

More Than You Know

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Reader, if I told you, what would you make of the gift from artist to author of a copy of Sigmund Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*? Would it be admission of the artist's analytical sessions? A key to unlock the content of his pictures: a clue to both iconography and autobiography in his works? Or perhaps the answer to Brannon's question, "Why are people their own worst enemies?" If Freud answers this question, from this very book and others, Brannon does not transpose psychoanalysis's solutions to entitle his enterprise. His work still expresses a lack not a solution in its uncertain treading of the line between success and failure, concealment and exposure. Nevertheless, with Freud as a reference, we expect, at the least, that what underlies Brannon's prints is visible to see—and read—as symptoms on the surface of their artifact. For in the artifice of Brannon's prints, it is always a matter of seeing and reading, literally and in that order.

Although a slim mass-market paperback, this particular edition of Freud is singular. As part of Penguin Books *Great Ideas* series, it has been treated specially with an embossed cover on which the author's name and book title have been elegantly overprinted in black and red type. Brannon's gift thus hints at his own letterpress prints in an attempt perhaps not so much to explain his work but to egregiously assert its worth by mimetic rivalry. That is, if in the end he really felt himself worthy of such a comparison.

Passed from hand to hand like a cultural fetish, this book is token of a secret sharing invisible to scrutiny or sight. A gift, however, we have to admit, is no key. Receiving it, what would *I* have to admit here in order to write about Matthew Brannon? Or to be read? Would I have to confess, for instance, that I am writing this drunk?... deceptively?...*self*-deceptively?...or with malice? Whatever the case, I would not have the resources Brannon commands, which are given, in fact, in and by the very medium of his artwork: printmaking. What was receptive to touch in the private transmission between Matthew and me becomes the imprint of a very public presentation in the artist's work.

This is a story of mastery and failure, elegance and embarrassment. Up or down, in or out, no one comes out unscathed.

### *The Tractable Matthew Brannon*

Of course all life is a process of breaking down, but the blows that do the dramatic side of the work—the big sudden blows that come, or seem to come, from outside—the ones you remember and blame things on and, in moments of weakness, tell your friends about, don't show their effect all at once. There is another sort of blow that comes from within—that you don't feel until it's too late to do anything about it, until you realize with finality that in some regard you will never be as good a man again. The first sort of breakage seems to happen quick—the second kind happens almost without your knowing it but is realized suddenly indeed.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Crack-Up*

Everything takes place on the surface, or just *under* it in Brannon's work, just as everything there is public or takes place *in* public. We shall try to find the relation between these two statements—and their two correlates—as together they define Brannon's work.

By public, first of all I mean not only that these prints are exposed in exhibition but also that they assume public forms. That is, they not only mimic genres but also are generic in their very use of word and image following the models of advertisements and posters, acquiring their easy elegance from the history of design. Take some of the earliest exemplars: *Sick Decisions* and *House of Rot* (both 2004). *Sick Decisions* and *House of Rot* reproduce movie posters of the 'B' or horror variety. Yet, Brannon's posters advertise only themselves or advertise only their titles, not any actual movie. Their referential function is short-circuited: there is no other product they send us to. Rather, they identify their own contents, which then must be interpreted according to their titles. Contents are given by a series of phrases that occupy the lower band of the print consistent with the placement of movie poster credits. Names of the production company, director, screenwriter, stars and co-stars, etc., have been oddly replaced by phrases such as, "A Frustrated Power Production—A Desperate Appeal Release—Sick Decisions—STARRING—Good Prison Visit—The Guilt Which Organizes Your Fear—Abuse of Education—Misplaced Trust—Not for Lack of Funds—", etc.

Are these collections of phrases symptomatic of "sick decisions" and "houses of rot" or are they merely the compilations of a smart-ass wordsmith who is keen "to brand or market phrases"? Who yet can say? In a 2006 interview, Brannon said, "I seek a play with words that is both specific in meaning and conversely teetering with inappropriate reception. But most often the poetry takes the form of a list, a roll call, or credit to one's delusional life."<sup>1</sup> Disregarding Brannon's "but," we might wonder whether, teetering, inappropriate reception is not only intimately linked to specific meaning but to the language dynamics of delusion, as well.

At any rate, these prints gather together images, titles, and phrases that play within ready-made genres—the horror picture in particular rather than the movie poster per se—which unite the individual (that is, sick decisions) to what Freud calls the "family romance" (that is, house of rot). (This gothic character is further exaggerated in the similarly structured works mimicking movie posters, *Premature Ejaculation* and *Grotesque Desperate* from 2005.) Not the typical haunted house, but, as we expect, the family home is not far behind—literally. It is obscured by the overlay of decorative motifs: circles of scrollwork as if details of an ornate ironwork gate through which the screened-back images of suburban homes can be glimpsed. Language, too, acts equally to obscure the background image but not through any imprecision of meaning or reference: both decoration and titles alike draw the eye to the surface. It is a case, as Derrida says, of the text "not there to say the saying inasmuch as it withholds from seeing."<sup>2</sup>

Seeing and reading are implicated in one another, but not in any immediately legible way. Other than the interjected titles, illustrations command attention. In the hierarchy of presentation, other text is secondary and usually appears below. Because of the texts' placement and point size, we have to bend over in front of a print to read them. Yet, writing here, I take the easy path or the unconscious route of treating Brannon's texts as the content of his work. Here is the first contradiction of my text. Then again, how does one write about illustration or decoration, which are usually secondary to any presentation? These elements, traditionally *parerga*, which include the works' titles, infiltrate centre stage. Here we have the second and third contradictions, but now of the work. However, we will never be sure where centre stage is in these works, indeed, what is central and what is peripheral, what is on view and what puts to view. (To remind

ourselves of the “insistent atopics of the *parergon*: neither work [*ergon*] nor outside the work (*hors d’oeuvres*), neither inside nor outside, neither above nor below, it disconcerts any opposition but does not remain indeterminate and it *gives rise* to the work. It is no longer merely around the work. That which it puts in place—the instances of the frame, the title, the signature, the legend, etc.—does not stop disturbing the *internal* order of discourse on painting, its works, its commerce, its evaluations, its surplus-values, its speculation, its law, and its hierarchies.”<sup>3</sup>)

The series *Loss of Words*, *Distraction Becomes You*, *Submission*, and *Drunk Baptism* (all 2004) exploit a less obvious form of signage, namely wine bottle labels (which themselves have their own history of typographic discernment). The embossed labels are only part of an overall illustrational schema, along with other accoutrements that drinking signifies (and effects consumption supposedly originate): boa feathers, champagne flutes, overturned wine bottles, broken glasses, and evanescent bubbles that prick the paper support. The language of the titles, for instance, “distraction becomes you” and “submission,” might be seductions and slogans for perfume advertising campaigns more than for liquor consumption, but they are turned, in the contrary logic of the *pharmakon*, towards ill consequences and unpardonable acts. For instance, in *Submission*, “9 glasses later, everything you say will come back to hurt you.” We might think that this language is turned around and against the apparatus of its appearance, that it counters advertising as a critique. But it is just as imagined or imaginary as advertising, and more self-delusional perhaps than corporate sell. Each print houses a little scenario, or back-story, easily overlooked as they are disguised typographically as faux wine labels and then, moreover, reversed in part. The label for *Distraction Becomes You* reads as if an obligatory government warning, “champagne headache/web-like distrust,” and then in reverse type, “unable to feel or care or make decisions.” Similarly, *Drunk Baptism* reads, “vin fin de table de God/the fear which organizes your guilt,” followed in reverse type by “everything I want, you have.” In the ambiguity of address here, we have to yet wonder who so authoritatively is speaking and to whom?

The deviation of the text is not disingenuous. Reversal obscures only what is in plain sight. It admits what is difficult to say personally or publicly. This device is a guarded moment of truth telling. Irony serves the same veiled purpose. So does the decorum of decoration. Adolph Loos said ornament is a crime, but the perfect crime would be décor. Purloined letters would be invisible there. What could an acute observer of society hide within the invisible visibility of decoration that would reflect a culture unaware back to itself?

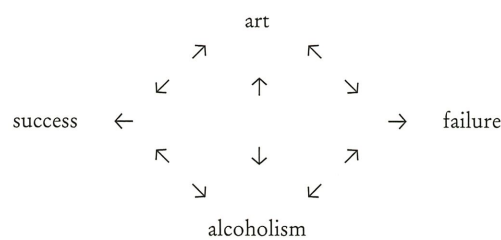
In the last few years there has been a widespread return in print advertising from photography to illustration, which has particularly played on the retro styles and fashions of the 1950s. Brannon’s prints evoke illustrative styles of the past as if they were, for instance, decorations to cookbooks or cocktail manuals but now enlarged and having inverted their secondary relationship to the main text. This domestic turn and suburban return has an uncomfortable edge in Brannon’s hands: kitchen knives, severed goosenecks and cocks’ heads, interspersed with scatterings of pinecones and needles in themselves are innocent enough without need to refer to a possible castration complex. (Freud, of course, was popularized in America in the 1950s.) But as in Douglas Sirk’s 1950s Hollywood melodramas, domestic artifacts and décor are symbols of societal constraints and vain achievements (such as his famous framed mirrors and

trophies). Another of Brannon's print series from 2004, thus, says it all in one of its title: *Country Club Upset*. Indeed, the reverse text in these prints précis mini-melodramas of derailed individuals as if *TV Guide* entries: *Disappointed Critic*: "diet pill paranoia & plastic trophies"; *End of the Family Line*: "delusional self-importance builds"; *Limp Consideration*: "career train wreck alcoholic workaholic seeks same."

"The million-dollar question I appreciate," Brannon has said, is "Why are people their own worst enemies?" Then as if offering a compendium of the content of his work, he goes on to list "topics which satellite around this question involve careerism, sexual misadventure, substance abuse, alcoholism, poor finances, poor parenting."<sup>4</sup> His images, though, betray none of these issues. How could a design of coral and tropical fish illustrate career failure or personal pathologies as suggested by the titles *Fatal Career Misset* or *Belligerent Euphoria* (2005)? Their respective texts explain nothing of the conditions or consequences, nor do their lists of phrases themselves resolve into any coherent narrative any more than Brannon's compendium quoted at the start of this paragraph. At a stretch, they might indicate a cluster of symptoms, but usually the lists collect different orders or registers of language use.

While we might see Brannon as a successor to earlier work on the social constructs of masculinity (Richard Prince) or the confusion of corporate and sociopathic behaviour in American culture (Cady Noland), he belongs to a longer line from which his work receives its drunk baptism. At least, the work, not the artist's life, takes its themes from this tradition, which stems from the "literary drunkenness" of Edgar Allan Poe, to use Baudelaire's phrase about this unhappy, failed American artist. Poe's career is emblematic of the constraints of a commercial culture on its arts and the compromises artists need make, extending even to genres they work in—or invent. On the East Coast, the relationships of writers and artists to Madison Avenue and on the West Coast to Hollywood, especially since the 1950s, have spawned their own genre in books and movies. (A subcategory includes the relation of artists to the domestic in the melodramas of suburban commuter culture.)

We could very crudely characterize these relationships for artists by the following diagram:



In this schema, the extremes of success and failure and those of art and alcoholism are not necessarily correlated (art and success or alcoholism and failure). In fact, we are not charting structural oppositions or terminal positions but a perceptual process that is not necessary overtly visible. This process is not apparent in the image but occurs in a narrative or happens during a monologue a character tells him- or herself in an excoriating moment of self-realization and confession. Thus, the two prints both titled *The last thing you remember was staring at the little white tiles* (2006), with

their respective his and hers matched set of trophies (or are they king or queen chess-pieces?), now read differently as scenarios rather than just lists of phrases. Something similarly happens in both cases to reveal the individuals to themselves and to us. Here is the “his” version:

—WALL TO WALL MIRRORS IN A PRIVATE BATHROOM AT A PARTY YOU NEED TO LEAVE—  
PALM TREES BRUSH THE WINDOWS—OUTSIDE THE SOUND OF INSECTS—THE CREDIT  
CARD DOESN’T HAVE YOUR NAME ON IT—SLIDE THE MIRROR RIGHT—SCAN THE  
PRESCRIPTIONS—SLIDE THE MIRROR LEFT—NOTE THE MOUTHWASH AND BAND AIDS—  
AN ASHED CIGARETTE INSIDE A FORTY FIVE DOLLAR SCENTED CANDLE—BLACK SOAP IN  
THE SHAPE OF A DOG—PERFUME & POWDER BOTTLES—LOOK AT YOUR GRAY FACE—  
RUN YOUR HANDS UNDER COLD WATER—RUN YOUR TONGUE OVER YOUR TEETH—  
TASTE BLOOD—BREATH IN AND FLINCH—YOUR COCK NOW HALF ITS SIZE—SWALLOW  
BITTER PHLEGM—FIGHT THE PANIC—FIGHT THE NAUSEA—THIS ISN’T PART OF YOUR  
JOB DESCRIPTION—THIS ISN’T THE WAY IT ENDS—THIS IS THE AWFUL LAST OF IT—HOLD  
THE SINK ON THE WAY TO THE FLOOR—LAY YOUR HEAD IN THE PISS SOAKED RUG—  
TRY TO FOCUS—WAVES OF HEAT & PRESSURE—SOMEONE IS KNOCKING—EVERYONE IS  
LAUGHING—WISH THAT CANDLE WAS OUT—

“*Whatever could have happened for things to have come to this?*” Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari ask in relation to F. Scott Fitzgerald’s essay *The Crack-Up*. They continue, “It is better to think of it as an affair of perception: you enter a room and perceive something as already there, as just having happened, even though it has not yet been done. Or you know that what is in the process of happening is happening for the last time, it’s already over with. You hear an ‘I love you’ you know is the last one. Perceptual semiotics. God, whatever could have happened, even though everything is and remains imperceptible, and in order for everything to be and remain imperceptible forever?”<sup>5</sup>

Something has happened, but this “something happened,” for us, is inflected by the telling. Phrases accumulate as if they are edits of film shots not just the consciousness of the character. Descriptions become imperatives of seeing: “slide the mirror right—scan the prescriptions—note the mouthwash and band aids.” In this crossover of film and writing, writing shades the situation with a tinge of noir. The genre precipitates the “action” or the fall, which is the imperceptible change. On the model of film noir, we could call Brannon’s works *décor noir*—perceptual semiotics obscured by decorative motifs.

Given this stylization of the text by genre, we realize that we are not dealing with individuals but character types. These types are defined by genre. No individual is confessing here—certainly not the artist/author, even if we are tempted to attribute “wanted to talk about abusive lifestyles—wanted to address how it all goes wrong” from *Raw Bar* to him. The expressions are already cultural and commonplace. (Even though Brannon invents them, they have the ring of the ready-made with their immediately recognizable connotations.)

Noir heroes are already on a downward slide, even before a precipitous new turn of events. Often living on the borderline between inside and outside society and operating, like artists, between the high life and riff raff, they are well poised to observe

the corruptions and illusions of society, once they have seen past their own lack of innocence. The noir crisis of consciousness, sometimes precipitated by a temporal disjunction (waking up beside a dead man not knowing how you got there), is the closest we have in our culture to the past function of the *memento mori*. In the past, these paintings, which allegorized death and sin in luxurious images such as table settings of overflowing flowers, fruit, fish, and fowl or simple juxtapositions of a skull and candle, reminded us of our mortality: remember you will die. With their ordinary domestic images disguising some other content, Brannon's prints address our guilty consciousness or guilty identifications through a subtext that is only revealed secondarily and as a crisis to the self. Thus, *Slut Best Friend* with its shrimp cocktail, *More Autopsy Than Diagnosis* with its lobster and tableware, and *Don't Call, Don't Even Write* with its side table décor of lamp, horse figurine, and clump of coral (all 2006). Thus, the turn within the text in *Slut Best Friend* from "—go to restaurants few can afford—collect art—breed miniature dogs—buy clothes few could wear—attempt hardcore—" to "—beg for another chance—once exotic now tedious—always the alcoholic—even in sobriety—even on days off—especially tonight—"; or, the turn within consciousness of *Bad Manners* (2008): "Halfway across the intersection you catch yourself mid-thought. The unfinished plate. The second house. A too tight watch. A tap on the shoulder. He wouldn't dare. He hasn't the nerve. This is my sand castle."

In such genre paintings, we do not look into their images as if through a window but see ourselves reflected back in the objects they depict. They are otherwise known as *vanitas* or vanity paintings and find their model, of course, in mirrors. It's not surprising then to see Brannon's prints reproducing this relationship as if our image is only temporarily absent in the open door of a vanity cabinet, the contents of toiletries and pills exposed: as in *Pulling Out*, the appropriately titled *Not So Young*, or *The Men in Your Life* with its skeletal hand menacing its toilette scene (all 2007).

Through this unavoidable daily image practice, a society binds an individual to it not so much only by its products as through its significations. Advertising takes up this *vanitas* mirror model, reflecting our desires back to us—and not without necessarily suppressing the guilt factor. Indeed, advertising often plays up excess without guilt, or excess beyond guilt. (See *Steak Dinner*, 2007: "—This year tell her you love her all over again—with a grab bag of diamonds—with mouthfuls of caviar—with your rent in clothes—a credit card of hotel rooms—stockings—champagne—plane tickets—and a soft slap on her bare ass—") Don't expect Brannon to perform a salutary critique countering advertising through its own language. Advertising supplies the language model for all occasions. *Pigs, Like Us* repeats the formula of *Steak Dinner*: "—they had to pump her stomach—amazing what they found—among the arugula, watercress, blue-fin tuna, age-dried steak—there it is—your heart—and look ... a bunch of razor blades—little light bulbs—cocaine—little travel bottles—anti-depressants—your old untouched job application—"

Language holds this list together containing this odd assortment in some sort of equivalency of ingestion. It's an equivalency commodities otherwise share, that is, when they are displayed in shop windows. These prints not only mirror mirrors but their equivalent: shop windows. And in mirroring shop windows, they mirror our culture. Here we find all we desire and more...more than you know—even humiliation and abjection. Culture holds all these together, civilization and its discontents, not as

an accumulation only of products but of symptoms, as well. A recent print depicts a hanging shark, its exposed stomach a collection of bottles, bones, and skeletal hands. Would it surprise you to know that its title is *The Profits and Losses of Biting the Hand that Feeds* and that it premiered at a prestigious art fair?

*The Intractable Matthew Brannon*

The inward directed craving for destruction mostly eludes our perception, of course, unless it is tinged with eroticism.

—Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*

Calculating the profits and losses of biting the hand that feeds you is risky business. It can end in success or failure. At the same time, it makes a game of success and failure. You can't see this tightrope Brannon walks because of how *you* participate in the game. The way you participate is how you automatically attribute success or failure or have it attributed to you. Walking the tightrope, Brannon teeters now inside, now outside the system, anticipating the risks of biting the hand that feeds him.<sup>6</sup> We are mistaken to think that, at any time, he stands altogether *outside* the system making a critique of it: he is a *full* participant. So much there depends on chance. He's calculated the odds in how things stand right now. You can't offend collectors with work today. They'll clamour and compete for it even if it insults them to their face. Brannon has staked his success on this. Can you trust the man? Or what he says? At the least, you would have to interpret everything he says as if he was a patient on a psychoanalyst's couch and then qualify his aggression.

Yet, Brannon only reveals the system by exposing himself. He masters the system to do so. This is the reason for the panoplied effects of his work: the care—or control—he asserts in framing devices from invitations and posters to hanging systems and exhibition design. I've implied that parergonal effects also enter *into* the works themselves but now to other effect than mastery. Everyone knows that printmaking is a debased medium in the hierarchy of art making. Brannon makes it otherwise so elegant. For such mastery in a debased medium, he would have to unmaster and debase himself. At least, it appears that the work's process is (a) debasing.

Over the couch or on it, Brannon would have it both ways. That is, he would always only repeat what was already in his own work. Above and below. Over and under the surface. In "public" and in "private." And between the two.

Symptoms are telling, that is, if we can separate public and private and not see what is advertised in public (not just as advertising but *as* public, the *res publica*) as symptoms that otherwise condemn the individual. Symptoms are secreted in the individual. Nevertheless, this is a public affair. Matthew Brannon makes it so. He only repeats in public what is already given there.

*Over* the couch, obviously, as decoration, and *on* it in analysis. The print splits itself in two. It is subject to this system of division and, in necessarily splitting itself, it casts part of itself below. In so doing, however, it also represses this division.

On the one hand, with the decorative print over the couch, Brannon takes advantage of the situation by using *décor* to expose the system, but only formally, that is



to say, by the work's elegant mask. The artwork expands out to the system's support: from the frame, to the context, to the institution, to the market. Yet only by exposing himself *below* do these parergonal effects return *in* the work to characterize the system as a whole.<sup>7</sup>

But on the other hand, in the ways of the couch—that is, on it, so to speak, as the subject in analysis—this exposure is guarded and devious, although it (he) tells its (his) truth through some deviancy. Deviancy merely means displacement, not deception, perhaps only a displacement of where to look or expect to look. The image, as always, is both central and distracting. But lower down, secondarily and in its secondary place, text debases itself, meanwhile debasing the individual. Whatever is said there, however low, would still be in your face.

A print is pliable; it takes an impression. Paper is tractable to an impression offering just so much resistance in its reception of an imprint. Not just receptive, print-making is an articulated medium. Articulation disappears in the process, though, in the mirror of a print's making—from a plate, platen, or stone—leaving only an image. Although at first, in Brannon's case, only an imprint takes. At first take. Then the singular impression is repeated in colour to reveal the image. The impression does not disappear altogether from sight as if repressed from consciousness, as in the mystic writing-pad. The effects of the operation slide under *and* down, as if there were two subjectiles of one work supporting and relating image and text.<sup>8</sup> What falls beneath or what is only thrown down below or beneath would rise in the work capturing our attention like a slap on the face—or worse.

I can't help but think of another very different artist who said shit to the world, Antonin Artaud who wrote: "*you will realize/from my maladroït drawings/but so crafty,/and so adroit,/that say SHIT to this world.*" Derrida glosses this statement with a discussion of Artaud's drawings thus:

*To throw* something right in someone's face, like an insult frank and straight and direct, addressed to this world with no detour, to spit at that face the figure of *excrement*, in a word, shit, that sums it all up: gestures, grammar, arithmetic, and the Kabbala that shits *at* the other and *on* the other. The crafty person, who comes to correct some wrong, is a sort of copula between the right of the *adroit* and the right of the awkward. The drawings are awkward because they are crafty, skillful, sly, adroit, indirect stratagems for plaguing this world with its norms and values, its expectations, its Art, its police, its psychiatry: in a word, its *rights*. Artaud is speaking to these sick rights to force them to say shit and saying it to those rights. *To* these rights, and *at* them, casting out the very word like excrement as well as excrement as a word. There would be a lot to say about the notions of address and law and rights, precisely, and the directions of the *throw* or the spurt [*le jet*], of the rejection [*le rejet*], the dejection, and the excrement. You can cast or spurt in all directions, whether with a projectile weapon or to send some gift, even some help. But sometimes it's enough to say "cast" or "throw" [*jeter*] in order to suggest the connotation of the cast or thrown away [*le déchet*] as it is rejected or abandoned. Usually, I throw on the floor anything that seems to me without value, or shoddy. But excrement, a perfectly shaped model of what is thus rejected downward, can also be of value as a weapon or as a present. And it can be thrown *upon* as well as *at*. *At* the other or *upon* the other. What receives excrement like that, for example right in the face [*la figure*] of its name, could be the surface of an underlying body, a subjectile in general,

but we should also note that the subjectile was constituted in this world and in the traditional history of its Art as an excrement itself: what doesn't belong to the body of the *work* is found beneath it, an epigraph, a matter exterior and parergonal sometimes dropped.<sup>9</sup>

“Adroit” and “maladroit” are only other signifiers for terms by which we have considered Brannon's works. The truth Brannon tells of America would not be Artaud's in France, but the two artists resort to similar means with different vehemence to let their work have its effect.

The tractable Matthew Brannon would be the man of mastery, yet conforming to the system with all the signs merely of rebellion. He would offer what was for sale. The intractable Matthew Brannon would be otherwise. Maybe a bit too familiar to us. Where would we draw the intractable division between mastery and conformity, between, as *A Lot like Trash* has it, “a conservative version of radical—a radical version of conservative”? Where would *you* like it, reader: Right in the face?

NOTES

1. Rosa Vanina Pavone, "Innocent Accidental Unintentional Indulgent. Never. An Interview with Matthew Brannon," *Uovo* (April 2006), 150.
2. Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 121.
3. Jacques Derrida, "Passe-Partout," *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 9.
4. Pavone, 152.
5. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 194.
6. "Brannon straddles the same line between grandeur and misery, and does so just as knowingly—interested as he is in restaging those social intricacies composing the 'court' of our contemporary art world. The thirty-four-year-old artist's recent exhibition at the David Kordansky Gallery in Los Angeles opened with *Health Insurance*, 2005, a framed real-estate advertisement from the '70s featuring a melancholic 'swinger' leaning against the mantle inside his well-appointed digs, obligatory martini in hand. THE GOOD LIFE, reads the text: SUCCESS IN HIS OAKHURST TERRACE PENTHOUSE...AN INVESTMENT IN BEAUTY AND SECURITY.... This sinister appropriation, with ad lingo intact, would seem to swerve Richard Prince's paradigmatic late-'70s images of living rooms and men in suits into an even more blatant critique of the corporate fetish, one that finally is stripped of its flimsy allegorical armature when it is disclosed that Oakhurst Terrace is rumored to belong to one of Kordansky's most important collectors. With the incredible cost of the properties noted at the bottom of the image, the promise of both 'beauty and security' only corroborates the crasser aspects of the current speculative market on younger artists. Brannon's cynical take on the state of today's art world is underlined by his decision to cap the image with a headstone. If there's a joke here, it's on every one of us, artist included." Jan Tumlir, "Openings: Jan Tumlir on Matthew Brannon," *Artforum* (February 2006), 196.
7. "What constitutes them as *parerga* is not simply their exteriority as a surplus, it is the internal structural link which rivets them to the lack in the interior of the *ergon*. And this lack would be constitutive of the very unity of the *ergon*. Without this lack, the *ergon* would have no need of a *parergon*." Derrida, "Parergon," *The Truth in Painting*, 59–60.
8. "Following the injunction, we will no longer be able to separate the drawing from the writing: the writing in it and writing outside of it, apparently dealing with it... We would like to *take account*, in sum, of two works and two subjectiles, two papers, one coming after the other and dealing with it, the one *on* which there would be held a discourse *about* the other, a 'commentary' dealing with the other. But this is not to be. The texts are different but inseparable, neither of the two is subjected or subordinated to the other, as its second. There are two subjectiles for one work, and in truth, two unique examples of the same event, absolutely different but indissociable. Is this even possible? But if it were not impossible, what would be the interest?" Jacques Derrida, "To Unsense the Subjectile," *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud*, trans. Mary Ann Caws (Cambridge, Mass. And London, England: The MIT Press, 1998), 124.
9. Derrida, "To Unsense the Subjectile," 117–18.