

On a Saturday morning in 1983, Arnie Zane filmed his partner, the legendary choreographer and dancer Bill T. Jones, as Keith Haring painted Jones's body, and photographer Tseng Kwong Chi shot some of the most iconic images of all three artists' careers. The video Zane edited from this footage captures an intense performance of interracial exchange in a London studio, where four prominent figures from the creative world of downtown New York interact in a cosmopolitan scene of art production. The video opens with the photo shoot, following Jones's movements under Tseng's direction. Using a still tripod shot, in which Haring and Tseng move between the camera and Jones, Zane keeps his focus on the naked black body of his lover and artistic partner. Each time a flash registers from Tseng's camera, the video cuts to a different pose held by Jones. "Burning Down

the House” by Talking Heads is the soundtrack. Quickly, the action jumps backward in time to the preparation of Jones’s body for still photography, as we watch Haring carefully painting smooth white lines onto Jones’s torso. Jones sits in front of a lighted dressing room mirror, containing his movement, as Haring slowly produces an extensive design across his chest and back. Bodies with upwardly stretched arms, a horned creature, non-representational lines that contour the shape of Jones’s body—all are incorporated into a larger spectacle of primitive iconography. With each edit cut, more and more of Jones’s black skin is colonized by Haring’s hand. While Zane’s cuts interrupt the flow of Haring’s brushwork, the video still evidences Haring’s remarkable skill, his ability to produce a fluid line and create striking outline forms while expertly adjusting the scale of his imagery, moment by moment, to suit his painting surface. Haring creates a line that in its appropriative citation of primitive art can ironically feel unique and original to the artist, particularly given his mesmerizing facility with the brush and his embodied, intimate engagement with a living canvas. The simplicity and immediacy of Haring’s work belies his virtuosic skill.

This instance of interaction with live flesh seems to make literal Haring’s ability to animate and enliven the many surfaces he encounters. The paint registers those places on Jones’s body where Haring has made contact, each brush stroke leaving a visible trace of interracial exchange. Throughout the video, Haring crouches on the edges and in the periphery of the frame; his figure cannot tempt Zane’s camera away from its obsessive focus on Jones’s body, seen alternately in parts and as a whole. In two consecutive extended shots, Haring paints Jones’s butt cheeks and then his inner thighs. In the first of these, Haring brushes a circular spiral pattern on each cheek. While Jones maintains a relative stillness, slight movements of his muscles cause the flesh to shift subtly under Haring’s expanding neoprimitive line. The close-ups that follow place Jones’s genitalia center stage. Haring makes three strokes over his subject’s penis, as if to explain his plan of execution, then proceeds to paint the lower abdomen and thighs. The intimate close-up renders and exaggerates the slightest physical movements; Jones’s penis bobs slightly, and his testicles move with his constricted breath. Describing the London photo shoot to Haring biographer John Gruen in an interview published in 1991, Jones states, “Of course, I’m totally naked, and Keith started at the top of me and gradually moved down with the brush, making these incredible patterns. Finally, he reaches my penis, and he does these last three stripes on it. . . . And he looks up at me in that kind of way he has with that little smile of his—and



it was total communion at that moment.”<sup>1</sup> Zane’s video reproduces this unfolding event through a kind of reverse striptease, in which the gradual covering of Jones’s body finally reaches the crotch: the grand finale in a scene of erotic spectatorship.

Tseng’s printed stills of Jones’s painted body, originally produced for Haring’s 1983 show at Robert Fraser’s London gallery, tend toward an objectification of the choreographer’s body, which seems to exist as simply another medium for Haring’s line (figure I.1). Zane’s video, however, in

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**Figure I.1.** Bill T. Jones, body painted by Keith Haring, London, England, 1983. Photo by Tseng Kwong Chi © Muna Tseng Dance Projects, Inc., [www.tsengkwongchi.com](http://www.tsengkwongchi.com). Art by Keith Haring © The Keith Haring Foundation.

highlighting process, movement, and spectatorship, complicates the operations of objectification. Jones is not merely an object for the reception of the line but a moving figure whose ability to endure what he would come to describe as a kind of becoming primitive is part of his virtuosity. In the video, Jones's skill competes with Haring's for the viewer's attention. Jones takes direction with expert control and enters into communion with other artists' visions, ultimately transforming himself in the process. "It took so long!" he told Gruen. "Over four hours! And the white acrylic paint was so cold! I suddenly felt what it must be to be a bushman! I was transformed, because as Keith was painting me, I moved almost constantly—and I followed Kwong Chi's instructions, because he was photographing me from every possible angle."<sup>2</sup>

Jones's first-person account of process offers a perspective that remains mostly invisible in the video and photos produced from the event. In most of the images that document the performance, Jones rarely looks directly at the camera; his spoken commentary suggests that his averted eyes are in part a deflection of a colonial gaze, the framing specularly that prepares and consumes his body as neoprimitive spectacle. Where Tseng's stills index Haring's formal versatility—his capacity to fluidly adjust the scale of his designs to fit myriad surfaces—the video's sensuous corporeality makes visceral the processes of spectatorship implicit in Jones's performance as inscribed body. Zane both enacts a fetishizing gaze with his camera and captures Jones's complex mobilization of his skills as a highly trained dancer and choreographer. In doing so, Zane also marks a differentiation between Haring and Jones. The context in which Jones "felt what it must be to be a bushman" is necessarily defined by an erotics of spectatorship and the consumption of otherness in a racially mixed field. Haring's brushwork, Tseng's photography, and Zane's filming are all of course visual engagements with the black body; but of these three, Zane's video—in revealing Jones's body as the focal point around which these other inscribing bodies circulate—gives the best sense of how this economy of visual exchange is performed into being. Zane's video gives us the frame of the performance, staging a naked black body becoming "bushman" via the inscription of paint and of technical capture, even as it also gives us the interplay between the fetish object as canvas and the fetish object as living, vital subject.

This moment of artistic production represents but one scene of cross-racial contact in Keith Haring's brief but phenomenally productive career. Often described as a graffiti artist by virtue of his renegade chalk drawing

on New York City subway platforms, Haring became associated with black and Latinx hip-hop culture in the popular imagination. This association was not just a fantasy but also reflected Haring's physical proximity to black and Latinx youth and his work with artists of color in varying contexts. This book critically examines how racial narratives cohere around the artist while exploring Haring's own racial framing of the world. The artist wrote in his journals that he did not feel white on the inside, and he often expressed a fetishistic desire for people of color; in these bodies, he found a soul more akin to his than that of white people. Examining his compulsive draw toward the brown men he serially objectified in an unfulfilled desire to have and be something other than white, *Keith Haring's Line* looks at Haring's racial fantasies but resists a simplistic narrative in which the artist's success is reduced to a white/brown binary of cultural appropriation and exploitation. Through a close reading of Haring's articulations and descriptions of whiteness, the book is attentive to the historical processes of racialization and examines the various ways in which race is reified through often contradictory narratives. Producing a narrative arc that follows the line as it travels across surfaces, from subway walls to canvas to black flesh, the book contextualizes Haring's neoprimitive inscriptions within a modernist tradition of primitivist fantasy; for Haring's line, while often borrowing from graffiti's aesthetic codes, also indexes a graphic history of colonial expansion, the emergence of race as a classifying discourse, and a Western desire for other bodies. I argue that Haring's painted line is a racial project with the capacity both to signify and to animate fields of cross-racial desire.

Though my argument thematically revolves around an idea of Haring's line, the narrative of the book does not follow the traditional linear path of the artist's monograph, resisting a teleological heroic narrative of the artist in favor of a performative engagement with the traces of Haring's life. These include standard biographical materials, such as artworks, published interviews, and photographs that document Haring's existence, but this evidence acts as an animating force, which provokes detours into the lives and works of other cultural producers who form a constellation within a larger field of cross-racial contact and queer desire. While the book addresses dynamics of race and desire that have been largely undertheorized in the critical reception of Haring's art, I do not uncover some previously unseen or unknowable truth about the artist, rewriting his biography according to a more correct version of events (most of what I analyze has been widely accessible). This would betray my sense of Har-

ing's line and obscure the potentialities in the unresolved nature of queer desire. The complicity between cultural producers that I elaborate in the following section extends to my own role as a critic as I attempt to theorize an understanding of Haring's art through my own relationship to the material. Given the influence of Roland Barthes on both Haring's artistic imagination and my own analysis, I take inspiration from D. A. Miller's *Bringing Out Roland Barthes*, in which the literary critic writes through and across the gay sexuality he shares with the deceased Barthes, an exercise that Miller understands to be informed by fantasy and projection. Referring to a produced knowledge of Barthes's sexuality, Miller writes, "What I most sought, or what I most seek now in the evidence of Roland Barthes's gayness is the opportunity it affords for staging this imaginary relation between us, between those lines on which we each in writing them may be thought to have put our bodies—for fashioning thus an intimacy with the writer whom (above all when it comes to writing) I otherwise can't touch."<sup>3</sup> Like Miller's approach to Barthes, this book on Haring might be understood as "an album of moments" in which I respond to names, artworks, and archival matter to produce an idea of the artist conditioned by my affective relations to him. Through the provocations of Haring's journals, I enact in these pages a kind of biographical image that resists objective representation in favor of a different type of portrait that might more effectively speak to the ambivalent nature of cross-racial desire, the animating capacities of Haring's line, and the emotional vicissitudes of an embodied, which is to say felt, knowledge that cannot be proved in any absolute sense.

This methodological orientation applies as well to the uncontained nature of that which I describe as the archive. While later in this introduction, I locate myself as a researcher in the Warhol Museum, referring to a collection of Polaroids protected within physical and administrative structures, the archive that animates this project exceeds these walls (and those of the Keith Haring Foundation), as I constitute a larger assemblage of materials, ephemera, and feelings related to the artist. Taking inspiration from a seminal text on the performative capacity of archival materials, this book reflects what Ann Cvetkovich describes as "an 'archive of feelings,' an exploration of cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception."<sup>4</sup> As such, the book performs against the tradition of the artist's monograph; I follow connective threads into the lives and work of other figures,

departing at times from a tight focus on Haring to convey something of the vitalizing capacity of his art and the energizing residue of his contact with the world. And, like Cvetkovich, I am feeling my way through materials left in the wake of traumatic loss associated with AIDS.

### **Collaboration and Complicity in the Scene of Racial Production**

I open with the scene of artistic exchange in London because it speaks to this book's larger concerns about Haring's inspirational contact with other bodies and the effects his success had on the lives and visibility of those with whom he worked. Jones's description and Zane's video draw out the activity behind the photograph, a still document in which Haring's vibrant white inscriptions on the form of a black male body threaten to overshadow the participation of others in this scene. Circulating in a world conditioned by a graphic history of white male domination, Tseng's photographs of Jones necessarily risk reproducing a violating objectification of the black body, highlighting the mastery of the white male artist over the virtuosity of those others who are indispensable to the art's creation. One could follow this line of thinking across all of Haring's art production, in its citation and appropriation of graphic sign systems that are inextricably bound to the expressive visual cultures of nonwhite subjects.<sup>5</sup> To do so, however, would be to reproduce fixed relationships among reified ideas of race, culture, and power. Resisting the piously seductive critique of Haring's appropriative and exploitative practices, this book pays particular attention to the line in Haring's art as a mobile sign that, while indexical of violent histories of contact with bodies of color, also imbues surfaces with a constantly animating force, producing meaning and experiences that exceed any fixed representation of history.

As I discuss in chapter 1, "Desire in Transit: Writing it Out in New York City," Haring develops a painting-as-writing practice inspired by an education in semiotic theory and the "magical" writing practices of queer artists like William Burroughs and Brion Gysin. That chapter explores how Haring's iconography emerged from his study of sign systems and the performative capacity of visual vocabularies. Working in the conceptual spaces between aurality, visibility, and signification, Haring experimented across media platforms while a student at New York's School of Visual Arts from 1978 to 1980. I argue that Haring's activity during his time at SVA, which included video art and performance as well as painting, laid the groundwork for his visual style and the modes of public art

performance that came to define his career. New to the city, Haring was not only exposed to an invigorating world of ideas and intellectual exchange, he was also immersed in a field of contact with new bodies and new opportunities for the exploration of his desire. This book argues that the development of his line, in its signifying potential, was inextricably bound to a field of, and education in, cross-racial desire.

If Bill T. Jones understands some of the potential repercussions of Haring's line as it appears on his black body, he also registers the line's relationship to Haring's personal life. Jones tells Gruen about the affinity he had for Haring who, like him, had grown up as a "country boy" (Haring was raised in central Pennsylvania, Jones in upstate New York) and only later became accustomed to the pretensions of bourgeois city life. Jones also felt a connection because of their involvement in interracial relationships. Arnie Zane, Jewish and middle class, was instrumental in Jones's development from country boy to city artist. Jones found in Zane an encouraging companion, who helped him overcome the insecurity he experienced in the early days of their relationship. In the interview with Gruen, Jones recalled that "at the beginning, I felt my inadequacies. I mean, I couldn't balance a checkbook. And people wouldn't even talk to me, because they assumed Arnie had the brains. But he was the one who encouraged me and promoted me."<sup>6</sup> It is significant that Jones, when asked to elaborate on his relationship with Haring, circles back to his own life with Zane, in a kind of sideways approach to the question of Haring's impulse toward cross-class relationships with men of color. This was an impulse that Jones clearly understood and just as clearly felt ambivalent about. As the interview with Gruen continues, Jones says he attempted to talk to Haring, with mixed results, about the obligations one incurs in undertaking intimate relations with men of differing class and race. "What I'm trying to say is that Keith loves people from a class lower than his own. Well, there's a responsibility that goes with that. And that responsibility is not just how generous you are but how you can bring that person up through his emotional perils and feelings of inadequacy." Jones claims that while Haring cared for his lovers, he never fully examined the repercussions of his interracial relationships and, in fact, retreated the more he was pushed on the subject; in particular, Jones explains that Haring failed to consider the difficult situation in which his lovers might find themselves in the racist and classist art world. Rather than calling Haring a racist, Jones argues, "He doesn't understand that he is a product of a racist environment."<sup>7</sup>

What does it mean for Jones to understand Haring, and implicitly himself, as products of a racist environment? Accepting Haring's line on his body and enabling Tseng and other photographers to distribute signifying documents laden with a history of colonial contact, Jones might easily be understood as colluding in a scene of racist fantasy, in a process akin to that explicated by Kobena Mercer (in his well-known discussion of Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs) by which "elements of commonplace racial stereotypes . . . regulate, organize, prop up and *fix* the process of erotic/aesthetic objectification in which the black man's skin becomes burdened with the task of symbolizing the transgressive fantasies and desires of the white gay male subject."<sup>8</sup> The charge can hardly be denied; but, as Mercer's emphasis here on fixity indicates, this way of phrasing the point also assumes that the script is already written, a dead letter that the bodies in play do no more than animate.<sup>9</sup> The scene Jones describes might instead be understood as a collaborative moment in which each artist uses a talent necessary to the conditions of production. The imagery that Tseng produced with Haring is often seen as archival documentary evidence of Haring's world, a kind of supplementary photojournalistic record of the artist's life. As the sole surviving figure from the London photo shoot (the interview with Gruen was published in 1991; Haring and Tseng had died in 1990, Zane in 1988), Jones underscores Tseng's contributions and, in doing so, to some degree destabilizes the prominence that Haring's work holds in the images. Explicitly naming the photographer's work as integral to his own performance for the camera, Jones makes visible a participatory labor that might go unnoticed by those who see Tseng's stills merely as documentary proof of Haring's process. The art world's fetishization of Haring's celebrated line, Jones's photographic inscription as an available black body, and the promise of Tseng's photos as indexical representations of the event are simultaneous effects of the imagery that make each artist legible and potentially obscure the interactive dynamics described by Jones.

Collaboration might seem an ideal way to conceptualize this scene, mitigating how Haring's art production overshadows the activity of Tseng and Jones. But the promise of collaboration as a descriptive framework that stresses dialogue and exchange rather than the mastery of a single artist quickly fades when faced with the reality of the art's reception. Collaboration cannot ultimately remake the social world of privilege that values Haring over those with whom he worked. My thinking about the false promise of "collaboration" takes inspiration from decades-long dis-

cussions in the discipline of anthropology, where researchers must confront the entanglement of their practice with the legacy of colonialism. As anthropologists came to critique their discipline's romanticization of fieldwork, the ideal of collaboration—supposedly indicating a more egalitarian, polyvocal working relationship between ethnographers and their subjects of study—came to be supplanted by the admission of complicity. George Marcus, in “The Uses of Complicity in the Changing Mise-en-Scène of Anthropological Fieldwork,” traces this shift before going on to challenge the notion that researchers can rest once they have acknowledged their complicity with regimes of colonial power. For Marcus, the ethical critique of the power imbalance between ethnographer and subject is revealed as insufficient in a world that cannot be defined through clearly demarcated localities, pure cultural origins, or fixed positions of authority. Citing the *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of complicity as a “state of being complex or involved,” Marcus forwards an understanding of the term as that which renders impossible the notion that bounded localized cultures can be accessed and known. Complicity as a primary condition of fieldwork, argues Marcus, “is an affinity, marking equivalence, between fieldworker and informant.” It is an “acknowledged fascination between anthropologist and informant regarding the outside ‘world’ that the anthropologist is specifically materializing through the travels and trajectory of her multi-sited agenda.”<sup>10</sup> The complicity Marcus describes here moves beyond the idea that the ethnographer's complicity within larger structures of global power simply corrupts any attempt at rapport or collaboration. Instead, it “is both more generative and more ambiguous morally; it demands a mapping onto and entry of the ethnographic project into a broader context that is neither so morally nor cognitively determined.”<sup>11</sup>

In this book, I think through complicity as an alternative framework to collaboration within the world and work of Keith Haring. Haring's line, I argue, is an emblem of complicity in the terms outlined by Marcus. It indexes a history of colonialism and appropriation in its citation of primitive art from across the globe, and this appropriation—one that extends to the graffiti practices of black and Latinx youth—can be seen as generative and symptomatic of Haring's erotic and social attraction to people of color. Yet, to make this broad connection between a global history of white domination, Haring's neoprimitive line production, and his libidinal drives—shaped as they are by racial categories of difference—is to

impose a story on the line that, while not untrue, potentially encases its mobility within a predictable moral and ethical narrative.

The opening scene of this book—which introduces a set of conditions that resonate across the field of Haring’s art production—demands to be read in terms that exceed such fixity. Jones recognizes that he cannot free himself from the limiting conditions of visibility in his partnership with Haring; as he puts it in the conversation with Gruen, he knows that one possible effect of Haring’s line is to turn him into “just another black dude.” But he also actively performs within the signifying logic of the line, recoding himself in the act of recollection through a discourse of becoming bushman. Like the complicit ethnographer and his informants, bound in a fascination that produces an orientation to the external world, Haring, Jones, Tseng, and Zane are mutually engaging with a sign system of primitive inscription. Within the London studio, they are complicit, manufacturing images in relation to a continually reconstituted and reimagined elsewhere—those spaces of reception in which the images circulate and those geographies that are part of the multiple and shared histories that shape them as subjects. *Keith Haring’s Line* frames Haring’s relationships as scenes of complicity rather than ones of collaboration in an attempt to stress the dynamic uncertainty of intimate and creative exchange. Echoing Amber Jamilla Musser’s privileging of complicity over subversion in her recent analysis of scenes of masochistic play, I understand Haring’s neoprimitive line as a graphic enactment, a visual-aesthetic performative, that conjures and draws subjects into a field of negotiations in which the outcome of participation and the agential terms of the subject cannot be forecast according to a perceived power imbalance or structural inequality.<sup>12</sup> Like Musser, I am interested in thinking through flesh as a sensational field through which difference is continually elaborated in an ongoing reorientation to bodily experience.

The problem of recognition in a field of erotic cross-racial spectatorship that arises in Jones’s account of his work with Haring resurfaces in each of this book’s chapters, as I trace the eruption of Haring’s line as the bearer of fantasies of cross-racial access and desire. While chapter 1 sets Haring’s early days of erotic exploration in New York City against his developing art practice and his theoretical reflections, chapter 2, “‘Trade’ Marks: LA II and a Queer Economy of Exchange,” explores the erotic dimensions of Haring’s fascination with graffiti art, and the complexities of his collaborations with the graffiti artist Angel Ortiz, better known by his tag LA II

(or sometimes LA 2). This chapter employs the gay-slang concept of “trade” to explore the financial and affective complexities of Haring’s collaborative work. In my usage, “trade” at once designates a severe structural imbalance of power (the racist underpinnings of the art market means that LA II does not necessarily benefit from the ongoing circulation of those pieces he completed with Haring) and evokes how Haring and LA II’s work makes those imbalances a source of performative energy: thus “trade” also points to a real affective transaction as well as to a situation of exploitation. Related questions arise in chapter 3, which treats the superstar diva Grace Jones. Jones made her body available for Haring’s inscription, provoking art historian Robert Farris Thompson to describe her as “theory made flesh,” the corporeal manifestation of all that might be signified by and indexed in Haring’s graphic line. In chapter 3, “Theory Made Flesh?: Keeping Up with Grace Jones,” I contextualize this fantasy of embodiment within Jones’s larger career and previous scenes of complicity with her artistic partner and lover, the French graphic designer Jean-Paul Goude, who claims responsibility for creating “the Grace Jones myth.” Rather than presume that Jones simply embodies the possibilities written out for her, I think through Jones’s flesh as a site of tension that, through its very availability, paradoxically announces her unknowability. This opacity, the inability to identify a coherent, stable subject, is an inherent quality of every figure—alive and dead—that populates the life of Keith Haring.

### Icon and Fetish

A chemical reaction occurred. Andy Warhol pressed the button of his Polaroid, producing a flash and exposing gelatin silver to the light emanating, reflecting, and radiating from Keith Haring and Juan Dubose, his first significant lover (figure I.2). Their forms were caught, written out against a light-sensitive surface. Breathing, living beings, Haring and Dubose existed for Warhol, posing in their desire—allowing themselves to be captured by the artist whose capture brought with it inclusion in a glamorous world of socialites and celebrities. Haring and “his black boyfriend” (as Warhol would refer to Dubose in his diary) are doubly written into a particular existence through the writing of light in the Polaroids and the transcription of a journal entry. Both documents would find their audience in mass production.

The Polaroids were enlarged, the images rewritten in black and white on acetate as positive proofs. The acetate allowed for another light pro-



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**Figure I.2.** Andy Warhol, *Keith Haring and Juan Dubose*, 1983. Polacolor ER, 4¼ × 3⅝ inches. © 1983. The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. / Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

cess. The silkscreen filter was created when the emulsion was exposed to intense UV light; bright light shot through the acetate, hardening the chemical in those places where exposure occurred. The dark forms on the acetate resisted the passing of light. Washing the emulsion surface, those areas not exposed to light flowed away, leaving a screen image of the lovers. The silkscreen frame used a filter made of silk, or a synthetic material that mimics the single filament thread produced from the silkworm's mouth. Single filament material allows ink to flow smoothly onto the canvas. And so the images of Haring and Dubose were written, rewritten, and painted onto the canvas surface.

The effect is all the more powerful because this particular relationship can seem itself already written—scripted to fit a familiar story about race and power. Dubose's presence in Haring's life seems to follow an overly coherent narrative script. In Gruen's biography, Haring discusses his relationship with Dubose and in the process claims that he is most comfortable in his intimacy with people of color:

My spirit and soul is much closer to the spirit and soul of people of color. And, yes, I have an erotic attraction for people of color, because there is no better way to be wholly a part of the experience than to be sexually involved. I firmly believe that a sexual relationship—a deep sexual relationship—is a way of truly experiencing another person—and really *becoming* that other person. So I had that with Juan Dubose, who was a black person. And I became part of his life.<sup>13</sup>

Those in Haring's social network often comment on the ever-present dark-skinned boys who occupied his life, and Dubose stands at the origin of this pattern. He exists as a site of becoming for Haring in this anecdote, which explicitly ties erotic intimacy to the artist's racialized sense of self. In chapter 1, I frame this particular erotic fantasy within a larger field of cross-racial desire, in which Haring claims a nonwhite interiority. I discuss how Haring's sexual and professional engagements with people of color were a stimulus for artistic production and personal fantasy throughout his adult life. His fetishization marked people of color as a potential source of freedom from whiteness and the violent histories of subjection that white people have perpetuated; Haring's own complicity with this historical framework remained relatively unproblematized, as he figured his inner "spirit and soul" as different from those of other white people. Haring's liberal presumption to know the inner life of brown people and to imagine his contact with people of color as a means

to become nonwhite reveals the context in which Dubose gets marked as a fetish.

Precisely as a fetish, Dubose's place in Haring's life seems overly narratable, even tritely predictable. Exhausted from tooling around the baths and by his failure to meet anyone with whom he could connect beyond sex, Haring reported his 1981 encounter with Dubose in rapturous, expectant terms, and his words conjure Dubose on a purely aesthetic level. "He's black, he's thin, he's the same height as me, and he's almost the same age."<sup>14</sup> After great sex, Haring claimed this black double as "the right person." Dubose wrote his number on stationery from the St. Mark's Baths, and so began Haring's descent into love. A car-stereo installer and DJ, Dubose enters the narrative of Haring's life through the recollection of others. Praised for his quiet beauty and cooking skills, Dubose oscillates between the roles of sexual object and domestic caretaker. Samantha McEwan, who shared an apartment with the couple, told Gruen that Dubose was "the quietest, the most unassuming, beautiful, gentlest, and really mysterious guy."<sup>15</sup> But her tone changes as she recounts the later years of the relationship. The creator of "wonderful meals" becomes a "monosyllabic" drug user who does little more than watch television. McEwan describes an increasingly introverted figure, an inverse image of Haring's increased productivity. "Keith was getting more and more active, Juan just retreated into himself—and it was a very sad thing to watch."<sup>16</sup> Frustrated with Dubose's jealousy and supposed inactivity, Haring eventually left Dubose and began a relationship almost immediately with a Puerto Rican man, Juan Rivera, who remained Haring's lover for several years. Years after the separation from Dubose, Haring received a call from Dubose's mother informing him that his former lover was dying. Haring visited Dubose in the hospital, trying to ensure that he was being treated appropriately for HIV infection. Dubose passed away shortly after the visit, and Haring proceeded to get people to come to the wake in Harlem. Haring recorded in his journals the difficulty he had telling his friends that Dubose had died, writing that it felt like the equivalent of announcing his own death. At the wake, Haring's fears of the open casket were assuaged when he glimpsed Dubose and was able to reassure himself that "he looks so beautiful!"<sup>17</sup>

In Haring's authorized biography and published journals, Dubose's entrance and exit neatly confine him to a secondary timeline to that of his more prolific and famous lover. As an artist, Haring engaged Dubose's fleshly existence in part as a way to further his own racialized fantasy of interior actualization, repeatedly articulating the terms of Dubose's pres-

ence within the structure of his own fame. Haring's friends, too, paint a portrait of Dubose that is clearly wedded to and filtered through Haring's desire and his career. Warhol's diaries, which discuss the remarkable photoshoot with Dubose in some detail, do the same. In an entry dated August 18, 1983, Warhol states that "Keith Haring came by with his black boyfriend and I took pictures. They were so lovey-dovey in the photos, it was nutty to see."<sup>18</sup> By the time Haring posed for Warhol, he was rapidly becoming part of the glamorous world of icons Warhol had been documenting and reproducing for years. He fit perfectly in the collection of stars and fashionable figures who populated scenes of excess, wealth, and beauty—a rendering of exclusivity and performed exception that mimicked the counter-cultural, self-produced importance of Warhol's Factory days. Haring's increasing fame and the ubiquity of his work would soon generate a publicity machine that would insert his face and art into the everyday lives of millions around the world. As Rene Ricard had predicted in a 1981 piece in *Artforum*, "Keith Haring" would become a trademarked sign in circulation.<sup>19</sup>

Haring's inclusion in Warhol's stable of subjects both signals Haring's arrival as famous and expedites his production as an icon. In the Warholian context, the generation of multiple canvases with a silkscreen of Haring's image makes perfect sense, but what about the "black boyfriend"? Neither ever-present commodity nor media superstar, Juan Dubose might appear a curious subject for Warhol's reproduction of the period. But the Polaroids from which the silkscreens are produced document and generate a defining relationship for Haring. The scene of bare-chested embrace enabled a series of iconic stills—temporal freezes that index Haring's notion of becoming other through his intimacy with a black man. Warhol's production machine does not seize Juan Dubose as subject in his own right but rather mobilizes his fleshly proximity to Haring to cement the artist's public image as a lover of dark men. Warhol as artist uses Dubose to codify Haring socially. Only within the context of the reproducibility of Haring's cross-racial relations does Dubose become an ideal subject for pop reproduction.

As a researcher invested in the operations of racism and the ways in which subjects are eclipsed or diminished in the story of Haring's life, I have produced a predictable narrative for Dubose and his historical treatment. To research Juan Dubose in the readily available sources on Haring's life is to witness the production of a brown and black sign that is an amalgamation of projections. A direct citation of Dubose's voice appears

to be absent from the record. One might seek to somehow recover his voice through his own recorded history or the stories of others who knew him—and thereby to return to Dubose some of the agency and participatory and innovative complicity with racial fantasy that I have attributed to collaborators like Tseng Kwong Chi and Bill T. Jones. But I am interested in Dubose as a counterpoint to the other figures in this book. The absence of his voice and the difficulty in locating alternative representations of him generates a productive resistance to the fantasy of a complete and correct narrative.

The power of that fantasy, and its dangers, have been sensitively analyzed by Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé in a 2007 book that provided a groundbreaking discussion of racial difference in Haring's life and work. In *Queer Latino Testimonio, Keith Haring, and Juanito Xtravaganza*, Cruz-Malavé documents the oral history of Juan Rivera, the man who followed Dubose as Haring's lover. Cruz-Malavé's book presents a direct transcript of recorded interviews with Rivera along with a separate chapter examining Haring's life and success through the lens of racial politics. Cruz-Malavé describes his concern about the possible consequences of sharing Rivera's story with an audience that might be all too eager to consume the sensational tale of a down-and-out Puerto Rican. Entrusted by Rivera, who felt scorned by Haring's authorized biographer, with the task of telling his side of the story, Cruz-Malavé asks, "What if I was providing someone with a walk on the wild side so that someone, me included, could finally feel, could *com-probar*, both confirm and taste that joyous sigh of relief, that jolt that may be experienced at living 'lesser' lives at a distance?"<sup>20</sup> In presenting this scene of complicity, Cruz-Malavé demonstrates that the disenfranchised subject cannot free himself from the economy of desire that denies his agency or commits violence against him. In other words, the recovered voice that would finally set right the historical record can never be more than a fantasy.

On a trip to Pittsburgh in 2005, that fantasy took a different form when I encountered Haring and Dubose—or rather, the imagistic trace of them. After years of researching Haring and writing about the role of cross-racial desire in the production and consumption of his work, my own desires were suddenly reinvigorated on seeing the Polaroids and acetate proofs filed in the collection of ephemera housed in the Andy Warhol Museum. I had seen reproductions of the silkscreen paintings Warhol produced from the photos, but the intensity of these recorded moments of contact, caught on the glossy surfaces of archived Polaroids, hit me viscer-

ally. These scenes of radiant intimacy jarred me in their emotional force. The images display the lovers in a bare-chested embrace. In some shots, their lips touch. In others, they simply stare at the camera. What I had previously experienced as beautiful but cool abstractions on canvas became something altogether different in my contact with this primary material. In the minutes when I first came upon the photos, I wanted to strip off my white archive gloves and pull the images from their plastic casing to expose them as much as I possibly could. I wanted to feel my way into them by touching the material register of light, sensually engaging the photo-sensitive surfaces that had been in such close proximity to the lovers.<sup>21</sup> Confronted with these Polaroids—images vibrating with the interracial contact that had become the focus of my academic project—I found myself in that fortunate but tricky space where new associations were being made, but their importance refused narrative coherence. Dubose cannot be rescued from the scripts of race and power that frame his story, and those scripts were of course in play in the creation of the Warhol photo-shoot; but the intimacy of the light writing in those images made that impossibility seem newly, productively disorienting. Inspired by Jennifer Doyle's *Hold It against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art*, I am drawn toward experiences of disorientation over fixity as they generate an affective space of criticism that retains the complicated, performative impact of art.<sup>22</sup> In writing *Keith Haring's Line*, the unknowability of my subject has exacerbated a fetishistic relationship to the queer artist and fueled a desire for contact with the traces of Haring's life. *Keith Haring's Line* is written in acknowledgment of that desire and of that frustration, and it explores in particular how the impossible desire for the archive upsets the coherence of biographical narrative.

### Against the Heteroheroic Timeline

This book in many ways maps my attempt to respond to an emotional call from archival matter. It indulges an intense contact with this material in order to excavate a queer futurity, a political possibility that vibrates in the records of Haring's past. Warhol's Polaroids, with their suggestion of immediacy, instant capture and development, energize the fetish objects of the archive with the promise and hope of intimacy, an approximation to being there, to having been there. They also heighten my frustrations with the standard narrative that has come to represent the remarkable life of Keith Haring, and they allow me to access the something else of the ar-

chive.<sup>23</sup> In other words, the sensorial, affective experience of my own longing disrupts the fixed conceptions of who the artist was and what kind of effects his art had and continues to have on the world.

A short sketch of the artist's life as it appears in catalogs and exhibition materials illuminates a standardized narrative. Keith Haring was born on May 4, 1958, in Reading, Pennsylvania, and grew up in nearby Kutztown. Under the tutelage of his father, Haring developed a drawing style in his youth that referenced popular comics and cartoons. In the late 1970s, Haring went to art school in Pittsburgh and eventually enrolled in the School of Visual Arts in New York City. Beginning in 1978, Haring was active in a developing downtown art scene that brought together visual art, video, and performance. His art school training, highly informed by semiotic theory, shaped Haring's line form production. By 1980, Haring was tagging the city with the chalk outline forms that would eventually garner him wide acclaim as a popular artist and bring him into the spotlight as an art gallery superstar. New York City—a playground of drugs, sex, and endless movement—offered a pulsating energy that fed Haring's art production throughout the 1980s. He devoted much of his time to public works and displayed a commitment to children through his outreach as an artist. While keeping strong social ties to “the street,” Haring enjoyed the high life of celebrity, befriending the most fabulous of 1980s icons. In 1988, Haring was diagnosed with HIV, and he died from AIDS-related causes in February 1990, at the age of thirty-one. His foundation continues Haring's legacy of funding for children's and AIDS-related organizations.

This narrative represents one that I have struggled with for almost two decades, as I attempt to reimagine Haring's life outside a standard timeline. Beginnings, ends, and the causal links that join them have produced much anxiety in each of my attempts to map a narrative of Haring's life. Perhaps my critical tale is best understood as beginning in the summer of 1997, when I visited the first full-scale retrospective of the artist at the Whitney Museum of American Art. The exhibit was sequenced according to a clear—overly clear—biographical telos: the museum's spaces had been configured to lead visitors sequentially through rooms that first invoked a sunny childhood and then beckoned them into the dark passages of subway tunnels and a glowing and thumping dance space, before terminating in a narrow black passage at the end of which, dimly lit by a single bulb, was visible an image of a sperm with horns (figure I.3). The spatialized sense of inevitability—of innocence lost to the city, of pleasure succumbing to a sexual plague—was palpable.



**Figure 1.3.** Keith Haring, *Untitled*, 1988. Sumi ink on paper, 30 × 22 ½ inches.  
Art by Keith Haring © The Keith Haring Foundation.

Months before attending the retrospective, I had read Haring's recently published journals. A complex portrait of the artist emerges in these pages, in which written meditations move seamlessly from Roland Barthes to bathhouse sex to considerations of the graphic line. The entries are of course ordered chronologically, but in a potent sense, they defy order; the topics remained independent, jumbled, fragmentary, animated. At the age of twenty-one, I felt hailed by the journals as I prepared for my own move to New York City. The Whitney retrospective seemed perfectly timed for my arrival. Days after moving to the city, I found myself in the presence of Haring's art—and in the presence of some of the actual journal pages on which he wrote: these too had been included in the show. The exhibition's wall text explained the structure of the show, with emphasis on the play the curators wanted to establish between individual art pieces and the ephemera encased in vitrines. The following passage accompanied the exhibit's first vitrine:

Keith Haring was dedicated to making his art available to the public and his life was linked to his art. As a boy, he used drawing as a form of writing and images as a way of telling a story. The images in this exhibition tell the story of his life; they are, on one level, like a diary. The biographical gaps between images are here filled in by the objects in the vitrines. These are taken from the collections of miscellaneous, often ephemeral things that Haring gathered and that were kept after his death, including photographs, ads, invitations, and old art school projects and assignments. What distinguishes Haring is the seamless exchange between his art and his life. By combining these collections and the art works, the public and the private, this installation presents the visual narrative of a creative life.<sup>24</sup>

In this text, written by curator Elizabeth Sussman and exhibit designers Tibor Kalman and Richard Pandiscio, Haring's art becomes synonymous with his life. His works, conceived of as diary entries, are framed here implicitly to convey a biographical narrative. The ephemera in the vitrines then become objects that fetishistically provide the narrative connections, the biographical integument, between pieces of art. To describe canvases as fragments of life and ephemera as narrative objects sets the stage for a very particular kind of storytelling, in which the presentation of Haring's life ghosts the biological body of the artist. This is the structure of many museum exhibitions, but the curators of Haring's retrospective clearly felt compelled to make explicit the manner in which objects perform. I had

responded powerfully to the journals, and I was no less affected by much of the ephemera, which the curators had taken pains to present more or less as journal entries. I left the show in tears.

These tears were in many ways a result of the exhibit's dramatic structure: the objects powerfully conjured Haring's absent presence, but the forceful and preordained directionality of their presentation robbed them of something of their potentiality. My tears were indicative not of cathartic mourning but of a sense of violation. The intense biographical imperative of the retrospective format seemed to flout at every turn my experience of Haring from the journals. As a spectator traveling through the stages of Haring's life, I was asked to follow a life of pleasure, fear, rage, and productivity that culminated with an emblem of pleasure indistinguishable from death. The blackness of the narrow exit contrasted dramatically with the bright open space that had preceded it, the devil sperm thereby privileged as a last line gesture in the diary of Haring's life—truly the end of the line. Anger and frustration overwhelmed me when confronted with this violent end. How could this story of Haring's life feel so fundamentally at odds with my understanding of the artist? Wasn't Haring's image of the devil sperm part of his larger critique of the tyranny of Christian morality? Placed at the end of his life, was this painting not reproducing that morality even as it heroicized him? How could an exhibit that celebrated an artist who fought systemic violence against people with HIV deploy the specter of AIDS in such an irresponsible way? Perhaps I had gotten Haring's story wrong. Wasn't this exhibit the true story of his life, with all the supporting evidence of his archive? This book was very much born of these questions and my urgent need to respond to the retrospective.

Almost six years later, in 2003, the Public Theater premiered *Radiant Baby*, a musical based on Haring's biography. While this show reproduced many of the thematic elements of the Whitney retrospective, the formulaic structures and expressive sentimentality of musical theater revealed something that was only implicit in the museum show: an emphasis on the literal child as the salvific telos of Haring's life story. The musical uses Haring's *Rolling Stone* interview of 1989, in which he first publicly announced his HIV status, as its central plot device.<sup>25</sup> In the first act opener, Haring is nowhere to be found. An assistant fields phone calls from the magazines while a multiethnic trio of children hovers eerily about the stage, speaking as a chorus and assuming the role of Haring's art students. "We are the kids he tries to teach / We are the ones he hopes his art will be able to reach," they announce. Haring emerges onstage, pauses at the

exterior to his studio, and begins a slow ballad. “How can you go forward when your heart is going back? / How can you paint color, when your future is painted black?” he sings woefully, before regaining his composure and rushing into his studio to take on his duties as artist and teacher to the expectant children. The musical unfolds from the knowledge of his HIV-positive status; this unannounced fact hovers behind every utterance, until the end of the musical, when the truth is climactically spoken to Haring’s assistant and Tseng Kwong Chi. The show positions the audience as knowledgeable spectators to an inevitable outcome. Haring’s HIV status, whether he chooses to admit it, is the open secret that gives life to the re-telling of events and shapes the moral trajectory of the show.

The musical, for all its innocent, child-obsessed song and dance, does not shy away from sex. Haring is drawn into memories of New York as a city full of boys; in one scene, set at the legendary dance club the Paradise Garage, Carlos, a DJ who serves as the show’s emblematic ethnic love interest, pushes the beat to a level that propels Haring’s body into motion. Eventually Haring’s life spirals out of control due to sexual excess, constant drug consumption, and a publicity machine that generates bad spin almost as quickly and voraciously as it makes him an “it boy” of the 1980s art world. “Draw me a way to see the end!” Haring pleads during a frenzied breakdown. Salvation appears in the shape of a fan letter from a twelve-year-old boy, who appears on stage to sing his appreciation. Haring realizes he must produce as much as possible in what little time he has left. Images of works from the last two years of his life flash across the stage in rapid succession. Amid a chorus dressed in white, Haring sings a closing hopeful tune before taking one final dramatic breath of air as the stage goes black.

*Radiant Baby* pointedly dramatizes a moral, causally coherent tale that was implicit in the Whitney retrospective. It crystallizes the ways in which Haring’s desire is violated by traditional mappings of life history, oriented in what I call heteroheroic fashion toward the telos of innocent children. The heterosexual pathos of time, a concept I visit later through Roland Barthes’s writing, is perfectly represented in *Radiant Baby*’s musical question of how to draw Haring’s end. His HIV diagnosis heightens the stakes of his artistic production, as Haring feels slighted by the art world and harps on his lack of proper recognition among the great modern masters. His cry for esteem and attention is answered by a more meaningful calling: that of the children. This access to temporal extension through the inspiration of youth offers a convenient substitution for the literal re-

production of children while also retroactively moralizing Haring's past actions. The musical suggests that Haring's newfound life in the face of death demands he accept accountability for his sins—not in this case the generic excesses of youth but a whole era of New York City sex, fame, and celebrity. The musical's celebration of life is hardly liberated from the very attitudes that promoted and continue to promote violence against those living with HIV.<sup>26</sup>

These experiences with productions of Haring's life have made vivid to me the stakes of a biologically inflected imagination of biography. These narratives might not explicitly communicate the biological science behind HIV and its effects on Haring's body, but they maintain a tacit connection between the social world, Haring's activities, and the scientific consequences of HIV infection. In April 1987, Ronald Reagan resisted calls for value-neutral AIDS education with the following statement: "After all, when it comes to preventing AIDS, don't medicine and morality teach the same lessons?"<sup>27</sup> While the danger and implicit phobia of this statement might be obvious, the connection between morality and science has become so naturalized that one is often left with more insidious articulations of this ideology when encountering the history of those lost to AIDS. This is in part due to the teleological way a life gets defined through a causally ordered chain of events. These stagings of Haring's life literalize an idea of Keith Haring's "body of work," creating an indexical relationship between his physical body and the art he produced. They document Haring's fight against phobic understandings of HIV even as they use a narrative form that encases his life in a moral structure. In the traditional mode of the heroic male artist's biography, Haring reaches greatness through his singular ability to overcome adversity. And in Haring's case, an investment in children becomes a way to maintain a sense of legacy despite his aberrant sexual behavior and his lack of biological progeny.

In countering this narrative, I have been drawn to the archive as a vibrant resource for ordering time otherwise. My training in performance studies has deeply informed the methodological approach of this book, even as the specifically queer dimension of this project has led me to question some of the most theoretically sophisticated reflections on the performative force of the archive. In Diana Taylor's 2003 essay "'You Are Here': The DNA of Performance," for example, the performance studies theorist searches for a realm of performance work that is not wed to the discursive. Her essay argues powerfully that the idea of "the archive"—a trope that

clearly partakes of the West's valorization of writing—needs to be supplemented with the idea of “the repertoire,” a more embodied way of conceptualizing the historical transmission of performative effects. As Taylor's titular reference to DNA suggests, the repertoire is tied for her not only to the body but to the biological, an emphasis that suits the performance sites that interest her—among them the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, whose well-known protests during and after Argentina's Dirty War rely on the symbolically potent reproductive connection linking the protesting bodies to the those of the disappeared.<sup>28</sup>

*Keith Haring's Line*, by contrast, remains drawn to the archive—precisely because of its textuality, and because of the queer effects that textuality sponsors. Like Taylor, I am invested in the way textual arrangement cannot fully grasp the affective dimension to the reproductions of history—desire's surplus to its textual representation. But I am wary—as many of the subjects of this book are wary—of a too-hasty reliance on the biologized body as the emblem of the performative. For those of us working with histories shaped by HIV and AIDS, the ideas of transmission and of the biological body have informed particularly charged discourses.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, the trope of lineage and futurity are deeply challenged by the queer legacies animated by Haring's archive.<sup>30</sup> The queer intellectuals who constitute a key part of the background to this book are obsessed with writing, and with articulating the performative potential of the future through writing. This very much includes Haring himself, who found inspiration in the experimental, performative writing practices of figures like Jean Genet, Brion Gysin, and William Burroughs.

The legacy that links these thinkers and artists to one another, and to Haring, can be conceptualized in erotic and bodily terms, but it evades any notion of a literal, procreative, or biological transmission. These are instead lines of desire and artistic possibility, and they reach into the discursive space of the archive as well. A queer desire has animated my apprenticeship in the archive, one that produces resistant vectors to universal truths embedded in historical narrative while creating associations of political possibility. There are no conclusive ends to these departures; rather, each opens a potential universe and refigures the futurity of artistic production by those who have been subsumed in moralizing narratives of remembrance. *Keith Haring's Line* is written against the impulse of traditional historical investigation, against the notion that time moves each figure and their production toward singular deaths.

## A Performance Studies Scholar in the Archive

Calling attention to how art and archival imagery animate me as a scholar, I want to demonstrate what a performance studies approach to art might look like. In chapter 1, I examine multiple stages for Keith Haring's performance in New York City, including the art studio, the subway platform, and the gallery. Connecting Haring's involvement in the nightlife and performance scene of downtown New York to his public display of art production on the streets and subways platforms, I take an expansive approach to performance practice; the various scenes in which Haring was active allow me to explicitly frame Haring as a performance artist. Moreover, while I am interested in Haring's impromptu creation of theaters for his artistic performance, I also underscore the performative nature of his art. I explore how the canvases and objects he paints do something in the world, thinking through the ways in which his graphic line constitutes scenes of consumption and the subjects who come in contact with it. This includes not only Haring's lovers and collaborators in life as well as his audience (which continues to grow) but also the analyst of his work. Keith Haring's line is a mobile sign inspired by semiotic theory and cross-racial desire, and it must be understood according to its animating capacities, which continue to make themselves felt whenever the work is witnessed.

Chapter 4, "Drips, Rust, and Residue: Forms of Longing," attends to the continued performative power of Haring's line as it manifests itself in a series of objects and artworks that have been revisited or remade following his death. This final chapter pushes my methodology to its furthest limit, exploring the vital and ambivalent energy with which I continue to experience the presence of a powerful artist. In the last stretch of this introduction, I want to begin to explore the possibilities of this way of reading by returning to Warhol's Polaroids—and to my own apprehension of them—to elaborate a mode of analysis that strives to capture the continued life of Haring's line, as it at once incites a history of cross-racial desire and refuses its containment within the coherent narratives that have come to represent the life and work of the artist.

In one particular silkscreen, Warhol used multiple images from his photo session with Haring and Dubose.<sup>31</sup> The result is a canvas in which their bodies blur in the center, as if the two men are pulling into each other and creating another being (figure I.4). The overlapping figures formally evoke Haring's fantasy about his relationship with Dubose. If Haring understood sexual intimacy as a powerful way to become nonwhite—to inhabit the otherness of his object of desire—this artistic expression rep-



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**Figure 1.4.** Andy Warhol, *Keith Haring and Juan Dubose*, 1983. Acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas, 40 × 40 inches. © 1983. The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. / Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

resents a visual manifestation of that possibility. A figure of cross-racial contact seems to emerge from the distinct but convergent bodies of Haring and Dubose. Warhol's canvas both highlights and breaks apart bodily boundaries. While in the original Polaroids, the embracing lovers retain their distinct bodily contours, Warhol's collage and manipulation of light rewrites those bodies as an overlay, producing an alternate vision that yet retains the visible contours of their individual forms. Warhol's archive thus offers a trace of his creative practice. I get some sense of the steps between the capture of the image and the final silkscreen, a canvas that has always seemed to me to represent so perfectly the tensions of my project. Compared with the smaller original Polaroids, the silkscreen—with its central bodily blur, this impossible figure—suddenly seems bigger to me. Moreover, my glimpse into Warhol's process makes the silkscreen feel less coolly intellectual than I had once perceived it. I have characterized the image as indicative of Haring's desire for nonwhiteness; I believe that is a valid reading. But now I must understand the image in relation to my own desire, for it is definitely my desire that is hailed by the archival material related to Haring's life.

The animating potential of Warhol's work was perhaps best described in Roland Barthes's 1980 essay on pop art. Defined by its reproducibility and repetition, the Warholian subject in Barthes's account accesses a temporality distinct from that of classical portraiture. For Barthes, Warhol's reproductions resist the teleological conventions of historical being. The urgency of being as defined by death—what Barthes refers to as the pathos of time—is replaced in pop art by the facticity of the image itself, in which it is no longer important for a work to “be given the internal organization of a destiny (birth, life, death).” But the subject is not eradicated by this evasion of biography and teleology: “However much pop art has depersonalized the world, platitudinized objects, dehumanized images, replaced traditional craftsmanship of the canvas by machinery, some ‘subject’ remains. . . . The one who looks in the absence of the one who makes.”<sup>32</sup> Naming the onlooker, the one who interprets and projects meaning onto the canvas, as the subject of the work, Barthes argues that the essence of the Warholian image is the rhetorical process through which the social world codifies the figure. Neither the artist nor his subject is essential to the art piece; rather, the work of art is its reception.

In Warhol's archive, I am left looking in the absence of those who made. Overcome with the desire to imagine, to know in some way that moment of intimacy between Haring and Dubose, I am confronted with the im-

possibility of knowing it, and with my own process of projection. To some degree I can name my compulsion to enter the scene of the photographs as conditioned by histories of loss and queer desire, the ongoing systemic violence against those with HIV, and the racist legacies of colonialism. Warhol's archive presents a process of mechanical reproduction around historical images and, as such, destabilizes the indexical relationship between the archival image and its referent. Like his silkscreen canvas, the documentary image from his archive demands that I engage in the act of its interpretation and interpolates me as the subject of the image. This is a scene of complicity, a complex field of negotiations in which I must accept the unknowable and pursue an interpretive project according to my desire, shaped as it is by the social worlds and histories I inhabit.

Haring, inspired by Warhol, allowed his line to be reproduced, to travel across surfaces and into the hands of consumers in the form of T-shirts, buttons, and posters. This was a utopic project where he imagined a world in which everyone could own a piece of his art. In this distribution, the line loosens itself from the artist and the moments in which he painted or drew his designs, allowing it a signifying life beyond the corporeal life of Haring himself. This continued and unpredictable life of meaning was always inherent to Haring's line, both as performance art project and as a graphic sign that indexed histories of contact and appropriation. The following story written in Haring's absence represents my attempt to articulate an understanding of the artist's life and his line, mapping fields of cross-racial desire to enliven the line beyond the limiting conditions of a singular story about the artist.