

The publisher gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the African American Studies Endowment Fund of the University of California Press Foundation, which was established by a major gift from the George Gund Foundation.

The publisher also gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the Art Endowment Fund of the University of California Press Foundation, which was established by a major gift from the Ahmanson Foundation.

Reading Basquiat

Reading

Exploring Ambivalence in American Art

Basquiat

Jordana Moore Saggese



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS BERKELEY LOS ANGELES LONDON

University of California Press, one of the most distinguished university presses in the United States, enriches lives around the world by advancing scholarship in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Its activities are supported by the UC Press Foundation and by philanthropic contributions from individuals and institutions. For more information, visit www.ucpress.edu.

University of California Press
Berkeley and Los Angeles, California

University of California Press, Ltd.
London, England

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First Paperback Printing 2021

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Saggese, Jordana Moore, 1979–.

Reading Basquiat : exploring ambivalence in American art / Jordana Moore Saggese.
pages cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-520-38334-0 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Basquiat, Jean-Michel, 1960–1988—Criticism and interpretation. 2. Basquiat, Jean-Michel, 1960–1988—Themes, motives. 3. Arts and society—United States—History—20th century. I. Title.

N6537.B233S24 2014

709.2—dc23

2013038506

Manufactured in United States

27 26 25 24 23 22 21
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48–1992 (R 2002) ∞.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project has benefited from the aid, expertise, and support of many individuals. My graduate advisor, Jonathan Fineberg, has tirelessly provided support at every stage of this book, from its inception. The project grew out of many conversations between us over the first few years of my graduate work, and his excitement about the project has sustained me throughout. His critical eye for good writing has exponentially improved my own.

I also thank my dissertation committee: Okwui Enwezor, Matt Hart, Jordana Mendelson, and Dana Rush. Their combined accomplishments are without measure, and I am grateful to have worked with them. All provided me with important feedback and encouragement, some of which I did not fully appreciate until the final moments of revising this manuscript (sorry about that!). At the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, I was lucky enough to be surrounded by scholars who challenged me and provided excellent models of research and argumentation in their own work. In the seminars of Rachael Ziady DeLue, David O'Brien, and Jeryldene Wood, I was given the freedom to explore my own ideas, as well as the confidence to investigate concepts and constructs that heavily influenced this project. I also thank Gabriel Solis in the Department of Musicology, who generously agreed to mentor me in my study of jazz history and theory; the products of our many meetings and discussions can be found within this book. I would never have even considered becoming an art historian were it not for the example of Leonard Folgarait at Vanderbilt University, whose dynamic lectures inspired me to ask difficult questions. I can only hope to have such an effect on my own students.

The financial support necessary to complete this project cannot go without recognition. I thank the School of Art and Design, the College of Fine and Applied Arts, and the Graduate College at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. A large portion of this project was completed under a predoctoral fellowship from the College of Arts and Sciences at Santa Clara University, and I thank the faculty, staff, and students in the Art and Art History Department there for their support. I also thank the Office of the Provost at California College of the Arts, which granted me money for my research

and travel expenses, as well as other subsidies that enabled me to develop the dissertation into a book. Many of the revisions to the manuscript were made while I was on a generous sabbatical from the college.

The lack of a dedicated archive for the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat meant that much of my research relied on the benevolence of individuals who provided me with their insight and assistance. Thank you to the many anonymous individuals who let me view their private collections of Basquiat's work. Tobias Mueller, director of the Galerie Bruno Bischofberger in Zurich, took a very early interest in this project and allowed me to access many works and records of the artist. I am grateful for his patience in fielding all my inquiries over the more than ten years that have passed since I accosted him in his booth at Art Basel. My sincere thanks also go to Bruno Bischofberger, Michael Halsband, Michael Holman, Suzanne Mallouk, Jérôme Schlomoff, Robert Farris Thompson, and Stephen Torton—all of whom graciously granted me interviews—and to Ivy Blackman and Lynne Kimura, who helped me through the archives and collections at the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, respectively. For their technical expertise and assistance I also thank Katy McKinnon, Catherine Montfort, and Emily Stielstra. The well-considered reports of my anonymous reviewers have made this manuscript stronger than I could have on my own. I am grateful to have also worked with an excellent team at the University of California Press, including Kari Dahlgren, Chalon Emmons, Stephanie Fay, and Jack Young. Thank you.

Many friends and colleagues offered their support throughout this project. The support of Gisela Carbonell-Coll, and our close mutual friend Mrs. Smith, has been particularly invaluable, and I am happy to call both of them my lifelong friends. I am also grateful for the advice and guidance of John Bowles, Julia Bryan-Wilson, Bridget Cooks, and Jackie Francis, who took the time to read early versions of the manuscript. The members of my writer's group—Kim Anno, Paula Birnbaum, Irene Cheng, Alla Efimova, Tirza True Latimer, Rachel Schreiber, and Jennifer Shaw—have made invaluable contributions to this book, providing critical feedback, at every stage, that was always delivered with good humor. At California College of the Arts I encounter artists and writers at every turn; a fortunate consequence is that there is always opportunity for inspiring conversations. Thank you to all my current and former students and colleagues there, especially Amy Campos, Jackie Clay, Amanda Hunt, Jessica Ingram, Jordan Kantor, Joseph Lease, Maxwell Leung, Maria Makela, Beth Mangini, Jeanette Roan, Raymond Saunders, Mitchell Schwarzer, Allison Smith, Tina Takemoto, and Joseph Tanke. I also benefited greatly from conversations at various conferences, where I was able to present this research at many stages of its devel-

opment. For granting me the opportunity to present my work to a larger academic audience, I particularly thank the members of the Modern Art Colloquium at the University of Illinois, as well as Renée Ater, Adrienne Childs, Tuliza Fleming, Theresa Leininger-Miller, Leo Mazow, Pamela Simpson, and the graduate students in Africana Studies at the CUNY Graduate Center.

Finally, I express my deepest gratitude to my family. My two children demonstrated patience beyond their years as I tried to prevent this project from encroaching upon time that was surely theirs. The unwavering confidence of my husband has inspired me to push further and to complete a project I often thought impossible. His encouragement, devotion, and humor have sustained me, and I will be forever grateful.



INTRODUCTION

Reading Jean-Michel Basquiat

IN FEBRUARY 1985, a twenty-four-year-old Jean-Michel Basquiat appeared on the cover of the *New York Times Magazine* alongside the caption "New Art, New Money: The Marketing of an American Artist" (plate 1).¹ Just a few years earlier the artist had been unknown, living on the charity of friends and writing in spray paint on the walls of lower Manhattan. By 1985 he had become one of the most famous American artists of the 1980s, selling paintings for upward of twenty-five thousand dollars. He was also a close friend of Andy Warhol and worked collaboratively with him. But more important, Basquiat had come to reflect growing anxieties about American art. Wearing a dark Armani suit—an emblem of his financial success—in this photo the young Basquiat made the connections between the contemporary artist and the art market visible. This was not the starving artist the public was accustomed to seeing. But something else was different here as well. Basquiat appeared barefoot; his expensive suit was splattered with paint. He appeared, in the words of Dick Hebdige, as "a poor boy plucked from obscurity. . . . Here was a Messiah suited to the New World of the Eighties: a Picasso in blackface."² Almost thirty years later, this image continues to provoke questions about the roles that commodification and race have played in the artistic legacy of Jean-Michel Basquiat.

During the 1980s, an increasingly intimate relationship developed between art and commerce. As Wall Street boomed from 1983 to 1987, the careers of Basquiat and his contemporaries Kenny Scharf, Julian Schnabel, and Keith Haring soared.³ These artists' neo-expressionist painting contrasted sharply with the aesthetic traditions of the conceptual artists, their immediate predecessors; the bold colors, the figuration, the gestural qualities, and the emotionality of these neo-expressionists' canvases emphasized their materiality. There was, in the words of one writer, a marked shift in neo-expressionist art "from the cool and cerebral to the volatile and passionate."⁴ The neo-expressionists also diverged from the critical perspectives of the conceptualists, who

had openly rejected capitalism and the culture industry. Hans Haacke (b. 1936), for example, made a career out of critiquing the capitalist dimensions of the art world. Piero Manzoni (1933–63) cynically commented on the symbiotic relationship between artists and collectors, selling cans of bodily waste that he priced according to the current market value of gold. Other works rejected the collector completely; the large earthworks constructed in remote locations by artists throughout the 1970s were not easily transported or displayed elsewhere. Basquiat and his fellow artists, by contrast, were profit- and career-oriented. Their work sold for unprecedented sums. Julian Schnabel's *Notre Dame*, for example, was bought for just over ninety-three thousand dollars at his auction debut in 1983, although it had sold only three years earlier for thirty-five hundred dollars.⁵ These artists were public celebrities courted by galleries and major businesses alike. References to successful young artists were ubiquitous in popular media coverage; they appeared in spreads in *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* magazines.⁶

The tenuous relationship between art and commerce was certainly not a new development, but in the 1980s it became more explicit. As art critic Lisbet Nilson described it in 1985, the New York art world of this period was "less a business than an industry."⁷ As unprecedented amounts of money flooded the art market, prices climbed precipitately; as in the case of Schnabel, the price of a single work could increase by hundreds of percentage points in just a few years. In response, artists made more work, and they made it bigger; dealers began to organize two-gallery exhibitions to keep up with demand.⁸ Large banks (and even some auction houses) began to facilitate loans for art purchases; financial institutions began to accept fine art as collateral against loans. In 1979 Citibank founded its art advisory service, offering clients assistance with building and maintaining large art collections. The gallery scene likewise exploded with greater numbers of private art dealers; in 1970, for example, the *Art Now: New York Gallery Guide* listed 73 galleries, but by 1985 that listing climbed to almost 450.⁹ Exhibitions sold out for extraordinary sums even before they opened.¹⁰ This art industry was complete with a cadre of new professionals to service the system, including corporate curators and advisers, art lawyers, tax experts, public-relations consultants, and artists' agents. Critic Robert Hughes found fault with this new art environment, calling it in one 1983 article for *Time* magazine a "'post-modernist' image machine, that powerful contraption which, modeled on corporate p.r. lines, has transformed the very nature of reputation in the art world over the last five years."¹¹ In an earlier essay for the *New York Times Review of Books*, Hughes drew on the historical example of Andy Warhol to encourage debate on whether an artist could be both commercially successful and a true member of the avant-garde.¹²

Jean-Michel Basquiat (along with Keith Haring) was of particular interest in this

overhyped art market because of his early association with the graffiti movement and the East Village art scene—both of which were suddenly thrust to the center of the financially driven New York art world in the early 1980s.¹³ According to *New York Times* art critic Grace Glueck, the move from street to gallery was “bound to happen, given the art world’s relentless search for new amusements and investments. And it did. After a long and scurrilous underground career,” she lamented, “graffiti has surfaced on the chaste white walls of galleries and museums.”¹⁴ Basquiat, along with his high school classmate Al Diaz, first became known for street writings signed with the name SAMO—an acronym for “same old shit.”¹⁵ Beginning in May 1978, two years before Basquiat’s first exhibition, he and Diaz (as SAMO) wrote maxims, jokes, and prophecies in marker and spray paint on subway trains throughout New York City (particularly the “D” train that took him from downtown Manhattan home to Brooklyn),¹⁶ as well as in lower Manhattan on the walls, buildings, and sidewalks around the School of the Visual Arts and in the SoHo and Tribeca neighborhoods, where there were many prominent art galleries. Diaz and Basquiat’s phrases critiqued consumer culture:

SAMO AS AN END 2 NINE-2-FIVE
NONSENSE
WASTIN’ YOUR LIFE
2 MAKE ENDS MEET . . . TO GO HOME
AT NIGHT TO YOUR
COLOR T.V. . . .

These phrases at times positioned SAMO as an alternative to the commercial art world: “SAMO as an end to playing art,” “SAMO as an end to all this mediocre art,” “SAMO for the so-called avant-garde.”¹⁷ Others were more poetic: “My mouth/ Therefore an error.©”¹⁸ SAMO, however, was short-lived. Just six months after they started, Basquiat and Diaz relinquished their anonymity in a December 1978 issue of the *Village Voice*, parting ways soon after.¹⁹ The epitaph “SAMO is dead” appeared on walls throughout lower Manhattan.

Basquiat capitalized on his newfound notoriety as SAMO, moving from the street to the studio. He appeared regularly on Glenn O’Brien’s public access television show, *TV Party*; he even exhibited his work on canvas, under the name SAMO, at the *Times Square Show*, an exhibition in June 1980 of more than fifty young artists that marked the genesis of the eighties art movement. In his review of the exhibition the art dealer Jeffrey Deitch drew special attention to the work Basquiat (still known as SAMO) exhibited, calling it “a knockout combination of de Kooning and subway scribbles.”²⁰ Basquiat,

because he had achieved some recognition in the East Village scene, was later invited to exhibit in *New York/New Wave*, a group show of sixteen hundred works by 119 artists that opened at P.S. 1 on Valentine's Day in 1981. He was an immediate success. Christophe de Menil, a major collector, and Henry Geldzahler, the commissioner of cultural affairs for New York City, bought pieces from the show. Almost immediately after, Basquiat was invited to exhibit in his first solo show, in Modena, Italy. An essay published in *Artforum's* December issue in 1981 gained the artist even more attention. The author compared Basquiat with master European painters, provocatively declaring, "If Cy Twombly and Jean Dubuffet had a baby, and gave it up for adoption, it would be Jean-Michel."²¹ The gallerist Annina Nosei, who showed the more established artists David Salle and Richard Prince, agreed to represent Basquiat, who had a one-man show at her SoHo gallery in 1982. That same year, he also had exhibitions in Los Angeles, Zurich, Rome, and Rotterdam and became the youngest artist ever invited to participate in *Dokumenta 7* in Kassel, Germany.

Basquiat's early success led some critics to accuse the media of exploiting East Village artists based on their own primitivist fantasies.²² In 1982 Hal Foster commented on the strange inversion by which graffiti ceased to be subversive and became celebrated; he named Basquiat's work specifically as an example. In an essay published in *Art in America* he observed, "In a March show, the stylish street-artist SAMO became Jean-Michel Basquiat, the new art-world primitive."²³ Transplanting Basquiat into the gallery represented a larger problem to Foster, because it entailed declaring as mainstream art what had been an act of resistance. Foster assumed that promoting graffiti artists was tantamount to economic and cultural exploitation—an example of the marketplace's fetishizing of aesthetically naive, poor, or nonindustrialized cultures. Although opinions like Foster's were in the minority, they further strained the tenuous boundary between art and commerce.²⁴

A major focus of this book is the persistent and lingering effect that Basquiat's so-called origins in the graffiti scene have had on his reception as an American artist. Basquiat was caught between the street and the studio. Early critics and historians of his work used the same stereotypes by which they judged many other African American painters. Basquiat was read as just another untrained, nonwhite artist. In a review of *Dokumenta 7*, for example, the critics Noel Frackman and Ruth Kaufmann referred to Basquiat as "a true primitive."²⁵ His beginnings as the street writer SAMO fed into the mythology of the untrained, African American naive artist, which was well established in the interwar period.²⁶ In an obituary following the artist's death in 1988 Robert Hughes attributed Basquiat's success to the art world's "need to refresh itself with a touch of the 'primitive.'"²⁷ Basquiat's reported relations to graffiti culture were

cursory at best, but early and brief associations were extrapolated into the false legend of an artist “who misspent his youth spraying graffiti on subway trains.”²⁸

Basquiat made several public attempts to break away from the implicit racism of such narrow readings, once telling an interviewer: “My work has nothing to do with graffiti. It’s painting, it always has been. I’ve always painted. Well before painting was in fashion.”²⁹ Nevertheless, a primitivist model has persisted in much of the scholarship on this artist, threatening his place in art history. Such scholarship seems a logical extension, given that the artist often chose to confront the stereotypes of the (overwhelmingly white) art world by self-consciously conforming to primitive notions.³⁰ The quick brushstrokes, jagged lines, rough textures, and seemingly chaotic compositions of his canvases speak directly to the stereotype. He appeared on the cover of the *New York Times Magazine* dressed in a fashionable European suit but with bare feet and dreadlocks.

In the history of modern art, visual expressions of the primitive are traditionally associated with premodern society. A primitive artist exists only in opposition to the civilized, to which he or she must have limited exposure. But Basquiat, growing up in New York, frequented the Brooklyn Museum of Art and other prominent museums with his mother, Matilde.³¹ As a high-school student, he was encouraged to explore the many cultural venues of New York City, and Basquiat continued to visit museums throughout his life. In a 1985 interview the artist recalled seeing Picasso’s *Guernica* at the Museum of Modern Art as a particularly formative experience.³² He even calls attention to his exposure to the global collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in a drawing from 1987 (plate 2); the images labeled “Augustus Saint Gaudens” and “Girl with pigeons” both refer to works in that museum’s collection.³³ Although he received no formal artistic training, Basquiat’s interests in art were nurtured at an early age. Matilde encouraged her son to copy drawings from an illustrated Bible at home, and copying from books and comics became part of his established practice.³⁴ When he attended school, Jean-Michel rebelled by spending his time drawing, painting, and creating comic strips.

As a consequence of Basquiat’s early reception as a primitive or graffiti artist, critics and historians have often attempted to legitimate him in the larger fields of modern European and American art. Analyses of his work in comparison to European modernism and American abstraction are ubiquitous. Early publications, such as that essay by Rene Ricard that claimed Basquiat as the forsaken child of Twombly and Dubuffet, sensationalized his similarities to European painters.³⁵ When Basquiat received one of his first exhibition reviews, for the show at the Annina Nosei Gallery in 1982, mentioned earlier, it was loaded with Eurocentric references. The reviewer Lisa Liebmann

wrote, "The speed lines and notations bear some relation to automatic drawing. . . . Basquiat's art suggests that particularly French aesthetic that is rooted in language and linguistic signs. It is an esthetic that the Surrealists codified, that later artists such as Dubuffet improvised upon."³⁶ Without a doubt, Basquiat engaged the history of Western art; he explicitly refers to the works of Leonardo da Vinci, Pablo Picasso, Robert Rauschenberg, and Cy Twombly within many compositions. To read Basquiat's work solely in this limited frame, however, is a mistake. Despite all attempts to look at Basquiat's work from within the existing frames of art history—modernism, expressionism, surrealism, and so on—these paintings resist such clean categorization and remain inscrutable. This has provoked a major problem in scholarship on this artist: while he may be stylistically "European," his subject matter is not. As bell hooks wrote in her review of the artist's posthumous retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1992, "Even when Basquiat can be placed stylistically in the exclusive, white male art club that denies entry to most black artists, his subject matter—his content—always separates him once again, and defamiliarizes him."³⁷

Throughout this book, I reframe the protocols Basquiat employed as a working artist and reconsider his grossly underestimated contribution to the history of American art, as well as the challenges this artist and his work present to the discipline. Before his death in 1988 Basquiat created approximately seven hundred large-format paintings on canvas, one thousand works on paper, and thirty sculptural works.³⁸ Most take the form of mixed-media collage in which the artist combined paper, acrylic paint, oil paintstick, crayon, charcoal, graphite, and even found objects. The resulting compositions combine words, symbols, photocopies, and gestural brushstrokes. Visual and textual references to ancient history, comic books, popular music, television, mythology, anatomy, politics, and fine art intermingle.

There is already a rich body of material that traces the origins of the images, symbols, and phrases in these works. In his essay for the Whitney retrospective, Richard Marshall traced many of Basquiat's lists, dates, and symbols to publications in the artist's library.³⁹ Other published interviews with and essays by the artist's close friends and family also focus on the source of Basquiat's personal iconography. An essay by Basquiat's father, Gérard, in a 2006 exhibition catalog is loaded with such attributions. "I think the multiple A's that populate Jean-Michel's early work," he explains, "refer to Hank Aaron the baseball player." He continues with the crown that appears throughout many of Basquiat's compositions, claiming "the crown meant that he was from royalty."⁴⁰ In this same catalog, an essay by the artist's longtime girlfriend, Suzanne Mallouk, seems to contradict Gérard's reading, claiming that the crown was instead a reference to a favorite television show. "At the end of *The Little Rascals*," she writes,

“there is a crown—sketched on the screen, and a title: King World Productions. That’s where the crown came from.”⁴¹

But the isolated, iconographic emphasis on specific symbols and icons in Basquiat’s paintings and drawings cannot account for the meaning of the works in which they appear or what they may reveal about Basquiat’s own artistic concerns. This study addresses larger questions of composition and narrative in Basquiat’s painting practice. While his work may inspire viewers to decode its particular representations, it also invites them to discover the possibilities for representation.⁴² I view his works not as a closed system but as multivocal.⁴³ Because they offer multiple levels of reference and perception in the words and images on the surfaces, these paintings and drawings highlight the dynamic process of looking. My aim is to understand the interactions of the references in Basquiat’s paintings and drawings, to discover not only what these signs and symbols represent but also how they generate meaning.

In both his artistic and personal lives, the artist cultivated what art historian Henry Drewal has called “multiconsciousness”—that is, “the capacity to negotiate multiple evolving personas in social terrains where others attempt to impose identities (and therefore possibilities) in struggles of self-assertion.”⁴⁴ This is a step beyond Du Boisian “double consciousness” and allows for the complexity inherent in the lives of people moving within the African diasporas and in the postmodern world.⁴⁵ Basquiat explored a range of artistic interests and practices during his life—in the visual arts, literature, and music. In undertaking this study, I wanted to examine the connections between these disciplines, taking into account the artist’s continuing engagement with each. What inspired his interest in jazz from the 1940s, references to which can be seen in multiple drawings and paintings? Does the proliferation of text on Basquiat’s canvases mean that we should read these works as poetry, paintings, or something in between?

The work of Jean-Michel Basquiat requires a methodology outside the boundaries of traditional art history. As Mieke Bal writes, such “disciplinary boundaries can be confining, and thus fail to let the subject of the discipline, the visual image, speak.”⁴⁶ This work exists at the intersection of language and image. Because of this, I argue that language and the according methods of linguistic analysis are useful to a study of Basquiat’s visual practice. When asked how he found the subjects for his paintings and drawings, Basquiat explained, “I get my background from studying books. I put what I like from them in my paintings.”⁴⁷ In fact, as I will discuss throughout the book, Basquiat constructed large parts of his identity—as a black man, as a musician, as a painter, and as a writer—via the manipulation of texts in his own library.

Basquiat’s work is concerned with the production of meaning rather than with the isolation of specific icons or texts. A semiotic approach to the work, rather than a strictly

formalist one, is much more appropriate in this case. According to Mieke Bal, semiotics as a theoretical model “takes art out of a formalist and autonomist idealization and takes the work as dynamic.” It “privileges meaning and the ways in which meaning is produced, considering aspects and details as signs rather than forms or material elements only.”⁴⁸ Semiotics allows for intersubjective analysis and interpretation in that it relies on the idea that the mental image (interpretant) that we produce in response to a work of art (sign), and the object (referent) to which that interpretant points, is always determined by the viewer. Moreover, that interpretant is always shifting in the process of semiosis.⁴⁹

For example, Basquiat’s 1983 composition *Jesse* (plate 3) includes several references to the life of the late jazz saxophonist Charlie Parker (1920–55). The words “KOKO” and “CHEROKEE”—the titles of two popular compositions by Parker—appear above and to the right of the word “Chan,” the nickname of Parker’s second wife, in the upper left corner of the composition.⁵⁰ Nearby on the canvas, the phrases “CRISPUS ATTUCKS HIGH,” “LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL,” and “ALONZO LEWIS” also appear—all references to Parker’s early education. Parker attended Crispus Attucks Elementary School and Lincoln High School while growing up in Kansas City, Missouri. Alonzo Lewis was a high school music teacher who influenced Parker’s pursuit of music as a profession.⁵¹ Basquiat must have known these details of Parker’s life; but as Basquiat was consistently attentive to the possibilities for multiple meanings and referents in the images and texts he included in his works, the significance of the three phrases “Crispus Attucks High,” “Lincoln High School,” and “Alonzo Lewis” can be considered in the context of other signs and symbols on the canvas as well.

Crispus Attucks (c. 1723–70) and Alonzo Lewis (1794–1861) were well-known abolitionists in the state of Massachusetts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By including their names in relation to Parker’s life, Basquiat made a double historical reference. Moreover, in positioning Attucks and Lewis within a canvas that referred to both Parker and the Olympian Jesse Owens—in the upper-right corner of the composition we can read the words “NEGRO ATHLETE” at the bottom of a section that also contains “JESSE OWENS” and two swastikas—Basquiat positions both Parker and Owens as heroic, historical figures by association.

Similarly, “KRYPTON”—the name of a chemical compound written in red at the top of the canvas—and “PERRY WHITE” are linked by way of the Superman series of comic books. Perry White was the editor-in-chief of the fictional newspaper the *Daily Planet*, while Krypton was the comic hero’s home planet. The underlined name “JIMMY OLSEN,” directly below “PERRY WHITE,” is that of a young reporter and photographer for the *Daily Planet*. The word “KRYPTONITE”—a mineral from the planet Krypton, and the only element that could diminish Superman’s power—appears near the upper-

right corner of the canvas. Here, Basquiat alludes to Superman instead of explicitly naming him.⁵² In all these examples the words and phrases carry meaning because they interact with each other in a context outside of the canvas as well as within it. Basquiat made his compositions intentionally difficult, relying on viewers to recognize the unspoken links between them. Only those viewers who know the breadth of the artist's interests can understand this operation clearly. As in his response to the primitive model, Basquiat subverted the relationship between artist, object, and viewer by creating a nonlinear narrative of painting.

I argue throughout this book that Basquiat's deliberate ambiguity and confusion in both language and image mirror his attempts to evade binaries—primitive/modern, black/white, original/reproduction, signifier/signified, or conceptualist/expressionist—in both his life and practice. Chapter 1 considers the implications of reading race into Basquiat's production—specifically the tension this work exhibits between the tendency to read black artists in terms of subject matter and white artists in terms of their aesthetic strategies.⁵³ The oeuvre of Jean-Michel Basquiat—born to a Haitian father and a Puerto Rican mother in the Park Slope neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York—grapples with a much larger set of cultural and artistic traditions that gives it deep roots in both black and predominantly white Western practices. In the years following Basquiat's death, the fields of identity politics and politico-aesthetic discourse have continued to expand. Part of my objective is to reevaluate this work from a critical perspective, building on this more recent scholarship. I am working here from hooks's claim that "Basquiat was grappling with *both* the pull of a genealogy that is fundamentally 'black' (rooted in African diasporic . . . traditions) *and* a fascination with white Western traditions" (my emphasis).⁵⁴

By looking more closely at the discourses around blackness, created both within and outside of Basquiat's work, we can get closer to understanding the place of this artist within a (now revised) black arts tradition. Chapter 1 considers the references to Africa and African art in the work of Basquiat as a way to move beyond the binary of formalism versus content. I argue that the artist mobilizes and negotiates the history of Africa in search of his own place in the contemporary art world, considering specifically the artist's knowledge of and familiarity with the syncretic nature of Yoruba culture and history. I examine the interaction and the overlap between African and American in his work, where he places the histories of the continents in parallel on his canvases. Most important, Basquiat's access to Africa was consistently filtered through and influenced by the texts of the American art historian Robert Farris Thompson, who provided the artist with a model of productive ambiguity that lies at the heart of both African diaspora culture and Basquiat's own practice. Drawing on sources from Africa,

Basquiat probes the boundaries of blackness but also those of American art. As a product of the African diaspora, and standing at the crossroads of several cultures, the work of this artist highlights the heterogeneity and diversity of American art practice.

In the chapters that follow, I further expand the parameters of aesthetic discourse to consider the impact of Basquiat's musical and literary interests on his working protocols as a painter, connecting his practices as a painter, a musician, and a writer. Furthermore, both music and literature provide models and vocabularies for considering the improvisational nature of Basquiat's work, as well as his preference for appropriation and collage, which are missing from an exclusively visual analysis. Underlying this approach is the idea that, in true postmodernist fashion, Basquiat himself saw connections, rather than disjuncture, between these disciplines. The inextricability of text, music, and painting is evident in the artist's own description of his process. When asked during an interview in the fall of 1982 how he selected words for his canvases, Basquiat casually replied, "When I'm working I hear them. You know? I just throw them down."⁵⁵

Chapter 2 examines the parallels between the compositional methods of Basquiat and those found in music—a lifelong interest of the artist. Basquiat was exposed to music at an early age; his father, Gérard, loved both jazz and classical music and constantly played records at home.⁵⁶ The artist's maternal grandfather, Juan, led a small Latino band in New York, and young Jean-Michel often watched him play the guitar.⁵⁷ As an adult, he became involved with the underground punk movement, sporting a blond Mohawk and hanging out at the Mudd Club—an epicenter of the underground downtown art and rock scene. And in 1979, Basquiat, along with his friends Nick Taylor, Michael Holman, and Wayne Dawson, formed a noise-band called Gray, a name possibly derived from the nineteenth-century textbook *Gray's Anatomy*—a gift from his mother when the artist was hospitalized as a child.⁵⁸ Basquiat led the group, playing a synthesizer, bell, and clarinet alternately during the band's performances. He also performed the lyrics to some of the songs, sometimes lying on the floor of the stage with the microphone and at other times playing recorded voices from a small tape deck.⁵⁹ The band became popular and performed frequently at the Mudd Club and other downtown venues, including Hurrah, Tier Three, Max's Kansas City, CBGB, and the Rock Lounge, before breaking up in 1981, shortly before Basquiat found fame in the art world.

Basquiat also became interested in hip-hop after meeting the musician and artist Fred Braithwaite, known professionally as Fab 5 Freddy, at a party in 1978.⁶⁰ Braithwaite, who is popularly credited with spreading rap beyond the Bronx, introduced Basquiat to early hip-hop culture by playing mix tapes of underground groups.⁶¹

Soon after meeting Braithwaite, Basquiat expanded his circle of friends to include several other graffiti and hip-hop artists, including Rammellzee, Toxic, and A-1. In late 1982 Basquiat, along with Fab 5 Freddy, Toxic, A-1, Al Diaz, and Rammellzee, produced a hip-hop single featuring the lyrics of Rammellzee and K-Rob.⁶² Titled *Beat-Bop*, this record was used in the soundtrack of Henry Chalfant's film *Style Wars*—a 1983 documentary of the New York graffiti and music scene. *Beat-Bop* was the first (and only) release of the artist's Tartown Record Company.⁶³

Scholars have argued that Basquiat personified hip-hop's methods of appropriation and sampling because he often referenced historical painting styles in his work.⁶⁴ The second chapter of this book looks more closely at Basquiat's relationship to jazz, considering specifically the structural effects of the music on Basquiat's painting process. Basquiat himself recognized hip-hop's connections to jazz; his title for the 1983 single *Beat-Bop* refers playfully to the predominant "beat" of rap music, and the "bop" style of jazz.⁶⁵ The layering of sources and sounds in hip-hop connects Basquiat's interest in jazz to his performances with Gray. Chapter 2 starts with the figure of the bebop musician Charlie Parker, whom Basquiat painted frequently—both in metaphorical references and in direct representations. Parker functioned for Basquiat as more than a cultural hero, in the traditions of the black athletes or other historical figures that the artist painted and drew. He represented for Basquiat a methodology that the artist then incorporated into his own visual practice. I compare Parker's and Basquiat's techniques of improvisation and appropriation in order to refine our perspective on spontaneity in visual art as something both deliberate and complex.

My final chapter looks at Basquiat's deep interest in text and writing as part of his larger investigation into the very foundations of identity, language, and art history. After the "death" of SAMO, Basquiat's interest in poetry and language persisted. Writing seeped into his paintings and drawings, sometimes in the form of word games, logos, and cryptic messages. And in his private notebooks he continually experimented with text.⁶⁶ Richard Marshall has published one of the few analyses of Basquiat's use of language in his catalog essay for the exhibition *In Word Only* at the Cheim & Read Gallery in New York in 2005. In his essay Marshall notes that "by 1982 Basquiat was obsessed with words, and they appeared everywhere, often as the sole visual content of a work."⁶⁷ Chapter 3 examines Basquiat's connections to the literary strategies of the Beat writers Jack Kerouac and William S. Burroughs. Certain similarities between the biographies of these authors and Basquiat's life exist, but I focus here on the ways in which Kerouac and Burroughs provided models of spontaneity and collage, and negotiated identity in ways that Basquiat could not have found exclusively in his visual sources. I look to Basquiat's own writings, from a compilation of the artist's note-

books, to connect his impulses in collage and concrete poetry to his work as a painter. My analysis also includes an examination of key texts by Kerouac and Burroughs, as well as the interpretations of their methods in literary scholarship. Both authors demonstrated sensitivity to the shifting boundaries between art, music, and literature, a sensitivity with which Basquiat identified. The Beat writers provided a model of literary innovation and textual experimentation that was also believed to be authentically expressive. In other words, it was through an interest in Beat literature that Basquiat found resolution for the tension between his conceptual and expressionist tendencies.

Exploring the connections between disciplines, Basquiat discovered modes of composition that an exclusively visual analysis overlooks. I demonstrate throughout the book that theories of language and theories of the diaspora in turn provide methodologies for the interpretation of these disjunctive images, which challenge the ideas of a singular narrative, unified aesthetics, and binaries of iconography. This is perhaps most emphatic in the artist's manipulation of several strands of cultural discourse (from modernism to primitivism), his intertwining of multiple voices and perspectives (African and American), his questioning of hierarchies (between real and reproduced, or between signifier and signified), and his crossing of critical and art historical boundaries (from conceptualism to expressionism).

Finally, I must note that this is a discourse constantly in flux. One considerable challenge in undertaking a monographic study of this artist is that, despite Basquiat's death in 1988, his oeuvre continues to expand. As I write this introduction, the news of the discovery of a trove of some sixty of the artist's early drawings, documentary footage, and even an unpublished screenplay has just emerged. Without a doubt these revelations will provide even more evidence for future scholarship on the artist and will allow an even deeper understanding of some of the themes—especially the role of writing—that this study addresses. Rather than position this book as absolute, I hope my study of Basquiat will help future scholars as they continue to open this work to interpretation.

"THE BLACK PICASSO"

Jean-Michel Basquiat and Questions of Race

In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself.

FRANTZ FANON, *Black Skin, White Masks*

IN HIS 1983 PAINTING *Mona Lisa*, Jean-Michel Basquiat adapted one of the best-known paintings in the history of art (plate 4).¹ As in Leonardo da Vinci's version (1503–6), the female figure at the center of Basquiat's composition appears seated, arms folded across her lap. Basquiat covered what was, in Leonardo's version, a lush landscape in the background with a thin layer of yellow paint that reveals a black ground beneath. He transformed the river above the right shoulder of Leonardo's sitter, as well as the winding path to the left side of the landscape, into thin curving outlines of white paint. Basquiat's composition includes several references to, and symbols of, currency that surround the central figure. Large *Is* flank the sitter's head on each side, outlined in circles; in the center of the composition the phrase "FEDERAL RESERVE NOTE" floats above her head; below that phrase appears a copyrighted notice: "THIS NOTE IS LEGAL TENDER FOR ALL DEBTS PUBLIC + PRIVATE." With these marks and phrases, Basquiat acknowledges his "indebtedness" to the European painter and draftsman. Alongside works like *Leonardo da Vinci's Greatest Hits* of 1982 (plate 5) and *Madonna* of 1985 (plate 6), *Mona Lisa* is part of Basquiat's larger effort to acknowledge the influence of Leonardo and, possibly, to place his own work in relation to an art historical genealogy.² By transforming his canvas into a form of currency ("THIS NOTE IS LEGAL TENDER FOR ALL DEBTS PUBLIC + PRIVATE"), the artist "paid off" his debt.

The work of Jean-Michel Basquiat has frequently been compared formally to that of other European and American painters. Critics often referred to him as "the black Picasso" and saw him as part of the neo-expressionist trend that took over New York after a decade of conceptualism.³ Artists Julian Schnabel, Robert Longo, David Salle,

Kenny Scharf, and many others electrified the New York art world with their works' grand scale, expressive gestures, and appropriated images. By 1980 there was a marked shift among artists, dealers, and critics—away from the intellectualism of the 1970s to mainstream appeal. In her 1983 article for *ARTnews*, Lisbet Nilson cited an assessment of the new generation by gallerist Mary Boone. According to Boone, while artists working in the 1970s generally moved toward "editing the audience—that is, *not* appealing to the general public[—] . . . the new art has a much broader appeal. It has images in it, it's colorful—and you can see something in it without a doctoral degree."⁴

Art press during the 1980s was concerned mostly with the market, and artists were forced to contend with its pressures. In fact, the boundary between art and business was no longer clear. Jeffrey Deitch, then vice president of Citibank and responsible for the bank's department that advised clients about art purchases, had left his gallery job in the mid-1970s to pursue an MBA at Harvard. Art became big business, and the number of commercial galleries exploded—from 73 in 1970 to nearly 450 less than fifteen years later.⁵ The prices of works by living artists increased, too, by hundreds of percentage points over a very short period of time. Many considered the sale of Jasper Johns's *Three Flags* (1958) for \$1 million in 1980 as the turning point; just three years later Julian Schnabel sold his 1979 plate-painting *Notre Dame* at an auction at Sotheby's for \$93,500.⁶ Annual earnings for many artists ran into the six figures.⁷

Courted by art dealers and collectors for most of his career, Jean-Michel Basquiat was part of this milieu, consistently grouped with the neo-expressionists because of his market success.⁸ In 1984 a Basquiat painting that had originally sold for \$4,000 went for \$20,900 at a Christie's auction.⁹ The next year the artist appeared on the cover of the *New York Times Magazine*; the tagline read, "New Art, New Money."¹⁰ McGuigan's article, like most of the contemporary press, dramatized the sudden market success of Basquiat, claiming, "Five years ago, he didn't have a place to live. He slept on the couch of one friend after another. He lacked money to buy art supplies. Now, at 24, he is making paintings that sell for \$10,000 to \$25,000. They are reproduced in art magazines and also as part of fashion layouts, or in photographs of chic private homes in House & Garden."¹¹ Basquiat's advantageous market position, noted by McGuigan, was due in part to his relationships with two high-powered art dealers who helped to solidify his place in the ranks of the neo-expressionists. New York's Mary Boone came to represent him, in cooperation with Swiss dealer Bruno Bischofberger, in March of 1984. At the time, Boone also represented Eric Fischl, David Salle, and Julian Schnabel; Bischofberger represented the European neo-expressionists Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, and Gerard Richter.¹² These early associations with the American and European avant-garde, not to mention his collaborations with Warhol

and Clemente, led to discussions of Basquiat's work in the context of a predominantly white art history. References to Pablo Picasso, Cy Twombly, Jean Dubuffet, and Robert Rauschenberg in both Basquiat's work and the criticism surrounding it remain particularly abundant.

In his catalog essay for the artist's retrospective exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, curator Richard Marshall compared Basquiat's visual vocabulary to that of Jean Dubuffet and art brut, and his predilection for expressive gestures to those of Jackson Pollock and Cy Twombly.¹³ He wrote, "Picasso's work gave Basquiat the authority and the precedent to pursue his own brash and aggressive self portraits"; and "from Cy Twombly, Basquiat also took license and instruction on how to draw, scribble, write, collage, and paint simultaneously."¹⁴ In the illustrations that accompany the essay, Marshall juxtaposed Jackson Pollock's *She Wolf* (1943) with Basquiat's *Part Wolf* (1982), and Picasso's *Homme Assis* (1971) with Basquiat's *Pater* (1982). In his 2005 catalog essay for the Basquiat retrospective at the Brooklyn Museum, curator Marc Mayer, too, noted Basquiat's connections to the European American paradigm; at one point he refers directly to the artist's "art brut sensibility," and he later compares Basquiat's work to that of the surrealists.¹⁵ Fred Hoffman's essay in the same catalog similarly argues for a reading of Basquiat in abstract expressionist and surrealist terms.¹⁶ The catalog that accompanied a blockbuster 2010–11 exhibition of his work at the Fondation Beyeler in Basel, Switzerland, which later traveled to the Musée d'Art Modern de la Ville de Paris, similarly placed Basquiat in the context of modernists like John Cage, Cy Twombly, Robert Rauschenberg, and Andy Warhol.¹⁷ Since his death, several exhibitions have been organized to demonstrate the correspondences between Basquiat and the white avant-garde.¹⁸ His work has been repeatedly juxtaposed in museums and galleries with that of Julian Schnabel, Jean Dubuffet, Joan Miró, and Cy Twombly, to name a few.

These formalist comparisons make clear Basquiat's understanding of modern European American painting, but I would like to push this even further. Basquiat appropriated ideas from a wide range of sources—from art history to contemporary package labels—and in exploiting these elements he shaped an innovative language of painting that corresponded to his own contemporary experience. It is not my intention to deny connections between Basquiat and other European or American artists. The artist himself cited Franz Kline, Robert Rauschenberg, and Cy Twombly as inspirational forces.¹⁹ He collaborated willingly with both Francesco Clemente and Andy Warhol in the latter half of his short career. Despite Basquiat's clear investment in European American models, however, these juxtapositions and comparisons tell only part of the story. As curator Marc Mayer has noted, Basquiat's engagement with European and American modernism was in part also a challenge to those mod-

els. "Many of these works," Mayer writes, "maintain a sub-textual argument with his predecessors, full of corrections, challenges, homages, and some spectacular showing off."²⁰

One could read Basquiat's engagement with the canon as part of a larger tradition of African American artists, going all the way back to Henry Ossawa Tanner. In his introduction to the catalog for the groundbreaking exhibition *Two Centuries of Black American Art* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Rexford Stead, then the deputy director of the museum, explained, "Staying close to the mainstream of American art was a way for black artists to find acceptance and commissions. Perhaps this conformity (or better, sublimation) was in itself another kind of 'black experience.'"²¹ Nevertheless, the search for the artist's Eurocentric origins has in many cases precluded a discussion of his place within an African American art tradition.²² While it is impossible to deny the stylistic similarities between Basquiat and his European predecessors, his work never quite converges with the European canon of art history. I would like to build on the foundation provided by scholars like Marshall and Mayer and interrogate this genealogy. As bell hooks wrote in her review of the 1992 Whitney retrospective, "Even when Basquiat can be placed stylistically in the exclusive, white male art club that denies entry to most black artists, his subject matter—his content—always separates him once again, and defamiliarizes him."²³ There are also racist implications in reading Basquiat solely in terms of a Eurocentric canon. As the cultural critic Dick Hebdige wrote in his essay for the 1992 Whitney catalog, such analyses link Jean-Michel's credibility to whiteness. He had to be "skinned alive," Hebdige claims, "bleached of his blackness and delivered into the hands of his right foster parents."²⁴ It was as if Basquiat could be accepted into the canon of art history only under such conditions.

Yet there is also a paradox at play here, for Basquiat always remained explicitly a black artist, always an outsider.²⁵ Unlike many of his contemporaries, Basquiat never received a large solo show at a New York museum during his lifetime.²⁶ Complicating the matter even further is the fact that Basquiat rarely cited an African American artist, despite the rich history of black painters that preceded him. In published interviews Basquiat reaffirmed the critical silences around artists like Norman Lewis, Jacob Lawrence, and Romare Bearden, choosing instead to comment, as he did in one interview, on artists like "Twombly, Rauschenberg, Warhol, Johns."²⁷ He often cited Franz Kline as a favorite as well.²⁸ In 1987, interviewer Isabelle Graw informed Basquiat he was "the only black man to have become a very successful artist."²⁹ The artist failed to correct her mistake, despite the fact that in this same year the Brooklyn Museum hosted a large retrospective of the work of Jacob Lawrence, and Romare Bearden was awarded

the National Medal of Arts.³⁰ Two years earlier, in 1983, two of Basquiat's paintings had been shown alongside the works of several prominent African American artists in the exhibition "50 Years of Afro-American Art," organized by the Center Gallery of Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania.³¹ It is worth asking whether Basquiat lacked knowledge of or exposure to famous black artists. In a series of forty-five plates Basquiat produced between 1983 and 1984, in which the artist memorialized several cultural and historical figures, the citations, too, tell of Basquiat's view of the cultural scene at this time. On the surfaces of these plates, we see portraits of several European and American artists (from Cimabue to Grandma Moses), musicians (such as Fab 5 Freddy), North American explorers (La Salle and de Soto), athletes (Jersey Joe Walcott and Rocky Marciano), and even a Canadian moose. However, the only black artists in the series include Basquiat and graffiti artists LA2 and Fab 5 Freddy.³² Basquiat did paint a portrait of photographer James Vanderzee after the two worked together in a portrait session in 1982; but this seems to be the exception.³³

Even the artist's close friend Fred Braithwaite called out the names of white artists exclusively—Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, and Jasper Johns—when speaking in 1992 of the interest in painting that he shared with Basquiat.³⁴ In a more recent interview published in 2007, Braithwaite continued to cite only white painters, including "Cy Twombly . . . [Pablo] Picasso . . . [Jean] Dubuffet . . . Robert Rauschenberg . . . [Andy] Warhol . . . [Jackson] Pollock, [Willem] de Kooning, and [Mark] Rothko."³⁵ Alongside the assertions of Hebdige and hooks, one must consider the possibility that Basquiat's comparisons with a white, European avant-garde were based in hyperbole as much as in racial politics. To call Basquiat "the black Picasso" potentially held more critical weight than any comparison that could have been made with a black artist at that moment.

The market value of Basquiat's work climbed dramatically throughout the 1980s. As early as 1983, when the artist was just twenty-two years old, the average sale price of his work increased by 600 percent. His fame in the more commercial world of collectors and dealers amplified his status as a downtown art celebrity; he appeared on an "Art Break" segment of the new Music Television (MTV) cable network and walked the runway in a Comme des Garçons fashion show.³⁶ Yet, Basquiat was never fully accepted in the strange world of commercialism either. The media hype that surrounded his appearance on the cover of the *New York Times Magazine* in 1985 was not simply about the "marketing of an American artist," despite what the cover article's title proclaimed. It remained impossible to ignore that Jean-Michel Basquiat was the "first *black* artist to achieve anything close to blue-chip status in the contemporary art market."³⁷

In fact, the tropes and stereotypes of primitivism that many black artists in the twentieth century faced consistently characterized the criticism about Basquiat as well. The "rag to riches" mythology proved to be more sustainable than the truth—that he was from a middle-class family, the son of an accountant father, living in a nice Brooklyn neighborhood. His early and brief associations with graffiti were extrapolated into the false legend of an artist "who misspent his youth spraying graffiti on subway trains."³⁸ As had occurred in the early twentieth century with Palmer Hayden, writers tended to focus on the mythology of Basquiat as an untrained primitive. Like Hayden, who became known as "the Janitor Who Paints," Basquiat was forever considered the wild naïf.³⁹ When asked in 1983 if he enjoyed being called the black Picasso, Basquiat replied, "Not so much. It's flattering, but it's also demeaning."⁴⁰ The artist frequently lamented the lack of scholarly perspectives on his work. For example, in a 1985 interview by friends Tamra Davis and Becky Johnston, he professed, "Most of my reviews have been more reviews on my personality. More so than my work. . . . They're just racist."⁴¹

From the very beginning, the artist was sensitive to these stereotypes. In an early television appearance with Glenn O'Brien on the latter's public access show *TV Party*, Basquiat asked to be called "Mr. SAMO"—a not so subtle demand for respect.⁴² The artist later challenged an interviewer who referred to his work as primitive, snapping back with the incisive question "Like an ape?"⁴³ Basquiat and his friends frequently recounted stories of the artist's embarrassment at his inability to gain admittance to certain restaurants or get service at pricey clothing boutiques, even at the height of his commercial celebrity.⁴⁴ In a 1987 interview the artist spoke of his frustrated attempts to hail a cab: "I go on the street, wave my hand and they just drive past me. Normally I have to wait for three or four cabs. A few taxi companies tell their drivers not to pick up blacks."⁴⁵ Basquiat constructed his self-image in response to such contexts—appearing unkempt at high-profile art world events. His girlfriend Suzanne Mallouk recalled, "To a big opening at the Mary Boone gallery he wore very expensive Comme des Garçons clothing, but he wore this straw hat. It was sort of to give the impression of an ignorant, uneducated black man, from the farm almost. He did it on purpose. He would play with these black stereotypes and present himself in the form of threatening black stereotypes to fuck with people, to be subversive, to make people stare at their own racism in the face."⁴⁶ Basquiat's Sambo-like appearance was an intentional performance of racist stereotypes that exposed the incongruity of his experience as a famous black artist—praised within the walls of a gallery or auction house, excluded from the rest of society—while simultaneously revealing the participation of the (predominantly white) art establishment in it. He literally played the primitive. The irony

of Basquiat's position as a famous black artist—that is, as both insider and outsider, subject and object, simultaneously—during his lifetime has only multiplied in the more than twenty-five years since his death.

Henry Louis Gates Jr. has argued that in the field of literature, "race has been an invisible quality, a persistent yet implicit presence."⁴⁷ Although unrecognized as a measure in biological sciences, "race" remains at the forefront of social practice as a marker of difference and of overt power structures. According to Gates, Western culture has historically used writing and literature as a way "to confine and delimit a culture of color."⁴⁸ In the eighteenth century, for example, Africans in America were alienated by the general prohibition against their formal education and their subsequent inability to write, which was considered the ultimate signal of one's capacity for reason at that time; many whites consequently believed African Americans to be inferior or unintelligent. As poetry, books, and autobiographies from African Americans began to appear in the late eighteenth century, however, these voices began to transform notions of black identity.

African Americans have faced similar confinements and limitations in the visual arts; most representations of African Americans by white Americans have historically failed to capture the complex range of black identity. The tendency of white Americans to represent African Americans in drawings, paintings, and sculpture led to flawed representations, and many African American artists sought to represent themselves, attempting the transition from object to subject. This reconstruction became the center of the New Negro movement (later called the Harlem Renaissance) and continued in the many black-oriented arts movements that followed in the second half of the twentieth century: Spiral, AfriCOBRA (the African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists), and the black arts movement, in particular. Encouraged by the writings of intellectuals, many artists began to redefine the relationship between race and representation. In 1926, for example, poet Langston Hughes expressed the challenges confronting African American artists in his essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," written for *The Nation* magazine. "The Negro artist," Hughes wrote, "works against an undertow of sharp criticism and misunderstanding from his own group and unintentional bribes from the whites."⁴⁹ It was a precarious balance. These artists re-presented African American identity as part of their new race consciousness, and once again the art was inextricably bound to politics. According to artist Aaron Douglas, "The field of plastic art was in a unique position in that there was almost no background; we had no tradition."⁵⁰

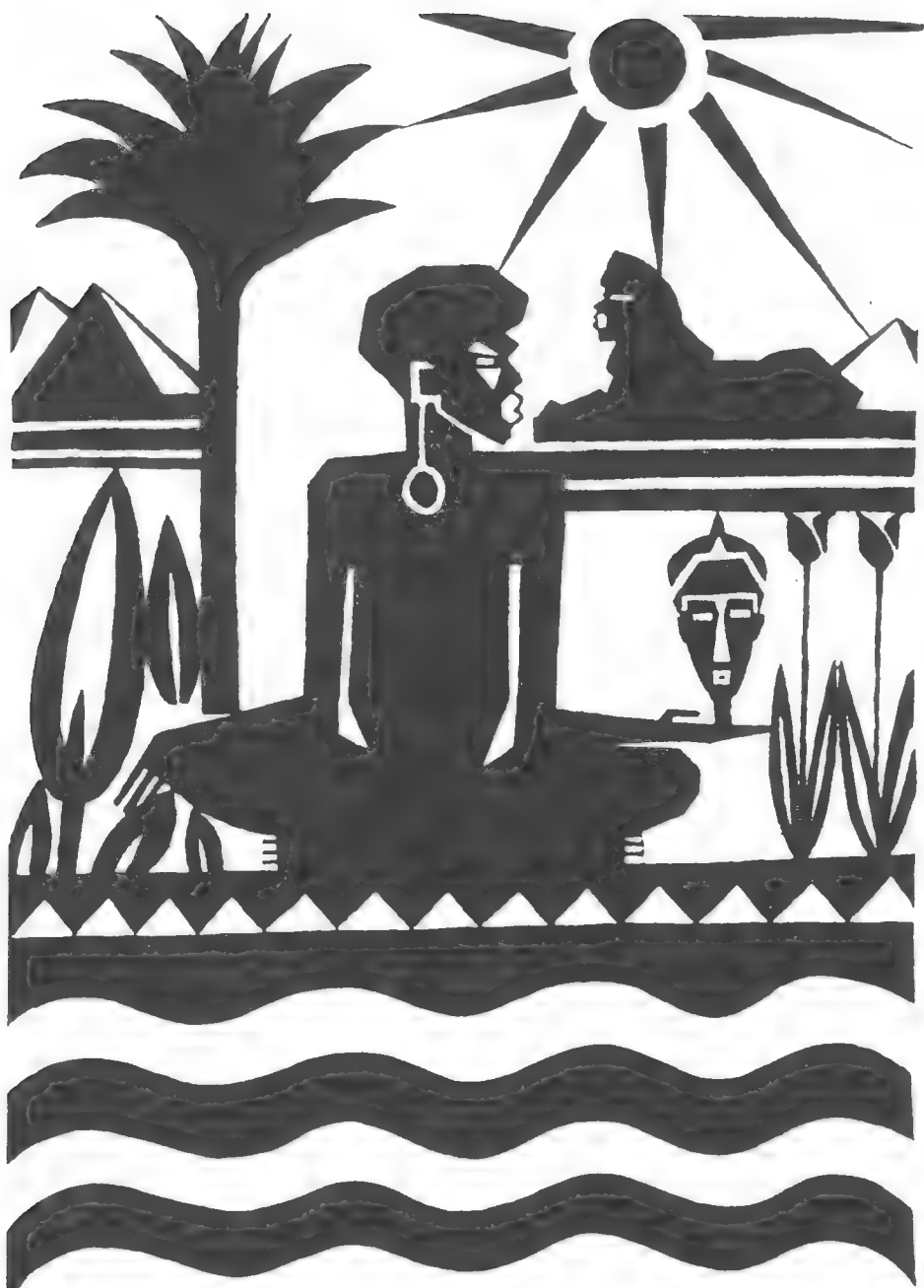
Douglas responded by creating his own artistic pattern, using the Egyptian style as inspiration for his figures. In the artist's *Poster of the Krigwa Players*, first published

in the NAACP's *Crisis* magazine in May 1926, Douglas engages the formal qualities of African art (figure 1). A large figure sitting in the center of the composition turns her head in profile, revealing a geometrically stylized eye, prominent mouth, large earring, and Afro hairstyle. In the left hand, this figure holds up an African-styled mask so that it faces the viewer. Douglas has also included several specifically Egyptian elements and references here: a sphinx appears above the figure's left shoulder, and two pyramids stand at the other side of the composition. "Du Bois," writes art historian Amy Helene Kirschke, "wanted Douglas to remind the *Crisis* audience of their African ancestry and to inspire in them an interest in their common heritage. Egypt was the common vocabulary to achieve this goal."⁵¹

Douglas's design also highlights several geometric patterns. A border of triangular shapes cuts horizontally across the composition approximately two-thirds of the way down from the top edge, and a stylized wave pattern covers the bottom third of the print. According to Kirschke, when considered alongside the stylized palm trees, leaves, and other plants in the composition, these geometric elements resemble both art deco patterns and African motifs. Douglas's 1926 poster illustrates the artist's investment in Africa, reaffirming New Negro ideology in visual terms while simultaneously engaging a European artistic tradition. He serves as an example of the first African American modernists, an example that surely must have interested Jean-Michel Basquiat.⁵²

As art historian Mary Schmidt Campbell has argued, new artistic styles evolved throughout the twentieth century as African American artists began to redefine their shifting identity: from object to subject, and from Negro to black.⁵³ However, as the new consciousness grew more popular, and artistic styles more diverse, the existence of a specifically black gesture or other form of expression came into question. The resulting diversity of African American art could not be easily classified in an art history divided by geographic and ethnic classifications. In his groundbreaking exhibition *Two Centuries of Black American Art* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1976, David C. Driskell explained the issue. "Most literature on black American artists," he wrote, "reflects sociological patterns that have been fostered by the tradition of classifying people and their culture according to race."⁵⁴ Driskell argues that, like all other artists, African American artists represent their view of the time and place in which they live. This necessarily means that every African American artist defines uniquely his or her visual responses to and interpretations of the contemporary world. So, we must ask these questions: How do artists represent blackness? How can we, as historians, interpret or theorize these representations?

Art historian and critic Joseph Jacobs has written eloquently on the unfortunate



A. DOUGLAS

Fig. 1 Aaron Douglas, *Poster of the Krigwa Players, Little Negro Theater of Harlem*, 1926. Illustration for the May 1926 issue of *Crisis Magazine* (the magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). Image reproduced with the permission of Crisis Publishing Co., Inc. Art © The Heirs of Aaron Douglas/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

tradition of excluding black artists from critical discourse, claiming, "The fact that a large number of black artists function within both a white and a black art world presents a problem for the white-dominated art establishment, for scholars and critics have difficulty putting the work in proper perspective. More often than not, one aspect of the work is emphasized at the expense of the other."⁵⁵ Like the African American artist Jacobs considers, Basquiat functioned within several worlds simultaneously, and these paintings reflect the diversity of his postmodern identity. Nevertheless, scholars have continued to separate Basquiat's work into binary categories of interpretation. On one side, there is his stylistic or formal relationship to European and American art, and on the other side any "black" qualities are considered in terms of subject matter alone.⁵⁶ The latter remains a common approach to interpreting the work of African American artists, where some promote the idea that race predetermines the subject or the nature of the work.⁵⁷ This dichotomy of form versus content also illuminates the tensions between the more traditional discipline of art history and the more discursive field of visual studies.⁵⁸

Scholarship since the mid-1990s has aimed to recuperate the criticism of African American art. Art historian Darby English, via his reading of contemporary artists such as David Hammons, Glen Ligon, and Kara Walker, who refuse "black" art as a distinct form of expression, has criticized the category itself as obsolete. He argues that blackness may be located not solely in the making of a work but also in our perception of it. English's argument repositions black representational space as a set of discourses and practices that are constructed historically, rather than as something intrinsic to the work itself. The work of Jacqueline Francis similarly focuses on the roles of identity in both the production and the reception of works of art. In her writing on Romare Bearden, for example, she proclaims that "identity and alterity are effects produced by the object, and yet, they are not the underpinnings of the object's meaning. Significant meaning is made by the artist *and* by audiences."⁵⁹ Both English and Francis provide a new mode of viewing the work of black artists, one that I apply retrospectively to the work of Basquiat. In looking more closely at the discourses around "blackness" that have been created both within and outside of the artist's work, we can come closer to understanding the place of this artist within a (now revised) black arts tradition: at the center of several cultural and artistic practices simultaneously.

Scholars and critics have frequently located Basquiat's "blackness" in the artist's interest in the social and political challenges presented by race. Throughout the 1960s—the time of Basquiat's childhood—New York City underwent a significant transition, from a city divided by religion (i.e., Catholics and Jews) to one divided by race.⁶⁰ Although typically framed as "the melting pot," open to new groups and with

unimpeded access to opportunities for all its residents, New York in reality was quite different. Many ethnic groups had certainly achieved economic prosperity and political power by the early 1960s, but the black and Puerto Rican populations were falling behind; it was ironic, considering their massive increases in population.⁶¹ In the fifteen years between 1950 and 1965, for example, the proportion of black and Puerto Rican citizens in Brooklyn alone rose from 9 percent to 29 percent. Yet the political power of these groups was not directly proportional to this demographic. For example, while blacks and Puerto Ricans constituted roughly 30 percent of Brooklyn's population, they made up only approximately 15 percent of the registered voters for the borough.⁶² The Brooklyn of Basquiat's youth was slowly moving from complacency to militancy as the black intelligentsia (including the Nation of Islam) began to, in the words of sociologists Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "exclusively, and without concern for the attitudes, power, and position held by white groups, fully shape their environment, their conditions of life, and their power."⁶³ This was an environment of increased activism, which Basquiat clearly connected to in his examination of black struggle within his paintings and drawings.

Many of the artist's works indeed focus on stereotypes of blackness and the place of black people in the world.⁶⁴ Black figures appear as prisoners (*Obnoxious Liberals*, 1982), servants (*Untitled [Maid from Olympia]*, 1982), cooks (*Eyes and Eggs*, 1983, and *Farina*, 1984) janitors (*Untitled*, 1981), and slaves (*The Nile*, 1983). *The Irony of Negro Policemen* (1981) also shows a black figure as policeman, a choice of profession that Basquiat seemed to have found ironic. Such depictions, however, were aimed at revisionism. When asked in 1985 of his future (but never realized) plans to direct movies, Basquiat replied that he intended to create movies "in which black people are portrayed as being people of the human race. And not aliens and not all negative and not all thieves and drug dealers and the whole bit."⁶⁵ The tragedy inherent in such stereotypes clearly interested the artist.

Not surprisingly, Basquiat also focused on the subject of famous black people. Painted while Basquiat was working with art dealer Larry Gagosian in Los Angeles, *Hollywood Africans* of 1983 (plate 7) demonstrates how the artist's use of black figures is much more provocative than may be at first assumed. On one level, this painting could be interpreted as a portrait of the artist and his friends Toxic and Rammellzee, who had traveled to see Basquiat in Los Angeles the previous year.⁶⁶ Basquiat painted a self-portrait on the right side of the canvas, which he labeled for the viewer "SELF-PORTRAIT AS A HEEL #3"; he also included the numbers "22 60/12," a reference to the date of his birth: December 22, 1960. To the left of the self-portrait Basquiat drew two other heads. Above the baseball cap of the leftmost figure, Basquiat included two ver-

sions of the word "TOXIC," in different sizes, in red. Above and directly below the center portrait appear the labels "ZEE" and "RMLZ," respectively. The related canvas *Hollywood Africans in Front of the Chinese Theater with Footprints of Movie Stars*, also from 1983 (plate 8), shows a similar grouping of three portraits; this time the faces of the artist and his friends appear much larger in relation to the canvas. The label "RMLZ" floats above the head of the central figure in this alternate canvas as well. The phrase "HOLLYWOOD AFRICANS," which Basquiat has written several times across both canvases, may jokingly refer to the temporary displacement of the artist and his close friends on the West Coast.⁶⁷

Basquiat may have also had an interest in the irony of his title phrase: Hollywood was the epicenter of the film and entertainment industry, and its treatment and depictions of Africans and African Americans may have piqued the artist, given his political inclinations. In fact, the name of Idi Amin, the Ugandan dictator who came to power in the 1970s and became known as the "Butcher of Uganda," appears in the lower-left corner of 1983's *Hollywood Africans* (see plate 7).⁶⁸ Basquiat specifically included several references to the commercial aspects of Hollywood in this composition, including the phrase "MOVIE STAR FOOTPRINTS" written above a drawing of blue shoeprints in the upper-left corner, and the "SEVEN STARS" rating circled in blue directly below. This section of Basquiat's canvas also includes the word "POPCORN" and the outline of what appears to be an Oscar statue. Considered alongside the year 1940, which appears at the top of the canvas, the Oscar statue could refer to Hattie McDaniel, the first African American to receive an award from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. McDaniel received her Oscar for Best Actress in a Supporting Role for her performance as a mammy in the 1939 film *Gone with the Wind*. The word "GANGSTERISM" appears toward the lower-left corner of the canvas, introducing a connection to the tendency of the media to stereotype African American men as violent criminals.⁶⁹

Basquiat brings another layer to his critique with the question "WHAT IS BWANA?" written in the upper-left corner of *Hollywood Africans* and then crossed out. *Bwana* is a Swahili word used for formal address, similar to *Sir*, used by English speakers. This particular term, however, has been misappropriated by Western literature and cinema, where subordinate African characters frequently address Caucasian men as "Bwana." A literary example can be found in the twenty-first chapter of Edgar Rice Burroughs's *The Son of Tarzan*, from 1915:

"Do you know where your master has gone?" he asked the black.

"Yes, Bwana," replied the boy.⁷⁰

Burroughs's serial stories of Tarzan were adapted for the cinema as early as 1918, the year the silent film *Tarzan of the Apes* was released. Between 1918 and 1981 almost sixty films with the Tarzan character, based on Burroughs's novels, appeared in theaters throughout North America. Basquiat's inclusion of the question "WHAT IS BWANA?" alludes to the Tarzan character and to the stereotypical image of the black savage perpetuated by these books and films. Consider also the films *Bwana Devil* (released in 1953), the true story of man-eating lions and their British victims in Kenya, and *Call Me Bwana* (released in 1963)—both of which reinforced the myth of a dark, primitive, and savage African continent. In all these examples, *Bwana* stands as a version of *Master*, or *Massa*, common in African American slave culture. Given the references to film and television that appear throughout the composition, combined with the evidence of the artist's political interest in the treatment of African Americans, *Hollywood Africans* becomes a sophisticated critique of black representation in mainstream entertainment and celebrity culture.⁷¹

In works such as *Famous Negro Athletes* of 1981, the artist calls attention to a common route to black celebrity: athletic prowess.⁷² As explained by Richard Marshall, the theme of black athletes is part of a larger fascination with black historical events. "These works," Marshall writes, "reveal the growing interest in Basquiat's Black and Hispanic identity, and his strong identification with historical and contemporary black figures and events." Marshall includes black athletes—Hank Aaron, Jesse Owens, and Jersey Joe Walcott—in the same line as other black historical figures, writing that "a random selection of names that appear in his [Basquiat's] paintings reveal the scope of his interest in and knowledge of black history: MALCOLM X, LANGSTON HUGHES, MARCUS GARVEY, HANK AARON, JESSE OWENS, JERSEY JOE WALCOTT, MILES DAVIS, DIZZY GILLESPIE, CHARLIE PARKER, MAX ROACH, LOUIS ARMSTRONG, BILLIE HOLIDAY, NAT 'KING' COLE."⁷³ Here, Marshall connects the theme of athletes to the artist's fascination with black history. The artist's father substantiates this claim, writing that Basquiat's repeated use of "AARON" in these paintings and drawings "refer[s] to Hank Aaron, the baseball player—for the spelling, and because there are so many baseball references in his work. At the time," he continues, "[Hank Aaron] was a major, major player and he was on the verge of breaking the Babe Ruth record. He was a very fascinating player, and Jean-Michel totally understood that."⁷⁴

Basquiat's interest in black athleticism was perhaps most apparent in the multiple references to boxers and the sport of boxing throughout his oeuvre.⁷⁵ Figures of black boxers appear in several of Basquiat's works. The large painting *Per Capita* from 1981 and the smaller drawing titled *Boxer's Rebellion*, from the so-called "Daros Suite" (1982–83), both include images of boxers. The canvases *Jack Johnson*, *Cassius*, *Jersey Joe*,

and *Untitled (Sugar Ray Robinson)*—all from 1982–83—take up this subject as well. In *Jersey Joe*, Basquiat wrote the boxer's name at the top of the canvas in white oil crayon directly above a roughly drawn illustration of a central figure taking a powerful left hook from the opposing figure (plate 9).⁷⁶ The solid red ground of the canvas calls to mind the explicit violence of the sport, which frequently compromised both the physical and mental health of its athletes. The uncut edges of the canvas that hang loosely past the edge of the composition amplify the tautness of the canvas stretched on its support; this emphasis on rigidity underscores the contractions of musculature required to sustain the physical force of a heavyweight fighter's punch. Basquiat also frequently referred to other artists in the contemporary scene as opponents, conceptualizing the art world hierarchies as a battle for heavyweight titles. According to his friend Michael Holman, Basquiat once expressed a wish to challenge neo-expressionist star Julian Schnabel. "He said," recalled Holman in an interview, "I'm going to box with that guy one day."⁷⁷

Black boxers have figured as subjects for many African American artists, who investigate ideas about the masculinity, sexuality, and commodification of men of color. As early as 1942, Richmond Barthé, for example, challenged the stereotype of the black athlete with his small bronze sculpture *The Boxer* (figure 2). In Barthé's image, the boxer is not the typically all-powerful middleweight or heavyweight glistening with sweat, fists held stiffly, as if awaiting his opponent. This figure is slight (a featherweight, perhaps). He wears only boxing gloves and boots, leaving him exposed and vulnerable to our gaze. *The Boxer* appears lost in thought; his stride and partially raised right fist indicate a reenactment of the fight. Barthé's depiction does not fit the stereotype of the black boxer—all brawn and no brains, concerned only with celebrity and the glories of victory. Instead, Barthé shows his athlete in a moment of quiet reflection, vulnerable and introspective.

In the 1990s, African American artists continued to take up boxing as a subject, with a similarly deconstructive aim. Glenn Ligon, for example, concentrated on the sport for his collaborative work with Byron Kim, *Rumble Young Man Rumble (Version #2)* of 1993, where the artists covered the white canvas exterior of a hanging bag with stenciled texts from boxing legend Muhammad Ali (formerly Cassius Clay). In one version of the work, currently in the collection of the Walker Art Center, the quoted text reveals Ali's interpretation of his own public image—frequently interpreted as inappropriately

Fig. 2 (opposite) Richmond Barthé, *The Boxer*, 1942. Bronze, 18¾ x 12½ x 6⅞ inches (47.6 x 30.9 x 17.6 cm). Simeon B. Williams Fund, 1948.79. The Art Institute of Chicago.



gloating—in the context of a dominant white culture. He explicitly cites his relationship to Islam as a positive, even uplifting one: “So now that we have a man in America today, Elijah Muhammad, who teaches us that we are the greatest, and it is a fact they cannot prove that we are not the greatest . . . so I don’t see why the need for commotion and the trouble over people are saying that they’re the greatest, what’s wrong with that? So if you the greatest, you just the greatest until proven wrong.”⁷⁸

In a later series from 1995 titled *Skin Tight*, Ligon altered seven regulation-weight punching bags, adding slogans, invented trademarks, and quotations from black musicians and athletes via a screen-printing technique.⁷⁹ One of these bags bears the word “Thuglife,” an allusion to the infamous tattoo worn by 1990s rapper Tupac Shakur, adapted into the form of the Everlast logo. In connecting the slain musician to the trademark of one of the world’s most recognizable athletic brands, Ligon makes a direct link between the commercial world and the commodification of black bodies through violence.⁸⁰ More recently, the photographer Lyle Ashton Harris produced a series of portraits for his *Memoirs of Hadrian* series (2002), in which he appears as a battered boxer. Bare-chested and wearing a jockstrap, he flexes his arms, captured midswing, alongside his torso. His head is upturned in exhaustion, and his contracted body covered in a glistening sweat. Basquiat’s interest in boxing in part connects him to this larger history of African American art.

Basquiat’s representations of African American boxers are complicated by the artist’s own appearance, while outfitted in Everlast boxing shorts and gloves, alongside Andy Warhol in a series of publicity shots for the exhibition of their collaborative works at Tony Shafrazi’s gallery in 1985. When reviewing the portrait series of Lyle Ashton Harris, *New York Times* critic Holland Cotter made an unfavorable comparison between Harris’s boxer and Basquiat in his appearance as a boxer in these publicity photographs with Andy Warhol. “Basquiat,” Cotter writes, “is a clown and little more.”⁸¹

The image to which Cotter refers is one of a series commissioned for the announcement of the 1985 exhibition of Basquiat’s collaborative paintings with Warhol (figure 3). The final publicity image was a composite of two individual portraits. The positioning of the artists side-by-side on the poster invites comparison: one black, one white, one young, one old. On the left of the composition Warhol appears in a white T-shirt. His right glove partially obscures his face as if he is protecting his cheek and lower-right jaw, while his left gloved hand appears perpendicular to the picture plane—taking a jab at his viewer. To Warhol’s left, Basquiat stands outfitted in a pair of Everlast boxing

Fig. 3 (opposite) Poster for the exhibition *Warhol and Basquiat: Paintings*, Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York City, September 14–October 19, 1985. Photograph © Michael Halsband/Licensed by Landov Media.

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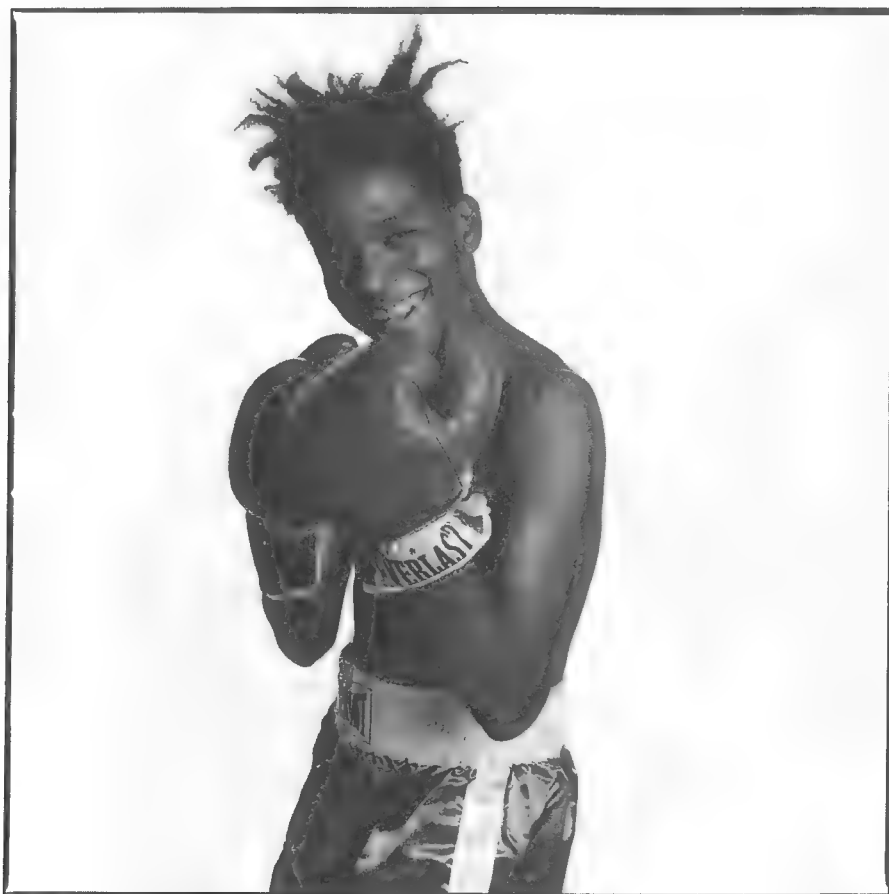


Fig. 4 Jean-Michel Basquiat, New York City, February 1985. Photograph © Michael Halsband/Licensed by Landov Media.

shorts and nothing else. Unlike Warhol, Basquiat takes a more defensive (if not ineffective) position; his elbows appear pressed into his abdomen, supporting the weight of the gloves on his hands as he bends slightly toward the camera's lens. Although his gloves are raised in a mock defensive position, Basquiat leaves his entire face exposed; he is merely playing the athlete. A second frame from this photo shoot likewise reveals a playful Basquiat (figure 4). Here the artist appears without Warhol. His wide, jovial smile contradicts the severity of his body's defensive posture.

In another frame from this session (the focus of Cotter's commentary), Basquiat, at the center, succumbs to Warhol's left uppercut (figure 5). According to the photographer, Michael Halsband, this scene was Basquiat's idea; he constructed the image



Fig. 5 Jean-Michel Basquiat and Andy Warhol, New York City, February 1985. Photograph © Michael Halsband/Licensed by Landov Media.

to appear as if Warhol punched him.⁸² While the manipulation of such an image has racial overtones, the larger point remains Basquiat's connection to and fascination both with the heroism of black athletes and with their abuse. Similar to his interest in janitors, prisoners, and slaves, Basquiat's focus on black boxers was part of a project to recuperate the history of black male athletes in popular culture. The artist's personal interest in the inevitable tragedy of the black athlete may have been due in part to his desire to avoid the same trappings and abuses of celebrity.⁸³ There is a clear correspondence between the commodification of black bodies via entertainment and sports, and that experienced by the artist in the overhyped contemporary art market of 1980s New York.

The issues surrounding commodification are a recurrent theme in Basquiat's oeuvre. His transformation of a painting such as *Mona Lisa* (1983; see plate 4) into a form of currency collapses the distance between cultural and economic capital. Basquiat's subsequent revision of Leonardo's iconic figure as a portrait of the gallerist Mary Boone in his work *Boone* from 1985 reinforces this point. Still, we cannot overlook Basquiat's own complicity in these systems of commerce and commodification. In addition to including citations of New York gallerist Mary Boone in his works based on the *Mona Lisa*, he consistently cited symbols of currency. Dollar signs, coins, references to Japanese yen, and Federal Reserve notes appear scattered across the artist's oeuvre. As I argue throughout this book, Basquiat occupies an ambivalent, if not conflicted, position. He frequently identifies with the masters—of painting, music, and literature—but simultaneously parodies both the concept of mastery and his own apotheosis. As much as Basquiat seems to critique the commodification of black figures (including himself), he also clearly blurs the boundary between art and financial markets. His appearance on the cover of the *New York Times Magazine* in 1985 clad in an Armani suit made it clear: this was about new art *and* new money.

In *Untitled (Arm and Hammer II)*—a collaboration with Andy Warhol from 1985—Basquiat comments on the relationship between the commercial and artistic worlds explicitly. Basquiat masked the most identifiable portions of the silk-screened Arm & Hammer logo on the left side of the composition (plate 10), painting out the interior circle of the logo that contains the line drawing of the disembodied muscular bicep and forearm clutching a hammer and redacting the identifying text ("ARM & HAMMER") above and below with large black bars. In the center of this circle, Basquiat has painted the head and bust of a dark-skinned figure on the white ground. A saxophone emerges from this figure's clenched teeth and extends past the boundary of the former logo. The year 1955 appears below the drawn figure, identifying him as saxophonist Charlie Parker; 1955 was the year of the musician's tragic death. Yet Basquiat's inclusion of the word "LIBERTY" above Parker's head, as well as the phrases "COMMEMERITVE" [*sic*] and "ONE CENT" in the black bars above and below the white interior circle, transforms the portrait into a commemorative coin. Although the United States Mint never released such a coin in its commemorative coin program, Basquiat himself designates Parker as worthy of memorializing in this way. More important, in this composition Basquiat seems caught between marking Parker as an important historical figure—that is, one worthy of commemoration—and critiquing the musician's reduction to just another commercial product.

Basquiat's interest in commemorative coins and currency extended beyond memorializing Parker to doing the same for other important black figures. Several other

works contain images of coins; most are dated either 1955 (the year of Parker's fictional commemorative issue) or 1951 (the year that half-dollars commemorating the historical black figures George Washington Carver and Booker T. Washington were issued). Drawings of such coins appear, for example, in *In Italian* (1983), *Liberty* (1982–83), and *Skin Head Wig* (1982–83) in a seeming critique of the commodification of blackness and its cultural products. This is a critique carried over into works like *Obnoxious Liberals* from 1982 (plate 11), where between the depiction of an enslaved black man on the left of the composition and a fanged figure in a cowboy hat on the right stands a figure in black, arms raised to the sky, whose body is clearly marked "NOT FOR SALE."⁸⁴ The surfaces of Basquiat's paintings and drawings—covered with citations to various forms of industrial trade (tar, oil, salt, and so on)—reveal an overall concern with commerce, as well as of commerce's tendency to consolidate power for the few at the expense of the many. In a number of these paintings and drawings, the discourses of commodification and blackness intersect.⁸⁵

In Basquiat's references to the peoples and histories of Africa, we also find evidence of the artist's political, aesthetic, and economic interest in blackness beyond the geopolitical borders of the United States.⁸⁶ In the painting *Eye-Africa* of 1984, Basquiat has placed—from left to right—representations of an eye, a polyhedron, a pickax, and the continent of Africa, each drawn in with a thin white outline on the dark black ground (plate 12). As the viewer's gaze moves across the surface of the canvas, from left to right, the pictorial clues begin to assemble into a clear message about the exploitation of the African continent. Progressing horizontally across the composition, we see that the polyhedron shape refers to a diamond, the pickax to a miner's tool. The scale of these objects is another disconcerting element; the diamond looms almost as large as the continent itself, while the overwhelming size of the pickax, as it stretches vertically from the top to the bottom of the five-foot canvas, makes it all the more menacing. Basquiat has divided the continent itself into separate sections with color: a bluish-green covers approximately three-quarters of the landmass, while the southern tip, marked with an "S," remains uncovered, with the black background showing through. As if to underscore his point, the artist focused on South Africa, the region of the continent most affected by the diamond and gold trades. As described, rather mildly, by historian John Reader, "The modern era of African history was inaugurated by the discovery of diamonds at Kimberley and gold on the Witwatersrand. Unimagined wealth awakened imperial dreams, while the mines intensified labour demands and polarized racist attitudes."⁸⁷

The accidental 1867 discovery of diamonds at Kimberley, located approximately a thousand kilometers northeast of Cape Town, and the forced labor of their mining,

eventually led to the segregation of South Africa.⁸⁸ In 1984, the year Basquiat painted *Eye-Africa*, the violence associated with apartheid in South Africa had reached an unprecedented level and was receiving global attention. In the fall of that year, the townships of Sharpeville and Sebokeng experienced a wave of violence. In September alone, twenty-six killings were reported in Sharpeville, including the murder of the deputy mayor, two men burned in a car, the strangling of four people, and the fires set in many buildings and cars. From September 1984 to February 1985, the government reported the following:

- 5 black councillors killed
- 4 black policemen killed
- 109 black councillors attacked
- 56 black police officers injured
- 143 black school buildings destroyed
- 6 black churches destroyed
- 516 private vehicles belonging to blacks badly burned or damaged
- 1,080 buses in service for blacks badly burned or damaged
- 146 black councillors "forced to resign"⁸⁹

Eye-Africa tells a story of violence and exploitation in pictures alone.

Basquiat's particular interest in South Africa may also be attributable to its example of a dominant minority culture. In the works *Natives Carrying Some Guns, Bibles, Amorites on Safari* (1982) and *South African Nazism* (1985), both of which highlight South Africa as their subject, Basquiat emphasizes the traumatic trajectory from the discovery of diamonds to the turbulence of 1980s anti-apartheid movements. In *Natives Carrying Some Guns, Bibles, Amorites on Safari* (plate 13) the artist has included two protagonists—one black and one white. The figure on the left, rendered in black with a gray-and-white head, holds a large sign aloft on which is written "ROYAL SALT INC ©" in white. Basquiat has drawn an arrow at this figure's eye level that points directly to an outlined (presumably white) figure wearing a safari-style hat and bandolier; a rifle appears to the right of this figure, held by an unseen hand. In comparison to the detailed face of the figure on the left, with eyes outlined and nose highlighted in white paint, the face of this right-hand figure remains mostly blank and uncharacteristic; his eyes seem vacant in comparison to the alarm conveyed by those of the other figure. By including several words and phrases, Basquiat gives another sense of the imbalance of the relationship between these two figures.

At the top of the canvas the artist has written, "COLONIZATION: PART TWO IN A

SERIES, VOL. VI," hinting at the continuing exploitation of native, minoritarian populations via the "settling" and "claiming" of territories by Euro-American governments.⁹⁰ Basquiat has noted some of the riches that attracted colonizers to these particular areas. He wrote "TUSKS" and "SKINS" repeatedly down the right half of the canvas. The transformation of the *s*'s in these words into dollar signs emphasizes the financial motivation behind these exploits. The reference to "SALT"—emblazoned in stark white on a large black ground—stands out among the others, as does the artist's comment at the bottom of the canvas: "I WON'T EVEN MENTION GOLD (ORO)." A straight line connecting the word "PROVISIONS" to "POACHERS" emphasizes the subtle differences between surviving and thriving off the land. Although the artist is concerned with South Africa here, the subject of this painting may be more expansive. For one, the inclusion of the names "CORTEZ" and "LANDAU"—colonizers of Mayan populations in the sixteenth century—brings the theme of colonization outside the borders of the African continent. The reference to salt, considered alongside the reference to gold at the bottom of the canvas, also brings up internal trade agreements within West Africa.⁹¹

There are many examples where obscure single words or phrases also point to the artist's interest in the continent and its history, particularly Egypt. In the seventh and the eighth panels of *The Dutch Settlers* (1982), the word "NUBIA" refers to a geographical area just south of ancient Egypt.⁹² Basquiat scattered other references to Egyptian history and kingdoms across several canvases. For example, on the canvas *Future Science Versus the Man* (1982) the artist wrote "EGYPT" in the center and in the upper left of the composition. Basquiat included "RAMESES II" at the top of *Kings of Egypt (Links)* from 1982; "AOPKHES" appears written on the surfaces of *K* (1982), *Versus Medici* (1982), and *Bap* (1983). Basquiat placed both the name of a ruler, "AMENOPHIS IV," and a period of Egyptian history (i.e., "MIDDLE KINGDOM") in *Mitchell Crew*. He partially obscured the word *ankle*, which appears in the lower register of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict* (1982), so that it instead reads as "ANK"—that is, one spelling of the Egyptian symbol that represents life.⁹³ *Melting Point of Ice* (1984) includes an image of an eye that Basquiat has labeled "EYE OF HORUS," its letters outlined in a black box to the lower right. The words "PROTECTION" and "HEALING" appear in a box directly below, reinforcing the artist's references to the Egyptian symbol of protection, royal power, and good health. The artist's particular interest in Egypt may have been sparked by the 1973 exhibition *Akhenaten and Nefertiti* at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. Basquiat was known to visit the museum frequently, and this particular exhibition was large, including 175 objects in its display. There was also the simultaneous release of a TV documentary, "Mystery of Nefertiti," on the Public Broadcasting Service affiliate station.⁹⁴

German art historian Susanne Reichling has been one of a few to claim that

Basquiat's interest in Africa moves beyond simple historicism and social critique. She has argued that Basquiat's references to Africa and African art are part of a larger expression of his identity as an African American: "In contrast to a primitivizing engagement with African art, which is only interested in its formal vocabulary and magical quality, in his works, Basquiat refers to the function of African art for African-American identity."⁹⁵ The function of African art in the formation of an African American identity has an art historical precedent in the work of the Harlem Renaissance artists and writers of the interwar period. Langston Hughes's "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1921) connects the landscape of Africa to that of America, drawing correspondences between the rivers of both continents.⁹⁶ Poet Countee Cullen wrote of the smells and sights of the African continent while simultaneously questioning his connections to it in his poem "Heritage" (1925). He asks in the opening line: "What is Africa to me."⁹⁷

Questions about a connection to Africa continued during the Black Power and black arts movements of the 1960s. As explained by Larry Neal in 1968, "The Black Arts and the Black Power concept both relate broadly to the Afro-American's desire for self-determination and nationhood. Both concepts are nationalistic. One is concerned with the relationship between art and politics; the other with the art of politics."⁹⁸ Like Alain Locke and W. E. B. Du Bois before him, Neal encouraged the development of a "black aesthetic" in the arts, toward a political end. Neal wanted to move beyond the "split vision" of Du Boisian double consciousness, "to go forth to merge these 'warring ideals' into One Committed Soul integrated with itself and taking its own place in the world."⁹⁹ Neal located this aesthetic in black music, and specifically in the blues. Visual artists of this period, a generation before Basquiat, began to incorporate more overtly social and political subject matter in their work in what was the most significant African American art movement since the Harlem Renaissance.

For many artists in the late 1960s this meant explicitly illustrating a connection with Africa. For example, the African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists, or AfriCOBRA, was a collective that used African prototypes as references for their designs in an effort to inspire connection among Africans throughout the diaspora.¹⁰⁰ The study of African civilizations, starting with Egypt, also provided the foundation for the Afrocentric movements of the 1980s promoted by scholars like Molefi Kete Asante. In his book *Afrocentricity*, Asante argues that "the core of our collective being is African, that is, our awareness of separateness from the Anglo-American experience is a function of our historical memory."¹⁰¹ Throughout the twentieth century, many black artists, writers, and intellectuals grappled with their relationship to the continent.

For Basquiat, the African and the African American remain inseparable and in constant negotiation. For example, in *The Nile* (also known as *El Gran Espectaculo*

and *History of Black People*) of 1983, the artist deliberately places the history of Africa and African America in parallel (plate 14).¹⁰² On the left panel of *The Nile* the artist painted two vertically aligned heads below the word “NUBA,” possibly a misspelling of the “NUBIA,” which appears in other canvases, such as *The Dutch Settlers*, or a reference to the people who inhabit the Nuba Mountains in the south-central region of Sudan in Africa. To the right of the lower head, Basquiat wrote the word “SALT,” outlined it with a box, and then crossed out the first letter—a reference to the trade of salt throughout the continent. A large boat, with oars descending below it, stretches across the middle sections of the left and center panels; in the center of the structure appears the name of the Egyptian ruler “AMENOPHIS”—with several letters crossed out. The references to Egypt also include the phrase “DOG GUARDING THE PHARAOH” in the upper-right corner and “THEBES,” the capital of the New Kingdom of Egypt, in the lower-left corner of the right panel. It is no surprise that many of the artist’s works center on Africa. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall has argued, “Africa, the signified which could not be represented directly in slavery, remained and remains the unspoken unspeakable ‘presence.’”¹⁰³ Basquiat’s focus on the African continent also extends beyond those continental boundaries to issues of the African diaspora—that is, the relationship between Africa and African America.

Richard Marshall has written of the references Basquiat has made, throughout *The Nile*, to the 1970 book *African Rock Art* by Burchard Brentjes, part of the artist’s collection.¹⁰⁴ The bright yellow curved shape at the bottom of the central panel, labeled several times both above and below with the word “SICKLE,” has been appropriated from an illustration in *African Rock Art* with the caption: “Sickle-shaped boat of the Nile valley dwellers.”¹⁰⁵ The large black boat that appears across the center of the composition is based on an image labeled in Brentjes’s book as “Seagoing ship of the ‘Eastern Invaders’” from the Upper Egypt region.¹⁰⁶ But Basquiat transforms the original African image and pushes it beyond its original context to refer to the transit of slaves from Africa to the Americas. The left side of the large boat starts in the same panel as the “NUBA” people and stretches across the painting so that the right edge of the boat points toward a black figure, drawn on the right panel with the word “SLAVE” written several times across the torso and crossed out. Basquiat makes clear the relationship between the people of Africa and those transported to the Americas during the Atlantic slave trade.

He further implies the connection of Africa to the Americas via the sickle-shaped boat in the central panel of *The Nile*. The sickle is also a type of agricultural implement first found in Egypt but used later throughout the Americas for harvesting grain.¹⁰⁷ Basquiat plays with the idea of geographical displacement with the word “MEMPHIS”

as well. If we read “MEMPHIS” in the context of the word “THEBES” right below it, the references again point to Egyptian history; Memphis was the ancient capital of Lower Egypt that declined with the rise of Thebes in the eighteenth dynasty.¹⁰⁸ But below “THEBES,” the artist has also written “TENNESSEE”; through a shared name, Basquiat connects ancient Egypt to the United States. This connection is underscored by an illustration caption that appeared in the Brooklyn Museum’s catalog for the 1973 exhibition *Akhenaten and Nefertiti*, which reads, in part: “Acquired by Henry Salt, perhaps in the Memphis Region, in 1826.”¹⁰⁹ A double entendre, the word “SALT” connects the problems of exploitation in both the industrial and the art world context, referring to the mining and export of salt and the collection of African art simultaneously. These examples center on the transfer of goods between Africa and the Americas, but perhaps more important they prompt the viewer to consider the power relationships that are re-inscribed through these trades.

Basquiat’s highlighting of the interaction and overlap between Africa and African America leads me to examine how these two cultural perspectives work together in Basquiat’s work. I do not mean to argue that Basquiat is not engaged with the works of Twombly, Pollock, Rauschenberg, or Warhol, because indeed he is. Rather, the influence of these artists is only one side of a more complex equation. Positioning Basquiat too firmly within a history of African American art has its flaws as well. We have no way of knowing whether the artist identified solely as African American, but it seems doubtful when considering his place within a distinctly Caribbean milieu. Basquiat points out the specifics of this heritage in an early, untitled drawing on paper (figure 6). In the second and third lines from the top of the page, the artist indicates the importance of this history, choosing to include not the names or birthdates of his mother and father, only their places of origin. He lists his mother this way: PUERTO RICAN (FIRST GENERATION), and his father this way: “PORT AU PRINCE, HAITI.” Lest some later reader misinterpret Port-au-Prince as a person’s name, the artist added “NAME OF THE TOWN” in the line immediately below.

Basquiat’s challenges to histories and hierarchies were never fully on one side of the oppositions black or white, Latin or Haitian, modern or postmodern. It is more useful to look at Basquiat in terms of his negotiation of European, American, African, and African American models simultaneously. Moreover, blackness may be located not solely in the making of a work but also in our perception of it. We must examine black representational space as a set of discourses and practices constructed historically, rather than as something intrinsic to the work itself.¹¹⁰ In this regard, models of diaspora—that is the negotiation of difference across the boundaries of race, history, and geography—prove useful.



Fig. 6 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Untitled*, 1983. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.

According to theories of the diaspora, Africa is not a site of origin as much as it is one of contestations. Although Paul Gilroy published his seminal text *The Black Atlantic* five years after the artist's death, its concepts are significant to understanding Basquiat's work. Gilroy argues, "All blacks in the West . . . stand between (at least) two great cultural assemblages, both of which have mutated through the course of the modern world that formed them and assumed new configurations."¹¹¹ Gilroy construes identity for contemporary black English as neither African nor European but

instead as somewhere between. The image of the ship navigating the waters of the Atlantic in the Middle Passage is his perfect metaphor. For Gilroy the ship is “a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion.”¹¹² This is the same ship that stretches across the panels of Basquiat’s *The Nile* (1983; see plate 14), emphasizing the discursive creation of black people, from “NUBA” to “SLAVE.” Gilroy’s metaphor, like Basquiat’s image, focuses our attention on the Atlantic—the space between continents, cultures, and nations—and on the transition as a site of movement and change rather than of origin and continuity.

Diaspora theory allows for a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of contemporary identity, one based not in the recovery of an original (read: African) identity but in the recognition of how identities are produced. As Hall has explained, this reflects the contemporary condition of colonized blacks in the West much more accurately. Such ideas are concerned with “not the rediscovery but the *production* of identity.”¹¹³ According to Hall, a common history exists among blacks—slavery, colonization, and so on—but this does not imply a common *origin*. Instead, “the original ‘Africa’ is no longer there. It too has been transformed.”¹¹⁴ Thus, Hall encourages a view of identity (in this case, Caribbean identity) that is not a straight line from point A (Africa) to point B (the Americas). He claims, “We might think of black Caribbean identities as ‘framed’ by two axes or vectors, simultaneously operative: the vector of similarity and continuity; and the vector of difference and rupture. Caribbean identities always have to be thought of in terms of the dialogic relationship between these two axes.”¹¹⁵ The point here is to recognize both the heterogeneity of Africa and its diasporas, and the complex negotiation that is a diaspora identity. Both are issues that figure centrally in Basquiat’s work.

In the years since Basquiat’s death, the study of diaspora has grown in both visual and cultural disciplines.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, we must heed the warning of American anthropologist Jacqueline Nassy Brown, who wrote in a 2009 essay that “the most abused term in the study of Black folks here and there is the very term that describes them: diaspora.” According to Brown, its critical specificity is undermined by the present fascination with the inclusiveness of diaspora as an object of study across the previous limitations of geography. “The association of diaspora with worldwide Black kinship,” she warns, “can actually render certain kinds of Black subjects, experiences, histories, and identities invisible.”¹¹⁷ Yet the diaspora model could also serve as a way to understand the web of formal influences and subject matter in Basquiat’s paintings and drawings—those images that cannot be reduced to the binary of stylistically European American and thematically African American. Such a singular approach neglects an analysis of the relationship between the worlds that the artist inhabited. Basquiat’s

work currently exists in a liminal space of art history; he has a half-Haitian, half-Puerto Rican ancestry and is equally interested in black history and modern painting.

The artist once explained in an interview first published in 1988: "I've never been to Africa. I'm an artist who has been influenced by his New York environment. But I have a cultural memory. I don't need to look for it; it exists. It's over there, in Africa. That doesn't mean that I have to go live there. Our cultural memory follows us everywhere, wherever you live."¹¹⁸ Basquiat's revelation of a "cultural memory" is closely connected to the theories of diaspora that developed in the twentieth century. The political scientist William Safran, who provided one of the earliest working definitions of diaspora, insisted that of the six defining criteria a person of the diaspora must "retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland, including its location, history and achievements."¹¹⁹

W. E. B. Du Bois, too, associated Africa with a collective memory, as evidenced by the many references throughout *The Souls of Black Folk*.¹²⁰ In his 1940 book-length essay *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*, Du Bois articulated his belief in the ethnic unity among Africans worldwide. "Africa," he wrote, "is of course my fatherland. . . . On this vast continent were born and lived a large portion of my direct ancestors going back a thousand years or more. The mark of their heritage is upon me in color and hair." He continues: "Since the fifteenth century these ancestors of mine and their other descendants have had a common history, have suffered a common disaster, and have one long memory. . . . But the physical bond is least and the badge of color relatively unimportant save as a badge; the real essence of this kinship is its social heritage of slavery, the discrimination and insult. . . . It is this unity that draws me to Africa."¹²¹ This idea of a collective memory or identity, of which both Du Bois and Basquiat speak, provided a foundation for the early pan-African movement as well.

In Basquiat's *50¢ Piece*, a work on paper from 1982–83, several elements refer to black independence movements (plate 15). Just to the right of center, the artist drew a bust portrait of a figure, which is labeled "MARCUS GARVEY" directly below. A side view of the same figure appears in the lower left. Garvey (1887–1940) was a proponent of the black nationalism and pan-African political movements. In 1914 he founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association to unite blacks in the pursuit of political and economic independence. Garvey also founded the Black Star Steamship Line—a fleet of three ships owned and operated by black people that facilitated both the return of African Americans to the African continent and trade by black people around the Atlantic. Basquiat's drawings "THE ARK"—in the lower-left and -right corners of *50¢ Piece*—link the Black Star Line's mission to a biblical initiative. Garvey's common

refrain "BACK TO AFRICA" appears beneath the frontal portrait of the black leader, repeated five times. Basquiat's interest in Garvey and pan-Africanism connects to the commodification of these ideas as well. The multiple references to "BANK OF JAMAICA" and "FEDERAL RESERVE NOTE," and the title of the work, *50¢ Piece*, all refer to the likely source of Basquiat's image: the fifty-cent Jamaican bank coin on which Garvey's image appeared.

Basquiat did not travel to Africa before 1986, but the artist gained access to its art and culture through texts, as he did with the many other subjects that held his interest. For Basquiat, the "unspeakable presence" of Africa led him to books about the continent and its culture as a way to construct his experience of the continent.¹²² Cullen's poem is again relevant:

Africa? A book one thumbs
Listlessly until slumber comes.¹²³

In the words of Stuart Hall, Basquiat was performing an identity not "grounded in the archaeology, but in the *re-telling* of the past."¹²⁴ In his retelling, Basquiat frequently relied on Burchard Brentjes's *African Rock Art* as a favored source.¹²⁵ Most influential, however, were the ideas of Robert Farris Thompson. When asked whom the artist considered to be the most informed about his work, Basquiat pointed directly to the African art historian.¹²⁶ The two first met in October 1984, when Thompson was writing an essay on the relationship between art and hip-hop, less than a year after the publication of his seminal text *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*.¹²⁷ In 1985 Thompson was commissioned to write an essay for the catalog of the artist's exhibition at the Mary Boone Gallery, which he titled "Activating Heaven: The Incantatory Art of Jean-Michel Basquiat." In his essay Thompson emphasized the artist's connection to the African diaspora, calling Basquiat "a heroic embodiment of the impact of Afro-Atlantic civilizations on the world" and "an avatar of a universalizing vision, multiply black, Afro-Atlantic."¹²⁸ Basquiat must have found a kindred spirit in Thompson, who like himself emphasized the role of the Caribbean and of the creole in his work and his life.¹²⁹

Interestingly enough, Basquiat's conversations with Thompson never addressed the latter's theories of diaspora.¹³⁰ It seems instead that the artist's access to those ideas came almost exclusively via text. Thompson's 1983 book *Flash of the Spirit*, published one year before their first meeting, proved particularly influential to the artist, as it reinforced some of his own ideas about cultural memory and its connections to Africa.¹³¹ In the section of the book devoted to Kongo art and religion in the Americas, Thompson

makes the case for a cultural transfer and subsequent adaptation via aesthetic strategies and traditions. His analysis shows traces of the influence of American anthropologist Melville Herskovits, who as early as 1920 began studying what he argued was evidence of the survival of African life in the Americas that shaped both religious and secular life. Herskovits was the first to advocate learning about the present condition of populations of African descent in the Americas by studying African history and culture.¹³² Thompson carried on this tradition in his analysis of African philosophy and visual arts, and Basquiat took notice.

For example, several images from the book appear in both the bottom left of the first and the top right of the third panels of the artist's 1984 painting *Grillo*, alongside several other words that may have come directly from Thompson's text (plate 16).¹³³ As historian Kellie Jones has observed, even the strips of nails that line the wooden panels of the work recall the Kongo Nkisi figures discussed in *Flash of the Spirit*.¹³⁴

A row of black figures with arms raised overhead lines the top right of the third panel. The word "NSIBIDI" that also appears slightly below this row of figures refers to the ideographic form of writing from the Ejagham people of southwestern Cameroon. As explained by Thompson in the fifth chapter of *Flash of the Spirit*, this writing was important because it is wholly African, free from Western influence, and stands as evidence of a direct cultural transfer. Nsibidi signs appeared in Cuba in the early nineteenth century, and, as explained by Thompson, "more than five hundred signs have emerged among the blacks of the traditional barrios of six cities in western Cuba: Marianao, Havana, Guanabacoa, Regla, Cárdenas, and Matanzas."¹³⁵ According to Thompson, these figures are part of a class of Nsibidi signs representing danger. This particular configuration signifies "all this country belongs to me"—an interesting choice considering Basquiat's displaced status as a black artist in America.¹³⁶

Basquiat's open, curving calabash drawing below the line of figures bears resemblance to the *anaforuana* (Afro-Cuban ideograms) also discussed in Thompson's fifth chapter. Other appropriated images include several variations on the Mokongo emblem found in black Cuba. We also see written here the words: "BABALAO," "EXUBARA," "ESU," and "OGUN"—all references to the religious practices of the diaspora discussed in *Flash of the Spirit*. A small oval shape has been labeled "DIVINING CHAIN" above and "NECKLACE OPELE" below, calling to mind Thompson's explanation of a Yoruba (Ifá) divination method, "involving the use of a divining chain (*opele*) made of string or metal."¹³⁷ The phrase "LEVANTAMIENTO DE PLATO" refers to a complex ideograph on the final page of Thompson's last chapter, representing "the custom of taking up the plate of a dead person from his table. . . . It is a mapping of a mass keening, a calligraphic machine for honoring myriad ancestors simultaneously."¹³⁸ It is this lift-

ing gesture that we see performed by the large figures on the first and third panels of *Grillo*.¹³⁹

Throughout Thompson's text, he insists on the mutability of culture. Predating Gilroy and Hall, Thompson provides a nuanced explanation of the African diaspora, tracing not just the origins of religion and art in Africa (i.e., Yoruba, Bakongo, Fon, Ewe, Mande, and Ejagham peoples) but also the transformations of religion and art in the New World. He opens his text with a chapter on the Yoruba (western Nigeria and eastern Benin Republic) and their *òrìsà* in order "to represent the impact of the mind and spirit of millions of Yoruba in West Africa on key black urban populations in the Americas." Thompson remains careful however to represent this impact as a "transition[,] . . . an introduction into a wider universe of interlocking forms."¹⁴⁰ Above all else, Thompson's diaspora focuses on the *production*, rather than the strict preservation, of African culture in the Americas.

In the drawing *Exu* (1988), which Basquiat completed the same year as his death, the artist chose a key figure of the African diaspora as his subject: Èsù-Elégbára, the Yoruba *òrìsà* also known throughout Africa and its diasporas as Eshu, Elégbá, Elegguá, Echu-Eleggua, Exu, and Papa Legba (plate 17). Henry Louis Gates Jr., in his groundbreaking analysis of African American literature, *The Signifyin' Monkey*, presents Èsù-Elégbára, a trickster figure, as a "topos that recurs throughout black oral narrative traditions and contains a primal scene of instruction for the act of interpretation."¹⁴¹ Èsù-Elégbára is of particular interest to Gates because he is a "double-voiced" character, speaking in more than one discourse simultaneously. Èsù-Elégbára is relevant to black language structure because he provides a way for Gates to conceptualize the ambiguity and the variability of vernacular language.

This ambiguity is something that scholars of Basquiat's work encounter, too. His work seems neither wholly Western nor non-Western, and it moves seamlessly between languages, cultures, and histories. In addition, the sheer diversity of references that can appear in a single image is staggering. In 1983's *Jesse* (see plate 3), for example, Basquiat layered and combined references to a musician (Buster Smith), anatomy (esophagus, ear, neck), cartoons (Popeye), psychology (paranoid schizophrenia), political regimes (communism, nazism), and chemical elements (cadmium, krypton). The names of several important historical and imaginary characters also appear, including those of African American athlete Jesse Owens, whose name is written in black capital letters above two swastikas in the upper right; the sixteenth-century astronomer Nostradamus, whose name the artist has misspelled in red letters just below the drawing of a head in the upper right; and Chan, the name of the last wife of jazz musician Charlie Parker, which appears in a black box on the left side of the composition. This

diversity of references in *Jesse*, as in most of Basquiat's work, appeals directly to the art historical tendency to decode.

In fact, a rich body of material traces the origins of Basquiat's images, symbols, and phrases. However, I would like to push these readings to consider elements outside the boundaries of direct signification. In his book *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, Georges Didi-Huberman argues for an expansion of the limited applications of iconography in order to uncover the true significance of a work of art. "Doing iconographic analysis," he writes, "is not a pure and simple matter of knowing textual sources, symbolism and meanings. What exactly is a text? What is a symbol, a source, a meaning?"¹⁴² With *Exu*, Basquiat provides a point of entry into discussions of the African diaspora and of its reconciliation of the complexities inherent in creating meaning at the intersection of art and culture.

Basquiat first indicated his familiarity with Èsù-Elégbára and his prominent role in the religious systems of the African diaspora with several specific details. The figure of the òrìsà stands in the center of the page with several instruments, including at least two versions of his staff or wand, directly above the right hand.¹⁴³ The elongated ears that protrude from the head and stand upright resemble the horns with which Èsù-Elégbára is often associated. As Robert Farris Thompson explained in *Flash of the Spirit*, "Because of his provocative nature, Eshu [Èsù-Elégbára] has been characterized by missionaries and Western-minded Yoruba alike as 'the Devil.'"¹⁴⁴ The pointing shapes projecting from the head of Basquiat's figure in *Exu* also recall representations of the òrìsà illustrated in *Flash of the Spirit*, which show Èsù-Elégbára (figure 7) with a knifelike shape rising out of his head. According to Thompson, "When a knifelike element rises out of Elegba's [Èsù-Elégbára's] head, it is a sign that the display of his powers has begun, the illustration of the wonder (*ara*) from which his special name, Eshu Odara, 'the Wonder-Worker,' derives."¹⁴⁵ In fact, two figures in Basquiat's 1985 canvas *Antar* also resemble Thompson's illustration (plate 18). *Antar*'s figures similarly stand erect on a small round base, arms bent at ninety degrees with a proportionately large knife shape protruding from the center of the head; they are almost identical to the image in Thompson's book. This particular illustration shows a wooden Eshu figure from Bahia, Brazil. The "charming Afro-Brazilian figure," Thompson writes, "is in the strongest tradition of visually rendering the Eshu knife."¹⁴⁶ Basquiat's spelling of the òrìsà's name as "Exu" at the top of his 1988 drawing—with a box to highlight the X—and again in the center, refers to the specifically Brazilian manifestation of Èsù-Elégbára.

Other formal details in *Exu* that reiterate Basquiat's familiarity with the òrìsà include the eyes surrounding this central figure. Concentrated in the upper portion



PLATE 17

Fig. 7 "Plate 17" from *Flash of the Spirit* by Robert Farris Thompson (New York: Vintage, 1983). © 1983 by Robert Farris Thompson. Used by permission of Random House, an imprint of The Random House Publishing Group, a division of Random House LLC. All rights reserved.

of the composition, this motif evokes the protective gaze of Èsù-Elégbára.¹⁴⁷ The eyes represented may relate to the Afro-Cuban story of a pair of burning eyes that appeared to the òrìsà; they might also connect this drawing to other works where the artist has represented eyes and their anatomy, including *One Million Yen* (1982), *PPCD* (1982–83), *Eye of Troof* (1982–83), *The Nile* (1983), and *Melting Point of Ice* (1984), among others.¹⁴⁸ Many Yoruba figures portray Èsù-Elégbára blowing a flute or whistle, linking him also with “thumb-sucking pipe-smoking and other oral activities.”¹⁴⁹ In his rendering, Basquiat has associated *Exu* with tobacco smoking, drawing ten cigarette outlines around the legs and feet of this figure; the artist has also written the words “TOBACCO VICE” across the lower right of the composition. Bluish-black, red, and yellow colors dominate the composition; red and black are Èsù-Elégbára’s ritual colors, and the yellow may recall the Yorubaland dress of members of his priesthood. The blue shape with a rounded portion pointing downward and a straight, handlelike portion suggests the club Èsù-Elégbára carries as a symbol of his warrior nature and his masculinity. Basquiat’s formal choices in the depiction of the figure reflect the artist’s knowledge of the basic context and history of this African diasporic figure. However, I would like to extend the analysis of his image past formalism to discover what other meaning this image might hold for the artist.

According to art historian Kellie Jones, Basquiat began to draw from African spiritual systems and their power toward the end of his short career in order to “claim all that was excess to those axes of identity [Western painter and black man], where he could open himself out to the entire broad spectrum of his creativity and his soul.”¹⁵⁰ Reading around the context of this particular work, in detail, explains not only Basquiat’s choice of this specific character but also its larger implications for reading his work as that of a “black” artist. Èsù-Elégbára is endlessly complex and defies simple logic: he serves both positive and negative areas of life at once. More specifically, *Exu* is a product of the negotiation between African practices and their displacement and reformation in the Americas.

As Africans were forced to migrate to the New World during the transatlantic slave trade, they began to associate the òrìsà of Yoruba cosmology with certain saints of the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁵¹ In Cuba, for example, the Yoruba term òrìsà was translated into *oricha* or *santos*, and the practice of worship was given the name “Santería” (i.e., the worship of the saints). Practiced initially in Cuba and Brazil, and later in many urban areas of the United States, Santería is the result of the syncretism, or subversive combination, of Yoruba religion (from West Africa) and European Catholicism. This was possible because Africans in the Americas found many structural similarities between their own religious practices and Roman Catholicism, particularly with the

cults of the saints and the practice of offerings. Despite the scattering of African peoples throughout the Americas, the *òrìsà* were preserved and worshipped in new forms. Many of the Yoruba *òrìsà*, such as Obatalá, Orunmila, Yemoja, Shango, Oshun, and Èsù-Elégbára, survived through this process of religious syncretism, in which they became associated with Catholic saints and certain functions were modified.¹⁵² For example, in Cuba Yemayá (Yemoja) is no longer associated with the Niger River in Africa, but with all freshwater; she has become the goddess of the ocean too. Ogun, the warrior and ironworker of the Yoruba, was transformed into a cane cutter in the New World.

Èsù-Elégbára, the subject of Basquiat's 1988 *Exu*, became subtly transformed into many saints in the Americas. His ability to appear as a child connected the *òrìsà* to the Holy Child of Atocha (Santo Niño de Atocha), while his connection to the Lonely Spirit of purgatory (Anima Sola) reflected his function as a messenger. Èsù-Elégbára's affection for children and his reputation as a miracle worker aligned him with Saint Anthony of Padua as well.¹⁵³ These adaptations and transfers allowed displaced Africans to maintain connections to African traditions while also creating meaningful associations to New World cultures. In the process, many Africans in the New World preserved much of their Yoruba identity.¹⁵⁴ Èsù-Elégbára is particularly important because he is the Yoruba deity present in all of the major African-inspired religions, including Santería (Cuba), Vodou (Haiti, Louisiana, and the Dominican Republic), and Candomblé (Brazil).¹⁵⁵ Robert Farris Thompson has connected Eshu statuary to the Spanish-speaking populations of New York City; Eshu came with black people emigrating from the Caribbean to New York City and Miami after World War II.¹⁵⁶

Èsù-Elégbára offers choices and stands at all intersections and liminal spaces of life—at the literal thresholds of homes and the curbs of roads, and at the metaphorical doors to the future; he is connected with the crossroads, a place also familiar to Basquiat.¹⁵⁷ Thompson recalled, after the artist's death, watching him make an offering to a busy intersection in lower Manhattan: "At the corner of Houston and Broadway I watched [Basquiat] make what Afro-Cubans call *ebo*: sacrifice to the crossroads."¹⁵⁸ Basquiat's sacrifice to and recognition of the crossroads, which figure prominently in religious practices of the African diaspora, further establishes his connection to the African diasporas. Anthropologist Karen McCarthy Brown has recounted in these very terms one scene of ritual action (performed by a Vodou priestess practicing in Brooklyn) she witnessed. She writes, "With the candle in one hand and the pot and the paper in the other, she slowly and deliberately saluted each of the four directions, ritually tracing the shape that is both a cross and crossroads and thus a point of historic confluence between Christianity and the religions of West Africa."¹⁵⁹ The concept of

the crossroads and its syncretic potential may have appealed to an artist who existed in an indeterminate (and often paradoxical) space. Basquiat's sacrifice to the crossroads also suggests a specific connection the artist may have felt to Èsù-Elégbára; like the òrìsà, Basquiat negotiated the intersection of several "worlds."

Èsù-Elégbára shares several personal characteristics with Basquiat. Practitioners consider Èsù-Elégbára to be the enfant terrible of all the òrìsà; he often presides malevolently over choices and decision making, allowing and even encouraging followers to make mistakes. He is an ambivalent character—a child and an adult, both old and young. Basquiat too had multiple dimensions: he would behave one way with close friends and another with others. Close friend Michael Holman has spoken of his ambivalence, explaining, "In a lot of ways Jean was very young and naive. He was a dichotomy. On one end, he was this wise old sage. . . . He was in many ways naive, ignorant to a lot of things, young, unsophisticated in some ways, and then supersophisticated in others."¹⁶⁰ In both his artistic life and his personal life, the artist cultivated what art historian Henry Drewal has called "multiconsciousness"—that is, "the capacity to negotiate multiple evolving personas in social terrains where others attempt to impose identities (and therefore possibilities) in struggles of self-assertion."¹⁶¹ Robert Farris Thompson wrote of Basquiat's ability to navigate multiple cultures with ease. In his account of a meeting with the artist, Thompson called attention to the fact that Basquiat served him "star apples from Jamaica and glasses of excellent red Bordeaux," linking the artist's choice of wine and food to a creolizing sensibility.¹⁶² This is a step beyond Du Boisian "double consciousness" and allows for the complexity inherent in people moving within the African diasporas. Basquiat's multiconsciousness places him at the crossroads of several cultures simultaneously. As a product of the diaspora experience, he highlights heterogeneity and diversity.

Basquiat also shares a wandering nature with Èsù-Elégbára; both scraped by and lived in the streets.¹⁶³ Èsù-Elégbára's constant movement and begging are symbolized by his authority over the feet, which have been a constant motif in Basquiat's paintings and drawings. Linguistic and imagistic representations of feet appear in several of these works. An amputated foot, with a cross-section of both bone and flesh, appears in the bottom left of the drawing *King Brand* (1982–83). Linguistic references to feet appear in the artist's 1982 *Self-Portrait as a Heel*; and in *Leonardo da Vinci's Greatest Hits* (1982), Basquiat included several anatomical drawings and close studies of the lower legs and feet (see plate 5). In the leftmost panel, Basquiat labels the "HEEL" of his rendered leg; this is repeated in the third panel, where we can read "HEEL" again three times in the center. At the bottom of this third panel, Basquiat has drawn the bottom of a foot (another version appears in profile at the top of the fourth panel) and written

in parenthesis below it "STUDY OF FEET." Basquiat's attention to Èsù-Elégbára's symbolic connection to feet overlaps with both the artist's established interest in anatomy and his obsession with Leonardo da Vinci.

Basquiat's engagement with subjects related to the African diaspora includes Haitian Vodou, known also by the more sensationalized and derogatory term *Voodoo*.¹⁶⁴ Basquiat's onetime girlfriend Suzanne Mallouk has spoken of a Haitian statue in Basquiat's possession. "There was a Haitian Voodoo statue that stood about three feet tall with a little bag around its neck. The statue was crudely carved out of dark wood. Jean bought his statue one day and told me never to open the bag around its neck. I never did. He told me never to touch the statue. I never did."¹⁶⁵ On the surface of 1984's *Grillo*, the word "RADA" refers to Vodou (see plate 16). According to Thompson, "*Rada*, predominantly Dahomean and Yoruba, is the 'cool' side of *vodun*, being associated with the achievement of peace and reconciliation."¹⁶⁶ In her 2005 essay "Lost in Translation: Jean-Michel in the [Re]Mix," art historian Kellie Jones argues that the black-hatted figure who appears in *The Guilt of Gold Teeth* (1982), and again in *Después de un Puño* (1987), represents the Vodou spirit "Baron Samedi" (plate 19).¹⁶⁷ Also, the title of the work *Gri Gri*, from 1986, refers to a Vodou talisman usually worn for protection; this distinctly African American amulet, which is filled with a mixture of herbs, oils, stones, bones, hair, nails, or other personal items, has roots in the West African religious practice of Vodun. With the transplantation of Africans throughout the Caribbean by means of the transatlantic slave trade, practices of West African Vodun were continued and modified over centuries to make up the religious practice now known as Vodou in the Americas. Vodou is prominent in Haiti, the birthplace of Basquiat's father. As Haitians moved into the United States, their religion migrated with them. In Brooklyn, where the artist was born in 1960, a large population of Vodou practitioners formed a new religious and cultural network.¹⁶⁸

Basquiat's inclusion of both Santería and Vodou elements in these paintings indicates his interest in the African, and specifically Yoruba, diaspora—that is, in the transformation and translation through cultural memory. The artist confidently displays in these works his knowledge of and familiarity with the syncretic nature of Yoruba culture and history—the foundation of African American culture, religion, and history in the Americas.¹⁶⁹ According to historian David Eltis, the largest proportion of the estimated 2 million enslaved Africans leaving from Bight of Benin ports between 1650 and 1865 were Yoruba.¹⁷⁰ The migration of Yoruba across the Atlantic rivaled the scale of European ethnic groups. Robert Farris Thompson devotes an entire chapter of *Flash of the Spirit* to Yorubaland—"black Africa's largest population, creators of one of the premier cultures of the world."¹⁷¹ It was in this text that Basquiat found a

meaningful connection between Haiti and Puerto Rico—the two sources of his own past. James Clifford, citing the work of Stuart Hall, has argued that the “discursive linking of pasts and futures is integral” to the production of identity. He states, “To imagine a coherent future, people selectively mobilize past resources. Articulations of tradition, never simply backward-looking, are thus generative components of peoplehood, ways of belonging to *some* discrete social time and place in an interconnected world.”¹⁷² Basquiat similarly mobilizes and negotiates the histories of Africa and the Americas in search of his own place in the contemporary world.

A drawing from 1987, *Untitled*, illustrates the syncretic nature of Basquiat’s artistic practice (see plate 2). As Richard Marshall has shown, this work consists primarily of Basquiat’s appropriation and recombination of several symbols from Henry Dreyfuss’s *Symbol Sourcebook: An Authoritative Guide to International Graphic Symbols*.¹⁷³ Throughout the drawing, Basquiat layered several symbols from Dreyfuss’s book (figure 8).¹⁷⁴ For example, in direct reference to one of Dreyfuss’s “hobo signs,” at the top left of the composition the artist drew two adjoining circles—the left with a dot inside—above the corresponding words “ILL TEMPERED MAN LIVES HERE.” Several other symbols and phrases in this drawing were also taken directly from Dreyfuss’s compilation of hobo signs, including several circles with arrows in the bottom right with the matching phrases “THIS WAY” and “NO USE GOING IN THIS DIRECTION.” From the “astrology” section of *Symbol Sourcebook*, Basquiat appropriated the symbol of circle with an X drawn through it, accompanied by the phrase “CHILD DIES,” which appears directly below the word “ARSENIC” in the upper left. The interlocking Y shapes at the bottom left of the drawing, combined with the phrase “FRIENDSHIP AMONG MEN,” come from the “astrology” section as well. The same “FRIENDSHIP AMONG MEN” symbol and phrase combination reappears near the center of the composition, in a row that also includes “MEN FIGHT” and “WIDOW AND CHILDREN”—all of which are from Dreyfuss’s text. Throughout *Untitled*, one can identify references not only to hobo and astrological signs but also to home economics (“COOL IRON” and “HOT IRON”), sewing machines (“STRETCH”), and washing machines (“AGITATE” and “SPIN DRYING”).

However, this drawing, *Untitled*, also includes several previously unidentified references to Yoruba culture, including words in the lower-right section of the composition that refer to the present geographical areas of Nigeria, Benin, and Togo in West Africa, from which the Yoruba came. Basquiat stacked the word “WARRIOR” atop the word “NIGERIA,” which is part of a line that reads: “NIGERIA, OWO / IJEBU AREA.” At the end of the line, parentheses appear to contain the partial word “YORUB,” with the terminal “A” marked out. To the right of “WARRIOR,” we can also make out the dates 1455–1640, which the artist has crossed out with a single black line. These dates refer to the early

FOLKLORE

Astrology (continued)

					
THE FAMILY	FRIENDSHIP among MEN	MEN FIGHT	MAN DIES	WIDOW and CHILDREN	ONE CHILD DIES
					
MOTHER with ONE CHILD	MOTHER DIES	SURVIVING CHILD with SEED of LIFE			

Hobo Signs

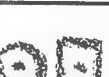
		 OR 			
NO USE GOING THIS DIRECTION	THIS WAY	HIT THE ROAD! QUICK!	GOOD ROAD to FOLLOW	ROAD SPOILED, full of other hobos	
					
DOUBTFUL	HALT	THIS IS THE PLACE	DANGEROUS NEIGHBORHOOD	THIS COMMUNITY indifferent to hobos	NOTHING to be GAINED HERE
					
YOU CAN CAMP HERE	FRESH WATER, SAFE CAMPSITE	DANGEROUS DRINKING WATER	O. K., ALL RIGHT	GOOD PLACE for a HANDOUT	ILL-TEMPERED MAN LIVES HERE
	 OR 				
WELL-GUARDED HOUSE	THE OWNER IS IN	THE OWNER IS OUT	A GENTLEMAN LIVES HERE	THESE PEOPLE ARE RICH	

Fig. 8 Astrology and hobo signs from *Symbol Sourcebook: An Authoritative Guide to International Graphic Symbols* by Henry Dreyfuss (1972; reprint, New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1984). Used by permission of The McGraw-Hill Companies, New York.

and middle periods of Benin history; Ijebu was one of the early southern regional sub-groups and kingdoms of Yoruba people that became dominant. The word “IJEBU” also invokes diasporas and migration within the African continent; the kingdom of Ijebu Ode was itself established by migrants from across Yorubaland. Also, owing to its location along the coast, the kingdom was actively involved in trade with the Europeans.

The Owo kingdom, bordered on the southeast by Benin, became the largest and the most dominant state in eastern Yorubaland.¹⁷⁵

The Owo were especially important for African art. According to African historian Funso Afolayan, "In the sphere of art, most especially terra-cotta modeling, and sculpture in wood, ivory and beads, Owo appeared to have stood as an intermediary between Benin and Ife, the cradle of the Yoruba race and the source from which Benin claimed to have derived its kingship and bronze casting tradition."¹⁷⁶ This artistic connection between Owo and Benin may explain why Basquiat has also included the words "BENIN HEAD," outlined in a rectangular box above the word "BRONZE," in this area of the drawing.

The combination of the words "WARRIOR," "NIGERIA," "OWO," "YORUBA," "BRONZE" and the dates 1455–1640 also match a specific object in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection of African art. An illustration from the museum's catalog of its permanent collection, published in 1980, shows a standing warrior figure from Nigeria in its section "Primitive Art."¹⁷⁷ In fact, the caption claims that this particular figure is "related to the Benin bronzes," and points the reader to related examples in the catalog. One such example is illustration number 1031, a full-page, richly colored illustration of a bronze head—that is, a "BENIN HEAD." Knowing the artist's penchant for copying words and symbols from other books, it is not difficult to imagine that Basquiat's preference for appropriation applied to the Met's catalog as well.

The connection between Basquiat's *Untitled* and the Met is further confirmed by another sketch in the lower center of this same drawing, labeled as "Victory 1902" with the name of the artist, "AUGUSTUS SAINT GAUDENS"; his nationality, "AMERICAN"; and his birth and death dates, 1848–1907, written below. This undoubtedly refers to Saint-Gaudens's bronze sculpture of *Victory* in the Met collection since 1917, which is also illustrated in the 1980 catalog. The phrase "GIRL W/PIGEONS" appears three times in the drawing, as do several versions of the word "GREEK," suggesting connections to another piece in the museum's permanent collection of Greek and Roman art: a marble grave stele of a little girl, ca. 450–440 B.C.E., which is illustrated in full color on page 78, and again in the frontispiece of the 1980 catalog.

Basquiat goes beyond simple collage in these references to African, Greco-Roman, and American art. He rewrites art history, drawing connections from these cultures into his experiences as an artist and as a visitor to this museum. He is concerned not only with the Yoruba diasporas but also with all diasporas and the cross-pollination of cultures, histories, and ideas that occurs. For this reason, it makes no sense to read these African and European elements in his works separately; Basquiat urges us to consider the interaction between the two as essential to his work.

The value of a term like *diaspora* lies not in its summoning of concepts of purity or origin but in its articulation of difference and disjuncture. Invoking Stuart Hall, literature scholar Brent Hayes Edwards explains that this new conception of unity is thus “not that of an identity, where one structure perfectly recapitulates or reproduces or even ‘exposes’ another, or where each is reducible to the other. . . . The unity formed by this combination or articulation is always, necessarily, ‘a complex structure,’ a structure in which things are related, as much through their differences as through their similarities.”¹⁷⁸ Edwards here takes up such definitions of diaspora in order to express translation, syncretism, and articulation between cultures—that is, to escape the limiting confines of geography or a search for origins. Basquiat’s drawing *Untitled* highlights the ambivalence of diaspora and its necessary negotiation of difference and similarity. Most important, this work demonstrates that the artist’s involvement with the African diasporas is not based solely on subject matter or iconography. One potential way to understand the artist’s syncretic combination of elements from various sources, histories, and cultures is to read the work from the perspective of the artistic strategy of “polyvocality,” seen in other objects of the African diaspora.

Like Basquiat’s works, objects associated with Haitian Vodou often embody several concerns simultaneously. For example, the image of the cross can function in Haiti as both a Christian crucifix and an image of the African crossroads. As described by Karen McCarthy Brown, Haitians who make the sign of the cross in the traditional Catholic gesture when passing by a church, both “inscribe on their bodies the heritage of Africa and simultaneously do homage to Christianity.” This gesture invokes both Africa and Christianity. “The image of the cross in Haitian Vodou,” she explains, “is unself-consciously bilingual.”¹⁷⁹ The symbols and objects of Haitian Vodou do not operate iconographically, in a one-to-one ratio; rather, they signify several things at once as the viewer moves them through a process of “metonymic exegesis.”¹⁸⁰ If we consider the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat through the lens of the polyvocal signification present in Haitian Vodou arts, a similar pattern emerges.¹⁸¹

The crown motif that pervades Basquiat’s work, for example, is often interpreted as an assertion of the artist’s power. Looking at the icon in works like *Charles the First* from 1982, Robert Farris Thompson explained its presence as a signification of Basquiat’s aspirations (plate 20). Literally speaking for the artist, Thompson proclaims, “I intend to have powers up to and including Thor. I intend to be king. I intend to show you and control you and make it function as art.”¹⁸² Here, Thompson reads Basquiat’s inclusion of the word “THOR” beneath the crown in this particular painting as a symbolic alignment of his own powers with those of the mythological Norse god of thunder. Considered in conjunction with the phrase “MOST YOUNG KINGS GET THEIR HEADS

CUT OFF," however, this crown may also belong to the historical figure King Charles I of England, who was publicly beheaded in 1649. Still, Suzanne Mallouk contends that the crown came from their favorite cartoon, *The Little Rascals*. She explains that Basquiat "watched *The Little Rascals* religiously, and *Our Gang*, which was the show that aired before. At the end of *The Little Rascals*, if you notice, there is a crown—sketched on the screen—and a title: King World Productions. That's where the crown came from."¹⁸³

Graffiti artists of the late 1970s and early 1980s also used the crown motif to establish a system of power and ranking among their peers. Graffiti writers who admired the work of others would express their respect for a piece by painting a simple, often three-pointed, crown next to the work. Accordingly, certain artists were made "kings" (as in king of the whole subway car or king of the wall). The artist's close friend Fab 5 Freddy talked about this phenomenon in a 2006 interview, explaining, "If you were a king, you would crown yourself. It was common as part of the street graffiti vocabulary to put a crown over your name—specifically if your tag was on a particular train the most. You were essentially designated the king of that line."¹⁸⁴

Kingship or royalty also relates to jazz culture—a frequent subject for Basquiat. As a form of advertisement in the 1920s, musicians often played outside the doors of nightclubs. Individual musicians competed to see who could draw the most people from the street. The winner would become the "king" of that particular area. It was also common for musicians to adopt aristocratic titles as a dual strategy of self-promotion and of subversion. Two of the major stars of jazz's big band era, the songwriter Edward Kennedy Ellington and the pianist William Basie, became a "duke" and a "count," respectively. The singer, songwriter, and jazz pianist born Nathaniel Adams Coles became known professionally as "Nat King Cole," and the flashy trumpet player Louis Armstrong was mentored by the New Orleans jazz legend "King Oliver." Lester Young was known as "Prez," Billie Holiday as "Lady Day," Miles Davis as "the Prince of Darkness," Earl Hines became "the Earl," and Lester Young even "knighted" the young pianist Charles Thompson, which made him "Sir Charles Thompson." This appropriation of terms usually reserved for white Western aristocracy boldly subverted established social hierarchies. Similarly, Basquiat titled his painting of Charlie Parker *Charles the First*. These acts of reappropriation emphasized the challenges that both artists posed to the white-dominated art worlds of their time. The icon of the crown in Basquiat's work, therefore, represents several ideas simultaneously. *Charles the First* not only refers to Thor or King Charles of England, but it also connects to cartoons, graffiti, and jazz culture and becomes shorthand for a challenge to social, historical, and artistic hierarchies.

Like the crown, which refers to jazz history, graffiti culture, and Norse mythology simultaneously, the black-hatted figure who appears in several of Basquiat's paintings also carries multiple, simultaneous meanings. As discussed earlier, Kellie Jones has pointed to the black figure wearing a top hat in *The Guilt of Gold Teeth* of 1982, and again in *Después de un Puño* of 1987, as Baron Samedi, the chief of the Gede family of spirits (or *lwa*) who is associated with death and cemeteries (see plate 19).¹⁸⁵ The black suit, top hat, and skull-like face of Basquiat's figure all suggest this representation is Baron Samedi. Yet this image of a black-hatted figure also continues along the path of metonymic exegesis typical of Vodou arts to signify more than one idea simultaneously. More than just Baron Samedi, this black-hatted figure evokes the entire family of Haitian Gede spirits. Gede, like all the Haitian *lwa*, or "spirits," is both one and many.

Aside from multiplicity, Basquiat's depiction of Gede may also connect in another way: to the *lwa*'s history in the Vodou religion as a spirit that avoids a fixed position. Because of his flexibility and lack of fear, Gede is especially significant to immigrant Haitian communities, such as those located in the Brooklyn of Basquiat's youth. "Gede," writes anthropologist Karen McCarthy Brown, "can guide people in adapting to almost anything, and he does not cower or pull back from the constant change of modern life."¹⁸⁶ Like Èsù-Elégbára, Gede is a trickster spirit with playful and childish energy. Although the dominion of Baron Samedi, the chief of the Gede spirits, includes cemeteries, Gede is concerned with life as well. Even looking at the skeletal face of the black-hatted figure in *Después de un Puño*, whose eyes are crossed out as if in death, we see evidence of Gede's overt connection to sexuality in the artist's rendering of the figure's nose—swollen, red, and unmistakably phallic—as a *zozo* (a crude word for *penis* in Haitian Creole). Basquiat's rendering of Baron Samedi, therefore, also invokes Gede and by extension his ambivalence. The presence of this figure signifies life and death, humor, and sex all at once.

Like Gede, the black-hatted figure in Jean-Michel Basquiat's paintings and drawings is both one and many. Referring to multiple ideas at once, the icon becomes a sophisticated articulation of Basquiat's views of history, society, religion, and his own identity. In the rightmost panel of the seven-paneled *Toussaint L'Ouverture Versus Savonarola* (plate 21), the figure of L'Ouverture, identified by the inscription "L'OVERTURE, T." above his head is also depicted frontally, wearing a large black hat and holding a sword in his right, slightly disembodied, hand.¹⁸⁷ Basquiat's inclusion of L'Ouverture in this work relates to the latter's personal history as half Haitian and half African American. François Dominique Toussaint L'Ouverture, who led the most significant slave revolt in history in 1791, is a significant figure in Haitian history and in the history of Africans in the Americas. In the social history of Haiti, he is perhaps the only hero

unmarked by scandal or treachery, and he still holds a mythological place in Haitian popular culture today.¹⁸⁸

Yet another figure in a black hat in an additional canvas complicates a reading of the black-hatted figure in *Toussaint L'Overture Versus Savonarola* as a simple revolutionary hero. In *PPCD* of 1982–83, we see a head that appears identical to that labeled as “L'OVERTURE, T.” in the later, seven-paneled canvas. The figure of *PPCD* floats in a blue space on the right side of the paper (plate 22). Several labels, which have been crossed out, in the top center of the composition identify this particular portrait as that of “FRANCOIS DUVALIER,” a prominent figure in Haitian politics of the twentieth century. Duvalier, a Vodou priest, declared himself president of Haiti for life in 1964. During his dictatorship, he metamorphosed into the figure “Papa Doc” and adopted the dress and mannerisms of Gede, inspiring fear among the populace. In evoking this image for himself, Papa Doc traded on the deep-rooted knowledge of Vodou powers among adherents of Haiti's dominant religion. “Papa Doc” Duvalier ordered mass executions and the institution of curfews that his civil militia (or Tonton Makout), composed partly of Vodou priests, enforced.¹⁸⁹ The influence of Vodou in Haitian politics was as difficult to measure in the 1980s as it was in the eighteenth century. But Basquiat had a personal connection to the horrors inflicted by Papa Doc. His father, Gérard, explained to one interviewer: “My mother and father were jailed. My brother was killed. I came to America when I was twenty.”¹⁹⁰

Basquiat linked Duvalier and L'Overture in his use of the same photocopy in his depictions of the black figure in *Toussaint L'Overture Versus Savonarola* and *PPCD*. In *Toussaint L'Overture Versus Savonarola* the face and the concept of Duvalier and L'Overture have merged. The black top hat is associated with the entire family of Gede spirits, through which Basquiat read the figure of Duvalier. The black figure in *Después de un Puño*, then, does more than make multiple references to contexts outside the canvas; it also conflates several images within the canvas. The black figure wearing the top hat in *Después de un Puño* is L'Overture, Papa Doc, and Gede simultaneously. Instead of functioning iconographically, with a static meaning, these images generate several meanings out of the web of Vodou, history, politics, and mythology.

In her essay “The Myth of the Black Aesthetic,” art historian Judith Wilson provocatively claims that “there is no black aesthetic in the visual arts if, by black aesthetic, we mean an identifiable set of artistic values or traits that applies to the works produced by the majority of African-American artists during the past few centuries.”¹⁹¹ Wilson proposes the adoption of the term “African-American aesthetic,” which, for her, represents a cultural identity more than a (contested) racial one. Nevertheless, it becomes difficult to locate an African American aesthetic, as there are not as many defined African American

artist groups as there are European American ones (e.g., the Nabis, Der Blaue Reiter, Dada, cubism, social realism, Ashcan school, minimalism, and so on) throughout the history of art.¹⁹² In many cases artists engage their cultural experiences as African Americans in their work, but their strategies and styles are not uniform. African American artists are diverse and do not always exclude European American influences; therefore, we cannot confidently locate a universal and completely separate “African American” aesthetic.

At the same time, the study of identity’s intersections with art practice has exploded in the years since Basquiat’s death.¹⁹³ Beginning in the 1990s, museums and other cultural venues made a concerted effort to engage with and to push against the politics of identity. Most notable of their efforts were *The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity* (1990)—a collaboration between the New Museum for Contemporary Art, the Museum of Hispanic Art, and the Studio Museum in Harlem; *The Theater of Refusal: Black Art and Mainstream Criticism* (1993) at the Fine Arts Gallery of the University of California, Irvine; and the Whitney Museum of American Art’s 1993 Biennial exhibition. The 1993 Whitney Biennial has been read by many scholars as the turning point for identity-based art discourse; it opened the month after Basquiat’s large retrospective at the Whitney closed.¹⁹⁴

The main theme of the Whitney’s biennial exhibition, according to director David Ross, was “the construction of identity.” Contemporary artists, he continued, “insist on reinscribing the personal, political, and social back into the practice and history of art.”¹⁹⁵ The exhibition’s head curator, Elizabeth Sussman, emphasized the content of the work, at times at the expense of its form. It was curator Thelma Golden who provided a way to interpret this new generation of artists. According to Golden, these were artists who wanted “to de-construct and de-center the politically constructed site of whiteness and its relation to the ever-changing definition of Americanness.”¹⁹⁶ Golden was among the first to consider this new generation of artists—Renée Green, Glenn Ligon, Daniel Martinez, Pepón Osorio, and Lorna Simpson among them—as working both within and against discourses of identity. It is ironic that such ideas were not more readily applied to the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat, exhibited in the same museum less than a month earlier.¹⁹⁷

Golden chose to elaborate on the complex intersections of art and identity for African American artists with her exhibition *Freestyle* at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 2001. In the exhibition’s catalog, Golden put forward a definition of “postblack” art: art of a post-civil rights generation that recognizes the diversity of experiences and identities that might be called “black.”¹⁹⁸ The “postblack” aesthetic moved beyond “the nationalist/aesthetic dogma of the 1970s Black Arts Movement”; it recognized that there no longer existed a singular style or school of African American art.¹⁹⁹ Citing the influ-

ence of Raymond Saunders's seminal essay "Black Is a Color" and the contributions of artists Robert Colescott, David Hammons, and Adrian Piper, Golden looked to "post-black" as a way to represent the ideological significance of artists "who were adamant about not being labeled as 'black' artists, though their work was steeped, in fact deeply interested, in redefining complex notions of blackness."²⁰⁰ She cites Leonardo Drew, Ellen Gallagher, Renée Green, Glenn Ligon, Kerry James Marshall, Alison Saar, Garry Simmons, Lorna Simpson, Kara Walker, Nari Ward, Carrie Mae Weems, and Fred Wilson as examples of artists with this sensibility. These are all artists of Basquiat's generation; Lorna Simpson was born in the same year in Brooklyn.²⁰¹ Might we also extend the postblack aesthetic to discussions of the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat?

In fact, Basquiat's work exemplifies the complexity of blackness and black experiences.²⁰² As Greg Tate has reminded us, "We shouldn't overlook the fact that Basquiat, like Rauschenberg and Warhol, his brothers in canvas-bound iconoclasm, made paintings that were unrepentantly about American culture."²⁰³ Basquiat also engages with issues of Europe, America, Africa, and the African diasporas, but these are not separate interests. As we have seen in *Untitled* (1987), these histories and identities exist simultaneously in a distinctly postmodern reality. The artist's blackness is constantly changing and shifting; we cannot locate it only in iconography. Instead, we must look at the web of race and ethnicities that the artist creates in his paintings. Jean-Michel Basquiat creates his own polyvocal aesthetic, which we must consider outside of our previous misconceptions about race, culture, and their place in art history.

In the words of Stuart Hall, the diaspora experience "is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference. . . . Diaspora identities," he states, "are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference."²⁰⁴ Although the tendency has been to interpret the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat on the side of white (formalism) versus black (content), there is an inherent and productive ambiguity at the heart of his practice. His work questions the boundaries of blackness. He drew on sources and ideas from Africa and the Americas but also from the spaces between. The undefined spaces of blackness serve as an analogue to the undefined spaces of Basquiat's works that are left behind when iconography fails. It is the production and reproduction of blackness taking place within these canvases that is of note, because Basquiat's methods of construction undertook similar processes. We might therefore heed Hall's advice: "Instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production,' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation."²⁰⁵

CREATIVITY FOUND AND MADE

What is important now is to recover our senses. We must learn to see more, to hear more, to feel more. Our task is not to find the maximum amount of content in a work of art, much less to squeeze more content out of the work than is already there. Our task is to cut back content so that we can see the thing at all.

SUSAN SONTAG, "AGAINST INTERPRETATION"

IN THE SPRING OF 1979, Jean-Michel Basquiat (then still known as the street writer SAMO) started a noise band with friend Michael Holman.¹ Known by many names—Channel 9, Test Pattern, Bad Fools—the band finally settled on the name Gray, which the artist suggested.² Basquiat played synthesizer, bell, clarinet, and occasionally a guitar with a metal file run across its loosened strings. The band performed in well-known downtown Manhattan venues such as the Mudd Club, CBGB, and Hurrah, as well as at the birthday party of renowned art dealer Leo Castelli, in 1981. They had a repertory of around fifteen songs, some of which were more traditional (i.e., with a clearly prescribed beginning, middle, and end), and others that Holman has described as “sound sculptures.”³ A friend of Basquiat and Holman, Glenn O’Brien has been one of the few to address Basquiat’s early involvement with music. He wrote the following about Gray in 2007: “It was a sort of new wave jazz concept that existed in an audio space explored by Miles [Davis] in his electric albums. . . . It was what was sometimes known as a noise band . . . , but it was a noise band ‘in a silent way’—they liked the space, the vacuum inside the sound.”⁴

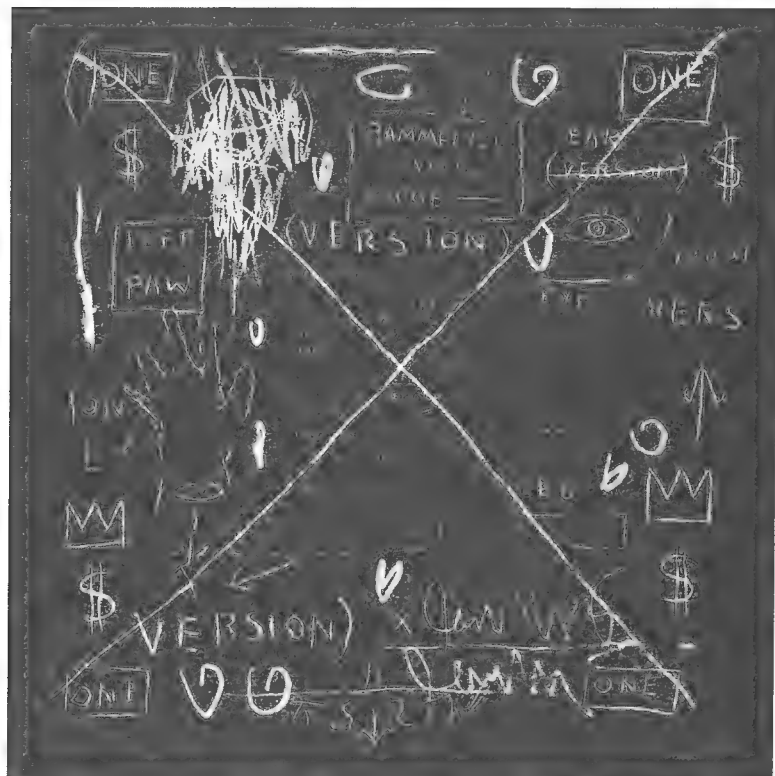
As in the artist’s paintings and drawings, the lack of apparent structure and the experimental nature of the songs by Gray defy clear categorization. As O’Brien explained, it was a noise band, but not quite. I suggest that Basquiat’s performances with Gray frequently reflected some of the same practices of appropriation present in his visual work. We know that on stage he called out lyrics reminiscent of those to Nat King Cole’s 1950 Academy Award-winning song, which connected to his admiration

for the painting of the same name: "Mona Lisa, Mona Lisa, men have named you, tea-stained brown, with missing pages . . ."⁵ Basquiat also made collages from sounds he collected with his tape recorder, some of which he played on stage while performing with *Gray*.⁶ In this chapter I explore further connections between music and painting in Basquiat's oeuvre in an attempt to find a pattern in his visual work. Analyses of music (and specifically jazz) provide a foundation for the experimental practices of improvisation and appropriation that prove so important to Basquiat's practice yet remain misunderstood.

Scholars have previously read Basquiat's appropriation of imagery from musical history, popular culture, and anatomy books in terms of a "cut and mix" or "sampling" aesthetic—locating the artist within the cultural milieu of 1970s and 1980s hip-hop.⁷ Such readings are encouraged by the artist's close affiliations with early hip-hop icons like Fab 5 Freddy, Michael Holman, and Rammellzee. In the late 1970s, Basquiat shared an apartment in the Alphabet City neighborhood of lower Manhattan with Fab 5 Freddy (a.k.a. Fred Braithwaite).⁸ Braithwaite appeared alongside Basquiat in Glenn O'Brien's film *Downtown 81* and in the music video for the Blondie song "Rapture" (1981)—considered by many to be the first mainstream song to include rap styling in the lyrics. In 1988, the year of Basquiat's death, Braithwaite also became the first hip-hop VJ on MTV. He hosted his own show, *Yo! MTV Raps*, until 1995. Basquiat also produced and designed the cover for the hip-hop single "Beat Bop" (1983), featuring K-Rob and Rammellzee (figure 9). Although initially distributed as a test pressing, the single soon became synonymous with the burgeoning hip-hop and graffiti movements, serving as the main theme for Henry Chalfant's 1983 documentary, *Style Wars*.

Art historian and curator Franklin Sirmans discussed the connection between the artist and hip-hop in his 2005 essay for Basquiat's retrospective at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, "In the Cipher: Basquiat and Hip-Hop Culture." Sirmans reads the artist as a turntablist, "spinning narratives in his paintings," writing that "Basquiat's art—like the best hip-hop—takes apart and reassembles the work that came before it."⁹ Sirmans argues that Basquiat's personification of the hip-hop sensibility was clearest in his appropriation of historical painting styles. He claims that the artist's subversion of social and artistic hierarchies—that is, what hip-hop scholar Tricia Rose calls "ideological insubordination"—as well as the agility with which he dismantled and reassembled the aesthetics of Western painting and the constructions of linguistic narratives, proves Basquiat's connection to hip-hop culture and its music.¹⁰

The insistence on reading Basquiat from within the frame of hip-hop continues to link the artist to discourses of graffiti and other "primitive" forms of expression and has consequently limited analyses of the work within the larger discourses of art history.



Like the white artists of his era, Basquiat engaged with strategies of appropriation and the attendant questions of originality. In this chapter, I consider more explicitly the artist's connections to the ideas of copying and imitation that informed this generation of artists. Building on Sirmans, I further complicate Basquiat's connections to music and its methods. His exposure to and exploitation of musical models reveal strategies of composition and appropriation that his strictly visual sources do not provide.¹¹ I argue that Basquiat's use of appropriation and quotation as compositional strategies suggests an interest not only in the structures of signification or a specifically hip-hop sensibility but also in the models of composition available to him via jazz. Basquiat's exploration of appropriated images, texts, and ideas from a wider history of art bears more than a striking resemblance to the strategies of bebop, which similarly critiqued the entire history of music that preceded it. Bebop dismantled the structure of jazz, forming a new style that reoriented the focus of the music from the performance of songs to the processes of their construction. I argue in this chapter that bebop music and musicians were frequent subjects for the artist, and more importantly, that bebop served as a model on which Jean-Michel Basquiat developed a new process of composition—one that uniquely troubles the stability of modernism via questions about originality, spontaneity, and improvisation.

When asked how he found the subjects for his paintings and drawings, Basquiat explained, "I get my background from studying books. I put what I like from them in my paintings."¹² As discussed in the previous chapter, Basquiat relied on texts, and the words and images appropriated from them, in constructing the collage of his own identity as a black artist. This included his exploration of a place somewhere between an African past and an American present, as well as the interactions among diasporas. However, Basquiat's methods of appropriation were more wide-ranging. In fact, a major part of the artist's process involved selecting and inserting various pieces of appropriated material into his compositions; on almost every surface, one finds symbols, images, and phrases that the artist freely borrowed from the world around him. He frequently worked on several canvases simultaneously, with open books surrounding him on the studio floor.¹³ The encyclopedic *Gray's Anatomy*—a gift from his mother, Matilde, when Basquiat was hospitalized as a child—was a favorite text, and we see its influence in the preponderance of anatomical drawings and medical terminology found throughout many of the artist's compositions. Other favored sources included the book of international symbols that was first published by Henry Dreyfuss in 1972,

Fig. 9 (opposite) Front and back cover art by Jean-Michel Basquiat for "Beat Bop," 1983. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.

art museum catalogs, books on African art, and even room-service menus. According to the artist, "A menu in a restaurant is a painting. I may not eat the roast pig on the menu but its legend remains before me. The menu, the texts[,] go on without me."¹⁴

Appropriated logos from television, comics, and cartoons dominate many of Basquiat's compositions. In *Charles the First* (1982; see plate 20), Basquiat painted the logo of the comic superhero Superman several times in the leftmost column directly below the letters "X-MN." Read in conjunction with the phrase "MARVEL COMICS," written in the lower-right corner and later crossed out with several lines, these letters refer to the X-Men group of comic superheroes. *Jesse* (1983; see plate 3) contains multiple references to Superman in the top center of the composition—"KRYPTON," "THE DAILY PLANET," "PERRY WHITE."¹⁵ We also see references to Batman and Robin in *Riddle Me This, Batman* of 1987.¹⁶ In *Television and Cruelty to Animals* from 1983, the artist wrote another comic reference ("POPEYE") twice on the canvas, crossing it out once. The "Superman" logo appears in black in the lower-left corner, as well as at the center of Basquiat's illustration of the symbol of the superhero Batman. Appearing in the lower right is "BULLWINKLE J. MOOSE," the dim-witted yet good-natured moose from the popular 1960s television cartoon series *Rocky and His Friends* and *The Bullwinkle Show*.¹⁷ *Vitaphone* (1984) incorporates another comic character, showing a lounging Bugs Bunny atop the red-and-yellow Warner Brothers logo. A series of works from 1983 all repeat the logo of *Mad Magazine* (*Bull Show One*, *Bull Show Two*, and *Bull Show Four*). *A Panel of Experts* from 1982 bears the phrase "SATURDAY MORNING CARTOON."

Basquiat reportedly appropriated the drawings of the twelve-year-old son of coworker and friend Chris Sedlmayr. Sedlmayr's son, Theo, has said: "He [Basquiat] copied my drawings. My crowns, cars, airplanes, and houses became part of his work."¹⁸ Basquiat even hired the child of a friend to sketch certain motifs on his larger canvases. According to art historian Jonathan Fineberg, "During his 1986 opening at the Mary Boone Gallery in New York, Basquiat introduced Jasper Lack, the boy who drew the motifs for *Revised Undiscovered Genius of the Mississippi Delta* and *Empire*, to Andy Warhol as 'the best painter in New York.'"¹⁹ Basquiat once related a story about the ambiguous distinction between copying and drawing in his artistic process. "I was making one [a drawing] in an airplane once," he recalled. "I was copying some stuff out of a Roman sculpture book. This lady said, 'Oh, what are you studying?' I said, 'It's a drawing.'"²⁰

According to Basquiat's studio assistant Stephen Torton, much of the artist's 1982 canvas *Man from Naples* (plate 23) derived from a story of Torton's travels through Italy, which Basquiat took as his own.²¹ He recalled, "We were hanging out a little bit and . . . I started telling a silly story of traveling, and he made a painting out of it. He

painted the entire story.”²² While driving from Florence to Siena, Torton had experienced a traffic jam so severe that it required the intervention of the local police force. An elderly Neapolitan man was selling sandwiches in the middle of the road, holding up traffic. In one traffic lane the man had set up a huge glass case with a pig on a spit inside, making sandwiches for drivers who would stop to buy them. The police confronted the man, and after much arguing he was convinced to leave, but not before he kicked over the glass case in anger. This caused the glass to break, and the pig inside rolled down the open street in front of the shocked crowd. In his painting Basquiat has captured the figure of the pig, looming large in the left panel of the composition. The words “MERCANTI DI PROSCIUTTO” across the bottom in blue combine with “BIG PIG SANDWICHES” of the line directly above and the reference to “NAPLES”—the origin of the elderly man—in the upper right of the first panel in a distillation of Torton’s story. Basquiat’s paintings and drawings contain endless collections of borrowed words, images, and symbols such as these, which stretch to the very edges of his compositions. It is clear that appropriation is the rule for this artist.

Appropriation entails the techniques of both copying and imitation; the first implies technical reproducibility (as in Basquiat’s use of photographic technologies to form the foundations of painted compositions), while the second more commonly indicates a creative transposition (as in the artist’s endless copying of texts, images, and other symbols from other sources). The distinction between the two has been an important one from the art historical viewpoint, and the history of modernism has been continually concerned with the legitimacy and the superiority of each practice. At various points throughout the history of art, each technique has been variously celebrated or disparaged. For example, in the case of academic art training in the nineteenth century, copying was prevalent. Many academic painters were historically trained by modeling the compositions of earlier artists.²³ This is a tradition that Basquiat continued as he copied from the notebooks of Leonardo, art history textbooks, and museum catalogs. Early critics stressed the potential of a copy from nature to result in a new (or naive) way of seeing. Art historian Richard Shiff has argued that both artists and critics viewed this form of mimesis as *expressive* rather than as straightforward representation. “The imitation of the artist’s way of seeing,” he writes, “serves as the means to the truth—not what he sees or represents, but *how* he sees.”²⁴

An alternative current of criticism, however, centered on the anti-academic artists (Matisse, Cézanne, Manet), who conceived of copying as an act devoid of interpretation. These painters instead focused on expressive devices (e.g., color and brushstroke) in order to signify originality and evoke a naive vision.²⁵ Originality was in fact the mark of talent and success for these artists. Shiff explains,

With the extreme concern for originality, the styles of various authoritative classic masters were reinterpreted to appear naïve rather than learned and self-conscious. So when Cézanne's admirers described him, around 1900, as the new Poussin, they did not intend to suggest that his work had been influenced by some study of the style of this master of the classical tradition. Instead, they saw Cézanne as rediscovering in his own naïve manner the universal truths evident also in Poussin's classic art. Cézanne, too, became a classic, and an original one—he drew his classicism forth from his “self.”²⁶

The concepts of originality, naïveté, spontaneity, and imitation certainly threaten to converge here, but what is of interest is the sensitivity to the boundary between what Shiff calls self-expression that is *found* rather than *made*. An emphasis on *found*, or naïve, expression likewise results in the domination of the ideology of originality in art history. This ideology neglects repetition or conscious making as a factor of creativity, and it is from such views that those of Harold Rosenberg and other modernist critics of the postwar generation have emerged. Clearly, the discourses of mimesis have shifted over time, from copy to imitation and back again. These binary views of appropriation persisted right up to the postmodern era—that is, Basquiat's critical moment—when both artists and critics interrogated the possibilities of appropriation. Basquiat's appropriation (particularly his appropriation of modernist masters like Picasso), like that of his contemporaries, demonstrates the instability of these modernist histories. This work proves that one simply cannot consider appropriation outside of its epistemological complications. Basquiat used techniques of copying *and* imitation throughout his large body of painted compositions. The surfaces of these compositions are littered with both mechanical photocopies (some of them turned into silk screens) and expressive transcriptions.

With the precipitous rise of technology throughout the twentieth century, the techniques and aesthetics of reproduction quickly filtered into the visual arts, inspiring questions about authenticity and originality along the way. In Basquiat's time, Rosalind Krauss considered the challenge of reproductive mediums to conceptions of originality in her landmark essay “The Originality of the Avant-Garde” (1981). Krauss begins her text with the paradox of Rodin's sculptural practice—that is, as both multiple and unique. The artist's reliance on the repetition and repositioning of identical figures in his compositions challenges the “cult of originality” to which even Rodin subscribed.²⁷ Throughout the essay, Krauss explicitly questions the relevance of the “original” among reproductive media and techniques commonly used by the avant-garde in the twentieth century. This reveals a larger issue for Krauss, who writes, “If the very notion of the avant-garde can be seen as a function of the discourse of origi-

nality, the actual practice of vanguard art tends to reveal that 'originality' is a working assumption that itself emerges from a ground of repetition and recurrence."²⁸ In this view, appropriation (copying, imitation, reproduction) and originality are not mutually exclusive; they are interdependent. It makes no sense to celebrate one of these terms while stigmatizing the other. Krauss's example here is the grid, to which many twentieth-century avant-garde artists have been committed in their practice (e.g., Agnes Martin, Ad Reinhardt, Sol LeWitt, Josef Albers, and so on). The grid makes an escape from repetition impossible for the very artists who value originality. As she claims, "The grid *can only be repeated*."²⁹ But what Krauss's analysis of the grid reveals is not so much the failure of the artist to achieve originality—that hallmark of the avant-garde and of modernism—but the myth of an original pictorial surface whatsoever. The doubt about, or even the fallacy of, what Krauss calls the "experience of originariness" allows for more productive readings of repetition, copying, and imitation that focus on the meanings produced in the reapplication of images and ideas rather than on their sources.³⁰

It seems no accident that when asked to name his favorite artists, Jean-Michel Basquiat replied, "Mostly Rauschenberg and Warhol."³¹ Both artists were intimately involved in the discourses of appropriation and reproduction in late-twentieth-century art. The proliferation of serigraph, or silk-screen, technology in the 1960s allowed Andy Warhol (1928–87) and Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008) to question the conceptual relationship between real and image through material technique. Both artists combined serigraphic methods with appropriated images in their construction of art objects in dialogue with the media landscape of this era. For *210 Coca-Cola Bottles* (1962), considered by many historians to be a landmark work for the artist, Warhol appropriated an image from popular culture—the ubiquitous Coca-Cola glass bottle—and screen-printed it onto his canvas 210 times. The repetitiveness of Warhol's process not only mimics but also underscores the repetitive nature of the imagery. We feel the presence of the machine—the one that stamps out the bottles in the Coca-Cola factory and the one that Warhol has used to create the image in his studio-turned-factory. Of course, Warhol celebrated the banality of his process and of popular culture in general, famously declaring, "Everybody looks alike and acts alike, and we're getting more and more that way. I think everybody should be a machine."³² But, more important, Warhol seems to also be questioning the conditions of contemporary culture and his own detachment from it.³³

Robert Rauschenberg and Basquiat took up images and objects in a similar way, making comparisons between the two artists popular among scholars. Like Warhol, Rauschenberg demonstrated an interest in the ideas and techniques of reproduction;

however, his aesthetic was less spare. After 1962, he used silk screen in his creation of densely layered paintings and combines that spoke to the contradictions inherent in mass culture. Rauschenberg's 1963 canvas *Estate* (figure 10), for example, demonstrates the acuity with which the artist would arrange appropriated images on a single canvas. In this work a single photograph of a building (seen most clearly in the upper-right corner of the composition) has been repeatedly silk-screened throughout the remainder of the canvas. In one combination, seen in the right center of the composition, Rauschenberg has laid the reproduction of this ordinary warehouse building directly to the left of an image that shows a decorative cornice from a nineteenth-century structure, thus highlighting the artist's tendency to draw equivalences between the past and the present, between high and low culture.³⁴

Born in 1960, Jean-Michel Basquiat came into a cultural landscape dominated by media culture like never before. Alongside his pop contemporaries, Warhol located his subject matter in mass culture and media and capitalized on industrial techniques like silk screen to underscore the increasingly complex relationship between the artist and the image. But unlike Warhol or Rauschenberg, Basquiat was born into this media landscape. Basquiat did not witness the slow transformation into the consumer culture in the postwar period; this was an established reality for him. His obsession with televisions, cartoons, advertisements, and comic books testify to an entrenchment in a landscape of images and icons that was characteristic of a group of artists known now as the "Pictures Generation."³⁵ As curator Douglas Ecklund has described it, "Whereas the baby boomers, born in the mid-1940s, had a sense of confidence in their ability to transform the world, these artists, who came of age in the early 1970s, were greeted by an America suffused with disillusionment. . . . The utopian promise of the counterculture had devolved into a commercialized pastiche of rebellious stances prepackaged for consumption."³⁶ These artists embraced the "commercialized pastiche" of their milieu, appropriating both the subjects and the methodologies of commodity culture. In the wake of the dematerialization of the art object put forward by minimalism and conceptualism, the Pictures Generation artists interrogated the "rhetorical, psychological, and social powers" of the image.³⁷

For example, in *Untitled* (1973), David Salle, a contemporary of Basquiat's, appropriated the logos of several instant-coffee brands and pasted them onto his own gelatin silver photographs of robed women, who look out their windows toward an unidentified object. The film *Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer* (1975) by Jack Goldstein centers on the appropriation of the roaring Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer lion, suspended in a circular frame bearing the Latin words "Ars Gratia Artist" (translated as "Art for Art's Sake"), which the artist has isolated on a red ground.³⁸ Goldstein fragmented the image and



Fig. 10 Robert Rauschenberg, *Estate*, 1963. Oil and silk screen on canvas, 96 x 70 inches (243.8 x 177.8 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

the sound from this appropriated film clip, re-presenting the lion in a seemingly endless mechanical loop of repetition. The result is a slow unraveling of the connection between sound and image that exposes the artificiality not only of the lion but also of the notion of ownership that this logo is meant to represent. Both Salle's collaged photographs and Goldstein's film employ appropriation and methods of mechanical reproduction to engage with, perhaps to celebrate or even to critique, consumer culture.

The Pictures Generation artists broke with modernist tradition in their tendency to "corrupt one medium with another"; many placed a conceptual and literal distance between themselves and the work in the staging of their pictures.³⁹ In his description of Jack Goldstein's films, curator and historian Douglas Crimp explains that such works signal a break with temporality as well. They do not "involve the artist's performing the work, but rather the presentation of an event in such a manner and at such a distance that it is apprehended as a representation—representation not, however, conceived as the *re*-presentation of that which is prior, but as the unavoidable condition of intelligibility of even that which is present."⁴⁰ The resonance of these images is found not necessarily in subject matter but in their presentation. Many of the artists in Crimp's exhibition—Robert Longo, Cindy Sherman, Sherrie Levine—manipulated photographic images so they would appear as fragments of an unknown narrative, confusing our perception of time.⁴¹ Crimp declares such objects as postmodernist, based not on their chronological position in a larger history but on their "radically new approach to mediums." Like Basquiat, the Pictures Generation artists used processes "of quotation, excerptation, framing and staging" in order to question the very systems of signification.⁴²

Sherrie Levine, for example, called specific attention to the role of the reproduced image in fine art photography with *After Walker Evans* (1981), an image first shown at her solo exhibition at Metro Pictures Gallery.⁴³ For this work, Levine rephotographed Evans's 1936 image of the wife of an Alabama sharecropper, which the Depression-era artist made on assignment under the Farm Security Administration. Levine's photograph is not of Evans's gelatin silver print, but of a catalog reproduction. The viewer cannot discern the difference. Levine's appropriation of Evans's reproduced image confronts the contradiction between photography (an infinitely reproducible medium) and fine art (considered as a unique object). We might say that her reproduction of Evans's image as its own gelatin silver print also returns the aura (to use Walter Benjamin's term) to the frequently reproduced FSA image. Levine's reproductions of photographic reproductions intervene directly in the discourse around photography—as a document or a work of art, as a unique image or an endlessly reproducible copy—while remaining entrenched within it.⁴⁴ Although Basquiat was never considered a member of the

Pictures Generation group, his appropriation is similarly engaged within the contemporary view of appropriation as a method of both criticism and complicity.⁴⁵ Basquiat's use of copies (both mechanical and physical) in his paintings and drawings raises questions about the aesthetic condition of the copied image, the structure of meaning, and the role of images in contemporary culture.⁴⁶

Basquiat's earliest works demonstrate a clear engagement with both the materials and the ideas of art making, themes that would occupy the artist throughout his career. *Anti-Product 4* of 1980 (plate 24), completed when Basquiat was more widely known by the pseudonym SAMO, may at first appear to be a simple collage, an exploration of color and composition. A blue-painted rectangle in the upper left mirrors the size and shape of a copied photo-booth image of the young Basquiat mounted at a forty-five-degree angle to its lower-right corner. Below this image of the artist, the word "BLUE," transcribed in blue acrylic paint, hovers above a copied UPC code marked with (presumably) the artist's own partial fingerprints. Here the artist presented the trace of his body as a mark of its potential commodification.

Anti-Product 4 is also partially marked by Basquiat's intellectual investigations. With his sly inclusion of the word "BLUE" depicted in blue, Basquiat highlighted the gap between an object (or person) and its representations, the slippages between signifier and signified, in a way reminiscent of Jasper Johns's work of the late 1950s. He questioned the parameters of identity as well, via the juxtaposition of his own fingerprints and his dramatic photographic portrait; the combination of these two elements with the UPC bar code in the lower-right corner—another manner of identification in the postindustrial age—brings in issues of criminality, tracking, and surveillance. Basquiat further emphasized the layers of intervention, and thus the conceptual distance, between real and reproduced with the very method of his production: xerography. In *Anti-Product 4* we also see the potential for the fragmented images to challenge conventional narratives of representation. Basquiat's composition encourages us to read in a new way, emphasizing not only content contained in the composition but its form as well. This work makes visible the fragmentation of the subject.

Under the influence of philosophers and critics Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Julia Kristeva, the critical attitude of the late 1970s and early 1980s leaned toward deconstruction—that is, a belief that subjectivity was manufactured via discourses of race, gender, and sexuality. More important for looking at the work of Basquiat, Roland Barthes's 1968 essay "The Death of the Author" questioned authorial voice, arguing, "It is the language that speaks, not the author."⁴⁷ In doing this, Barthes realigned the focus from the creation of verbal forms to their enunciation. The text transforms from "a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God)"

into what Barthes calls a “multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.” Because the text is no longer under the exclusive jurisdiction of a single figure, it is without an origin. “The text,” he writes, “is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture.”⁴⁸ Basquiat’s appropriation functions in this “tissue of quotations,” challenging the notions of authenticity and originality—the very pillars of modernism.

Basquiat appropriated both from the popular media and from the masters of art history.⁴⁹ In *Mona Lisa* from 1983 (see plate 4), while Basquiat covered the background—a lush landscape in Leonardo’s composition—with a layer of yellow paint over a black ground and reduced the river and winding path of Leonardo’s image to thin curves of white paint, the artist retained the iconic painting’s basic composition and its title. Basquiat also found a parallel to his own interest in anatomical drawings in the illustrations of hands, bones, and skulls in the Leonardo monograph he owned.⁵⁰ Basquiat copied the rear view of the bottom half of the male torso from Leonardo’s notebook *Studies of Legs of Man and the Leg of a Horse*, 1506–7, onto the upper portion of his canvas *Leonardo da Vinci’s Greatest Hits* (1982; see plate 5). Similar references to Leonardo appear as visual references in 1983’s *Big Shoes* (plate 25) and as a textual reference (“LEONARDO AND HIS FIVE GROTESQUE HEADS”) in an untitled canvas from the same year.⁵¹

Basquiat’s early paintings reveal the artist’s appropriation of many other modern masters. He based the entire composition of *Untitled (Maid from Olympia)* from 1982 on Manet’s famous nude from 1863 (plate 26). Basquiat’s *Three Quarters of Olympia Minus the Servant* (1982) combines a reference to Manet with one to Edgar Degas via the inclusion of the text “WOMAN DRY HER NECK” BY EDGAR©” (plate 27).⁵² References to both Manet (“OLYMPIA”) and Leonardo (“MONA LISA”) appear written across the black ground of *Crown Hotel (Mona Lisa Background)*, also from 1982. We see a linguistic reference to Auguste Rodin’s nineteenth-century sculpture *The Thinker* in the top left of Basquiat’s *Jawbone of an Ass* (plate 28). In 1983 Basquiat painted versions of “THE REAL LEONARDO DA VINCI” and “THE FAKE LEONARDO DA VINCI”—that is, *New* and *Fake*, respectively.

The artist’s homages also include those to Picasso. The leftmost panel of Basquiat’s *Untitled* (1983) contains a version of one of Picasso’s standing figures in his 1907 *Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J.)*, her right arm folded at a forty-five-degree angle above her head (plate 29). Basquiat included part of Picasso’s biography at the center of his canvas *Pegasus*, of 1987 (plate 30): “PABLO BEGINS TO DRAW AND PAINT ATTENDS BULLFIGHT COMPLETES EARLIEST WORK.” In *Gold Griot* (1984), Basquiat has drawn the nose on his central figure to resemble an automobile—the nostrils are transformed into tires, while the rest of the nose has been made into the body of the car via the addition of

one vertical line along the bridge and one horizontal line across the nasal sidewalls in white (plate 31). Basquiat's transformation of a facial feature into an automobile reads as a witty allusion to Picasso's assemblage *Baboon and Young* (1951–55), where the animal's face was formed from two toy cars.⁵³ Classical art, too, was a source for Basquiat. Versions of the ancient Greek statue *Aphrodite*, known as the *Venus de Milo*, appear in Basquiat's *Untitled (Venus 2000 B.C.)* from 1982, *Venus* (1982), *Top Tee* (1982), and *Untitled (Venus/The Great Circle)* of 1983, and as a photocopy collaged onto the surface of the painting *Piscine Versus the Best Hotels* (1982; plate 32), among others.⁵⁴ The list goes on and on.

Yet, the artist's blatant reproduction of images from classical art history has perplexed critics and scholars. The tendency has been to focus on formalism and iconography, pinpointing the sources of each image. In the case of Basquiat's use of images from Leonardo da Vinci, for example, most analyses have remained focused on the origin of each quotation. Enrique Hauser's article "The Leonardo Addiction of Jean-Michel Basquiat" lists several examples where the artist has taken illustrations directly out of Leonardo's published notebooks.⁵⁵ Richard Marshall, too, has located and identified Basquiat's use of images from modern artists. In his 1992 essay for the Whitney Museum's retrospective, he provided an illustration comparing the "original" works of modern artists—in this case Pollock and Picasso—to Basquiat's reproductions. Such resemblances might be read as an affirmation of the younger painter's talent, putting him on the historical map of modernism. Those methods that seek to link Basquiat stylistically to a modernist past bear traces of Walter Benjamin's work on the aura; it is as if locating the original will somehow make Basquiat's own practice authentic. Yet binary comparisons never quite engage appropriation as a legitimate practice.⁵⁶ We are reminded of Douglas Crimp's warnings to critics of the Pictures Generation. "We are not," Crimp claims, "in search of sources or origins, but of structures of signification: underneath each picture there is always another picture."⁵⁷

Basquiat's engagement with the *Mona Lisa* (from 1983; see plate 4) provides the perfect opportunity for us to consider the ways in which these theories of authorship and appropriation come forward in the artist's work. For one, Basquiat was not the only artist to have appropriated Leonardo's masterpiece; Marcel Duchamp similarly cited this painting, at the end of 1919, with his ready-made painting *L.H.O.O.Q.*, a postcard-size reproduction of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* on which Duchamp drew a handlebar mustache and goatee. As a ready-made, commercially available object (i.e., a postcard), Duchamp's revision of Leonardo was always already about the commodification and circulation of art objects in the age of reproduction. Almost immediately, Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.* was co-opted and reinterpreted by fellow Dada artist Francis Picabia, who

put a modified version of Duchamp's image (minus the goatee) on the cover of the twelfth issue of his Dada magazine, 391.⁵⁸ We must consider that Basquiat's citation of Leonardo could not have happened outside a consideration of Duchamp. Not only is it true that "underneath each picture there is always another picture," as Crimp claimed, but also Basquiat's appropriation of *Mona Lisa* by way of Duchamp, by way of Leonardo, shows us that the chain of signification expands and compounds.

Basquiat's appropriation of *Mona Lisa* lies a step beyond the work put forward by the artist's contemporaries. The examples by Salle and Goldstein mentioned earlier critique consumerist culture via the artists' deployment of the techniques and subjects of advertising. Basquiat's *Mona Lisa* collapses the space between consumerism and art culture, becoming a form of currency in itself. We see the markings that spell "FEDERAL RESERVE NOTE" along the top of the composition. The sitter's head is flanked on both left and right by large numbers in a font style similar to that used by the United States Mint. Both this painting and the artist's processes of appropriation found throughout his oeuvre not only question the structures of signification—that is, the relationship between an image and its meaning—but also turn that binary structure against itself. Basquiat's *Mona Lisa* is an appropriation of Leonardo, but more important it is an appropriation of the legacy of appropriation. This operates differently from even Salle's appropriations of Delacroix and Géricault in that Basquiat's appropriations are not fragments or pieces of a historical image that are inserted into a contemporary context to construct a synthetic whole. Basquiat inserts his appropriation and its histories whole so that they fragment into narratives (the history of art, the role of consumerism or appropriation within that history) within the space of his canvas. These works force us to read *into* the images through the layers of representation and appropriation.

One could certainly read Basquiat's appropriation as part of a larger tradition of African American artists. For example, Rexford Stead, former deputy director of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, has argued, "Staying close to the mainstream of American art was a way for black artists to find acceptance and commissions. Perhaps this conformity (or better, sublimation) was in itself another kind of 'black experience.'" ⁵⁹ Romare Bearden, for example, similarly used photostat technology in his appropriation and transposition of Western painting models.⁶⁰ Such techniques were enabled by photography and the array of visual reproductions available in the twentieth century, many of which Basquiat also used in his studio. In her analysis of Bearden's appropriative practices, art historian Sarah Kennel points to André Malraux's 1953 book *The Voices of Silence* for a theorization of the relationship between the reproduced image, the masters, and the twentieth-century artist.⁶¹ In his first chapter, "Museum Without Walls," Malraux addresses the ubiquity of color reproductions of paintings,

which in turn has given artists unprecedented access to works they would have been unable to see in a physical present. These reproductions make up a "museum without walls," and this new museum, Malraux writes, "will carry infinitely farther that revelation of the world of art" than was previously possibly solely within the walls of the physical museum.⁶² The access to masterpieces allowed by the photographic reproduction has enabled artists to revise the history of art. In the words of Malraux: "While photography is bringing a profusion of masterpieces to the artists, the latter have been revising their notion of what it is that makes the masterpiece." The photographic reproduction, "suggest[ed], then impos[ed] a new hierarchy."⁶³ Such methods of reproduction allow the artists to rewrite art history, inserting themselves into the canon. This is not a passive consumption of reproductions but an active process of reworking and revising a history of images.

Kennel argues that Romare Bearden subscribed to the notion of a democracy provided by this "photographic history of art."⁶⁴ Bearden likely studied paintings and drawings of the Old Masters as part of his curriculum at the Art Students League, and he even cited his study of Byzantine and early Italian Renaissance painting as major influences on his own explorations of space and light. In a letter to a fellow artist in 1945, he explained, "I've tried to learn the design of pictures studying Byzantine painting, and the old Italian primitives, etc."⁶⁵ Several of Bearden's watercolor and ink works from this period in fact show a surprisingly literal adaptation of these sources. He looked to Sienese artist Duccio di Buoninsegna, German Renaissance painter Dirk Bouts, Giotto, Rembrandt, and de Hooch, among others, transposing their compositions into his own increasingly abstract style. He worked from the compositions of Picasso, Cézanne, and Matisse and from African art sources as well.

Like Basquiat, Bearden relied on reproductions in his studio to guide him; the use of this source material varied, from loosely inspired transpositions to exacting copies.⁶⁶ Bearden never hid his appropriations, frequently claiming in letters and interviews that admiration for the work of others was an integral part of the creative education of any artist. He refused outright the modernist notion of complete spontaneity and originality and embraced these influences on his own work. According to Kennel, "We can interpret Bearden's drive to systematically paint copies following a canonical history of Western art—from Duccio to Matisse, or early Renaissance to modern—as a bid to position himself in relation to that tradition. . . . Plunging into a traditional history of painting offered Bearden the means through which he could productively shape an artistic identity and reshape the historical and cultural representations of race."⁶⁷ Kennel reads Bearden's appropriations as part of a larger initiative to place himself within an art historical lineage. Moreover, Bearden's copying and transposing

of Old Masters, modern painters, and African art was more than a formal exercise; it was a deliberate attempt to “establish visual and cultural affinities between historical and artistic moments.”⁶⁸

According to Lee Stephens Glazer, Bearden used art-historical reproductions in a process of acknowledgment and revision that allowed the artist both to assert his awareness of a history of art and to express his individual identity as a black man. “For Bearden, as for Malraux,” Glazer writes, “the artist necessarily confronts history, first imitating and then mastering it. Each new creation is part of a series; the new work acknowledges the past even as it asserts its own difference. Artistic style renounces its connection to a unique object or individual point of view to become a form of writing, a chain of signifiers in which each signifier possesses meaning through its relationship to already existing signifiers.”⁶⁹ Like Basquiat, Bearden did not faithfully reproduce the visual vocabulary of art history, but instead used photographic technology to transform it. He reproduced almost, but not exactly. Bearden’s technique of incorporating reproductions into larger compositions and narratives of black life in his *Projections* series, for example, allowed the artist, in Glazer’s reading, “to acknowledge the significance of the art-historical past even as he revised its forms to accommodate new representations of African-American identity.”⁷⁰ Bearden’s impulse to appropriate reproductions was in part provoked by his recognition that his role as a cultural producer would be necessarily informed by the discourses that preceded him. As both Kennel and Glazer acknowledge, Bearden’s use of reproduced images was motivated by a desire to learn from these examples and to assert his aesthetic mastery of them in turn. These are impulses shared by Basquiat, who was equally invested in a process of signification through style.

Complicating matters even further is the fact that both Bearden and Basquiat appropriated and reproduced their own work as well. In the case of Bearden, he frequently used his 1964 photostats as models for later collages. He included both photocopies (in black and white and in color) and photostats of details from his 1963–64 works as materials in later compositions.⁷¹ Xerography is likewise the key component of Basquiat’s self-appropriative process.⁷² As early as 1978, Basquiat made photocopies of his own drawings and layered them with texts onto small postcards that he would try to sell on the street.⁷³ According to Fab 5 Freddy, “At the time we met, Jean was going to this color Xerox shop on Prince Street and gluing stuff together, creating postcards and baseball cards. Then we would walk around the Village trying to sell them.”⁷⁴ In his later work, Basquiat placed a variety of photocopied papers directly on the canvas. At that moment, photocopying technology was becoming more affordable and more readily available. These photocopied drawings became part of his painting repertoire,

allowing him to work faster on his large compositions. When asked in 1983 by Henry Geldzahler if he drew frequently, Basquiat replied, "Yesterday was the first time I'd drawn in a long time. I'd been sort of living off this pile of drawings from last year, sticking them on paintings."⁷⁵

Throughout his career Basquiat continued to use a photocopy machine to copy his own drawings, which he would then paste on his canvases. The background of *La Colomba* from 1983 (plate 33), for example, consists primarily of photocopied drawings collaged onto the surface. This would happen often, as Basquiat attempted to cover a previous composition and rework the same canvas. According to studio assistant Stephen Torton, when Basquiat wanted to cover a canvas to start anew, there were two options. "One was to take raw paper and just systematically glue it on top of an existing painting so that he could start again with a neutral canvas. The second option was to cover it with drawings."⁷⁶ The drawings were copied and arranged in a random pattern by Torton, because in Torton's words, "he [Basquiat] didn't want me sitting there like a designer and trying to lay out an interesting collage of drawings. He wanted the randomness of me picking up drawings and gluing them down."⁷⁷ Basquiat would then go back to the composition with acrylic, oil, and paintstick—at times obscuring entire blocks of the drawings, as on the left panel of *La Colomba*, and at other times drawing over the top of them. The sculptural work *Brain*, from 1985, fits this pattern: it consists almost entirely of photocopied drawings collaged onto the surfaces of twenty-seven wood boxes, which were then covered by markings in paint and crayon. The process of copying his own drawings became such a large part of Basquiat's practice that later in his career he purchased a color Xerox machine for his studio.⁷⁸

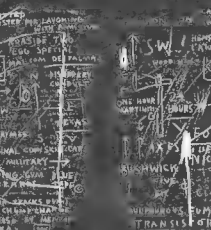
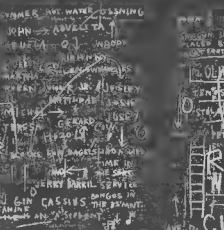
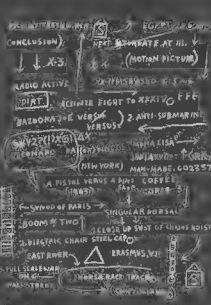
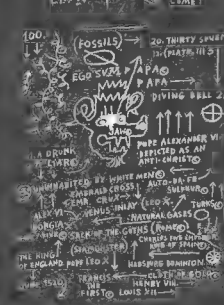
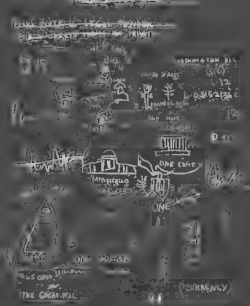
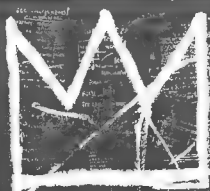
Basquiat would also use the same photocopied drawings across multiple objects. The thirty-two drawings known as the "Daros Suite" from 1982–83 were most frequently used in this way. Torton explained, "He would just give me them [the "Daros Suite" drawings]. I would literally take them over in a folder to Jamie Canvas [an artists' supply store] and just do whatever I liked. I would come back with hundreds of Xeroxes. I would make fifty of one, fifty of another."⁷⁹ For example, the artist attached photocopied versions of a man's head in profile from the original drawing known as *PPCD*, which was part of the "Daros Suite" (1982–83; see plate 22), to the surfaces of *Sell Grit* (1983) and *A Next* (1984). The same head appears, labeled as "FIG 23," in the leftmost panel of *Undiscovered Genius of the Mississippi Delta* (1983), as well as in the rightmost panels of *Life Like Son of Barney Hill* and *Toussaint L'Overture Versus Savonarola* (see plate 21) from the same year.

Like Warhol and Rauschenberg before him, Basquiat used serigraphy in his methods of self-appropriation. He issued an edition of eighteen lithographs in a series titled

Anatomy, in 1982. In 1983 the artist produced several other series. *Tuxedo* (figure 11) was a large, silk-screened black painting made from the reproductions of sixteen previous drawings and issued as an edition of ten. *Untitled (Return of the Giant Figure)*, produced in an edition of ten, was composed from a collection of the artist's small drawings. Basquiat also produced a five-part series of two-color silk screens, derived mostly from the sketchbooks of Leonardo da Vinci and from *Gray's Anatomy*, as well as an untitled edition of twelve silk screens that used reproductions of twenty-eight of the artist's own drawings.⁸⁰ Several canvases from 1984–85, created around the time that Basquiat began a series of collaboration paintings with Andy Warhol and Francesco Clemente, have silk-screened images of drawings, on top of which the artist painted after applying them; these canvases include *Sienna*, *Thin Foil*, *Cathode*, *Logo*, *Alpha Particles*, *Carbon/Oxygen*, *Melting Point of Ice*, and *Untitled (Arm and Hammer II)*, along with several untitled pieces (see plate 10). In many cases the lines between paint, paper, and canvas are seamless, and one cannot easily discern the thin line between original and appropriated material. While the location and identification of Basquiat's source materials and the patterns of their use in the finished works is indeed valuable information, his use of the quotations can be elucidating as well; they are, in fact, inseparable.

Concerned with the scientific cataloguing and observation of concrete objects, a formalist history of art often fails to consider anything outside the realms of specific description and direct signification. This inevitably leads to an incomplete understanding of the work of art, especially when the meaning lies outside of formal description or iconography. "Doing iconographic analysis," writes preeminent art historian Georges Didi-Huberman "is not a pure and simple matter of knowing textual sources, symbolism and meanings. What exactly is a text? What is a symbol, a source, a meaning?"⁸¹ Basquiat's images and his liberal use of appropriation foreground the tension between the scientific and the subjective branches of the discipline of art history. We can identify the sources of these appropriated motifs, texts, and images, but what happens next? Didi-Huberman's question about symbolism and meaning becomes particularly important when we look at the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat. For this body of work, it is not enough to decode the appropriated signs and symbols; we must also try to discern meaning in their interactions and in the artist's protocols of construction. Basquiat's appropriation is as expressive as it is abundant. To borrow Didi-Huberman's

Fig. 11 (opposite) Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Tuxedo*, 1982–83. Silk screen on canvas, edition of ten, 102 $\frac{2}{3}$ x 59 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (261 x 152 cm). Private collection, courtesy of Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, Zurich.
© The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



words, Basquiat's work does not necessarily "pertain to a representational code"; rather, "it opens representation."⁸² But Basquiat's methods—of collage and of appropriation—also move representation beyond content. These works fracture the subjects and narratives of interpretation, compelling us to consider the processes of making and the experiences of seeing these works. If we are to understand the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat, we must reorient ourselves toward its form.⁸³

Applying theories outside the traditional parameters of art history is particularly fruitful in the case of an artist like Jean-Michel Basquiat, who practiced in many disciplines and did not draw a hard line between his work in music, image, and text. This was true of many artists working in downtown New York at that time, who moved in the spaces between music and art. As explained by Fab 5 Freddy, "When the ideas began to gel, the musical aspects were a part of it. . . . A lot of the people that we hung around with, like Jean-Michel, knew what the latest records were, knew what the latest dances were, and we went out at night and listened to music and danced a lot. We painted in the daytime, that was the whole idea—and *it was all seen as one*."⁸⁴ Music and art were inseparable for Basquiat and many artists in the downtown scene in the late 1970s and the 1980s. Even the seminal exhibition *New York/New Wave*, the first show in which Basquiat's work was exhibited publicly, was more about the music scene than the art.⁸⁵ Basquiat himself revealed the inextricability of sound and image in his own practice, claiming in a 1983 interview with Marc Miller that, when deciding what images to place on his canvas, "when I am working, I hear them."⁸⁶

The relationship between the eye and the ear is one that interested the artist throughout his career. Acknowledging his discomfort in speaking about his work or his process, Basquiat once compared himself to a musician. "I don't know how to describe my work," he explained. "It's like somebody asking Miles [Davis], 'How does your horn sound?' I don't think he could really tell you why he played[,] . . . why he plays this at this point in the music."⁸⁷ The historian Robert Farris Thompson described the experience of watching Basquiat paint in his studio in February 1985 as both a visual and an auditory process: "Basquiat activated an LP of free, Afro-Cuban, and other kinds of jazz. Then he resumed work on an unfinished collage. Hard bop sounded. Jean-Michel pasted on letters and crocodiles. He did this with a riffing insistence, matching the music. Digits in shifting sequences, 2222, 444, 5555, further musicalized the canvas, like the chanted numerals of the Phillip Glass and Robert Wilson opera *Einstein at the Beach*. Four styles of jazz—free, mambo-inflected, hard bop, and, at the end, fabulous early bop with sudden stops—accompanied the making of that collage."⁸⁸ In an earlier essay Thompson invoked the term *incantations* to describe Basquiat's works produced in this environment—that is, surrounded by sound.⁸⁹

Basquiat actively transposed subjects and forms from auditory sources onto his paintings and drawings. The story of the Neapolitan merchant selling prosciutto in the street that appears scattered over the surface of *Man from Naples* (1982; see plate 23), for example, was one that the artist *heard* in his studio. One of Basquiat's trademark phrases, "boom for real," was sourced from a television news interview that the artist recorded.⁹⁰ The names of the musicians—Max Roach, Dizzy Gillespie, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker—and the records that Basquiat listened to appear in these works as well. *Discography (One)* and *Discography (Two)* from 1983 transcribe in great detail the label information from two Savoy recording sessions that included both Charlie Parker and Miles Davis in their lineups (figures 12 and 13).⁹¹ The 1983 canvas *Low Boy in Junkie Paradise*, for example, bears Basquiat's transcription of Parker's second solo in his Savoy recording of "Red Cross."⁹² References to eyes and ears, too, appear alongside one another in the artist's compositions. For the back cover for the single "Beat Bop" (1983; see figure 9), Basquiat designed a composition that places the drawing of an eye, surrounded by staccato lines of eyelashes, in the upper-right corner below the word "EAR"; a second, less-detailed eye also appears toward the center of this composition—directly below the outline of a hand. We see references to eyes and ears in the central panel of the artist's composition *Untitled* from 1983 as well (see plate 29).

Although some scholars have previously analyzed Basquiat's work in relation to hip-hop, I propose jazz as a critical framework for looking at this oeuvre. The theories and methodologies of this music provide a new way to think about spontaneity, originality, appropriation, and the subversive potential of appropriative practices. We must consider that, alongside his early connections to hip-hop, Basquiat was equally invested in jazz music. The artist himself recognized the indebtedness of hip-hop to jazz music in titling his record "Beat Bop," a playful reference to the predominant "beat" of rap music, and the "bop" style of jazz.⁹³ As did many musicians and scholars, Basquiat's close friend Fab 5 Freddy recognized the legacy of jazz in the music. Growing up with the great bebop drummer Max Roach as his godfather, he explains, "I was always conscious of the fact that there was some kind of connection, just in the cool factor of what was inherent in Bebop and the music that I was involved in."⁹⁴ Fab 5 Freddy not only sparked Basquiat's interest in rap music, but he also claims to have introduced Basquiat to bebop. In a 1999 interview with Franklin Sirmans, Fab 5 Freddy specifically recalled the artist's ardent interest in the Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie recording *Jazz at Massey Hall*, from 1953. Basquiat reportedly owned a vast collection of jazz records, including albums by Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, Billie Holiday, and Lester Young.⁹⁵ The artist's close friend Glenn O'Brien has written that Basquiat



Fig. 12 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Discography (One)*, 1983. Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas, 66 x 60 inches (167.5 x 152.5 cm). Private collection, courtesy of Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, Zurich. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.

“knew about Miles Davis and John Coltrane and Charlie Parker the same way he knew about Picasso and Duchamp and Pollock.”⁹⁶

As discussed in the first chapter of this book, the tendency to cite Basquiat alongside white painters—as O’Brien does here, and as the artist did himself on many occasions—must be read in relation to the overwhelming critical silence surrounding black artists at this moment. However, the story of black music was quite different; begin-



Fig. 13 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Discography (Two)*, 1983. Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas, 66 x 60 inches (167.5 x 152.5 cm). Private collection, courtesy of Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, Zurich. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.

ning with the Harlem Renaissance in the early decades of the twentieth century, intellectuals like Alain Locke and W.E.B. Du Bois cited music (in particular spirituals and the blues) as examples of the richness of African American culture.⁹⁷ The theme of music also appeared in the literature surrounding this movement, particularly in the work of Langston Hughes—a figure whom Basquiat depicted directly in an untitled drawing from 1983.⁹⁸ Despite the pitfalls that may come along with reading Basquiat



Fig. 14 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Untitled (Now's the Time)*, 1985. Acrylic and oil paintstick on paper, 43 x 30½ inches (109 x 77.5 cm). Private collection. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.

in the context of jazz, I push this analysis forward with the assumption that the artist wanted to engage deliberately with this well-established history of black creativity.⁹⁹

Basquiat's connections to this style of music have already been explored commercially. Reproductions of several Basquiat paintings with recognizable musicians' portraits were marketed by Pomegranate Communications as a boxed set of greeting cards. And a reproduction of the canvas *Trumpet* was used as the cover art for *Basquiat Salutes Jazz*, a music compilation released by Prestige in 2005.¹⁰⁰ Jazz musicians started to appear in Basquiat's paintings in 1982, such as *Charles the First* (see plate 20); references to jazz musicians or recordings appear in more than thirty large-format paintings and twenty works on paper. Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie are the two musicians who appear most frequently, both literally as figures in the paintings and metaphorically through linguistic references to their music. The artist painted canvases with figures playing the trumpet, the saxophone, or the drums; he also devoted several canvases to replicating the labels of jazz records or the entire discographies of musicians.¹⁰¹

Basquiat's *Untitled (Now's the Time)* (figure 14), a work on paper from 1985, borrows the shape and label of a Savoy disc from the 1940s and the title from an original song ("Now's the Time") written by Charlie Parker forty years earlier. A partial figure on the left, head down and arms raised outward, and the outlined musical notes in the center of Basquiat's label, strongly resemble the characteristic Savoy design. In the center of Basquiat's drawing, he has transcribed the proper original (SAV-585) and master (573-B) numbers, which would appear in any discography in order to indicate the date of recording and of first release, respectively. The title of Parker's song also appears written—"NOW'S THE TIME©"—across the center of a large wooden record created by Basquiat, *Now's the Time* (1985), above the letters PRKR, the artist's spelling of *Parker* without the vowels. For *Discography (One)* (see figure 12) the artist has given the complete information for this particular recording session at the WOR studios; the name of the group, "Charlie Parker's Ree Boppers," appears at the very top of the canvas, with the recording musicians listed directly below. *Discography (Two)* (see figure 13), reproduces the details—down to the sound engineer—of an August 1947 recording session of the Miles Davis All-Stars.

Many scholars and critics, too, have connected the artist with jazz, identifying explicit references or pointing to the "spontaneity" in jazz practice as connected with Basquiat's style of composition. Art historian Robert Farris Thompson noted that jazz and blues music are prominent in Basquiat's work. His essay "Royalty, Heroism, and the Streets" for the artist's 1992 Whitney Museum retrospective was reprinted in the 2009 edited volume *The Hearing Eye: Jazz and Blues Influences in African American Visual Art*.¹⁰² According to Thompson, the jazz and blues references in Basquiat's work

"appear as content, they appear as names, they appear as style."¹⁰³ But what does it mean to say that jazz and blues appear "as style" in these paintings and drawings? Scholars have previously discussed the works of Jackson Pollock and Stuart Davis in terms of their engagement with jazz, and yet few have analyzed the structural impact of jazz on the styles of these European American artists more profoundly.¹⁰⁴ Glenn O'Brien has perhaps come the closest to an analysis of Basquiat's work in jazz terms, writing in 2005: "The very essence of Basquiat's work is rooted in jazz—in the choruses and solos. In the representation of ancient African forms with divine resonance. In the role of homage, reference, plays on words and on riffs. Basquiat, like Parker, understood the magic of quotation."¹⁰⁵

In her 1983 article "Jazz and the Visual Arts," art historian Mona Hadler addressed the influences of jazz on various European and American artists throughout the first half of the twentieth century, including Pablo Picasso, Stuart Davis, Fernand Léger, Henri Matisse, Romare Bearden, Man Ray, and Arthur Dove.¹⁰⁶ According to Hadler, the specific effects of jazz were tied to distinct aesthetics. For example, artists already interested in African art made an aesthetic connection between these art forms and jazz music in terms of the "primitive" impulses they sought, while those concerned with issues of modernism and urbanity interpreted the dynamic sounds of jazz music as analogous to their experience of the modern city. Hadler's article connects cubist and cubist-inspired works, such as those by Pablo Picasso, Stuart Davis, or Romare Bearden, to "certain general stylistic characteristics" of jazz music. She states, "On the whole, artists saw jazz as parallel in form and applicable to the content of a great many contemporary issues."¹⁰⁷

Throughout her article, Hadler presents several examples of the formal and iconographical influences of jazz in modern art. She argues that the strong contrast of Léger's compositions parallels the syncopated rhythms of jazz; she connects depictions of jazz subjects in Matisse's *Jazz* cutouts series of the late 1940s to an interest in the circus and its performers. Hadler also describes the work of Francis Picabia and Albert Gleizes in the United States as "among the earliest pictorial renditions of jazz."¹⁰⁸ Twelve years later, in 1995, in her article "Jazz and the New York School," Hadler focused exclusively on American artists, arguing that "the most apparent connection between jazz musicians and the artists of the Abstract Expressionist generation is their shared commitment to an improvisational process."¹⁰⁹ As evidence, she cites Ornette Coleman's own admission of Pollock's influence, which included the use of a Pollock image on the 1961 album cover of Coleman's *Free Jazz*, and the titles of works by surrealist painter Jimmy Ernst, which were apparently inspired by boogie-woogie recordings. Hadler

argues that the jazz improvisational process appealed to Ernst because of its similarity to the surrealist automatist technique. "He [Ernst] clearly expressed the conjunction of jazz and automatism in paintings of 1944 such as *Blues from Chicago* and *Echo-Plasm*. Ernst began *Echo-Plasm* and many other paintings of the period by using an automatic technique he called 'sifflage,' which involved blowing on thin oil paint until it spread in weblike patterns on the canvas. In essence, we can call it 'blowing the blues.'"¹¹⁰

Hadler's passage is problematic, as it falsely assumes a similarity between the unconscious, uncontrollable nature of automatist practice and the improvisational process of jazz musicians.¹¹¹ She also produces a false dichotomy between improvisation and "the carefully arranged music of the big bands [and] . . . small groups such as the Modern Jazz Quartet."¹¹² Overall, Hadler's arguments neither specify the structural impact of the music on art nor adequately address an engagement with musical improvisation, which is particularly relevant with an artist like Jean-Michel Basquiat, whose references to jazz extend beyond title, theme, and iconography.

The 1997 exhibition *Seeing Jazz*, organized by the Smithsonian Institution, also cursorily explored the relationship of this music to the visual arts. In his introduction to the exhibition's catalog, American Literature professor Robert O'Meally argues for "the artistic and literary works . . . as visualizations of music—visual equivalents to the sound of jazz." The overall focus of the exhibition centered on sampling artists and writers who have somehow referenced jazz in their work. As an example, O'Meally presents the effect and the interplay of rhythm in modern literature via several writers. He explains, "Writers like Toni Morrison, Ntozake Shange, Amiri Baraka, Albert Murray, Michael Harper and Rita Dove (just to name some leaders of the literary jazz aesthetic) not only tell the stories of jazz characters but pace their lines to approximate the dance-beat cadences and other rhythmic features of jazz music. Through playfully syncopated repetitions, their words perform a jazz dance on the page."¹¹³ In addition to showcasing "rhythm," the exhibition was organized around the musical categories of "improvisation" and "call and response"; in each case, paintings, sketches, sculptures, and photographs are juxtaposed with the jazz-themed texts of both writers (e.g., Andy González, Michael Ondaatje, Ralph Ellison) and musicians (e.g., Sidney Bechet, John Coltrane). For example, Basquiat's *Horn Players* from 1983 (plate 34) appears in the *Seeing Jazz* exhibition catalog alongside an excerpt from Ishmael Reed's poem "I Am a Cowboy in the Boat of Ra" (1989). In the reproduced painting, the artist's connections to and interests in jazz are explicit in his subject matter. We see likenesses of both Charlie Parker and trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie holding their instruments and looking out at the viewer from the left and right panels, respectively, of the three-part canvas.

The word “ornithology,” a reference to both the nickname (i.e., “Bird” or “Yardbird”) of and a composition by Charlie Parker, appears five times (twice marked out).

Basquiat’s *With Strings Part 2* of 1983 appears on another page of the *Seeing Jazz* exhibition catalog, to the left of a poem by Helio Orovio titled “The Cord Between the Fingers.” This juxtaposition encourages the viewer/reader to seek connections between the canvas and the poem—the rhythmic vibrations of Orovio’s instrument and the visual sensations of Basquiat’s canvas. Basquiat’s painting does in fact show some connection to jazz, and to Parker specifically; on the canvas, just to the left of the center, we again see the word “ornithology” written in black with a red mark over it. The explicit connection between this canvas and Orovio’s poem remains unclear. We are led to assume that Basquiat has been included here on the basis of his subject matter or its vague correspondence to “a swingingly improvised dimension.”¹¹⁴

In trying to understand the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat, the history, the politics, and the structure of jazz are indeed essential. On the one hand, jazz music provided Basquiat with a creative example of an engagement with the diaspora and a model for opposition to hierarchies of genre. Basquiat may have cited jazz music and its most famed musicians for jazz’s negotiation between the African and American influences—something that clearly related to the artist’s own identity as a product of the African diaspora. Robert Farris Thompson, for example, has argued that Basquiat’s use of diverse musical references in his visual practice belongs to a drive toward self-creolization—a blending of Afro-Caribbean and European cultures, modern art, jazz, and opera.¹¹⁵ The center panel of the 1984 painting *Zydeco* (figure 15) addresses one type of creolized music from Louisiana, which combines French Creole, Cajun, and other African American styles such as gospel, R&B, and jazz.¹¹⁶ A figure in the center of the composition holds an accordion, one of the central instruments of zydeco music, and Basquiat has written the word “zydeco” three times—above, to the right side, and below the figure. *Zydeco* and its inherent creolization may have interested the artist as a subject for the same reasons that jazz did. From its inception in New Orleans, a well-preserved area of Afro-Caribbean culture, zydeco music blended African and European American musical forms and crossed the divide between popular and commercial music, as well as between rural and urban culture. New Orleans jazz musicians rooted themselves in European traditions from the outset with their use of European instruments, such as the accordion that Basquiat features here in the center of his canvas. However, the music’s vocal traditions, call-and-response-style arrangements, and close ties to dance can be understood as characteristically “African” retentions.¹¹⁷

As a product of the African diaspora, the history of jazz is also a history of the appropriation and the negotiation of traditionally European and African musical styles

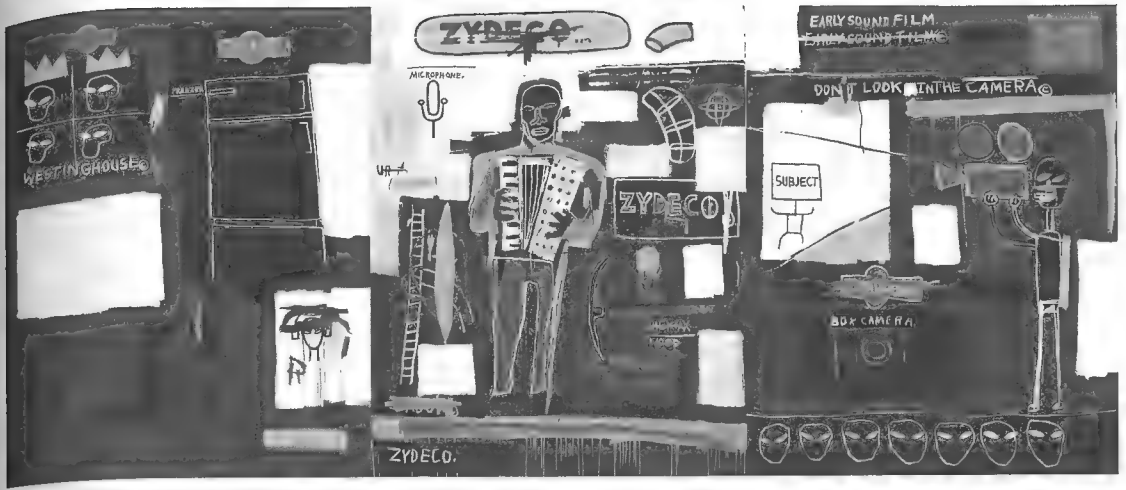


Fig. 15 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Zydeco*, 1984. Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas, 86 x 204 inches (218.5 x 518 cm). Bischofberger Collection, Switzerland. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.

and traditions. Almost every jazz scholar has addressed the duality and interaction of the music's European and African sources.¹¹⁸ In his encyclopedic text *The Creation of Jazz: Music, Race and Culture in Urban America*, music historian Burton Peretti points specifically to structural similarities, citing the distinctive “swing” rhythm in jazz as a result of the combination of West African polyrhythm with the monorhythm of European march and dance music styles.¹¹⁹ The nondiatonic scales, polyphonic/contrapuntal rhythmic effects, and antiphonal vocal techniques of African music also appear in jazz.¹²⁰ A constant negotiation between the “African” and the “American” characterizes this music.¹²¹

In fact, the culture of African Americans is itself a negotiation between both African and American influences, and the transmutation of African elements into African American music may stand in as a microcosm of the structure of black society as a whole. As it oscillates between these two poles, jazz's history and structure reflects the Du Boisian “double consciousness,” or even the multiconsciousness of black life and culture.¹²² In the updated introduction to his 1963 book, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) explained the impossibility of studying jazz and blues musics absent a consideration of African American history. This music, Baraka wrote, “was the history of the Afro-American people as text, as tale, as story, as exposition narrative, or what have you.” This music “was the score, the actually expressed creative orchestration, reflection of Afro-American life, our words, our libretto, to those actual, lived lives.”¹²³

As discussed in the first chapter, many of Basquiat's works explore the African presence as their subject. 1982's *Untitled (Maid from Olympia)*, for example, shifts the focus in Manet's *Olympia* from the reclining nude in Manet's foreground to her black servant in the background (see plate 26). In Basquiat's canvas the servant is pushed to the center of the canvas; her blackened face, devoid of color or expression, functions as a mask and highlights her lack of identity in the mainstream world. This shift in focus echoes the subversive character of jazz music, which transgresses the hierarchies of genre in its creolization of African and European musical languages and destabilizes the expected rhythmic orders of European composition with an African-influenced syncopation.

Basquiat's investment in jazz may also have been motivated by an interest in black social and political history, theories of black aesthetic genius, or the same ideas about black martyrdom that he explored in his series of athletes. For many musicians and artists of the 1920s and 1930s, jazz was a celebration of black culture and a chance for redefinition. Duke Ellington once explained, "Our aim has always been the development of an authentic Negro music. . . . We are not interested primarily in the playing of jazz or swing music, but in producing a genuine contribution from our race."¹²⁴ In Ellington's era, artist Aaron Douglas used jazz to represent the creative spirit of black Americans when he placed the saxophone-playing figure in the center of his panel for the *Aspects of Negro Life* series in 1934.¹²⁵ This instrument, which the central figure thrusts upward in a grand gesture toward the heavens, represents the uniqueness of black music (i.e., jazz), just as the inclusion of Egyptian elements recalls the glory of the African American past. Douglas's saxophone connects jazz music to the larger social issues of representation and identity in the African American community at this time. Alain Locke recognized the contributions of both Douglas and Ellington as part of this larger New Negro movement.¹²⁶ Locke's 1936 book *The Negro and His Music* brought New Negro ideas about music into the early swing era and connected discussions about jazz in the 1920s and 1930s with future generations of both intellectuals and musicians. In fact, many European and European American artists of the modern period equated jazz with a sense of modernist originality, as well. Piet Mondrian, for example, explored this connection in his *Broadway Boogie Woogie* of 1942–43.¹²⁷

In the 1940s the transformation of jazz into the bebop style—pioneered by musicians Thelonious Monk, Max Roach, Charlie Parker, and Dizzy Gillespie—similarly echoed the many ideological and social transformations in black life. The challenge that bebop musicians presented to the structures and the traditions of jazz music was analogous to the challenge of social boundaries taking place in the broader African American culture.¹²⁸ The black musicians of postwar bebop distinguished themselves

from the swing-era players with their extensive formal education and strong instrumental skills. They also detached themselves from the role of entertainer, popularized by such artists as Louis Armstrong. The bebop musicians resisted popular praise and even purposely disrespected the public. Miles Davis, for example, often played with his back to the audience; Charlie Parker made no further concession than to announce his numbers before playing them.¹²⁹

Apart from their performance style, bebop musicians also alienated society at large with their inverted work hours, nomadic lifestyles, and distinct social habits—namely, their clothing and language.¹³⁰ The music became part of the changing perspective of young black society, and some musicians became indirect activists. John Birks “Dizzy” Gillespie, a frequent subject for Basquiat and a model for his methodology as a painter and writer, explained in his 1979 autobiography *To Be or Not to Bop*: “We didn’t go out and make speeches or say, ‘Let’s play eight bars of protest.’ The music proclaimed our identity; it made every statement we truly wanted to make.”¹³¹ Dexter Gordon likewise recalled, “There was always somebody putting it [bebop] down. . . . I really think it was the start of the revolution, the civil-rights movement, in that sense, because that’s what the music is talking about. This is all the young generation, a new generation at that time. And they’re not satisfied with the shit that’s going down. . . . It was a time of great flux. And it was a time of change, and the music was reflecting this.”¹³² Indeed, the music that emerged in the 1940s did so in a time of great change—under the shadow of Jim Crow and the Second World War. Jazz music connected to contemporary questions about both the status of music as an art form and the potential for social change. Basquiat found an analogue here to his own “politics of style.”¹³³

According to Eric Porter—whose 2002 book *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?* explored the intellectual history of jazz from the perspective of its musicians—understanding the specific development of bebop in the last half of the 1940s is in fact “crucial to understanding jazz as we know it.”¹³⁴ With its emphasis on small group improvisation, infectious speed, chord substitutions, and continuous cymbal lines, bebop contrasted sharply with the swing era of jazz that immediately preceded it. Swing musician Cab Calloway (1907–94) went so far as to call it “Chinese music” because the strange sounds of bebop differed so much from the music of the traditional band music of the 1930s.¹³⁵ Swing transformed jazz into orchestral music with a steady groove (4/4 beat) that was perfect for dancing. Its musicians were organized into larger bands, with matching uniforms, constrictive musical arrangements, and a strict code of behavior that maintained consistency. Bebop was a modernist revolution in its public performance of methods and techniques typically reserved for the after-hours jam session.¹³⁶

Blurring the previously impervious boundary between harmony and dissonance, bebop musicians incorporated dissonant intervals—the minor second, the major seventh, the major second, the minor seventh, or the flatted fifth—even frequently ending on these intervals, thereby avoiding any tonal resolution. A bebop composition contained frequent cross-rhythms, interchange of meter, and a division of beat between the bass and the drums.¹³⁷ The performance of this music differed greatly from the big-band, entertainment-oriented traditions that preceded it. Bebop performance turned inward, driven by the desires of the musicians rather than those of a listening audience. As described by music historian Scott Deveau: “There is no frame for the performance, no spoken introductions or attention-getting silences. Hardly a word is exchanged beyond a few cryptic phrases—‘blues in B-flat,’ ‘rhythm changes,’ a quick countdown to set the tempo—and they are off, into a performance that may last anywhere from a few minutes to an hour.”¹³⁸ Most notably, this new style of jazz realigned the focus of music to the solo and improvisation. Basquiat listened attentively to bebop recordings in his studio; Fred Braithwaite recalled, “I remember in a short period of time he started buying up a lot of Bebop records and immediately dissecting and breaking down Bebop.”¹³⁹

Basquiat’s paintings and drawings refer predominantly and specifically to bebop. Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Max Roach, and Miles Davis are the musicians that appear most frequently in these works—literally and metaphorically.¹⁴⁰ The titles of songs and albums—“Cherokee,” “Sho’Nuff,” “Ko Ko,” “Ornithology,” “Big Shoes”—repetitively written across several canvases and works on paper are all from bebop. He even took care to reproduce the musical notation of Parker’s solo in “Red Cross” in his painting *Low Boy in Junkie Paradise* (1983) and a 1983 untitled drawing, which also included a partial portrait of the saxophonist.¹⁴¹ At times, Basquiat’s references to bebop are obvious, as in the 1984 canvas *Max Roach* (plate 35). Here, we see the pieces of a drum kit isolated on a pink ground; the bass drum, floor tom, and hi-hat seem to float in space, closely surrounded by a second, more dense layer of red paint that covers the lower half and upper-right quadrant of the composition. A figure at the center of the canvas, painted over in silver so that only the eyes and the upper portion of the head and face remain visible, appears to repeat the colors of the drum kit—a dark red paint partially covered by horizontal marks made in crayon. The shared palette of the figure and the drums creates a visual link between the man Max Roach (as identified by the title of the painting) and his instrument. Basquiat presents Roach as indistinguishable from and essential to the drum kit. In other works, Basquiat’s references to bebop are less explicit, especially for those viewers less versed in music history. The top left corner of *Big Shoes* (1983; see plate 25), for example, contains a pasted photocopied

paper with the word "PREE" positioned horizontally between a simple cross symbol above and a range of numbers (51–53) below. In this case, only a jazz aficionado might recognize the passing reference to Charlie Parker (1920–55), whose daughter Pree was born in 1951 and died of pneumonia before her second birthday.

When directly painting bebop figures and references, Basquiat most frequently concentrated on Charlie Parker. Parker was arguably the most influential and prolific musician of the bebop era, releasing more than 130 albums before his untimely death in 1955. *Untitled (Charlie Parker's Allstars)* of 1983 recounts the discography of Charlie Parker's Reboppers, recorded at the WOR studios in New York, November 26, 1945. *CPRKR* of 1982 points the viewer to the date and the location of Parker's tragic, and somewhat mysterious, death: April 2, 1955, Stanhope Hotel. *Heaven* of 1985, a wooden door on which Basquiat has painted in acrylic and oil, bears the phrase "DEAD BIRD," a reference to Parker's nickname "Bird" and his death. For 1983's *Horn Players*, Basquiat wrote the word "ORNITHOLOGY"—the title of one of Parker's most famous compositions—five times (see plate 34).

Many of Basquiat's paintings seem to refer directly to Ross Russell's controversial biography of Parker, of which the artist reportedly owned a case of copies.¹⁴² A producer who recorded the music of Parker, Gillespie, and other mid-twentieth-century jazz titans, Russell characterized Parker as "an Amos and Andy radio character, a stereotype like Kingfish, rigged out with cone-pone diction and a jaw-breaking vocabulary. He is a Mississippi nigger who has just arrived in town from the Delta."¹⁴³ In *Untitled (Rinso)* of 1982 (plate 36), for example, Basquiat writes the names "KINGFISH" and "SAPPHIRE," two characters from the *Amos 'n' Andy Show*. Knowing the artist's predilection for double entendres, we must note that "Amos and Andy" was also the name of a jazz club in Parker's hometown of Kansas City.¹⁴⁴ The painting *Undiscovered Genius of the Mississippi Delta* from 1983 and the earlier drawing *Undiscovered Genius* from 1982–83 both evoke this particular passage, as well; the phrase "ARE NOT PRINCES KINGS?" that appears in the upper right on the latter brings up the royal character that Basquiat gave to Charlie Parker repeatedly in diverse works. Taken as a group, we might see these three works as Basquiat's criticism of such racist characterizations as Russell's. The artist's repeated references to royalty also call to mind the unscrupulous practices of many record producers, including Russell, who withheld the appropriate royalties from musicians they represented.

Artist and art historian Olu Oguibe has argued that Basquiat's connection to Parker lies in his reading of the musician as a martyr. In his essay, "Represent'n: The Young Generation in African American Art," Oguibe addresses Basquiat's tendency to paint black athletes—Joe Louis, Sugar Ray Robinson, Muhammad Ali—as evidence of the

artist's view of these men as martyrs, claiming that "what Basquiat saw in [these figures] was not mere celebrity but a history of hardship, shortchanging, and inevitable tragedy based on race, which he clearly identified with because it was his own fate too."¹⁴⁵ Oguibe argues that Basquiat's preoccupation with figures like Charlie Parker and Joe Louis, whom he depicted in *St. Joe Louis Surrounded by Snakes* (1982), was rooted in the tragedy of those who came before him, who were not able to escape the burden of their race. The managers and the promoters who surround Joe Louis in the center of Basquiat's composition are cast as metaphorical snakes taking advantage of the boxing star. Louis's subsequent bankruptcy, which led him to his position as a bellman in a Florida hotel at the end of his life, could not have escaped Basquiat's notice.

Like many black musicians of the jazz era, Parker was similarly at a disadvantage on the commercial side of the music, which profited music publishers over performing musicians. According to music historian Scott Deveau, the realities of modern capitalism at play in the mid-twentieth century marked jazz artists as performers rather than as composers. This was due mostly to the reliance on musical improvisation in the bebop style over the fixed texts of musical notation. Parker, for example, was never paid royalties for his compositions and recordings, despite his success; he was even banned from the New York nightclub Birdland, which was named after him. The subsequent isolation of these musicians from commercialism only served to solidify the position of the music as a form of modernism. In Deveau's words: "All modernist art forms stoutly declare their independence from the marketplace and zealously patrol their borders with mass culture."¹⁴⁶ Basquiat was likewise interested in the boundary between commercial and critical success, frequently exploring commodification as a subject for his writings, paintings, and drawings.¹⁴⁷

Charles the First of 1982 (see plate 20) is perhaps the most cited of Basquiat's works on canvas; he painted it during what many scholars and critics consider to be the high point of his career, and it possesses all the characteristic features of Basquiat's best work. The scratched out marking in oil paintstick, the thick drips of acrylic paint, the proliferation of seemingly random text ("CHEROKEE," "OPERA," "FEET," "THOR," and "HAND"), the crowns, the cartoon logos and references (to the X-Men, Superman, and Marvel Comics), the anatomical drawings, and the copyright symbols are all typical of his style. Within the composition, Basquiat mixes references to Parker's personal life with historical facts and musical allusions. The word "CHEROKEE," circled in light blue, with four feathers drawn above at the top of the rightmost panel of the canvas, refers to the popular song "Cherokee," the chords of which Parker turned into a regular set of riffs that recur in his improvisations.¹⁴⁸ Basquiat has painted over the top half of the

center column with a rectangle of blue paint, leaving a small window of the canvas beneath to show through. Inside this small window of canvas we see that Basquiat has pasted a sheet of photocopied paper (the same as that which appears in the upper-left corner of *Big Shoes*), and then he has outlined its borders in a thick application of this same blue paint. The drips of blue that fall from the border of this photocopied page slightly obscure the word "PREE," the name of Parker's infant daughter, with "1951–1953" written above a cross in black.

Basquiat placed a crown in the left column of *Charles the First* with the phrase "MOST YOUNG KINGS GET THEIR HEADS CUT OFF" written in the corner below; the combination of crown and epithet memorializes the widely respected genius of Parker. His regular drummer, Max Roach, eulogized him: "Bird was kind of like the sun, giving off the energy we drew from him. We're still drawing on it. His glass was overflowing. In any musical situation, his ideas just bounded out, and this inspired anyone who was around. . . . Bird contributed more and received less than anybody."¹⁴⁹ Basquiat's title, *Charles the First*, marks Parker as the principle figure in a line of influences that others followed; it also connects Parker to a nobler lineage, particularly to King Charles I of England, which proves significant in light of the fact that the king's beheading in 1649 led to the beginning of the so-called cult of the Martyr King.¹⁵⁰

Basquiat, in fact, saw Parker as both a genius and a martyr; but to read the paintings of the musicians from within the same frame as those of the athletes would be a mistake. The athletes Basquiat chose to represent seem more consistently tragic, and only approximately eleven of Basquiat's published works focus on them, while more than fifty take jazz or Parker as their subject. The artist also invested more specifically in the biography of Charlie Parker than in any other subject. In these works, Basquiat referred repeatedly to "Chan," the nickname of Parker's companion and second wife, and Pree, the name of their daughter; to Parker's mentor, Lester Young; his protégé, Miles Davis, Parker's nickname "Bird," and his death at the Stanhope Hotel on April 2, 1955.

Like Basquiat, whose celebrity always threatened to outpace his craft, Charlie Parker is almost as renowned for his biography as for his discography. While he was disciplined in music, he was famously undisciplined in his personal life, and he symbolizes hesitancy toward commercial success that bordered on self-destruction. As described by his biographer Ross Russell, Parker "lived from hand to mouth, on cadged and proffered meals, in strange beds, and changed his address often."¹⁵¹ In addition to having a transient lifestyle, Parker was an infamous addict. "Drugs," writes Russell, "allayed the pressure he suffered from the lack of steady work, the public indifference to his music, his contradictory, indeed ridiculous, role—a creative artist composing and improvis-

ing in a night club."¹⁵² Basquiat often emulated artists who faced struggles with addiction, including not only Parker but also the authors William Burroughs and Jack Kerouac, both of whom are discussed in the third chapter of this book. Parker provided Basquiat with a model of the transient addict-artist. In 1983, Basquiat described his life before gaining fame to Henry Geldzahler. Relating how he spent most nights at the Mudd Club in lower Manhattan, he explained, "I went there every night for two years. At the time I had no apartment, so I just used to go there to see what my prospects were."¹⁵³

Basquiat's informal education in the New York club scene at the Mudd Club, playing in his own experimental noise band, "Gray," was similar to that of jazz musicians, who went to Minton's Playhouse or Monroe's Uptown House in Harlem to jam with other musicians in the bebop era. Owing to the underground nature of this music, many of the up-and-coming musicians were schooled in the new style at these jam sessions. The jam session was in fact "the jazzman's true academy."¹⁵⁴ The music's underground beginnings and the informal education that many bebop musicians experienced in the clubs were similar to elements that Basquiat experienced, too, as a musician (with the band Gray) and as a painter (beginning as the street writer SAMO). Both Parker and Basquiat also achieved artistic maturity at an early age (Basquiat at the age of twenty-two and Parker by twenty-four), despite failing to graduate from high school. The artist may have felt an affinity for Parker, who also left home at an early age to pursue something radically new. Both suffered car accidents (Parker at the age of fifteen and Basquiat at seven) that profoundly affected their careers. Parker's settlement from his accident allowed him to purchase his first decent saxophone, and Basquiat's accident inspired his fascination with *Gray's Anatomy*, which never waned. Both also had extremely close relationships with their mothers.

But aside from any fascination Basquiat might have had with Parker's biography, Parker attracted Basquiat's attention most of all for his compositional style as a jazz innovator. Parker functioned for Basquiat as an emblem of this music, which profoundly affected the artist's studio protocols. Basquiat may have felt a connection to bebop, and to Parker specifically, because of his own displaced role in comparison to the previous histories of art. Bebop destabilized all the expected orders of musical composition, in a way similar to Basquiat's challenge to the domain of the visual arts. Furthermore, readings of Parker's musical improvisational style and method, which dispel the myths of spontaneous composition currently espoused in analyses of post-war painting, provide a new way to address the compositional methods of appropriation in Basquiat's work.

Musicologist Derek Bailey has argued in his book *Musical Improvisation: Its Nature*

and Practice in Music that although musical improvisation is practiced across a range of genres, it remains the most misunderstood of all musical processes.¹⁵⁵ We might say the same for the visual arts, where the concepts of spontaneity, improvisation, and originality are often conflated in discourse. While musicologists and music historians have historically concerned themselves with traditional modes of composition, in the late twentieth century many began to pay more attention to improvisational methods. Bruno Nettl's influential text *In the Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation*, published in 1998, signaled a change in musical scholarship by focusing not only on the finished composition but also on the methods of its creation in the context of live performance.¹⁵⁶ *In the Course of Performance* rejected the dominant stereotype of improvisation as lacking in planning and discipline. Nettl instead posed a provocative question concerning the role of race in our understanding of "improvisation as the music of people who don't plan ahead and don't have elementary musical technology: can this be the white musical world's way of expressing a racist ideology?"¹⁵⁷ As a predominantly African American music, jazz has almost predictably suffered from such assumptions. Many have wrongly assumed that, because jazz improvisers perform without musical scores, conductors, or formal training, they are performing in a purely spontaneous manner. There is certainly an analogue here to Basquiat's own reception as a graffiti or self-taught artist with little to no knowledge of the art world or its histories.¹⁵⁸

But then, how is it that a jazz fan can always recognize the personality of the artist in every performance?¹⁵⁹ The very presence of a recognizable style negates the concept of complete spontaneity. As the contemporary artist Kerry James Marshall once said about Jackson Pollock's drip paintings—the preeminent example of painterly improvisation: "What appears to be spontaneous in Jackson Pollock is often an illusion, too. . . . At a certain point, those rhythms and those patterns and those directions become incredibly calculated . . . , it's like a dancer. . . . Because you've already worked through it so many times before that it starts to appear to be an automatic gesture. When it's not an automatic gesture at all; it's a calculated gesture."¹⁶⁰ Jazz improvisation is similarly calculated; musicians study other musical models in an informal, but thorough, way.¹⁶¹ Successful improvisers must possess an advanced knowledge of repertory and composition. Despite a lack of formal education, many often devote large amounts of time to memorizing the solos of other musicians, as a way to test their technique.¹⁶² Jazz improvisers master the chord progressions of popular songs, which provide the base for melodies. Many also have an impressive theoretical knowledge of harmony, which they later bend to their own styles. Overall the sophistication of jazz improvisation has been reexamined in musicology, and many scholars have reclaimed

improvisation as an art form. Wynton Marsalis summarizes and validates these more recent arguments when he explains, "Jazz is not just, 'Well, man, this is what I feel like playing.' It's a very structured thing that comes down from a tradition and requires a lot of thought and study."¹⁶³ Improvisation is not a completely spontaneous, much less an unconscious, act.¹⁶⁴

The hidden, underlying structure in bebop solos is one of the most interesting features of the music. Far from being the result of a "stream of consciousness" method, bebop improvisations are highly structured.¹⁶⁵ One of the main features of improvisational technique deals with the harmonic pattern, or chord structure, of the song. In the swing era, the melody (or theme) of a popular song like "Honeysuckle Rose" (Thomas Waller, 1929) would be played, followed by several choruses of solos and ending with a recapitulation of the opening melody; this is known as a "theme and variations" technique. The recognizable quality of the melody was required mostly because this jazz was played in dance halls and clubs before a large audience. In bebop, however, the musicians frequently dropped the opening melody and its recapitulation at the end of the song. These musicians often played without an obvious "theme" or melody and instead organized their music based on the underlying chords of many swing songs.

This method of composing produced anxiety in the uninitiated. Only select aficionados would be able to recognize the underlying melody and appreciate the skill of the improvising soloist. According to jazz musicologist Frank Tirro, widely recognized as the first scholar to publish an analytic study of jazz, in 1967, "Never did the respectable be-bop musician tell his audience or the other players the name of the original melody. The others were to discover the secret for themselves if they could. If they could not, they could listen as they would to any jazz tune treated as theme and variations; but every experienced be-bop musician knew that *Groovin' High* was played to the chords of *Whispering*, that *Scrapple from the Apple* was *Honeysuckle Rose*, that *Ornithology* was *How High the Moon*, and that *Anthropology* was an altered version of *I Got Rhythm*."¹⁶⁶ Many times, these musicians made their music purposely difficult as a challenge to others outside this culture. Despite the air of impenetrability, however, bebop did adhere to a number of standards. Every ensemble contained a piano, drums, bass, and guitar; other instrumentalists entered at will after an introduction was given by the pianist. Each musician took a solo (of an undetermined length) in turn, as the rhythm section accompanied. The other horns, meanwhile, waited or improvised behind the soloist.¹⁶⁷

Almost the entire bebop repertory consisted of a few standard songs—blues or pop standards such as George Gershwin's "I Got Rhythm" or Ray Noble's "Cherokee."

Bebop musicians superimposed melodic themes onto the harmonic structure of these "standard" swing songs, playing them with sudden key modulations in order to keep interlopers at bay.¹⁶⁸ Parker composed many pieces in this way, which are part of what is called the "silent theme" genre. "Scrapple from the Apple" and his famous "Ko Ko" were both composed to the chord progression of Ray Noble's standard "Cherokee."¹⁶⁹

The intentional confusion and effrontery of the inventors of bebop was part of their larger culture of subversion. The musicians' dress, lifestyle, and music all signified opposition to the mainstream. One particularly important part of the new bebop style was its language, called "jive." In jive, *gold* was money, a *pad* was a bed, and to be knocked out became known as *being gassed*; *chinchy* was a word used as a combination of cheap and stingy.¹⁷⁰ The beboppers introduced jive into their spoken language, in a process akin to what Henry Louis Gates Jr. has called "signifyin'," as part of a larger black cultural movement that rejected the dominant white world. This new black vernacular "assumed the singular role of a black person's ultimate sign of difference."¹⁷¹ Gates explains the intentionally subversive character of signifyin' (the term itself is a comment on and a means of distinguishing oneself from conventional language). In linguistic practice, signifyin' is a critical revision of language structure, meant "to critique the nature of (white) meaning itself, to challenge through a literal critique of the sign the meaning of meaning."¹⁷² By taking up the underlying chords of other songs, bebop musicians similarly reconstructed the meaning of those songs. The bebop composers, like Parker, organized their music in this way in order to simultaneously make reference to and distinguish themselves from those traditions.

In his 1962 essay on Charlie Parker, "On Bird, Bird-Watching and Jazz," Ralph Ellison describes the satirical component of signifyin' in jazz, even making his own wordplay on the saxophonist's nickname in the first line: "But what kind of bird was Parker?" "Back during the thirties," he writes, "members of the old Blue Devils Orchestra celebrated a certain robin by playing a lugubrious little tune called 'They Picked Poor Robin.' It was a jazz community joke, musically an extended 'signifying riff' or melodic naming of a recurrent human situation, and was played to satirize some betrayal of faith or loss of love observed from the bandstand."¹⁷³ Parker would play a riff, or sequence of notes, from a particular song—in Ellison's example, "They Picked Poor Robin"—to send a message to other musicians or members of the audience. Parker also juxtaposed quotations popular with elite culture; his quotes from such sources as "Jingle Bells" or "Pop Goes the Weasel" are deliberate jokes when set against Stravinsky's "Introduction" from *The Rite of Spring*.¹⁷⁴ Parker inserts one of his favorite motives, the "Habañera" phrase from George Bizet's *Carmen*, in his live impro-

visation of "Hot House," performed with Dizzy Gillespie in 1953 at New York's Massey Hall—a recording that Basquiat reportedly owned.¹⁷⁵

Signifyin' in both language and music was above all a challenge; it was meant to confound those who were not hip. From the rhetorical standpoint, what interests Gates is the overlap (not necessarily a coincidence) of black people taking up the term *signifyin(g)* and of the existence of the same term (i.e., *signifying*) in standard English semantic order since Saussure. Gates explains the nature of his dilemma in trying to describe signifyin': it operates both within and against the semantic traditions of the English language. "Some black genius or a community of witty and sensitive speakers," says Gates, "emptied the signifier 'signification' of its received concepts and filled this empty signifier with their own concepts. By doing so, by supplanting the received, standard English concept associated by (white) convention with this particular signifier, they (un)wittingly disrupted the nature of the sign = *signified/signifier* equation itself."¹⁷⁶ Parsing the differences between black "Signification" and white "signification" becomes difficult from this perspective. The radicalism of this intervention into the order of meaning comes in its deployment of the formal system of language to usurp and to disrupt its conventions—typically established by white, middle-class people. Parker did this in taking excerpts from Stravinsky and Carmen, inserting them into his own improvisations.

Parker learned his craft through the imitation of previous masters. He also quoted tunes in his solos that belonged to other musicians; for example, he "learned to play [tenor saxophonist Lester] Young's solos note-for-note."¹⁷⁷ As a boy in Kansas City, Parker watched Young from the balcony above the bandstand at the Reno Club. He would play "along with Lester, only in his head, his fingers moving on the keys the way Lester's fingers moved." Parker would "finger his old saxophone and follow Lester's lines note for note."¹⁷⁸ After being embarrassed by his lack of harmonic knowledge during an early performance on the bandstand at the Reno Club in the spring of 1937, Parker spent several months studying with his impressive collection of Lester Young recordings. "The records," writes Parker's biographer Ross Russell, "were Charlie's most important subject for study. His portable phonograph had a set screw that could be tightened to lower the speed of the turntable. This adjustment made it easier for him to analyze the solos and study the nuances of tone that made Lester sound as if he were singing, shouting, and talking through the saxophone. Charlie learned each solo by heart."¹⁷⁹ Basquiat's appropriations of other (modern European and white American) artists operate in this same way. As Gates argues in the case of language, the artist's revisions of master European and American painters, and his appropriation of objects and images from the world history of art, are part of a challenge and a "critique [of] the nature of

(white) meaning itself." Basquiat's repeated use of the phrase "Cherokee" in his painting alludes to this history, as he was adapting the lessons learned from bebop to his methods of painting. His 1983 drawing *Untitled (History of Jazz)* makes Basquiat's knowledge of this method even clearer. In the lower quarter of the composition, he has written:

CHARLIE PARKER A TRUE LEADER OF A NEW BREED OF
LOOSENEED DISILLUSIONED REBELS TOOK THIS
EXISTING FORM STRIPPED IT DOWN STOLE THE
MELODIES FROM THREE DIFFERENT SONGS SPLICE THEM
AND PLAY THEM SIDEWAYS THRICE THE ORIGINAL
TEMPO. THE BEAUTIFUL BABY BEBOP.¹⁸⁰

Basquiat frequently based his own compositions on the patterns of other artists, as in works such as *Leonardo da Vinci's Greatest Hits* (1982; see plate 5), which takes its title from the tradition of music compilations often issued by record labels. Basquiat's reliance on the models of other artists becomes even more obvious in his use of many of the symbols and figures from museum catalogs, such as the 1980 illustrated volume documenting the collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (see *Untitled*, 1987; plate 2), Robert Farris Thompson's 1983 book *Flash of the Spirit* (see *Antar*, 1985; plate 18), and other texts in his library. According to Suzanne Mallouk, Basquiat felt anxiety about his success early on, particularly since he lacked formal training. She recalled,

He was selling a lot of work for the first time ever, and he came home and he was very worried. He knew I had gone to art school, and he said to me, "Suzanne, I'm really worried. I feel like a fraud because I'm now selling my work and I don't know how to draw." And I said, "Then you must teach yourself. Go and get some how-to-draw books." . . . So he went and he got this *How to Draw a Horse* book, *How to Draw a Flower*, whatever, and he practiced. And he learned to draw.¹⁸¹

Like Bearden, Basquiat taught himself to draw via his appropriation and mastery of other objects and images. We see, in fact, two versions of what appears to be a belt in the leftmost panel of *Notary* of 1983 (plate 37). When asked about these motifs by an interviewer, the artist simply replied, "That's a drawing I did at the Metropolitan of a Roman belt buckle that was bronze."¹⁸² Basquiat looked to Picasso, Dubuffet, and Twombly, frequently copying these artists, but with his own inventive brilliance. Some in the art world failed to make the creative leap of understanding these methods of appropriation and self-appropriation in Basquiat's work. The conservative critic for *Time*, Robert Hughes, wrote, "Success forced him to repeat himself without a chance

of development.”¹⁸³ Comments like this reinforce the modernist myth of originality, failing to recognize Basquiat’s innovations. In musical analysis, however, appropriation is recognized as part of a compositional strategy.

By far the most studied aspect of bebop improvisation is the use of precomposed figures and quotations, selectively borrowed from other musical compositions. The surface repetition, and the use of recognizable quotations—sometimes called licks, tricks, patterns, motives, riffs, or crips by musicians—are distinctive features of this genre. In 1974, Thomas Owens copiously transposed every known live recording of Charlie Parker improvising, and surprised many music scholars and critics by proving that “in spontaneously composing, [Parker] drew primarily on a repertory of about 100 motives of varying lengths, modifying them, and combining them in a great variety of ways.”¹⁸⁴ For the most part, Parker used motives that were only a few notes long and were therefore amenable to a variety of harmonic contexts. This was partially based on necessity; the speed at which Parker often played, sometimes playing as many as twelve notes per second, never allowed total spontaneity.¹⁸⁵ Of Parker, Owens writes,

Each piece contains much that is familiar. But no two choruses are alike, even among the hundreds of blues choruses that are preserved. The mix of familiar motives is always different, and some phrases or portions of phrases, are always unfamiliar. Each new chorus provided him an opportunity, which he invariably took, to arrange his stock of motives in a different order, or to modify a motive by augmenting or diminishing it, by displacing it metrically or by adding or subtracting notes. Such was the nature of improvisation to Parker, just as it probably has been to every mature improvising artist in any musical tradition around the world.¹⁸⁶

In the case of Charlie Parker, music scholars have recognized that the saxophonist’s insertions of jazz riffs into improvisatory solos relied on the structure of each song for their meaning.

Thomas Owens claimed that Parker drew upon his repertory of a hundred or so motives for solos that were based on the harmonic pattern of the song. These were “normally organized without reference to the theme of the piece being performed.”¹⁸⁷ Owens meant that Parker essentially chose which motives to insert into a particular solo based on the song’s underlying harmonic structure. More recent scholarship has added new information about Parker’s technique. Henry Martin, for example, has argued, “Parker would often absorb the underlying foreground motives and voice-leading structures of the themes, then fashion his solos in light of that larger-scale the-

matic material.”¹⁸⁸ Whatever the methodology, Parker’s methods of improvisation, particularly his quotation of precomposed motives, are complex and sophisticated. One need only listen to Parker’s various takes of “Red Cross,” recorded by Savoy in 1944, to understand this. As Ross Russell explains, “No two [solos by Parker] were alike. Charlie often quoted but never repeated himself.”¹⁸⁹ His particular mix of syncopations, tone quality, and articulations are unique to him alone.

Basquiat signals his admiration for Parker’s methods by painting the word “CHEROKEE”—Ray Noble’s standard song that served as the foundation for two of Parker’s best-known songs—in the upper-right corner of *Charles the First* (1982; see plate 20). The word “CHEROKEE” became shorthand for referencing Parker. Basquiat uses this reference to one of Parker’s most popular motives as a precomposed figure, just as Parker used his citation of the tune. Basquiat also used many of the motifs he appropriated from his extensive library of world history and art books as favorite “licks.” Crowns, feathers, coins, feet, skulls, and black-hatted figures appear over and over in his compositions. Figures with halos (or crowns of thorns) appear in several compositions, including sixteen paintings from 1982 alone. The same birdlike figure—arms outstretched, shown in left profile view—that appears drawn in white in the upper-left corner of *Untitled (Black Tar and Feathers)* (plate 38) also appears in at least three other canvases painted that same year. The crown in *Charles the First* is so prevalent in his paintings and drawings that it is now used as the logo for the artist’s estate. Throughout 1983, Basquiat often included drawings of the “head” side of a 1951 coin, as in *Skin Head Wig*, *In Italian*, *Brother’s Sausage*, and *Frogmen*. There is also an altered version of this coin in *Life Like Son of Barney Hill*, where a photocopied head serves as a stand-in. The coin appears reversed in *Moon View* and *Two Sided Coin*, both from 1984.

Like Parker with his repertory of a hundred motives, Basquiat had his collection of favorite icons, and his use of the photocopy machine echoes Parker’s use of reproduced musical imagery. As he repositioned these copies in new contexts, Basquiat also unfixed the original source material. Basquiat likely admired the ingenuity with which Parker rearranged his motives, inserting them unexpectedly into his solos. In many cases, these deliberate quotations required advanced musical knowledge on the part of the listener/viewer to be recognized. Just as Charlie Parker organized his motives according to the thematic or harmonic patterns of the songs, as shown earlier in this chapter, the placement of Basquiat’s reproductions is relative to the theme of the overall composition and changes significantly depending on its context.

But Basquiat pushed his citations and appropriation further than Parker did. He

not only cut and mixed the work of other authors, artists, images, and texts but also appropriated, cited, and rearranged his own work as well. The faint "FREE" in *Charles the First* (1982; see plate 20), for example, also appears in the upper-left corner of *Big Shoes* (1983; see plate 25). The black frame that surrounds *Madonna* (1985) bears the word "FREE" at the top (see plate 6). All are photocopies of a single drawing. Basquiat also used the same photocopied drawing of a man to create several compositions from 1983. In *PPCD* (1982–83), Basquiat has colored in the face and hat of the figure and labeled him, in the upper left, as Haitian dictator François Duvalier (see plate 22). The same figure appears—with modified hairstyle and beard—as the head of a coin in the rightmost panel of *Life Like Son of Barney Hill* of 1983. The same head is labeled as "Fig. 23" in the leftmost panel of *Undiscovered Genius of the Mississippi Delta*, and in the right panel of *Toussaint L'Overture Versus Savonarola* (1983; see plate 21).¹⁹⁰

Basquiat's inclusion of jazz figures in his paintings, therefore, goes beyond jazz as African American cultural history: it cuts to the heart of his creative protocols on the level of method and structure. Basquiat's interest in jazz music ties into his interests in creolization. This music, like his visual work, was a product of the negotiation of African and European sources and influences. Jazz music also provided Basquiat with a model for the "politics of style," which he continued from his start as SAMO. Most important, the structure of jazz improvisation—particularly its reliance on appropriation—fit in with Basquiat's own modes of composition. Much as Charlie Parker appropriated musical sources and performed musical figures, Basquiat drew from a repertoire of visual and cultural histories.

In 1983, Basquiat was invited to exhibit his painting *The Philistines* (1982) in a group show at the renowned Fondation Beyeler in Basel, Switzerland, titled *Expressive Painting after Picasso*. While in Basel, Basquiat painted over a 1955 exhibition poster from the museum, which included Picasso's classic portrait *Tête de femme* (1921) on the front, crossing out Picasso's original signature in the upper-left corner (plate 39). He signed the poster once in the lower-right corner of the reproduction of *Tête de femme* (where, in fact, we would expect to see Picasso's signature) and again in the bottom-right corner of the poster itself. Basquiat even laid claim to the intellectual and artistic copyright to sell the appropriated image as his own work, leaving the sticker price ("\$5.00") exposed in the upper-right corner.¹⁹¹ It seems here that Basquiat is not satisfied to simply be included in a history of artists responding to Picasso; the artist challenges such genealogies, inserting himself into the canon.

Untitled (Picasso Poster) also highlights the complicated relationship between primitivism and European modernism—another recurrent theme of Basquiat's work. The artist's strokes in pink acrylic are most emphatic in the upper-right quadrant of Picasso's

composition. Here, Basquiat flattens the curve of the hairline with one long horizontal stroke at the top of the image, but follows the contour along the left side of the woman's face. The resulting shape, which Basquiat has isolated from the background of the image, looks more like a mask than a face and further accentuates Picasso's well-known modernist appropriation of African art. As a person of African descent, Basquiat was surely invested in the irony of a modern art history that systematically excludes artists of African descent while simultaneously remaining indebted to them.

As Thomas McEvilley has explained, "By taking on the role of the white borrower, Basquiat collapsed the distance between the colonizer and the colonized, embodying both at once."¹⁹² In other words, Basquiat inverted the model by including and imitating the production of white culture as a nonwhite artist. We might interpret this inversion in terms of "disidentification" theorized by José Esteban Muñoz—that is, Basquiat's cannibalization of mainstream art practices goes further than simple appropriation. The artist was concerned with deploying these modernist codes and practices "as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture."¹⁹³ This goes a step beyond Bearden's process (with respect to Malraux) of mastery via imitation. In other words, Basquiat assumed the position of the mainstream in order to highlight the politics of the marginal. In addition, Basquiat confronted the conventions of the (overwhelmingly white) art world by self-consciously painting in a style that conformed to primitivist notions: the quick brushstrokes, jagged lines, rough textures, and seemingly chaotic compositions of his canvases speak directly to the stereotype.¹⁹⁴

The art historian Richard Schiff has argued, "To the extent that pictures communicate semiotically and can become objects of interpretation, theories of pictorial representation can be extracted from pictures of pictorial representation. . . . Such pictures both form statements of theory and exemplify practice."¹⁹⁵ If this is the case, then what statement of theory do the appropriations of Jean-Michel Basquiat make? The self-conscious copying and repetition in Basquiat's work require that we redefine our own conceptions of originality, spontaneity, and improvisation—the touchstones of postwar modernist art criticism. In his 1952 essay "The American Action Painters," critic Harold Rosenberg put forward a romanticized idea of abstract painting that was completely spontaneous. According to Rosenberg, after WWII "the painter no longer approached his easel with an image in his mind; he went up to it with material in his hand to do something to that other piece of material in front of him. The image would be the result of this encounter."¹⁹⁶ Rosenberg describes the act of painting as improvisational, even intuitive, for the abstract expressionists. He writes, "At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which

to act—rather than as a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze, or ‘express’ an object, actual or imagined.”¹⁹⁷

Rosenberg claims that the result of a painting is not in the mind of the truly improvisational, expressionist painter when he begins. In abstract expressionism, as Rosenberg argues, the artists focused on a sense of discovery in the process of painting and worked spontaneously to create something that did not exist before. Such a process, which Rosenberg posited as intrinsic to modernism, relied on the unthinking impulses of the artist. Even in the case of artists who used sketches or drawings in preparation for larger works—as is the case with Jean-Michel Basquiat—Rosenberg contends that the final work maintained a level of detachment from reason or premeditation. He writes, “If a painting is an action a sketch is one action, the painting that follows it another.”¹⁹⁸ The resulting painting he interpreted as a type of prolonged act of spontaneity.

As argued many decades later by Daniel Belgrad, an American studies scholar, the conceptions of spontaneity and improvisation reflect both an intellectual and a cultural discourse.¹⁹⁹ According to Belgrad, this “culture of spontaneity” (in music, art and literature) developed out of a specific opposition to corporate liberal culture of the postwar period. The spontaneous aesthetic, such as that espoused by Rosenberg in his 1952 essay, was said to offer “unmediated access to unconscious thought processes,” providing “a vantage point from which to question the culture’s authority.”²⁰⁰ In search of this unconscious process many abstract expressionist painters referred back to the automatist techniques of surrealism, which similarly rejected the dominance of reason, logic, and information in the Western world. Defined by André Breton in the first “Manifesto of Surrealism” (1924), psychic automatism was “a pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.”²⁰¹ Artists working within Breton’s described parameters approached their media either without preconceived images or ideas, or by using only those culled from the far reaches of the unconscious (via dream analysis). We can see the effects of these ideas on the abstract American painters of the postwar generation and on their critics. Such ideas of spontaneity and improvisation remain in many analyses of modernist painting today. Following Rosenberg, scholars often conflate the concept of originality with that of spontaneity in analyses of modernist practice. But there seems to be a crack in this framework when one realizes that improvisation, spontaneity, and originality do not necessarily preclude repetition or even conscious choice. Basquiat’s excessive quotation forces us to reconsider the methods of appropriation, because he extends and

redefines Rosenberg's paradigm of abstract expressionist spontaneity as the marker for truly improvisatory painting.

Basquiat's work also requires a revision of modernist discourse—specifically of a modernist art occupied with the task of representing an original truth or “innocent eye.” As explained by Richard Shiff, while modernist practice may appear “engaged in a (vain) struggle to re-present an origin, and original truth,” in reality this is a consequence of the contemporary historian. “The historian,” writes Shiff, “makes a self-conscious representation of ‘naïve’ or ‘original’ vision” even though the maker may have never considered his or her work as such.²⁰² The copying of works of art (as in Picasso's appropriation of African art) has never been the sole terrain of postmodernism, as imitation and influence have in fact been present throughout the history of painting in general and in the development of modernist practice specifically. Roger Benjamin has cited “historiographical prejudice” as the cause for the general ignorance surrounding the modern copy. He explains, “In the teleological progression favoured by modernist histories of art, the work considered to mark a new stage of development, by definition the original work, is valued over the work which does not venture beyond pre-established formulae. The copy rates still lower on this scale of values.”²⁰³ In Benjamin's estimation, the post-Enlightenment, postindustrial emphasis on the individual creator has compromised a critical evaluation of the role of the copy in modern art. The copy was always already an imitation, unable to escape the influence of its artist. Every copy thereby challenges the centrality of the “original” in discourses of modernism.²⁰⁴

Basquiat's focus on Picasso's appropriation of African art similarly undermines the privileged position of the origin in hierarchies of modern art. The question does not solely concern Picasso's imitation of or influence by African art but also concerns the relationship between the authorial function and the repetitive function—that is, the difference between the mechanical and the expressive. Basquiat's repeated use of appropriated materials—both in his explicit photocopying of his own work and in his representation of reproduced images like *Untitled (Picasso Poster)*—reveals the artist's engagement in the postmodernist discourse of his era.²⁰⁵ But I argue that these same appropriative tendencies also reveal the longer history of mimesis's unstable position. I believe that Basquiat's specific focus on masters like Degas, Manet, Picasso, and Leonardo also intentionally critiques modernism.

In Basquiat's work, originality is defined by premeditation, imitation, and even the repetition of certain compositional elements. Via his imitative appropriations of other works of art, he attempted to rewrite the canon of art history, placing his own work in dialogue with that of other African American artists attempting the same revisionist

history. Despite his anxiety about a lack of training, he placed himself in a history of academic painting, where the techniques of appropriation are tradition. Basquiat drew from multiple sources in an attempt to create an intertextual synthesis—of European and non-European, of past and present. But perhaps most important, Basquiat is an artist who took on the techniques of both imitation *and* copying, negotiating a type of originality that is simultaneously *found* and *made*.



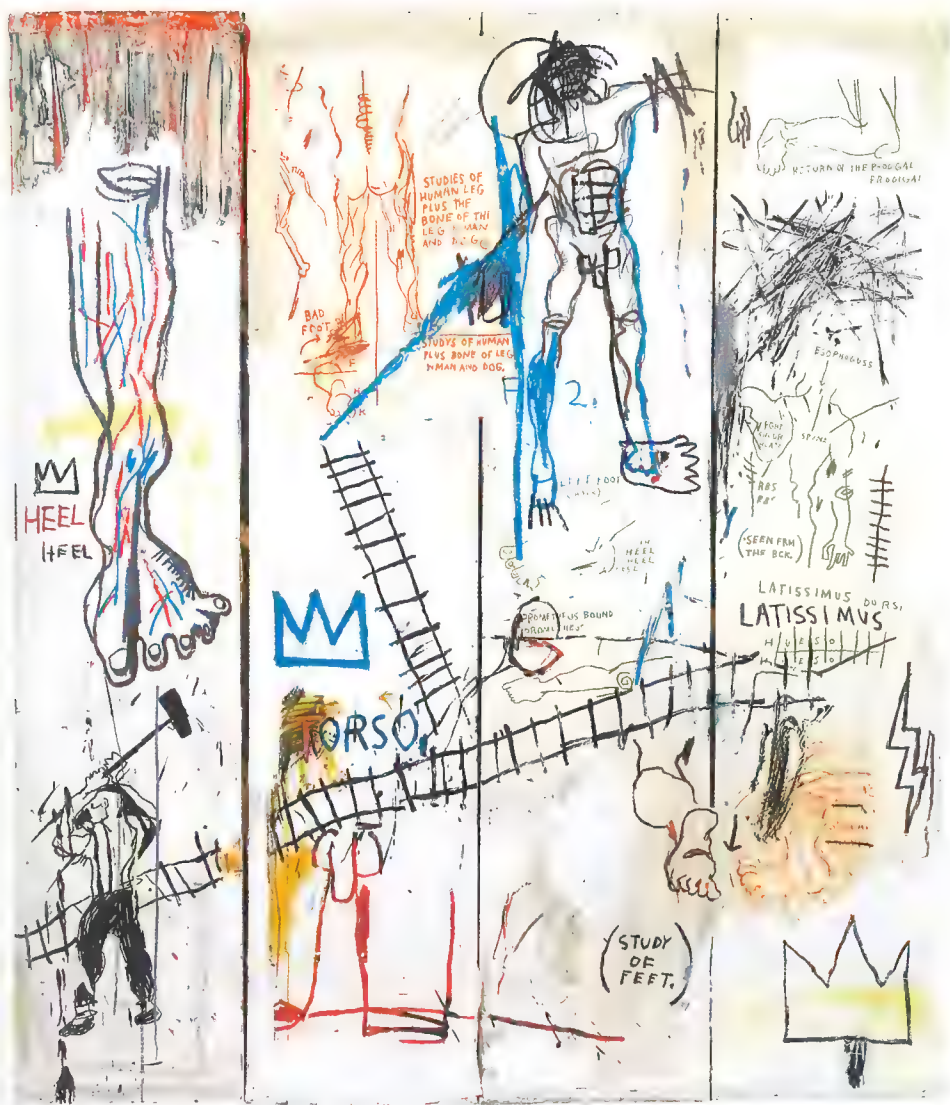
Pl. 1 Jean-Michel Basquiat on the cover of the *New York Times Magazine*, February 10, 1985. Photograph © Lizzie Himmel. Reproduced with the permission of the New York Times, PARS International Corp.



Pl. 2 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Untitled*, 1987. Graphite and colored pencil on paper, 42 1/2 x 29 1/2 inches (107 x 75 cm). Private collection. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



Pl. 4 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Mona Lisa*, 1983. Acrylic and pencil on canvas, 66 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 60 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches (169.5 x 154.5 cm). Private collection. Photograph: Banque d'Images, ADAGP/Art Resource, NY. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



Pl. 5 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Leonardo da Vinci's Greatest Hits*, 1982. Acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas, four panels, 83¹⁵/₁₆ x 72³/₁₆ inches (213.2 x 183.3cm) overall. Princeton University Art Museum. Lent by the Schorr Family Collection. L.1989.12. Photograph by Bruce M. White. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



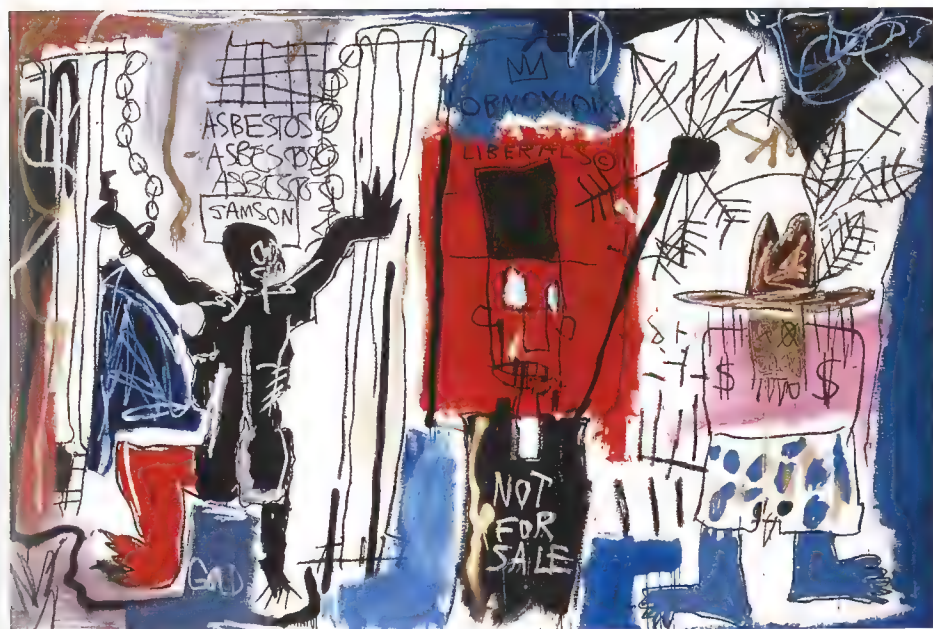
Pl. 6 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Madonna*, 1985. Acrylic, oil paintstick, and photocopy collage on wood, 42 x 23 x 3 inches (106.7 x 58.5 x 7cm). Private collection.
© The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



Pl. 9 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Jersey Joe*, 1983. Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas, 47¼ x 36 inches (120 x 91.5 cm). Private collection, courtesy of Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, Zurich. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



Pl. 10 Jean-Michel Basquiat and Andy Warhol, *Untitled (Arm and Hammer II)*, 1985. Acrylic, oil paintstick, and silk screen on canvas, 167 x 285 cm. Bischofberger Collection, Switzerland. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat. © The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc./Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



Pl. 11 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Obnoxious Liberals*, 1982. Acrylic, oil paintstick, and spray paint on canvas, 68 x 102 inches (172.5 x 259 cm). The Eli and Edythe L. Broad Collection, Los Angeles. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



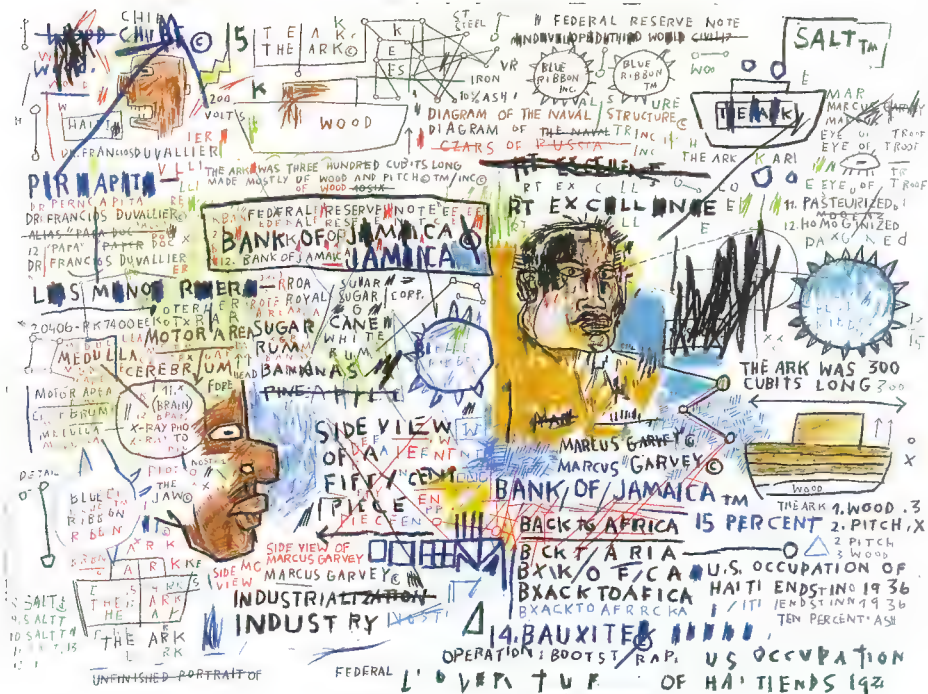
Pl. 12 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Eye-Africa*, 1984. Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas, 66 × 60 inches (167.5 × 152.5 cm). Private collection. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



Pl. 13 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Natives Carrying Some Guns, Bibles, Amorites on Safari*, 1982. Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas mounted on wood supports, 72 x 72 inches (183 x 183 cm). Private collection, courtesy of Francesco Pellizzi, New York City. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



Pl. 14 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *The Nile*, 1983. Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas mounted on wood supports, three panels, 68 x 141 inches (172.5 x 358 cm) overall. Private collection. Photograph: Banque d'Images, ADAGP/Art Resource, NY. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



PI. 15 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *50¢ Piece*, from an untitled suite of thirty-two drawings, 1982–83. Acrylic, oil paintstick, pastel, crayon, and pencil on paper, 32 sheets, 22½ x 30 inches (57 x 76.5 cm) each. Daros Collection, Switzerland. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



PI. 16 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Grillo*, 1984. Acrylic, oil, photocopy collage, oil paintstick, and nails on wood, four panels, 96 x 211½ x 18 inches (244 x 537 x 45.5 cm) overall. Private collection. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



Pl. 17 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Exu*, 1988. Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas, 79 x 100 inches (199.5 x 254 cm). Private collection. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



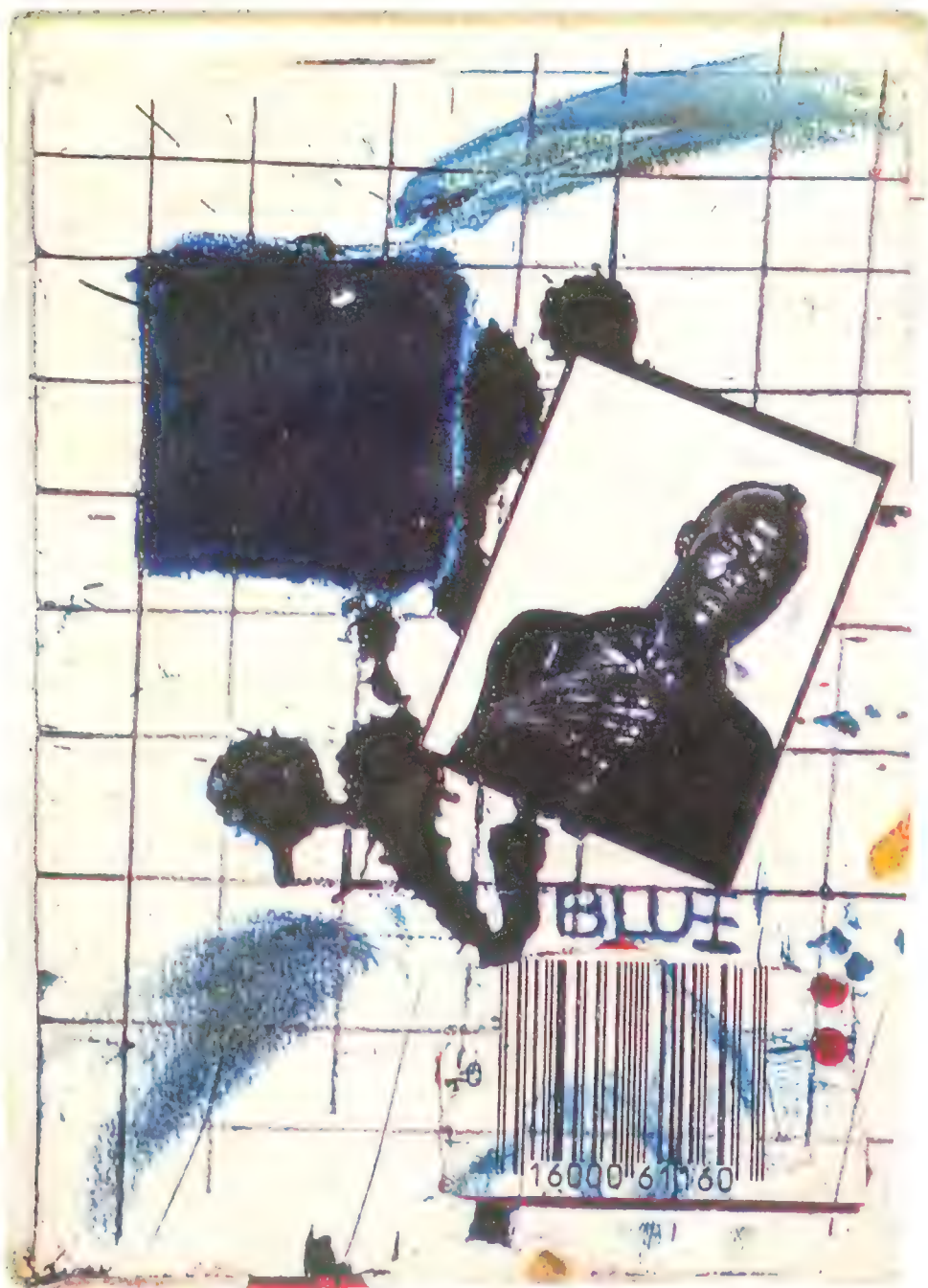
Pl. 18 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Antar*, 1985. Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas, 78 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches x 110 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches (200 x 280 cm). Private collection, courtesy of Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, Zurich. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



PI. 19 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Después de un Puño*, 1987. Acrylic, oil paintstick, and photocopy collage on canvas, 85 x 61 inches (215.5 x 153.5 cm). Private collection. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



Pl. 20 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Charles the First*, 1982. Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas, three panels, 78 x 62 inches (198 x 158 cm) overall. The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat, New York. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



Pl. 24 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Anti-Product 4*, 1980. Xerographic print of a postcard collage and acrylic, mounted on paper, 14 x 10.8cm. Collection of Lio Malca, New York. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



Pl. 25 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Big Shoes*, 1983. Acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas, 84 x 84 inches (213.5 x 213.5 cm). Private collection, courtesy of Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, Zurich. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



PI. 26 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Untitled (Maid from Olympia)*, 1982. Acrylic, graphite, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas mounted on tied wood supports, 48¼ x 30 inches (122.6 x 76.2 cm). Private collection. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



PI. 27 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Three Quarters of Olympia Minus the Servant*, 1982. Acrylic, graphite, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas on tied wood supports, 48 x 44½ inches (121.9 x 112.4 cm). The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat, New York. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



Pl. 29 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Untitled*, 1983. Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas mounted on wood supports, three panels, 96 x 72 inches (243.8 x 182.9 cm) overall. Private collection. Photograph: Banque d'Images, ADAGP/Art Resource, NY. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



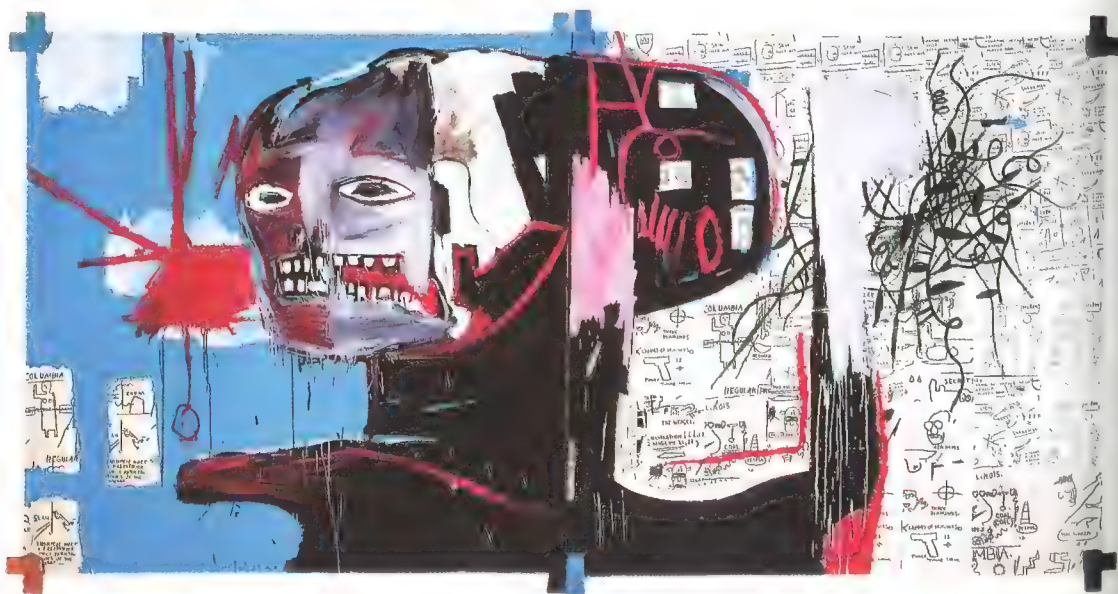
PL. 30 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Pegasus*, 1987. Acrylic, graphite, and colored pencil on paper mounted on canvas, 88 x 90 inches (223.5 x 228.5 cm). Collection of John McEnroe, courtesy of Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



Pl. 31 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Gold Griot*, 1984. Oil and oil paintstick on wood, 117 x 73 inches (297 x 185.5 cm). The Broad Art Foundation, Santa Monica. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



Pl. 32 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Piscine Versus the Best Hotels*, 1982, detail. Acrylic, oil paintstick, and photocopy collage on canvas mounted on wood supports, four panels, 62¼ x 82¾ inches (158 x 210 cm). The Schorr Family Collection. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



Pl. 33 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *La Colomba*, 1983. Acrylic, oil paintstick, and photocopy collage on canvas mounted on wood supports, two panels, 72 x 144 inches (183 x 366 cm) overall. Private collection. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



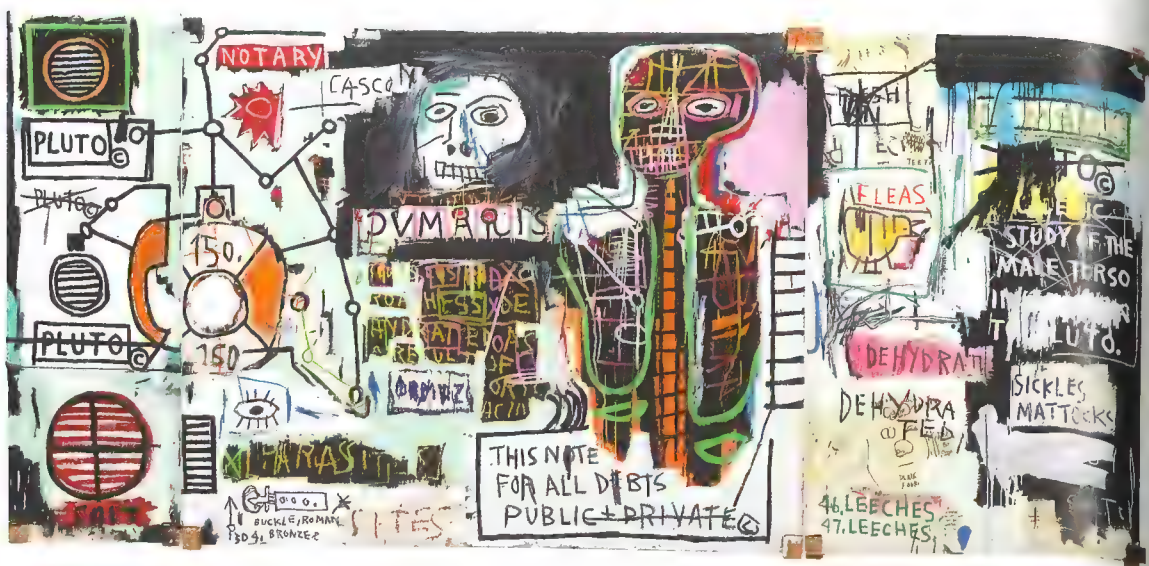
Pl. 34 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Horn Players*, 1983. Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas, three panels, 96 x 75 inches (244 x 190.5 cm) overall. The Broad Art Foundation, Santa Monica. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



Pl. 35 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Max Roach*, 1984. Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas, 60 x 60 inches (152.5 x 152.5 cm). Private collection. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



Pl. 36 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Untitled (Rinso)*, 1982. Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas mounted on wood supports, 72 x 72 inches (183 x 183 cm). The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat, New York. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



Pl. 37 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Notary*, 1983. Acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas mounted on wood supports, three panels, 71 x 158 inches (180.3 x 401.3 cm) overall. Princeton University Art Museum. Lent by the Schorr Family Collection. L.1989.1.3 ac. Photograph by Bruce M. White. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



Pl. 38 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Untitled (Black Tar and Feathers)*, 1982. Acrylic, oil paintstick, spray paint, tar, and feathers on wood, two panels, 180 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 192 inches (275.5 x 233.5 cm) overall. Private collection. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



MAITRES DE L'ART MODERNE

GALERIE BEYELER

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JUIN - JUILLET - AOUT 1955

Pl. 39 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Untitled (Picasso Poster)*, 1983. Acrylic on exhibition poster, 28 x 19¼ inches (71.1 x 48.9 cm). Mugrabi Collection. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



Pl. 40 Jean-Michel Basquiat, *LNAPRK*, 1982. Acrylic, oil paintstick, and marker on found paper on canvas mounted on tied wood supports, 72¼ x 66⅝ inches (186.7 x 183.5 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; gift of June and Paul Schorr in honor of the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Whitney Museum of American Art 91.83. Digital image © Whitney Museum of American Art, NY. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.

THE LANGUAGE OF EXPRESSIONISM

I had just been at a rap jam up in the Bronx which was a DJ battle between Grandmaster Flash and Grandwizard Theodore, who were two inventors of turntable technology. They were both going back and forth at each other. They would each get ten minutes and play a few records and cut them, slice them, dice them, remix them. It was William S. Burroughs's cut-up theory, it was collage painting, it was cubism, it was all going on.

FAB 5 FREDDY

THREE BLACK-AND-WHITE PHOTOGRAPHS, taken in a fifteen-minute session in Paris in 1988, give us a rare view of Jean-Michel Basquiat just a few months before his death.¹ In the first image of the series (figure 16), Basquiat bows his head solemnly, leaving the bottom three-quarters of his face in shadow. He covers his face with both hands, his fingers digging into his forehead and displacing the mound of flesh just above the browridge. Basquiat's uncovered eye looks out at us but remains obscured in shadow. In the absence of a clear view of the artist's face, the small icon of a man that dangles from Basquiat's necklace and falls in the center of the composition commands our attention. Made of what appears to be hammered metal, the pendant shows a man in three-quarter profile. A boxing glove appears at the figure's right cheek. Perhaps the turned position of his head is a result of this glove's impact? No forearm emerges from the glove, which makes it nearly impossible to determine who the aggressor might be.² But the despondent expression of this figure's face remains clear enough; as Basquiat's surrogate it projects its melancholy onto the artist.

In a subsequent frame (figure 17), Basquiat's left hand covers the corresponding side of his face in opposition to the figure on his necklace. Basquiat's palm hovers above his left cheek, and his four fingers lightly touch his face, arching upward and curving to the right to create a cascade from the top of the hairline down to the bridge of the nose. He looks seductively toward the camera with his uncovered eye. The third extant photograph from this portrait session is the only one in which Basquiat does not cover



Fig. 16 (left), **Fig. 17** (right), **Fig. 18** (opposite) Portraits of Jean-Michel Basquiat in Paris, 1988.
Photographs © Jérôme Schlomoff, Paris.

any part of his face or head but gazes directly, if not menacingly, at his viewer (figure 18). Here, the striking metallic icon that fell in the center of the other two images has been covered, and Basquiat takes on its three-quarter-profile pose. In its place, at the center of the composition, the artist clutches a copy of Jack Kerouac's *The Subterraneans* to his chest.

According to the photographer, Jérôme Schlomoff, Basquiat insisted on being photographed with Kerouac's novel, the famed Beat writer's third major work. Schlomoff, who typically forbade the inclusion of additional personal objects in his portraits, originally denied Basquiat's request to be photographed with Kerouac's book. But after Basquiat's repeated assertions that this book was not an extraneous object, the photographer relented. As Schlomoff recounted more than twenty years after this session, Basquiat explained that "this book was everything to him, at this difficult stage of his life." The photographer recalled Basquiat's conflicts with art dealers and



misunderstandings with his close friends. "He [Basquiat] told me," Schlomoff continued, "that this book was his Bible, that he carried it with him everywhere (I believe it, given its worn-out look), it was very important to him."³ When Schlomoff brought the prints to Basquiat at the gallery shortly after, the artist immediately liked them. Basquiat chose this third image, with *The Subterraneans*, to replace an image previously selected for his Vrej Baghoomian Gallery exhibition invitation and poster.⁴ In the intervening years, several retrospective catalogs reproduced this image alongside the more familiar images of the artist with his 1970s noise band or with his much-publicized girlfriend Madonna. But why, in the superficial 1980s art world, with its emphasis on wealth and celebrity, did Basquiat present himself as a quasi bohemian clutching a tattered and obviously well-read copy of Kerouac's novel? The answer requires us to explore his relationship not only to Beat writers, whom he often publicly cited as important to him, but also, more broadly, to language itself.

Throughout the 1980s, artists publicly reveled in their self-consciousness.⁵ In the 1988 portrait of Jeff Koons (figure 19) that appeared in a gallery advertisement less than a year after Basquiat's Baghoomian exhibition, the young artist appears with a serene expression, unblemished skin, and flawlessly coiffed hair, all of which project an unrealistic level of perfection. The superficiality of Koons's portrait is further highlighted by the message behind him on the chalkboard: "Banality as Saviour." This maxim falls in line with the overall objective of Koons to assert himself and his artistic production as a commodity among other commodities. The artist's work focuses his viewers on external or extrinsic factors often linked to desirability or profitability. This moves one step beyond Warhol, in that Koons's objective was not as much a critique of a media-saturated culture as it was an ambivalent maintenance of its supremacy.

Koons appropriated kitsch objects with popular appeal—vacuum cleaners, basketballs—and inserted them into the arena of high art. He seemingly followed Baudrillard's theory of the simulacra—that is, the idea that images have saturated our reality to such an extent that there is no longer a clear distinction between an original (or reality) and its representation—in his use of found objects or industrial techniques of fabrication.⁶ Koons specifically went so far as to commission oil paintings that copied his own banal photography for the sole reason that paintings typically commanded higher prices at auction. Such paintings were completed by machines, making them both technologically and conceptually part of a lineage that goes beyond Warhol and his factory of the 1960s and even Duchamp's readymades of the early twentieth century. According to critics such as Hal Foster, Koons and his peers had none of the critical modernist position of these earlier artistic movements. The perceived difference lay in the inability of these artists to maintain a critical distance from mass cul-

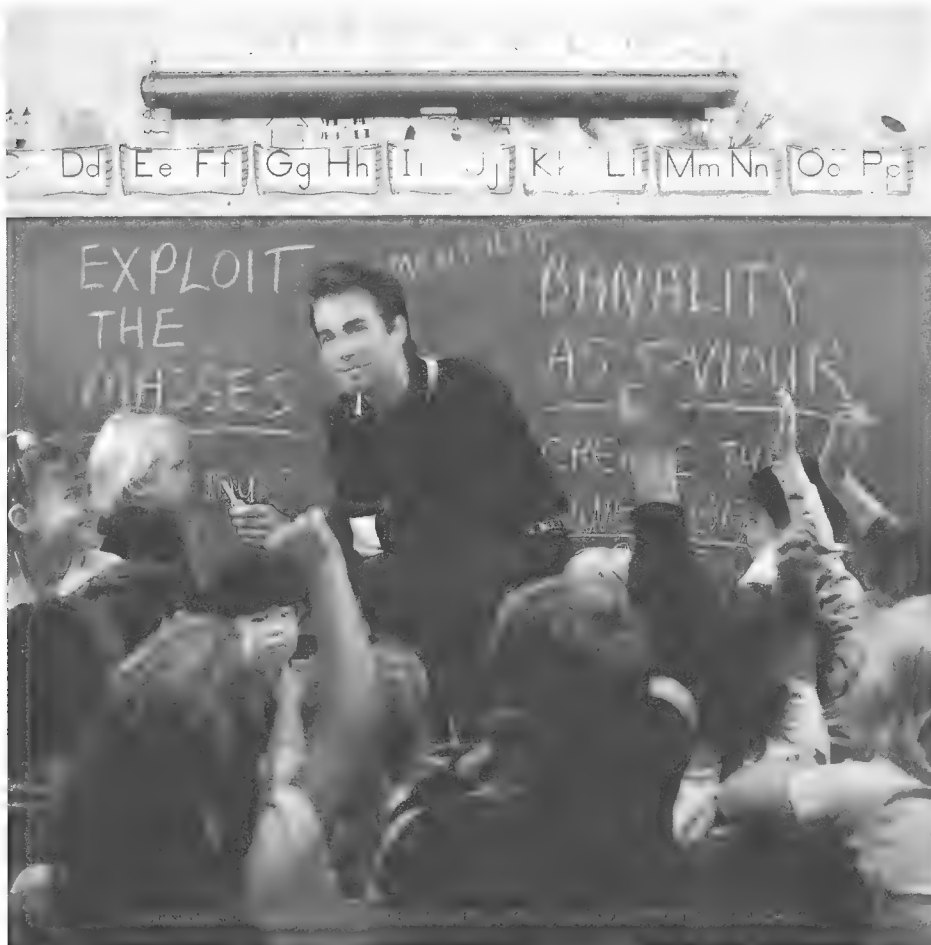


Fig. 19 Jeff Koons, *Art Ad Portfolio*, 1988–89. Lithographic print on paper from a portfolio of four color lithographs, 45 x 37¼ inches (114.3 x 94.6 cm). © Jeff Koons.

ture; instead, they indulged in it, making their work more akin to commodity fetishism.⁷ In 1988, Koons's gallery advertisements (the press for his exhibition *Banalities* included an image of the artist alongside women in bathing suits) did not include any images of actual art works. Instead, these were advertisements focused on the artist. With his persona, Koons went even further, attempting to market himself as a type of commodity: the celebrity art star. After his marriage to readymade celebrity Ilona Staller, a former actress in pornographic films, in 1991, Koons further transformed into a Hollywood-worthy persona. This reportedly included acting lessons, a professional accessorizer, and a workout regimen designed by Arnold Schwarzenegger.⁸ In a 2003 interview, Koons connected his explicit focus on celebrity art culture to this image-

obsessed era. "At the time," he explained, "it felt like our culture was so Hollywood-based that you weren't participating in it unless you were involved with film."⁹

In contrast to the airbrushed, artificial persona presented by a contemporary such as Jeff Koons, Basquiat emphasized his subjectivity through both his expressionist style of painting and the introspective persona he developed.¹⁰ He appears in the 1988 portrait as the gritty, unkempt artist. Yet Basquiat himself seemed to subscribe to these more artificial modes of self-presentation in an earlier portrait from 1985. Taken less than three years before the Paris series, Basquiat's image for the cover of the *New York Times Magazine* (see plate 1) presents a confident artist gracefully holding his paintbrush and dressed debonairly in an Armani suit. In a second portrait from the same year, taken for the advertisement of his collaborative exhibition with Warhol at the Tony Shafrazi Gallery in New York, Basquiat mugs for the camera in his name-brand boxing gear (1985; see figure 4). In the series of portraits from Paris, however, Basquiat appears less comfortable among the markers of wealth and celebrity. In contrast to his sophisticated wardrobe of black turtleneck and tweed blazer with jeweled buttons at the cuffs, his hair appears matted and disheveled; we can see clearly the blemishes, scars, and pigmentations that mar his face and hands. The tight frames of all the images focus exclusively on the face and upper torso of the artist, creating a much more intimate view of a man who otherwise seemed distant. Standing before the camera clutching Kerouac's novel, Basquiat shows himself as both the subjective artist and the distanced intellectual. Despite the gestural marks that dominate many of the artist's paintings and drawings and have caused Basquiat's critical alignment with neo-expressionism, the presence of Kerouac's novel in this late portrait encourages a consideration of the presence of language and text within these frames and an exploration of the arbitrary boundaries erected between language and image, as well as the resulting tension between neo-expressionism and conceptualism in the 1980s.

One of the most recognizable characteristics of most of Basquiat's paintings is the overwhelming abundance of written words on the canvas. Robert Farris Thompson describes it this way: "It's as if he were dripping letters."¹¹ Basquiat's works combine gestural painting (a perceived "expressionist" element) with references to text and language (an interest of conceptual artists in this period). One critic in 1984 read the works as representative "of conflict between personal instinctual drives and the collective dictates of a world of 'word processing.'"¹² We can detect that conflict in works like 1987's *Pegasus*, where the artist has covered the large composition with small markings made with pencil (see plate 30). From a distance, the overwhelming size of the paper-covered canvas amplifies the minute quality of the symbols and letters on its surface. Moving closer to the composition, one cannot help but scan the canvas, beginning

to read the delicate lines of the text: "EROICA," "SALT," "STEEL," "ASPHALT," "SYRUP," "MIGHT," "MONEY," "MUSCLES," "IRON," "INSIGNIA," "VENUS," "SUPER" "EIGHT," "BELL," "BUZZER," "AUDIO," "VAPOR," "IL PUBLICO BRUTO," "NAVEL," "URINE," "BALTIC AVE. OBSERVATORY," "NUCLEAR REACTOR," "KEY," "LAMP," "DIODE," "PUNCH," "BROKEN WING," "PEGASUS." But within the careful lines that dominate the composition, we see moments of rupture. Scribbles and marks that strike through some text appear as aberrations. In a strictly visual sense, these thick lines obscure the text. The rupture here also happens on the linguistic level, as the viewer strains to see the words that have been marked out. But what seems most prominent in the composition is a large swath of black acrylic at its top. This black section of the canvas bears a distinctly gestural, expressive quality; we can discern the isolated moves of the paintbrush that carried this black acrylic paint over the text-covered surface.

In Basquiat's contemporary moment, critics were split on identifying the work as either neo-expressionist or graffiti-influenced (but never conceptualist). Descriptions of his working process as frenetic underscored the connection of this artist to a dynamic brand of postwar American art. One reviewer of the artist's May 1984 show with Mary Boone tended to focus attention specifically on the application of paint, writing, "The young artist uses color well, applying it flatly, as in a composition [*Eye Africa* of 1983]. . . . Elsewhere, the paint is used more expressionistically in bright impastoed blocks."¹³ A different critic described the paintings in a show later that same year at Mary Boone as "offhand, disorderly and random, mixing rough and smooth, drawn and barely drawn, to create an impression of facility and ease." Basquiat, he writes, "clearly tries not to try, going slack instead of slick."¹⁴ Other critics focused on the graffiti-origins of the artist. For art writer Lisbet Nilson, for example, Basquiat (along with Keith Haring and Kenny Scharf) was in a category of artists "influenced in varying degrees by graffiti, popular music, and street culture." The artist, according to Nilson, was producing something outside the "ambitious" figurative, expressionist paintings of Schnabel and Salle, or the artists like Cindy Sherman and Robert Longo, whose work was "cool and critical, based on . . . photographs, found images, or words."¹⁵ The irony of a comment like Nilson's is palpable; in paintings like *Pegasus* we see that Basquiat is *both* expressive *and* critical.

The work of Basquiat complicates the boundary between text and image. In the words of Henry Geldzahler, "Jean-Michel Basquiat the artist and Jean-Michel Basquiat the poet are one and in perfect harmony."¹⁶ As discussed in the introduction to this book, Basquiat first became known as the street writer SAMO, covering the walls of downtown Manhattan with his poems throughout 1978 and 1979. In late 1980 and early 1981—the earliest moments of his career as a painter—Basquiat compiled notes,

lists, and drawings in a collection of four composition notebooks. Compiled and published in 1993 by collector Larry Warsh, the notebooks show the sketches for compositions (the three heads labeled as "FAMOUS NEGRO ATHLETES"), phone numbers of friends ("DIEGO 4313685"), appointments ("MONDAY MAY 8TH 2PM"), lists of needed supplies ("DURACELL AA, PENS, PADS, TAPES") and drafts of stories and poems:

A YELLOW FLASH A2STORY HOUSE
BLOWN TO PIECES/WE TOOK PICTURES
RAPIDLY/IT'S TIME TO GET OUT OF
HERE.¹⁷

Establishing a complete chronology (i.e., whether something appeared first in a notebook, a drawing, or a painting) for Basquiat's use of text remains difficult. There is no public archive of the artist's records, and the same words and images often appear in works variously classified as notebooks, sketchbooks, drawings, silk screens, and paintings.¹⁸ But Basquiat continued to write texts in notebooks and sketchbooks and on paper throughout his career.¹⁹

Basquiat often layered language interchangeably with images in his paintings as well. In *Hollywood Africans in Front of the Chinese Theater with Footprints of Movie Stars* (1983), for example, Basquiat substituted language for image in the rightmost figure of the composition (see plate 8). Instead of drawing the teeth that we might expect to fill the interior cavity of this figure's mouth, the artist simply outlined the word "TEETH" in a rectangular box that sits in the space where we might expect to see them. Similarly, in the left panel of the canvas *Untitled* from 1983 (see plate 29) the artist wrote the word "FEET" in red oil paintstick in the blank space where we would expect to see the feet of the figure that appears above. As discussed in the first chapter of this book, Basquiat deploys linguistic collage in his painting *The Nile* as a way to explore the conceptual connections between the Memphis of ancient Egypt and Memphis, Tennessee (see plate 14). The use of this city highlights the continuity between Africa and the New World, transgressing hierarchies of history and challenging the stability of the relationship between signifier and signified.

One of Basquiat's most comprehensive inventories of words comes from Herman Melville's 1851 novel *Moby-Dick*, which sat on Basquiat's bookshelf among an eclectic collection of literature: Homer's *The Odyssey*, Louis-Ferdinand Céline's *Journey to the End of the Night* (1932), William Burroughs's *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962), Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Three Plays of Euripides*, Kerouac's *The Subterraneans* (1958), Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), an encyclopedia, and a textbook on the

Golden Age.²⁰ Basquiat's *Melville*—a text drawing from 1988—reproduces *Moby-Dick*'s 135 chapter titles in black text on sheets of white paper.²¹ The work stretches across nine sheets of paper, the last three of which contain key words from the text (e.g., "CETUS," "WHALE," "BALLENA," "ETYMOLOGY") along with the famous first statement of Melville's novel, "CALL ME ISHMAEL." During the same period, Basquiat copied several entries from *Moby-Dick* into his notebooks as well. But what do we make of the artist's obsession with Melville? Richard Marshall, one of the few historians to address this particular text in Basquiat's oeuvre, has written, "It is not clear if Melville's epic held a special appeal for Basquiat, if he identified with any of the characters, if the story had a metaphorical significance, if he had read the book, or if he was merely attracted to the detailed, descriptive chapter titles with corresponding page numbers."²² I suggest that Basquiat's attraction to *Moby-Dick* was in fact its manipulation (or perhaps abandonment) of traditional narrative structure. For most of the novel the subject is absent.²³

Given the artist's obsession with text and language, literary theory provides a point of entry into the analysis of Basquiat's paintings and drawings. In their groundbreaking book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari put forward one method of literary analysis that proves useful in looking at both Melville's text and Basquiat's engagement with it. They write, "We will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier; we will not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities, in which other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed, and with what bodies without organs it makes its own converge."²⁴ For Deleuze and Guattari, the search for an origin, or a linear relationship between signifier and signified, is not the focus; hierarchical and linear thinking is discouraged. They put forward the model of the rhizome as one by which to understand a noncentered structure that is not composed of units structured within rules (i.e., structuralism). *Moby-Dick* is the example of a rhizomatic novel in that there is no real beginning to the novel; the text begins outside of Ishmael's narrative in the etymology and extracts. Also, the narrative continues after the novel's climax, as Ishmael discusses events that take place outside the contained narrative. We can similarly locate a displacement of linear narrative, origins, and hierarchical structures found in the rhizome of *Moby-Dick* in the work of Basquiat. The artist draws our attention in *Melville* to the tension between the disjunctive narrative and the linearity proposed in its table of contents, and, with the phrase "ETYMOLOGY," to the etymology of language itself. Again we find traces of Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s "signifying monkey"—that is, "he who dwells at the margins of discourse, ever punning, ever troping, ever embodying the ambiguities of language."²⁵

Within the literature on Jean-Michel Basquiat there has been a struggle to articulate the ambiguous presence of text in Basquiat's oeuvre. This is in part due to Basquiat's complication of a simplistic divide between conceptualism and expressionism—a polarity that defined art criticism at this historical moment.²⁶ As described by art historian Isabelle Graw, this was a moment where critics on either side of the debate “displayed a tendency to make totalizing claims.” “Entire decades,” writes Graw, “were stripped of any ambivalence and rendered as devoted to ‘one’ artistic style, whose predominance one was now determined to break.”²⁷ In the spring of 1981, in a special issue of *October* titled “Art World Follies,” Douglas Crimp declared “the end of painting,” choosing to instead champion in his essay conceptual art practices that were critical of rather than complicit with the art market.²⁸ In the pages of *October* and elsewhere, Crimp, along with his peers Hal Foster, Craig Owens, and Benjamin Buchloh, debated the legitimacy of neo-expressionist painting, claiming that its perceived focus on the beauty and rarity of the painted object played into bourgeois interests. Conceptual art was positioned as more cerebral, in part because of its explicit engagement with language and its seeming refusal of the art object, while neo-expressionism was understood above all as a drive toward less relevant concerns, like aesthetics and subjectivity.²⁹ Such binaries were underscored by the criticism of Barbara Rose, who also curated the first major painting exhibition of the decade, *American Painting: The Eighties*, at New York University's Grey Art Gallery.³⁰ In her catalog to the exhibition, which opened in the fall of 1979 and featured works by forty artists, Rose claimed painting as “transcendental,” “the product exclusively of the individual imagination rather than a mirror of the ephemeral external world of objective reality.”³¹ None of Rose's chosen examples included text.

For all of the inclusions of text within Basquiat's paintings and drawings, concerns with language were no longer considered the domain of painting in the 1980s. The rhetoric of painting at this moment centered instead on illusionism, transcendence, and catharsis. Critics like Donald Kuspit, Hilton Kramer, and Suzi Gablik argued that expressionism offered an opportunity to reunify the fractured modern self, restoring faith to art via its emphasis on spontaneity and subjectivity, while conceptualism remained a demonstration of intellectual cynicism over creative authenticity.³² In 1981, for example, Hilton Kramer wrote in the *New York Times*: “Against the ‘closed’ styles so long in fashion, the Neo-Expressionists offer us painting that is nothing if not ‘open’—painting that releases the medium from the restraints of high-minded theory in order to allow fantasy and emotion to play a more forthright role in determining the boundaries of pictorial discourse.”³³ For Kramer and his peers, expressionism was “against” the theory-driven practices of the conceptualists, relying, as Kramer put it,

“more on instinct and imagination than on careful design and the powers of ratiocination.”³⁴ Regardless of their position on the validity of expressionism, the polarity between these groups of critics in the 1980s remains astounding. Expressionism is continuously interpreted as invested in originality, beauty, and sincerity, while conceptualism is said to center on intellectualism, theory, and politics. Isabelle Graw warns us that an unfortunate but common consequence of this binary is that we ignore “that some conceptual artists were advocates of pictorial practice, and that some allegedly ‘neo-expressive’ painters used conceptual and institution-critical approaches.”³⁵ In this context of totalizing claims, what are we to make of an artist like Jean-Michel Basquiat, who explicitly addresses both sides of the debate, whose work is evidence of both an expressive and a conceptualist practice?

Basquiat’s fascination with language relates directly to the legacy of conceptual art that preceded him. The conceptualists moved to text as a way to restrict both the impulse to manufacture art objects and their eventual sale as commodities in the art market. This emphasis on language was also inspired by the intellectual undercurrents of poststructuralism and its emphasis on the power of language to order experience. The metaphor of language as ideology may have appealed to Basquiat, who (as I have shown in the first two chapters) appropriated directly from books in his own library many of the words and phrases that cover these compositions. These texts provided him with iconographic source material, but also with a mediated experience of the world—of art, culture, and history.³⁶ In many cases, these letters and words are also formal elements, and it becomes difficult to discern the linguistic from the imagistic functions. Basquiat’s words move between literal and figurative significance. His repetitive writing of certain names and words, with alternating letters crossed out, explores language as form, detached from meaning. Again, this impulse connects Basquiat’s practices as a writer and as a visual artist.

In one of Basquiat’s notebooks, a large blue, calligraphic *A* marks a single page, flanked by a vertical brushstroke in black on the left and two perpendicularly intersecting black marks on the right. Among the pages of lists and phrases, this glyph stands in isolation; in its calligraphic excess, this *A* pushes past its function as a letter and becomes an image instead. The same happens a few pages later, where Basquiat has drawn a small head with a crown and painted over it roughly in gold. We can see that the peaks of the characteristic three-pointed structure of this crown, however, trace the letter *W*. Just a few pages from the back of this same notebook, Basquiat also drew a tepee structure with O-rings of smoke floating out toward the right edge of the page.³⁷ In these notebooks, Basquiat transforms letters into drawings and calls attention to the connections between image and language.

As discussed in the first chapter, Basquiat's mobilization of material and ideas from both European and non-Western sources already complicates the binaries of black/white or primitive/modern in the dominant discourses of art history. Likewise, his various acts of appropriation, discussed in the second chapter, unify the perceived polarity between theory-driven and instinct-driven art practices. Basquiat's oeuvre of images combined with text (and in some cases drawings that consist entirely of text), as noted, complicates the binary of expressionism/conceptualism. Like the theories of diaspora or appropriation explored in the previous chapters, theories of language in turn provide methodologies for the interpretation of these disjunctive works, which challenge the ideas of singular narratives, unified aesthetics, or binaries of iconography. The Beat writers in particular, whom Basquiat points to directly in his 1988 portrait, provided the artist with models of ideology, spontaneous prose, and collage that allowed him to challenge the epistemological, visual, and semiotic norms of this era. The Beat writers provided a model of literary innovation and textual experimentation that was also believed to be authentically expressive. In other words, it was through an interest in Beat literature that Basquiat found resolution for the tension between his conceptual and expressionist tendencies.

In a 1986 interview, Basquiat declared William S. Burroughs to be his favorite living author.³⁸ The artist's admiration might have been in part inspired by Burroughs's experiences with heroin addiction. Basquiat mentions opiates often in his notebooks and text drawings. One work, *Untitled (History of Jazz)* from 1983, reproduces the names of jazz musicians, instruments, and genres alongside the words "OPIATES" and "ALCOHOL"—highlighted by the rectangular boxes that the artist has drawn around these (and only these) individual words.³⁹ A page from his sketchbook dated circa 1987–88 tells a morbid story:

JUNK BECOMES CHICKENSHIT
 DUEL WITH DEATH
 STILL ALIVE AFTER
 YOU PULL THE TRIGGER.⁴⁰

Aside from their struggles and obsessions with opiates, both Burroughs and Basquiat also came to their art with little formal training. Describing his introduction to writing, Burroughs explained, "I started to write in about 1950; I was thirty-five at the time; there didn't seem to be any strong motivation. I simply was endeavoring to put down in a more or less straightforward journalistic style something about my experiences with addiction and addicts."⁴¹



Fig. 20 William Burroughs and Jean-Michel Basquiat in New York City around Christmas of 1986.
 Photograph © Victor Bockris/Licensed by Corbis.

According to one biographer, Basquiat carried around Burroughs's first novel, *Junk*, which focused on subculture, addiction, and the addict-artist.⁴² *Junk* must have appealed to Basquiat on many levels, particularly in its voyeuristic descriptions of heroin use and addiction. Basquiat may have seen parts of himself in the character of Nick, a painter that Burroughs, as the character William Lee, meets in New York. Lee described Nick as "a Village character," a man who "was always half sick, his large plaintive brown eyes watering slightly and his thin nose running."⁴³ Like Basquiat in early accounts of his life in New York, Nick lived in the Village, frequently staying on the couches of friends and relying on others for food and money. Nick also painted; Burroughs describes the results as "concentrated, compressed, misshapen by a tremendous pressure."⁴⁴ Burroughs was in fact an influential figure for the punk and East Village scenes of the 1970s and 1980s. Basquiat visited Burroughs's Bowery loft (known as the "Bunker" owing to its lack of windows) several times in 1986. A photograph from 1986 shows the young Basquiat with Burroughs at a party organized by Victor Bockris and attended by several other East Village artists, writers, and musicians (figure 20).⁴⁵ During the party Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg, also in attendance, made sketches in Basquiat's notebook. Burroughs later visited Basquiat's loft-studio on Great

Jones Street, and the two eventually traded works.⁴⁶ Beyond any biographical parallels or personal relationships Basquiat might have had with the Beats, however, these authors, like the bebop musicians that similarly occupied him throughout his career, provided structural models of ideology, composition, and process that Basquiat appropriated into his practice.⁴⁷

The philosophy and methods of the Beats clearly resonate with Basquiat's challenges to the hierarchies of modernism, with his continuing revisions to his own biography, and with the fragmentation of identity. Holding Kerouac's *The Subterraneans*, Jean-Michel Basquiat rehearsed the statements against the emptiness of contemporary life he made as SAMO ten years earlier—an emptiness that Koons seemed to celebrate. By aligning himself squarely with Beat literature, Basquiat identified with their criticism against the “banality” and the excesses of society. Indeed, Basquiat's early writings frequently criticized the capitalistic excess of his own time. Along with his collaborator Al Diaz, he positioned SAMO “as an alternative 2 ‘playing art’ with the ‘radical chic’ sect on Daddy\$ funds.” This hypercritical poetry often included references to the new materialism, which was exemplified by the commercialization and commodification of everything from hamburgers to holidays. One such passage reads:

MICROWAVE & VIDEO X-SISTANCE
“BIG MAC” CERTIFICATE
FOR X-MAS⁴⁸

Basquiat's concerns with capitalism and the commodification of art continued in his later work as well. For one, the artist's methods of appropriation, which relied extensively on technologies of photographic reproduction, also more implicitly addressed the overwhelming commodity fetishism of the 1980s art market. In the works themselves, too, Basquiat revealed an obsession with commerce. As noted in the first chapter, Richard Marshall, the curator of Basquiat's 1992 retrospective at the Whitney Museum, observed the artist's linguistic expression of an interest in commerce, noting “frequent references to petroleum and its by-products (TAR, OIL, PETROL, GASOLINE) and to ‘peso neto’ (meaning ‘net weight’).”⁴⁹ Basquiat's 1982 canvas *Natives Carrying Some Guns, Bibles, Amorites on Safari* (see plate 13) deals explicitly with the commercial exploitation of native populations. On the surface, the artist has written the phrase “GOOD MONEY IN SAVAGES,” along with the words “POACHERS,” “TUSKS,” and “SKINS”—references to the illegal thefts of plants and animals—transforming s's into dollar signs. In 1983, Basquiat transformed Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* (see plate 4) into a form of currency through his inclusion of the words “FEDERAL RESERVE NOTE” across

the top of the canvas, the outlines of the number one flanking the head of the sitter on either side, and the phrase "THIS NOTE IS LEGAL TENDER FOR ALL DEBTS PUBLIC + PRIVATE"—which he placed under "copyright"—in the upper-left corner.⁵⁰ The artist even included his version of the seal and number of the federal issuing district (i.e., "B" and "2" for New York City) and the alphanumeric serial number (B688490934). *Undiscovered Genius* of 1982–83 bears a drawing of an eye within a pyramid—such as the one that appears on the back of a U.S. treasury bill—in the lower-left corner. We see the phrase "FEDERAL RESERVE NOTE" in the upper-left corner of *Liberty* (1982–83), as well as a sketch of a coin in black and gray above the note "ROOSEVELT FIVE CENT PIECE."

On the surfaces of several canvases, Basquiat wrote values in monetary units. For example, in the upper-left corner of *Charles the First* (1982) we see "HALOES FIFTY NINE CENT." The phrase "FIVE CENTS" (with some letters crossed out) appears in brown oil paintstick in the upper left of *Television and Cruelty to Animals* (1983). Basquiat's references to money, value, and commodities also include the words "ONE CENT," "DOLLAR BILL," "ANDREW JACKSON," "LOANS," "DEBT," "TAX FREE," "YEN," "NOTARY," "REGISTERED TRADEMARK," "COPYRIGHT," "ESTIMATED VALUE," "DRY GOODS," "TOBACCO," "SALT," "ZUCHER," "ALCOHOL," "COTTON." Throughout his oeuvre we find images of coins. Drawings of coins—both dated to 1951—appear on *In Italian* (1983) and *Skin Head Wig* (1982–83); a coin dated to 1949 appears in the upper right of *Mr. Kipper* from 1983; and another large coin floats in the center of Basquiat's 1984 composition *Moon View*.⁵¹ References to parts of coins and currency also appear. For his later collaborative work with Andy Warhol, Basquiat transformed an Arm & Hammer logo into a coin with Charlie Parker on its face (see plate 10). Such references to capitalism seem to align the artist with the critics of the 1980s who opposed expressionism on the grounds that it lacked political engagement and was complicit with bourgeois commodity culture.

Basquiat and the Beats also intersect over jazz and, more specifically, bebop, which figured prominently in the work of both. As the unofficial spokesman for the Beat generation, Kerouac addressed the music, and its role for the Beat writers, in several essays, including "Aftermath: The Philosophy of the Beat Generation," which he published in *Esquire* in March 1958.⁵² He positioned bop music as part of a larger cultural search for freedom and spiritual awakening, writing, "We'd stay up 24 hours drinking cup after cup of black coffee, playing record after record of Wardell Gray, Lester Young, Dexter Gordon, Willie Jackson, Lennie Tristano and all the rest, talking madly about that holy new feeling out there in the streets."⁵³ Kerouac also wrote several essays on jazz for *Escapade* magazine—the earliest in 1959. In his article "The Beginning of Bop," Kerouac reveals his enthusiasm and respect for this form of music,

likening it to great poetry, and the musicians themselves to twelfth-century monks. In his novels, the underworld quality of bop music, with its own language, mannerisms, and culture, is also essential to the dejected characters Kerouac describes. The narrator of Kerouac's *The Subterraneans* speaks of Charlie Parker and attends live jazz performances at the Red Drum music club in San Francisco. In her study of Kerouac's prose, Regina Weinreich claims, "The jazz environment of the novel provides the perfect correspondence between the literary style and the world it aims to represent."⁵⁴ Jazz also provided a linguistic model for characters such as Mardou Fox, who speaks like a blues singer—with interpolations and private thoughts inserted into the overall conversation (or verse).

The connection of Beat literature to jazz music brings up questions of race as well. As discussed in the previous chapter, jazz—a music that is simultaneously African and American, but not entirely one or the other—is a metaphor for the disjunctive and displaced subjectivity of an African in the diaspora. The ambivalent (and often ignored) position of African Americans within the Beat literary movement only reinforces this instability. African American poets and writers—LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), Bob Kaufman, and Ted Joans—are consistently written out of the mainstream history of this movement, which continues to crystallize around Kerouac, Burroughs, Ginsberg, and Ferlinghetti.⁵⁵ Kaufman and Joans in particular relied on jazz metaphors in their own writings, because the music provided a model for the negotiations and interactions between African and American culture, the margins and the mainstream, that framed their production.⁵⁶ It is certainly more than coincidental that the two major influences on Basquiat's practice—jazz music and Beat literature—connected so squarely with his own interrogations of the boundaries of race.

The structures in Kerouac's writing resemble jazz improvisation solos as well. In composing, Kerouac was limited only by the restraints of the page, whose shape he used to determine the length and the form of his poems. He compared this process to that of a jazz musician, who makes "his statement within a certain number of bars, within one chorus, which spills over into the next, but he has to stop where the chorus page stops."⁵⁷ Kerouac compares himself to a tenor saxophone player "drawing a breath and blowing a phrase on his saxophone, till he runs out of breath, and when he does, his sentence, his statement's been made. . . . That's how I therefore separate my sentences, as breath separations of the mind."⁵⁸

The same might also be said of Basquiat's mode of pictorial composition, which seems constrained only by the size of the artist's canvas. The artist covered the surface of *Pegasus* (1987), for example, with an endless collection of words and symbols that stretch to the very edges of the canvas (see plate 30). In the lower-right corner

of the composition, we see one of the “hobo signs” from Henry Dreyfuss’s *Symbol Sourcebook* (see figure 8)—one large vertical oval, with another projecting from its center at ninety degrees. To the right of this symbol Basquiat has included the appropriate label from Dreyfuss’s book: “EASY MARK SUCKER,” with each word stacked vertically. The terminal *R* in the last row appears to have just barely squeezed into the edge of the frame.

Basquiat’s insistence on including Kerouac’s novel in his own portrait can also be read as an attempt to connect with issues of identity and existence that Kerouac and his contemporaries explored. The Beats shared a belief that the crisis of civilization was rooted in the decay of values and ideals focused on metaphysics and spirituality; they represented a search for the self, and they wanted to discover a mode of perceiving truth. Literary scholar Gregory Stephenson links the Beat writers to a Dadaist and surrealist heritage of aesthetic subversion—a comparison that holds true in the work of Basquiat as well.⁵⁹ In fact, Basquiat’s experimentations with improvisatory techniques, discussed in the previous chapter, often invited comparisons to the early modern European avant-garde. In one of the first published reviews of the artist’s works, from an exhibition at Annina Nosei’s gallery in October 1982, one critic wrote that “the speed lines and notations” on Basquiat’s canvases “bear some relation to automatic drawing.”⁶⁰ While we must acknowledge other intellectual and artistic histories within Basquiat’s oeuvre, the artist’s commitment to aesthetic experimentation in the service of existentialist inquiry always remains at the forefront. In the artist’s early photocopied collages, such as *Anti-Product 4*, discussed in the second chapter, Basquiat interrogates the boundary between real and reproduced as an analog for his own complicated subjectivity (see plate 24).

Although the styles of the writers and poets most often associated with this movement—Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs—differed greatly, these authors shared a desire to journey inward to the darkest recesses of the human psyche, which likely appealed to Basquiat. Beat poetry and literature highlighted chaos and taboo desires.⁶¹ In fact, the horrifying violence and uncontrolled madness described by these texts make many readers uncomfortable. In an excerpt from Williams S. Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch* a fifteen-year-old boy describes his first sexual encounter to his father.

“Well, son, did you get a piece of ass?” “Yeah. This gash comes to the door, and I say that I want a piece of ass and lay the double sawski on her. We go up to her trap, and she remove the dry goods. So I switch my blade and cut a big hunk off her ass, she raise a beef like I am reduce to pull off one shoe and beat her brains out. Then I hump her for kicks.”⁶²

The transgressive nihilism of Beat literature evokes the obscenity and the madness of the modern world. In works such as *Untitled (Black Tar and Feathers)* of 1982 (see plate 38), Basquiat similarly evokes dark subjects.⁶³ The figures roughly outlined in the upper half of this canvas stand anxiously erect, arms strained and stretched horizontally. Each seems constrained by the rectangular boundaries that divide the upper portion of the composition into three parts. In the lower half of the composition, Basquiat has drawn gridlike structures and circles over the black oil paint in some sections with white paintstick. Into the center of this black ground, the artist poured tar and covered the still-wet surface with white feathers. What remains is more than an aesthetically compelling layering of textures and contrasting colors. The use of tar as an artistic material also calls to mind historical associations, particularly with the torture of African Americans in the American South. Basquiat's tar provokes a visceral response from the viewer, as he or she imagines the acute pain of removing the dried tar from bare skin. Like Burroughs in his description of a boy's sexual assault and murder of a young woman, Basquiat uses brutal imagery to underscore the cruelty of racial violence.

Aside from these ideological concerns, Basquiat also shares several compositional strategies with Beat literature. For example, in his introduction to William Burroughs's 1953 semi-autobiographic novel *Junky*, Oliver Harris argues that Burroughs's text functions almost as a *trompe l'oeil* painting that changes every time one sees it. The paintings of Basquiat share this tendency. In semiotic terms, the interpretant (i.e., the mental image a viewer/reader forms in response to an image, or *sign*) is always shifting in the process of semiosis.⁶⁴ In *Untitled (Rinso)* from 1982, what seems at first to be a random arrangement of text and image becomes a sophisticated commentary on representations of blacks in the media (see plate 36). The "NO SUH NO SUH" on the left side of the canvas recalls the racist jargon of the *Amos 'n' Andy* show. The "whitewashing" action of the soap serves double duty as a critique of the evasion of social responsibility in the media. The fifty-pound weight recalls the burden of a black in white society—"too heavy a load."⁶⁵ Knowing the artist's inclination to quote from art history, we might read the references "VENUS" and "MADONNA" written in the upper-left corner of *A Panel of Experts* (1982) as homage to classical masterpieces. On the other hand, once we are aware of the artist's personal relationships with women we could read these same words differently. Considered in conjunction with the image of two stick figures below—one punching the other squarely in the face—Basquiat could also be referring here to the reported fight between girlfriends Suzanne Mallouk (whom he called "Venus") and Madonna Ciccone, when Mallouk punched Madonna at the Roxy nightclub.⁶⁶

Beat literature's reliance on "autobiographical fiction" also provided Basquiat with a model for dealing with his own fractured subjectivity. In Kerouac's *The Subterraneans*, for example, a narrative blend of fiction and reality blurs the boundaries of the self and captures the anxiety of identity in the modern world.⁶⁷ This method relies on the assumption that identity and the world are trapped in constant flux. This feeling pervades Kerouac's *The Subterraneans*. The opening passage reads,

Once I was young and had so much more orientation that I could talk with nervous intelligence about everything and with clarity and without as much literary preambuling as this; in other words this is the story of an unself-confident man, at the same time of an egomaniac, naturally, facetious won't do—just to start at the beginning and let the truth seep out, that's what I'll do—. It began on a warm summernight—ah, she was sitting on a fender with Julien Alexander who is . . . let me begin with the history of the subterraneans of San Francisco . . .⁶⁸

Kerouac's preface "this is the story of" makes it difficult to determine the place of the narrator in the story to follow: is the narrator the primary character or not? Are Julien Alexander and the narrator the same person? Throughout the story Kerouac makes frequent shifts back and forth from the first person to the third person, even in the middle of sentences. Real-life events overlap with fiction, and even Kerouac himself appears as a character, Leo Percepied. This is a strategy that Kerouac employed in almost all of his major works, becoming Peter Martin in *The Town and the City* (1950), Sal Paradise in *On the Road* (1957), Ray Smith in *The Dharma Bums* (1958), Jack in *Book of Dreams* (1961), and Jack Duluoz in *Big Sur* (1962), *Desolation Angels* (1965), and *Vanity of Duluoz* (1968).⁶⁹ Most of the secondary characters in these novels also correspond to people in Kerouac's real circle of friends and acquaintances. He based the only black character in *The Subterraneans*, Mardou Fox, on his real-life love Alene Lee. Kerouac's close friends Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs become Adam Moorad and Frank Carmody, respectively, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti appears as Larry O'Hara.⁷⁰ Kerouac based *The Subterraneans* on events that took place in Greenwich Village in New York, where he lived during the summer of 1953, but he set the novel in San Francisco.⁷¹ *On the Road* tells the story of his travels and friendship with Neal Cassady (Dean Moriarty in the novel).⁷² The correspondence to real events is so strong that scholars have been able to date the events in the novel with some accuracy.⁷³

Because of the confusion and fragmentation of subjectivity in William Burroughs's novel *Junky* (1953), the book also resists normative reality. In *Junky*, the author, who at times is also the narrator, moves between objectivity and subjectivity, in this way

giving his reader a glimpse into the life of a heroin addict.⁷⁴ Burroughs, who shuffled at random between his alter egos William Lee and the Master Addict, repeatedly inserted the word *you* into his narratives, which both makes us complicit in the criminal activities that dominate the story and positions us as voyeurs to an underworld of drugs and violence.⁷⁵ Writing from the quasi-anthropological perspective of a detached observer, Burroughs complicates the boundary between author and narrator, observer and observed, making it extraordinarily challenging for a reader to locate a cohesive view of the "truth."

This was also the case for the young Basquiat, who frequently and simultaneously told divergent stories of his own life. According to some friends, Basquiat was raped and abused as a child and he later performed as a male prostitute; but his father and a number of his close friends maintain that he was well provided for and never abused in any way. In the case of his early relationship with gallerist Annina Nosei, there are several discrepancies as well. According to some, Nosei forced Basquiat to paint in the basement of her gallery as slave labor. Collector Doug Cramer reported, "He looked like a slave or very close to it."⁷⁶ Others have claimed that Nosei's business dealings often left Basquiat confused; she sold paintings out from under him and exploited his talent.⁷⁷ In an interview with Anthony Haden-Guest, Basquiat once admitted that he had not recognized these problems until later,⁷⁸ but when talking with Marc Miller, the artist rejected all such accounts: "I was never locked anywhere. Oh Christ. If I was white, they would just call it an artist-in-residence."⁷⁹ Basquiat's confusion and manipulation of the boundaries between truth and fiction also shaped his early alter ego, SAMO.⁸⁰

Basquiat created complex and fragmented stories and histories on his canvases as well. In *Untitled (Rinso)* from 1982 (see plate 36), Basquiat juxtaposes the very real "Rinso" soap brand, the first granular detergent, introduced in 1918, with "SAPPHIRE" and "KINGFISH," referring to two fictional characters from the *Amos 'n' Andy* radio-turned-television show. In *Charles the First* (1982; see plate 20), "THOR," signifying the mythological god, is aligned with the very real figures of King Charles I of England and the jazz musician Charlie Parker. In the upper-left corner of *Jawbone of an Ass* from 1982 (see plate 28), Basquiat has painted a figure, wearing a beret, whose right hand cups his face in contemplation. Above the figure, one can barely read the words "Rodin's Think[ing]," which the artist has written twice, and subsequently crossed out, in black oil paintstick. Onto the center of the painting the artist has glued two rectangles of canvas on which he has written the names of rulers—"ALEXANDER THE GREAT," "SCIPIO," "DIDO, and "CLEOPATRA"—alongside those of great thinkers, such as "SOCRATES," "VIRGIL," and "MACHIAVELLI." One can also read references to great

historical battles (e.g., "THE PUNIC WARS") and allusions to film history (e.g., "BEN-HUR"). Here, Basquiat has combined Greek and Roman antiquity with Renaissance Italy, to which he adds American history, represented by the phrases "EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION" and "LOUISIANA PURCHASE," alongside the names of political figures—"VAN BUREN" and "TYLER," as well as the partially obscured "LINCOLN, A." in the lower center of canvas. The cartoon characters and comic book references in the right third of the composition, and the reference to transcendental philosophy at the low center of the canvas, further complicate attempts at interpretation. In a single composition, the artist blends references to French art, the Greek and Roman empires, cartoons, comic books, movies, American politics, and the history of philosophy (i.e., "TRANSCENDENTALISM").

Little has been written about Basquiat's writings apart from the expressions of interest in the works on paper and canvas that consist only of text. The Cheim & Read Gallery organized an exhibition of around sixty-five of these works in 2005, and in his catalog essay Richard Marshall emphasizes the visual elements of Basquiat's text, claiming that "in words, Basquiat discovered a form of visual expression ideally compatible with his inherent appreciation of naive, childlike drawings, scribbling, cryptic signs, and letter printing."⁸¹ Marshall recognizes both the conceptual and formal power of text in Basquiat's works, noting a connection to both Burroughs and Kerouac. I argue that the presence of text in the paintings, and what some have regarded as a separate phenomenon in the "text drawings," are in fact closely related impulses. In fact, Basquiat's methods in both painting and writing draw consciously upon the Beat writers.

On a compositional level, analyses of Beat literature provide a point of entry into Basquiat's dense compositions because they also explicitly connect ideology to methodology. Characterized by its reliance on improvisation and a lack of revision, Kerouac's "spontaneous prose" technique, for example, connected to the writer's interest in preserving the subjective qualities of his writing. In his 1953 essay "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose," he describes this procedure as "an undisturbed flow."⁸² Kerouac liked the confessional quality and the implied frenzy of this technique, which seemed to better approximate the reality of the human psyche. In a 1968 interview he proclaimed, "Goddamn it, FEELING is what I like in art, not CRAFTINESS and the hiding of feelings."⁸³

Kerouac apparently came by the idea for his characteristic spontaneous style while writing his infamous tale *On the Road*, first published in 1951. He was influenced by the letters of his friend Neal Cassady, as well as by the prophecies of Goethe and Dostoevsky, who both predicted, according to Kerouac, "that the future literature

of the West would be confessional in nature.”⁸⁴ Kerouac claimed to have written *The Subterraneans*, the novel in Basquiat’s Parisian portrait, in just three nights sitting at his mother’s kitchen table in Queens, with the help of the stimulant Benzedrine. The urgency of Kerouac’s process—typing day and night to finish a manuscript—is similar to Basquiat’s own process. As described by friend Nicholas Taylor, “He was painting everyday without having much of a break. Ten paintings against a wall and keep painting for two or three days without sleep.”⁸⁵

In an introduction to one edition of *The Subterraneans*, Kerouac explained his compositional process, calling it “the prose of the future, from both the conscious top and the unconscious bottom of the mind, limited only by the limitations of time flying by as your mind flies by with it.” He goes on to write, “Not a word of this book was changed after I had finished writing it in three sessions from dusk to dawn at the typewriter like a long letter to a friend. This I believe to be the only possible literature of the future. UNINTERRUPTED AND UNREVISED FULL CONFESSIONS ABOUT WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED IN REAL TIME.”⁸⁶ In this note to the reader, Kerouac highlights several of the essential elements of his style: the confessional and personal quality (as if he were writing “a long letter to a friend”), the speed, and the lack of explicit revisions. All three are essential qualities that one can locate in the work of Basquiat as well.

While Kerouac’s prose maintains a personal quality with the dominance of its first-person narrative, Basquiat achieves the same effect via imagery that is rooted in the intimacy of his free association and past experience. The cars and anatomical drawings that populate his compositions recall the trauma of being hit by a car as a child and his subsequent hospitalization. According to the artist’s friend Fred Braithwaite (a.k.a. Fab 5 Freddy), several references to the urban spaces of Basquiat’s childhood also appear. Images of skelly courts recall the street game played by children, where players would shoot bottle caps across a “playing court” drawn in chalk on the concrete surface. The phrase “FLATS FIX” from a 1981 ink drawing refers to a sign for a tire shop on Fourth Avenue in Brooklyn.⁸⁷ The lists and phrases are borrowed from his everyday life—room service menus, television newscasts, or the stories of friends. As noted in chapter 2, the artist drew one of his trademark phrases, “boom for real,” from a television newscast interview with a homeless person during a winter blizzard. According to Nicholas Taylor,

One evening Michael Holman and I went up to Wayne’s loft where Wayne and Jean-Michel were taking vocal samples from the television news. Wayne pushed the record button while a homeless person was commenting on the icy conditions in New York City. The man said

to the reporter: "Fell on my ass, boom, for real!" Since the tape was at the beginning, Wayne could push "play" and then "rewind" quickly, and the audio was "ignorantly" looped to sound like: "Fell on my ass, boom, for real, boom, boom, boom, for real, fell on my ass, boom."⁸⁸

Basquiat also sourced the words and images for his 1982 painting *Man from Naples* (see plate 23) from the travel story of his studio assistant, Stephen Torton.⁸⁹

As discussed in the previous chapters, even the passages from texts in his library construct a personal view of the artist's experience of art history and the construction of his own complex identity within a separate, dominant cultural framework. Basquiat's drawing *Untitled* from 1987 (see plate 2), for example, draws imagery and texts from the artist's visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art (and presumably its bookstore). This was a pilgrimage he often made weekly with Braithwaite, who recalled in an interview published in 2006: "We'd go up to the Metropolitan Museum and act like we were art students. We would take out drawing pads and stuff, and walk around making sketches of stuff we thought was cool."⁹⁰ Looking at *Untitled* (1987) we can identify references to sculptural traditions from ancient Egypt and Greece, as well as from nineteenth-century America. More than a rehearsal of art history, however, Basquiat's juxtaposition of these images and museum texts is also a rehearsal of his place within this lineage and a record of his place within the institution of the museum. He was "acting like" an artist.

Basquiat's repeated insertions of his own visage into his compositions further bring these works into a first-person narrative. For example, *Self-Portrait* of 1982 shows a tall black figure, with dreadlocks (very similar to the hairstyle of the artist at this time), that stretches the vertical length of the seventy-six-by-ninety-four-inch canvas. The sheer height of this figure (at nearly eighty inches) makes him larger than life size, since the artist stood just under six feet tall.⁹¹ We see the artist again in *Self-Portrait as a Heel* and *Self-Portrait as a Heel Part Two* from the same year. In the latter image, Basquiat draws our attention to the construction of this representation with the words "back view" and "composite" written on this silhouetted figure. Basquiat also makes himself the subject in such works as *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict* (1982) and later in *Self-Portrait* (1986). Self-representation asserts how the artist himself wants to be seen; he balances on the delicate line between subject and object, a task made even more complex for Basquiat as a black man forced into the shadows of the dominant culture. Here, Basquiat refuses his viewer a complete vision of himself. Instead, he exists almost entirely in shadow, reflecting his own uncertain place in the larger society.

Another characteristic of the spontaneous prose technique that Basquiat seems to emulate is its speed. Kerouac explained that the swiftness of his prose “was the only way to express the speed and tension and ecstatic tomfoolery of the age.”⁹² He used punctuation, or a lack of it, to emphasize this aspect of the writing. Looking at the text from a strictly visual and formal perspective, we notice that the author’s words appear to flow together seamlessly, without the interruption of capitalization or punctuation. He cites the poet William Carlos Williams (1883–1963) as his example, writing in his “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose” that there should be “no periods separating sentence-structures already arbitrarily riddled by false colons and timid usually needless commas.”⁹³ The very first paragraph of *The Subterraneans*, quoted earlier, is a good example.

Once I was young and had so much more orientation that I could talk with nervous intelligence about everything and with clarity and without as much literary preambing as this; in other words this is the story of an unself-confident man, at the same time of an egomaniac, naturally, facetious won’t do—just to start at the beginning and let the truth seep out, that’s what I’ll do—. It began on a warm summernight—ah, she was sitting on a fender with Julien Alexander who is . . . let me begin with the history of the subterraneans of San Francisco . . . ⁹⁴

Kerouac’s paragraph never actually ends, but runs into the next paragraph, followed only by an ellipsis . . . Only one period appears in this arrangement of ninety-eight words; Kerouac prefers the semicolon for its noninterruptive quality and the dash for its visual effect of leading the eye to the next word. Kerouac’s obvious lack of punctuation renders the syntax indistinct, and the prose becomes almost overwhelming to the casual reader. Once you stop reading, you may or may not be able to find your place again. Frequently, the eye scans repeatedly over the same words, because they seem new; this is because you only saw the words before. They rattle through your head as you whiz past them, not comprehending them, your lips moving feverishly in an attempt to keep time with Kerouac’s rhythm.

Basquiat’s writings certainly share this fast tempo. The lack of punctuation, promoting a feeling of speed, is common as well. He writes,

A DOG WATCHING A DOG
ON TELEVISION BITE
EACH OTHER⁹⁵

And in another example:

PAY FOR SOUP
BUILD A FORT
SET THAT ON FIRE⁹⁶

The capitalization of all letters in these examples places every word on the same plane of significance, and the lack of punctuation requires reading in a single breath. This gives the reader a feeling of anxiety and speed associated with the modern world that is very similar to Kerouac's own prose. The speed of composition is a characteristic of Basquiat's practices in drawing and painting as well.

In drawings such as *50¢ Piece* of 1982–83 (see plate 15), Basquiat denies the viewer any negative space to rest the eye. Instead, he compacts texts and images into the same space, creating constant movement as the eye traverses the canvas; it borders on becoming overwhelming. Starting in the top left corner of the composition, the artist has written several references to Haiti and its former leader: "DR. FRANCOIS DUVALIER," "ALIAS 'PAPA DOC'." Directly to the right, Basquiat has drawn the outline of a boat, which he labels "THE ARK." Beneath the structure the phrase "THE ARK WAS THREE HUNDRED CUBITS LONG AND MADE MOSTLY OF WOOD AND PITCH" appears. There is no visual separation between these two ideas (one biblical, the other political); rather, they exist in the same space. This is a pattern that continues throughout the composition. Where we would typically expect visual data, Basquiat instead supplies an abundance of text, leaving the viewer to read through the various messages about Haiti, Noah's Ark, naval structures, Jamaica, salt trading and mining, and the pasteurization process.

In *Piscine Versus the Best Hotels* from 1982 (see plate 32), Basquiat included a paper collage at the top of the composition that he covered with words drawn in red, blue, and black oil paintstick. Packed together within the tight frame of the paper are references to names, dates, and places that we are left to piece together. In the upper-left section of the canvas, Basquiat pasted a large sheet of paper directly to the left of two smaller figure drawings stacked vertically. On the far right side of this large sheet, we might first notice "ANTON CERNAK" and "MAYOR OF CHICAGO," written in parentheses directly below—a reference to the mayor of Chicago elected in 1931, who was assassinated while shaking hands with then president-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt. Below it, Basquiat has included both the date and the place of the assassination—"FEB 15 1933" and "(MIAMI)." "BLEACHERS AT A BULL RING COLLAPSE," written slightly larger in dark paint just to the left of this section's center, likely refers to an event in Sincelejo, Colombia, where collapsed bleachers caused the deaths of 222 people on January 22, 1980. Throughout this section, we see several other markings related to large-scale tragic events. Another deadly sporting disaster—the 1955 Le Mans motor race—is

recalled in this same panel, with the phrases "CAR HURLED INTO GRANDSTAND" and "83 KILLED," in the lower right, and the line "JUNE IITH LE MANS."

Basquiat also records in shorthand two major train accidents. "MAY THREE NEAR TOKYO/163 KILLED) INBOUND"—written in two black lines, just a few inches down from the top of the composition—refers to a collision between an inbound freight train and an outbound commuter train near Tokyo that left 163 people dead and 400 injured. And the name "JOHN LUTHER JONES" at the lower center and the nearby phrase "DIES WITH HAND ON BRAKE" refer to the heroic death of train conductor John Luther "Casey" Jones at the turn of the century. An employee of the Illinois Central Railroad, Casey Jones was killed on April 30, 1900, when his train—the "Cannonball Express"—collided with a stalled freight train in Mississippi. He was the only fatality in the accident, a fact that has been attributed to his refusal to abandon the train, and legend states that when his body was pulled from the wreckage his hands were still clasping the train's whistle cord and brake.⁹⁷ In this section of Basquiat's painting we see evidence of the speed of his composition through the quick writing of these words in paintstick. But if we take them together, we might also connect the speed of the artist's process to his subject matter—that is, the deadly potential of speed in firearms, sports, and transportation.

The third major feature of Kerouac's method that corresponds to Basquiat's practice is a lack of revision. "In spontaneous prose," Kerouac claimed, "you just tell what happened. You don't stop, you just keep going."⁹⁸ He argued that maintaining the spontaneity of thought required editorial restraint. He resisted any alterations to his original manuscripts, as Kerouac explained at length in 1968.

All my editors since Malcolm Cowley have had instructions to leave my prose exactly as I wrote it. In the days of . . . *On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums*, I had no power to stand by my style for better or for worse. When Malcolm Cowley made endless revisions and inserted thousands of needless commas like, say, Cheyenne, Wyoming (why not just say Cheyenne Wyoming and let it go at that, for instance), . . . well nowadays I am just grateful to him for his assistance in proofreading the manuscript and in discovering logical errors, such as dates, names of places.⁹⁹

Kerouac often typed manuscripts directly onto endless rolls of teletype paper or Canasta's drawing paper. In a 1959 interview he claimed that the roll of paper for *The Dharma Bums* was "a hundred feet long." When he handed over the manuscript of *On the Road* to his publishers, "it was all no paragraphs, single-spaced—all one big paragraph."¹⁰⁰

His literary peers harshly criticized Kerouac for this; Truman Capote said of Kerouac: "He's not a writer, he's a typewriter."¹⁰¹ Kerouac's method of writing for hours without stopping and his lack of editing separated him even from his colleagues. On his characteristic lack of revision, Kerouac explained, "By not revising what you've already written you simply give the reader the actual workings of your mind during the writing itself: you confess your thoughts about events in your own unchangeable way."¹⁰² The resulting prose creates characters that often correct themselves; their speech and their thoughts come in false starts and sputters. These corrections are not normally set apart from the remainder of the text; rather, the reader reads the correction as naturally as he or she would listen to it in casual conversation. In *The Subterraneans* Kerouac writes, "So I feel like leaving at once to get 'back to my work' the chimera not the chimera but the orderly advancing sense of work and duty which I had worked up and developed at home."¹⁰³ The uninterrupted flow of words, thoughts, and ideas was part of a larger concern with frankness and the truth of experience. Kerouac and the other Beat writers did not try to disguise their feelings or personal anguish with technique and craft; instead, they strove to bring honesty to their expressions.¹⁰⁴ Basquiat's paintings, which preserve corrections, overmarkings, and spelling attempts in the final canvases, have a similar quality.

Robert Farris Thompson has written of Basquiat's preoccupation with crossing out words. In his 1985 essay "Activating Heaven: The Incantatory Art of Jean-Michel Basquiat," Thompson recounts one instance of showing Basquiat a sketch he had made of the artist's painting, *Revised Undiscovered Genius of the Mississippi Delta*. Upon seeing the sketch, "all he [Basquiat] would say was 'You forgot to cross out CATFISH.'"¹⁰⁵ There is hardly an example of a canvas where a word has not been crossed out.¹⁰⁶ *LNAPRK* of 1982 (plate 40) reveals several layers of text; on the top half of the canvas, one can detect the vowel sequence "EEIOU" alongside the word "VACA," which corresponds to the drawing beside it of a cow (*vaca* is the Spanish word for "cow"). On the lower half of the canvas, the word "SWISS," written in pink, covers the three citations of the German word "ESSEN" (i.e., "to eat"). It may not be coincidental that the title "Luna Park" refers to a section of the Coney Island amusement park and that the landmark volume of Beat poetry by Lawrence Ferlinghetti is titled *A Coney Island of the Mind*.¹⁰⁷ In an interview with Marc Miller, Basquiat explained that the two lower circles in the lower-left panel of *Notary* (1983) were preliminary attempts at his final image that appears at the top of the panel (see plate 37). He left all three versions, making more obvious his process as he thought through these images. In Kerouac's novels as well, particularly in *The Subterraneans*, the act of writing is for Leo Percepied (and by extension for Kerouac himself) a transformative process.

Stephenson describes it as "a mode of confronting, learning from, and correcting his failings and mistakes."¹⁰⁸

The correction and crossing out of words occurs in Basquiat's writings as well. In one of the artist's notebooks, we encounter the following text:

~~THE SPORES FLOATED ON EVERTHIN~~
~~THE SPORES FLOATED ON A POTATO FOM~~
~~THE-I~~
SPORES FLOATED ON THE POTATO FOAMING THRU THE SKIN
THEY HID ON SPOONS
THE GERMS ON A SPOON BEHIND THE OVEN
THE COLONY OF ROACHES IN THE OVEN LAY EGGS
UNDER TINFOIL IN THE OIL SWAMPS OF
BROILED STEAKS.
COOKED AND RECOOKED¹⁰⁹

Basquiat's preserved corrections and marked out words, which appear in many paintings and drawings, connect his practices as a visual artist to his work as a writer. In the artist's writings, crossed out words and phrases grant the reader insight into Basquiat's creative process. In the preceding example, we can literally read his struggle for expression. He has crossed out the first three lines and revised them into the fourth line. As in the visual work, Basquiat preserves these revisions as integral to the process of his writing.

In a discussion with Thompson in 1987, Basquiat explained, "I cross out words so that you will see them more; the fact that they are obscured makes you want to read them."¹¹⁰ The precarious balance between concealment and revelation indicated by the artist here bears a striking resemblance to twentieth-century conceptualizations of the complex relationship between the authority of language, the nature of existence, and questions of truth—concepts all addressed in different ways by Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, and Derrida. Speaking of the relationship between Nietzsche and Freud in the work of Jacques Derrida, for example, literary critic and theorist Gayatri Spivak has argued that these philosophers share the belief "that the verbal text is constituted by concealment as much as revelation, that the concealment is the revelation itself." She continues: "Freud suggests further that where the subject is *not* in control of the text, where the text looks supersmooth or superclumsy, is where the reader should fix his gaze, so that he does not merely read but deciphers the text, and sees its play within the open textuality of thought, language, and so forth."¹¹¹ In crossing out words so that

we notice them, Basquiat similarly puts the issues of textuality—in thought and language—into question.

Robert Farris Thompson hinted at the connections of Basquiat's crossing out of words to Derrida's concept of *sous rature*, or writing under erasure, in an essay as early as 1985. Thompson writes, "It occurred to me that someone inevitably will write a book linking this aspect of Basquiat's style with Jacques Derrida's writings on the nature of erasure. It also occurred to me that I will not be that person."¹¹² The strategy of *sous rature*—that is, crossing out a word within a text but allowing it to remain—appeared in Martin Heidegger's *Zur Seinsfrage*, a letter in which the philosopher tries to define nihilism.¹¹³ Such definitions require Heidegger to question Being, which he puts before all other concepts. As explained by Gayatri Spivak, "Heidegger crosses out the word 'Being' and lets both deletion and word stand. It is inaccurate to use the word 'Being' here, for the differentiation of the 'concept' of Being has already slipped away from that precomprehended question of Being. Yet it is necessary to use the word, since language cannot do more."¹¹⁴ Heidegger crosses out the word "Being" in order to illustrate the inaccuracy produced between the concept and the question of existence, while still preserving the significance of this problem. "To make a new word," writes Spivak, "is to run the risk of forgetting the problem or believing it solved."¹¹⁵

While Heidegger locates the possible tension between a sign and the impossibility of a transcendental or universal signified in terms of being, Derrida presents an alternative with *sous rature*. He argues instead that the sign itself (phonic or graphic) is a structure of difference—always partly "there" and "not there." And he calls the part that is the other, or absent, within the difference that is the sign, the "trace." As summarized by Spivak in her preface to *Of Grammatology*, "Heidegger's Being might point at an inarticulable presence. Derrida's trace is the marker of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present, of the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience."¹¹⁶ For Derrida then, language is effaced even as it is made legible. We must question the very authority of the text, the meaning of being, the value of truth, and the concept of the primary signified.¹¹⁷

The strain of language to meet conceptual needs—especially in regard to the nature of existence—is something that historians of African American art must also specifically confront. In the case of Basquiat, I have already asked the question of blackness in the first chapter of this book. That is, to what extent can the experiences of blackness be expressed in either language or image? How might we interpret those experiences through theory? We might argue that such concepts, like that question of Being, escape signification. Despite Basquiat's challenges to and the limitations of blackness,

however, it would be dangerous to eliminate or abandon the term completely. To do so "is to run the risk of forgetting the problem or believing it solved." According to Spivak, Heidegger places Being before all other concepts in order to "free language from the fallacy of a fixed origin."¹¹⁸ We might therefore see attempts to highlight the failures of language to match experience (or "Being") in Basquiat's claims that he crosses out words in order to emphasize their presence. Surely these revisions can be placed within the artist's own post-civil rights context, where language was so closely connected to identity as racial categories shifted from negro to black to Afro-American and to African American.

Basquiat highlights his own doubt about the authority of language via the crossing out of these words on his paintings and drawings. We see an example of this in the right panel of *The Nile* from 1983, where the artist has drawn a black figure and inscribed three words vertically on the torso in white paint (see plate 14). Basquiat wrote "ESCLAVO" ("slave" in Spanish) in the first and third lines with the second, fourth, and sixth letters marked out with large white blocks. The word "SLAVE" appears inside the outline of a white rectangle on the line between, obscured by light pink scribbles. Basquiat's erasures force us to consider the disjuncture between the image (of a black man) and its label (slave) and therefore the inability to capture accurately the relationship between language—either in Spanish or English—and image or experience.

In the 1980s Basquiat's exploration of and experiments with language stood out in the predominantly neo-expressionist landscape in which critics positioned him. As a consequence, contemporary analyses continue to suffer in their neglect of the textual components of the artist's practice. The prevalence of text in the paintings of contemporary artist Glenn Ligon, however, may provide a point of entry into Basquiat's practice. In his essay "Text, Subtext, Intertext: Painting, Language, and Signifying in the Work of Glenn Ligon," curator and critic Okwui Enwezor aligns Ligon's painting with post-abstract expressionist artists (e.g., Ad Reinhardt, Jasper Johns, and Frank Stella) and with late-1960s artists who dealt explicitly with language (e.g., Mel Bochner, Joseph Kosuth, and Ed Ruscha).¹¹⁹ Enwezor contends that, in contrast to those artists, Ligon, in his 1980s context—both political and artistic—was aligned more closely with the conceptual and postconceptual African American artists and their investigations of the relationship between language and the construction of identity. "Ligon's work," Enwezor writes, "opened up the semantic rules of identity and linguistic construction by virtue of its syntactical disposition towards subject-object relations based on the appropriation of language, sign, text, and speech as material for his painting practice."¹²⁰ Although the austerity of Ligon's paintings stand in stark contrast to Jean-

Michel Basquiat's painterly, heavily collaged surfaces, Enwezor names Basquiat as one example of an African American artist with similar concerns.

For Enwezor, Ligon represents the power of language to shape "our social selves and cultural identity across the landscape of the American literary and artistic imagination."¹²¹ Ligon does this through a manipulation of literary texts, usually fragmented and then stenciled onto a primed canvas or panel so that the viewer is forced to consider the intertextual relationship—"between text and image, reading and looking; between writing and language, literature and narrative, speaking and hearing, race and American identity."¹²² Ligon's selection of texts, however, is based specifically on narratives of difference and the place of the black subject within discourse, with the project of making previously invisible narratives visible. For example, the artist's *Untitled (I Am a Man)* from 1988 takes its title from a picket sign—carried by a striking sanitation worker in Memphis and memorialized in a black-and-white photograph by Ernest C. Winters—that declared: "I AM A MAN." According to Enwezor, Ligon's transposition of this phrase—stenciled in black onto a white canvas—makes an argument for the inseparability of subjectivity from blackness.¹²³ Art historian Darby English states a similar case for Ligon's work in text, reading the use of language as a critical method to address language's effects on subjectivity.¹²⁴ As discussed earlier, these are certainly concerns that Basquiat shared. His erasure and revisions of the word *slave* in *The Nile*, for example, indicate his concern with the black subject, who is hailed into existence via the assignment of language.¹²⁵ Both artists employ the rhetorical act of signifying in an effort to break hierarchies of fixed meaning in texts and images—what Henry Louis Gates's Jr. has called "chiasmus"—specifically in relation to black representation.¹²⁶

Both born in 1960, Basquiat and Ligon entered the art world in the era of neo-expressionism. In fact, much of Ligon's early work (before the stencils) was based in expressionism. Early paintings were covered with brushwork that obscured handwritten texts, and Ligon even cited de Kooning's *Pirate (Untitled II)* from 1981 as an early influence. Ligon's interest in the body persisted via his selection of texts. In much the same way that the sweeping brushwork of these early paintings resembled bodily movement, such as that seen in de Kooning, the texts in his later works evoked the flesh. In his argument, Enwezor evokes Roland Barthes's book *The Pleasure of the Text*, where in the epigram Barthes describes a language that is "lined with flesh, a text where we can hear the grain of the throat, the patina of consonants, the voluptuousness of vowels, a whole carnal stereophony."¹²⁷ Ligon's concern with the black body, therefore, is not abandoned with a move from figuration to text. It is only slightly obscured. In a similar way, Basquiat's deployment of techniques belonging to both painting and writing, and his use of traditions identified with conceptualism and expressionism, are

only divergent methods by which the artist explores the same idea: the ways in which meaning is produced.

In borrowing, manipulating, and obscuring narratives in both text and image, Basquiat illustrates a concern with the gaps between language and subjectivity, as well as between language and image, affirming once again an ambiguous position. *Pegasus* from 1987 (see plate 30) is one of many works that reveal Basquiat's obsession with all signs—that is words, images, or gestures that stand for something else (or, in Derrida's terms, mark difference). The symbols and words that he has selectively copied from Dreyfuss's text, among others, operate between language and image, signifier and signified. In the work there is no distinction or hierarchy between language and image. The ways in which Jean-Michel Basquiat complicates the relationship between text and image simply cannot be interpreted from within an exclusively visual milieu—expressionist or conceptualist. The artist's investigations seem in part modeled on those of another Beat writer—William Burroughs, whose “cut-up” technique literally collapsed the division between the disciplines of writing and the visual arts in its application of the visually based strategies of collage and montage to language. When asked about his favorite books in an interview with Tamra Davis and Becky Johnston in 1985, the artist cited Burroughs as his “favorite living author, definitely.”¹²⁸

Burroughs's distinctive cut-up technique allowed him to abandon linear narrative via his formal manipulations of text. In the rearrangement of words—formed literally by taking scissors to his text—Burroughs crossed the boundary between word and image.¹²⁹ Many have described Burroughs's technique as “collage writing.”¹³⁰ And Burroughs himself noted that “cut-ups establish new connections between images, and one's range of vision consequently expands.”¹³¹ Cut-ups were a negotiation between the linguistic and the visual from the very beginning. Burroughs adapted the technique from Brion Gysin, an American surrealist painter whom he met in Paris in 1958.¹³² In a letter to a friend, Burroughs, who was struggling with his own writing at the time, wrote, “I see in his painting the psychic landscape of my own work. He is doing in painting what I try to do in writing.”¹³³ Although they were no more than acquaintances at the time of Burroughs's letter, he and Gysin became friends after the summer of 1958 and began to collaborate. In an essay on Gysin's methods, Burroughs explains that the cut-up “brings the writer to collage, which has been used by painters for fifty years.” He explains the process: “Cut right through the pages of any book or newsprint[,] . . . lengthwise, for example, and shuffle the columns of text. Put them together at hazard and read the newly constituted message. Do it for yourself. Use any system which suggests itself to you. Take your own words or the words said to be ‘the very own words’ of anyone else living or dead. You'll soon see that words don't belong to any-

one. Words have a vitality of their own and you or anybody can make them gush into action."¹³⁴ Here, Burroughs brings in the idea of visually arranging materials based on formal, rather than conceptual, purposes. We can see his connection to the visual arts here; Gysin was trained as a painter, and he introduced a level of structural exploration and conceptual imagination to Burroughs.¹³⁵

At this time, Burroughs also began a visual practice. He started with collages and photomontages, later evolving to making pure paintings and sculptural assemblage. Gysin and Burroughs collaborated on a type of "scrapbook medium," which combined photography, collage, clippings, typing, and drawing. From 1963 to 1972, Burroughs filled roughly twenty small notebooks with his own collages.¹³⁶ However, Burroughs refrained from public exhibitions until Gysin's death in 1986. The first solo exhibition of his work was at the Tony Shafrazi Gallery in 1987. According to curator Robert Sobieszek, "Burroughs simply attacks the picture plane with whatever tool presents itself—brush, spray can, marker, brayer, mushroom—and lets his unconscious direct the painting."¹³⁷ His process in the visual work is similar to the literary collages he completed simultaneously. He even looked to models in the visual arts, such as Paul Klee, in order to compose. According to his journals, he expressed his interest in Klee while working on the novel that would become *Naked Lunch*: "I am trying, like Klee, to creating something that will have a life of its own, that can put me in real danger, a danger which I willingly take on myself."¹³⁸

Naked Lunch, which was assembled and edited by Alan Ansen, Allen Ginsberg, and Jack Kerouac and published in 1959, is the first example of a Burroughs cut-up. However, according to Burroughs, this was accidental; he claimed that the sections were arranged according to the order in which they arrived at the printer.¹³⁹ Scholars generally consider the publication of *Minutes to Go* (a collaboration between Burroughs, Gysin, Gregory Corso, and Sinclair Beiles) and *The Exterminator* (by Burroughs and Gysin) as the first true cut-ups. Both collections allowed Burroughs to break free from traditional uses of language, and he began to combine texts and images in an unprecedented way. This allowed him to capture more accurately a sense of the confusion, anxiety, and alienation of contemporary experience. Gysin outlined the method in a short essay titled "Minutes to Go:"

Pick a book any book cut it up
cut up
prose
poems
newspapers

magazines
the bible
the koran
the book of moroni
la-tzu
confucius
the bhagavad gita
anything
letters
business correspondence
ads
all the words.¹⁴⁰

This technique deconstructs both words and images simultaneously. The origin of individual elements is not important compared to what they become once assembled. In a 1965 interview, Burroughs made clear his intentions: "I've been interested in precisely how word and image get around on very, very complex association lines."¹⁴¹

With the cut-up technique, Burroughs challenged the linearity of traditional narratives and literature. In *Naked Lunch*, he contradicts almost all of our assumptions about both life and literature. His assault on linguistic sense and narrative structure reflects a rebellion against societal norms and the regulation of identity. Even the "Atrophied Preface" that comes in unexpectedly at the end of this novel argues for its immediacy. In one passage Burroughs contends that "there is only one thing that a writer can write about: what is in front of his senses at the moment of writing. . . . I am a recording instrument. . . . I do not presume to impose 'story' 'plot' 'continuity.'"¹⁴² However, it almost seems as if Burroughs's inclusion and very placement of this "preface" should overtake any claims made within it; even its existence is a challenge to conventional literary structure.¹⁴³ Certainly, there is no linear narrative within the text; instead, the reader stumbles along a disturbing path of pornography, cannibalism, bestiality, addiction, and racism.

This lack of linearity is present in the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat as well, where there is as much emphasis on the selection of signs, symbols, images, and texts as there is on their specific arrangement. The iconographic isolation of specific symbols and icons in Basquiat's paintings and drawings is certainly useful, but strictly iconographic interpretations of the individual elements in Basquiat's paintings and drawings explain neither how the visual and verbal signs within these works constitute meaning nor what their arrangements may reveal about Basquiat's own artistic concerns. In

his book *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, Georges Didi-Huberman poses useful questions on the limitations of iconography. "Doing iconographic analysis," he writes, "is not a pure and simple matter of knowing textual sources, symbolism and meanings. What exactly is a text? What is a symbol, a source, a meaning?"¹⁴⁴ These questions become particularly important when looking at the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat. For this body of work, it is not enough to decode signs and symbols, we must also try to discern meaning in their interactions.

Literary analyses of Burroughs's version of chaos provide some model for the interpretation of Basquiat's canvases, particularly in the treatment of the author's imagery. "*Naked Lunch* evokes a world of total sickness, without an outpost of purity or even a glimmering hope of cure," one critic writes.¹⁴⁵ In the tale of "Hassan's Rumpus Room," Burroughs describes how a young boy's sodomy becomes a spectacle. At one point, "the boy crumples to his knees with a long 'oooooooooh,' shitting and pissing in terror." The boy's sodomizer, the fictional businessman Salvador Hassan O'Leary, also becomes his murderer. "He moves in behind the boy," Burroughs writes, "with a series of bumps and shoves his cock up the boy's ass. He stands there moving in circular gyrations. The guests shush each other, nudge and giggle. . . . He steadies the boy with hands on the hip bones, reaches up with his stylized hieroglyph hand and snaps the boy's neck. His penis rises in three great surges pulling his pelvis up, ejaculates immediately."¹⁴⁶ Such descriptions conjure images of a violent (and perhaps taboo) eroticism.

In Basquiat's own writings, we encounter the following narrative—

YOUTH HAS DICK CUT-OFF BY FOUR TRANVESTITES
HE HAD BEEN RIDING WITH THEM ON
THE SUBWAYS AND FOUND HIMSELF
IN THE APT. THEY WERE SQUATTING
IN AND FELL ASLEEP.
~~SOMEONE~~ SOMEONE SCREAMS TURN DOWN THE
RADIO.¹⁴⁷

Like Burroughs's novel, Basquiat's text challenges both behavioral and semiotic norms. The disjunctive narrative takes characters from the margins of society, transvestites and squatters, and implicates them in the violent act of a young boy's sexual mutilation. As the reader progresses to the last line of text, Basquiat's inclusion of the phrase "SOMEONE SCREAMS" brings the brutality of the event even closer. However, this discomfort is only amplified as the line continues to "SOMEONE TURN DOWN THE RADIO" and the text reveals a shocking level of apathy. The perverseness of Basquiat's scene reinforces

his connection to Burroughs. Basquiat, like Burroughs, uses the alienating confusion and chaos to reflect the experience of contemporary life. Such passages are not intended to be humorous; rather, the violence here confesses the unspeakable content of the unconscious that arises in a spontaneous form of prose. The horror is so horrendous that the laughter comes from the desperate attempt of the reader to distance oneself from this transgressive content.

Like Basquiat, Burroughs also quoted the work of others. He rearranged the texts of these writers (including his own as though he were another person) in order to find new relationships or connections between the passages and the images they provoked and to dislocate language from orderly meaning.¹⁴⁸ For example, the first text of *The Third Mind* (1978), a collaboration between Burroughs and Gysin, is credited to Gérard-Georges Lemaire “and Brion Gysin with the help of Jean Chopin and the more or less voluntary collaboration of Marcel Duchamp, Franz Kafka, Philippe Mikriammos, Jacques Derrida, William Burroughs, Dada, Gertrude Stein, and several others.”¹⁴⁹ Burroughs literally cut up and pasted together sections of his texts and relied on carbon copies, just as Basquiat used photocopies.¹⁵⁰ Burroughs explained in a 1965 interview that this was one way to create something entirely new; this led to the possibility of endless permutations that capitalized on the flexibility of language. “Any narrative passage or any passage, say, of poetic images is subject to any number of variations, all of which may be interesting and valid in their own right. A page of Rimbaud cut up and rearranged will give you quite new images. Rimbaud images—real Rimbaud images—but new ones.”¹⁵¹ For Basquiat, too, sampling became a form of collaboration rather than of imitation. His appropriation of Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*, as seen in his *Mona Lisa* from 1983 (see plate 4), allows Basquiat to make a more sophisticated comment on his relationship to the Renaissance artist. As explained in the first chapter, Basquiat transformed Leonardo’s famed painting into a commentary on his own displaced position in a Eurocentric history of art and the commodity-driven nature of the 1980s art market. Subsequent revisions of Leonardo’s *Mona Lisa* include Basquiat’s 1985 mixed-media work *Boone*, which takes the artist’s onetime art dealer Mary Boone as its subject.¹⁵² In the latter work, Basquiat’s appropriation of Leonardo’s most famous subject reworks an exemplar of ideal beauty into a critique of vanity.¹⁵³ In both cases, the appropriated materials are changed in their new roles.

The work of Jean-Michel Basquiat complicated the boundary between conceptualism and expressionism via its mixtures and manipulations of text and image, language and gesture. As a result, currently analyses have continued to ignore the relationship between these elements of Basquiat’s practice—that is, his position as both writer and artist. But as we have seen, Basquiat’s notebooks highlight his interest in

the formal possibilities of language. His paintings, such as *Hollywood Africans in Front of the Chinese Theater*, play with language, which has the capacity to substitute for image completely. Theories of identity emerging toward the end of Basquiat's life have expanded our understanding of the artist's movement between the binaries of black and white, primitive and modern, and African and American, and new theories of appropriation provide a way to comprehend Basquiat's challenge to hierarchies of the real and the reproduced in the modernist paradigm. In much the same way, looking more closely at the role of language—ontologically, epistemologically, and art historically—allows a more comprehensive analysis of the ways Basquiat complicated the polarities of 1980s art criticism. For Basquiat the question was not one of language versus image, conceptualism versus expressionism, or even intellect versus instinct.

Toward the end of his life, Basquiat apparently intended to abandon painting completely in order to focus on writing.¹⁵⁴ This partly explains his insistence on placing a copy of Kerouac's *The Subterraneans* in his 1988 photographic portrait despite the preferences of the photographer, Jérôme Schlomoff. Basquiat made clear his intention to become a writer and to be celebrated as such. "All laughed at him when, at that time, he told them (and nobody mentions that) that he wanted to stop everything, even painting, and go to Los Angeles, to get away from the East Coast, to start writing. . . . He added that when his entourage tried to prevent him from doing such a thing by telling him he was far from writing like Kerouac, he replied, 'I know, and I could not care less, it is like with drawing[:] I will learn.'"¹⁵⁵ Schlomoff's recollection is particularly interesting because it emphasizes Basquiat's admiration of Kerouac. It also connects his processes of appropriation to his practices as a writer. He used Leonardo, Picasso, and Pollock to learn painting; he intended to use Kerouac as a model for his writing. Confirming his intention to quit painting to pursue a career as a writer, his girlfriend Kelle Inman recalled that the artist called from Hawaii, where he traveled the summer before his death to clean up. "He sounded terrific," said Inman. "He said he was fishing with the guys, he was giving up painting, he was going to be a writer."¹⁵⁶ At the end of June, Basquiat left Hawaii and traveled to Los Angeles. There he saw another friend, Tamra Davis, whom he also told of his new literary intentions. Describing their conversation, Davis has stated, "I said, 'Why don't you draw?' He said, 'No, I'm going to become a writer. I want to become a writer. But I can't write.'"¹⁵⁷

Basquiat seems to have thought his very ineptitude as a writer would open new possibilities. Abandoning painting, as he abandoned music, he was deliberately seeking to cut himself up in order to find fresh combinations of the known—as Parker, Kerouac, and Burroughs had, as anyone who deeply engages in the intellectual implications of a diasporic identity must do. Basquiat's use of language complicates traditions of com-

position and narrative but also the legacies of conceptualism and expressionism—seen as two polarities in the 1980s. Moving outside the visual tradition, he built upon the processes and innovations of the Beats, as he did with the appropriations and improvisations of bebop, in order to develop a practice that was expressive and conceptual in equal measure.

INTRODUCTION

1. Cathleen McGuigan, "New Art, New Money: The Marketing of an American Artist," *New York Times Magazine*, February 10, 1985.
2. Dick Hebdige, "Welcome to the Terrordome: Jean-Michel Basquiat and the 'Dark' Side of Hybridity," in *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, ed. Richard Marshall (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, in association with Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 62.
3. See Alison Pearlman, *Unpackaging Art of the 1980s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
4. McGuigan, "New Art, New Money," 24.
5. Michael Stone, "Off the Canvas: The Art of Julian Schnabel Survives the Wreckage of the Eighties," *New York Magazine* (May 18, 1992): 34. See also Barbara Rowes, "For Painter Julian Schnabel, There's No Sound Sweeter than Cracking Crockery," *People Magazine* (December 12, 1983).
6. For example, an August 1983 issue of *GQ* magazine included work by Basquiat in a fashion spread. References to Basquiat also appeared in the December 1985 issue of *Esquire*. In February of 1984, the cover of *Vanity Fair* featured a design by Keith Haring; Eric Fischl appeared in the same magazine three months later (an experience Fischl cited as influential to his 1984 work *Vanity*). See also David Bourdon, "Sitting Pretty: A New Cast of Art Stars Comes into Focus," *Vogue*, November 1985; Andrew Graham-Dixon, "Neo-Geo," *Vogue* (British edition), September 1987; Paul Taylor, "A New Avenue for Art . . . Madison," *Vogue*, February 1985; Anna Wintour, "Fall Fashion: Painting the Town," *New York Magazine*, August 29, 1983.
7. Lisbet Nilson, "Making It Neo," *ARTnews* 82 (January 1983): 64.
8. Painters Julian Schnabel and David Salle, who were represented by gallerist Mary Boone, had grown so popular by the early 1980s that Boone gave each a dual exhibition, using her own first-floor gallery space at 420 West Broadway and the additional space of the Leo Castelli Gallery upstairs. Castelli also lent his gallery in order to give double show coverage to Robert Longo (represented by Metro Pictures) and Sandro Chia (represented by Sperone Westwater). *Ibid.*, 69.
9. McGuigan, "New Art, New Money," 25.
10. Many critics and scholars of this period expressed fear that the marketplace had become too influential on the critical reception of art and artists. See Suzi Gablik, *Has Modernism Failed?* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1984).
11. Robert Hughes, "Three from the Image Machine: In SoHo, a Trio of Rising Reputations but Uneven Talents," *Time*, March 14, 1983, 83.

12. See Robert Hughes, "The Rise of Andy Warhol," *New York Times Review of Books*, February 18, 1982, 6–10.
13. By 1982, the Lower East Side of Manhattan (later called the "East Village") had displaced SoHo as the most avant-garde artistic neighborhood. Pearlman, *Unpackaging Art of the 1980s*, 17–18.
14. Grace Glueck, "On Canvas, Yes, But Still Eyesores," *New York Times*, December 25, 1983.
15. According to art historian and curator Leonhard Emmerling, SAMO first appeared as a character in the school newspaper. In that essay, "Basquiat drew a comic about a young searcher for truth, who wishes to find a modern and stylish form of spirituality, but who instead is confronted with a false priest who attempts to sell him on various established religions, including Judaism, Catholicism, and Zen Buddhism. Finally, the pseudo-religion of SAMO takes hold of the young man." *Basquiat* (Köln: Taschen, 2003), 12.
16. Jean-Michel Basquiat, "Art: From Subways to SoHo: Jean-Michel Basquiat," interview by Henry Geldzahler, *Interview*, January 1983. Reprinted in Luca Marenzi et al., *Basquiat* (Milan: Edizioni Charta, 1999), lvii. Page references are to the 1999 publication.
17. According to the artist, SAMO was a way of "attacking the gallery circuit." "I Have to Have Some Source Material around Me," (1985), interview by Tamra Davis and Becky Johnston, in *Basquiat*, ed. Sam Keller and Dieter Buchhart (Basel: Fondation Beyeler, 2010), 23.
18. An incredible photographic archive of fifty-seven images documenting SAMO writings has recently been published online by Henry Flynt.
19. Philip Faflick, "SAMO© Graffiti: Boosh-Wah or CIA?" *Village Voice*, December 11, 1978, 41.
20. Jeffrey Deitch, "Report from Times Square," *Art in America* 68 (September 1980): 61.
21. Rene Ricard, "The Radiant Child," *Artforum* 20 (December 1981): 43.
22. I am using the term *primitive* throughout this book to refer to the specific category of art that was invented by western European audiences to describe the art of those outside that geographical area and cultural context (mostly Africa, Asia, and the Pacific Islands). The primitive category implies an untrained or uncivilized mode of artistic practice. This is a concept that Hal Foster has framed as both "manifestly racist" and as "fundamental to narratives of history-as-development and civilization-as hierarchy." "The Artist as Ethnographer," in *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 177. This is different from *primitivism*, which I use to describe the Western tradition (dating back to the late nineteenth century) of celebrating certain art forms understood as primitive. I discuss Basquiat's relationship to both *primitive* art and *primitivism* in the first chapter of this book.
23. Hal Foster, "Between Modernism and the Media," *Art in America* (Summer 1982): 15.
24. Several critics at this time, including Diego Cortez and Rene Ricard, supported the popularization of graffiti, reading it as a necessary expansion of the aesthetic parameters of modernist practice.
25. Noel Frackman and Ruth Kaufmann, "Dokumenta 7: The Dialogue and a Few Asides," *Arts Magazine* 57 (October 1982): 97.
26. The critical reception of African American artists of the late 1930s and 1940s such as William H. Johnson and William Edmondson is one example. See Mary Ann Calo, "African-American Art and Critical Discourse between World Wars," *American Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (1999): 580–621.

27. Robert Hughes, "Requiem for a Featherweight: The Sad Story of an Artist's Success," *New Republic* 199, no. 21 (November 21, 1988): 33.

28. Waldemar Januszczak, "Voodoo Meets Graffiti in the Twilight World of SAMO," *The Guardian* (August 25, 1988).

29. Jean-Michel Basquiat, "Jean-Michel Basquiat," interview by Demosthenes Davvetas, *New Art International* (Lugano, Switzerland), no. 3 (October–November 1988). Reprinted in Marenzi et al., *Basquiat*, lxiii. Page references are to the latter publication.

30. Thomas McEvelley, "Royal Slumming: Jean-Michel Basquiat Here Below," *Artforum* 31, no. 3 (November 1992): 95.

31. The biography of Jean-Michel Basquiat is largely unfixed. Many details of the artist's short life are highly contested by and debated among not only scholars but also the close friends and family of the artist. This is certainly complicated by the fact that only a handful of interviews with Basquiat survive in the public domain. Working within these limits, I have attempted throughout the book to include only those details of the artist's life that seem particularly relevant to his development as an artist and which can be corroborated by multiple sources. I have avoided the issue of sexuality completely and address the artist's intimate relationships only briefly in my analysis. Basquiat's widely sensationalized drug use is relevant here only in the way that it connects him to a broader milieu. That is, I consider this work to be an act of representation rather than an illustration of the artist's lived experiences. I am working here from the model of Jacqueline Francis, who uses a similar phrase in her essay on Romare Bearden. "Bearden's Hands," in *Romare Bearden: American Modernist*, ed. Ruth Fine and Jacqueline Francis (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, in association with Yale University Press, 2011), 128.

32. Basquiat, "I Have to Have Some Source Material around Me," 23.

33. As discussed in a more detailed analysis of this work in the first chapter, the first phrase refers to Saint-Gaudens's bronze sculpture of Victory (1902), in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art since 1917. The second pertains to a work in the museum's permanent collection of Greek and Roman art: a marble grave stele of a little girl, ca. 450–440 B.C.E.

34. Basquiat, "I Have to Have Some Source Material around Me," 22. When, at age seven, he was hospitalized after being hit by a car, Jean-Michel received a copy of *Gray's Anatomy* from his mother; it became a favorite reference in his artworks. Two other favorite sources, discussed in the second chapter of this book, were a copy of Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks and a book of international symbols first published by Henry Dreyfuss in 1972.

35. Ricard, "The Radiant Child," 43.

36. Lisa Liebmann, "Jean-Michel Basquiat at Annina Nosei," *Art in America* 70 (October 1982): 130. It is interesting that Liebmann's review positions Basquiat firmly within a French tradition, especially in connection to the Parisian avant-garde.

37. bell hooks, "Altars of Sacrifice: Re-Membering Basquiat," *Art in America* 81, no. 6 (June 1993): 70. It is worth noting here that hooks's essay is also the first to read the black bodies—often skeletons or bodies stripped of flesh—in Basquiat's oeuvre as grotesque and to interpret these violent representations as a commentary on the horrors of the African American experience.

38. Although the oeuvre of the artist continues to expand with the discovery and sale of new works, these numbers are commonly accepted estimates.

39. Richard Marshall, "Repelling Ghosts," in Marshall, *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, 15–27.
40. "Gérard Basquiat in His Own Words," in *Jean-Michel Basquiat 1981: The Studio of the Street*, ed. Jeffrey Deitch, Franklin Sirmans, and Nicola Vassell (New York: Deitch Projects, in association with Edizioni Charta, 2007), 90.
41. "Suzanne Mallouk Remembers," in Deitch, Sirmans, and Vassell, *Jean-Michel Basquiat 1981: The Studio of the Street*, 99.
42. Here, I am working from the model of Georges Didi-Huberman. See *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004).
43. *Multivocality* and/or *polyvocality* are terms used frequently in discussions of Haitian art. See Donald J. Cosentino, "Introduction: Imagine Heaven," in *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, ed. Donald J. Cosentino (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995). One could just as easily insert here Bakhtin's familiar term *heteroglossia*. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).
44. Henry John Drewal, "Signifyin' Saints: Sign, Substance and Subversion in Afro-Brazilian Art," in *Santería Aesthetics in Contemporary Latin American Art*, ed. Arturo Lindsay (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 263.
45. Robert Farris Thompson wrote of Basquiat's ability to navigate multiple cultures with ease in his 1985 essay for the artist's exhibition at the Mary Boone Gallery in New York. In his account of a meeting with the artist, Thompson calls attention to the fact that Basquiat served him "star apples from Jamaica and glasses of excellent red Bordeaux" and links it to Basquiat's creolizing sensibility. "Activating Heaven: The Incantatory Art of Jean-Michel Basquiat," in *Jean-Michel Basquiat* (New York: Mary Boone and Michael Werner, 1985), n.p.
46. Mieke Bal, "Seeing Signs: The Use of Semiotics for the Understanding of Visual Art," in *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Mark A. Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 91.
47. Thompson, "Activating Heaven," n.p.
48. Bal, "Seeing Signs," 74.
49. Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976) and *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).
50. Basquiat's interest in the life and music of Parker is addressed in the second chapter of this book.
51. Ross Russell, *Bird Lives!: The High Life and Hard Times of Charlie (Yardbird) Parker* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997).
52. Other references to comic books in this same work include lightning bolts held in large, powerful fists at the top center of the canvas, the words "Action Comics," and the onomatopoeic "Bam" and "Pow" below the larger fist with lightning.
53. See Lowery Stokes Sims, "Subject/Subjectivity and Agency in the Art of African Americans," *Art Bulletin* 76, no. 4 (December 1994): 587–90; Derek Conrad Murray and Soraya Murray, "Uneasy Bedfellows: Canonical Art Theory and the Politics of Identity," *Art Journal* 65, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 22–39.

54. hooks, "Altars of Sacrifice," 70.

55. Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Jean-Michel Basquiat: An Interview* (1981), by Marc Miller (New York: Inner-Tube Video, 1989), VHS, 34 min.

56. "Gérard Basquiat in His Own Words," 90.

57. Eric Fretz, *Jean-Michel Basquiat: A Biography* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2010), 2.

58. The group's original lineup included Basquiat, Kenny Compton, and Michael Holman. Nick Taylor and Wayne Dawson joined later, as did Vincent Gallo. As the band members evolved, they were known by several names, including Test Pattern and Channel 9, before settling on Gray. Michael Holman, interview by the author, New York City, September 8, 2007.

59. Ibid.

60. Michael Holman, the cofounder of "Gray" with Basquiat, was also a prominent figure in the early hip-hop movement. He produced a public access television show, *Graffiti Rock*, which featured hip-hop music alongside the concurrent trends of graffiti and break dancing.

61. Ingrid Sischy, "Jean-Michel Basquiat as told by Fred Braithwaite, a.k.a. Fab 5 Freddy," *Interview*, October 1992, 119.

62. The original motivation for the record—whether it was a "battle rap" between Rammellzee and Basquiat or simply an experimental record—remains unclear. The record featured lyrics by Rammellzee and K-Rob only.

63. In a 1983 interview with an Italian journalist Basquiat also mentioned working on "an African drum album." His explanation "No se terminato, questo momento," a mixture of Spanish and Italian words, could indicate his uncertainty that he would finish the album. Lisa Licitra Ponti, "The House of Jean-Michel," *Domus*, no. 646 (January 1984): 68.

64. Franklin Sirmans, "In the Cipher: Basquiat and Hip-Hop Culture," in *Basquiat*, ed. Marc Mayer and Fred Hoffman (New York: Brooklyn Museum of Art, 2005), 91–105. Basquiat, however, at times expressed an ambivalence toward hip-hop, once asserting in a 1982 interview that "both [rap music and graffiti] have evolved into fashions more than actual cultural expressions." Basquiat, *Jean-Michel Basquiat: An Interview*.

65. *Bop* and *bebop* are interchangeable terms and refer to a specific style of jazz that emerged in the 1940s. Bebop trumpet player Dizzy Gillespie titled his memoir *To Be or Not to Bop* (New York: Doubleday Press, 1979). The *beat* in the title of Basquiat's single may also be a reference to Beat literature, which is steeped in jazz. Beat writing was another interest of the artist's, and I explore this in chapter 3.

66. Toward the end of his life, the artist seems to have planned to focus on writing rather than painting. I discuss this in more detail in chapter 3.

67. Richard D. Marshall, "In Word Only," in *Jean-Michel Basquiat: In Word Only*, ed. Larry Warsh (New York: Cheim and Read, 2005), n.p. See also Jeffrey Hoffeld's essay "Word Hunger: Basquiat and Leonardo," in *Basquiat* (Lugano, Switzerland: Museo d'Arte Moderna, 2005), 87–100.

1. "THE BLACK PICASSO"

Epigraph: Black Skin, White Masks, trans. Charles Lam Markham (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 229.

1. Basquiat's inclination toward appropriation is the subject of the second chapter of this book.

2. Basquiat included references to Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* in a series of works from 1982 to 1983, including *Crown Hotel (Mona Lisa Black Background)* of 1982, *Boone* (1983), *Mona Lisa* (1983), *Lye* (1983), and *Thesis* (1983).
3. Basquiat responded to the nickname in a 1985 interview by Tamra Davis and Becky Johnston. *Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child*, dir. Tamra Davis (New York: Arthouse Films, 2010), DVD, 90 min. "Black Picasso" is also the title of an article published six months before the artist's death. Nicolas Bourriaud, "Black Picasso," *Decoration International* (February 1988): 22.
4. Mary Boone cited in Lisbet Nilson, "Making It Neo," *ARTnews* 82 (January 1983): 67.
5. Cathleen McGuigan, "New Art, New Money: The Marketing of an American Artist," *New York Times Magazine*, February 10, 1985.
6. Nilson, "Making It Neo," 62.
7. McGuigan, "New Art, New Money."
8. The preponderance of monetary references throughout the artist's oeuvre invites questions about Basquiat's level of comfort with the commercial excess of his environment.
9. This painting is cited as *Untitled (Skull)* from 1982 in M. Franklin Sirmans's "Chronology." Sirmans records the sale price at \$19,000, rather than the \$20,900 cited by McGuigan. See Sirmans, "Chronology," in *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, ed. Richard Marshall (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, in association with Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 245.
10. McGuigan, "New Art, New Money." See also Ellen Lubell, "New Kid on the (Auction) Block," *Village Voice*, May 29, 1984.
11. McGuigan, "New Art, New Money."
12. Sirmans, "Chronology," 244.
13. The alignment of Basquiat with art brut certainly calls to mind the issues of the primitive that surface in most readings of African American art, as discussed in the introduction.
14. Richard Marshall, "Repelling Ghosts," in Marshall, *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, 16.
15. Marc Mayer, "Basquiat in History," in *Basquiat*, ed. Marc Mayer and Fred Hoffman (New York: Brooklyn Museum of Art, 2005), 46, 48–49.
16. Fred Hoffman, "The Defining Years: Notes on Five Key Works," in Mayer and Hoffman, *Basquiat*, 129–39.
17. See, for example, the essay by the exhibition's curator, Dieter Buchhart: "Jean-Michel Basquiat: A Revolutionary Caught between Everyday Life, Knowledge and Myth," in *Basquiat*, ed. Sam Keller and Dieter Buchhart (Basel: Fondation Beyeler, 2010), 9–20.
18. See *Jean-Michel Basquiat, Julian Schnabel* (Malmo, Sweden: Rooseum Center for Contemporary Art, 1989); *Cy Twombly and Jean-Michel Basquiat: Works on Paper* (New York: Briggs Robinson Gallery, 2004); *Dubuffet, Basquiat: Personal Histories* (New York: Pace Wildenstein, 2006).
19. Jean-Michel Basquiat, "Art: From Subways to SoHo: Jean-Michel Basquiat," interview by Henry Geldzahler, *Interview*, January 1983, 44–46, reprinted in *Basquiat*, by Luca Marenzi et al. (Milan: Edizioni Charta, 1999), lvii–lxi. Page references are to the 1999 publication. Also, when asked in a subsequent interview to name his favorite American artists, Basquiat said, "Twombly, Rauschenberg, Warhol, and Johns." See "Jean-Michel Basquiat," interview by Demosthenes Davetas, *New Art International* (Lugano), no. 3 (October–November 1988), reprinted in Marenzi et al., *Basquiat*, lxiii. Page references are to the latter publication.

20. Mayer, "Basquiat in History," 44.
21. Rexford Stead, introduction to *Two Centuries of Black American Art*, by David C. Driskell (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1976), 9.
22. As African American performance artist and photographer Lorraine O'Grady has written, "Under the compulsion to find hegemonic origins for him, such as Jean Dubuffet or Cy Twombly, analysis is being strangled." "A Day at the Races: Lorraine O'Grady on Jean-Michel Basquiat and the Black Art World," *Artforum* 31, no. 8 (April 1993): 11.
23. bell hooks, "Altars of Sacrifice: Re-Membering Basquiat," *Art in America* 81, no. 6 (June 1993): 70.
24. Dick Hebdige, "Welcome to the Terrordome: Jean-Michel Basquiat and the Dark Side of Hybridity," in Marshall, *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, 60.
25. José Esteban Muñoz has read Basquiat's relationship with white artists and the predominantly white art establishment of the 1980s in terms of his theory of disidentification. "Famous and Dandy Like B. 'n' Andy: Race, Pop, and Basquiat," in *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 37–56.
26. Two of the artist's paintings, *Untitled* (1981) and *The Dutch Settlers* (1982)—both of which were later listed in the collection of Eli and Edythe Broad—appeared in the 1983 Whitney Biennial.
27. Basquiat, "Jean-Michel Basquiat," interview by Demosthenes Davvetas, lxiii.
28. Jean-Michel Basquiat, "The House of Jean-Michel," interview by Lisa Licitra Ponti, *Domus*, no. 646 (January 1984): 66–68, reprinted in Marenzi et al., *Basquiat*, lxx. Page references are to the latter publication.
29. Jean-Michel Basquiat, "Waiting for Basquiat," interview by Isabelle Graw, *Volkenkratzer Art Journal* (Frankfurt), no. 1 (January–February 1987), 44–51, 106–7, reprinted in Marenzi et al., *Basquiat*, lxxvii. Page references are to the latter publication.
30. *Jacob Lawrence: American Painter* was organized by the Seattle Museum of Art and ran from October 1 through December 1, 1987, at the Brooklyn Museum.
31. Basquiat's paintings were included in a section of the exhibition titled "Self-Taught to Neo-Expressionism," alongside the work of graffiti artists Blade, Dondi, and Futura 2000. Among the other artists included in the exhibition were Romare Bearden, Elizabeth Catlett, Ed Clark, Robert Colescott, Sam Gilliam, David Hammons, William Hawkins, Palmer Hayden, William H. Johnson, Jacob Lawrence, Norman Lewis, Joe Overstreet, Howardena Pindell, Betye Saar, Alison Saar, Bob Thompson, and Bill Traylor.
32. *Jean-Michel Basquiat: Portraits 45 Plates* (Zurich: Edition Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, 1996).
33. *VNDRZ*, 1982, acrylic and oilstick on canvas, 60 × 30 inches. Illustrated in Tony Shafrazi et al., *Jean-Michel Basquiat* (New York: Tony Shafrazi Gallery, 1999), 118.
34. Ingrid Sischy, "Jean-Michel as Told by Fab 5 Freddy (a.k.a. Fred Braithwaite)," *Interview*, October 1992, 119.
35. "Rapping with Fab 5 Freddy," in *Jean-Michel Basquiat 1981: The Studio of the Street*, ed. Jeffrey Deitch, Franklin Sirmans, and Nicola Vassell (New York: Deitch Projects, in association with Edizioni Charta, 2007), 120.
36. MTV was also a large corporate sponsor for the Basquiat retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1992; this was the first major art exhibition to be supported financially

by the network. David Ross, "Remarks," opening reception and dinner for the *Basquiat* exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art, October 20, 1992, Exhibition Records, Frances Mulhall Achilles Library, at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

37. Steven Hager cited by Hebdige, "Welcome to the Terrordome," 62, emphasis added.

38. Waldemar Januszczak, "Voodoo Meets Graffiti in the Twilight World of SAMO," *Guardian*, August 25, 1988.

39. Hayden (born Peyton Cole Hedgeman) began as a janitor and handyman for the Harmon Foundation, which granted him one of the first two Awards for Artistic Achievement in 1926. A *New York Times* review of the 1926 exhibition, typical of much criticism of African American artists at this time, focused almost exclusively on Hayden's former profession rather than his artistic achievement. Some scholars have argued that Hayden's later composition *The Janitor Who Paints* (c. 1937) reveals Hayden's concern with such stereotypes. See John Ott, "Labored Stereotypes: Palmer Hayden's *The Janitor Who Paints*," *American Art* 22, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 102–15.

40. Basquiat, "The House of Jean-Michel," 68.

41. Jean-Michel Basquiat, "I Have to Have Some Source Material around Me" (1985), interview by Becky Johnston and Tamra Davis, in *Basquiat*, ed. Sam Keller and Dieter Buchhart (Basel: Fondation Beyeler, 2010), 25.

42. Basquiat was then known only by his street-writer persona SAMO—a collaboration between himself and a friend, Al Diaz. In the late 1970s, Basquiat and Diaz covered subway trains and the walls of lower Manhattan with cryptic messages in paint. See the introduction of this book for further detail. *TV Party* aired on New York Public Access Television from 1978 to 1982. Basquiat appeared on the show several times.

43. Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Jean-Michel Basquiat: An Interview* (1981), by Marc Miller (New York: Inner-Tube Video, 1989), VHS, 34 min.

44. See *Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child*.

45. Basquiat, "Waiting for Basquiat," lxvii.

46. Suzanne Mallouk, interview by the author, New York City, April 6, 2008.

47. Henry Louis Gates Jr., "Writing 'Race' and the Difference It Makes," in *Race, Writing and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 2.

48. *Ibid.*, 6.

49. Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," *The Nation* 112 (June 16–23, 1926).

50. Leslie Collins, "Aaron Douglas Chats about the Harlem Renaissance," in *The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader*, ed. David Leavering Lewis (New York: Penguin, 1994), 120.

51. Amy Helene Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas: Art, Race, and the Harlem Renaissance* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), 77.

52. The multiple instances of "AARON" that appear throughout Basquiat's body of work have been interpreted almost exclusively as references to Hank Aaron, an African American baseball player (he played in the major league from 1954 to 1976); but in fact the same name could also represent artist Aaron Douglas. In a 1985 essay, Robert Farris Thompson referred to Basquiat as the "spiritual brother" of Douglas. "Activating Heaven: The Incantatory Art of Jean-Michel Basquiat," in *Jean Michel Basquiat* (New York: Mary Boone Gallery and Michael Werner Gallery, 1985), n.p.

53. Mary Schmidt Campbell, introduction to *Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America* (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 1994), 11–56.

54. David C. Driskell, “Black Artists and Craftsmen in the Formative Years, 1750–1920,” in Driskell, *Two Centuries of Black American Art*, 11.

55. Joseph Jacobs, *Since the Harlem Renaissance: 50 Years of Afro-American Art* (Lewisburg, PA: Center Gallery of Bucknell University, 1985), as cited by Mary Ann Calo, “African-American Art and Critical Discourse between the Wars,” *American Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (1999): 610.

56. In the field of art history, Robert Farris Thompson, Franklin Sirmans, and Kellie Jones prove exceptions; they do not engage in this division. I build upon the work of all three scholars in this chapter and throughout the book.

57. Lowery Stokes Sims, “Subject/Subjectivity and Agency in the Art of African Americans,” *Art Bulletin* 76, no. 4 (December 1994): 587–90.

58. See Derek Conrad Murray and Soraya Murray, “Uneasy Bedfellows: Canonical Art Theory and the Politics of Identity,” *Art Journal* 65, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 22–39.

59. Jacqueline Francis, “Bearden’s Hands,” in *Romare Bearden: American Modernist*, ed. Ruth Fine and Jacqueline Francis (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, in association with Yale University Press, 2011), 130, emphasis added.

60. Throughout the artist’s childhood, the Basquiat family moved several times within the Brooklyn borough of New York City. When Jean-Michel was born, the family lived in Park Slope. Around the time of the birth of the second daughter, in 1966, the family relocated to the East Flatbush section of Brooklyn; and in 1971, following the separation of Gérard and Matilde Basquiat, Jean-Michel moved with his father and two sisters into the Boerum Hill neighborhood. See Sirmans, “Chronology,” 233–34.

61. American sociologists Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan published their intensive study of New York’s ethnic groups in 1963. It was subsequently revised and issued in a second edition in 1970. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians and Irish of New York City*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970).

62. *Ibid.*, xix.

63. *Ibid.*, xvi.

64. See also hooks, “Altars of Sacrifice.”

65. Basquiat, “I Have to Have Some Source Material around Me,” 26.

66. While working with the Larry Gagosian Gallery in Los Angeles in April 1982, Basquiat flew out several members of his entourage to join him, including Rammellzee, Toxic, A-1, and Fab 5 Freddy. This would likely have been the case the following year as well, when Basquiat had a second exhibition at Gagosian’s gallery, titled *Jean-Michel Basquiat: New Paintings*, which ran from March 8 to April 2, 1983. *Hollywood Africans* was exhibited in this later show.

67. Stephen Torton, telephone interview by the author, July 26, 2011.

68. “Papa Doc,” the nickname of Haitian dictator François Duvalier, appears in several works as well, including *Museum Security (Broadway Meltdown)* of 1983 and *PPCD* (1982–83).

69. Richard Marshall has also interpreted this painting as “referring to the types of roles and dialogue that black actors were limited to.” “Repelling Ghosts,” 21. The role of blacks in popular media is an issue that Basquiat addressed in *All Colored Cast* and *All Colored Cast Part II*, both of

1982. Franklin Sirmans, "In the Cipher: Basquiat and Hip-Hop Culture," in Mayer and Hoffman, *Basquiat*, 91–105.

70. Edgar Rice Burroughs, *The Son of Tarzan* (1915; repr., Fairfield, IA: 1st World Publishing, 2005), 265–66.

71. Such linguistic references also appear in *Untitled (Rinso)* of 1982, where on the left side of the canvas Basquiat wrote the words "NO SUH NO SUH."

72. Considering the artist's predisposition to incorporate texts into his work, this painting may take its title from one book in a youth biography series. Anna Bontemps, *Famous Negro Athletes* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1964).

73. Richard D. Marshall, "Jean-Michel Basquiat and His Subjects," in *Jean-Michel Basquiat* (Paris: Galerie Enrico Navarra, 1996), 2:21.

74. "Gérard Basquiat in His Own Words," in Deitch, Sirmans, and Vassell, *Jean-Michel Basquiat 1981: The Studio of the Street*, 90.

75. Gérard Basquiat, the artist's father, was a boxing fan, too. He recalled in a 2007 essay that he and his son would often watch fights together on television. *Ibid.*

76. The punch depicted may in fact be the famous left hook that Walcott delivered to the chin of Ezzard Charles in the seventh round to become the Heavyweight Champion of the World in 1951.

77. Michael Holman in *Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child*. Rene Ricard also wrote of Basquiat's desire to box Julian Schnabel. He wrote, "One of the first things out of Jean's mouth was: 'So, can you set up a boxing match between me and Schnabel?'" "Golden Boy," *Vogue*, October 1992, 204.

78. Glenn Ligon and Byron Kim, *Rumble Young Man Rumble (Version #2)*, 1993, paintstick on canvas punching bag, metal. Installed dimensions: 36 × 13 × 13 inches, overall. Collection of the Walker Art Center, Butler Family Fund, 1995.148. Ellipsis included in the artwork.

79. Ligon completed this project during an artist's residency at the Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia.

80. Basquiat, too, produced a series of heavyweight punching bags, in collaboration with Andy Warhol in 1985–86. I have written about this work elsewhere. "Appropriation in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Ménage à Trois: Warhol, Basquiat, Clemente* (Bonn: Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 2012), 135–43.

81. Holland Cotter, "When the I Is the Subject, and It's Always Changing," *New York Times*, September 12, 2003.

82. Halsband said that Jean-Michel posed Andy Warhol to make it look like he was giving Basquiat an uppercut, then put himself in the picture and laid his face on the glove, making it look like he was getting punched. Telephone interview by the author, July 26, 2011.

83. This line of thought is also addressed by Olu Oguibe in "Represent'n: The Young Generation in African-American Art," in *The Culture Game* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 121–38. It is worth noting that Basquiat's interest in black boxers, as well as in black musicians, may also be attributable to a lack of successful models among black artists at the time (as discussed in the first part of this chapter).

84. Andrea Frohne has read the figure in this work as a representation of Oshoosi, the hunter of the Yoruba òrìsà, based in part on the five arrows clutched in the figure's left hand. "Represent-

ing Jean-Michel Basquiat," in *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities*, ed. Isidore Okpewho, Carole Boyce Davies, and Ali A. Mazrui (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 442–45.

85. Marshall, "Repelling Ghosts," 16.

86. See also Susanne Reichling, "Jean Michel Basquiat: Der afro-amerikanische Kontext seines Werkes" (PhD diss., Universität Hamburg, 1998); Kellie Jones, "Lost in Translation: Jean-Michel in the (Re)Mix," in Mayer and Hoffman, *Basquiat*, 163–79.

87. John Reader, *Africa: A Biography of the Continent* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 499.

88. The increased interest in this area created the need for a large migrant labor force, made up mostly of native Africans. In the first few years of mining at Kimberley, the African labor force held a strong position; as described by Reader, "Employers in diamond fields could exercise little or no control over the supply, availability, cost, productivity, and honesty of their labour force." In response, however, the British government established regulations that set a precedent for legalized racial discrimination; fines, imprisonment, and corporal punishment were introduced to control black laborers. By 1879, the Kimberley laborers were forced to live on the premises of their employers' minefields and given barracks-like accommodations; the forced segregation of South Africa began. *Ibid.*, 503.

89. Brian Lapping, *Apartheid: A History* (New York: George Braziller, 1986), 173–74. South Africa's high levels of "black on black" violence led many big companies and banks, including Chase Bank in Manhattan, to divest their holdings and to refuse future loans to the nation. See also Steven Debroy, *South Africa under the Curse of Apartheid* (New York: University Press of America, 1990); Alfred Tokollo Moleah, *South Africa: Colonialism, Apartheid and African Dispossession* (Wilmington, DE: Disa Press, 1993).

90. The inclusion of vocabulary associated with published texts (*volume, series*) here and elsewhere connects to the artist's interest in appropriating content from books, discussed in the second chapter of this book.

91. The northern populations often traded with the southern populations, exchanging salt for gold, with Ghana acting as the intermediary.

92. Basquiat's placement of the word just beneath the head of a black figure connects beyond geography to the Nubian peoples.

93. This last detail was observed by Maïca Sanconie in "The Use of Language in Jean-Michel Basquiat's Art" (paper delivered at "African American and Diasporic Research in Europe: Comparative and Interdisciplinary Approaches—a Conference in Honor of Michel Fabre and Geneviève Fabre," Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris, December 2004).

94. Howard Thompson, "Fascinating 'Mystery of Nefertiti' on WNET," *New York Times*, October 15, 1973, 75. The Brooklyn Museum of Art also possesses a large collection of Egyptian art and artifacts.

95. "In Gegensatz zu einer primitivischen Auseinandersetzung mit afrikanischer Kunst, die nur an deren Formenvokabular und magischer Qualität interessiert ist, bezieht sich Basquiat in seinen Arbeiten auf die Funktion der afrikanischen Kunst für das afro-amerikanische Selbstverständnis." Reichling, "Jean Michel Basquiat," 83. English translation by the author.

96. In *Jim Crow* from 1986, Basquiat, too, took up the theme of rivers, writing on his wood support in paintstick: "HUDSON RIVER," "OHIO RIVER," "THAMES RIVER," "MISSISSIPPI RIVER," "RED

RIVER." He also made a drawing in 1983 of Langston Hughes, whom the artist labeled simply as "FAMOUS POET."

97. Countee Cullen, "Heritage," in *Color* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1925), 36.

98. Larry Neal, "The Black Arts Movement," *Drama Review* 12 (Summer 1968): 29.

99. Larry Neal, "Any Day Now: Black Art and Black Liberation," *Ebony* (August 1969): 55.

100. Founded in Chicago in 1968, the original group of artists included Jeff Donaldson, Wadsworth Jarrell, Jae Jarrell, Barbara Jones-Hogu, and Carolyn Lawrence, among others. The group is still active today, but the membership has changed. For more information, see "The Current Collective," *International Review of African American Art* 21, no. 2 (2007): 4–11.

101. Molefi Kete Asante, *Afrocentricity* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1988), 27.

102. This same painting has also been published with the misspelled title *El Gran Spectaculo* and simply as *History of Black People*.

103. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 230. Cited in Jones, "Lost in Translation," 166.

104. Marshall, "Repelling Ghosts," 24.

105. Burchard Brentjes, *African Rock Art* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1970), 61.

106. *Ibid.*, 54.

107. "SICKLE" may also refer to the inherited blood disorder sickle cell anemia, which affects mostly those with African ancestry. According to the National Institutes of Health, "In the United States, . . . sickle cell anemia affects 70,000–100,000 people, mainly African Americans. The disease occurs in about 1 out of every 500 African American births." "Explore Sickle Cell Anemia," National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, September 28, 2012.

108. See Ian Shaw, ed. *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Kellie Jones has also made a similar observation in "Lost in Translation," 168.

109. Cyril Alred, *Akhenaten and Nefertiti* (New York: Brooklyn Museum, distributed by Viking Press, 1973), 49.

110. This approach is influenced by Darby English's *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

111. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 1. Art historian Robert Farris Thompson was the first to use the term "the Black Atlantic" in discussions of the African diaspora. See Isidore Okpewho, introduction to Okpewho, *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities*, xxii.

112. *Ibid.*, 2.

113. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 224.

114. *Ibid.*, 231.

115. *Ibid.*, 226.

116. See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997); Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed., *Diaspora and Visual Culture: Representing Africans and Jews* (London: Routledge, 2000); Susan Manning and Edward Taylor, eds.

Transatlantic Literary Studies: A Reader (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); Kobena Mercer, ed. *Annotating Art's Histories: Exiles, Diasporas and Strangers* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008); Jana Evans Braziel and Annita Mannur, eds., *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader* (London: Blackwell, 2008).

117. Jacqueline Nassy Brown, "Black Europe and the African Diaspora: A Discourse on Location," in *Black Europe and the African Diaspora*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine, Tricia Danielle Keaton, and Stephen Small (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 201.

118. Basquiat, "Jean-Michel Basquiat," interview by Demosthenes Davvetas, lxiii. Basquiat did in fact travel to Abidjan in West Africa in mid-1986.

119. William Safran quoted in Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 6.

120. F. Abiola Irele has argued that Du Bois discovered this Africa upon visiting the South, where "the strange beauty of the spirituals gave aesthetic dimension to this association of a people with a soil, a particular space, and beyond, with a continent." See "'What Is Africa to Me?': Africa in the Black Diaspora Imagination," in *Souls* 7, no. 3-4 (2005): 27.

121. W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (1940; repr., Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1984), 257-58.

122. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 230.

123. Cullen, "Heritage."

124. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 224.

125. This text was first published in 1969, and Thompson observed its citation in several of Basquiat's canvases from 1983, including *Notary* and *Chinese*. See "Activating Heaven," n.p. Richard Marshall reproduces several examples of Basquiat's appropriations from this book in his 1992 essay "Repelling Ghosts."

126. Basquiat in *Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child*.

127. In a 1985 article, Cathleen McGuigan mentioned having observed Thompson's book lying on the Basquiat's studio table. McGuigan, "New Art, New Money."

128. Thompson, "Activating Heaven," n.p.

129. *Créolité*, a term first introduced in the 1989 text *Éloge de la Créolité (In Praise of Creoleness)*, attempts to describe the cultural and linguistic heterogeneity of the French Caribbean. Creoleness is one way to understand the socioeconomic, cultural, and even creative complexities of the Caribbean; it specifically rejects binary concepts. It is a theoretical frame, which opens interpretation to the postmodern collage of cultures and identities in both geographical and intellectual spaces. In "Créolité and Creolization," the introduction to the accompanying catalog for Documenta 11, Okwui Enwezor and his fellow editors argue that creoleness expresses "the 'kaleidoscopic totality,' the 'nontotalitarian consciousness of a preserved diversity.'" See Okwui Enwezor et al., *Créolité and Creolization: Documenta 11 Platform 3* (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2003), 14.

130. Robert Farris Thompson, telephone interview by the author, August 23, 2011.

131. Curator and art historian Kellie Jones has located similar references to Thompson's book in *Grillo* of 1984, the same year that Thompson and Basquiat first met. She writes, "In the heavily collaged area of *Grillo* we see references to Thompson's *Flash*, and particularly to icons of power found there: the cosmic Nsibidi writing and the leopard-skin power symbols of the Niger Delta, the Rada religion of Haiti, the Yoruba gods Esu (the trickster of the crossroads) and Ogun (war)."

Jones, "Lost in Translation," 173. Jones likely means the Cross River in southeastern Nigeria here, rather than the Niger Delta.

132. See Melville J. Herskovits, *The American Negro: A Study in Racial Crossing* (1928; repr., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964) and *The Myth of the Negro Past* (1941; repr., Boston: Beacon Press, 1958).

133. Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Vintage, 1983), 109.

134. Jones, "Lost in Translation," 173. In this essay, Jones also identifies references to the diaspora in Basquiat's transcription of the words *Eshu* and *Ogun*.

135. Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 228.

136. *Ibid.*, 245.

137. *Ibid.*, 35.

138. *Ibid.*, 268.

139. Thompson has also written of a gesture "that has come down to the Black Americas from ancient Kongo" in Basquiat's 1984 canvas *Gold Griot*. See "Activating Heaven," n.p.

140. Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, xv.

141. Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 5.

142. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, trans. John Goodman (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 35.

143. The *òrìṣà* are deities in Yoruba religious practice. According to Gary Edwards and John Mason, "These deities are specific parts or forces, selected to exist within God, which govern different parts of the universe." See *Black Gods: Òrìṣà Studies in the New World* (Brooklyn: Yorùbá Theological Archministry, 1985), 1.

144. Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 19.

145. *Ibid.*, 28.

146. *Ibid.*, 31.

147. Babatunde Lawal, "Reclaiming the Past: Yoruba Elements in African American Arts," in *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, ed. Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 312.

148. Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 20–21.

149. John Pemberton, "Eshu-Elegba: The Yoruba Trickster God," *African Arts* 9, no. 1 (October 1975): 26.

150. Jones, "Lost in Translation," 172.

151. The basis and the development of this syncretic process is much more complex than this chapter allows. Scholars continue to debate whether this move was the result of external pressures alone, as well as whether it was the extent of the transformation for both displaced and local cultural groups. For a review of the literature see Andrew Apter, "Herskovits's Heritage: Rethinking Syncretism in the African Diaspora," *Diaspora* 1, no. 3 (Winter 1991); Rosalind Shaw and Charles Stewart, *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis* (London: Routledge, 1994); Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

152. This process of modification goes both ways, often leading to adaptations in the characters of the Catholic saints as well. Christine Ayorinde, "Santería in Cuba," in *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, ed. Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 219–20.

153. Edwards and Mason, *Black Gods*, 31.

154. Although there are more òrìsà in the Yoruba pantheon than it would be possible to count, most are regionally important, identified with specific ancestors or geographical features of a particular area. Èsù-Elégbàrà is one of the few òrìsà venerated almost everywhere in Yorubaland. This is because of his close connection with Yoruba cosmology and Yoruba beliefs about the origins of life. In Yorubaland, Èsù-Elégbàrà is the messenger of all the òrìsà; he is the intermediary between them, Olodumare (the Supreme Being), and humanity. This makes him a very important part of divination (Ifá) when a practitioner attempts to reconcile his or her own troubles, anxieties, or illness through communication with the òrìsà. He is also "the keeper of áse (life force) which is the essence of God." Ibid., 13.

155. Lawal, "Reclaiming the Past," 302.

156. Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 25.

157. His provenance over the crossroads and his function as a messenger to the gods makes him especially important to Santería; he "is invoked at the beginning and end of all Santería ceremonies." See Ayorinde, "Santería in Cuba," 211.

158. Robert Farris Thompson, "Royalty, Heroism and the Streets: The Art of Jean-Michel Basquiat," in Marshall, *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, 32. An *ebo*, or sacrifice, is made to preserve and honor the òrìsà. In the Afro-Cuban practice of Santería (i.e., the origin of Thompson's word *ebo*), this can take many forms; in general, sacrifices are gifts of animals or plants. Joseph M. Murphy, *Santería: African Spirits in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 15, 18–20.

159. Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 343.

160. Michael Holman, interview by the author, New York City, September 8, 2007.

161. Henry John Drewal, "Signifyin' Saints: Sign, Substance and Subversion in Afro-Brazilian Art," in *Santería Aesthetics in Contemporary Latin American Art*, ed. Arturo Lindsay (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 263.

162. Thompson, "Activating Heaven," n.p.

163. Mason and Edwards, *Black Gods*, 17–18.

164. Jana Evans Braziel includes a chapter on Basquiat in her text on artists in the Haitian diaspora. *Artists, Performers, and Black Masculinity in the Haitian Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

165. Jennifer Clement, *Widow Basquiat: A Memoir* (Exeter, U.K.: Shearsman Books, 2001), 70. This book is written from the perspective of Suzanne Mallouk, whose stories are incorporated throughout.

166. Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 164.

167. Jones, "Lost in Translation," 177.

168. See Brown, *Mama Lola*.

169. Although the exact number of Yoruba transplanted to the United States during the trans-

atlantic slave trade is unknown, art historian Babatunde Lawal has outlined Yoruba influences in American dance (i.e., the "juba"), theater, visual art, music, and architecture. He cites artists of the Harlem Renaissance, who, with the encouragement of Alain Locke, incorporated African themes and forms into their work. Hale Woodruff, for example, painted a figure in his mural series *Art of the Negro* (1951) that alluded to Sango (a Yorubaland òrìsà who transferred to Afro-Cuban and New World religious traditions). Lawal also cites several examples of Yoruba elements in African American art from the period immediately preceding Jean-Michel Basquiat's work. For example, Jeff Donaldson's painting *Victory in the Valley of Esu* from 1971 shows a black man holding a double-headed ax, the symbol of Sango. Donaldson's *Wives of Sango* (1968), too, overtly takes an òrìsà as its theme/subject. "Reclaiming the Past," 291–324.

170. David Eltis, "The Diaspora of Yoruba Speakers, 1650–1865: Dimensions and Implications," in *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, ed. Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 30.

171. Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, xv.

172. James Clifford, "Taking Identity Politics Seriously: 'The Contradictory Stony Ground . . .'" in *Without Guarantees: Essays in Honor of Stuart Hall*, ed. Paul Gilroy, Lawrence Grossberg, and Angela McRobbie (New York: Verso, 2000), 97.

173. In an untitled drawing from the previous year, Basquiat reproduced many of the symbols from Dreyfuss's text in a grid format even more similar to that of the book. This untitled drawing from 1986 is illustrated in the exhibition catalog *Jean-Michel Basquiat: Works on Paper* (Paris: Galerie Enrico Navarra, 1999), 42.

174. Henry Dreyfuss, *Symbol Sourcebook: An Authoritative Guide to International Graphic Symbols* (1972; repr., New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1984).

175. Funso Afolayan, "The Early Yoruba Kingdoms," in *Understanding Yoruba Life and Culture*, ed. Nike S. Lawal et al. (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2004), 39.

176. Ibid.

177. Howard Hibbard, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 561. Although it is not certain, Basquiat may have owned this very catalog, which would have been for sale in the museum's store.

178. Brent Hayes Edwards, "The Uses of Diaspora," *Social Text* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 59.

179. Karen McCarthy Brown, *Tracing the Spirit: Ethnographic Essays on Haitian Art* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, in association with the Davenport Museum of Art, 1995), 13.

180. Donald J. Cosentino, "Introduction: Imagine Heaven," in *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, ed. Donald J. Cosentino (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995), 48.

181. I am using the word *polyvocal* here to underscore the connection of Basquiat's work to forms of expression other than the visual. Sound, as shown in the second chapter of this book, is an important frame of analysis in looking at the significance of these images.

182. Robert Farris Thompson, in *Imagining America: Icons of 20th Century American Art*, by John Carlin and Jonathan Fineberg, directed by Hart Perry (New York: MUSE Film and Television, in association with Funny Garbage and Public Media, 2003), DVD, 120 min.

183. "Suzanne Mallouk Remembers," in Deitch, Sirmans, and Vassell, *Jean-Michel Basquiat 1981: The Studio of the Street*, 99.

184. "Rapping with Fab 5 Freddy," in Deitch, Sirmans, and Vassell, *Jean-Michel Basquiat 1981: The Studio of the Street*, 120.
185. Jones, "Lost in Translation," 177.
186. Brown, *Mama Lola*, 376.
187. Basquiat has misspelled L'Ouverture's last name here as "L'Overture," linking it to the musical term *overture*. Basquiat's interests in and connections to music are discussed in the second chapter of this book.
188. The historians Sidney Mintz and Michel-Rolph Trouillot have argued that the role of Vodou in the revolution begun by L'Ouverture is contested. "It is probably more important to try to document the complex social organization of the colony on the eve of the Revolution," they write, "before speculating about the importance of religion in the formation of the slaves' resistance to slavery." "The Social History of Haitian Vodou," in Cosentino, *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, 138.
189. See Alfred Metraux, *Voodoo in Haiti*, trans. Hugo Charteris (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959).
190. Gérard Basquiat, as quoted by Anthony Haden-Guest, "Burning Out," *Vanity Fair*, November 1988, 184.
191. Judith Wilson, "Part One: The Myth of the Black Aesthetic," in *Next Generation: Southern Black Aesthetic* (Winston-Salem, NC: Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, 1990), 24.
192. Of course, exceptions to this are the Harlem Renaissance artists in New York and Chicago in the 1930s, and the black arts movements centered in large metropolitan areas (e.g., Chicago, Los Angeles, and Cincinnati) beginning in the 1960s. Many of these groups consciously shared artistic styles and ideologies. However, Wilson seems to be concerned with applying the label "African American aesthetics" to the work of artists who do not consciously share a style or ideology.
193. Identity politics as such had roots in the post-civil-rights era. It was in the 1990s, however, that shows at major cultural venues began to engage and examine these same ideas.
194. Public reaction to the 1993 Whitney Biennial was mixed. See Arthur Danto, "The 1993 Whitney Biennial," *The Nation* (April 19, 1993); Eleanor Heartney, "Identity Politics at the Whitney," *Art in America* 81, no. 5 (1993): 42-47; Roger Kimball, "Of Chocolate, Lard, and Politics—1993 Biennial Exhibit, Whitney Museum of American Art," *National Review* 45, no. 8 (April 26, 1993), 54; Peter Plagens, "Fade from White," *Newsweek*, March 15, 1993, 72; Peter Schjeldahl, "Missing: The Pleasure Principle," *Village Voice*, March 16, 1993; Roberta Smith, "At the Whitney, a Biennial with a Social Conscience," *New York Times*, March 5, 1993.
195. David A. Ross, "Know Thyself (Know Your Place)," preface to *1993 Whitney Biennial Exhibition* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993), 8.
196. Thelma Golden, "What's White? . . .," in *1993 Whitney Biennial Exhibition* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993), 27.
197. This irony is illustrated in bell hooks's response to the Whitney's 1992 Basquiat retrospective. hooks, "Altars of Sacrifice."
198. Golden credits herself and her friend the artist Glenn Ligon with the invention of this term. See introduction to *Freestyle* (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 2001), 14.
199. Ibid.
200. Ibid.

201. Leonardo Drew (b. 1961), Ellen Gallagher (b. 1965), Renée Green (b. 1959), Glenn Ligon (b. 1960), Kerry James Marshall (b. 1955), Alison Saar (b. 1956), Garry Simmons (b. 1964), Lorna Simpson (b. 1960), Kara Walker (b. 1969), Nari Ward (b. 1963), Carrie Mae Weems (b. 1953), and Fred Wilson (b. 1954).

202. I take the distinction between black experience and black experiences from the work of Jacqueline Francis. "Bearden's Hands," 119–42.

203. Greg Tate, "Nobody Loves a Genius Child: Jean-Michel Basquiat, Flyboy in the Buttermilk," in *Flyboy in the Buttermilk: Essays on Contemporary America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 238. In this essay, Tate considers Basquiat's style of mixing and appropriation in terms of its relationship to hip-hop. This is an issue that I consider in the following chapter.

204. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 235.

205. *Ibid.*, 222.

2. CREATIVITY FOUND AND MADE

Epigraph: Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation," in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), 23.

1. Basquiat and Holman were the original members of this band. They were later joined by Shannon Dawson, Wayne Clifford, Nick Taylor (who replaced Shannon Dawson), and eventually Vincent Gallo. The band dissolved in the late summer or early fall of 1982. Michael Holman, interview by the author, New York City, September 8, 2007.

2. The choice of *Gray* as the band's name was likely influenced by the artist's interest in the book *Gray's Anatomy*, a gift from his mother when Basquiat was hospitalized as a child.

3. Holman, interview by the author, September 8, 2007.

4. Glenn O'Brien, "Basquiat and Jazz," in *The Jean-Michel Basquiat Show*, ed. Gianni Mercurio (Milan: Skira Editore S.p.A., 2006), 49. *In a Silent Way* is also the title of a studio album by jazz musician Miles Davis in 1969 (Columbia Records). Many scholars and critics consider this particular album as the beginning of Davis's "electric period," which included extended improvisations that lasted up to twenty minutes. I thank my anonymous reviewer for pointing out this detail to me.

5. "Michael Holman Speaks Music," in *Jean-Michel Basquiat 1981: The Studio of the Street*, ed. Jeffrey Deitch, Franklin Sirmans, Nicola Vassell (New York: Deitch Projects, in association with Edizioni Charta, 2007), 105.

6. Michael Holman, interview by the author, September 8, 2007.

7. See Greg Tate, "Black Like B.," in *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, ed. Richard Marshall (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, in association with Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 56–59; Ian McLean, "Probability, Rap and Coincidence: Gordon Bennett's Notes to Basquiat," *Third Text* 50 (Spring 2000): 107–9; Lydia Yee, Franklin Sirmans, and Greg Tate, eds., *One Planet under a Groove: Hip Hop and Contemporary Art* (New York: Bronx Museum of the Arts, 2001); Derek Conrad Murray, "One Planet under a Groove: Hip Hop and Contemporary Art," *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, no. 16–17 (Fall–Winter 2002): 60–65.

8. Ingrid Sischy, "Jean-Michel Basquiat as told by Fred Braithwaite, a.k.a. Fab 5 Freddy," *Interview*, October 1992, 119.

9. Franklin Sirmans, "In the Cipher: Basquiat and Hip-Hop Culture," in *Basquiat*, ed. Marc Mayer and Fred Hoffman (New York: Brooklyn Museum of Art, 2005), 92.
10. Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 100.
11. I take a cue here from Martin Jay, who has written on the tendency toward "ocularcentrism," or the privileging of vision over other senses. "The Rise of Hermeneutics and the Crisis of Ocularcentrism," *Poetics Today* 9, no. 2 (1988): 307–26.
12. Robert Farris Thompson, "Activating Heaven: The Incantatory Art of Jean-Michel Basquiat," in *Jean-Michel Basquiat* (New York: Mary Boone Gallery and Michael Werner Gallery, 1985), n.p.
13. Richard Marshall has written of Basquiat's extensive collection of world history and art history texts, including "the oversized 1966 volume *Leonardo da Vinci*, published by Reynal and Company, New York . . . ; *African Rock Art* by Burchard Brentjes; *Symbol Sourcebook: An Authoritative Guide to International Graphic Symbols* by Henry Dreyfuss; *Artistic Anatomy* by Paul Richer; *Gray's Anatomy*; and H. W. Janson's *History of Art*." Marshall, "Repelling Ghosts," in Marshall, *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, 23.
14. Thompson, "Activating Heaven," n.p.
15. See the introduction to this book for further discussion of this image.
16. Basquiat's interest in painting references to comics may have a connection to his relationship with Andy Warhol, who also painted comic figures early in his career.
17. A drawing labeled "BULLWINKLE" also reappears in *Roosevelt III* of 1983.
18. Phoebe Hoban, *Basquiat: A Quick Killing in Art* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 46. Copying is in fact just one form of appropriation found in Basquiat's work—a nuance that I take up later in this chapter.
19. Jonathan Fineberg, *The Innocent Eye: Children's Art and the Modern Artist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 220.
20. Jean-Michel Basquiat, "Art: From Subways to SoHo: Jean-Michel Basquiat," interview by Henry Geldzahler, *Interview*, January 1983, 44–46, reprinted in Luca Marenzi et al. *Basquiat* (Milan: Edizioni Charta, 1999), lix. Page references are to the 1999 publication.
21. Stephen Torton, telephone interview by the author, July 26, 2011.
22. Ibid.
23. See Albert Boime, *The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Phaidon, 1971).
24. Richard Schiff, "Representation, Copying, and the Technique of Originality," *New Literary History* 15, no. 2 (Winter 1984): 348.
25. Ibid., 355.
26. Ibid., 356.
27. Rosalind E. Krauss, "The Originality of the Avant-Garde" (1981), in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 155–56.
28. Ibid., 157–58.
29. Ibid., 160.
30. Ibid.
31. Jean-Michel Basquiat, "I Have to Have Some Source Material around Me" (1985), interview

by Becky Johnston and Tamra Davis, in *Basquiat*, ed. Sam Keller and Dieter Buchhart (Basel: Fondation Beyeler, 2010), 23.

32. Andy Warhol, "What Is Pop Art? Interviews with Eight Painters (Part 1)," in *ARTnews* (November 1963), reprinted in John Russell and Suzi Gablik, eds., *Pop Art Redefined* (London: Hayward Gallery, in association with the Arts Council of Great Britain, 1969), 116. Page references are to the reprinted publication.

33. See Jennifer Doyle, Jonathan Flatley, and José Esteban Muñoz, eds., *Pop Out: Queer Warhol* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).

34. Robert S. Mattison, *Robert Rauschenberg: Breaking Boundaries* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 99–100.

35. The *Pictures Generation* was a press moniker adapted from the 1977 exhibition *Pictures*, organized by Douglas Crimp at New York's Artists Space. Although the original exhibition included just five artists working in this vein—Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, and Philip Smith—a group of younger artists who exhibited at the Metro Pictures Gallery (Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, and Cindy Sherman) are often included in this group as well. See also Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 75–98.

36. Douglas Ecklund, introduction to *The Pictures Generation, 1974–84* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009), 16.

37. Thomas P. Campbell, director's foreword to Ecklund, *The Pictures Generation, 1974–84*, 6.

38. Basquiat also reproduces this phrase in his drawing *Untitled (ARS*GRATIA*ARTIS)*, 1985, graphite, colored pencil, oilstick, and paper collage on paper, 39¼ × 27¾ inches.

39. Crimp, "Pictures," 76.

40. *Ibid.*, 77.

41. Postmodern theorist Jean Baudrillard argues that, in the era of postmodernity, signs are replaced by simulacra—material representations or images. Many artists of the so-called Pictures Generation interrogated the dominance of the simulacra via their manipulation of appropriated images. "Simulacra and Simulations" (1981), in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 169–87.

42. Crimp, "Pictures," 87.

43. This exhibition also included Levine's rephotographing of other Farm Security Administration works by Walker Evans.

44. Levine's specific appropriation of male artists also speaks to issues of gender as well. According to historian Donald Kuspit, these works empty the original of their creative value and replace it with a flat affect. In doing this, Levine suppresses the creative achievement of the male artist. "For Levine," he claims, "maleness is simply a signifier and guarantee of success, and in scooping out or hollowing out other artists' success she destroys their maleness." *The Cult of the Avant-Garde Artist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 107.

45. The phrase *criticism and complicity* is borrowed from the published roundtable discussion of several artists who address 1980s consumer culture in their work. David Robbins, "From Criticism to Complicity," *Flash Art International*, no. 29 (Summer 1986): 149–52.

46. The artist's reproduction of readymade images may also connect to the sublimation of personal desire to commodity desire taking place both in popular culture and in the overhyped art

market of the 1980s. Marx's discussion of the commodity fetish is overwhelmingly convincing in this context. I thank Jordan Kantor for pointing this out to me. Karl Marx, "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof," in *Das Kapital* (1867), in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), 318–29.

47. Roland Barthes, "La mort de l'auteur" [The death of the author], *Manteia*, vol. 5 (1968); trans. Stephen Heath in *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 143. Page references are to the translated edition.

48. *Ibid.*, 146.

49. In the catalog to the 1990 exhibition *High and Low* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik discuss the relationship between comic books—certainly of interest to Basquiat—and modern art. *High and Low: Modern Art, Popular Culture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1990), 153–229.

50. Enrique Hauser, "The Leonardo Addiction of Jean-Michel Basquiat," *Achademia Leonardi: Journal of Leonardo Studies and Bibliography of Vinciana*, 3 (1990): 98.

51. Marshall points out both of these examples in his essay "Repelling Ghosts" (23), which draws largely on the previously cited work of Enrique Hauser.

52. See also the reading of this image by Nicholas Mirzoeff in *Bodyscape: Art, Modernity, and the Ideal Figure* (London: Routledge, 1995), 160. The same phrase also appears in a work on paper from 1983, *Untitled (Woman Drying Her Back by Edgar)*, which is illustrated in an exhibition catalog edited by John Cheim, *Jean-Michel Basquiat Drawings* (New York: Robert Miller Gallery/Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat, 1990), 48.

53. The allusion to the automobile may specifically refer back to Basquiat's childhood, when he was struck by a car at the age of seven.

54. Basquiat's choice of this particular sculpture may be connected to his personal life as well. He frequently called his longtime girlfriend Suzanne Mallouk by the nickname "Venus." Suzanne Mallouk, interview by the author, New York City, April 6, 2008.

55. Hauser, "The Leonardo Addiction of Jean-Michel Basquiat," 93–100.

56. For scholars like bell hooks, the assessment of Basquiat's indebtedness to European modernism has a racial component as well. In her review of the Whitney's 1992 retrospective, she chastised scholars for their tendency to read the work solely in terms of European and American artists, writing that such criticism ignores a significant issue in the work: Basquiat's status as an African American and his engagement with this history. I address her argument in the first chapter of this book.

57. Crimp, "Pictures," 87.

58. Picabia's image, labeled "TABLEAU DADA by Marcel Duchamp," appeared in the magazine in March 1920.

59. Rexford Stead, introduction to *Two Centuries of Black American Art*, by David C. Driskell (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1976), 9.

60. Bob Thompson (1937–66), an African American artist whose expressionist painting preceded Basquiat's by thirty years, provides another model for reconciling the appropriative impulses of the artist with the dominant conceptions of originality required of the modern artist. Thompson, who first traveled to Europe in 1961, was thoroughly engaged in the Western traditions of art as a student who pursued a bachelor of fine arts degree at the University of Louisville. He frequently looked at art

history books, studying Giotto, Piero della Francesca, Masaccio, Titian, Caravaggio, and Breugel. Judith Wilson, for example, has noted that Thompson's 1963 canvas *Queen of Sheba's Visit to King Solomon* is an obvious adaptation of one of Piero della Francesca's *Arezzo* panels. In Thompson's version, one of Piero's grooms has been transformed into a silhouetted man wearing a broad-brimmed dark hat. In most cases, Thompson's appropriation is praised as innovative rather than criticized as derivative. Scholars have read his use of the imagery and the techniques of other artists as "irreverent eclecticism" that "suggests remarkable self-confidence and an extraordinary capability for creatively savvy play," observes Wilson. "Garden of Music: The Art and Life of Bob Thompson," in *Bob Thompson* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1998), 43.

61. Sarah Kennel, "Bearden's Musée Imaginaire," in *The Art of Romare Bearden*, ed. Ruth Fine (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, in association with Yale University Press, 2003), 138–55.

62. André Malraux, *The Voices of Silence*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (1953; repr., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 16. Page references are to the reprinted edition.

63. *Ibid.*, 17, 18.

64. Kennel, "Bearden's Musée Imaginaire," 141.

65. Romare Bearden, undated letter to Walter Quirt, 1945, in *ibid.*, 141.

66. Kennel, "Bearden's Musée Imaginaire," 143.

67. *Ibid.*, 144.

68. *Ibid.*, 146.

69. Lee Stephens Glazer, "Signifying Identity: Art and Race in Romare Bearden's Projections," *Art Bulletin* 76, no. 3 (September 1994): 415.

70. *Ibid.*, 411.

71. Ruth Fine, "Nurtured and Necessary: Mothers of Invention," in *Romare Bearden: American Modernist*, ed. Ruth Fine and Jacqueline Francis (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, in association with Yale University Press, 2011), 187–90.

72. Although there is more research to be done in this area, one difference between Bearden's use of xerography and Basquiat's use of the technology is that the former typically reused details from earlier works. Basquiat, however, tended to copy entire drawings and use them in later canvases.

73. M. Franklin Sirmans, "Chronology," in Marshall, *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, 235.

74. Sischy, "Jean-Michel Basquiat as told by Fred Braithwaite, a.k.a. Fab 5 Freddy," 119.

75. Basquiat, "Art: From Subways to SoHo," 57.

76. Torton, telephone interview by the author, July 26, 2011.

77. *Ibid.* The concept of randomness or spontaneity, as it relates to a specific discourse of postwar in the United States, is addressed later in this chapter.

78. Bruno Bischofberger, interview by the author, Zurich, May 12, 2010.

79. Torton, telephone interview by the author, July 26, 2011. The Jamie Canvas Company was an artist's supply store located at 151 Spring Street, off West Broadway, in New York City.

80. Michiko Kono, image caption, *Basquiat*, ed. Sam Keller and Dieter Buchhart (Basel: Fondation Beyeler, 2010), 111; Stephen Torton, telephone interview by the author, August 10, 2011. New City Editions in Venice, California, published the 1983 silk screens.

81. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: The End of a Certain History of Art*, trans. John Goodman (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 35.

82. Ibid., 24. In this quote, Didi-Huberman refers to the fifteenth-century Italian painter Fra Angelico.

83. See also Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation," in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (1966; repr., Picador, 2001), 3–14.

84. Sischy, "Jean-Michel Basquiat as told by Fred Braithwaite, a.k.a. Fab 5 Freddy," 119, emphasis added.

85. "A Dialogue between Diego Cortez and Glenn O'Brien," in Deitch, Sirmans, and Vassell, *Jean-Michel Basquiat 1981: The Studio of the Street*, 15.

86. Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Jean-Michel Basquiat: An Interview* (1981), by Marc Miller (New York: Inner-Tube Video, 1989), VHS, 34 min. Basquiat's connection of visual and hearing practices has been explored by Joshua Kun. In the fourth chapter of his book *Audiotopia*, Kun compares Basquiat to musician Raahsan Roland Kirk, claiming that both "theorized race and the fissures of American identity by establishing a close relationship with the world of sound." *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 115.

87. Basquiat, "I Have to Have Some Source Material around Me," 26.

88. Robert Farris Thompson, "Royalty, Heroism, and the Streets: The Art of Jean-Michel Basquiat," in Marshall, *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, 31.

89. Thompson, "Activating Heaven," n.p.

90. According to Nick Taylor, this was a recording Basquiat made with his friend and onetime band mate Wayne Dawson. "Jean-Michel Basquiat: An Intimate Portrait, Cepa Gallery website, n.d., www.cepagallery.org/store/basquiat/24t.html. This story was repeated by Fab 5 Freddy in "Basquiat and Friends," roundtable discussion at the Fondation Beyeler, Basel, Switzerland, May 9, 2010.

91. Charlie Parker's Reboppers recorded the first one on November 26, 1945, in New York City for Savoy Records. The Miles Davis All-Stars recorded the second one on August 14, 1947, in New York City for Savoy Records.

92. "Red Cross" was recorded as a B-side by the Tiny Grimes Quintette (Savoy, September 1944). Music historians have that claimed "Red Cross" is the first piece composed entirely by Parker, who was featured on the record alongside Clyde Hart (piano), Lloyd "Tiny" Grimes (guitar, vocals), Jimmy Butts (bass, vocals), and Doc West (drums). See Carl Woideck, *Charlie Parker: His Music & Life* (1996; repr., Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 107. Basquiat's transcription is not, however, entirely accurate.

93. *Bop* and *bebop* are interchangeable terms and refer to a specific style of jazz that emerged in the 1940s. Bebop trumpet player Dizzy Gillespie titled his memoir *To Be or Not to Bop* (New York: Doubleday Press, 1979). The "beat" here may also be a reference to Beat literature, which is steeped in jazz. Beat writing was another interest of the artist's, and I explore this in chapter 3.

94. Franklin Sirmans, "Over the Brooklyn Bridge: Fred Braithwaite, a.k.a. Fab 5 Freddy, on Basquiat," in *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, ed. Tony Shafrazi et al. (New York: Tony Shafrazi Gallery, 1999), 41.

95. Klaus Kertess, "Brushes with Beatitude," in Marshall, *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, 51; "Gérard Basquiat in His Own Words," in Deitch, Sirmans, and Vassell, *Jean-Michel Basquiat 1981: The Studio of the Street*, 90.

96. O'Brien, "Basquiat and Jazz," 47.

97. Du Bois devoted a chapter of his 1903 book *The Souls of Black Folk* to "sorrow songs." The

majority of black intellectuals at this moment, however, remained divided on the significance of jazz. According to historian Alwyn Williams, "W. E. B. Du Bois and Alain Locke celebrated the spiritual as an honourable part of Afro-American cultural heritage, but were more hesitant in ascribing merit to the music found in speakeasies." "Jazz and the New Negro: Harlem's Intellectuals Wrestle with the Art of the Age," *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 21, no. 2 (July 2002): 1.

98. Hughes's well-known poem "The Weary Blues" was first published in 1926. Robert O'Brien Hokanson has argued Hughes used bebop to explore and challenge the boundaries between music and poetry, high and low culture. "Jazzing It Up: The Bebop Modernism of Langston Hughes," *Mosaic: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 31, no. 4 (December 1998): 61–82.

99. The artist's friend Fred Braithwaite (a.k.a. Fab 5 Freddy) publicly eulogized Basquiat with Hughes's 1937 poem "Genius Child," changing the last line of the original to read: "Free him and let his soul run wild." Hoban, *Basquiat*, 5.

100. *Basquiat Salutes Jazz*, Prestige PRCD-11031–2, 2005, compact disc.

101. A series of drawings made in Switzerland in 1985 have an overwhelmingly musical focus. The catalog for an exhibition curated by Bruno Bischofberger offers several examples, including *Lester Young*, *Bud Powell*, *Ave Maria*, *Godchild Miles Davis*, *Syncopation*, and *Jazz Embryo*. See *Basquiat* (Trieste: Museo Revoltella, 1999).

102. Graham Lock and David Murray, eds. *The Hearing Eye: Jazz and Blues Influences in African American Visual Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

103. Thompson, "Royalty, Heroism, and the Streets," 32.

104. See Robert O'Meally, introduction to *Seeing Jazz: Artists and Writers on Jazz*, ed. Elizabeth Goldson (San Francisco: Chronicle Books in association with the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service, 1997); Howard S. Becker, Robert R. Faulkner, and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, eds., *Art from Start to Finish: Jazz, Painting, Writing, and Other Improvisations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Graham Lock and David Murray, eds., *The Hearing Eye: Jazz and Blues Influences in African American Visual Art* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2009).

105. O'Brien, "Basquiat and Jazz," 55.

106. American jazz bands began to tour Europe as early as 1919, and artists who emigrated to the United States were exposed to the music almost immediately after their arrival.

107. Mona Hadler, "Jazz and the Visual Arts," *Arts Magazine* (June 1983): 93.

108. *Ibid.*, 94.

109. Mona Hadler, "Jazz and the New York School," in *Representing Jazz*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 248.

110. *Ibid.*, 251.

111. Hadler does briefly acknowledge the myth of unconscious improvisation in both jazz and surrealist art, using Ernst as an example of this transformation in attitude: "His ideas countered the 'primitivist myth' of jazz as pure inspiration, produced in a trance, and devoid of intellectual content." *Ibid.*, 254.

112. *Ibid.* Hadler also seems to conflate jazz and blues into a single musical type.

113. O'Meally, introduction to *Seeing Jazz*, 7.

114. Goldson, *Seeing Jazz: Artists and Writers on Jazz*, 43.

115. Although I do not address it here, Basquiat's interest in the opera offers another opportunity for analysis in terms of music.

116. See Thompson, "Royalty, Heroism, and the Streets."

117. Burton Peretti, *The Creation of Jazz: Music, Race and Culture in Urban America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 100.

118. Ingrid Monson, introduction to *The African Diaspora: A Musical Perspective*, ed. Ingrid Monson (New York: Garland, 2000), 1.

119. Peretti, *The Creation of Jazz*, 108.

120. Lewis Porter and Michael Ullman, *Jazz: From Its Origins to the Present* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 8–9.

121. Musicologist Travis Jackson was among the first scholars to argue that jazz is structurally the most European and the least African of all African-derived musics in the Americas (i.e., music associated with the religious performances and practices of Santería in Cuba and Candomblé in Brazil). In his essay "Jazz Performance as Ritual," Jackson finds that jazz's similarity to other African musical forms lies in the conceptual foundations that inform the production and social functions that the two types share. "Jazz Performance as Ritual: The Blues Aesthetic and the African Diaspora," in Monson, *The African Diaspora: A Musical Perspective*, 23–82.

122. The concept of multiconsciousness and its relationship to the artist's identity is addressed in the first chapter of this book.

123. LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), introduction to *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (1963; repr., New York: Perennial, 2002), ix.

124. Duke Ellington quoted in Eric Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?: African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 1.

125. There are, in fact, many examples of African American artists from the first half of the twentieth century who engage with jazz on these terms (e.g., Charles Alston, Norman Lewis, Elizabeth Catlett, and Archibald Motley Jr.). The references to black musicians (usually saxophonists) in African American painting are so prevalent that more recent artists have taken up the motif as a form of critique. See David Hammons's *Bird* from 1973, for example. I thank my anonymous reviewer for this example.

126. Locke addressed the music of Ellington and Louis Armstrong in his book *The Negro and His Music* (1936; repr., Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1968).

127. See also Richard Powell, "Shades of Grey in the Black Aesthetic," in *Next Generation: Southern Black Aesthetic*, ed. Judith Wilson (Winston-Salem, NC: Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, 1990), 24–30.

128. Although the primary swing musicians—Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Earl Hines, and Cab Calloway—were black, ironically the white bands were the most popular, and black musicians could find steady employment only by imitating the style of white bands. See Ira Gitler, *Swing to Bop: An Oral History of the Transition in Jazz in the 1940s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 3.

129. Porter and Ullman, *Jazz*, 188.

130. Frank Tirro, "The Silent Theme Tradition in Jazz," *Musical Quarterly* 53 (July 1967): 314.

131. Dizzy Gillespie cited by Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 58.

132. Dexter Gordon quoted by Gitler, *Swing to Bop*, 311.
133. I have borrowed this term from Trent Lott. "Double V, Double Time: Bebop's Politics of Style," in *Jazz among the Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 243. Lott's readings of the political content of jazz have more recently been challenged by Scott Deveaux, who characterizes the relationship between bebop and politics as "oblique at best." See *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
134. Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 54.
135. Ross Russell, *Bird Lives!: The High Life and Hard Times of Charlie (Yardbird) Parker* (1973; repr., New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 137. Page references are to the reprinted edition.
136. Deveaux, *The Birth of Bebop*, 202.
137. Burnett James and Jeffrey Dean, "Jazz," in *The Oxford Companion to Music*, ed. Alison Latham (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
138. Deveaux, *The Birth of Bebop*, 203.
139. Fred Braithwaite quoted by Sirmans, "Over the Brooklyn Bridge," 41. In this interview, Braithwaite states that a particular favorite of Basquiat's was a live recording of a performance at Massey Hall, where Gillespie and Parker shared the stage.
140. Charlie Parker's mentor, Lester Young, also appears in Basquiat's *Untitled (Stardust)*, 1983.
141. Basquiat, *Untitled*, 1983, oil paintstick and ink on paper, 76.2 x 55.88 cm. Collection of Herbert and Lenore Schorr.
142. Phoebe Hoban writes, "*Bird Lives!* the Charlie Parker biography by Ross Russell, was one of his favorite books." *Basquiat: A Quick Killing in Art*, 340. Although Hoban's text has been criticized for inaccuracies by many of Basquiat's close friends, I am relying here on the corroboration of the artist's girlfriend, Suzanne Mallouk. Interview by the author. See also Kertess, "Brushes with Beatitude," 51.
143. Russell, *Bird Lives!*, 14–15.
144. *Ibid.*, 30.
145. Olu Oguibe, "Represent'n: The Young Generation in African American Art," in *The Culture Game* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 124.
146. Deveaux, *The Birth of Bebop*, 13.
147. Basquiat's uneasy relationship to commercialism is discussed in further detail in both the introduction and first chapter of this book. According to Michael Holman, a close friend of the artist, Basquiat had a fascination with bums, homelessness, and poverty in general. Holman recalled one instance when Basquiat, although by that time rich and successful, posed as a homeless man and begged for money on the street. Holman, interview by the author, New York City, April 8, 2008.
148. Parker did this by writing new melodies over the original chords of the song, as was a standard jazz practice.
149. Max Roach quoted in Porter and Ullman, *Jazz*, 218.
150. The phrase "Charles the First" also appears in *CPRKR* of 1982.
151. Russell, *Bird Lives!* 139.
152. *Ibid.*, 141. Although many may assume that Parker's lack of work was a by-product of excessive drug use, the American Federation of Musicians recording ban left many musicians at this time

without income for almost two years (1942–44). See Frank Tirro, *Jazz: A History* (New York: Norton, 1977); Robert Leiter, *The Musicians and Petrillo* (New York: Bookman, 1953).

153. Basquiat, "Art: From Subways to SoHo," lix.

154. Ralph Ellison quoted by Deveau, *The Birth of Bebop*, 212.

155. Derek Bailey, *Musical Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1980), 1.

156. Although rare, some early texts that addressed musical improvisation include Ernst Ferand, *Die Improvisation in der Musik* (1938) and David Sudnow, *Ways of the Hand* (1978).

157. Bruno Nettl, "An Art Neglected in Scholarship," introduction to *In the Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation*, ed. Bruno Nettl with Melinda Russell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 7.

158. See the first chapter of this book.

159. For example, Wynton Marsalis recalled that "all of these giants [musicians] could play and sound different." Quoted in Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 2.

160. Kerry James Marshall, in *Imagining America: Icons of 20th Century American Art*, by John Carlin and Jonathan Fineberg, directed by Hart Perry (New York: MUSE Film and Television, in association with Funny Garbage and Public Media, 2003), DVD, 120 min.

161. Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 17.

162. The basic repertory that musicians learn from listening to recordings of others only allows them to play at an introductory level. Later in this chapter, I discuss more specifically how memorization and imitation play a large role in jazz improvisation

163. Wynton Marsalis quoted in Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 63.

164. Daniel Belgrad, in his book *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), argues that abstract expressionist painting and Beat writing are the best examples of this spontaneous impulse. However, many of Belgrad's examples tend to perpetuate the notion of improvisation as completely spontaneous and unthinking.

165. One of the most comprehensive studies of bebop improvisation is Thomas Owens's dissertation study of 250 improvisations of Charlie Parker, "Charlie Parker: Techniques of Improvisation" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1974). See also Henry Martin, *Charlie Parker and Thematic Improvisation* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001).

166. Tirro, "The Silent Theme Tradition in Jazz," 326–27.

167. Deveau, *The Birth of Bebop*, 203.

168. According to Deveau, "Harmonic obstacles were a way of keeping the unqualified at arm's length while providing a useful challenge for those with the talent and courage to remain behind." *Ibid.*, 214–15.

169. Owens, "Charlie Parker: Techniques of Improvisation," 327.

170. This new vocabulary was eventually codified in Dan Burley's *The Original Handbook of Harlem Jive* in 1945. See Russell, *Bird Lives!*, 178–79.

171. Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifyin' Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), xix, 46.

172. *Ibid.*, 47.

173. Ellison cited in *ibid.*, 105.
174. Owens, "Charlie Parker: Techniques of Improvisation," 29. This is a trick that Parker learned from Art Tatum, who would insert fragments of "Them There Eyes" into "Beguine," and "Goodbye Forever" into "The Man I Love," when he played piano at Jimmy's Chicken Shack in Harlem (where Parker worked as a dishwasher for three months in 1938). See Russell, *Bird Lives!* 100.
175. See Sirmans, "Over the Brooklyn Bridge."
176. Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, 46.
177. Russell, *Bird Lives!* 37.
178. *Ibid.*, 56–59. For more on Parker's relation to Young and Smith, please see Owens, "Charlie Parker: Techniques of Improvisation," 36–37.
179. Russell, *Bird Lives!* 91.
180. Larry Warsh, ed., *Jean-Michel Basquiat: In Word Only* (New York: Cheim and Read, 2005), plate 39.
181. Mallouk, interview by the author.
182. Basquiat, *Jean-Michel Basquiat: An Interview*.
183. Robert Hughes, "Requiem for a Featherweight: The Sad Story of an Artist's Success," *New Republic*, November 21, 1988, 34.
184. Owens, "Charlie Parker: Techniques of Improvisation," 269.
185. *Ibid.*, 35. In the live recording of "Salt Peanuts" at the Royal Roost (December 12, 1948), which included Parker in an ensemble featuring Dizzy Gillespie, trumpet; Al Haig, piano; Tommy Potter, bass; and Max Roach, drums, one can hear as many as twelve notes per second. Hear the performance of "Salt Peanuts" on Charlie Parker, *The Complete Live Performances at Savoy*, Savoy SVY-1702½/24, 1998, compact disc.
186. Owens, "Charlie Parker: Techniques of Improvisation," 35. Parker listened thoroughly and repeatedly to recordings of Young's solos with the Count Basie band, which were released by Decca in the late 1930s. For more on this period of Parker's life, see Russell, *Bird Lives!* 90–92.
187. Owens, "Charlie Parker: Techniques of Improvisation," 269. *Theme* here is defined as a frequently recurring melody or group of notes in a composition.
188. Martin, *Charlie Parker and Thematic Improvisation*, 3.
189. Russell, *Bird Lives!* 182.
190. For this discovery, I thank Tobias Mueller, director of the Galerie Bruno Bischofberger in Zurich, who first showed me a canvas on which this photocopied head appeared.
191. For further discussion of this image, see Jordana Moore Saggese, "'Cut and Mix': Jean-Michel Basquiat in Retrospect," *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 28 (Fall 2011): 88–95.
192. Thomas McEvilly, "Royal Slumming: Jean-Michel Basquiat Here Below," *Artforum* 31, no. 3 (November 1992): 95.
193. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 31.
194. McEvilly, "Royal Slumming," 95.
195. Shiff, "Representation, Copying, and the Technique of Originality," 334.
196. Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," *ARTnews* 51, no. 8 (December 1952),

reprinted in *The Tradition of the New* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 25. Page references are to the 1994 publication.

197. Ibid.

198. Ibid., 26.

199. Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

200. Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," 29.

201. André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism" (1924), in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 76.

202. Shiff, "Representation, Copying, and the Technique of Originality," 334.

203. Roger Benjamin, "Recovering Authors: The Modern Copy, Copy Exhibitions and Matisse," *Art History* 12, no. 2 (June 1989): 176.

204. Using Matisse's copy of Chardin's *Le Buffet* (1728) as his example, Benjamin writes of the dominance of the copy in the artist's academic training (Matisse was taken up by Richard Shiff too). Matisse's version, however, is not an exact replica of Chardin. It was nevertheless valued, because by this time critics had accepted the "temperament" of the artist as a necessary component of any copy.

205. Craig Owens has written that the postmodern artist "does not invent images" but lays claim to them as meaningful signifiers and assigns new meaning to them by redefining their contexts. See "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," in *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 205.

3. THE LANGUAGE OF EXPRESSIONISM

Epigraph: Ingrid Sischy, "Jean-Michel Basquiat as Told by Fred Braithwaite, a.k.a. Fab 5 Freddy," *Interview*, October 1992, 122.

1. In February of 1988, Basquiat traveled to Paris to prepare for an exhibition at the Yvon Lambert Gallery, where a young photographer (Jérôme Schlomoff) approached the artist and asked if he might take his portrait. Schlomoff, email to the author, December 3, 2007.

2. The artist's interest in boxers and boxing is explored in the first chapter of this book.

3. "Normalement si je photographie toujours les gens avec leur vêtements et leur bijoux personnels, j'évite que les gens ajoute au portrait un objet symbolique étranger à la relation qui s'instaure entre eux et moi, comme par exemple le cigarette, un stylo, un livre. . . . Mais avec Basquiat c'était différent. Il m'a en effet demandé au milieu de la séance si on pouvait faire une photo avec ce livre, et je lui expliqué pourquoi ça me gênait, je lui ai dis que ce livre n'était pas symbolique de sa propre identification que ça allait devenir un élément rajouté. Il m'a répondu que c'était exactement ce qu'il souhaitait, parce que ce livre représentait tout pour lui, à ce moment difficile de sa vie (Warhol venait de mourir, il n'y avait pas si longtemps, les tourments avec les marchands d'art, et voir mêmes ces plus proches amis). Il me disait que ce livre était comme sa Bible, qu'il ne s'en séparer jamais (je le crois il n'y a qu'à regarder sont état), c'était très important pour lui." Schlomoff, email to the author. All typos in the original French have been preserved in this transcription. Translation to English by Dr. Catherine Montfort.

4. This exhibition ran from April 29 to June 11 in 1988 in Paris and was the second-to-last show of Basquiat's work during his lifetime.

5. Kathy Halbreich, ed., *Culture and Commentary: An Eighties Perspective* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Museum Shop, 1990).

6. The most famous artists in the group, known as "simulationists," were Koons and Peter Halley. Both were represented by the Sonnabend Gallery in New York. For further discussion of their critical reception, see Alison Pearlman, *Unpackaging Art of the 1980s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 20–24; and Irving Sandler's "Postmodernist Art Theory," in *Art of the Postmodern Era: From the Late 1960s to the Early 1990s* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 332–74.

7. Hal Foster, "The Future of an Illusion, or the Contemporary Artist as Cargo Cultist," in *Endgame: Reference and Simulation in Recent Painting and Sculpture*, ed. Yve-Alain Bois, David Joselit, and Elizabeth Sussman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 103.

8. A 1991 article mentions Koons's Schwarzenegger-designed exercise plan. See Anthony Haden-Guest, "Art or Commerce?" *Vanity Fair*, November 1991.

9. In this interview Koons also mentioned hiring a celebrity photographer to take his portrait. Katy Siegel, "Jeff Koons Talks to Katy Siegel," *Artforum* online (March 2003).

10. The contrast between the Koons and Basquiat portraits (or even between Basquiat's late portrait and those taken earlier in his career) underscores the perceived divide between simulationist artists and neo-expressionists—a significant polemic in the 1980s art world. According to the historian Alison Pearlman, the simulationists "supposedly rejected Neo-Expressionism's pretensions to the authentic expressions of angst-ridden, individual, existential experience." Put more succinctly, this rhetoric presupposed that the simulationists were "against the subjectivist tradition of modern art." *Unpackaging Art of the 1980s*, 4.

11. Robert Farris Thompson, in *Imagining America: Icons of 20th Century American Art*, by John Carlin and Jonathan Fineberg, directed by Hart Perry (New York: MUSE Film and Television, in association with Funny Garbage and Public Media, 2003), DVD, 120 min.

12. Gregory Galligan, "Jean-Michel Basquiat: New Paintings," *Arts Magazine* 59 (May 1985): 141.

13. Vivien Raynor, "Art: Paintings by Jean-Michel Basquiat at Boone," *New York Times*, May 11, 1984.

14. Review of the Mary Boone Gallery exhibition, *ARTnews* 83, no. 7 (September 1984): 168.

15. Lisbet Nilson, "Making It Neo," *ARTnews* 82 (January 1983): 65.

16. Henry Geldzahler, introduction to *Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Notebooks*, ed. Larry Warsh (New York: Art + Knowledge Press, 1993), 8.

17. Larry Warsh, ed., *Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Notebooks*, n.p.

18. In addition to the sketchbooks, several works on loose paper consisting solely of text in ink or crayon—dating from 1979 to 1988—have been sold as drawings to private collectors. For some examples of this work, see Larry Warsh, ed., *Jean-Michel Basquiat: In Word Only* (New York: Cheim and Read, 2005). In the interest of clarity, I use the medium to guide my description of works throughout this chapter. *Notebook* refers only to those works in the artist's private composition notebooks or bound sketchbooks that have been posthumously published. *Text drawing* refers to works on paper in crayon, graphite, colored pencil, or ink that consist solely of text. *Drawing* refers to a work on paper that may consist of a combination of text and image, drawn in ink, crayon, graphite, and/or acrylic and oil paintstick.

19. Notebook pages from ca. 1980–81, ca. 1983–84, and 1987–88 were reproduced in the catalog

for the 2005 exhibition *Jean-Michel Basquiat: In Word Only* at the Cheim & Read Gallery, New York City (Larry Warsh, ed., *Jean-Michel Basquiat: In Word Only* [New York: Cheim and Read, 2005]). All pages (identified as "sketchbook page") were also listed in the collection of the estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat. To date, this is a private collection unavailable to scholars.

20. Documentary footage from *Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child*, dir. Tamra Davis (New York: Arthouse Films, 2010), DVD, 90 min.

21. Warsh, *Jean-Michel Basquiat: In Word Only*, plate number 62. This text drawing is in a private collection, in the United Kingdom.

22. Richard D. Marshall, "In Word Only," in Warsh, *Jean-Michel Basquiat: In Word Only*, n.p.

23. I address the role of absence later in this chapter.

24. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 4.

25. Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Figures in Black: Words Signs and the "Racial" Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 236. See also my discussion of Gates's text *The Signifyin' Monkey* in terms of the ambiguity of race in chapter 1.

26. See also Benjamin D. Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Aggression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting," *October* 16 (Spring 1981): 39–68; and Thomas Lawson, "Last Exit: Painting," *Artforum* 20, no. 2 (October 1981): 40–47. Hal Foster argues against expressionism in "Between Modernism and the Media," *Art in America* 70 (Summer 1982): 13–17, and "The Expressive Fallacy," *Art in America* 71 (January 1983): 80–83, 137. Both are reprinted in a collection of Foster's essays, *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1985). Craig Owens's position on expressionism in the early 1980s is outlined in his essays "Back to the Studio," *Art in America* 70 (January 1982): 99–107, and "Honor, Power, and the Love of Women," *Art in America* 71 (January 1983): 7–13.

27. Isabelle Graw, "Conceptual Expression: On Conceptual Gestures in Allegedly Expressive Painting, Traces of Expression in Proto-Conceptual Works, and the Significance of Artistic Procedures," in *Art after Conceptual Art*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 122. Writing has in fact always been a concern of expressionist painting (e.g., comparisons of Jackson Pollock's drip paintings in relationship to automatic writing). Paintings by such artists as Franz Kline, Adolph Gottlieb, Hale Woodruff, or Norman Lewis also more directly include writing. The inability of postwar scholarship to reconcile writing and gesture in abstract expressionism seemed to affect black artists, however. Ann Gibson, for example, has argued that this sometimes presented problems for Norman Lewis, whose work was consequently regarded by some art critics as too calculated and both inadequately instinctual and, thereby, inadequately expressionist.

28. Douglas Crimp, "The End of Painting," in *October* 16 (Spring 1981): 69–86.

29. Alexander Alberro has challenged the view of conceptual art as a movement that rejected the art object as a commodity. *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

30. The exhibition ran at the Grey Art Gallery from September through October 1979, later touring other cities in North America and Europe, including Houston; Nantes and Paris, France; Helsinki; Aachen; Vienna; Tel Aviv; Budapest; Warsaw; Bari; Genoa; Barcelona; Lisbon; and Madrid.

Upon the exhibition's return to the United States in 1982, the bulk of the exhibited paintings were sold to Midwestern art collectors Ronnie and John Shore.

31. Barbara Rose, *American Painting: The Eighties* (New York: Grey Art Gallery, in association with Thorney-Sidney Press, 1979), n.p.

32. Donald B. Kuspit argues in favor of expressionism in "Flack from the Radicals: The American Case against German Painting," in *Expressions: New Art from Germany*, ed. Jack Cowart (Saint Louis: Saint Louis Art Museum, in association with Prestel Verlag, 1983), 137–52. See also Kuspit, *The New Subjectivism: Art in the 1980s* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988). For Suzi Gablik's arguments on the role of expression in avant-garde art, see her book *Has Modernism Failed?* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984).

33. Hilton Kramer, "Expressionism Returns to Painting," *New York Times*, July 12, 1981. This article was a direct response to the writers associated with the journal *October*, especially those who published articles in its spring 1981 special issue, titled, "Art World Follies." For more on Kramer's defense of expressionism, see his articles "Signs of Passion," *New Criterion* (November 1982) and "The Art Scene of the 80's," *New Art Examiner* (October 1985).

34. Kramer, "Expressionism Returns to Painting."

35. Graw, "Conceptual Expression," 122.

36. As discussed in the first two chapters, the artist frequently relied on texts, such as Robert Farris Thompson's *Flash of the Spirit* for his knowledge of African art and culture and Ross Russell's biography *Bird Lives!* for information on jazz musician Charlie Parker.

37. All three examples are published in Warsh, *Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Notebooks*.

38. Jean-Michel Basquiat, "I Have to Have Some Source Material around Me" (1985), interview by Becky Johnston and Tamra Davis, in *Basquiat*, ed. Sam Keller and Dieter Buchhart (Basel: Fondation Beyeler, 2010), 26.

39. This was first observed by Marshall, "In Word Only," n.p. The work is reproduced as plate 39 in the exhibition catalog, Warsh, *Jean-Michel Basquiat: In Word Only*.

40. Ibid.

41. William S. Burroughs, "The Art of Fiction No. 36," interview by Conrad Knickerbocker, *Paris Review*, no. 35 (Fall 1965), reprinted in George Plimpton, ed., *Beat Writers at Work: The Paris Review* (New York: Modern Library, 1999), 4. Page references are to the reprinted interview.

42. Phoebe Hoban, *Basquiat: A Quick Killing in Art* (1998; repr., New York: Penguin, 2004). Another biographer, Eric Fretz, lists *Junky* as Basquiat's favorite Burroughs work. See *Jean Michel Basquiat: A Biography* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2010), 153. See also Klaus Kertess, "Brushes with Beatitude," in *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, ed. Richard Marshall (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, in association with Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 52.

43. William S. Burroughs, *Junky: The Definitive Text of "Junk"; 50th Anniversary Edition*, ed. Oliver Harris (New York: Penguin, 2003), 36.

44. Ibid.

45. Bockris's book *Beat Punks* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000) explores the relationship between the two artistic bohémias of the Beats in the 1950s and the Punks in the 1970s.

46. The works traded were Basquiat's collaged sculptural work *Nod* and Burroughs's *Woman as Man*, a wood relief made with gunshots. Kertess, "Brushes with Beatitude," 53.

47. Basquiat and Jack Kerouac were both the children of immigrants; Kerouac's parents emigrated from Quebec to Lowell, Massachusetts, and he spoke French to his mother, just as Basquiat had learned Spanish from his mother. Kerouac's eldest brother, who died young from rheumatic fever and figured prominently in Kerouac's writing, and Basquiat's father were both named Gérard. To date, there is no evidence that Basquiat was aware of these biographical parallels.

48. A photograph of this work is reproduced in *Jean-Michel Basquiat 1981: The Studio of the Street*, ed. Jeffrey Deitch, Franklin Sirmans, Nicola Vassell (New York: Deitch Projects, in association with Edizioni Charta, 2007), 125–26.

49. Richard Marshall, "Repelling Ghosts," in Marshall, *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, 16.

50. An abbreviated version—"THIS NOTE FOR ALL DEBTS PUBLIC + PRIVATE"—also appears on *Notary* from 1983.

51. I further discuss the ambiguous position of the artist within the art market—that is, as both critical of, and profiting from, the sudden influx of cash to the 1980s market—in the first chapter of this book.

52. This particular essay was written the year before (1957) in Mexico City and titled "About the Beat Generation." Kerouac retitled it and published it as "Aftermath: The Philosophy of the Beat Generation." This article is also interesting because it mentions Alene L., the woman upon whom Kerouac based the character Mardou Fox in *The Subterraneans*. *The Portable Jack Kerouac*, ed. Ann Charters (New York: Penguin, 1995), 552.

53. Kerouac, "About the Beat Generation," 559–60.

54. Regina Weinreich, *The Spontaneous Poetics of Jack Kerouac: A Study of the Fiction* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 132.

55. Ted Joans evidently reciprocated, acknowledging this connection to Basquiat with his poem "The Ladder of Basquiat." *Ted Joans: Selected Poems* (St. Paul, MN: Coffee House Press, 1999).

56. Amor Kohli, "Black Skins, Beat Masks: Bob Kaufman and the Blackness of Jazz," in *Reconstructing the Beats*, ed. Jennie Skerl (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 105–16.

57. Jack Kerouac, "The Art of Fiction No. 41," interview by Ted Berrigan, *Paris Review* (Summer 1968), reprinted in George Plimpton, ed., *Beat Writers at Work: The Paris Review* (New York: Modern Library, 1999), 104. Page references are to the reprinted interview.

58. *Ibid.*, 116. Regina Weinreich, too, uses musical models of synchronicity, syncopation, and synesthesia in her analysis of the writer's "free prose" style and his attempts to reach simultaneity.

59. See Gregory Stephenson, introduction to *The Daybreak Boys: Essays on the Literature of the Beat Generation* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990).

60. Lisa Liebmann, "Jean-Michel Basquiat at Annina Nosei," *Art in America* 70 (October 1982): 130.

61. See Stephenson, introduction to *The Daybreak Boys*.

62. William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch: The Restored Text*, ed. James Grauerholz and Barry Miles (New York: Grove Press, 2001), 100.

63. In fact, we might see Basquiat's engagement with such subjects as an illustration of abjection—proposed by Georges Bataille as the dialectic of appropriation (one of the artist's main compositional strategies). See "The Use Value of D. A. F. de Sade (An Open Letter to My Current Com-

rades)" (1929 or 1930), in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 91–102.

64. For a more comprehensive discussion of Peirce's semiotic theories, see Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976) and *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

65. This refers to the title of Deborah Gray White's book *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894–1994* (New York: Norton, 1999).

66. Jennifer Clement, *Widow Basquiat: A Memoir* (Exeter, U.K.: Shearsman Books, 2001), 89. This book is written from the perspective of Suzanne Mallouk, whose stories are incorporated throughout.

67. See Oliver Harris, introduction to Burroughs, *Junky: The Definitive Text of "Junk"*; 50th Anniversary Edition.

68. Jack Kerouac, *The Subterraneans* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 1. All punctuation, including ellipses, is taken directly from the original text.

69. Ann Charters, "Identity Key," in Kerouac, *The Portable Jack Kerouac*, 619–20.

70. Ibid.

71. Warren French, *Jack Kerouac* (Boston: Twayne, 1986), 46.

72. According to Warren French, although the narrative of *On the Road* occurs over twenty-four months, the real time spanned is slightly less than four years. He writes that "each of the four major parts of the novel describes one of Sal's road trips reflecting Kerouac's own major ventures between 1946 and 1950," and that each part "follows a remarkably similar pattern leading to identical conclusions." Ibid., 38.

73. A letter from Kerouac to Neal Cassady in May 1951 supports French's argument. In the letter Kerouac writes, "Story deals with you and me and the road . . . how we first met 1947, early days; Denver 47 etc.; 1949 trip in Hudson; the summer in queer Plymouth and 110-mi-an-hour Caddy and Chi in Detroit; and final trip to Mexcity with Jeffries—last part dealing with your last trip to N.Y. and how I saw you curtin around a corner of 7th Ave. last time." Kerouac to Neal Cassady, Richmond Hill, May 22, 1951, in Kerouac, *The Portable Jack Kerouac*, 606.

74. We know from his biographers that this book is more or less an account of Burroughs's own experiences throughout his first few years of heroin use. However, the fact that he published the text in 1953 as *Junkie: Confessions of an Unredeemed Drug Addict* by William Lee—that is, a pen name that he formed from a combination of his own name and the surname of his mother—shows that this account is not as straightforward as it first seems.

75. Harris, introduction to *Junky*, xi.

76. Cramer cited by Hoban, *Basquiat*, 83.

77. Gallery assistant Gene Sizemore reported that he signed three canvases himself so that they could be sold. See Hoban, *Basquiat*, 88. In a public roundtable, Basquiat's onetime studio assistant Stephen Torton also confirmed Nosei's tendency to sell paintings without the artist's knowledge. "Basquiat and Friends," roundtable discussion at the Fondation Beyeler, Basel, Switzerland, May 9, 2010.

78. Hoban, *Basquiat*, 87.

79. Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Jean-Michel Basquiat: An Interview* (1981), by Marc Miller (New York: Inner-Tube Video, 1989), VHS, 34 min.

80. As noted in the introduction to this book, Basquiat began his career as a fictionalized street artist, created with his close friend Al Diaz. Through his prophetic writings on the walls, Basquiat as SAMO became a celebrity. Even after Rene Ricard's *Village Voice* article revealed the identity of SAMO, Basquiat continued to blur the boundaries between these two identities.

81. Marshall, "In Word Only," n.p. See also Jeffrey Hoffeld's essay "Word Hunger: Basquiat and Leonardo," in *Basquiat*, ex cat. (Lugano, Switzerland: Museo d'Arte Moderna, 2005), 87–100.

82. Jack Kerouac, "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose" (1953), reprinted in Kerouac, *The Portable Jack Kerouac*, 484.

83. Kerouac, "The Art of Fiction No. 41," 101.

84. Ibid.

85. Nicholas Taylor, "Gray + Interview," interview by Taka Kawachi, in *King for a Decade: Jean-Michel Basquiat* (Kyoto, Japan: Kornisha Press, 1997), 13.

86. Kerouac, cited in Kerouac, *The Portable Jack Kerouac*, 481.

87. "Gérard Basquiat In His Own Words," in Deitch, Sirmans, and Vassell, *Jean-Michel Basquiat 1981: The Studio of the Street*, 90. *Flats Fix*, 1981, acrylic on paper, 36 × 48 inches (91.4 × 12.9 cm). The work is illustrated on page 45 of the Whitney Museum's 1992 catalog.

88. Nicholas Taylor, "Jean-Michel Basquiat: An Intimate Portrait," Cepa Gallery website, n.d., www.cepagallery.org/store/basquiat/24t.html. This story was repeated by Fab 5 Freddy in "Basquiat and Friends," roundtable discussion at the Fondation Beyeler, Basel, Switzerland, May 9, 2010.

89. Stephen Torton, "Basquiat and Friends," roundtable discussion at the Fondation Beyeler, Basel, Switzerland, May 9, 2010. I discuss this story and this painting in further detail in the second chapter of this book.

90. "Rapping with Fab 5 Freddy," in Deitch, Sirmans, and Vassell, *Jean-Michel Basquiat 1981: The Studio of the Street*, 121.

91. Suzanne Mallouk, email to the author, December 2, 2007.

92. Kerouac, "The Art of Fiction No. 41," 103.

93. Kerouac, "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose," 484.

94. Kerouac, *The Subterraneans*, 1. All punctuation, including ellipses, is taken directly from the original text.

95. From *Untitled (Suite of Fourteen Drawings)*, 1981, ink, crayon, and acrylic on paper, 30 × 22 inches (76.2 × 55.9 cm) each, Stephanie and Peter Brant Foundation, Greenwich, Connecticut.

96. Ibid.

97. Jones was later immortalized in a ballad sung by his friend Wallace Saunders—a black engine wiper for the Illinois Central. Many other musicians and bands have referred to Jones in their songs, including AC/DC, Johnny Cash, Kris Kristofferson, and the Grateful Dead.

98. Al Aronowitz, "St. Jack (Annotated by Jack Kerouac)," in *The Blacklisted Masterpieces of Al Aronowitz* (New York: self-published, 1981), reprinted in Kevin J. Hayes, ed., *Conversations with Jack Kerouac* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 34. Page references are to the reprinted essay.

99. Kerouac, "The Art of Fiction No. 41," 100.

100. Aronowitz, "St. Jack (Annotated by Jack Kerouac)," 34.
101. Capote cited by Val Duncan, "Kerouac Revisited," *Newsday*, July 18, 1964, reprinted in Kevin J. Hayes, ed., *Conversations with Jack Kerouac* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 49. See also George Plimpton, ed., *Beat Writers at Work: The Paris Review* (New York: Modern Library, 1999), 97.
102. Kerouac, "The Art of Fiction No. 41," 100–101.
103. Kerouac, *The Subterraneans*, 17.
104. Stephenson, *The Daybreak Boys*, 11.
105. Robert Farris Thompson, "Activating Heaven: The Incantatory Art of Jean-Michel Basquiat," in *Jean-Michel Basquiat* (New York: Mary Boone Gallery and Michael Werner Gallery, 1985), n.p.
106. Joshua Kun has argued that this process of crossing out words is akin to the scratching of records by hip-hop DJs. See *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
107. I thank Jonathan Fineberg for pointing this out to me.
108. Stephenson, *The Daybreak Boys*, 31.
109. Warsh, *Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Notebooks*, n.p. All strikethroughs and underlined passages have been duplicated from the original version.
110. Basquiat quoted in Robert Farris Thompson, "Royalty, Heroism, and the Streets: The Art of Jean-Michel Basquiat," in Marshall, *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, 32.
111. Gayatri Spivak, translator's preface to *Of Grammatology*, by Jacques Derrida (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), xlv.
112. Thompson, "Activating Heaven," n.p.
113. Martin Heidegger, *The Question of Being*, trans. Jean T. Wilde and William Kluback (New York: College and University Press Services, 1958).
114. Spivak, translator's preface to *Of Grammatology*, xv.
115. *Ibid.*
116. *Ibid.*, xvii.
117. Spivak notes that these are all concepts Derrida derived from Nietzsche, whom Derrida understands both through and in opposition to Heidegger. See *ibid.*, xxii and xxxiii.
118. *Ibid.*, xvi.
119. Okwui Enwezor, "Text, Subtext, Intertext: Painting, Language, and Signifying in the Work of Glenn Ligon," in *Glenn Ligon: AMERICA*, ed. Scot Rothkopf (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2011), 52.
120. *Ibid.*, 51.
121. *Ibid.*
122. *Ibid.*, 54.
123. *Ibid.*
124. See Darby English, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 201–54.
125. I am referring here also to Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation, whereby ideology addresses the abstract individual and produces him or her as a proper subject. See "Ideology and

Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes toward an Investigation," first published in French in 1970, reprinted in Althusser, *Essays on Ideology* (London: Verso, 1993), 1–60.

126. Enwezor, "Text, Subtext, Intertext," 58. The concept of chiasmus, as a sign of rupture, is central to Gates's theory of signifying and its employment of an endless chain of signifiers (rather than a fixed, universal signified).

127. Barthes cited in *ibid.*, 60. Earlier in this essay, Enwezor draws on Henry Louis Gates's concept of signifying to argue for a reading of Ligon's texts as a type of figuration.

128. Basquiat, "I Have to Have Some Source Material around Me," 26.

129. See Robert A. Sobieszek, *Ports of Entry: William S. Burroughs and the Visual Arts* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1996).

130. See Plimpton, *Beat Writers at Work*, 1.

131. Burroughs, "The Art of Fiction No. 36," 12. This quotation also relates to the larger meta-physical aspect of the cut-ups, which Brion Gysin related directly to Scientology.

132. Gysin and Burroughs both had rooms at 9 rue-Git-le-Coeur, Paris, which was known as the "Beat Hotel."

133. Burroughs first mentions Gysin (though not by name) as a neighbor in a Parisian hotel, one who was not a writer but a painter. William S. Burroughs to Allen Ginsberg, Paris, October 10, 1958, in *The Letters of William S. Burroughs, 1945–1959*, ed. Oliver Harris (New York: Viking Penguin, 1993), 398.

134. William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin, "Cut-Ups Self Explained," in *The Third Mind* (New York: Seaver Books, 1978), 34.

135. Gysin began studying at the Sorbonne in 1934, and his circle included Max Ernst, Victor Hugo, Meret Oppenheim, Salvador Dalí, and Picasso. In New York in 1940, he shared a studio with Roberto Matta and encountered both Jackson Pollock and Arshile Gorky there. James Grauerholz, "On Burroughs' Art," in *William S. Burroughs at the Front: Critical Reception, 1959–1989*, ed. Jennie Skerl and Robin Lydenberg (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 239–41.

136. Sobieszek, preface to *Ports of Entry*, 45.

137. *Ibid.*, 21.

138. Burroughs cited by Grauerholz, "On Burroughs' Art," 242, emphasis in the original. Much more remains to be written on the relationship between Burroughs's visual and textual practices. The visual and literary practices of Burroughs are connected and, in some ways, even interdependent. Gysin and Burroughs's collaborative work *All God's Children Got Space* from circa 1971–73, for example, combines photographs and texts of space exploration and astronomy and even includes a maritime scene. In the lower third of the page, the third- and second-to-last photographs from the right show a fictional astronaut alongside a documentary photograph of an astronaut on the moon. The label beneath these two photographs indicates that the leftmost image is from H. G. Wells's *Things to Come*, a film based on Wells's 1933 novel *The Shape of Things to Come*, while the image on the right is a photograph from NASA's Apollo 12 lunar mission. Through his combination of fiction and reality, Burroughs explores the issues of his own literature in visual form.

139. Gysin, "Cut-Ups: A Project for Disastrous Success," in Burroughs and Gysin, *The Third Mind*, 42–43.

140. Brion Gysin, "Minutes to Go," in Burroughs and Gysin, *The Third Mind*, 40.

141. Burroughs, "The Art of Fiction No. 36," 9.
142. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 221.
143. This point is something with which other critics of Burroughs have struggled. See Jonathan Paul Eburne, "Trafficking in the Void: Burroughs, Kerouac, and the Consumption of Otherness," *Modern Fiction Studies* 43, no. 1 (1997): 53–92.
144. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, trans. John Goodman (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 35.
145. Richard Kostelnatez, "From Nightmare to Serendipity: A Retrospective Look at William Burroughs," *Twentieth Century Literature* 11, no. 3 (October 1965): 124.
146. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 63–64.
147. Warsh, *Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Notebooks*, n.p.
148. The fact that Burroughs had detached himself from his own prose is also a significant factor in the psychotic depersonalization that is part of the content and is reflected in this technique.
149. Burroughs and Gysin, *The Third Mind*, 9.
150. Tobias Mueller, conversation with the author, Zurich, June 2005.
151. Burroughs, "The Art of Fiction No. 36," 11–12.
152. Basquiat joined Mary Boone's gallery in 1984 and had his first exhibition there in May of that year and another in March 1985. The latter exhibition produced a catalog with an essay by Robert Farris Thompson. Basquiat broke ties with the dealer in the fall of 1986.
153. Leonhard Emmerling, *Jean-Michel Basquiat, 1960–1988* (Cologne: Taschen, 2003), 50.
154. Schlomoff, email to the author.
155. "Tous rigolaient de lui lorsqu'il disait à cette époque (et personne ne parle de ça) qu'il voulait tout arrêter, même la peinture, et partir à Los Angeles pour s'isoler de la côte Est, pour commencer à écrire. . . . Il ajouta que lorsque son entourage essayait de l'empêcher de faire ça en lui disant qu'il était loin d'écrire comme Kerouac, il répondait, 'Je sais, et je m'en fou, c'est comme avec le dessin j'apprendrais.'" Schlomoff, email to the author. All typos in the original French have been preserved in this transcription. Translation to English by Dr. Catherine Montfort.
156. Kelle Inman quoted by Anthony Haden-Guest, "Burning Out," *Vanity Fair*, November 1988, 196.
157. Ibid.

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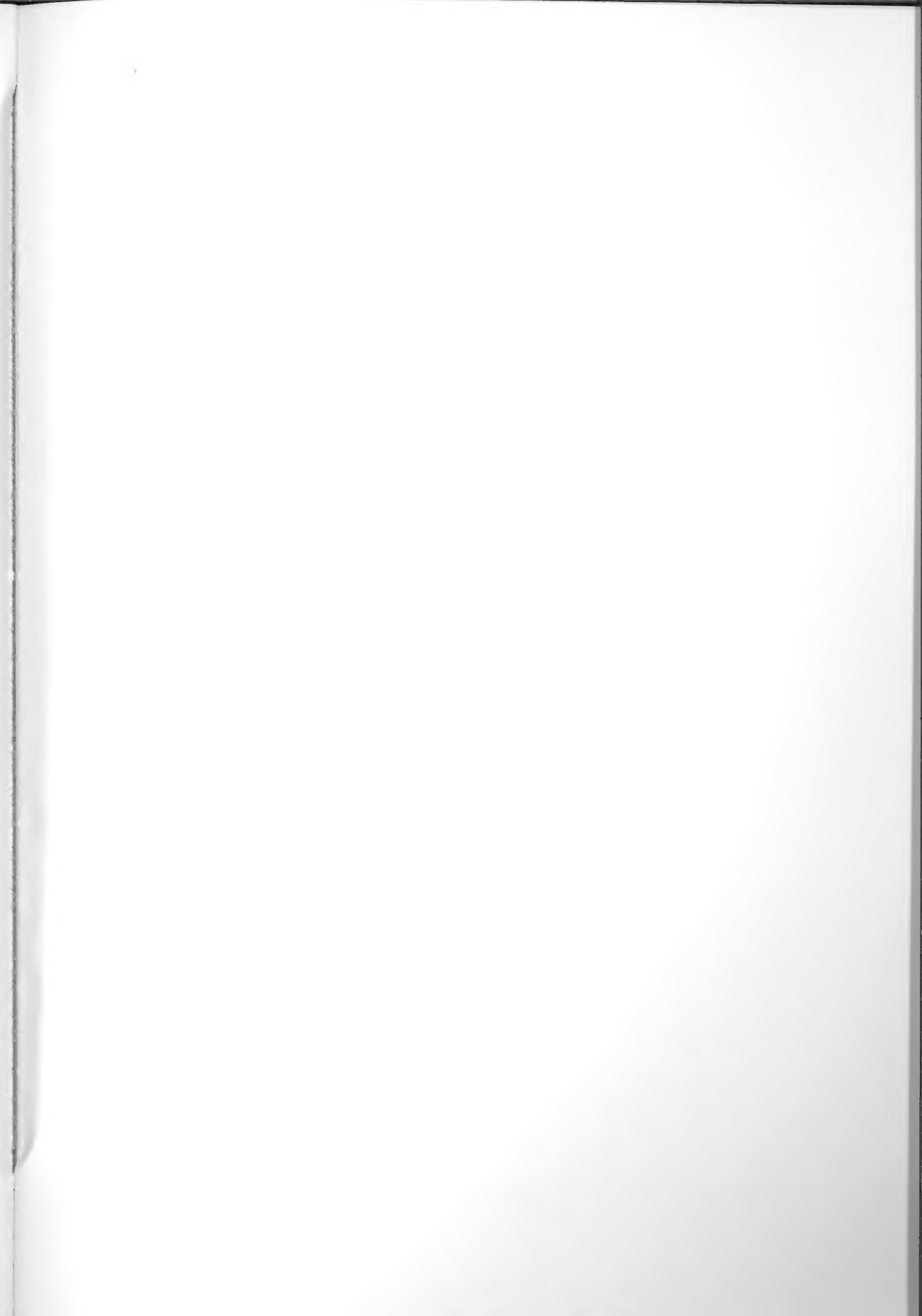
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TEXT: 10.5/15 ADOBE GARAMOND

DISPLAY: AKZIDENZ GROTESK

COMPOSITOR: BOOKMATTERS, BERKELEY

INDEXER: CAROL ROBERTS



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University of California Press

www.ucpress.edu

ISBN: 978-0-520-38334-0



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