of the Idea of the Creative Being," *Qui Parle* 12, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2000): 18.
18. Blumenberg locates the break with the ancient concept of reality in the work of G. W. Leibniz, who also made repeated demands for a theory of probability, or *logica probabilium*. See Hans Blumenberg, *Realität und Realismus* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2020), 27. See also Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability: A Philosophical Study of Early Ideas about Probability, Induction and Statistical Interference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

19. Agamben, *What Is Real?*, 40.
20. Molderings, *Über Marcel Duchamp*, 46 (trans. Ben Caton).
21. Blumenberg, “Imitation of Nature,” 48. For an introduction to the author’s concept of reality, see also *Realität und Realismus*.
22. Jean Clair, *Courte histoire de l’art moderne: Un entretien* (Paris: L’Echoppe, 2004), 14 (trans. author).
23. Clair, *Courte histoire de l’art moderne*, 29 (trans. author). “Dream catchers” of the type Clair describes have a structure similar to that of a spider’s web.
24. See Ann Lauterbach, “On Cheyney Thompson: The Task of Art in the Age of Information,” in *Cheyney Thompson: Metric, Pedestal, Landlord, Cabengo, Récit* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 177.
25. In this context, it is also necessary to mention Michel Foucault’s groundbreaking analysis of Diego Velázquez’s *Las Meninas* (1656). See Foucault, *The Order of Things*, translator unnamed (New York: Pantheon, 1970), chap. 1.
26. Magnus Schäfer, “I, a Painter,” in Michael Krebber, *The Ridiculed Snails* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2013), 14. See also John Kelsey, “Stop Painting Painting,” *Artforum* 44, no. 2 (October 2005): 222–225.
27. With unceremonious pragmatism, Thompson refers to these works as “pedestals” or “broken volumes.” For the sake of simplicity, however, I use the term “sculpture” throughout this text.
28. Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, trans. John Goodman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 446.
29. Named after the quantum physicist Erwin Schrödinger (1886–1961), this “cat” describes the following (purely theoretical!) experimental arrangement: A cat is locked inside a wooden box whose interior cannot be seen from the outside, along with a device that is able to release a deadly gas. Whether the gas is actually released or not is determined by an internal locking mechanism, the activation of which is dependent on changes in a particular (invisible) molecular structure within the system. As long as the box remains closed, the person conducting the experiment knows nothing about the animal’s condition. The cat is therefore simultaneously considered both alive and dead—a (mental) overlap of states termed “superposition” in quantum physics (see passage XII). Until the box is opened, the actual possibility of the cat being still alive can only be described as more or less probable; only when it is opened can clarity be obtained. This intervention (opening the box) distorts the experiment, however, and thus too the result; this so-called measurement problem (see passage XV) therefore also reveals a lack of clear distinction between subject and object, consequently pointing to a central problem of epistemology (see passage III).
30. Raphael Rubinstein, “Provisional Painting,” *Art in America* 97, no. 5 (May 2009): 122–128.
31. João Ribas, “Metric Pedestal Landlord Cabengo Recit,” in *Cheyney Thompson: Metric, Pedestal, Landlord, Cabengo, Récit*, 3.

## Passage II

1. Title of a short film by Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub, France, 1977, 11 min.
2. David Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself," *October* 130 (Fall 2009): 125–134. Joselit names Cheyney Thompson (alongside artists such as R. H. Quaytman, Jutta Koether, and Wade Guyton, among others) as one representative of a form of contemporary painting whose character he sees as stemming from its embeddedness within wider networks.
3. "'One Has to Be Able to Take It!' Excerpts from an Interview with Martin Kippenberger by Jutta Koether, Nov. 1990–May 1991," in *Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective*, ed. Ann Goldstein, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: MOCA, 2008), 316. Tom Holert, in his book *Knowledge Beside Itself*, identifies a related trend in contemporary art: "In curatorial statements . . . and writings by artists, knowledge has emerged, often alongside 'research' and 'epistemology,' as a core area of competence for contemporary art, seemingly eclipsing more aesthetic categories that have long organized and filtered art's production and appreciation such as beauty, style, and genre." Tom Holert, *Knowledge Beside Itself* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2020), 8.
4. See Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 82ff.
5. Ann Temkin, "The 'Late Work' of Martin Kippenberger," in Goldstein, *Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective*, 264.
6. Here, I would like to refer readers to the chapter on the "Plural Temporality of the Work of Art," which examines the mythical ship of Theseus with particular emphasis on the wider context of "debris of the past," in Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 7–20.
7. Roberta Smith, "Art in Review; Cheyney Thompson," *New York Times*, December 22, 2006, Section E, 40. Smith's choice of words carries a historical significance: the same newspaper previously reviewed Marcel Duchamp's debut at the New York Armory Show in 1913, famously using the exact same phrase in describing his revolutionary cubist work *Nude Descending a Staircase*.
8. Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, trans. John Goodman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), xvii. This contradictory nature had, incidentally, already been identified in Erwin Panofsky's seminal early treatise on the subject (see passage I).
9. Not even Picasso himself saw analytical cubism as actually having succeeded in overcoming perspective: "But it was just 'painting,' says Picasso, even the tables are in perspective: under a veil of apparent modernity, the same old mimetic structure is at work." See Yve-Alain Bois, "The Semiology of Cubism," in *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, ed. Lynn Zelevansky, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992), 171. Several contemporary critics expressed similar views at the time of the movement, including the Russian avant-gardist Ivan Aksionov, who gave the following assessment of Picasso's 1914 tondo *The Architect's Table*: "The elements of the picture continue to be volumes, stubbornly refusing to give up their third dimension to the painter who created them."

Quoted in T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 181.

10. Cf. Fritz Novotny, *Paul Cézanne: Gesammelte Schriften zu seinem Werk und Materialien aus dem Nachlass*, ed. Gabriel Ramin Schor (Vienna: Klever, 2011), 11. See M. M. Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope of the Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holmquist, ed. Michael Holmquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84–258.

11. Exhibition press release, 1817, Sutton Lane, London, October 17–November 21, 2003; “present military operations” most likely refers to the American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003.

12. Hans Belting, “The Subject in the Picture: Perspective as a Symbolic Form,” in Belting, *Florence and Baghdad: Renaissance Art and Arab Science*, trans. Deborah Lucas Schneider (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 211.

13. Within the field of literature, an exemplary treatment of the *Medusa* theme can be found in Peter Weiss’s three-volume novel *The Aesthetics of Resistance* (1975–1981); the first two volumes have been translated into English by Joachim Neugroschel (vol. 1) and Joel Scott (vol. 2) and published by Duke University Press in 2005 and 2020, respectively. For a general cultural-historical overview of the *Medusa* motif, see Jean Clair, *Méduse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989). On the metaphor of the shipwreck, see Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence*, trans. Steven Rendall (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996). See also passage XVI.

14. Here, the ultimately *political* nature of the original painting’s depiction of the event should be emphasized; see passage XV.

15. Dieter Bachmann, “The Results of a Sinking,” in *Memento Metropolis* (Copenhagen: Victor B. Andersens Maskinfabrik, 1996), 122.

16. Hal Foster, “Preposterous Timing,” *London Review of Books* 34, no. 21 (November 8, 2012): 3.

17. For an alternative reading of the sandbagged area in particular as a “non-site,” see passage XVI.

18. Within the development of scientific theories, too, the emergence of a comparable paradigm shift has been described as a sequence of “normal science, crisis, revolution, new normal science.” See Ian Hacking, *Representing and Intervening: Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 7. See also Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 23ff.

### Passage III

1. Jorge Luis Borges, “Funes the Memorious,” in Borges, *Labyrinths*, trans. James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1962), 153.

2. Rosalind E. Krauss, “Grids,” *October* 9 (Summer 1979): 50–64.

3. It should be noted here that the symbolic aspect of woven structures has long been judged to be of cultural-historical relevance. Aby Warburg, for example, repeatedly speaks of “rhizomes” in this context, as do Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

4. Insofar as this title seems to point beyond the work's material contingencies alone, it also reflects a specific observation about contemporary painting (and, more specifically, "the aporias of circulation"), which David Joselit summarizes as follows: "The question has become, not where to deposit a quantum of paint on its support, but rather, where will the painting—or the image—go." David Joselit, "Marking, Scoring, Storing, and Speculating (on Time)," in *Painting Beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-medium Condition*, ed. Isabelle Graw and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), 17. Additionally, see Ann Lauterbach, "On Cheyney Thompson: The Task of Art in the Age of Information," in *Cheyney Thompson: Metric, Pedestal, Landlord, Cabengo, Récit* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 178.
5. The ostentatious reconstruction of curves in the direct proximity of a grid might be understood as a counteracting gesture to the work of Piet Mondrian, whose interest was not least in the radically straightened form—"the abandonment of all curves." See Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 247. The use of a process developed by Bézier, who for many years worked for the French automobile manufacturer Renault, also bears a reference to Martin Barré and his so-called *Renault* series (see passage XV).
6. Ann Goldstein, "The Problem Perspective," in *Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective*, ed. Goldstein, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: MOCA, 2008), 87.
7. Arno Victor Nielsen, "Keep Smiling," in *Memento Metropolis* (Copenhagen: Victor B. Andersens Maskinfabrik, 1996), 104. In the face of capitalism's inherent processes of speculation about future profits and the use of stochastic methods in reducing financial risks for market players (see passages XIII and XVII), Gilles Châtelet has identified a new form of "knighthood"—the "Trader-Knight": "He sees himself as valiant and dramatic. Always at the outposts of volatility. Upstream of what has just been prepared as the new raw material of the market. And ready to prepare head on the Great Dragon of Contingency." Gilles Châtelet, "The Dissident Knights," in Châtelet, *To Live and Think Like Pigs: The Incitement of Envy and Boredom in Market Democracies*, trans. Robin Mackay (New York: Sequence Press, 2014), 130.
8. While the fan was in fact a gift from the real-life landlord, it should also be understood as a red herring that establishes a purely personal and non-work-related reference to Thompson's friend and colleague Sam Lewitt. The inclusion of such a device as a conscious act of misdirection was awarded the important function of an ultimately unexplainable exception that undermines any code, any system—even one as meticulously designed as this exhibition; it is a house of cards that carries its own illogicality within it, and which may collapse at any moment.
9. This reference is not an accidental one, since the Rubens painting in question is *The Apotheosis of Henry IV and the Proclamation of the Regency of Marie de Médici*, from 1623–1625, which itself features the figure of Bellona at its center.



10. Not least, it is in the work of Jacques Derrida (whose 1980 text “The Law of Genre” counts as an important influence on Thompson) that the methodical deconstruction of “objectivity” and “subjectivity” go hand in hand. On the various concepts of the subject within philosophy, see, among others Simon Lumsden, “Hegel, Derrida and the Subject,” *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 3, no. 2/3 (2007): 32–50.
11. Yve-Alain Bois, “A Pedestal Is a Pedestal Is a Pedestal,” in *Cheyney Thompson: Metric, Pedestal, Landlord, Cabengo, Récit*, 6. See also passage VII.
12. Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*, trans. Alan Sheridan and John Law (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).
13. Bruno Latour, “On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications Plus More Than a Few Complications,” *Soziale Welt* 47, no. 4 (1996): 369–381.
14. Kerstin Stakemeier, “Controlled Medium Specificity: Networks and Painting,” in *Painting 2.0*, ed. Manuela Ammer, Achim Hochdörfer, and David Joselit (Munich: Prestel, 2015), 267.

#### Passage IV

1. Ta-Nehisi Coates, *The Beautiful Struggle* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2008), 220.
2. Roberta Smith, “Art in Review; Cheyney Thompson,” *New York Times*, December 22, 2006, Section E, 40. The title of the show comes from an article (“La Non Intervention”) that appeared in an edition of the journal *Revue Robho*. Titled “Quelques Aspects de l’Art Bourgeois,” the focus of the issue was on a critical engagement with “Les Institutions du Systeme.” See *Revue Robho* 5/6 (1969): 30.
3. This specific comparison is taken from a discussion of the exhibition by Frances Richard in *Artforum* 45, no. 6 (February 2007): 290–291. In the corresponding diagram, the central intersection where C, M, and Y overlap can appear in gray; while the colors are in fact contained within the equally sized sections, they “neutralize” each other.
4. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C. Lenhardt (London: Routledge, 1984), 127.
5. See the discussion of Thompson’s sculptures in passage XI.
6. Quoted in Luis Pérez-Oramas, “Lygia Clark: If You Could Hold a Stone,” in *Lygia Clark: The Abandonment of Art, 1948–1988*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2014), 33.
7. Continuing this attributive association game inevitably evokes a further reference to Leo Steinberg’s notion of the “flatbed picture plane,” whose function can subsequently be compared to that of the surfaces of Thompson’s tables. See Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 82ff. The principle equivalence of the horizontal and the vertical as a site for displaying image and text alike would later be demonstrated by Thompson in his “pedestals,” which featured all-over prints. See passage XI.

## Passage V

1. Félix Guattari, *Molecular Revolution in Brazil* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 328.
2. For more on this subject, see the catalog for the eponymously titled exhibition: *Black Paintings*, ed. Stephanie Rosenthal, exh. cat. (Munich: Haus der Kunst, 2006).
3. *Matisse on Art*, ed. Jack D. Flam (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1978), 106.
4. For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to Thompson's *Black Paintings* throughout this book, but it should be noted that this is not an official title given to the works by the artist himself.
5. See Alexander N. Lawrentjew, "Rodschenkos Labor: Kunst und Naturwissenschaft," in *Rodschenko: Eine neue Zeit*, exh. cat. (Hamburg: Bucerius Kunst Forum, 2013), 11–21. See also Ortrud Westheimer, "Maler-Labor: Experimente mit der Ungegenständlichkeit," in the same book, 100.
6. In creating the *Black Paintings*, Thompson produced sixteen "films," similar to the color separations used within screen printing—one for each of the sixteen gray tones used in the paintings. He then projected these onto the canvas one after the other, individually reproducing each tiny digit of the abstract image by hand in sixteen separate stages. For a detailed account of Thompson's working method, including his use of projectors and templates, see Pia Gottschaller, "Painting as Technology: Toolpaths and Pathways through Cheyney Thompson's Work," *Journal of Contemporary Painting* 7, nos. 1–2 (2021): 115–161.
7. Sigmund Freud, quoted in Georges Didi-Huberman, *Was wir sehen blickt uns an: Zur Metapsychologie des Bildes* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1999), 223. English translation quoted from Rosenthal, *Black Paintings*, 73.
8. Gottschaller, "Painting as Technology," 125. The arbitrary selection and extraction of certain details (and, ultimately, formats) is a repeated feature of Thompson's work, as when choosing the canvases for his *Chromachromes* and *Chronochromes* (see passages VI and VII).
9. Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1954; Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970).
10. Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (London: Continuum, 2008), 115.
11. Didi-Huberman, *Was wir sehen blickt uns an*, 228. English translation quoted from Rosenthal, *Black Paintings*, 73.
12. Quoted in Hal Foster, "'Made Out of the Real World': Lessons from the Fulton Street Studio," in *Robert Rauschenberg*, ed. Leah Dickerman and Achim Borchardt-Hume, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2016), 91.
13. "What their convergence does show . . . is the profound degree to which Modernist art belongs to the same specific cultural tendency as modern science, and that is of the highest significance as a historical fact." See Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in *Modernism with a Vengeance*,

1957–1969, vol. 4 of *The Collected Essays and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 90–91.

14. Erwin Panofsky, “Galileo as a Critic of the Arts: Aesthetic Attitude and Scientific Thought,” *Isis* 47, no. 1 (1956): 3–15, here 14.

15. In his description of Rodchenko’s practice, which from early on made use of mathematical algorithms, Alexander N. Lawrentjew even speaks of “painting as a future science,” emphasizing the experimental character of his grandfather’s working method (trans. Ben Caton). See Lawrentjew, “Rodschenkos Labor,” 13.

16. Thompson has repeatedly spoken of the influence of Martin Barré (1924–1996) on his own practice. The work of the French painter was characterized in part by a similar fixation with surface and with the two-dimensional character of the image. See Stephen Melville, “Martin Barré,” in *As Painting: Division and Displacement*, ed. Philip Armstrong, Laura Lisbon, and Stephen Melville (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 64–69.

17. Gottschaller, “Painting as Technology,” 125; Hans Blumenberg, *The Genesis of the Copernican World*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 676. See also Jürgen Goldstein, *Hans Blumenberg: Ein philosophisches Portrait* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2020). On the role of the black mirror in photography specifically, see Arnaud Mallet, *The Claude Glass: Use and Meaning of the Black Mirror in Western Art*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2004).

18. Blumenberg, *Genesis of the Copernican World*, 621.

19. As the German physicist and Copernican Georg Christoph Lichtenberg once stated, “the chief thing is always invisible.” Quoted in Blumenberg, *Genesis of the Copernican World*, 619.

20. Aby Warburg correspondingly spoke of “dynamograms,” which Didi-Huberman in turn describes as “graph[s] of the image-as-symptom.” See Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Surviving Image: Phantoms of Time and Time of Phantoms: Aby Warburg’s History of Art*, trans. Harvey Mendelsohn (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016), 108.

21. Anne Sauvagnargues, *Armmachines: Deleuze, Guattari, Simondon*, trans. Suzanne Verderber (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 160.

22. Alain Badiou’s comment that his fellow countryman Pierre Soulages’s black polyptychs represent a “displacement of the body in space” must therefore also be understood in this context. See Alain Badiou, “Soulages’ Ultrablack,” in *Black: The Brilliance of a Non-Color*, trans. Susan Spitzer (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2016), 43. For an overview of the subject of displacement in painting, see also Armstrong, Lisbon, and Melville, *As Painting*.

23. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 56.

24. See also Hans Blumenberg, *The Laughter of the Thracian Woman: A Protohistory of Theory* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), and Goldstein, *Hans Blumenberg*, 297.

## Passage VI

1. Michel Foucault, quoted in *As Painting: Division and Displacement*, ed. Philip Armstrong, Laura Lisbon, and Stephen Melville (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 46.
2. Nicolas Bourriaud, “Michel Foucault: Manet and the Birth of the Viewer,” in Michel Foucault, *Manet and the Object of Painting*, trans. Matthew Barr (London: Tate Publishing, 2011), 15.
3. See exhibition press release, *Robert Macaire Chromachromes*, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, May 2–July 4, 2009.
4. Munsell’s eponymous color system spatially maps the three primary colors, along with the secondaries and tertiaries; these are then organized into five families of hues. The result is a triaxial and asymmetrically shaped diagram: the Munsell Color Tree. This allows each color to be located and numerically indexed within the tree and described in terms of its hue, value, and chroma. As a consequence, colors are no longer individually “named”—thereby avoiding any (romantic) connotations with specific words—but can instead be identified by anonymous combinations of numbers and letters. It should also be noted that Thompson thus “flattened” the coded information of the three-dimensional tree onto the two-dimensional surface of the canvas.
5. The philosopher interprets the tight mesh of horizontals and verticals formed by the masts and rigging that appear in the upper center of Manet’s seascape *The Port of Bordeaux* (1870–1871) as an explicit reference to the webbed structure of the underlying canvas. See Foucault, *Manet and the Object of Painting*, 42–44.
6. Hubert Damisch, *A Theory of/Cloud/: Toward a History of Painting*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 227.
7. Yve-Alain Bois et al., *Art since 1900* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2016), 747.
8. Here, I refer to Christian Bonnefoi’s definition of the tableau as “an underlying, nonappearing structure that is masked by the stylistic successions of painting, which are then gathered together in a totalizing history of art.” See Christian Bonnefoi, “The Objection That the Obscure Makes to Painting,” in Armstrong, Lisbon, and Melville, *As Painting*, 205.
9. Damisch, *A Theory of/Cloud/*, 229.
10. Clement Greenberg, “The Crisis of the Easel Picture,” in *Arrogant Purpose, 1945–1949*, vol. 2 of *The Collected Essays and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 222.
11. Cf. the title essay on Hubert Damisch’s *Fenêtre jaune cadmium, ou les dessous de la peinture* (1984), in Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), especially 249–252, from which this translation (“the underside”) is taken.
12. Catherine Millet, “Interview with Martin Barré,” trans. Stephen Melville, in Armstrong, Lisbon, and Melville, *As Painting*, 190.
13. Clement Greenberg, “Louis and Noland,” in *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1959*, vol. 4 of *The Collected Essays and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 97.
14. Clement Greenberg, “The Pasted-Paper Revolution,” in *Arrogant Purpose, 1945–1949*, 61–66.

15. Bois, *Painting as Model*, 178.
16. This level of specificity also distinguishes the *Chromachromes* from Mondrian's earlier abstractions, which were given generic titles such as *Composition with Red, Blue and Yellow* (1927).
17. The original sales prices for the *Chromachromes* correspondingly followed a graded scale based exclusively on size (see passages VII and XIII).
18. David Joselit, "Blanks and Noise," *Texte zur Kunst* 77 (March 2010): 132.
19. Damisch's *Fenêtre jaune cadmium, ou les dessous de la peinture*, cited in Bois, *Painting as Model*, especially 249–252.

## Passage VII

1. Stéphane Mallarmé, "Une dentelle s'abolit," in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 74; English translation in Stéphane Mallarmé, *Collected Poems*, trans. Henry Weinfeld (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 80.
2. The original concept of the *dispositif* as a regulatory framework that is staked out a priori can be traced back to Foucault. Understood by him as an "apparatus" within which heterogeneous social interactions are able to occur and which connects all of their relevant elements, his use of the term still has static connotations, in the sense of spatial-temporal limitations. Deleuze subsequently furnishes the *dispositif* with a dynamic and eventful component, along with Christian Bonnefoi, who emphasizes its temporal aspects. Consequently, I shall draw upon the latter two authors' dynamic understanding of the concept. In this respect, a formalistic reading in terms of Greenbergian spatial "flatness"—as employed in Passage VI—is less useful in understanding the explicitly temporal character of the *Chronochromes*. See Michel Foucault, "The Confessions of the Flesh," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Writings*, trans. Colin Gordon and Leo Marshall, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 194–228; and Gilles Deleuze, "What Is a Dispositif?," in *Two Regimes of Madness*, trans. Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina, ed. David Lapoujade (New York: Semiotexte, 2007), 343–352. See also Yve-Alain Bois, "The Future Anterior: On a Canvas by Christian Bonnefoi," *Journal of Contemporary Painting* 5, no. 1 (2019): 49–57.
3. Borrowed from the fashion world, this term describes the characteristic diagonal cut used in individual, made-to-measure tailoring, which ensures that a garment sits as smoothly as possible on the body. Thompson names the French designer Madeleine Vionnet (1876–1975) as the primary reference in this context; called the "Queen of the Bias Cut," she was also known for her precise application of geometrical rules.
4. Were one to place all of these *Sets* created in 2010–2011 alongside one another while observing the respective distances between the works, the resulting installation would be around 26 meters long in total.

5. It is once again Deleuze who, on the basis of G. W. Leibniz's writings, identifies the baroque in particular as a site where curvatures or folds were produced, an insight from which he subsequently derives a corresponding metaphysics of the era. See Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).
6. If one follows Deleuze's strict definition, however, the existence of folds in the form of physical spaces "in-between" the works could be disputed; we are, after all, dealing here with individual canvases that are separated from one another, and not a single continuous length of folded fabric, as Deleuze originally postulated. Crucially, the *Chronochromes* abandon continuity in favor of individual (or discrete) units of time, with the indeterminate lengths of the intervals between them meaning their temporal factor is not only folded into them but swallowed altogether, thereby disappearing from view. See Gilles Deleuze, "The Fold," trans. Jonathan Strauss, *Yale French Studies* 80 (1991).
7. The philosopher Henri Bergson's reflections on this notion of the *durée* had a great influence on artists at the start of the twentieth century. It is well known, for example, that Henri Matisse would often find ways to visibly incorporate the idea of temporal duration into his working process. These ranged from the exact photographic documentation of his paintings' various stages of completion to his decision to leave visible traces of his lengthy experiments with the composition of his pictures in their underlying layers of paint. See *Matisse: Radical Intervention, 1913–1917*, ed. John Elderfield and Stephanie D'Alessandro (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).
8. For a technical treatment of the working process, including details on the artist's choice of colors and materials, see Pia Gottschaller, "Painting as Technology: Toolpaths and Pathways through Cheyney Thompson's Work," *Journal of Contemporary Painting* 7, nos. 1–2 (2021): 115–161. Gottschaller's analysis focuses on precisely these sorts of deviations from the rigid parameters that Thompson repeatedly imposes upon himself, but which can never be exactly adhered to, digressions the author repeatedly describes as "slippages."
9. Amelia Barikin, *Parallel Presents: The Art of Pierre Huyghe* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 177.
10. Thompson will later begin experimenting with unstable surfaces in his own paintings, which will be affected by local climatic conditions; see passage XIII.
11. The connotation of "canvas" with "skin" is well established, and the term has been used in relation to contemporary painting, such as that of Bonnefois. See Bois, "The Future Anterior," 53, n. 1. See also the corresponding text by Jean-Luc Nancy and Federico Ferrari, *Being Nude: The Skin of Images*, trans. Anne O'Byrne and Carlie Anglemine (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014); and Amy Knight Powell, *Depositions: Scenes from the Late Medieval Church and the Modern Museum* (New York: Zone Books, 2012), chap. 8, "The Shroud as Body Double," 211–233.

12. Cf. Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Surviving Image: Phantoms of Time and Time of Phantoms: Aby Warburg's History of Art*, trans. Harvey Mendelsohn (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016).
13. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 25
14. Catherine Millet, "Interview with Martin Barré," trans. Stephen Melville, in *As Painting: Division and Displacement*, ed. Philip Armstrong, Laura Lisbon, and Stephen Melville (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 190.
15. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, quoted in Hubert Damisch, *A Theory of /Cloud/: Toward a History of Painting*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 225.
16. Cf. Jaleh Mansoor, "The Letter of the Law, Interrupted, or What Is Real Abstraction?," in Blake Rayne, *Tense and Spaced Out: Polar Nights, Glacial Chaos, and the Ecology of Misery*, ed. Katherine Pickard and Tim Saltarelli (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), 99–100.
17. Kerstin Stakemeier, "Controlled Medium Specificity: Networks and Painting," in *Painting 2.0*, ed. Manuela Ammer, Achim Hochdörfer, and David Joselit (Munich: Prestel, 2015), 263–264.
18. Damisch, *A Theory of /Cloud/*, 231.
19. If we follow Jorge Luis Borges, not even this certainty is guaranteed. Like other thinkers before him, Borges questions not only the continuity of temporal sequences but also the notion of succession per se, and with it, any possibility at all of chronological determinacy. Borges's remarks hold a dual significance in the present context: First, he directly relates Alain Badiou's assertion of the irreconcilability of large-scale abstraction and spatial orientation to the temporal dimension, when he states that "if we deny matter and spirit, which are continuities, and if we also deny space, I do not know what right we have to the continuity that is time." On the other hand, by presenting the reader with discrete periods of time separated by unspecified intervals, Borges widens the discussion to include the possible reality of a dream. In illustrating his point, he chooses a work of literature that is also astoundingly pertinent in describing the sequence of a multipart *Set of Chronochromes*: "A night on the Mississippi. Huckleberry Finn wakes up. The raft, lost in the shadows of twilight, continues downstream. . . . Negligently he opens his eyes: he sees an indefinite number of stars, a nebulous line of trees. Then he sinks into a sleep without memories. . . . In my eyes it is . . . unjustifiable to add a chronological precision: for instance, the fact that the above-mentioned event should have taken place on the night of June 7, 1849, between 4:10 and 4:11." See Jorge Luis Borges, "A New Refutation of Time" (c. 1944–1946), *The Oxford Philosopher: Inclusive, Accessible Philosophy*, accessed April 27, 2022, <https://theoxfordphilosopher.com/2018/10/17/a-new-refutation-of-time/>.

See also Alain Badiou, “Soulages’ Ultrablack,” in *Black: The Brilliance of a Non-Color*, trans. Susan Spitzer (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2016).

20. Paul Hill has discussed the striking use of veils in Titian’s work, such as in his 1558 portrait of Archbishop Filippo Archinto, writing that “Titian’s art brings together body, veil and paint as the very stuff and subject of representation.” See Paul Hill, “Titian’s Veils,” *Art History* 9, no. 5 (November 2006): 772.

21. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, 67.

22. It is important to emphasize that in this understanding, “relative value” can in fact only be established *over time*. Yve-Alain Bois demonstrates the similarities between Thompson’s way of thinking and that of Georges Seurat, such as the latter’s practice of setting his price structures by meticulously calculating the working time required and multiplying this by a fixed daily rate. (See Yve-Alain Bois, “A Pedestal Is a Pedestal Is a Pedestal,” in *Cheyney Thompson: Metric, Pedestal, Landlord, Cabengo, Récit* [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012], 5.) Early on in his career, Thompson and his gallerists also devised a consistent (if ambitious) system for pricing his works, based on size. That a price calculated *in time* can never correspond to its value *over time*, meanwhile, is clear from the example of Seurat himself. Albert C. Barnes paid the equivalent of just over £10,000 sterling for the French artist’s famous work *Les poseuses* (79 x 99 inches) in 1926, while a significantly smaller version was sold for over £430,000 in 1970, an increase of several multiples even when accounting for inflation. See Gerard Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste III* (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1982), 327–328.

23. Herbert Molderings, *Über Marcel Duchamp und die Ästhetik des Möglichen* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2019), 46 (trans. Ben Caton).

## Passage VIII

1. Jack Vance, *The Green Pearl*, book 2 of the *Lyonnesse* trilogy (London: Gateway Essentials, 2011, ebook), chap. 1, section IV.

2. For an introduction to Daumier’s work, see *Daumier 1808–1879*, exh. cat. (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1999), 192–195. Daumier produced numerous lithographs of Macaire from 1836 onward, before eventually providing a series of illustrations for Pierre-Joseph Rousseau’s 1842 book *Physiologie du Robert-Macaire*, which features the eponymous rogue in various roles, including a musician and a chemist.

3. See exhibition press release, *Robert Macaire Chromachromes*, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, May 2–July 4, 2009: “In almost the same moment that industrial capitalism began to produce representative social types, Robert Macaire dissolved the efficacy of those types through a process of



multiplication. . . . Strangely, Macaire lost his image, and like vampires peering in the looking glass, our images no longer come back to us.”

4. In this context, the term “outsider” should be understood as a synonym for “exteriority.” It has been stated within literary theory that language finds the necessary distance from itself only when viewed from the outside; that it is only in that moment when the *I* of the author becomes a *He* (an act of depersonalization) that *literature can emerge*. See the relevant comments by the literary theorist Maurice Blanchot, from whom I borrow this notion. See Anne Sauvagnargues, *Artmachines: Deleuze, Guattari, Simondon*, trans. Suzanne Verderber (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 24–25. (See also passages IX and XVII.)

5. Yve-Alain Bois, “Picasso the Trickster,” in *Picasso Harlequin 1917–1937*, ed. Bois, exh. cat. (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2008), 19–37.

6. Mac Linscott Ricketts, “The North American Indian Trickster,” *History of Religions* 5, no. 2 (Winter 1996): 343; quoted in Bois, “Picasso the Trickster,” 35.

7. Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, trans. Lawrence R. Schehr (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 184.

8. Paul Valéry’s novel *Monsieur Teste* (1896), which served as inspiration for Duchamp and Jacques Tati, tells the story of a writer who adopts the persona of a dandy, and who subsequently observes and describes himself in this role. Not only is the latently narcissistic figure of the dandy mirrored in this act of literary introspection, the list of possible interpretations could also be widened to include Thompson or, for that matter, Michael Krebber (see passage I), both of whose self-referentiality as painters consists precisely in the way in which they reflect their artistic identities through the consistent scrutiny of their respective painterly techniques. Discussing the dandy’s role as a social outsider, Baudelaire even described the dandy as possessing a supposed “aristocratic superiority of mind” that affords him possibilities and potential that make him an “institution outside the law.” See Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life* (New York: Phaidon, 1965), 26–27.

9. Alexander Zevin, “Panoramic Literature in 19th Century Paris: Robert Macaire as a Type of Everyday,” <http://dl.lib.brown.edu/paris/Zevin.html>.

## Passage IX

1. Michel Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, trans. James Harkness (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 53.

2. In Manet’s full-length portrait of Louis Daguerre (1872), for example, the subject himself seemingly sketched out the painter’s signature in the foreground of the picture with his walking stick.

3. I refer, of course, to the signature on Duchamp’s *Fountain* of 1917; the artist used multiple pseudonyms in signing his works, such as Rose Marcel Dee and Rose Sélavy.

4. Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of All Things* (New York: Zone Books, 2009), 33.
5. The divergence from the usual Latin spelling *imago* can possibly be explained as a reference by Agamben to the so-called *ymago mundi*, a late medieval compendium of cosmographic speculation by the French theologian Pierre d'Ailly (1351–1420).
6. Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 56.
7. Hubert Damisch, *A Theory of /Cloud/: Toward a History of Painting*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 229.
8. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 66.
9. Jacques Rancière, *Mallarmé: The Politics of the Siren*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2011), 53–54. Damisch recognizes in Mallarmé's "blanks" that "same void that constituted a substratum upon which, according to Epicurus, atoms clustered together in variable order and arrangement, 'like letters which, although there are not many of them, nevertheless, when they are arranged in different ways, produce innumerable words.'" See Damisch, *A Theory of /Cloud/*, 229.
10. "Knowledge of celestial signatures is the magician's science." Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 55.
11. Walter Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," in Benjamin, *Reflections*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Harvest/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 336.
12. The equally ambiguous term "liquidation" should be understood here as implying a process of dissolution.
13. Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 7 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974), 666 (trans. Ben Caton). Cf. *Benjamin-Handbuch*, ed. Burghardt Lindner (Heidelberg: J. B. Metzler, 2011), 248.
14. Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in Derrida, *Limited Inc*, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988).
15. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, translator unnamed (New York: Pantheon, 1970), 26.
16. Enzo Melandri, "Michel Foucault: L'epistemologia delle scienze umane," quoted in Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 59.
17. Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 55–56.
18. See Arthur Danto, "Metaphor and Cognition," in Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1992), 72 ff. While Danto describes metaphor as a means of manipulation, its connotations are less political in the context I've described.
19. Kerstin Stakemeier, "Controlled Medium Specificity: Networks and Painting," in *Painting 2.0*, ed. Manuela Ammer, Achim Hochdörfer, and David Joselit (Munich: Prestel, 2015), 262.
20. Giorgio Agamben, paraphrasing Melandri: "If for the Renaissance episteme a signature thus refers to the resemblance between the sign and its designated thing, in modern science it is no

longer a character of the individual sign but of its relation with other signs” (Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 59).

21. See Hans Blumenberg, *Theorie der Unbegrifflichkeit* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2007). For further reading, see for example Miguel de Beistegui’s programmatically titled study *Aesthetics after Metaphysics: From Mimesis to Metaphor* (London: Routledge, 2012) and that book’s review by Clive Cazeaux in the *British Journal of Aesthetics* 54, no. 4 (October 2014): 499–504.

## Passage X

1. Philip Guston, “Faith, Hope, and Impossibility,” reprinted in *Philip Guston: Retrospective*, ed. Michael Auping, exh. cat. (Fort Worth: Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, 2003), 94.

2. See Robert Wald, “Materials and Techniques of Painters in Sixteenth-Century Venice,” in *Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese: Rivals in Renaissance Venice*, exh. cat. (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2009), 73–84.

3. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 67.

4. Adrian Searle, “Never Trust a Painter,” *Guardian*, September 25, 2001; quoted in João Ribas, “Unfinished Too Soon,” in *Michael Krebber: The Living Wedge* (London: Koenig Books, 2017), 16.

5. Cf. Jacques Derrida, “The Law of Genre,” *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1980): 55–81.

6. Meyer Schapiro, “Recent Abstract Painting,” in *Modern Art* (New York: George Braziller, 1979), 217–218. The author made a somehow related comparison regarding the work of Georges Seurat: “Thus Seurat rationalized even his own labor as a sum of units of work, in contrast to his contemporaries, who identified every stroke with the experience of a lifetime or the priceless effect of inspired genius.” See Schapiro, “Seurat and La Grande Jatte,” *Columbia Review* 17, no. 1 (November 1935): 16.

7. Roger Shattuck, “The Doubling of Fiction,” *Yale French Studies* 6 (1950): 101. Maurice Blanchot writes in turn that “the récit is not the narration of an event, but the event itself, the approach to that event . . . an event which is yet to come and through whose power of attraction the récit can come into being, too.” Quoted in Vivek Dhareshwar, “The Song of the Sirens in *The Heart of Darkness: The Enigma of Récit*,” *boundary 2* 15, no. 1/2 (Autumn 1986/Winter 1987): 72.

8. Cf. Francesco Giusti, “Recitation: Lyric Time(s) I,” in *RE-: An Errant Glossary*, ed. Christoph F. E. Holzhey and Arnd Wedemeyer (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2019), 35–47.

9. Augustine, quoted in Giusti, “Recitation: Lyric Time(s) I,” 38.

10. Harold Rosenberg, “The American Action Painters,” *ArtNews*, December 1952.

11. Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 348–353.

12. Michael Krebber, “What Is Courbet?,” *Artforum* 46, no. 9 (May 2008): 348.
13. For a detailed description, see Pia Gottschaller, “Painting as Technology: Toolpaths and Pathways through Cheyney Thompson’s Work,” *Journal of Contemporary Painting* 7, nos. 1–2 (2021): 115–161.
14. A later short series titled *Quantities of Pigments Paintings*, presented at Galerie Buchholz in 2013, had a similar focus on quantitative distribution. In that case, however—in contrast to the *Chronochromes (récit)*—a mathematical algorithm was employed in achieving this. See passage XIII.
15. The show, *Sometimes Some Pictures Somewhere*, took place in New York from May 19–June 23, 2012; the accompanying press release reads like a mock advertising brochure promoting the gallery.
16. See Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 3–64. See also Éric Alliez and Jean-Claude Bonne, “Matisse-Thought and the Strict Quantitative Ordering of Fauvism,” in *Collapse*, vol. 3, ed. Robin Mackay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2007), 207–229.
17. Gottschaller, “Painting as Technology,” 151.
18. Anne Sauvagnargues, *Artmachines: Deleuze, Guattari, Simondon*, trans. Suzanne Verderber (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 17.
19. Compare to Thompson’s earlier use of, for example, a fan in the Whitney Biennial, as described in passage V.
20. This logic could also be applied to the works from the earlier *Chronochromes* series of 2009, which David Joselit tellingly discussed under the title “Blanks and Noise”—with “noise” understood by him as a sort of (digital) background interference. See David Joselit, “Blanks and Noise,” *Texte zur Kunst* 77 (March 2010): 129–132.
21. Joseph Vogl, “Taming Time: Media of Financialization,” in *and Materials and Money and Crisis*, ed. Richard Birkett et al. (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2013), 76.
22. As defined on Wikipedia.
23. Hans Blumenberg, “An Anthropological Approach to Rhetoric,” in *History, Metaphor, Fables: A Hans Blumenberg Reader*, edited and translated by Hannes Bajohr, Florian Fuchs, and Joe Paul Kroll (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press and University Library, 2020), 189.

## Passage XI

1. Elias Canetti, *The Human Province*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (London: Picador Books, 1986), 260.
2. Simon Baier also draws attention to the difficulties faced in making a precise distinction between the paintings and the *Pedestals* when he writes, “it is irrefutable that what is precipitated and objectified as ‘information’ on them, beyond and outside the paintings, metamorphotically acts as their very support. . . . This information . . . always exchanges itself for its objectification. It lets things appear at peripheries where the differences between painting, object display, figure,

discourse, motif, signifier . . . constantly disarticulate themselves.” Simon Baier, “Dead Time Painting,” in *Cheyney Thompson: Metric, Pedestal, Landlord, Cabengo, Récit* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 181–182.

3. See exhibition press release, *the completed reference: pedestals and drunken walks*, Kunstverein Braunschweig, December 8, 2012–February 10, 2013.

4. In what could be read as a sly comment on his famous predecessors—the “master draftsmen” of the Renaissance—some drawings were executed using a “precious” silverpoint stylus, as used by Albrecht Dürer, among others.

5. The use of the term “device” here is deliberate and refers to Jasper Johns, who himself used ready-made items such as folding rulers and brooms in treating his paintings’ surfaces. “Johns has always enjoyed occupying this indeterminate position: the artist as cipher, medium oracle, channel.” From Morgan Meis, “Is the Painting Counting?,” in *Jasper Johns*, exh. cat. (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2017), 42. See also passage XVII.

6. Following the analysis of Jürgen Goldstein, it is once again Hans Blumenberg whose philosophical practice serves as a programmatic reference here. Blumenberg’s famously inexhaustible range of interests spanned many subjects and explicitly sought to “follow the meandering paths of human thought.” See Jürgen Goldstein, *Hans Blumenberg: Ein philosophisches Portrait* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2020), 24 (trans. Ben Caton). See also passage XVI.

7. Cf. David Joselit’s description of the “portal,” quoted in passage VI. David Joselit, “Blanks and Noise,” *Texte zur Kunst* 77 (March 2010): 132.

8. A now-destroyed sculpture featuring schematic illustrations of variously browned French fries appeared alongside a series of *Chronochromes* at Galerie Buchholz back in 2009; for an attempt at a decidedly psychoanalytic contextualization of the other two references, see Yve-Alain Bois, “A Pedestal Is a Pedestal Is a Pedestal,” in *Cheyney Thompson: Metric, Pedestal, Landlord, Cabengo, Récit* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 7–8.

9. The idea of using an algorithm also came to Thompson somewhat by coincidence, inspired by a computer program designed for the management and storage of artworks and used by his gallery.

10. The artist compiled a list of all relevant references that appeared separately, as a bound book, which interested visitors to the Kunstverein could browse through on site. Thompson would later return to the book format, even if the work in question—a comprehensive collection of the artist’s *Bellona* drawings—would initially remain unrealized; see passage XV.

11. Quoted in Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 132.

12. See the discussion of Fernand Deligny in passage XV.

13. Quoted in Bois, *Painting as Model*, 144. The parameterization of the working process, and of subjectivity, was of central importance throughout Strzemiński’s entire body of work. On Kobra’s attempts to mathematically rationalize “spatiotemporal rhythms” in her sculptural practice, see

Katarzyna Słoboda, “The Movement of Space-Time,” in *Katarzyna Kobro: The Movement of Space-Time*, ed. Katarzyna Słoboda (Cologne: Walther König, 2022), 9–3.

14. Simon Baier seems to indicate this same problem of translatability across genres when he writes that “the transfer of things into language produces an impossible, heterotopic set.” See Baier, “Dead Time Painting,” 182.

15. On the important question of to what extent the use of an algorithm can, in turn, ultimately be seen as a constraint of chance under the sign of a capitalist economic system, see passage XVII.

## Passage XII

1. It also indicates a reference to the form of the so-called Peano curve, named after the Italian mathematician Giuseppe Peano (1858–1932); one characteristic of such a curve is the dense and labyrinthian path it forges as it increases in length.

2. On Mallarmé, see Jacques Rancière, *Mallarmé: The Politics of the Siren*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2011), 53–54.

3. This also explains the chosen title for the exhibition at Campoli Presti: *Drunks*.

4. See Jean Clay, “Le dispositif Martin Barré (1) L’œil onglé,” *Macula* 2 (1977): 73. See also Helmut Draxler, “Malerei als Dispositiv: Zwölf Thesen,” *Texte zur Kunst* 77 (March 2010): 39–45.

5. Thompson himself has underlined this idea by comparing his own approach with that of Marcel Duchamp’s *Three Standard Stoppages*. This key work from 1913–1914 saw the French artist drop three threads, each a meter long, onto a canvas. These landed in random curves that, in turn, produced three different linear lengths. In Thompson’s account of his own works, by contrast, he emphasizes the moment—or gap—of free fall, *before* the threads land and take concrete form.

6. On the significance of stochastic processes within the field of language, see Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of the so-called Markov Chain in Anne Sauvagnargues, *Artmachines: Deleuze, Guattari, Simondon*, trans. Suzanne Verderber (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 219–231. See also passage XVII, note 35.

7. See *Louis Bachelier’s Theory of Speculation*, trans. and ed. Mark Davis and Allison Etheridge (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006). It is important to note that in generating his own algorithms, Thompson does not use any “real” random numbers. The algorithms in question effect a pseudo-randomness and so are, in fact, ultimately deterministic. See also passage XVII.

8. In his *Florence and Baghdad: Renaissance Art and Arab Science*, trans. Deborah Lucas Schneider (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), Hans Belting identifies the classical Islamic *mashrabiya* window screen as a “secondary order” that makes light a measurable factor and draws the eye. “In the Islamic world, a screen is built on this threshold. . . . The screen is

permeable, but it is permeable not for the *gaze* . . . and only for the *light*, thereby also reversing the orientation between interior and exterior” (274).

9. As with the paintings’ shared format (81.5 x 61.14 inches), this number was stipulated from the start. A numerological decryption of the works’ respective numbers of vertical and horizontal rows, meanwhile, will not be attempted here.

10. Leo Steinberg, “Jasper Johns: The First Seven Years of His Art,” in *Other Criteria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 52.

11. Giorgio Agamben, *What Is Real?*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 32.

12. A related form of superimposition—the phenomenon of “*moiré*”—has long been a concern within contemporary photography. Liz Deschenes (see passage VII), for example, produced a series of works by this name in 2006 that each overlaid two *identical* patterns, with slight discrepancies in their respective positions that produced the effect of optically distorted grids. Interestingly, the focus of Deschenes’s practice is also on questioning conventional notions of time and spatial order—in her case, those that have developed within the photographic context as a result of the prevailing primacy of the “decisive moment” of shutter release, and of the necessarily monocular perspective the conventional camera produces.

13. Yve-Alain Bois, “Martin Barré,” in *Martin Barré* (Cologne: Galerie Daniel Buchholz et al., 2008), 40.

14. Bois, “Martin Barré,” 59.

15. Agamben, *What Is Real?*, 32.

16. This entails a further problem—namely, that the possible might be reduced to the mere probable in the service of the market—which will be discussed in passage XVII.

17. Sauvagnargues, *Artmachines*, 14.

18. Morellet seemed well aware of these limitations, predicting in 1965 that “electronic brains” might at one point supplement or even replace the artist’s decision-making process. With this, he drew attention to a contradiction that would seem to hold a great deal of potential for future relativization, given the advances currently being made within the fields of AI and quantum computing: “It would still remain . . . up to the artist to supply these machines with instructions and to decide upon the goal to be attained.” François Morellet, “Choice in Today’s Art,” reprinted in *October* 157 (Summer 2016): 133. See also passage XVII.

19. For all his obvious privilege, however, Packer is far from sheltered, since his name appears on the kill list of an obscure assassin who could strike without warning at any time.

20. Don DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* (London: Picador, 2011), 24; italics added.

21. It is precisely Packer's desire to see recognizable forms and *order* behind the *chaos* of the pixels on his monitors that ultimately seals his fate in the novel, when a misjudged speculation leads to a catastrophic financial loss. In this respect, any perceived resemblance between an individual *Stochastic*—a composition based on chance—and a “cloud” or “continent” must naturally also remain precarious speculation.
22. Quoted in Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 162.

### Passage XIII

1. T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 11.
2. The repeated reference to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (see passage XII) relates to the corresponding interpretation by Frederick Turner. The literary scholar sees in Shakespeare's poetic puzzle of changing perceptions a model for understanding reality in the age of quantum physics. The comedy, Turner claims, contrasts the clearly defined outlines of urban life with the diffuse light of the forest—a place where nothing is what it seems (“How easy is a bush supposed a bear”), anything could happen, and the trickster Puck alone knows how things really are. See Turner, “Quantum Theory in the Arts,” *American Arts Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (Spring 2012). For an introduction to the subject, see also Lynden Stone, “Re-Visioning Reality: Quantum Superposition in Visual Arts,” *Leonardo* 46, no. 5 (2013): 448–454.
3. The description of the series in question as “quantifiable” artworks alone underlines the artist's critical tone, given the context of the all-encompassing economization of social life. Meanwhile, the very notion of the *Quantity Painting* as constituting one “genre” implies another, clearly far more absurd in its nature: the *Quality Painting*, however this might look. That quantity (size) is generally taken as a measure of value (by equating it with price) should be seen as equally problematic, however. For any fluctuations within a rigid pricing system such as Thompson's (see passage VII, note 22), any differing amount a collector might be willing to pay (potentially based on a subjective judgment on the “quality” of a particular work) must then ultimately be a “slippage” within that quantitative system—or else be based on pure speculation. In this reading, the notion of “quality” itself can be seen as a “slippage.”
4. Here, too, a certain Robert Macaire seems to have his finger in the pie. Walter Benjamin, in his interpretation of Baudelaire (see passage VIII), located the figure of the dandy within the London Stock Exchange—as a trader at the heart of the global financial network, processing the unpredictable flow of information free of any visible emotion. Cf. Walter Benjamin, “The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire,” in Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, ed. Michael William Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 125.



5. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, 12.
6. Robert Merton, quoted in Joseph Vogl, “Taming Time: Media of Financialization,” in *and Materials and Money and Crisis*, ed. Richard Birkett et al. (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2013), 74. See also passage XVII.
7. Cf. Vogl, “Taming Time,” 76.
8. Trevor Stark, *Total Expansion of the Letter: Avant-Garde Art and Language after Mallarmé* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020), 329.
9. I refer here to Polke’s contribution to the 20th Venice Biennale in 1986, a set of large-scale paintings produced for the German Pavilion and titled *Athanor*.
10. For a more detailed description, see Pia Gottschaller, “Painting as Technology: Toolpaths and Pathways through Cheyney Thompson’s Work,” *Journal of Contemporary Painting* 7, nos. 1–2 (2021): 115–161.

#### Passage XIV

1. “‘One Has to Be Able to Take It!’ Excerpts from an Interview with Martin Kippenberger by Jutta Koether, Nov. 1990–May 1991,” in *Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective*, ed. Ann Goldstein, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: MOCA, 2008), 316.
2. Anne Sauvagnargues, *Artmachines: Deleuze, Guattari, Simondon*, trans. Suzanne Verderber (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 14, 189.
3. The titles of the individual canvases indicate that they are also conceived as *Quantity Paintings* in technical terms: these list the overall amount of paint used for each work, along with ten additional (smaller) numbers that break this total down to the respective quantities used in each individual stroke of the brush, as in, for example, *Blue (58.37ml, 24.07ml, 19.3ml, 14.77ml, 7.02ml, 29.99ml, 20.55ml, 16.89ml, 14.27ml, 6.01ml) [211.22ml]*.
4. Exhibition press release, *Sometimes Some Pictures Somewhere*, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, May 19–June 23, 2012.
5. Cf. Michael Wilson, “Cheyney Thompson,” *Artforum* 56, no. 3 (November 2017), <https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/201709/cheyney-thompson-71798>.
6. Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 161.
7. See, for example, Sauvagnargues, “Deleuze: Cinema, Image, Individuation,” chap. 5 of *Artmachines*, 85–109. See also Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).
8. Martin Barré, quoted in Catherine Millet, “M. B. Elsewhere,” trans. Charles Penwarden, in Yve-Alain Bois, *Martin Barré* (New York: Thea Westreich/Ethan Wagner et al., 2008), 274.
9. Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (London: Verso 1997), 25.

10. Amy Knight Powell, *Depositions: Scenes from the Late Medieval Church and the Modern Museum* (New York: Zone Books, 2012); Hal Foster, "Preposterous Timing," *London Review of Books* 34, no. 21 (November 8, 2012): 12–14.
11. Ellen G. Landau, *Jackson Pollock* (New York: Abrams, 1989), 137 and 182.
12. See passage VI. Greenberg appears to have relativized his oft-cited comparison between Pollock's "all-over" or "drip" paintings and "wallpaper" over the years, as seemingly confirmed by a note from 1967. Cf. Clement Greenberg, "Jackson Pollock: 'Inspiration, Vision, Intuitive Decision,'" in *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, vol. 4 of *The Collected Essays and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 246.
13. David Joselit, "Reassembling Painting," in *Painting 2.0*, ed. Manuela Ammer, Achim Hochdörfer, and David Joselit (Munich: Prestel, 2015), 171.
14. A similar comparison is made by Michael Fried, whose book *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008) argues that certain types of (digital) photography can be seen as revenants of oil painting.
15. See Pia Gottschaller, "Painting as Technology: Toolpaths and Pathways through Cheyney Thompson's Work," *Journal of Contemporary Painting* 7, nos. 1–2 (2021): 115–161.
16. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 9–11.
17. See, for example, Christopher Roberts, "Entropy, Sacrifice, and Lévi-Strauss's Dismissal of Ritual," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 23 (2011): 326–350. "Sacrifice is the machinic interface of myth and ritual where the distinct event of destruction transforms the background fact of entropy into an object of experience" (344).
18. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 293.
19. "The ritornello unleashes spatiotemporal rhythm and measure in an aesthetic and sensory mode, as habit, habitation and habituation." Sauvagnargues, *Artmachines*, 124.

## Passage XV

1. Quoted in Adrien Chappuis, *The Drawings of Paul Cézanne*, vol. 1 (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1973), 52.
2. To quote Thierry de Duve: "That hackneyed issue of the death of painting." See de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 148.
3. The label "Zombie-Abstraction" was first brought into circulation by the American art press in 2016, as a derogatory term for contemporary abstract painting that makes targeted use of historical templates, mostly from the mid-twentieth century.
4. David Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself," *October* 130 (Fall 2009): 125–134.

5. David Joselit, “Reassembling Painting,” in *Painting 2.0*, ed. Manuela Ammer, Achim Hochdörfer, and David Joselit (Munich: Prestel, 2015), 180.
6. Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Surviving Image: Phantoms of Time and Time of Phantoms: Aby Warburg’s History of Art*, trans. Harvey Mendelsohn (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016), 327.
7. Didi-Huberman, *The Surviving Image*, 46–47.
8. Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 14. The authors continue: “To describe a work of art as an ‘anachronism’ is to say that the work is best grasped not as art, but rather as a witness to its time, or as an inalienable trace of history; it tries to tell us what the artwork *really is*. To describe the work of art as ‘anachronic,’ by contrast, is to say what the artwork *does*, qua art.”
9. I am considering only Thompson’s Bellona drawings here, and not the paintings featuring the same motif (see passage XVI).
10. The temple and column (Columna Bellica) dedicated to her in 296 BCE at Rome’s Campus Martius was destroyed; the few surviving depictions of Bellona from the imperial period include portraits of her on denarius coins, where she appeared with helmet and lance, occasionally driving a wagon.
11. This term is borrowed from Georges Didi-Huberman when he again refers to Aby Warburg, as well as to Erwin Panofsky’s *Zum Problem der historischen Zeit* (*Reflections on Historical Time*). See Didi-Huberman, *The Surviving Image*, 59.
12. Didi-Huberman, *The Surviving Image*, 10.
13. The notion of a sequence of substitutable copies that might be traced back to so-called prime objects is attributed to George Kubler, while it is Paul Valéry’s well-known essay on Leonardo’s method (which the author sees as implying a “law of continuity”) that places the perception of relations at the core of the creative process. See Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 11. That Thompson’s practice is irreconcilable with the notion of continuity is further cemented by his use of an anachronic time model, which demonstrates the discontinuity that exists within temporal developments—a hypothesis that was ultimately proven correct by the discovery of Planck units, as the smallest possible discrete time intervals. The antique maxim *natura non facit saltus* was therefore proven false by discoveries within the field of particle physics: the world is not “in flux” (a basic assumption within the work of Leonardo, for example); rather, nature proceeds incrementally, and in leaps and spurts—indeed, maybe even like a “drunk.”
14. Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 18.
15. It is within precisely this form of mathematization, the turn “from the phenomenological to the diagrammatic,” that George Baker identifies a previously underexamined line of development within twentieth-century modernism, whose origins he locates in part in the Orphism and machine

drawings of Francis Picabia: “This vectoring provides the transition to the diagrammatic figuration that is to come, a vast network of displaced corporeal integers connected now beyond physical or phenomenological experience. . . . This is the trajectory and the modernist story—quite different from the ‘return to order’—that needs now to be told.” George Baker, “The Body after Cubism,” *October* 157 (Summer 2016): 62. See also David Joselit, “Dada’s Diagrams,” in Joselit et. al, *The Dada Seminars* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 221–239.

16. To quote T. J. Clark on Cézanne: “Out of the flux of visual particles would come the body again (says Cézanne)—naked, in Nature, carrying the fixed weaponry of sex.” While what Clark describes as painting’s “antagonistic” reflex to recreate a known order (“Call it the body”) might also be interpreted within Thompson’s work, its grounds for justification are clearly very different in that case. See T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 11.

17. See the exhibition press release, *Toolpaths for Bellona*, Campoli Presti, Paris, March 22–April 12, 2018.

18. The ambivalence of the figure of Bellona, however, is demonstrated by the fact that she exerted an obvious influence on Delacroix’s depiction of Liberty in *Liberty Leading the People*, while her pose is in turn reminiscent of that of the black sailor at the bow of the raft in Géricault’s *The Raft of the Medusa*, leading his fellow shipmates to safety. Adding to Bellona’s ambiguity, in Roman mythology she is variously referred to not just as Mars’s daughter but also as his sister or his wife.

19. Cf. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, 10.

20. While Clement Greenberg does not explicitly talk of “superposition” in this context, it can clearly be understood as either a layering of equivalent states or a form of equilibrium. See Greenberg, “Cezanne: Gateway to Contemporary Painting I,” in *Affirmations and Refusals, 1950–1956*, vol. 3 of *The Collected Essays and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 117–118. If we interpret Yve-Alain Bois correctly, however, it was the same equilibrium that the radical art theorist Władysław Strzemiński (see passage XI) criticized as “arch baroque”—“an art entirely governed by conflicting forces striving toward an equilibrium.” Cf. Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 300.

21. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Cézanne’s Doubt,” in Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 13.

22. Meyer Schapiro, “Cezanne and the Philosophers,” in Schapiro, *Worldview in Painting* (New York: George Braziller, 1999), 82.

23. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, trans. Michael B. Smith, ed. Galen E. Johnson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 130.

24. Here, it should be pointed out that Merleau-Ponty's "primacy of perception" was controversial even within the phenomenological school of the period. This resulted in a sort of factional dispute that saw Jean-Paul Sartre argue, in 1940, for a "primacy of the imagination." While this idea awards a central function to the "imaginative consciousness"—and with this, too, the notion of the possible—Sartre never formulated any corresponding *logica probabilium* in the Leibnizian sense (which is itself only fragmentary); nor did he make use of any stochastic methods. Cf. Lambert Wiesing, "Merleau-Ponty's Entdeckung der Wahrnehmung," in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Das Primat der Wahrnehmung*, ed. Lambert Wiesing (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2019), 118–119.
25. Meyer Schapiro, "Cezanne and the Philosophers," 83–85.
26. William Rubin, "Cézanne: Watercolorist and Painter," in *Cézanne Watercolors*, exh. cat. (New York: Acquavella Galleries, 1999), 19.
27. Rubin, "Cézanne: Watercolorist and Painter," 29.
28. Rubin, "Cézanne: Watercolorist and Painter," 22.
29. Cf. Didi-Huberman, *The Surviving Image*, 46 ff.
30. This would seem to reflect the quantum mechanical understanding of events as discrete and unpredictable changes whose progression can only be modelled on the basis of probabilities.
31. Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 34.
32. This term was coined by Emile Zola, who, by describing the author in a dual role, sought to draw attention to the interplay between human behavior and societal conditions.
33. As first introduced by the physiologist Claude Bernard (1813–1878). For an introduction, see Anja Zimmermann, "Zwei Realismen: Kunst, Wissenschaft und das 'wahre Bild,'" in *Ästhetik und Objektivität: Genese und Funktion eines wissenschaftlichen und künstlerischen Stils im 19. Jahrhundert* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2015).
34. A reference to William Henry Fox Talbot yields a further insight here. While Thompson employs an autonomous computer program, the photographic pioneer imagined the existence of a "pencil of nature," also the title of his key work from 1844. This book contained a selection of what Talbot tellingly termed his "photogenic drawings," produced "without any aid whatever from the artist's pencil." Cf. William Henry Fox Talbot, "Introductory Remarks," in Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1969). See also Rosalind E. Krauss, "Tracing Nadar," *October* 5 (November 1978): 29–47, particularly 40–42.
35. Thompson's considerations on this subject can be traced back to an earlier project titled *Scorched Earth* (2005–2006), an artistic collaboration that aimed to counteract the increasing commercialization of the medium within the art market.
36. On Deligny, see Anne Sauvagnargues, *Artmachines: Deleuze, Guattari, Simondon*, trans. Suzanne Verderber (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 162–184.

37. Here, it is worth recalling that the arbitrary movements of visitors to the Braunschweig exhibition (see passage XI) could, in principle, have produced any number of such wandering trails; had these metaphorical “life paths” been recorded in the manner of Deligny’s diagrams, the resulting lines would likely be similarly meandering in their appearance, instead of being constricted by an algorithm and within the parameters of an (arts) institution.
38. Suzanne Verderber, translator’s preface, in Sauvagnargues, *Artmachines*, xix.
39. Cf. also Roman Jakobson, “On Realism in Art,” in Jakobson, *Language in Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 21.
40. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (New York: Continuum, 2004), 3–28.
41. This was the title of the 2018 exhibition at Galerie Buchholz in Berlin.
42. Didi-Huberman, *The Surviving Image*, 46.
43. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, 22.
44. If we are to believe Deleuze and Guattari’s arguments in *Anti-Oedipus*, however, then any such difference would still have been—would always be—under the sign of capitalism (see passage XVII). See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972), trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (New York: Viking Press, 1977).
45. Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, trans. John Goodman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 17.
46. Michiko Kakutani, “Book of the Times: Cosmopolis,” *New York Times*, March 24, 2003, section E, 10.
47. Kakutani, “Book of the Times: Cosmopolis.”

## Passage XVI

1. Robert Smithson, “A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art” (1968), in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 94.
2. Clair, *Courte histoire de l’art moderne: Un entretien* (Paris: L’Echoppe, 2004), 7 (trans. author).
3. And so, in light of Clair’s statement (see note 2), it may well also be true that “entropy is . . . history’s other.” See Gary Shapiro, “Entropy and Dialectic: The Signatures of Robert Smithson,” *Arts Magazine* 62 (Summer 1988): 100.
4. Roger Caillois, *The Mask of Medusa* (New York: C. N. Potter, 1964).
5. Quoted in Jennifer L. Roberts, *Mirror Travels: Robert Smithson and History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 31.
6. See John Kelsey, “Hallucination Machines,” in *Alibis: Sigmar Polke, 1963–2010*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2014), 228–233.

7. Quoted in Giorgio Agamben, *What Is Real?*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 19.
8. Quoted in Agamben, *What Is Real?*, 21.
9. Deleuze cites the example of Captain Ahab's metamorphosis in *Moby Dick*, where the novel's protagonist becomes ever more similar to the whale he is hunting. See Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael E. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 78.
10. Anne Sauvagnargues, *Artmachines: Deleuze, Guattari, Simondon*, trans. Suzanne Verderber (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 52.
11. Giorgio Agamben, "Identity without the Person," in *Nudities*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 46–54.
12. See Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *L'œil cartographique de l'art* (Paris: Galilee, 1996), 86 (trans. author).
13. In the case of the example given above (of the container filled with gray and white sand), this state would require an entirely uniform distribution of equal quantities of each color of sand.
14. Rosalind E. Krauss, "Entropy," in Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 76.
15. "Like the Greek *pinax*, which simultaneously served as map, writing tablet, and star chart, the map of today is also multifunctional and can be connected to anything. One may by all means describe it as *impure*, since it combines various different media—painting, photography, sculpture, or installation." Buci-Glucksmann, *L'œil cartographique de l'art*, 118 (trans. and emphasis author).
16. "Eine vertrakt reflektierte Optik." Hans Blumenberg, quoted in Jürgen Goldstein, *Hans Blumenberg: Ein philosophisches Portrait* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2020), 287 (trans. Ben Caton).
17. Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence*, trans. Steven Rendall (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).
18. For "the sea alone is turbulent." See Goldstein, *Hans Blumenberg*, 299 (trans. Ben Caton).
19. Jacob Burckhardt, quoted in Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator*, 70. Here, a reference to the well-known phenomenon of sea sickness is insightful, since the vertigo-like sensation of nausea it produces is itself a result of a sort of superposition: of those of a ship's elements that appear to be stable from the perspective of those onboard, such as its cabin walls, and those bodily sensations that communicate the unsteady motion of the sea (see passage XII).
20. Buci-Glucksmann, *L'œil cartographique de l'art*, 96 (trans. Ben Caton).
21. See Michel Foucault, "Des espaces autres," in *Dits et écrits*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 1575. English translation by Matthew Barr quoted in Nicolas Bourriaud, "Michel Foucault: Manet and

the Birth of the Viewer,” in Foucault, *Manet and the Object of Painting*, trans. Matthew Barr (London: Tate Publishing, 2011), 17.

## Passage XVII

1. Paul Valéry, letter to André Gide, December 3, 1902, in *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, vol. 15, ed. Jackson Matthews, trans. Marthiel and Jackson Matthews (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 236.
2. Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Picasso Papers* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1998), 123.
3. Fritz Novotny, *Cézanne und das Ende der Wissenschaftlichen Perspektive* (Vienna: Anton Schroll, 1938).
4. See Herbert Molderings, *Über Marcel Duchamp und die Ästhetik des Möglichen* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2019), 39 (trans. Ben Caton).
5. Thierry Davila, “Duchamp with Mallarmé,” *October* 171 (Winter 2020): 7.
6. Cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, “From Ontology to Technology,” in *The Fragile Skin of the World*, trans. Cory Stockwell (Cambridge: Polity, 2021), 16–45.
7. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Pantheon, 1970), chap. 10, section VI. For Foucault, the notion that language does not reproduce or represent the world is fulfilled in the late work of the author Raymond Roussel, which the philosopher sees as bearing concrete signs of a language that speaks only itself: “Style is . . . the possibility . . . of saying the same things but in other ways. All of Roussel’s language, in its reversal of style, surreptitiously tries to say two things with the same words.” Michel Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel* (London: Continuum, 2006), 18.
8. Within the field of stochastics, the term “stateless” describes conditions such as that of a roulette wheel, where every game begins anew without any influence from previous results.
9. Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, trans. John Goodman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 446; Giorgio Agamben, *What Is Real?*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 40.
10. Agamben, *What Is Real?*, 41.
11. David Joselit, “Marking, Scoring, Storing, and Speculating (on Time),” in *Painting Beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-medium Condition*, ed. Isabelle Graw and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), 17–19. For a broader discussion of the notions of the “gap” and the “fold,” as well as Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s own account of a “chiasmus” in his book *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), see Stephen Melville, “Counting /As/ Painting,” in *As Painting: Division and Displacement*, ed. Philip Armstrong, Laura Lisbon, and Stephen Melville (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 6–8.



12. Gilles Châtelet, “The Average Man as Statistical Degradation of the Ordinary Man,” in Châtelet, *To Live and Think Like Pigs*, trans. Robin Mackay (New York: Sequence Press, 2014), 45–53.
13. Antoinette Rouvroy, “Algorithmic Governmentality and the Death of Politics,” *Green European Journal*, March 27, 2020.
14. In an interview, Thompson said, “To me classical perspective really complemented the capitalist organization of life, in that the subject was always being placed in relation to the vanishing point—the point of mystification that the subject can’t approach but can only see from a distance—and that was a nice allegory, as it were, for commodity fetishism. You can see the thing that you desire, but you don’t see the social relations or labor that go into making that thing, because it’s on the other side of the vanishing point.” Cheyney Thompson, interview with Andrew Maerke, “On Record #4: Cheyney Thompson on Art Education,” *ART iT*, May 11, 2011, [https://www.art-it.asia/en/u/admin\\_ed\\_onrecord\\_e/gu1jzkhxtracfnfyp5zuq](https://www.art-it.asia/en/u/admin_ed_onrecord_e/gu1jzkhxtracfnfyp5zuq). The literary theorist René Girard understood mimesis in a broad anthropological sense, as the human need to imitate others; authors such as André Orléan would in turn develop a decidedly mimetic economic theory on this basis. See André Orléan, *The Empire of Value: A New Foundation for Economics*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014).
15. See also Trevor Stark, *Total Expansion of the Letter: Avant-Garde Art and Language after Mallarmé* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020), 331.
16. This statistical method is often employed within market research, as a tool for determining consumer behavior.
17. Writing in another context, John Kelsey once aptly stated that “schizo-culture has been upgraded with GPS.” See John Kelsey, “Street Easy,” in Blake Rayne, *Tense and Spaced Out: Polar Nights, Glacial Chaos, and the Ecology of Misery*, ed. Katherine Pickard and Tim Saltarelli (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), 192.
18. It should be noted that the “Black-Scholes” formula used here represents an algorithm commonly described as both *biased* and *convergent*, i.e., narrowing (see also note 24).
19. Rouvroy, “Algorithmic Governmentality and the Death of Politics.” A decidedly economic interpretation, meanwhile, is offered by Shoshana Zuboff: “The ‘market’ is no longer invisible, certainly not in the way [Friedrich] Hayek and [Adam] Smith imagined. . . . Total information tends toward certainty and the promise of guaranteed outcomes. These operations mean that the supply and demand of behavioral futures markets are rendered in infinite detail. Surveillance capitalism thus replaces mystery with certainty as it substitutes rendition, behavioral modification, and prediction for the old ‘unsurveyable pattern.’ This is a fundamental reversal of the classic ideal of the ‘market’ as unknowable.” Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2019), 497.
20. Rouvroy, “Algorithmic Governmentality and the Death of Politics.”

21. This is an additional use of the original information that Zuboff describes as a “behavioral surplus” in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (185). See also Antoinette Rouvroy, “Die Herrschaft der Algorithmen ist ziellos,” *Philosophie Magazin* 45 (May 2019): 58–60.
22. Hans Blumenberg, “‘Imitation of Nature’: Toward a Prehistory of the Idea of the Creative Being,” *Qui Parle* 12, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2000). See also Joseph Vogl, “Taming Time: Media of Financialization,” in *and Materials and Money and Crisis*, ed. Richard Birkett et al. (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2013), 76.
23. David Tyfield, “Science, Innovation and Neoliberalism,” in *The Handbook of Neoliberalism*, ed. Simon Springer, Kean Birch, and Julie MacLeavy (London: Routledge, 2016), 341.
24. That is, a system based on a “convergent” perspective that serves in its own way to structure—i.e., to narrow—the field of vision.
25. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (New York: Continuum, 2004), 83–122.
26. The expression “fourth person singular” can be traced back to the American poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti; see also the discussion of Maurice Blanchot in Anne Sauvagnargues, *Artmachines: Deleuze, Guattari, Simondon*, trans. Suzanne Verderber (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 24–25.
27. Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, trans. Christopher S. Wood (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 67.
28. Cf. Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 162. Even Walter Benjamin’s understanding of “aura” is worth considering in this context, when he speaks of its paradoxical features as “a strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be.” See Benjamin, “Little History of Photography,” in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, part 2, 1931–1934, trans. Rodney Livingstone et al., ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 518.
29. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 2.
30. On the subject of distance, see *Kulturkritik nach Ernst Cassirer*, ed. Enno Rudolph and Bernd-Olaf Küppers (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1995). Bruno Latour, meanwhile, speaks explicitly of the “tyranny of distance” in this context. See Latour, “On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications Plus More Than a Few Complications,” *Soziale Welt* 47, no. 4 (1996): 372.
31. Christine Buci-Glucksmann, “From the Cartographic View to the Virtual,” *Medien Kunst Netz*, [http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/themes/mapping\\_and\\_text/cartographic-view/1/](http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/themes/mapping_and_text/cartographic-view/1/).
32. Marcel Duchamp, *Duchamp du signe*, ed. Michel Sanouillet (Paris: Flammarion, 2008), 64.
33. Quoted in Davila, “Duchamp with Mallarmé,” 7.

34. If we are to believe Agamben's arguments regarding the signature, Paracelsus himself saw the unsigned as representing an (or *the*) original state, since Adam lived "completely unmarked" (*unbezeichnet*) in Eden, "and would have remained so had he not 'fallen into nature.'" In his treatise *De natura rerum*, the Swiss polymath finally concludes that nothing in nature remains unmarked; all science, all knowledge, is accordingly a consequence of sin. See Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of All Things* (New York: Zone Books, 2009), 33.
35. Jakob Schillinger, "Oswald Wiener on Dandyism," *October* 170 (Fall 2019): 49. Paying tribute to Wiener's particular contribution to cybernetics, Schillinger also mentions the German philosopher Max Bense (1910–1990): "Bense's computer-generated poetry demonstrated . . . that authorship is nothing but a sufficiently complex stochastic process, and meaning nothing but a set of probabilities" (40).
36. Gilles Châtelet, "Middle Class Yoghurt-Maker or Heroism of the Anyone?," in Châtelet, *To Live and Think Like Pigs*, 149–157.
37. It was Robert Musil who identified this rare species as "possibilitarians." Such figures, the author claims, live "within a finer web, a web of haze, imaginings, fantasy, and the subjunctive mode." Musil, *The Man without Qualities* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1995), vol. 1, book 1, chap. 4.
38. Duchamp, the avid chess player, produced works with titles such as *Draft on the Japanese Apple Tree* (1911) and *Ventilation* (1921).
39. On the "inaudible rhythms" of Piet Mondrian's work, see Caro Verbeek, "Looking to Piet's Beat: Mondrian's Inaudible Rhythms," trans. James Hannan, in *Mondrian Evolution*, exh. cat. (Basel: Museum Beyeler, 2022), 178–185.
40. Agamben, *What Is Real?*, 43.
41. Or can even ghosts be explained away? According to a much-cited phenomenon (FoP, the ghostly "feeling of presence"), they themselves might be mere neurological "slippages," their felt presence a symptom of schizophrenia or Alzheimer's disease.

## Coda

1. Here, Jean Clay's description of Martin Barré can equally be applied to Thompson: "An aesthetic of aporias, with his painting delivering to us, as if by syllepsis, the one and its other, the Law and what subverts it." See Clay, "Le Dispositif Martin Barré: l'oeil onglé," quoted in Yve-Alain Bois, "Martin Barré," in *Martin Barré* (Cologne: Galerie Daniel Buchholz et al., 2008), 40.
2. Robert Musil, *The Man without Qualities* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1995), vol. 1, book 1, chap. 4.



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Gespensstergeschichte f[ür] ganz Erwachsene Aby Warburg

*Mnemosyne, Grundbegriffe II* (July 2, 1929),

Warburg Institute Archive, London, III, 102.4, p. 3