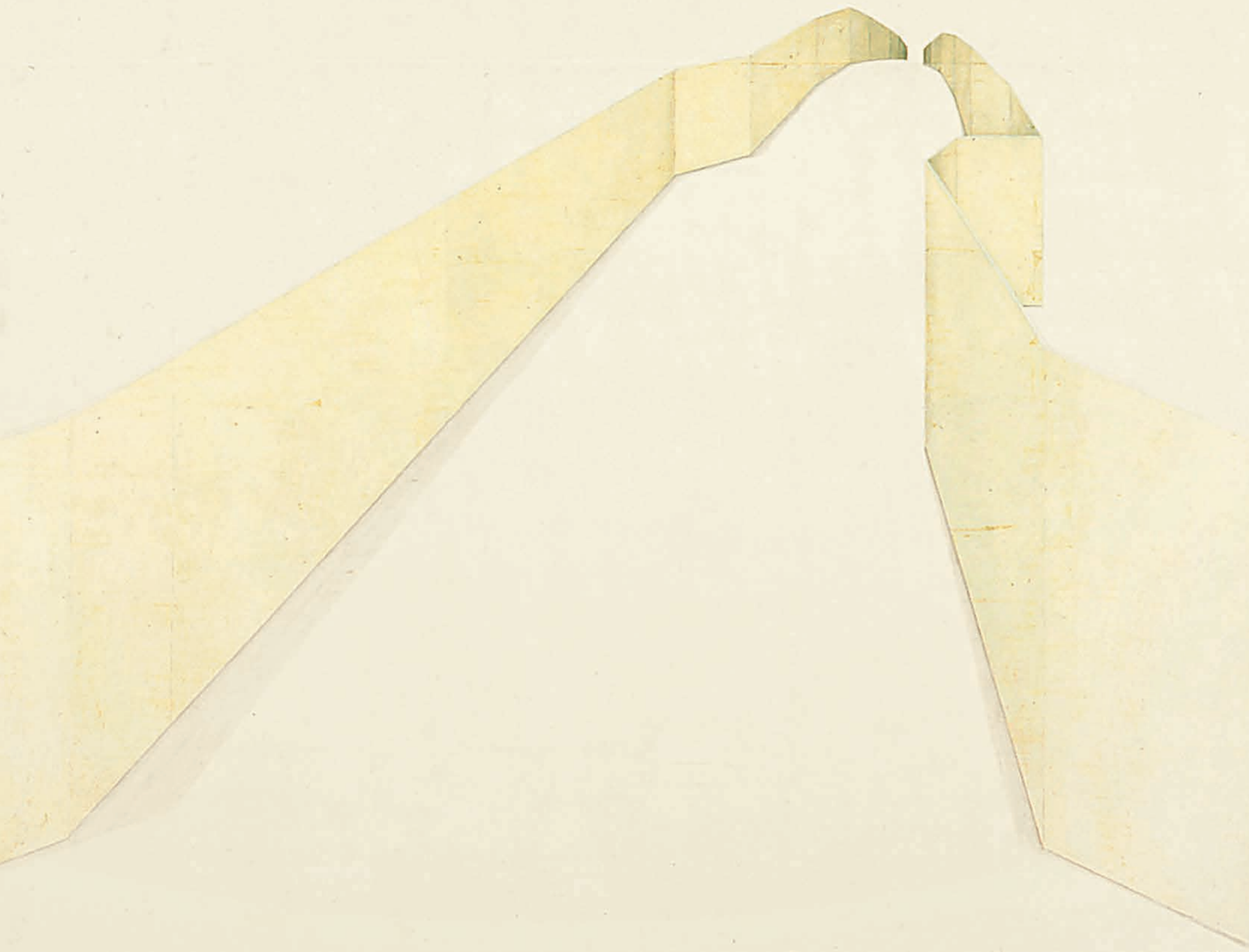


Monika Leisch-Kiesl

Evoking a Sign | Perceiving an Image

Toba Khedoori : Drawn Painting



PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

“Monika Leisch-Kiesl’s book *ZeichenSetzung / BildWahrnehmung. Toba Khedoori: Gezeichnete Malerei* (VfmK 2016) is the most thorough study of the artist’s work to date. Not only does it present in-depth analyses of Toba Khedoori’s ‘drawn paintings’; it also is a very concise and scholarly discussion of the phenomenology of draftsmanship under contemporary conditions,” comments Stephan E. Hauser, librarian at Schaulager Basel. Schaulager (www.schaulager.org) holds one of the largest collections of Toba Khedoori’s work, definitely the largest in Europe, which formed the starting point of my investigation.

The result is a book about Toba Khedoori’s outstanding drawings, about the history and theory of drawing in the 20th and 21st centuries, especially from the 1970s onwards—and about Khedoori’s place within it. It is also a book about the question of how to describe the process in which images and especially drawings gain meaning and relevance, in the viewer’s eye and in different social contexts. This is a question for which again Khedoori’s painted drawings of the late 1990s and 2000s form a significant reference point—and for which I have developed the German term “ZeichenSetzung,” a term that tags a constitutive threshold between “making a mark” and “setting a sign” and which we have now decided to translate with the phrase “evoking a sign.” I delve deeper into this concept through a dialogue between drawing—Toba Khedoori’s *Rope 2* from 2011—and Jacques Derrida’s search for the *brisure* (in English “hinge”) as the moment when signification dis/appears.

It was instantly clear that this book demands an English translation, first of all for Toba Khedoori herself and also for the literature on her work (which up to now has been for the most part in English), and finally to introduce the term “ZeichenSetzung” to the English-speaking academic community. But the time was not ripe back then. So I decided to have initially only selected parts of the book translated.

Therefore, the reader will find here an introduction that articulates the aim and leading questions of this study, followed by a description of one of Khedoori’s drawings, a short insight into the question of what drawing since the 1970s might be, some hints and indications regarding the concept of “ZeichenSetzung,” and a short discussion of one of Jacques Derrida’s texts. But he/she will also find a lot of empty space. So one has to jump a little from here to there, with the Table of Contents guiding the way. And a box full of red lines, which I discovered in the studio of German artist Katharina Hinsberg, marks the possible trails that might be laid out.

I’d like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to the translators Laura Schleussner and Jennifer Taylor, who accepted the challenge of translating just some parts of a bigger whole; to the artists, who gave their permission for this piecemeal translation, which is only available online at the moment; and to Sibylle Ryser, the designer of the German book, who had to find an adequate form for this not yet published publication.

In the hope that the reader will be intrigued by this appetizer –

Monika Leisch-Kiesl, August 2018

MAIN CHAPTERS
AVAILABLE ENGLISH CONTENT
YET TO BE TRANSLATED CONTENT

INTRODUCTION 11	TOBA KHEDOORI 24	DRAWING 28	MIMESIS AND DEIXIS 36	IMAGE GROUNDS 44	IN CONVERSATION WITH JACQUES DERRIDA 52	CUT. KATHARINA HINSBERG 60
PRELUDE ...						
	26 Five Drawings	31 First Cue Art Historical Context	39 what isn't missing and how do you know it's gone	47 the uncertainty of the edge and how it meets the real	... Toba Khedoori, <i>Untitled (Rope)</i>	... her searching lines in the thin air brought them together
...	The Reception of Khedoori's Works	... Second Cue The Phenomenon of Drawing	... one must cross the dense thicket of semiotics	... <i>The Image Is an Act and Not a Thing</i> . Pheno- menological Approaches to the Image	55 le trait—le retrait le trait/en son retrait The Time of a Drawing	... Nulla dies sine linea
...	Further Lines of Inquiry	... Third Cue Regarding a Drawing	... Art Historical Considerations Art in the Context of Symbolic Orders The Regime of (In)visibilities	Image Acts Gazing Acts Seeing as a Practice "Imagination"	... la brisure/la trace entre la bordure visible et le fantôme central Image Ground and Sign la brisure il n'y a pas de hors-texte I faut penser la trace avant l'étant un blanc textuel	... In a drawing, the "together" is only the together of some vanishing marks. Together is enough
		... Fourth Cue Marks/Signs	... Philosophical Considerations From Pierce to Eco and Derrida Pierce—A Drawing Thinker	... The Materiality and Mediality of "Marks" The Image Field The Continuum of the Ground Duration of Figuration	... l'unique cette différence	
		... Fifth Cue The Conceptual—The Narrative	... we must become Egyptologists Everything is Sign Essence The Involuntary Memory The Subject Signs and Art Evoking a Sign	... Space Becoming Time and Time Becoming Space	... the "sans" of the pure cut le livre pur l'imagination, ce pouvoir de médiation le clin d'œil de l'instant	
		... Sixth Cue Thought Forms		... Toba Khedoori, <i>Untitled (Purple River)</i>		
		... Seventh Cue Space and Time				
		... Instead of a Conclusion Toba Khedoori, <i>Untitled (Stick)</i>	... Toba Khedoori, <i>Untitled (Logs)</i>			

CONTENT

INTRODUCTION	11
TOBA KHEDOORI	24
DRAWING	28
MIMESIS AND DEIXIS	36
IMAGE GROUNDS	44
IN CONVERSATION WITH JACQUES DERRIDA	52
CUT. KATHARINA HINSBERG	60

- 1 Roger Laporte, quoted from Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* [1974], transl. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016, 71.

Drawings have a featherlike quality.

(Louise Bourgeois)

The Hinge [La Brisure]

You have, I suppose, dreamt of finding a single word for designating difference and articulation. I have perhaps located it by chance in Robert[’s Dictionary] if I play on the word, or rather indicate its double meaning. This word is *brisure* [joint, break] “—broken, cracked part. Cf. breach, crack, fracture, fault, split, fragment, [*brèche, cassure, fracture, faille, fente, fragment.*]—Hinged articulation of two parts of wood- or metal-work. The hinge, the *brisure* [folding-joint] of a shutter. Cf. *joint*.”

(Roger Laporte, letter)

(Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*)¹

INTRODUCTION

The two quotations that function as mottos introducing this book stake out the questions central to this inquiry.

Beginning with a statement by Louise Bourgeois situates the origin of my perceptions, questions, and reflections in art, and more concretely, drawing. The *Insomnia Drawings* (1994–95), shown at documenta II in 2002, made a lasting impression on me. This series of drawings in small format, spread out before the viewer and taking up the entire space, are predominantly in red and black but also show light blue lines forming a secondary web of markings. Some drawings display wave-like, circular, spiral, or zigzag formations. Others show representational figures, such as an eye, a face, a bird, part of a body, or the face of a clock. The weightlessness of the words “featherlike quality” is surprising, given the persistence, intensity, and sheer presence of Louise Bourgeois’s drawings. I do not know the context in which the artist formulated this thought; I encountered the quote in an exhibition catalogue² – and it has captivated me ever since.

The metaphor does not only imply lightness; feathers are also prickly, and they have sharp quills. “A featherlike quality” also suggests something momentary. The description fits the bizarreness of Bourgeois’s drawing oeuvre, as a sculptor situated in the context of Dadaism and Surrealism. However, neither this utterly inexhaustible oeuvre nor comparable positions following in its tradition of diaristic drawing are the locus of my reflections. I have instead chosen to focus on contemporary positions in drawing that are generally indebted to the traditions of Minimalism and Conceptual Art.

But still, the chosen motto goes to the heart of the matter. Highly precise yet impossible to pin down—this quality seems to particularly define drawing, or at least a broad spectrum of historical and contemporary examples.

This takes us to the choice of the second quotation. In my opinion, “drawing”—initially meant in a generalizing sense, therefore the quotation marks—and the searching and thinking of Jacques Derrida have something to say to one another, and not merely beginning with Derrida’s *Mémoires d’aveugle*, first published in 1990 (*Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, in a translation published in 1993).

This excerpt from one of Derrida’s literary contemporaries, the poet and philosopher Roger Laporte, is awkward. He is searching for a word that grasps an instance of meaning poised between the future and the past, which would ultimately go down in the history of philosophy and semiotics, and also art and cultural theory, as *différance*. Derrida quotes the letter in the first part of his 1967 text *De la Grammatologie* (in English, *Of Grammatology*, published in 1976), in which he formulated the theoretical foundations of his thought, even though by this point in time he had already largely developed his theory of *différance*. We will come back to this later. But to give a better indication of the direction in which we are heading, I quote an incisive excerpt from the chapter immediately preceding the “brisure,” or “hinge”:

“The trace is in fact the absolute origin of sense in general. Which amounts to saying once again that there is no absolute origin of sense in general. The trace is the *différance* which opens appearance [*l’apparaître*] and signification.”³

In other words, this is about the question of how “meaning” (as problematic as this term may be) arises, without naming a source or establishing the significance. And here is where I see a proximity between the notion of *différance* and specific qualities of drawing. Derrida once again commented on drawing in 2002, relatively late in his life: “In a drawing that deserves to be called so, in what constitutes such a drawing, a movement remains that is separate and discrete in an absolutely secret way (in the sense of the *secretum*); it cannot be traced back to what we see in the bright light of day.”⁴

- 2 Louise Bourgeois – Meret Oppenheim – Ilse Weber. *Zeichnungen und Arbeiten auf Papier*, exh. cat. Aargauer Kunsthaus Aarau, March–May 1999, and Swiss Institute, New York, May–July 1999, Stephan Kunz, Christiane Meyer-Thoss, Beat Wismer (eds.), Zurich: Edition Unikat, 1999.
- 3 Derrida, *Of Grammatology* [italics in the original], 70.
- 4 Jacques Derrida, “Denken, nicht zu sehen” (*Penser à ne pas voir*, 2002), in: Emmanuel Alloa (ed.), *Bildtheorien aus Frankreich*, Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2011, 323–346, here: 344 [translated into English from the German text by Jennifer Taylor].

- 5 See Gottfried Boehm (ed.), *Was ist ein Bild?*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1994; W. T. J. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994; for an overarching look at their work ten years after the initial spark for this discussion ignited, see Monika Leisch-Kiesel, "Fragen nach Bildern," in: *kunst und kirche* 71 (1/2008), special issue "bild – körper – raum," 61–71.
- 6 For further information see www.eikones.philhist.unibas.ch/en/home/ [accessed August 1, 2018].

These brief indicators should initially suffice to spark an interest in an encounter between a "featherlike quality" and the *brisure*. Of course, I am not the first to identify Derrida's theory as enlightening in relation to an understanding of (modern and postmodern) drawing; in almost every contemporary text on drawing one finds a mention of this thinker in one passage or another.

A brief note on language: A study such as this one inevitably relies on discourses in various languages: English, French, and my native language, German. Originally written in German, the text has now been translated into English. The conceptual realms sometimes evade translation, however, and so I have cited some leitmotifs that concern me here in their original language, and have also quoted Derrida's texts in their French spelling—and I encourage readers to make the effort of engaging with these different linguistic contexts as well.

My aim in this discourse is not necessarily to clarify a far-reaching question that has been explored in multiple facets in contemporary theoretical debates, but potentially to shed some additional light on it. This is, in simple terms, the question of the sign and the image.

I would like to formulate the indicated question as follows: I am not asking, "What is an image?" or "What is a sign?" Instead my question is, "How does an image become a sign?" This permits, and possibly even gives rise to, a certain "contextualization" in various social and cultural contexts. Conversely, I am also asking "How does a sign become an image?"— which implies a specific form of "attention."

To pose the question in different terms: How do images acquire "meaning"? Whereby "meaning" is not framed as a fixed content but is understood as the effect or impact of an image and its broader, for example social, relevance.

I am hereby consciously following in the footsteps of Gottfried Boehm, whose book *Was ist ein Bild?*, published in the mid-1990s, quickly became a bestseller in the humanities and in cultural studies, while introducing a supposed "iconic turn" simultaneously with W. J. Thomas Mitchell's study *Picture Theory*.⁵ Gottfried Boehm's writings, and conversations with this inspired thinker, have had a fundamental influence on my work. The present text has thus been written in the ambit of *eikones* – the Center for the Theory and the History of the Image at the University of Basel, a national research institute founded by Boehm.⁶

A certain fascination and concomitant sense of unease towards the "iconic" or "pictorial turn" are the thorn in the side of this study. Many different things have been gathered under the umbrella of the "iconic turn" over the last twenty years. In addition to cultural diagnoses in relation to the flood of images that has supposedly become more pronounced due to digitalization, there are questions relevant to visual communication, analyses of the use of images in science and technology, attempts to theoretically articulate the concept of the image, genuine art historical inquiries, and also reflections on iconoclasm rooted in the fields of religious studies and theology. Meanwhile, the "iconic turn" seems to have been supplanted by the "performative turn," whose roots extend further back in time, certainly at least to the speech act theory of John L. Austin.

As much as such "turns" may assume relevance in diagnosing their respective era, they are nonetheless limited in their ability to truly address core issues, let alone illuminate associated constellations of problems. Even if the "iconic turn" is generally considered a critique of the "linguistic turn," the impetus behind these two notions leads in different directions. As valid as it may be to emphasize the image as a source of knowledge versus the logicity of language—and thereby promote research into this form of knowledge production in order to develop a corresponding terminology—this endeavor is certainly not to be seen as a falling back behind the achievements of the "linguistic turn." Gottfried Boehm, who often refers to the "logos" of the image, understands this development in image criticism as following and running parallel to the centuries-old tradition of linguistic criticism. Nor is the realization of the importance of performativity in perceptual and communicative processes an achievement of the last ten years but rather a constituent element of linguistic and image theory.

By creating a tension between "sign" and "image," I am bringing about a rupture—not in the matter at hand but in the thinking about it. My aim is to create a fissure in the debate, at

the very place where one can already be felt. Images are a subgroup of signs, say semioticians. In contrast, semiotics is not capable of grasping the specific quality of the image, say aestheticians. Both are correct, which is just my point: both.

The investigations of the past twenty years that have attempted to understand the specific quality of perceiving an image—whether rooted in art history, phenomenology and hermeneutics, or in the philosophical discipline of aesthetics—have uncovered many inspiring and productive considerations that are far from being exhausted. At the same time, they entail the danger of setting the lone individual in front of a framed canvas to linger indefinitely in silent observation, just like in Caspar David Friedrich's *Mönch am Meer* (ca. 1810). But this concept of the image does not satisfy many art historians, and with good reason, especially those of a younger generation who came of age in the context of Critical Theory, for which the journal *kritische berichte* played a central role.⁷

"Modern semiotics is first and foremost a set of discussions," writes Dieter Mersch in the insightful introduction to his collected writings *Zeichen über Zeichen*.⁸ He continues: "Almost all contemporary philosophical projects converge around the problem of the sign, language, and interpretation [...] This central position is an expression of destruction; the critique of metaphysics and the philosophy of the sign, language, and the symbol actually belong together."⁹ Setting aside this claim of universality for a moment, one can certainly say that "semiotics"—here in quotation marks as a kind of placeholder momentarily leaving open which aspects or trajectories I consider it productive to pursue—as a catalyst has produced so many (not only philosophical) theorems and discourses that art history cannot afford to abandon it. Not only does it supply us with a sophisticated set of tools for addressing theoretical questions, such as the role of "author" and "reader" or the constitution of "sense" and "meaning"—all highly complex terms. The theorem of the sign also opens up paths into different cultural and social communication processes and relationships. It is obvious that trying to explain highly nuanced works of art with the help of a schema of pictograms is not only inadequate but also completely misses the mark. Similarly, images in art are insufficiently understood when considered solely from the standpoint of visual culture—even when these kinds of studies can have a vital and inspiring impact, as exemplified for instance by the work of Sigrid Schade,¹⁰ and can even open a blind eye or two among iconophiles.

I am aware that with the title of this book, "Evoking a Sign" [*ZeichenSetzung*], I am opening up further issues. Who/where is the stimulating moment? After the death of the author? But perhaps particularly for this reason I am convinced that the question of "evoking a sign" [*ZeichenSetzung*] is worth exploring.¹¹

Emma Cocker writes about "the premise of the *if*," in contrast to which *then* is "a form of fixation."¹² Her text appears in a volume of collected essays on diagrammatology, *Drawing a Hypothesis: Figures of Thought* (2011). As the title of the volume indicates, Cocker examines the theorem of the "hypothesis" in relation to the process of drawing. "The hypothesis is often considered as a preliminary or preparatory phase within a given enquiry; it creates the premise for something to follow where it is perceived as being always antecedent to something else."¹³ What is appealing about her understanding of hypothesis—which is very close to what I expect from an image, or better said, a drawing—is an inherent and deeply rooted openness, "the premise for something to follow." She continues, "It marks the entrance of a threshold zone between the known and the unknown."¹⁴ Interesting is not only the notion of "marking" but also the idea of the threshold as a space that simultaneously indicates a beginning.

Cocker then explicitly applies this line of thought to drawing: "Drawing is the language through which the hypothesis is shaped within art practice, since it too has been habitually designated as a preliminary activity, always coming before, rarely taken for what it is in itself."¹⁵ Cocker's thesis considers drawing a form of hypothesis, thus having a preliminary nature. As seductive as this thesis is, there are two points I would like to adjust. First, the characterization of a relationship of mediacy—"through which"—as if drawing were something subordinate,

- 7 Within the Anglo-American context one could compare this journal in a sense with the *Art Journal*.
- 8 Dieter Mersch, "Introduction," in: *Zeichen über Zeichen*, Munich: dtv Verlag, 1998, 9–36, here: 14 [transl. J.T.].
- 9 Ibid., 28 [transl. J.T.].
- 10 See Sigrid Schade and Silke Wenk, *Studien zur visuellen Kultur*, Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2011.
- 11 It is almost impossible to translate the German term "ZeichenSetzung" in an adequate manner, for it tags a constitutive threshold between "mark" and "sign." It pinpoints the "semantic vibration" that occurs between the generation of a picture, concretely a drawing, and the generation of meaning in regarding a picture / a drawing. To ensure that the manifold potential of the term "ZeichenSetzung" is conveyed, I add the term in brackets.
- 12 See Emma Cocker, "Distancing the If and Then," in: *Drawing a Hypothesis: Figures of Thought*, Nikolaus Gansterer (ed.), Vienna: Edition Angewandte, 2011, 97–108.
- 13 Ibid., 98.
- 14 Ibid., 98.
- 15 Ibid., 100. With reference to Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

entering the process in a secondary stage as a form of the idea. Second, the description of drawing as preliminary, as “rarely taken for what it is in itself.” However, Cocker’s thesis really has explosive power, if reformulated as: “drawing *as* hypothesis and therefore *valid* as such.”

Perhaps this is just what Cocker means in writing: “Like the hypothesis, drawing is a conjectural operation, the tentative manifestation of an insurgent *if*. The hypothetical *if* is typically understood as a conditional statement, closely followed by the consequential or predictive *then*. Whilst *if* is the opening of innumerable possibilities, *then* grounds [...]”¹⁶ This “insurgent *if*” already sounds a lot more self-confident! But the conditional still requires explanation. And also, it must be articulated who or what “*then*” is and where it takes place.

Given this introductory outline of the set of problems at hand, I would like to suggest the following operation: taking the *if* to be the image, in this concrete situation a drawing, and the *then* to be the sign. In other words: The *if* – *then* may be understood as “making a mark”/“setting a sign,” in other words: “evoking a sign” [ZeichenSetzung].

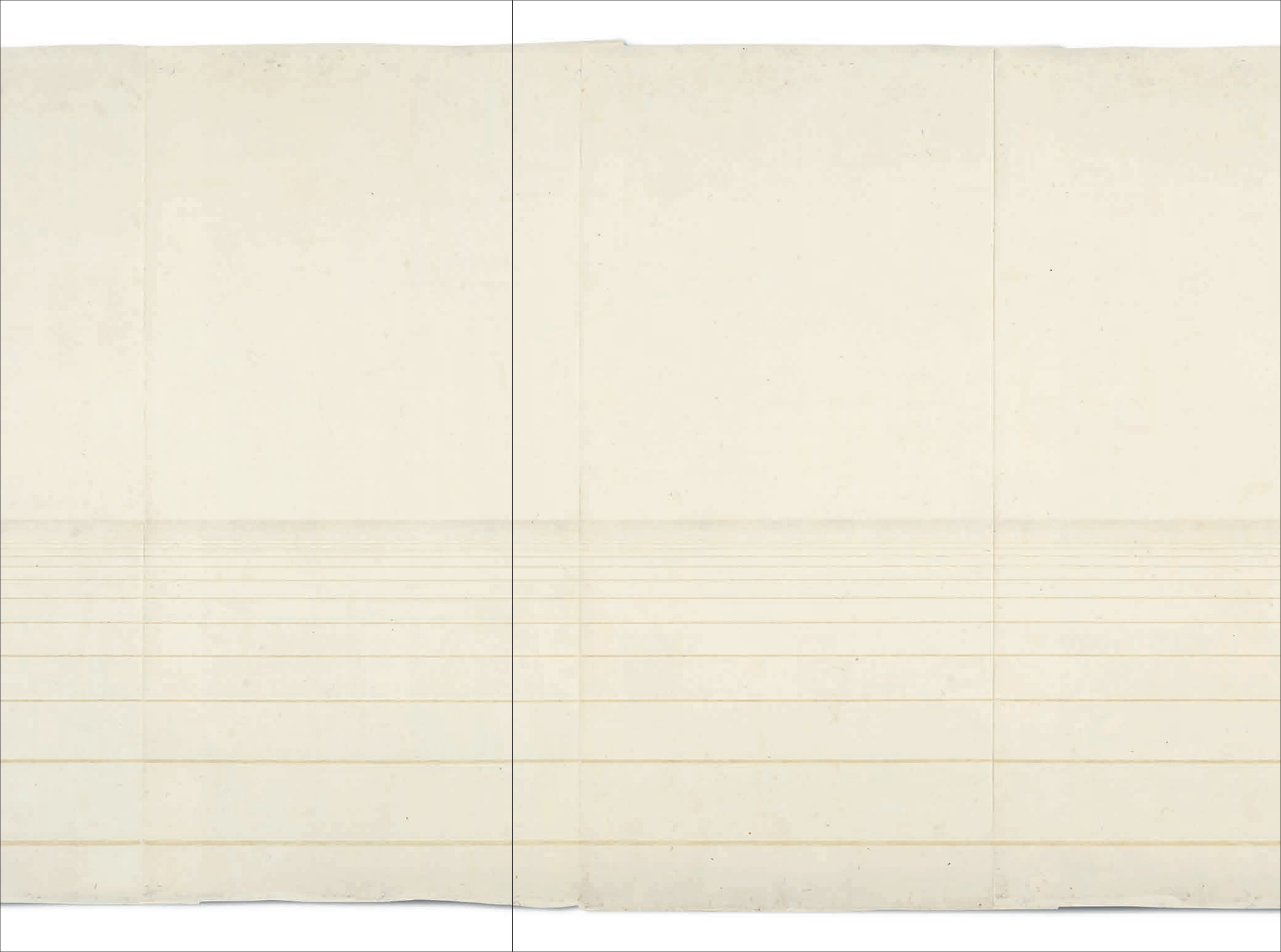
In this sense, I have selected a third motto:

The premise of the *if* – *then* grounds.

(Emma Cocker)

FIG. 1
Toba Khedoori, *Untitled (Horizon)*, 1999
Oil and wax on paper, 144,7 × 362,3 in







Five Drawings 26

The Reception of Khedoor's Works ...

Further Lines of Inquiry ...

- 1 After careful examination of the works, even the restorer at the Schaulager in Basel suspected that the pencil lines as well as the gray paint had been applied to the paper before the wax layer. However, it is just the opposite: First Khedoori prepares the paper by applying wax over the surface. Then she transfers a drawing onto the wax, afterwards she draws the lines with oil paint. So there is no other layer of wax.

TOBA KHEDOORI

Five Drawings

Untitled (Horizon) from 1999 (FIG. 1) extends a good nine meters in width and is three and a half meters high. It is a work that does not merely fill the wall; it fills the space. Although matte white like the wall, the work stands out as a separate visual layer. Viewers find themselves positioned at a substantial distance. Initially appearing almost completely monochrome, the surface of the picture does not create an all-over effect like a Barnett Newman or Mark Rothko, artists who wanted to lure viewers as close to the picture surface as possible so that they would feel as though they were entering a seemingly boundless and therefore overwhelming pictorial space. Instead, the work situates itself *in front of* the prospective viewer. One unconsciously moves toward and away from the picture, walking along its length, possibly moving in closer but then stepping back again in order to see.

Toba Khedoori's large-format drawings, coated with a layer of wax ranging from white to ochre in color, are never truly monochrome. They always reveal *something*, in this case extending horizontal lines, which lend meaning to the title, the "Horizon" in parentheses following "Untitled."

Nor does the drawing consist of a flat, white surface. Five vertical swaths of paper of equal width were pieced together to produce the giant format. The paper has a certain thickness and corporeality, being bowed in one place or another. Its seams are clearly visible. The sheets of paper, coated in wax, are pinned directly to the wall. They are thus joined with the wall but nevertheless unmistakably distinguish themselves from it. Gallery walls are generally painted white; Khedoori's pictorial grounds are not. Although she uses white paper, she coats it with a pale layer of wax, lending it an off-white tone ranging to an eggshell or cream color and giving it the appearance of a thin, unbleached piece of cardboard. Nor is the wax a pure white. Exhibiting a milky or even ocher tone, it bears the traces of the production process—the dust, tiny hairs, insects, simply the particles that one finds in every artist's studio. The pictorial surface thus takes on a certain corporeal and tactile quality. Although attached directly to the wall, the work casts a slight shadow.

Fine horizontal parallel lines have been drawn all the way across the picture surface, first lightly with a pencil and ruler and then traced over free-hand in black paint. The lines begin at one edge and continue to the other, running off the paper as if they were coming from and ending in the space of nowhere. Although they look like fine pencil or ink lines, they have actually been rendered with the brush. The lower lines are somewhat wider and are lighter gray in color, as if the lines themselves were casting shadows. The upper lines become progressively thinner and are placed closer together. As matter-of-fact as these lines seem, it is nevertheless difficult to determine their origin. The wax coating melds with the drawn or painted lines and glazed bands, making it almost impossible to differentiate between them.¹

With gradually decreasing intervals between them, the lines cross the lower half of the image, working their way up to the middle. The upper half of the image is empty. Standing in front of the drawing, one has the impression of perspectival space, as if standing before an open landscape extending off into the distance, or a stretch of open sea with gently moving waves.

Although Khedoori prepares her pictorial grounds with the paper lying on the floor, she then mounts it onto the wall and executes the constellation of lines standing vertically before the picture, sometimes with the help of a ladder. Considering the size of the format, drawing such horizontal lines not only requires a sure hand but also a range of different bodily positions.

The different situations that determine the production process also influence how the image is viewed. One perceives the picture support and senses the corporeality of the pictorial surface. One can move along the lines, but no specific direction is indicated, whether from left to right or right to left. And one can view the work as an image with classical central perspective, looking through this “window” onto another world.

What certainly captures attention is the unspectacular quality of the image on the one hand, and its commanding presence on the other. As simple as the lengths of paper seem at first, they give rise to a highly complex perceptual process. Just a few lines in an empty space create a situation—a situation that arises momentarily, compels the gaze to linger, and then leaves the viewer with plenty to ponder.

This kind of purely linear work is rather atypical of Khedoori. Usually her drawings contain a subject. Since the mid-1990s—she was awarded her MFA in 1994—she has been positioning simple objects in the middle of large-format images, either as single objects or in a serial sequence. *Untitled (Train)* from 1995 shows a toy train that recalls a model train set; *Untitled (House)* from the same year shows a vertical cross-section of a building in a manner recalling a dollhouse. The 1996 series *Untitled (Doors)* depicts balcony (or maybe jail) doors from a frontal perspective and *Untitled (Seats)* from the same year presents rows of chairs arranged to accommodate an audience. *Untitled (Window)* from 1999 shows a solitary window, whereas *Untitled (Windows)* from 2001 depicts a row of windows.

DRAWING

First Cue Art Historical Context	31
Second Cue The Phenomenon of Drawing	...
Third Cue Regarding a Drawing	...
Fourth Cue Marks/Signs	...
Fifth Cue The Conceptual—The Narrative	...
Sixth Cue Thought Forms	...
Seventh Cue Space and Time	...
Instead of a Conclusion Toba Khedoori, <i>Untitled (Stick)</i>	...

FIG. 2
Toba Khedoori, *Untitled (Stick)*, 2005
Oil and wax on paper, 142×80 in



First Cue:

Art Historical Context

Bernice Rose, who undertook a reassessment of drawing in 1992 in her book *Allegories of Modernism*, reexamines the medium as poised between the “modern” and “postmodern.”¹

“In this view, the postmodern is characterized by breakup and fragmentation on its surface—its idiosyncratic details subject to rearrangement according to the new principles of material operation, as disparate modes are manipulated. One long-held myth of modernist art is that it is a virtually inviolable body of abstract principles in which form and content are one. But a tension has always existed between modernism’s totalizing structure and its ‘perversely’ subjective details, making it vulnerable to constant reinterpretation and opening it to allegory. The myth of modernism, which still obtains, making postmodernism continuous with modernism, holds that the principle of art—the aesthetic—is itself redemptive.”²

In addition to this line of inquiry, typical of the early 1990s, which attempts to differentiate between the principles of modernism and those of postmodernism, paired with a redefinition of the artist as author—a set of questions that quickly ran its course—the achievements of Minimal and Conceptual Art are of increasing interest, along with their relevance in terms of understanding the medium of drawing.

These include both the self-reflexivity of the medium and the altered role of the viewer. In the words of Bernice Rose: “And in the 1970s as the mark itself and the process by which it was made came to be more and more the subject of drawing, the graphological and the conceptual functions of drawing merged.”³ Also of growing interest was the space the viewer occupies: “Thus, a phenomenological space, one of sensation, became integral to art.”⁴ No longer was pictorial space the autonomous space of representation (even if adhering to the principles of abstraction); it had become instead the space of the image and the viewer together in the exhibition scenario. A third observation is key: The heroic gesture of modernism had once and for all met its end, and taking its place was the fragment and all its genuine possibilities.

This summarizes the key conceptual trajectories in drawing.

The major exhibition and publication project *Drawing from the Modern* (2004–05) undertaken by MoMA in New York spanned three exhibitions and accordingly a three-volume catalogue, examining the history of drawing from 1880 to 2005. The period from 1975 to 2005 was given the subtitle “After the Endgames,” and the selected works on view were categorized under the following headers: New Figures, New Expressions; The Culture of Pictures; Drawing History; Hand and Body; A Whole New World; The Space of Art; and Global Pop.⁵ This overview represented more a cartography of the “postmodern” terrain than any new insights from a conceptual standpoint.⁶

Another expert on drawing in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Catherine de Zegher, authored a history of drawing from 1910 onward in the context of another MoMA exhibition, *On Line*, in the early 2010s.⁷ She assigns particular importance to the line as a genuine aspect of drawing: “In the twentieth century, many artists made line the subject of intense exploration, including semiotic and phenomenological investigations.”⁸ The reference to semiotics and phenomenology in the context of this study is worthy of attention. Whereas Zegher does not take this assertion any further, this area will be explored here in greater depth further on.

To return to Zegher’s art historical overview, she, too, identifies a shift around 1960, in which the line takes on a conceptual quality. In this context she speaks about a “textually and linguistically informed Conceptual art”⁹ and sees parallels with contemporary developments in

- 1 See Bernice Rose, “Allegories of Modernism,” in: *Allegories of Modernism: Contemporary Drawing*, exh. cat. MoMA, New York (New York: Harry Abrams, 1992), 10–118.
- 2 Bernice Rose, “Preface,” in: *Allegories of Modernism*, 6–9, here: 7. In terms of her art historical approach, in her essay “Allegories of Modernism” Rose discusses major names of the 1980s, beginning with Georg Baselitz and Joseph Beuys and including Mike Kelley and Jannis Kounellis, Robert Rauschenberg and Nancy Spero.
- 3 Bernice Rose, “Allegories of Modernism,” in: *Allegories of Modernism*, 10–118, here: 13. In this context, Katharine Stout points to the seminal essay by Rosalind Krauss: “Grids,” in: *October* 9 (1979), 50–64. See Katharine Stout, *Contemporary Drawing: From the 1960s to Now*, Tate Publishing: London, 2015, 21.
- 4 Bernice Rose, “Allegories of Modernism,” in: *Allegories of Modernism*, 10–118, here: 12. Interestingly, Rose mentions both these aspects in her 1976 text “Drawing Now,” but using a slightly different terminology. At the time she described an emotional cooling of the most important mark in drawing, namely the line itself, and explained drawing as a field whose meaning was equivalent to that of real space: “The drawing is seen as a field coextensive with real space, no longer subject to the illusion of an object marked off from the rest of the world. The space of illusionism changes, merges with the space of the world, but by doing so it loses its objective, conventional character and becomes subjective, accessible only to the individual’s raw perception.” (Bernice Rose, “Drawing Now,” in: *Drawing Now: 1955–1975*, exh. cat. MoMA, New York, 1976, 9–95, here: 14).
- 5 See Jordan Kantor, “Drawing from the Modern: After the Endgames,” in: *Drawing from the Modern*, vol. 3: 1975–2005, exh. cat. MoMA, New York, 2005, 12–56. The essays in the other volumes are similarly structured: Jodi Hauptman, “Drawing from the Modern: Imagination without Strings,” in: *Drawing from the Modern*, vol. 1: 1880–1945, exh. cat. MoMA, New York, 2004, 12–56; Gary Garrels, “Drawing from the Modern: The Resilience of Imagination,” in: *Drawing from the Modern*, vol. 2: 1945–1975, exh. cat. MoMA, New York, 2005, 12–52.
- 6 Another exhibition, this one in a German-speaking country in 2004, likewise undertook a characterization of “modern” and “postmodern” drawing, but this time using the term “late modern”: Johannes Meinhardt, “Spätmoderne Zeichnung” in: *Gegen den Strich: Neue Formen der Zeichnung*, exh. cat. Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden (Nuremberg: Verlag für moderne Kunst, 2004), 32–39. Meinhardt dates the shift in drawing to the 1960s/70s, describing the already sufficiently well-known phenomena in this period such as the loss of authorship, etc. In the process, he casts the development of drawing in quite a modest light: “All that remained of drawing after expelling the idealism of expression and meaning were material procedures, methods for inscribing movements or features into a surface, leaving behind material traces that are then seen as graphic elements, above all lines.” (Ibid., 36) [transl. J.T.]
- 7 See Catherine de Zegher, “A Century under the Sign of Line,” in: *On Line: Drawing through the Twentieth Century*, Cornelia H. Butler (ed.), exh. cat. MoMA, New York, 2010, 21–124. Zegher divides the one hundred years of the history of drawing into two major periods: “Line, Plane, Space: In Tension (1910–1960)” and “Space, Line, Plane: In Relation (1960–2010).” She then breaks the period from 1960 to 2010 down into different, sometimes overlapping segments and discusses selected positions in each of these given contexts: “Drawing = Line = Drawing (1960–1980),” “Lines over Lines: From Grid toward Web (1965–1995),” “The Conceptual Line in the Plane/Plain (1960–2000),” and “Plane / Space / Line: A Mobile Set of Relations (1990–2010).”
- 8 Ibid., 23.
- 9 Ibid., 103.

- 10 See Cornelia H. Butler, "Walk-around Time: Drawing and Dance in the Twentieth Century," in: *On Line*, 137–204.
- 11 Catherine de Zegher, "A Century under the Sign of Line," in: *On Line*, 21–124, here: 119.
- 12 Alain Badiou, "Drawing," in: *Lacanian Ink* 28 (Fall 2006) 44, quoted in *ibid.*, 119.

linguistics and semiotics (without articulating this further). The "conceptual line" has both an intellectual/conceptual and corporeal/sensual quality—as most clearly evinced in works in public space and Land Art. What makes Zegher's text stand out among comparable art historical surveys of drawing is her look at concurrent developments in modern dance. In addition to repeated references to dance in her own text, the catalogue also includes an essay on drawing from the perspective of dance by Cornelia H. Butler.¹⁰ For our inquiry, the aspects of space and movement offer productive insights. Besides drawing as an illusionary projection, drawing has also come to be understood as an immediate marking of the world. I consider both aspects, and most of all the relationship between the two, to be essential to understanding the true potential of contemporary drawing. Zegher speaks of an "in-between-lines" and the defining of the relationship between real and imaginary space,¹¹ citing Alain Badiou in this context:

"That is exactly the problem of drawing. In one sense, the paper exists, as a material support, as a closed totality; and the marks, or the lines, do not exist by themselves; they have to compose something inside the paper. But in another and more crucial sense, the paper as background does not exist, because it is created as such, as an open surface, by the marks. It is that sort of movable reciprocity between existence and inexistence, which constitutes the very essence of drawing. The question of drawing is very different from the question of Hamlet. It is not 'to be or not to be,' it is 'to be and not to be.' And that is the reason for the fundamental fragility (and femininity) of drawing: not a clear alternative, to be or not to be, but an obscure and paradoxical conjunction, to be and not to be. Or, as Deleuze would say: a disjunctive synthesis."¹²

what isn't missing
and how do you know it's gone 39

one must cross the dense thicket
of semiotics ...

Art Historical Considerations ...
Art in the Context of Symbolic Orders
The Regime of (In)visibilities

Philosophical Considerations ...
From Pierce to Eco and Derrida
Pierce—A Drawing Thinker

we must become Egyptologists ...
Everything is Sign
Essence
The Involuntary Memory
The Subject
Signs and Art
Evoking a Sign

Toba Khedoori, *Untitled (Logs)* ...



FIG. 3
Toba Khedoori, *Untitled (Logs)*, 2006
Oil and wax on paper, collage, 141,1×184 in

what isn't missing and how do you know it's gone

With this formulation by Collier Schorr in conjunction with an exhibition of the work of Toba Khedoori¹ I am picking up the threads of the previous chapters in order to first examine my introductory question “How do images gain meaning?” within the horizon of semiotic theory. Do these theorems help to explain the individual and social relevance of images, or do such structural models, which have largely been developed in the context of linguistic studies, not apply to images? Is it worthwhile to read “images” as “signs” or does this kind of reading sooner or later reach its limits? The limits of the “image”? Most of all, does the theorem of “evoking a sign” [ZeichenSetzung] as I have introduced it—with its oscillation between “mark” and sign—offer an answer to the approaches proposed by semiotics, which are often quite unsatisfactory in terms of understanding the processes of producing and viewing images?

First, I would like to recap the terms and formulations that I consider relevant in order to think a few steps further in this direction.

Toba Khedoori operates with a way of seeing that is equally mimetic and abstract. She is not so much interested in depicting reality as in questions related to evoking and imagining reality.

What makes her “icons of the representational world” so unusual? They are neither codes of consumer culture nor fantastical fabrications. They have been described with words like “tremor” and “vibration,”² as “objects immediately recognizable to the viewer,”³ as inherently fragmentary while simultaneously representing a clearly understood typology,⁴ as “figurative moments,”⁵ or as a “minimal event.”⁶ Once set on paper, a “mark”—a touch, an indication, a trace—remains there, according to Elisabeth A. T. Smith; it does not disappear, not even throughout different phases of reworking, and thus it is incorporated into the final work⁷; furthermore, as such, it continues to produce an effect.

Looking at Khedoori's works from the early 2010s, Julien Bismuth characterizes this continuous oscillation between figuration and abstraction as a “constant equivocation between looking like lines and looking like branches.”⁸ He defines this particular quality of understanding as follows: “If vibration is a movement that is both active and static, *equivocation is a semantic vibration*, the moment when words no longer simply ‘point,’ but also tremble and waver.”⁹ In my view, the notion of “semantic vibration” goes to the core of some of the key aspects of understanding the “sign” in the context of drawing. It reflects a state of understanding oscillating between grasping something and having it just slip through your fingers, a process that is unending. It also applies to semantic comprehension, which could be described in terms of the same vibrating movement. Semiotics thus ceases to be the killer of pictorial perception—an idea that comes very close to what I am trying to say with the concept of “evoking a sign” [ZeichenSetzung].

Worthy of consideration in this context is a point made by Marilu Knode, who also identifies elements of refusal in Khedoori's images, speaking of “barriers” to understanding.¹⁰ Correspondingly, despite or, better said, given Khedoori's simple motifs, she describes a rejection of narrative: “In light of these haunted images, the literalness of a table and chair, a train or a house seems downright festive, discursive, overly emotive, when in fact the enigmatic preciseness with which Khedoori chooses her images undermines any narrative projection from the viewer.”¹¹ They tell a story, but then again they do not, or at least not in the way one initially sees them.

To talk about drawing in more general terms, it was already characterized in the context of documenta 6 in 1977 as a medium for appropriating reality.¹² In art historical terms, we introduced for the period under discussion here, roughly the 1990s and 2000s—by contrast with the

- 1 See Collier Schorr, “Over the Underneath,” in: *Toba Khedoori*, exh. cat. Johnson County Community College, Overland Park, KS, 1996, 2–10, here: 2.
- 2 See Julien Bismuth, “Drawing by Design,” in: *Toba Khedoori*, exh. cat. David Zwirner Gallery, New York, 2013, n.p., here [7].
- 3 See Elisabeth A. T. Smith, “Vertigo,” in: *Toba Khedoori*, exh. cat. Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, 1997, n.p., here [1].
- 4 See Anthony Vidler, “Home Pages,” in: *Toba Khedoori*, exh. cat. Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, 1997, n.p., here [1].
- 5 See Hans Rudolf Reust, “Ereignisse im Raum,” in: *Fresh Widow*, exh. cat. Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2012), 228–230, here: 228.
- 6 See Hans Rudolf Reust, “Im Raum der Zeichnung,” in: *Toba Khedoori und Vija Celmins: Gezeichnete Bilder*, Museum für Gegenwartskunst Basel, 2001, 14–17, here: 15.
- 7 See Smith, “Vertigo,” [1].
- 8 Bismuth, “Drawing by Design,” [3].
- 9 Ibid., [10] [italics added by M.L.-K.]
- 10 See Marilu Knode, “Toba Khedoori,” in: Barry Schwabsky, *Vitamin P: New Perspectives in Painting*, London: Phaidon Press, 2002, 172.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 See Lothar Romain, “Von der Botschaft zur Kommunikation,” in: *documenta 6*, vol. 1, Kassel: Dierichs, 1977, 19–32, here: 20.

- 13 *Vitamin D2: New Perspectives in Drawing*, with an introduction by Christian Rattemeyer, project catalogue, Phaidon: London 2013.
- 14 See Catherine de Zegher, "A Century under the Sign of Line," in: *On Line: Drawing through the Twentieth Century*, exh. cat. MoMA, New York: 2010, 21–124, here: 119.
- 15 See Catherine de Zegher, "Befreiung der Linie," in: Angela Lammert et al. (eds.), *Räume der Zeichnung*, Vienna: Akademie der Künste, 2007, 189–211, here: 192.
- 16 Ibid., 210.
- 17 Michael Newman, "The Marks, Traces, and Gestures of Drawing," in: Catherine de Zegher and Avis Newman, *The Stage of Drawing: Gesture and Act, Selected from the Tate Collection*, exh. cat. Tate Liverpool and The Drawing Center, New York, 2003, 93–108, here: 99.
- 18 Ibid., 100.
- 19 See Susanne Leeb, "A Line with Variable Direction, Which Traces No Contour, and Delimits No Form," in: Nikolaus Gansterer (ed.), *Drawing a Hypothesis*, Vienna: Edition Angewandte, 2011, 29–42, here: 33.
- 20 Emma Cocker, "Distancing the If and Then", in: *Drawing a Hypothesis*, 97–108, here: 106 [italics added by M.L.-K.].

positions addressed in *Vitamin D2*¹³—the term “narrative conceptual art.” In relation to the works of Khedoori I described this quality as a sounding-out of the tension between an exploration of language and narration—whereby I mean “exploration of language” in the sense of exploring her artistic media (which as such are self-evident and relevant to meaning), while with “narration” I attempt to convey here refers to representational worlds, although it is unclear what story they are actually telling.

As to the question of the social relevance of drawing, the kinds of observations are worthy of consideration that see drawings less as an illusionary projection and more as a “marking of the world.” Catherine de Zegher writes about “in-between-lines” and creating a relationship between real and imaginary space.¹⁴ In comparing developments in drawing to those in sculpture, she emphasizes the extension of these disciplines into real space and the “rediscovery of this (social) space,”¹⁵ and more specifically she articulates a “philosophical model of relation and resistance.”¹⁶ As someone who has a profound knowledge of drawing, she mentions “philosophy” here and there quite lightly, without going into more depth. For this reason, I don’t want to discuss these references more extensively. However, the view of drawing as a “model of relation and resistance” makes it clear that drawing does not make its mark just anywhere in empty space but in *this* world. This re-action takes different forms for different concepts of drawing—drawing as a process of gradually producing signs in the sense of meaning, or as a form of quoting everyday signs. At any rate, in both cases signs are not isolated but bound into sign-generating processes, and thereby “drawing.”

And they are also to be *regarded* as drawings. Related to this are the observations surrounding Leonardo’s “spots/stains/blots” and the question of the role of the imagination. To cite Michael Newman once again, quasi as a leitmotif: “Will the blot—which could also be seen as a stain—have become a mark?”¹⁷ He continues: “What exactly happens on the side of the subject when a mark is recognized as one?”¹⁸

These phenomena can be explored more deeply in conjunction with theorems encountered in the context of diagrammatics, one branch of a broad field of research that accentuates the initiating and experimental nature of this eidetic form of thought. This agile way of thinking is for example expressed in the term “pivotal points.”¹⁹ Diagrammatic reasoning targets the fragmentary and the open, qualities often claimed for drawing and which, in this sense, are also required for thinking. It is the “if and then,” as Emma Cocker put it. She used the terms “internal” and “external” in this context to describe the transition between the inside and outside worlds—in other words, the relation of drawing to reality—quite explicitly as a hypothetical drawing or a drawn hypothesis: “The supposing drawing is in the world but not quite of it, it remains at the *level of suggestion*. Suggestion is the practice of including or guiding thought without resource to rhetorical ruse or rational reasoning, the bringing forward of ideas in the absence of intervening sense.”²⁰ What “supposing” and “suggestion” mean for a potential semiotic reading of drawing is to be explained in the following.

the uncertainty of the edge
and how it meets the real 47

The Image Is an Act and Not a Thing. ...
Phenomenological Approaches to the Image
Image Acts
Gazing Acts
Seeing as a Practice
“Imagination”

The Materiality and Mediality of “Marks” ...
The Image Field
The Continuum of the Ground
Showing
Duration of Figuration

Space Becoming Time and
Time Becoming Space ...

Toba Khedoori, *Untitled (Purple River)* ...



FIG. 4
Toba Khedoori, *Untitled (Purple River)*, 2011–2012
Oil on canvas, 36,6×53,8 in

the uncertainty of the edge and how it meets the real

This phrase by Avis Newman points to a different kind of reference to reality in a drawing than that of the sign.¹ What space in time does the drawing generate, or which time within space? How, or perhaps better said, when, in the sense of a moment and duration, does the space of the drawing meet up with the space of the viewer?

When looking at Toba Khedoori's works, we spoke of "white space with dust." The white ground with its movements and light effects entices viewers to abandon themselves to a space of imagination, a sensation that is then fractured by the workshop character of the patched-together lengths of paper, unexpectedly bringing us back down to earth again. We spoke of perspectival ruptures and a fluctuation between two-dimensional and three-dimensional seeing. The surface holds us more firmly in the here and now, while the space lets our minds wander. [...]

"That is exactly the problem of drawing. In one sense, the paper exists, as a material support, as a closed totality; and *the marks*, or the lines, do not exist by themselves; they have to compose something inside *the paper*. But in another and more crucial sense, the paper as background does not exist, because it is created as such, as an open surface, by the marks. It is that sort of movable reciprocity between existence and inexistence, which constitutes the very essence of drawing."² Alain Badiou thus excellently encapsulates the interplay of marks and ground in drawing. It is only the "marks," the touches, traces, markings, that create the ground of the picture. A line is not set *on top of* a pre-existing background, but that ground is in fact generated by the line. For this reason, the marks in a drawing cannot be read in isolation either; they are only able to unfold their agency when they are integrated *into* that ground, which they themselves have created and which at the same time carries them.

Like movement in dance, in which time and space become one, the at once temporal and space-forming dimension of the line is of vital importance for the effect produced by a drawing. The aspects of the gradual reception process—as the viewer notices, wanders around, imagines, and returns to the format of the surface—take place both successively and simultaneously, and are repeated again and again. The duration of becoming has often been described as the *proprium* of drawing. I see the duration of becoming as lying essentially in a drawing's *reception*. In this sense, I would also like to emphasize Michael Newman's observation: "Drawing, with each stroke, re-enacts desire and loss. Its peculiar mode of being lies between the withdrawal of the trace in the mark and the presence of the idea that it prefigures."³ These ideas, I would like to emphasize, take on contour in the process of perception, which necessarily remains bound to the strokes. [...]

"What does the eye do? It sees and it thinks." This is how I have distinguished the special quality of regarding a drawing. In the words of Avis Newman: "In viewing a drawn line, however formalized, we follow the record of a *trajectory of thought*."⁴ I would like to add: This is a thinking at the moment of touch, with the status of a fragment, along a trace, at the abyss of the edge, in white space with dust, from "mark to mark"—always fleeting.

Here, the energy or the space of the image is pervaded by the mark. Or better said: Here is the locus of "evoking a sign" [ZeichenSetzung]. The drawing "holds the moment before the mark takes on the status of image or becomes an act of inscription."⁵ The "mark" in the drawing is not something that has ever been a given; it exists as a potentiality, or more precisely as a potentiality of perception. It is in the interplay of mark and ground that the eye generates meaning.

Bernice Rose already addressed in her 1976 text the interweaving of the "space of illusionism" and the "space of the world" as an event that takes place in the viewer's own space.⁶ Rose's

- 1 See "Conversation: Avis Newman/Catherine de Zegher," in: *The Stage of Drawing: Gesture and Act, Selected from the Tate Collection*, selected by Avis Newman, curated by Catherine De Zegher, ed. by Catherine De Zegher, exh. cat. Tate Liverpool and The Drawing Center, New York, 2003, 67–82, 165–174, 231–237, here: 167.
- 2 Alain Badiou, "Drawing," in: *Lacanian Ink* 28 (Fall 2006), 44 (see Ch. "Drawing", note 12) [italics added by M.L.-K.].
- 3 Michael Newman, "The Marks, Traces, and Gestures of Drawing," in: Catherine de Zegher and Avis Newman, *The Stage of Drawing*, 93–108, here: 95.
- 4 "Conversation: Avis Newman/Catherine de Zegher," here: 171.
- 5 Avis Newman, *ibid.*, 235.
- 6 "The drawing is seen as a field coextensive with real space, no longer subject to the illusion of an object marked off from the rest of the world. The space of illusionism changes, merges with the space of the world, but by doing so it loses its objective, conventional character and becomes subjective, accessible only to the individual's raw perception." (Bernice Rose, "Drawing Now" [see Ch. "Drawing", note 4]).

- 7 Emma Cocker, "Distancing the If and Then," (see "Introduction", note 11), 106 [italics added by M.L.-K.].
- 8 "Conversation: Avis Newman/ Catherine de Zegher," here: 233.

wording "merely subjective" with the tone of an excuse (the text was written in 1976) has to be reinterpreted and strengthened by "force of the subject." Emma Cocker's words point the way: "Within the drawn hypothesis, internal and external realities are conceived as a continuum, where *the body's skin* no longer keeps the individual distinct from the world but rather is considered a precarious threshold through which they merge, becoming inseparable."⁷ The notion of *the body's skin* as a communication threshold between inner and outer worlds implies that the process of reception is one that reaches deeper than eye and mind. Perception is not only a distanced seeing, and thinking is not only logical reasoning. With regard to this "infinite space of sensation," Avis Newman spoke of "both the sensations of the body and the sensations of the mind."⁸ She focused in her arguments mostly on the processes of drawing; I would like to claim that the "space of sensation" also applies to the process of reception. A reception that remains bound to the surface of the drawing [...].

Our observations and considerations thus far are unmistakably aimed at a phenomenological questioning. What is to be clarified here are the specific situations of perception that apply to pictures (in art). The focus will now be on phenomena that in a semiotic reading of images are often either blocked out or translated into a vocabulary of signs—both of which miss the mark when it comes to the specific quality of the pictorial generation of meaning. In other words: While we have thus far articulated with the phrase "evoking a sign" [ZeichenSetzung] the interconnectedness of image production and image reception in terms of linguistic and other, non-linguistic, semiotic processes, now we must discuss in more detail the specific qualities of "imagery." We will do so by considering drawing.

Toba Khedoori, *Untitled (Rope)* ...

le trait—le retrait 55
le trait/en son retrait
The Time of a Drawing

la brisure/la trace ...
entre la bordure visible et le fantôme central
Image Ground and Sign
la brisure
il n'y a pas de hors-texte
il faut penser la trace avant l'étant
un blanc textuel

l'unique ...
cette différence

the “sans” of the pure cut ...
le livre pur
l'imagination, ce pouvoir de médiation
le clin d'œil de l'instant

FIG. 5
Toba Khedoori, *Untitled (Rope 2)*, 2011
Oil on canvas, 37,1×23,3 in



le trait—le retrait

le trait, en son retrait When it comes to the attempt to think of both aspects at once, the “unassailable ground” and its “invisibility” on the one hand, and the “marking,” the “making a mark” or “marking within the mark” on the other, at the same time and yet with the acknowledgment that they are ineradicably different—in my opinion, Jacques Derrida has succeeded in a unique way at just this in a short passage from a text he wrote in 1978, *La vérité en peinture* (*The Truth in Painting*, 1987), and done so even more precisely than in his 1990 text.¹

Under the heading *Passe-Partout*, Derrida writes: “So the question would no longer be ‘What is a trait?’ or ‘What does a trait become?’ or ‘What pertains to such a trait?’ but ‘How does the trait treat itself? Does it contract in its retreat?’ A trait never appears, never itself, because it marks the difference between the forms or the contents of the appearing. A trait never appears, never itself, never for a first time. It begins by retrac(t)ing [*se retirer*]. I follow here the logical succession of what I long ago called, before getting around to the turn of painting, the *broaching* [*entame*] of the origin: that which opens, with a trace, without initiating anything.”²

What makes this passage particularly interesting in our context is the role of the stroke (*trait*), which is characterized as the broaching (*entame*) of an origin. According to the translator, the French verb *entamer* means both “‘slicing into’ (for example a loaf of bread) and ‘beginning’/‘opening’ (for example a book).”³ It can mean even more in fact, but more on that later.

In applying this text to drawing, it helps to first outline it: “So the question would no longer be ‘What is a trait?’ or ‘What does a trait become?’ or ‘What pertains to such a trait?’ but ‘How does the trait treat itself? Does it contract in its retreat?’” can be read as the process of drawing. The question that Derrida thus poses would be: “How is a stroke (*trait*) drawn and does it contract in its retreat (*retrait*)?”

The second part—“A trait never appears, never itself, because it marks the difference between the forms or the contents of the appearing. A trait never appears, never itself, never for a first time. It begins by retrac(t)ing [*se retirer*].”—could allude to the description of an object through a (contour) line. Once a line describes an apple, a rabbit, a table, etc., it is no longer itself. This notion stems from Derrida’s interest in inside versus outside—the quoted passage comes from a chapter called *Passe-Partout*—whereby I believe that this inside/outside is to be understood in a broader sense than merely describing an object.

The third part—“I follow here the logical succession of what I long ago called, before getting around to the turn of painting, the *broaching* [*entame*] of the origin: that which opens, with a trace, without initiating anything.”—could be applied to the effect of the drawing. What then initiates this *trait* in the eyes or in the imagination of the viewer?

In the French original, the passage reads (in the outline mode undertaken above):

“La question ne serait plus alors: ‘Qu’est-ce qu’un trait?’ ou ‘Que devient un trait?’ ou ‘Qu’est-ce qui a trait à un tel trait?’. Mais: ‘Comment le trait se trait-t-il? Et se contracte-t-il en son retrait?’

Un trait n’apparaît jamais, jamais lui-même, puisqu’il marque la différence entre les formes ou les contenus de l’apparaître. Un trait n’apparaît jamais, jamais lui-même, jamais une première fois. *Il commence par se retirer.*

Je suis ici la conséquence de ce que j’avais appelé il y a longtemps, avant d’en venir au tour de la peinture, l’entame de l’origine: ce qui s’ouvre, d’une trace, sans *initier*.”⁴

Derrida continues: “One space remains to be broached in order to give place to the truth in painting.”⁵ Thus, not only the temporal but also the spatial quality comes into play. In French, this sentence reads: “Un espace reste à entamer pour donner lieu à la vérité en peinture.”⁶

- 1 I first presented these observations at the international Derrida colloquium on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of his death, *The Future Belongs to the Phantoms*, 28 to 30 September 2014, at the University of Art and Design Linz, under the title “le trait – le retrait. Broaching (*Entame*) in/of the Drawing” [transl. J.T.]. On the colloquium, see www.ufg.ac.at/Archivdetail.2267+M5f29b693407.0.html?&tx_ttnews%5Bpointer%5D=9 (accessed 6 August 2015).
- 2 Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987, 11 (*La vérité en peinture*, 1978).
- 3 Derrida, *Die Wahrheit in der Malerei*, Vienna: Passagen-Verlag, 1992, 27, translator’s note on “Passe-Partout,” note 16 [translator’s note translated by J.T. into English from the German translation of Derrida’s text].
- 4 Derrida, *La vérité en peinture*, Paris: Flammarion, 1978, 16 [italics and outline form added by M. L.-K.].
- 5 Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 1987, 11.
- 6 Derrida, *La vérité en peinture*, 1978, 16.

Why does Derrida choose the preposition “in” for the process of generating meaning in the context of painting? We must bear in mind that “in” in English articulates something other than “en” in French. The French “en” functions both as a local preposition, for example *en ville*: in the city, or *en mer*: at sea, as well as a temporal preposition, for example *en août*: in August, or *en trente minutes*: in 30 minutes, or also for a period of 30 minutes; the latter meaning becomes even clearer in the phrase *en semaine*: during the week.

What does “en” then mean in the formulation *en peinture*? Or *en dessin*?

The French “en” can also function as a modal preposition: *être en bonne/mauvaise santé*: “to be in good/poor health,” or *dire quelque chose en français*: “say something in French.” And sometimes it has to be translated with “as”: *portrait de l’artiste en jeune homme*: “portrait of the artist as a young man.”

What does “en” this sense then mean in the formulation *en peinture*? Or *en dessin*?



CUT
KATHARINA HINSBERG

her searching lines in the thin air ...
brought them together

Nulla dies sine linea ...

In a drawing, the “together” is only ...
the together of some vanishing marks.
Together is enough

When you leave the room, what have you seen?
A box full of lines may form the ending.
It's standing around in the studio like an afterthought.

FIG. 6 (PREVIOUS PAGE)

Katharina Hinsberg, Material/packaging
of the project *Binnen*, 2008/2016,
Cut tissue paper

ILLUSTRATIONS

COVER

Toba Khedoori, *Untitled (Walls)*, 2000
Oil and wax on paper, 365 × 861 cm /
143,7 × 339 in (cut back)
Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation, on permanent
loan to the Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel
Photo: Douglas M. Parker Studio
© Toba Khedoori

FIG. 1

Toba Khedoori, *Untitled (Horizon)*, 1999
Oil and wax on paper, 367,7 × 920,4 cm /
144,7 × 362,3 in
Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation, on permanent
loan to the Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel
Photo: Douglas M. Parker Studio
© Toba Khedoori

FIG. 2

Toba Khedoori, *Untitled (Stick)*, 2005
Oil and wax on paper, 360,7 × 203,2 cm /
142 × 80 in
Albertina Wien
Photo: Douglas M. Parker Studio
© Toba Khedoori,
Courtesy Regen Projects, Los Angeles

FIG. 3

Toba Khedoori, *Untitled (Logs)*, 2006
Oil and wax on paper, collage,
358,5 × 467,5 cm / 141,1 × 184 in
Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation, on permanent
loan to the Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel
Photo: Bisig & Bayer, Basel
© Toba Khedoori

FIG. 4

Toba Khedoori, *Untitled (Purple River)*,
2011–2012
Oil and wax on paper, 93 × 136,8 cm /
36,6 × 53,8 in
Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation, gift of
the president 2012, on permanent loan
to the Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel
Photo: Bisig & Bayer, Basel
© Toba Khedoori

FIG. 5

Toba Khedoori, *Untitled (Rope 2)*, 2011
Öl auf Leinwand, 94,3 × 59,4 cm / 37,1 × 23,3 in
© Toba Khedoori,
Courtesy Galerie Zwirner, New York/London
and Regen Projects, Los Angeles

FIG. 6

Katharina Hinsberg, Material/packaging
of the project *Binnen*, 2008/2016
Cut tissue paper
Photo: Atelier Hinsberg
© Katharina Hinsberg, Bildrecht, Vienna 2016

VITA

MONIKA LEISCH-KIESL

art historian and philosopher,
Professor of Art History and Aesthetics
in Linz, Visiting Scholar in Basel.

RESEARCH FOCUSES

image and text, drawing, art theory
and aesthetics, gender studies, art in
inter- and transcultural contexts.

PUBLICATIONS (SELECTION)

Verbergen und Entdecken. Arnulf Rainer
im Diskurs von Moderne und Postmoderne
[“Masking and Unmasking. Arnulf Rainer
and the Discourse of Modernity and
Postmodernity”], (1996)

nexus. Künstlerische Interventionen im
Stadtraum
[“nexus. Artistic Interventions in the
Urban Space”], ed. together with
J. Schwanberg (1999)

Was spricht das Bild? Gegenwartskunst
und Wissenschaft im Dialog
[“How do Images Speak? Contemporary
Art and Sciences in Dialog”], ed. together
with J. Schwanberg (2011)

Ästhetische Kategorien. Perspektiven der
Kunstwissenschaft und der Philosophie,
[“Aesthetic Categories. Perspectives of Art
History and Philosophy”], ed. together with M.
Gottschlich and S. Winder (2017)

“Global Art History”. Transkulturelle Ver-
ortungen von Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft
[“‘Global Art History’. Transcultural Local-
izations of Art and Art History”], ed. together
with J. Allerstorfer (2017)

“Die Zukunft gehört den Phantomen.”
Kunst und Politik nach Derrida
[“‘The Future Belongs to the Phantoms.’
Art and Politics after Derrida”], ed. together
with A. R. Boelderl (2018).

www.leisch-kiesel.com

IMPRINT

This online-publication consists of
Selected Parts of the German Book:

Monika Leisch-Kiesel
ZeichenSetzung | BildWahrnehmung.
Toba Khedoori : Gezeichnete Malerei,
Verlag für Moderne Kunst: Wien 2016

Translation:
Laura Schleussner, Jennifer Taylor

Design and Typesetting:
Sibylle Ryser

© Monika Leisch-Kiesel, 2018