Performance and the Museum

Museum Research Consortium
Research Dossier 4

MoMA

Contents

Cover: *CREDIT TO BE ADDED*

Ben Vautier, “Fluxus repertoire” books (undated)

Julia Pelta Feldman
Institute of Fine Arts, NYU

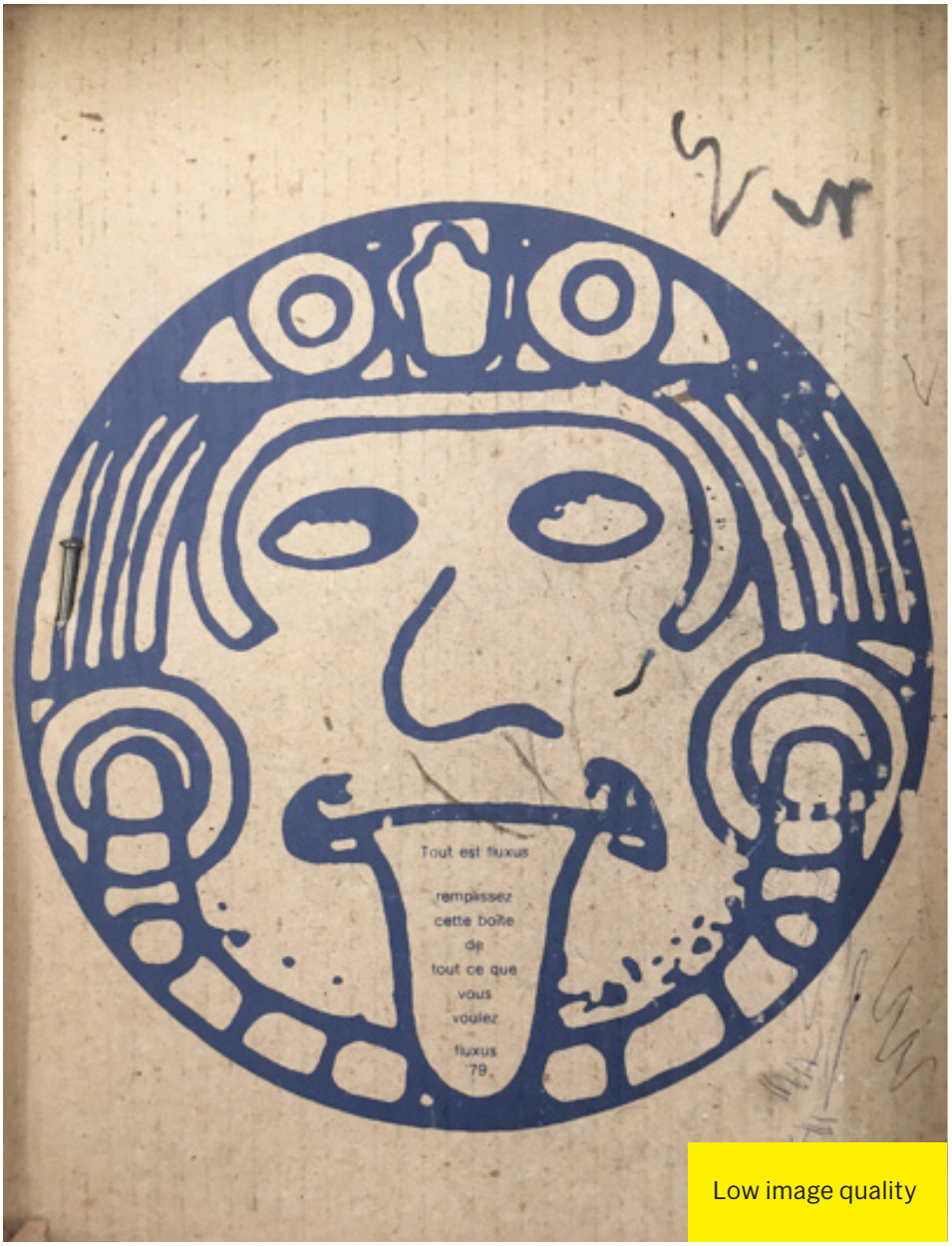

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Plate 1 Ben Vautier. “Fluxus repertoire” books. Undated. Two binders with hand-written and printed Fluxus scores organized by last name of artist. Marks next to scores may indicate works performed by Ben Vautier. According to note by Hendricks, “These two books were used by Vautier for performance and are the basis for a planned book of Fluxus scores.” Binders are housed in cardboard box annotated by Ben Vautier. The Museum of Modern Art Archives. Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Archives. I.1274

These two modest binders, apparently repurposed address books with divisions for names A through Z, are a kind of scrapbook, with text and images from multiple sources pasted onto hole-punched pages within. Referred to as Ben Vautier's "Fluxus repertoire" books—because that is what he wrote on their spines—these objects challenge traditional art history and museum cataloguing techniques. Typical systems of interpretation and registration rely on clear authorial attribution and precise stipulations as to what constitutes the work's material and intellectual integrity. In conforming to these needs, traditional works of art such as paintings and sculptures are also obedient to art history, museums, and the art market. Fluxus, the artistic movement or network with which Vautier is primarily associated, endeavored to confound exactly those systems. It did so through two primary channels. Fluxus—originally conceived by its founder, George Maciunas, as an alternative publishing house—produced cheap editioned works, manufactured by Maciunas and distributed directly to buyers through the mail, which circumvented not only museums and galleries but also typical notions of value and good taste. Its other important medium was the "event score," often credited to George Brecht, which brought performance art structurally closer to music and allowed most anyone, not only a score's author, to perform it. Event scores and editions, collaboratively designed, created, and disseminated, broke down barriers between artist and audience, and deliberately dissolved singular authorship under the collective aegis of Fluxus.

This explains why Vautier could refer to these binders, which primarily contain event scores by other artists, as his own "repertoire": it was common for Fluxus artists to perform each others' works, and here, Vautier seems to have marked those pieces he performed with a neat X. Thus, the binders constitute a valuable primary document of Vautier's activities within Fluxus. Yet Vautier, the putative "author" of these objects, actually authored very little of what is within them (though some scores by others are handwritten by him, and often in a kind of shorthand that does not correspond exactly to other sources). The binders were meant to be used like a scrapbook or notebook, not displayed as art—an assertion supported by their unprepossessing appearance. In that sense, the binders do not constitute an artwork, but a kind of archival document, which explains the fact that they are part of the collection of the Museum Archives, rather than the Museum's permanent collection.

Yet even if they are not themselves artworks, the repertoire books undeniably, and perhaps paradoxically, contain works of art: scores by other artists, including Albert Fine, Dick Higgins, Toshi Ichiyanagi, Joe Jones, Takehisa Kosugi, Arthur Køpcke, Milan Knížák, Maciunas, Ben Patterson, Nam June Paik, Tomas Schmit, Mieko Shiomi, Emmett Williams, and Robert Watts. On their own, such scores constitute a problematic ontological category. The written score for a piece of music does not constitute the work of art—only the performance can claim that—but event scores can make a claim to being independent art objects with visual as well as documentary interest. This is especially true for those that were typeset by Maciunas, a talented designer. Like Fluxus's editions, scores are theoretically multiple works, but variations often exist, and some are rarer than others. In this sense, Vautier's repertoire books contain several treasures, including a particular version of Maciunas's "In Memoriam to Adriano Olivetti" (1962), copies of which are not found elsewhere in the Museum's collections. But to remove this page from the repertoire books would damage their integrity as documents.

Vautier's repertoire books serve to remind us that objects can never tell more than part of the story of performance, and that to hallow artifacts as artworks may even impair our ability to tell those stories. The multiple authorships and identities of these books aren't merely inconvenient; to simply side-step them—which the museum has successfully done, for example by attributing the binders to Vautier—is to undermine or dismiss their very meaning. It has often been noted that Fluxus, a deliberately anti-institutional movement, poses problems for museums that seek to integrate it into the histories of more mainstream movements. It is by no means impossible for museums to collect, preserve, and exhibit Fluxus works, but to insist on doing so within traditional frameworks and systems is inevitably to sterilize them.

Simone Forti, ***See Saw*** **(1961–2011)**

Barbora Bartunkova
Yale University

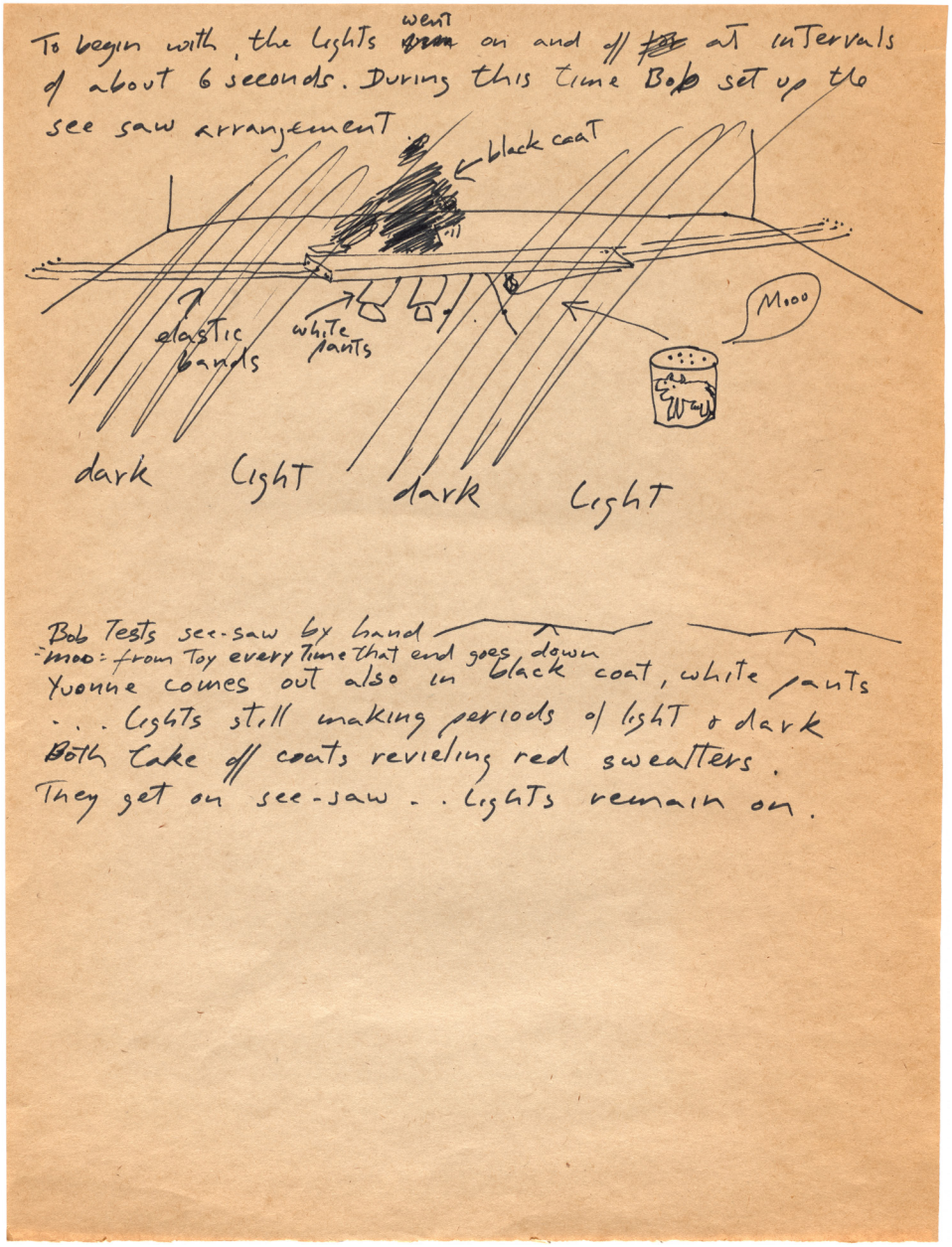

Plate 2 Simone Forti (American, born Italy, 1935). *See Saw—hand drawn/written description of original performance (1961), with notes about Bob Morris*. c. 1972. Ink on newsprint. 14 x 11". Unique. Committee on Media and Performance Art Funds. 1769.2015.2

Simone Forti developed her seminal *Dance Constructions* out of the urge to experience her body without technical and stylistic constraints—to "feel things as simple and basic as the gravitational pull between [her] mass and the rest of the earth, or a need to push and pull and climb."[1] In *See Saw*, the simple plywood construction becomes central to the investigation of such bodily experience, as the dancer's physical gestures and movements interact with the see-saw's physics.

Although Forti coined the phrase "dance constructions" as she was developing her series of works for an event organized by La Monte Young at Yoko Ono's Chambers Street loft in May 1961, she had already introduced two performances in December 1960 at the Reuben Gallery in New York that she would also include in this body of work.[2] During *Happenings at the Reuben Gallery*, Simone Forti presented *See Saw* and *Rollers* at a shared event with Jim Dine and Claes Oldenburg. In this original version, *See Saw* was performed by Yvonne Rainer and Robert Morris. As lights turned on an off, Morris entered the space wearing a long black coat and set up the see-saw arrangement, fastening a "moo-sound" toy to the underside of the see-saw and connecting the plank on both sides to the walls of the room with elastic bands, creating a continuous zig-zagging line. After Morris tested the see-saw with his hand, Rainer entered, also wearing a long black coat. As the pair took off their coats, revealing red sweaters and black shorts, they mounted the see-saw with the lights remaining on and began an improvisational exploration of movements, positions, and interactions on the see-saw, constantly shifting the weight of their bodies and tilting the board from one side to another. At one point, Morris picked up and read an Art News magazine, and Rainer created a commotion and screamed. As the performance neared its end, Forti sang the song *Way Out on a Sun Baked Desert* before unhooking the "moo-sound" toy, tipping it to "moo" one last time as the performers disembarked from the board.[3]

While *See Saw* provided an exploration of balancing movements, the work itself, as Meredith Morse argues, presented a "balancing act."[4] Not only did the performance push the boundaries of the medium of contemporary dance, but it also presented a pivotal moment in Forti's artistic development in which she negotiated with the improvisational nature of her previous work with Anna Halprin and the experimental approaches she encountered in the New York avant-garde circles.[5] Robert Ellis Dunn's dance composition classes at the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, which also introduced participants to the scores of John Cage, particularly informed her theoretical approach to her new dances.[6] While acute awareness of bodily movement and an intuitive approach were still key to *Dance Constructions*, the dances became oriented toward the fulfilment of tasks, following scripted instructions in interactions with bodies and objects rather than free improvisation.[7]

Among the *Dance Constructions*, *See Saw* occupies a unique position, as the work requires a creative restaging rather than only a training of tasks, allowing for more variation in its action and use of props. In a recent interview with Sabine Breitwieser, Forti articulated her shift in perception regarding the performance: "I'm beginning to think that *See Saw* is not really a *Dance Construction*. It's a score for a play. And then the score has to be interpreted."[8] Forti's approach has generated different versions of *See Saw* from the 1960s to the present, effectively encapsulated by Forti's description of the work as a "domestic drama," which conveys its theatrical aspect and suggesting a thematic concern with personal relationships.[9]

The staging of the rapport between the two dancers arises from the choice of performers and the rehearsal process. For example, during the preparation of the 2011 edition performed at The Box in Los Angeles, which lasted several hours over three days, Forti encouraged Brennan Gerard and Sarah Wilbur to first familiarize themselves with the see-saw and freely explore possibilities of movement before directing them to explore contrasting paces and ways of finding and disrupting equilibrium through small shifts in posture. Forti would take brief notes and sketch quick drawings into a large notebook, recording observations on bodily adjustments as well as moments and utterances of particular interest. These textual and visual fragments would be useful in the development of the final performance, while serving as instructions for future dancers and a historical record of the work and its process.[10]

More recently, See Saw was performed during the exhibition *Simone Forti: "Here It Comes"* (2016) at Vleeshal, Middelburg in the Netherlands, where Forti selected the artistic duo Mie Frederikke Christensen and Margaux Parillaud to create their own interpretation of the work.[11] Into their choreographed and more improvised sequences on and around the see-saw, the artists introduced two blocks of red clay, a signature material frequently deployed in their performances.[12] By adding this malleable element, they shifted the work's possible meanings into the realm of their friendship and artistic relationship, while offering an exploration of female relationships more broadly.

In its original version and later interpretations, *See Saw* investigates the intersection of Simone Forti's strong artistic vision and the dancer's intuitive approach to their balancing act. The work as a whole explores a shifting constellation of bodies, objects, and sounds, articulating new forms of movement and presenting continually innovative interventions in postmodern dance.

1. Simone Forti, “Dance Constructions,” artist’s statement, Department of Media and Performance Art, Museum of Modern Art.

2. Ibid. The program at Yoko Ono’s loft, *Five Dance Constructions and Some Other Things*, also included *Huddle, Slant Board, Hangers, Platforms, From Instructions*, and *Accompaniment for La Monte’s 2 Sounds and La Monte’s 2 Sounds*.

3. This description is based on Simone Forti’s hand-drawn/written description of the original performance of See Saw, with notes about Bob Morris from c. 1972, as well as Forti’s artist’s statement. See Simone Forti, “*See Saw*,” artist’s statement, Department of Media and Performance Art, Museum of Modern Art.

4. Meredith Morse, “Between Two Continents: Simone Forti’s See-Saw,” in *Simone Forti: Thinking with the Body*, ed. Sabine Breitwieser (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2014): 37–38.

5. Ibid.

6. For a discussion of Dunn’s influential classes see Meredith Morse, *Soft Is Fast: Simone Forti in the 1960s and After* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016): 42–45.

7. Robert Morris, “Notes on Simone Forti,” in *Simone Forti: Thinking with the Body*, ed. Sabine Breitwieser (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2014): 46.

8. This conversation occurred on November 20 21, 2013. See Sabine Breitwieser “The Workshop Process: Sabine Breitwieser in Conversation with Simone Forti,” in *Simone Forti: Thinking with the Body*, ed. Sabine Breitwieser (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2014): 27.

9. Athena Christa Holbrook, “*See Saw*,” notes on the performance during *Simone Forti:* “*Here It Comes*” at Vleeshal, Department of Media and Performance Art, Museum of Modern Art, 2016.

10. Here I draw on the training video of the performance and Simone Forti’s notebook, both in the collection of the Department of Media and Performance Art at the Museum of Modern Art.

11. The exhibition, curated by Roos Gortzak, was held on January 31–April 3, 2016. See Vleeshal. “Simone Forti ‘Here It Comes’: 31.01–03.04.2016,” *Vleeshal,* accessed 25 April 2017, http://vleeshal.nl/en/exhibitions/simone-forti.

12. Holbrook, “*See Saw*.”

Edward Ruscha, ***Royal Road Test*** **(1967)**

Rebecca Straub
Yale University

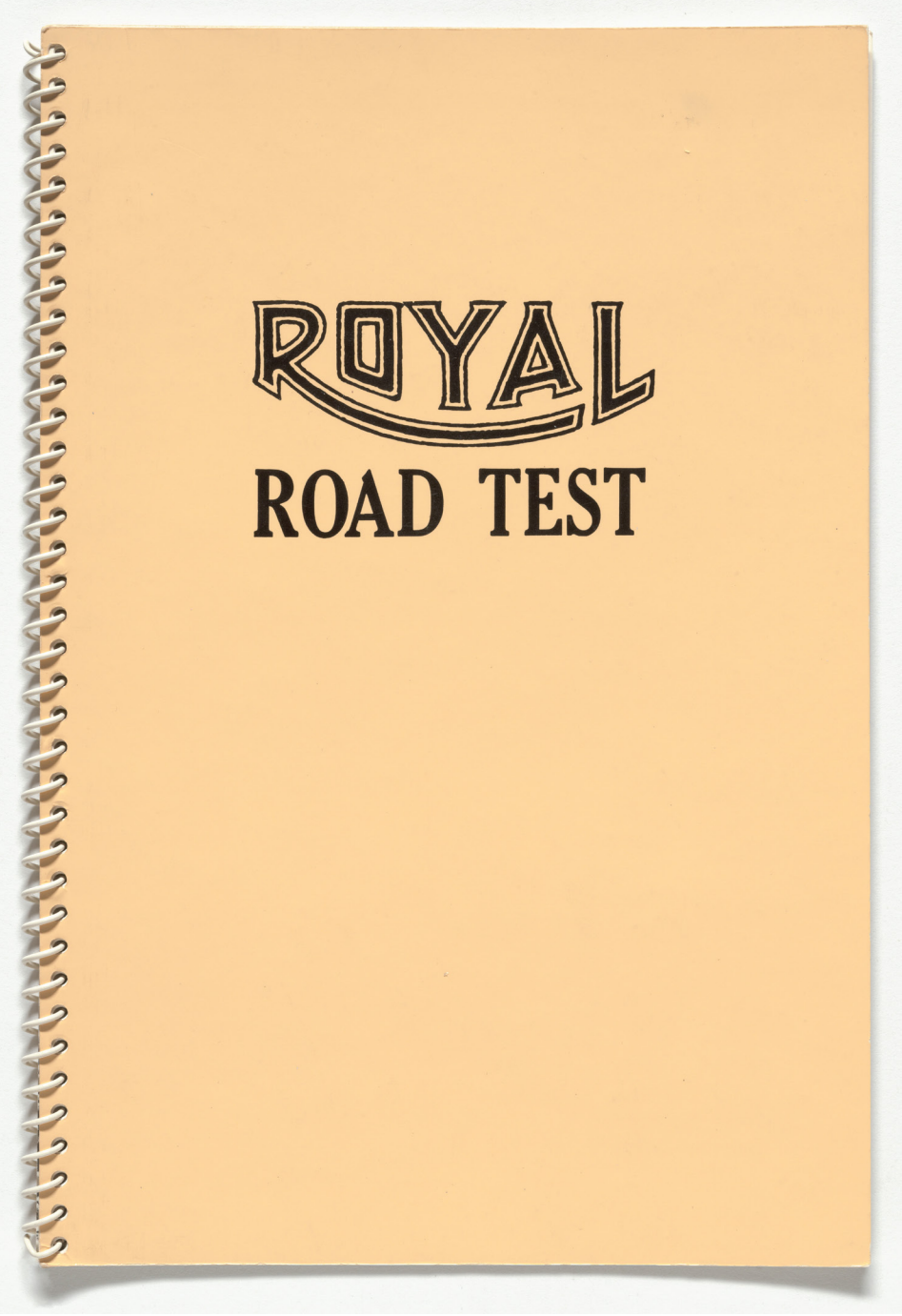

Plate 3 Edward Ruscha (American, born 1937). *Royal Road Test*. 1967. Artist's book. page (each): 9 5⁄16 x 6 1⁄4" (23.7 x 15.8 cm); overall (closed): 9 5⁄16 x 6 3⁄8 x 5⁄16" (23.7 x 16.2 x 0.8 cm). Publisher: Edward Ruscha. Printer: Blair Litho, Los Angeles. Edition: 1,000. Partial gift of the Daled Collection and partial purchase through the generosity of Maja Oeri and Hans Bodenmann, Sue and Edgar Wachenheim III, Agnes Gund, Marlene Hess and James D. Zirin, Marie Josée and Henry R. Kravis, and Jerry I. Speyer and Katherine G. Farley. 709.2011

On a single page torn from a legal pad, Ed Ruscha scrawled something like a list (fig. 3.1). The sheet outlines *Royal Road Test* (1967), a slim spiral-bound book that documents the events of Sunday, August 21, 1966 (pl. 3). Just after 5PM, Ruscha sped a Buick down U.S. Highway 91 while Mason Williams threw a Royal Model X typewriter from the car's window. Patrick Blackwell played photographer, shooting the scattered pieces of the Royal along the road's shoulder, approximately 122 miles southwest of Las Vegas.

With one notable exception, Ruscha's list corresponds to the sequence of similarly titled images that fill the book. The "Test Area," in the finished text is titled "Topography" in the draft (fig. 3.2). As both the configuration of land surface and its graphic delineation, understanding American topography, required an investment in the contour lines of its cartographic expression. The U.S. Geological Survey redrew the desert in relief.[1] By the mid-twentieth century though, the agency charged with taking inventory of American landholdings and producing topographic maps, was tasked with locating an adequate "proving ground for nuclear weapons."[2] Not far from Ruscha's "Test Area," subterranean nuclear blasts were attempted at the Nevada Test Site, a newly christened center for weapons development.[3] Such a stretch of desert provided "a variety of geology and topography [...] many different experiments [could] be conducted simultaneously," or so stated Robert E. Miller of the Atomic Energy Commission in his welcoming address to a section of the Geological Society of America in 1966.[4] Ruscha's choice of "topography" and then "test area" to describe an image in which a band of brush cuts like a low horizon across the desert scene, suggests the broader shift from landscape to laboratory that scholars like Emily Eliza Scott have recently sought to describe in relation to Land Art.[5] Here though, a plastic spine stitches the two halves of the image back together and performs the work that a probing of the book's title might help to explain.

Royal Road Test plays off the "royal road" in Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*. Coupled with Ruscha's list, it is a reminder that the earliest model of the mind advanced by the founder of psychoanalysis was itself topographical; a tripartite structure that encompasses the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious simultaneously. For Freud, dreams are the "royal road" to the latter stratum, the key to understanding cognitive processes that resist even self-reflection.[6] Dreams, Freud argued, condense memories, interests, and motivations, into unified symbols that offer access to latent impulse and unconscious desire.[7] This concentrated symbol he writes, "is the same as in a book where we space or print in heavy type any word upon which particular stress is laid for the understanding of the text."[8]

In *Royal Road Test*, all the words are of equal weight. The titles stick closely to the content they describe. A "Rubber twirler knob," follows a "Line Space Lever," and in breaking apart the typewriter, exploding its form and then gathering up its pieces, Ruscha engages in dream-work of his own (fig. 3.3). The "generosity of photography," inserts sand and desert stone around the particular (and now particulate) elements of the Model X.[9] As Ruscha condenses them, the excess referent adheres. The Royal carries the road that tested it, as a term like "test" acquires a new meaning borne deep beneath the Nevada desert or on a stretch of highway shifting a new Buick into higher gear.

Ed Ruscha is often said to materialize or at least reveal the material quality of language in his work. *Royal Road Test* stages the physical process through which words, manifested as materials acquire new meanings. Machine fragments are bound together with a precariousness similar to a term like "test," which both splinters into and contains the many ways it is made to mean. The test-culture that emerged in mid-century America highlights the performative context in which much of the material world and language itself were main actors. Ruscha's *Royal Road Test* applies pressure, quite literal force, to the tools and terms with which we communicate.

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1. Morris M. Thompson, Maps for America: Cartographic products of the U.S. Geological Survey and Others, (Washington, D.C.:U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979), 256.

2. Such a search for the ideal test site produced a great deal of geologic knowledge, as Edwin Eckel of the U.S. Geological Survey stated, "This accumulated knowledge results from a well-financed, well-supported approach by an integrated team of geologists [...] The products of this symbiosis have been good for the sponsor—the Atomic Energy Commission—and for the earth sciences." See: Edwin B. Eckel, "Development of Geologic Knowledge at Nevada Test Site" (1966), in *Nevada Test Site*, ed. Edwin B. Eckel (Boulder: The Geological Society of America, Inc., 1968), 4–5.

3. Robert E. Miller, "Welcoming Address for Rocky Mountain Section, Geological Society of America" (1966), in Nevada Test Site, ed. Edwin B. Eckel (Boulder: The Geological Society of America, Inc., 1968), 1.

4. Robert E. Miller, "Welcoming Address," 2.

5. Emily Eliza Scott, "Desert Ends," in *Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974*, ed. Elizabeth Hamilton (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2012), 66–85.

6. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. A. A. Brill (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2005), 479. See also: Richie Robertson, "Introduction" in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud translated by Joyce Crick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xi–xv.

7. Ibid., 467–468.

8. Ibid.

9. Lee Friedlander quoted in Walter Benn Michals, "Photographs and Fossils," in *Photography Theory*, ed. James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2007), 444.

Figures missing

Fig. 3.1 Ed Ruscha's list of photos for *Royal Road Test*. Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Fig. 3.2 "Test Area" in *Royal Road Test*

Fig. 3.3 "Rubber Twirler Knob" in *Royal Road Test*

Oswald Wiener, ***Die Verbesserung von Mitteleuropa, Roman*** **(1969)**

Jakob Schillinger
Princeton University

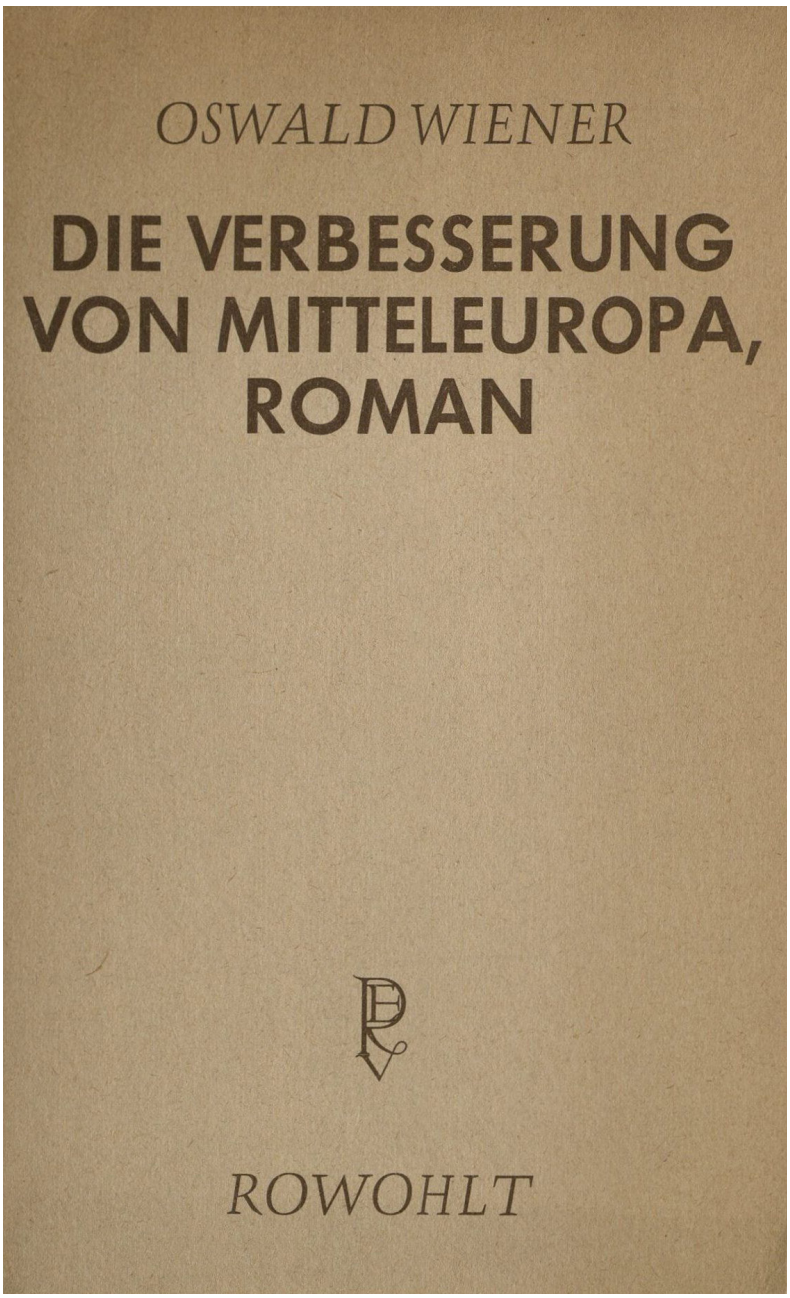

Plate 4 Oswald Wiener (Austrian, born 1935). *Die Verbesserung von Mitteleuropa, Roman*. 1969. The Museum of Modern Art Library

"Is this book a novel?"[1] The question greatly occupied the contemporary reception of Oswald Wieners's *Die Verbesserung von Mitteleuropa, Roman* (1965-69). It was considered an "un-book," a "borderline case of literature," "anti-literature circulating as literature," or "negative form,"[2] but also "something along the lines of a novel," and even a "Bildungsroman"—a "coming-of-age novel the way it could, or should look today."[3] This problematic status not only testifies to both the lasting grip of the humanist tradition after modernism the new pressure exerted on the genre at the time—by Georges Perec or Andy Warhol, to name only two prominent examples. The *Verbesserung's* problematic status points to a paradox at the heart of Wiener's aesthetic, which is produced by a media-technological cesura. If Warhol's roughly contemporaneous a: a Novel can be seen as a product of the newly available audio tape technology, whose capacity for indexical recording it exploits, Wiener's "novel" registers the contemporaneous emergence of the symbolic machine.

Written largely during his tenure at Austro-Olivetti, where he worked as director of the data processing department, the *Verbesserung* manifests Wiener's longstanding concern with the performative dimension of language. Informed by the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein and increasingly by cybernetics, Wiener saw himself as a "language engineer" and language as a means not for conveying meaning, but for "controlling [...] situations."[4] As a member of the Vienna Group, Wiener had pursued this approach in several proto-happenings in the mid-to-late 1950s; the *Verbesserung* transposed this engagement with the performative dimension of language to a book.

At first glance, the *Verbesserung* might be taken as a work of theory rather than fiction—part regurgitation of, part dialogue with Wiener's intellectual references, interspersed with invective, rants against the protagonists of canonical histories of Western thought, but also graphic narrative scenes, or a five-page description of a pencil. But Wiener, too, claimed the status "Entwicklungsroman"[5] for the *Verbesserung* and thus indicated a foil against which the book's formal characteristics and its performative function come into focus. The book's pseudo-scholarly formatting alone contradicts this label: a ten-page index is followed by a "preface" of more than 160 pages, three short appendices, and an extensive bibliography, but there is no main section—an absence stressed by the fact that the entire book is paginated in Roman numerals. Neither is there the "inner development of an individual [...] into a 'characterful harmonious whole person' and member of society"[6] one would expect from a Bildungsroman. While in many passages the text's oscillation between external and self-reference creates the effect of a stream of consciousness, this consciousness ceaselessly decenters itself. Although the narrator's "i" does account for the index's longest entry, suggesting a central position, it decomposes into a multitude of instances as the text installs no unitary narrative perspective. What's more, the *Verbesserung*'s heterogeneous segments of text don't coalesce into a linear sequence, and thus—rather than development—suggest the random access and statistical analysis facilitated by the prominently placed index. The representational coherence of a world, so typical of the novel, fails to emerge. Furthermore, the consciousness staged in the *Verbesserung* is not only decentered, but informationally closed. Frequent recursions explicate the text's genesis from a feedback loop between the author and his own writing—denouncing the notion of an objective reality accessible to consciousness, or of transmitting meaning between consciousnesses. Accordingly, the *Verbesserung* rejects hermeneutics, shifting the focus to the very process of reading—of signal processing—itself. As a consequence, most reviews string together quote after quote, only to conclude "that one actually cannot recognize the book in this account,"[7] and one critic determines that "in order to summarize the book, one would have to copy it. This requires no critic or literary scholar; a machine would do."[8]

It is precisely this distinction between human and machine that is at stake in the *Verbesserung*, and that was rendered precarious at the time by the emergence of a new concept of information: Integrating switching algebra, information theory, and feedback, cybernetics launched a concept of information as operative and recursive, which took over the epistemological place occupied previously—in the modern formation of knowledge—by the human.[9] A section titled "appendix A, der bio-adapter," illustrates this new knowledge and explicates not only its epistemological, but also its political implications in an apocalyptic scenario of a human's integration with a machine that anticipates the Wachowskis' 1999 The Matrix. Based on an embodied mathematics, the bio-adapter posits the analogy and functional equivalence of human and machine. It treats linguistic utterances just like products of the metabolism: as data indexing behavior, which is not interpreted semantically, but analyzed statistically in terms of transition probabilities. Based on accumulated data, behavior can thus be predicted and, via feedback, controlled. By grasping the individual in terms of behavior, i.e. as a function transforming given inputs into predictable outputs, the human being is black-boxed—i.e., hollowed-out, her interiority bracketed.

The V*erbesserung*, however, doesn't simply reject traditional hermeneutics in favor of machine-reading, as the above-cited critic argues. It acknowledges the latter, but seeks to evade it. In Wiener's subsequent writings, this antinomy—escaping the dictate of the machine without resorting to humanist arguments—would produce a formalized program against formalization: To uphold an ever so precarious difference from—and headstart over—the machine, the human had to model and internalize control in order to out-do it: to

constantly observe and modify her own behavior to counter the emergence of patterns. The *Verbesserung*'s abrupt breaks and shifts in stylistic register and mode of address, as well as its recursiveness, can be seen as an exercise to this effect—even if the text itself questions its success. The *Verbesserung's* reformulation of the development novel thus puts forth a precarious humanity no longer given, but thoroughly artificial: The human is no longer a "characterful harmonious whole person," but trace of a ceaseless self-deterritorialization; not the product of an "inner development," but a surface effect; and she is situated within networks that are not so much social as they are technological.

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1. Ruediger Engerth, "An Den Grenzen Der Formulierbarkeit. Zu Oswald Wiener: Die Verbesserung von Mitteleuropa," *Literatur Und Kritik*, no. 38 (1969): 504. All translations by JS.

2. Hohmann, *Experimentelle Prosa*, 102; Hagelstange, "Die Thematisierung der Sprache im zeitgenössischen Roman," 12, 200; Best, "Rückzug Auf Die Sprache Oder: Der Verlust Des Fiktionalen," 34; Fülleborn, "Zur Frage der Identitä von österreichischer und moderner Literatur," 69. in: Kubaczek, *Poetik der Auflösung*, 3–4.

3. Urs Widmer, "Nein, Diese Suppe Ißt Er Nicht," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 11, 1969, sec. Literaturblatt, 2L; Jürgen Becker, "Daß Alles Ein Dreck Ist. Oswald Wieners Monströse 'Verbesserung von Mitteleuropa,'" *Die Zeit*, August 5, 1969, 12; Jörg Drews, "Oswald Wiener/ Die Verbesserung von Mitteleuropa," *Neue Rundschau* 81, no. 2 (1970): 375.

4. Oswald Wiener, "Das 'Literarische Cabaret' Der Wiener Gruppe," in *Die Wiener Gruppe. Achleitner, Artmann, Bayer, Rühm, Wiener. Texte, Gemeinschaftsarbeiten, Aktionen.*, by Gerhard Rühm (Reinbek b. Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1969), 401.

5. Oswald Wiener, *Schriften zur Erkenntnistheorie* (Wien; New York: Springer, 1996), 109.

6. Heike Gfrereis, *Literatur/Heike Gfrereis* (Hrsg.)., Metzler Kompakt (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2005), 19.

7. Widmer, "Nein, Diese Suppe Ißt Er Nicht."

8. Dietmar Dath, "Gegen Naivität," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2005.

9. Pias, building on Michel Foucault, speaks of information as "a new 'empirico-transcendental doublet'." Claus Pias, "Zeit Der Kybernetik. Eine Einstimmung," in *Cybernetics = Kybernetik: The Macy-Conferences 1946–1953*, ed. Macy Conference (Zürich: Diaphanes, 2003), 17.

Artur Barrio's "records" at *Information* (1970)

Sonia de Laforcade
Princeton University

Plate 5 Artur Barrio, *Work realized in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil, April 20, 1970* (installation view at *Information*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, July 2–September 20, 1970)

Since 1969, when Barrio began to produce so-called "situations"[1] for exhibitions and public spaces in Rio de Janeiro, he systematically collaborated with other artists to record these processual works, producing a body of film and photography which he called "records."[2]

In his 1969 "Manifesto," the first of a series of polemical texts for which the artist became well known early on in his career, Barrio laid out a materialist view of both the situations and the records. He positioned these against "the increasing use of materials considered expensive for our, my reality, in 3rd world socio-economic terms (including Latin America), due to industrialized products not being within our, my reach, but in the power of an elite who I contest."[3] His work, he argued, leveraged "materials which are perishable and cheap," such as toilet paper and bodily fluids, as a "contestation" of this reality.[4] While expensive technologies did make their way into Barrio's process through the records, they were introduced through a gesture of displacement. The multiplicity of this recording apparatus, which included "photography, film, sound recording, etc.—or simply the retinal or sensory record,"[5] allowed for each type of record to underscore the partiality and insufficiency of the other. Although the Super 8 film and slides Barrio used as *registros* were not as "perishable and cheap" as toilet paper, he argued that they possessed a "rich technical precariousness."

The records, posited from the beginning as signifying markers of Barrio's position on the uneven terrain of technological availability, were exhibited for the first time in New York, on the occasion of the 1970 exhibition *Information* at the Museum of Modern Art (pl. 5; fig. 5.1). In the exhibition catalogue, however, Kynaston McShine devoted much of his curatorial essay to describing a world unified by technology advances. "With an art world that knows more readily about current work, through reproductions and the wide dissemination of information via periodicals, and that has been altered by television, films, and satellites, as well as the 'jet,' it is now possible for artists to be truly international,"[6] he wrote. The flattening effect of technology on international communication was further visualized on the exhibition catalogue cover (fig. 5.2), where images of various communications technologies are reduced to data points to convey a totalizing sense of informational consistency.[7] Yet the point of view necessary for such flattening came into sharp relief when McShine declared in his opening remarks that, "After all, Time magazine is available almost everywhere on Wednesday mornings."[8]

Though Barrio wrote that his records functioned "simply as an informative process of an idea," his emphasis on process and technological lag can be said to have run against the grain of the catalogue's dotted surface and its picture of the world as an information system. In his early correspondence with McShine, Barrio gave him a warning of sorts by gluing a pack of cigarette rolling paper to a letter (figs. 5.3-5.4) that read, "Unfortunately I can only send this material at the moment, the reason being that I am still recovering from pneumonia. . At any rate I hope to send you more in July when I am fully (recoperated) recored (sic)."[9] Barrio had to be fully "recored" in order to send the records, and whether or not this was a creaky bilingual pun, it foregrounded the body's subjection to illness and physical distance as powerful obstacles to the information dream. No more than a single color slide was glued to verso of the letter, while the loose stack of rolling papers in their box, like a pile of blank sepia frames, functioned both as a promise of the slides to come and of the wait that would precede them. (McShine does not seem to have made use of any or much of the rolling paper to pass the time.) As Barrio wrote on fragment of cardboard included with the letter, the "total process" of the work was not an instantaneous one but an "interminable process."

1. Barrio's term in Portuguese is situações. The term describes Barrio's process, in which the viewer typically encountered the work without expecting it and without the institutional markers that conventionally would frame it as a work. It also distinguishes this process from the more popular "happening," which implied a different logic by which participants, drawn by an announcement, participated with a sense of momentous expectation.

2. Barrio's term in Portuguese is *registros*.

3. Artur Alípio Barrio de Sousa Lopes, "Manifesto" in *Regist(r)os* (Porto: Fundação de Serralves, 2000), 226.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid. 227

6. Kynaston McShine, *Information* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 140.

7. See Eve Meltzer's extensive discussion of *Information* in "The Dream of the Information World," and of the exhibition catalogue design specifically pp. 46-47, in *Systems We Have Loved: Conceptual art, affect, and the antihumanist turn* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). Meltzer also discusses the various conflicting concepts of "information" that artists brought to bear on the exhibition beyond that which was expressed by the catalogue design.

8. Kynaston McShine, *Information* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 138.

9. Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.11. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

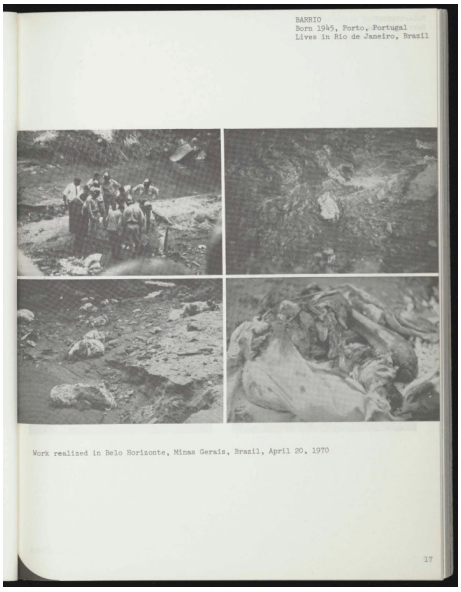

Fig. 5.1

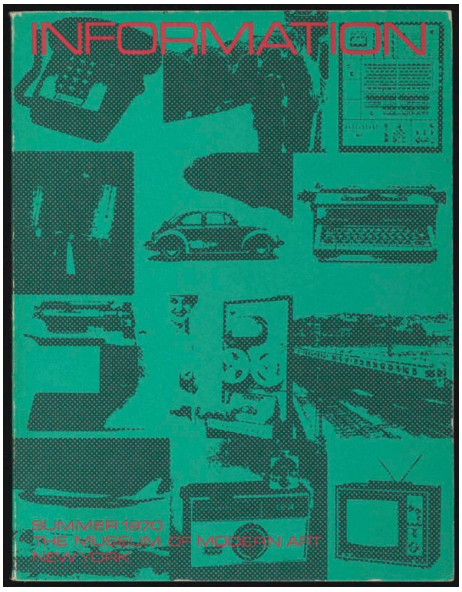

Fig. 5.2

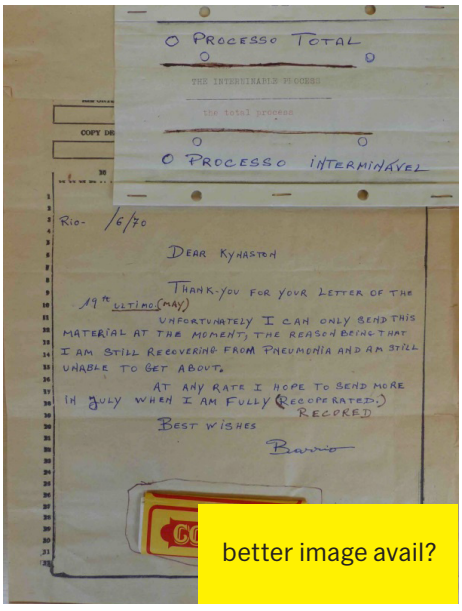

Fig. 5.3

Fig. 5.4

Fig. 5.1 Kynaston McShine, Information (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 17.

Fig. 5.2 Kynaston McShine, Information (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970).

Fig. 5.3–5.4 Letter from Barrio to Kynaston McShine, April 1970, Recto and Verso (Kynaston McShine Information Exhibition Research, IV.11. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York)

Joan Jonas and Richard Serra, *Paul Revere* (1971)

Gillian Young
Columbia University

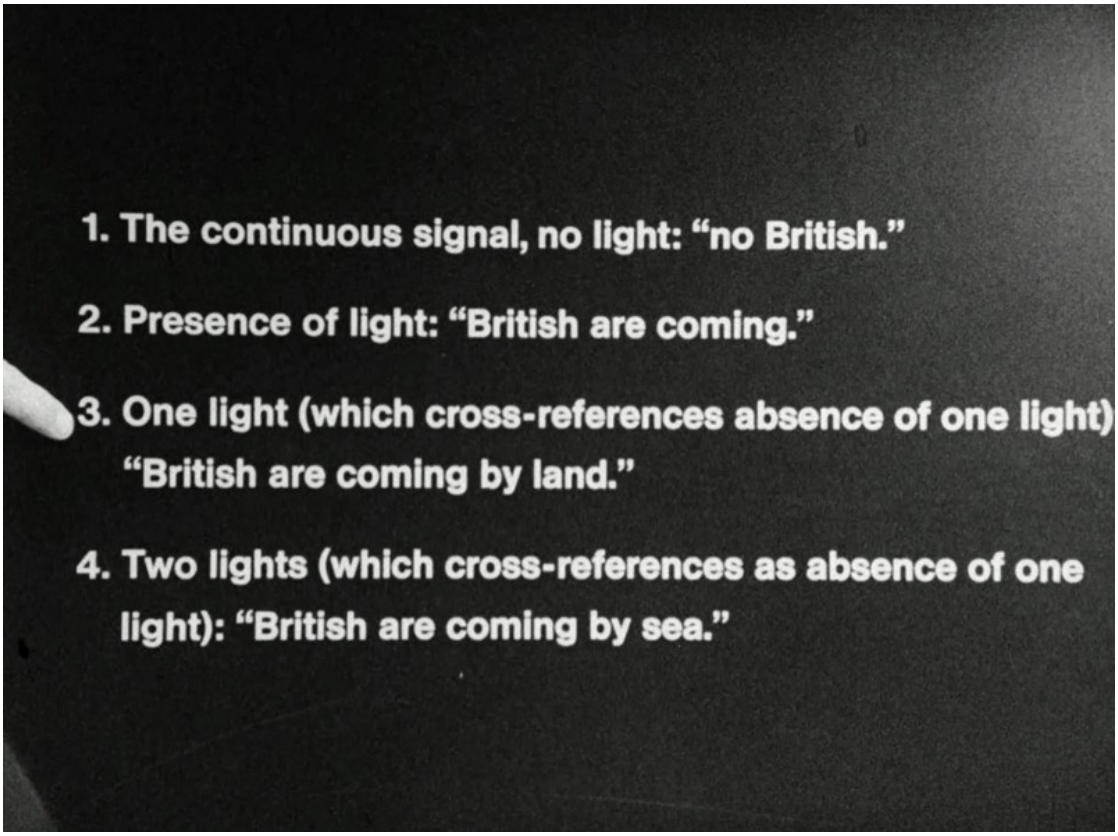

Plate 6 Joan Jonas (American, born 1936) and Richard Serra (American, born 1938). *Paul Revere*. 1971. 16mm film (black and white, sound). 9 mins. Gift of Richard Serra. Circulating Film & Video Library. 815857

In 1971, Joan Jonas and Richard Serra collaborated on a film about telecommunications based on an unlikely source: the lantern signal devised by Paul Revere during the American Revolution. Deadpan and didactic, *Paul Revere* catalogues the unexpected intricacies of this seemingly simple communication system. The opening shot shows Jonas and Serra's hands each grasping a large light bulb (pl. 6). "The film you are viewing will demonstrate, with your attention and cooperation, aspects of an operative process in communication," Jonas intones off-screen. "A simple two-message system will be employed: The informational model of Paul Revere's signaling light tower will be the example…" The hand-held light bulbs correspond to the lantern flashes visible from a steeple in Boston that would signal if the British troops were taking an overland or marine route: "one if by land, two if by sea" (fig. 6.1).

The year they filmed *Paul Revere*, both Jonas and Serra were in the middle of making large-scale outdoor works. Serra was constructing *Shift* (1970-72), a site-specific sculpture in a field outside Toronto. The sculpture's vast scale was determined by the furthest possible distance he and Jonas could across the field while keeping one another in view. Meanwhile, between 1970 and 1972, Jonas organized performances on beaches, college campuses, and city streets, where performers sent semaphore-like signals to spectators across great distances—enacting a rudimentary form of "television." At the moment that TV became accessible to artists through new video technologies (Jonas and Serra bought a Sony portapak in 1970), *Paul Revere* excavates the early history of telecommunications, where optical and sonic telegraphs were used to send encoded messages. The long-distance parameters of both Jonas's and Serra's work at this time corresponded to the particular range of Revere's signaling light tower, which yoked telecommunication to human signalers and embodied perception.

In the vein of structural films made by the couple's friend Michael Snow and others, *Paul Revere* unfolds according to a predetermined schema: the methodical enhancement of the basic lantern code with cross-references (another lantern, a church bell) that would verify Revere's signal. These cross-references, which become maddeningly complex, are designed to deal with potential contingencies: paranoid farmers who, jolted from their sleep, think that the double flame is a hallucination, or Boston teenagers who sneak into the tower and light the lanterns for fun. Throughout the film, the technical jargon of the voiceover contrasts with the limited economy of action as Jonas and Serra display cards with text from the narration and perform demonstrative actions using simple props. The tight frame typically admits only a single body part—often just the hands—as if matters of signaling are best articulated through gesticulation (fig. 6.2).

The bodily scale of the film points to the source of its script: *Kinesics in Context*, an anthropological text published by Ray Birdwhistell in 1970. "Kinesics" is the study of body language: non-verbal communication made up of cultural repertoires of corporeal signals. Birdwhistell's book piqued the interest of a number of other artists involved with performance, including Richard Schechner of The Performance Group, Yvonne Rainer and Steve Paxton of Grand Union, and directors Robert Wilson and Richard Foreman. The particular passage chosen by Jonas and Serra has the effect of layering corporeal technique and teletechnology—suggesting that even our most intimate encounters are mediated by codes akin to long-distance signals.

Jonas and Serra's citation of this seemingly random example from the American Revolution takes on added significance in the context of the Vietnam War. In the midst of the first "television war," Jonas and Serra mined the roots of telecommunication in military techniques for controlling and monitoring space that are inseparable from communicating across it. Toward the end of the film, the premise of Revere's signaling system—namely, that the British are in fact going to attack—is thrown into question: "What if they are landing on a peaceful excursion? Or what if the French decide to take advantage of this situation and are mistaken for the British?" If our closest interactions involve the negotiation of bodily signals, here the militaristic drive to eliminate human noise and uncertainty from conflict at a distance blunts receptivity.

1. All quotations from Joan Jonas and Richard Serra, *Paul Revere*, in *Artforum* Vol. X, Number 1 (September 1971): 65–67.

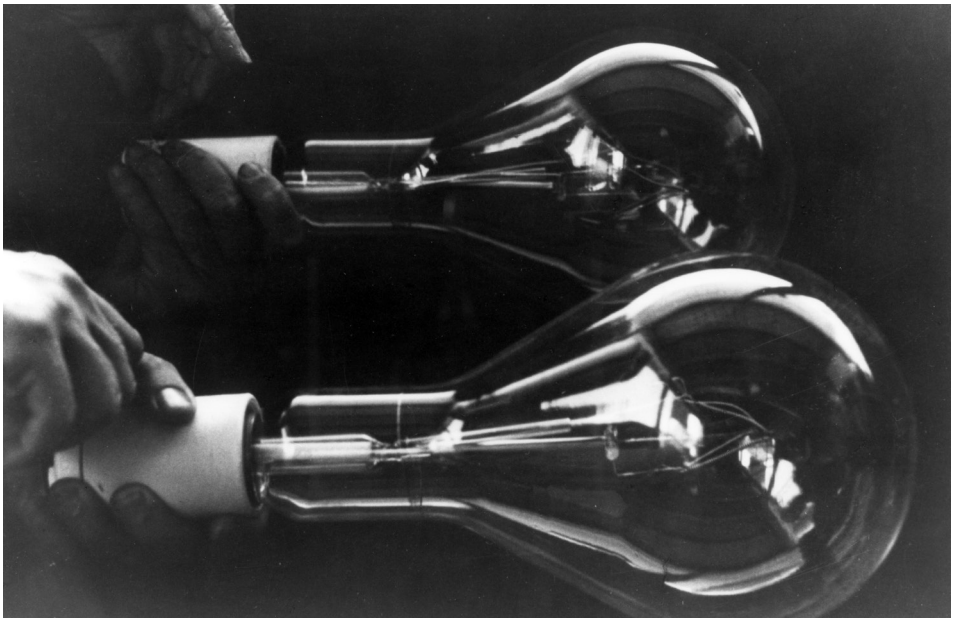

Fig. 6.1

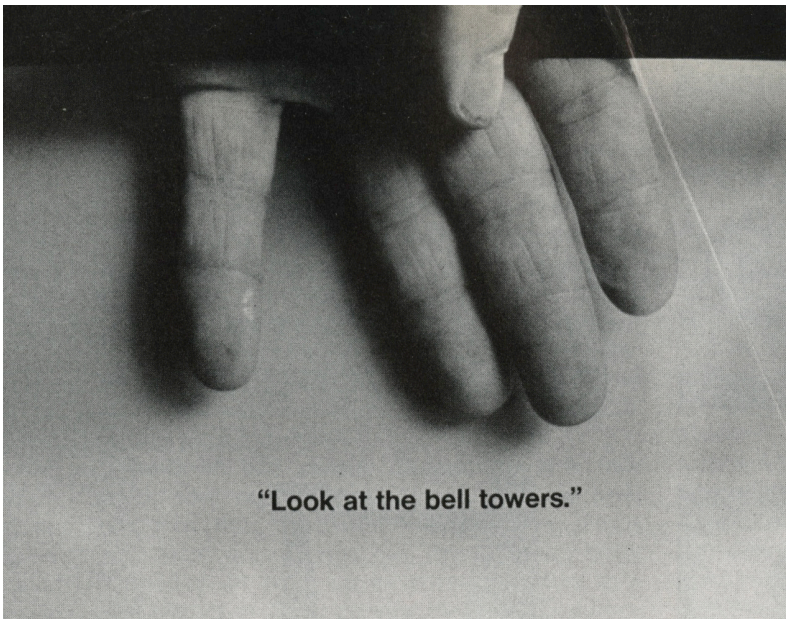

Fig. 6.2

Fig. 6.1–6.2 Still from *Paul Revere*. 1971.

Charles Ray, ***Plank Piece I and II*** **(1973)**

Jessica Bell Brown
Princeton University

Plate 7 Charles Ray (American, born 1953). *Plank Piece I and II*. 1973. Two gelatin silver prints, printed 1992. 30 x 40" (76.3 x 101.7 cm). Samuel J. Wagstaff, Jr. Fund and Purchase. 93.1993.ab

In *Plank Piece I and II* (1973) we see undergraduate art student, Charles Ray, in his studio, pinned against a wall with a splintered plank of wood (pl. 8). Likely with assistance, the artist photographed himself in two precarious positions. On the left, the plank rests in the hinge of Ray's hip; on the right, Ray's chest and arms are prostrate against the wall; he slides downward, nearly inches from the floor. Here the plank stabilizes his dangling body just behind the knees. We see a fluorescent work light, a littered carpet, a work table and sawhorse, random D-rings on dingy white walls—an otherwise unremarkable scene. When unified with the plank and supporting wall, Ray's L-shaped body echoes the sharp angles of his studio. Here Ray frames a performance of artistic labor, using the camera to make his sculptural act indistinguishable from the pictorial index of serial activity in the studio.[1] Even Ray's sweatshirt, belted jeans, and work boots heighten this picture of art "work."

In another early work *Bench* (1974), also in MoMA's collection, Ray situates two performers at opposite ends of a wooden board suspended behind each other's knees (fig. 8.1); Bench was once even suggestively displayed as the ephemera[2] of *Plank Piece*. David Pagel elaborates on hidden energies in Ray's works like these: "beneath their mundane surfaces lurks a malevolence capable of manifesting itself as infinite cruelty."[3] Other critics hailed Ray's body sculptures as too transparent, "marred by their decidedly demonstrative nature… they had a nagging aura of show-and-tell."[4] In 1995, Ray seemed ambivalent. Arguably, his snapshots approach the realm of deadpan absurdity.[5] "The humor is like a close call story," he said, "I thought of my body as a sculptural element creating tension between the body as persona or object."[6] If Ray, dangerously suspended in air, relegates his own fragile, white male body as merely material, he by consequence distances *Plank Piece I and II* from an artistic ego, and too, of a subject emerging through performed corporeality.[7] As a result, the work's pictorial manifestation presents us with an ontological predicament; after all, his early relationship to minimalist art and performance is demonstrably vexed. "Performance art" as Judith Tannenbaum suggests, "was criticized for being too spontaneous, expressionistic, and formless, minimalism was accused of alienating its audience and ignoring the culture in which it was created.[8] *Plank Piece I and II* uses the strategy of performance documentation to propose an argument about sculpture's dependency on the beholder's share, provocatively dramatizing the contingent relations between "the body, the spectator, and the everyday world."[9] Here the photograph's affective efficacy hinges on the idea of enactment as an index for Ray's art "work."

Plank Piece I and II, now a touchstone in the narrative arc of Ray's artistic development, was one of his earliest experimentations with what he called "structural events."[10] The artist recalled in an interview: "The components in the early work were simply what was needed to hold the thing up."[11] We must ask ourselves, in pondering Ray's proposition, when does the work of art occur? Can we concede that Ray's body is simply one part of a logical circuit of materials coming together to make a work of art? While the viewer must stand in for the presence of Ray's foreclosed spectator, Ray needs the complicity of such witnessing of his orphaned "non-performance" to bastardize any coherent genealogy of an avant-garde.

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1. Curator Paul Schimmel writes in an essay "Beside One's Self" that "increasingly, Ray was to believe that sculpture was more than an object: it was an activity." As published in *Charles Ray* (New York: Scalo/Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998), 66.

2. In 2005, *Bench* was shown adjacent to *Plank Piece I and II* in the exhibition *Take Two. Worlds and Views: Contemporary Art from the Collection*, September 14, 2005–March 21, 2006. According to the artist file in MoMA's Department of Painting and Sculpture, when the Museum purchased from Feature Gallery in New York, *Bench* was shown in landscape orientation, after its original manner of activation by two figures sitting on each end.

3. See Pagel, "Charles Ray" *Forum International*, May 1992, 79–82.

4. Christopher Knight. "Sculptor Takes Himself Out of the Picture" *Los Angeles Times*, Aug 5, 1990.

5. Peter Clothier, quoting the artist: "At first I denied the empathetic element… But in retrospect, these pieces have kind of pathos—almost like a series of Goya prints—and they're also funny." *Artnews*, December 1987, 97-98.

6. Ibid.

7. See Joan Hugo's interview with the artist "Between Object and Persona: The Sculpture Events of Charles Ray" as printed in *High Performance*, Issue 30, 1985. Hugo writes: "Increasingly dissatisfied as the work moved closer to performance, his concern became once again the resolution of the equation between the sense of the event and the language of formalism," 28.

8. Judith Tannenbaum in "Introduction" to *PerForms: Janine Antoni, Charles Ray, Jana Sterbak*, (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1995), 5.

9. See Hal Foster's essay "The Crux of Minimalism" in *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Twentieth-Century*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 40.

10. In a 1995 interview, Paul Dickerson asks: "What about the sculptures of yours that include your body?" The artist later responds: "Most of those pieces denied the aspect of event or performance. I thought of my body as a sculptural element creating tension between the body as persona or object." Interview with Charles Ray and Paul Dickerson, *BOMB Magazine*, Issue 52, 1995. Accessed May 2017: http://bombmagazine.org/article/1867/charles-ray

11. Ibid.

Fig. 7.1

Fig. 7.1 Charles Ray, *Bench* (1974), performance photo

On Marta Minujín's *Kidnappening* (1973)

Vivian A. Crockett
Columbia University

Plate 8 *Kidnappening*, created by Marta Minujin, with technical assistant Gary Glover. Summergarden Program, August 3–4, 1973. Photographic Archive. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

On August 3rd and 4th of 1973, as part of a MoMA's *Summergarden* series, Marta Minujín staged what she termed an "opera-cantata-happening," a kitschy spectacle combining poetry, dance, and music in an homage to the recently deceased Pablo Picasso.[1] Like a more typical museum garden party event, the evening involved a lively performance by fifty volunteers, with faces painted in the style of Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, who danced according to forty-four gestural quotations from classical sculptures and Picasso's Cubist works while reciting fragments of texts by Stéphane Mallarmé, Ezra Pound, Arthur Rimbaud, Friedrich Hölderling, William Blake, and William Shakespeare (pl. 9).

Like Minujín's 1972 *Summergarden* event, *Interpenning*, Kidnappening encouraged audience participation, with performers coaxing onlookers to learn the movements. The garden party concluded with fifteen pre-selected participants being 'kidnapped' and blindfolded by the actors and escorted in vehicles to various destinations around the city (figs. 9.1–9.2). In spite of the looming threat of kidnapping and other aggressive political tactics that permeated the larger global sociopolitical sphere, Minujín insisted that the kidnappings be "friendly." The kidnappers were instructed to playfully lure their kidnapees away to—in Minujín's words—an "innocent adventure in creative activity."[2] *Kidnappening* foreshadowed Argentina's *Dirty War*, which, in between 1976 and 1983, led to the disappearance of approximately 30,000 dissenters of the military dictatorship. In the description, later accounts, and photographic documentation of the event, *Kidnappening* evokes an unapologetic jovial tone in sharp contrast to its more sinister allusions.

Understood relative to earlier works, such as *Minucode* (1968), *Kidnappening* seemed less a political statement than part of Minujín's broader study of social relationships.[3] Minucode and Kidnappening similarly exposed their audiences to new social experiences within the safe confines of an elite cultural context. Participants in the *Kidnappening* were taken on benign adventures, among them, a glamorous banquet at the home of journalist Nancy Barber (figs. 9.3–9.4).[4]

Kidnappening was an institutionally sanctioned, performative disruption, in contrast to Minujín's recent *Nicappening*, where Minujín and others interrupted an auction at Sotheby's Parke Bernet in support of the December 1972 earthquake in Managua, Nicaragua (figs. 9.5–9.6). Minujín and others repeatedly shouted phrases including, "Do you realize what happened?" and "Wake up!"[5] *Nicappening* sought to break through the sterile, altruistic veneer of the charity auction format and to bring visceral attention to the grim realities of the disaster. This happening was arguably the most confrontational and antagonistic work during this particular phase of Minujín's time in New York, whose practice was much more subdued relative to her happenings of the early nineteen sixties and the broader politicized artistic scene in Argentina.[6]

In various Latin American contexts, including Argentina, artists employed a range of tactics to address increasingly repressive political conditions. In Graciela Carnevale's *Encierro y escape* (*Confinement and Escape*, 1968), the artist left visitors locked up inside a glass-front gallery for over an hour, hoping that those inside would overcome passive acceptance of their entrapment and recognize the need to free themselves.[7] In a U.S. context, Chris Burden's *TV Hijack*, executed in early 1972, offers an extreme artistic cooptation of political means, in which the artist held an interviewer hostage on live television.[8] Burden's action tactfully recognized the role of television and other forms of mass media in mediating our experiences of real and staged events.

Minujín's tactics were in line with broader discourses on Pop art, happenings, and 'media art' developed by Argentinian theorists including Oscar Masotta, Jorge Romero Brest, and Roberto Jacoby. In 1966, Jacoby was one of the organizers of *Sobre Happenings* (*On Happenings*), which included distinctive restagings of happenings such as Carolee Schneeman's *Meatjoy* and Claes Oldenburg's *Autobodies*. Jacoby later recounted: "We copied them as if they were scripted plays, which was a way of killing the happening or transposing it to the rules of reproducibility."[9]

Kidnappening's title followed a common nomenclature formula for Minujín's participatory works: the combination of the word 'happening' with the central thematic of the work—in this case, 'kidnapping.' This naming structure was indicative of the broader operations of Minujín's conceptual process: the notion that various elements could be appropriated, manipulated and combined in the development of a work. With that came the impulse that a politically oppressive act was as easily appropriated as an element from another happening or a pose from a Picasso painting, and that any of these could be employed with the same levity.

1. Summergarden is an initiative begun in 1971, with funding from the Mobil Foundation. The program series provided free admission on summer weekend evenings from 6 to 11 pm, often featuring art, music, and dance.

2. See "Press Release: Kidnappening," Department of Public Information Records, II.A.45. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

3. *Minucode* was an environmental projection of films showing four cocktail parties attended by major figures from the worlds of art, fashion, politics, and economy. Minujín aimed to virtually 'bring together' people from different social groups "in a supposedly neutral space." See *Obras*, 256.

4. *Obras* 90–91, 259.

5. This event took place on June 12, 1973. For additional details see: Victoria Noorthoorn, ed., *Marta Minujín: obras 1959–1989* (Buenos Aires: MALBA, Fundación Constantini, 2010), 88–89; 258.

6. Luis Camnitzer argues that a shift occurs after 1970 in Latin America and beyond, "when art evolved from being a political tool to become what is known as 'political art.'" See Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2007).

7. Graciela Carnevale, "Project for the Experimental Art Series," in *Listen Here Now! Argentine Art of the 1960s: Writings of the Avant-Garde*, ed. Inés Katzenstein (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2004), 299–301. The event occurred in Rosario, Argentina on October 8, 1968, as part of the *Ciclo de Arte Experimental (Experimental Art Series)*, organized by the Grupo de Arte de Vanguardia (Avant-Garde Art Group).

8. "*In the course of the interview, Phyllis asked me to talk about some of the pieces I had thought of doing. I demonstrated a T.V. hijack. Holding a knife at her throat, I threatened her life if the station stopped live transmission. I told her that I had planned to make her perform obscene acts*." Excerpt from artist statement in *Chris Burden: Beyond the Limits*, ed. by Peter Noever, ed. (Ostfildern: Cantz, 1996), 132.

9. Roberto Jacoby from interview with Rosángela Rodriguez, July 1991. Qtd in Ana Longoni, "Action Art in Argentina from 1960: The Body (Ex)posed," *Arte No Es Vida: Actions by Artists from the Americas, 1960–2000*, ed. Deborah Cullen (New York: El Museo del Barrio, 2008), 89.

Fig. 8.1

Fig. 8.2

Fig. 8.3

Fig. 8.4

Figs. 8.1–8.2 *Kidnappening*, 'Kidnappees' being escorted out of the museum. Photographic Archive. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

Figs. 8.3–8.4 Marta Minujín, *Kidnappening*. 'Kidnappee' and 'kidnapper' at a host's loft. Marta Minujín Archive.

Fig. 8.5

Low image quality

Fig. 8.6

Figs. 8.5–8.6 Marta Minujin, *Nicappening*, June 12, 1973. Intervention at Sotheby's Parke Bernet, New York. Marta Minujín Archive.

Lynda Benglis, ***Now*** **(1973)**

Jack Crawford
The Graduate Center, CUNY

Plate 9 Lynda Benglis (American, born 1941). *Now*. 1973. Video (color, sound). 12 mins. Acquired through the generosity of Barbara Pine. *729.1976*

One of thirteen video works created by Lynda Benglis in the seventies, *Now* (pl. 10) montages several generations of footage of the artist performing in front of a CRT monitor that plays tape of static or of the artist's own enlarged, distorted, and pre-recorded self-image. Over the course of twelve minutes, *Now* repeatedly builds up and strips down these layers of footage, refusing a separation between pre-recorded and live. Instead, each layer represents a manipulated, mediated performance before the camera. *Now*'s structure is purposely opaque, yet Benglis offers moments of spatial and temporal orientation when, for example, she presses a hand to the CRT screen she stands in front of (pl. 10), identifying the spatial terms of her relationship to the pre-recorded image, before mockingly bringing her thumb to her nose. The video's last seconds provide another moment of structural clarity when Benglis asserts three times in succession "Let's run that through and see how it is;" she clearly hears the pre-recorded phrase and repeats it and then again, creating a kind of videographic mise-en-abyme. While many of Benglis's movements and utterances throughout *Now* suggest that she is following her own previously recorded cues, there are just as many moments when her selves fail to synch up.

In the video's climactic moments, Benglis's triple selves chirp a chaotic chorus of "Now?" and "Now!" followed by loud moaning and facial contortions. The artist sticks out her tongue, as if trying to make bodily contact with her own image. Her futile efforts emphasize the ironic dimension of the work's title; the titular "now" is verbally summoned but never arrives. The artist's attempts at impossible physical contact lend the work a playful, even parodic, quality and create a mediatized autoeroticism that recalls much early video art. In the seventies, artists like Nam June Paik, Vito Acconci, Robert Morris, Richard Serra, Joan Jonas, and Benglis began to incorporate new video technology into their artistic practices. Embracing the possibilities of immediate visual feedback, artists manipulated their self-images and played with layering time and space. In her 1976 essay "Video: the Aesthetics of Narcissism," Rosalind Krauss identified this closed-system of video feedback and pervasiveness of the artist's self-image as narcissism.[1] Certainly Benglis's *Now*, a primary target of Krauss's scathing critique, is a hermetic twelve minutes, yet its spatial and temporal dislocations and montage of synchronicity and disruption also perform a subjective decentering informed by both feminism and the regime of televisuality.[2]

Audio distortions and facial contortions recur throughout Benglis's video oeuvre. In fact, *Now*, her first endeavor into color video, synthesizes strategies from works like *On Screen* and *Document* of the previous year. Each of these engagements with video technology thematizes the medium's primary qualities of delay, feedback, and mediation. This attention to the specificities of medium and material process also characterizes the latex pours, polyurethane foam sculptures, and wax reliefs for which Benglis is primarily known. She considers video "no more or less than one of several medium I use to make art—all deal with the layering of time and space."[3] Indeed, *Now*'s distortions of the artist's face, enlarged and several generations removed (fig. 10.1), visually echo her earlier swirls of neon latex.

Just as *Now* performs the condition of the embodied subject before the camera, so Benglis's sculptural practice finds her body negotiating medium and material. The choreographic dimension of her latex and polyurethane foam pours both parodies the ejaculative spectacle of action painting and anticipates the emphasis on gendered embodiment in her videos and short series of advertisements called "sexual mockeries."[4] Benglis's investigations of subjectivity and particularly her embrace of a strategy of ironic self-fashioning merge her conflicted relationship to second-wave feminism with an indebtedness to Andy Warhol. In fact, Benglis created *Now* at the height of her interest in the dual forces of gender and artifice, forces which offer a new frame for considering Benglis's investment in mediatized autoeroticism. In the wake of mounting media hype surrounding her work,[5] Benglis turned to video, shifted her sculptural practice from elegant mounds of polyurethane to the gaudy camp of her plaster and foil "sparkle knots," and created the series of four sexual mockeries that culminated in her infamous 1974 *Artforum* spread.[6] If the pours and sexual mockeries allowed Benglis to parody the art world's reliance on gender archetypes, the hermeticism of video performances like *Now*, *On Screen*, and *Female Sensibility* (1973), enabled Benglis's exploration of an alternative mediatized erotics, still parodic and artificial but no longer referential.

1. Rosalind Krauss: 'Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism', in *October* 1 (Spring 1976): 51–64.

2. Susan Richmond, "The Ins and Outs of Female Sensibility: A 1973 Video by Lynda Benglis," *Camera Obscura* 69, vol 23, no. 3 (2008): 88

3. Benglis quoted in *Video Art: An Anthology*, ed. Ira Schneider and Beryl Korot (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 23.

4. "Interview: Linda [sic] Benglis," *Ocular*, 34.

5. This hype culminated in an article "Fling, Dribble, and Drip," a multi-page spread in the February 1970 issue of *Life* magazine that juxtaposed six color photographs of Benglis in action across from a much smaller black-and-white Hans Namuth photograph of Jackson Pollock. See David Bourdon, "Fling, Dribble and Drip," *Life*, February 27, 1970.

6. Susan Krane, *Lynda Benglis: Dual Natures* (Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 1991), 33.

Fig. 9.1

Fig. 9.1 Lynda Benglis, *Now*, 1973. Video still

Energy Changes: Elaine Summers at *Summergarden* (1973)

Beth Gollnick
Columbia University

Plate missing

Plate 10

In early September of 1973, the Museum of Modern Art issued a press release announcing two performances of Energy Changes by the Elaine Summers Dance & Film Company for the museum's *Summergarden* series:

> The Elaine Summers Dance and Film Co. will perform in the Sculpture Garden of the Museum of Modern Art for the *Summergarden* program on Friday and Sunday, September 21 and 23, from 6 to 9 pm. Visitors to *Summergarden* are invited to wander throughout the garden among the dancers, musicians (playing everything from flutes to pottery), projected films, trees, fountains, and sculptures.[1]

Elaine Summers described *Energy Changes* as: "A series of dances to be performed in museums and gardens. The dance and the dancer as a work of kinetic art always in process," in her grant proposal to the National Endowment of the Arts, which provided funds for the development and rehearsal of the piece.[2] *Energy Changes* incorporates the five stages of Summer's somatic practice, Kinetic Awareness, into the company's repertory; dancers transition over the course of several hours (modified for each performance location) from slow, almost imperceptible movement to large gestural expression including interaction with each other and audience members. A version of *Energy Changes* was performed at several institutions, including for five days in the galleries of the Brooklyn Museum beginning April 30, 1974, on the campus of the Albright-Knox Museum's sculpture garden on June 30th the same year.

MoMA's iteration of the piece was accompanied by a map outlining the starting position of the twelve dancers in the garden, included was a note: "Please feel free to walk or sit among the dancers and musicians." Describing the event for the *Village Voice*, Deborah Jowitt reflected: "It was very curious—the meditative dancers; the soft closeup films of the dancers and of children (by Summers, Phil Niblok, Albert Rossi, and Tedrian Chizik) projected intermittently on small TV sets; the hushed and hooting tones made by the ambling musicians; and us. We weren't low-key at all; we didn't even change places quietly."[3]

The two nights featured different musical accompaniment: on Friday, Philip Corner hung cymbals, gongs, and suspended strips of metal from the branches of the elm trees, accompanied simple scores posted on signboard inviting the audience members to create musical accompaniment as they moved throughout the garden and a handbill asking them to reflect on the sound of the water, while the Sunday performance featured Carman Moore as composer, with ten musicians and an accompanying sound tape. Publicity stills show the dancers in matching form-fitting beige leotards and tights, but color slides from the performances capture a much more informal style of dress: on Friday dancers wore green velour overalls, more similar to the prevalent bell bottom pants worn by attendees.

Claire Bishop has noted that Elaine Summer's *Summergarden* performance was part of a "second wave" of performance programming at the Museum of Modern Art beginning in the early seventies.[4] Summers was one of several of several Judson Dance Theater alumni who was commissioned to choreograph dance pieces intended for museum performance in these years.[5] Furthermore, *Energy Changes* was not the first time Summers mobilized a liminal outdoor space as a site of performance. *Fantastic Gardens* (1964) mixed dance, sculpture and film with performers moving amidst the audience in the garden of Judson Memorial Church. Summers captured the collaborative and collegial atmosphere of the group in her film *Judson Fragments* (1964), which included footage from the event and other Judson performances, presaging the evolution of Summers's intermedia practice over the next decade. According to Summers, *Fantastic Gardens* was her first intermedia work and the inspiration for the collaborative ethos of her Experimental Intermedia Foundation, which supported dance, film, and musical work by John Herbert McDowell, Gene Friedman, Trisha Brown, Pauline Oliveros, and Philip Corner.

Energy Changes also featured addition to her live footage of the dancers recorded on video by artists Davidson Gigliotti and Naim Jun Paik, in addition to a videographer funded by the National Endowment for the Arts. MoMA has recently restored and digitized a reel showing a rehearsal of the *Summergarden* piece, making a heretofore unseen record of an intermedia work available to researchers. This new material engages with the expansion of the Performance Chronology project, mining the archive for traces of the intermedia, dance, and video work that often slipped by undocumented before the development of consistent practices for preserving this work.

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1. "Elaine Summers Dance and Film Co. at Summergarden," II.B.1047, Publicity, Museum of Modern Art, https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/5035/releases/MOMA_1973_0106_73.pdf?2010.

2. Experimental Media Foundation, 1968–1986, Box 7, Fol. 9, Elaine Summers Papers, (S) *MGZMD 422, New York Library for the Performing Arts, Jerome Roberts Dance Division.

3. Deborah Jowitt, "Seen Through, Heard Beside Fountains," *Village Voice*, September 27, 1973.

4. Claire Bishop, "The Perils and Possibilities of Dance in the Museum: Tate, MoMA and Whitney," *Dance Research Journal* 46, no.3, Dec 2014: 62–76.

5. Trisha Brown performed *Waking on the Wall* (1971) at the Whitney Museum on March 30, 1971. Lucinda Childs presented *Untitled Trio* (1968/73) at the Whitney Museum in 1973, after a five-year hiatus following the 1968

Anna Bella Geiger, ***Passagens I*** **(1974)**

Benjamin Murphy
Princeton University

Plate 11 Anna Bella Geiger (Brazilian, born 1933). *Passagens I*. 1974. Video (black and white, sound). 9:55 mins. Purchase. 418.1991

There is a strange ambiguity to Anna Bella Geiger's 1974 video *Passagens I*. Following the artist closely as she climbs various flights of stairs, the camera seems almost to stalk Geiger in her ascent, recalling the dread-laden suspense of thriller films and television shows in which the viewer is made to occupy the position of the predator whose approach from behind signals imminent violence. Indeed, Geiger's video suggests the commingling, so characteristic of the thriller genre, of this violent suspense with sexual voyeurism, as the camera, positioned slightly below the artist on the stairs, seems to attempt repeatedly to peek under Geiger's heavy plaid skirt. Yet if *Passagens I* is suspenseful, it is also uneventful. The camera, finally, never does get a view under the artist's skirt. And in fact, nothing happens to the artist at all. The video eschews narrative development or climax, presenting instead a series of plodding, repetitious actions whose sober deadpan is only heightened by the spare visual aspect of the black and white image through which it is relayed. Even when the screen switches scenes, it is only more of the same, with Geiger climbing a new flight of stairs without ever seeming to reach the top, and with the camera dutifully, if also creepily, following the artist on her seemingly endless journey. At once both sinister and banal, the video cultivates sexualized suspense only to subsume that suspense within a monotonous structure that refuses any spectacular culmination.

Geiger produced *Passagens I* at the behest of the São Paulo-based curator Walter Zanini, who in 1974 supplied Geiger and several other artists with a Sony Portapak and, in so doing, effectively catalyzed the inauguration of video art in Brazil.[1] It thus comes as little surprise that Zanini would become one of the most perceptive commentators on the early development of the medium in the country and on Geiger's own work in that medium. In an essay for an exhibition that included *Passagens I* from 1978, for example, Zanini captured the ambiguous tone of this video and others like it when he wrote that such works constituted a type of "counter-TV" or "anti-TV" which, he argued, alluded to the trappings of middle-class television viewing while at once challenging the forms of attention normally solicited by that mass medium.[2] Indeed, Zanini's concept of "anti-TV" suggests the mode by which *Passagens I* both summons and subverts the regimes of viewing that structured commercial television in Brazil through its deployment of anti-climactic suspense. It was only two years before Geiger produced her video that the Brazilian telecommunications conglomerate Embratel launched color television nation-wide, capping a period of rapid development of the country's broadcast infrastructure that successfully united Brazil's expansive territories into a single viewing public. By appropriating the structure of voyeuristic anticipation so characteristic of both film and network television programming, *Passagens I* thwarts the narrative satisfaction delivered through the bright, plot-driven products of that structure, abusing the attention of the unified national public posited by the TV medium while never providing it with the consummation of a coherent story or a compelling product.[3]

Yet if *Passagens I* refuses spectacular culmination, it nevertheless hints at a type of narrative progression, and it is in this subtle plot line that another political valence can be discerned. Beginning in a nondescript interior, the video switches scenes several minutes in to a take of Geiger climbing steep steps in an outdoor alleyway, terminating with the artist ascending a broad flight of exterior marble stairs that dwarf her with their impressive scale.[4] Perhaps in partial explication of the title of the work, Geiger enacts a passage from private, personal space to an imposing public space whose stately, neoclassical orderliness suggests the apparatus of government. And Geiger's depiction of this space as both intimidating and austere is no coincidence. In 1968, the military dictatorship then governing Brazil implemented Institutional Act No. 5, a sweeping piece of legislation that suspended legal due process in various realms and that instituted restrictive censorship regulations that affected the arts and the mass media alike. "I plunged into an abyss without ever knowing how to swim,"[5] Geiger recalled of her experience of the years following the implementation of Act No. 5, and *Passagens I* could well be interpreted as a meditation on this dark experience. Within this context, Geiger's heavy, plodding footsteps read as a cipher for the dull dread and deliberate uneventfulness of a person who knows she is being watched, and the artist's passage from the interior space of the home to a public architecture of power suggests the passage of the individual into the watchful optics of the State. Indeed, the grainy, unremarkable quality of the video recalls nothing so much as surveillance footage.

Geiger's video, then, critically illuminates the intersection of mass media and government oppression in the Brazilian national context in which it was produced. And yet it also bears potential implications for the history of video art on a broader, transnational scale. In 1976, just two years after Geiger made *Passagens I*, and just one year after the video was first exhibited in the United States,[6] the America art historian and critic Rosalind Krauss would pen what to this day remains one of the most influential theoretical accounts of video art. Considering videos by Vito Acconci, Linda Benglis, and several other North American artists, Krauss noted how these artists tended to fixate on video's unique capacity for synchronous, closed-circuit feedback in order to construct situations of mirroring between camera and monitor that allowed them to focus exclusively on their own reflected image. Video, in the hands of these artists, thus presented what Krauss called an "aesthetics of narcissism," a "psychological situation, the very terms of which are to withdraw attention from an external object—an Other—and invest it in the Self."[7]

Passagens I presents a succinct counterpoint to Krauss's diagnosis of video's narcissism in various ways. Rather than exhibiting a mirroring scenario in which the artist views herself to the exclusion of any Other, the video presents the artist as viewed precisely by another, and thus casts the figure of the artist as existing only insofar as she is observed within the structure of sexualized voyeurism that always posits a second viewer who would peak up the artist's skirt while her back is turned. And rather than the hermetic space, outside of social life, of narcissist self-surveillance, Geiger presents herself as positioned within, and observed by, the purview of the State within a suffocating institutional space. Yet the greatest contrast, and contribution, that *Passagens I* makes toward Krauss's argument comes perhaps in the question of medium specificity. For Krauss, video's aesthetics of narcissism is ultimately related to the unique conditions of its technological support: capable of instantaneous transmission, the video apparatus, unlike that of film, is able to record itself in real time, and thus the condition of the mirror image, and the psychological condition that it subtends, becomes imbedded within the very structure of the medium. Notably, *Passagens I* does not utilize feedback, yet it does engage with a different property unique to the medium of video, and in so doing it offers an interesting twist on Kraus's canonical argument. For as Geiger's video ceaselessly records flights of stairs as they progress downward on the screen with the artist's ascent upward, a visual rhyming begins to emerge between the image on the screen and the technological mode in which it is transmitted to the screen. Video's scan line, that horizontal zip that shuttles back and forth in descending fashion, leaving electronic streaks and blips in its wake as it traces the video image onto the screen, begins to match the horizontal shape of the stairs which it scans. *Passagens I* thus offers an instance in which an intense, almost obsessive interest in video's unique mode of recording determines the thing it records. And this suggests a psychological situation of its own. Aware that she is being watched, Geiger constructs a scene that prefigures the form in which it will be transmitted through surveillance. Geiger gives us what we might call an aesthetics of paranoia. She gives us an image of obsessive suspicion that one is being recorded, so obsessive that the image accommodates itself to the way it will appear in recording.

1. For Zanini's account of this series of events, see Walter Zanini, "Videoarte: uma poética aberta," in Walter Zanini, ed., *I Encontro de vídeoarte*, São Paulo (São Paulo: Museu da Imagen e de Som, 1978), reprinted in Cristina Freire, ed., *Walter Zanini: Escrituras Críticas* (São Paulo: Annablume, 2013): 164–5; See also Nick Fitch, "'*Situações-Limites*': The Emergence of Video Art in Brazil in the 1970s," *Moving Image Review and Art Journal* vol. 1, no. 1 (2012): 59.

2. Walter Zanini, "Videoarte: uma poética aberta," 160–161.

3. For a more extended discussion of the relationship between early video art and television in Brazil, see Elena Shtromberg, "Chapter 3: Television," *Art Systems: Brazil and the 1970s* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016): 97.

4. The first scene of the video was recorded in a house in Rio de Janeiro's Jardim Botânico neighborhood, the second occurs on the Rua Santo Amaro in the Glória neighborhood of the same city, and the third was recorded on the front steps of the neoclassical façade of the Instituto Benjamin Constant, located in the affluent Urca neighborhood. See Nick Fitch, "'*Situações-Limites*,'" 65; and Dária Jaremtchuk, "Capítulo 3: Anna Bella Geiger e a ampliação de suportes," Anna Bella Geiger: Passagens conceituais (Belo Horizonte: FAPESP, 2007): 127.

5. Quoted in Felipe Scovino, "Anna Bella Geiger," *Arquivo contemporâneo: Organização e entrevistas* (Rio de Janeiro: 7 Letras, 2009): 21. My translation.

6. Geiger first exhibited her video works in the United States at the exhibition "Video Art," organized by Suzanne Delehanty at the University of Pennsylvania's Institute of Contemporary Art in 1975.

7. Rosalind Krauss, "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," *October* vol. 1 (Spring 1976): 57.

Senga Nengudi, ***Studio Performance with R.S.V.P.*** **(1976)**

Molly Superfine
Columbia University

Plate 12 Senga Nengudi (American, born 1943). *Studio Performance with R.S.V.P.*. 1976. Gelatin silver print. Sheet: 30 x 40" (76.2 x 101.6 cm). 4/5 plus 1 AP. Committee on Media and Performance Art Funds. 1120.2014

In this 1976 documentary photograph of Senga Nengudi in her Los Angeles studio, the artist activates her sculptural object *R.S.V.P. (Répondez s'il vous plaît)* (pl. 13). The resulting performance, offered here as a still image taken by Ken Peterson, is what the artist considers a complete "event"[1] and what others have called a "live sculptural event."[2] These terms recognize Nengudi's simultaneous engagement with performance, dance, and objecthood in one space. Part of her series of works with nylon mesh, *R.S.V.P.* saw its first gallery performances in 1977. The piece was performed in Nengudi's first New York solo exhibition at Just Above Midtown Gallery, and in her following solo exhibition at Pearl C. Wood Gallery in Los Angeles (fig. 12.1). Maren Hassinger, fellow artist and close friend, frequently activated Nengudi's nylon pieces (fig. 12.2).[3]

Shrouded in black with her knees bent, Nengudi looks as if she is hovering above the floor. She is a contained, coherent form—save for her hand jutting vertically above and grasping onto a leg of *R.S.V.P.* Unlike the nylon bulbs of sand in her sculpture on the opposing side of the image, the artist's body has not yet fully given way to gravity's drag. As a contrast, the sculpture is fragmented and dispersed, pulled and contorted in various directions. The nylon mesh pieces appear almost creaturely at first. Pulled taut on either side of the central weight, the legs stretch away, suturing themselves to the wall. Meanwhile, the sagging sand succumbs to gravity, daring the piece to anchor itself fully to the floor. Despite the tension, there is softness here, too. The sand, bulbous within its nylon container, creates flesh-like sacks that read as both breast and flaccid phallus.[4]

Nengudi's first pregnancy sparked her interest in the transformations that a woman's body undergoes and questions of bodily possession and dispossession, as in a "way of being for another or by virtue of another."[5] Nengudi is engaged with how bodies manipulate themselves and the objects (or the other bodies) with which they interact. Imitating the capaciousness of skin, nylon pantyhose are coded as feminine objects meant to match the hue of the skin of the wearer. Nylon pantyhose engender Nengudi's objects with an anthropomorphism that reflects the tactility, elasticity, malleability, and fatigue of the body, especially as signaled by certain epidermal qualities. *R.S.V.P.* also engages with questions of bodily captivity by investigating blackness as that which "marks" and "names" bodies, and through this close experience with skin as the outer containing and defining frame of the body.[6] The artist is curious with what Michelle Stephens calls the "mind-body relation between the psyche and the skin," which she describes as "how a historical process of seeing and understanding the skin as object and other, the site of difference, shapes the psychic formation of black subjects.[7] It is crucial that this material is flexible, but not infinitely so. The nylon mimics the making and undoing of the body's flesh. Firm skin eventually gives over time. Just as the nylon transfigures to make space for the weight of the sand, the body endures.

This piece calls for response both through its title—*répondez s'il vous plaît*—and in its operating logic, as the piece relies upon a performer to be activated. Nylon stockings which stretch and tighten like skin, demand haptic perception. That is, viewers and performers of *R.S.V.P.* and Nengudi's later mesh pieces engage multi-sensorially, and cross-sensorially. Or, as Laura Marks writes, "the eyes themselves function like organs of touch."[8] Less an interrogation of those outside opposing forces vying for control of the body—specifically black women's bodies—and more an examination of the body's own bargaining with time and manipulation, Nengudi's nylon sculptures consider epidermal variations and operations.

The limits of one's body, especially in relation to other bodies and objects, are pushed and pulled, undergoing a process of interrogation and discovery. Nengudi foregoes the possibility of violence suggested by making the transforming epidermis an object to be handled through performance, and instead stages an intimate and fleshy experience. By wading through the course of dispossession and captivity, and relying upon participation, Nengudi's *R.S.V.P.* proposes curiosity, engagement, and experimentation as a radical way forward.

1. In a letter to gallerist Thomas Erben on 15 February 1995, Nengudi writes, "It is important for you to understand that permanence has never been a priority for me—to the chagrin of many. I guess when people are with my art I want them to have an experience—for it to be an event. Sort of like spending time with Monet's *Water Lilies*. To go above and beyond the human condition on to higher ground. To straddle the worlds of reality and light." See Begum Yasar, ed., *Senga Nengudi*, 2016, for more archival materials.

2. Bradley, "Transferred Flesh: Reflections on Senga Nengudi's R.S.V.P.," 163.

3. In *Costume Study for Mesh Mirage*, a piece made after *R.S.V.P.* but also from 1977, Nengudi moves to allow her nylon pieces to surround and consume the viewer, instead of relying on just a small gesture of activation, as in R.S.V.P. Later pieces, as exemplified in figure 3, depict nylon pieces made after *R.S.V.P.* Jones, *South of Pico*, 194.

4. Bradley, "Stretched Infinity," 73.

5. Butler, *Precarious Life*, 24 (Butler's emphasis).

6. I look here to Michelle Ann Stephens' reading of Hortense Spillers' famous essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" in Stephens' book *Skin Acts*, 3.

7. Ibid., 4.

8. Marks, *Touch*, 2.

Fig. 12.1

Fig. 12.2

Fig. 12.1 Photograph by Harmon Outlaw. Installation image of Senga Nengudi *R.S.V.P.* at the Pearl C. Woods Gallery in Los Angeles in 1977.

Fig. 12.2 Photograph by Harmon Outlaw. Senga Nengudi (left) and Maren Hassinger (right) performing pieces from Nengudi's *Nylon Mesh* Series at the Pearl C. Woods Gallery in Los Angeles in 1977.

Guy de Cointet,
Prop for Going to the Market
(1975)

Rachel Valinsky
The Graduate Center, CUNY

Plate 13 Guy de Cointet (French, 1934–1983). Going to the Market. 1978. Performance, prop. 30 1⁄16 x 48 1⁄16" (76.3 x 122 cm). 7/50 (+VIII HC). Gift of Brian and Paula Ballo Dailey. 618.2012

The only prop used in Guy de Cointet's 1975 performance *Going to the Market* was a shaped painting featuring a sequence of black letters and numbers arranged along eight variously long rows, set against a white background and bordered by a polychromatic mock-frame (pl. 14). Eschewing any form of conventional syntax and grammar, the painting's non-semantic content suggests an ostensibly arbitrary ordering logic, or points to an encrypted pattern which is at first glance undecipherable. The viewer is interpolated into a multiplicity of interactions with the work when faced with such nonsensical language. One response is to fluctuate between the acts of reading and looking; the other, to attempt to decipher.

In the mid 1970s, the Los Angeles-based French artist produced short, "one object pieces"[1] written for one actress and ranging from eight to ten minutes. In delivering her monologue, the actress would progressively describe and elucidate the painting- or book-as-prop's coded logic, in the process underscoring the centrality of the interpretive act, at once evocative of a semantic operation and its dramatic execution. Often performed on the same bill as *Going to the Market*, these short pieces included *Two Drawings* (1974) (fig. 14.1), *At Sunrise a Cry Was Heard or the Halved Painting* (1974) (fig. 14.2), Lost at Sea (1975) and *My Father's Diary* (1975) (fig. 14.2).

In *Going to the Market*, first performed by Peg Shirley at the Cirrus Gallery in Los Angeles in 1975, the actress stands in front of the painting, melodramatically recounting the fictional story of Adul and Roz, lovers who, after a row and a parting of ways, reconnect at "the market" (figs. 14.3a-b). Like many of Cointet's plays, the text is an assemblage of readymade lines, culled from domestic soap operas, pulp novels, classical literature, and his own poetic reflections, all brought together to produce a tenuously coherent narrative. As she recites certain words, the actress points to the corresponding grouping of letters and numbers in the painting, laying bare the logic of the text's encoded structure. Those narrative elements that are embedded in the painting—reproduced in full or reduced to their skeletal grammatical form—can be traced back to the performance's written script, where Cointet was sure to underline them for the performer (fig. 14.4). Note "Adul" to the left of the third line or "Roz" in reverse in the line below. Numerical values evoke age, duration, the time of day, the velocity of a car. Even the painting's edges are symbolic, denoting a kind of topological program: the green border stands for a forest, a horizontal black edge for a straight, flat road, while the short vertical orange segment above, for the rising sun.[2]

Subsequent performances during the artist's lifetime, and then posthumously, in the many restagings of Cointet's pieces that have taken place since 2009, were undertaken by Mary Ann Duganne, a longtime collaborator of the artist. Photographs and video recordings documenting the performance, be it Shirley's or Duganne's, emphasize the close interplay between performer and object and the dramatic quality of the performer's delivery, evidenced through exaggerated gestures, affectively-charged speech, and an array of facial expressions ranging from rapture to distress (figs. 14.6a–b). Most significantly, the relationship of the performer to the object is secured through the repetitive pointing motion that ties her speech to the visual system of the painting. This deictic gesture reveals the dual status and temporality of the object. At once prompt and script, the prop becomes a mnemonic aid cueing the actress's speech for the performance-in-progress, as narrative elements can be extracted from the text when a knowing eye traverses its contents. The prop serves as a map—both spatial and temporal—visually embedding and representing the various narrative coordinates of the script. At the same time, the object accrues time and stands as a record of the performance that has taken place: a container holding matter for future uptake. The prop anticipates, records, and is constituted by each performance.

Going to the Market was also featured in an hour-long performance titled *Oh, a Bear!* (1977) staged only three times in the late 1970s, which collected several of the short "one object pieces," excerpts from *Ethiopia* (1976) and new materials, presenting them in a new synthesized production (figs. 14.7 and 14.8).[3] Here, *Going to the Market* was treated as a unit within a modular structure and the prop, placed in a networked context with other pieces, features most prominently in its capacity as painting in the scenography of the play. In the performance description, Cointet writes: "The action of *Oh, a Bear!* takes place in Maggie's living room [...]. On the walls hang several paintings [...]. During the performance these pictures, books, and objects, all abstract, are presented, experienced, and discussed by the two characters in the piece."[4] The prop, identified as a painting, is thus firmly situated within two visual and symbolic economies—the theatrical and the painterly.

Cointet's stage objects,[5] as exemplified by early works like *Going to the Market*, conserve a double reading as *painting* and *prop*, operating midway between his conspicuously encoded drawings exhibited outside of a performance context, and the monochromatic geometric props of his later, multi-actor performances, which acted as visual phonemes with constantly shifting roles. While the former hang on the wall awaiting decryption through the mutually-informative acts of looking, reading, and decoding, the latter would increasingly come to be understood by Cointet as equally active in their on-stage performance as the actors themselves. The prop for *Going to the Market* mobilizes both of these interpretive itineraries.

1. As performer Mary Ann Duganne Glucksman calls them in "Who Is Guy de Cointet?" *Artforum* (Summer 2007): 5.

2. The prop used in Shirley's 1975 performance was shortly thereafter replaced by another, slightly-altered prop, in which greater mirroring between the script and the painting's encoded signs can be observed. Now in MoMA's collection, it rephrases the sequence "H E 5 V O N R I" in the third line as "H O S M R K T 4," which introduces the titular "market," stripped of its vowels, into the painting. A 1976 publication titled *The Portrait Review* featured illustrations of the 1975 performance, including a schematic of the painting on the cover, clearly demonstrating the difference between the first object and the second. This "second" prop was used in performances as early as 1977 at the CAM Houston.

3. *Oh, a Bear!* was first performed in 1977 at 80 Langston Street in San Francisco, California by Mary Ann Duganne, Helen Mendez, and Jane Zingale. The performance reprised several earlier works, including *My Father's Diary, At Sunrise a Cry Was Heard*, *Going to the Market*, and an excerpt from the longer play, *Ethiopia* (produced in 1976 in collaboration with Robert Wilhite). In 1978, Cointet spent a month as an artist in residence at PS1 at Alana Heiss's invitation, culminating in a performance of *Oh, a Bear!* on May 21, 1978 in the P.S.1 Auditorium, Queens, New York. There is no photographic documentation of the performance, but the prop would likely have been presented in this context.

4. Guy de Cointet, performance description, *Oh, a Bear!,* 1977, http://www.guydecointet.org/en/performance/314

5. Marie de Brugerolles uses this term to refer to Cointet's sculptural props. See "The Stage Object in the Age of Commodity Fetishization," in *Not to Play with Dead Things*, 33–41 (Nice: Villa Arson/Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2010).

Fig. 13.1

Fig. 13.2

Fig. 13.3 a

Fig. 13.3 b

Fig. 13.1 Guy de Cointet, *Two Drawings*, 1974. Performed by Mary Ann Duganne, Fort Worth Art Museum, November 1977. Photograph by Dias. Courtesy of Estate of Guy de Cointet/Air de Paris.

Fig. 13.2 Guy de Cointet, *My Father's Diary*, 1975. Performed by Mary Ann Duganne, Fort Worth Art Museum, Texas, November 1977. Photograph by Dias. Courtesy of Estate of Guy de Cointet/Air de Paris.

Fig. 13.3, a–b Guy de Cointet, *Going to the Market*. Performed by Peg Shirley, Cirrus Gallery, Los Angeles, California, January 14, 1975. Photography by Photo Helene Gaillet. Courtesy of Estate of Guy de Cointet/Air de Paris.

Fig. 13.4

Fig. 13.5 a

Fig. 13.5 b

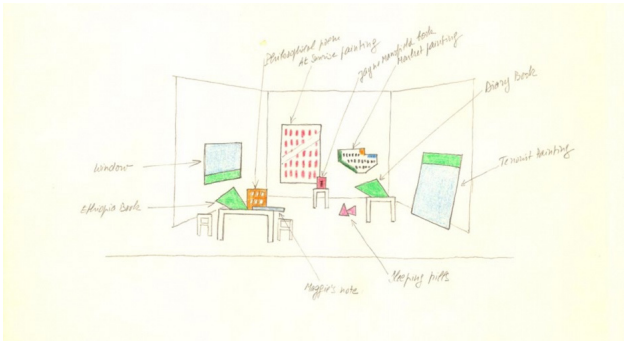

Fig. 13.6

Fig. 13.4 Guy de Cointet, *Script for Going to the Market*, 1975 (page 1 of 3).

Fig. 13.5, a–b Guy de Cointet, *Going to the Market*. Performed by Mary-Anne Duganne as part of Nine Artists, The Temporary Contemporary, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California, 1985. Courtesy of Estate of Guy de Cointet/Air de Paris.

Fig. 13.6 Guy de Cointet, Sketch for the set for *Oh, a Bear!*, 1977. Courtesy of Estate of Guy de Cointet/Air de Paris.

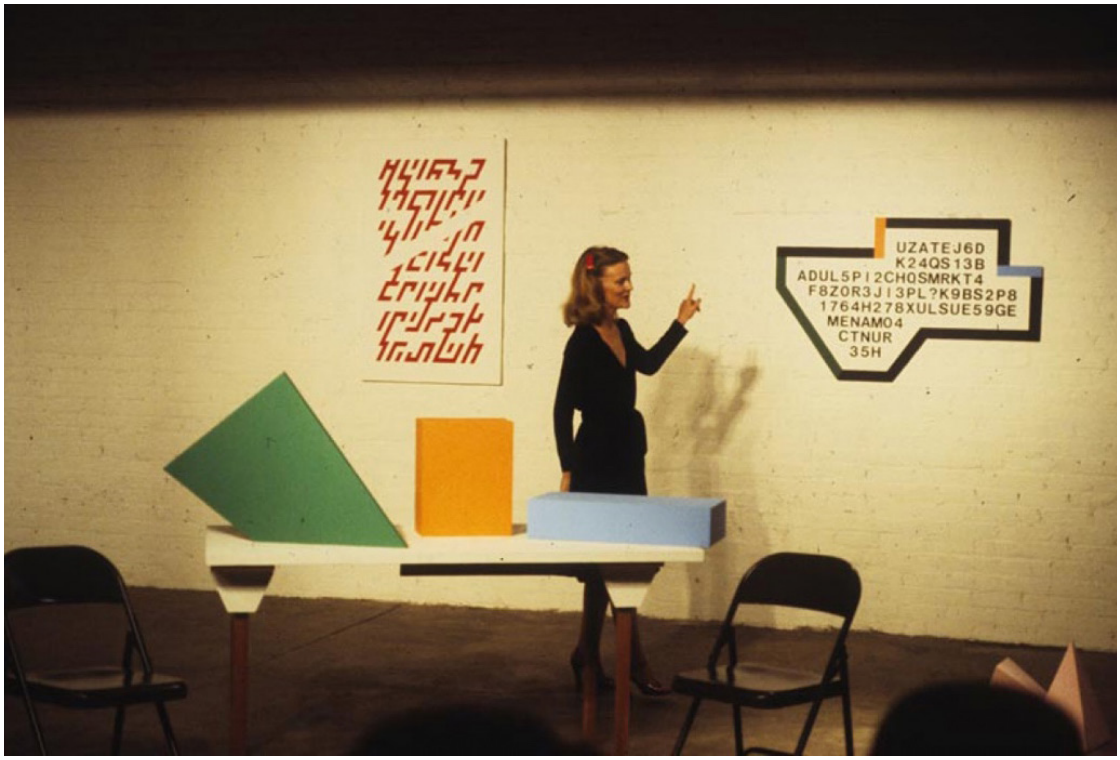

Fig. 13.7

Fig. 13.7 Guy de Cointet, *Oh, a Bear!* 1977. Performed by Mary Ann Duganne, Helen Mendez, and Jane Zingale at 80 Langston Street, San Francisco, California, 1977. Courtesy of Estate of Guy de Cointet/Air de Paris.

Cedric Price, *Generator* (1976–80)

Johanna Sluiter
Institute of Fine Arts, NYU

Plate 14 Cedric Price (British, 1934–2003). *Generator Project, White Oak, Florida. Development of the "Friendly Barrier Concept"*. 1978–80.
a. Crayon, ink and ink stamp on electrostatic print
b. Color ink, ink, and ink stamp on electrostatic print
c. Crayon on cut selfadhesive labels on electrostatic print, with crayon and ink stamp
d. Color ink and ink stamp on electrostatic print, mounted on board.
Each: 8 ½ x 11 ¾" (21.6 x 29.9 cm). Gift of The Howard Gilman Foundation. 1274.2000.ad

An enigmatic phrase accompanies the files associated with Cedric Price's *Generator* (1976–80); annotating office records and scrawled across sketches repeatedly appear the words: "Never look empty, never feel full."[1] This caption literally and figuratively underscores two perspective drawings of geometric outlines in desolate landscapes, hinting at a barebones structure amidst sparse vegetation beyond (fig. 15.1). Yet *Generator*'s mysterious motto and indefinite image were fully intentioned by the architect who conceived of "no predefined use, only a desired end effect," and anticipated that "its purpose will not become apparent until people start using it."[2]

In 1976, Howard Gilman commissioned Price to design a versatile recreational complex for the Gilman Paper Company's corporate retreat in White Oak, Florida.[3] The contradictory brief called for intimacy and openness, history and innovation, high culture and untamed nature.[4] In response, Price proposed a gridded timber framework with 150 modular 12' x 12' cubes that could be moved, combined, and reconfigured as needed. Seeking to liberate users from deterministic design and increasing bureaucratization of leisure, *Generator* was to be unenclosed and unplanned, constructed using humble, prefabricated components, and artificially intelligent.[5]

Price's scheme for an architectural feedback machine responsive to visitor input and external stimuli was governed by burgeoning cybernetics through collaboration with John and Julia Frazer. Together, the three surveyed interest in prospective activities and recorded their spatial requirements through questionnaires and connection games (fig. 15.2). This data was then fed into *Generator*'s computer program, which inventoried structural and programmatic uses, recommended logical organizations known as "menus", and even generated unsolicited proposals through its "boredom component"—developed in case users became passive or infrequent contributors to the alteration of their environment. Two human agents were also enlisted to catalyze transformation on-site: "Polarizer" encouraged group interaction and experimentation with *Generator*'s possibilities, while "Factor" physically orchestrated new arrangements via mobile crane (fig. 15.3).[6]

Although originally intended as an arts venue, Price maintained "no demands for a particular performance to be established." Rather, "the only demand is that the architecture itself shall respond to the people's capacity to change their minds," thereby generating new ideas and dynamic spaces.[7] In essence, *Generator* was less concerned with facilitating performance than it was with being functionally performative. Challenging the built environment's typically delayed response to changing conditions, *Generator*'s skeletal system attempted to enrich new freedom of thought through a choreography of "objects, networks, and processes that cross the human and the nonhuman" and indicated Price's movement away from architectural objecthood to a practice of encounter and event.[8] "Performance" became his architecture's evaluative metric, privileging users' ephemeral interactions and affect above traditional notions of program, fixity, and form.[9]

Generator incorporated many aspects of the earlier *Fun Palace* (1960–66), another sentient structure designed to incubate artistic creation (fig. 15.4). With *Fun Palace*, Price transposed radical theater tactics yielding heightened engagement between audience and actors, while more overt references appeared in its elaborate catwalk circulation system. Moreover, *Fun Palace* served as precedent for *Generator*'s cybernetic organization, of which partnering computer programmer, Gordon Pask, likened "scripting" its software to an act of dramaturgy.[10]

Furthering this analogy, one might say *Generator*'s computational system also performed linguistically, reading stimuli, translating it into code, and articulating a message via physical construction (fig. 15.5). Through the input of constatives (verbal descriptions, gaming analyses, microprocessor chip sensorium), *Generator* produced performative possibilities and enacted change through architectural enunciation. By equating digital code with built form, *Generator* operated akin to performative language, wherein a change in relations is actualized in the very moment of its pronouncement.[11] Returning to the project statement, and considering its applicability vis-à-vis linguistic performance, *Generator* probed the potentiality of a spatialization of language and literalized the designation of performative words that create "concrete situations."[12] Reconsidered thus, the pregnant voids in Price's sketches can be reframed as spaces for the vacillations of linguistic performance and negotiation—neither empty nor full.

With its insatiable appetite for change, *Generator* provided a stage to continually be set and reset anew and, due to its fluctuating processes of feedback and (re)production, was constantly in a state of becoming. Rather than static, representational architecture, *Generator* was perpetually amended by new speech acts, and, although unrealized, successfully demonstrated the performative dimension of coded architectural language.[13]

1. Price commented upon this phrase and its singular application to *Generator* in "Technology is the Answer, but what was the Question?" Pre-recorded talk, Pidgeon Audio Visual (1979), reprinted in *Cedric Price Works 1952–2003: A Forward-Minded Retrospective*, Ed. Samantha Hardingham (London: Architectural Association; Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2016), pp.330–331, p.330.

2. Ibid.

3. Howard Gilman was a businessman and philanthropist, whose collections of photography and architectural drawings (the latter curated by Pierre Apraxine) were bequeathed to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Museum of Modern Art, New York. Among the drawings donated, *Generator* was the only commissioned work in the collection. Gilman and Price were introduced by MoMA Junior Council President, Barbara Jakobson, in 1976. She remained intimately involved with *Generator* following the initial meeting and was designated by Price to act as "Polariser," discussed above.

4. For a full transcription of the brief, see: *Cedric Price Works 1952–2003: A Forward-Minded Retrospective*, p.447 and Pierre Apraxine's recollections in conversation with Paola Antonelli in *The Changing of the Avant-Garde: Visionary Architectural Drawings from the Howard Gilman Collection*, Ed. Terence Riley (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2003), p.150.

5. The popular notion of *Generator* as "the first artificially intelligent building" was founded upon two early reviews of the project: W.A., "World's First Intelligent Building," *RIBA Journal* (June 1980) and Deyan Sudjic, "Birth of the Intelligent Building," *Design 385* (January 1981).

6. The role of "Factor" was to be filled by Wally Price, operations manager for the White Oak Plantation. Ultimately, it was hoped that *Generator* would physically manage its own architecture with advances in computer technology, especially since lack of staff enthusiasm for maintenance proved one of the project's major stumbling blocks. See Apraxine and Antonelli, p.151.

7. Price, "Technology is the Answer, but what was the Question?" p.330.

8. The quotation is taken from Judith Butler, "Performativity," in *In Terms of Performance* (New York: e-flux, 2016) and resulting conclusions draw upon characterizations of the project in Keller Easterling, "An Internet of Things," *e-flux Journal* 31 (January 2012).

9. Although more often today pertaining to factors of energy, economy, and ecology, "performance" was intended to be interpreted much more literally by Price. See, "Technology is the Answer, but what was the Question?"

10. As described by Pask's "Theory of Conversation," outlined in the article, "The Architectural Relevance of Cybernetics," *Architectural Design* (September, 1969).

11. For more on performative actions, see Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Manchester University Press, 1979) and J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words: The Williams James Lectures Delivered in Harvard University in 1955* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

12. See Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965).

13. Andrew Pickering provides the most comprehensive account of the performative dimension of cybernetics in his book, *The Cybernetic Brain: Sketches of Another Future*; however, Price's collaborators on *Fun Palace* and *Generator* (Gordon Pask and John and Julia Frazer, respectively) hinted at such possibilities much earlier. See the aforementioned article by Pask, as well as, *The Cybernetics of Human Learning and Performance: A Guide to Theory and Research* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1975) and John Frazer, *An Evolutionary Architecture* (London: Architectural Association, 1995).

Fig. 14.1 a

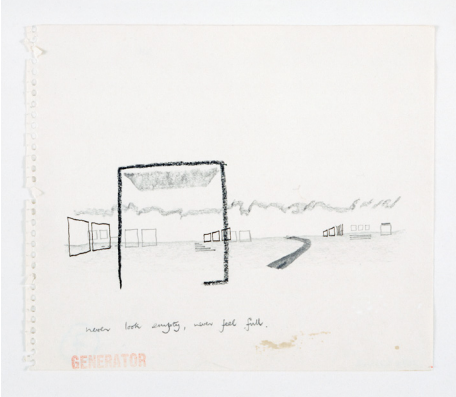

Fig. 14.1 a

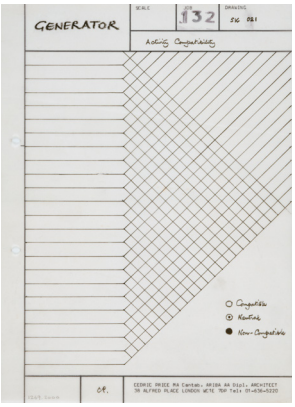

Fig. 14.2

Fig. 14.3

Fig. 14.1 *Generator Project, White Oak, Florida. Overriding Architectural Perspectives*. 1978–80.
a. Graphite and ink on paper mounted on board
b. Graphite, crayon and ink on paper. Each: 8 x 10" (20.3 x 25.4 cm). Gift of The Howard Gilman Foundation. 1272.2000.ab

Fig. 14.2 *Generator Project, White Oak, Florida. Activity Compatability Graph*. 1978–80. Ink and crayon on printed tracing paper, with ink stamp. 11 ⅝ x 8 ¼" (29.5 x 21 cm). Gift of The Howard Gilman Foundation. 1269.2000paz-armada

Fig. 14.3 *Generator Project, White Oak, Florida. Perspective*. 1978–80 Cut-and-pasted printed color electrostatic print on electrostatic print, with airbrush, ink, graphite, crayon, and ink stamp on board. 8 ⅛ x 21 ½" (20.6 x 54.6 cm). Gift of The Howard Gilman Foundation. 1280.2000

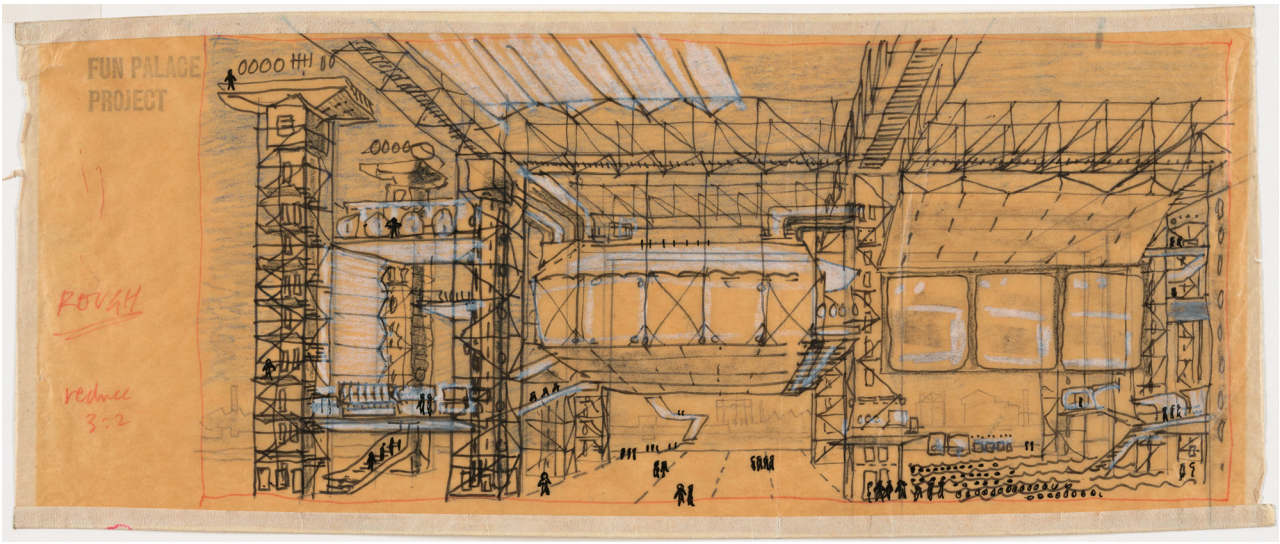

Fig. 14.4

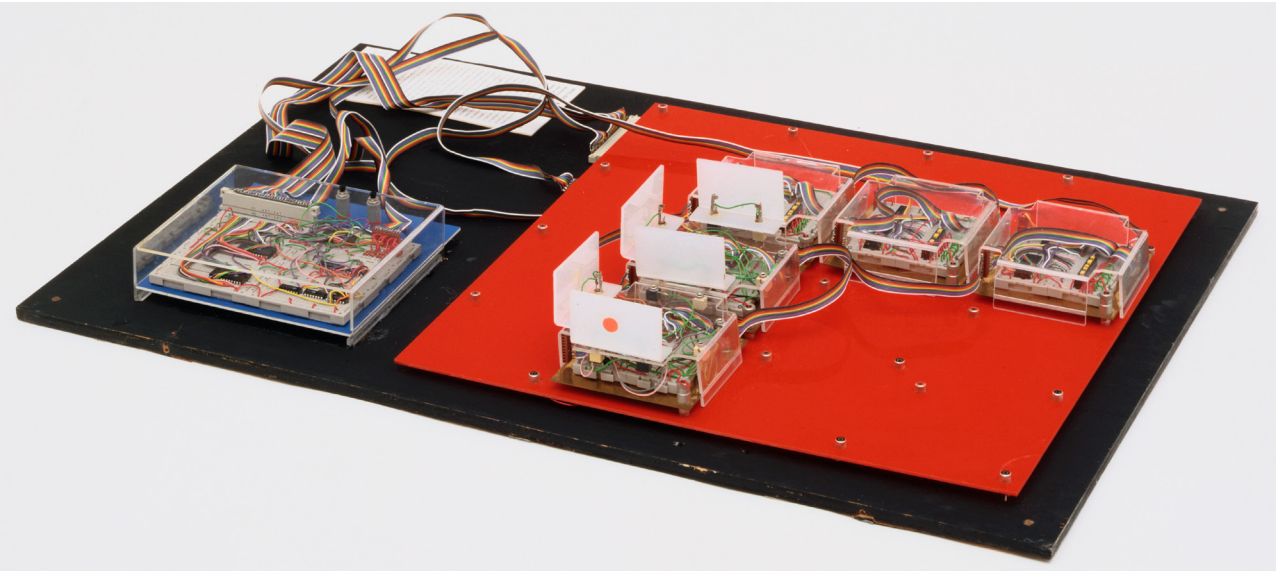

Fig. 14.5

Fig. 14.4 *Fun Palace for Joan Littlewood Project, Stratford East, London, England*. 1959–61. Felt tipped pen, ink, graphite, crayon and ink stamp on tracing paper with tape. 6 ½ x 15 ⅞" (16.5 x 40.3 cm). Gift of The Howard Gilman Foundation. 1231.2000

Fig. 14.5 *Generator Project, White Oak, Florida*. 1978–80. Plastic, metal, plastic coated wires, and self-adhesive paper dots. 4 ¼ x 31 x 20 ½" (10.8 x 78.7 x 52.1 cm) (irregular). Gift of The Howard Gilman Foundation. 1319.2000

Lorraine O'Grady, *Untitled (Mlle Bourgoise Noire)* (1980-83/2009)

Erich Kessel
Yale University

Plate 15 Lorraine O'Grady (American, born 1934). *Untitled (Mlle Bourgeoise Noire)*. 1980 83/2009. Fourteen gelatin silver prints. Each: 8 ½ x 10" (21.6 x 25.4 cm). 2/20 plus 2AP. Committee on Media and Performance Art Funds. 78.2014.a-nplus 1 AP. Committee on Media and Performance Art Funds. 1120.2014

Wearing a dress made of 180 white gloves, adorned with a tiara and carrying "the whip- that-made-plantations-move," Lorraine O'Grady emerged at the Just Above Midtown gallery in 1980 as Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire (Internationale).[1] Miss Black Middle Class was the 1955 champion of a global beauty competition held in Cayenne, the capital of French Guiana, the same year that O'Grady graduated from Wellesley. On the 25th anniversary of this coronation, Mlle. Noire decided to break the pageantry of her elegant silence and protest what she saw as excessively cautious work by black artists. After handing out chrysanthemums attached to the cat o' nine tails and whipping herself with the violent implement 100 times, Mlle. Noire performed a poem:

> THAT'S ENOUGH!
> No more boot-licking…
> No more ass-kissing…
> No more buttering-up…
> No more pos…turing
> of super-ass..imilates…
> BLACK ART MUST TAKE MORE RISKS!!![2]

O'Grady's poem targeted the "Afro-American Abstraction" exhibition displayed at MoMA PS1 earlier that year between February and April, which she decried as "tame" and "well-behaved."[3] But O'Grady's performance was not a singular event and was re-staged at the New Museum's "Persona" exhibit the following year and at the Harlem Afro-American Day Parade in September of 1983.

The photographic documentation that grants us belated access to O'Grady's performance was taken Coreen Simpson and Salima Ali at the New Museum. The fourteen gelatin silver prints draw a narrative arc, linking Mlle. Noire's departure from her home, to her arrival at the museum's former New School location (fig. 15.1), to the recitation of a new poem (fig. 15.2), to the final culminating image that shows Mlle. Noire celebrating with David Hammons and other friends (fig. 15.3). While these images provide valuable insight into the visual strategies O'Grady deployed, they also register the audience's reaction and reception of Mlle. Noire as they occurred real time. The reactions of the audience span from concern to amusement, but confusion seems to be the strongest trend across the images. There is an extent to which O'Grady's performance is illegible or inaudible within the space, despite the glaring spectacle she creates.

In some sense, this is not surprising. Recall the fact that in Mlle. Noire's imagined titular claim originated not from Harlem or the Southern United States but from a geographic and temporal remove: French Guiana, 25 years ago. O'Grady describes the locale as the "otherside of nowhere."[4] Though a somewhere by any means, French Guiana is located, in this imaginative stroke, as a non-place at the edge of the world. In her intervention into the New York art scene, Mlle. Noire becomes a diasporic figure through her fictive travels and undoing of geographic and temporal borders.[5] Mlle. Noire thereby comes to embody what O'Grady once called "perhaps the only vantage point from which the center and the peripheries might be seen in something approaching their totality…"[6] The "whip-that-made-plantations-move" produces a similar form of confusion. It is a sign of a collision of past and present that stretches the event horizon of transatlantic slavery to implicate Mlle. Noire's audiences. As Saidiya Hartman and Hortense Spillers have written, the scene of violence against black women reintroduced by Mlle. Noire is one that remains both foundational to American social life and, paradoxically, constitutes "the position of the unthought."[7][8] Thus, in the same moment that O'Grady confronts her audience face-to-face with black female abjection, this confrontation remains unthinkable—out of space, time and mind. As O'Grady said: "In 1980, no one listened to me. Nobody even had the vocabulary to understand what I was talking about."[9]

As elements of blackness, the unthought and the nowhere not only produce the shock visible on the audience's faces in the eleventh silver gelatin print, but also constitute a position of criticality that motivates the artist's project (fig. 15.4). It is from that positionality that O'Grady can deploy the afterlife of slavery as a barb against the structural violence of the art world. In her earliest engagements with this milieu during the late 1970s, O'Grady encountered, for the first time, the denial of her voice's value.[10] This was symptomatic of a broader problem, however, which was the apparent impenetrability of the art world's well-financed establishment and the particular demands it placed on black artists, all while structuring their voices out of the conversation. This puts into relief O'Grady's demand that black art take more risks. The urgency of the performance and her claim that the tipping point had been reached suggest that the protest functions additionally as an invitation, entreating fellow black artists to join in her in articulating new standards of protest, critique, presence and art-making. In this sense, O'Grady departs from the long genealogy of black creatives such as W.E.B. DuBois and Alain Locke attempting to push other black artists do better. She calls for action not purely *against* the fact that black artists are positioned on the outside, but perhaps also *because* they are positioned on the outside. She understands this fact as a vantage point of criticality from which the totality of the problem might best be seen.

1. Lorraine O'Grady, "Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire Performance Synopsis," Lorraine O'Grady, 2007, accessed May 07, 2017.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Lorraine O'Grady, "This Will Have Been: My 1980s," *Art Journal* 71, no. 2 (2012): 6–17, accessed May 7, 2017. doi:10.1080/00043249.2012.10791090.

5. Here I draw on Cathy Caruth's theorization of temporality, diaspora and history as articulated in "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History (Freud, Moses and Monotheism)," *Yale French Studies*, no. 79 (1991), 181–192.

6. Lorraine O'Grady, "Some Thoughts on Diaspora and Hybridity: An Unpublished Slide Lecture," Roundtable, Wellesley University, 1994, accessed May 7, 2017, http://lorraineogrady.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Lorraine-OGrady_Some-thoughts-on-diaspora-and-hybridity-an-unpublished-slide-lecture.pdf.

7. Saidiya V. Hartman and Frank Wilderson, III, "The Position of the Unthought," *Qui Parle* 12, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 183–201, accessed May 7, 2017. JSTOR.

8. I also draw on Hortense Spillers conceptualization of black women as the medium through which an American cultural/ideological "grammar" emerges. She names this condition a "cultural vestibularity" in Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics* 17, no. 2, 1978.

9. *Wellesley in the Arts*, Lorraine O'Grady, Vimeo, October 7, 2011, accessed May 7, 2017, https://vimeo.com/149182076.

10. Ibid.

Fig. 15.1

Fig. 15.2

Fig. 15.3

Fig. 15.4

Fig. 15.1 Lorraine O'Grady, "Mlle Bourgeoise Noire and Her Master of Ceremonies Enter the New Museum," from *Untitled (Mlle Bourgeoise Noire)*. 1980–83/2009. 78.2014.b

Fig. 15.2 Lorraine O'Grady. "Mlle Bourgeoise Noire Shouts out Her Poem," from *Untitled (Mlle Bourgeoise Noire)*. 1980–83/2009. 78.2014.l

Fig. 15.3 Lorraine O'Grady. "Mlle Bourgeoise Noire Celebrates with Her Friends," from *Untitled (Mlle Bourgeoise Noire)*. 1980–83/2009. 78.2014.n

Fig. 15.4 Lorraine O'Grady. "Crowd Watches Mlle Bourgeoise Noire Shouting Her Poem," from *Untitled (Mlle Bourgeoise Noire)*. 1980–83/2009. 78.2014.k

Charles Atlas, ***Hail the New Puritan*** **(1985–86)**

Ian Wallace
The Graduate Center, CUNY

Plate 16 Charles Atlas (American, born 1949). *Hail the New Puritan*. 1985–86. Video (color, sound). 84:47 mins. Uneditioned. Committee on Media and Performance Art Funds. 255.2015

Though it's tempting to interpret *Hail the New Puritan* as a portrait of London's post-Punk counterculture under the Thatcher administration, Atlas imagined the film as something closer to an "antidocumentary"; "like *A Hard Day's Night*—but with dancing"[1] (fig. 16.1). The made-for-TV film, initiated by an invitation from WGBH producer Susan Dowling, first aired on May 21, 1986 during the BBC Channel Four program "Dance on 4."[2] This was the second in a series of dance films Atlas produced in collaboration with several choreographers—among them Douglas Dunn, Karole Armitage, and Philippe Decouflé—beginning in 1983. Its subject is the then 23-year old choreographer Michael Clark, who had recently turned down an invitation to join the British Royal Ballet to spend a summer working with Merce Cunningham before joining Armitage's company in New York. Following Clark and company as they rehearse for a performance of his work *New Puritans*,[3] the film captures activities that range from the mundane to the erotic to the virtuosic, demonstrating the means by which the cloistering of high art from mass culture might be collapsed by exploiting television's direct mode of address and its strategies for capturing, directing, and retaining attention.

Atlas's film mimics the tone and structure of a made-for-TV artist documentary with the added embellishments of production and costume design by the performance artist and club promoter Leigh Bowery and a soundtrack by post-punk band The Fall.[4] Interweaving rehearsal footage, staged performances, and unscripted faux-reality within a pseudo-documentary narrative arc, the film thematizes the ways in which artistic production is narrated within TV's conventional formulas. Staccato editing, visual effects, and performative acts of distanciation accent the film's narrative structure, demonstrating the manipulability of the formal devices—camera movements, captioning, soundtrack, repetitive takes, and the visibility of the camera apparatus—that conventionally distinguish documentary from narrative fiction and documentation from live performance (fig. 16.2).

While Clark and Atlas's respective training is on full display in the film—Clark studied classical ballet and Scottish dance, and Atlas's early career was spent as assistant stage manager and eventually filmmaker-in-residence for the Cunningham company—the combined influence of 1950s Hollywood movie musicals, Armitage's "punk ballets," and the conventions of '80s TV lend the film a certain campy hedonism, and its attitude toward dance is more cheeky than reverential. Both Atlas's cuts and the performers' semi-improvised actions continually interrupt the narrative action. In the opening dream sequence, Bowery and friends obscure a tableau of dancers as they walk back and forth to eat snacks off of a table placed in front of the camera. In a later scene, a studio rehearsal carries on in the background as Ellen van Shuylenburch steps into the foreground to take a phone call (fig. 16.3). Elsewhere choreography is mingled with and set in counterpoint to the expressive externalization of prosaic thoughts as we witness Gaby Agis dancing along a canal while ruminating aloud to the camera about moving out of Clark's apartment and finding her own place. These sequences simultaneously suggest forthright artificiality and the confessional intimacy of TV documentary. Later, Atlas captures the distinctly queer wit and rapport of Bowery and friends bitchily reading each other as they prepare for a night out (fig 16.4). Intermittent cuts to images like the Thatcher administration's war-on-drugs billboards ("74% SAY NO") serve as a reminder of the political stakes of such subversive modes of self-presentation.

Though some concessions had to be made to Channel Four's producers—a sex scene that was deemed too risqué was cut from the version of the film seen on TV[6]—the broadcast format also presented Atlas the opportunity to carry out strategic formal interventions. A scene that mimics the gestalt of an iTV late night talk show panel, with The Fall's Mark E. Smith playing host, was placed in the film to appear on screen at the precise moment that the real talk shows were coming on air, aiming to snag the attention of confused channel surfers at home. Rather than reducing artistic production to the mere scrambling and manipulation of signs that might characterize its broader cultural moment, *Hail the New Puritan* takes aim at the television broadcast as both a kind of institutional frame and a cultural mode of address, taking up TV as both hammer and nail in its subversion of cultural norms.

1. "Stuart Comer talks with Charles Atlas" in Stuart Comer, Douglas Crimp, Lia Giangitano, Lucy Sexton, Charles Atlas, (eds.), *Charles Atlas* (New York: Prestel, 2015), p. 272

2. *Hail the New Puritan* was subsequently screened on New York's WNEW-TV in a one-time broadcast later the same year. The Dutch broadcast company VPRO also bought and broadcast the film in The Netherlands.

3. *New Puritans* is featured midway through Atlas's film: as Clark and company perform on a soundstage, Atlas and crew are visible in the foreground of the shot, playing themselves as they "film" the performance.

4. Clark did not have his own company at the time; the dancers Gaby Agis, Leslie Bryant, Matthew Hawkins, Julie Hood, and Ellen van Schuylenburch were recruited to play the part for the film.

5. Author's conversation with Charles Atlas, May 1, 2017

Fig. 16.1

Fig. 16.2

Fig. 16.3

Fig. 16.4

Fig. 16.1–16.4 Still from Charles Atlas, *Hail the New Puritan*, 1985–86

Mario Cravo Neto, ***Black Torso in White Wash*** **(1988)**

Abigail Lapin Dardashti
The Graduate Center, CUNY

Plate 17 Mario Cravo Neto (Brazilian, 1947–2009). *Black Torso in White Wash*. (Torso negro com cal). 1988. Gelatin silver print. 18 ⅛ x 18 ⅛" (46 x 46 cm). Gift of Mario Cravo Neto. 867.1996

"What is photography exactly? Fine art photography is appropriation. [...] Basically, photography is [a] "found object."" [1] This statement by the Brazilian photographer Mário Cravo Neto (1947–2009), who hails from Salvador in the northern state of Bahia, sheds light on the expressions found in his work *Black Torso in White Wash* (1988). Depicting a black torso and hands covered in white chalk against a dark background, the black and white photograph resonates with certain aspects of the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomblé (a mixture of West African-derived practices, indigenous rites, and Catholicism), which is deeply rooted in Bahia. However, here the artist appropriates the black body and renders it as an anonymous "found object" that is stripped of his identity, producing an ambiguous representation that is at once grounded in Candomblé rituals and its associations with salvation while also presenting the persistence of oppression.

Candomblé rituals often employ a white chalk called Efun, which used to be imported from West Africa. The color white symbolizes the deity *Oxalá*, who is responsible for the re-birth of practitioners after their initiation into the religion and has associations with purity and Jesus Christ. [2] During initiation ceremonies, the back and at times the head, shoulders, and upper arms of the initiate are covered with dots designed with this white chalk. This material is also used to ensure a soul's safe passage after death. Small crosses made of white chalk are drawn on those performing the seven-day funeral ceremony that follows the physical burial of an initiate. [3] Bodies fully covered in white chalk appear in other African-diasporic religions including Haitian Vodou's deity Gede, which Cravo Neto may have seen in the Franco-Brazilian Pierre Verger's ethnographic photographs. [4]

Rather than depicting an entire body performing rituals in a temple, Cravo Neto focuses on the isolated torso and hands set in an undefined space created in his studio. The photograph does not directly allude to Candomblé ceremonies but rather makes symbolic allusions to the religion. According to art historian Roberto Conduru, the chalked body in Cravo Neto's work signifies healing for the persistent suffering of African diasporic people. In reference to the general lack of individuality in the image, Conduru explains that during trans in Candomblé ceremonies, personal identity is lost in favor of the deity's embodiment of the initiate, which renders personal identity fleeting. [5] Inspired by Candomblé, Cravo Neto justified the anonymity of his figures by envisioning them as the faceless punctum of the image: "If I photograph somebody, I am appropriating this person, putting that person in another context. [...] I don't see him as a person. There is no name when I am trying to put together something that is harmonious. I don't care who is there. What I care about is the whole." [6]

While Conduru soundly interprets the image especially considering Cravo Neto's own position as a Candomblé initiate, the artist's decision to anonymize the black body can also recall the history of oppression towards African diasporic people, during which enslavement stripped people of their identities and cultures and reduced them to commodities. [7] The appropriation of the black body is reinforced through the lack of a head in the image, which creates an oblique relationship between the body and Candomblé—where the head is the fundamental vehicle through which the deity enters the body during initiation. In *Black Torso in White Wash*, Cravo Neto omits the head to focus on a romanticized, textural, and softly-focused vision of the hands and nude torso. The hands in the foreground can symbolize the forced labor of black bodies on Brazilian soil during colonization and thereafter, making this anonymous figure a paradigm for this image. The cropped perspective can be understood through Jacques Lacan's discussion of the fragmented body; in the mirror stage, the infant formulates an "I" that is haunted by the uncoordinated, fragmented body, which results in a vision of an "aggressive disintegration of the individual." [8] *Black Torso in White Wash* may at once represent the haunting trauma of the Middle Passage and the persistent oppression of blacks in Brazil and beyond because of its anonymity, while at the same time attempt a kind of salvation through its symbolic association with Candomblé's white chalk.

1. All translations by author unless otherwise noted. Deepest thanks to Roberto Conduru for his suggestions. Interview with Hans-Michael Herzog in English, March 16, 2002. In *La Mirada: Looking at Photography in Latin America Today*, ed. Hans-Michael Herzog et al., (Zurich: Daros Latinamerica Collection, 2002), 72.

2. Paul Christopher Johnson, Secrets, *Gossip, and Gods: The Transformation of Brazilian Candomblé* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 117.

3. Mikelle Smith Omari-Tunkara, *Manipulating the Sacred: Yoruba Art, Ritual, and Resistance in Brazilian Candomblé* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 105.

4. For more on Gede, see Katherine Marie Smith, *Gede Rising: Haiti in the Age of Vagabondaj* (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2010).

5. Roberto Conduru, "Imagens-Corpos na fotoplástica de Mario Cravo Neto," *Pérolas negras, primeiros fios: experiências artísticas e culturais nos fluxos entre Africa e Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, 2013), 79.

6. Interview with Hans-Michael Herzog, 73.

7. In Brazil, Candomblé had survived heavy persecution through secrecy and syncretization (the associations with Catholicism). See Smith Omari-Tunkara, 25.

8. Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I/Of the Gaze as Petit a," *Philosophers on Art from Kant to the Postmodernists: A Critical Reader*, ed. Christopher Kul-Want (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 154.

Houston Conwill, ***The Cakewalk Humanifesto: A Cultural Libation*** **(1991)**

Ashley James
Yale University

Plate 18 Houston Conwill (American, 1947–2016). *The Cakewalk Humanifesto: A Cultural Libation*. Projects series (19). 1991. Installation view. The Museum of Modern Art Archives

Seeking out the few pleasures they could enjoy under the regime of antebellum chattel slavery, on Sundays, more frequently in the summer than in colder seasons, enslaved persons in the South would gather together and entertain themselves by dance, with "both young and old… dress[ing] up in hand-me-down-finery to do a high-kicking, prancing walk-around."[1] Subversively and with humor, these dances often *mimicked* the "sophisticated" moves of their masters, an example of the enslaved's limited though inventive means of undermining their oppressors. This mimicry went undetected by slave owners, however, and instead, the exploiters predictably sought to capitalize on these fleeting moments of the enslaved's joy by selecting the best dancers from a group and conscripting their participation in inter-plantation parties. Thus they turned the recreational dance into a "cakewalk" competition, so called because the "winner" would be rewarded a small cake for their "excellence."[2] This matrix of black cunning and white opportunism developed further into the new century, when vaudeville dancers transformed the cakewalk into a popular mainstream dance craze, thus continuing a circuit of white dependence on black ingenuity and labor that stretches back to the 18th century, but might certainly be thought to extend into our present moment.

The cakewalk—in its cleverness, revisionism by inversion of the "high and low,"[3] humor, and imbrication with (restrained) black movement—comes to serve as theory, metaphor, and physical referent for Houston Conwill's 1991 *The Cakewalk Humanifesto: A Cultural Libation*, an installation/performance that charts and commemorates dense and expansive narratives of African Americans' migration and uneven post-slavery progress through the idiom of dance, and with the use of understated, multi-referential materials.

The main feature of *Humanifesto* is a large rectangular glass window-like structure, eight feet wide and just over eight feet in height, on which is etched a circular diagram—evocative of a dance floor (chart)—that depicts four major sites of African American history (Louisville, Kentucky; New Orleans, Louisiana; Memphis, Tennessee; and Atlanta, Georgia) placed into relation spatially and through the inclusion of directive arrows indicating modes of exchange. (The fifth site—Tuscumbia, Alabama—differs from this black migratory focus; it is the site of the blind and deaf activist Helen Keller's birthplace.) At the four quadrant nodes circumscribing the circle, Conwill has placed quotes written by important African American intellectuals and writers: Jayne Cortez, James Baldwin, Sojourner Truth, Langston Hughes, Martin Luther King, Jr. and A. Philip Randolph. By linking symbols of dance movement with that of African American migration (and effective communication[4]), Conwill initiates a "rechoreographing" of history[5] that, in Kellie Jones' words, "substitutes historical chronology for time that is non-linear, synchronic, and syncretic," and—importantly—"respatialized."[6]

While the dance chart is one reference for this circular migratory map, another is the "Kongo cosmogram," a Robert Farris Thompson-coined phrase for the quadrant "crossroads" form important in traditional Kongo civilization, and for which the horizontal line indicates a division between the living and the kingdom of the dead.[7] Conwill's dance-chart cosmogram indexes the artist's long-standing interest in bridging (perceived) African cultural forms to those of African Americans—particularly as it concerns the spiritual[8]—in part due to a more general understanding of African American history as diasporic and thereby necessarily African.

The importance of the spiritual and of the ritual in particular carries into the other features that comprise the *Humanifesto*. Accompanying the larger glass structure is a glass table on which rests a glass bowl and jug. In the bowl Conwill has placed dirt culled from each location save for Tuscumbia, for which a jug of water serves as representation.[9] In so doing, Conwill literally grounds these otherwise metaphoric sites, and brings the Mid-Manhattan viewer into close relation to a Southern American history that might otherwise appear distant both in time and space. Though modest and understated, the table evokes an altar or a shrine, onto which visitors pay respect or at the very least reflect.

Though "performative" in the sense that the gathered soil reminds of the person who has collected it, the more explicitly performance aspect of the *Humanifesto* comes through the inclusion of another object that rests on the glass table—a book entitled *Libations*. Written by Conwill's sister, poet and professor Estella Marie Conwill Majozo, *Libations* takes on the epistolary form—as letters written to Conwill from the five sites that ruminate on the importance of eight important black women literary and liberatory figures: Phillis Wheatley, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Ida B. Wells, Mary McLeod Bethune, Bessie Smith, Josephine Baker, and Zora Neale Hurston. The text brings an important black feminist perspective to the work, and so too a performative one: Conwill intended for the book to be read aloud in the gallery space, sequentially and until completion. Importantly, this was to be performed by volunteers of any gender and age—indicative of Conwill's desire for his work to be widely communally felt.[10] Though the reading of *Libations* is clearly performative, so too is the window structure, ultimately: Various levels of light—dependent upon the weather and time of day—shine through and illuminate the cosmogram, drawing forth narratives both optimistic and disheartening. For instance, on some days, at a particular time, Atlanta, Georgia, is spotlit, the birthplace of MLK, full of hope and promise. But on a later date and at a later time, Memphis, Tennessee, is the city that finds center, the space wherein—at the hands of white supremacy—the race leader ultimately met his untimely end.

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1. Brooke Baldwin, “The Cakewalk: A Study in Stereotype and Reality,” *Journal of Social History* Vol. 15, No. 2, (Winter 1981), 208.

2. Ibid., 207-209.

3. Linda Goode Bryant, “Introduction,” *Cakewalk by Houston Conwill*, (New York: Just Above Midtown/Downtown Gallery, 1983), 6.

4. Lynn Zelevansky, “Houston Conwill: The Cakewalk Humanifesto, A Cultural Libation,” (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1989), 2.

5. Ibid.

6. Kellie Jones, *South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 217.

7. Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1983), 108–131.

8. Many African American artists during this time period turned to African (spiritual) customs in their art for inspiration, content and form. See: Kellie Jones, *South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

9. Zelevansky reads this jug of water as symbol of “purification.” See: Zelevansky, “Houston Conwill: The Cakewalk Humanifesto, A Cultural Libation,” (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1989), 2.

10. Zelevansky, 3.

UH-OH, I GOT STAMINA: Physical Endurance in Maria Hassabi's *PLASTIC* (2016)

Ksenia M. Soboleva
Institute of Fine Arts, NYU

Plate 19 Maria Hassabi (born Cyprus, 1973). *PLASTIC*. 2016. Performance photograph. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Maria Hassabi: *PLASTIC* was co-commissioned by MoMA; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

The idea of stamina is intrinsic to two phenomena that are inherently intertwined: performance and protest. Both can be read as a choreography of bodies in a carefully chosen space, establishing a relationship with those who are watching, and constructing agency through the individual or social body. Maria Hassabi's performance *PLASTIC* exemplifies this interrelation through its powerful use of stamina.

Recently turned into a buzzword by the chorus of the Australian pop icon Sia's music hit *The Greatest*, the word stamina refers to the ability to sustain prolonged physical or mental effort. In the first minute of Sia's corresponding music video, widely interpreted as a tribute to the victims of the 2016 Orlando shooting, we see motionless bodies scattered over the floor. They appear to be inanimate, but as the beat starts the bodies rise up and join the American dancer Maddie Ziegler in her energetic choreography. The ambiguity between inanimate and animate, and stillness and motion, is not very dissimilar from a first encounter with Maria Hassabi's performance *PLASTIC*, performed at the MoMA in spring 2016 (pl. 20). The piece consisted out of four to eight performers placed around the transitional "in-between spaces" of the museum: two staircases and the Marron atrium, which the artist filled with furniture borrowed from elsewhere in the building (fig. 20.1). At any given time during the institution's opening hours, the visitors would stumble upon Hassabi's performers in positions that demanded the highest level of concentration, radiating an almost sculptural quality. Hassabi shows a profound awareness of the museum-space, where unlike in a theater, the spectators are the ones who move and the spectacle is still.[1] Some visitors would therefore simply walk by or move around the bodies, but if one were to pay attention long enough, they would notice that the bodies were in fact slowly moving in space, adopting one complex pose after another (fig 20.2). Looking closely, one could even catch a glimpse of a twitching muscle or a tear, emphasizing the fragile bodily state of the performers and the high amount of stamina required to remain in balance. The choreography functioned on a loop system, with a subtle soundtrack created by Morten Norbye Halvorsen and Marina Rosenfeld playing in the background.

André Lepecki has noted in his most recent publication, *Singularities*, that performance in the twenty-first century is not merely an aesthetic category, but also a form of political power.[2] The stamina that one needs for many of the long-duration performances that have recently received critical attention from scholars such as Lepecki and Diana Taylor, implies a resistance to the dominant narrative, a desire to break free from the temporal norm by putting one's physical and/or mental perseverance to the test. In an interview with Philip Bither, Maria Hassabi states that instead of infusing her performance with emotionality, it is the physicality that brings the emotionality out of the performers.[3] Holding positions for prolonged amounts of time makes physicality more fragile and the constant chance of falling reflects the very timely fear of everything around us being disoriented. The chance of falling was furthermore heightened by the fact that Hassabi staged her performance in the abovementioned transitional spaces of the museum, thereby moving away from the traditional notion of the stage and instead interfering in the human infrastructure. This brings to mind nonviolent action protests such as Occupy Wall Street, when protesters camped out in a public park, and disrupted the business infrastructure of the financial district. Similarly, the performers of *PLASTIC* seem to be camping out, unsettling the hectic flow of crowds at MoMA. (fig. 20.3)

The physicality of the performer and the spectator plays a central role in *PLASTIC*. Indeed, Hassabi insists that her performance does not exist without the audience. This brings us to the question of documentation, an ongoing challenge within performance studies. While understanding the importance of documenting her performances, Hassabi believes that the presence of a camera fundamentally changes the work as the camera replaces the position of the viewer. Documentation, Hassabi argues, is not its own art.[4] While the artist's work certainly shows an acute awareness of photography, to argue that the acts of stillness performed in *PLASTIC* are a form of photography would be to do it injustice. I would suggest that temps mort is a more productive term in this case, for it is more accurate to see *PLASTIC* not as sequence of frozen stills, but as stillness embedded in movement. I am not suggesting, however, that film is the best medium to document the work. As mentioned above, the essential aspect is the performer-spectator encounter. How then, does one meaningfully document the emotions provoked by this piece? In his essay *The Performativity of Performance Documentation*, Philip Auslander offers an interesting analysis, dividing performance documentation in two categories: documentary and theatrical. Arguing that performers are fully aware of performance's dependence on photographic documentation, he introduces the idea of the performativity of documentation itself: the act of documenting as an act of performance. Could it be possible, I wonder, to consider a reversal of this idea in Hassabi's case: the act of performance as an act of documenting. Similar to oral history being the main documentation medium for centuries, could one argue that in Hassabi's work the viewer's experience performs this documenting role? The use of the term body language to connote communication through movement, emphasizes what a powerful tool the body can be. It is through the performance of stamina that the viewers consequently become aware of their own stamina, and embed the experience within themselves, making it a part of their bodies. As Sia's music video suggests, we need stamina to survive adversity. Hassabi's performance *PLASTIC* implies that stamina is a form of protest.

1. See Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett's comparison of the historical relation between museum and theatre.

2. André Lepecki, *Singularities: Dance in the Age of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

3.

4.

5. Philip Auslander, "The Performativity of Performance Documentation," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, vol. 28, no. 3 (September 2006): 1–10.

Fig. 19.1

Fig. 19.2

Fig. 19.3

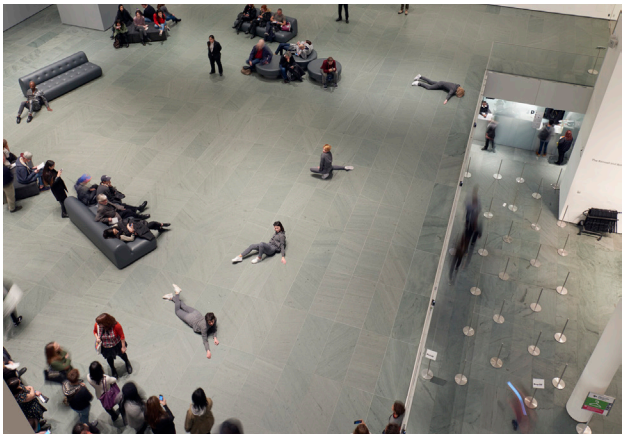

Fig. 19.4

Fig. 19.1 Maria Hassabi, *PLASTIC*, 2016. Performance on stairs between 4th and 5th floor permanent collection galleries

Fig. 19.2 Maria Hassabi, *PLASTIC*, 2016. Performance on couch in Marron Atrium

Fig. 19.3 Maria Hassabi, *PLASTIC*, 2016. Performance on stairs from Agnes Gund Garden Lobby

Fig 19.4 Maria Hassabi, *PLASTIC*, 2016. Performance in Marron Atrium