The Making of Intermedia: John Cage to Yoko Ono, 1952 to 1972

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Abstract

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This dissertation maps the emergence of intermedia art practices in relation to mid-20th century U.S. social conditions and media technologies, focusing on John Cage and Black Mountain College, Gertrude Stein and the Judson Poets Theater, Ray Johnson and the Something Else Press, and Yoko Ono and Fluxus. The dissertation argues that these artists and sites of art practice perform a queer art, not necessarily through expressive content but rather through a queer temporality that embraces what is preliminary, incomplete, and outmoded. The queer sensorium developed in these works questions and provides alternatives to culturally-privileged modes of the auditory and the visual.

Chapter 1 looks at John Cage's *Untitled Event* at Black Mountain College. Chapter 2 looks at the Judson Poets Theater's adaptation of Gertrude Stein's "A Circular Play" as a musical theater performance called *In Circles*. Chapter 3 looks at Ray Johnson's book *The Paper Snake* published by Dick Higgins and the Something Else Press. Chapter 4 looks at Yoko Ono's book

Grapefruit and the form of the Fluxus event score. A coda to the dissertation looks at a recent artwork by the artist William Pope.L, *Another Kind of Love: John Cage's 'Silence,' By Hand*, an artwork that returns to the mid-century emergence of intermedia with questions regarding the mediation of race.

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"Every genealogy is a fiction. There's no such thing. There's only one genealogy. It takes place in our dreams. Every specific genealogy is a fiction. I just reread *Moses and Monotheism*. I like it that a Jew such as Freud should have put himself out so much to prove that Moses was an Egyptian."

Jill Johnston, "Untitled," *Marmalade Me* (Johnston 3)

"I think Ray would agree with Jill's statement about genealogies. Furthermore, he would add that since every genealogy is a fiction, one should get to the project of writing – in words, movements, images, collages, gestures, fidgets, twitches, stumbles."

José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (Muñoz 121)

Introduction: The Gradual Making of the Making of Intermedia

"In the digital age, intermedia is, as Dick Higgins recognized, not poetry *plus* painting or any other A + B, but, in the name of his famous press, Something Else."

Marjorie Perloff, "Fluxier-than-Thou" (Perloff 587)

"The arts of science, of politics, of history, and of painting and poetry all have finally the same *material*: that which is constituted by the interaction of the live creature with [their] surroundings. They differ in the media by which they convey and express this material, not in the material itself."

John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (Dewey 323)

In "Fluxier-than-Thou," a 2004 essay reviewing Hannah Higgins's study of *Fluxus Experience* and a new collection of the work of the Fluxus-affiliated Swedish artist Öyvind Fahlstrom, Marjorie Perloff writes that in the 1960s works of artists in the Fluxus network it can be seen how "the avant-garde of the later twentieth century is to be found, not in stable genres such as lyric or fiction or even film, but in intermedia works" (Perloff 586). But Perloff registers a skepticism about the "Deweyite approach" to Fluxus and intermedia described in Higgins's *Fluxus Experience.* For Perloff, Fluxus as a practice of "material embodiment and social transformation" appears "utopian and nostalgic" and "not likely to influence the ways contemporary art is currently taught and studied" (582-582). Instead, Perloff argues for thinking of Fluxus – in questioning genre and medium and challenging the category of art – "as part of the much larger Conceptualist-Minimalist aesthetic of the later twentieth century" (583).

While it is useful to think of Fluxus and the turn to intermedia as part of a broader history of postwar art, it is important to not discount how practices such as those in the Fluxus network foregrounded embodied experiences occurring between the media of art processes and the media of life processes. Fluxus, and sixties intermedia more generally, can be thought of as part of a turn to what Claire Bishop in *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* calls "participatory art," "in which people constitute the central artistic medium" (Bishop 2). And thus it is useful, as Hannah Higgins argues in *Fluxus Experience*, to consider Fluxus and intermedia in terms of a pragmatist redescription of art as occurring within the ordinary, bodily processes of life and not in some separate sphere. It could be said that one of the best articulations of Fluxus and 1960s intermedia aesthetics appears as early as 1934 in John Dewey's *Art as Experience*: art understood as intensified engagement with the aesthetic dimension occurring in all perceptual experience and social exchange.

This dissertation emerged through a desire to think of poetry and poetics – language art, language in and as art – in terms of a "participatory art" through which the social and technical mediations of bodily experience become foregrounded and perhaps altered. This line of inquiry follows from work in contemporary poetics scholarship turning attention to *sites* and *processes* of performance. In *Distant Reading: Performance, Readership, and Consumption in Contemporary Poetry*, Peter Middleton calls for a scholarly attentiveness to how "poems have to be realized, performed, or as we ordinarily say, read, for their meaning to be produced" (Middleton xi). In *Postliterary America: From Bagel Shop Jazz to Micropoetries*, Maria Damon articulates a "postliterary poetics," in which "shtick, side effects, ephemera, the paratextual and paraliterary" become "as charged with significance as the main event, the standards, the readings, the displays of skill" (Damon 2). In *Fieldworks: From Place to Site in Postwar*

Poetics, Lytle Shaw engages poetry practices in terms of the production of social space, whether in particular physical places or in "discursive sites" (Shaw 8). *The Making of Intermedia* links a poetics of process and situation to what Joan Retallack, in *The Poethical Wager*, has discussed John Cage's making of "orientational vectors" (Retallack 178). This dissertation shows how queer "orientational vectors" in post-Cagean intermedia can call attention to and perhaps alter what Retallack has termed "legitimated geometries of attention" (179) and their "distributions of value and power" (180).

This dissertation does not necessarily engage works that might normally be thought of as "poems." But central to the dissertation are practices of language, literacy, textual inscription, and print circulation through which "intermedia" occur: in the provisional material instantiations of ephemeral, bodily practices and social exchanges. In conversation with José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, the dissertation argues for attending to and valuing that which can register as utopian or failed in Fluxus and related practices occurring (or almost occurring, or occurring in ways that might not appear as occurring, or visibly failing in attempts to occur or refusing to occur) in the gap between art and life. The dissertation articulates a queer genealogy of such practices, by following some of the ways that the term *intermedia* became used in the mid-20th century as a name for practices of art and life that otherwise might not have a name or might be misrecognized by existing names.

The research for the dissertation happens to have occurred while a renewed interest in midcentury intermedia emerged. In 2014, Siglio Press republished Something Else Press's 1965 Ray Johnson book, *The Paper Snake*, in addition to a new collection of previously unavailable materials called *Not Nothing: Selected Writings by Ray Johnson, 1954-1944*. In 2015, ICA Boston organized the first comprehensive exhibition in the United States on Black Mountain

College, *Look Before You Leap: Black Mountain College, 1933-1957*. Also in 2015, the Museum of Modern Art in New York had its first Yoko Ono exhibition, *Yoko Ono: One Woman Show, 1960-1971*. At this moment of renewed interest in the making of "intermedia" as a name for practices that might not have a name, or might have the wrong name, or cannot speak their name, this dissertation maps the emergence of intermedia art practices in relation to mid-20th century U.S. social conditions and media technologies, with chapters on John Cage and Black Mountain College, Gertrude Stein and the Judson Poets Theater, Ray Johnson and Something Else Press, and Yoko Ono and Fluxus. The dissertation argues that these artists and sites of art practice perform a queer art, not necessarily through expressive content but rather through a queer temporality that embraces what is preliminary, incomplete, and outmoded. The queer sensorium developed in these works questions and provides alternatives to culturally-privileged modes of the auditory and the visual. *The Making of Intermedia* is a history of aesthetic improprieties emerging from and supporting forms of life regarded as improper.

The practices discussed in *The Making of Intermedia* locate art in situations and exchanges mediated by forms of language, literacy, and textuality. This poetics of intermedia does not necessarily result in the production of poems-as-literature but rather in *the construction of modes of attention* by means of linguistic acts occurring in different times and spaces in some material medium or media. Chapter 1 is an encounter with John Cage's 1952 *Untitled Event* at Black Mountain College as a textual event that occurs in the histories written of the emergence of event-based, participatory, and intermedia practices in the 1950s into the 1960s. Chapter 2 turns to the musical theater experiments of Judson Poets Theater at Judson Church in New York in order to attend to the sixties reception of Stein in relation to the Judson Gallery and the Judson Dance Theater and an aesthetic of exaggerated attention to everyday life. Chapter 3 enters the

queer times and spaces of the "correspondance" art of Ray Johnson and engages Dick Higgins's articulation of "intermedia" by means of the Something Else Press. Chapter 4 considers the "event score" form as adapted by Fluxus-affiliated artists such as Benjamin Patterson in *Methods and Process* and Yoko Ono's *Grapefruit*, and attends to how Ono has worked with affective registers and sensory modalities that have been dismissed as unserious. A coda to the dissertation attends to William Pope.L's 2013 *Another Kind of Love: John Cage's 'Silence,' By Hand* in relation to W.J.T. Mitchell's call in his 2010 DuBois Lectures to think of race as a *medium.* The coda articulates a making of intermedia beyond the Cagean medium of whiteness.

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Chapter 1: John Cage, Black Mountain College, and *Untitled Event*

"Every structure embodies a geometry of attention that renders some things audible/visible and others inaudible/invisible. Cultures do their orientational work in large part unconsciously/unintentionally in naturalized figure-ground relations that appear to be simply the way things are. Habits of perception are difficult to inspect."

Joan Retallack, "Geometries of Attention" (Retallack 175)

"The arts only ever lend to projects of domination or emancipation what they are able to lend to them, that is to say, quite simply, what they have in common with them: bodily positions and movements, functions of speech, the parceling out of the visible and the invisible."

Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (Rancière 19)

In *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, the composer Michael Nyman points out a crucial difference between the aesthetic (and anti-aesthetic) orientations associated with John Cage and Marcel Duchamp. Nyman notes that Cage's "experimental music has, for the performer, effected the reverse of Duchamp's revolution in the visual arts" (Nyman 14). Beginning with Cage's *4'33"* as a point of origin for the emergence of experimental music, Nyman describes the practice of experimental music as a practice of "outlining a *situation* in which sounds may occur, a *process* of generating action (sound or otherwise), a *field* delineated by certain compositional 'rules' (Nyman 4). Not limited only to situations, processes, or fields already codified in forms of composed music, experimental music since Cage has expanded the potential for involving the interior and exterior bodily processes of performers (including audiences as performers) in the experience of art-making. Even when shaped by aspects of

Duchamp's anti-aesthetic orientation, the possibilities for aesthetic experience articulated by Cage through experimental music detour from Duchamp's Cartesian move of forgetting "the hand" and initiating a "nonretinal" art of "the head." The difference between the Duchampian turn from hand-to-head in the discursive field of visual art and the Cagean turn from head-to-hand in the discursive field of art music is a crucial difference between the general tendencies of a conceptual art linked to Duchamp and an intermedia art linked to Cage (even when these categories are not mutually exclusive). This chapter argues that an art of intermedia oriented around attention to and through intentional and unintentional bodily processes emerged through experimental music, and shows how this emergence can be seen in an exemplary scene in the making of intermedia: John Cage's *Untitled Event* at the experimental, interdisciplinary Black Mountain College in the summer of 1952

This chapter further argues that with the *Untitled Event* at Black Mountain College, Cage developed a prototype for what can be called an art of queer phenomenology: a theatrical queering of the act of attention. When asked in a 1965 interview if he thought that all concerts were theatrical, John Cage responded: "Yes, even a conventional symphony orchestra: the horn player, for example, from time to time empties the spit out of his horn. And this frequently engages my attention more than the melodies, harmonies, etc…" (Kirby and Schechner 104). In responding this way, Cage presents himself in the role of an improper audience member, perversely deviating from the proper formation of attention that would be expected in someone attending a concert of a symphony orchestra. The horn player's spit – the bodily residue of the production of music, that which an audience would be expected to ignore – becomes instead for Cage, the main event. This remark by Cage about the horn player's spit exemplifies Cage's art of calling attention to the cultural disciplining of attention.

Discussions of the politics of Cage's aesthetic project have ranged from the "denial of commitment" problematized in Moira Roth's 1977 critique of "the aesthetic of indifference" to the "historically specific queer resistance" celebrated in Jonathan Katz's 1999 recuperation of Cage's "queer silence" (Roth 47; Katz, "John Cage's Queer Silence," 241). The political reception of Cage, when attuned to sexual politics, has tended to focus on Cage's *4'33'*, Cage's noteless musical composition. In the summer of 1952, the pianist David Tudor premiered John Cage's *4'33"* in upstate New York. Tudor opened and closed the lid of the piano at the beginning and ending of each movement but otherwise did not intentionally produce any other sounds with the piano.[1] The performance likely intensified the audience's attention to the bodily sensations involved in attending to a defamiliarized performance situation. The audience likely experienced the ambient sounds now canonically associated with Cage. The audience also likely experienced something not usually remarked upon in discussions of *4'33"*: the heightened visuality generated by an audience looking at each other and at the piano while trying to make sense of the unexpected situation. A musical performance became visual art and theater, a scene of bodily reactions and relations of an audience estranged from the normal habits of performing the role of audience member.

Part 1: Queer Reception

4'33" was one of the works that the art historian Moira Roth discussed in terms of an "aesthetic of indifference" that emerged from the belated reception of the Duchampian readymade in the practices of Cold War-era New York artists such as Jasper Johns, Robert

[1] The score for Cage's *4'33"* can be seen in Fig. 1.

Rauschenberg, and John Cage. Roth questioned the political implications of the "tones of neutrality, passivity, irony, and often negation" in these artist's practices (Roth 35), questioning how these artists could have practiced a "denial of commitment in a period that might otherwise have produced an art of passion and commitment" (47). But in considering Cage's *4'33"*, Roth did acknowledge the possibility that another sense of politics could be operating in "the aesthetic of indifference." Roth noted that for Cage, "the denial of conventional meanings" in a noteless piece of music "was in order to allow a different sort of meaning to emerge" (41). It was this recognition by Roth of a Cagean opening to "a different sort of meaning" that Jonathan Katz elaborated upon when returning to "The Aesthetic of Indifference" at the end of the 1990s.[2]

Informed by gay and queer organizing and theorizing, Katz embraced in the 1990s what he described as Cage's mid-century "seductions away from a dominant expressive discourse and toward other meanings for other purposes" ("John Cage's Queer Silence," 243). For Katz, the Cage aesthetic authorized a mode of practice that could attempt to evade both explicit opposition to and complicity with a system of oppression. In Katz's reading: a homosexual subject named John Cage was able to work within homophobic cultural formations of the Cold War U.S. through a practice that "avoids the recolonizing force of the oppositional: what permits the dominant culture to consolidate its authority by reference to an excluded other" (245). Katz's Cage is the product of a recoding of historical avant-garde techniques of estrangement and defamiliarization as "queer." For Katz, the queerness of Cage occurs not so much through the

[2] In 1998, Roth and Katz collaborated on producing a volume of Roth's collected writings. Their collaboration includes commentaries from both art historians, forming what Roth and Katz describe in their preface as an alliance between a gay man and a straight woman that would have been "unthinkable" before the emergence of queer studies ("Preface," xvi). Commenting on Roth's "The Aesthetic of Indifference," Katz notes that when Roth was writing in the 1970s, "the constrained subjectivity of seemingly paralyzed artists in the 1950s employing the indirection of a politics of negation" would likely have appeared "unreadable in terms of political action" in post-1960s activist culture ("Identification," 65).

production of a legible queerness as through the production of queer effects in the bodies of audiences. The Cagean spectator becomes recruited into a temporary queer space, "torn" from the "familiar" and moving into what Katz calls "an exegetical otherness we can term 'queer,' joining their author in a profound alienation of expectation" ("Identification," 67).

Following Roth and Katz, this chapter argues for a queer reception of Cage. But a queer reception of Cage need not be limited to the question of "indifference" or "resistance." Instead, Cage can be thought of in relation to a turn in queer studies to concerns with social space, temporality, relation, and sensation. This turn in queer studies can be seen, for example, in Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*, in which Ahmed attends to how "inhabiting a body that is not extended by the skin of the social means the world acquires new shapes and makes new impressions" (Ahmed 20). Similarly, Jack Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place* articulates a version of queer studies based in attending to "nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time" (Halberstam 6).

Cage's aesthetic project can be seen as a project of enacting queer orientations to social organizations of time, space, and the senses. For this alternative queer reception of Cage, it is helpful to look not just at *4'33"*, the focus of most previous receptions of Cage in terms of queerness, but especially at the other Cage event that also occurred in the summer of 1952: the untitled intermedia event that Cage organized at Black Mountain College. The event at Black Mountain proposed that art could be made in the act of queer reception.

The queer orientation to sociality and the senses that Cage enacted in two key events in the summer of 1952 – the premiere of *4'33* and the event at Black Mountain College – can already be glimpsed in one of the earliest texts produced by John Cage: the speech on U.S. neocolonialism in Latin America given by a 15-year-old John Cage in the Southern California

Oratorical Contest in 1927 (published as a book in 2012 by the New York-based Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar). In the speech, titled "Other People Think," Cage called for the United States to be "hushed":

> One of the greatest blessings the United States could receive in the near future would be to have her industries halted, her business discontinued, her people speechless, a great pause in her world of affairs created, and finally to have everything stopped that runs, until everyone could hear the last wheel go around and last echo fade away… then, in that moment of complete intermission, of undisturbed calm, would be the hour most conducive to the birth of Pan-American Conscience. Then we should be capable of answering the question, 'What ought we to do?' For we should be hushed and silent, and we should have the opportunity to learn that other people think (Cage, *Other People Think*, 11-12).

The 15-year-old's speech (1st place in the Southern California Oratorical Contest for 1927) displays a prefiguration of what can be called the Cagean art of intermission. Normally that which comes *between* acts, intermission – "complete intermission" – becomes for Cage, a primary form of "what ought we to do." By centering pausing and waiting, intermission and silence, such a practice can call attention to the formation of attention and thus have the potential to open onto a changed attention – a different perceptual orientation to receptivity, in which "other people think." Where Douglas Kahn, in his study of sound art, *Noise, Water, Meat*, has pointed to *Other People Think* as an example of Cage's "silencing of the social" (Kahn 189), it can be alternatively argued that Cage does not so much "silence" as *re-orient* the social. Cage's art of re-orientation, as seen early on in *Other People Think*, offers an invitation for a change in the mode of attention that in part constitutes the social.

Where *4'33"* has been thought of as resisting the codes governing articulation, *Other People Think* can be thought of as an anticipation of Cage's interest in intermission as a calling to attention of what happens between, beside, before, or beyond that which can appear legible or perceptible as "resistance." The attention to the matter of attention became even more

pronounced in Cage's turn from *4'33"* to the multisensory, intermedial theatrical situation of the event at Black Mountain College. The event was a work of queer reception, offering spectators an occasion for becoming corporeally and intercorporeally oriented to phenomena that might otherwise appear queer, to phenomena that might otherwise not appear. While it is no longer unusual or taboo to discuss John Cage's work as "queer," whether in biographical terms or in terms of some kind of "queer resistance" enacted through "silence," the queer orientation to embodiment and sociality presented in Cage's theater events, such as the event at Black Mountain College, has yet to receive adequate attention.

Part 2: Queer Description

The intermedia event at Black Mountain College in the summer of 1952 has been given various names, most often *Untitled Event* (a name that both complicates its placement in a genealogy and places it as a beginning of a tradition of practices complicating genre). The event has been documented through textual descriptions from Cage (most significantly, in Cage's 1961 book *Silence*) and from other event participants (most significantly, in the descriptions of the event collected in Martin Duberman's 1972 book *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community*).

To write a description of *Untitled Event* is to write of the difficulties of describing the event. Cage scholar William Fetterman has written of how "no two sources contain the same recollections" and that "the duration of the performance, the time of day it was performed, and the date are questionable, from the conflicting recollections" (Fetterman 97). The different accounts of *Untitled Event*, produced through differences of embodied perspective and memory,

form part of the textual event of *Untitled Event*, an event that continues to perform and circulate textually as a key reference in histories of postwar event-based art.[3] Through textual mediation, *Untitled Event* can be understood as a queer performance, not necessarily in terms of legible queer content bur rather in terms of how such a performance materializes (or fails to materialize), how such a performance involves meaning and value beyond that which can be perceptible or valuable within normative temporalities and normative protocols of perception. The work of queer reception, the work of describing the ephemeral, has been described in José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* as "queering evidence" (Muñoz 65), a mode of description produced through "attending to ephemera," "the remains, the things that are left, hanging in the air like rumor" (85).

As a textual event, the key site through which *Untitled Event* occurs is John Cage's 1961 book *Silence*. Most accounts of the summer 1952 event begin (or remain) with the account given by Cage in the foreword to the widely-circulated Wesleyan University Press book:

> At Black Mountain College in 1952, I organized an event that involved the painting of Bob Rauschenberg, the dancing of Merce Cunningham, films, slides, phonograph records, radios, the poetries of Charles Olson and M.C. Richards recited from the tops of ladders, and the pianism of David Tudor, together with my *Julliard* lecture, which reads: 'A piece of string, a sunset, each acts.' The audience was seated in the center of all activity. Later that summer, vacationing in New England, I visited America's first synagogue to discover that the congregation was seated precisely the way I had arranged the audience at Black Mountain (*Silence* xxx).

Cage's description encapsulates the variety of practices and media at work both in the event and in everyday life at Black Mountain College. In general, the variety of references and textual forms of *Silence* recall the variety of fields, practices, and personalities that Cage interacted with at the experimental, interdisciplinary college, which has since become famous as an intersection between American progressive education in the pragmatist tradition and the exiled German

[3] An example appears as Fig. 2: M.C. Richards's drawing recollecting the 1952 event in 1989.

artist-teachers of the Bauhaus experiment in design education. *Untitled Event* incorporated the variety of arts and artists at college, in one site, through "time brackets" assigned by Cage as generated by chance operations. Through these "time brackets," Cage incorporated in one scene what otherwise would have been considered separate art forms and media. The importance of the 1952 event at Black Mountain College to Cage's self-understanding and self-presentation of his overall body of work at the time of the 1961 publication of *Silence* can be seen in the fact that Cage mentions the event near the very beginning of *Silence*, in the third paragraph of the book's foreword.

The popularity and wide circulation of Cage's *Silence* for over half a century now has established Cage's description of the *Untitled Event* as something of an authoritative account of the event. It remains the basis for any description or discussion of the event, and therefore establishes Cage as author of the event. This mode of authorship exemplifies Julia Robinson's argument that "the historical record on Cage is comprised, to an unusual extent, of the testimony of [Cage's] own words" (Robinson 17). As Robinson has written, "*Silence* was the first register of Cage's accumulated 'performances,' and the first glimpse of them as part of a systematic strategy of performativity" (Robinson 17). John Cage would not have become John Cage if not for his access to print publication and print publicity, a crucial medium for his practice (as evidenced in *Sound Pages: John Cage's Publications*, a catalog of Cage's many book-based works). As with Antonin Artaud, textual mediation is paradoxically central to John Cage's event-based works such as *Untitled Event*. For Artaud and Cage, texts are on-going performances. As Artaud scholar Robert Lublin has written, Artaud's writings on theater "have a dual existence – as explanations of Artaud's theatre and as performative events in their own right" (Lublin 62).

In attempting to write about *Untitled Event* as part of a comprehensive history of Black Mountain College in his 1972 *Black Mountain: An Exploration of Community,* Martin Duberman suggests that "of the event itself, there are – one might even say, by design – varied accounts" (Duberman 351). Duberman argues that the inability of the event to result in a coherent account of what happened should be considered central to the meaning of the event. As Duberman notes, variations in descriptions of the event can be ascribed to "distortions of memory" as well as "differences in perspective – sight lines, acoustical reception, etc…" (Duberman 351). Duberman's method for accounting for the multiple perspectives recollected by participants in *Untitled Event* is to collage descriptive variations to produce a description based in difference. This use of collage, as an alternative or challenge to a claim of a definitive history, exemplifies the New Left historiographical project that is Duberman's *Black Mountain: An Exploration of Community*: an attempt to enact Black Mountain College's "exploration of community" in the form of a book. As seen with Duberman's approach to *Untitled Event, Black Mountain: An Exploration of Community* attempts to construct a new mode of cultural history: accounting for differences in memory related to differences in embodiment and social position, while incorporating the historian's self-reflexivity in the act of inscription. And as Jason Ezell has argued in "Martin Duberman's Queer Historiography and Pedagogy," it was through Duberman's inclusion of self-reflexive commentaries on the difficulties of attending to embodied difference in writing a history of a community (particularly in regards to the sexual politics of Black Mountain College) that Duberman "came out" in print – beginning a transition from functioning as a Princeton cultural historian to fashioning a new role as a gay public intellectual (Ezell).

Part 3: Artaud and the Mise-en-Scène of the Social Body

It was through Antonin Artaud's writings on *mise-en-scene*, as translated by Black College poetry and pottery professor Mary Caroline (M.C.) Richards that Cage found a theatrical framework with which to experiment with the postwar temporal and sensorial configurations of the cinematic and the televisual. Through the correspondence between the composer Pierre Boulez and David Tudor, a close collaborator with Cage and the pianist in the first performance of *4'33"*, Artaud's work arrived at Black Mountain College. At Black Mountain, M.C. Richards produced the first English translation of *The Theater and Its Double*. Richards, who had arrived at Black Mountain College as a literature instructor from the University of Chicago but turned to pottery at Black Mountain, wrote of being drawn to Artaud's work at a moment in her life when she was "ready to imagine alternatives to the intellectual culture in which [she] had been trained" (Richards 347).[4]

In a series of interviews in the mid-1970s with the French musicologist Daniel Charles, published in English as *For the Birds*, John Cage discusses having been influenced by Antonin Artaud and *The Theater and Its Double*. (It is curious that Artaud and *The Theater and Its Double* do not receive mention in any of the texts of Cage's *Silence*, a book in which so many of the texts are comprised largely of references to and citations of influences and affiliations.) In *For the Birds*, Cage credits Artaud with "the notion of a multi-dimensional theater" (166) and thus the basis for *Untitled Event*. In the interview with Daniel Charles, Cage speaks of Artaud's *The Theater and Its Double* as having given him the "idea of a theater without literature," in

[4] The art historian Jenni Sorkin has argued that M.C. Richards's post-Black Mountain pottery events in New York in 1958 should be considered a central part of the history of the emergence of event-based art in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

which "words and poetry, may, of course always enter into it […] but the rest, everything that is in general non-verbal may enter into it as well" (52).

Following Artaud, the theater of Cage's *Untitled Event*, organized by what Cage called "time brackets" rather than a script, differs from dramatic, literary theater in that it operates through the framing of activity within a theatricalization of time within a situation of everyday life (the Black Mountain College cafeteria). While Cage and *Untitled Event* might not normally be thought of in terms of an Artaudian "theater of cruelty," Cage produced in *Untitled Event* an Artaudian *mise-en-scène* of the reorganization of what can belong where, what can happen when, and what spatial, temporal, and sensorial arrangements can occur.

Even more crucial to Cage's *Untitled Event* than Artaud's renunciation of "the theatrical superstition of the text and the dictatorship of the writer" (Artaud 124) was Artaud's emphasis on *mise-en-scène,* as described in *The Theater and Its Double*:

> How does it happen in the theater, at least in the theater as we know it in Europe, or better in the Occident, everything specifically theatrical, i.e. everything that cannot be expressed in speech, in words, or, if you prefer, everything that is not contained in dialogue (and the dialogue itself considered as a function of its possibilities for 'sound' on the stage, as a function of the exigencies of the sonorisation) is left in the background? (37).

Discussing the importance of Artaud to postwar artists like Cage, the art historian Branden Joseph has written of Artaudian *mise-en-scène* as incorporating those aspects of art forms that are "improper to their specific medium: the remains of language that do not belong to literature, of color that do not belong to painting, of sound that evade the definition of music." Joseph compares these "degraded remains cast off by competing modernist arts" with "the shockingly impure bodies (including social bodies) in Artaud's writing," bodies "frequently constituted by the excrescences (pus, sperm, feces) a 'proper' body dispels" (Joseph 499). What Artaud offered artists such as Cage was a way of turning away from the protocols of medium purification

enforced in the modernist art criticism associated with figures such as Clement Greenberg. As Caroline Jones has argued in *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses*, Greenberg's policing of medium-specificity and the privileging of opticality can be understood in relation to Greenberg's efforts to write himself out of an ethnically-marked body through a regime of criticism enforcing the bodily norms of a managerial modernist subject oriented around visual mastery rather than the proximate senses of smell and touch associated in that discourse of mastery with a laboring, ethnic body.

Following Branden Joseph's analysis of Artaud's midcentury U.S. reception and Caroline Jones's analysis of the conditions of modernist criticism in which that reception occurred, it can be argued that Cage's *Untitled Event* presented a questioning of the organization of social bodies and senses in art. In incorporating the variety of artists on site at Black Mountain College engaged in what might otherwise have been considered, in Greenbergian modernism, distinct and sensorially-segmented art forms into one site via "time brackets," *Untitled Event* can be seen as having staged a social body in a nonnormative fashion. And as Lucy Brandock has suggested of *Untitled Event*'s scriptless organization: "For Artaud, as for Cage and those others at Black Mountain College, following the script and thus remaining in the place designated for you is not necessarily a good thing" (Bradnock 18).

Part 4: Film and the Field of Time

Untitled Event exemplifies Cage's turn to an Artaudian theater of turning attention away from the textual and the literary to a situation of life in and as theater: the *mise-en-scène* in its ephemerality. With *Untitled Event*, Cage followed Artaud's call to "abolish the stage and the

auditorium and replace them by a single site, without partition or barrier of any kind, which will become the theater of action" (Artaud 96). To enact such a theater, Cage turned to what he called "time brackets," modeled on the materiality of film.

The most thorough description of how Cage used "time brackets" to structure the *Untitled Event* comes from Cage himself: "during periods that I called time brackets, the performers were free within limitations […] compartments which they didn't have to fill, like a green light in traffic. Until this compartment began, they were not free to act, but once it had begun they could as long as they wanted to during it" (Kirby and Schechner 52). Cage's construction of an event-based art framed by precise measurements of time can be related to the material structure of film. As Judith Rodenbeck has argued, *Untitled Event* has the structure of "a film score, laying a collage of actions over a temporal matrix" (Rodenbeck 100). As early as a 1937 talk in Seattle (later published in *Silence*), Cage was articulating the potential that the standardized measurement of time in the material of film had for restructuring art, beginning with music: "The composer (organizer of sound) will be faced not only with the entire field of sound but also with the entire field of time. The 'frame' or fraction of a second, following established film technique will probably be the basic unit of measurement of time" (Cage 5). This understanding of film time, translated beyond the materiality of film, is what enabled Cage to engage non-normative relations-in-time between different media normally organized with different temporal and sensorial configurations.

Cage described time as the basis for collaboration between arts: "I had no feeling for harmony. I was interested in noises. I had to find what would be proper structure for noises, and when I found it – an empty time structure – I found a proper structure for collaboration between two arts such as dance and music. And that, of course, covers all sorts of things, singing for

instance, anything, in fact, that happens in time" (Cage and Shapiro 104). With *Untitled Event*, Cage organized a kind of cinema-like spectacle of bodies (including audience bodies) moving in time. *Untitled Event* enacted a queer theatricalization of time, by disregarding the kinds of time normally associated with each of the modes of art involved in the event. *Untitled Event* offered its participants a situation in which to attend to how the temporality normally involved in the organization of particular media as well as the temporal organizations of everyday life (as mediated through standardized measurements of clock time) could occur otherwise, even if only ephemerally.

In many accounts of *Untitled Event*, paintings by Robert Rauschenberg appeared in the event. These paintings were likely Rauschenberg's *White Paintings*, produced prior to the event with white housepaint applied to an untreated canvas with a paint roller. As described in *Silence* in John Cage's "On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work": "the white paintings caught whatever fell on them" (Cage 108). The *White Paintings*, as objects and events, perform as screens on which shadows appear in their ephemerality. As part of *Untitled Event*, the *White Paintings* would have called attention to the passing of time in the scene in which they appeared. The *White Paintings* involved the spectators of the event in the *mise-en-scène* of the event, passing in time, ephemerally.

Part 5: Mediated Sensorium

Historically, Cage's *Untitled Event* can be understood as a negotiation of what Caroline Jones has called the mid-20th century "bureaucratization of the senses," in which "bodies were organized in particular ways that colonized newly specific sensory and bodily functions –

bureaucratically enhancing aesthetic relations to these functions, and giving them a commodity address" ("Senses" 95). *Untitled Event* highlights how a central concern of Cage's work is the technical mediation of physical embodiment, particularly the mediation of sense-perception and proprioception. It is in "Experimental Music," the same text in *Silence* in which Cage announces a turn to theater, that Cage mentions one of his most famous anecdotes. The anecdote is Cage's description of being in an anechoic chamber:

> For certain engineering purposes, it is desirable to have as silent a situation as possible. Such a room is called an anechoic chamber, its six walls made of special material, a room without echoes. I entered one at Harvard University several years ago and heard two sounds, one high and one low. When I described them to the engineer in charge, he informed me that the high one was my nervous system in operation, the low one my blood in circulation. Until I die there will be sounds. And they will continue following my death. One need not fear about the future of music. (8)

Even if, as sound artist Seth Kim-Cohen has suggested, "it is unlikely that the high sound was Cage's nervous system and far more likely that it was caused either by low-level tinnitus […] or by the sounds of air molecules bumping into the eardrums: a sound often perceptible after a period in very quiet surroundings," Cage's anecdote of the anechoic chamber points to Cage's "revelation" that "there is no such thing as silence, as long as one is alive, there is sound" (Kim-Cohen 161). It was not only through ambient sounds that Cage articulated why there is no such thing as silence but also through an awareness of embodiment, and particularly the non-intentional productions of sound of a creature's interior bodily processes. In the anechoic chamber, Cage encountered his embodiment as a kind of Duchampian readymade.

Helen Molesworth has argued that the anechoic chamber anecdote "locates Cage's most generative musical, artistic, and compositional idea within the body itself – most importantly, within the interior of the body, the nervous and circulatory systems, realms of bodily experience of which we are usually not aware" (Molesworth 72). Molesworth has further argued that Cage

shared with other Black Mountain artists a primary motivating concern with "how to mediate and discuss the body within artistic production" (Molesworth 72), whether in the used bed quilt that provided the material basis for Robert Rauschenberg's indexing of bodily fluids in his 1955 *Bed* or the poetics of "proprioception" articulated by another participant in Cage's *Untitled Event*: the poet Charles Olson.

Olson wanted a poetry based in "proprioception," what he described as "SENSIBILITY WITHIN THE ORGANISM / THE MOVEMENT OF ITS OWN TISSUES" ("Proprioception" 181). In a text written in 1950 at Black Mountain, "Projective Verse," Olson called for a writing generated from "that place where breath comes, where breath has its beginnings" ("Projective Verse" 249). Olson found the possibility for a breath-based writing, a writing mediating between the bodily interior and exterior, in the technical mediation of the typerwriter. Olson wrote of the "advantage of the typewriter" that "due to its rigidity and its space precisions, it can, for a poet, indicate exactly the breath, the pauses, the suspension even of syllables, the juxtaposition even of parts of phrases" ("Projective Verse" 245). Olson's desire for a poetics of breath and proprioception shares with Cage's work a postwar awareness of what Caroline Jones has termed the "mediated sensorium," "a subject's way of coordinating all of the body's perceptual and proprioceptive signals as well as the changing sensory envelope of the self" ("Mediated Sensorium" 8). *Untitled Event* staged the "mediated sensorium" in time, as spectators were faced with learning ways of attending to a new arrangement of sensory mediations, and thus becoming aware of the mediation of their own embodiment.

Surprisingly, Cage himself was only able to articulate his theater work in terms of the visual and the auditory. When asked for a definition of theater in the mid-1960s, Cage replied: "I would simply say that theatre is something which engages both the eye and the ear. The two

public senses are seeing and hearing; the senses of taste, touch, and odor are more appropriate to intimate, non-public situations. The reason I want to make my definition of theatre that simple is so one could view everyday life as theatre" (Kirby and Schechner 50). Cage then adds: "if you add tasting, smelling, touching to theater you get ritual" (104). It is curious that Cage, in articulating everyday life as theater, claims to exclude taste, touch, and odor from the public scene of the theatrical, considering how much taste, touch, and odor constitute everyday life. In Cage's terms, the *Untitled Event* would be thought to have ritual-like aspects: the seating arrangement in triangles facing each other and the serving of coffee in cups that could have been ashtrays.

Cage's description of the event mentions that the space of the event resembled a space of ritual: "vacationing in New England, I visited America's first synagogue to discover that the congregation was seated precisely the way I had arranged the audience at Black Mountain College" (*Silence*, xxx).[5] As Cage recalled of the coffee cups at the event: "In each of the seats was a cup, and it wasn't explained to the audience what to do with the cup – some used it as an ashtray – but the performance was concluded by a kind of ritual of pouring coffee in each cup" (Kirby and Schechner 25). The coffee in the ashtray raised the problem of what kind of matter belongs where. Even with something as simple as the pouring of coffee, *Untitled Event* was a performance questioning what modalities of a sensorium a social body can engage at a particular place and time under particular frames of activity. To follow Cage's terminological distinction

[5] John Cage did locate a work of event-based art in the space of a synagogue in July 1967, as reported in the *New York Times:* "The Sabbath was ushered in here Friday night at Temple Beth El with three dancers, two singers, electronic music, eerie sound tracks, psychadelicacies, and John Cage in the pulpit basing his sermon on the words of the prophet Buckminster Fuller" ("John Cage Holds a Jewish Happening").

between “theater” (an event of the public senses) and “ritual” (an event of the non-public senses), *Untitled Event* can be thought of as an event in-between, an intermedia, of theater and ritual.

The Cagean aesthetic, in its theatrical/ritual form, calls attention both to a social body’s mediation of the senses and to the range of a particular body’s interior and exterior functions, not only those that might be coordinated or mastered in the presentation of a self. Cage’s work opens itself to bodily processes, and not only those bodily processes that a subject might be thought to have control over. Such processes can include unmasterable bodily processes and bodily processes not accessible linguistically without technical mediation. While the Cage aesthetic might often be thought of in terms of what Caroline Jones has described as Cage’s “technologically mediated selflessness” (“Finishing School,” 642), Cage’s embrace of mediation does not mean “egolessness” is somehow bodiless. To the contrary, the Cage aesthetic, especially in its theatrical-ritual forms, calls attention to the range of the body’s interior and exterior functions – not only those that might be coordinated or mastered in socially legible and legitimated presentations of an ego. *Untitled Event* exemplifies a theatrical situation in which spectators are part of a spectacle of the display of the technical mediation of embodied experience. In the later 1960s, Fluxus artists such as Yoko Ono would expand upon the sensorium of Cagean theater to further include what Cage called the “non-public senses” of taste, touch, and odor.

Part 6: Distributions and Orientations

Untitled Event occurred at a time, the early 1960s, when the cinematic and the televisual were constructing a new sensorium based in the mediation of the screen. Through time-brackets,

Cage began to adapt structures from cinema and television beyond cinema and television. In the foreword to *Silence* in which Cage describes the *Untitled Event*, Cage articulates what would be called four years later by Cage's student Dick Higgins, an art of intermedia: "being as I am engaging in a variety of activities, I attempt to introduce into each one of them aspects conventionally limited to one or more of the others" (ix).

The aesthetic of intermedia introduced by Cage in the *Untitled Event* at Black Mountain College in the summer of 1952 staged a questioning of what Jacques Rancière has described in *The Politics of Aesthetics* as "the distribution of the sensible," "the set horizons and modalities of what is visible and audible as well as what can be said, thought, made, or done" (Ranciere 85). *Untitled Event* enacted a poetics of queer attention, a making of models and modes of nonnormative practices of reception. Like much of Cage's work, *Untitled Event* enacted a shifting of attention to that which might not normally be thought of as worthy of consideration. *Untitled Event* drew participants into finding ways of becoming oriented to the mix of sensory experiences occurring around and through them. The event drew attention to the activity of attending.

And yet there is the question, raised by Eva Diaz in her recent study of Black Mountain, *The Experimenters: Chance and Design at Black Mountain College*, of whether *Untitled Event* was simply "sensory overload," of whether an attempt "to broaden the boundaries of perception" can end up resembling "entertainment, diversion, and a subject immersed in a wash of confounding effects that to many is the experience of 'life' in late-capitalist modernity" (Diaz 99). Diaz's questioning of the Cage aesthetic recalls Edward Said's recollections, in "From Silence to Sound and Back Again: Music, Literature, and History," of attending a Cage event in

1967 when both he and Cage were in residence at the Institute for Advanced Study at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign:

> All of us were supposed to do something like give a lecture or seminar during our year. Cage put on a 'performance' in a barn with eight or nine cows, fifteen tape recorders, a mime trope, miscellaneous instrumentalists scattered all over the structure, and a whole battery of lights and other sounds blaring through dozens of speakers. You walked through for a few minutes if you could stand the din, and then walked out (Said 522).

Cagean event-based art can be seen as a mode of presenting the "distribution of sensible" of the sensory overload of late capitalism; but this does not mean the Cagean aesthetic intends complicity or resistance with this sensory overload. Rather, the event-based aesthetic of intermedia, inaugurated by the *Untitled Event* in the summer of 1952, can be considered a mode of queer inquiry in the form of receptivity.

As suggested by Díaz, Cage's event-based art anticipated many of the key concerns around the "attention economy" that are now debated in fields such as visual culture studies and critical media studies. Historically, *Untitled Event* can be understood as Cage's response to what Fred Turner terms the "democratic surround," "a turn away from a single-sourced mass media and towards multi-image, multi-sound source media environments" (Turner 3). In Turner's account of postwar media, Cage's *Untitled Event* can be seen in relation to other immersive media environments such as that of *The Family of Man*, the 1955 collaboration of the United States Information Agency, the Museum of Modern Art, and photographer Edward Steichen, an exhibition employing an "immersive multiscreen environment as a means of bringing visitors to an understanding of America's wartime mission" (Turner 103). Similar to *The Family of Man*, "Cage was promoting modes of performance in which each sound was as good as any other, in which every action could be meaningful or not – a space, in short, in which audience members found themselves compelled to integrate a diversity of experiences into their own individual

psyches" (Turner 6). As this chapter has argued, Cage's turn to theater and ritual with *Untitled Event*, and Cage's approach to language and textuality in *Silence,* can best be understood as part of Cage's adaptations of structures from cinema and television beyond cinema and television.

As Cage writes in "On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work," included in *Silence*: "As for me, I'm not so inclined to read poetry as I am in one way or another to get myself a television set, sitting up nights looking" (*Silence* 105). This statement can be considered in relation to perhaps the most famous statement of Cage's in *Silence*, from the "Lecture on Nothing": "I have nothing to say / and I am saying it / and this is poetry / as I need it" (Cage 109). The saying of "nothing," in calling attention to the circumstances of the saying and the "nothing," becomes a staging of the activity of language in which the mise-en-scène matters rather than an expressed content. It is a poetics of attention to the conditions of saying. With Cage, it is the *in-between* that becomes articulation: the scene of the between, the mediation, the intermission, the condition.

In the present moment, with attention itself becoming a crucial political, social, and economic site, an art of calling attention to the forming of attention – questioning the "distribution of the sensible" – can be a kind of political work, even if not immediately legible as such. The turn to phenomenology in queer studies, in which "queer" becomes what Sara Ahmed has described as "a matter of how things appear, how they gather, how they perform to create the edges of spaces and worlds" (167) offers a way of re-encountering *Untitled Event* through its textual traces. Cage's intermedia event at Black Mountain College in the summer of 1952 was a prototype for a queer phenomenology.

The intermedia aesthetics exemplified in *Untitled Event* prompts a shifting of attention to that which might not normally be thought of as worthy of thought: the sensory, especially,

kinaethetic, processing of activity. The "surround aesthetic" of *Untitled Event* drew participants into finding ways of becoming oriented to the mix of sensory experiences going on around and through them, and thus drawing attention to the activity of attending. Intermedia such as *Untitled Event* requires what Sally Banes and André Lepecki have called a "performance theory of the senses," attuned to "understanding the conditions under which the body interfaces with and assigns privileges to certain modes of the perceptible while condemning other modes to the shadows of the imperceptible and the valueless" (Banes and Lepecki 2). *Untitled Event* staged a social body in a queer orientation to what Caroline Jones termed "the bureaucratization of the senses." Whether linguistic or extra-linguistic, the meanings of *Untitled Event* occurred through the ways the spectators found of orienting themselves to what Cage called theater: the "various things going on at the same time" (Cage 149).

Chapter 2: Gertrude Stein, Judson Church, and *In Circles*

"Clever theatrical performances of Stein's work, like those of Al Carmines in the 1960s offer a legacy to Stein criticism, suggesting to readers how they might respond to Stein once they realize that a page of her writing yearns to be a theater, a music hall, a garden, a room."

Catherine Stimpson, "Reading Gertrude Stein" (Stimpson 269)

"If you feel the weight of the AIDS epidemic dragging you down, *In Circles* may be just the cathartic experience you need […] Since it was composed in 1967, it is obviously not about AIDS, but about surviving what wears us down."

The Advocate, " Giving Nonsense a Chance: Gertrude Stein Comes Full Circle in San Francisco Revival" (Bean 58)

In 1968, a New York-based record label called Avant Garde Records released a 12" vinyl LP called *In Circles*. This record was both a circular object and a recording of an adaptation of Gertrude Stein's 1920 "A Circular Play" as a musical theater event by the Judson Poets Theater of Judson Memorial Church, a Baptist-affiliated church in Manhattan's Washington Square Park.[6] Other releases from Avant Garde Records in 1968 included *Knock Knock*, an album of folk songs recorded by the Medical Mission Sisters (a Philadelphia-based Catholic health charity that won a Grammy Award for its 1966 Avant Garde Records album *Joy is Like the Rain*), and *Busy Day*, an album of children's songs recorded by Bill Comeau, the youth minister at the First Congregational Church of Old Greenwich, Connecticut.[7] However well *In Circles* might have fit

[6] An image of the *In Circles* record from Avant-Garde Records can be seen in Fig. 3.
[7] In "Gentle Revolution: Bill Comeau, Avant Garde Records and Christian Psychadelia," David Keenan has discussed the role of Avant Garde Records in the emergence of Christian-themed folk and psychedelic music in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Keenan).

the ecumenical tastes of Avant Garde Records, it might seem strange that the words of Gertrude Stein could have circulated on a record label dedicated to spreading the gospel through folk and psychedelic music.

In its appearance as part of the name of the 1960s Christian record label Avant-Garde Records, the name "avant-garde" departs from the expected meaning of the name in a recognized art-historical narrative of an avant-garde of the 1920s and 1920s repeated or reworked in a 1960s neo-avant-garde. The history of *In Circles* links what Robert Rauschenberg in the mid-20th century described as a desire to "act in the gap between art and life" with what Walter Rauschenbusch described in the early-20th century as a desire for a "social gospel," for a church responsive to a public beyond the church, a church oriented around secular possibilities of social transformation. Formed by Rauschenbusch's "social gospel" as a church existing in the gap between the spiritual and the social, Judson Memorial Church became a formative site in the 1960s for intermedia experiments in Rauschenberg's "gap between art and life."

This chapter stages a reception of Gertrude Stein's 1920 "A Circular Play" and Judson Church's 1968 *In Circles* recorded and circulated by Avant Garde Records. The chapter argues that the emergence in the 1960s of an aesthetic of intermedia occurred in part through a renewed interest in the work of Gertrude Stein, particularly Stein's articulation of a "landscape theater" in her U.S. lecture tour of 1934-1935, as published in *Lectures in America*. The intermedia activities at Judson Church in the 1960s – in the Judson Dance Theater, the Judson Gallery, and the Judson Poets Theater – involved intermedial relations between what Dick Higgins termed "art media" and "life media" (such as the intermedium of theater and painting in what Allan Kaprow called "happenings" and the intermedium of the rituals of religious performance and the rituals of art performance in the musical theater productions of the Reverend Al Carmines and

the Judson Poets Theater). The Avant Garde Records recording of the Judson Church production of Stein's "A Circular Play" exemplifies the co-emergence of a postwar neo-avant-garde aesthetic of intermedia with what could be called a Stein Era that began two decades after Stein's death.

Writing in *boundary 2* in the early 1980s of the 1960s reception of the work of Gertrude Stein after the postwar exhaustion of literary modernism, Catherine Stimpson noted that in the 1960s, "the academic reputation of Stein lagged behind that which she earned among experimental artists" (Stimpson, "Gertrude Stein: Humanism and Its Freaks" 307). Through the work of artists such as Dick Higgins, republishing Stein's work through The Something Else Press, and participants in the Judson Poets Theater, performing Stein's supposedly unperformable plays, the aesthetic possibilities available in Stein's work found renewed attention in the 1960s and prompted a scholarly reconsideration in the following decades after the emergence of cultural postmodernity and the institutional provocations of feminist, lesbian, and gay social movements.[8] The Stein Era that began in the 1960s, through experimental art practices in social spaces such as Judson Church, emerged in large part through artists and activists drawn to Stein's work through what Stimpson has described as "a sense of eroticized historical affinity" (Stimpson 308), not only with Stein as a biographical figure (the Lesbian Jew) but with the queer textures of Stein's works and their pleasurable complications of normative conceptions of media

[8] One of the Something Else Press's first publications was their 1966 edition of Gertrude Stein's out-of-print *The Making of Americans,* placing into trade circulation the first large print-run ever of an unabridged edition of the 1925 book. The press published more books by Stein than any other author. In a piece in the September 1972 issue of *The Something Else Newsletter* titled, "Why Do We Publish So Much Gertrude Stein?" Dick Higgins writes that "much of what we publish is in the Stein spirit, and it seems also Steinian to use the best work of the past to support the present, by using Stein's public domain books to support our publication of newer masters like [Daniel] Spoerri, [Bern] Porter, [Toby] MacLennan and [Jackson] MacLow: these reflect back onto her work too" (Higgins, "Why Do We Publish So Much Gertrude Stein?" 2).

and institutional regulations of corporeal sensation, bodily comportment, and social interaction.[9] Under the sign of Stein, the performance culture of Judson Church experimented with alternative organizations of time, space, and movement, involving bodily practices associated with cultural forms such as musical theater and religious ritual.

Part 1: Judson Church and the Good News of Intermedia

In 1959, Judson Church established a small, basement gallery as a form of community outreach. The gallery attracted artists in the milieu of Allan Kaprow such as Claes Oldenburg and Jim Dine, who were then experimenting with the "painters' theater" of multisensory "happenings," involving the immersion and physical participation of spectators.[10] In writing about Oldenburg's beginnings in the Judson Gallery, Robert Haywood has described the church as "an important anomaly in postwar history" for its destabilization of the "basic modernist tenet" of art's separation from religious institutions; for at Judson, "a number of New York artists who produced a socially engaged or critical body art in the 1960s often found a church more open and hospitable than strictly secular institutions such as museums" (Haywood 206). In 1960, Oldenburg's installation *The Street* appeared in the Judson Gallery. It was a sort of street scene made with throwaway cardboard, newspaper, and burlap. The installation occurred in the gap between interior and exterior, the space of the church gallery and the space of the street and the city. Joshua Shannon has written of *The Street* as "a cogitation on the changing shape of New

[9] In "A Trail of Roses: Stein's Legacies in 1960s Art," Tania Ørum has also discussed the sixties reception of Stein, focusing on the Danish reception through the Fluxus network.
[10] The foundational text on "Happenings" is Michael Kirby's 1965 collection *Happenings*, with statements from and documentation of "happenings" by Allan Kaprow, Red Grooms, Robert Whitman, Jim Dine, and Claes Oldenburg. Dick Higgins and the Something Else Press released a recording of Allan Kaprow's *How to Make a Happening* as an LP in 1966.

York City" (Shannon 16), in light of the "urban renewal" plans of Robert Moses that at that time threatened to limit street-level pedestrian experience through highway expansion. Shannon links the ephemeral, everyday materials of *The Street* at the Judson Gallery to the *Merz* of Kurt Schwitters, describing Oldenburg's installation as "a kind of Merzbau of the sidewalk, rendered in trash" (Shannon 25), in which "the signs in *The Street* are made so as to short-circuit communication in favor of an insistence on their own materiality and their own occupation of space in the city" (Shannon 35). *The Street* was the site of Oldenburg's first "happening" at the Judson Gallery, *Snapshots from the City,* in which characters wearing materials from the installation performed a nonnarrative theatrical scene of "the street," as a strobe light flickered on and off.

One of the spectators of Oldenburg's work in the Judson Gallery was a Union Theological Seminary student named Al Carmines.[11] From southeastern Virginia, Carmines moved to New York to study at Union Theological Seminary with Paul Tillich. Carmines was in part drawn to Tillich for his concern with what theology could learn from art: "Tillich was the first theologian I read who took Picasso, Heine, Goethe, Degas, not just as illustrations, but seriously, took them as saying something fundamental about the nature of human beings and life" (Carmines, "The Actor Speaks" 55). Upon graduating from Union Theological Seminary, Carmines worked at Judson as an assistant minister, responsible for the church choir and the church's outreach to artists through the Judson Gallery. Recollecting how the church served its community of artists, Carmines spoke of how "the artists wanted two things: a space, which is rare in New York City, and the church was willing for the space to be used […] and two: the artists needed some kind of response from outside their group, and the Church people gave it"

[11] David Crespy has written a detailed account of Carmines' encounter with Oldenburg's work at the Judson Gallery (Crespy 62-65).

(Smith 171). Judson became, as noted by Laura Rosati and Mary Anne Staniszewski in their *Alternative Histories: New York Art Spaces, 1960 to 2010*, a "precursor" for the alternative art spaces that emerged in the city over the following decades as sites for emergent art practices not easily saleable or fundable (Rosati and Staniszewski 94-95).

When participants in an experimental choreography workshop organized by Robert Dunn (a student in John Cage's legendary experimental composition classes at the New School in the late 1950s who went on to collaborate with the Merce Cunningham Company on introducing chance procedures into choreography) were looking to perform dance work that they had developed through attention to the movements and gestures of everyday life, they approached Reverend Carmines. Through the hospitality of Judson Church, artists who had participated in Dunn's experimental choreography workshops, such as Yvonne Rainer, Elaine Summers, Steve Paxton, and Trisha Brown, formed the Judson Dance Theater.[12] In the space of the church, these artists developed works based in ordinary (but not necessarily normative) bodily processes, movements, and gestures. Working in the gap between art and life, the Judson Dance Theater questioned who and what could be involved in dance. For example, Yvonne Rainer's 1963 *We Shall Run* had its participants (some trained as dancers and some not trained as dancers) wear street clothes and form patterns through the everyday activity of running.

Writing of his experience of attending the first concert of the Judson Dance Theater, Reverend Carmines recalled:

> My sensation from the first concert was one of awe at the stinging vitality of the work and fear and anxiety that the traditional ground rules of all art seemed to be obliterated by the work. I watched the pieces in a kind of frenetic trance, hardly believing my ears or eyes. Not, I must hasten to add, because the work was particularly shocking or bizarre. No, the pieces shook me precisely for the opposite reason. Here the primary movements

[12] The most comprehensive account of the formation of the Judson Dance Theater appears in Sally Banes's *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962-1964*.

> of living and the primary sounds of life seemed to be used in all their 'ordinariness' to create a powerful aesthetic experience but one which was not 'arty' or 'pretty' or 'moving' in the usual sense. Suddenly, the simple fact of moving, standing, kneeling, crouching, lying down, listening, seeing, smelling, touching, not-touching, took on what I can only call a kind of classicism. Indeed, my most immediate memory of the early years of the Judson Dance Theater is a kind of classicism – a nobility of primary movements and sounds (Carmines, "In the Congregation of Art" 25-26).

This locating of aesthetic experience in the "everyday" and the "ordinary" was characteristic not only of the Judson Dance Theater but also the Judson Gallery and the Judson Poets Theater. As described by Carmines, art at Judson – across the different material media engaged by artists in the Gallery, the Poets Theater, and the Dance Theater (and many Judson-affiliated artists were involved in more than one of these) – shared "a certain attention to movement *qua* movement, to what you're doing as you're doing it at the moment, and not as it refers to something else" (Smith 172). The Judsonian preoccupation with "the ordinary" and the work of framing attention to the most basic aspects of embodiment in time and space shares and extends Gertrude Stein's preoccupation with ordinary language.

The ways that dance scholars have discussed the modes of embodiment involved in the practices of the Judson Dance Theater, such as Ramsay Burt on "unruly bodies," Sally Banes on the "effervescent body," and Deborah Jowitt on "everyday bodies," can also be fruitful for understanding the Judson Poets Theater's practices of displaying the production of language as an embodied practice, particularly in the Judson Poets Theater's performances of "closet dramas" by Gertrude Stein. In *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces*, Ramsay Burt has written of how the Judson Dance Theater produced dance with "unruly bodies" challenging the disciplinary procedures of conventional dance training; thus forming "a context in which embodied experience [in dance] could become a site of resistance against normative ideologies rather than an affirmation of them" (Burt 21). In *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde*

Performance and the Effervescent Body, Sally Banes describes how the milieu of Judson Church in the early 1960s embraced "the effervescent body – with its emphasis on the material strata of digestion, excretion, procreation, and death" along with "the object-body, the technological body, and the botanic or vegetative body" (Banes 191).[13] The Judsonian embrace of not normally aestheticized bodily processes, pedestrian movements, and behaviors and gestures from everyday life, what Deborah Jowitt decribes in *Time and the Moving Image* as Judson Dance Theater's dance of "everyday bodies," constructed an art in which "the body in all its states was acceptable," "clumsiness could figure in dance as well as adroitness, plumpness as well as trimness" (Jowitt 318). In presenting a full range of ordinary bodily processes in public space within an art frame, the Judson aesthetic involved enacting an embodied questioning (in the bodies of both "performers" and "spectators") of the boundaries of public and private and the hierarchies of how social value gets attributed (or not) to particular modes of bodily comportment and capacity.

When dance critic Jack Anderson wrote about the Judson Poets Theater in a 1967 issue of *Ballet Review* for an audience familiar with the Judson Dance Theater, Anderson described the Judson Poets Theater as a "presentationalist, non-illusionist, and non-naturalist theater" (Anderson 73). This can be seen in how Al Carmines and the Judson Poets Theater produced a form of musical theater as way of performing Gertrude Stein's supposedly unperformable closet dramas from the 1920s. The Judson Poets Theater performers were not so much acting roles or

[13] Banes's concept of "the effervescent body" draws upon Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of the grotesque and the "material bodily lower stratum," Mary Douglas's theories of purity and danger in the apprehension of "dirt" as "matter out of place," and Marcel Mauss's theories of "techniques of the body" and the social structuration of bodily habits and habitus. Deborah Jowitt's term "everyday bodies" might be a more capacious term for the processes described by Banes in relation to the Judson Dance Theater, in which bodies can be seen to not only "effervesce" but also to undergo institutional regulations and structural limitations that challenge appearances of effervescent liveliness.

impersonating characters as presenting language and movement and displaying the processes involved in making the performance. The Judson Poets Theater shared with other art practices that emerged in the 1960s at Judson Church and its milieu, such as Fluxus, an aesthetic orientation to an exaggerated attention to "the ordinary," such as in the theatricalization of ordinary objects and materials in the sculptural installations and happenings of Claes Oldenburg in the Judson Gallery and in the framing of everyday body movements and gestures as dance by Yvonne Rainer and the Judson Dance Theater.

Based on theater historian Stephen Bottoms's research in *Playing Underground: A Critical History of the 1960s Off-Off-Broadway Movement* on the Judson Poets Theater's group process of making performances, this chapter argues that the attention to everyday speech patterns, behaviors, and gestures in participants' embodied productions of language enabled the Judson Poets Theater to perform what had previously been considered for decades as unperformable closet dramas by Stein. The chapter considers how the Judson Poets Theater produced a musical theater performance of "A Circular Play," a text of fragments of overheard gossip rather than dramatic action. The chapter suggests that the crossings of boundaries in intermedia practices in the Judson milieu can be thought of in relation to the ways that song and dance numbers in musical theater can, as musical theater scholars Dominic Symonds and Millie Taylor have argued in *Gestures of Music Theater: The Performativity of Song and Dance*, "defy structural boundaries, their effects seeping fluidly through conventional modalities of understanding and affecting us therefore in tangential and peripheral ways" (Symonds and Taylor 4).

Founded in 1961 as a forum for playwrights in the Judson community, the Judson Poets Theater's low-budget productions relied upon the resources and personnel of the church

community. The name of the Judson Poets Theater recalled the Cambridge Poets Theater of the 1950s, which Nora Sayre has described as having had "a congregational purpose – it was home for poets and performers in a period when artists were often classified as freaks, when academia was repressive, when homosexuality was regarded with horrific fascination" (Sayre 98). The Judson Poets Theater can also be thought of in relation to the "poets theaters" associated with the New American Poetry, as described in Kevin Killian and David Brazil's *The Kenning Anthology of Poets Theater, 1945-1985* and Philip Auslander's *The New York School Poets as Playwrights: O'Hara, Ashbery, Koch, Schuyler and the Visual Arts*, which also tended to produce low-budget, low-tech performances for an in-group of self-identified outsiders. But nonetheless, the Judson Poets Theater can best be understood through its imbrications with the performance culture of Off-Off-Broadway and with Judson Church, the Judson Dance Theater, and the Judson Gallery.

Originally providing piano accompaniment for Judson Poets Theater productions, Reverend Al Carmines eventually began to compose music for the Judson Poets Theater by drawing upon a pastiche of religious, popular, and classical styles. With Carmines's music, the Judson Poets Theater productions became part of a circuit of Off-Off-Broadway musical theater performances. The Judson musicals included an Al Carmines musical based on Winnie the Pooh, *Sing Ho for a Bear* in 1964; Maria Irene Fornés's *Promenade* in 1965; Helen Adam's *San Francisco's Burning* in 1967; and Carmines's *The Faggot* in 1973.[14] Judson Poets Theater's most celebrated and most attended performances were their Gertrude Stein musicals, including performances of Stein's "What Happened" in 1963, "Three Sisters Who Are Not Sisters" and "Play I, Play II, Play III" in 1964, "A Circular Play" (as *In Circles*) in 1967, and Leon Katz's adaptation of *The Making of Americans* in 1972. With their emphasis on meanings conveyed by

[14] A Judson Church poster for *The Faggot* can be seen in Fig. 4.

word-sounds instead of the construction of a plot or impersonation of character, Stein's supposedly impossible-to-perform theater pieces provided the Judson Poets Theater with the basis for performing attention to language as an event occurring in and between bodies. Through constructing a performance history of *In Circles*, it can be seen how Stein's 1920 closet drama "A Circular Play" became performable and meaningful in the 1960s intermedia milieu and performance culture of Judson Church.

Part 2: Gertrude Stein, Closet Drama, and "A Circular Play"

"A Circular Play" appears in Gertrude Stein's 1949 *Last Operas and Plays*. The text has what appears to be a title – "A CIRCULAR PLAY" – marked by a year, 1920 – and then what appears to be possibly another title – "A PLAY IN CIRCLES" (Stein, "A Circular Play" 139). By calling the text a play, the title points to theatrical convention and suggests a reading of the text in relation to expectations for drama in performance. The title recalls what Stein says in her 1935 lecture "Plays": "I think and always have thought if you write a play you ought to announce that it is a play" (Stein, "Plays" 260). Yet to attempt to read "A Circular Play" as a play – as with all of Stein's texts announced as "plays," published in *Geography in Plays* in 1922 and *Last Operas and Plays* in 1949 – results in great difficulty and confusion. Other than being named as a "play," the text of "A Circular Play" does not follow most of the textual conventions for the appearance of a play on the page (such as a list of characters and the demarcation of stage direction). "A Circular Play" thus provokes readers to construct new ways of attending to the text's patterns and configurations. The "play" in the title puts into play the identity of the

category of "play." The "circular" in the title announces a reshaping of the conventions of a genre.

The text of "A Circular Play" appears in stanza-like segments (or "circles") marked by what could be circle-titles, indented between the segments. To quote from the beginning of the text until the third of these circle-titles:

> First in a circle.
> Papa dozes mamma blows her noses.
> We cannot say this the other way.
> Exactly.
> Passably.
> Second in a circle.
> A citroen and a citizen.
> A miss and bliss.
> We came together.
> Then suddenly there was an army.
> In my room.
> We asked them to go away
> We asked them very kindly to stay.
> How can Cailloux be dead again.
> Napoleon is dead.
> Not again.
> A morning celebration.
> And a surprising birthday.
> A room is full of odd bits of disturbing furniture.
> Guess again.
> The third circle.
>
> (Stein, "A Circular Play" 139)

The indented circle-titles (of which there are forty-seven) continue throughout the text, and can be seen as the spacing making the segments visible as such. The circle-titles often reference circles and circularity, "social circles," numeration, or processes of communication. Sometimes, these circle-titles seem to suggest stage directions or performance instructions of sorts.

That these circle-titles are not arbitrary or meaningless, and do articulate thematic patterns of connection between segments, can be seen by listing them (in order of appearance):

1. “First in a circle.”
2. “Second in a circle.”
3. “The third circle.”
4. “Four times three.”
5. “Circle Hats.”
6. “Circles.”
7. “In a circle.”
8. “Encircle.”
9. “The idea of a circle.”
10. “Beauty in a circle.”
11. “The Circle.”
12. “Another circle.”
13. “For a circle.”
14. “A mildred circle.”
15. “A circle higher.”
16. “Circular saws.”
17. “An inner circle.”
18. “Circle one.”
19. “Circle two.”
20. “Circle three.”
21. “Circle four.”
22. “Four circles.”
23. “Consider a circle.”
24. “Not a circular saw.”
25. “Leave a circle.”
26. “Leaves or a circle.”
27. “Let us circle.”
28. “Can a circle enlist.”
29. “In a circle.”
30. “Inner circle.”
31. “Relieved for a circle.”
32. “Round circles.”
33. “Encircle Alice.”
34. “Sing fifty.”
35. “Now we come to the circle.”
36. “Sing circles.”
37. “Circular watches.”
38. “Circular glasses.”
39. “Circular sets.”
40. “In circles.”
41. “Repeat north.”
42. “More circles.”
43. “Circular addresses.”
44. “Conceive that as a circle.”
45. “News of circles.”
46. “Circular dancing.”

47. “Circles.”

(Stein, “A Circular Play” 139-151)

Across the segments that appear between these circle-titles, there are no consistent characters and there is no linear unfolding of a plot for dramatic action and resolution. As Franziska Gygax has written in *Gender and Genre in Gertrude Stein*, because “A Circular Play” cannot be read through the conventions of character formation and linear plot, “the reader or spectator recognizes many clusters of everyday speech, yet he or she can never follow a progressive line and is constantly taken aback by new turns or, as it were, by new circles of words or phrases” (Gygax 42). While visually linear, the text of “A Circular Play” suggests that verbal meanings can occur in circular rather than linear patterns and suggests a visual representation of embodied performance different from the theatrical norms of drama.

One approach to reading “A Circular Play” has appeared in a collaborative artist book, *Une Pièce circulaire*, published by Editions La Traversière in 1985. In *Une Pièce circulaire*, each page of the book displays an artist’s arrangement of the words of a segment of “A Circular Play.” The book thus offers textual performances of readings of “A Circular Play,” based in the graphic possibilities of letterforms and the printed page. As Renée Riese Hubert has observed of *Une Pièce circulaire*: through this book, “Stein’s play becomes an event, or a happening, or even a textual production in the double sense of the term” (Hubert 348). This collaborative artist book is one example of an approach to performing a seemingly unperformable “play.” Another example is the Judson Poets Theater’s turn to musical theater in the adaptation of “A Circular Play” as *In Circles*. As seen in both examples of performances of Stein’s “A Circular Play,” the text’s resistances to theatrical representation and literary reading can be generative of experimental performances in different media. These generative effects of negations and

evasions of theatrical and literary conventions relate to discussions of Stein's work in terms of what scholars such as Martin Puchner have called "the modernist closet drama."

In *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama,* Puchner develops a theory of modernist drama's resistances to theatricality in part through a helpful reading of Stein's work as a "a particularly strange kind of closet drama" (Puchner 161). Puchner has observed that Stein's theater is a theater not of mimetic representation but of diegetic narration. Mimesis in theater is "the direct presentation of objects, persons, speeches, spaces, and events on a stage" (Puchner 24). Diegesis in theater consists of "the indirect, descriptive or narrative representation of objects, persons, spaces, and events through language (either spoken by a rhapsode, narrator, chorus, or author or represented in the dramatic text for the reader" (Puchner 24). Plays conventionally have both mimetic and diegetic elements. Stein's "plays," however, are entirely constructions of diegetic elements. Stein's "plays" are based in what Puchner describes as "modes of textual representation that explicitly foreclose any sort of impersonation" (Puchner 16). While Stein's "plays" remain linked to the conventions of theater by including words referring to theatrical convention (such as the word "play"), such words do not perform their usual functions as they would in a theater of mimetic representation.

W.B. Worthen, in his study of *Print and the Poetics of Modern Drama,* has discussed how in Stein's plays, the "accessories of the printed drama are folded into the poetics of 'the play'" (Worthen 163). Stein folds "the conventional apparatus that enables the theater to 'objectify' the play onstage into the play itself" and thus "reframes the accessories *as* the play, as part of its verbal identity *as play*" (Worthen 65). "A Circular Play" theatricalizes not dramatic action but instead, language and reading. Worthen argues that because Stein "summons the signs

of theatre while simultaneously exhausting their theatrical functionality," "Stein's plays have yet to be fully digested as either literature or theater" (Worthen 70).

To attend to the Judson Poets Theater's interest in Stein and particularly Stein's "A Circular Play," it is helpful to reconsider "modernist closet drama" through the queer rereading of the genre (or anti-genre) offered by Nick Salvato in *Uncloseting Drama: American Modernism and Queer Performance*. Salvato argues that queer artists such as Stein produced seemingly unperformable "closet dramas" in order to engage alternative meanings and alternative modes of meaning production (such as gossip). Arguing that closet drama has been a "uniquely suitable space for the expression of queer sensibilities" and that "queerness produces confusion and contortions akin to those of closet drama," Salvato links how "closet drama approaches the stage (if it does so at all) ambivalently and ambiguously" with how "the queer refuses to fit into stable sexual roles" (Salvato 11).

To engage a Steinian closet drama such as "A Circular Play," it is helpful to return to Stein's thinking on theater from the lectures of the 1934-1935 lecture tour collected in *Lectures in America*, and particularly the lecture titled "Plays." In this lecture, Stein discusses theater in terms of what can make one "nervous" when sitting in the space of a theater for a dramatic performance based in mimetic representation: "your emotional time as an audience is not the same as the emotional time of the play" (Stein, "Plays" XXIX). Attuned to gaps between interiority and exteriority of experience (gaps perhaps particularly familiar to queers), Stein found it troubling that in watching a play the "emotional time" represented by actors is always ahead or behind of the "emotional time" of the audience watching the play. Stein does, however, mention in the lecture an experience of being a theater spectator that was less troubling and much more enjoyable to her. Speaking of attending a dramatic performance in French by Sarah

Bernhardt, Stein says: “I must have been about sixteen years old and Bernhardt came to San Francisco and stayed two months. I knew a little french of course but really it did not matter, it was all so foreign and her voice being so varied and it all being so french I could rest in it untroubled And I did” (Stein, “Plays” XX). As Johanna Frank has observed of Stein’s Bernhardt anecdote: “Story time on the stage did not conflict with the emotional time of the spectator because, as an English speaker watching a French production, Stein could not follow the story or the action on stage” and “instead, meaning was located in the timbre, inflection, gesture, tone, rhythm, sonority, and resonance of the words spoken or sung” (Frank 515).

In the lecture “Plays,” Stein points to the Bernhardt experience and the experience of cinema as the basis for thinking of how theater might evade dramatic representation and instead become a “landscape” involving a simultaneity of sensory experiences: “the thing which has induced a person like myself to constantly think about the theatre from the standpoint of sight and sound and its relation to emotion and time, rather than in relation to story and action is the same as you say general form of conception as the inevitable experiments made by the cinema.” Stein describes in “Plays,” the invention of an alternative, post-cinematic theater of landscape: “I felt that if a play was exactly like a landscape then there would be no difficulty about the emotion of the person looking on at the play being behind or ahead of the play because the landscape does not have to make acquaintance.” As Julianne Rebentisch has noted, Stein’s theatrical landscapes are temporal “in the sense of processuality of the aesthetic experience itself” rather than “in the sense of a temporal course of action represented in the text” (Rebentisch 151).

Stein’s landscape theater can be thought of as a precursor to what Hans-Thies Lehmann has termed “postdramatic theater,” in which the “wholeness, illusion, and world representation”

of the dramatic becomes in the postdramatic, "no longer the regulating principle but merely one possible variant of theatrical art" (Lehmann 22). As with Stein's "A Circular Play," postdramatic theater can be based in a primary attention of audiences and performers on the theatrical situation itself rather than on theatrical representation of dramatic action. Steinian theater frames attention to language's materialization through embodied practices.

In Steinian theater, such as in the example of "A Circular Play," language occurs not primarily as a means of representation but rather as an object in a process of materialization. "A Circular Play" can be encountered in terms of what Charles Bernstein has described as Stein's "wordness" and what Joan Retallack has described as Stein's "eros of language." For Bernstein, "wordness" names Stein's "satisfaction in language made present, contemporary; the pleasure/plenitude in the immersion in language, where language is not understood as a code for something else or a representation of something else – a kind of eating or drinking or tasting, endowing an object status to language" (Bernstein 143). For Retallack, Stein's "eros of language" names a process in which words become "fondled objects of poesis, radiant in their everyday connotations, not needing to point to transcendent meaning" (Retallack 6). Language in Steinian theater is a matter of sensation if not representation. A performance of "A Circular Play," such as Judson Poets Theater's *In Circles*, can heighten attention to the sensory processes involved in not-only-verbal bodily materialities through which linguistic communication occurs (such as in the forming of "social circles.")

Called a "play," Stein's "A Circular Play" upsets expectations for printed text of a play to be oriented around possible mimetic representation on a stage in a theater. The Steinian "play" instead offers a diegetic narration of (incomplete, failed, "queer") processes of play-making. For example, to return to the circle-titles in "A Circular Play": these titles sometimes seem to be

stage directions for the representation of action but then surprise with a cluster of text incongruent with the title, veering off and circling back onto other patterns of meaning:

> Leave a circle.
> Leaves in or circle.
> In travelling to California what do you say to me. I say oh have you been thin.
> Leaves or a circle.
> I leave you there.
> Do not despair.
> I recollect that there is no hurry. Why do the Indians make China. They make Indo china.
> Leaves for to-day.
> A circle in royalty.
> Royal circles are distinguished by their color.
> Remain in a circle.
> A distinction. Have they changed their minds. He looks very well. We were surprised that he did not resemble Mr. Mirrlees. You meant the Frenchman.
> A Neapolitan noble is a neapolitan noble. And women are that. Do you know the brother. Poor brother he is dead. He was killed in the army.
> Let us circle.

(Stein, "A Circular Play" 145-146)

The circle-titles shift between possible actions to be staged and notations of organization for display on the page (or a staged version of the visual sign). The text in the segments between the circle-titles shift between (in a text without conventional markings of character names) possible voices of characters, or overhead gossip, and a kind of narrator or commentator. Themes, if not actions, unfold non-linearly, with textual patterns in different segments circling back to each other around words associated with social circles, physical appearances of bodies, geography, war, and naming (particularly in relation to nation). The text plays with expectations and anticipations of patterns and conventions, with meanings occurring circuitously and unexpectedly in the attention of a reader or spectator. A Steinian theatrical text like "A Circular Play" involves what Laura Frost has described as a kind of textual "tickling." Frost suggests that

"Stein's writing substantially and structurally operates like tickling" (Frost 75) in that "tickling fuses pleasure with irritation, intimacy, and estrangement" (Frost 66). With Stein's "plays," such as "A Circular Play," the Judson Poets Theater found the basis for a theater not of the spectacle but of the tickle.

Part 3: Al Carmines, *In Circles,* and Off-Off-Broadway

The first performance of *In Circles* at Judson Memorial Church was on October 14th, 1967. There were ten performances of *In Circles* at the church, and these performances were received with enough enthusiasm and interest to enable the Judson Poets Theater to move *In Circles* from Off-Off-Broadway to Off-Broadway. *In Circles* ran for 222 performances at the Cherry Lane Theater and 56 performances at the Gramercy Arts Theatre. The Judson Poets Theater's *In Circles* thus became, as Leslie Atkins Durham has noted in *Staging Gertrude Stein: Absence, Culture, and the Landscape of American Alternative Theater*," the longest run of any work by Gertrude Stein staged in the twentieth century" (Durham 85).[15]

The emergence of *In Circles* can be understood in relation to the performance culture of Off and Off-Off Broadway musical theater and experimental theater as well as the intermedia environment of Judson Church. Supported and hosted by the church, the Judson Poets Theater did not have the same financial pressures as other institutions and could thus nurture unprofitable experiments (without even needing to charge for tickets for performances, in a prominent Manhattan location). Besides the physical space of the church, the Judson Poets Theater was able

[15] In *Gertrude Stein's Theatre of the Absolute,* Betsy Alayne Ryan has documented the production history of Stein's "plays," including the Judson Poets Theater's performances of "A Circular Play" as *In Circles* (Rayne 167).

to draw upon the resources of the congregation (for an audience, for participants in performances, for additional material support) as well as a community of affiliated artists with training in various media. In addition to the church and the Judson Gallery and Judson Dance Theater, the Judson Poets Theater also shared personnel and audiences with the emergent network of Off-Off-Broadway theaters.

As described by Albert Poland and Bruce Mailman in their 1972 guide to Off-Off-Broadway, *The Off Off Broadway Book*: "the places were small, nontheatrical facilities in cellars, bars, storefronts, and coffehouses," in which "the tightness of the space forced the playwrights to work with stringent technical limitations" (Poland and Mailman xi). These provisional Off-Off-Broadway theaters that began to emerge in the 1950s included, most famously and foundationally, Judith Malina and Julian Beck's Artaud-influenced Living Theater, and later Joe Cino's Caffe Cino, Ellen Stewart's La Mama, Joseph Chaikin's Open Theater, and Richard Schechner's Performance Group. From the late 1960s into the early 1970s, Off-Off-Broadway began a trend of what Elizabeth Wollman has termed "adult musicals," thematically based on "human sexuality as it was being negotiated in the United States during the 1970s," in musicals such as *Let My People Come* that influenced Broadway productions such as *Hair* (Wollman 3-5). Due to their small scale, The Off-Off-Broadway performance culture in the 1960s tended to produce intimate performance situations in which audiences and performers either already knew each other or would come to know each other through the performances. Operating with low budgets and in unconventional spaces for theater, performances in this Off-Off-Broadway culture tended to have a homemade quality and often recalled obsolescent media (such as early cinema) and outmoded forms of popular entertainment (such as vaudeville).

It was Judson Church where Helen Adam, the Scottish ballad writer who moved to San Francisco in the 1940s and became a central figure among those who became known as the San Francisco Renaissance, found a home for a New York performance of her "ballad opera" written in rhymed couplets and set to Scottish folk tunes, *San Francisco's Burning*. In 1965, Adam moved to New York after having *San Francisco's Burning* performed in San Francisco. As Kristen Prevallet describes in her introduction to the *Helen Adam Reader*, Adam and her sister Pat Adam went to New York with the expectation of having *San Francisco's Burning* staged on Broadway. The failure of that effort led to their meeting Al Carmines and thus to the production of the Judson Poets Theater version of *San Francisco's Burning*, for which Carmines composed new music (Prevallet 47).[16]

The Judson Poets Theater produced a form of intermedia between musical theater's basis in outmoded modes of popular entertainment and the Judson Dance Theater and Judson Gallery's attention to the ordinary materials and movements of everyday life. Through this intermedium of what could be called the Judson musical, the Judson Poets Theater was able to generate a performance of Stein's supposedly unperformable "A Circular Play." The invention of the Judson musical and its success in adapting "A Circular Play" as *In Circles* exemplifies Nick Salvato's argument in *Uncloseting Modernism* that the seemingly unperformable "closet dramas" of queer modernist artists such as Stein, "tended to resist in some ways the theatrical constraints and conventions of the present" in which they were working (Salvato 6) but that in the 1960s, "new generations of theater practitioners could bring to bear techniques and styles of staging – indeed, perverse media – uniquely suited to the adaptation of notoriously difficult modernist works" (Salvato 12). In arguing that performance practices attuned to embodiment have enabled

[16] The Helen Adam-Al Carmines collaboration on *San Francisco's Burning* as a Judson Poets Theater musical resulted in a book of texts, music, and drawings from Hanging Loose Press.

performances of modernist "closet dramas" to occur, Salvato further argues that "our understanding of the queer textures of modernist closet drama" becomes "enriched by a consideration of such drama's performance history" beyond the literary-institutional "fantasy of disembodied reading" (Salvato 15).

It might seem odd that a key site of advanced art in the 1960s, in the turn to installation and minimalism in dance and sculpture, would also be a site for experiments in adapting styles and techniques of musical theater to low-budget, small-scale Off-Off-Broadway theatrical performances (albeit theatrical performances invested in a "non-illusionistic" theater resisting the concealment of the apparatuses of theatricality). But what connected the Judson Poets Theater's turn to musical theater with other art activities in its proximity was a shared investment in intermedia, in working in the "gaps" between zones of the social and the cultural that had come to be thought of as separate. Like (or *as*) intermedia, American musical theater has always been an art of *mediation* between different social and cultural formations and their associated modes of mediating bodily sensation. As David Savran notes in *A Queer Sort of Materialism: Recontextualizing American Theater*: the American musical theater has been "the emblematic middlebrow genre," "recycling and recombining elements of, on the one hand, public amusements like cinema, minstrel shows, and vaudeville, and, on the other, serious art" in a "promiscuous mixture of commerce and art, entertainment and politics, the banal and the auratic, profane and sacred, spectacular and personal, erotic and intellectual" (Savran 15).

The reception of musical theater in other spheres of cultural practice has often been phobic and dismissive. For example, there is the case of the neglect and trivialization of the poet Kenward Elmslie, a formative figure in the so-called New York School of Poetry, whose poetry emerged with his work in the musical theater. Franklin Bruno, a contemporary poet deeply

invested in the history of American popular song lyrics, has argued (in one of the few published texts on Elmslie's over half-a-century of work) that the discomfort with Elmslie comes in part from the musical theater-like tendency of Elmslie's work to have "rhyme and wordplay appear to be pursued as ends in themselves," in which "the poem is in part an outlet for excess linguistic and libidinal energy, whereby the lyricist's sensual – but also anxious and perhaps involuntary – turning over of word-sounds and combinations comes to temporary rest in a context relatively unconstrained by externally imposed narrative and musical structure" (Bruno 28). The attention to word-sounds in a poet like Elmslie, or in musical theater more generally, is key to the aesthetic of the Judson Poets Theater in their performance Stein's "A Circular Play" as *In Circles*. With Stein's text as a basis, the Judson Poets Theater produced a theater of language in circulation, a scene of words sounded in and through bodies. The Judson musical can be thought of in relation to Richard Poirier's articulation in *Poetry and Pragmatism* of Stein as part of the pragmatist tradition's preoccupation with ordinary language, in "a philosophical heritage that is unique for the privilege it accords to casual, extemporized, ordinary idiom, to uses of language that translate into little more than sound" (Poirier 166).

Informed by both Gertrude Stein and musical theater, the Judson Poets Theater approached language and the sounds of words similar to how the Judson Dance Theater approached movement and the gestures of behaviors. In *Playing Underground: A Critical History of the 1960s Off-Off-Broadway Movement*, Stephen Bottoms has reconstructed a history of the Judson Poets Theater's making of *In Circles*. Lawrence Kornfeld, a director who began his career at the Living Theater, worked with a cast of ten, including Reverend Carmines at the piano, and members of the Judson Dance Theater such as Arlene Rothlein, Elaine Summers, and David Vaughan. According to Bottoms, this group "developed their performance by working

their way through Stein's text, literally page by page, responding to whatever ideas were sparked among the people in the room" (Bottoms 165). What occurred in the group in their making of the performance shaped the elements of behavior that would be reenacted in the performance. For example, when David Vaughan "was a few days late in coming into rehearsals owing to other commitments," Vaughan "also 'arrived late' in the performance itself, entering at the point in the text where he had entered the process" (Bottoms 165). Drawing upon the language of systems theory and cybernetics, Bottoms describes the Judson Poets Theater's process of making *In Circles* as "a responsive feedback loop – a circle": "Carmines treated the development of his scores as another 'character' in this interactive process, writing music by day, responding to whatever was happening in rehearsal. He would teach new material to the cast each morning, and then Kornfeld would listen to the new sequences and consider how to best stage them" (Bottoms 166).

In Circles differs from the text of "A Circular Play": not all of the words from "A Circular Play" occur in *In Circles* and the words that do occur, occur in patterns based not as they appear in the text but as they were sounded through the group process of reading. As noted by Michael Feingold when writing about *In Circles* and the Judson Poets Theater in the journal *Theater* in 1968: "The composer creates emphatic statements through his choices of where he lays strees. In Stein: four statements of fact. In Carmines: three lines of parlando, then a full song on the line, Mrs De Monzy has adopted a child, repeated perhaps twenty times" (Feingold 113).

The Judson Poets Theater's process for the making of *In Circles* was particularly adequate to the form of Stein's "A Circular Play" in that the text of the play itself consists of fragments in which characterization occurs through patterns of word-sounds rather than delineated characters. The patterns of word-sounds that circle in and around the segments of the

"play" model processes of group communication, processes re-enacted through the Judson Poets Theater's performance. In *Transferential Poetics, from Poe to Warhol*, Adam Frank has argued that "the particular challenges of Stein's plays emerge from her epistemic ambitions for them: they offer a literary form for representing a group's dynamics to itself" (Frank 114). Frank argues that because the texts of Stein's plays "do not distinguish between various formal theatrical elements – dialogue, stage directions, setting, characters, titles – a reader who aims to experience and somehow understand a Stein play must decide on each one of these elements" and that "these formal decisions are not entirely different from the intonational, rhythmic, and grammatical decisions a reader makes when he or she reads any piece of Stein's writing aloud; imagining a particular staging of a Stein play is an elaborated extension of the practice of reading her texts aloud" (Frank 50). As exemplified by the Judson Poets Theater and elaborated in Frank's reading of Stein's practice of playwriting, Steinian theater is a theater of reading. It is a theater of reading in which reading exceeds a supposedly "disembodied," individual practice: "because Stein's plays are attempts to stage group relations, collaborative group efforts can restage those dynamics and help to understand them" (Frank 51).[17]

Another way of approaching Stein's theater is Jane Palatini Bowers's argument in her study of Stein's theater, *They Watch Me As They Watch This: Gertrude Stein's Metadrama*, that Stein's plays are works of "recording poeisis, the play of the poet with language" and that in Stein's theater, "the language that plays before us is a record and reenactment of the language of poet" (Bowers 134). But the "language of the poet" in a play like "A Circular Play" is itself a recording and reenactment of language generated through social processes such as gossip.

[17] Frank has pursued, though the medium of radio, further research on Stein's plays as stagings of group dynamics. Frank writes about the Radio Free Stein project in the Winter 2014 issue of *The Capilano Review* (Frank, "Introducing Radio Free Stein" 49-55). Recordings from the research can be found at radiofreestein.com.

Writing of the role of gossip in Stein's plays, Chad Bennett has described the plays as calling for the kind of "performative listening" that gossip itself performs in everyday life (Bennett 318).

With Stein, as exemplified in the Judson Poets Theater's encounter with "A Circular Play," a "play" performs as a kind of medium through which to attend to language as it occurs socially. Following Bowers, it might be helpful to think of the Judson musicals, whether of Stein works or informed by a Steinian poetics, as presentations of "recording poiesis," mediated by recording processes and group processes. The Judsonian-Steinian display of "recording poiesis" also involved calling attention to the media environments in which the Judson Poets Theater existed, especially performances of self in everyday life connected to particular recording processes and media environments in everyday life at the moment (as thematized in one of the plays performed by the Judson Poets Theater, Rosalyn Drexler's *Home Movies* of 1964).

Lawrence Kornfeld, the director of *In Circles*, wrote in reflection on the production – mimicking the style of Stein's *Lectures in America* – that "what happened in these productions was what happened to the people who did them: the words and music were not what happened: what happened was that the people who acted and sang and danced *were* the action the music and the dancing" (Kornfeld 33). Kornfeld wrote that "*In Circles* was about the world as people live in it" (Kornfeld 38) and that "only Gertrude Stein cared what the words were about and maybe some of her friends for gossip cared, but I only care about what they will mean after we all fight over them" (Kornfeld 34). Alluding to Stein's *The Making of Americans*, Al Carmines spoke in an interview of being drawn to Stein's interest in how people might be understood through "how we see them repeating themselves over and over again in the same words, or actions or gestures" (Carmines, "A Conversation with Al Carmines" 14). With Stein's "A Circular Play," the participants in the Judson Poets Theater production of *In Circles* presented

their individual and group processes of reading the text; they presented Stein's language in modes informed by what they learned, in the act of reading the text, about their bodily processes of producing that reading of the text.

Judson Poets Theater's approach to Stein's "A Circular Play" can be understood through the theory that Michael Kirby developed in a foundational text for *TDR* in 1972 called "On Acting and Not-Acting." In the text, Kirby articulates an understanding of emergent performance practices of 1960s intermedia as "non-matrixed" performance, in which the performer is no longer embedded "in matrices of pretended or represented character, situation, place, and time" (Kirby 4). As "non-matrixed" performance, the Judson Poets Theater's *In Circles* involved not mimetic representation of dramatic action based on the text of a play but rather a presentation of the sounding of words through the material bodily practices involved in doing so.

Similar to Bertolt Brecht's preference for amateur actors rather than trained actors (in order to make visible that acting is acting), Carmines spoke of a "great joy" in working with untrained singers in Judson Poets Theater performances: "Their lack of ability to sing is interesting… and they become more interesting when they *try* to sing" (Stasio 10). Carmines was particularly interested in what happens in "that split second between talking and singing, and what kinds of nuances and atmospheres are created by the human voice singing something, instead of saying it" (Carmines, "The Musical Theater of Al Carmines" XX).

For *In Circles*, the Judson Poets Theater did have a scene and costumes, adopting a sort of garden party motif. But as Leslie Atkins Durham has noted of the garden party costumes and set, the "countrified gentility" of the set and costumes "was never made to appear genuine" (Durham 88). The Judson Poets Theater's combination of "non-matrixed" performance (in which a performer presents behavior as if in everyday life) and the unabashed artifice of theatricality in

costume, set, and some voicings and gestures can be seen as an example of what cultural historian Howard Brick has described in *Age of Contradiction: American Thought and Culture in the 1960s* as a general paradox of 1960s U.S. culture: "the coincidence of a devotion to the ideal of authenticity – of discovering, voicing, and exercising a genuine whole personality freed from the grip of mortifiying convention – and fascination with the ways of artifice, with the calculated techniques of image making or 'the games people play'" (Brick 66).

In producing a performance of Gertrude Stein's "A Circular Play" as a kind of musical theater in *In Circles*, the Judson Poets Theater produced what Dick Higgins termed an "intermedium," "in the field between the general area of art media and those of life media" (Higgins 20). Stein's "A Circular Play" consists of textual bits that sound like a kind of overheard gossip or the reception of various messages in transmission. The text of the play does not offer the necessary information with which to produce for an audience a theatrical mise-en-scene to be comprehended through the conventional media of theatrical spectatorship. Yet in the recirculation of the language of the text of Stein's "play," through the daily activities and embodiments and relations of the participants in *In Circles*, Stein's text became a conveyor of affect through embodied vocalization and movement. Stein's theater is a theater of constructing and presenting modes of attention, attention to the ordinary (but not necessarily normative) processes through which the making and hearing the sounds of words occurs as a material event.

An audience of such a theater need not only try to interpret what is occurring but can feel invited to attend to the embodied processes of reception. Stein teaches modes of attending to matters prior to or in excess of normative protocols of interpretation. Stein offers ways of being untroubled in the processes of experiencing the making of sense as an ongoing occurrence. "A Circular Play" is a play of reading, whether enacted through the reading of a book or a collective

presentation on the staged space of a theater in front of spectators. In Stein's theatrical work, it becomes particularly noticeable how, as Joan Retallack has described, Stein relocated the production of meaning from "authorial intention to readers' poesis, in which the primary issue becomes not so much interpretation as use of the text" (Retallack 36). *In Circles* exemplifies the link between Steinian "readers poesis" and the "erotics of art" called for in the writings of one of the first critics to draw attention to the Judson Gallery, the Judson Dance Theater, and the Judson Gallery: Susan Sontag.[18]

Part 4: In Circulation

Let us circle back to the May 10th 1988 issue of *The Advocate*, at the time a social movement-oriented gay magazine. With a cover story on the Rainbow Coalition presidential campaign of the Reverend Jesse Jackson, the issue includes a review of a revival of *In Circles* at San Francisco's Theater Rhinoceros – twenty-one years after the first performance of *In Circles* at Judson Poets Theater. The title of the review, "Giving Nonsense a Chance," points to the queer textures of Stein's works – that they might not make sense in a normal fashion or be valued in terms of dominant social norms; but like "peace," can be given a chance. The title points to a utopian element in the work, the "chance" of a different arrangement of bodies and

[18] Essays collected in Sontag's 1966 *Against Interpretation* – particularly, "Going to the theater, etc."; "Happenings: an art of radical juxtaposition"; and "Notes on 'Camp'" – form an early reception history of the Judson Gallery, Judson Dance Theater, and Judson Poets Theater. Sontag's 1964 essay "Against Interpretation" could be read as a statement of the poetics and aesthetics of the Judson milieu. Sontag and Al Carmines were friends, and mention of Judson Church and Carmines appears throughout the journals and notebooks collected by Sontag's song David Rieff in 2012 in *As Consciousness Is Harnessed to Flesh*. In a journal entry from November 1965, Sontag writes: "My biggest pleasure the last two years has come from pop music (The Beatles, Dionne Warwick, The Supremes) + the music of Al Carmines" (Sontag XX).

movements, different organizations of the sensory experiences of social relations. A glimpse of the "chance" is what can occur in a performance of *In Circles* – whether at Judson Poets Theater in 1967, or Theater Rhinoceros in 1988, or on the record from Avant Garde Records, or now on an MP3 of the record.

The ways that a performance like *In Circles* produces queer social space across time can be understood in relation to Nick Salvato's work on modernist closet drama's queer positionings between social demarcations of public and private space and the regulations of linguistic codes and bodily comportments associated with them. And *In Circles* can similarly be thought of in relation to D.A. Miller's figure in *Place for Us* of the "boy in the basement" listening to original cast recordings of musicals, and the temporary queer space enacted in such an experience filled with utopian potential. *In Circles* can be thought of (as its very title suggests) an on-going performance of possibilities of evading "straight time," the kind of time organized in a timeline progressing "straight" into a normative image of the future, in what Elizabeth Freeman has called "chrononormativity," in which "institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts" (Freeman 3).[19]

Working in a queer temporality, the Judson Poets Theater performed an attention to the present of the making of an event by means of outmoded (no longer popular) modes of popular entertainment associated with formative elements of American musical theater. Such a practice relates to Heather Love's observations in *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* that "queers have embraced backwardness in many forms: in celebrations of perversion, in defiant refusals to grow up, in explorations of haunting and memory, and in stubborn

[19] In 2007, Freeman edited a special issue of *GLQ* on "Queer Temporalities."

attachments to lost objects" (Love 7). In an art frame, outmoded modes of popular culture can offer glimpses of possibilities of movement, meaning, and value no longer or not yet possible.

In 1969, the Reverend Al Carmines wrote to the board of directors of Judson Memorial Church celebrating the Judson Poets Theater's capacity to bring together "the avant-garde and the traditional, the historical and existential, the religious and the theatrical, the communal and the purely classical" in producing "total-involvement celebrations with a distinctly secular content, but a distinctly hip-Pentecostal style!" (Carmines, "Judson Poets' Theater Archives" 39). Carmines's version of camp, in a Rauschenbuschian-Rauschenbergian capaciousness for the quotation and recirculation of variegated materials and desires – in the gaps of multiple zones of art and life, embraced affective registers often trivialized in dominant cultural forms. As Carmines wrote in a 1971 essay titled "Keep the Camp Fires Burning": "Pop is cool and brilliant and hard-edged at its best. But camp allows us the possibility of warm nostalgia accompanied by some laughter and some tears. We need both. Camp defend yourself! The icy and slick barbarians are upon you!" (Carmines 65). Giving nonsense a chance, what Reverend Carmines said he loved about Judson performances like *In Circles* was "the kind of joy that emerges, so far as one can tell, from action or words or music itself – a taking of basic elements seriously, seriously enough to find them worth rejoicing about or mourning about" (Smith 172).

Chapter 3: Ray Johnson, Something Else Press, and *The Paper Snake*

"When Something Else Press went bankrupt in 1974 there were still around seven hundred copies of the original 1,840 copies left; most of these wound up in a tomato warehouse in Vermont which had formerly been a marble worker's union hall, and were stored under the podium where Rosa Luxemburg gave her one and only speech in America early in this century. Is there a correspondence ('correspondance' is the corresponding term in Johnson's world) between *The Paper Snake* and Rosa Luxemburg?"

Dick Higgins, "The Hatching of *The Paper Snake*" (Higgins 28)

"I'm trying to work with journalists and photographers in a kind of conceptual art piece of writers writing about what I do from the initial scale to the finished portrait, and photographers documenting the writer and myself as a little Hollywood set that we're all involved in a cooperative thing, and one of the ideas I have is to have Hans Namuth, the photographer, who had done all those historic photos of Jackson Pollock painting and who has photographed artists over the years, for Hans Namuth to photograph me doing a drawing of Joe Namuth, football star, and another photographer who would be photographing Hans Namuth photographing me drawing Joe Namuth and then a writer would write about what happened – a sort of theater piece."

Ray Johnson, interview with *Detroit Artists Monthly* (Spodarek and Delbeke 6)

In a 1967 essay published in the *Atlantic Monthly* as "The Literature of Exahustion," John Barth, author of metafictions such as the 1966 *Giles Goat-Boy, or The New Revised Syllabus*, wrote of "the used-up-ness of certain forms" and the "felt exhaustion of certain possibilities" in producing literature (Barth 29). Barth mentioned in the essay having received in the mail a catalog from The Something Else Press and noticing the catalog's advertisement for Ray Johnson's *The Paper Snake* – a book composed from mail received by the book's publisher (Dick Higgins) from the book's author (Ray Johnson). Barth speculated that while the mailing he

had received from the press appeared to be simply a catalog of books, it could itself "be one of their offerings, for all I know: The New York Direct-Mail Advertising School of Literature" (Barth 29). For Barth, the "offerings" of The Something Else Press were amusing counterexamples to the kind of literary production that he desired from the "exhaustion" of literary modernism: a literature that could thematize its own "exhaustion" but nonetheless remain literature – a "literature of exhaustion" that Barth found best exemplified in the *Labyrinths* and *Ficciones* of Jorge Luis Borges. As Barth noted in retrospect in his 1980 essay, "The Replenishment of Literature," the "exhaustion" that he was writing about in 1967 was not the "exhaustion of language or literature but of the aesthetic of high modernism: the admirable, not-to-be-repudiated, but essentially completed 'program' of what Hugh Kenner dubbed 'the Pound era'" (Barth, "The Literature of Replenishment" 71).

Barth was accurate in suggesting that unlike himself or his hero Borges, those involved in The Something Else Press were not necessarily interested in or able to use an awareness of the limits of literature to achieve within literary institutions the production of literature inscribed with a self-awareness of its own "exhaustion." Instead, the press turned away from producing that which could be institutionally recognized as literature. With a catalog that could seem as significant as the books advertised in the catalog – books likely to appear insignificant in terms of literary value according to institutionalized protocols of literary reading – the Something Else Press was involved in *something else* than literature but from within the cultural apparatus of literary publishing.

Focusing on one of the first publications of the press, Ray Johnson's *The Paper Snake*, this chapter looks at the materialization of an aesthetic of what Something Else publisher Dick Higgins termed in the press's first newsletter in 1965, "intermedia." The chapter traces how what

John Barth dismissed as "The New York Direct-Mail Advertising School of Literature" emerged in queer New York in the 1960s through artists formed at or informed by the interdisciplinary art environment of Black Mountain College (an environment exemplified by John Cage's 1952 *Untitled Event*). Elaborating upon José Muñoz's engagement with Johnsonian intermedia as a queer utopian practice, the chapter argues that the work of Ray Johnson – difficult to categorize except as "something else" – anticipated, and remains in excess of, the "conceptual art" that it might resemble.

Part 1: The New York Direct-Mail Advertising School of Literature

Dick Higgins said in an interview that before he encountered the work of John Cage, he had intended to go into musical theater (Mottram 163). Instead of making it to Broadway, Higgins ended up at the New School in John Cage's classroom. Out of the encounter between Higgins's interest in musical theater's incorporation of multiple media and the interests of those involved with Higgins in the Cage class, Higgins's articulation of an aesthetic of "intermedia" emerged. In participating in Cage's New School classes – the key site after Black Mountain College of Cage's pedagogical work – Higgins became part of a network of artists who, often under the name of Fluxus, turned in the early 1960s to publication (especially, experimental periodical publication) as a primary site of art practice.[20] Through the founding of The Something Else Press as a means of commercial distribution of published material that would

[20] Stephen Perkins's "Fluxus Periodicals" discusses the role of periodical publishing in the construction of Fluxus as a transnational network (Perkins 64-76). Bruce Althusser's "The Cage Cass" discusses the role of Cage's New School in the formation of the New York milieu of Fluxus (Althusser 17-24).

normally not have much distribution, Higgins's initial articulation of "intermedia" circulated through art, literary publishing, and academic social systems and gathered new meaning.

With Higgins's inherited wealth, The Something Else Press was able to widely distribute books by Higgins and his friends – alumni of Black Mountain College, members of the Cage class at the New School, participants in the experimental milieu around Judson Church, and an international network of affiliates of these social circles. The press also published books, pamphlets, and newsletters that provided historical and theoretical contexts for these books. Operating with what Higgins would later describe as a "past/present dialectic" (Higgins "The Something Else Press" 32), the press brought back into print books by Gertrude Stein (*The Making of Americans* in 1966; *Geography and Plays* in 1968; *Lucy Church Amiably* in 1969; *Matisse Picasso and Gertrude Stein* in 1972) as well as historical avant-garde materials such as Richard Hulsenbeck's *Dada Almanach* of 1920 and oddities of outmoded popular culture such as a 19th century mass market publication, William Brisbane Dick's *100 Amusements* of 1879. And linking the press's "intermedia" experimentation with Marshall McLuhan's "probes" into the "sensory ratios" and "human extensions" of different technical media, Something Else published Marshall McLuhan's *Verbi-Voco-Visual Explorations* in 1967.

Higgins's "past/present dialectic" involved queerly reconceiving what an avant-garde might be, by staging a relationship to the historical avant-garde – but not in terms of patrilineal succession: "it's sort of like the Dadaists were our uncles and aunts, but the whole teleology and purpose of these things is very different" (Zurbrugg 29). For Higgins, the Something Else publishing agenda could be seen as having been driven not by agonistic relations with predecessors or antagonistic relations with contemporaries but by a desire for the "something else" of emergent and residual alternatives to dominant social and aesthetic forms. As noted by

Something Else bibliographer Peter Frank, the press's republication of the 1920 *Dada Almanach* in 1966 "was one of the first reprints of original documents by early 20th century avant-garde movements to be issued as a general trade publication, on either side of the Atlantic" (Frakn 14). The *Dada Almanach* circulated after 1966 under the sign of Something Else, as did *Dick's 100 Amusements*. The republication of *Dick's 100 Amusements* from 1873 played upon the shared name of the book's 19th century author (William Brisbane Dick) and the book's 20th century publisher (Dick Higgins), and displayed resemblances between 19th century games and the "event scores" being produced by Fluxus artists in the Something Else milieu.

The press was distinct in how it was, in Higgins's words, "specializing in the avant-garde but working through the 'book trade' format rather than that of small presses as such" (Higgins "The Something Else Press" 28). Higgins's approach to publication was notably different from that of Fluxus impresario George Maciunas. Comparing Something Else with Maciunas's Fluxus publishing operations, Higgins noted that Something Else's "main idea was to try to get these avant-garde materials into a form where people could simply buy them, have them, live with them, and get them beyond the charmed circle that was the limit of distribution, say, that George Maciunas's Fluxus boxes could reach" (Zurbrugg 28). Something Else Press's first employee, Barbara Moore, has recollected how the press "was bucking the trend toward eccentric mulitples and boxed editions" and instead published books that could be sold in bookstores with "cloth-covered boards and shiny dust jackets" ("Some Things Else About Something Else"). Until the exhaustion of Higgins's inherited wealth, large print-runs made the Something Else books affordable and able to circulate beyond Higgins's social circle. As Moore has recollected of Higgins's publishing decisions (and bad business decisions leading to the press's eventual bankruptcy), the press produced many more copies of books that would be otherwise

unpublishable or publishable in very limited editions: "Having printed, let's say 1000 copies of a book, and having given out the first 200 free to friends and potential reviewers, and having generated perhaps 50 bookstore orders (all returnable) such as would greet any new, decently publicized volume, Dick would survey the remaining stock and declare 'it's time to reprint.'" (Moore "Some Things Else About Something Else").

The press's capacity for wide distribution and high-quality production is what enabled it to serve a crucial function in shaping what has been called the neo-avant-garde orientation of 1960s New York art. But in addition to circulating "historical avant-garde" and "neo-avant-garde" materials through literary trade publishing, the press further concretized an aesthetic of intermedia through book projects based in experimentation with the physical medium of the book – such as using the publishing conventions of children's books in the production of Ray Johnson's *The Paper Snake* and publicizing as a "book," the four foot-by-eight foot nearly inhabitable structure that was Alison Knowles's *The Big Book*.[21] Through the press's newsletter (*The Something Else Newsletter*) and its Great Bear pamphlet series (named after The Something Else Press office's water cooler supplier, Great Bear)[22], the press's approach to book publishing

[21] As described by Something Else bibliographer Peter Frank "*The Big Book* was big enough to live in, and was equipped for it. The pages, supported on castors and joined by a two-inch galvanized steel spine, sheltered or supported a bed, chair, table, fan, hotplate, medicine chest, kitchen, exercise bar, and running between the two pages, a tunnel, coated in Astro-turf – among other items. Knowles' silkscreened imagery festooned every nook and cranny" (Frank 84). Nicole Woods has written of *The Big Book* as "feminist archite(x)ture" (Woods 6-25).

[22] Higgins's "past/present dialectic" can be seen in the range of materials included in the twenty pamphlets in the Great Bear series. Crossing ritual, outmoded popular entertainment, the historical avant-garde, and the neo-avant-garde, the series included pamphlets such as Al Hansen's *Incomplete Requiem for W.C. Fields*, Luigi Rossolo's *The Art of Noise*, John Cage's *Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)*, and Jerome Rothenberg's *Ritual: A Book of Primitive Rites and Events* as well as "samplers" from the Milan-based Zaj group and the French economist and Fluxus artist Robert Filliou.

through commercial distribution and high quality-production as well as material experimentation can be seen as linked in Higgins's efforts in articulating an aesthetic of "intermedia."

The first issue of *The Something Else Newsletter*, dated February 1966, begins with the sentence: "Much of the best work being produced today seems to fall between media" (Higgins "Intermedia" 1). The statement signaled a shift from the "purity" of medium and "self-sufficiency" of the art object regulated in the protocols of modernist criticism. Adopting the word "intermedium" from Coleridge, Higgins found that "intermedia" could name art practices that complicate the way that a structure of sense perception becomes socially codified as a particular "medium" of art practice. "Intermedia" differs from "mixed media" or "multimedia" (such as the incorporation of multiple media in musical theater) in that "intermedia" not only involve multiple media but require new perceptual practices not already codified in a single "medium." (Years after the initial use of the term "intermedia" in the inaugural issue of *The Something Else Newsletter*, Higgins would produce a chart in 1981 naming some possible intermedia. The chart includes terms such as "action music," "dance theater," "visual novels," "sound poetry," "graphic music notations," "mail art," "science art," "concrete poetry," and "conceptual art.")[23] The *inter* of intermedia marked a turn from the modernist obsession with purification of medium to embracing process, liminality, hybridity, and emergence.

As exemplified in Ray Johnson's *The Paper Snake*, "intermedia" would become a name not only for art practices occurring in-between "media" but art practices occurring in-between what Higgins came to call "art media" and "life media."[24] One of the most crucial aspects of the

[23] In a 2001 issue of the journal *Leonardo*, Higgins's chart of intermedia is included along with a 1981 essay by Higgins looking back on the initial use of the term "intermedia" in 1965 (Higgins, "Intermedia (1981)," 52-54.

[24] Higgins's elaboration upon the relations of "art media" and "life media" appears in the 1983 essay collection, *Horizons: The Poetics and Theory of the Intermedia* (Higgins, *Horizons* 4-21).

first articulation of "intermedia" in the inaugural issue of *The Something Else Newsletter* was Dick Higgins's discussion of the Duchampian readymade. Higgins wrote that the readymade "suggests a location in the field between the general area of art media and those of life media" (2). Higgins noted in the 1965 text that "at this time, the locations of this art are relatively unexplored, as compared with media between the arts" and that he could not "for example, name work which has consciously been placed in the intermedium between painting and shoes" (2). The intermedium between painting and shoes would become realized in 1977 when Ray Johnson painted a pair of shoes, one shoe with the word "John" and one shoe with the word "Cage," to make *John Cage Shoes* (Fig. 6).

As was typical of Ray Johnson's work, *John Cage Shoes* functioned as an intermedium between a medium of art (the shoe as a readymade) and a medium of social exchange (the proper name as a readymade). "Intermedia" as a name for the kind of social process involved in *John Cage Shoes* became a more pronounced sense of the term as the Something Else Press emerged. *The Something Else Press Newsletter* was not only *about* intermedia but functioned as a kind of intermedia between art and publicity, between art and social exchange. This blurring of everyday occurrences with the production of art can be seen for example in the fourth issue of *The Something Else Newsletter,* dated August 1966, with the headline "Serious Gabcard." With this hokey name for gossip, "gab," along with a proclamation of its seriousness, the headline generates a sense of the frivolity and intimacy involved in the emergent self-awareness of a group. The newsletter headline, typical of the newsletter and the press, performs as a kind of intermedium between the frivolous and the serious.

The "Serious Gabcard" included a call for contributions in language sounding perhaps more like a church newsletter than an avant-garde publishing operation, announcing: "We'd love

to receive small and marvelous facts, remarks, enigmas, proverbs, family and regional traditions, birthday news, and so on for a Diary we're thinking of putting out in 1968. ("Serious Gabcard" 3). This interest in personal histories and collected language as readymades also appears in "Serious Gabcard" in an advertisement for the press's publication that same year of Swiss and Romanian artist Daniel Spoerri's *Anecdoted Topography of Chance*, a map of 80 objects lying on Spoerri's table on October 17th, 1961 at 3:47 pm, annotated with anecdotes about the objects from Spoerri and his friends. The advertisement for the Spoerri book mimics the language of early 1960s commercial advertising:

> Situation, a man, a famous artist, alone in his Paris room, about to clean up the breakfast table. Idly he begins to think about the histories of the objects, the dishes on the table… Then less idly… Excited by the project, he draws up a map of the table, and begins to compose the history of each object – who gave it to him, what it means to him.. To his histories he appends delightful footnotes, additional histories, digressions. His friends write footnotes, then the translator, the illustrator, until there is built up a fantastically vivid self-portrait of the man and his friends and his city.

Both the proposed "diary" for which the newsletter solicited contributions and the Spoerri book advertised in the newsletter focused on already existing materials and they way they become meaningful socially. This interest in the book as an intermedium between art production and everyday habitation can also be seen in two of the other books advertised in the "Serious Gabcard": the nearly-inhabitable book of Alison Knowles's *The Big Book* and a book produced from the residue of social exchange, Ray Johnson's *The Paper Snake*, advertised in the newsletter as a book "of things which [Ray Johnson] sent to Dick Higgins over a period of years – small collages, playlets, poems, poetic postcards, et cetera" ("Serious Gabcard" 3).

In the newsletter and in its book publishing practice, The Something Else Press framed social exchange as a site of the "something else" of art. In social exchanges brought into further exchange through publication and distribution, "intermedia" and "something else" named a

process of questioning names, categories, and positions in "art" and "everyday life." For example, an announcement of the various activities of Dick Higgins in the January 1968 issue of *The Something Else Newsletter*, under the headline "Chatter Letter," exemplifies the press's participation in a broader social process of anti-disciplinary activity that have come to define the year 1968 historically. For Something Else, this social process of questioning categories appeared in a ludic form in the hokey language typical of Dick Higgins and Something Else, shifting between the frivolous and the serious within the same sentence:

> Dancer Dick Higgins joined Alison Knowles, John Cage and various others in a performance in Chicago at the Second City in October in connection with the opening of the new museum. The critic Dick Higgins lectured in November at a class at New York University, and the Press published composer Dick Higgins's *Wipeout for Orchestra,* a graphic notation on index stock and transparent acetate (it's a huge poster really, with 100 signed and numbered copies -- $5). In February and March various branches of the State University system of New York will be hearing from machine-gunner Dick Higgins as he prepares the performance of his *Thousand Symphonies*. But for now, pianist Dick Higgins will be one of the performers at a concert at New York University's Weinstein Residence Hall, 5-11 University Place, on December 16th, from 6pm to 1am. ("Chatter Letter" 3).

Across these scattered activities and positions of dancer, critic, composer, machine-gunner, pianist Dick Higgins can be seen the Something Else Press's work of *scattering* categories and materials: the playful complication of categories and the serious business of distribution.

Dick Higgins shared with Ray Johnson and others involved in the Something Else Press – working through the implications of the work of Marcel Duchamp and John Cage – a preoccupation with naming (especially, proper names) and the relationship of the function of names in social processes of identifying value and position in a structure or system. Ray Johnson's *The Paper Snake* emerged from the mailings that Ray Johnson addressed to Dick Higgins. The mailings from Johnson to Higgins were only a very small part of the mailing that Johnson sent out through what has come to be known as the New York Correspondance School.

This "school" emerged through Johnson's mailings, which emerged from the collage works that Johnson began to make after arriving in the city from Black Mountain College (where Johnson worked closely with Josef Albers in studying art as a serial process of testing perceptions of the surfaces of materials).[25] Through the United States Postal Service (a bureaucratic readymade for an art medium and distribution system), Johnson sent collaged materials often playing upon the name of the recipient, often asking the recipient to mail the materials onto someone else named in the mailing. Working with collaged materials from everyday life, often residue of commercial exchange and advertisement – more in the manner of the *Merz* of Kurt Schwitters than the Pop of Andy Warhol – Johnson addressed correspondence (or as Johnson spelled it, *correspondance*, with *dance* emphasizing the work of the "correspondance school" as work in movement) both to New York art world figures and to people in the telephone book who happened to have names that verbally or visually rhymed with something in the material that Johnson was working with.

Punning upon the name of correspondence schools operating through the mail, Johnson constructed through the United States Postal Service something like an alternative educational institution (a *correspondance* school) to continue those experiments in collage that he began at the alternative educational institution that was Black Mountain College. Johnson's work was a kind of *social collage*, with the surface effects of names suggesting new social relations and positions for which Johnson and the "correspondance school" served as "medium." Writing of Ray Johnson's work as an early example of "networked art," Craig Saper has argued that Johnson's work cannot be thought of only in terms of "social context" but must be thought of as a *sociopoetics*: "when aesthetic and poetic decisions embodied in artworks lead to a heightened

[25] Eva Díaz has written of how "Albers's emphasis on process led some of his students [such as Ray Johnson] to perceive art objects as artifacts of rehearsed performances, but in ways that pushed the logic of variation toward a concern with the serialized mark" (Díaz 150).

or changed social situation, one needs to describe these forms as *sociopoetic* rather than as artworks within social contexts" (Saper xii). As archived in *The Paper Snake,* Ray Johnson enacted through the play of names and circulation of materials ephemeral appearances of possible reorganizations of social energies and redistributions of social positions through engaging the distribution of people in social systems as art. The very work of distributing and circulating was as much the art practice of Ray Johnson, Dick Higgins, and The Something Else Press as whatever appeared in what was distributed and circulated.

Part 2: The Snaking of Americans

Ray Johnson said in an interview that "The Snaking of Americans" could be a subtitle for his work. Demonstrating in conversation his system of puns, associations, correspondences, and other word plays, Johnson remarked of "The Snaking of Americans" that it would be "a very oblique S&M reference, Sade in Japan, Made in Japan, Making and Snaking, S&M and M&S" (Martin 190). The changing of a letter to produce a new meaning in a word – from Making to Snaking – is a typical technique of Johnson's and a technique often on display in *The Paper Snake*. In referencing S&M and the distributions of power in "making" and "snaking," and the distributions of power in any relationship at whatever scale (from the interpersonal to the transnational), Johnson was also "making" and "snaking" a correspondence with Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans* and its making of "a history of everyone who ever was or is or will be living" and the "bottom nature in them."

Nayland Blake, an artist whose work works with relations of power involved in race and sexuality, has written of how Ray Johnson shares with Gertrude Stein "the device of naming and

misnaming as a method of description" (Blake 108).[26] The Ray Johnson-Gertrude Stein connection in investigating and playing with the proper name as a site of relations of power can be seen for example in Ray Johnson's 1971 portrait titled *Jackson Pollock,* in which an image of Gertrude Stein appears instead of an image of Jackson Pollock. A queer relationship with proper names is key to Johnson's work. Once when asked by an interviewer about his childhood, Johnson replied that he had just received in the mail "a listing of twenty-five people named Ray Johnson in Minneapolis" and that instead of only hearing from one Ray Johnson, "all twenty-five Ray Johnsons should perhaps speak at the same time" (Fesci 19). Johnson appeared to be interested in playfully undermining the way that a proper name is supposed to function to identify an individual subject in a matrix of legal, social, and property relations. As Ina Blom has argued, "Johnson's use of proper names exceeds the framework of addressability" (Blom 14).

The forty-eight unnumbered pages of *The Paper Snake* include items such as lists of neckties; fragments such as "your feet are / like the ice / in a vodka / martini"; letters on bureaucratic letterhead (such as the letterhead of Edward T. Crinnion, First Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Housing and Buildings, City of New York) signed by Ray Johnson; and a listing of "R. Johnsons" from a telephone directory. Many of the items in *The Paper Snake* – all items sent from Ray Johnson to Dick Higgins – play upon "Johnson" and "Dick" as nicknames for the penis. Even though many of the items play upon the surfaces of public forms, especially bureaucratic forms, much of the book seems like a private exchange between Dick Higgins and Ray Johnson.

[26] John Keene has dedicated a poem to both Ray Johnson and Nayland Blake, borrowing a title from Ray Johnson, "How to Draw a Bunny" (Keene 11-14).

For example, one of the pages of *The Paper Snake* has a text on the bottom right side of the page with the title "A Bill for Dick Higgins." Above the text on the left is an image of what appears to be a piece from the back of a canvas with the silhouette of a duck, with the signature of Ray Johnson below. The duck's bill is a pun with the "bill" of the title of the piece. There is also a sonic relation between "Dick" and "Duck." Is the "bill" only the duck's bill or is the bill an invoice? (It was Dick Higgins who paid for the publication of *The Paper Snake*). Is there someone named Bill for Dick Higgins? Below the image and the title, there is text set to the left of the page as a poem might be set:

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwyz 1234567890
Gertrude Stein is *dead*.
Mary Baker is *dead*.
Alice B. Toklas is ed
abcdefghijklmopqrstuwxyz 1234567890
Gertrude Stein is *dead*.
Mary Baker is *dead*.
Alice B. Toklas is deaf.
Peggy Lee is virile.
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz 1234567890
Gertrude Stein is mnopqrstuvwxyz
Mary Baker is *dead*.
Alice B. Toklas bought flowers at the market. She took them
home and Gertrude Stein.
One and two. One and two. One, two, three.
Abcdefghijklmopqrstuvwxyz 1234567890
Gertrude Stein id. Gertrude Stein's id is dead.
Mary Baker is dead.

A Bill for Dick Higgins, who is Peggy Lee.

The text names the system of ten numbers and twenty six letters through which it operates. The text names Gertrude Stein, Mary Baker, Alice B. Toklas, Peggy Lee, and Dick Higgins (who is Peggy Lee). The text states the deaths of Gertrude Stein and Mary Baker. Who is Mary Baker? The founder of Christian Science? Who is Peggy Lee? The singer and actress

Peggy Lee? Peggy Lee is virile. Around these proper names and the inscription of the alphabet through which these names can be articulated, meaning can be produced by a reader of the text through the variations upon the patterns of announcement and through additional information not fitting the pattern. For example, the statement "Gertrude Stein is mnopqrstuvwxyz" makes one wonder why "mnopqrstuvwxy" and not "abcdefghijkl" or "abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz"? The text alludes to the relationship of Alice B. Toklas and Gertrude Stein, followed by a counting of "One and two" and "One and two" and "One, two, three." What relations might be articulated in the text beyond the "one and two" of the coupling of Toklas and Stein, or might there be a message involving a group of three rather than the "one and two" of sender and receiver? The text calls attention to systems of inscription (the A-Z of the Latin alphabet and the 0-9 of the Arabic numerals) as well as systems of social relations (marked by the proper name).

"A Bill for Dick Higgins" is typical of the pieces in *The Paper Snake* and Johnson's work in general in that they create little systems, however mysterious or seemingly illegible, which are able to call attention to the systems in which they operate (the alphabet, the system of proper names, the postal service, the artworld). Another one of these little systems appears in a text in *A Paper Snake* titled "10 Questions":

1. How many legs does Jackson Pollock have? (see three)
2. What is a butter-churn? (see five)
3. Where is Robert Bucker's painting? (see two)
4. What is a burp-gun?
5. Is my house empty? (see eight)
6. Are brown paper bags filled with tears? (see two)
7. Will you see my valentine? (see eight)
8. Does Ray Johnson invent delicate little contraptions to set off the reflexes of newly acquired tastes? (see one or two)
9. Is that friendly yak *still* there?
10. There were once five little dippers. One died? (see six)

None of the questions receive answers, except for redirection to other questions. There is circulation that occurs within the system and at points, the system gets stuck at the "burp-gun" and the "friendly yak." Rather than functioning as a game with an endpoint, the system is one of play but within closed parameters. The language appears to be referential, but the connections between references are seemingly arbitrary – in some ways reminiscent of some of the poems of John Ashbery's 1962 *The Tennis Court Oath*.

Another figure that might come to mind when thinking of Ray Johnson as functioning both as an insider and outsider of early 1960s New York art world is Frank O'Hara, who was born a year before Johnson but who died a year after the publication of *The Paper Snake*. The proper name was central for both Johnson and O'Hara. As Lytle Shaw has written of O'Hara's relation to the proper name: "rather than using proper names as secure markers of property and identity, O'Hara tends to cast them as fluid and overdetermined cultural signs whose coding and overcoding provide a way to imagine experimental kinship structures, both social and literary" (Shaw 19). Where Johnson differs from O'Hara is that O'Hara generated texts that could be read through protocols of reading lyric poetry, even as O'Hara's texts are what Bruce Boone has described as "a site of competing language practices – the dominant language practice of the New York art world of the 50s and the oppositional language of gay men" (Boone 76). The primary difference between Johnson and O'Hara was O'Hara's institutional location within the Museum of Modern Art and within Ivy League networks. Johnson was a more complicated figure socially, well-connected but nonetheless positioned as a kind of outsider. The use of proper names and name dropping in the work of Ray Johnson is not quite like Frank O'Hara's use of names to present a closed social world for the gaze of a voyeuristic reader, but rather

functions to complicate the boundaries of a closed social world rather than simply performing a place in a closed social world.

Johnson's work, as exemplified in *The Paper Snake*, does involve the kind of intimate address often found in queer New York art practices of the 1960s, as discussed by scholars such as Gavin Butt in *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948-1963*, Reva Wolf in *Andy Warhol, Poetry, and Gossip in the 1960s*, and Lytle Shaw in *Frank O'Hara and the Poetics of Coterie*. It is helpful to think of Johnson's work, such as the pieces collected in *The Paper Snake*, as part of an art discourse in which, as Butt has written, "gossip's informal and trivializing mode of address comes to be elevated to the status of an artistic expression" (Butt 12). Like artists discussed by Butt, Shaw, and Wolf such as Larry Rivers, O'Hara, and Warhol, Johnson's work involves gossip. But Johnson's gossip is less direct and less oriented around displaying himself as part of an in-group. Ray Johnson's work involves working between different social codes and scrambling them, with pleasure, beyond the confines of an artworld and into the United States Postal Service, whether through the "correspondances" of the New York Correspondance School or *The Paper Snake* and the catalog of The Something Else Press. As Lucy Lippard has noted of a pun at the center of Johnson's work: "it surely didn't escape Johnson that he was obsessed with the U.S. mail, another cross-reference that may have appealed to him as a gay man" (Lippard, "Special Deliverance" 148).

The Paper Snake collects in a book the kinds of performances that Johnson carried out through the mail both with intimate friends, many of them some of the figures at the center of the New York art world, and with unknown people he connected with through finding their name and address based on a verbal or visual pun. *The Paper Snake* provides a glimpse into a moment in one set of these "correspondances," that between Ray Johnson and Dick Higgins. Many of the

pieces are addressed to Dick Higgins and thematize the activity of correspondence. For example, one text beginning with "Dear Dick" and signed "Ray J" is composed of a series of sentences announcing something either enclosed or not enclosed, playing upon the epistolary convention of announcing enclosures in a letter but adding a joke to the convention by announcing that which is not enclosed. Some of the enclosures are silly and fanciful – "I enclose some fur" or "I enclose a three-legged animal" – and some of the enclosures are literal – "I enclose my signature" and "I enclose a Y (a fragment of RAY)" – while the not-enclosures generate light humor – "I do not enclose a man with his left hand in his jacket pocket / with a black shoe on his left shoulder" or "I do not enclose Jesus Christ." The repetitions of – and variations between – "I enclose" and "I do not enclose" also call attention to possible meanings of "enclosure" beyond that of enclosures within written correspondence.

The texts in *The Paper Snake* appear often very simple or silly but also quite opaque and inaccessible in their references. It often appears that the material could be either quite random or some kind of code. Kate Dempsey has traced Johnson's interest in code to several sources, including the interest in secret or alternative languages (or alternatives to language) prevalent at Black Mountain College during Cold War stigmatization of the Left and homosexuality. Dempsey has written of how Ray Johnson shared with Anni Albers an interest in "indecipherable language," involving codes and cryptography in relation to pre-Columbian Andean weaving (Dempsey "Weaving Correspondence"). Dempsey has speculated that another source for Johnson's interest in code could likely have been radio programs that Johnson might have listened to as a child in the 1930s: radio programs for children sponsored by Ovaltine, for which children were encouraged to send away in the mail for secret decoder rings. Perhaps prefiguring Johnson's New York Correspondance School, listeners of these shows were invited to become

"Secret Squadron members" and send away through the mail "to form smaller clubs and practice sending messages among themselves" (Dempsey "Code" 23). Dempsey has argued that "the focus on cryptography in radio serials during Johnson's childhood reflected in the climate of fear and suspicion of the WWII and the Cold War Period" (Dempsey "Code Word: Ray" 23). Similarly, Craig Saper has written of how "Johnson's work was a disappearing act, and his act taught the participants in networks and assemblings the poetic tactics of reversing, avoiding, and detouring surveillance" (Saper 43).

The book format of *The Paper Snake,* in its stability as an object, is unusual when compared to other Johnson works tending to involve a much more ephemeral materiality. Except for *The Paper Snake* and some collages owned by others, Johnson was able to continue to re-work his work over his entire life – with collages often made and remade with layers of materials from different decades. Johnson was known to destroy works, to sandpaper off existing elements of works, and to use pieces of works in new works – sometimes even attempting to modify works already owned by others. Except for distributing his work for free through the New York Correspondence School, Johnson was reluctant to engage in the gallery system even when there was interest. With the Correspondance School, Johnson was able to continue to recirculate, redirect, and rework his work in its ephemerality.

The Paper Snake is unusual for Johnson's oeuvre, in that it stabilized what would have otherwise remained in process. Dick Higgins wrote that "Ray did not seem to believe that the book would ever materialize" and that since he "wanted Ray to remain interested in the book long after its publication," he "arranged to take Ray to Bohn's bindery right when the book was being cased in, that is when the sheets were being glued into the assembled board bindings" (Higgins, "The Hatching of the *The Paper Snake*" 28). Higgins wrote that Johnson "was so

delighted to see a team of people actually working on his book that it moved him enough to provoke a very unusual postcard from him […] which reads, simply, 'Thanks'" (Higgins, "The Hatcing of *The Paper Snake"* 28).

It is important to note that *The Paper Snake* was published at the time of the emergence of the so-called dematerialization of art practice. With *The Paper Snake* and other works of Ray Johnson, there is a questioning in the work of where the work occurs and when the work occurs. Ray Johnson's way of working tended to concretize the social relations (and offer glimpses of other possible social relations) through which the work can occurs and materialize (however ephemerally). Johnson was attentive to the meanings involved in every aspect of a work, especially elements not often thought of as meaningful elements in an artwork. For example, one of the most authored elements of *The Paper Snake* is the price of the book. As Higgins has written: "I asked [Ray] what the book should cost; he said immediately '$3.47,' a thoroughly unusual price. I gagged, knowing that I was unlikely ever to recover my investment in the project at that rate, but I used that price anyway, thinking that the price, which startled people, was a form of publicity – they would never forget it" (Higgins 28). Johnson's work, like much of the Something Else "intermedia" is not about "concepts" abstracted from the social processes generating them, but inscribing these social processes in the work – often through a ludic approach.

Part 3: "Oh Doctor, I Detest Being Told I Have That Conceptualism"

There is a Ray Johnson mailing included in the 2014 collection *Not Nothing*, in which a cut-out image of a doctor and patient appears with two speech bubbles drawn – one drawn from

the doctor reads, “MR. ANDRE, YOU SEEM TO HAVE A SLIGHT CASE OF CONCEPT-UALISM” and the one drawn from the patient reads, “OH, DOCTOR, I DETEST BEING TOLD I HAVE THAT CONCEPTUALISM” (Zuba 107). The name Mr. Andre refers to the sculptor and concrete poet Carl Andre, associated with minimal art in his work with ordinary and “raw” materials. In this mailing, Johnson uses the form of a cartoon to play with the word “conceptualism” by recontexualizing it from art to medicine. Below the image of the doctor and patient are the words: “THE MARCEL DUCHAMP CLUB.” Johnson’s mailings often named various fan clubs for major and minor celebrities and art world figures such as The Shelley Duvall Fan Club, The Jean Dubuffet Fan Club, and the Paloma Picasso Fan Club. Yet here for Duchamp, as noted by Nyland Blake, it is a “club” and not a “fan club.” Blake reads the omission of “fan” as Johnson establishing distance from a Duchamp tradition often associated with so-called conceptual art (Blake 108).

It was Ray Johnson’s friend Lucy Lippard who wrote in 1968 with collaborator John Chandler of a “dematerialization of art,” emphasizing “the thinking process almost exclusively” (Lippard and Chandler 31). In their article “The Dematerialization of Art,” Lippard and Chandler listed among examples of this “dematerialized” art, “Daniel Spoerri’s *Anecdoted Topography of Chance*, George Brecht’s ‘events’, Ray Johnson’s ‘mailings’, and innumerable other books, objects and projects listed in the Something Else Press catalogues” (Lippard and Chandler 33). Lippard and Chandler were interested in these works as examples of what they saw as documentation of a thinking process becoming the site of art practice. Lippard’s 1973 book *Six Years* is often considered to mark the late 1960s emergence of so-called “conceptual art” as the dominant tendency in advanced art practice.

To trace how the articulation of "dematerialization" became "conceptual art" it is helpful to look at the long subtitle of Lippard's *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972: a cross-reference book of information on some esthetic boundaries: consisting of a bibliography into which are inserted a fragmented text, art works, documents, interviews, and symposia, arranged chronologically and focused on so-called conceptual and information or idea art with mentions of such vaguely designated areas as minimal, anti-form, systems, earth, or process art, occurring now in the Americas, Europe, England, Australia, and Asia (with occasional political overtones), edited and annotated by Lucy R. Lippard.* It is significant that the title includes "so-called" before the names "conceptual and information and idea art," emphasizing the process (and politics of) naming involved in their construction. *Six Years* is a sort of bibliographical text, with annotations from Lippard and excerpts from texts. Organized by year, the book maps the emergence of these related fields of art activity through the perspective of Lippard as a participant in and organizer of many of the examples included in the book. The book marked a shift in the distribution and boundaries of roles such as "artist" and "critic" and "curator." The book also marked a shift in emphasizing art's occurrence through textual, bibliographical, and discursive material processes, however "dematerialized" these art practices might be thought to be. In the essay introducing *Six Years*, Lippard makes mention of "proto-conceptual art" such as the "impressively eccentric manifestations as Ray Johnson's use of the postal system" (Lippard *Six Years* 6).

Besides claims of "dematerialization," the turn to what Lippard called in the subtitle of *Six Years*, "so-called conceptual art" might best be thought in relation to a turn to publication as a key material site of art practice, such as in Seth Siegelaub's use of the catalog form as exhibition site, with the *Xerox Book* of 1968 in which Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Douglas

Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, Lawrence Weiner each contributed 25 pages to the book as their art for the "exhibition" that was the book. In an interview, Siegelaub explained that "for many years it has been well known that more people are aware of an artist's work through 1) the printed media or 2) conversation than by direct conversation with the art itself" (Harrison 202). Siegelaub suggested that "the catalog can now act as primary information for the exhibition, as opposed to secondary information *about* art in magazines, catalogues, etc. and in some cases the exhibition can be the 'catalogue'" (Siegelaub 202).[27]

In 1970 at the Museum of Modern Art, Kynaston McShine curated an exhibition titled *Information*. In the catalog for the *Information* exhibition, McShine observed that "increasingly artists use the mail, telegrams, telex machines, etc. for the transmission of works themselves – photographs, films, documents – or of information about their activity" (McShine 140). An example of a work in the exhibition is John Giorno's Giorno Poetry Systems and its Dial-a-Poem service, a set of phone lines connected to answering machines, through which callers would hear a poem when calling the number. Such an art practice participated in an art of communication and distribution, of which Ray Johnson and Something Else Press were early practitioners. But to describe such work as "conceptual" can obscure the material bases and processes through which the works occur. While these art practices are not necessarily involved in the production of material art objects, the practices nonetheless materialize socially through, as, and in relation to objects and infrastructure. As noted in an article cited by Lippard in *Six Years*, Ray Johnson's friend William Wilson wrote of how Johnson's use of the postal service functioned not merely as a "concept" but as a material process in Johnson's work: "The slow daily post is still useful, but

[27] Alexander Alberro has devoted a book-length study to Siegelaub's exhibition, publication, and publicity practices in the late 1960s that were central to the emergence of "so-called conceptual art": *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*.

technologically as obsolete as the nineteenth-century middle-class family in which grandfather seems to have devoured bacon and the morning post together. Now that data can be communicated electronically, the old fashioned mails begin to yield aesthetic possibilities" (Wilson 54).

While it might make sense to name Johnson's work, or the work of Dick Higgins with The Something Else Press, as "information art," the name of "conceptual art" or "conceptualism" would obscure the importance of materiality and social process in intermedia. It is useful to think of Johnson's work not only in relation to "so-called conceptual art" but also to concrete poetry, for as Jamie Hilder has written, both concrete poetry and what has come to be known as conceptual art involve "*displaying* language: in conceptual art, it was meant as the dematerialization of the art object; in concrete poetry, it was the rematerialization of the word" (Hilder 586). Ray Johnson could be thought as having developed a sort of intermedium between "conceptual art" and "concrete poetry" in that the work both calls attention to language in its materiality as well as the material media through which linguistic exchange occurs and the embodied social energy involved in the production of "concepts" and "information."

Part 4: Queer Intermedia

In looking back at his desire to publish Ray Johnson's *The Paper Snake* as one of the first books of The Something Else Press, Dick Higgins wrote that "since a book is a more permanent body than a mailing piece or even than our own physical ones, I could not help wondering what it would be like to make a new body for Johnson's ideas as sort of a love letter or time capsule for the future, since it was quite clear to me that the book would entail a sacrifice of resources for

the present – no way could this be a money-making project" (Higgins 76). Johnson's mailing pieces were a ritualized practice of everyday life for Johnson, occurring through the almost outmoded system of the postal service. The pieces continued beyond Johnson, who instructed recipients to "please send to" other recipients. The pieces were mostly made in cheap, ephemeral materials, usually paper. The pieces provoked questions of art's materialities and temporalities. By incorporating into a published books those pieces that he had received from Ray Johnson at a particular time, Dick Higgins produced an unusual object – unusual in relation to Johnson's work and unusual in relation to most books distributed through the literary publishing system. Always existing in process, Johnson's pieces often can appear unfinished or unserious – materials for art rather than a self-sufficient, closed, finished artwork.

In "The Literature of Exhaustion," John Barth was dismissive of the "intermedia" advertised by The Something Else Press for being incomplete and remaining in what might normally be seen as a preliminary stage of art-making. For Barth, intermedia could at best "suggest something usable in the making or understanding of genuine works of contemporary art" (Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion," 30). But what Dick Higgins, The Something Else Press, and Ray Johnson were involved in was the work of framing the processes and systems of art, language, everyday life – and especially everything *in-between* – as art. Johnson's work provokes questions of value. The work's ephemerality is not "immaterial" but rather involves a messier materiality involving an alternative temporality.

Like Ray Johnson's Correspondance School, Lucy Lippard's *Six Years* mapped an emergent artworld. Johnson and Lippard shared an interest in complicating artworld boundaries, complicating who and what can circulate within the social system of art. As Johanna Gosse has argued, "although Johnson sought to sidestep the art world's conventional exhibition venues, and

commercial modes of distribution, his mail art was still in some sense all *about* the art world" (Gosse). While Johnson's work was largely based in a New York art world, his playful use of the proper name within mode of address involved in the structure of the United States Postal Service enabled Johnson's work to circulate beyond an artworld (as did the publication of *The Paper Snake*). Johnson shared with Dick Higgins and The Something Else Press a desire to circulate art beyond a closed artworld. Where Andy Warhol's Factory was bringing mass production and popular culture into the artworld, the Something Else milieu (with many connections to the Factory, especially through Ray Johnson) was bringing the artworld out into a public beyond the artworld.

The turn to so-called "dematerialization" in art practice in the 1960s can better be thought of as a complication of the materialities of art, rather than as some sort of "immateriality." Ray Johnson's work, in its material ephemerality and foregrounding of sociality, was part of this turn. Ray Johnson's work performed a kind of mapping of the social processes through which it occurred. Ina Blom has written of how Johnson's work works "on the performativity of the social itself" in which "communication exchange is encircled by reflexivity as a running commentary on the precarious production of communications" (Blom 181). It is thus important to think of Ray Johnson not only in terms of "conceptual art" but in terms of what Claire Bishop has called "participatory art," "in which people constitute the central artistic medium and material" (Bishop 2). Johnson's "participatory art" of social collage was an event-based art, occurring largely through linguistic utterance, playful verbal-visual production, and the circulation of printed matter.

From the time of *The Paper Snake* through the rest of his career (possibly including his death, when he drowned himself on January 13th, 1995), Johnson produced events called

"nothings."[28] The "nothing" was a pun on the "happening" of Allan Kaprow (a participant with Dick Higgins in the Cage class at the New School), who began to articulate the "happening" after the death of Jackson Pollock. Kaprow noted how the "all-over" surface of Pollock's canvas expanded painting into the room in which it appeared, initiating what Dick Higgins would later call an intermedium between painting and theater. As Kaprow wrote in the 1958 in "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock":

> Not satisfied with the suggestion through paint of our senses, we shall utilize the specific substances of sight, sound, movements, people, odors, touch. Objects of every sort are materials for the new art: paint, chairs, food, electric and neon lights, smoke, water, old socks, a dog, movies, a thousand other things that will be discovered by the present generation of artists. Not only will these bold creations show us, as if for the first time, the world we have always had about us but ignored, but they will disclose entirely unheard of happenings and events, found in garbage cans, police files, hotel lobbies; seen in store windows and on the streets; and senses in dreams and horrible accidents. An odor of crushed strawberries, a letter from a friend, or a billboard selling Drano; three taps on the front door, a scratch, a sigh, or a voice lecturing endlessly, a blinding staccato flash, a bowler hat – all will become materials for this new concrete art" (Kaprow 9).

Johnson's "nothings" worked with "nothing" (or almost "nothing") as the material for a happening. In April 1965, Grace Glueck reported on a Ray Johnson "nothing" in *The New York Times* in an article titled "What Happened? Nothing" (Fig. 5). Glueck reported that Johnson's "most eventful Nothing, a ½ minute affair, came about when he dumped two boxes of wooden dowels down a stairwell, just out of earshot of an invited audience. 'It sounded to me like a waterfall, or coal going down a chute,' he recalls. What else happened? 'Nothing.'" (Glueck).

José Muñoz has written of the Johnsonian "nothing" that "a nothing is a utopian act insofar as it acknowledges a lack that is normalized as reality and attempts to work with and through nothingness and ephemerality" (Muñoz 118). Like Cage's *Untitled Event* at Black

[28] There is a listing of Johnson's "nothings" in the catalog for the Wexner Center retrospective of Johnson's work in 1999 (Jones 203-213).

Mountain College, Johnson's "nothings" and "correspondances" performed a framing and changing of attention to the situations, processes, materials, and mediations through which the event occurred. There is a question in Johnson's work not of "immateriality" but of what can materialize, of who and what can matter where and when. Craig Saper has written of how Johnson through the Correspondance School "put himself in the position of a structuring absence, which increased many people's desire to know more about him" (Saper 30). "Dematerialization" for Johnson means not "immateriality" but enacting ways for those who do not matter to matter. Muñoz those saw Johnson as involved in both "critique and an additive or reparative 'gesture" in a "queer utopian practice," "'building' and 'doing' in response to the status of nothing assigned to us by the heteronormative world" (Muñoz 118). In writing on Johnson, Muñoz made a Johnsonian pun on the names Ray Johnson and Jill Johnston, a friend of Johnson's, a participant in the Correspondance School, and a dance critic whose dance column (collected in the 1971 collection *Marmalade Me*) performed a similar kind of queer mapping of the social as Johnson's work. Muñoz added the word "queer" before "intermedia" to emphasize how intermedia involves in queer time and space that which is in-between, that which is no longer and not yet, enacting another way of mattering.

Intermedia can name the queer time and space of a work, work that exists in the event of its materialization and not as the already or fully materialized. Ray Johnson's intermedia was based in inscribing and playing with an awareness of the systems in which it occurred. Johnson's work displays an interest in systems and what might be done in systems – to not only participate in the self-reproduction of a system but to introduce queer delays and detours and excesses in the system. Johnson shared this systems-orientation with Fluxus and Something Else Press artists who were some of the earliest art world adopters of digital computing, telecommunications

networks, and information systems as sites of art practice (as discussed by the contributors to Hannah Higgins's and Douglas Kahn's edited collection, *Mainframe Experimentalism: Early Computers and the Foundations of the Digital Arts*).

There is an interview in which Ray Johnson sounds like Gertrude Stein sounds when "feeling historical." Johnson tells the interviewer: "I have simply had to accept the fact that out of a life necessity, I have written a lot of letters and given away a lot of material and information, and its has been a compulsion. And as I have done this, it has become historical" (Martin 191). In the gradual making and snaking of Ray Johnson, Ray Johnson worked with the proper name as a readymade and generated queer social collage, rearticulating and recirculating (and constructing situations for rearticulating and recirculating) where these proper names might point, what lives they might name or authorize (however improper they might be).

Chapter 4: Yoko Ono, Fluxus, and *Grapefruit*

"I wish not to become confused with the high minded types who feel they have achieved Satori by becoming plantlike. I am still groping in the world of stickiness."

Yoko Ono, "The Word of a Fabricator"

"Returning to having various dimensions of art, does not mean, for instance, that one must use only sounds as means to create music."

Yoko Ono, "To the Wesleyan People"

"New affective bonds emerge out of these insurgent histories of thinking, feeling, seeing, hearing, eating, fabricating, and touching, which cut through representations of the modern subject."

Rizvanna Bradley, "Other Sensualities"

When asked in an interview about her art being "highly conceptual," Yoko Ono responded: "I'm saying we have all this conceptual world within us. But at the same time we have to be reminded that this is also a part of the body. We are a body and we often forget that" (Watson and Le Frenais 13). In this response, as in other statements, Ono emphasizes art's mediation of and by embodiment. The ways that Ono's art, such as her book *Grapefruit*, have involved attention to the mediation of bodily experience (including the corporeal and intercorporeal processes of mental experience) remain in excess of descriptions of postwar art as "conceptual" or "dematerialized." While the historical emergence of a so-called "conceptual art" cannot be understood without Yoko Ono's work, Yoko Ono's work cannot be fully understood if

limited to the category of "conceptual art."[29] Yoko Ono's work also cannot be fully understood if limited to Yoko Ono's image as a celebrity; and in fact, the ways that Ono has worked with her celebrity image can be understood as part of Ono's art, even if Ono's art has never been able to be seen as central to Ono's celebrity image.[30]

The term *intermedia* offers a way of attending to the multiple social and aesthetic intersections and deviations that constitute Ono's art, and Ono's art offers a way of understanding the postwar emergence of an aesthetics of intermedia. In *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York*, Midori Yoshimoto has described Yoko Ono as part of a cohort of artists (also including Yayoi Kusama, Takako Saito, Mieko Shiomi, and Shigeko Kubota), who as Japanese women working in 1960s New York art scenes such as Fluxus, formed intermedia art practices. Yoshimoto argues that these artists' practices in part emerged through the difference that "unlike Western art, Japanese art traditionally did not have clear divisions between artistic media" (Yoshimoto 40). This cohort of artists, including Ono, shared a "desire to remain relatively free from any preexisting notions of art" in the postwar New York scene, and thus "chose media that did not necessarily fit within conventional categories" (192). Ono's art questions social and aesthetic categorizations. The work provokes attention to the aesthetics of social categorization (the ways that social processes of assigning value and power operate in part through bodily sensation) and the social categorization of aesthetics (the ways that different organizations of sensory experience become socially valued or devalued).

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[29] Kynaston McShine included work from Yoko Ono in the landmark *Information* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1970, often considered a beginning of conceptual art. Lucy Lippard's *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* includes two extracts from *Grapefruit (*"Map Piece" and excerpts from "To the Wesleyan People") and an excerpt from Emily Wasserman's *Artforum* review of Ono's 1972 Everson Museum exhibition *This Is Not Here*.

[30] Sven Lütticekn has recently argued for thinking of Ono's work with celebrity as a medium as part of a turn to the production of "persona" as art (101-126)

Such questioning of categories can be seen and felt in the material form of a book in Ono's *Grapefruit*. First published in 1964 in Tokyo in a self-published edition of 500 and expanded in 1970 for a mass-market publication by Simon & Schuster, Ono's *Grapefruit* can be understood as an intermedia book. The book works through concerns of Ono and her affiliates in Fluxus regarding the mediation of embodiment in art, in relation to a media environment shaped by cinema, television, magnetic recording, and telecommunications and by emergent understandings of biological and social organization in terms of networked systems. Ono's *Grapefruit* questions categorizations of art's media and involves readers as embodied participants in a book that calls attention to how it occurs as an on-going event.

That Yoko Ono's art has received quite limited scholarly reception – and often a default "Oh, Yoko" response of trivialization – can be attributed to the ways that Ono's life and work complicate forms of social and aesthetic categorization: gender; celebrity and marginality; national location and racialization; popular culture and fine art; "conceptual art" and embodied experience. In addition to Midori Yoshimoto's account of the emergence of Ono's art in *Into Performance,* some reconsideration of Ono as an artist has begun in the past decade. Arthur Danto, for example, suggested that in the 1960s and 70s, "Ono's fame made her almost impossible to see," and argued that Ono be considered as "one of the most original artists of the last half century" (Danto 176). Brigit Cohen has argued that because Ono's career, involving postwar Japan and the United States as well as global circulations of popular culture, does not fit "standard historiographical categorization by national frameworks" (Cohen 183), a transnational approach can make possible the kind of scholarly reception that Ono's work has long deserved.[31] While Yoko Ono's art cannot be fully understood without thinking of how the work has come to

[31] Hannah Higgins, in "Border Crossings: Three Transnationalisms of Fluxus," has argued for a transnational approach to Fluxus scholarship.

be entangled with Ono's hated and admired image, Ono's work with her mass media image remains only one dimension of her work. Ono's work as an artist began long before – and continues long after – Ono's relationship with John Lennon.

In *Racial Things, Racial Forms: Objecthood in Avant-Garde Asian-American Poetry*, Joseph Jeon has written of Ono as "a figure in which one may witness the inner workings of the recombinant ideological forces that compose her iconicity" (Jeon 146). Jeon argues that after Ono's emergence as a celebrity after meeting John Lennon in 1966, reactions of disgust or dismissal towards the supposed strangeness or inscrutability of Ono's art "become a mode of objectifying Ono in racial terms, in reaffirming her foreignness" (Jeon 146). Rarely has Ono's work been written about without centering John Lennon and The Beatles, and the one work of Ono's to receive any substantial scholarly attention over time has been the work in which Ono seems to appear most visible as a "hate object": *Cut Piece*. The tendency to restrict Ono scholarship to *Cut Piece* reinscribes Ono's art as being only worthy of attention in terms of Ono's iconicity.

First enacted in Kyoto in 1964 and in New York in 1965, and then included textually in *Grapefruit*, Ono's *Cut Piece* is an invitation for an audience to cut off pieces of the performer's clothing. In Ono's early enactments of the piece as the performer, *Cut Piece* generated some of the most iconic images of Ono. *Cut Piece*, as Julia Bryan-Wilson has argued, has come to "bear the burden of being Ono's most critically-lauded work, the one summoned to rescue her from decades of jokes made at her expense" (Bryan-Wilson 19). *Cut Piece* has been able to be seen as legible for scholarly attention, and worthy of serious discussion, for how it poses questions concerning violence in relation to marked categorizations of race, nation, and gender. Yet the scholarly fixation on *Cut Piece*, combined with the general scholarly neglect of most of Ono's

over six decades of intermedia art production, reinscribes Ono as being legible and serious only within the very conditions of representation that *Cut Piece* itself has been said to question.

Attending to the crucial role of Ono and *Grapefruit* in the making of an aesthetic of intermedia in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, this chapter argues for turning attention from *Cut Piece* to the form in which it occurs in its appearance in *Grapefruit*: the form of the *event score*. Succicntly defined by Liz Kotz in *Words to Be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art*, event scores art "short instruction-like texts proposing one or more actions" (Kotz 59). Constructed and circulated by Ono and other artists in the transnational network of Fluxus, the event score formed part of a turn in postwar art to what Grant Kester, in *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, has termed "performative interaction" (Kester 77). In an art of "performative interaction," the artwork (more likely to be understood as an event rather than as an object) unfolds through feedback loops and dialogical processes.

Fluxus artists such as Ono worked with the event score as a way of extending the Duchampian readymade. These artists began to regard human embodiment (and other biological and social systems) as "readymades." They turned to interior and exterior bodily processes (and other systemic processes) as an art medium. The Fluxus event score provided a material-textual support for new understandings of the readymade, such as what Liz Kotz has termed the "perceptual readymade" and what David Joselit has termed the "metabolic readymade." For Kotz, the "perceptual readymade" names Fluxus's "reframing of everyday experiences as events of art" (Kotz 177). For Joselit, the "metabolic readymade" names Fluxus's production of "a kind of bio-readymade to be literally metabolized in both organic bodies and consumer networks" (Joselit 1972). While both Fluxus and some versions of conceptual art exemplify a turn in postwar art to a preoccupation with modes of distribution and forms of attention, Fluxus (at least

in the version associated with Ono) can be described as having a primary concern with human embodiment (including the bodily interior) in relation other organic and inorganic systems.

Constructing a reading of *Grapefruit*, this chapter looks at the ways that Ono has worked with textual inscription, linguistic utterance, and the circulation of print publication as part of what Barry Shank has described as Ono's "insistent performance of the imbrications of abstraction and embodiment" (Shank 183). The chapter traces the development of the Fluxus event score in relation to two texts that Ono wrote during the time of the composition of *Grapefruit*: "Word of a Fabricator," from 1962, and "To the Wesleyan People," from 1965. The chapter argues that Ono's adaptations of the event score exemplify an aesthetic of intermedia. The chapter further argues that Ono's aesthetic of intermedia presents queer aesthetic implications for the social organization of time, space, sensation, and relation.

Part 1: Fluxus and the Event Score

In "Fluxus Feminus," Kathy O'Dell has written of how the historical reception of Fluxus has often de-emphasized the centrality of embodied practices in Fluxus and has obscured how "there were probably more women and artists of color associated with Fluxus than with any other previous grouping of artists in Western art history" (O'Dell 43).[32] Also challenging previous scholarly reception of Fluxus as a white male neo-avant-garde, Midori Yoshimoto has written, in in a special issue of *Women & Performance* on Fluxus, that "despite women's prominence in Fluxus, much of their contribution remains obscure in Fluxus scholarship" ("An

[32] Artists central to Fluxus as women artists and/or artists of color include: Alice Hutchins, Alison Knowles, Shigeko Kubota, Kate Millet, Charlotte Moorman, Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, Ben Patterson, Takako Saito, and Mieko Shiomi.

Evening with Fluxus Women," 369). Yoshimoto calls for the construction of a "feminist archive of Fluxus," "collecting and preserving new accounts by women artists that might otherwise become lost" ("Women and Fluxus," 287). A feminist reception of Fluxus can attend to how the work of Fluxus-affiliated artists such as Yoko Ono exceeds previous description of Fluxus as a neo-avant-garde recasting of Dada in the 1960s United States. Fluxus need not be understood only in terms of the shock, negation, and iconoclasm associated with Fluxus impresario-figure George Maciunas (and even the work of Maciunas can best be understood when not limited to an idea of vanguardism but rather attentive to Maciunas's role in linking a variegated network of artists).

For understanding Yoko Ono's work in relation to Fluxus, it is thus useful to consider what Hannah Higgins has described in *Fluxus Experience* as the two tendencies in Fluxus. One tendency, the dominant tendency in scholarly and museological reception, has been an understanding of Fluxus as a belated avant-garde: performing a reenactment of historical avant-garde attacks on art as a bourgeois institution *for* bourgeois art institutions. The other tendency, which Higgins advocates for in *Fluxus Experience*, is to understand Fluxus as "experientially affirmative art" (Higgins 13). Higgins argues that "Fluxus transforms the avant-garde (as institutional critique, as iconoclasm) to become, in part, its opposite: aesthetic experience" (Higgins 99). This revised understanding of Fluxus places Fluxus less in relation to the historical avant-garde than it does to twentieth century philosophical provocations and revisions based in returning attention to the embodied basis of thought and experience, such as pragmatism (i.e., John Dewey's *Art as Experience*) and phenomenology (i.e., Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*). For Higgins, Fluxus has as much or more in common with John Dewey as it does with Tristan Tzara. As a practice of producing experiential situations through

event scores and distributed collections of ephemeral materials, Fluxus "situated people radically within their corporeal, sensory worlds," in a materiality "incompatible with a radical division of object and subject, of perceiving and knowing" (Higgins 67).

The Fluxus event score can be understood as a mode of pragmatist aesthetics or as a kind of art of phenomenological encounter.[33] The emergence of the Fluxus event score can be traced to John Cage's classes in experimental composition at the New School in New York in 1958 and 1959, particularly in the work of one of the participants in the class: a professional chemist who had adopted the name George Brecht. The example of George Brecht is thus a useful place to begin, before moving onto a revised and expanded understanding of Fluxus, as articulated by scholars such as O'Dell, Yoshimoto, and Higgins and as seen and felt in uses and extensions of the event score in the works of Fluxus-affiliated artists such as Ben Patterson and Yoko Ono.

George Brecht and other participants in the Cage classes at the New School experimented with modes of art practice that could move beyond the abstract expressionist gesture that had come to be codified as "the modern" in postwar New York art. These participants in Cage's classes, arriving from various fields, constructed modes of practice that, as Julia Robinson has argued, could shift "from singular abstraction to repeatable model" (Robinson 79). The pieces that George Brecht made in the Cage class worked with printed textual inscription as the basis for a "score," like a musical score but for any activity – not necessarily, or only, "music." These scores could be repeated, as in a computer program (and it is not coincidental that Fluxus artists were some of the first artists to demonstrate an interest in digital computing, the aesthetic

[33] "Pragmatist aesthetics" articulates an alternative to a Kantian aesthetics of distance and disinterest. Following John Dewey's *Art as Experience*, Richard Shusterman has redescribed pragmatism as a "somaesthetics," "building on the pragmatist insistence of the body's central role in artistic creation and appreciation" and highlighting "the soma – the living, sentient, purposive body – as the indispensable medium for all perception" (Shusterman 3).

dimensions of code, and the aesthetic possibilities of programming). Brecht described event scores as "psycho-physical structures" (Ouzounian 206), suggesting a way of understanding how textual inscription and print literacy are entangled with psychological (and thus physiological) processes of organizing experience.

Another name for the event score might be "word event," a name that can point to a distinction between the event score and literary poetry. *Word Event* was also the name that George Brecht gave to a particular event score in Spring 1961. This score consists of four lines of text. The first line has the title of the score: "WORD EVENT"; the second line, indented with a black dot, has one word: "EXIT"; the third line has Brecht's name, G. Brecht, as a signature for the piece; and the fourth line notes the month and year of the composition of the piece. The "exit" of *Word Event* could be seen as similar to the "exit" of an exit sign above a door, except that when appearing above a door, an exist sign refers to an actual action that can be taken (exiting through the door). With *Word Event*, as a printed surface, the word "exit" may simply appear as something displayed – with the printed page functioning in a way similar to the wall of a gallery. The "event" of *Word Event* might be the act of seeing the piece, with the "exit" naming that which can occur once the activity of seeing the piece concludes. Or, the "exit" might be read as an imperative: an instruction to take the action of "exiting," whether "exiting" the act of looking at the piece, or in some other, perhaps metaphorical, sense of "exit."

Event scores, or "word events," such as Brecht's *Word Event* call attention to processes of naming and to the operations of sign systems. Other artists in the Fluxus network worked with the form of the event score to further engage the imperative structure of instruction. One such artists was Benjamin Patterson, in his 1962 book *Methods and Processes* (Fig. 7). Patterson, a classically-trained musician, left – exited – the United States, after no symphony orchestra would

hire him (an African-American). In Germany, Patterson become part of an experimental music scene that formed one of the nodes of the Fluxus network.[34] Patterson's *Methods and Processes,* published in English and Japanese by a Tokyo gallery for a Fluxus exhibition in 1962, unfolds through a series of untitled event scores. One of the pieces in *Methods and Processes* reads:

> wash hands
> put on gloves
> and
> think dietician, obstetrician, pedicure, etc.
> take off gloves
> and
> wash hands
> put on gloves
> and
> think fop, fad, banker, boxer, etc.
> take off gloves
> and
> wash hands
> put on gloves
> and think garbage man, boogy man, Eichmann, etc.
> take off gloves
> and
> wash hands

Whether read as text or also enacted as score, the instructions for washing hands, putting on gloves, and taking off gloves instantiate an embodied process of thinking through shifting situations and positions in the world.

It is worth noting that the one proper name to appear in this piece is Eichmann, likely referring to Adolf Eichmann, executed in 1962, the year of the publication of *Methods and Processes* To think Eichmann – and take off gloves and wash hands – recalls what Hannah

[34] A reception of Patterson's work from the 1960s has begun recently, such as in the Patterson retrospective *Born in the State of Flux/us*, curated by Valerie Cassel Oliver at Contemporary Arts Museum Houston in 2010. The exhibition catalog situates Patterson as a central figure in the emergence of Fluxus. George E. Lewis has argued that there is a relation between Patterson's positionality as an African-American and the ways that Patterson's event scores emphasize a participant's experience through intention and improvisation (Lewis 86-108).

Arendt described in her reports from the Eichmann trial as "the banality of evil," the horrific consequences that can come from the ordinary and not necessarily malicious carrying out of the bureaucratic functions, the methods and processes, of the role that one finds oneself in. In a 1965 text titled "Notes on Pets," Patterson discusses the event score form as based in information theory and behavioral psychology. Patterson describes the pieces of *Methods and Processes* as "micro-environments composed of instructions relating back to the reader-participant" ("Notes on Pets," 52).[35] Patterson, like Yoko Ono in *Grapefruit*, adapted the form of the Fluxus event score as a prompt for attention to socially-situated behaviors, bodily habits, and thought processes, including but not limited to the behaviors, habits, and thought processes involved in embodied acts of reading text.

The Fluxus event score as instruction piece, as seen in Patterson's *Methods and Processes* from 1962 and Yoko Ono's *Grapefruit* from 1964/1970, introduces new ways of thinking of language in and as art. Natasha Luschetich, in her recent book on Fluxus – *Fluxus: The Practice of Non-Duality*, points out that "Fluxus artists' engagement with language probes the agency language exercises in framing reality" (Luschetich 63). As prompts for attending to language's agency, Fluxus event scores from George Brecht's *Word Event* to the pieces of Patterson's *Methods and Proceses* and Ono's *Grapefruit*, can be thought of as having anticipated some aspects of what would become two decades later, Language Writing, a network of poetry practices based in a preoccupation with linguistic materiality and the politics of sign systems. But while an event score might be seen as a kind of poem, the processes involved in attending to

[35] Patterson's "Notes on Pets" appears in a collaborative Something Else Press book called *Four Suits* (produced by Dick Higgins, with contributed chapters from Patterson as well as Alison Knowles, Philip Corner, and Tomas Schmitt). In a publisher's foreword to the book, Dick Higgins writes of these artists as sharing an interest in intermedia, "the art that lay between the arts" ("Publisher's Foreword," xi). Higgins further describes Patterson's work as "mid-way between the arts and science, in this case psychology" (xii).

or enacting an event score can exceed normative protocols of literary reading. An event score, as Liz Kotz, writes, involves multiple "temporal and performative dimensions" that "inhabit the inscription itself through the operations of reading, designation, and perception" (Kotz 9).

Event scores emphasize how the activity of literacy is an embodied and socially-mediated behavioral and perceptual processes. The cross-temporal and multi-sensorial performative dimensions of textual language in the Fluxus event score, when collected, published, distributed, and encountered in book form in Yoko Ono's *Grapefruit*, provoke questions such as when, where, and how a book occurs. So far, in the multiple disciplines in which it could be seen as relevant, *Grapefruit* has received very limited scholarly attention. Often trivialized as a kind of novelty gift or retro celebrity paraphernalia from The Sixties, *Grapefruit* should be studied for the ways that it has circulated in popular culture but also for how it works with the Fluxus event score and elements of Japanese aesthetics to enact a processual, participatory aesthetics of intermedia.

Part 2: How to Do Things with *Grapefruit*

In Tokyo in 1964, Yoko Ono first published the event score instruction pieces of *Grapefruit* in an edition of 500 through what she called the Wunternaum Press. The name for the press plays upon the German words *wunderbaum* (beautiful tree) and *weltinnenraum* (interior world).[36] After Ono's rise to fame through the media attention to her relationship with John

[36] In "Coughing is a Form of Love: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Philosopher," Thomas Kellein quotes from his correspondence with Ono on the naming of the press: "This word wunternaum… has the roots in Wunderbaum. I wanted to publish my work from 'another world'" (Kellein 147). The word *weltinnenraum* appears in several of the pieces of *Grapefruit*,

Lennon, Simon & Schuster published in 1970 an expanded edition of *Grapefruit* for the mass market. With the Simon & Schuster edition of *Grapefruit,* the event score became, as Liz Kotz has written, "something resembling popular culture" (Kotz 61). In the Simon & Schuster edition, the book of unnumbered pages has nine numbered sections, naming a variety of art media: 1) Music; 2) Paining; 3) Event; 4) Poetry; 5) Object; 6) Film; 7) Dance; 8) Architecture Pieces; and 9) On Films. In between "Dance" and "Architecture Pieces," an unnumbered section appears with the title "Information." This "Information" section includes a note on *Cut Piece*, in addition to other writings such as "To the Wesleyan People," the text that Ono wrote after the occasion of a talk at Wesleyan University, discussing her relation to an aesthetics of intermedia. In the nine numbered sections of *Grapefruit* there appear short pieces in the form of the event score, written in an imperative language of instruction. In addition to event score instruction pieces, the book includes various fragments of text (such as letters from Ono to friends) and drawings.

The event score instruction pieces in *Grapefruit* resulted from Ono's adaptation of the event score, as the form circulated in the Fluxus network beyond George Brecht's initial experiments in the Cage class at the New School and into spaces such as the series that Ono organized and held at her Chambers Street loft in New York from 1960 to 1961.[37] Upon returning to Japan in 1962 for a series of events (including the first performance of *Cut Piece*), Ono wrote a text that she later translated in English as "The Word of a Fabricator." In this text, Ono explains how and why she adapted the event score as an alternative to Cagean chance

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for example in "Card Piece VII": "Open a window of one of the houses in / your Weltinnenraum. / Let the wind come in."

[37] Artists participating in Ono's loft series included co-organizer La Monte Young as well as artists working in and across fields such as dance, sculpture, and music: Terry Jennings, Ichiyanagi Toshi, Henry Flynt, Joseph Byrd, Jackson Mac Low, Richard Maxfield, Simone Morris (Forti), Robert Morris, and Dennis Lindberg. A copy of the schedule for the series appears in Reiko Tomii and Kevin Concannon's chronology of Ono's career (Tomi and Concannon 308).

operations. Ono questions Cage's art of "random operation," for "making it appear that his set of rules are equally real and valid as the law of nature" ("The Word of a Fabricator," 285). In another vocabulary, that would be described as ideology's naturalization of power. In "The Word of a Fabricator," Ono explains how she turned from Cagean "random operation" to the making of what she describes as the intentional "fabrication" of "fictional rules and their enactment." The event score, as instruction piece, became Ono's means of constructing what she called "rituals without the dignity of being real," rituals of a "conceptual reality" that "becomes a concrete 'matter' only when one destroys its conceptuality by asking others to enact it" (285).

Many of the pieces of *Grapefruit* can be understood as examples of what Liz Kotz has termed the "perceptual readymade," the naming and framing of an act of perception as a work of art. Fluxus prompts acts of attention to processes of perception. In "The Origins of the Fluxus Score," Anna Dezeuze has written of how Fluxus shifts art to "perceptual activities," in which the event score becomes "an invitation to find an event" (Dezeuze 88). For example, in the "Music" section of *Grapefruit*, there is a piece titled "Earth Piece." Like George Brecht's *Word Event*, the piece consists of a title ("Earth Piece"), followed by a line of text that can be read as an imperative statement ("Listen to the sound of the earth turning"), and a date (1963 Spring). The piece calls for attention to that which is already happening (the earth turning), but in doing so, generates the question: How does one listen to the sound of the earth turning?

Pieces such as "Earth Piece" include elements that are already in performance and elements that call attention to and question the modes and limits of performability. A reader of *Grapefruit* becomes what Natasha Luschetich terms Fluxus's "percipient-interactant":

> Regardless of whether the percipient-interactant performs the action, is reminded of an occasion when he/she unwittingly performed an action, observes other people's unwitting performances of the action, or, provides an entirely new performative realization, he/she has entered into a multi-dimensional relationship with the score, the fragment of reality

> scored, the unwitting performance of the score in his/her immediate surroundings, as well as his/her own intentional performances. In short, the percipient/interactant has become a distinct player in the language game proposed by the score (Lushetich 59).

Ono's *Grapefruit* presents textual situations for "percipient-interactants" to engage in acts of perception and contemplation through interaction with the text. The book thus expands the activity of reading into a rage of behaviors and modes of attention beyond that which might normally be thought to constitute the act of reading. *Grapefruit* prompts a revision of the word "reading" and suggests new performances of reading.

The words of Ono's instructions in *Grapefruit* involve shifts between literal and literary levels of meaning while also shifting the ways different sensory modalities become addressed through textual inscription. For example, in the "Poetry" section of *Grapefruit,* Ono includes several "touch poems," which provoke questions about what it means to perform "touch."[38] These "touch poems" in *Grapefruit* include: "Touch Poem for a Group of People" (dated 1963 Winter) and five numbered pieces with the title "Touch Poem" (from 1963 Summer, 1963 Autumn, and 1964 Spring). In placing these pieces in the "Poetry" section of *Grapefruit*, Ono proposes a kind of haptic poetry, drawing upon not only the habituated practice of sight-based reading of text but also an expanded reading practice involving the haptic perceptions of tactility. The "Touch Poem for a Group of People" has one sentence: "Touch each other." The "Touch Poem" dated 1963 Spring begins:

> Give birth to a child.
> See the world through its eyes.
> Let it touch everything possible
> and leave its fingermark there
> in place of a signature.

[38] In "Tangible Acts: Touch Performances," Jennifer Fisher considers Ono's work with touch in the 1960s and 70s in relation to works by other feminist artists also working with touch at the time, such as Valie Export (with *Touch Cinema*) and Mierle Laderman Ukeles (with *Maintenance Art*).

The "touch poems," like many of the pieces in *Grapefruit*, shift between performable actions contingent upon embodiment and other complex processes that might each take a lifetime to perform or that can only be "performed" in acts of the imagination.

The shifting between the enactable and the metaphorical, within a piece or even within a particular statement in a piece, generates a utopian dimension in *Grapefruit*. To understand how artists such as Yoko Ono began in the 1960s to work with intercorporeal processes of perception and fantasy, Anna Dezeuze has drawn upon D.W. Winnicott's theory of the *transitional object*. For Winnicott, the *transitional object* (such as a child's blanket) occurs in a space between interior psychic reality and the exterior reality of the world, between the me of "the child" and the not-me of "the mother."[39] Dezeuze adapts Winnicott's theory of the transitional object to describe what she terms the "transitional artwork," an artwork that occurs in a "dialectic movement between reality and utopia by combining both within the space of a transitional space" ("Play, Ritual, and Politics," 213). How Ono establishes a dialectic of reality and utopia in a "transitional space" of textual inscription can be seen, for example, in *Grapefruit*'s "Touch Poem" dated 1964 Spring:

> Hold a touch poem meeting at somewhere
> in the distance or a fictitious address
> on a fictitious day

[39] Dezeuze specifically links Ono's art to the art of Lygia Clark. At the same time that Ono was producing the pieces of *Grapefruit*, Clark was working in Brazil on "propositions" for a sensorial and relational art oriented around a kind of group therapy. Dezeuze's linking of Ono and Clark as practitioners of the "transitional artwork" suggests a trajectory of contemporary art that cannot be subsumed under a U.S.-centered rubric of "conceptual art." A next step for Ono scholarship could be further consideration of Ono's art in relation to the genealogy of contemporary art articulated in Pedro Erber's *Breaching the Frame: Contemporary Art in Brazil and Japan*. Linking the Brazilian Neoconcretists (such as Lygia Clark and Helio Oiticica) with Japanese counterparts such as Aksegawa Genpei and the Gutai group who also embraced a heightened attention to materiality, Erber challenges the Anglo-American narrative of contemporary art as an art of dematerialization.

Or, in "Touch Poem VI," which reads: "Ask people to come. Invite only dead people." The imaginative work central to the enactment of these touch poems can be contrasted with touch poems based in instructions that might very well be enacted in an actuality beyond the imaginative. For example, "Touch Poem V" reads: "Feel the wall. Examine its temperature and moisture. Take notes about many different walls." Both modalities of the touch poem invite some form of enactment, and provoke memory of and contemplation of haptic experience.

Besides the "touch poems" in the "Poetry" section of *Grapefruit*, there is a "Touch Piece" in the "Information" section of the book. The instruction consists of one word: "Touch." Below the one-word instruction appears a paragraph of information:

> This piece was performed many times in different places in Europe, United States, and Japan, usually, the lights are put off and the audience touches each other for ten minutes to sometimes over two hours. In Nanzenji Temple in Kyoto, 1964, it lasted from evening till dawn. In London, people started to whistle the theme song of "Bridge of River Kwai" during the performance which became a chorus.

It is significant that Ono includes this information with the one-word instruction of "Touch Piece" in its appearance in *Grapefruit*. An event score instruction piece can occur across multiple materializations in different times and places, whether in a book or on a gallery wall or in another space in another form. The meaning of an instruction piece changes in its enactment in different iterations and locations through differently positioned embodiments and relations. And thus it is significant that Ono includes with the one-word instruction of "Touch" information about what that meant in a particular enactment in London: when participants whistled a song whistled by the British prisoners of war in a 1957 movie set in a Japanese prison camp in Burma. By including mention of both the London enactment and the Kyoto enactment of the same piece, Ono suggests how the sensorial actions and experiences prompted by the piece are not just

phenomenological encounters but are phenomenological encounters in corporeal and intercorporeal bodies produced socially and historically.

The simple or seemingly silly instruction pieces of *Grapefruit* often involve implicit or explicit processing of trauma, destruction, and violence. Kristine Stiles has written of Ono's "ability to create models from personal and intimate experience for public and social action" (Stiles 32).[40] Ono's event score instruction pieces operate through affective registers (such as silliness) that generate something else beside the already codified forms of critique and negation associated with an orthodox avant-garde position. That seeming simplicity or silliness are crucial to the cultural work performed by Ono's event scores can be related to Anna Dezeuze's argument that Fluxus event scores can be thought of as "therapeutic exercises" ("Origins of the Fluxus Score," 91). Sometimes resembling avant-garde iconoclasm, sometimes resembling culture industry self-help, *Grapefruit* holds together and presents "therapeutic exercises" for engaging not yet categorized (which is to say, *queer*) forms of life. Like the open-endedness of its instruction pieces, *Grapefruit* remains in process through a utopian dimension in aesthetic experience.

Part 3: Not Only *Cut Piece*

Grapefruit includes two pieces titled "Cut Piece." One "Cut Piece" appears in the "Painting" section of the book. Dated "1962 Summer," it has a one-sentence instruction: "Throw

[40] Kristine Stiles, who authored one of the first scholarly articles on Ono ("Unbosoming Lennon: The Politics of Yoko Ono's Experience,"), has argued for studying postwar and post-1960s art through trauma theory. The articles collected in Stiles's *Concerning Consequences: Studies in Art, Destruction, and Trauma* outline an art history co-emergent with Ono's art.

it off a high building." Other pieces in the "Painting" section also include an instruction to "cut," such as:

> "Cut a painting up and let them be lost in the wind." ("Pieces of the Wind")
>
> "Cut a hole in the bag filled with seeds of any kind and place the bag where there is wind." ("Painting for the Wind")
>
> "Drill a hole in the sky. Cut out a paper the same size as the hole. Burn the paper. The sky should be pure blue." ("Painting for the Skies")
>
> "Cut out jackets or dress from acquired paintings, such as Da Vinci, Raphael, De Kooning. You may wear the painted side in or out. You may make underwears with them as well." ("Painting to Be Worn")

In these pieces, "painting" occurs through the act of the cut: material becomes opened, dispersed, resurfaced, or repurposed (as in film or collage). In "Painting for the Skies," Ono reworks what Duchamp termed the "reverse readymade," the turning of a work of art back into a useful everyday object: suggesting that the material substrate of famous, valuable "acquired paintings" could be re-cut as the material of underwear. There is humor in such pieces, along with a shifting of attention to how art occurs in its materiality.

The other piece in *Grapefruit* called "Cut Piece" is the event score of the famous *Cut Piece*, and it appears in the "Information" section of the book. The piece has the title "Cut Piece" but no date. Like the one-word instruction of "Touch Piece," the event score of "Cut Piece" has a one-word instruction: "Cut." In *Grapefruit*, below the instruction of the event score, a paragraph of text presents this contextualizing information:

> This piece was performed in Kyoto, Tokyo, New York, and London. It is usually performed by Yoko Ono coming on the stage and in a sitting position, placing a pair of scissors in front of her and asking the audience to come up on the stage, one by one, and cut a portion of her clothing (anywhere they like) and take it. The performer, however, does not have to be a woman.

The often quoted last sentence of the paragraph provokes the thought of how the enactment of the piece might be different if enacted not by Yoko Ono or not by someone gendered as a woman. The location of the performance and the embodied social positions of the performers (including the audience as performers) are all part of the piece and all come into play through the one-word instruction: "Cut." It is significant to recall that *Cut Piece* emerged in Ono's work in relation to a performance culture of 1960s New York that at sites such as Judson Church embraced what Michael Kirby termed in his 1972 text, "Acting and Non-Acting," "non-matrixed performance," performances based not in the mimetic representation of a character but rather in the presentation of behavior. *Cut Piece*, as James Harding, has argued in *Cutting Performances: Collage Events, Feminist Artists, and the American Avant-Garde*, "exposed a *submatrix* functioning beneath the presumably 'nonmatrixed performance practices,'" (Harding 106). A "nonmatrixed performance" is not possible; for as *Cut Piece* has shown: any performance occurs through a material submatrix of raced and gendered social positions and relations.

In calling attention to social positions and relations, many of the pieces in *Grapefruit* also suggest ways of imaging, enacting, and attending to altered distributions and relations of sensation that in turn suggest altered social relations. As elaborated in the writing of Jacques Rancière in texts such as *The Politics of Aesthetics* and *Aisthesis*, changes in sensory distribution – *aesthetics* – can suggest changes in distributions of value and power – *politics*. A politics of Ono's aesthetics can be seen for example in the "smell pieces" in the "Event" section of *Grapefruit*. These "smell pieces" include one of the earliest pieces included in the book, "Smell Piece," dated 1953 Autumn, as well as other pieces titled "Smell Piece" that are dated 1962 Winter and 1963 Winter. The piece from 1953 instructs: "Send the smell of the moon." The piece from nine years later in 1962 shifts the instruction slightly: "Send a smell to the moon."

However fanciful these might seem, the instructions provoke a queer re-imagining of space, sensation, and transmission. Two other pieces also titled "Smell Piece," from 1963 Summer, also involve the instruction of sending smelling: "Use a name card without a name. Put an address and a smell instead." "Send smell signals by wind." These instructions provoke the imagination of an alternative distribution of names, addresses, and sensations. With these "smell pieces," Ono shares with many Fluxus-affiliated artists, especially Ray Johnson, an interest in finding a queer utopian dimension in social systems of naming, addressing, and distributing.

With the form of the event score adapted as instruction piece, Ono also established in *Grapefruit* ways of framing attention to the technical mediation of the sensorium as it occurs ambiently and corporeally. For example, "Tape Piece II," also titled within the piece as "Room Piece," asks the reader, the percipient-interactant to:

> Take the sound of the room breathing
>
> 1) at dawn
> 2) in the morning
> 3) in the afternoon
> 4) in the evening
> 5) before dawn
>
> Bottle the smell of the room or that particular hour as well.

The reader can then imagine how a room "breathes" and can think of how to record the room "breathing" at different times. The piece links the material support of the printed instruction with the material support of tape recording, suggesting a mode of attending to "the sound of the room breathing." Open to the contingent and temporal, the piece calls upon a proximate and ephemeral sensory occurences: the piece asks the reader to "bottle the smell" of the room or the hour. The act of performance in this piece, as in many of the pieces of *Grapefruit*, moves between that which can be enacted and that which involves a utopian dimension between perception and

fantasy. This particular piece suggests a reimagining of a particular technical medium (tape recording): How might the device of the tape recorder have other potential uses beyond that which it is designed for? The piece invites the percipient-interactant to imagine the tape recorder as a new kind of device: a device not only for recording sound but also a device for "recording" smell.

Another such piece suggesting creative misuse or non-use of a technical medium appears with "Tape Piece III," also titled "Snow Piece":

> Take a tape of the sound of the snow falling.
> This should be done in the evening.
> Do not listen to the tape.
> Cut it and use it as strings to tie gifts with.
> Make a gift wrapper if you wish, using the same process with a phonoset.

In a piece such as "Tape Piece IV," also titled "Moving Piece," Ono moves the perversion of the medium into a provocation regarding modes of economic and social exchange and value:

> Take a tape of the sound of the stairs moving.
> Do not listen to the tape.
> Cut it out and give it out to the people on the street.
> Or you may sell it for a moderate price.

While these "tape pieces" have actualizable elements, one of *Grapefruit*'s "tape pieces" is perhaps fully actualizable: the "Body Sound Tape Piece," a piece recalling John Cage's anecdote of hearing the non-intentional processes of the interior body in the anechoic chamber at Harvard University. This piece by Ono is a reminder of how bodies produce sound both intentionally and non-intentionally and how attention to such sound can be made possible through the technical mediation of devices of recording and listening. "Body Sound Tape Piece" asks the reader to: "Make body sound tapes of different people at different times. Of the old, young, crying, longing, excited, calm, doubtful, etc." Contingencies of embodiment combine with technicity in

the "body sound tape." As exemplified by these "tape pieces," *Grapefruit* addresses itself to, and imagines, a reader existing as a technically-mediated, socially situated creature.

It is significant to note that *Grapefruit* emerged at the time that Ono began making films. It is both through film and through the event score instruction pieces of *Grapefruit* that Ono developed what Asa Osterweil, in *Flesh Cinema: The Corporeal Turn in American Avant-Garde Cinema*, has termed Ono's "corporeal mode of address" (Osterweil 177). Ono, argues Osterweil, addresses readers and viewers in a way that "challenges the Kantian ideal of disinterested distance spectatorship while insisting upon the 'text' as an embodied interface in the process of constant material transformation" (Osterweil 179). Ono could be considered in relation to and as an example of structural filmmaking, in basing the practice of filmmaking in a preoccupation with the filmic apparatus. Yet unlike many of the structural filmmakers, Ono's films emphasize how the viewer and the viewed are embodied, social creatures. Ono regarded filmmaking as a participatory art occurring between screen and spectator. As she said in an interview: "At the time I was making films, what I felt I was doing was similar to what The Rocky Horror Picture show did later. I wanted to involve the audience directly in new ways" (Macdonald 16).

Grapefruit includes notes on and scores for many of Ono's films, and thus suggests that Ono's films are like other pieces of *Grapefruit* in being invitations for others to enact. Ono begins the "On Films" section of *Grapefruit*: "These scores were printed and made available to whoever was interested at the time or thereafter in making their own version of the films, since these films, by their nature, became a reality only when they were repeated and realized by other filmmakers." Some of the scripts included in *Grapefruit* are similar in form to an event score instruction pieces, such as "Film Script 3": "Ask the audience to cut the part of the image on the screen they don't like. Supply scissors." With humor, the piece provokes attention to normative

habits of spectatorship. Similarly, "Film Script 5" invites the reader not to produce a new film per se but rather to experience an altered relation to the cinematic:

> Ask the audience the following:
> 1) not to look at Rock Hudson, but only Doris Day.
> 2) not to look at any round objects but only square and angled objects – if you look at a round object watch it until it becomes square and angled.
> 3) not to look at blue but only red – if blue comes out close eyes or do something so you do not see, if you saw it, then make believe that you have not seen it, or punish yourself.

In not-doing, in imagining, in self-punishing, the normally passive spectator acts – but not in ways that might not normally be seen as acting or taking action. Ono does not reject popular culture or the spectacle but instead suggests a queer interaction with it. Ono's work with the filmic apparatus can be understood as informing the overall cultural work that the aesthetic provocations and invitations of *Grapefruit* perform.

Grapefruit ends with a section titled "On Films." In this section, Ono includes commentaries on her films, such as *Film No. 4*, also known as *Bottoms* (Fig. 8). This film begins with a list of names "starring" in the film, including Ono, Ono's family, and friends such as Ben Patterson. The film then consists entirely of close-ups of the "bottoms" of these actors, filmed walking. The "bottoms" form a fleshy, moving grid, resembling a structural film (normally associated with straight male filmmakers) but with a difference: the screen becomes a kind of skin. *Film No. 4* re-orients the cinematic gaze from the normative frontality of cinema to the backside, to the "bottoms," in which the anus complicates normative cinematic categorization of gender and the differentiation of individual subjects.

Ono's text on *Film No. 4* in the "On Films" section of *Grapefruit* playfully challenges the seriousness of the phallus: "I wonder why men can get serious at all. They have this delicate long

thing hanging outside their bodies, which goes up and down by its own will […] If I were a man I would always be laughing at myself. Humor is probably something the male of the species discovered through their own anatomy. But men are so serious. Why? Why violence? ("On Film No. 4"). Ono goes on to then describe *Bottoms* as "an aimless petition signed by people with their anuses" and suggests that "next time we wish to make an appeal, we should send this film as the signature list." With this, Ono shows how the anus – how the social body of *Bottoms* – can produce a signature, even if not the signature of a normative subject, of an "individual." With this film, as with so much of her work, Ono articulates a different form of politics, operating through different bodily zones and different affective registers than what might normally be thought to constitute the political. That it might still register as silly, or unserious, or excessive, or insufficient as art should be thought of as a reminder of the political potential of the Ono aesthetic.

Grapefruit ends with the last text in the "On Films" section, a text titled "On Rape." The title refers to Ono's 1969 film with John Lennon, *Rape*, in which they had two cameramen follow a random woman until she collapses in her apartment. "On Rape" does not describe the film. Instead, Ono offers a commentary, beginning: "Violence is a sad wind that, if channeled carefully, could bring seeds, chairs and all things pleasant to us." Never directly commenting on the film itself in this final piece in *Grapefruit*, a final piece that is not an event score, Ono does include a kind of event score within the piece: "Maybe you can send signed, plastic lighters to people in place of your penis. But then some people might take your lighter as a piece of sculpture and keep it up in their living-room shelf." This piece, as with *Grapefruit* as a whole, proposes unexpected and not yet codified aesthetic forms of working through or counteracting structural violence, in modes that remain hopeful of remaining in process, and not as an art

object on the "living-room shelf." It is significant to note again that Ono ends *Grapefruit* with "On Rape" and to notice that the letters of the word "rape" appear within the letters of the one-word title of the book. The placement of the text at the end of the book does suggest that the problems of the *Rape* film are central to the overall work of *Grapefruit*. Ono's "On Rape" does not need to be read as dismissing what is so problematic about the *Rape* film, even if the language of the text does not directly articulate a critique and might even appear to trivialize what is so problematic about the film. What might seem like an inappropriate or insufficient response might be thought of as part of Ono's mode of commentary and critique elaborated across the pieces of *Grapefruit*.

In a 1989 interview, Ono did articulate a more direct commentary on the film: "I don't want to see *Rape* now. I haven't seen the *Rape* film in a long time, but just thinking about the concept of it frightens me now because now I'm in that position, the position of the woman in the film" (Macdonald 12). Amelia Jones, in *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, compares Ono and Lennon's 1969 *Rape* film with Vito Acconci's 1969 *Following Piece*, in which the artist followed random people on the street in New York up until the very point at which each person could no longer be followed. Jones notes that the film "enacts the gender specific orientation of predatory impulse that Acconci explores exclusively in terms of his own subjectivity" (Jones 127). The production of the Ono and Lennon film, like the Acconci piece, should be critiqued – as Ono suggests in the interview response – for being produced through a form of assault and violation.

The *Rape* film can be seen as having not only been complicit with, but having taken to an extreme, the scopic regime and male gaze of normative cinema. That *Grapefruit* ends with the "On Films" section, with the text "On Rape," is poignant in that all of the pieces proceeding the

text in the book suggest organizations of the senses that challenge, evade, exaggerate, make fun of, imagine life beyond dominant sensory regimes (such as those of the cinematic apparatus). *Grapefruit*'s queer aesthetic of intermedia involves its percipient-interactants in new organizations of (or new imaginations of new organizations of) the senses: a challenge to dominant conditions of representation and dominant modes of spectatorship.

Part 4: *Grapefruit* as Queer Intermedia

In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, José Esteban Muñoz writes of "queer intermedia" as "interdisciplinary in relation to both art-making protocols and taxonomies of race, gender, and sex" (Muñoz 116). Intermedia is a queering of genre, a queering of categorization, social and aesthetic. A reviewer noted of Ono's art in 1972 that Ono was interested not in "mixed-media" but in an "art which is in conception altogether independent of the idea of genre" (Benedikt 29). Independence from genre, both in terms of genres of art and genres of social life, might not be possible or desirable. "Art-making protocols" and "taxonomies of race, gender, and sex" are social and historical conditions that cannot simply be escaped but can be re-worked, re-configured, re-routed, re-imagined, queered.

In "To the Wesleyan People," a text that Ono includes in *Grapefruit*, a text dated January 13th, 1966 and written on the occasion of a lecture by Ono at Wesleyan University, Yoko Ono discusses what could be described as an aesthetic of queer intermedia. Ono begins in the text by making a distinction between her event-based art and Happenings: "Event, to me, is not an assimilation of all the other arts as Happenings seems to be, but an extrication from the various sensory perceptions." It might seem odd that Ono describes her work as "extrication" from sensory perceptions, considering that so much of her work involves attention to sensory

perception. But what Ono's work offers is an "extrication" from a normative organization of sensory perception. Ono goes on in "To the Wesleyan People" to discuss how her event-based art works with "something that starts it moving, the closest word for it may be a 'wish' or 'hope.'" In involving a mix of performable and unperformable elements, Ono's events occur in part through a utopian dimension of what Muñoz (following Ernst Bloch) terms the no-longer and the not-yet.

Ono's queer intermedia also emerges through the production of different relations to media differentiation in art production and aesthetic experience. In "To the Wesleyan People," Ono writes that "it is nice to return to having many different arts, including happenings, just as having many flowers." But for Ono, these different arts could be different from the current organization of the arts: "in fact, we could have more arts 'smell,' 'height,' 'taste,' 'cry,' 'anger,' (competition of anger)', that sort of thing, etc.") Ono's sensory extrications and sensory rearrangements are a queering of art's media: a transitional space, an intermedia, for the emergence of new arts, queer arts and forms of life.

As Ono tells the Wesleyan People and the readers of *Grapefruit*:

> People might say, that we never experience things separately, they are always in fusion, and that is why 'happening,' which is a fusion of all sensory perceptions. Yes, I agree, but if that is so, it is all the more reason and challenge to create sensory experience isolated from other sensory experiences, which is something rare in daily life. Art is not merely a duplication of life. To assimilate art in life, is different from art duplicating life.

Following "To the Wesleyan People" in *Grapefruit* is a text titled "Sense Piece," which does not have an event score instruction but states: "Common sense prevents you from thinking. Have less sense and you will make more sense." Ono's refusal of "common sense" and embrace of various forms of "nonsense" occurs through a queer attention to sense perception.

Ono's queer intermedia can be thought of as involving what Rizvanna Bradley, in a special issue she edited of *Women & Performance* on texture, has termed "other sensualities." As Emily Wasserman noted in a 1972 *Artforum* review of Ono's first major exhibition, *This Is Not Here* at the Everson Museum in Syracuse, Ono works with "the subtle mechanisms of the senses, transposed into unexpected relationships with everyday stimuli" and evokes the "possibility for the transfer of somatic processes like laughing, coughing, smelling or listening, beyond their immediate time span or space" (Wasserman 71). Ono's art-in-life holds a space for readers, viewers, percipient-interactants to engage in a dialectic of fantasy and reality, a space within which to re-imagine and re-work reality. Ono's work with the form of the instruction both implies the relationship of power involved in instruction and re-routes that power to those receiving the instruction. Ono's work with basic bodily processes and affective registers that might register as silly or unserious articulates a different politics through queer re-imaginings of rearrangements of time, space, sensation, and relation.

In 2013, Ono published a second book of instructions, a kind of sequel to *Grapefruit*, called *Acorn*, with instruction pieces originally distributed as part of a web project. Ono now also re-circulates pieces from *Grapefruit* via social media. Ono has taken on what Brigid Cohen has described as a "late-career role as a kind of matriarch of transnational vanguards having developed a sophisticated use of social media and the internet" (Cohen 212). The pieces of *Grapefruit*, and now *Acorn*, persist in occurring through attention to bodily processes in the present and to the not yet and the no longer. The space of *Grapefruit* is a transitional space, a queer intermedia, between bodily possibility as mediated socially and technically and that which might seem nonsensical, impossible, queer.

Coda: William Pope.L's *Another Kind of Love: John Cage's 'Silence,' By Hand*

"For my money, resistance to established power is always necessary, even if, especially if, the established power is radical, avant-garde, or subversive."

William Pope.L, "Canary in the Coal Mine" (56)

"The best medium for a project is usually the wrong one."

William Pope.L, "William Pope.L on 'Acting a Fool' and Alternative Futures"

In the summer of 2014, there were two exhibitions installed next to each at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. One exhibition, *Art Expanded, 1958-1978,* displayed work from a range of artists involved in the emergence of an "expanded" field of art oriented around event and experience (artists often connected through the Black Mountain, Fluxus, and post-Cagean networks that are the focus of this dissertation). One exhibition, *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art* displayed works from the 1960s to the present that work with *black performance* as a medium – and not necessarily works limited to "performance art" as a genre. Originating in an exhibition at Contemporary Arts Museum Houston and a series of events at the Grey Art Gallery at New York University and the Studio Museum Harlem, *Radical Presence* emerged from curator Valerie Cassel Oliver's work in organizing a Benjamin Patterson retrospective and researching *black performance* in Fluxus.

At the Walker, the wall at the entrance of *Radical Presence* displayed over two hundred

sheets of yellow legal pad paper.[41] On these pages appeared the words of John Cage's 1961 book *Silence,* as rewritten, in ink, by hand, by the artist William Pope.L. Pope.L's *Another Kind of Love: John Cage's 'Silence,' By Hand* (2013) appeared as a line between the two exhibitions, *Radical Presence* and *Art Expanded*. The title of this work questions affection and affiliation, as the rewriting-by-hand indexes the labor of production. As an exhibition of *black performance* in contemporary art, *Radical Presence* at the Walker appeared to begin with John Cage's *Silence.* By Pope.L's hand, Cage's *Silence* becomes *Another Kind of Love*. The sheets of yellow legal pad paper document, in black ink, labor and love. In Pope.L's *Another Kind of Love,* Cage's *Silence* appears in a genealogy of contemporary art, in a kinship with Cage's turning away from the post-Duchampian removal of the hand in the strategy of the readymade into an intermedia art of foregrounded multisensory embodiment.

As Huey Copeland argues in *Bound to Appear: Art, Slavery, and the Site of Blackness in Multicultural America,* the Duchampian readymade should be read "in light of slavery's structuring principles" (Copeland 18): "Long before the genre's originator, Marcel Duchamp, turned a urinal into a work of art through a series of enunciative acts in 1917, black bodies were subject to even more arbitrary and binding shifts in their categorical status, ready-mades *avant le lettre*" (18). Pope.L's career of making work explicitly invoking the *readymade* in both senses appears in another work appearing in *Radical Presence* in addition to the opening wall with *Another Kind of Love*: Pope.L's *Eating the Wall Street Journal*.[42] In a corner of the exhibition, there appeared chewed pages of newspaper, a toilet (recalling Duchamp's toilet), and containers of condiments such as ketchup and mayonnaise. In the catalog for *Radical Presence,* there is an

[41] The first of these sheets, PopeL's rewriting of the cover of *Silence,* can be seen in Fig. 9.
[42] The most comprehensive account of Pope.L's work so far appears in the 2002 book, *William Pope.L: The Friendliest Black Artist in America*.

image of a performance of *Eating the Wall Street Journal*, in which Pope.L appears on the toilet, next to containers of milk and ketchup, chewing pages of the *Wall Street Journal* (Fig. 10). In Pope.L's *Eating the Wall Street Journal*, the information of finance capitalism appears not disembodied or dematerialized but through a body's efforts and metabolic processes.

The efforts and processes of language and art are made insistently visible in Pope.L's *Another Kind of Love: John Cage's 'Silence,' By Hand*. Pope.L produced the pages of *Another Kind of Love* during a series of marathon readings of Cage's *Silence* called *Cage Unrequited*, in which the artist and other participants read aloud from the book as Pope.L inscribed the yellow legal pad sheets of paper with the words of the book. [43] In a video of part of *Cage Unrequited* produced by the Studio Museum Harlem, Pope.L appears at a desk with another desk behind him.[44] On the table is a yellow legal pad and a copy of Cage's *Silence*. Pope.L is reading from Cage's "Lecture on Nothing": "As you see, / I can say anything / . / It makes very little / difference / what I say / or even how I say it. / At / this par-ticular moment, / we are passing through / the fourth / part / of a unit which is the / second unit in the second large / part of this talk . / It is a little bit / like passing through Kansas." Pope.L continues reading the "Lecture of Nothing" about ¼ of the way through, ending after reading: "Each moment / is absolute, / alive and sig- / nificant. / Blackbirds / rise / from a field making / a / sound / de-licious / be-beyond / com-pare / I heard them / because / I ac-cepted / the limitations / of an arts / conference / in a Virginia / girls' finishing school, / which limitations / allowed me /quite by accident / to hear the blackbirds / as they up and / and overhead." Pope.L then gets up and moves to the desk behind him.

[43] Catharine Damman discusses these events in "Anti-Oedipus: Pope.L's 'Cage Unrequited.'"
[44] The video can be seen on the Studio Museum's YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=agZ66X5uEvQ.

At this other desk, Pope.L begins reading from a sheet of paper: "Julius Eastman, 1940-1990) was a taut, wiry, gay African-American man. He had such an appearance of athleticism and pent-up energy that he could look dangerous, yet he had a gentle sense of humor, and his deep sepulchral voice, incommensurate with his slight figure, conveyed the solemn authority of a prophet." The words are from Kyle Gann's liner notes to *Unjust Malaise*, a 2005 compilation of Eastman's work. Read by Pope.L, the liner notes tell a story about Julius Eastman and John Cage:

> During a performance of Cage's theater piece *Songbooks* that was chaotic in the best sense of the word, Eastman performed the segment of *Songbooks* that was merely the instruction, 'Give a lecture.' Never shy about his gayness, Eastman lectured on sex, with a young man and woman as volunteers. He undressed the young man onstage, and attempted to undress the woman, who resisted. The next day, the ever-mild-mannered Cage gave an angry lecture about the misuse of the performances of his music, and, before our incredulous eyes, pounded his fist on the piano to punctuate his words: 'the freedom in my music does not mean the freedom to be irresponsible!'

This story, told by Gann and recited by Pope.L – stepping back from *Silence*, is a story of conflicting meanings of *freedom,* of conflicting modes of queer aesthetics, of an acknowledgment that the Cagean "aesthetic of indifference" can never be indifferent. As Ryan Dohoney has noted in "John Cage, Julius Eastman, and the Homosexual Ego": Eastman "revealed the limits of Cagean acceptance and the degree to which Cagean freedom was contingent on performers' having internalized Cage's own tastes and preferences" (Dohoney 47).

In stepping away from Cage and turning to Eastman, Pope.L in *Cage Unrequited* produces *Another Kind of Love* in act of queer genealogy turning away from a straight line to a

white future produced through erasures such as that of Eastman, whose work as a composer has only begun to receive scholarly attention now almost two decades after his death.[45]

There is a great effort, a labor of love, in re-inscribing Cage's *Silence*, but in Pope.L's hand, the text cannot be "silent," which is to say, it cannot be white and unmarked. Pronounced by a marked body, Cagean words become queered, in failing to maintain their whiteness and unmarkedness. The *Lecture on Nothing* has a different sound in Pope.L's scene of reading and writing. In Pope.L's *Cage Unrequited* scene of reading and writing *Another Kind of Love*, the Cagean "I" becomes un-unmarked: "As you see, / I can saying anything / . / It makes very little / difference / what I say / or even how I say it." In *Another Kind of Love*, there are differences that make a difference in the recitation of this "I" of *Silence*.

When seen as an aesthetic of blankness or indifference, the Cagean aesthetic is specific to the medium of whiteness. A white avant-gardism of the blank or the "nothing," as the musicologist Lloyd Whitesell has argued in "White Noise: Race and Erasure in the Cultural Avant-Garde," enacts "a rhetorical structure analogous to that assumed by the white subject" as supposedly neutral and universal (Whitesell 184). Understanding unmarked racial whiteness as a medium of Cage's art can show how Cage's work is always operating through race even if not through its content. To understand how Pope.L has worked with how Cage worked with whiteness as a medium, it is helpful to turn to W.J.T. Mitchell's 2010 DuBois Lectures, *Seeing Through Race*. Returning to W.E.B. DuBois's articulation of race in terms of a "veil," a social mediation of bodily perception, Mitchell argues for understanding race as a *medium*, "something we *see through*, like a frame, a window, a screen, or a lens" (Mitchell xii). In this argument, race

[45] The new Eastman reception includes Renee Levine Packer and Mary Jane Leach's edited collection *Gay Guerilla* and Ellie Hisama's "'Diving into the earth': The Musical Worlds of Julius Eastman."

is not just "content to be mediated, an object to be represented visually or verbally, or a thing to be depicted in a likeness or image" but rather "race is itself a medium and an iconic form – not simply something to be seen, but itself a framework for seeing through" (Mitchell 13). What happens to a medium of race specific to the social capacity to be unmarked – the medium of whiteness – when it occurs in an art of intermediation with a medium of seeing through and from the condition of racialization?

In the racial intermedia of *Another Kind of Love,* John Cage's *Silence* cannot be radically-unmarked. An intermedium involving the medium of race in its art, *Another Kind of Love*'s *Silence,* exemplifies how an art of intermedia involves in the complexity of its medium, the medium of race, in queerly enacting *something else* than that which already has a name and a place in a straight-white genealogy. Enacting another future – stepping back from Cage's *Silence* after laboring to reproduce *Silence* – Pope.L says the name Julius Eastman, the author of *Evil Nigger, Gay Guerilla,* and *Stay On It*. The very names of Eastman's compositions mark art's never neutral social medium, the systems and structures that (un)mark bodies as something or mark bodies as nothing.

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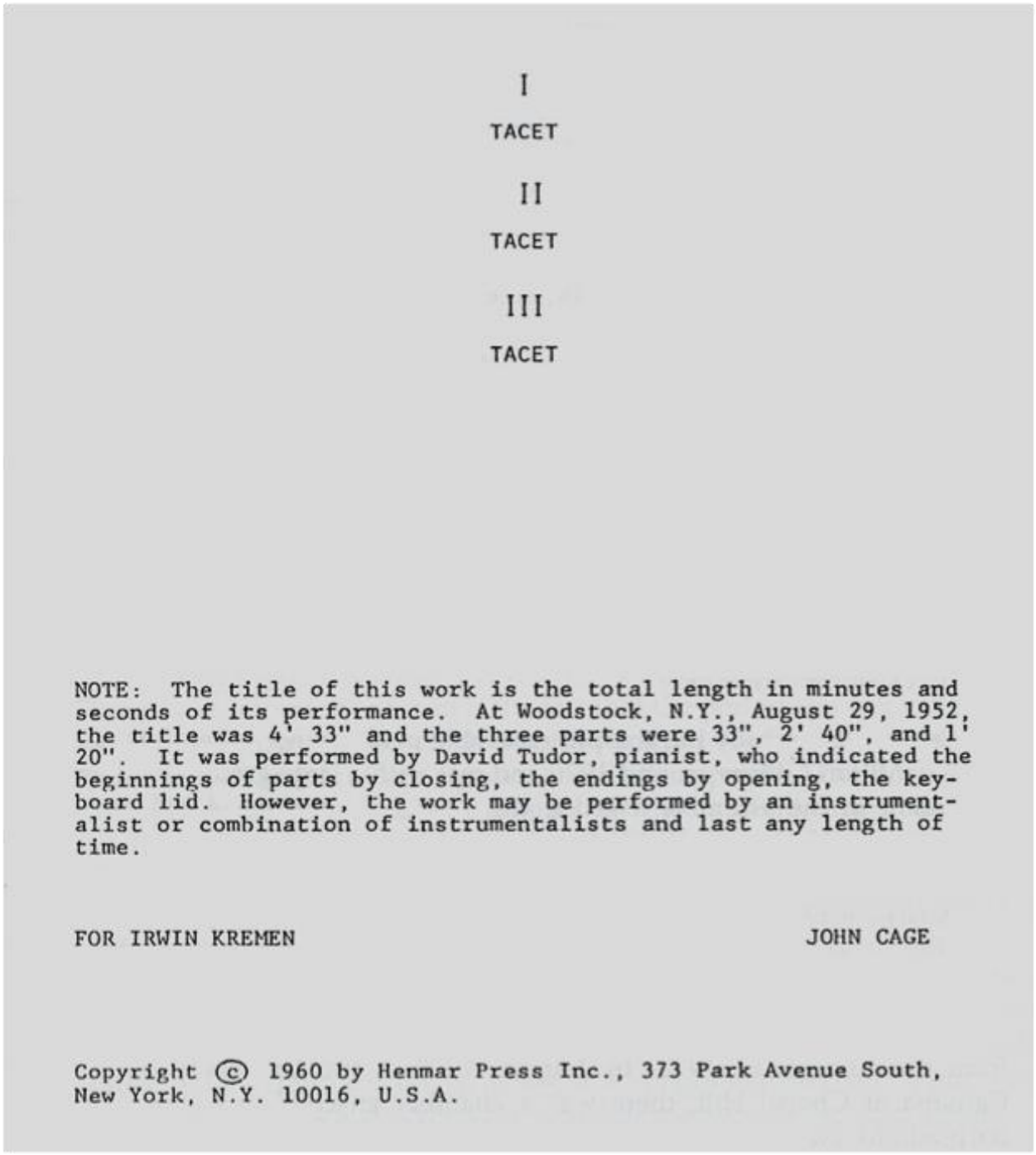


I

TACET

II

TACET

III

TACET

NOTE: The title of this work is the total length in minutes and seconds of its performance. At Woodstock, N.Y., August 29, 1952, the title was 4' 33" and the three parts were 33", 2' 40", and 1' 20". It was performed by David Tudor, pianist, who indicated the beginnings of parts by closing, the endings by opening, the keyboard lid. However, the work may be performed by an instrumentalist or combination of instrumentalists and last any length of time.

FOR IRWIN KREMEN

JOHN CAGE

Fig. 1.

John Cage, score of *4'33"* (1952, published 1960)

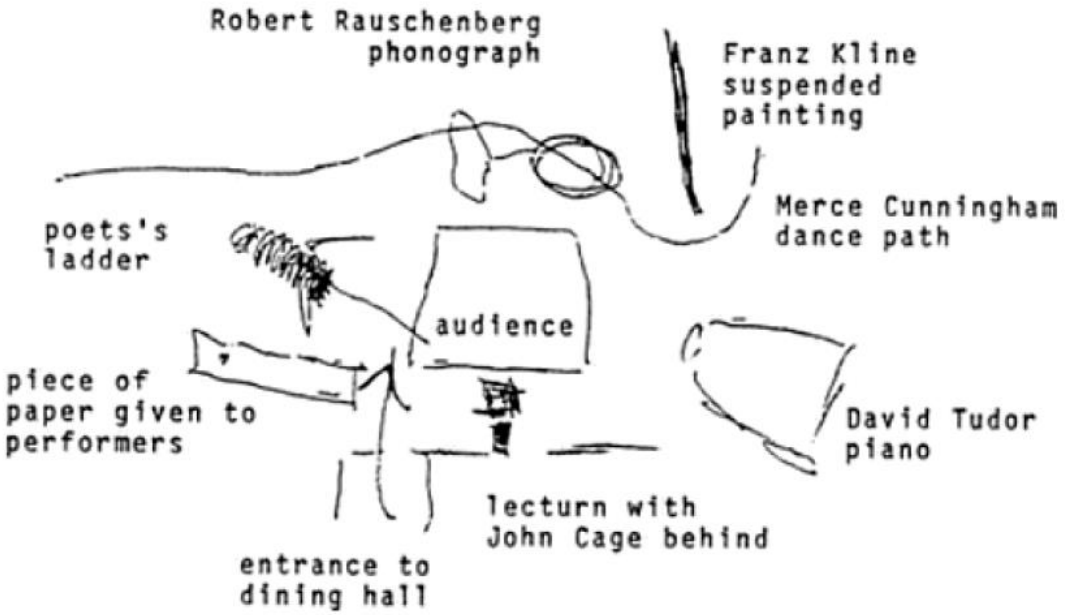


Fig. 2

M.C. Richards, drawing of *Untitled Event*, 1989

Fig. 3

In Circles LP, 1968

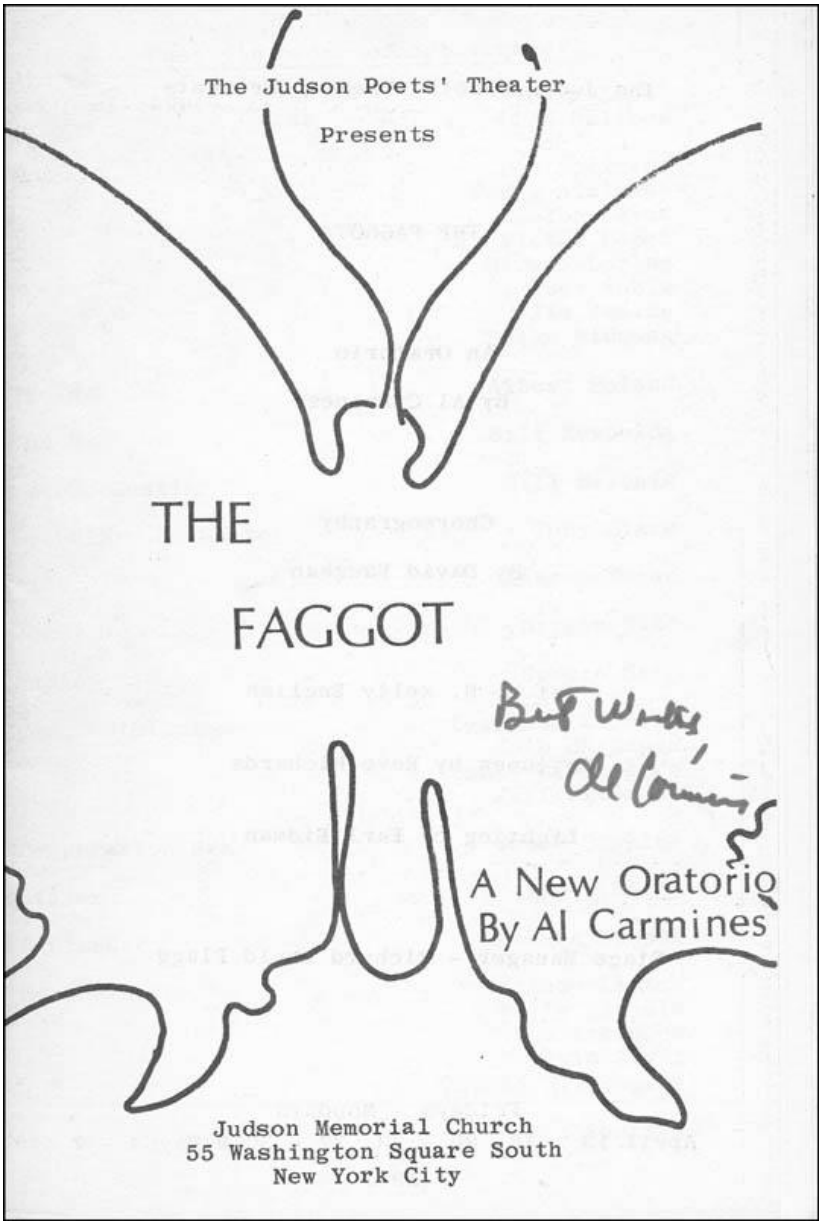


Fig. 4

Judson Church, flyer for *The Faggot*, 1973

Art Notes

What Happened? Nothing

By GRACE GLUECK

THE Willard Gallery on East 72d Street is having a retrospective (OK —call it an introspective) of works by Ray Johnson, who may well be New York's most famous unknown artist. Though Johnson's collages have for years been creeping into first-rate collections, he's never before had a gallery show. His previous exhibitions have been fairly impromptu—on sidewalks, in Grand Central Station and down on Peck Slip.

"I've never really believed in the gallery thing," said Johnson, a baby-bald young man in a leather motorcycle jacket. "But at the same time I've been dying for a show. Ambivalence, you see. Occasionally I visit collectors with a box of collages wrapped in newspaper under my arm, like a Fuller Brush man. That pleases me. I've showed them on Mies Van Der Rohe tables all over town."

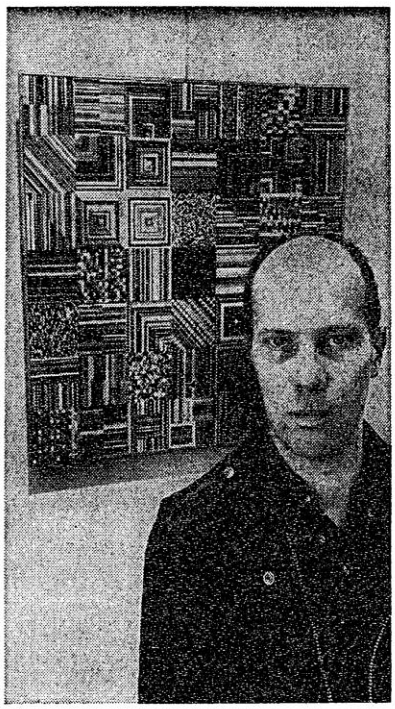
Epistolist

Johnson has also won underground fame for his Nothings, a type of cool un-Happening which he invented. His most eventful Nothing, a ½-minute affair, came about when he dumped two boxes of wooden dowels down a stairwell, just out of earshot of an invited audience. "It sounded to me like a waterfall, or coal going down a chute," he recalls. What else Happened? "Nothing."

But Johnson is probably best known for his epistolomania, an obsession that grips him anywhere from 8 to 10 hours a day. He is founding director of the New York Correspondence School of Art, composed of several hundred friends across the country with whom he is in constant pen-and-ink communion. Recipients of his letters, poems, cartoons, collages, announcements of spurious art shows and other Johnsonia tend to hoard them as collectors' items. Johnson, in turn, treasures what they send back.

"I study cancellations, the manner in which the stamp is placed, the way the address is done. Then I classify and file the contents. It's a marvelous art form, the letter—full of wonder and surprise."

To preserve his creative isolation, Johnson lives in "voluntary poverty" on the Lower East Side. "My apartment is absolutely bare—a table, a bed, a chair, a typewriter, a coffee pot. I can't stand works of art—they have too many associations. Living this way, I can do what I want—which is, to write letters."



Richard Saunders—Scope

Ray Johnson and early work
Ambivalence, you see

PEEL

From London comes word that the staid Royal Academy of Arts, founded in 1768 and as predictably sedate as the British monarchy, is attempting a startling change of spots. In a desperate attempt to boost flagging attendance figures (and raise hard cash) the academy has decided shamelessly to woo modern art.

In fact, reports The London Sunday Times, things have already gone so far that at the forthcoming Summer Exhibition (a show that has tended to keep avant-gardists away in droves) pop king Peter Blake will show not one but three works, along with a major painting by Sandra Blow, a leading British abstractionist. The academy will also allow this year, for the first time, the works of important artists to hang together instead of separately next to amateur daubers. And its president, Sir Humphrey Brooke, is attempting to break down the long opposition of important London dealers, who have traditionally kept their artists out of Academy shows.

It is no secret in London that the Academy has been in some financial straits. Most of its big recent exhibitions, with the exception of last year's Goya show, have been flops. Only 47,000 saw the recent exhibition of 18th and 19th century British art lent by the American collector, Paul Mellon, who paid the show's expenses himself. And 2½ years ago, to help make ends meet, the Academy sold its famous Leonardo drawing for over $2,000,000.

An effect of the Academy's new approach, notes The Times, may be to attract more attention from TV, providing an additional attendance boost. One TV airing of a Dutch art exhibit staged by the Academy, said Sir Humphrey hopefully, had produced the next day "a whole new class of gallery-goer. There was banana and orange peel all up the main staircase."

FACTS

Last week's rejection of Alexander Calder's crablike stabile, "Guichet," by Park Commissioner Newbold Morris as "too abstract" to adorn a city-owned plaza at Lincoln Center, has highlighted a pair of rather unsurprising facts:

Fact #1: The dearth of "abstract" art on New York City property. Compared with such European municipalities as Vienna, which has no hesitation about commissioning abstract art for park lands and housing projects, New York makes rather a dreary show. In fact, reveals the New York City Art Commission, the only really "abstract" art on municipal grounds is found in, of all places, the public schools. Examples: Exterior murals by Hans Hofmann for the New York School of Printing; an abstract "Flight" sculpture by Gwen Luks on the facade of the High School of Aviation Trades; a series of abstract panels by sculptor Constantine Nivola for the new West Side High School. There is no abstract art at all on New York City park lands.

Fact #2: Many Calder sculptures, of the type rejected by Mr. Morris, are right out on public view in cities throughout the world. Notable examples (excluding private museums, which are often apt to have a Calder in the garden) include one in front of UNESCO headquarters in Paris; another in the main square of Spoleto, Italy, a third before the American Consulate at Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany. And last year, French cultural minister André Malraux dedicated a whopping stabile at the Maison de la Culture in Bourges, France.

COLLAGE

The Detroit Institute of Arts is staging "Art in Italy, 1600-1700," the first comprehensive exhibition of Italian baroque art to be shown in the United States in two decades. . . . London small talk has it that John Pope-Hennessy, curator of sculpture at the Victoria & Albert Museum, may soon replace the retiring Sir Philip Hendy as director of London's National Gallery. . . . "Images of Leonard Baskin," a film produced and directed by Warren Forma, will appear on Channel 13 April 13 at 8 P.M.

Fig. 5

Ray Johnson's Nothings in the *New York Times*, 1965

Fig. 6

Ray Johnson, *John Cage Shoes*, 1977

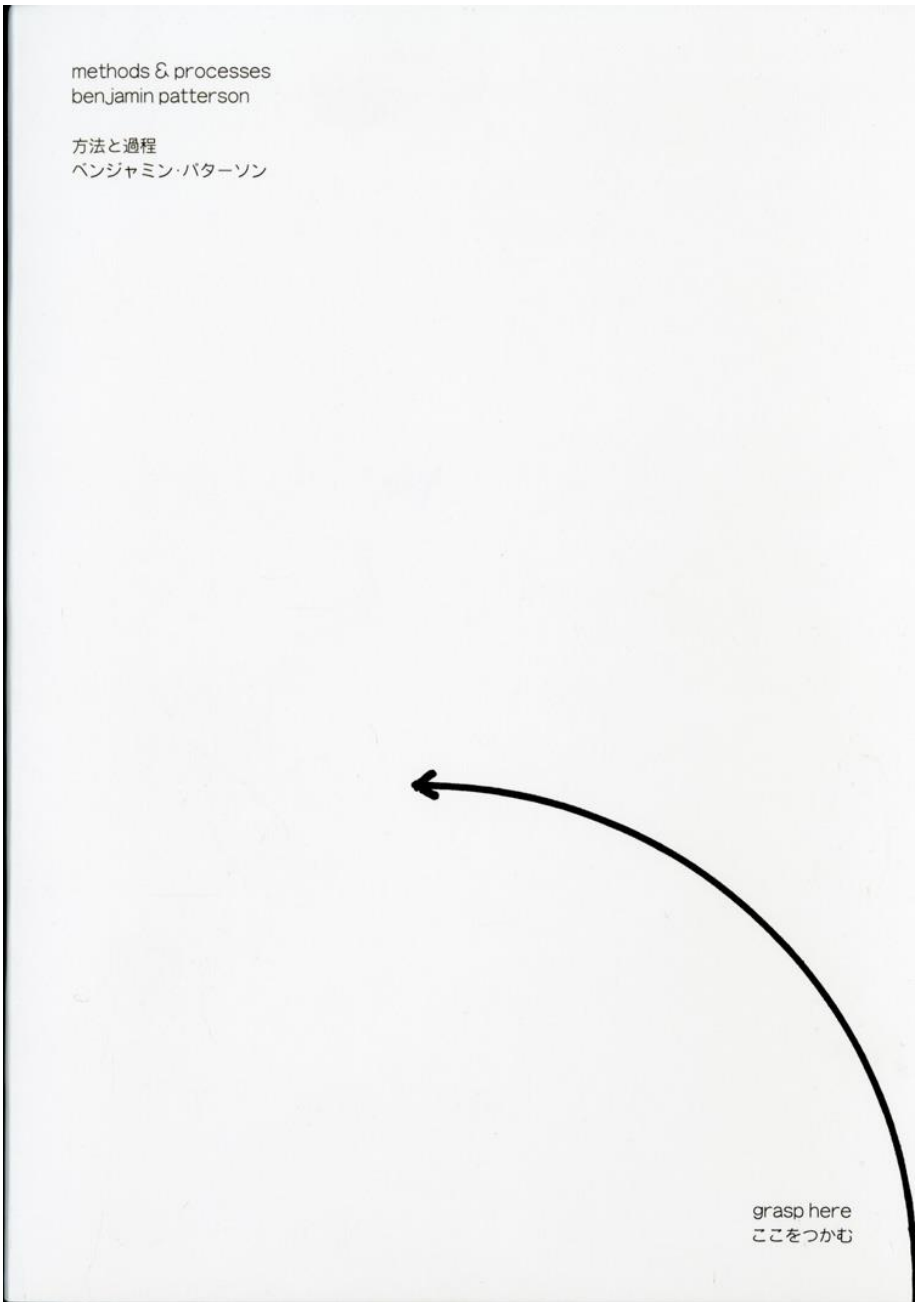


Fig. 7

Front cover of Benjamin Patterson, *Methods and Processes*, 1962

Fig. 8

Still from Yoko Ono, *Film No. 4 (Bottoms)*, 1966

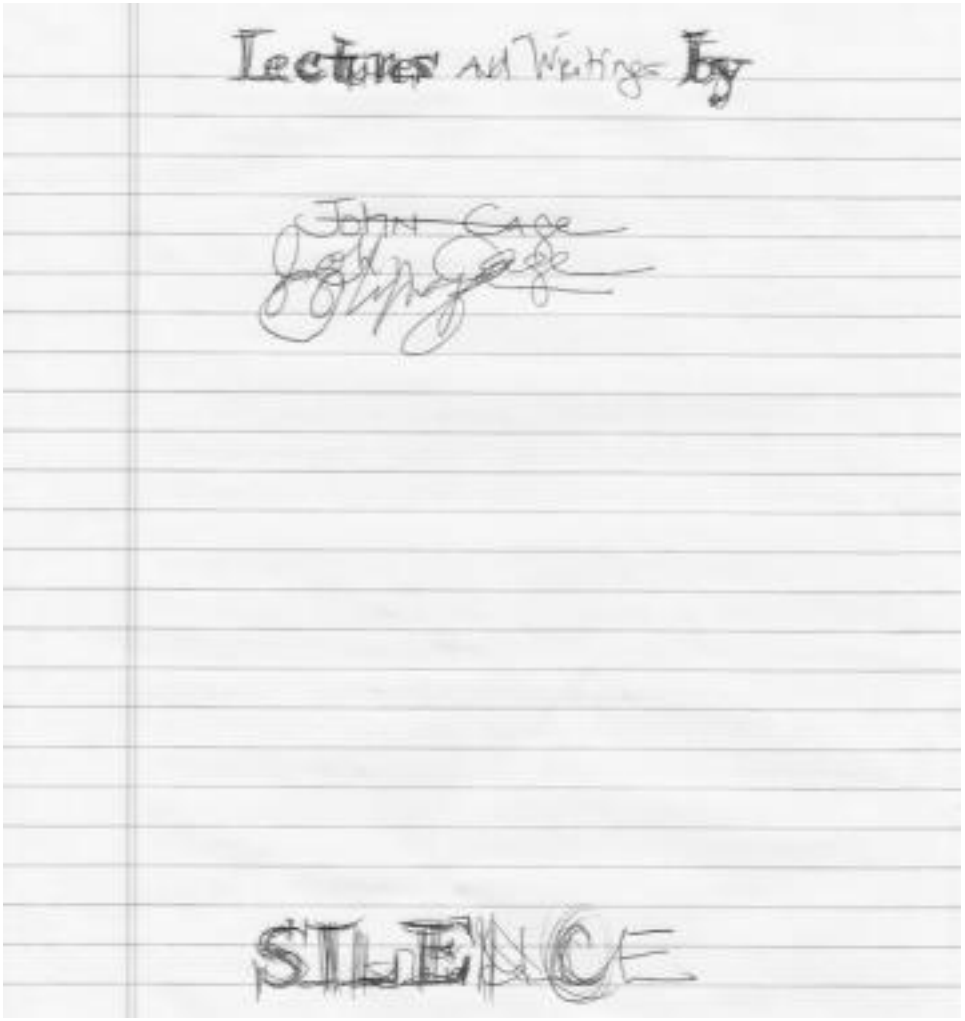


Fig. 9

William Pope.L, *Another Kind of Love: John Cage's 'Silence,' By Hand*, 2013

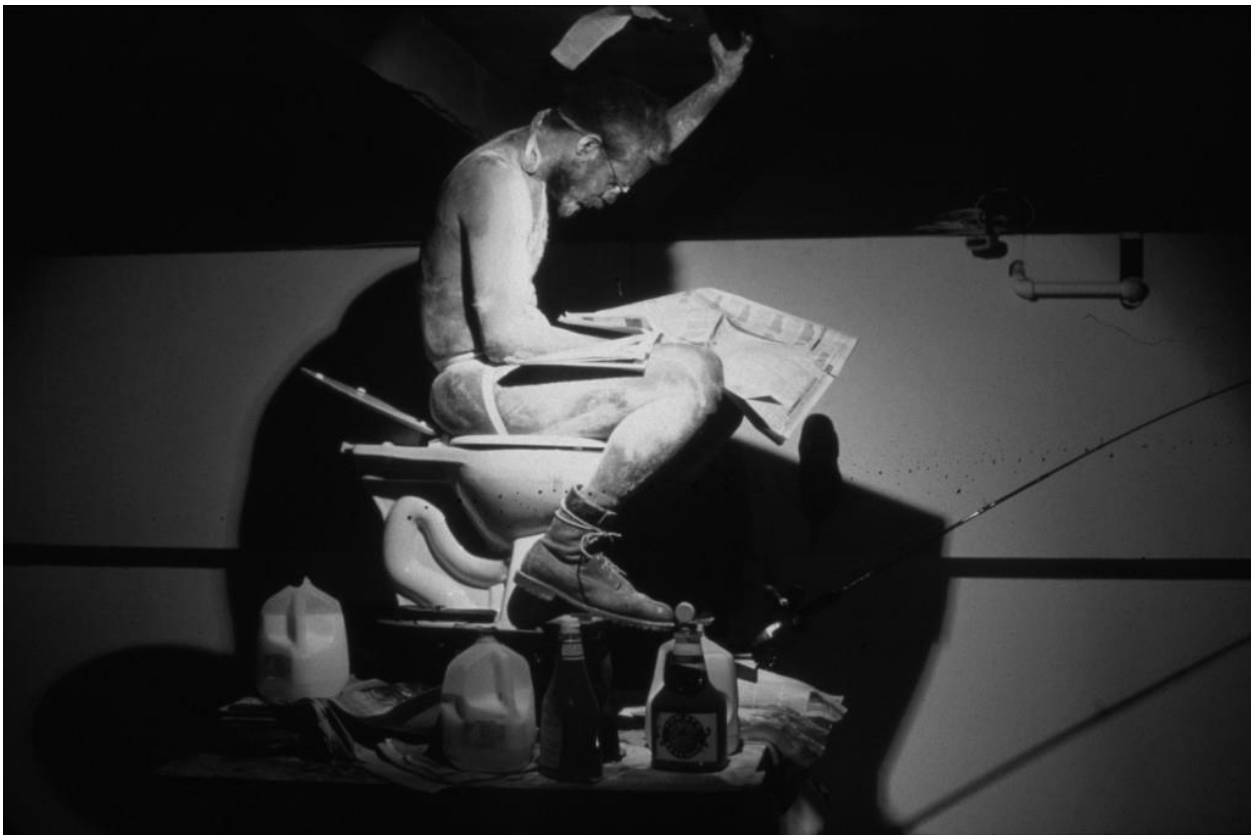


Fig. 10

William Pope.L, *Eating the Wall Street Journal*, 2000