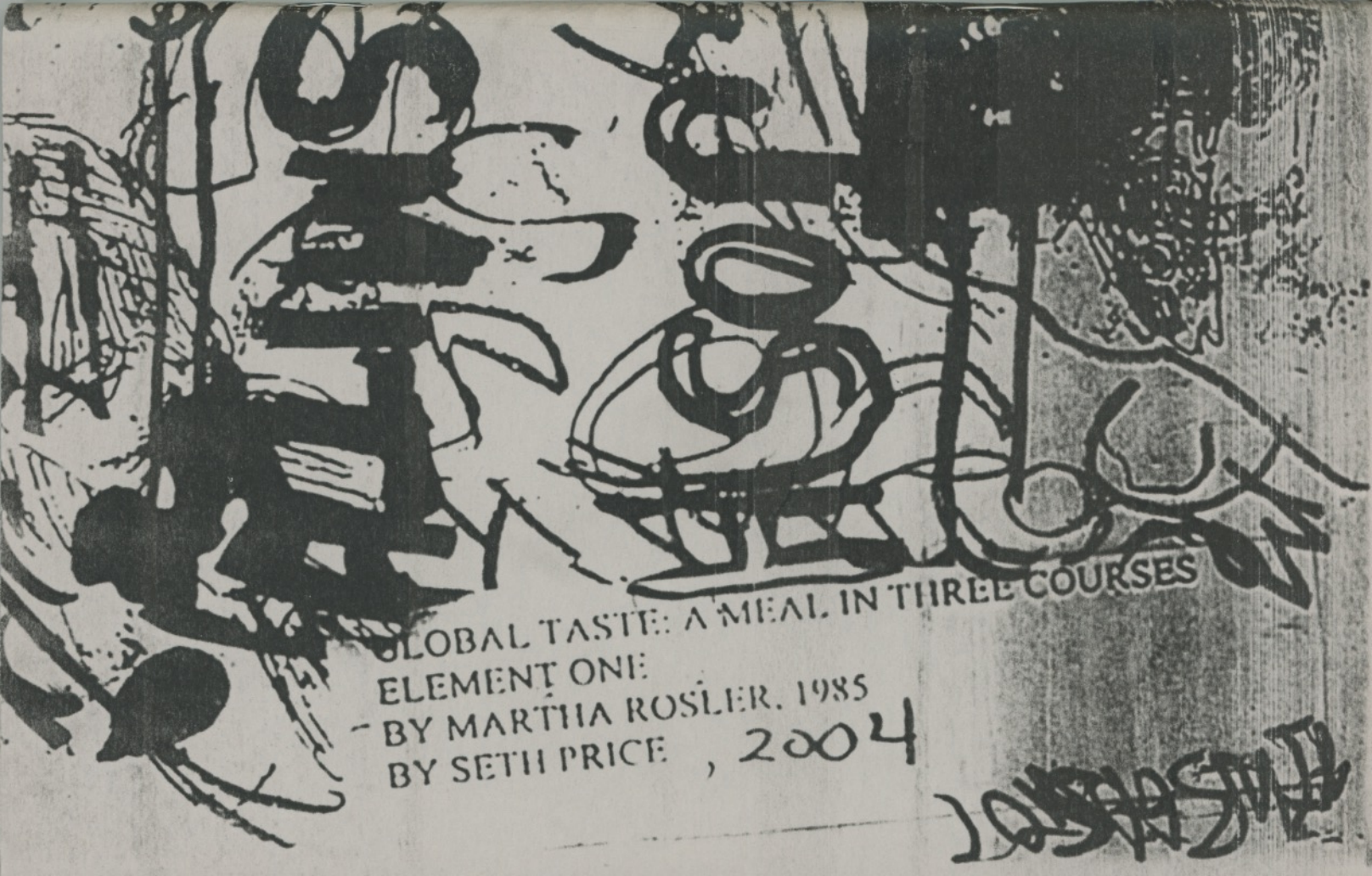


GLOBAL TASTE: A MEAL IN THREE COURSES

ELEMENT ONE

- BY MARTHA ROSLER, 1985

BY SETH PRICE , 2004

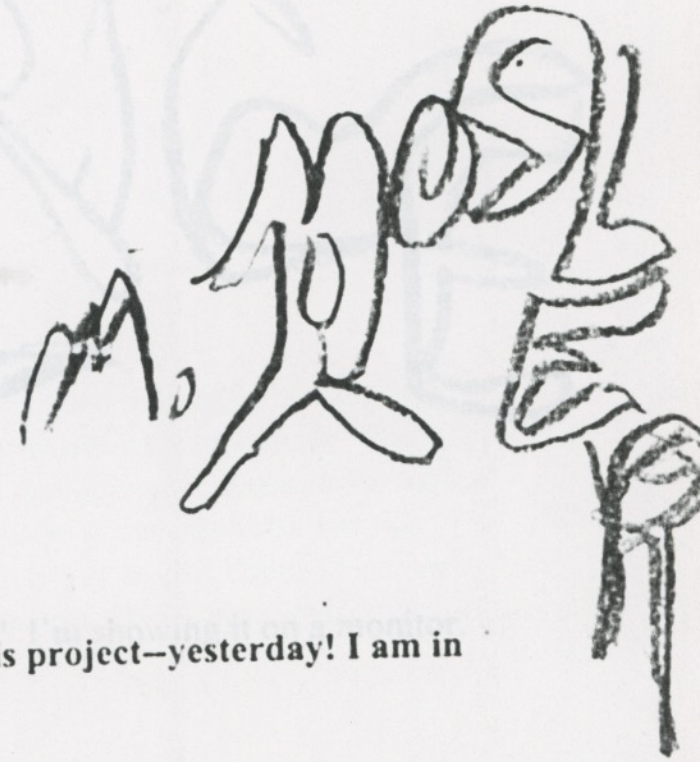
JOHNSMITH
18/30

GLOBAL TASTE: A MEAL IN THREE COURSES
ELEMENT ONE
BY MARTHA ROSLER, 1985
BY SETH PRICE , 2004

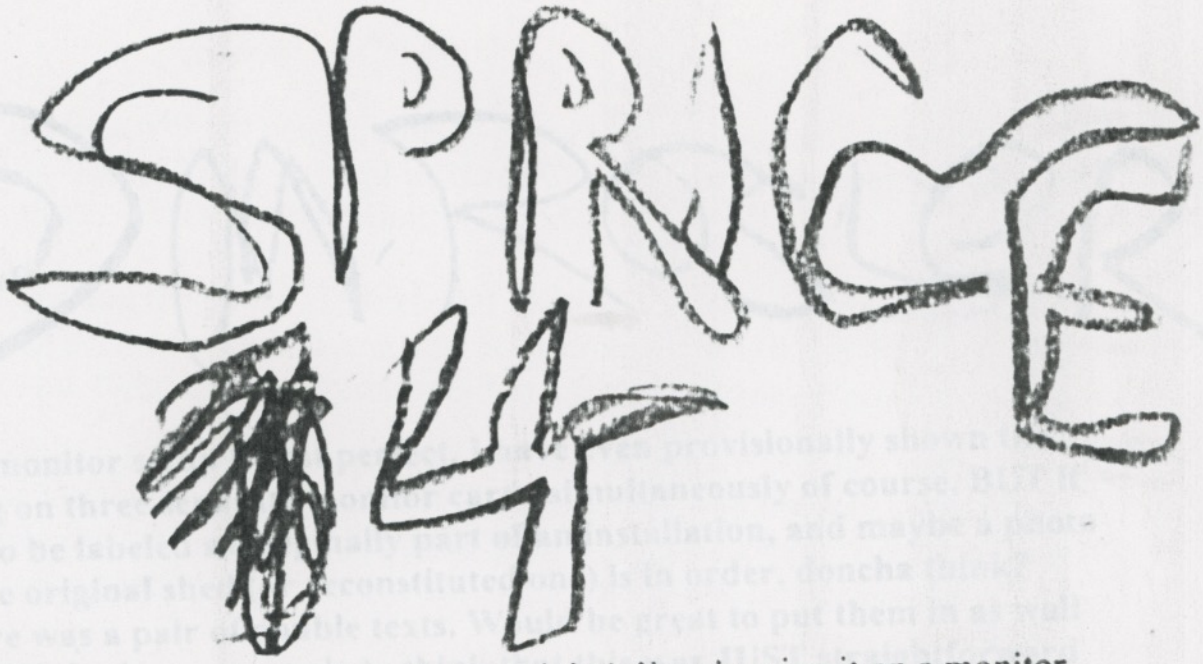
2 SETH PRICE

Martha, It's Seth. I'm showing your Global Taste video soon, I thought I would write with some questions. Maybe you have a moment to reply--are you still in Europe?

It's been about two years since we discussed this piece in full—for that show that was canceled—so, while I remember you were leery of the gesture---- you suspected that I might be making fun of you---I can't remember why.



Hi Seth,
I was just thinking about you --and this project--yesterday! I am in Brooklyn! Let's talk (or write).



You had a poster with the installation, right? I'm showing it on a monitor.

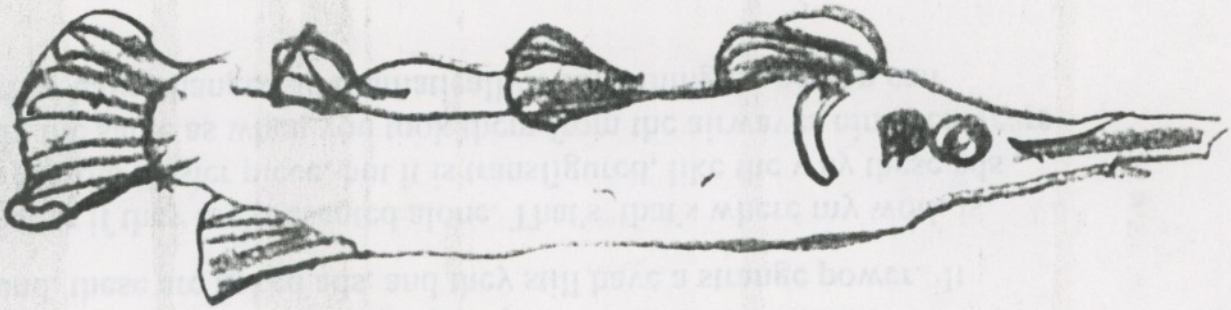
SM ROSLER

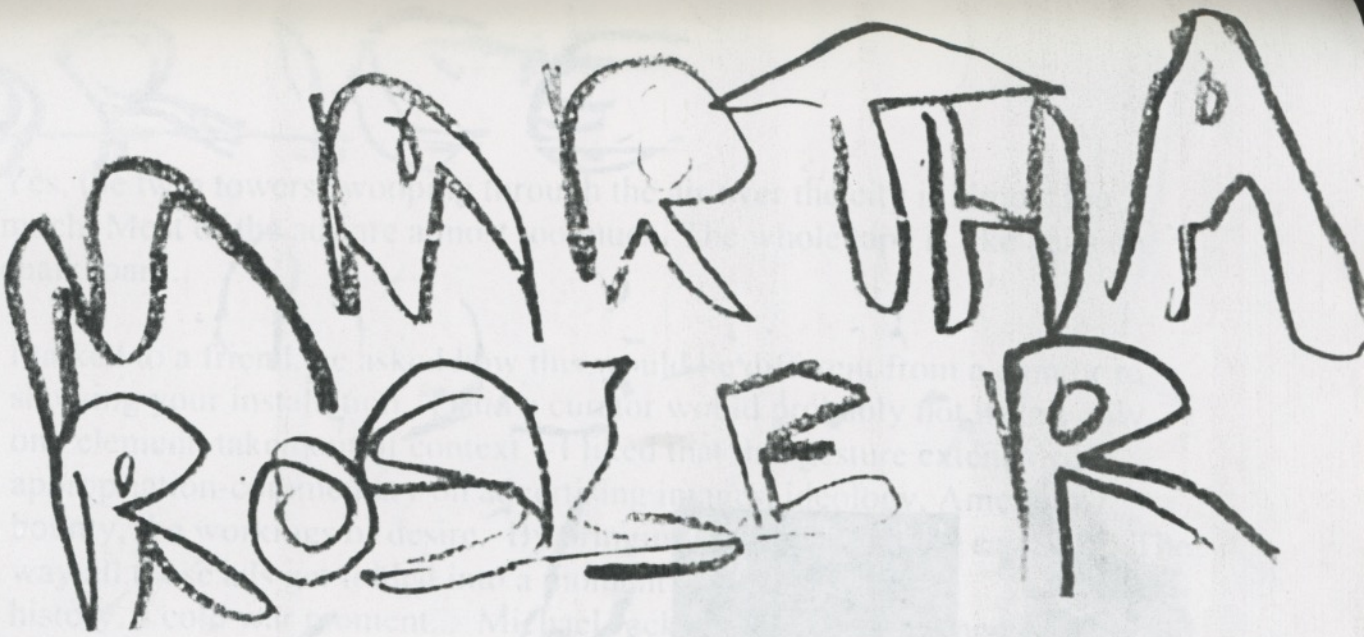
The monitor setup is just perfect. I have even provisionally shown the thing on three separate monitor carts, simultaneously of course. BUT it has to be labeled as originally part of an installation, and maybe a photo of the original shed (or reconstituted one) is in order, doncha think? There was a pair of double texts. Would be great to put them in as wall label? I don't want people to think that this was JUST straightforward appropriation...

Maybe the title will tell people what is going on. We originally agreed that I'd call it 'Global Taste: A Meal in Three Courses; Element One; By Martha Rosler, 1985'. You liked the 'clinical' aspect.

I disagree about the photo of the shed. I like that the ads are ripped out of context. It's a context which can only be presumed. It lurks in the background, these are naked ads, and they still have a strange power. It doesn't matter if they are presented alone. That's that's where my work is. It's still a Martha Rosler piece, but it is transfigured, like the way these ads are exactly the same as when you took them from the airwaves nineteen years ago, but they have changed so dramatically. Something no person can control.

I think it's good if there is some confusion---is it your piece, my piece, where's the piece. You approach it from this time and context, see it as a montage of 'old commercials'... maybe then you read the title and have to do a double take.





OK, this all sounds fine to me, after all.

By the way, the tape starts with Manhattan landing, a Saatchi Brit Airlines ad that opens with the twin towers coming in for a landing to a Wagner theme, with bemused people staring up from below.

PRICE

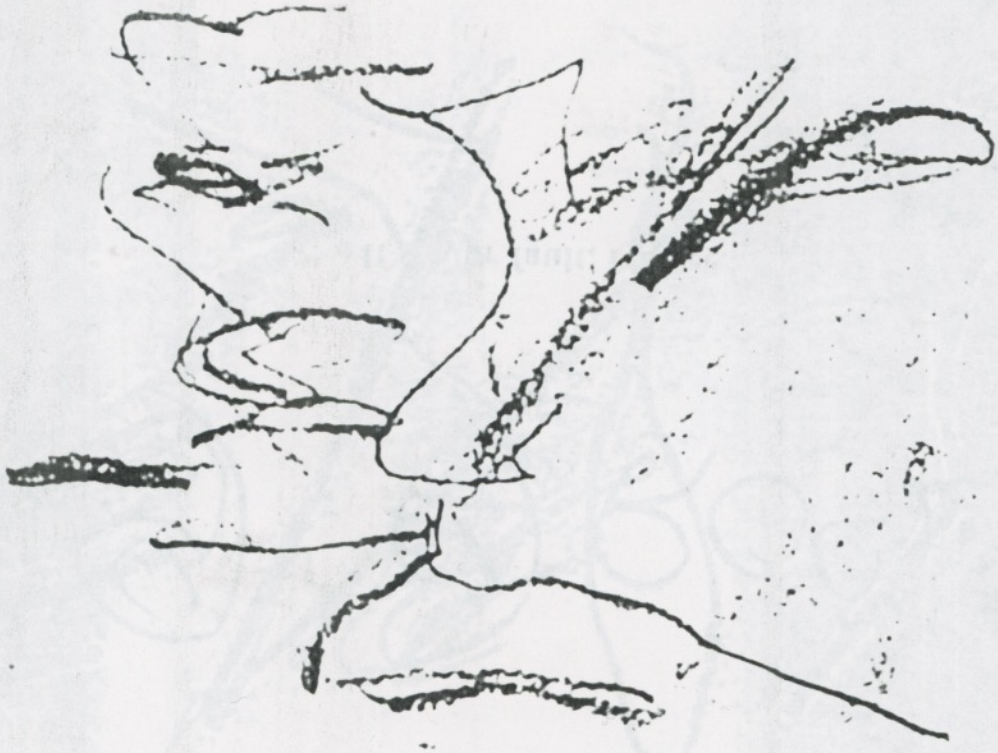
Yes, the twin towers swooping through the air over the city is almost too much. Most of the ads are almost too much. The whole tape is like nails on chalkboard.

I talked to a friend, he asked how this would be different from a curator re-showing your installation. I said a curator would probably not install only one element, taken out of context. I liked that this gesture extends your appropriation-commentary on advertising images, ideology, American bounty, the workings of desire. By bringing nostalgia into the equation. The way all those ads get folded into a moment of history, a cold war moment... Michael Jackson is back in the news, there's a kind of winking eighties fetishism, Cabbage Patch kids are being sold again, because kids who got them twenty years ago have their own kids now, to buy for--- a link between the generations.

If someone walks in and merely glances at the piece, especially within the context of a show on the subject of appropriation, they might dismiss it as mere retro mongering. And I'll get blamed for that, not you, stop worrying you'll look bad.

9 M. ROSLER

It's your fault, I agree.



S. PRICE 10

10

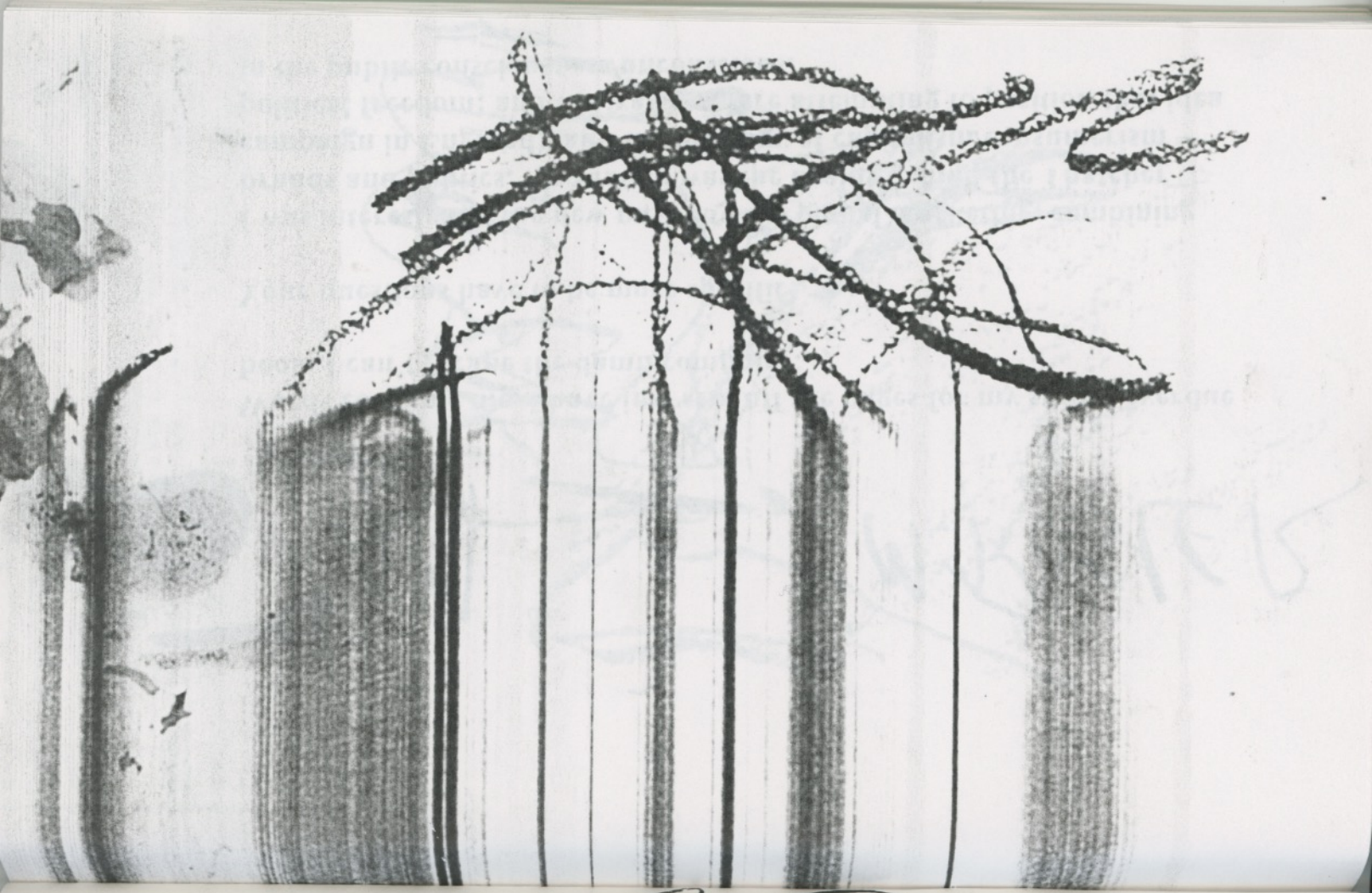
Curt emails, aren't you on good terms with words../ What were your thoughts with the Global Taste installation; position it in The Life World for me.

11 — M. ROSLER

Words consume me. I have just sent off the pages for my stupid overdue book. I can't escape the damn computer.

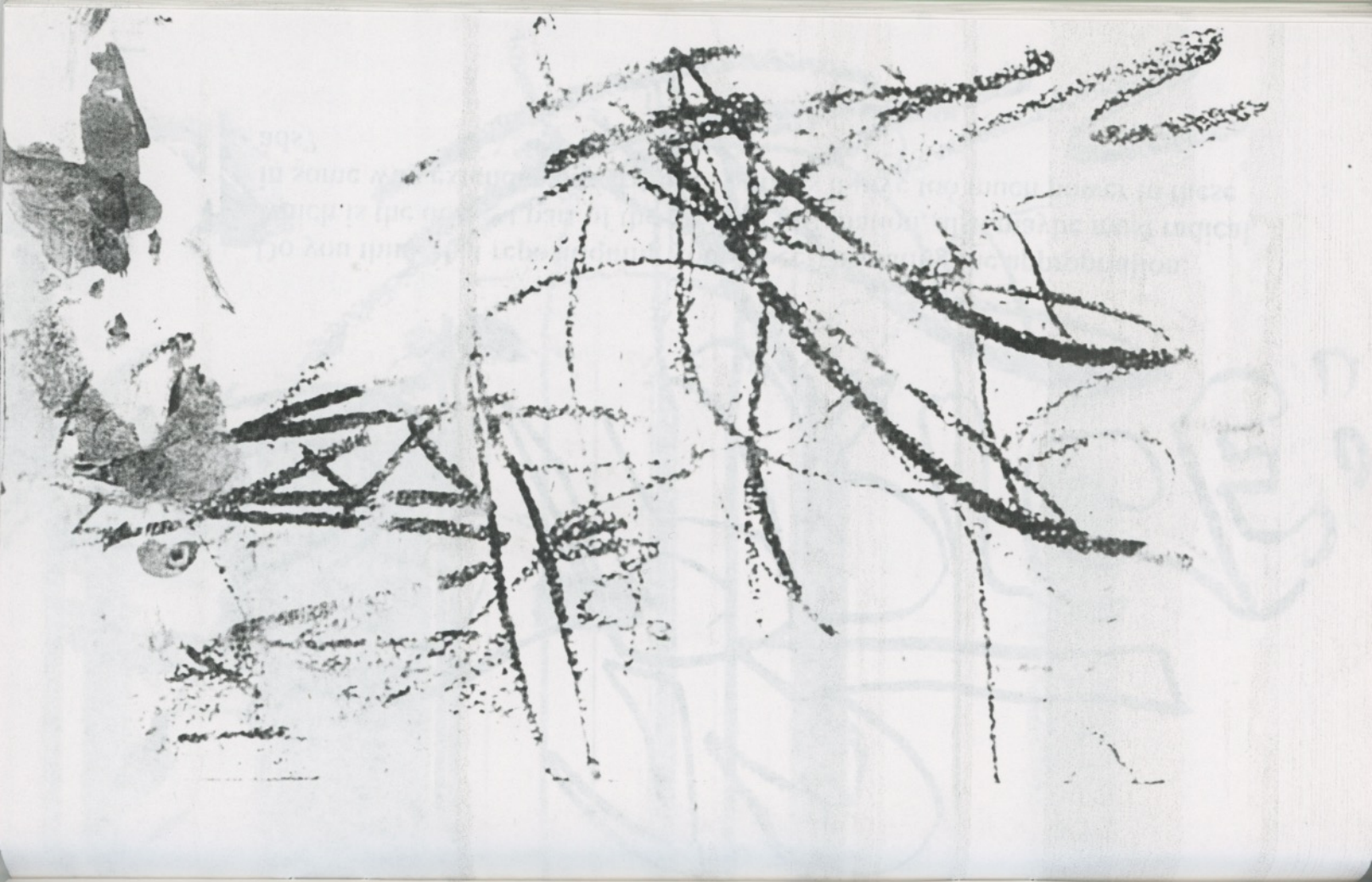
Your questions have to be more specific!

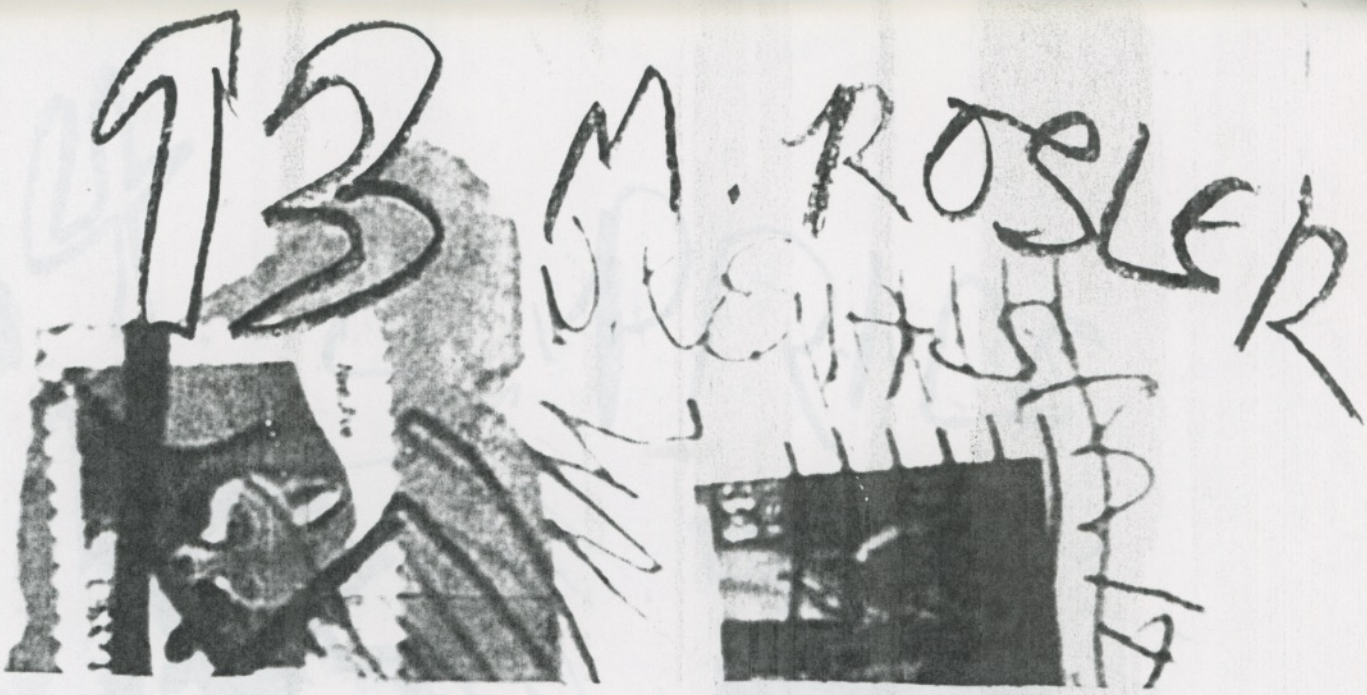
I was interested in the new push toward global marketing, combining brands and politics, eg, Saatchi was the brains behind the Thatcher campaign in England), and the ideology of capitalism/consumerism = political freedom; and the way we were attempting to position that idea in the public consciousness/unconscious.



12 SPACE!

Do you think that repositioning your piece---isolating the appropriation, which is the densest part of the original installation, also maybe most radical, in some way extends your critique--or does it give too much power to these ads?





Depends on the viewer... but not in the context of sitting on a monitor in an art show. The power of framing is the strongest determinant here, I should think.

Yes, the piece is about framing. But some of the ads you selected are now well-known pop cultural documents--the Michael Jackson/Pepsi moonwalking ad, for example.

15

M. ROSLER

They were already, when I chose them. But they truly were playing in the week I chose all the ads from.

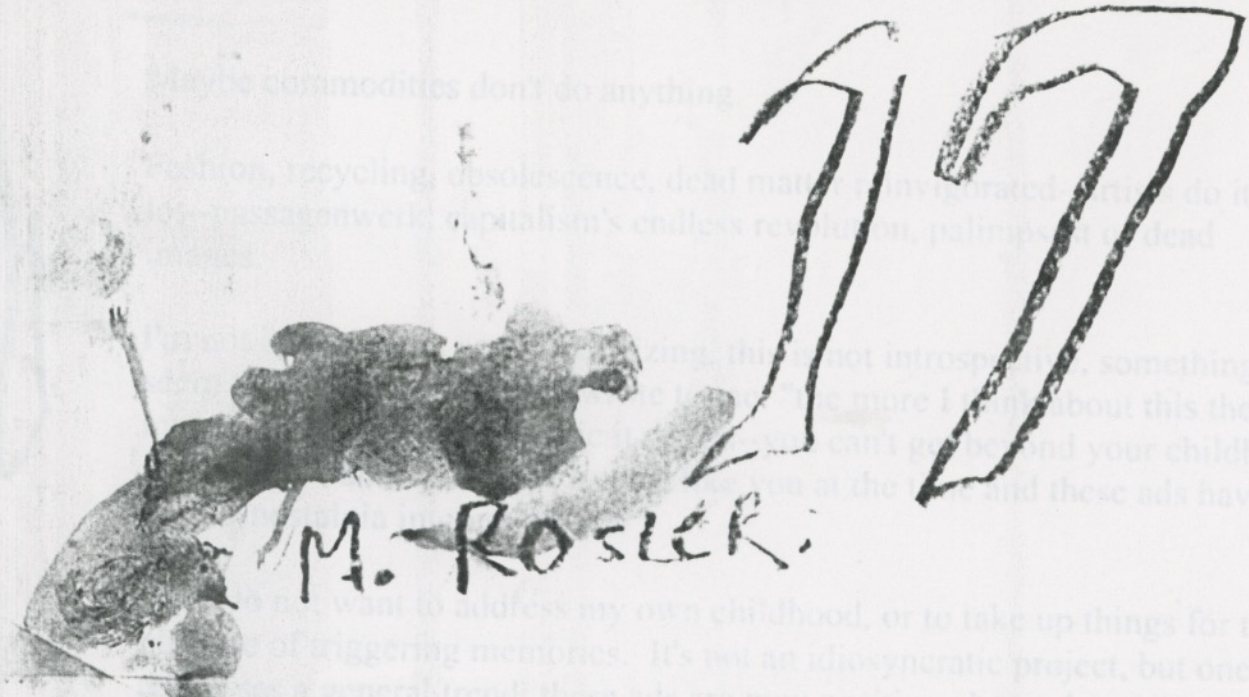
The nostalgia element of all of this doesn't interest me in the slightest, by the way. I was not a child like you at the time and these ads have ZERO nostalgia interest for me. In fact, no ads even from my own day, do.

Don't understand this gesture to be one primarily of 'retro' or nostalgia....
Like you the nostalgia aspect has very little personal interest for me. It can

be a trap, should be handled with care, but it should be used by artists, because it's so much a part of our culture, music, fashion, advertising....

It's an effect, and can be treated as a part of the syntax of marketing.

The re-presentation of your appropriation might both extend and blunt the political elements of your critique. The nostalgia element is simply something to mess with. It's interesting as a cultural phenomenon, and as another way that the commodity functions and folds its own obsolete and broken droppings back into itself. You should be able to acknowledge this.



I should? Well then, I guess I do... Which commodity does that? All of em? Or only some?

Maybe commodities don't do anything.

Fashion, recycling, obsolescence, dead matter reinvigorated--artists do it a lot--passagenwerk, capitalism's endless revolution, palimpsest of dead images.

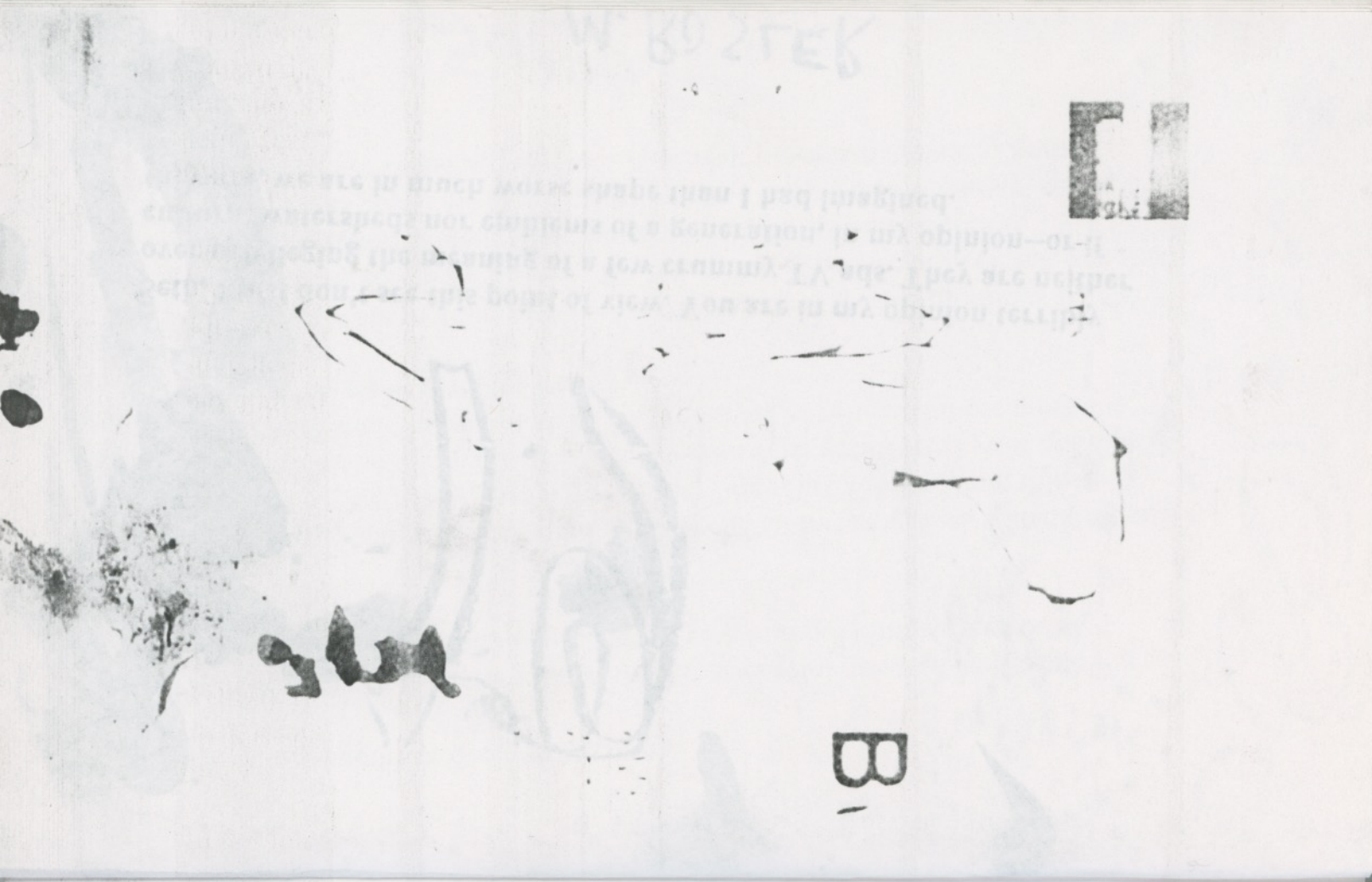
I'm not interested in sentimentalizing, this is not introspective, something you seem to disagree with. You wrote to me: "the more I think about this the more absurd and idiosyncratic it seems--you can't get beyond your childhood memories!", and "I was not a child like you at the time and these ads have ZERO nostalgia interest for me."

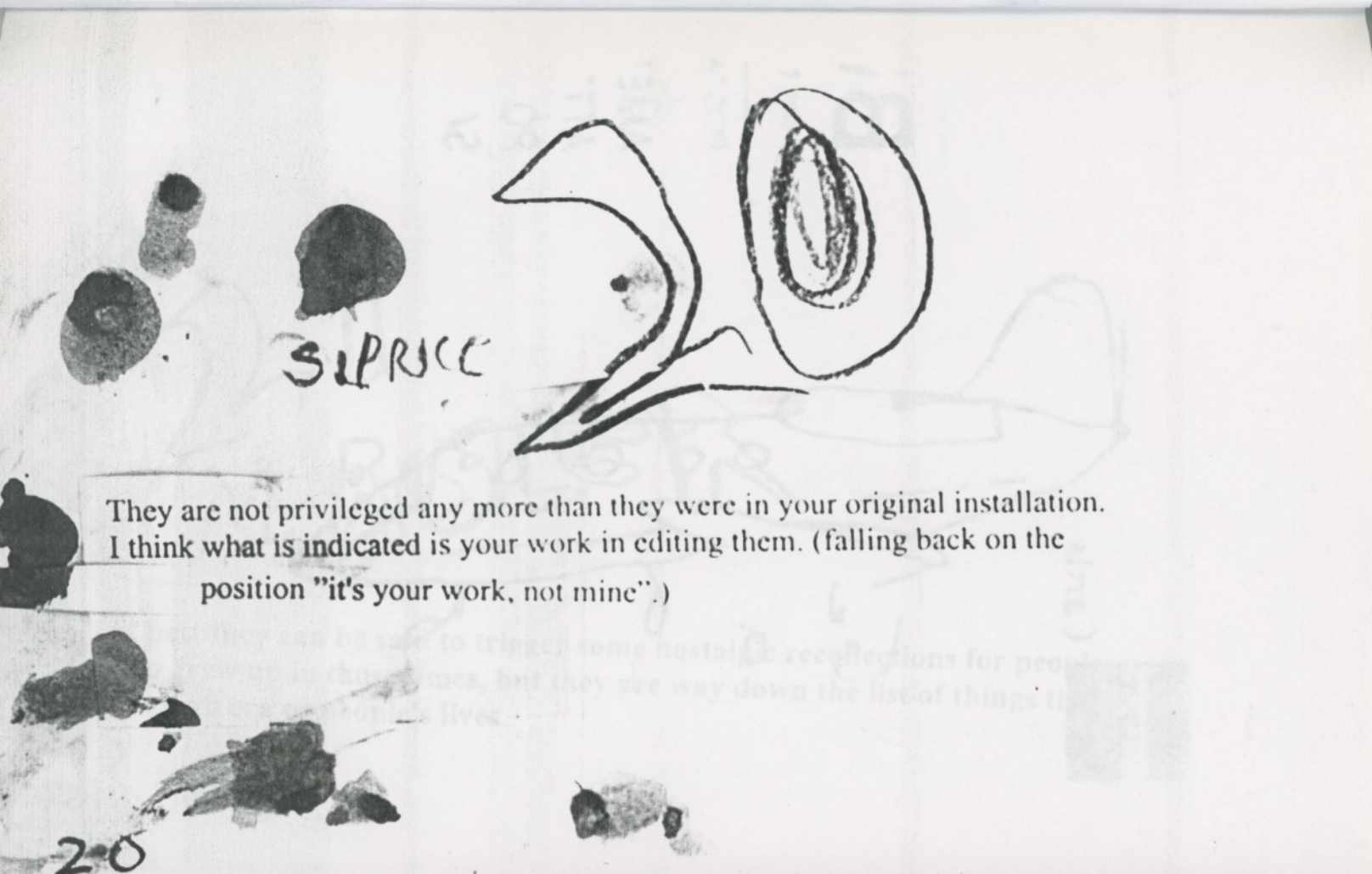
But I do not want to address my own childhood, or to take up things for the purpose of triggering memories. It's not an idiosyncratic project, but one that addresses a general trend: these ads are now positioned as cultural watersheds, as emblems of a generation, etc---they assume 'classic' status. They indeed are classics, why not. And your piece is a classic. Double classic.

S. PRICE

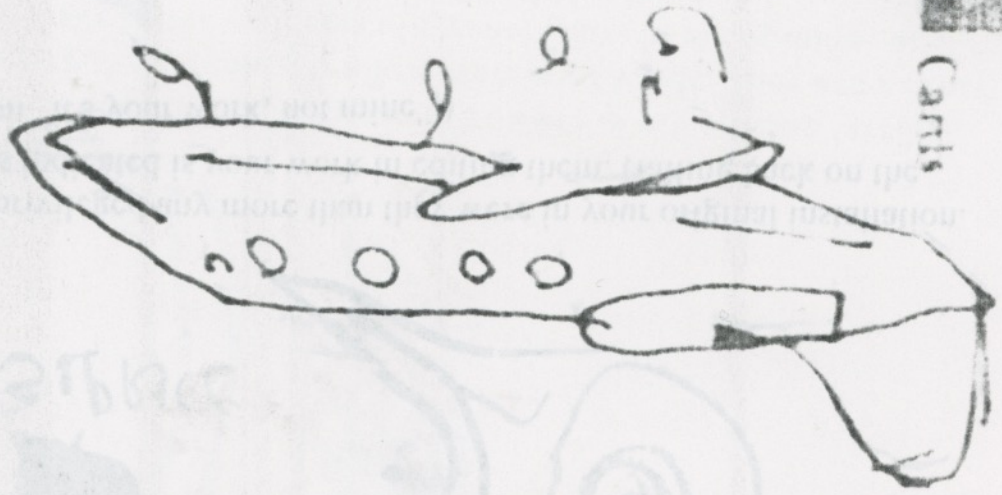
Seth, I just don't see this point of view. You are in my opinion terribly over privileging the meaning of a few crummy TV ads. They are neither cultural watersheds nor emblems of a generation, in my opinion--or if they are, we are in much worse shape than I had imagined.

M. ROSLER





They are not privileged any more than they were in your original installation. I think what is indicated is your work in editing them. (falling back on the position "it's your work, not mine".)



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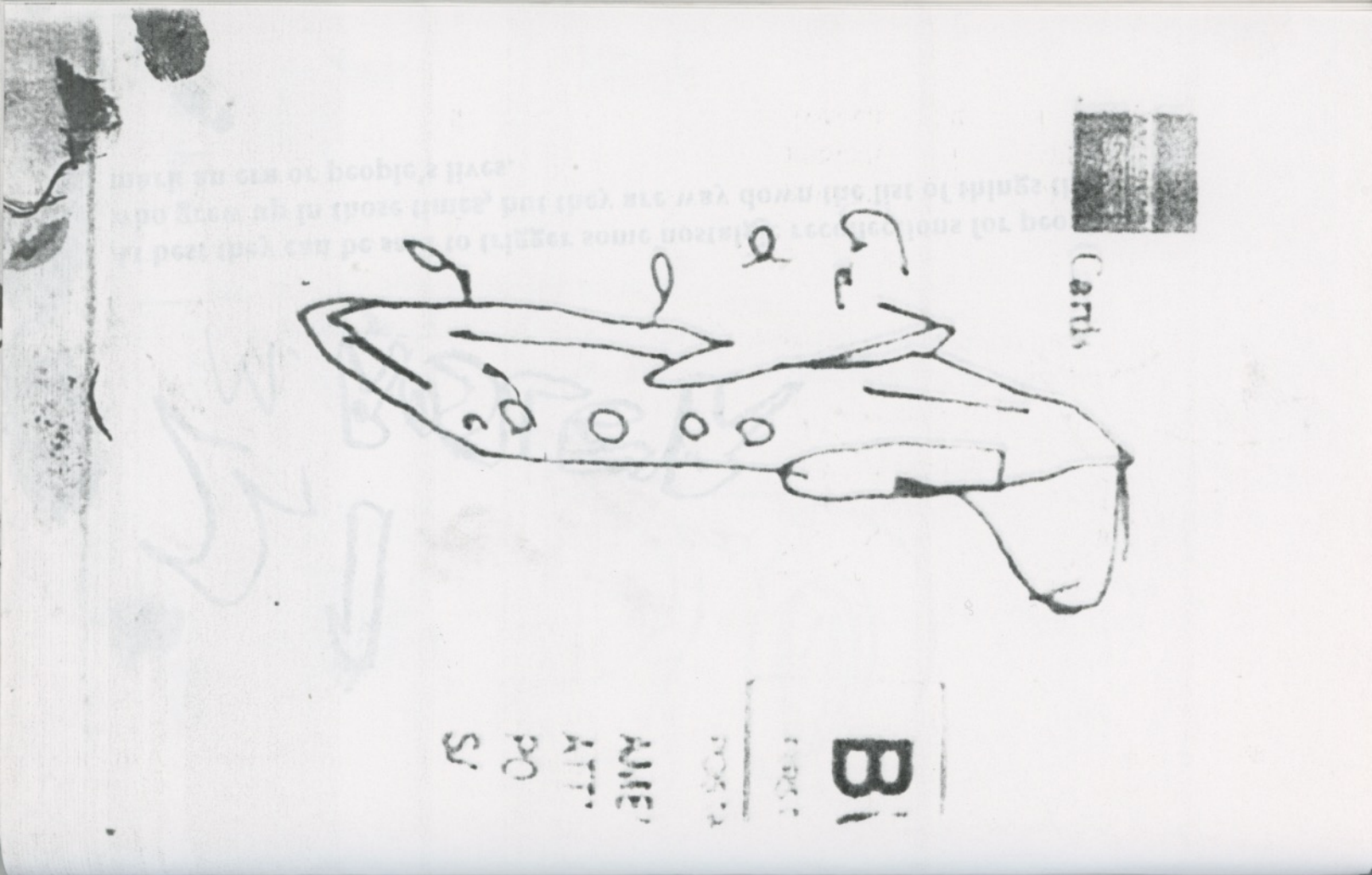
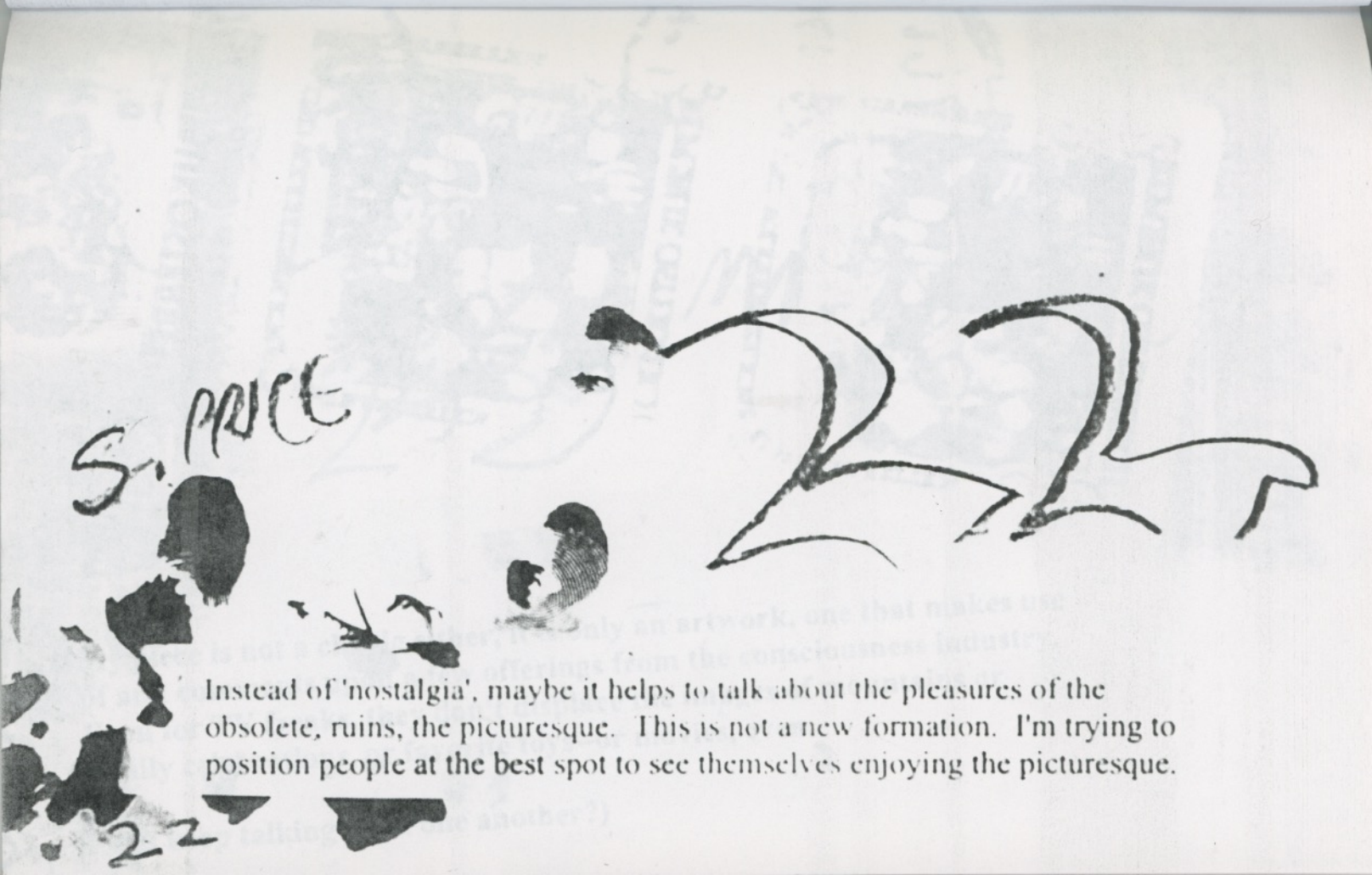
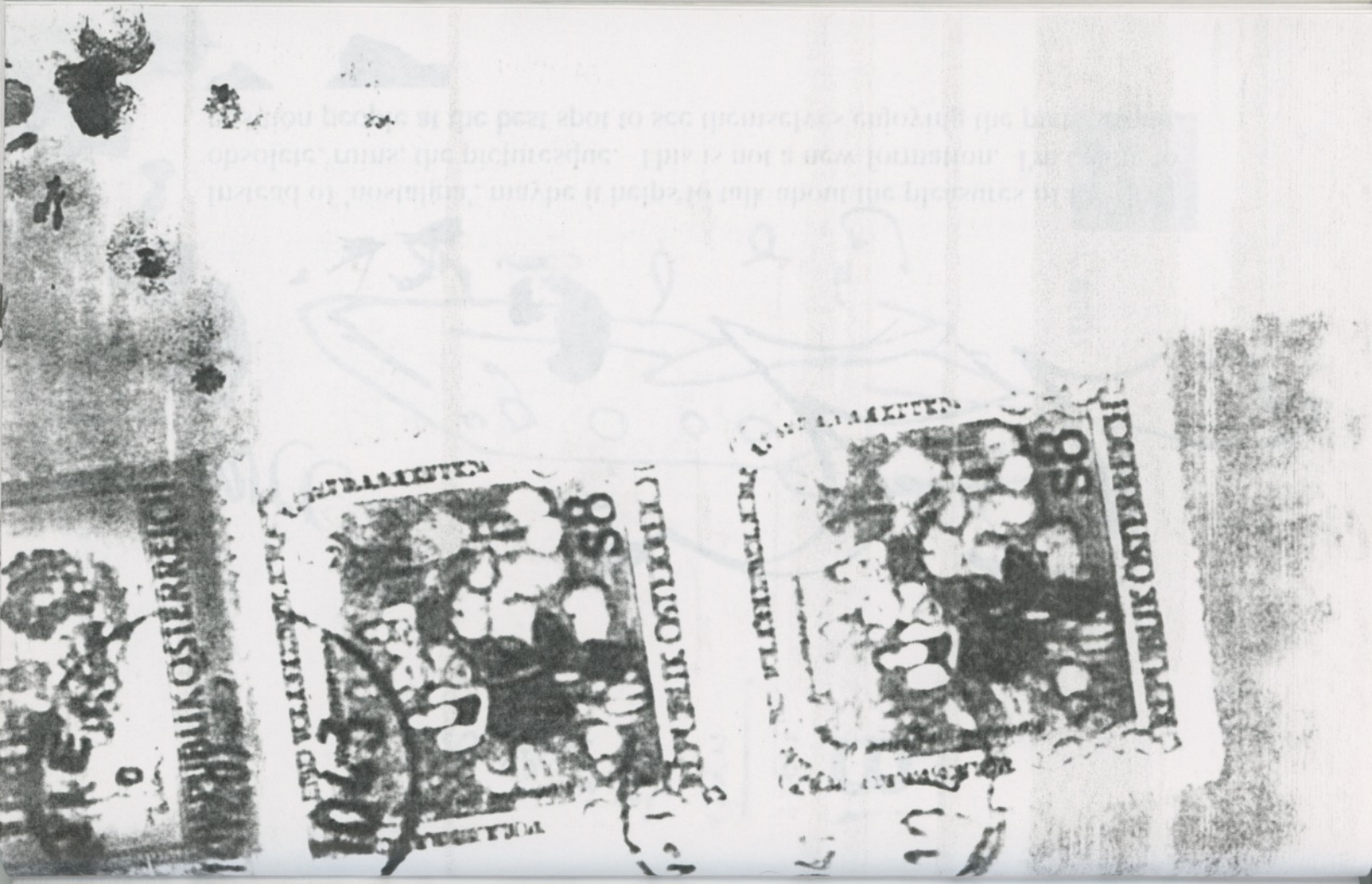
M. ROSLER

At best they can be said to trigger some nostalgic recollections for people who grew up in those times, but they are way down the list of things that mark an era or people's lives.





Instead of 'nostalgia', maybe it helps to talk about the pleasures of the obsolete, ruins, the picturesque. This is not a new formation. I'm trying to position people at the best spot to see themselves enjoying the picturesque.

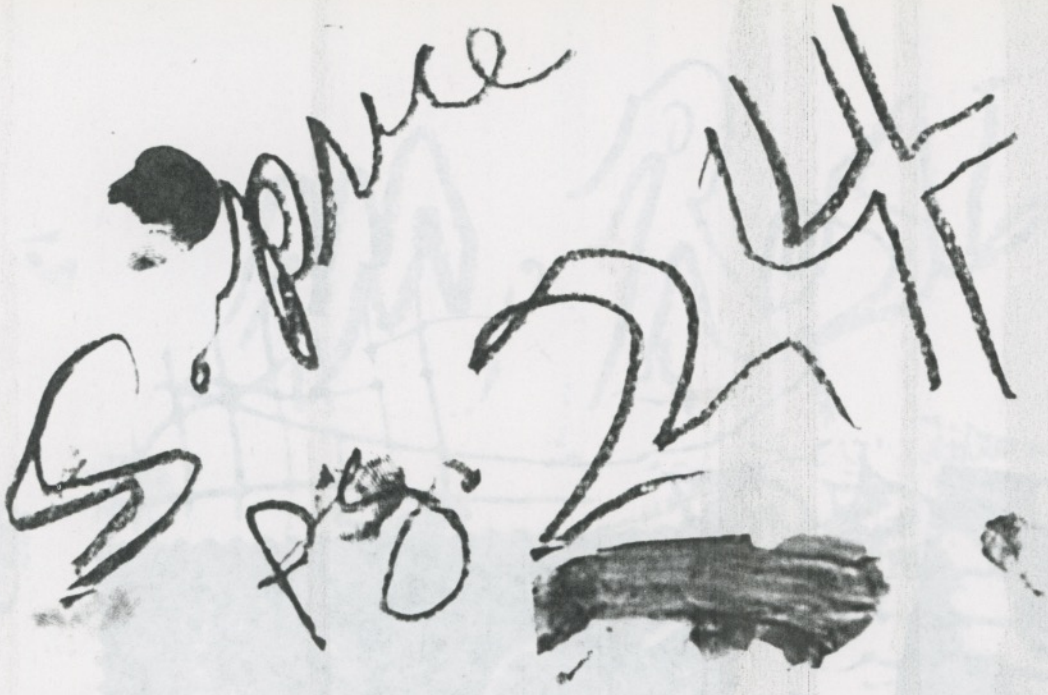


23 M. Kosler

23

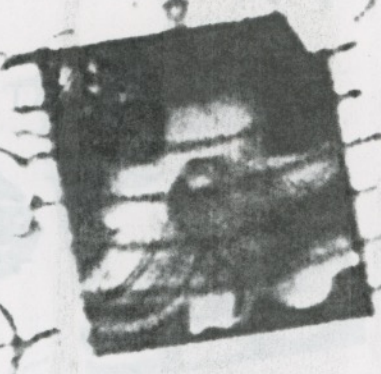
My piece is not a classic either, it is only an artwork, one that makes use of and comments upon a few offerings from the consciousness industry. Even for TV freaks, they don't displace the images of mountains or family celebrations, or favorite toys--or movies, even.

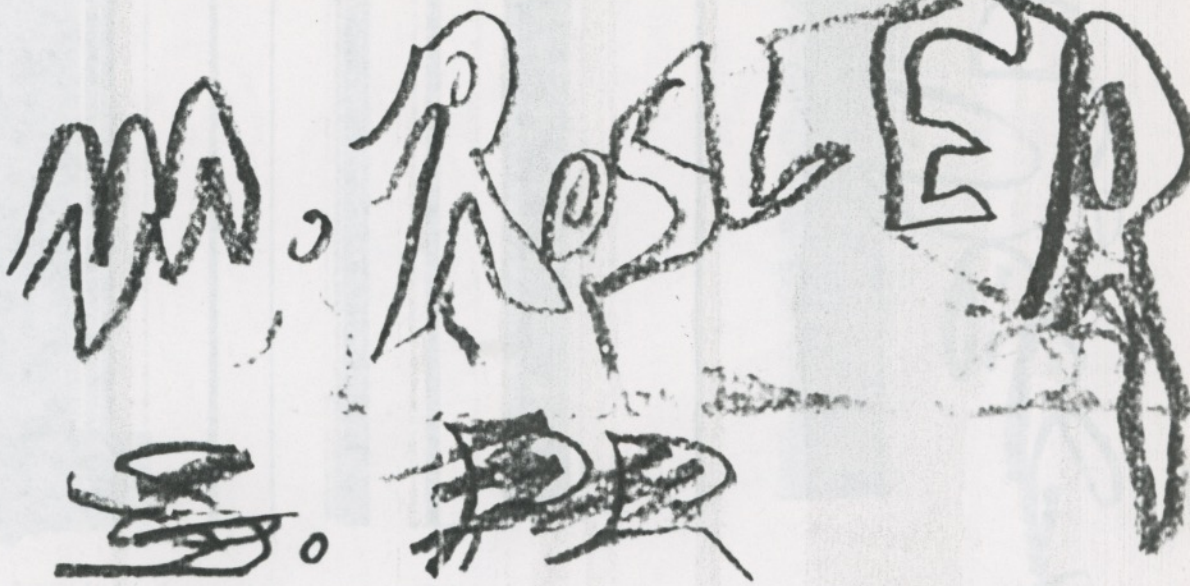
Let's keep talking (past one another?)



When I called them classic and your installation classic, I was not being entirely serious.

They are framed as art, so they are in any case fragile and verging on irrelevance.

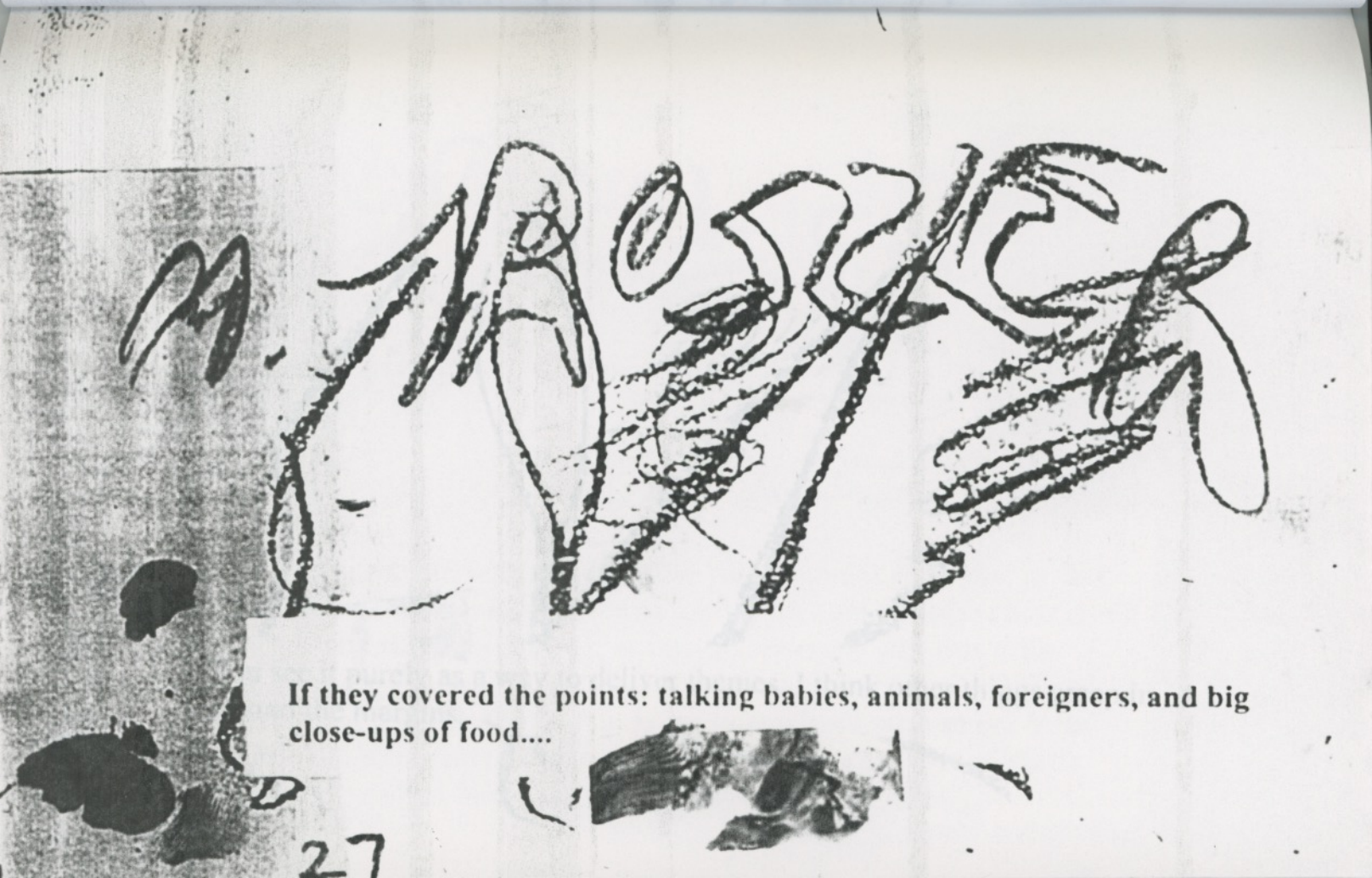




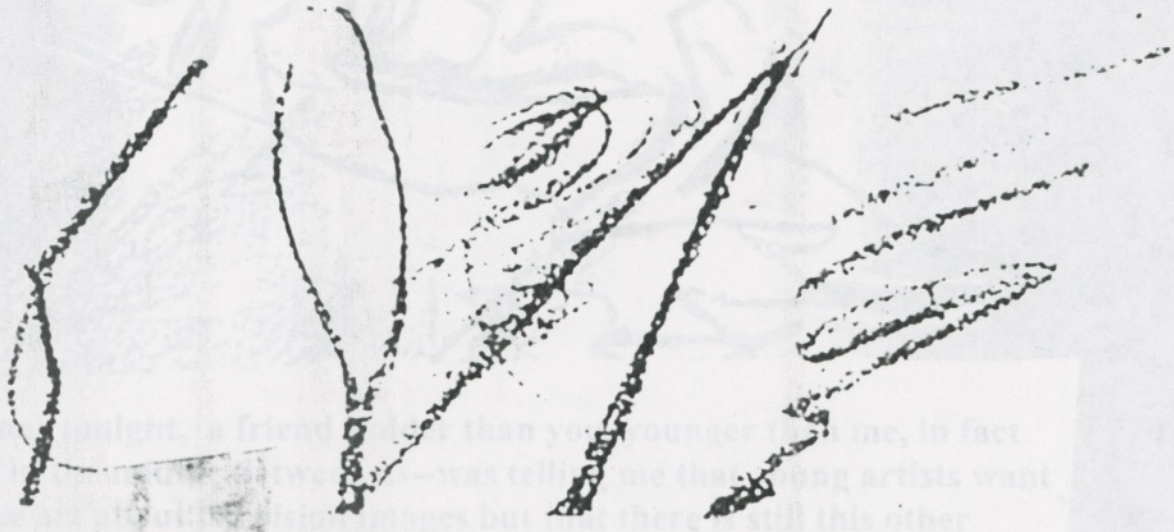
Hmmm, in my installation they simply flowed, a selection right from the screen of the day.... And the front screen had the TEXT, which was therefore privileged, no?

Yes, a selection right from the screen of the day, and thus a claim to transparency.

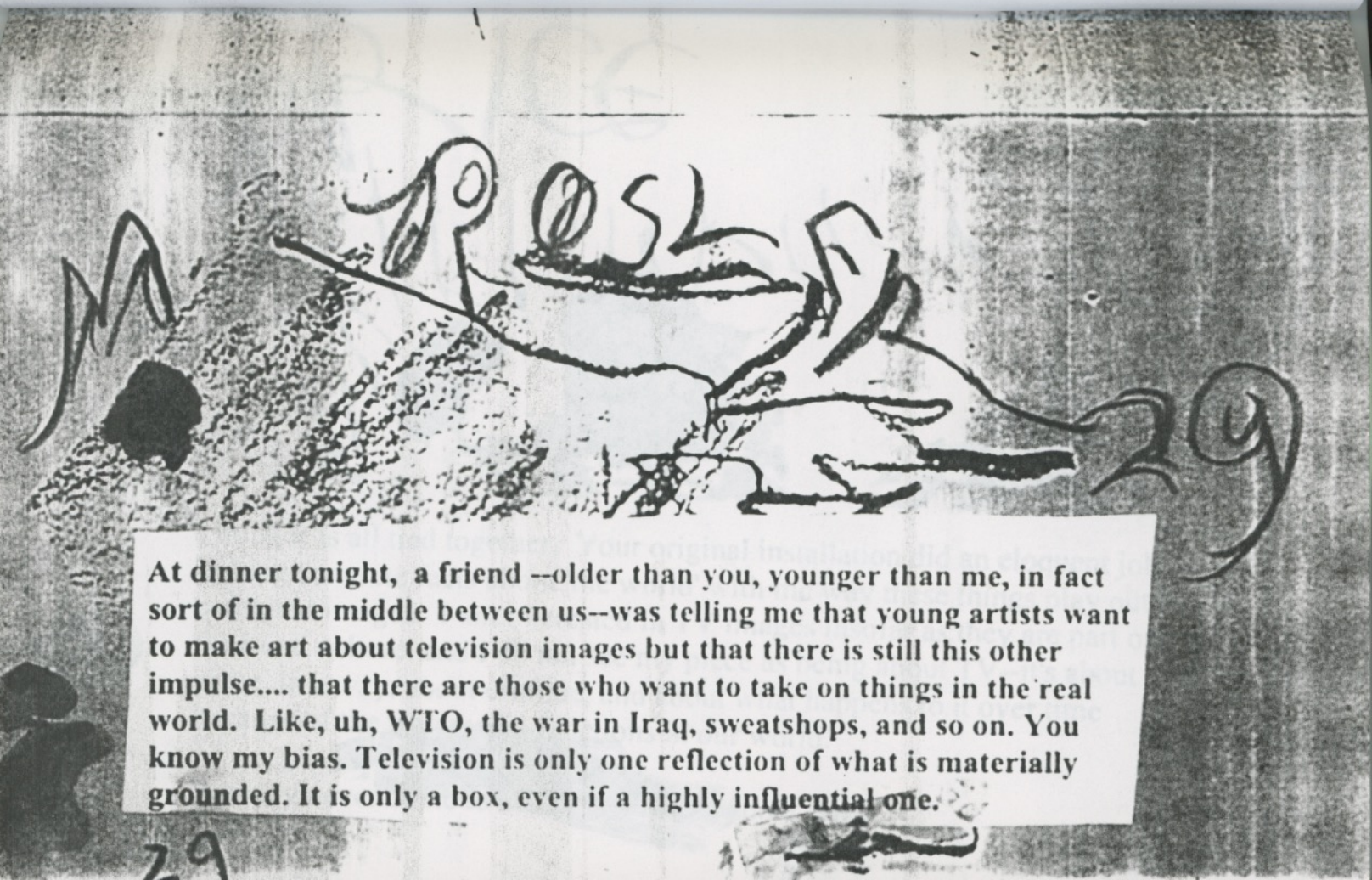
How would you restage the installation in a different time, and retain that sense? Redo it with contemporary ads?



If they covered the points: talking babies, animals, foreigners, and big close-ups of food....



You see it purely as a way to deliver themes, I think other things creep in around the margins.



At dinner tonight, a friend --older than you, younger than me, in fact sort of in the middle between us--was telling me that young artists want to make art about television images but that there is still this other impulse.... that there are those who want to take on things in the real world. Like, uh, WTO, the war in Iraq, sweatshops, and so on. You know my bias. Television is only one reflection of what is materially grounded. It is only a box, even if a highly influential one.

I think it is all tied together. Your original installation did an eloquent job of linking concrete facts about 'the world' with the way these things play out in mediated images. I am interested in TV images insofar as they are part of our time and culture, and I do not see my piece as being about TV--it's about your piece, in a way, about critique, and about what happens to it over time because of the way media functions in our world.

We may never come to an understanding about this!

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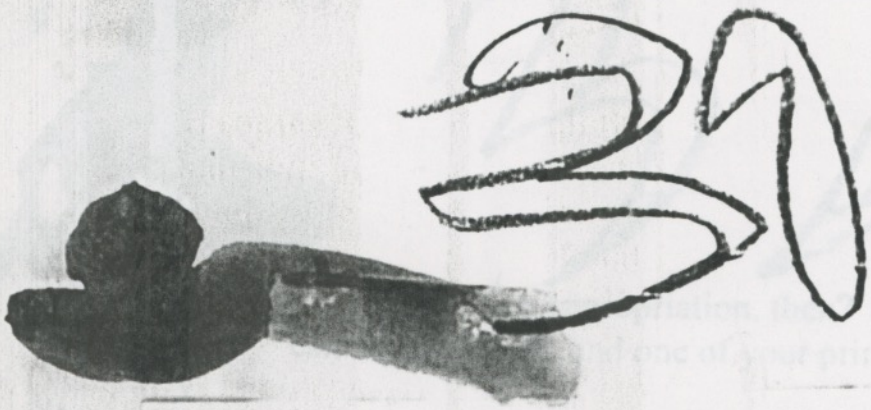
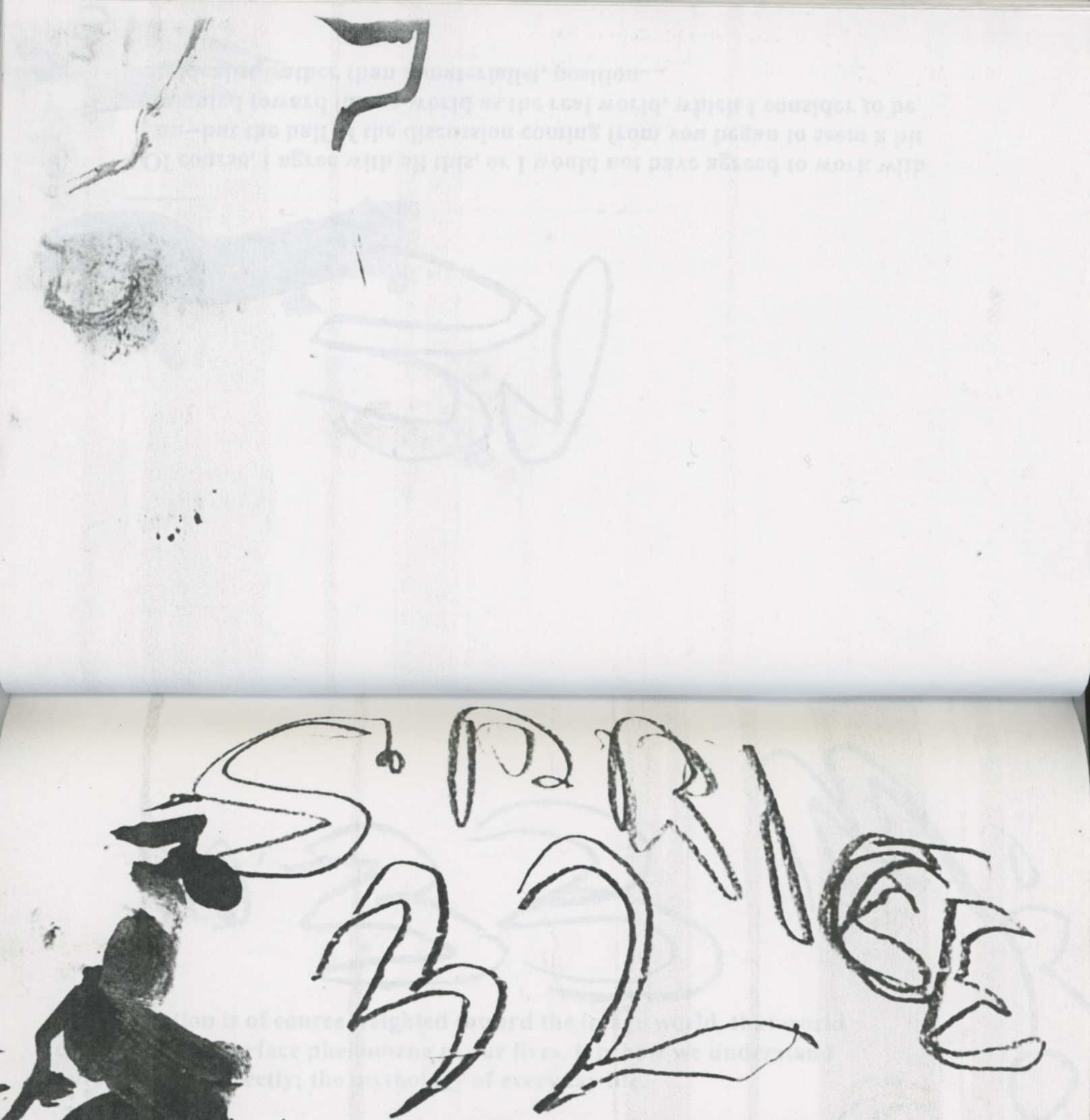


Of course, I agree with all this, or I would not have agreed to work with you--but the half of the discussion coming from you began to seem a bit weighted toward image-world as the real world, which I consider to be an idealist, rather than a materialist, position....



How do you see appropriation, then? A strategy weighted toward what you call image-world, and one of your primary strategies.

I mean appropriation even on the level of genre or discourse, as in your use of the TV-show format for "Baby S/M", with you as a floating sperm dispensing information: inhabiting the realm of the children's educational program....

Don't insist that you are 'simply' using that genre; it is surely the inhabiting of a role: the 'as if' moment that you've spoken about elsewhere.

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Appropriation is of course weighted toward the image world. that world constitutes the surface phenomena of our lives. it is how we understand ourselves--incorrectly; the mythology of everyday life.

(Don't forget Helen Keller and The Miracle Worker; her teacher.)

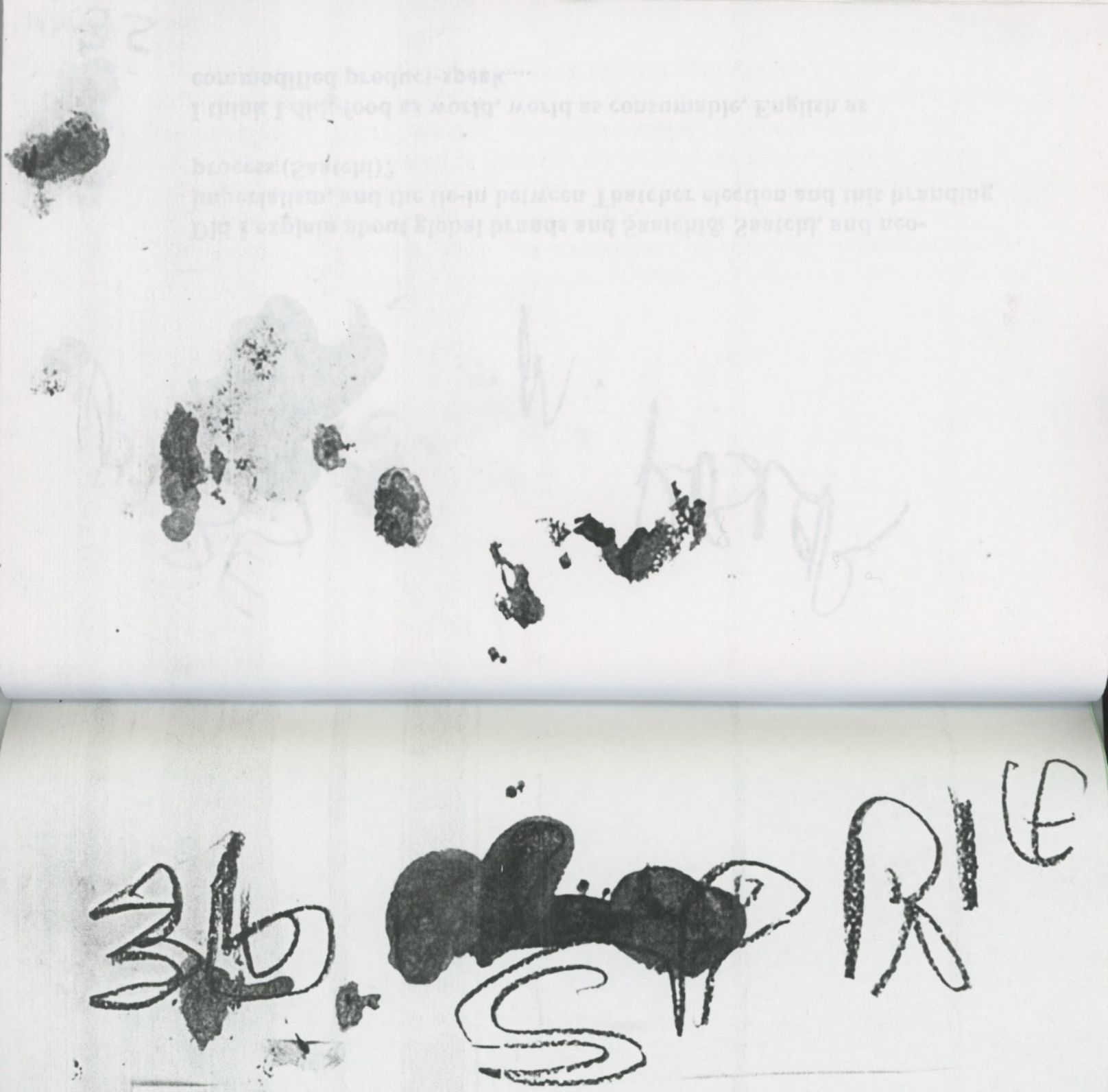
MROSLER

3/4 PRICE

Yes, all of that heavy ideology-critique stands out---every decision you made in crafting this piece stands out when viewed in isolation---it must be one of the most heavily edited videos you ever made. By recontextualizing the piece, the perversity of the selections is highlighted: why these ads, why this cut, why the inclusion of Planet of the Apes… the hand of *Martha Rosler* is indicated. Your video may seem on the surface to be a programmatically conceptual 'installation element', but in actual fact it is a highly edited piece, as much so (more so, maybe) as is, say, Semiotics of the Kitchen.

Did I explain about global brands and Saatchi& Saatchi, and neo-imperialism, and the tie-in between Thatcher election and this branding process (Saatchi)?

I think I did: food as world, world as consumable, English as commodified product-speak....



The video makes that very clear. I think you get my drift----I'm not interested in an ironic appraisal of your work, or nostalgia per se. Especially now, when you are being held up as a model in a new moment of 'Globalization' concerns, I want to re-present your work, show what is there but not seen in other contexts, reveal it as a highly edited work in and of itself...

One day maybe we can show it in a theater, from start to finish, a Film.

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