

A Work: Andrea Büttner, Ruth Proctor,  
Joachim Schmid, Anne Tallentire

11 April – 25 May 2019

**HOLLYBUSH GARDENS**

Issue no. 4

1-2 Warner Yard, London EC1R 5EY  
[www.hollybushgardens.co.uk](http://www.hollybushgardens.co.uk)



Andrea Büttner  
*Untitled (potato)*, 2006  
Acrylic on glass  
22 × 30 cm

In German, glass paintings are referred to as *Hinterglasmalerei*, which in English translates to 'reverse glass painting'. This is a method of applying paint to the reverse side of glass, an art form widely used for sacral paintings since the Middle Ages, most famously the art of icons in the Byzantine Empire. Later, reverse painting on glass spread to Italy, where it influenced Renaissance art, and from the middle of the 18th century this medium became favoured by the Church in Central Europe. Throughout the 19th century, reverse painting on glass was widely popular as folk art in Austria, Bavaria, Moravia, Bohemia and Slovakia.

Büttner's interest in the medium was awoken when she learnt that local farmers in Bavaria, where her mother's family is from, used to make reverse glass paintings. At times the farmers would make glass paintings and give them to the church as votive offerings in the hope of being blessed with good harvests. In situations where crops had failed, they would sometimes knock on doors to try to sell the paintings. Glass painting was a medium used by the Bavarian farmers to prevent or escape poverty, a subject of great interest to Büttner. Poverty, and the way citizens respond to it, reveals something about the social and political climate that we live in. Büttner has noted that poverty used to cause rage and uprisings, but that in today's society it is made manifest by individualised shame and humiliation.

*Untitled (potato)* from 2006 is Büttner's first work featuring the potato, which has since become a recurring motif in her practice. In this piece, the image of the single potato, painted on the back of the glass, reveals the artist's interest in the role played by the Bavarian farmer in relation to this medium. The connection between the manual labourer and the spiritual realm that Büttner makes apparent in this work can be understood through Marx's theory that capitalist societies are composed of two parts, the base and superstructure(s). The farmer, a producer of the necessities of life, belongs to the base, and the maker of glass paintings – works of art – is situated within the superstructure. The painter-farmer thus disrupts his position within this partition, an act that can be understood as emancipatory. Büttner suggests that we can also think of the farmer's position as that of the lover. As an amateur painter the farmer engages in a passion that is not structurally 'theirs'. By dedicating time and care outside of their realm of production, the farmer crosses between the base and superstructure, unfaithful and yet committed to both.

The potato grows underground, and in plenty. It is easily accessible and affordable for most people; it is not a luxury product, but something widely available. We feed off it, it keeps us alive. It connects us as humans instead of separating us. We share the knowledge of the potato; we know what it feels like

to hold it, we remember the earthy smell and know the taste. The potato is not a motif one would immediately associate with contemporary art, but it has featured in kitchen still lives by, for instance, Van Gogh and Manet. The littleness of the potato brings to mind Kurt Schwitters' painted stones, which have featured in one of Büttner's woodcuts. Schwitters wanted to destroy all conventional notions of art and put forward that anything could be used to make a work of art. Round and small like Schwitters' stones, Büttner's potato is also an object that belongs to the sphere of the everyday. Littleness also brings us to Büttner's video *Little Works*, from 2007, for which the artist handed a camcorder to a Carmelite nun living in a closed order in Notting Hill. The camera holder shows us her sisters in the process of making art and craft objects, such as crocheted bowls stiffened with sugar water, candles and lavender bags, activities they engage with in their spare time. We see how the sisters arrange and display their 'little works' on a mantelpiece, and gather around as a community to take an interest in what each and every one has been making. What we witness is familiar yet estranged in its enclosed-ness; the making of the works, the arranging of the display and the private ritual of showing the works parallel the art world. The way in which the video was made highlights one of the rules of the order – outsiders are not allowed in; but the video also invites us to turn a critical gaze towards our own community and question the rules and boundaries that we adhere to within the sphere of the art world.

Büttner's own 'little work' is of course her glass painting, which she makes in the private and domestic setting of her kitchen. Dieter Roth, an artist who Büttner has written about, also made works in the kitchen. His *Tischmatten* (table mats) works are made by placing paper or card on domestic surfaces and leaving it there to gather stains, grease and smears from everyday living. These works come into being through accumulation as the stains gather much like dust, with no extra effort required, and yet this melding of art and life achieves an instant aesthetic beauty. Büttner's glass paintings require a more directed effort of making, but she shares with Roth an embrace of the domestic sphere as a place of making, and through reverse glass painting, Büttner has found her own medium for achieving instant beauty.

Malin Ståhl



Etwas kam auf uns zu. Man sah es nicht, man hörte es nicht, man schmeckte es nicht, man roch es nicht. Doch wer die Nachrichten verfolgte, fühlte das Ende der Welt nahen. Ich versuchte in meiner Hilflosigkeit, dem Nicht-Wahrnehmbaren ein Bild abzugewinnen. Ich fotografierte den bezogenen Himmel über Berlin, der voller Bedrohung war. Der Blick nach Osten auf das Unheimliche, das keine Mauer aufzuhalten vermochte. Beim Entwickeln des Films war ich etwas nachlässig. In den Bildern ist deshalb zu sehen, was am Himmel nicht zu sehen war. Ein Fehler machte einen anderen sichtbar.

Joachim Schmid  
*April 1986*, 1986/2016  
Four pigment ink prints  
30 × 40 cm (each)

In April 1986 the Chernobyl nuclear disaster unfolded over Europe, emanating from the city in the Ukraine, then part of the Soviet Union. The spectre of nuclear fallout permeated the air, realising the fear many people held about nuclear power. Bound up in this was also the fear of the unknown and of the Eastern Bloc, and the West's antagonism with them, and a sense that change was afoot as the communist way of doing things seemed increasingly up for change. In February that year, Gorbachov's speech to the Communist Party Congress had expanded upon the need for political and economic restructuring, or *perestroika*, and called for a new era of transparency and openness, or *glasnost*.

In Berlin the wall was a real everyday expression of Eastern Bloc power and repression; most Berliners were affected by the wall in some way. In 1986 the invisible matter coming towards the west of the city made the end of the world feel closer. Under these conditions Joachim Schmid made *April 1986* (1986/2016) in an attempt to capture the invisibility of the matter coming towards West Berlin. It is a futile action, of course, but one that is connected to how 'action' is bound up with a sense of place, and to the tracking and making of time and space as a mechanism to understand and make concrete a reality that is beyond personal control. In this series of photographs you sense the powerlessness felt as the camera points to the sky. The Berlin rooftops are a real geographical marker (and one that comes with another story about gentrification and the fortunes of the city), and what we see are random blobs in the sky, created, we learn, from the lack of agitation in the photo processing lab. Whilst Schmid refers to this lack as an act of sloppiness, it is also a moment of bodily connection to the subject – he has permitted this aleatoric moment that has generated a trace of the 'invisible' to become an artwork. This material trace is in fact air bubbles that have attached themselves to the negative – one chemical act (photographic processing) becoming representative of another (polluted air from the nuclear disaster). It is possible to read this as some kind of encoding or 'projection', the signification becoming about photography rather than the reality of the scene Schmid was attempting to portray. The act can be seen as a material disturbance and a time-lapse. The 'lack' of information transferred to the negative is a void, or a register, if you like, of how much fission product was in the atmosphere, the fallout of which was measurable but the impact uncertain, dependent as much on wind pattern as on relative proximity.

Material disturbance and aleatoric moments are consistent markers in Schmid's oeuvre. *Bilder von de Strasse* (1982–2012), an opus of 1,000 found images on the streets of the world, is an episodic meditation on the collecting of found images that have been

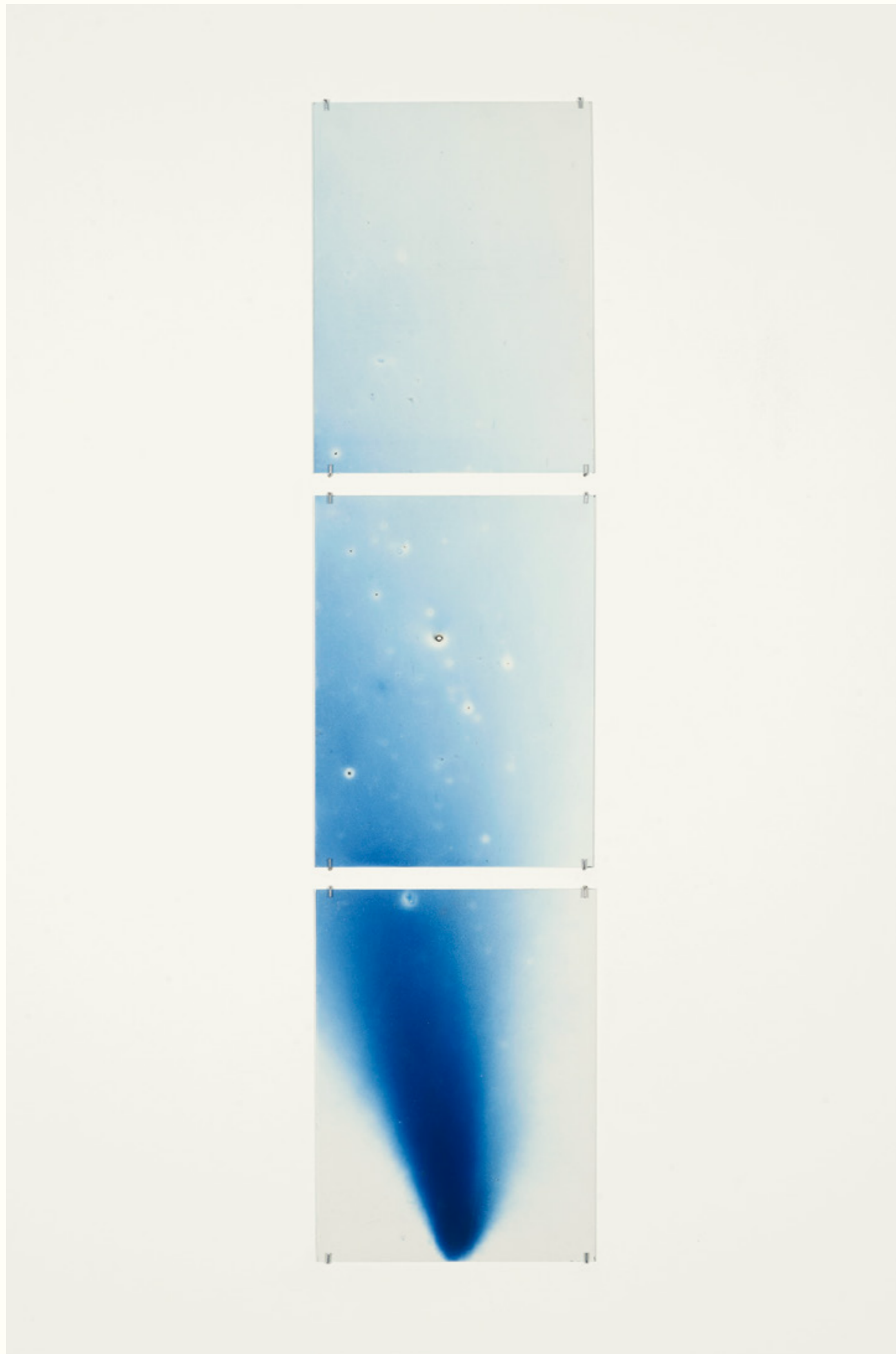
distributed by chance. A walker, stalker of ideas, gatherer and finder, Schmid often responds to the fissures that visual culture has produced. Initially Schmid's practice responded to the materiality of the printed photographic image, and as the modes of production have evolved and become manifold, he has moved into the realms of the reproduced image in works such as *Main Street* (2015) and the image interventions seen in *Statics* (1999). He has been a prolific maker of independent artists' books, but his work is increasingly leaving the printed page to be found on walls. Schmid's process almost always moves in tandem with an awareness of the fragmentation of life and the conditions produced by the technological apparatus of the 'lens'. In this way, his practice has echoes of the Benjaminian project, moving through particular moments of acute analysis to then touch on the vastness of the production of, say, amateur image-making.

The story around the work is often just as important to Schmid, and he talks of the poor quality of the images, doing something with the found or indeed making use of perceived 'mistakes' or 'trash'. Sometimes the structural differences in our environment or in a sequence or genre of image-making that Schmid wishes to reveal are shown through minor alterations or differences in shape, such as in the images of Brazilian football fields found all over the country in *O Campo* (2010).

Schmid's oeuvre has an improvised and performative quality that connects his practice to legacies of conceptual art, and it is here at this intersection where the materiality and the construction of the works can be found to be ever in a mode of producing.

Lisa Panting

← The following is the English translation to the German text in the work: *Something was coming upon us. You couldn't see it, you couldn't hear it, you couldn't taste it, you couldn't smell it. Yet anyone following the news could feel the end of the world moving closer. Feeling helpless, I tried to produce an image of the imperceptible. I photographed the grey sky over Berlin, full of threat. In view to the east, the uncanny, something no wall could stop. But I was a bit careless in developing the film. So in the images you can see what you couldn't see in the sky. One mistake made the other one visible.*



Ruth Proctor  
*Smoke Drawing*, 2015  
 Flare residue caught on archival paper, 3 parts  
 21 × 29.7 cm (each)

*Smoke Drawing* is a piece positioned between here and there, now and then; a surface that not only captures the residue of a flare but also a specific moment, a volatile reaction, the power of a smoke signal, compression and escape, the flow of an action.

In an extension of three A4-size sheets of archival paper displayed in a vertical line one on top of another, Ruth Proctor shows the visible residues of working with a smoke signal, one of the oldest forms of long-distance communication used to disorient attackers or position allies at a marked location. The work also hints at the unsettled meaning of the colour of the smoke signals, as there is no universally standardised meaning attributed to any colour used as a smoke grenade<sup>1</sup>; blue could stand out in a woodland background, while orange may be more visible for search-and-rescue signals at sea.

‘I try to bring lightness of touch to my work, the almost accidental and temporary becoming frozen for a moment in time’, Proctor says. It is possible to document what we see during Proctor’s actions using video or photography. However, turning our attention to temporality and the ephemeral raises the question of how one can reproduce the experience of time passing, of colour fading out into nothingness.

This is the point of departure for *Smoke Drawing*, three instants of the same moment, three stages displaying the blowout, the drawing in space and the disappearance. Proctor positioned the flare on the lower end of three sheets of paper placed on the floor, turning them into a new location for a performance and also a timeline that captures the action. These three sheets have become a resting space for the transient material, fragile and never completely certain. This space is set apart by fractions of a second, which is evoked in the segmentation of the sheets when arranged for viewing.

Proctor has used flares in the past as part of her actions and performances, which are ‘often fragile, momentary push or trigger, as if staging a dare.’<sup>2</sup> For *If the Sky Falls* (2012, 2015 and 2017) and *Smoke Walk Test* (2012), she led crowds – and attracted curious spectators – through routes, with a trail of coloured smoke that could be followed from behind and above, ‘channelling social and political influences as well as formal, spatial and poetic aspects of the material in context of different landscapes’, Proctor says. Whilst walking, the artist was mapping, drawing in space and temporarily marking her location with blue smoke, establishing a connection ‘to the sky, bringing the intangible down to where the body is located, to the ground.’ The works were also, according to Proctor, ‘thinking about the intangible made tangible, a physicality that is at once intense and large scale but also weightless, transient, formless and uncertain.’

In these performances she used elements that allowed her to fiddle with spontaneity and the ephemeral, and to ensure that time and space can flow in an uncontrollable way, thus highlighting the uncertain, an important factor in her practice.

Here, facing *Smoke Drawing*, it is not possible to locate the source that triggers the colour, but it is easy to identify with the eruptive column of blue smoke that there served to direct the crowd. Now, it is recognisable as a colour holding small particles that simulate tiny deserted islands in the middle of a vast ocean, but then, those who followed Proctor holding the smoke flare would not have noticed. Here, you are free to spend more time to appreciate the gradient of blue and perceive the passing of time; there the temporary mark in space evaporated swiftly and the effect in the spectator vanished too.

The smoke walks have also been materialised differently in *Orange Experiments* (2016), a series of large works on paper in which Proctor has pinpointed a moment rather than capturing a movement<sup>3</sup>. These works on paper were made in the garden of Proctor’s parents, where she built a tent-like structure with a large sheet of archival paper as the ceiling. The orange flare perforated the cover, burning a hole in the paper and leaving intense orange residue on it.

Proctor constantly challenges herself, along with exploring new forms of documenting her actions. She repeats and reconstructs ‘ideas and visual elements in new ways, so there is a constant thread of works that refer to themselves and reflect, or duplicate, where the history of a previous work is evident in something new.’<sup>4</sup>

Nella Franco

1. Also known as flare or smoke bomb, the smoke grenade is a canister-type device designed to produce a coloured smoke cloud for 50 to 90 seconds, dependent on the size and model. The flares used by the artist were ‘cold burning’ cartridges with a lower temperature than military and marine distress smokes.

2. Chris Fite-Wassilak, ‘Ruth Proctor: Sympathetic Magic’, *Hollybush Gardens*, issue no. 3, May 2015.

3. *Orange Experiments* relate directly and indirectly to *If the Sky Falls* (2015) performed in Mexico City, action where Proctor wanted to highlight what could be seen as a distress signal and the association with the action. The orange colour became much more about ‘necessity – due to circumstances made it only possible to find orange flares – and situation of the politics of the city, being a female and a foreigner making a protest-like action within an already polluted city’, Proctor recalls.

4. Ruth Proctor in conversation with Hollybush Gardens, November 2009.



Anne Tallentire

*Photositings*, 2007–ongoing

Archival pigment print mounted on aluminium

88 × 8 cm

*walking*

In *Practices of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau held a magnifier to the tactical and resistant aspects of ordinary daily practices. He dedicated an entire chapter to walking, in which he opposed the walker to the voyeur. Walkers are the ‘ordinary practitioners of the city’, he wrote, whose ‘bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban “text” they write without being able to read it’; the voyeur’s urban space is geometrical and panoptic, while the walker’s is ‘anthropological, poetic, and mythic’.<sup>1</sup>

While walking through London, Tallentire began taking photographs of things piled up on the pavement. Some of these photographs, cropped and paired, later formed the basis of the *Photositings* series. These images from everyday urban encounters are part of a tactical peripatetic practice that finds and makes meaning through mobility, transience and chance. They operate, in de Certeau’s words, ‘down below’.

*ordinary*

Much of Tallentire’s work is borne of mundane things encountered on the street. *Photositings* is filled with prosaic and rough-hewn objects, which have been moved out onto the street and placed or thrown down, stacked, balanced, piled, leaned, draped, weighed down, or grouped and bounded. It is a series of ordinary life’s overlooked material manoeuvres.

*flux*

When asked why he made assemblages from ‘junk’, Alan Kaprow replied, ‘It was very liberating to think of oneself as part of an endlessly transforming real world.’<sup>2</sup> Tallentire’s images freeze but also inhabit the perpetual flux of material configurations. They mark brief moments of acknowledgement within a continual flow.

*multiple*

Photographic images rarely operate singularly in Tallentire’s work. Here, each structure is doubled, articulated through two possible views. When exhibited, they come in multiples; pairs are stitched together, one followed by another, side by side, unfolding as a rhythmic progression. Each presentation makes possible a novel constellation, while new encounters on the street continue to expand the collection of pairs. The work is composed as an unbounded inventory, configured to be reconfigured.

Amy Luo

1. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 93.

2. Susan Hapgood, *Neo-Dada: Redefining Art, 1958–1960* (New York: American Federation of the Arts, 1994), 116.