Line Let Loose

Scribbling, Doodling and Automatic Drawing

David Maclagan

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SCRIBBLING, DOODLING AND AUTOMATIC DRAWING

David Maclagan

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For Jos ten Berge, a tireless explorer of this wilderness

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Introduction

As young children, most of us were often involved in marking, scribbling and what we would later learn to call 'drawing'. We struggled with lines and were sometimes carried away by them: they seemed part of us and yet strangely independent. We did this for ourselves, out of curiosity and the desire to quite literally make our mark on the world. Only later did we learn that there was an audience for our innocent experiments. From the outside it might have seemed that ignorance and lack of coordination set limits to what we could achieve; but the lines between habit and invention, accident and design, did not yet exist for us. We were exploring a territory beyond language and the intentions we would later learn to voice in it: adults, caught in its web, envied our apparent freedom and saw all kinds of creative attributes in our careless marking. In the course of growing up, most people gradually lose touch with this creativity, which at first seemed so natural and spontaneous but subsequently has to be coaxed out of its hiding places. Trained artists often have to un-learn their carefully acquired skills in order to do this, but there are ways in which even those of us who are not artists can catch a glimpse of this innocent originality, and scribbling or doodling is foremost among them.

Although there is a relatively brief history of children's art, the notions of scribbling and certainly that of doodling seem to be modern ones: perhaps they are the obverse of the competence in verbal and visual communication that most of us acquire in order to get by in the world. There seems to be something backward or regressive about them: they ignore or subvert these modes of communication, either by outright denial, as in scribbling something out, or through the self-indulgent escapism of doodling – hence the terms are often used in a dismissive or pejorative sense. But regression can also lead us back to the most elementary kinds of mark, to the very roots of drawing, and these are not just

of evolutionary interest but are something modern artists have returned to in order to recover a spontaneity and energy that more sophisticated modes have lost.

In September 2011 Jessica Cooney, a researcher at the University of Cambridge, revealed that a number of the 'flutings' in the Palaeolithic site at Rouffignac had been made by children between the ages of three and seven. Flutings are meandering marks made on the clay of cave walls, using between two and four fingers; previous research by Leslie Van Gelder and Kevin Sharpe, on the basis of comparison with modern digits, had even been able to identify a core group of individuals responsible for them. These flutings, dating from at least 13,000 years ago, occur alongside other, more symbolic, adult drawings, and at the very least they suggest that in some of the earliest human art there is already an area in between the informal, the playful and the more serious (some of the flutings appear to be rudimentary symbols or signs, called 'tectiforms'; illus. 1).

In several ways these cave 'finger-paintings' by children can be seen as ancestors of today's child art (illus. 2). Because of their composition and the coexistence in them of meanders and tectiforms they differ from chimpanzee drawings, which are in many other ways a comparable phenomenon. Though we can only guess at the motives behind them, they seem to be on the cusp between random, finger-traced 'macaroni' marks and more deliberate markings, and in this they are perhaps also distant cousins of what we now call scribbling or doodling. The former are apparently aimless marks while the latter are marginal excursions from some other task in hand, but both have a similarly immediate and playful character. There are risks in extrapolating these modern concepts backwards in time, or sideways on to other cultures; yet our persistent interest in them is surely a curiosity about the origins or development of 'drawing', and these origins are not just historical.

Beginnings are not just a more or less hypothetical starting point: in a sophisticated culture like our own, they are also the vanishing point for images of a lost innocence, all the more if this 'innocence' is something of a fantasy. The history of modernism was often coloured by a nostalgia for

1 Rouffignac cave wall showing meanders and 'macaroni' marks made by the fingers of Palaeolithic adults and children.

something cruder and more energetic, closer to what is 'original' in several senses of the word. This is as close as we can get to the roots of drawing, and by the same token it also displays spontaneous invention and unselfconscious novelty. Often the two are conflated: we are fascinated by child art, 'primitive' art, or work (such as that of the insane or of people with disabilities) that seems, through breakdown or short circuit, to have recovered this vital and creative immediacy. Such work is, by definition, beyond the conventional pale, and when first discovered it seems to have a force lacking in more sophisticated art – hence it is adopted (kidnapped, even) by artists looking for ways out of what feels like the dead end of tradition. Yet this capture in itself, like the discovery of a previously unknown tribe, means that it will sooner or later be assimilated into the wider culture from which it once seemed to stand apart.

'Scribble' refers to a wide range of rudimentary marks, usually with a degree of 'attack' to them, whose intentionality is uncertain, or at least non-artistic. Hence scribbling is on the threshold of what we might decide to call 'drawing'. The marks made by chimpanzees in experimental investigations

into 'primate art' or by very young children are called scribbles because their status is uncertain. Are they just random, or is there an element of play or experiment to them, or are they the beginning of some kind of pictorial expression (and how can we tell the difference between any of these from the marks alone)? In common usage there is usually a somewhat derogatory undertone to 'scribble', as if our default response is that it is meaningless. However, one of the characteristic features of modernism is that the domain of meaning is constantly being redefined, and in this context the scribble has undergone a more radical re-evaluation than either the doodle or the automatic drawing.

In the early twentieth century the term 'scribble' was a somewhat indiscriminate category that included the most elementary scrawls as well as more complex non-representational drawings that did not fit into established pigeonholes. In its most rudimentary forms, it was often treated as one of the basic building blocks of drawing and played a key role in theories about childhood development. Yet by the same token it soon became a sort of model (or anti-model) for the most spontaneous and impulsive form of mark, particularly under the influence of Dadaism. Resorting to scribbling also became a kind of device, just like the use of chance, used by artists to bypass conscious decision-making. However, the scribble's status was soon changed by the very modernist innovations it had partly inspired: gestural, non-representational marks now seemed to carry a charge all the more potent because they had been made spontaneously. These cousins of the scribble were soon seen as the hallmarks of unconscious form creation, and were a prominent feature of Abstract Expressionism, for example.

Once these informal marks had become part of the lingua franca of improvised drawing, however, they turned into recognizable signs of a spontaneous creativity that was seen as more authentic than what resulted from training or expertise. Scribbling could be engaged in as a contrast to more professional ways of drawing, and something that had once been made in a casual and unthinking way could now be made deliberately, which is something of a paradox. In addition, whenever it could be found in its purest

forms, for example in chimp art, in child art or even in the work of people with severe learning difficulties, it could be appropriated into the more sophisticated context of 'art'. In recent years the scribble has been turned into something like a recipe or model, and some artists have gone so far as to commission 'scribbles' from other people, which they then incorporate into their own work.

The doodle, on the other hand, is something that can only be made by an adult. While the term 'doodle' emerged in the mid-1920s, the type of marginal drawing it referred to has a much longer history, associated with manuscripts, whether the official ones of medieval scribes or the handwritten texts of more recent writers. Such forms of what could be called pictorial truancy might have served a variety of purposes that we can only guess at: for example, relief from a laborious task, a kind of creative idling or some kind of comment on the manuscript text. Obviously the relation between a handwritten text and

2 Child's scribble, by a boy aged 5.

its accompanying doodles is somewhat different from that between a printed one (the agenda for a meeting, for example) and the doodles that surround or invade it. Even more than manuscript, print is a visible token of the authority against which doodles often rebel – its mechanical uniformity is something that invites a more 'hands-on' interference.

Scribbling and doodling are, in their different ways, 'unconscious', in that they are made in a distracted state or for some purpose other than an artistic one. In fact, this unconsciousness takes several forms: a kinaesthetic or muscular idiom that is largely divorced from conscious awareness; forms of possession by some agency outside conscious control, demonstrated most dramatically in spiritualist automatism; and the various modes of psychoanalytic unconscious. No doubt it was because doodling began to emerge as a phenomenon in the modern era, when psychoanalytic ideas about the unconscious were circulating outside the consulting room, that such marginal drawings came to be looked at from a psychological angle. As the craze for collecting them grew in the 1920s, a spate of popular articles and books claimed that they conveyed unconscious aspects of the personality, and doodles were volunteered by celebrities for interpretation along such lines, which was usually pitched in rather flattering terms. Nevertheless, doodling never shook off its association with escapism: most students, for example, are embarrassed at being discovered doodling, as if this casts doubt on their attention. As the notion gained public acceptance, the phrase 'it's just a doodle' also became a protective screen for all sorts of drawings that might not pass muster as 'art'.

This was particularly the case with a good deal of what came to be called Outsider art; here such drawings are usually marginal in a socio-cultural sense rather than being situated literally in the margins. They often have many of the characteristics of doodles: they are created in an absent-minded state and shift between different graphic idioms – physiognomic, ornamental and architectural, for example. But many of them are created outside the normal time and space constraints that govern doodles, and therefore I have called them 'meta-doodles'. Beyond a certain point there is no firm distinction between these extra-curricular drawings and similar drawings that could be

called 'art'. As with the scribble, once the idea has gained currency, it becomes fair game for more professional artists to exploit, and this is also part of the edgy traffic between Outsider art and the mainstream art world.

If scribbling and doodling have been subject to cultural assimilation and digestion, the question arises whether their original innocence has not largely evaporated, and a degree of self-consciousness crept in. On the other hand, the term 'doodle' now has a greatly enlarged constituency: drawings of all kinds are flagged up as such, particularly on a variety of Internet sites. In addition, with the advent of digital techniques for recreating almost any kind of mark, as with programs such as the Quantel Paintbox, the original circumstances under which the marks were created have been altered so much that in this new form they amount to a mutation. There are even computer programs, such as zefrank.com's The Scribbler, that will turn a digital scribble into a progressively more complex drawing that can be halted at any stage. So the original conditions that once defined scribbles and doodles, and separated them from other more official kinds of drawing, have virtually (so to speak) collapsed.

Automatic drawing, however, seems at first sight to be the exception. Historically, its most dramatic form was to be found in spiritualist seances: in a trance state in front of witnesses, mediums produced writing and other 'automatic' phenomena, including drawings. There is thus a performance aspect to many automatic productions, in a way that does not apply to scribbling or doodling. Even at the time, there was controversy about the extent to which these manifestations were genuinely unconscious, and many instances of fraud or subterfuge were unmasked. However, as we shall see, the distinction between authentic practice and trickery is not always clearly marked, and this is also a feature of the artistic adoption of such techniques.

In some cases, individuals introduced to spiritualism carried on producing writing and drawings, or a combination of them, in isolation or in secret. They still spoke of being guided or dictated to by spirits, and some writers have seen this, like the term 'doodle', as a sort of alibi for something that the artists themselves did not want to call 'art'. However, even when it is

carried out in solitude there is still a performance aspect to automatic drawing, and perhaps the same could be said of many improvised or 'unconscious' drawings. This dramatic character was carried over when the Surrealists adopted these techniques, purged of any metaphysical associations, in the early 1920s. They carried out group seances and collective creation, and there were also spectacular individual instances of automatism. Early Surrealist imagery, however, pivoted on the conjunction of recognisably far-fetched ingredients, and therefore tended to be figurative, and this required a certain amount of deliberation to produce: hence the performance of automatic fluency showed itself more readily in verbal than in pictorial form.

When Abstract Expressionist artists took automatism in a new, non-figurative direction in the 1940s, this performance aspect became even more conspicuous, as exemplified in Hans Namuth's famous film of Jackson Pollock painting on glass, or in the term 'action painting' itself. Here the idea that unconscious form creation was the direct result of abandoning conscious control was hugely influential. This connection depends on what I shall call a 'mythology' of unconscious form creation: the idea that spontaneous or improvised artistic production is a short cut to the deeper levels of the unconscious. Automatism, whether in drawing or in painting, seemed to provide this. But, as we shall see, this assumption glosses over the fact that there is a considerable range of such drawing, some of which is well practised and some of which is simply habitual or stereotypical.

Nevertheless, the performative aspects of automatic drawing seem unassailable, providing we have some external corroboration of them. But what happens when we have to depend upon the artist's account alone, and even more when there is just the look or feel of automatism to an image without any circumstantial evidence to back it up? What are the factors that might then qualify a drawing as being 'automatic'? Besides the claim to have been drawing in a dissociated state or under some compulsion, there is also a style of drawing that is more or less fluid or gestural, and that seems to bear the evidence of spontaneity. But many such drawings are called 'automatic' not so much because they have actually been created spontaneously,

or with a variable degree of 'floating attention', but because they are laying claim to being authentic examples of unconscious form creation, or else because their improvised and fluent appearance is simply assumed to have been the result of some kind of automatism.

At this point we may have to face the fact that we are dealing as much with our *image* of automatism as with its actual reality. This does not diminish its interest or its importance – it simply makes it a more elastic phenomenon that stretches from discussion of individual instances (is this or is this not a genuinely automatic drawing?) to the re-examination of more deep-seated cultural assumptions about the inherent value of unpremeditated creativity or unconscious form creation. One of the things this book tries to do is to show how forms of drawing that originally had a quite specific profile came to take on much wider significance. Forms that once seemed by definition to have been created without training or conscious control came to occupy a grey area somewhere between the deliberate and the accidental. Inevitably, this means that their initial definitions are expanded, sometimes to the point where they become labels that can be applied to an almost indefinite range of phenomena.

I will try to unpack some of the processes whereby this has happened, and to show how, in the mid-twentieth century, interest in these different ways of enlisting what lies outside normal conscious control reached a peak. When the world-weariness of postmodernism began to set in, even these refreshingly different forms of drawing started to feel a bit stale. In addition, the conceptual basis for their connection with unconscious form creation, along with other features of psychoanalysis, has become more debatable. Nevertheless, they still form a significant part of our artistic repertoire and continue to exercise a powerful attraction, so apart from putting them in a historical context, this book is a tribute to their continuing spell.

3 Ingrid Calame, working drawing, 2002, coloured pencil on Mylar. Here the artist has overlapped different tracings from the random marks left on the floors of industrial buildings.

1
From Innocence to Experience

Scribbling, doodling and automatic drawing can all be seen as forms of 'drawing', but this itself is a notoriously elusive concept. A recent book calls drawing 'the primary art of creativity'.[1] Its most comprehensive description might be something like a set of marks made by human hand that seem to have been deliberately inscribed on a surface of some kind. The range of drawings is seemingly endless: they can be huge or tiny, representational or abstract, exquisite or rough; they may be a means to some other end (a sketch, a study or even an exercise), or else they can be an end in themselves. Drawings are records, observations, discoveries and inventions, sometimes all at once. Some drawings are consciously directed at an audience, while others seem to be more private; we may draw what we know or what we see outside us, or we may draw 'from within'.

In most of these situations drawing is a fairly conscious process, though there is usually a complex exchange between what is being conveyed – information, feelings or compositional structure, for example – and the drawing process itself, so that one reason drawing is of such interest is that it seems to be so close to an artist's intentions. With certain exceptions, we call something a drawing because we believe it to have been made deliberately. Sometimes artists use found, accidental lines or marks as 'drawings' – a good example is the work of Ingrid Calame, who traces marks left on factory floors or streets and turns them into large drawings (illus. 3). But even drawings that are experiments or ventures into the unknown still have what could be called an envelope of intentionality about them.

But not all marks that give the appearance of intentionality are actually deliberate; or rather, a mark that was made for one reason – erasure or disfigurement, for example – may look like one that was made for another, more

'artistic' reason. Not only can all sorts of marks be seen as 'drawings' whether or not they were intended as such, but the first inscriptions made by children or primates using a drawing or writing instrument are often perceived as drawings. Here there is an ambiguous territory in which we cannot be sure to what degree intentionality was involved, or in the case of primates, whether human notions of intention are relevant. Whereas drawing is often considered to be the most immediate expression of an artist's thought, or at least of an observation or idea, scribbling and doodling are forms of drawing where there is no such antecedent. Instead, the 'drawing' in them is either accidental, as in the scribble, or something aimless that then starts to feed off itself, as in the doodle. In automatic drawing, on the other hand, the intentionality is displaced: it is not the artist who draws, but something outside their normal responsibility.

The definitions involved in drawing are therefore not just a graphic concern. If we learn to draw in a number of different ways – by instruction, by copying others and by our own experiments – we also learn at the same time what to label 'drawing' and why: we learn what a 'proper' drawing is under different circumstances, and what is not. But this line, so to speak, is not fixed: there is constant traffic across it. What is accidental or careless sometimes comes to be seen as having a crude expressive energy that is missing in more sophisticated drawing; this may be imported into the world of art in various ways, directly or indirectly, or attempts may be made to imitate its rudimentary force. It is almost a cliché of modernism that work with these characteristics – child art, so-called primitive art or the supposed derangements and regressions of 'psychotic art', for example – served as a demonstration of what a spontaneous and uncultivated creativity could achieve; or rather, how something could appear as such, even if its intentional status was unfathomable.

Scribbling, doodling and automatic drawing also come into this category. A 'scribble' is, almost by definition, something on the edge of proper drawing, and the term is normally used in a derogatory or self-deprecating way (such as Arthur Sullivan's 'idiot who, in railway carriages, scribbles on window-panes'). Similarly, 'doodling' is regarded as an absent-minded distraction, an

activity that is marginal in every sense. Automatic drawing, while it has many of the same characteristics, also implies a peculiar kind of dislocated intention: a deliberate invitation to something beyond the drawer's normal consciousness, a form of dictation that may come from the unconscious or some other source, such as the spirit world. All three seemed, at least to begin with, to escape from the restrictions of conventional art, and also to be accessible to people without any professional art training.

However, the novelty and impact of all these idioms on the world of art depended on specific historical conditions. In the early decades of the twentieth century their power was all the greater for them having been excluded from art education and the world of fine art (though we shall see that this exclusion was to some extent a matter of wishful thinking). Once they began to be incorporated into these worlds, their status inevitably became more ambiguous: a deliberate scribble or a conscious doodle risks turning into what the painter Barnett Newman called 'contrived spontaneity'. The situation is somewhat different with automatic drawing. Whether in the context of spiritualism or of modernist experiment, it usually looks like a drawing; it is more the trance-like circumstances of its creation, or its public display of unconscious dictation, that sets it apart from other forms of artistic invention. But once it comes to be associated with a widespread belief in spontaneity as the key to unconscious form creation, its original characteristics get generalized, so that it is the 'look' of a drawing rather than the circumstances of its creation that give it the feel of automatism.

We could situate all three of these modes on a spectrum, ranging from the casual and often aggressive (scribbling), through the more playful and escapist (doodling) to the sustained complexity of much automatic drawing. In a sense this spectrum could be seen as echoing the developmental path of drawing, from the most rudimentary marks, through naive and playful explorations to something that looks like a fully fledged composition, whether it is deliberate or not. Certainly, the scribble has featured as the starting point in various theories of the evolution of drawing.[2] Development implies progression, yet in art regression to an earlier, simpler and more

powerful mode is sometimes a seductive option: the scribbles of primates and children, the supposedly confused and disordered drawings of the insane, the random meandering of doodles and the obsessive permutations of mediumistic drawing, have all inspired modern artists trying to break out of the box they feel trapped in.

Another thread that connects all three of these modes is that of the involvement of bodily gesture. In scribbling the hand movements are often wide and vigorous, in doodling they are smaller in scale, while in automatic drawing they often have a calligraphic fluidity, sometimes involving the whole arm. Recently, in the work of Cy Twombly and Sol LeWitt, the intimate scale of these idioms of mark-making has been expanded on to a monumental format, and the gestures involved correspondingly magnified. Again, the question here is what else besides the muscular and nervous systems might be involved, even if these are what give the immediate impetus to such marks. Perhaps the hand, and behind it the body, has its own ways of articulating what could be called 'thought'. We shall see later that this kinaesthetic dimension plays an important part in spontaneous form creation.

In the early stages of their modern cultural evolution this link with the involuntary seemed beyond doubt. A scribble is not intended as a drawing; it is made for some other purpose, for example trying out a pen or erasing something, and its artistic interest is an accidental side effect. Doodling takes place in distracted or absent-minded states such as in meetings and during telephone conversations, and is only intermittently attended to, and in general its artistic value is irrelevant. Automatic drawing is produced under dissociated or trance-like conditions, and in its original mediumistic context its artistic interest was secondary to the import of the messages it conveyed.

Scribbling, doodling and automatic drawing also seem like dialects of some common graphic language: whereas the idiom of scribbling is impatient and abstract, that of doodling is restless and a hybrid mixture of abstract, decorative and figurative, while automatic drawing usually has a comparably shifting mixture but in more concentrated and extended forms. Just as verbal

language can be produced without any conscious choice or deliberate intervention having to be exercised, so each of these modes can be engaged in with varying degrees of consciousness. But once we become aware of these graphic idioms and it becomes possible to recreate them artificially, they become more self-conscious signals of 'spontaneous' creativity, and can soon become stylistic mannerisms.

However, although each of these three forms of inscription seemed, in the early modernist period, to be independent of any acquired artistic skill, they were all actually linked in different ways to conventional communicative modes. Writing is one of the most obvious of these: while the scribble has a negative relation in that it erases messages, the doodle embroiders them, sometimes to the point of illegibility, and automatism often wanders between words and images. In addition, both doodling and automatism draw on established pictorial codes, whether these derive from the tradition of fine art or from more popular stereotypes, but because both are created in a distracted or dissociated state, this connection is rarely considered to be a conscious or deliberate one. In fact, as we shall see, all three types provide evidence of what could be called an unconscious stratum of forms – structures, patterns, figures and faces, for example – that have become something like a subliminal kind of pictorial lingua franca.

If the use of these codes is largely unintentional, what sense can we make of them? The idea that there are significant forms in art that are prompted by processes that are subliminal or unconscious in the broadest sense is, with its secular and psychological perspective, a comparatively modern one.[3] Perhaps because of their rudimentary nature, there does not seem to be a semiotics of scribbles, but doodles and automatic drawings are seen as carrying messages which, while they may not always be explicit, are capable of being deciphered. This is only to some extent a matter of literal reading: in doodles especially, a compound of something akin to graphological analysis and a diffuse notion of unconscious symbolism was applied early on.[4] Interestingly, Russell Arundel's hugely influential book on doodling, *Everybody's Pixillated* (1937), equated doodles with automatic

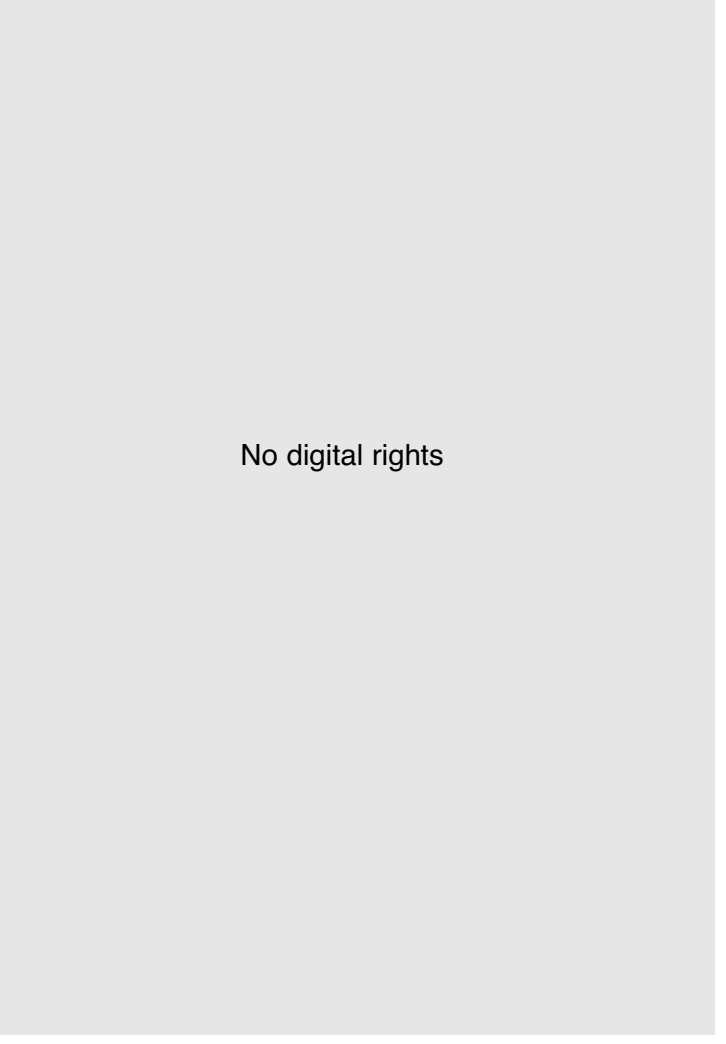
writing, but here it was less what was 'written' than the way in which it was written that mattered:

> Psychiatrists agree that the designs in a doodle cannot be accurately interpreted, but the character of the design, the manner in which it was made, the depth and harmony of lines, and the manner in which designs, figures and words are co-ordinated with the activity of the person at the time the doodle was made, are highly significant.[5]

Nevertheless, like many subsequent 'doodle dictionaries', Arundel's chart of 120 different patterns gives a generic meaning to each one, independent of the context in which it was originally created (illus. 4). In the end, there is a crucial distinction here, as in any model based on the notion of 'language', between the meaning of an individual symbol on its own and its meaning within the specific context in which it is embedded.

If scribbling is associated with making something illegible, then doodling conjures up the fantasy of a private language, and automatic drawing is often in the context of receiving messages from a source outside the subject. Certainly, a scribble is, almost by definition, in some kind of collision with language, or at least with visual articulacy, and we shall see later that this is part of its appeal to artists. A doodle, on the other hand, nearly always has some connection with language, either because it is literally made in the margins of a manuscript or text, or because it can be 'read' as if it were some kind of unconscious writing. In its early association with spiritualist communication, automatic drawing was also treated as conveying messages of some kind, although there was seldom a consistent method for reading them.

In the cases of both doodling and automatic drawing the passage of time and the increasing self-consciousness resulting from their cultural dissemination mean that they no longer have the same novelty or innocence they once had. It is more than half a century since doodles first became a popular fad, and there has been a recent spate of 'how to doodle' books, but



4 Russell Arundel, page from pixillation chart in his book *Everybody's Pixillated* (1937). Like a dictionary, this key gives the meaning of individual motifs.

5 Tauber, spontaneous drawing, ink on paper, before 1920. This early twentieth-century drawing by a psychiatric patient, which would have been labelled a scribble, seems like a prolonged doodle, in which the stippling may have come last.

very few attempts to examine their cultural background or their evolving relation to the wider art world. Automatic drawing has an even longer history, and has also been widely disseminated as an accepted art practice. Just as 'doodle' is now an umbrella term that covers a wide range of drawings, many of which are made under very different conditions from the original first wave of doodles, so automatism is no longer the pure practice it once was, and it is hard to tell to what extent the many drawings with the hallmarks of spontaneity – jerky, gestural lines or cursory loops – have actually been carried out in a truly automatic process.

Even before these developments there were inherent problems with the supposedly 'unconscious' nature of each of these genres. In the early years of the twentieth century the term 'scribble' encompassed a considerable range of inscriptions, some of which went far beyond the merely casual, and might well have had a degree of intentionality to them (illus. 5). To a more obvious extent doodling usually includes a fluctuating level of conscious intervention; otherwise we would have no first-hand testimonies as to how they were created. At first sight, automatic drawing seems to be more securely ring-fenced by a deliberately induced dissociation, most obvious in the trance state in which it is supposedly carried out, but the evidence of sleight of hand in some instances of mediumistic performance suggests a grey area in which practised familiarity slides into the deliberate production of the required phenomena. We shall see that this also applies to the use of automatism in modern art.

Faced with this uncertainty, we need to bear in mind that in dealing with what looks like unconscious form creation we are often confronted with the possibility that we are dealing with the *image* of automatism as much as its literal reality. This image has become so widespread that we take it for granted that spontaneous drawing, in all its various methods, gives access to forms that have an unconscious origin. In the first half of the twentieth century, in contexts far beyond its origins in spiritualism, automatic drawing came to be seen as the most immediate way of accessing unconscious imagery, and this was directly influenced by the contemporary diffusion of the notion of an unconscious, in both its Freudian and Jungian forms. This was a concept

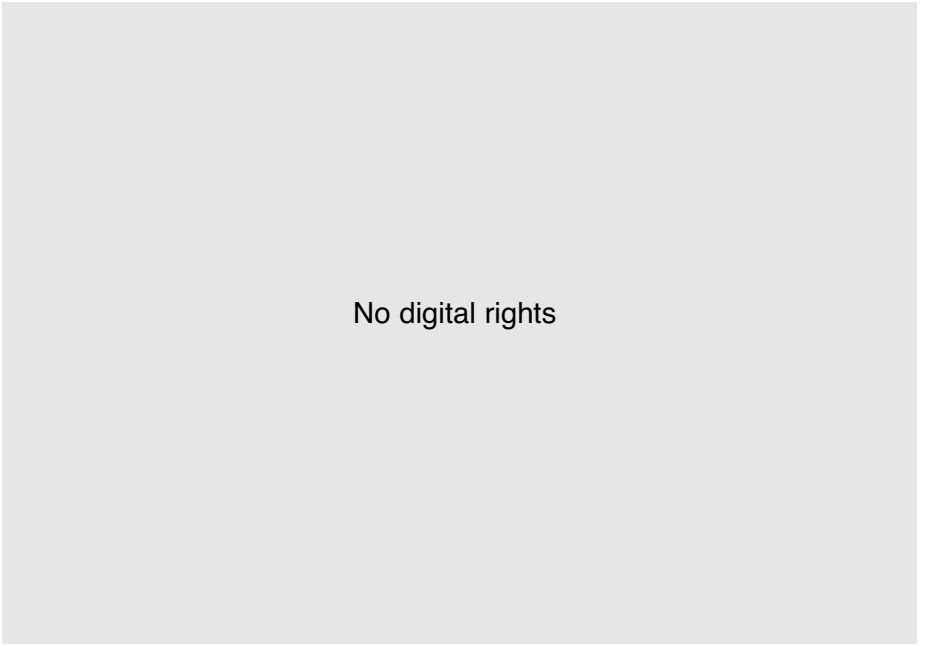
that extended far beyond its original clinical context, and into the realm of everyday life.

In classical psychoanalysis, the forces at work in the unconscious were considered to be more powerful and opportunistic than the rational mind: hence their subterranean effects often trumped the moves of conscious intentionality. It was as if the reach of responsibility had been extended, from those acts that were consciously decided upon, to a whole range of acts and thoughts that could be seen retrospectively as having been unconsciously determined. Many of these ideas soon entered popular discourse and the notion of various forms of unconscious intentionality, such as the 'Freudian slip', became almost commonplace.

In the context of art, this meant that spontaneous form creation was seen as the doorway to the world of unconscious imagery: first came the automatic drawing, then its unconscious meaning. In fact, as we shall see, for most artists who adopted this technique it was the resulting freedom of invention that mattered, and any unconscious significance was secondary. Certainly, when the Surrealists adopted automatism as a technique for accessing the 'real functioning of thought', it was the resulting play of analogy and visual camouflage that attracted them, rather than the sometimes rather predictable interpretation of these phenomena in terms of unconscious symbolism. Nevertheless, in both Surrealism and its artistic successors there remained what might be called a background expectation, that unconscious imagery was likely to have a sexual or aggressive character to it and that its idiom was the slippery one of primary process, in which the rules of logic and causality were ignored.

So here we have various inflections, some suspicious, some more approving, of what amounts to a psychoanalytically inspired mythology of unconscious form creation, evidence for which could be found both inside and beyond the conventional boundaries of art. It is a mythology, not because it is misleading but because it gives dramatic meaning to unknown energies that are manifest in pictorial form. It is now deeply embedded in our culture and is one of the chief motive forces behind the

identification of spontaneous modes of mark-making such as scribbling, doodling and automatic drawing with immediate access to unconscious form creation, or at least the nearest we can get to it. I shall now look at each of these modes – scribbling, doodling and automatic drawing – in turn, in order to examine these problems in more detail.



6 Drawing by a 5-year-old boy.

2
The Career of the Scribble

What do scribbling, doodling and automatic drawing have in common? I have suggested that they lie on a spectrum of involuntary or absent-minded mark-making, from the most rudimentary to what is sometimes a remarkable performance. Scribbling is, in many accounts, the most fundamental form of marking. In child art and in primate art, which are both categories we create in order to refer to 'drawings' whose authors have little or no idea of 'art', it is evidence of the most elementary manipulation of a crayon or brush. The intentionality of such manoeuvres is something we can only guess at, since those who make them have little or no speech: perhaps it owes as much to kinaesthetic sensations (the sound or friction of the pen or pencil on the surface, as well as the enjoyment of muscular movement) as to any preconceived motive. In this sense they could be called 'unconscious'. Nevertheless, especially in the case of children, they are often seen as the original versions of what later evolved into more deliberate and recognizable forms of drawing (illus. 6).

Scribbling also refers to a phenomenon that is a regression to these primary modes of mark-making: people scribble over something in order to mask or obliterate it. There is something impatient or even aggressive about this, a kind of attack on, or negation of, some existing message, or the aim to deface or disfigure. There is often an exciting energy in such marks, and we can come to enjoy them despite their original irrelevance. In fact, as with the developmentally primitive form of scribbling, we sometimes come across a nostalgia among sophisticated or educated draughtsmen for this more elementary and vigorous idiom. This was certainly a component in the avant-garde interest in child art in the early years of the twentieth century; but it has become much more prominent since, and has been engaged in more deliberately.

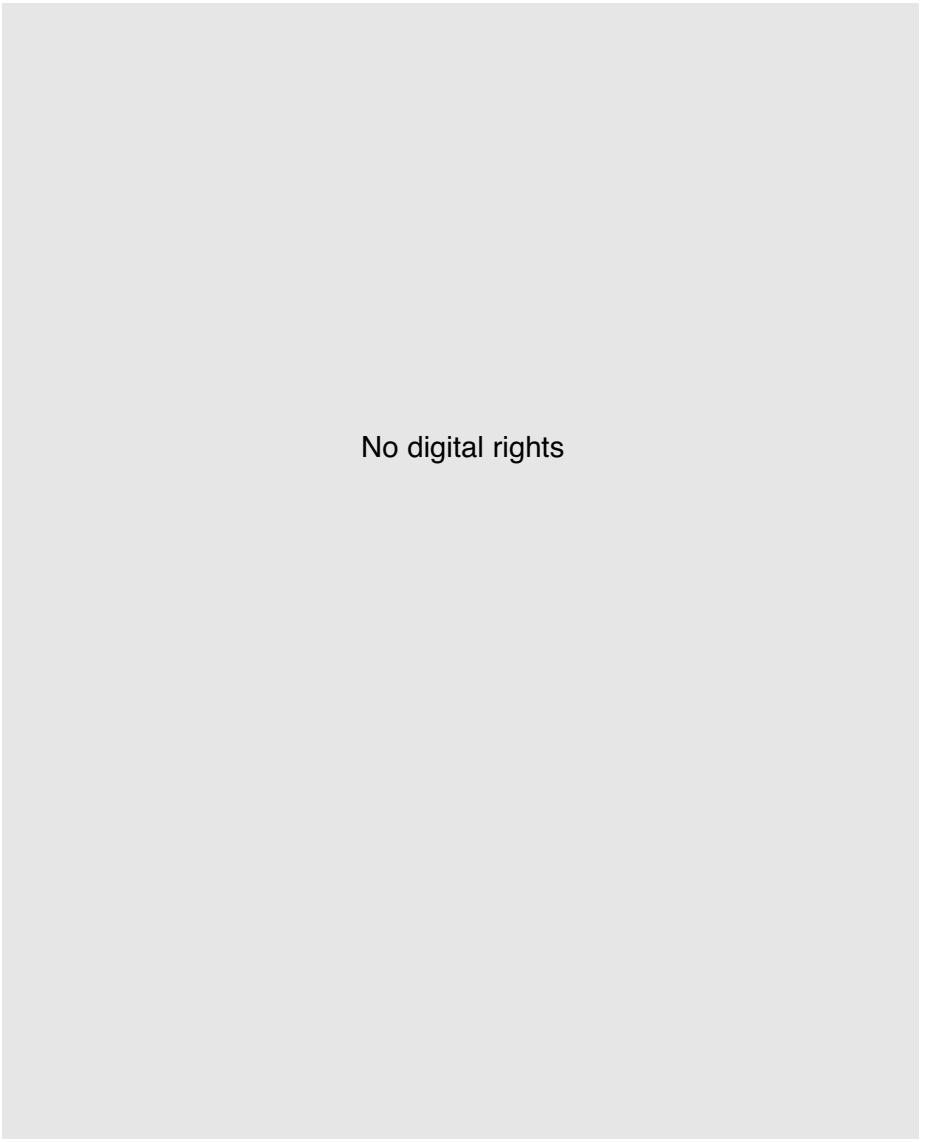
7 Athens shop window. Whitewash scribbles made to cancel the window's transparency can be seen as an abstract 'drawing' with its own shadow version.

'Scribbling' is thus something of a catch-all or a nondescript term: in carrying it out, has skill been deliberately forgotten, or was it never there? Is it just an impatient erasure, or is there some obscure intent behind it? Later we will see that intention may effectively belong more to the discoverer or promoter of a scribble than to the person who originally made it. In some ways an interesting scribble is like a found object: the originality, liveliness or creativity that we find in it may have little or nothing to do with the scribbler's original motive. A good example of this are shopfront windows that have been whitewashed over in the course of renovation, sometimes simply to make the glass opaque: we can treat them as found objects, and they can be looked at as absent-minded paintings with 'expressive' brushwork (illus. 7).

The uncertainty about scribbling's intentionality is reflected in the context of early psychiatry by the use of the term to label a wide variety of

work, much of which we would now consider to be drawing of one kind or another. It was generally used in a pejorative sense, to indicate that something had no intention and no meaning, and was merely indicative of the patient's confusion (illus. 8). It is not surprising, then, that 'unorganized, aimless scribbling' features in Hans Prinzhorn's seminal study of the 'configurative drive' in his book *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, published in 1922, based on some 5,000 works from psychiatric hospitals.[1] For him, this was the most basic building block for all subsequent directions in which this drive could be channelled (roughly, those of representation, symbolism and ornamentation). It is also worth noting that Prinzhorn considered that 'even the simplest scribble . . . is, as a manifestation of expressive gestures, the bearer of psychic components, and the whole of psychic life lies as if in perspective behind even the most insignificant form-element.'[2] This is a notion picked up in the almost contemporaneous cult of the doodle, as we shall see later. Nevertheless, in his book a whole range of drawings, from what would be readily called a 'scribble' to what are much more organized patterns, is illustrated under the same rubric (illus. 9, 10).

But at almost the same time as these judgements were being passed, in the early decades of the twentieth century, their basis was being subjected to revision as a result of some of the more radical innovations of modernist art. Previously held assumptions about representation and symbolism, expression and communication were challenged, most obviously by the Dadaists. One effect of these avant-garde revolutions was to give the primitive and the child-like a new and more positive value. There was a sudden spurt of spontaneous and informal drawings – informal in the sense that they were marks made for their own sake, that did not have to represent or express anything – that were seen as in some way parallel to the thoughtless innovations of child art. Artists as diverse as Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Mikhail Larionov and Henri Matisse collected child art, and their work clearly showed its influence.[3] Perhaps this interest was still biased towards the figurative, but Klee's practice of 'letting a line go for a walk' could be seen as a slowed-down version of scribbling, that hovers on the edge between the abstract and the figurative.



8 Heinrich M., untitled drawing, pre-1920, pencil, coloured pencil and pen on paper. What looks like a soldier's casqued head in the centre is overlaid by a mass of other inscriptions.

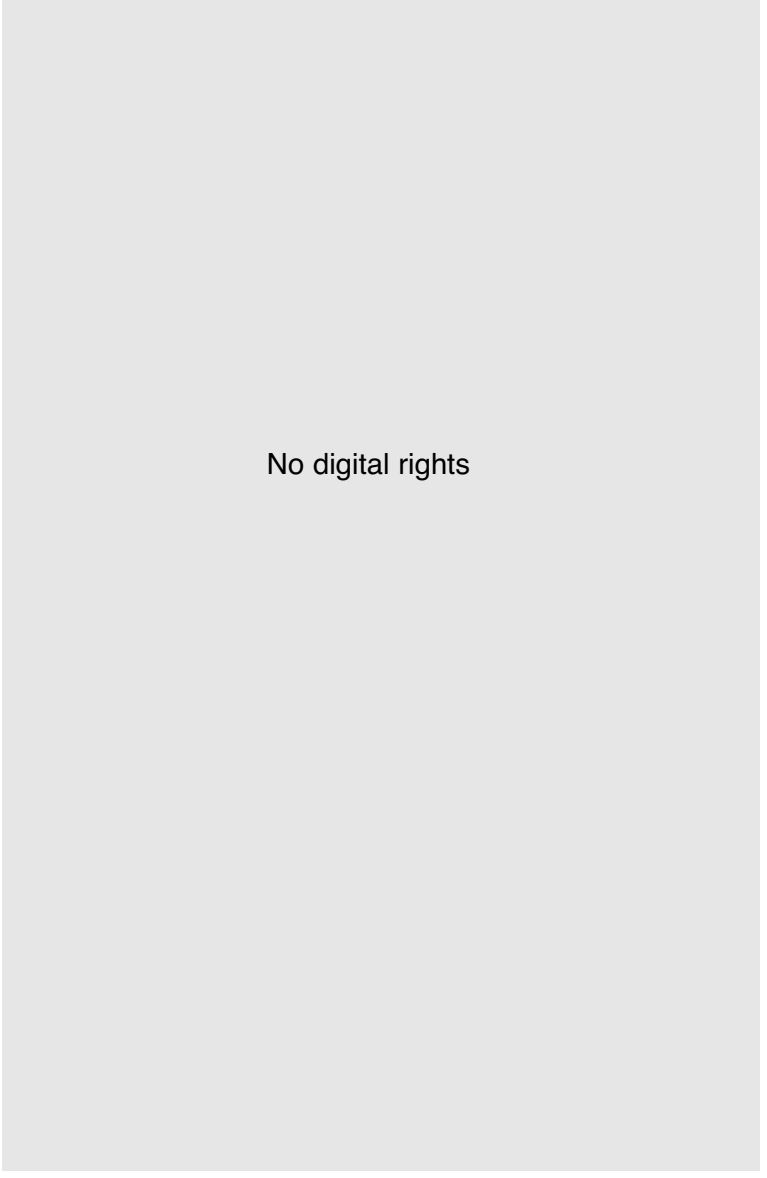
The scribble is not just the most elementary form of mark-making: it often seems to carry an expressive charge, a momentum that is not simply kinetic but also psychological. However, this usually originates in an area that is essentially non-verbal, as in the drawings of very young children and the seemingly comparable area of primate art.[4] As adult humans, we are tempted to see such rudimentary and energetic marks as expressive (illus. 11); but perhaps this depends on some form of intentionality, however obscure, that might be present in humans but not in chimpanzees. As one writer on primitive art points out:

> Assessing the aesthetics of monkey painting requires measuring the distance on the paintings [or drawings] themselves between the simian processes by which they have been created (and their particular visual attributes) and our spontaneous recognition of them as artworks.[5]

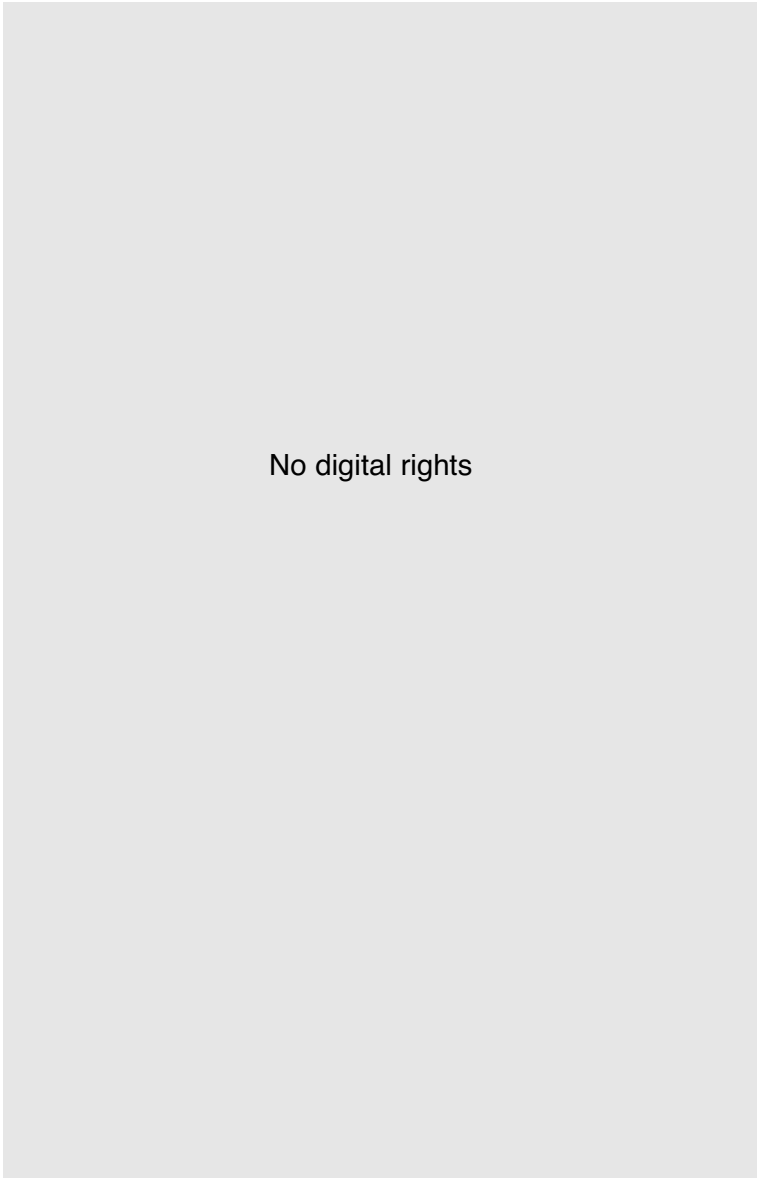
Our sophisticated notion of the expressive potential of scribbling, which, Lenain writes, is derived from 'the aesthetic appreciation of an elementary kind of painting which is completely abstract and is dominated by the gestural', is being projected onto primates, despite the fundamental differences that remain between us and apes.[6] The result is that we forget that

> the first impression of a communication that is direct and without pretence, such as the impression one may gain from contact with a large anthropoid, constitutes the characteristic feature of a relationship taking place *outside the realm of the inter-subjective*, with a living creature that is certainly close to us in certain respects, but also basically does not belong to the world of meaning.[7]

This argues for a crucial difference between primate scribbles and similar-looking drawings produced by humans who are not in a position to tell us what might be going on.



9 Emma Hauck, letter to her husband, 1909, pencil on paper. The repetitive superimposition of a plea to her husband becomes, in its illegibility, something labelled a 'scribble'.



10 Ludwig Wilde, pencil drawing on notebook leaf, before 1920. This was labelled ‘scribble’ by Hans Prinzhorn, in whose book it appeared in 1922.

This situation has, however, since been complicated in several ways by the emergence of 'elephant art'. First, the animal handler David Gucwa's work in the early 1980s with the elephant Siri shows that the animal was able to graduate from making marks in the dust with a stick held in its trunk to 'drawing', simply by being given a pencil and paper, and by this being incorporated into her daily routine without any additional reward. Gucwa refused to put the elephant's work on the art market, though he did send some of its drawings to a number of artists and critics. Willem de Kooning is said to have commented: 'That's a damn talented elephant. I look forward to following his career.' In complete contrast, the Russian artists Komar and Melamid more recently set up an elephant art school in Thailand, where the animals are trained to make paintings and the results then marketed with all the hype at their disposal. Alexander Melamid asserted: 'It is not the intention of the artist that matters, it's the later interpretation of their intention that does . . . Who's to say these animals are not artists?'[8]

Irrespective of the question of the ways in which animals might or might not be 'artists', these examples also illustrate the spectrum of attitudes that can be taken towards the scribble. At one end, it can be taken as one of the most rudimentary forms of marking; at the other, it can be seen as radically expressive. In between, it can be commercially promoted as 'art', even if other motives are also involved (ecological ones, in the case of the Thai elephants). In their witty book *Why Cats Paint: A Theory of Feline Aesthetics*, two writers, one an artist and the other a critic, illustrate all the varieties of aesthetic response that can be applied to the delightfully gestural idiom of feline painting: while scribbling as such does not feature in their book, the interpretative strategies that are involved remain essentially the same.[9]

The same issues that crop up in relation to animal art, about the importance or otherwise of an explicit intentionality and the degree to which humans project this, come to a head where art is created by humans who have little or no capacity for any other form of communication. Very young children are the obvious example, and their drawing is usually situated at the beginning of some kind of developmental path. But even quite rudimentary scribbles

11 Drawing by Congo, a chimpanzee, made between 1956 and 1958. The parallels between primate art and child art can be misleading.

can be seen as 'art', either out of parental pride or because of their appeal to artists looking for visual stimulation – in both cases an expressive intention may be ascribed, explicitly or implicitly, with little or no warrant. These problems are aggravated when we are dealing with drawings by adults whose development seems to have been arrested at some early stage.

In many special art studios for people with various forms of disability, work is created that may have a childlike or primitive character, sometimes looking like a scribble or a doodle. This work is certainly praiseworthy in terms of the human benefit it offers to the artists involved, but many of these studios are also oriented towards the exhibition and sale of this work.

Inevitably, there are factors that complicate its artistic status: are we excited by the glimpse it offers into the most fundamental creative processes, or does it sometimes show an originality that owes little or nothing to training or skill? Because of the communication gap between us and the artists, and perhaps out of a wish to compensate for their difficulties, we are tempted to see such work as peculiarly expressive.

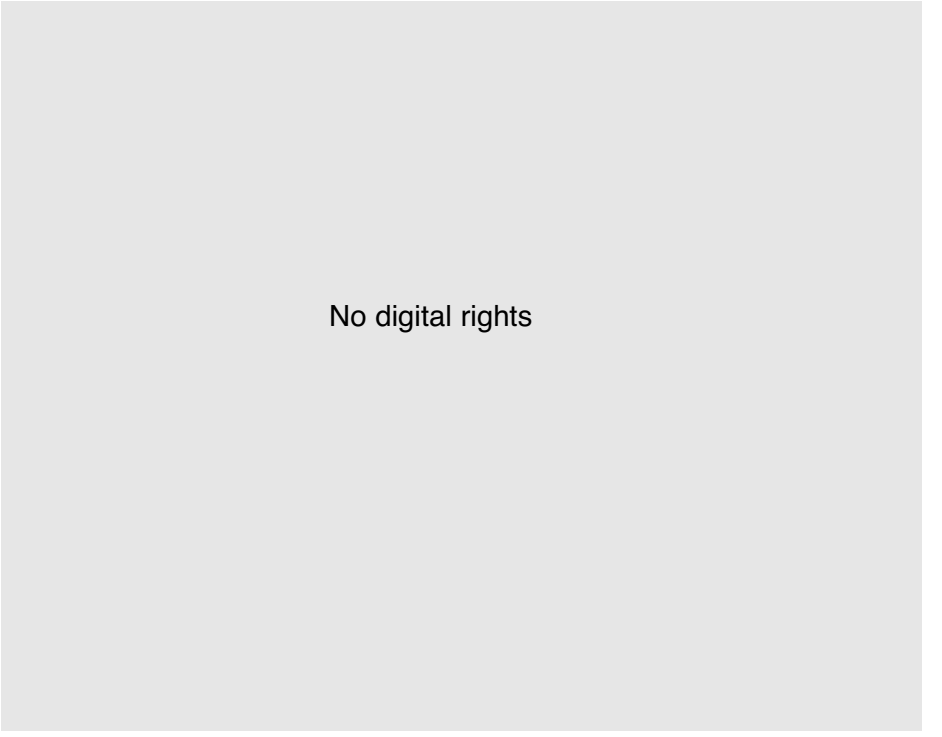
When, on account of these artists' difference from us and their obvious segregation from the world at large, their work is promoted as Outsider art, even more serious difficulties arise. One dramatic instance is the case of Judith Scott, a deaf and mute artist with Down's syndrome, who worked mainly in 'fibre art' but also produced a number of scribbly drawings.[10] We cannot be sure whether Scott had any concept of art as such, and because of her inability to communicate we can only guess at whatever obscure intentionality lay behind her work, which is nonetheless exhibited as an outstanding example of Outsider art. Our appreciation of her work seems to lie somewhere between the fascination of something exceptional that is in some way the creative signature of an individual and of a found object, where the creativity is entirely ours. But there is an uncomfortable difference between artists whose particular developmental level seems to be low, and the deliberate regression of an experienced artist like de Kooning. Although the work he made when he was afflicted with Alzheimer's disease might seem to contradict this, because he was supposedly no longer fully aware of what he was doing and was not deliberately regressing, I think that a good deal of his ingrained expertise was still carried over into this final period.

There are also occasions on which scribbling, or something like it, can be used as a means of non-verbal communication, usually with children or with adults whose speech is limited. While this kind of play takes place in many families as a matter of course, it was put to a special use by the child psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott in the late 1950s. He would draw a quick 'squiggle' on a sheet of paper and pass it over to the child with the invitation to turn it into whatever he or she liked, and would then explore what the result might mean.[11] While Winnicott believed that playing had an inherent

value and was a sign of normal functioning, both the process and the results of the 'squiggle game' could be made sense of from a therapeutic perspective, and this was a more serious and responsible business than the popular interpretation of doodles, about which I will say more in the next chapter. Ironically, a commercial game, similar to Pictionary, is now marketed under the name Squiggle.

More recently, a similar strategy has been used by the artist Ody Saban, who has a long-standing interest in such basic forms of mark-making. She has composed a series of sheets of paper, each with some minimal mark or sign on them, on which another person is invited to draw their response within a five-minute time limit (interestingly, they are also asked to provide a title on the reverse). Saban has used this collaborative and spontaneous mode of drawing with a wide range of participants, including her own daughter as well as some recognized Outsider artists. We shall see later that similar strategies were used in Surrealism and the movements inspired by it.

Nevertheless, in its original forms, before these more recent experiments or provocations introduced an element of self-consciousness, the scribble seemed like the most basic example of a line let loose from all responsibility. Even when it might have served some purpose, such as erasure, this was treated as irrelevant. This was exactly what made it attractive to modernist artists, for whom it served as both a means for prospecting and a sign of spontaneous freedom from artistic convention or even the need to communicate. A good example of the latter is František Kupka's *Promenade d'un trait blanc* of 1922, where the jerky, restless character of a scribble is the basis for a marvellously inventive linear excursion, in which the viewer can feel the energy of each twist and turn. In some of Joan Miró's painting-poems from the late 1920s it is also possible to see something like an exquisitely casual scribble-like calligraphy, for example in *A Bird Chases Pursues a Bee and Kisses It* (1926), where the word *poursuit* ('pursues') is made to mimic the trajectory of the chase. Scribbling features frequently in Miró's drawings and in some of his paintings – it is a central part of his *Homage to Corot* (1965), for example (illus. 12).



12 Joan Miró, *Homage to Corot*, 1965, drawing. Miró often used scribbles as a kind of sketch.

Scribbling in Miró usually has an innocent and playful character, but in some more recent artists' work, it seems to be its impatience and attack that attracts. It is as if what was, to begin with, sublimated into creative invention starts to revert to a more aggressive idiom, as in some of the work of Antonio Tàpies, Arnulf Rainer, Joseph Beuys and Ian McKeever. For example, in Rainer's 'overdrawings', existing images are scribbled over in an expressionistic surge of lines that sometimes almost obliterates the original. A good example is his treatment of a series of photographs of the bizarre sculptural heads made by the eighteenth-century sculptor Franz Xaver Messerschmidt (illus. 13). Writing about these drawings, Rainer says:

> The original often strikes me as a mere expanse of grey stone, a featureless rock formation. This leads to cancelling, scribbling, the imposition of chaos: a purely structural response that always reappears when I pass beyond, or fall short of, a certain level of nervous excitation . . .[12]

Here scribbling seems almost a last resort, a desperate attempt to inject life into an image that threatens to congeal.

Scribbling also has an obvious relationship to graffiti and tagging, and this is conspicuous in Jean-Michel Basquiat's paintings, for example. In spite of its popular association with vandalism and fly-by-night territory marking, graffiti is, of course, a highly sophisticated form of inscription, but part of its impact comes from the nocturnal and illegal buzz it generates (described by some taggers as 'bombing'), and there is a shock effect comparable to scribbling when it is imported into a fine art context. Some graffiti can be seen as stylized and expanded scribbles: certainly, some taggers' emblems derive from cursive signatures that have first been carefully practised on paper. Some graffiti walls are a bit like the visual equivalent of shouting arguments, and typical samples of these have, incidentally, been the subject of some of Ingrid Calame's transcriptions (such as in *Frog Town Turf War*, 2006).

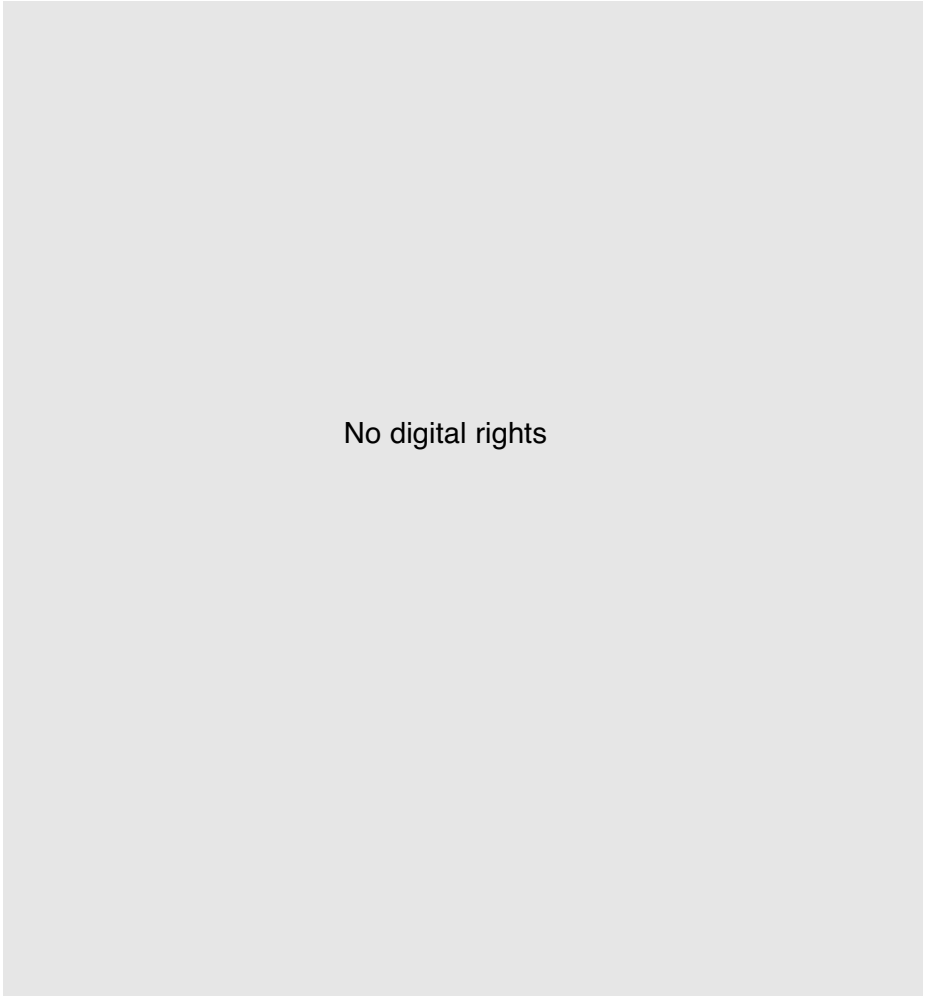
However, there are less dramatic, smaller-scale ways in which the impulsive energy of scribbling enters into a great many artists' work. As we

shall see, in many of de Kooning's drawings the loss of control in scribbling – or rather, the invocation of some other, more kinaesthetic form of control – becomes a kind of abbreviated automatism. The urgency and graphic attack of such drawings led some critics to see its role in de Kooning's notorious *Women* series as misogynistic; but, whatever connection this might have to the artist's womanizing, it clearly also belongs to what was already, in the 1950s, establishing itself as a tradition of spontaneous creativity, in which improvisation and thoughtless invention were the order of the day. Scribbling could be seen as the converse of the traditional value placed on manifest skill in draughtsmanship, but once it became an established idiom, it was no longer possible to use it with the same insouciance: like the swipes, swerves and drips of action painting, it turned into a self-conscious manoeuvre, or even something to mimic or parody.

In 1953 Cy Twombly, who had been drafted into the cryptographic section of the U.S. Army, began making drawings in the dark in an attempt to bypass his learned drawing skills.[13] Paintings from a couple of years later, such as *Olympia* and *Arcadia*, look like magnified scribbles, but Twombly is surely using such marks in a much more self-conscious way, even if they are executed with comparable brio. In a sense these deliberately casual marks, so challenging and exciting in their nonchalance, are a logical conclusion to the history of Expressionist and Abstract Expressionist drawing and brushwork. While they hark back to early modernist experiments with rudimentary or accidental marks, there is a deliberate anti-finesse to some of Twombly's scrawls (illus. 14). This is perhaps a hallmark of their expressive authenticity, rather like the way that in improvised music, squeaks and squawks signal genuine improvisation to begin with, but can then turn into tiresome mannerisms.

The most obvious current symptoms of this self-consciousness about scribbling are where artists employ scribbles, doodles or 'automatic' drawings in their work that they themselves have not made, thus disconnecting the scribble from any personal expressivity. From around 2005 Sol LeWitt commissioned assistants to make 'scribbles', by which he

13 Arnulf Rainer, untitled overdrawing on photograph of a Franz Xaver Messerschmidt sculpted head, 1975–6. Rainer frequently drew over highly charged images of heads, as if to amplify their expression.



14 Cy Twombly, *Tree Wheeler*, 1955, water-based paint, wax crayon, coloured pencil, pencil and pastel on canvas. With its loose, scribbly sweeps, this is as much a giant drawing as a painting.

seemed to mean drawings that did not obviously fit into any descriptive system. They ranged from 'layers of straight lines meticulously drawn in black graphite to rows of delicately rendered wavy lines in coloured pencil'.[14] This far from raw material was then blown up and made, by assistants, into huge coloured wall paintings that are carefully composed, flat and abstract.

LeWitt's last commission, *Wall Drawing #1268*, designed by him in 2006 and completed in 2010 after his death, is a massive project (2,200 square feet) involving intense collective scribbling. As usual, LeWitt's instruction was simple: 'Line. Continuous gradation and feel of steel.' Sixteen artists worked with graphite pencils on a carefully primed surface in a stairwell at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, for seven hours a day (a total of nearly 5,000 hours). Locally, the scribbles are carefully random, but viewed from a distance LeWitt's design is composed to look like large metal columns, with appropriate volume and gradations of shading. The paradox is that overall, instead of being impatient or anarchic, the scribbles are laboriously sustained: as one participant put it, 'In learning how to see the built-up density each scribble was making, I could scribble more accurately.' Several described being taken into something akin to a meditative state, and it seems almost as if this degree of concentrated scribbling sometimes amounted to a form of automatic drawing.

More recently, Ceal Floyer has used hundreds of the pads used in stationery stores, on which customers test pens, as the ingredients for a massive wall drawing. Presumably it is the anonymity and accidental expressivity of these doodles that attracts such artists and enables them to use them like readymades. Another way the accidental energy of the scribble can be exploited is when artists deliberately use random movements, such as the shaking of a car or train, in order to generate what could be called 'seismographic' scribbles or doodles.[15] In this way a whole drawing, rather than just an opportunistic series of marks, can be created. The distinction between accident and design is an ambiguous one. Many artists have explored this no-man's-land: one of the most striking examples is the scribbling duet performed in Lethbridge, Canada, in

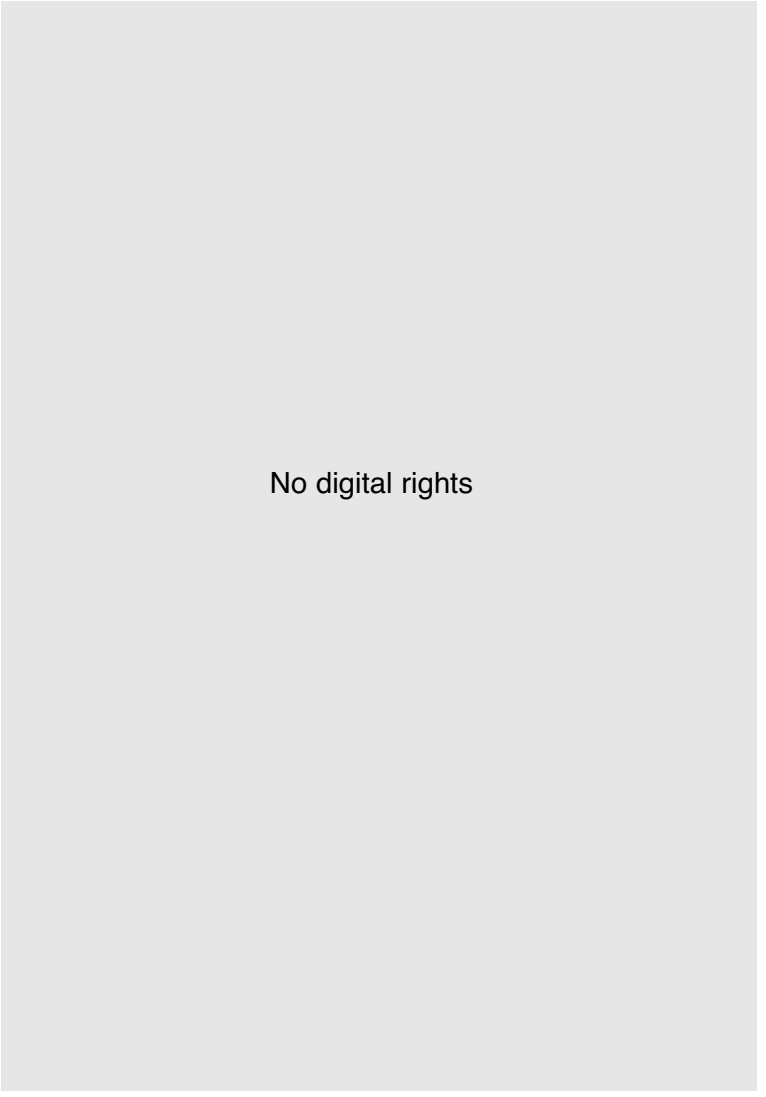
2003, by the drummer Roger Turner and the artist Susan Turcot. The surface they drew on was wired to transmit sound, so that the noise of the marks they made constituted a kind of improvised percussion.

Some have used their own scribbles or doodles as ways of 'breaking the ice'. Even as early as the 1900s, Adolf Hölzel used doodle-like drawings as a way of limbering up his hand (illus. 15). In some of his paintings from the late 1940s de Kooning reportedly used to scrawl a letter or scribble a shape as a way of getting himself started, though usually no trace of it would survive. In later life, de Kooning would also draw while watching television. As one sympathetic commentator notes:

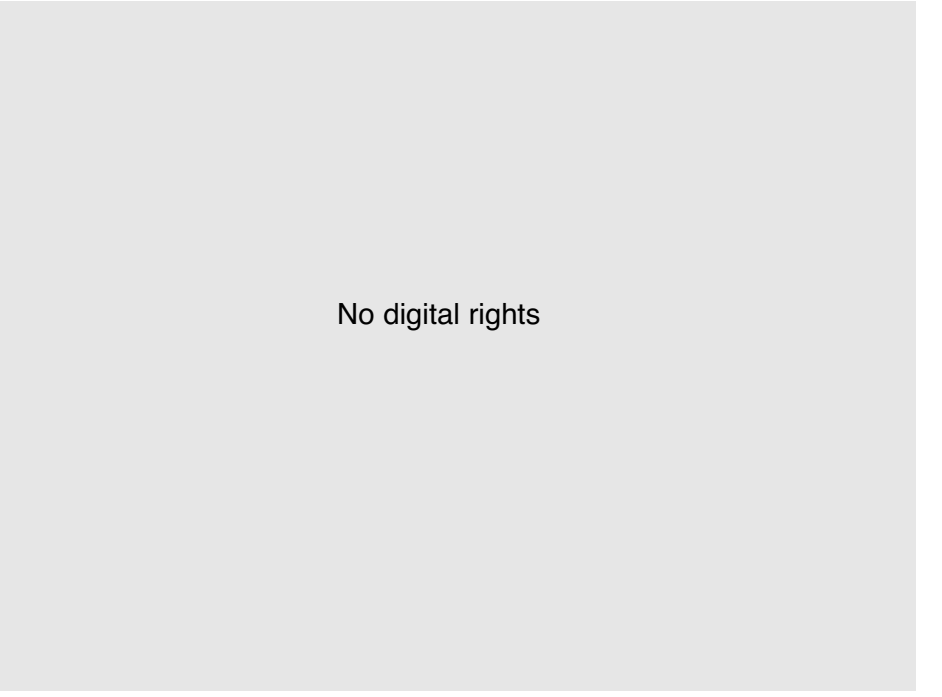
> Watching television and drawing blindly were two devices that served the same purpose, allowing de Kooning to circumvent his practised eye . . . His eyes-closed and television art originated within the fixed margins of a sheet of paper, the hand's domain, as opposed to some indeterminate space inhabited by a model and traversed by the eye. As a loss of control controlled by the conditions under which de Kooning set himself to work, his method caused skill and chance to become indistinguishable.[16]

There is almost a sense that such ways of disconnecting the artist's hand from conscious control actually allow it to be more expressive (illus. 16).

In my own work, which consists of improvisations on A1-size drafting film using oilsticks and oil pastels, a loosely scribbled drawing serves as a starting point. This is not so much a compositional structure as an energetic field, which subsequent passages of painting or drawing usually override: nevertheless, portions of it survive, almost as if they were wriggling or squirting out, and are a reminder of the spontaneous process of the whole work's creation (illus. 18). The slippery medium, like the vellum that de Kooning sometimes used, allows for a lot of drastic and immediate alteration; but here too there is also a canny subliminal practice or expertise at work. On the other hand, in Iain Andrews's recent work, which is on linen, scribble-like



15 Adolf Hölzel, *Figure and Writing*, *c*. 1912, ink on paper. Here writing and drawing seem almost to swap places in a scribbly idiom.



16 Willem de Kooning, *Untitled*, *c*. 1980, ink drawing. Here the spontaneity of scribbling is a crucial ingredient in the work's raw energy.

OPPOSITE: 17 Iain Andrews, S*tudy for Elegy on the Death of a Bumblebee*, 2012, ink and graphite on paper. The final painting is a wild 'transcription' of a Dutch still-life: this 'study' is a manic outline of its underlying energy.

'studies' are sometimes made when the painting process seems to have got stuck, as a way of freeing it up (illus. 17).

While de Kooning himself was wary of anything like automatism (which he was introduced to in 1937), the widespread use of spontaneous drawing by Abstract Expressionist artists such as Jackson Pollock did, as we shall see, effectively broadcast the use of a scribbly, gestural style of drawing as a sign of authentic immediacy. Meanwhile, I want to look at something in which a miniaturized form of scribbling plays a significant role, and which is almost as widespread: the doodle. Not only are doodles generally more highly elaborated than scribbles, but their potential significance has also attracted far more popular interest.

18 David Maclagan, untitled, 2011, oilstick on Mylar. These paintings start with a scribbled overture, traces of which remain where not transformed by paint.

19 David Lloyd George, doodle on blotting pad, *c*. 1918. A celebrity doodle 'rescued' by an assistant who also happened to be an artist.

3
The Doodle and Beyond

Although doodling is treated as if it were a natural, spontaneous and universal phenomenon, and indeed doodle-like drawings have a long history, it is actually a modern concept that emerged in the mid-1920s and rapidly became extremely popular. In effect, it took over some of the associations of 'scribble', such as its unintentional character and its universal and informal practice. It seems that even in the late 1920s 'scribble' was used to refer to what was beginning to be called 'doodle'.[1] The origins of the term 'doodle' itself are surprisingly difficult to track down. It appears as early as Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language*, meaning a trifler or idler, and its etymology was later variously traced to Dutch or German words for 'foolish'. Then there is the American usage of 'Yankee Doodle', with similar connotations.[2] The modern term, with its specific association with absent-minded and marginal drawing, seems to have appeared in the early twentieth century: it figures, for example, as something that people would recognize in the screenplay for *Mr Deeds Goes To Town* (Robert Riskin, 1936). By the mid-1930s it had become something of a craze, with an expanding interest in the reproduction and interpretation of celebrity doodles.

There are a number of possible reasons for this: the increasingly widespread association between literacy and bureaucratic work; the emergence of graphology (at its peak in the early twentieth century); the diffusion of psychoanalytic ideas about free association and unconscious thought; and an interest – half-admiring, half-malicious – in the careless drawings by celebrities (politicians, actors, writers). The connection with graphology is made explicit in a book of 1957 by Helen King, a graphologist:

> The signature shows the personality – that side which we appear to be to the public. The penmanship shows the character – that which we really are. And the doodles tell of the unconscious thoughts, hopes, desires.[3]

Roughly half of King's 'Doodle Dictionary' section has to do with doodling recognizable items – animals, houses, faces and the like – but the other half includes motifs like crossing out, undulation, chequerboards and 'designs'. All these motifs, whether figurative or not, illustrate some basic stylistic features and their psychological implications, for example:

1. Angular doodles are indicative of planning, construction, criticism and aggressiveness.
2. Curved formations tell of affection, friendliness and sentiment. Tact, ease in talking are often shown.
3. Heavy pressure on doodles may show sorrow, serious thoughts.
4. Light pressure usually indicates receptivity.[4]

Here we enter a largely unexplored territory, to which we shall return, where the 'natural' expressivity of line is shaped by cultural influences.

Of course, marginal drawings that can be seen as the ancestors of doodling have a long history, and can be found in medieval manuscripts and illuminated books.[5] Though we can only guess at what prompted them, they usually have a humorous or grotesque character, so it is probable that they were partly motivated by a desire to take a holiday from the task in hand or to rebel against the system. The authority of this system was not just institutional (monastic or commercial) or societal (class or rank), but was embodied in a whole cluster of rules governing the proper execution of different kinds of writing and the respective roles of writing and ornament, for example. Even today, writing is a discipline and many of us have experienced the difficulty that can be felt in submitting to it. The subordinate role of decoration, not only in art but in manuscript and printed text, is a similar imposition.

Marginal drawings rebel, sometimes slyly, sometimes blatantly, against these constraints.

But manuscripts were read, and even account ledgers were open to inspection, so I wonder about the extent to which such drawings, which were often quite carefully executed, were noticed, and what sense was made of them. A subversive or escapist character is certainly more conspicuous in modern doodles, and at the same time the space they occupy, whether in personal notes or official agendas, is a more private one. If I think no one is going to see my doodlings, then I may be less likely to disguise their nature. Even before the term became current, there was an occasional interest in doodles by famous people, as if the doodle's private character showed what lay behind the public persona. Herbert Olivier, an official British war artist, went off with a drawing made by David Lloyd George during the Armistice negotiations of 1918. Whether it was because it said something about the prime minister's boredom, or because it had some artistic interest, we shall never know (illus. 19).

This may be one reason why 'doodle' has a specifically modern, psychological slant to it. The combined influence of graphology and a generalized version of the Freudian unconscious contributed to the many 'analyses' accompanying published doodles, which linked them to their author's character or unconscious preoccupations. In one of the first books to be published on doodles, in 1937, Russell Arundel wrote:

> While doodles appear to be aimless pixillations they are in reality accurate pictures of the Subconscious Mind. They are psychic blueprints of man's inner thoughts and emotions that have slipped from the deeps of memory onto paper.[6]

'Pixillated', incidentally, was a term originating in the film industry to designate spoiled stock, and was widely used between the wars to mean 'tipsy'. Of course, the interpretations published by Arundel and others tended to be fairly sycophantic, because of the status of the subjects. In

fact, the steady procession of books about doodling created a highly ambiguous situation: while celebrity doodles were seen as reinforcing the characteristics that had made their authors famous – determination, creativity and sensitivity, for example – more mundane doodles were thought to betray less admirable qualities.

If we look at Arundel's 'pixillation chart', composed of 120 distinct ingredients, we can see a variety of different strategies at work (illus. 20). Sometimes, where something is recognizable, it is the content that matters: a knife and a whip indicate sadism, ladders or steps ambition, a black cat superstition. Basic geometric shapes have equally simple meanings: squares and triangles have practical or logical associations. Where there are abstract patterns, their rigidity or fluidity is on a spectrum between the orderly and the careless or impatient. In only one or two cases is the style of otherwise similar figures – even or wavy lines, for example – significant. An occasional negative note is struck by interpretations of self-centeredness, morbidity or sexual fixation. In some ways Arundel's approach resembles the later analysis of children's drawings by Rhoda Kellogg, where 'basic scribbles' are progressively built up into 'combines' and 'aggregates' (illus. 21).[7]

Comparing Arundel's 'pixillation chart' with King's 'doodle dictionary', it is remarkable how little overlap there is. In some cases – stairs indicating ambition, or noughts-and-crosses-type games suggesting competition – the agreement is based on stereotypical symbolism. In one of the few instances of identical form, wavy or undulating lines are given quite different meanings: Arundel states that they express a fear of water, while for King they indicate a gentle and sensitive personality. Both writers seem to work better when tackling whole doodles, which often have several components that yield a more nuanced interpretation. One problem with analysing the doodles of people well known in their professions is that professional characteristics, such as planning, ambition or action, are there as givens, and the doodle interpretation often feels made to confirm them. Both Arundel and King tend to treat their examples as matching the persona of the doodler, and it was hard anyway to

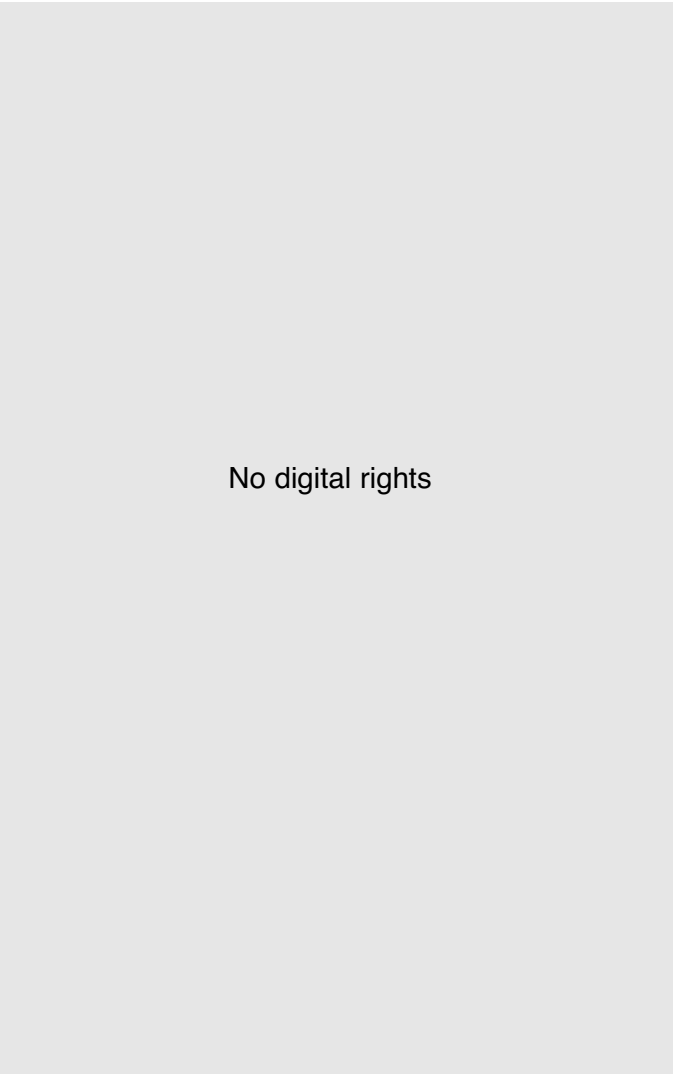
say anything too unflattering about public figures who had voluntarily submitted their doodles for analysis.

This was not always the case. In the early 1920s, for example, the Surrealists raided the wastepaper baskets after a ministerial meeting and published the discarded doodles in order to discredit the politicians concerned.[8] And I have already mentioned another instance, where an artist stole the doodle Lloyd George had been making. Nevertheless, as a spontaneous and absent-minded form of drawing, doodling was also regarded from an essentially egalitarian perspective: most people, whether they thought of themselves as creative or not, did it on the side (literally, in the margins), during meetings or lectures, or while on the phone. These doodles were often discarded, not just because they were of no obvious interest or artistic value, but also because there was often a fear of embarrassment should they be discovered by someone else. For more objective reasons the doodles of scientists working on sensitive military research were often routinely destroyed.[9]

All of us who doodle know that the activity has connotations of escapism and self-indulgence: it is almost as if, faced with the demands of something outside me (the lecture, meeting or conversation), I feel the need to recover a subjective, clandestine space for myself. For many, doodling is a kind of graphic truancy, a form of private, miniaturized graffiti – a way of burning off surplus energy, of diverting attention from the tedious task in hand. It is perhaps also a switch from the mental towards the manual, like a kind of sublimated fidgeting. No wonder that most people are embarrassed at being discovered doodling, as if it showed that they were not paying proper attention. But, somewhat surprisingly, recent research suggests that doodling can, in some cases, actually enhance concentration on an intellectual task.[10] Nevertheless, there is often an aura of secret disobedience to doodling, or at least the wish to set up one's own private rules as opposed to those one is supposed to be following.

Perhaps the stricter the system of rules, the more powerful is the build-up of tension, and the corresponding desire to break out of them. In its

20 Russell Arundel, page from pixillation chart in his book *Everybody's Pixillated* (1937).



21 Rhoda Kellogg, evolution of basic forms from scribble, 1969. A kind of family tree of the scribble and its descendants.

original forms, doodling is, as I have suggested, not just a reaction against the discipline or hierarchy of the meeting and the institution sponsoring it, for example, but against the authority of language itself, whether in spoken or in written form. It is a kind of revenge of the pictorial over the linguistic. Certainly, many doodles include deliberate bending of its rules – playing with the shape of letters to the point of illegibility, for example – but they also involve a whole range of graphic permutations that easily take on a life of their own once they have been released from the tyranny of writing. In this way we can invent our own rules and play with them.

These escapes include abstract or 'decorative' devices such as repetition, symmetry, inversion and other forms of geometrical structuring. There are often abrupt shifts in graphic pitch, between the curvilinear and the angular, between densely packed textures and free-range excursions. Passages of pattern seem to take on a life of their own, as if the drawn line is having a conversation with itself, and at the same time there can be something quite comforting and familiar about these elaborations. On top of this (literally, sometimes) the doodler discovers or invents figures or constructions that may start off as framing or pictorial scaffolding, but that sometimes turn into mechanical or architectural elaborations. This typical 'agenda' doodle clearly has a mixture of themes from the workshop ('impact', 'appraisal', 'judgement'), echoes of the institutional heading ('employers') and decorative or architectural embroideries (illus. 22). It is interesting that there is only one mask-like face.

There are also destructions, such as overlaying or blacking out, whether to conceal things from other people's eyes or because they are no longer relevant. But these scribblings or erasures can then take on a momentum of their own and turn into a negative compositional factor. In this doodle it is as if, despite the fact that there is no obvious external constraint, the person has gone over and over the same shapes and patterns, to the point where they are barely legible (illus. 23). One could say that doodling plays out a dynamic relation between order and disorder, constraint and freedom, public and private – this being perhaps as much

a reflection of the context in which it is engaged in as of the doodler's individual personality.

Animation is also a pervasive feature of doodling. Figures, faces and scenes appear, sometimes like uninvited guests, with all their accompanying activities and expressions. As in our fantasy life, these figures may be all too familiar, or even painfully clichéd, displaying ways in which our supposedly personal inner worlds have been colonized by characters from collective media narratives (TV, films, cartoon strips and video games, for example). Doodling provides a kind of short-cut into a collective, often vulgar 'unconscious', a reservoir of vernacular imagery that is a far cry from the grandiose idioms of myth or archetypes.

So not all the common factors involved in doodling are conscious ones: even on a purely formal level they might also include what psychologists and psychiatrists have tried to analyse in terms of regular patterns beneath the superficial variety of graphic automatisms, especially those to be found in 'psychotic art'. One example is the 'creative form constants' put forward by two modern psychiatrists, which they group into physiognomic, formal and symbolic clusters.[11] Perhaps because of the shared psychiatric context, these are very close to Prinzhorn's model, referred to earlier. Again, there is the assumption that what has a playful, unconscious meaning in normal everyday situations acquires a more diagnostic spin in a medical context, and the possibility that a patient might be playing with the 'proper' rules of representation, ornament or even the human figure, is excluded. There would obviously be more place for this in a doodle.

What is so often missing, even outside a clinical context, is any account from the doodler themselves of what might (or might not) have been going on in their mind. One of the best inside descriptions of the dynamics of doodling somewhat pre-dates the term itself. In 1911 Wilhelm Worringer claimed that in tracing 'beautiful, flowing curves, our inner feeling unconsciously accompanies the movement of our wrist'; but there was also a contrary tendency, in which

23 Anonymous doodle, *c*. 2002. A more abstract doodle also done at a meeting.

OPPOSITE: 22 Anonymous agenda doodle, 16 October 2000. A typical doodle done during a meeting.

> the pencil will move wildly and violently over the paper and instead of the beautiful, round, organically tempered curves, there will be a hard, angular, ceaselessly interrupted jagged line, of the most powerful vehemence of expression.[12]

Here 'the reflex sensation is not accompanied by any feeling of satisfaction, for we have the impression that we are being coerced by some alien, imperious will.' Worringer then gives an even more vivid account of this process:

> At every break, at every change of direction, we feel how forces suddenly checked in their natural course are blocked, how, after this instant's arrest, they pursue, with a momentum increased by the obstruction, a new direction of movement. And the more frequent the breaks, the more numerous the obstacles, the more powerful will be the impetus at the points of rupture, the more forceful each time will be the onrush in a new direction . . .[13]

This opposition between attractive curves and more awkward angularities was put forward in an earlier book of his, *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908); its revision of the status of decorative and ornamental forms, and its promotion of the 'organic' over the geometric, also had a pervasive influence on modernist artists such as Kandinsky.

There can be little doubt that many of the challenging innovations of modernism – the escape from representation, the denial of the need to communicate, the use of play and accident, for example – which initially aroused such hostility from the general public were soon readily accepted by them under the aegis of the doodle. Even today people will accept all kinds of awkwardness, disfigurement or decorative improvisation in doodles that they would react against in a work of art. But then the doodle has the advantage of being very different from an artwork: it profits from its secrecy and modesty. This, as we shall see, makes it an attractive source to be raided by artists – as though something

of this innocence could be smuggled across the frontier between art and non-art. Nevertheless, doodling also offers many non-artists an inside experience of spontaneous form creation.

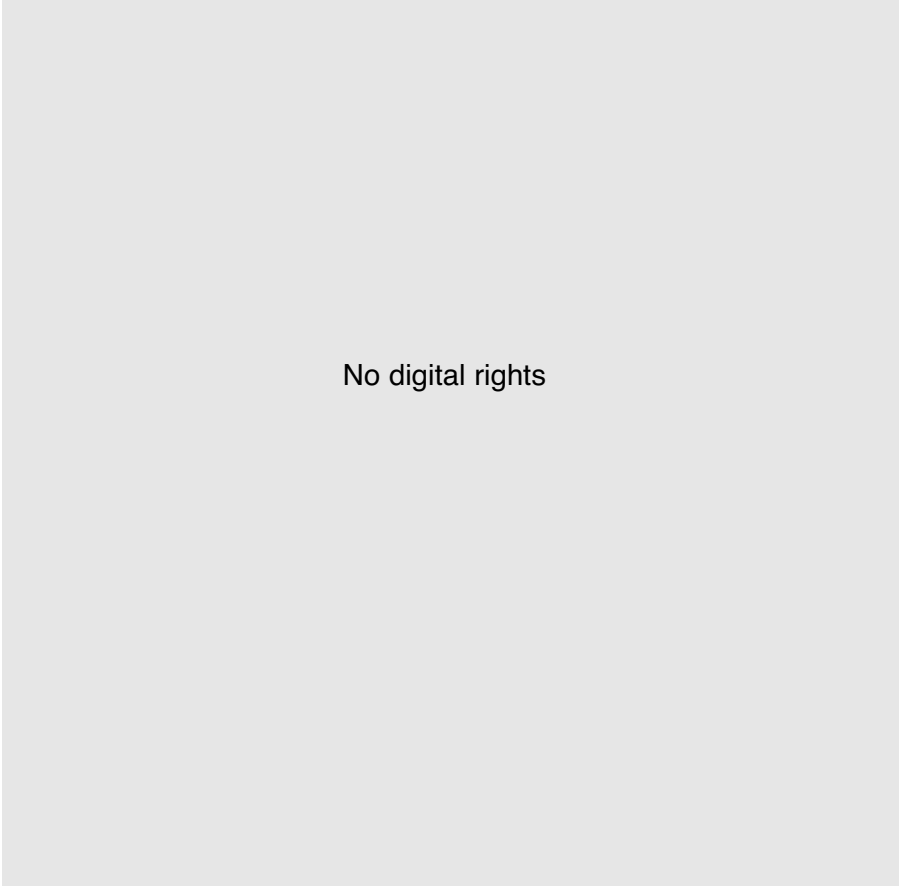
Whether we are trained artists or not, the assimilation and digestion of unpalatable artistic inventions does not just take place consciously: it also happens at a predominantly subliminal level. Once their novelty wore off, many of the innovations of modernism – Cubist, Constructivist or Surrealist, for example – have decayed into cliché and sunk down into what amounts to an underground reservoir of stylistic mannerisms or ready-made formulae. I think this is continually being added to, in much the same way that graphic design and advertisements extend people's pictorial vocabulary without them always being fully aware of it. Doodles are in fact one of the best places to tune into this, because in most cases they are produced fairly unselfconsciously. People who have no training in art are actually less likely to recognize and avoid these subconscious recipes, which is why, for example, we often find them in work produced in special art studios for people with various forms of disability, where the mechanisms of doodling also play a significant role.

The term 'mechanism' is not just a figure of speech: there are now lots of artificial means of generating doodle-like drawings. Arundel came up with 120 basic doodle patterns; it would be quite easy to put these into a permutational program, and several computerized mini robots seem to have operated in this way – Harold Cohen's crab-like drawing robot, AARON, for example, and Jochem van der Spek's Tekenmachine 4 and 5, shown on a video at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, in 2008. The latter draws simultaneously in black with two arms, and in white with two others trailing just behind, effectively part erasing what has gone before: it bounces off the frame within which it appears to be contained (I could not work out whether or not the device itself was a digital artefact) in an almost perfect illustration of Worringer's account. Others are virtual programs, such as can be found on the Internet, where a participant's initial scribble will gradually be transformed into an increasingly complex drawing, which can be halted at any stage.[14]

No matter how complex these pre-programmed gadgets may be, they still go through only the most abstract versions of doodling. Real-life doodles are more personalized, not only because they often contain names and numbers, but also because, as we have seen, they often have a strong human presence, in the form of faces, figures and actions. To some degree these must be the result of conscious intervention, no matter how fleeting. This does not necessarily mean that the doodle as a whole is not done in a distracted or absent-minded state, which could therefore be described as a diluted form of automatism. Curiously, the habitual dimension of doodling seems to be something difficult to replicate mechanically; perhaps because there is often a subtle dialogue between the habitual or familiar and more conscious interventions that a computerized program cannot easily reproduce.

Some features of doodling are generic: for example, in cross-hatching, most right-handers prefer the top-right-to-bottom-left diagonal. Other features may appear more peculiar to the individual but, like handwriting, can still be read in terms of their inflection of more general laws or expectations. The connection with handwriting is something that is not just a matter of interpretative coincidence: not only did doodles begin like weeds flourishing on the margins of writing, but they use the same instrument, a pen or a pencil, for their own, different purposes. As we shall see, this connection is broken by digital technology; there, the relation to the hand and its writing functions is quite different. There is also the question of what happens when doodling is no longer subject to these influences that are at once its constraints and its stimulus.

Unfortunately, most doodles are fairly mundane, and this may be another reason why they are often discarded. That this was the case even in the 1930s seems to be borne out by a competition run by a London evening paper in 1937: there were over 9,000 entries (including one from Ernst Gombrich) and the results were subjected to a broad stylistic and psychological analysis by three psychiatrists.[15] The authors claimed that because they were part of a competition, the artistic standard of the entries



24 Mehrdad Rashidi, doodle, 2012, ink on found paper. This little bird, half-carrying a cottage on its shoulder, is a doodle that has crossed over into the world of Outsider art.

must be higher than normal, but most of those illustrated are average in every sense of the word.

As one might expect, the visual language of these doodles is hybrid, often combining many different elements on a small scale; hence there is an overlap in their statistical analysis. Faces, writing and 'ornamental detail' contributed 60 per cent each, with 'objects' closely following at 50 per cent. Surprisingly, there were few (12 per cent) purely ornamental doodles. Although several drawings by chronic schizophrenics (including Vaslav Nijinsky) were included for comparison, the psychological conclusions drawn were that the doodles are evidence of a 'lowering of consciousness' and illustrate a 'primitive' level of mental functioning (bundled up with 'myths, sagas, fairy tales, superstitions and other cultural customs of primitive races').[16]

Doodling has been a recognized phenomenon for 70 or 80 years now, and one might expect it to have undergone some evolution. But because of both its temporary nature (most doodles are thrown away) and its marginal status, there is little evidence on which to base an account of this. Surely its original interest as a suggestion of its creator's unconscious preoccupations has worn thin by now, or has at least been accompanied by a greater interest in its creative or artistic quality. It now has something in common with Outsider art, in that it stems from privacy and solitude and becomes an object of interest for others, almost against its will. With the increasing interest in the artistic aspect of doodles, there is sometimes an ambiguous negotiation when an individual doodler has many of the circumstantial hallmarks of Outsider art and then accepts their work being exhibited as such. A recent example is the Iranian refugee Mehrdad Rashidi, whose drawings have been bought by the Collection de l'Art Brut, among others (illus. 24).

Similarly, doodling seems to offer the possibility that there is a universal latent creativity in almost everyone. However, there is still a qualitative problem: doodling might be the lowest common denominator of such creativity. Several other questions arise at this point: is there a historical aspect to

25 Bill Prosser, *Human Wishes 8*, transcription of a Samuel Beckett doodle, 2008, pencil on paper. Unusually, this follows Beckett's original closely, even including his fingerprint.

doodling? What difference have modern inventions like the ballpoint or felt-tip pen made? Has the continuing interest in doodles made them less embarrassing? To what extent can the notion be applied across cultural boundaries?

First, ingredients of doodles that are recognizable – images of dress, contemporary cartoon characters and the like – do give a dated feel to many older doodles. It may also be the case that even more abstract, or at least decorative, elements also have a shelf-life. The evidence is complicated by the fact that most pre-twentieth-century 'doodles', such as the mediumistic drawings of Victor Hugo and the manuscript embellishments of Fyodor Dostoevsky or Friedrich Engels, for example, come from authors with multiple talents that included art. Then, the widespread use of pens that do not have to be refilled obviously enables a more fluid doodling (one of the most striking examples of this, as we shall see, are the spiritualist drawings of Laure Pigeon, in some of which almost the entire sheet is covered with a dense web of blue ballpoint). Next, the current popularity of doodles and the plethora of recent publications on the subject (there are thousands on Amazon.com), most of them rather prescriptive, have probably made them more acceptable, if not actually encouraged them.

Then there is the question of whether authors' doodles are a distinct category. Certainly, long before the term was coined, writers' manuscripts were often plentifully doodled (examples include Dostoevsky, Mark Twain and Gerard Manley Hopkins). Since the recognition of doodling, this has presumably become even more common. Sometimes a writer's doodles attract a flurry of academic interest; this was the case, for example, with Samuel Beckett. Interestingly, his doodles have been the subject of a remarkably painstaking series of transcriptions by the artist Bill Prosser, in which a gallery of doodled characters have been enlarged and usually re-presented in a ballpoint texture so dense as to be almost imperceptible. The example shown here, however, is in pencil and even recreates Samuel Beckett's fingerprint (illus. 25).[17] Can such doodles be seen simply as another kind of truancy from

the task in hand, or are they sometimes a sort of creative idling, in which energies that have temporarily stalled in writing are channelled into graphic form? Certainly, critics have sometimes tried to find connections between doodles and text (particularly in Beckett's case), and this is a special case of their more generalized interpretation in terms of unconscious thoughts or preoccupations.

There are several different answers to the question as to whether doodles can be found in other cultures. As we have seen, drawings that resemble doodles can be unearthed as far back as the 'meanders' or 'macaroni' on Palaeolithic cave walls. Some theorists have suggested that these functioned as prompts for more figurative imagery, and this is also a factor in doodling. In a similar fashion, they can also be 'discovered' in other, more recent cultures, such as the drawings by Mithila women in northeast India. One of these artists, Pushpa Kumari, is even labelled an Outsider artist.[18] However, the problem here is the same as with the early European examples already cited: we are projecting the modern concept on to areas where the whole notion of doodling is unknown, and on to drawings whose motivation may be quite different. As a loose appropriation this is not unlike the interest in 'primitive' art, or indeed child and chimp art – it satisfies our needs through a kind of cultural kidnap. The fact remains that doodling in our Western culture has specific associations: it is sedentary, it is in competition with some other activity, it is camouflaged by an absent-minded indifference and it is often treated as meaningless while still being seen as having some link to the doodler's character.

A particularly tricky and exceptional example is one where an English art teacher encouraged her teenage New Guinean pupils to create 'free' drawings, using felt-tip pens for the first time.[19] Undoubtedly, as she admitted, these students had been exposed to 'western art forms from Rembrandt to Donald Duck' in reproduction,[20] and they also drew upon motifs from their own culture; but the parallels with doodling are evident (illus. 26). However, these are more like what I shall call 'meta-doodles' – that is, drawings that have many of the characteristics of doodling but that no

26 Drawing by a 16-year-old New Guinea student, *c.* 1970, felt-tip on paper. Here some traditional motifs have been released from their usual functions.

longer have the same relation to writing or text. In addition, such prompted drawings, however individual their signatures, also have a collective orientation. This might still be another example of accessing the subliminal reservoir of forms that I mentioned earlier, in this case in a more concentrated and coherent form because of tribal traditions that are barely a generation away.

It may be that doodling in its original sense will be an inevitable accompaniment to the spread of literacy in cultures that were once pre-literate, and also to the introduction of modern Western materials such as pens and paper (much as has happened with Australian Aboriginal art). This would be evidence that doodling satisfies general human needs, such as playfulness or the wish to escape from a confined situation such as the classroom or meeting. As with the New Guinea material, it would be fascinating to see what cultural differences in idiom were then manifest.

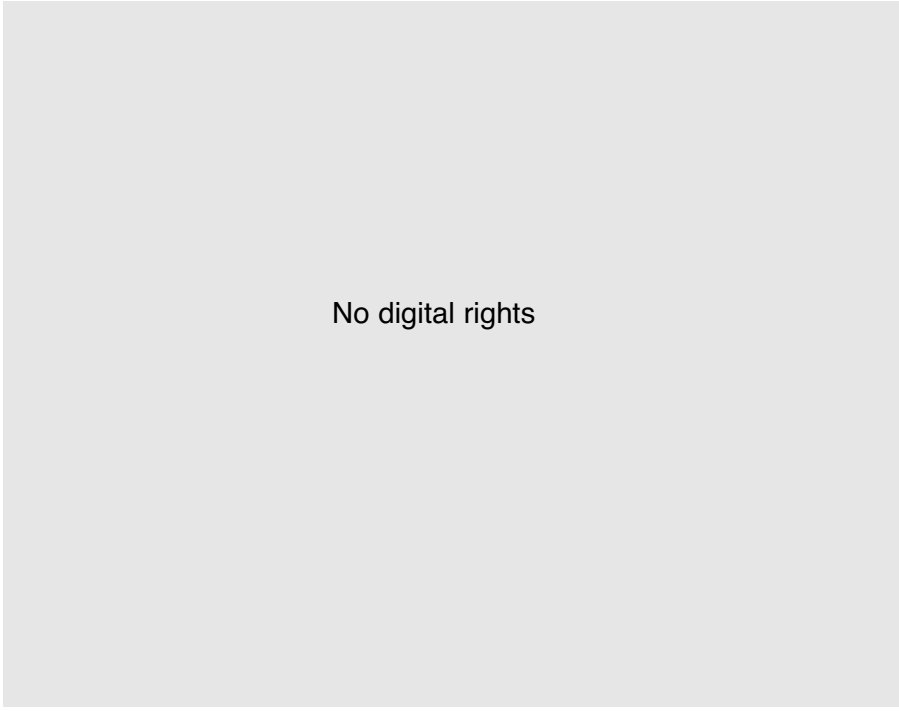
Nevertheless, in our own culture doodling is one of the few bridges between the world of art and a more common and popular form of drawing that does not necessarily owe anything to professional skill or training. In some ways the doodle occupies a cultural ghetto; it is trivialized and insulated from the wider world of art, and its popular published versions are usually numbingly condescending. Yet doodling is not a completely encapsulated phenomenon: it can be situated on a spectrum, from the most elementary forms of mark, of which the scribble is typical, to highly complex automatic drawings or 'meta-doodles', which we shall come to later. In all these modes, where the human hand is involved there is a complicated and shifting relation between spontaneity, some degree of reflection and creative originality.

One way in which this relation is played out is in the no-man's-land between doodle and sketch. It is well known that many artists and designers use casual or informal drawings, some of which might be called 'doodles', as a source of inspiration. This has become quite a noticeable feature of contemporary architectural design, almost as if it is a way of breaking free of the constraints associated with working drawings and plans. One striking example is Frank Gehry's sketch for what became the School of Management

at Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland. Another is the use of 'drawdling', among other techniques usually associated with the world of art, by Thom Mayne's Morphosis studio. Inevitably, there is some degree of self-consciousness involved, first of all in the decision to use something like doodling as a creative device, and then subsequently in translating the result into a practicable design; but the appeal of doodling is still that it bypasses control and intention.

In the case of many visual artists, something like doodling is engaged in as a kind of warm-up. As Henry Moore put it, 'Sometimes you would sit down with no idea at all, and at some point you'd see something in the doodling, scribbling . . . and from then on you could evolve the idea.'[21] The painter Alan Davie, who is also an improvising musician, covers A4-size sheets with a systematic series of doodle-like compositions as a way of loosening up at the beginning of a day in the studio. In other cases, something like doodling is engaged in under circumstances where other art-making is impossible, as in the hundreds of drawings the artist Dave Pearson made towards the end of his life when he knew he was dying (illus. 27). Some creative people doodle obsessively – one example is the film-maker David Lynch, who has a background in fine art and continues to practise, and who makes hundreds of drawings on the insides of matchbook covers, which could be called doodles because of their scale but which are often quite complex miniature drawings.

Then there is the familiar phenomenon in which, to the public eye, any dashed-off drawing by a famous artist can be called a 'doodle'.[22] This taps into the widespread fantasy that the slightest scribble by a gifted creator carries their inimitable stamp. It is certainly likely that practised hands will execute more complex or inventive doodles than the average, and this is obviously in contrast to the democratic lingua franca of most doodles. Artistic doodling also taps into the notions of spontaneous, unpremeditated creativity which we have already seen associated with automatic drawing. The paradox here is that the decision to abandon conscious control is itself a kind of counter-intention, and that



27 Dave Pearson, ‘doodle’ drawing, *c*. 2004, graphite on paper. Pearson turned the page around while drawing, so this is not as simple as the label ‘doodle’ implies.

28 Vonn Stropp, drawing, 1992, ink on paper. The structure of this elaborate doodle is close to that of Stropp's larger contemporaneous drawings, also executed under internal compulsion.

29 Louis Soutter, ink drawing on page of a copy of the Le Corbusier book *Une Maison – Un Palais* (*c*. 1930). Some of his marginal drawings have an evident relation to the page underneath, others seem like private excursions.

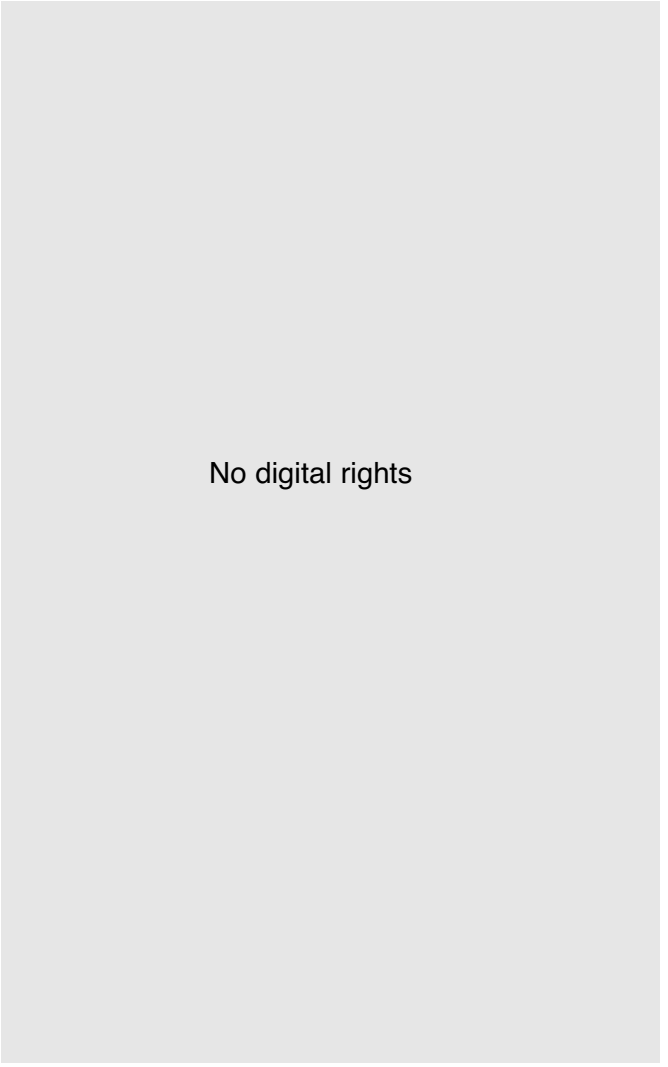
however impulsive the technique used, the artist's characteristic signature is still legible.

Artists as various as Georg Baselitz and Tracey Emin will sometimes use a deliberately casual or inept idiom very similar to that involved in doodling, in order to accentuate the spontaneity and authenticity of their work (and also to suit its often risqué subject-matter). It is often hard not to see something self-conscious in this pictorial slang. At the opposite end of the spectrum, artists may actually depict doodles. For example, a print by Michael Rothenstein shows a dangling handset with superimposed layers of reproduced telephone pad doodling beneath it. Some artists go even further and appropriate 'doodles' that have been made by other people to use in their own artwork.

The majority of doodles, because of their casual and amateur nature, have no pretensions to the status of 'art'. However, once the processes involved are given more space and time in which to expand, as in the 'meta-doodle', we see a qualitative change: densely packed and intricate drawings appear that make demands on the spectator's attention comparable to the obsessive concentration with which they were created (hence the exhausting effect of looking at some Outsider art). Similar experiences confront us when looking at drawings that, for one reason or another, can be called 'automatic'. There is also a grey area here, where some drawings are like automatic doodles. This example, by the Outsider artist Vonn Stropp, was made in a clearly distracted state while listening to the radio (hence the angry reference at the bottom to finding himself humming along to a NatWest commercial); yet it has much of the fluid shifting between forms that is associated with automatic or psychedelic art (illus. 28).

One of the most extraordinary cases is that of the Swiss artist and musician Louis Soutter. After several forays into conventional success, he effectively withdrew from the world and spent the last nineteen years of his life, against his will, in an old people's home. Friends gave him copies of their books (others he stole from their libraries), and Soutter filled seventeen of them with elaborate drawings. Like doodles, these were usually done in the

margins of the text, but elaborated to such an extent that they compete with it and effectively overwhelm it (illus. 29). With the three books that were given to him by his first cousin Le Corbusier, who was an admirer of his work, it is evident that the drawings are often a reaction against the text, which Michel Thévoz describes as 'a nocturnal counterpoint to Le Corbusier's hygienic limpidity'.[23] This kind of complex relation between text and drawing is also played out in automatic drawing, which we come to in the next chapter.



30 Paul Goesch, ink drawing from sketchbook, pre-1920. Goesch trained as an architect before he became a psychiatric patient.

4
Early Automatic Drawing

We have seen that part of the hybrid nature of doodling is that there is often a fluctuating level of consciousness attached to it, and that it is fairly indiscriminate in its use of different stylistic idioms. Automatism refers in general to a complex sequence of behaviour carried out in the almost complete absence of conscious awareness, and is at first sight a more radical and autonomous phenomenon. The concept originated in the context of nineteenth-century psychopathology, and often referred to actions carried out under the influence of hypnotic suggestion or to fugues or escapist episodes, sometimes quite prolonged, of which the normal personality had no recollection. It was also used in cases of hysteria or psychosis as a way of explaining the irruption of unconscious psychic material so startling that it did not seem to belong to the subject's normal frame of reference and that, because of its degree of organization, was often ascribed to some other agency, such as an alter ego or even a messenger from the world of spirits.

In Pierre Janet's highly influential work *L'Automatisme psychologique* (1889), there is a distinction between total and partial automatism: in the latter, a part of the psychic apparatus is split off from conscious awareness but is still experimentally accessible, for example by the encouragement of automatic writing.[1] Phenomena belonging to this category included 'the divining rod, spiritism and mediumism, obsessive impulses, fixed ideas and hallucinations of psychotic patients and finally . . . possession, that is, the attitudes, acts and feelings of the individual being controlled by a subconscious idea'.[2] Automatic writing and drawing, along with post-hypnotic suggestion, were assigned to this category, presumably on the grounds that the subject might be aware of being engaged in writing or drawing but did not have any sense of its content. In Janet we catch glimpses

of complex behavioural clusters that are seemingly independent of conscious control, the results of which are sometimes remarkable, and which in another context might be called inspiration. However, pictorial automatism does not feature in Janet's work; rather, it was its verbal forms, which later provided a model for Surrealist automatic writing.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that the most spectacular examples of a compulsion or dictation powerful enough to be considered as forms of automatism were to be found in psychotic art and spiritualist art: the psychotic artist was allegedly governed by instinctual or unconscious forces beyond his control, while the mediumistic artist submitted more willingly to the influence of spirits. In both cases work, often quite complex, seemed to have emerged fully fledged, without any previous sketch or plan. Of course, only a few psychotic artists produced work of this kind with a sustained consistency: many other works are either a jumble of forms and styles, or use a conventional diagrammatic or representational idiom that does not appear to be in any way automatic. But psychiatric concepts of delusion, hallucination and delirium fed into the image of the psychotic artist as someone driven by forces over which they had little or no control, and this could be seen as equivalent to automatism.

In his monograph of 1921 on Adolf Wölfli (1864–1930), one of the most prolific 'psychotic artists', the psychiatrist Walter Morgenthaler stated that

> Wölfli never created in accordance with an ideal, but entirely in response to his instincts. He doesn't know the laws by which he works, but he obeys them unreservedly . . . When he creates, it is in a state at once sublime and oppressed, ruled by a powerful inner tension, by something concrete, serious, and measured, yet fully personal, violent, and turned towards the absolute.[3]

While the psychiatric context reinforces the idea of something like automatism at work here, it is important to recognize that this could also describe an extreme version of the inspiration under which many non-psychotic artists work or have

worked. However, in what Hans Prinzhorn, writing at almost the same time, said of 'schizophrenic art', there is more of a sense of an impersonal drive:

> These works really emerged from autonomous personalities who carried out the mission of an anonymous force, who were independent of external reality, indebted to no one, and sufficient solely unto themselves. The inborn primeval process of configuration ran its course far from the outside world, without plan but by necessity, like all natural processes.[4]

Here the link is more evident, between an instinct or compulsion and something bordering on the automatic. The idea that the psychotic artist is independent of any tradition and draws almost exclusively on an inner world was also a key ingredient in Jean Dubuffet's notion of Art Brut ('raw art'), an art created in isolation independent of any tradition.

To what extent is this connection to automatism viable? For obvious reasons, most accounts of psychotic artists at work are based on hearsay or inference. However, two of the most celebrated psychotic artists, Wölfli and Aloïse Corbaz (1886–1964), created over a long period of time and produced substantial bodies of work. Morgenthaler, who had a good deal of contact with Wölfli, stated that he drew without premeditation, starting from the outside and working in, and that in general he worked ceaselessly until his meagre ration of materials (in the early years, one pencil and two sheets of paper per week) was exhausted. Wölfli had the luxury of a cell to himself in which to work, while Corbaz worked secretively and could only be observed at work towards the end of her life, when she was entirely absorbed in her drawing. She too seems to have worked spontaneously, treating her images almost as independent characters (according to the few recordings made of her talking while drawing). So here we have examples of something that does seem very close to automatism.

Gifted creators like Wölfli, Corbaz and Martín Ramírez are exceptional in psychotic art on account of the sustained and consistent nature of their work. While this was often ascribed to instinctual or unconscious dictation, there is always the possibility that conscious choice entered into the picture,

but we have no way of knowing to what extent. The situation is complicated by the fact that there is also a third party: the contribution of the ongoing drawing process itself. In a real sense, the elaboration of a drawing can involve surrendering to its independence or following its lead, and this can then give rise to the feeling that some other agency is dictating the work. In the case of Ramírez, for example, it is not difficult to imagine how the repeated contour lines in his landscapes might have generated a fascinating momentum of their own, to which he felt he had to submit. Michel Thévoz writes of such effects:

> At the root of this quasi-hypnotic practice there is a natural obsession, the to-and-fro of the pencil or pen on paper, the repetitive and incantatory rhythm, which evoke a secondary state of distraction, of disconnection and imaginative capacity.[5]

In other cases, such as Emma Hauck's desperate and compacted written pleas, and the intricate elaborations of Paul Goesch's sketchbooks (illus. 30), we can see many of the characteristic features of automatism: repetition or permutation, for example, or elisions between different genres. We then have to ask: to what extent does calling such work 'automatic' also depend upon the specific conditions of execution we associate with the term, such as being in a trance-like state?

In the case of a great deal of psychotic art, we know very little about the individual circumstances under which a work was made. From a conventional psychiatric perspective, it was assumed to have been created in an irrational state; its sense of obscure compulsion and its graphic compression (labelled *horror vacui*, the need to leave no empty space), along with its disordered or delirious character (often labelled as 'hallucinatory'), give the impression of its having been created without much deliberation or restraint. This could then be seen, like Wölfli's work, as automatic. On the other hand, there are some works with a pronounced formality, or even a diagrammatic style – such as by August Natterer, Josef Heinrich Grebing and August Klett

(or Klotz) – where it is hard not to imagine some degree of deliberation. Furthermore, there is always the possibility of a certain amount of humour, irony or satire in some psychotic art. Although such aspects are by their nature unprovable, their presence suggests some degree of conscious control. None of these things means that they could not still have elements of automatism, but it would be in a diffuse and obscure form.

However, there are some drawings that do have a more obviously improvised character that would fit with the fluency of automatic drawing. In some cases, these are purely 'decorative' excursions: in Ludwig Wilde's notebooks they have a recognizably 'Persian' idiom (illus. 31), while in some of Paul Goesch's sketches there are echoes of his architectural training. In other examples, notably Ida Maly's work, there is a more elaborate embroidery of lines and textures that looks very like certain spiritualist drawings (illus. 32). It is not hard to imagine such work being created in a state of reverie or self-absorption that would be close to automatism, and that might be as much a result of external circumstances (the boredom or desperation born of confinement, for example) as of any psychotic disorder.

Automatism found its most dramatic form in the mid-nineteenth-century milieu of spiritualism, in which recently deceased personalities, previous incarnations and spirit guides often appeared to be responsible for a wide range of phenomena, including automatic writing and drawing. This is even more striking because there was usually an audience to witness the medium's performance. Even if many of these exploits were probably faked, their ingredients are still impressive: for example, communicating messages in dozens of different languages, many of them allegedly unknown to the medium (xenolalia), and sometimes produced under severe constraints, such as with a pencil lodged between two clean slates.[6] Unknown scripts were also produced – Hélène Smith's Martian alphabet is one of the most famous examples – as well as drawings.[7] The spiritualist artist Ferdinand Desmoulins could even draw portraits of dead people in the dark. Contrary to our modern expectations, much of this work was actually carried out in a quite conventional representational style, which

perhaps came more naturally to the medium, as well as forming part of a well-educated person's skills.

Whereas automatic writing played a significant part in seances, automatic drawing occupied a more marginal place, perhaps because it was less easily legible as a message. Some of the most fascinating mediumistic work of the period – Georgiana Houghton's and Hilma af Klint's, for example – anticipated the experiments of modernist artists like Kandinsky in spiritualized abstraction by several decades. In some cases the work is obviously symbolic or almost diagrammatic; but in others it is as if the process of drawing itself, with its tangle of lines and textures, generated suggestive shapes and forms. Sometimes these procedures are like a form of divination; for example, like Victor Hugo, Jeanne Tripier used blots and stains, sometimes obliterating writing, to obtain her messages (she believed she was a reincarnation of Joan of Arc). Here the contribution of the drawing process is deliberately invited and colluded with (illus. 33).

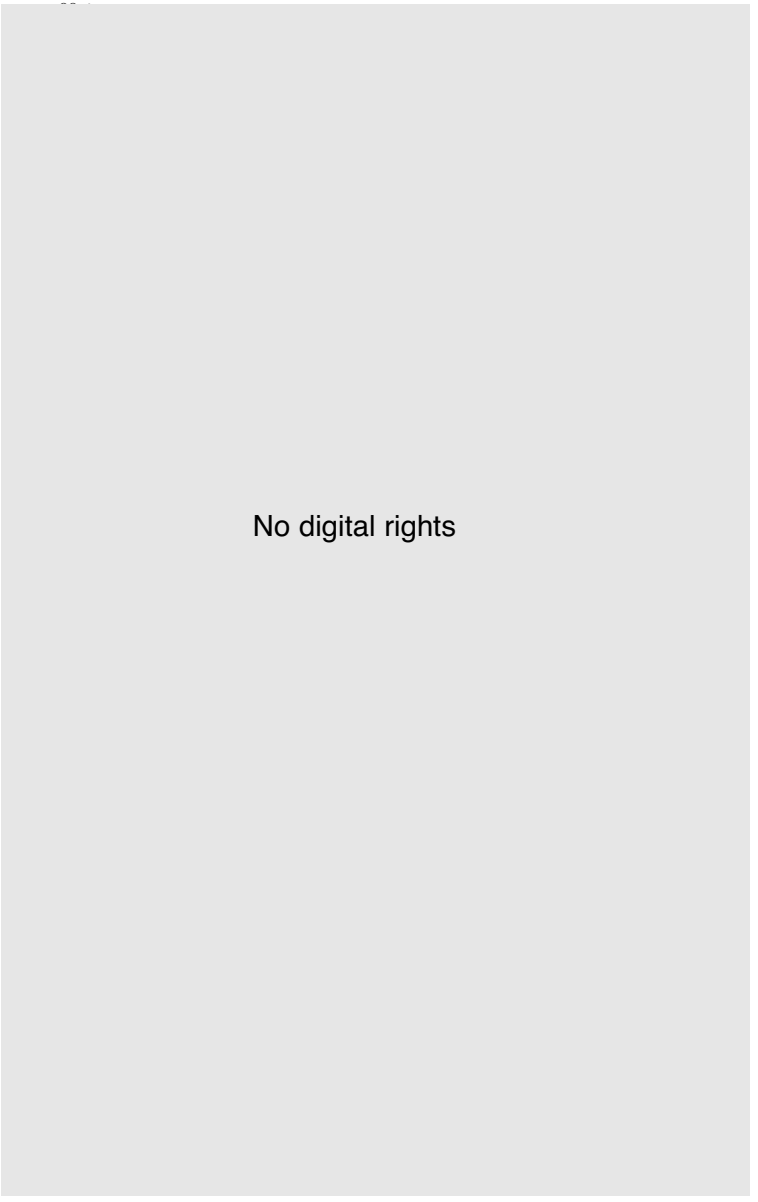
Spiritualist automatism sought to open a passage between the realm of the living and that of the dead, and as we shall see, modernist adaptations of its techniques, most famously in Surrealism, sought to open the way to unconscious inspiration. Both could be seen as modern European versions of the shamanic communication with spirit worlds practised in tribal cultures. In many instances, such as Native American shamanism, there is also a similar combination of legerdemain, theatrical performance and genuine trance phenomena. Likewise, in spiritualist phenomena the boundary between conscious invitation, contrivance and complete surrender is hard to draw, and it has been easy to disqualify many genuinely strange events on account of the trickery that is sometimes a part of their envelope. However, the factor common to both that I want to focus on here is not what kind of evidence automatism provides for the existence of these domains, but what I shall call its 'performance' aspect: that is, its address to an audience of some kind.

At first sight it might seem obvious that this is only present when automatism is practised in a seance or group setting. This was reinforced by the use of photography to document mediumistic phenomena as well as to

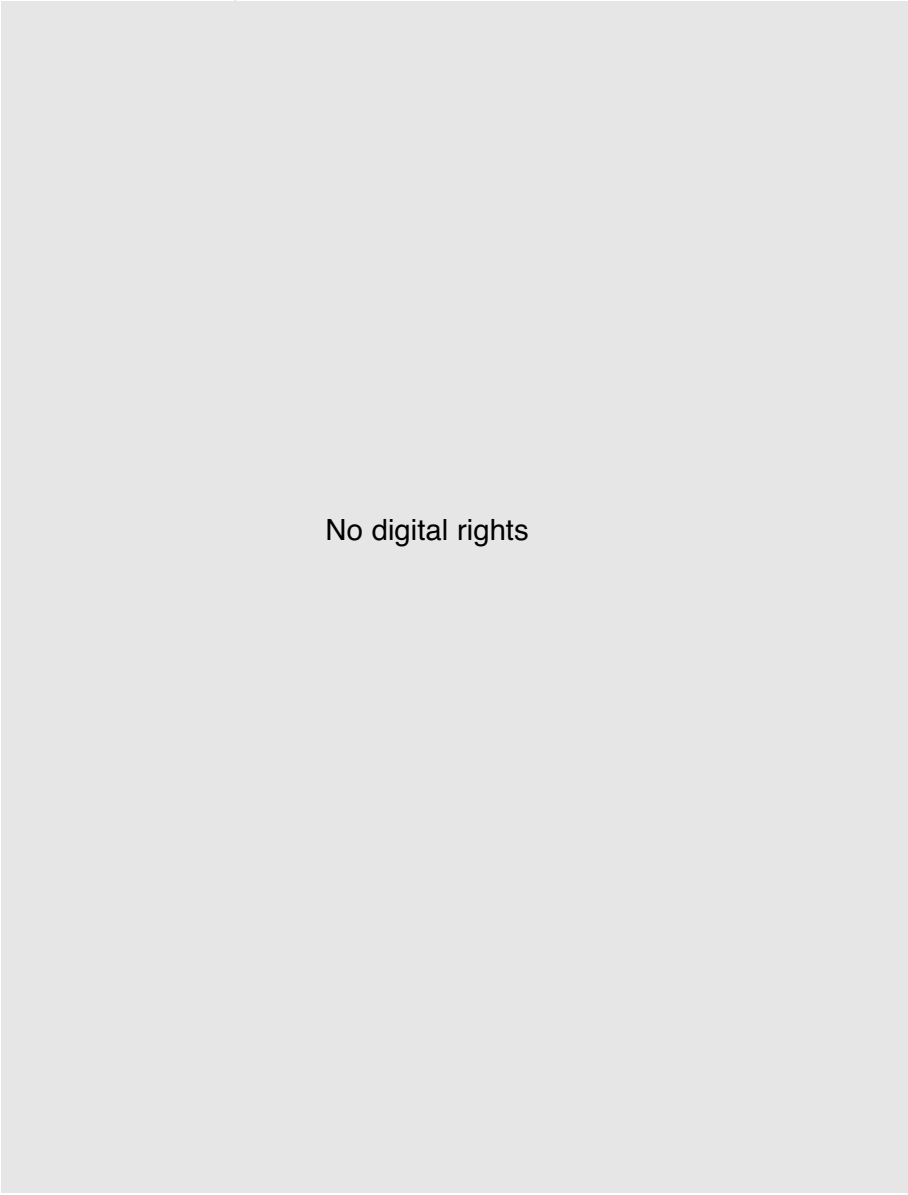
expose fraud.[8] However, automatism was also a technique that could be learned and one that an individual could engage in privately. But even in descriptions of solitary automatic drawing or writing, there is often a keen sense of addressing an invisible, interiorized audience. This is also present in many other forms of art making. It is not necessarily the same thing as being conscious of how the work might look to potential viewers: it is something more obscure and less a matter of choice. Many artists describe watching their hand at work, almost as if it belonged to someone else. At what point does this witnessing turn into something like a performance, and what are the differences between what could be called a private, internal performance and one conducted in front of a real audience? Or to put it another way, if one part of the personality is inviting another part to convey messages or invent forms, then there is a kind of secret collusion between the two that has elements of an internal dialogue or drama.

In parallel with late nineteenth-century spiritualism, psychoanalysis sought to explain mediumistic phenomena through the scientific investigation of unconscious psychological processes. Although Freud was deeply suspicious of occultism, some other psychoanalytic investigations did also engage in such internal dialogues. Carl Jung was not only interested in the subject through his participatory research with his medium cousin Hélène Preiswerk, but also went on to compose his *Red Book* out of material that had been dictated to him by figures that certainly belong to the same family as spirit guides, even if they are more self-consciously archetypal. *The Red Book* is copiously illustrated with symbolic scenes, many of which derived from elaborated unconscious fantasies, but whose careful painting seems far from automatic. However, some of the mandala drawings in Jung's notebook from 1917 are more spontaneous and bear some resemblance to some of Af Klint's automatic seance drawings from the 1890s.[9]

There is also a clear convergence between the written elaboration of unconscious material in archetypal psychology and the texts and utterances produced in spiritualist circles. In both instances complex bodies of material, including verbal and pictorial imagery, emerged in quite dramatic form. In



31 Ludwig Wilde, pencil drawing on notebook leaf, before 1920. Here ‘decorative’ motifs acquire a life of their own.



32 Ida Maly, untitled drawing, 1930–40, watercolour and ink on paper. Maly studied art before being diagnosed with schizophrenia in 1928.

his essay 'On the Transcendent Function', written in 1918, which deals with the gathering and working through of fantasy material from the unconscious, Jung mentions the use of a planchette for automatic writing as one way of stimulating unconscious fantasy material. However, his instructions for taking the path of 'creative formulation' by making pictures from these fantasies clearly imply a more conscious working up of the original image, to the extent that he warned against their psychological significance being eclipsed through their being taken as 'art'.[10] Ironically, Jung's own lavish illustrations to his *Red Book* have a highly finished, artistic quality to them.

Drawings created under direct spiritualist influence (or permission) do seem to have a more evident automatic character, not only because of the circumstances under which they were created but also because there is a fluency to them, a shifting in and out of recognizable forms, such as figures, faces and even words, and a powerful impression of a multitude of motifs crowding into the picture. In many cases the drawing was carried out in a series of sessions, most remarkably in Madge Gill's case, whose most spectacular work was on rolls of calico that were wound up as she went along, creating vast drawings sometimes up to 35 feet long. Although Gill later identified a spirit, 'Myrninerest', as being responsible for her work, she kept this secret from the world at large, even though she organized seances at her home after her husband's death in 1933. Although she eventually began to exhibit her work, she refused to sell it on the grounds that it did not belong to her.

Many of Gill's drawings have a structure in which there are abruptly alternating black and white patterns and areas of cross-hatching, interspersed with gaps: these are often occupied by quite formulaic female faces, giving the impression that the figures associated with them are embedded in these textures, which sometimes have dizzying and contradictory architectural perspectives to them. I suspect that in other drawings, especially ones on paper, she began with looping and skipping lines, which she then started to fill in, sometimes with cross-hatching, sometimes with pure black, and these drawings have a more abstract character (illus. 34). There is

often a rather claustrophobic feel to her work, as though the figures and the spaces that contain them are jostling in a confined space, and one could see this as evocative of some kind of afterlife, though these faces are more like idealized images from Gill's own fantasy world.

Raphael Lonné, who worked as a postman, started drawing as a result of attending a neighbour's seance, and claimed that his drawings and writings were dictated by spirits. At first he drew at home in the evenings, for a couple of hours per drawing. The drawing period then began to be spread out over several days, but usually for a similar amount of time per session. Lonné seems to have worked from top left to bottom right 'like a page of writing', and perhaps this is one reason why he sometimes allowed some empty passages (illus. 35). His work, like Gill's, sets up a varied territory of textures out of which an astonishing range of forms emerge. In many ways these echo the work of another postman Outsider artist, Ferdinand Cheval; in both artists' work, animal and human figures are lodged like fossils in a suggestive texture, but in Lonné's case you can catch them appearing and disappearing, while Cheval's three-dimensional technique is inevitably more explicit. Lonné's later works use a wider range of materials, including gouache and varnish, in a more sophisticated way, and are less figurative. Although he began as an adherent of spiritualist beliefs, Lonné distanced himself from them in later life.

Laure Pigeon's work was discovered only after her death, when it was being thrown out on the pavement. Having been introduced to spiritualism after she had separated from her husband in 1933, she lived on her own and drew in secret for more than 30 years, building up a total of more than 500 drawings, each one dated. Until the mid-1950s Laure's drawing was loose and linear, with plenty of open spaces in which there were occasional words or brief passages of text; but thereafter, although it has occasional suggestions of faces and words, it consists for the most part of a tracery of densely layered lines that are sometimes so thickly overlaid that the surface of the paper is shiny in places. Her use of blue ballpoint pen, a medium admirably suited to automatic drawing, gives her work a wonderful sense

33 Jeanne Tripier, drawing, 1937. A professed psychic medium before being hospitalized, Tripier continued to use aleatory methods both to generate and to conceal her messages.

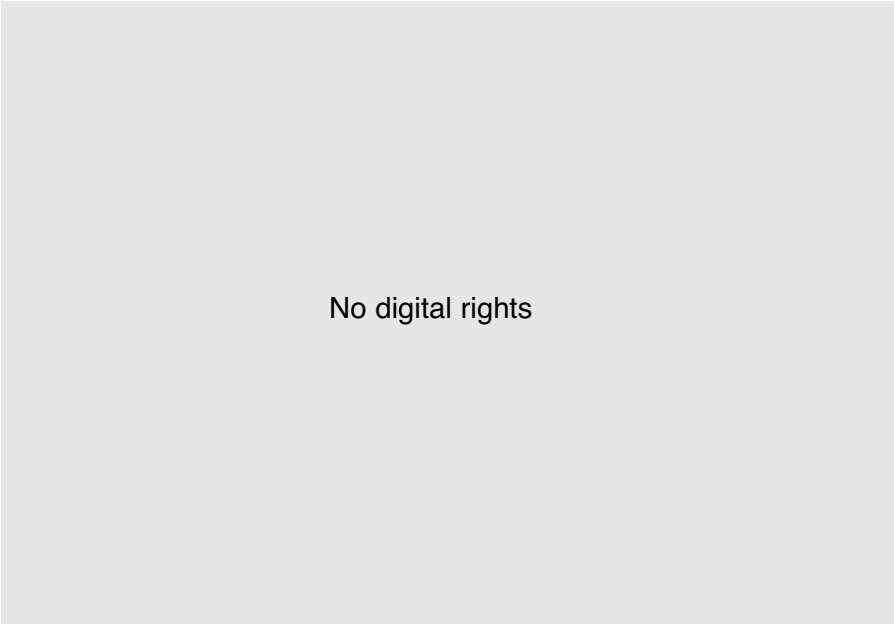
34 Madge Gill, drawing, 1962. Unusually, this drawing has passages where the original drawing is inked out.

of fluidity. Thick clusters of lines, almost like tresses of hair or currents of water, weave around spaces that are either empty or barely occupied by feminine profiles or embroidered names: the effect is of an intense, almost swooning, sensuality (illus. 36).

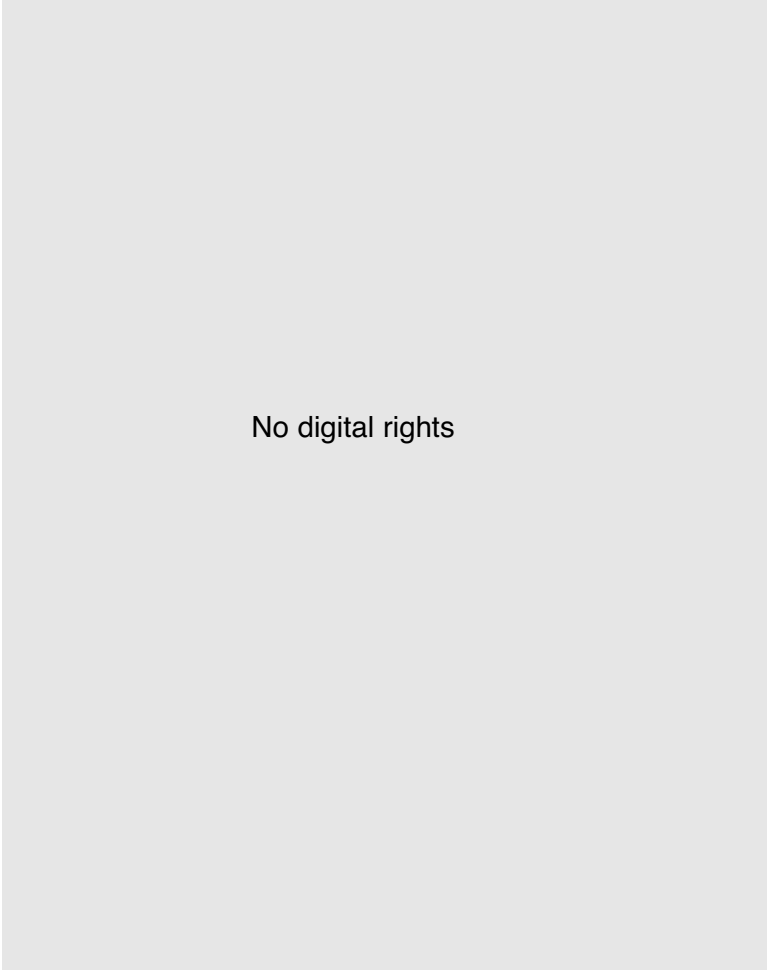
There are actually quite a number of mediumistic artists whose work also gives a similar feeling of densely woven textures: Mme Bouttier (illus. 37), Jane Ruffié (illus. 38) and Fernande Le Gris (illus. 39), for example. In their drawing, too, we find a network of 'organic' textures that suggest compacted three-dimensional forms into which all sorts of figures could easily be read, but which remain on the threshold of legibility in ways that are seductive and fascinating. These exquisite graphic themes and variations are some way removed from Anton Ehrenzweig's 'inarticulate form', which we shall come to in the next chapter, in having a high degree of rhythmic elaboration and some suggestions of spatial depth. Nevertheless, they could still be seen as examples of unconscious form creation. They may well have been created in an auto-hypnotic or trance-like state, or else produced in a more diffuse absent-mindedness: any of these would qualify as some form of automatism.

However, the cursive and undulating idiom of these artists is not the only one to be found in mediumistic art. A similarly formal version of automatism can be found in the work of Anna Zemankova, a perfectionist housewife and mother, who was encouraged to take up drawing again in her fifties. She worked for several hours each morning, before the family got up, in a state of entranced absorption, using ballpoint and coloured pastel, and later, embroidery (illus. 40).

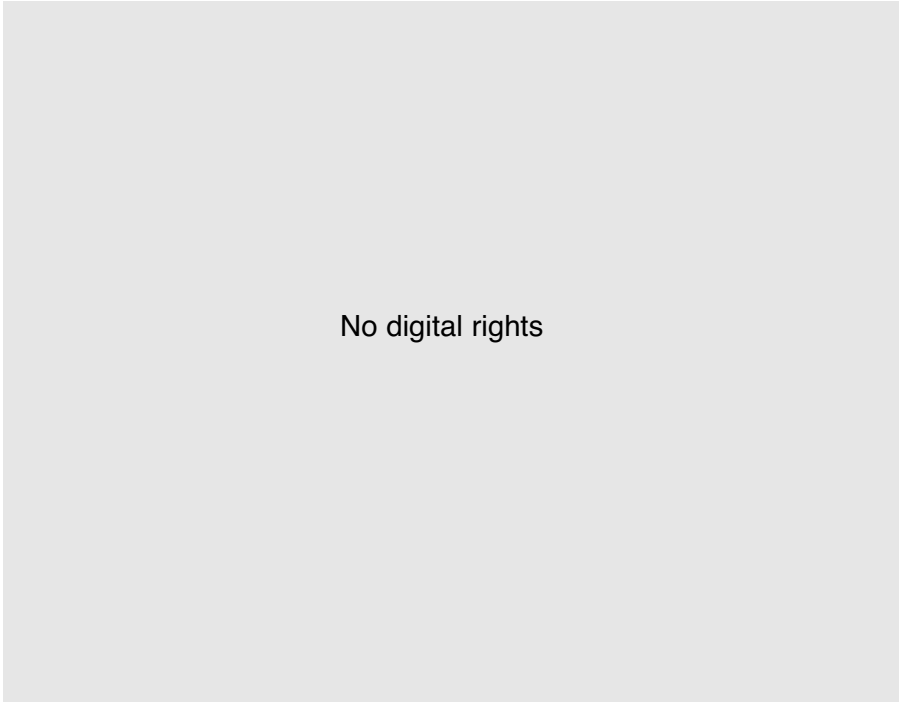
These and other remarkable examples of spiritualist art seem like the most authentic forms of automatic drawing and painting. The work is known to have been carried out in a trance-like state, with little or no conscious intention; its creators felt that someone or something was dictating it; and the work itself has a strong sense of fluency and is crowded with forms that have a bewildering variety. Nevertheless, the process of the work itself unfolding must also have made its own contribution, sometimes giving the impression of being like an independent agency. It is more unusual



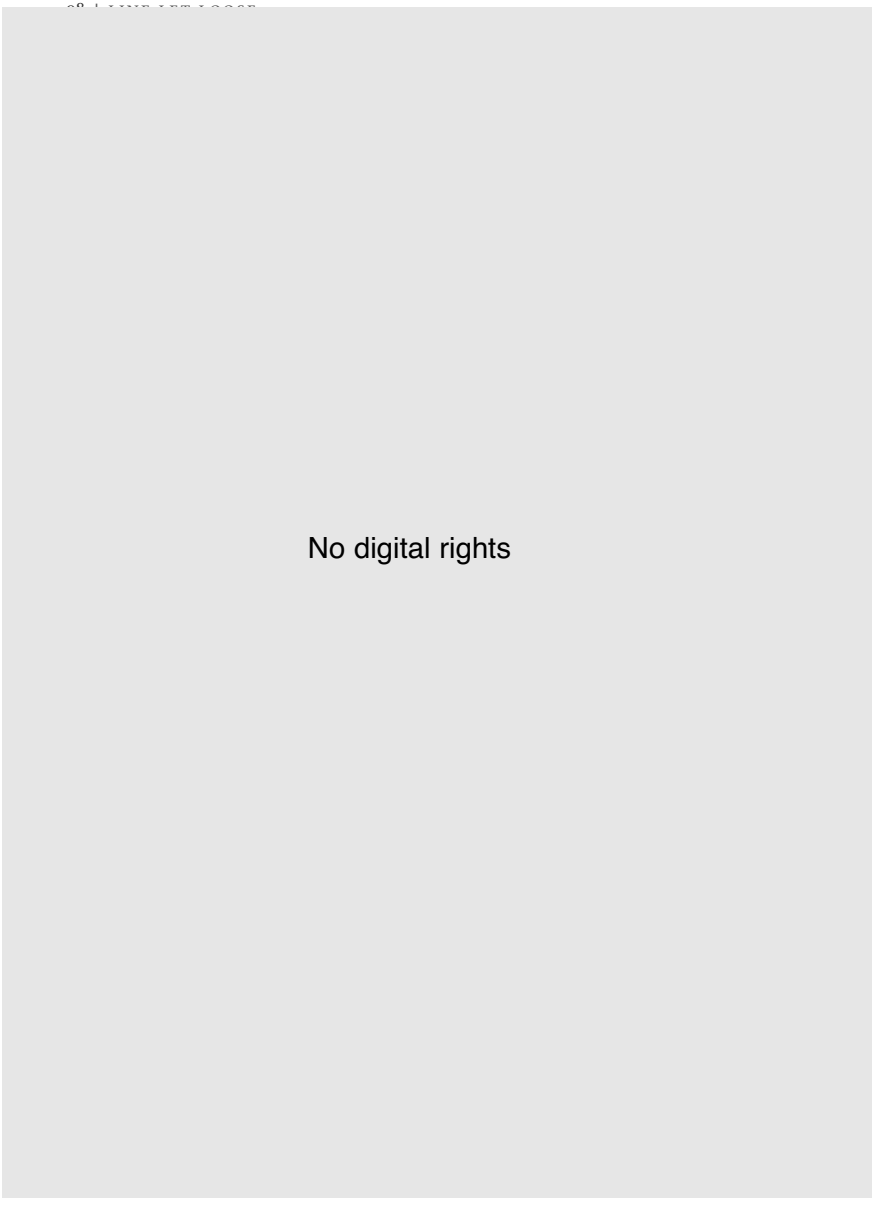
35 Raphael Lonné, untitled drawing, November 1964, ink on paper. Faces and vestigial creatures are embedded in a kind of metamorphic texture, dictated by spirits.



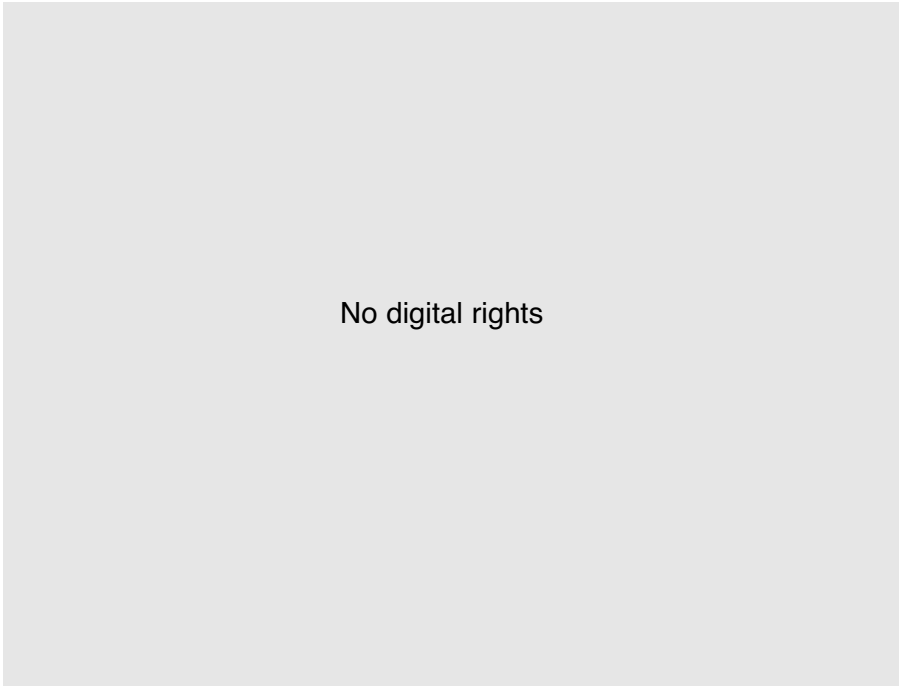
36 Laure Pigeon, *Untitled,* 1963, ink on paper. In this late solo spiritualist work, the name 'Pierre' can clearly be made out.



37 Mme Bouttier, untitled drawing, 1899, pencil on paper. There is a wonderful hybrid language of forms, veering between the vegetable, the animal and the marine.



38 Jane Ruffié, untitled drawing, *c*. 1939, pencil and coloured pencil on paper. After 20 years of written spiritualist messages, Ruffié began automatic drawing, still to offer answers to people's questions.



39 Fernande Le Gris, *Prehistory*, 1966, pencil drawing on paper. At the right there is something like a list from a dream encyclopedia, while the drawing is resolutely abstract.

to find similar work these days, but one remarkable example is a Philippine woman known as Marjoje (Mary-Joseph-Jesus) who in 2006 said that she heard God, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit speak to her. She was hospitalized as a psychotic, but was then supported by Gyllenkroken, a Swedish studio dedicated to helping people with mental health problems through art training programmes. At the same time, in private, she began to produce a large number of automatic drawings that she claims contain hidden spiritual messages and can cure illness and destroy evil spirits (illus. 41).

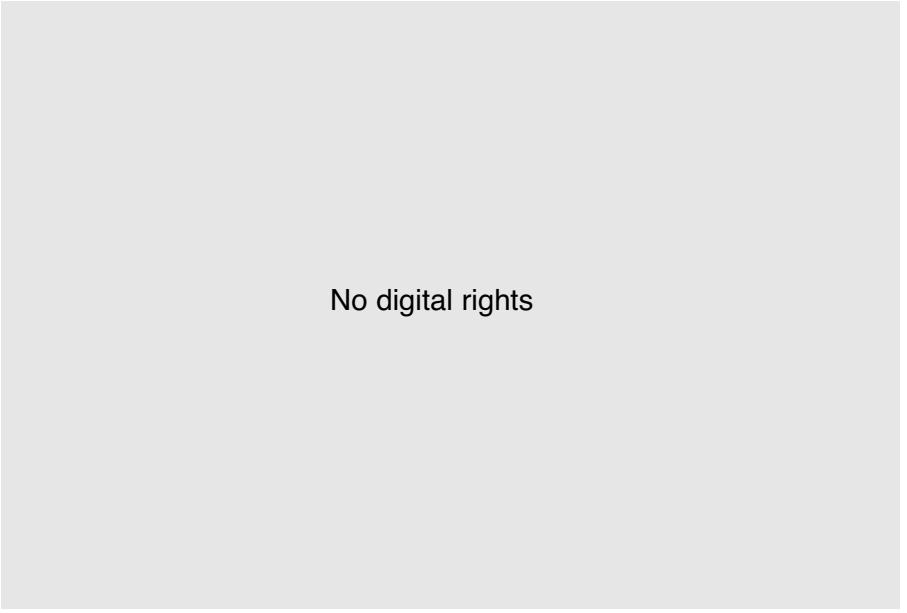
There is an extraordinary description of how something like this might have come about in a more mundane context in Gottfried Keller's *Der grüne Heinrich* ('Green Henry'), first published in 1850 and quoted in a footnote in Prinzhorn's book:

> But hardly had I drawn half an hour and dressed up a few branches with uniform needles, when I sank into a deep sleep of dissipation and scribbled thoughtlessly at the edges, as if I were testing a pen. In time an endless weave of lines attached itself to these scribbles which I continued to expand every day when I began work, until the monstrosity covered the greater part of the surface like a huge grey spider web. But when one looked more closely at the confusion, one discovered the most praiseworthy cohesion and diligence, in that it formed, with a continuous line, a labyrinth of pen strokes and curves which produced perhaps thousands of yards, and which could be followed from beginning to end. Occasionally a new method showed itself, in a sense a new epoch of work: new patterns and motifs, often tender and appealing, surfaced . . . Only occasionally were there smaller or larger hesitations, certain knots in the wanderings of my confused, depressed soul, and the care with which the pen sought to extricate itself from the embarrassment proved how the dreaming consciousness was caught in the net.[11]

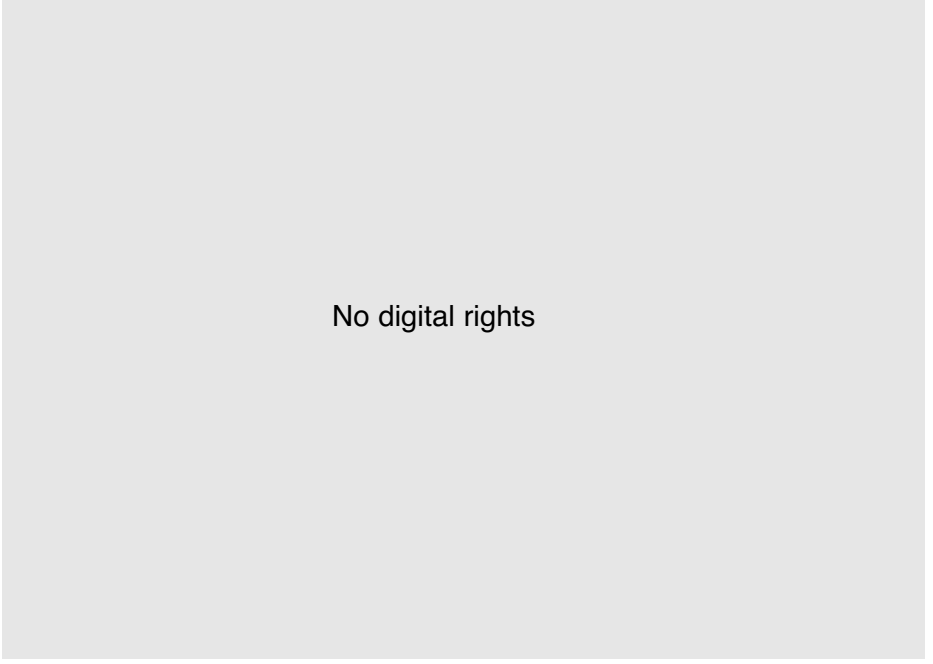
This is a fascinating account of how a drawing that started like a doodle gradually took on a life of its own and continued for weeks at a time. Keller

was himself a landscape painter, and this passage is obviously drawing on his own experience.

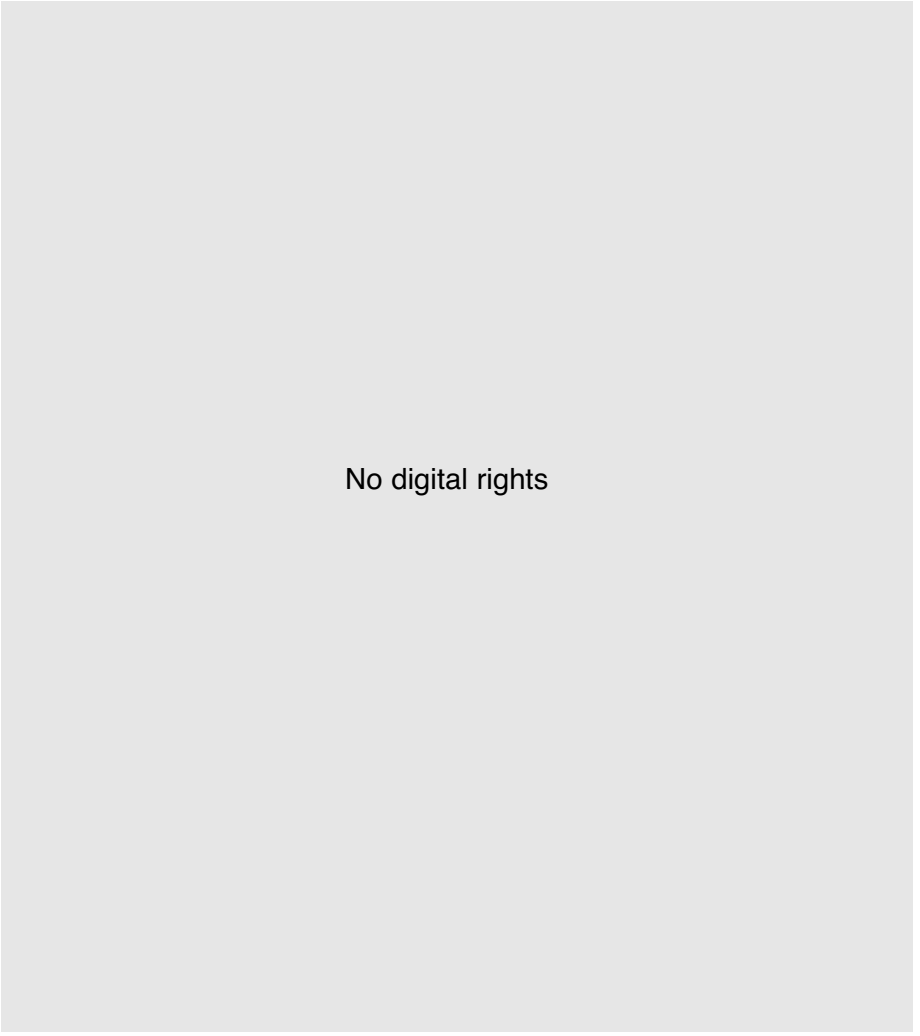
The range of automatic drawing created under the aegis of spiritualism is impressive, and it was a widespread phenomenon all over Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. In the next chapter I shall look at how spiritualist techniques were hijacked by Surrealism, and at how automatism later became a widespread technique for generating new forms that were 'unconscious' in a number of different ways.



40 Anna Zemankova (1908–1986), *Flowers and Spiral*, ballpoint, coloured pencil and repoussé. Although executed in a trance-like state, Zemankova's imagery has its own peculiarly painstaking style and often involves creasing and stitching.



41 Marjoje, automatic drawing, *c*. 2007, ink on paper. According to the artist, these drawings are modern dictations from God, with spiritual and healing powers.



42 André Masson, *Automatic Drawing*, 1924, ink on paper. This has much of the fluent overlapping, with suggestions of hands, faces and so on, that has come to be associated with automatism.

5
Automatism, the Unconscious and Modern Art

Both the pathological cases of psychological automatism and the contemporary examples of mediumistic outpourings inspired the Surrealists. André Breton, Louis Aragon and Théodore Fraenkel all had backgrounds in medicine and psychiatry that gave them a close acquaintance with relevant psychiatric material. Breton's first-hand experience of the power of delusion made an indelible impression on him.[1] Hence when Surrealism is defined in the first Surrealist Manifesto, it is in these terms: 'Pure psychic automatism by which it is proposed to express, either verbally, or by writing, or by any other means, the real functioning of thought.'[2] Since thought could most readily be identified with its expression in language, the initial material on which this declaration was based consisted mainly of automatic writing, along with dream accounts, as well as the contagious group trance states that characterized what came to be called the Sleeping Era of the movement.

These early experiments in automatic writing were a mixture of self-induced trance, disinfected of its spiritualist connotations, and what was inspired by their (mis)understanding of the psychoanalytic technique of 'free association'. They also bore a close resemblance to the techniques pioneered by Janet in his investigations of partial automatism, and Janet was certainly an important influence on the Surrealists. In the more private and less theatrical sessions that resulted in the jointly authored text *Les Champs magnétiques* ('The Magnetic Fields') of 1920, Breton and Philippe Soupault engaged in sustained periods of automatic writing. Interestingly, Breton later acknowledged that the speed of automatic dictation varied 'from a fairly neat writing to one that was so rapid as to be barely legible and sometimes necessitated abbreviations.[3]

In fact, there are even occasional doodles, labelled *gribouillis automatique* ('automatic scribble'), in the margins of the original manuscript, though they never received any attention.[4] In addition, Breton's account of early sessions with Robert Desnos mentions drawings as well as speech and writing.[5] In fact, Desnos seems to have painted as well as drawn scenes that were 'automatic' in the sense that they came to him in a trance, some of which were like pictorial obituaries of his friends.[6] Even more interesting are a couple of long, narrow drawings by Max Ernst, dated 1923, each entitled *Leçon d'écriture automatique,* which, with their figurative idiom and constant changes of perspective, look almost like extended doodles.[7] But anything that could be recognized as automatic drawing was slower to emerge in early Surrealism.

One difficulty with the need to find a pictorial equivalent to automatic writing was that the Surrealist formula for a marvellous image depended on a recognizable distance between its figurative components ('the chance encounter of an umbrella and a sewing-machine on a dissecting-table'). Whereas a word immediately conjures up its referent, a passage of drawing has to have a minimal degree of representation in order to do the same, and this requires at least a kind of graphic shorthand. There are obviously limits to the extent to which this is compatible with the spontaneity of execution associated with automatism (although we saw that some mediumistic drawings do have an elaborate degree of figuration). Surrealist artists found various techniques to create equivalents to verbal automatism: Ernst's collages, his 'frottages', or Oscar Domínguez's 'decalcomania', for example. These generated suggestive textures out of which landscapes and figures could be mined, in the same way that Alexander Cozens's ink blots had been used more than a century before.[8] However, drawings that were truly automatic in execution were more likely to skate on the edge of anything recognizable.

André Masson's automatic drawings of the mid-1920s seem like the closest to a pictorial version of automatism. They present an overall calligraphic network of lines, in which fragments of animal and human bodies, architectural motifs and landscape elements are loosely knitted together, often giving the sense of an all-devouring and violent energy. The fact that his line is inflected,

almost as if he were using a broad-nibbed pen, adds to the calligraphic impression (illus. 42). Masson himself later recalled how they were created:

> Physically, you must make a void in yourself, the automatic drawing taking its source in the unconscious, must appear as an unforeseen birth. The first graphic apparitions on the paper are pure gesture, rhythm, incantation, and as a result pure scribble . . . When the image appears one must stop.[9]

This ties together the physical energy of the scribble, the unconscious rhythms of the doodle and the visionary qualities of automatism.

What Masson's automatic drawings give us a hint of is something that could be called pre-representational form (in French often called *informel*). As Breton later put it:

> Surrealism's essential discovery is, in effect, that without preconceived intention, the mobile pen that writes or the mobile pencil that draws weaves an infinitely precious substance, which cannot be substantively or commercially defined, but which nevertheless appears to be charged with everything within the writer or painter that is emotional.[10]

Like many of Breton's texts, this is delightfully suggestive, and in the same text he still describes painting as a window giving onto an interior world; whereas Masson's drawings present something like a matrix of latent forms, none of which is visible in quite that way. It is as if he is conveying a sense of Heraclitean flux, a territory full of metamorphic potential. We shall see that a similar feeling is carried over in many of Jackson Pollock's drawings from the late 1940s, as a direct result of Surrealist influence.

Certainly, once automatism had been established as a definitive and recognized practice, it was impossible to avoid its becoming a recipe, or at least a consciously chosen option. Indeed, even in its original contexts – Janet's psychological automatism and the contemporaneous spiritualist use of trance

– there was the problem of the more or less conscious choice made to engage with it. In a text written in 1941, Breton conceded that 'automatism can contribute to composition, in painting as in poetry, alongside certain preconceived intentions.'[11] Nevertheless, in the same text he claims that automatism leads in a straight line to the Freudian unconscious,

> that 'abyss-like' depth [where] rule the absence of contradiction, the flexibility of emotional investments prompted by repression, atemporality and the replacement of external reality by psychic reality, subject to the pleasure principle alone.[12]

One difficulty with this, as several writers have pointed out, is that direct access to the unconscious is, by definition, a contradiction in terms; but automatism seemed to promise a way of getting as close as possible. There are also certain techniques, such as drawing with the left hand or with eyes closed, that seem to get the artist fairly close; these are arguably cousins of scribbling and doodling, and also related to automatic drawing.

But close to what? I would suggest that there are actually several different kinds of unconscious that might be involved in automatic drawing, and they may sometimes coexist. First, there is what could be called a 'kinaesthetic unconscious': spontaneous drawing is likely to reveal subliminal habits of the drawer's hand in much the same way as handwriting does, even when scribbled in haste, and these signature features can be seen as unconsciously expressive of the author's character. Then there is the notion of a symbolism that is 'unconscious' in a psychoanalytic sense, with its repertoire of disguised sexual forms: but these yield only a fairly restricted and impersonal range of meanings, as we saw with the psychiatric research into doodles. Finally, there is the realm of archetypes and the collective unconscious, as put forward by Jung, with its mythological and transpersonal dimension.

Precisely because they have now become part of our common cultural currency, the last two models of unconscious form creation have sometimes been quite consciously adopted by artists: the Surrealists celebrating the fertility

of Freudian symbolism, and some Abstract Expressionists (particularly Pollock) being drawn to the depth of Jungian imagery. Some of these artists were committed to automatism as a way of accessing unconscious imagery, others (Dalí is a conspicuous example) used Freudian iconography in a much more knowing way. Perhaps in reaction to this, others (Robert Motherwell for instance) preferred to see unconscious form creation as simply a way of generating new and unpremeditated images, where formal invention was more important than unconscious content.

Nevertheless, the gestural idiom of spontaneous mark-making can be read in terms of an elementary vocabulary of subliminal symbolic forms, almost as if the physical aspects of scribbling, doodling and automatic drawing evoked on a microcosmic scale similarly corporeal fantasy elements from the unconscious. In their most obvious, Freudian, form these consist of phallic or vaginal shapes. Interpretation of spontaneous drawing from this perspective generally adheres to an iconography that is essentially figurative and that lends itself readily to double entendre (the 'Freudian symbol' or visual pun). In Melanie Klein's post-Freudian inner world, apparently abstract forms can also evoke graphic micro-dramas involving primitive, infantile modes of incorporation or expulsion, creation and destruction. Hence Kleinian (or 'object relations') symbolism is more amorphous and involves frequent shifts of identity in a pantomime of part-objects, such as good or bad breasts as well as a whole range of bodily fluids. Adrian Stokes, who was an influential writer on art and psychoanalysis in the mid-twentieth century, gives a vivid description of how the latter is translated into art:

> We have here the manner of endless bodily function as well as of hardly touched states of mind, more muscular, more independent than the resonance of images in a dream, yet, viewed in terms of the intellect's categories, vague and boundless as are the spongy images of sleep . . .[13]

Writing in 1961, he clearly disapproves of the slippery (yet 'muscular') nature of such 'modern paintings' (which certainly included Abstract Expressionism),

and no doubt he would have expressed similar reservations about the drawings associated with them.

Yet Stokes's contemporary Anton Ehrenzweig (who is never acknowledged in his work) took a very different line, though still within the same Kleinian perspective. In between what in spontaneous drawing could be seen as unconscious in a purely executive sense and what could be situated in a more symbolic dimension, giving rise to the kind of interpretations I have just mentioned, there is another level of unconscious form creation, which he called 'inarticulate form'. This is a highly ambiguous idiom, typically to be found in the sketchy background forms of some traditional art, supposedly illegible to the conscious mind, and hence structurally 'unconscious'. While such forms are in effect invisible in traditional art, they are foregrounded in the abstract painting of the sort that Stokes so much disapproved of.

Here Ehrenzweig describes the nature of 'technique', by which I take him to mean spontaneous handling, or facture, as he said:

> Wholly automatic and completely withdrawn from conscious form control are the chaotic forms of 'technique'; in 'technique' forms appear to be even more accidental and unintentional than the sketchy background forms. We can hardly make out any structure at all and cannot even say whether the forms are superimposed or overlapping . . . The nervous and erratic quality of a good technique could never be achieved by conscious effort. The nervous hand movements guiding the brush oscillate without aim and appear – wrongly – as accidental.[14]

The implication is that there are forms of structure other than those associated with consciously controlled composition. When Ehrenzweig insisted that these could not be deliberately contrived, I think he meant to refer to a different kind of drawing from the conscious draughtsmanship of the traditional academy, and I believe that it is something that, as we shall see, artists can cultivate through special practices that involve disarming or bypassing their conscious supervision of the drawing process.

> In order to become aware of inarticulate forms we have to adopt a mental attitude not dissimilar to that which the psychoanalyst must adopt when dealing with unconscious material, namely some kind of diffuse attention.[15]

In any case, just as with the popularization of psychoanalysis, once the concept of inarticulate form had been published, attention was bound to be drawn to it, and as we have seen, various strategies could be found to bypass conscious interference in order to facilitate its appearance.

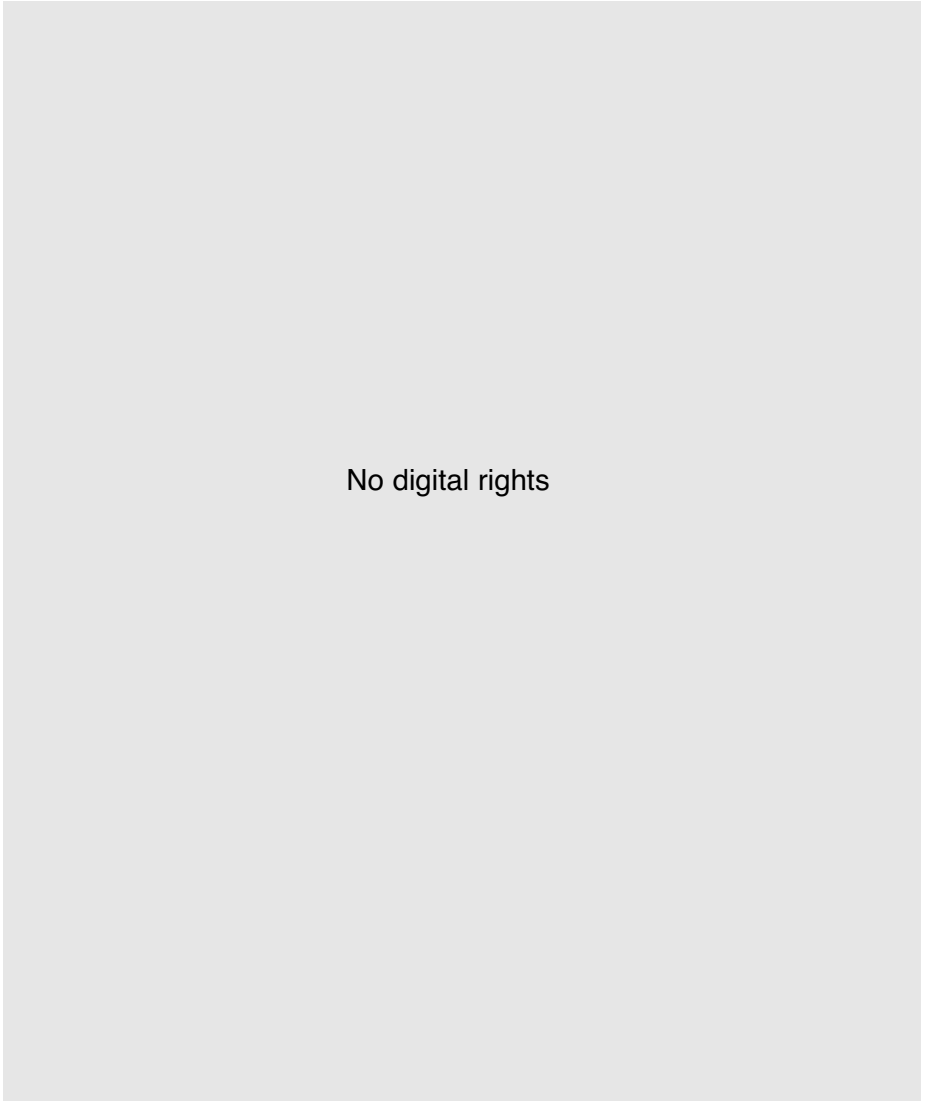
Surrealist automatism, along with the continuing interest in child art, had a widespread influence, particularly on artists belonging to the COBRA group (Asger Jorn, Lucebert, Constant). In this drawing Jorn is clearly using an idiom that looks almost automatic, in which forms and suggestions of figures overlap with one another (illus. 43). But, according to a text he wrote two years earlier, this may not be quite as straightforward a process as it seems:

> It was so difficult to liberate myself from aesthetic working principles that it took me five years before I was able to create purely automatically. And I achieved this only to discover that I had filled the picture with a multitude of meaningless formulations of form and colour. So I set about removing colours and forms that hid the pictorial content and gradually was able to reveal my visions.[16]

It is as if the removing and revealing entails a conscious editing of what automatism had unconsciously thrown up. This raises some interesting questions about the degree of conscious revision that can take place before a drawing ceases to qualify as automatic.

In this connection there is a fascinating quotation from a commentary on one of Jorn's drawings:

> A child draws and paints *beside* itself, on a *parallel* course. In so doing he neither 'abandons' himself nor sets himself 'free'; the child is not creating,



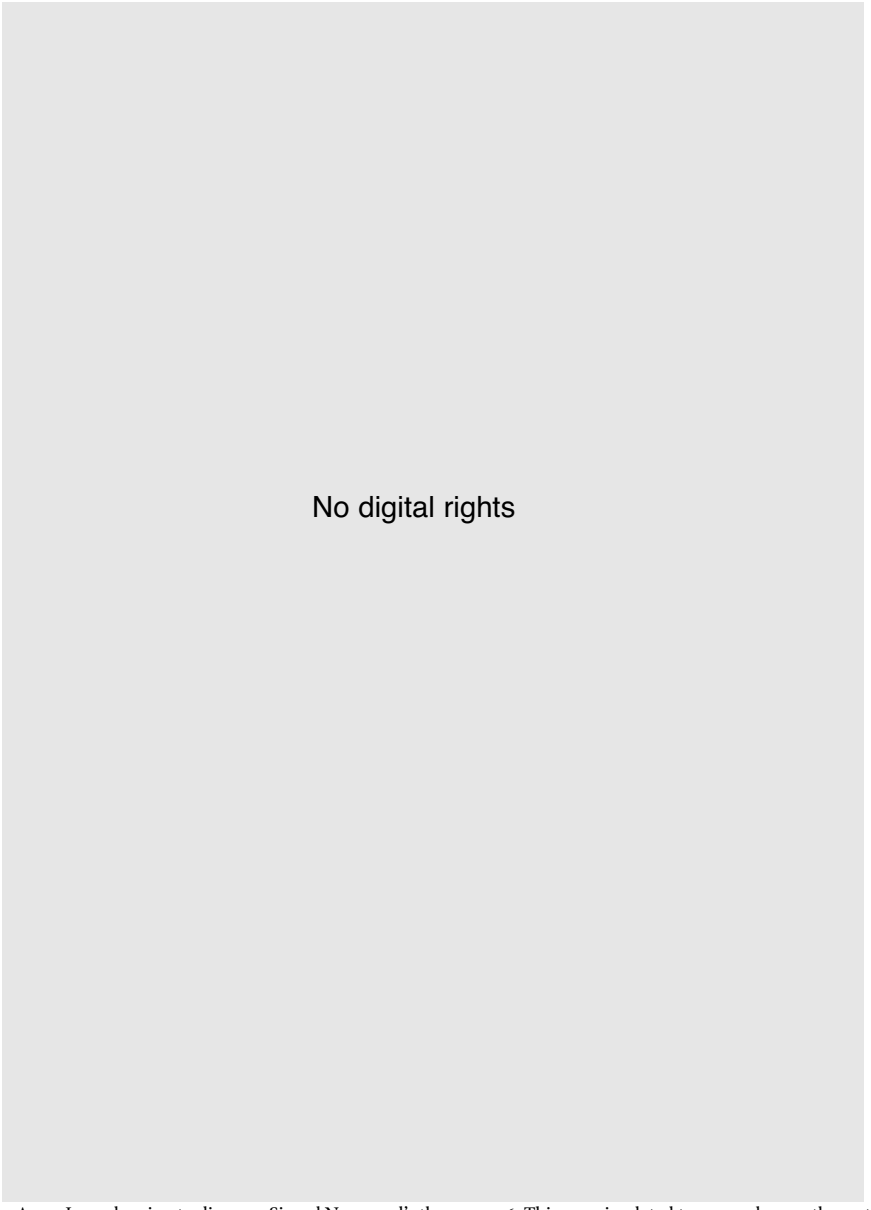
43 Asger Jorn, drawing for *Orners Ret*, 1950, ink on paper. The spontaneous handling is as likely to have generated recognizable figures as to have embellished them.

> *it* is creating; it is not a matter of *internal necessity* (Kandinsky), but of external necessity, which is perhaps the truer of the two.[17]

I take this to mean that the process of creating the work makes its own contribution, to some extent independent of whatever is in the artist's mind. This phenomenon could be seen as an ingredient of automatism, without itself being strictly automatic. It introduces a third party to the agencies responsible for automatism, from something that must either be an external source (spirits) or else an internal one (the 'mind's eye'), towards something like a feedback loop between the emerging work and the artist who is creating it.

There is a particularly interesting example of this problematic association between automatism and the unconscious in an experiment conducted by Jorn in order to disprove the theory of the Danish psychoanalyst Sigurd Næsgaard, who claimed that abstract, and in particular automatic, drawings always revealed an underlying 'basic theme'. In 1946 Jorn produced a complex and ambiguous automatic drawing and then submitted it to a number of his artist friends, asking them to pick out the basic motif (illus. 44). They each came up with different choices. Jorn's own choice (illus. 45) thus implies that the artist knew better than any other person what the real content of his automatic drawing was. One could also see this experiment in terms of Ehrenzweig's concept of 'inarticulate form', in which the subliminal order in an apparently chaotic work is not amenable to analysis in terms of the gestalt forms familiar to the conscious mind.

As we have seen, this connection between freedom of expression and freedom from conscious control goes back to the early years of the twentieth century, when there was a convergence of interest in child art, the primitive and the art of the insane. All these seemed to point to a creativity that was uncontaminated by education or commercial ambition. When Jean Dubuffet began, shortly after the Second World War, to formulate the notion of Art Brut as an unrefined and unsophisticated creativity that owed little or nothing to convention or to official culture, he too was attracted to work that, because of its spontaneous and unpremeditated character, seemed to be outside or



44 Asger Jorn, drawing to disprove Sigurd Næsgaard's theory, 1946. This was circulated to over a dozen other artists to see if there was any convergence between the 'basic forms' they discovered in it.

45 Jorn's own version of the basic form in illus. 44, 1946.

beyond the mainstream. So it is not surprising that when Dubuffet began to build a collection of such work, a substantial portion included psychotic and spiritualist work that appeared to have been dictated from outside the boundaries of normal identity and the conscious control associated with it.

If Art Brut makers created as a result of an overwhelming compulsion rather than out of artistic or commercial ambition, then psychotic and mediumistic art would seem to be prime candidates. The immediate and uninhibited nature of some spiritualist automatism, and the fact that something other than the individual carrier was responsible for it, might have seemed like a guarantee of this creative autonomy. However, Dubuffet never actually made any such claim: indeed, he was suspicious of the very notion of dissociation, preferring to believe that mediumistic artists exercised a considerable degree of choice and were well aware of the strangeness of what they were creating, even if they subsequently disowned this by invoking the responsibility of spirits. On the other hand, he felt that a great deal of spiritualist art was in its way as commonplace as the conventional academic art that Art Brut sought to contradict.

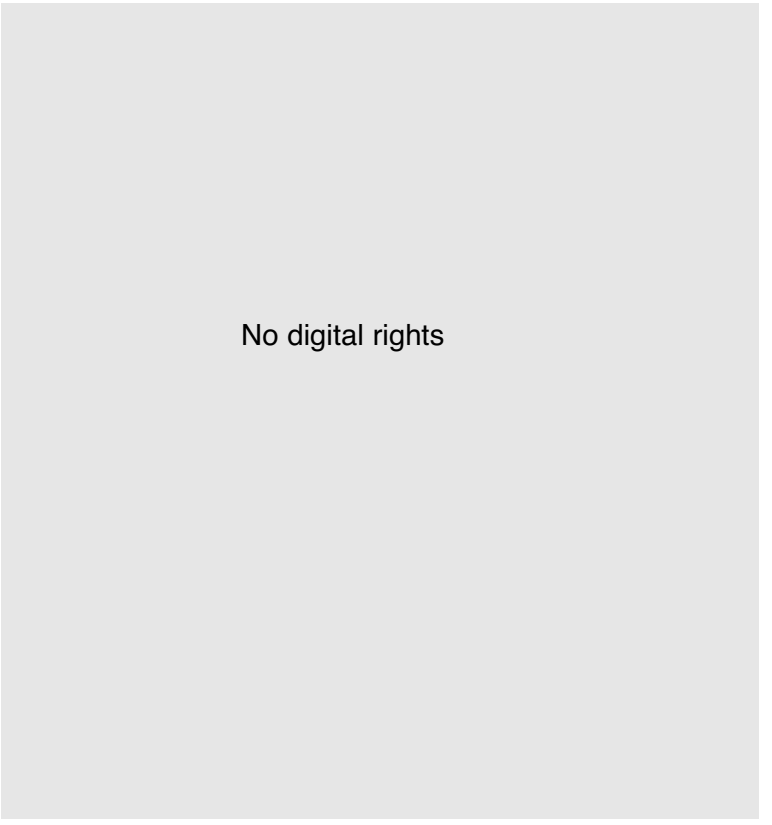
In fact, as we have seen, many of the mediumistic artists in Dubuffet's collection – Jeanne Tripier, Laure Pigeon and Raphael Lonné, for example – ended up drawing by themselves, perhaps on account of the extra time required for drawing as opposed to writing. In all three cases the responsibility for both texts and drawings were ascribed to spirit agencies, previous incarnations or other spiritualist dramatis personae. Perhaps some of these were messages aimed at an invisible living audience, in much the same way that the unknown majority of artists may still address 'posterity'. Both Dubuffet and his successor at the Collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne, Michel Thévoz, were in no doubt that these spiritualist beliefs were a kind of alibi behind which people who would never have dared claim to be artists could shelter.[18] The same, of course, is true of the doodle.

After Surrealism had been exiled to America during the Second World War, pictorial automatism took off with a renewed impetus. Action Painting, as Harold Rosenberg called it, dramatized its performance aspect, most

famously in Hans Namuth's film of Jackson Pollock painting on a sheet of glass with the camera beneath it. Pollock had in fact taken part in several group sessions of automatic writing and drawing organized by Roberto Matta in 1942 (other artists participating included Lee Krasner, Robert Motherwell and William Baziotes): the results show a complex interplay between writing, indications of figures and gesturally loaded marks. They are like crosses between sketches and doodles; the common factor is presumably a conscious interest in what has been spontaneously and unconsciously generated. However, Motherwell later claimed: 'Plastic automatism . . . is very little a question of the unconscious. It is much more a weapon with which to invent new forms.'[19]

I suggest that something more complicated is often going on, that cannot simply be understood in terms of the psychoanalytic unconscious (if that is what Motherwell meant): a two-way traffic, with marks with a strong gestural momentum generating new forms, and at almost the same time attacking existing forms, with the impetus for this coming as much from the forms themselves as from any previous mental state of the artist. Motherwell, for instance, wrote in 1944 about 'a dialectic between the conscious (straight lines, designed shapes, weighed colour, abstract language) and the unconscious (soft lines, obscured shapes, automatism)'.[20] Once again, what is assumed to be the informal facture of automatism can quickly become a stylistic idiom that can be sought or copied.

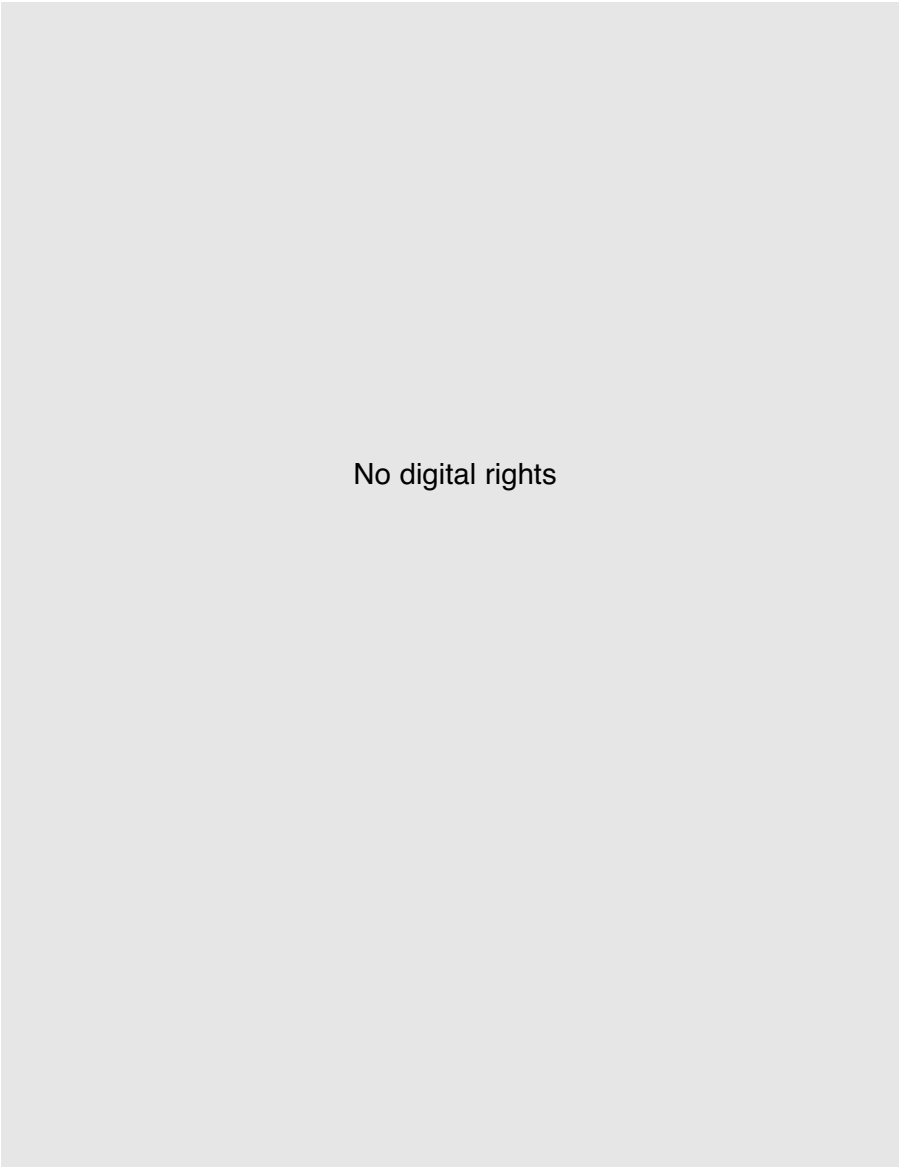
Nevertheless, a number of Pollock's drawings from 1939–40, when he was in therapy with the Jungian Joseph Henderson, illustrate this in-between area. It is unlikely that Pollock made these drawings specifically for his therapist: it is more probable that he brought them along in the same way as another patient might bring a record of their dreams. They date from only a year before Pollock took part in Matta's automatism workshops – in all probability Pollock was already experimenting with spontaneous drawing, inspired by Surrealism. One of them has a striking resemblance to Jorn's automatic test drawing, almost as if Pollock were fishing for 'significant' forms in the way that Jorn describes (illus. 46). The drawings range from what look like sketchbook sheets to more worked-out compositions in which some of his symbolic vocabulary is



46 Jackson Pollock, untitled 'psychoanalytic drawing', 1939–40, pencil. Pollock brought these drawings to sessions with his Jungian analyst.

rehearsed (illus. 47). The drawings show not only the influence of automatism but also the emergence of archetypal motifs from their matrix. The relation between the two is complicated by the fact that Henderson, when sued by Pollock's widow Lee Krasner for breach of confidentiality, tried to paint out, so to speak, the Jungian influence in them; but this influence was already in the air, and Pollock was evidently sympathetic to it. The fact that Pollock brought drawings to his therapy simply makes the connection between spontaneous drawing and unconscious motifs both explicit and circumstantial.

In much of Pollock's later work the distinction between painting and drawing is elided, and the dialectic between creation and dissolution is



47 Jackson Pollock, untitled 'psychoanalytic drawing', 1939–40, pencil. Some of these drawings are indistinguishable from his contemporaneous studio sketches.

dramatized on a large scale. Automatism here is a polyvalent phenomenon, and the 'unconscious' components are hybrid: a mixture of calligraphic and gestural traces, figurative residues and what could be described as compositional interventions. As in Masson's automatic drawings, Pollock's interest, in his 'drip' paintings and associated drawings, was probably as much in the sea of potential forms as in anything that could be fished out of it: in effect, it is not so much a matter of images *from* the unconscious as of images *of* the unconscious. As Michael Leja has written, this time of the lines in Pollock's drip paintings:

> Not only do they evoke physical traces of the unconscious, records or indexical signs of its involvement in the work, they also signify the unconscious metaphorically. They continue to *depict* by showing us an image of the dynamic unconscious as vortex: a whirling rush of energy both refusing to yield its own contents – pulling them even further from the reach of consciousness – and threatening to swallow the viewer who dares to peer in too closely.[21]

There is a shift here, from the traditional picture, whether Freudian or Jungian, of the unconscious as a reservoir of symbolic forms that can, in theory, be identified, to something more like Ehrenzweig's ideas about the 'depth mind' (in which forms are not so clearly distinguished) and inarticulate form.

As we have already seen, by 'inarticulate form' Ehrenzweig meant unconsciously created form characterized by extreme ambiguity, overlap and de-differentiation. Such forms could be found even in traditional art, in spontaneously sketched background features, for example; but they are a conspicuous aspect of modern art:

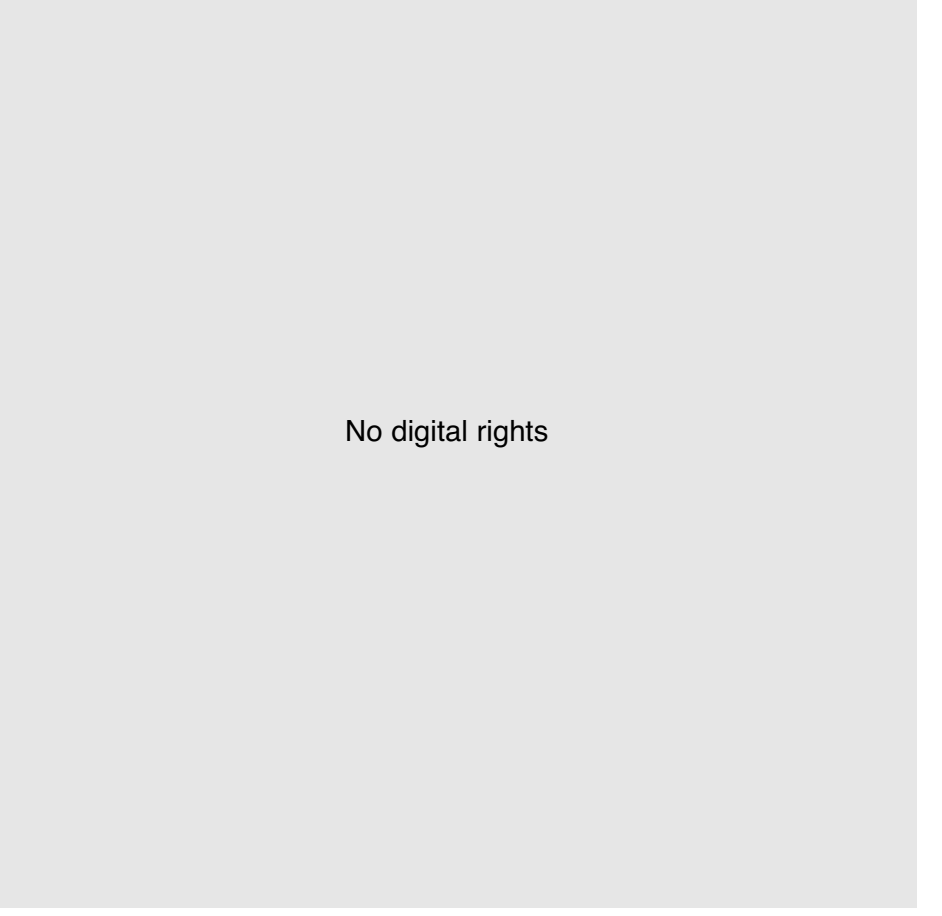
> The modern artist tends to create more automatically, with less conscious form control, than the traditional artist. At the beginning he knows only vaguely, if at all, what he is going to produce; his mind is curiously empty while he watches passively the forms growing from under his brush.[22]

This is not far removed from the classic image of automatism, where work is produced under unconscious dictation, and the role of consciousness seems to be that of a mere spectator. However, as many artists know, the situation is not quite as simple as this: there can be fluctuating or intermittent moments of awareness during even the most impulsive drawing process. These moments are liminal, in the sense that they are neither conscious nor unconscious, but somewhere in between; but because they are not consciously directed it is tempting to call them 'automatic'. Ehrenzweig's inarticulate form does not depend upon complete absent-mindedness, especially when an artist is experienced in using it; but it cannot be consciously imitated.

Interestingly, an Outsider artist, Ody Saban, and a poet, Thomas Mordant, under the name Mordysabbath, have recently revived the Surrealist technique of collective creation in their 'Jeu de la Création Fusionnelle', which has many features in common with automatic drawing. Here all the participants draw simultaneously on the same surface and frequently change places, so that no one corners any area for themselves and each person's drawing is altered by others. Although no talking is allowed, there must be a fringe awareness of other people's activity, and some of the participants say that it is as if the final drawing had been created by another entity (illus. 48).

There is another way in which consciousness can be altered or the interference of self-awareness diminished, and that is through one form or another of intoxication. This has traditionally been a form of artificial inspiration, but the wave of 'psychedelic art' in the late 1960s seemed to provide impressive evidence of imagery that was 'state-bound', in that its style was a direct result of what Aldous Huxley called 'opening the doors of perception' through the use of mind-altering drugs such as LSD. In psychedelic art there is often something akin to automatic drawing, in that conscious control is surrendered, familiar outlines dissolve, surfaces come alive and there is a constant, usually curvilinear, shifting between forms.

Certainly, there is some work, that of Henri Michaux in particular, that does try to document the onset of drug-induced disturbances of thought and perception, right up to their dissolution or vanishing point. However, as with



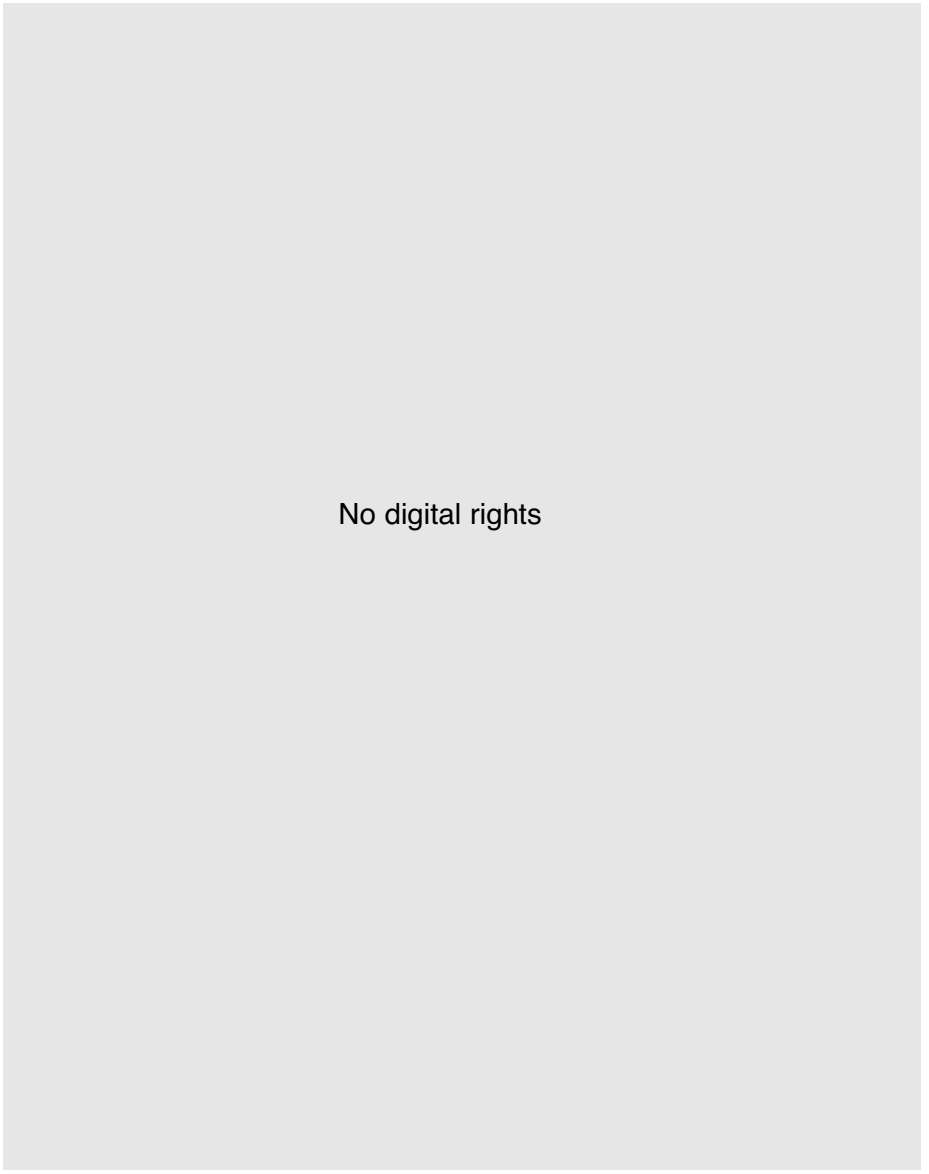
48 Mordysabbath (Ody Saban and Thomas Mordant), collective drawing, 1997, mixed media on paper. In their 'Game of Collective Drawing' participants are given strict instructions not to claim any space as their own.

'psychotic art', there is the stumbling block that the state of altered consciousness actually interferes with the execution of the drawing that is supposedly documenting it. It may well be that much psychedelic art is a souvenir or re-creation of the original experience. In fact, in Michaux's work there is a visible continuity between drawings done just after the Second World War, in which the solubility of ink and watercolour throws up vestigial figures, and his mescaline works begun after 1954, many of which are surprisingly abstract (illus. 49). Furthermore, a decade later Michaux embarked on a series of 'reintegration drawings' that were not prompted by drugs, but that effectively reproduce hallucinogenic experiences (illus. 50). His description of them reminds me of the experience of some doodlers:

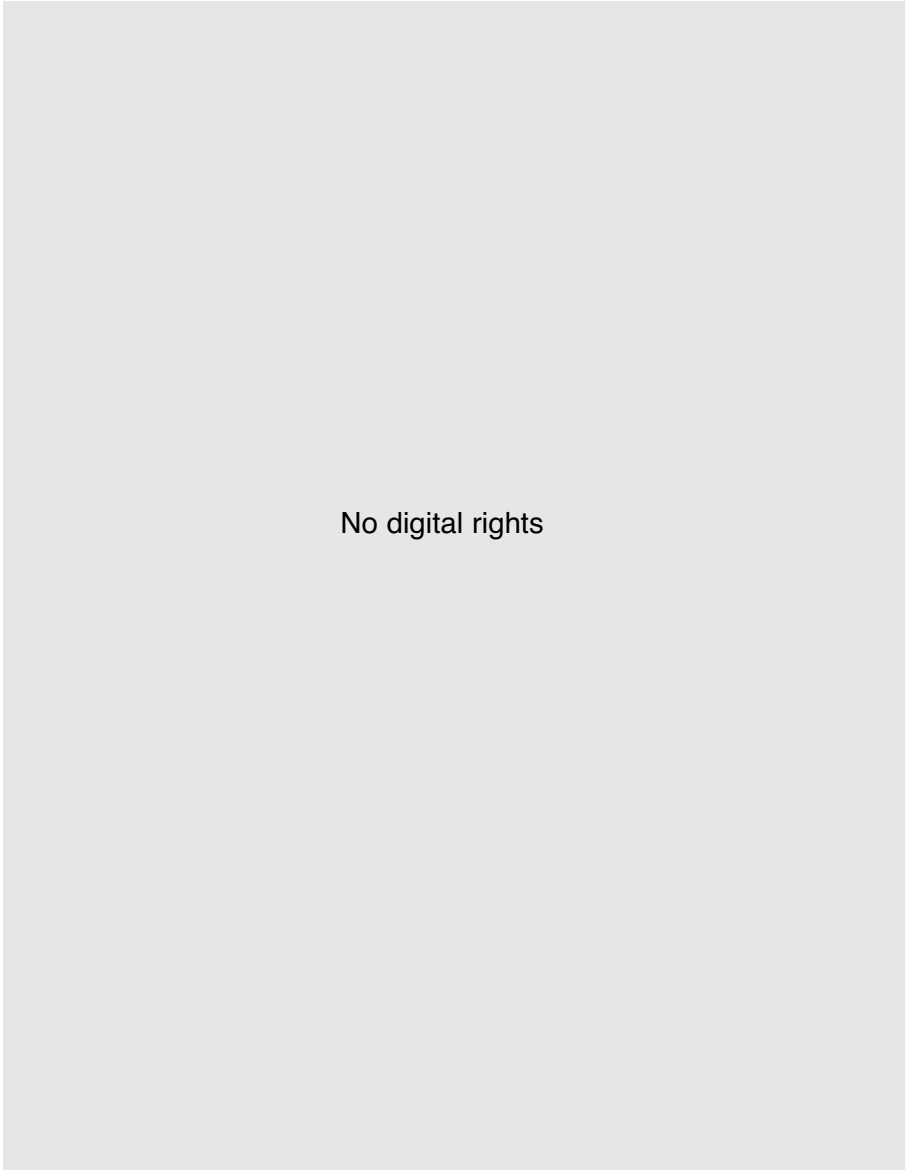
> However, when I pick up again the fine pen that leads to slender linearity, after some time, prompted also by a little dizziness that makes the slight lines and the space they evoke tremble, I find myself once more (not, it is true, forced, but simply invited) in a fugitive world, well-known, immense and immensely pierced, where everything is and at the same time isn't, shows and doesn't show, contains and doesn't contain, drawings of a fundamental indetermination, into which half-seen faces slip, sometimes with one expression, sometimes with another, in aspects that are indefinitely indeterminate and non-definitive.[23]

So there is an overlap here between the original psychedelic experience and the ways in which the process of drawing itself does not just document but also contributes to the resulting unsettling leakage between forms.

In addition, there is what might be called a diffuse stylistic 'acid' idiom that is not necessarily a direct result of 'tripping', just as there is also a stylistic aspect to much spiritualist art. It is impossible to tell how many of Sophie Podolski's drawings were created under the influence of one drug or another (or of her alleged schizophrenia), but there is a typical and pervasive slippage between different idioms, including writing (perhaps her training as a graphic designer was also subverted). Certainly, her work, created in the early 1970s,



49 Henri Michaux, mescalinian drawing, 1958, ink on paper. Under psychotropic drugs the normal outlines of figures dissolve into an 'abstract', lattice-like structure.



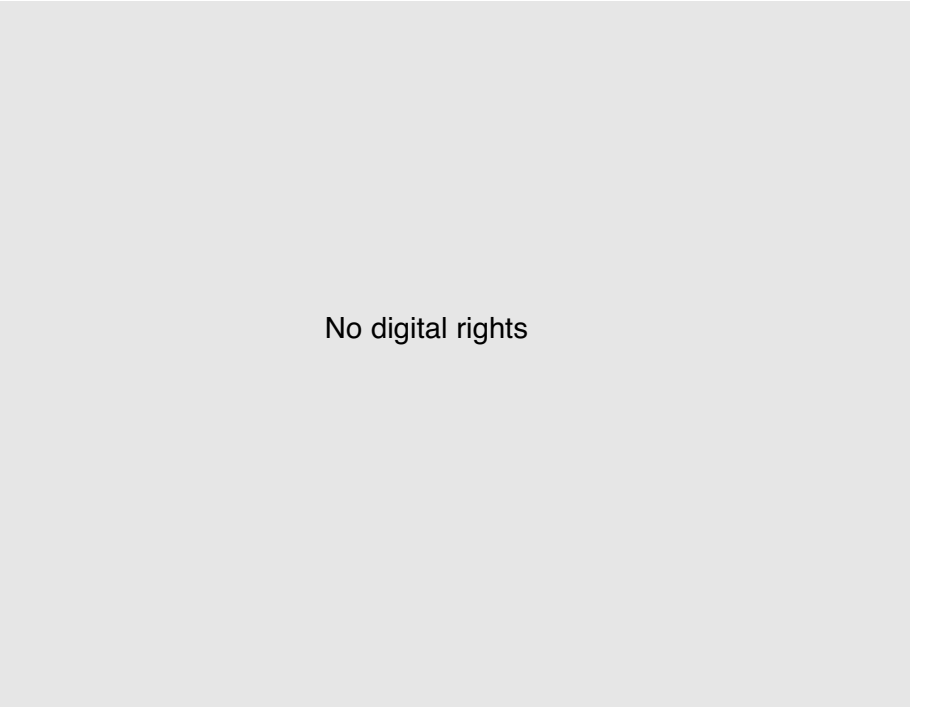
50 Henri Michaux, drawing, 1976, chalk on paper. The perceptual ambiguity induced by psychotropic drugs is carried over into this revisiting of the experience.

is a superb example of the freewheeling, 'underground' style of the period (illus. 51, 52). Although it could be seen as something like a doodle let off the hook, there is a sense of anarchic freedom and invention here that is characteristically 'psychedelic'.

Perhaps, just as with spiritualism and later with the doodle, the umbrella of drug effects gave a kind of permission for free-range graphic excursions, many of which are extraordinarily complex. This is quite different from the framework within which most scientific experiments on the effects of drug intoxication are carried out, where the capacity for representation is used as a baseline. It is interesting that the psychiatrists Guttmann and Maclay, who analysed a huge sample of doodles in the 1930s and '40s, were also some of the first to conduct experiments on the effects of mescaline on an artist's drawing (Julian Trevelyan was one of their subjects). These experiments, and others like them, do seem to show the disintegration of the conventional figurative forms that were usually their starting point.

In another example, from a different experiment in 1951, the artist set himself the task of making a realistic portrait of the same person every hour, and found that 'my hand is being dragged along by the dynamics of some "system of co-ordinates"'. At a certain point he abandoned the experimental task and let himself paint what he felt like. Here we see two different ways of experimenting with drug intoxication: in the first, it is seen negatively as an interference with 'normal' functioning, while in the second it is experienced positively as a creative release. Interestingly, László Mátéfi, who was the subject in the second experiment, was both an artist and a doctor. Halfway through he explained: 'I draw the lines as they are given to me – lines are not lines at all – lines are perceptions of the body – everything is moving – they are streams . . .'.[24] This description is not far removed from artists' accounts of being taken over by the drawing process without being under the influence of any drug, and it could also be applied to automatic drawing. As the Dutch researcher Jos ten Berge points out, it is hard to tell the difference between a drawing that displays distortions or perseverations induced by LSD, and one that is more the result of prolonged doodling under the aegis of a 'trip'. The latter is what I call

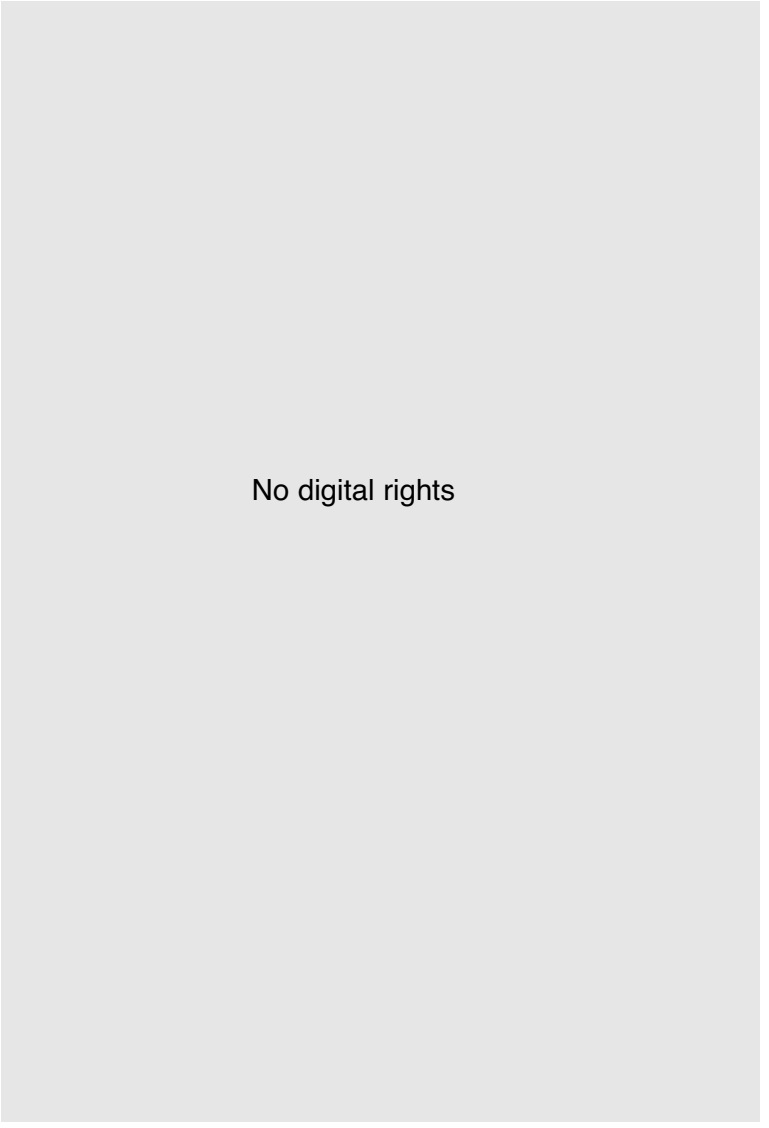
51 Sophie Podolski, drawing, before 1974. These drawings, skidding between writing and drawing, were probably done under the direct influence of various drugs.



52 Sophie Podolski, drawing, before 1974.

a 'meta-doodle' because it extends and intensifies many of the characteristics of doodling and is also created outside the usual context of doodling.

We see how, in the case of psychedelic drawing, as with automatic drawing, once the genre has been established it is impossible to be sure whether a drawing with a typical cascade of leapfrogging forms was really created under the influence of a psychotropic drug, or whether this influence was direct or indirect. A recent book claims that the 'surge of unfettered creative imagination that happened in art of the 1960s and thereafter' was due to what the author calls a 'psychedelic consciousness', which was not necessarily the literal result of taking psychotropic drugs but a kind of general cultural permission that he attributes to the seismic shift in consciousness that came in their wake.[25] I would prefer to suggest that, like scribbling, doodling and automatic drawing, psychedelic art has been cut loose from its drug-induced origins and now forms part of an extraordinary and hybrid range of drawing, such as can be found in some current anthologies of the genre.[26]



53 Paul Klee, *Drawing Knotted in the Manner of a Net*, 1920, ink on paper. Klee often seems to be making up his own rules in order to disrupt them.

6
Meta-doodles and Other Elaborations

The free line that escapes in scribbling, takes a holiday in doodling and reaches some kind of climax in automatic drawing could take as its motto Klee's famous observation: 'A line goes out for a walk, so to speak, aimlessly, for the sake of the walk.'[1] Notice that the line goes for a walk of its own accord, not, as is often misquoted, being taken for a walk. There is something tentative and playful about Klee's recipe, and it is easy to imagine this linear truancy giving rise to a meandering in which the line meets up with itself, starts conversations and eventually knits itself into a web (illus. 53). Klee's description implies a single continuous line, perhaps one getting as complicated as Gottfried Keller's, mentioned at the end of chapter Four; but such a drawing can also contain many competing lines and textures that generate an astonishing range of different forms.

What Keller described is a drawing that is more than a doodle: it is something rather like a prolonged, semi-automatic drawing. I call such works 'meta-doodles' because although they have many of the characteristics of doodles, they are not subject to the same constraints (such as a relation to some kind of text, a shortage of time or lack of space). In addition, they share a feature with some of the forms of mediumistic dictation previously mentioned, in that their creators sometimes speak of working in a trance-like state, or of feeling compelled to complete the work, no matter how laborious or painful the process.

Like doodles, meta-doodles do not follow any preconceived plan, although something that looks planned may result. To a greater or lesser extent they are improvisations; however, this does not mean that they don't sometimes have a more or less well-ordered structure, sometimes showing a marked tendency towards symmetry. Indeed, some meta-doodles, such as

the work of Augustin Lesage, Marc Lamy and Eugene Andolsek, have quite a pronounced geometric idiom. One example, where there is an obvious relation to doodling, is the Outsider artist Scottie Wilson, who became something of a cause célèbre in Britain just after the Second World War. While in Canada he bought and sold second-hand items, and according to his own account he was idly trying out a gold-nibbed fountain pen when a drawing began to emerge. Wilson's work typically involves passages of contrapuntal cross-hatching, which he subsequently overlaid with coloured crayon, but it also contains highly formalized figures (some of which he called 'Greedies' or 'Meanies', illus. 54).

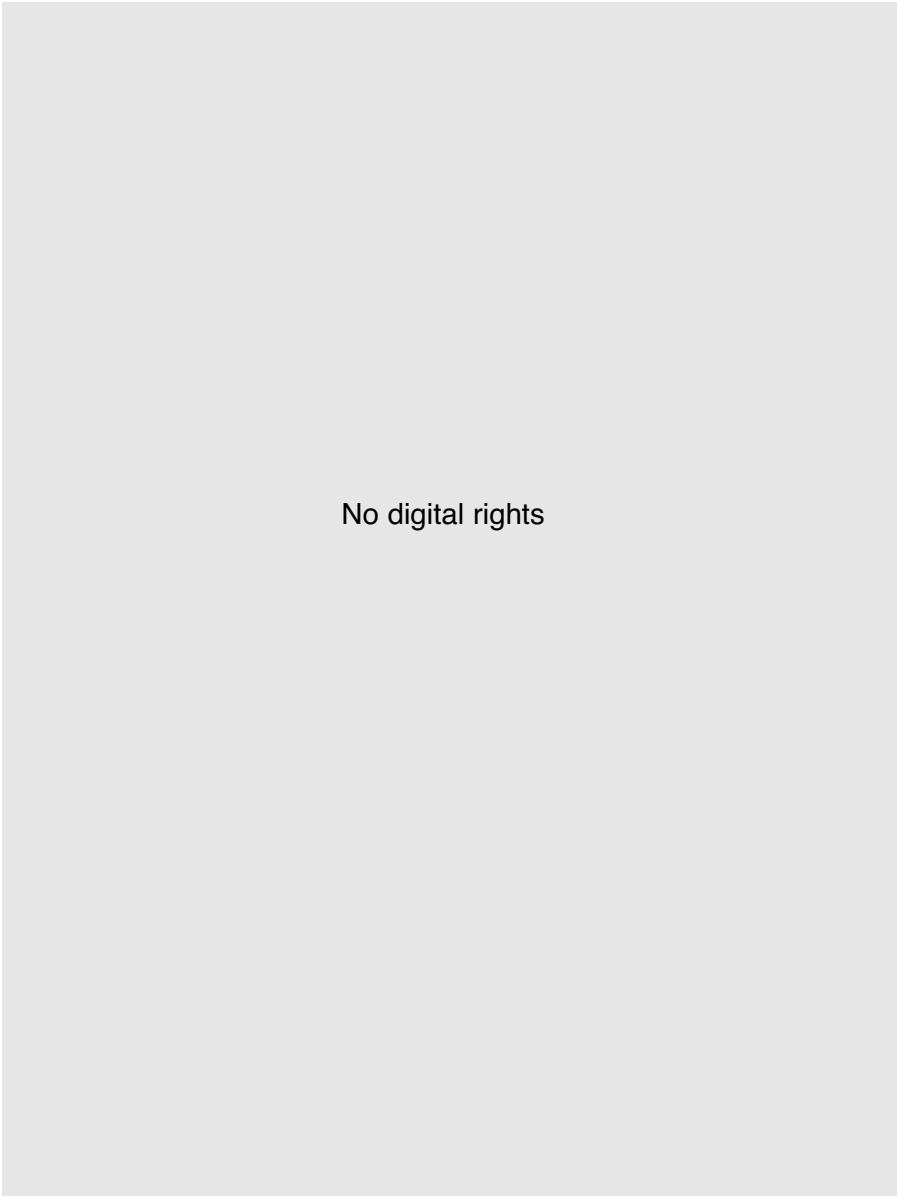
In other cases, such as Unica Zürn and Wols (as we shall see), there is a much more free-floating and 'organic' proliferation of different shapes. Here there is a tendency for recognizable forms, whether figurative or abstract, to emerge 'out of the blue', which is also a familiar characteristic of doodles. This indeterminacy makes some meta-doodles almost like picture-puzzles for the spectator, and perhaps for the artist too: figures play hide-and-seek, textures grow and then get overgrown, and lines pursue their own career or get swept into a melee or tangle. It is almost as if, with their complications and permutations, such meta-doodles are constantly teetering on the edge of legibility: forms may swirl around restlessly, generating suggestive textures and promising endless possibilities but seldom fulfilling them.

One way of looking at this, as I have already suggested in connection with automatic drawing, is to see the meta-doodle as a kind of ground or field that is ploughed over and tilled by the drawing process itself, out of which forms that may be more or less recognizable appear, and into which they might then seem about to disappear. As in certain forms of divination, random marks or textures can be interrogated and made to deliver messages or tell stories. Such techniques figure in Jeanne Tripier's work and were part of her mediumistic practice (see illus. 33). One could call such processes 'visionary', providing that we bear in mind that the vision may be prompted more by the drawing process itself than by a pre-existing mental picture that is then translated into graphic form.

Hence the actual creation of meta-doodles, insofar as we have any first-hand testimony of it, seems to display a spectrum: from the casual or absent-minded with intermittent conscious interventions to what sounds like a complete absence of awareness. In some cases it is as though what began as a doodle has then gone on to 'automatic pilot', or even as if the whole drawing has been executed by someone else. 'I would wake up and the drawing was there and I didn't even know how it got there', said Eugene Andolsek (who nevertheless worked with a ruler and compass on graph paper). Many meta-doodles certainly have the look or feel of this kind of automatism, such as some of those in the Collection de l'Art Brut (for example, Magali Herrera, Vojislav Jakic [illus. 55] and Thérèse Bonnelalbay). But this automatism is different from the more spectacular forms we have come across in Surrealism or Abstract Expressionism, because it occurs in ways that are more drawn out and diffuse, and it shades into a kind of distracted improvisation.

The self-taught artist Richard Nie's work is certainly full of typical meta-doodles, and since I happen to know a certain amount about how his drawings were created, it is worth exploring them a bit. He usually worked in prolonged sessions at night, often starting with a pencilled 'doodle' that, if it survived, might then be confirmed and elaborated in ballpoint or felt-tip. Frequently, the faces or figures that then emerged were surrounded by ripples or contours that were sometimes barely visible, so that they were secretly enveloped by a protective field. In his later work this matrix is more clearly visible, and the whole page would be covered in a dense web of forms, some stacked like totem poles. In these works it is hard to tell which came first, the field or the figures embedded in it, but I am fairly sure that most of his drawings evolved without any sketch or plan, the forms often responding to what was already there, as in doodling.

When, later, Nie sometimes signed his letters to me 'Richard Doodler', this was something of an ironic acknowledgement. In fact, his very early work was often on a small scale and he was uncertain about its value or interest, as if it were nothing more than a doodle; but with



54 Scottie Wilson, ink and coloured pencil drawing, *c.* 1935. In this early work Scottie has made a symmetrical vessel out of whose cross-hatching mysterious heads emerge.

55 Vojislav Jakic, page from drawn book, before 2003. In densely packed pages, words and figures are embedded like fossils.

encouragement and increasing self-confidence he came to attach more importance to it (illus. 56). It was these more intensely worked drawings that I first called 'meta-doodles',[2] and they were what subsequently got Nie recognized as an Outsider artist (illus. 57). However, he was suspicious of people's reasons for wanting to purchase and own his work and was reluctant to part with it (even, like Klee, making carbon copies of some of his underlying compositions). There seems, among other things, to be a kind of psychological hangover here from the secrecy surrounding doodling, as if his drawings might offer too much access to his inner world.

Here too the actual process of drawing makes crucial contributions. For example, repeated cross-hatching, which is a characteristic ingredient of doodling, has its own momentum which then in reaction often generates

56 Richard Nie, two drawings, *c*. 1981, ink on paper. Two of Richard's early 'doodles', which he tended to discard.

movements in an opposite inclination, as in the work of Gill and Wilson; the resulting more or less symmetrical patterns can then give rise to conflicting perspectives and sudden shifts in direction. Their rhythm can be subtle or muted, as in Wilson's work, where the hatching is often overlaid with crayon, or it can be telescopic and staccato, as in Gill's dizzying graphic fugues. Similar processes can conjure up mask-like faces (Richard Nie, Marc Lamy), which seem to be caught in the matrix that encloses them, half framed, half trapped, in something like an echo of the image-generating process itself. There is a kind of no-man's-land here, between a doodle left to its own devices and an automatism that in some way reflects itself.

Almost all the meta-doodles I have dealt with so far are situated on the margins of modernist or avant-garde practice; indeed, they were, to begin with, a rich source of techniques and processes that could, as we have seen, be imitated or even purloined by more professional artists. We are now a long way down the historical line from the heady days of avant-garde experiment with spontaneous and informal drawing, and meta-doodles are no longer, if they ever were, the monopoly of Outsider art. In one sense, any unplanned drawing that seems to carry on in semi-independence of the artist creating it, and that occupies a greater amount of time and space than a doodle, could be given that title. Some of the better known artists whose work would come into this category include Henri Michaux, Unica Zürn and Wols. Michaux gives a description of his drawing process that has a familiar ring to it:

> A line rather than lines. So I start, letting myself be led by one, just one, that I let run, without lifting the pencil from the paper, until by dint of wandering in this narrow space, it comes to an obligatory halt. What you then see is an entanglement, a drawing seeming to wish to go back on itself.[3]

One could easily see this as an example of following Klee's recipe for letting a line go its own sweet way, and it also sounds like the description of a meandering doodle-like drawing.

57 Richard Nie, pencil drawing on paper. A later, beautifully elaborated drawing, done in all-night sessions.

Some of Unica Zürn's early drawings seem to have begun as doodles, according to Hans Bellmer, who was her companion:

> During a relaxed conversation at my mother's, Unica was sketching absent-mindedly (like people scribble when they are on the phone). With my expert eye I immediately saw her remarkable talent for automatic drawing, sustaining a graphic 'me-lody' without break . . .[4]

But again, however casual their origin, most of these drawings are so intensely worked that they qualify as meta-doodles (illus. 58). Even if one did not know of Zürn's troubled mental history, which ended in suicide, there is something disquieting about their intricate embroidery, with half-hidden faces and creatures embedded in it. There is also clearly an oracular function to the anagrams that feature in some of her drawings: it is almost as though the direction her life was going to take depended on them. Writing about Zürn's largely autobiographical texts, one commentator asks:

> What would an existence be like whose consequences were objective coincidences [*hazards objectfs*] whose surprises I have just been celebrating? That of people whose lives are governed by mental automatism. Not an automatism seen through the narrow end of a literary and artistic lens, but that weighty and implacable process that can dictate wonderful work just as it dictates the command to leave once and for all.[5]

It may be all very well to follow a line, as Klee suggested, but who knows where it might lead you: here, the image of automatic dictation takes on its most sinister and compelling form.

Many of the drawings of Wols (Alfred Otto Wolfgang Schulze), on the other hand, which are on a smaller scale, have a doodle-like feel – a zany, carefree atmosphere to them in which all kinds of humorous excursions take place (illus. 59). It is as if, despite (or because of?) the modest scale of his

work, which during the Second World War was a consequence of his refugee status, he was able to make a marvellous cocktail of the whimsical and the cosmic. As one of his notes puts it, 'We tell out little earthly stories / through little bits of paper'. It is typical of Wols's almost Buddhist detachment that he should have adopted this casual and self-effacing idiom. Some of his most intricate drawings were produced while he was interned in various French camps as an alien during the war; yet the whimsical delicacy of their lines, which are almost like whispers, seems to have been enhanced in a secret and internal form of escape.

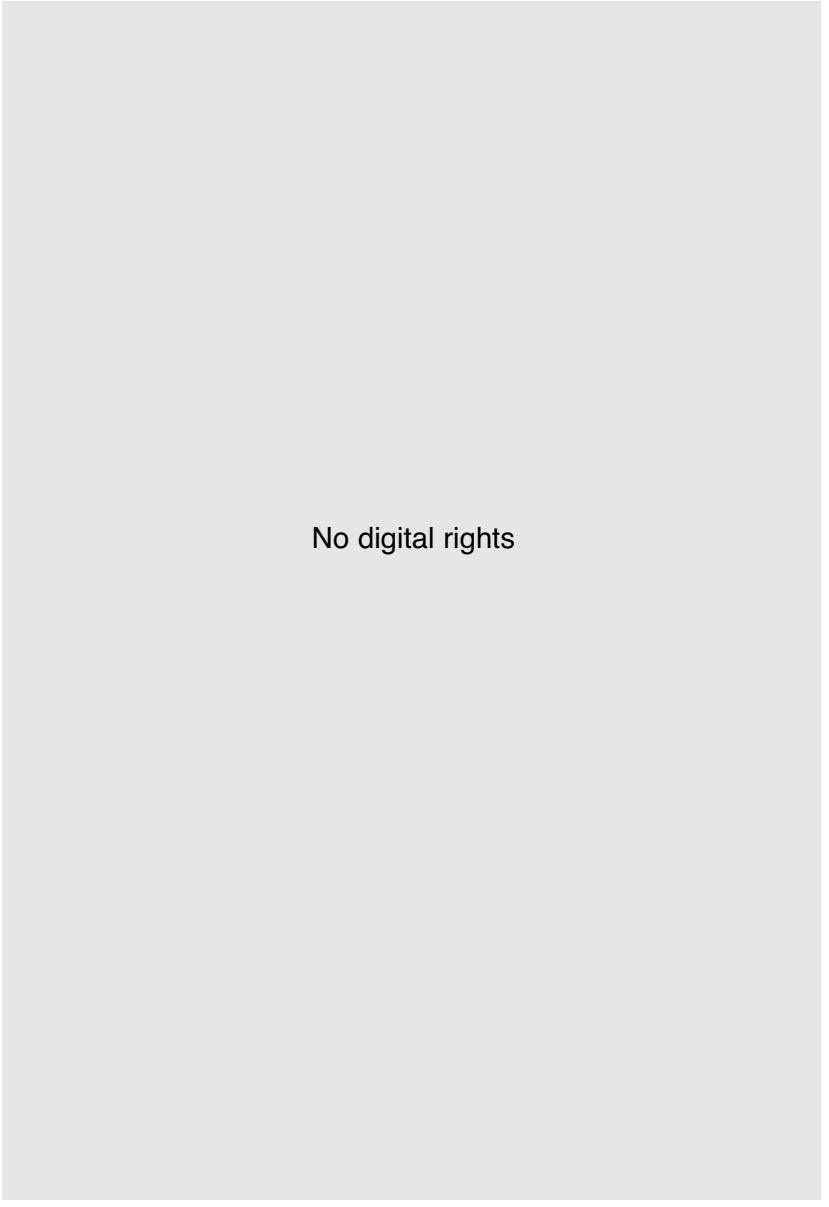
Both Zürn's and Wols's work is the result of processes that either begin spontaneously or else have a good deal of the graphic meandering that we associate with automatism; but there are other, more tightly regulated forms of drawing that could also qualify as meta-doodles. One example is the work of the architect Hans Scholze, who began drawing almost by accident, when he had bought some card to be used for maquettes and found himself, over a single 24-hour session, covering the sheet with lines that were 'unconsidered and uncontrolled'. Although some of his early drawings still have the shifting and floating quality of doodles (illus. 60), many of his later drawings are intensely worked into, in ways that could be called obsessive and unrelenting, like some kind of endless visual fugue (illus. 61). Here, surely, just as much as with any extraneous prompting, it is the process itself, with all its elaborate repetitions and permutations, that governs the work – almost as if, by obsessively concentrating his efforts, the artist ends up eclipsing whatever intentions might preside, however episodically, over the process of a drawing.

In this way, perhaps like the work of Lesage, something that starts out from a position apparently quite opposite to the letting-go of automatism ends up in a very similar psychological space. The sheer complexity and variety to be found in meta-doodles mean that we may have to rethink the ways in which they can be seen as 'unconscious form creations'. There might be a whole spectrum of ways in which conscious control of a drawing can be relaxed or abandoned, and many of them might be quite far removed

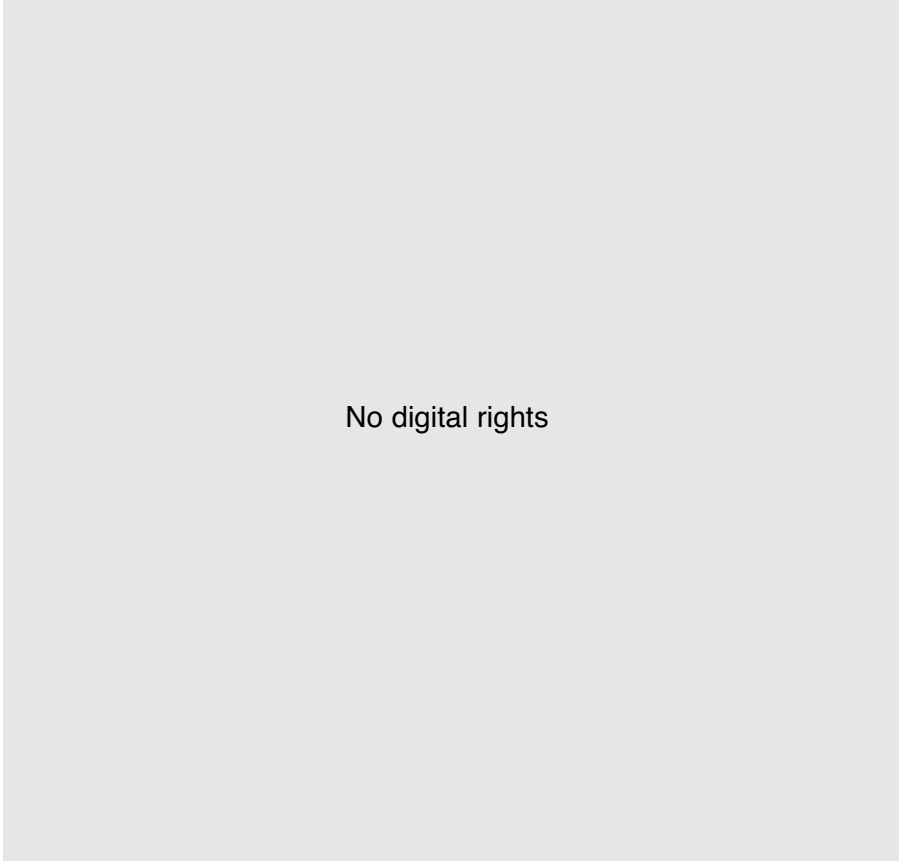
from the performance aspects associated with Surrealism or Abstract Expressionism. Similarly, the results no longer fit into the hermeneutic pigeonholes of classical psychoanalysis.

At this point it is worth looking again at what might have happened to automatic drawing now that it is in its second or third generation. There are several issues entangled here: one, as we have just seen, has to do with the degree of conscious intervention that can be admitted before the term 'automatic' becomes invalid or irrelevant. Another involves questioning the extent to which imagery that has been 'unconsciously' elicited, in whatever way, is of interest on that account alone, without its having to be analysed. Perhaps it is the astonishing ingenuity of what Freud called primary process thinking, which often includes remarkable visual puns, rather than its hidden unconscious content, that is intriguing. Here again, Ehrenzweig's ideas about inarticulate form are relevant.

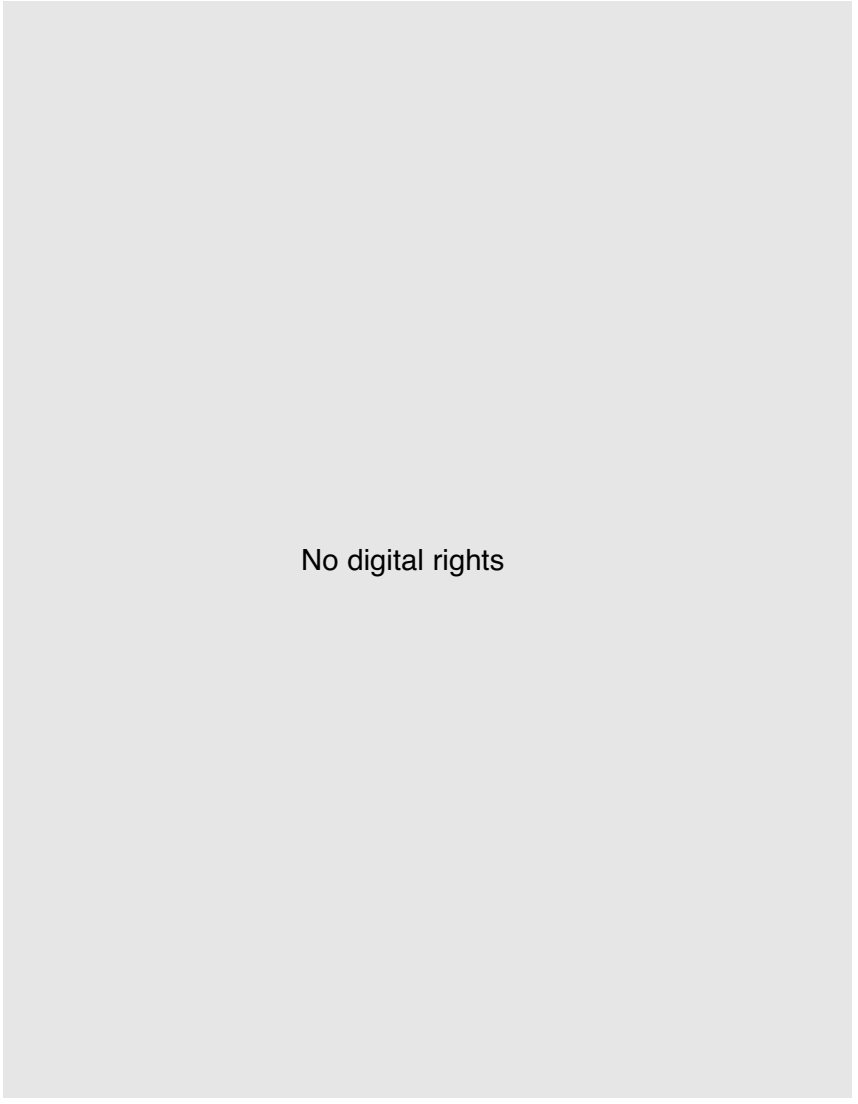
In more strictly visual terms, as we have seen, it might be the relief offered from consciously ordered and conventional principles of composition by free-floating and ambiguous forms, or the seduction of an underground reservoir of indefinite possibilities, that were the main attractions of automatism, in whatever form. In its heroic period, automatism was something invoked by artists in order to give a certain cachet to their improvisations. Now the boundary between spontaneity and deliberation is harder to maintain. In many cases we are often dealing with the *image* of automatism as much as with its literal manifestation. In effect, this collective image or fantasy of unconscious form creation is part of what I earlier called a mythology of the unconscious, and, like any mythology, it tends to establish its own stereotypes. It is not just that something can look automatic when it has been fairly deliberately executed (or vice versa, as in the examples of Lesage and Andolsek), but that automatism has become a kind of background presence in a great deal of modern art, something intrinsic to what Daniel Belgrad calls 'the culture of spontaneity' – a title that plays on the word 'culture' to suggest 'cultivation', and 'the paradox that spontaneity is an art that improves with practice'.[6]



58 Unica Zürn, drawing, 1959, ink on paper. Almost hidden in the top half is an anagrammatic poem about love.



59 Wols, *Allegory around the Trumpet*, 1939, ink and watercolour on paper. In delicate lines and whimsical metamorphoses, Wols conjures up a dream-like instability.



60 Hans Scholze, untitled ink drawing, 1965. Though trained as an architect, Scholze did not feel he really belonged to the art world.

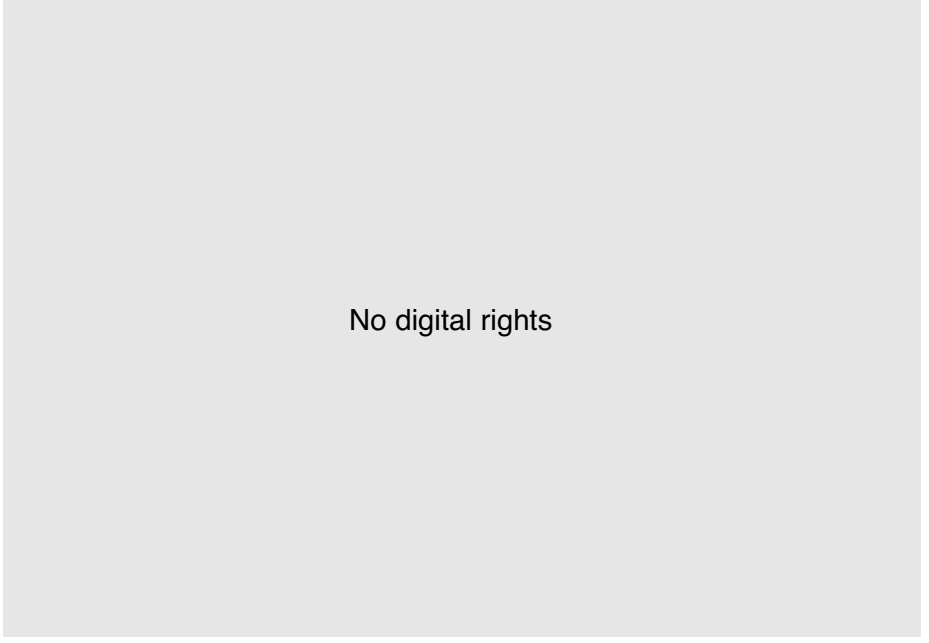
All this means that not only is automatism no longer as dependent on a verifiable context as it once was, but that there are many diffuse or diluted forms of it. If, initially, there was a spectrum, with the primitive scribble at one end, followed by the doodle, with its limited freedom of manoeuvre, and more spectacular displays of fully fledged automatism at the other end, with many 'meta-doodles' somewhere in between, current practices are less easy to place on it. A lot of drawings invoke or evoke automatism without strictly complying with its performance criteria, and may have been arrived at by very different means. In addition, once automatism, whether in reality or in appearance, turned into an established feature of modernism it was no longer possible to use it with the same insouciance: like the swipes, swerves and drips of Abstract Expressionism, it became a self-conscious manoeuvre or a cliché to play with.

In this context it is interesting that in some of Cy Twombly's later paintings, the ungainly scribbles of his earlier work are replaced by graceful, undulating lines and repeated loops, rather like preliminary essays at a form of abstract writing, as in the series *Nini's Paintings* of 1971. While these painting-drawings have an unimpeded impetus that gives them the appearance of automatic drawings, it seems obvious from the degree of overpainting and pentimenti that they have been subject to a whole series of working decisions. But then these works could have been carried out in several sessions, during each of which a degree of automatism could have come into play. Like de Kooning, Twombly said that he spent most of his time in the studio just looking, and then worked very fast. Again, what matters is that, regardless of how they were actually carried out, these works have the *feel* of a fluent, frictionless facture that is characteristic of a certain type of automatic drawing.

In all these different ways artists have been pushing the envelope of scribbling, doodling and automatic drawing, and in so doing they have, wittingly or unwittingly, brought into question their relation to energies and processes beyond the pale of consciousness. What once seemed utterly thoughtless (the scribble), an unconsidered distraction (the doodle) or an immediate line to the unconscious (automatism) has now been reconfigured

as something more complex and ambiguous. The creative process itself, despite its more dramatic manifestations (in Surrealism or Abstract Expressionism), often turns out in practice to be a shifting mixture of the instinctive and the familiar, the subliminal and the intensely focused. Nevertheless, the image of line let loose remains a seductive one, that hovers on the edge between submission to anonymous forces and the release of an individualized freedom. Just like the cultural production and promotion of child art, primitive art and the art of the insane, the exploration of these informal modes of inscription has travelled from the initial excitement of discovery to an increasingly common and knowing exploitation.

61 Hans Scholze, untitled and undated ink drawing. Scholze's later work has a tighter, stiffer feel to it.



62 Marijn van Kreij, 'Double Drawing', 2010, mixed media on paper. What look like a doodle and its copy are actually two incestuously related drawings.

Conclusion

In relation to all three of the modes dealt with in this book – scribbling, doodling and automatic drawing – it could be said that today we are faced with a situation in which the grass has been trodden flat. All three began as marginal, disqualified or overlooked phenomena, and all three were on that account exploited, imitated and promoted, and all three have now been so thoroughly incorporated into our notions of spontaneous or unconscious creativity as to end up being taken for granted, if not to have become clichés. What could be called the idiom of spontaneity, whether it is fluent or jerky, figurative or abstract, is so pervasive, and the artist's invocation of the involuntary so widespread, that a grey area has in effect been established in which it is no longer possible to tell whether the handwriting of spontaneity is genuine or contrived.

How much does this matter? The distinction is itself a questionable one: not only are artists more alert than most to what is going on in a scribble or doodle, but their awareness of their own style and its mutations blurs the boundary between the intentional and the unconscious. Constant practice in this no-man's-land, of the kind that artists like de Kooning engaged in, leads to a situation in which distinctions between authenticity and contrivance become almost impossible to maintain, for the artist themselves as much as for their audience. An artist's resorting to scribbling, doodling or automatic drawing may have begun as a drastic attempt to escape the familiar limits of their personality; but the paradox remains that, even in these genres, their individual signature often persists, and this is part of their fascination. On a collective level, if these idioms of informality have become common artistic currency and their original innocence has been dissipated, then this is likely to

become part of the dialogue that art has with itself, and a source of knowing reflection and comment.

This is illustrated in the work of quite a few contemporary artists. One example is the Dutch artist Marijn van Kreij, whose drawings work over the distinctions between the automatic and the deliberate. Over a period of several years he has made a series of more than 40 drawings from the same photograph of Kurt Cobain: while these are certainly copies, they are deliberately imperfect ones. The process of repetition, which seems the polar opposite of spontaneity, generates its own minute and unpredictable variations, some of which are deliberate, others accidental; the question of what significance to attach to them is left in suspense. Even more striking are his 'double drawings', where what looks like a doodle that has been laboriously duplicated turns out to have been made with spontaneous marks being created and recreated on both sheets during the working process, so that distinctions between 'original' and 'copy', spontaneous and contrived, are undone (illus. 62). In such ways the relationship between the freedom associated with scribbling, doodling and automatic drawing and the sophisticated and self-conscious world of art seems to have come full circle.

One might think that this is the end of the story; but the advent of the Internet and the invention of new forms of information and communications technology in both software and hardware forms has opened up a whole other dimension to these modes. First of all, websites and online journals provide a forum in which people, who may not even flag themselves up as professional artists, can display their work, and sometimes their working process, to an invisible but potentially global audience. This short circuits the relation between solitude and communication that was once at the heart of doodling: it is as if today Robinson Crusoe were a castaway in a bedsit, surfing the World Wide Web. I know of several artists with serious mental health problems that interfere with their ability to socialize who use the Internet in this way, and their work often has a compulsive character comparable to that in meta-doodles or in automatic drawing. Again, the term 'doodle' often acts as an umbrella or decoy; nevertheless, what is presented as a doodle or

automatic drawing is only the tip of an iceberg of invisible artistic activity whose full extent is, by definition, unknowable.

It is my guess that since the beginning of the twentieth century the vast majority of artists, even including those with some professional training, have been virtually unknown, or have had little or no recognition in terms of exhibitions, sales or critical response during their lifetime, and that on their death their work will often have been thrown away, as happened to Laure Pigeon's drawings. The Internet offers artists ways of preserving and displaying their work, and the software associated with it provides new techniques for creating it. Now they can access a virtual audience – and this is particularly striking in the case of the previously secretive or withdrawn world of doodling. A mind-boggling array of drawings can be found on a variety of websites online under the general title of 'doodle', and it is extremely hard to tell, even from the rather manic time-lapse videos that some artists provide, just how spontaneously they might have been created. Again, how much difference does this now make?

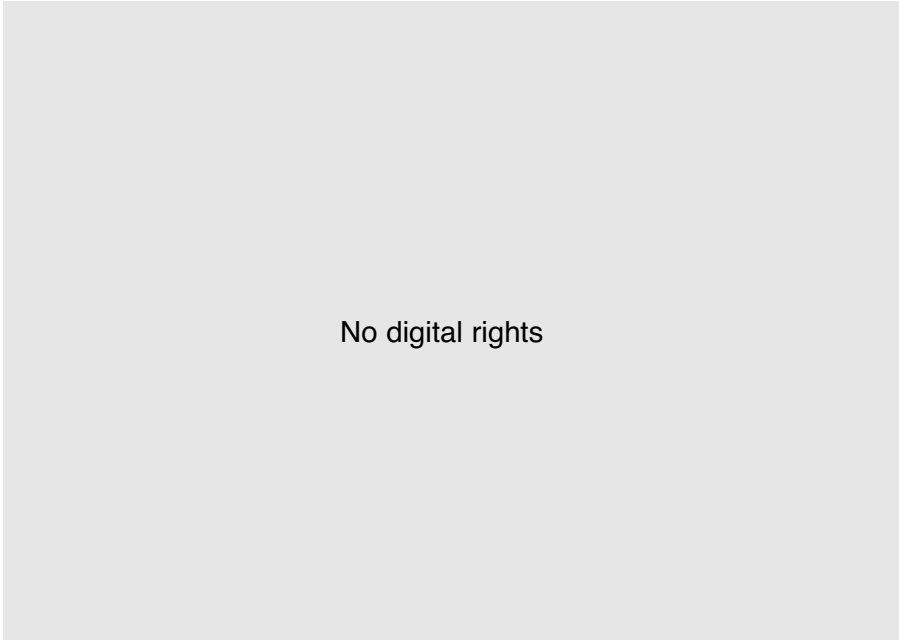
While there are several websites to be found that are devoted to documenting doodles (including DoodlersAnonymous.com and SNC), what can be found on most of the sites that invoke doodling is in fact more like what I have been calling meta-doodles. My guess is that this online space now displays a greater variety and volume of such work than contemporary art galleries will ever be able to. This opens up a whole new domain: what was once unknown or marginal can now create its own virtual constituency, its own digital democracy. Among other things, the criteria that until now have defined Outsider art – the absence of art training, insulation from the market and social isolation, for example – will also have to be reconfigured as a result. These websites are clearly aimed at an audience, and often invite feedback. Needless to say, the quality of this work is extremely variable: some has all the nonchalant bluntness and vulgarity of throw-away doodles, while other work is both fascinating and uncategorizable.

One example, out of many, is the artist Carlo Keshishian, whose work I came across on OutsideIn.org.uk, though he has actually exhibited in galleries

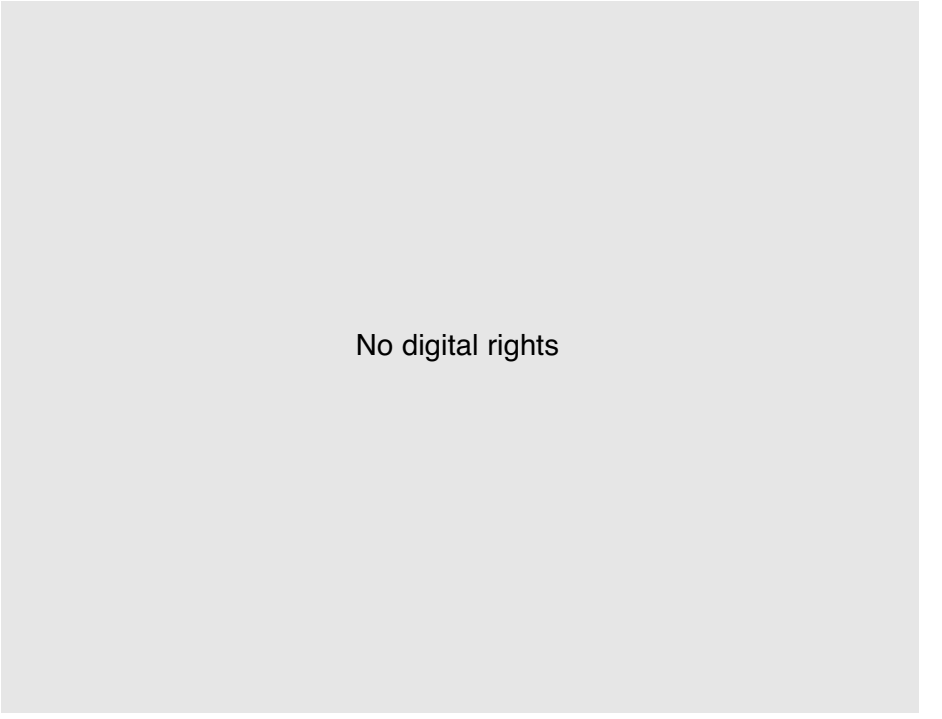
in London and Beirut. At school he was a prolific doodler, at first in the classroom, where he would find himself drawing on his schoolwork. As in doodles, words played an important part in his later drawing, mostly following his stream of consciousness; but in some larger works, such as *Picture Worth a Thousand Words* (1998–9), the entire surface is covered with minuscule furrows of text, each sentence of which took around twenty minutes to paint, thus amounting to a kind of slow-motion automatism half-way between writing and drawing. Keshishian also makes similar but smaller works in ink (illus. 63). Other contemporaneous works consist entirely of densely packed dots or lines: nine of these were combined into a huge aggregate composition entitled *The Void* (2001–7), one panel of which is reproduced here (illus. 64). The labour-intensive nature of this work would certainly qualify it as a meta-doodle, and it seems that the artist often works in a trance-like state, sometimes in all-night sessions. Like many such artists, Keshishian usually works to the accompaniment of music: 'The tempo and the mood of the music dictate the direction, pace and density of the drawing.'[1]

Another example is the self-taught Flemish artist Eric Weets, who covers large sheets of paper with minutely detailed, endlessly proliferating figures, machines and building structures, all drawn in a careful linear idiom reminiscent of comics, and crammed with grotesque imagery recognizable from the history of art, from Bosch or Breughel to Robert Crumb. These intricate compositions seem, to judge by footage of him at work, to emerge steadily and without any preliminary plan. Their consistently legible figurative imagery seems like a different 'unconscious' idiom from that found in automatic drawing from the early twentieth century – it is more like a verbal stream of consciousness, even though Weets is working in a strictly non-verbal mode. He says:

> You will find in my work everything that plays a part in daily reality, including childhood beliefs carried unconsciously into the adult mind, and more conscious experiences learned by observation and study.[2]



63 Carlo Keshishian, *Diary,* 1998–9, ink on card. Densely packed furrows of text look almost abstract from a distance.



64 Carlo Keshishian, *The Void*, 2001–7, paint on canvas, detail. A mass of tiny circles almost coagulate in a work so labour-intensive as to induce a trance state in the artist.

Although his drawings look a bit like extended doodles, their total concentration on recognizable figurative components, each in the grip of something or someone else, gives them the feel of an endlessly interlocking Karmic charade (illus. 65).

The revolution caused by the Internet and the new devices linked to it is not just because anyone with the necessary skills in using websites can promote their work, but also because there is a formidable array of programs that can imitate or enhance almost any drawing or painting technique. It is possible to program a mouse in order to be able to doodle on-screen, and even save and superimpose previous pages, so that the work retains something of a casual and improvisatory nature. There are also, as we have seen, programs that will turn your merest digital scribble into an elaborate, continuous 'doodle', and where you can choose to halt the process at any stage. Presumably, these are based on similar principles to the drawing machines mentioned in chapter Three, except that there is no need for a mechanical translation: it can all be done in virtual space. This raises the question of where the creativity in all this is located: is it in the original program, or in the person using it? Laurent Danchin, who has taught for several years in a college where digital media are a prominent part of the curriculum, claims that:

> confronted by the computer, the draughtsman of genius turns into the orchestral conductor of special effects prescribed mathematically by the machine, but nobody gains more from this than someone who, like him, is capable of drawing in an old-fashioned way.[3]

But this seems to me rather a rearguard argument, given the multitude of programs that can seamlessly turn the most mediocre sketch into an impressive 'drawing'. In fact, some artists who use digital media, such as James Faure-Walker, deliberately distort such programs in order to find a creative way of contradicting the facility that they normally offer.

But if we take 'doodle' to mean something done on the edge of a written or printed text, digital doodling presents some interesting new problems. In

effect, we are now faced with what amounts to a mutation of the doodle, in its original sense. In using a mouse, one vital ingredient has been stretched to breaking point: the connection between the hand that writes and the hand that doodles, and this surely makes more of a difference than does the digital translation of other drawing effects. On the other hand, drawing using a stylus preserves this connection, even though the results are displaced from pad to screen. Where touch-screens have replaced the mouse, as on tablet computers, the relation between the stylus or, more commonly, the finger, and an endless variety of marks, colours and textures becomes more direct, almost amounting to a sophisticated form of finger painting. Some artists, including David Hockney, simply use tablet computers as convenient digital sketchbooks, but many others use them as a way of elaborating improvised and unpredictable drawings; these can be quite immediate, made in minutes or seconds, or much more worked, perhaps taking several hours. These new media also offer the unprecedented advantage that every stage of a work can be saved and returned to later. However, this immediacy and flexibility comes with a near complete absence of the resistance and friction conventionally associated with both writing and drawing. From a traditional perspective this could be seen as a shortcoming; but, just as the planchette once gave the pencil a new mobility for automatic writing, so these modern media may unlock a whole new dimension of free-range drawing.

One might see these recent developments as indicative of the new directions that scribbling, doodling and automatic drawing might now move in. In their original forms they were (at least in the case of the first two) marginal and constrained as well as trivialized and overlooked; and they were exploited by the art world, partly on account of their innocence and inventiveness. Inevitably this led to these genres becoming devices that were used more self-consciously, and hence they ran the risk of turning into 'recipes' for 'unconscious' form creation. In addition, fluency and immediacy were sometimes replaced by prolonged and labour-intensive modes of execution. Digital media provide not only new means for documenting what is emerging as a vast new terra incognita, but also the possibilities of transforming its creation.

65 Eric Weets, *Painting No. 8: Conscious Times*, 2010, ink on canvas. In almost impenetrable detail faces, figures and buildings proliferate in a work created over a period of sustained improvisation.

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Conclusion

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