WORDS TO BE LOOKED AT

Language in 1960s Art

Liz Kotz

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Words to Be Looked At

Introduction

Almost anyone with a passing knowledge of contemporary art knows that language in its many forms—as printed texts, painted signs, words on the wall, recorded speech, and more—has become a primary element of visual art. Under labels like Fluxus, Pop art, Conceptual art, and text and image, words have proliferated in art since the 1960s—in a complex relation with poetry, newly emerging activities of performance art, and the world of experimental music. So much so that for artists today, making works out of language has become almost routine. One could cite any number of examples: in an installation, a tape-recorded voice chants threatening phrases when we step into a small room; in a public art project, an artist arranges for short provocative phrases to appear on the electronic billboard above Times Square; and in a gallery, another artist presents a list of everyone he has ever met on a long wall.

That this practice has become common does not make it any less strange. Part of the goal of this book is to recover the strangeness of this practice by going back to its beginnings. In many of the texts that are discussed here, language has been reduced to a kind of object that has been isolated, broken apart, crossed out, and at times nearly evacuated of meaning or expression. For many readers, this will no doubt seem an impoverishment of the resources and richness of language—a repression of its capacities for narrative and lyricism, argument and political speech, telling a story or making a point. This represents a historical paradox: why, in a decade when this country was undergoing some of its most violent and productive upheavals, should artists working in the United States deliberately choose not to make statements? Why should they choose to examine the materiality and activity of

language in such reduced, inexpressive, and to our eyes, seemingly depoliticized forms?

In a 1970 interview, the artist Carl Andre stated that "matter as matter rather than matter as symbol is a conscious political position."[1] For Andre, the goal of art was to recover a direct sensuous experience of the world around us, an experience of the actuality of things, rather than relating to the world through symbol, representation, or the reduced and distorted mediums of "information." Yet we cannot presume a firm divide between matter and representation here. As a poet, one of the primary materials Andre worked with was language. And subsequent artists as different as Dan Graham, On Kawara, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, and Lawrence Weiner could be seen as applying classic minimalist strategies to the burgeoning worlds of information and the mass media. The emphatic antifunctionality of their self-referential systems was seen as a way to "wreck" language and wreck art, and perhaps to disassemble and disable the larger systems of publicity and propaganda that used words and images to create fantasies of consumption and falsify reality.

Perhaps. For people like me, who came on the scene long after the originary moments of Minimalism and Conceptual art, any effort to grasp the political claims of these projects can only be a reconstruction. While this historical period may be all too distant from us now, we are still left with its objects—and in particular, with the rich, radical, and odd array of works with language. This book adapts its title from a line by the artist Robert Smithson, who famously described a 1967 exhibition at the Dwan Gallery in New York City as consisting of "Language to be Looked at and/or Things to be Read." Smithson's press release records what became the first of four annual Language exhibitions at Dwan, one of the galleries most involved with Minimal art and Earthworks. The four exhibitions helped crystallize a new practice of language-based art that was modeled chiefly on sculpture. As Smithson's description implies, words in this context were treated in some sense like objects—to be looked at, and also to be accumulated, built up, moved around, and broken apart—just as objects could be treated like words, could be read or interpreted to have meanings beyond their mute physical appearance. And the ambiguous conjunction "and/or" intentionally confuses the boundaries between these two ideas.

Smithson proclaims that "language operates between literal and metaphorical signification," and proceeds to call for practices that disrupt or invert the relation between literal meaning and the metaphoric properties of language: "Literal usage becomes incantatory when all metaphors are suppressed. Here language is built up, not written."[2] Smithson's own pencil drawing *A Heap of Language* (1966) has become an example of what this might look like; a list of terms describing language are handwritten in twenty-one lines arranged in a heaplike shape on graph paper: "Language / phraseology speech / tongue lingo vernacular / mother tongue, King's English / dialect brogue patois idiom slang / a confusion of tongues, Babel universal language," and so forth. These terms may be accumulated, massed, and stacked on graph paper, but the far-ranging linguistic and political dimensions they invoke cannot be contained there.[3] As he notes, "Discursive literalness is apt to be a container for radical metaphor."[4]

Even though Smithson will claim that "my sense of language is that it is matter and not ideas—i.e., 'printed matter,' " he knows very well that while you can to some extent treat words like things, like "matter," the materiality of language is enormously complex.[5] By their nature, words are both here—concretely and physically present on the page, or in the moment of utterance—and yet also elsewhere—referring to, evoking, or metaphorically conjuring up sets of ideas, objects, or experiences that are somewhere else. In structural linguistics, this doubleness is understood as the very structure of the linguistic sign, which is made up of both a signifier (a sound image) and a signified (a concept). The relationship between a signifier and a signified is arbitrary, not natural or "motivated," and word meanings are built up by constantly changing uses over the history of a language. If a metaphor is "one thing used or considered to represent another," the very structure of language ensures that there can be no firm boundary between the "literal" and "metaphoric" meanings of words.

In addition, the "meaning" of words—their potential to express, signify, indicate, or cause—is complicated by placement and use. As Smithson argues in his evocative, if idiosyncratic, prose, "The power of a word lies in the very inadequacy of the context it is placed, in the unresolved or partially resolved tension of disparates," and he observes that "a word fixed or a statement

isolated" produces a kind of paradox.[6] What these remarks suggest, I think, is that although a word is partly defined by its contexts—by its location in a sentence, publication, or speech in a specific time and place by a specific person—a word also constantly exceeds these contexts and goes elsewhere. A term, phrase, or text taken out of its normal context of use and resituated on to a blank page, for instance, or the wall of a gallery can do something else entirely.[7]

In Smithson's own work, the displacements between physically remote "site" and "nonsite"—a map, marker, or reconstruction of the site brought into the gallery space—echo certain operations of language. These displacements occur in both time and space, and yet Smithson's own fixation on language as matter perhaps partly blinds him to its temporal dimensions. Despite my own borrowing of his phrase of words "to be looked at" as a kind of shorthand for this practice, it is important to understand that it is not just the *visual* presentation of words but their use as an underlying structure and temporal model that undergirds artists' uses of language in the 1960s.

Of course, words have always surrounded visual art, as a caption, title, inscription, or criticism, and even in the Western tradition, it is only relatively recently that words were banished from the pictorial field and relegated to a supplementary function. In the twentieth century, one could argue that it was with Cubism that snippets of language decisively reentered the picture plane, and that by the 1960s, as Pop painters drew on advertising and poster design, the use of language as a graphic emblem or visual sign was commonplace. Yet the trajectory I wish to focus on is a different one—one that moves from the use of words in musical notation, to the form of the "event score" or performance instruction, to experimental poetry and the wide-ranging adoption of language as an instruction, schema, or template for works constructed in all types of media. While some of these works present themselves as autonomous texts, others appear to have a chiefly instrumental or inscriptional function in relation to the performance, action, or object that is seen as the actual work.

This study focuses on projects carried out in and around New York City in the 1960s. It is organized around two bookends: the "text score" for composer John Cage's legendary "silent composition," *4'33"* (1952) and Andy Warhol's notorious taped-and-transcribed book, *a: a novel,* published by Grove Press in 1968. The one uses sparse written instructions to direct a per-

former to remain silent during three arbitrarily determined time brackets; the other records twenty-four hours of endless talk, programmatically retaining all the mistakes, misspellings, inconsistencies, and informational "noise" entailed by transcription from tape to text. On the surface, they could not be more different. Yet the underlying logic they share will show how the turn to language in 1960s' art occurred in the wake of new recording and transmission media, as words took on a new materiality and urgency in the face of magnetic sound.

Cage's landmark composition instructed the performer of an unspecified instrument to remain silent for three chance-determined movements of 30", 2'23", and 1'40".[8] Often understood as the evacuation of music as a structured compositional activity by turning perceptual responsibility over to a newly activated listener, or alternately, interpreted as a concise conceptual gesture or a frivolous neo-Dada prank, *4'33"* has lived a public life of scandal and acclaim for over fifty years—even as most people who have heard of or know the piece have probably not seen its score, or scores. Its idea of focused perceptual attention, of performing "nothing," seems so simple that we tend to forget it is a composed work with a structure, so minimal that it seems hardly a structure at all, much less consider that its three durational movements, operating independently of any sounding (or nonsounding) material, structurally mimic the operations of the recording device that fills an arbitrary length of time with whatever happens to occur during that time and place. Although it was originally composed in musical grand staff notation, the very compression of the piece allowed it to be transposed into different notational forms, including language. This version of the score, the text or "tacet" score, will be important for visual artists and performers turning to language in the 1960s.

If *4'33"* frames a short period of time in which, apparently, nothing is going on, Warhol's *a: a novel* gives us, in astounding detail, a whole lot of "nothing going on." Some 451 pages' worth, in fact, in which Ondine, Warhol, and various friends and hangers-on—Billy Name, Gerard Malanga, Lou Reed, Edie Sedgwick, and dozens more—talk and talk and talk, animated by the presence of the tape recorder and, for many, copious amphetamines. Despite the project's conceit to present a pure record of twenty-four

hours of life, unedited and unexpurgated except for haphazard accidents of transcription, we now know that not only was the taping conducted during separate sessions in 1965 and 1967 but that Warhol and various of the young female transcribers made edits and changes to the text, although far from systematic ones. In spite of Warhol's deliberate inscription of the project into generic conventions and canonical literature—for instance, the unavoidable references to James Joyce's *Ulysses,* complete with the fractured soliloquy near the end—*a: a novel* is rarely read as literature, if it is read at all. Despite Warhol's fame, and the book's recent republication by Grove, it is roundly ignored. Not unlike *4'33",* it tends to be embraced or dismissed as an idea, or a conceptual gesture, rather than as a durational, experiential project that must be undertaken to be understood. The work also bears undeniable affinities with Cagean operations of indifference and nonselectivity, the imperfections of mechanical registration and transcription in Warhol's silkscreens and early films, and a barrage of endurance-based durational performance projects of the 1960s and 1970s. It is Warhol's decision to subject language itself to these technical procedures that makes the work, critically and perhaps literally, "unreadable." And the fact that the text was recorded, transcribed, and published, but never actually "written," often seems to guarantee its exclusion from what is called writing, much less literature.

Between these bookends we will encounter a series of other works with language: the short and elliptical event scores of George Brecht and La Monte Young, texts so minimal and condensed that some comprise only a single word; the experimental collage-based poetries of John Ashbery and Jackson Mac Low, which transfer Cagean compositional procedures from sound to language, and the poetic experiments with words on a page conducted by artists Carl Andre and Vito Acconci; and the massive array of projects produced in and around Conceptual art by artists including Victor Burgin, Dan Graham, Douglas Huebler, On Kawara, Joseph Kosuth, and Lawrence Weiner that use language as everything from advertising logo and bureaucratic record to self-referential system and analytic proposition. Among the recurring questions I will return to is what happens to language when it is subject to procedures of mechanical and indexical recording—procedures that tend to treat language as a material that can be broken up, isolated, compiled randomly,

and collected in quantity.[9] In the fields of literature or poetry, we still expect utterances to have an author, a source. But in the visual arts, the long legacy of Marcel Duchamp's readymades—industrially produced objects selected and presented, largely unaltered, as art objects—permits a different type of practice, in which "found," recorded, or preexisting materials can be framed or appropriated for artistic use. As we will see, such practices allow artists to address a vast field of "language in general" that potentially takes in words wherever they are found—brand names, advertising slogans, office records, grocery lists, banal conversations, telegrams, assembled documents, and instructions for making a work.

Despite this admittedly wide reach, this book is not a survey. It does not aim to be exhaustive. Its account moves in a roughly chronological order, with chapters organized around comparisons of two to three paradigmatic works or figures. In order to discuss these in some detail, any number of other artists or examples are noted only briefly. A more extended account of the event score form, for instance, would include a look at works by Tony Conrad, Walter De Maria, Henry Flynt, Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Robert Morris, Yoko Ono, Mieko Shiomi, and any number of other practitioners. I have focused on works by Brecht and Young not only because they were earliest but also because they contain, in a condensed and contradictory way, many of the possibilities that would make the form so productive for other artists. Part of what is useful about language, as we will see, is how it allows us to cut across categories and movements—like Fluxus, Minimalism, and Conceptual art—that are too often discussed in isolation. In addition, it allows us to understand the interrelations among experimental music, poetry, and art that were so crucial at the time. In this wider scope, Cage's centrality is no accident, as he is the critical figure in the interdisciplinary artistic avant-garde that emerges in the postwar era, with an enormous impact not just in the United States and Europe but throughout much of the world.

Although centered in New York City, the turn to language in 1960s art was an international phenomenon, in which avant-garde practitioners made text-based works for printed matter and performance events as well as gallery contexts. Critics grounded in Conceptual art have understood this turn to language as a withdrawal from visuality or objecthood in favor of a work of

art constituted by series of linguistic propositions, yet the very heterogeneity of work produced far exceeds this analysis. In addition, the adoption of linguistic models and materials in the visual arts took place alongside, and roughly at the same time as, the much-recognized "linguistic turn" in philosophy and critical theory—yet the range and diversity of these artistic projects can only partially be assimilated to prevailing semiotic and structural models.

The organization of the book comprises three sections: chapters 1 and 2 chiefly address music and works that come out of music; chapters 3 and 4 explore poetry; and chapters 5 and 6 discuss visual art. Chapter 1, "Proliferating Scores and the Autonomy of Writing," begins by comparing the three scores for Cage's *4'33":* a now-lost version in grand staff notation, with the three movements notated with rests, that was used in the debut performance; a graphic score comprising simple vertical lines on horizontal pages, made in 1953; and the typewritten score, perhaps written around 1958 (or even earlier), that is the piece's most frequently circulated form. While artists, poets, and critics have tended to read Cage's lectures and gnomic pronouncements without understanding how they arose from a specifically musical practice, I argue instead that it is crucial to comprehend his development as a composer and, in particular, his decision to make work structured by lengths of time. Of course, one could claim that all musical pieces are structured by time, but in Cage's hands, the externally determined form of the temporal container will play a decisive structuring role, such that in a work like *4'33",* almost all other musical properties have been evacuated so that the work becomes a pure durational structure. In Cage's universe, moreover, "indeterminacy" is first and foremost a relation between a notation and a realization. Examining a series of Cage's works of the early 1950s, I trace out how Cage arrived at this more "open" relationship between score and performance through the failure of his efforts at precision and control.

The second chapter, "Post-Cagean Aesthetics and the Event Score," examines what happens when language enters the space of the musical score by reading the short "word pieces" made from 1959 to 1961 by Brecht and Young. Coming out of an expanded sense of both music and medium, these strange little texts demonstrate the centrality of postwar experimental music to postwar experimental art. Ephemeral and extraordinarily compressed,

event scores occupy a liminal place between poetry, performance, and concept. Brecht's 1961 *Word Event*—which simply reads " • exit"—may exist as a small printed card or a sign on a wall, and by implication is performed everywhere exits are made. Like Young's *Composition 1960 #10,* which reads "Draw a straight line and follow it," these are inseparably words to be read and actions to be performed. Contextualizing these works in the trajectory of 1950s' experimental music from which they emerged, I show how these influential event scores reflect the strange duality of language that is both autonomous text and an instruction to do something, and contend that the temporal and performative dimensions increasingly come to inhabit the linguistic inscription itself through the operations of reading, designation, and perception.

Having established the framework of the post-Cagean score form, chapter 3, "The Poetics of Chance and Collage," then moves slightly back in time to consider a pair of collage-based and partly chance-generated poems by Ashbery and Mac Low. Avowedly inspired by Cage's 1951 composition *Music of Changes,* both Ashbery's "Europe" (1958) and Mac Low's "5 biblical poems" (1954–1955) draw words from an existing source, which they render as a series of physically dispersed and syntactically disjunctive linguistic fragments. Unlike their Dadaist predecessors, however, these poems preserve the unit of the individual word, and explicitly retain marks of punctuation, typographic notation, and placement to register traces of the prior printed text. In so doing, the chapter asserts, their use of language as a kind of notational device introduces elements of process and quasi-indexical recording that aligns them with contemporaneous practices by artists like Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. Using previously unpublished archival sources to unpack Mac Low's trajectory, I demonstrate how the two poets draw almost diametrically opposed "lessons" from their encounters with Cagean models: while Mac Low's efforts to re-create an early twentieth-century fusion of "artistic, spiritual & political renewals" (in critic Jerome Rothenberg's words) leads him toward collective oral performance of the poems as a means to revitalize language, Ashbery's cooler, more distanced engagement with avant-garde legacies embeds performative aspects within the play of pronouns and shifters within the poem itself.

Most accounts of the intersection between poetry and the visual arts in the 1960s pursue an older "painters and poets" model, tracing the adoption of a painterly aesthetics of gestural expression and bodily enactment by New York School and Black Mountain poets, or charting the myriad painter and poet collaborations of the 1960s. However valuable, such approaches fail to address the crucial art of the period, as it occurs in the interface between sculpture and emerging forms of performance and site-based art. Chapter 4, "Poetry from Object to Action," reads the 1960s' poetry of artists Andre and Acconci in relation to emerging forms of minimal and postminimal visual art. While neglected in most art historical accounts, these artists' sustained work with language throughout the 1960s was formative for their better-known work in sculpture, in Andre's case, and performance and video, in Acconci's. This chapter looks at examples from Andre's privately published *Seven Books of Poetry* (1969) and selected Acconci poems as well as the influential magazine *0 to 9* (1967–1969) that he coedited with poet Bernadette Meyer to show how these influential but little-studied experiments with language as object, site, and field of force helped set the stage for subsequent, overtly conceptual projects.

Chapter 5 "Language between Performance and Photography," turns to the profusion of works with text and language produced in and around Conceptual art in the mid- to late 1960s, proposing one trajectory through this art, in which uses of language either vector toward the conditions of "photography" or the conditions of "performance"—although these will not be so easily separable, as soon becomes clear. The chapter opens with a comparison between the tripartite structures of two oddly similar projects, Brecht's 1961 *Three Chair Events* and Kosuth's 1965 *One and Three Chairs,* both of which explore the relationship between language and the object by playing it off a third term: in Brecht's case, performance, and in Kosuth's, photography. Linking the performance notations of Cage and Fluxus with the fabrication instructions of minimal art, I posit the emergence in the 1960s of a new model for artistic production, in which the work—be it object, image, performance, or installation—is now a specific realization of general schema, and is seen to operate analogously to linguistic statements. I then compare late 1960s' projects of Weiner and Richard Serra that engage temporal and process dimen-

sions repressed in more orthodox minimal and conceptual art, in order to trace the historical reemergence and transformation of Cagean principles of indeterminacy.

Chapter 6 "Text and Image: Rereading Conceptual Art," probes the ubiquitous pairing of photography and text in many conceptual projects of the 1960s that aligns language with photography in the communicative space of the modern mass media, or treats language as a type of indexical recording apparatus—for instance, reducing language to the quasi-scientific documentation of procedures, or attempting to suppress referentiality through tautological and self-reflexive systems. Through readings of works by Burgin and Huebler, I trace a key shift from perceptual to semiotic models in Conceptual art; in this shift to more information-based paradigms, the use of words moves from instruction, description, and indexical record to a more conventional, if also ambivalent, status as caption.

This conclusion considers Warhol's *a: a novel* as a monumental realization of the implications of Cage's *4'33",* a shattered text that represents a compendium of almost all the language practices we have encountered so far. Durationally structured according to the lengths of the audiotape cassettes used by the recording apparatus, the novel's transcribed form records the unforeseen accidents and distortions caused by its own process of production. Strictly numerically ordered according to the number of cassettes, the 451 pages of transcribed speech replicate almost every formal device of twentieth-century avant-garde and experimental poetics from the fractured syntax and pulverized words of Dada poetries, to the numbered paragraphs, double columns, gaping holes, and dysfunctioned punctuation of postwar poets like Ashbery and Mac Low. Comprised of found language generated by a found structure, *a: a novel* represents the logical extension, and perhaps the logical conclusion, of the readymade project.

1

Proliferating Scores and the Autonomy of Writing

As language enters 1960s' visual art from all sides, one tendency stands out: the use of words to propose or record a set of procedures for making a work. This notion—of a work as something that can be notated or realized in language—derives from music, specifically from the experimental music of the 1950s.

To understand how the turn to language challenged the very nature and structure of the work of art, we need to address this trajectory from musical composition to the visual arts. In turn, this will necessitate coming to terms with the deep structural transformations occurring in modern music, musical notation, and sound phenomena in the middle of the twentieth century. Central to this story is the work of the American composer John Cage, and in particular, his landmark silent composition *4'33"* (1952). Although composed as a piece of music, *4'33"* could also be described and notated entirely in words and numbers—a quality that helped make it accessible to people without musical training. Indeed, this version of the score, the text score published in 1961, circulated widely in the 1960s.

To grasp the impact of this work, we must consider what it means for words to occupy the space of the musical score, not merely as auxiliary annotation but as a primary material that displaces conventional musical notation. In his compositions of the 1930s and 1940s that led to *4'33",* Cage gradually eliminated from his work many of the properties conventionally considered musical—melody, harmony, rhythm, and even notes—and instead came to reconceive music as the "organization of sound" and the musical composition as something like a time structure—a series of time lengths

or "time brackets" that could be filled with any material, or none. It is precisely because conventional musical syntax is voided in *4'33"* that verbal language can take the fore.

This crucial relationship between *4'33"* as a durational structure and the fact that it can be notated entirely in language will take some work to tease out. For it is no coincidence that these permutations in modern music happened around midcentury. The composition of *4'33"* is overdetermined by its relation to then-new technologies of sound recording and sound production. First phonography, then radio broadcast, microphony, loudspeaker technologies, and the like had already greatly altered the sensory experience and scientific understanding of sound before magnetic tape, oscillators, sine wave generators, and other electronic means of recording and producing sound became available in the 1940s and 1950s. These technologies radically challenged composers' perceptions of what sound was and what music could be. Many eccentricities of postwar experimental music are incomprehensible without this larger technical and historical context, from the so-called crisis in notation and the strange fetishization of the score as an independent graphic object to Cage's programmatic insistence on dissociating sound from intentionality, a move that mirrors what some have described as audiotape's "acousmatic" property, its tendency to separate sound from its source.[1]

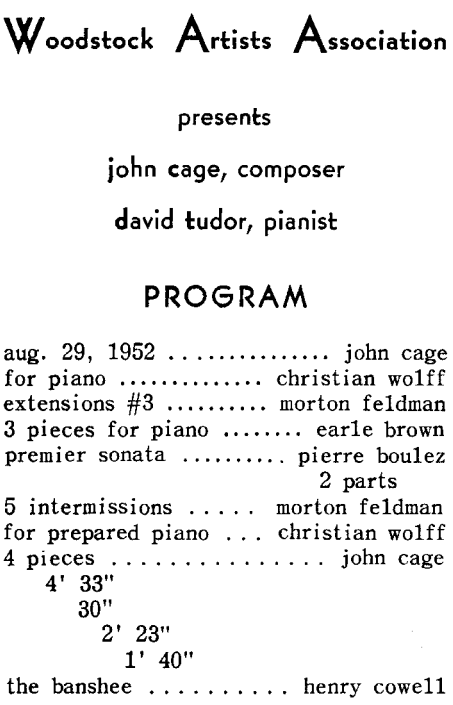
Viewing *4'33"* in this context will require rethinking what has long been a canonical (if highly eccentric) work. For instance, the opposition to hierarchy and the radical openness to "whatever happens" that characterize Cage's work of the 1950s are often understood as the expressions of a philosophy or worldview, and particularly, as results of Cage's sustained encounter with Zen Buddhism. While not discounting the importance of that encounter, I want to propose a different logic, in which the much-celebrated Cagean philosophy is partly the result of changes in material support and medium. Understanding *4'33"* in this way, as part of a perverse turn to language that occurs in reaction to the electronic inscription of sound, will help elucidate why the piece was so productive for 1960s' visual artists, poets, and performers who were also absorbing the perceptual effects of new recording technologies.

Proliferating Scores

As various accounts attest, *4'33"* was first realized in August 1952 by the pianist David Tudor, who sat silently at the piano and carefully raised and lowered the keyboard lid to mark three irregularly timed sections consisting of chance-determined time brackets of 30", 2'23", and 1'40", thereby providing a minimal compositional frame that would open up the performance to unanticipated environmental sounds and transfer responsibility for the experience on to the perceptual capacities of audience members.[2]

For all its simplicity, the piece did not come easily. Cage had apparently struggled with the idea of writing a "silent piece" since at least 1948, when he half jokingly described his plan to compose a piece of uninterrupted silence and sell it to the Muzak Company: "It will be 3 or 4 1/3 minutes long—those being the standard lengths of canned music—and its title will be *Silent Prayer.*"[3] If, as Cage has insisted, the example of Robert Rauschenberg's 1951–1952 *White Paintings* emboldened him to proceed with the project, according to John Holzaepfel, "It was Tudor's interest in performing it that persuaded him [Cage] to finish it" in time for a concert the pianist had planned for the end of August for the Woodstock Artists Association at the Maverick Concert Hall, where the work was played alongside compositions by Cage's friends and fellow new music pioneers Earle Brown, Pierre Boulez, Henry Cowell, Morton Feldman, and Christian Wolff.[4] The initial reaction apparently was not positive, as members of the audience began to talk and walk out. Cage later recounted losing valued friendships over the work.[5]

Existing as rumor, scandal, and verbal description far more often than as a performed work, *4'33"* since its debut has had a curious status. Much about its genesis remains unclear, and it may seem as though the piece cannot always bear the weight of its subsequent history and impact. By its nature, the composition's radical abstraction produces radical ambiguity. *4'33"* represents both a crystallization of certain Cagean imperatives into their clearest and most influential "statement," and a work that is in many respects highly atypical of Cage's overall production, a limit point from which one could argue that Cage himself gradually withdrew, leaving its implications for others to take up.[6]



Woodstock Artists Association

presents

john cage, composer

david tudor, pianist

PROGRAM

aug. 29, 1952 ..... john cage
for piano ..... christian wolff
extensions #3 ..... morton feldman
3 pieces for piano ..... earle brown
premier sonata ..... pierre boulez
2 parts
5 intermissions ..... morton feldman
for prepared piano ... christian wolff
4 pieces ..... john cage
4' 33"
30"
2' 23"
1' 40"
the banshee ..... henry cowell

PATRONS: Mrs. Emmet Edwards, chairman; Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Berkowitz, Dr. and Mrs. Hans Cohn, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Cowell, Mr. and Mrs. Rollin Crampton, Mr. and Mrs. Roland d'Albis, Mr. and Mrs. Pierre Henrotte, Dr. and Mrs. William M. Hitzig, Mrs. Charles Rosen, Dr. and Mrs. Harold Rugg, Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Semmler, Mr. and Mrs. John Striebel, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Thibaut, Jr., Capt. C. H. D. van der Loo, Miss Alice Wardwell.

MAVERICK CONCERT HALL

Friday, August 29 8:15 P. M.

BENEFIT ARTISTS WELFARE FUND

Figure 1.1 Woodstock Artists Association, Program for August 29, 1952. Courtesy of the Getty Research Library.

The goal of this chapter is to present an account of *4'33"* and Cage's work more generally that allows us to understand its rich and diverse legacy for subsequent work in the visual arts and poetry. To do this effectively, we need to understand key aspects of Cage's work as a composer. From his early percussion music of the 1930s and 1940s to his turn to chance-based and indeterminate compositions in the early 1950s, Cage pursued a series of unorthodox musical moves that paved the way for *4'33"*: reconceiving the musical composition as a time structure, voiding the work's internal musical syntax by gradually abandoning conventional musical "notes" in favor of noise sounds and quantitatively-defined "sound parameters," and moving toward an "indeterminate" relationship between score and performance in which the musical notation ceases to be a system of representation and instead becomes a proposal for action. Understanding the conceptual and historical roots of these moves requires looking closely at Cage's own accounts, yet also reading them critically and against the grain, to clarify not only the internal musical logic of Cage's unorthodox choices, but their relation to the larger ruptures introduced by new technologies that altered our relationship to time and seemed poised to displace older systems of writing and inscription.

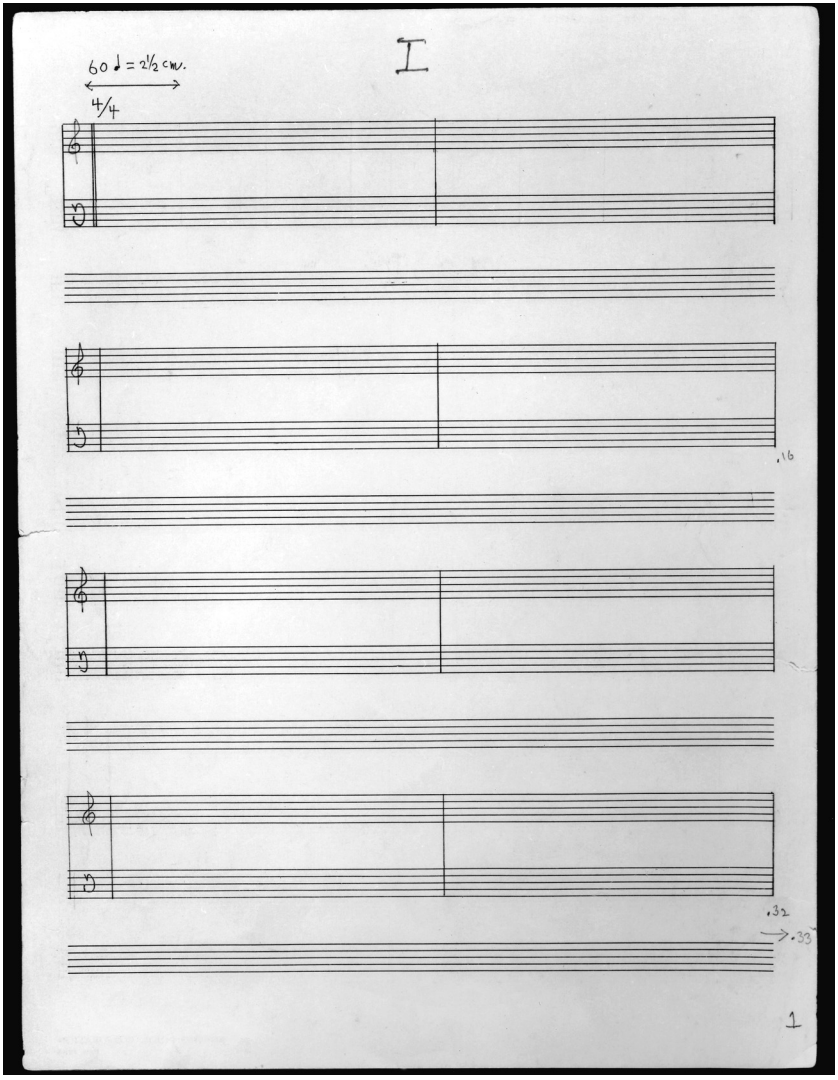
Critics have argued that *4'33"* was central to the altered function of the score in postwar music. Michael Nyman declares, "As notation, *4'33"* is early evidence of the radical shift in the methods and function of notation that experimental music has brought about."[7] Within this trajectory, *4'33"* is the work in which the Cagean score fully breaks from an older representational model to assume a new "operational" function, in which the notation no longer describes what we hear but what we do. As Ian Pepper argues, *4'33"* marks the breakthrough to "'composition' as an autonomous process of writing, as a graphic production that is not secondary to, and has no determined relation to, the sound of the work in performance."[8] This potential autonomy of writing was not authorized by Cage, who always insisted on the sounding of the composition; but it would be taken up by others who saw *4'33"* as a license to sever writing from the production of sound.

Curiously, however, in such discussions it is not clear *which score* we are dealing with. Complicating any analysis of *4'33"* is the fact that the work has had at least three quite distinct notations: a handwritten score in conventional

grand staff notation with blank measures of silence that Tudor used for the initial performance at Woodstock in August 1952, and that was subsequently lost and later reconstructed; the proportionally notated graphic version of the score that Cage gave to Irwin Kremen (the work's dedicatee) in June 1953, a version of which was published in *Source* 2 (July 1967) and later issued in a corrected scale by C. F. Peters as Edition 6777a; and the typewritten text-based version published in 1961 by Peters as Edition 6777, which despite its 1960 copyright, has never been clearly dated.[9] In addition, there are certain discrepancies between these scores and the information recorded in the program for the work's August 29, 1952 premier at the Maverick Concert Hall that records the work as "4 pieces": 4'33", 30", 2'23", and 1'40".[10]

Cage himself routinely dated the "work" *4'33"* to 1952, without differentiating between scores, despite their distinct notational modes. In interviews and statements, he repeatedly dodges questions about the differences between them, and his own accounts are patently inconsistent—although the overall length of *4'33"* was supposedly arrived at through random methods, Cage's late 1940s' idea for a composition of uninterrupted silence already entailed a standard pop song length. His plan for a piece of "silent Muzak" not only implies that *4'33"* was designed to have a curious interface with vernacular and commercial music practices but also suggests the repressed aggressivity of the piece, one that performs, in Douglas Kahn's analysis, not only "silence" but also "silencing," carried out on and within forms of industrial standardization.[11]

Since the 1960s, *4'33"* has often been flattened into a conceptual provocation, or an unstructured gesture of rebellion or revolt. Yet as debuted in 1952, the work was a highly structured composition and a publicly performed intervention into both musical and extramusical discourses, a public "speech event" whose social or political valence continues to elude definition. However seductive, efforts to read a specific politics of negation into Cage's project consistently neglect the musical and aesthetic specificity of *4'33"*. Despite the work's fame and the endless discourses around it, detailed accounts of its composition, notation, and initial performance are limited. In his 1988–89 Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard University, Cage described the piece


I
60 ♩ = 2½ sec.
4/4
1
1
1

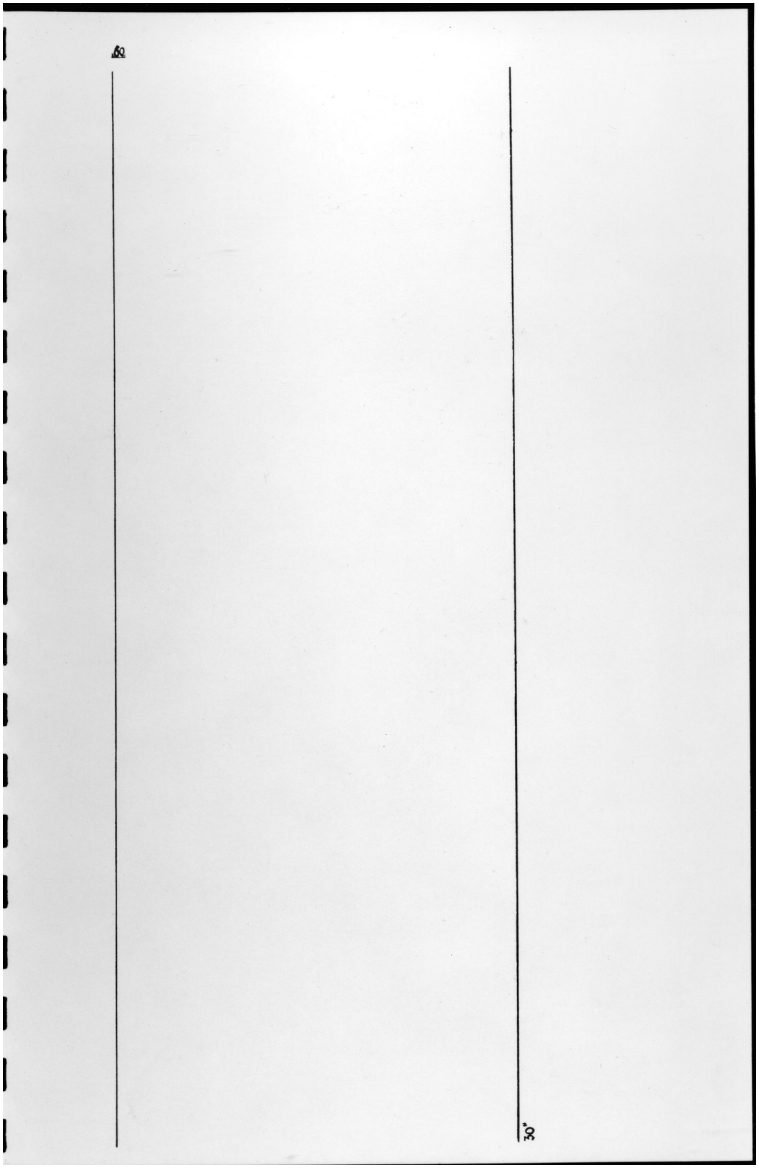


Figure 1.3 Cage, second page from graphic score of *4'33"* (1952). 1953. © 1960 by Henmar Press Inc., New York. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

I

TACET

II

TACET

III

TACET

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

FOR IRWIN KREMEN JOHN CAGE

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Figure 1.4 Cage, typewritten score of *4'33"*. (1952) © 1960 by Henmar Press Inc., New York. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

as having been built up gradually, "note by note," with procedures like those used in *Music of Changes,* Cage's legendary 1951 piano work composed by means of chance procedures:

> When I wrote *4'33"* I was in the process of writing the *Music of Changes* that was done in an elaborate way there are many tables for pitches for durations for amplitudes all the work was done with chance operations in the case of *4'33"* I actually used the same method of working and I built up the silence of each movement and the three movements add up to *4'33"* I built each movement up by means of short silences put together it seems idiotic but that's what I did I didn't have to bother with the pitch tables or the amplitude tables all I had to do was work with the durations . . . it took several days to write and it took me several years to come to the decision to make it.[12]

In an interview with William Fetterman, Tudor insisted that "the original score was on music paper, with staffs, and it was laid out in measures like the *Music of Changes,* only there were no notes. But the time was there, notated exactly like the *Music of Changes,* except that the tempo never changed, and there were no occurrences—just blank measures, no rests—and the time was easy to compute. The tempo was 60."[13] Tudor scholar John Holzaepfel concurs that *4'33"* was originally written on staff paper, in proportional notation that graphed time according to bars, indicating silences as rests, just as one would conventionally notate a part for an instrument that remains silent for a specified length of time or movement during a larger work. In performance, Tudor read these by a stopwatch. In Tudor's 1989 reconstruction, the piece is notated in grand staff form, with a time signature of 4/4—precisely the system used to notate the *Music of Changes* (which Holzaepfel terms "the parent work" of *4'33"*). Holzaepfel concludes that the 1989 reconstruction "accurately reproduces Cage's lost score," although in other texts he has emphasized Tudor's practice of constructing, for the purposes of performance, conventionally notated scores of works originally written in proportional and graphic notation.[14]

By situating *4'33"* within Cage's musical production, these accounts help us understand the work not merely as a perceptual experience or conceptual "idea" but as a structured composition, and as the product of a radical reconfiguration of the relation between sound and notation. As Tudor recalled in an interview for the German journal *MusikTexte,* Cage insisted that "it was very important to understand that every note of the piece had been composed. . . . It is, in philosophical hindsight, very important to understand that he had completed a compositional process in order to produce this piece."[15] *4'33"* is a composition whose performance parameters can be indicated in a series of different notations, *and* the richness and material specificity of those notations. My insistence on the specificity of the scores for *4'33"* may be puzzling to those who would see the transposition between metered and graphic notations as a "trivial translation," or who insist, for instance, on the fact that current music notation software often allows one to show a score in either regular or "piano roll" notation that roughly resembles Cage's space=time rendering. While Cage may have seen these notations as equivalent, the process by which he came to do so is of tremendous interest. If in the shift from metered to graphic notation vestiges of Cage's early approach to phrasing drop out, it is also the concision and extreme reduction of the piece that allow it to be so elegantly rendered in language, since the work comprises three silent durations and no notes.

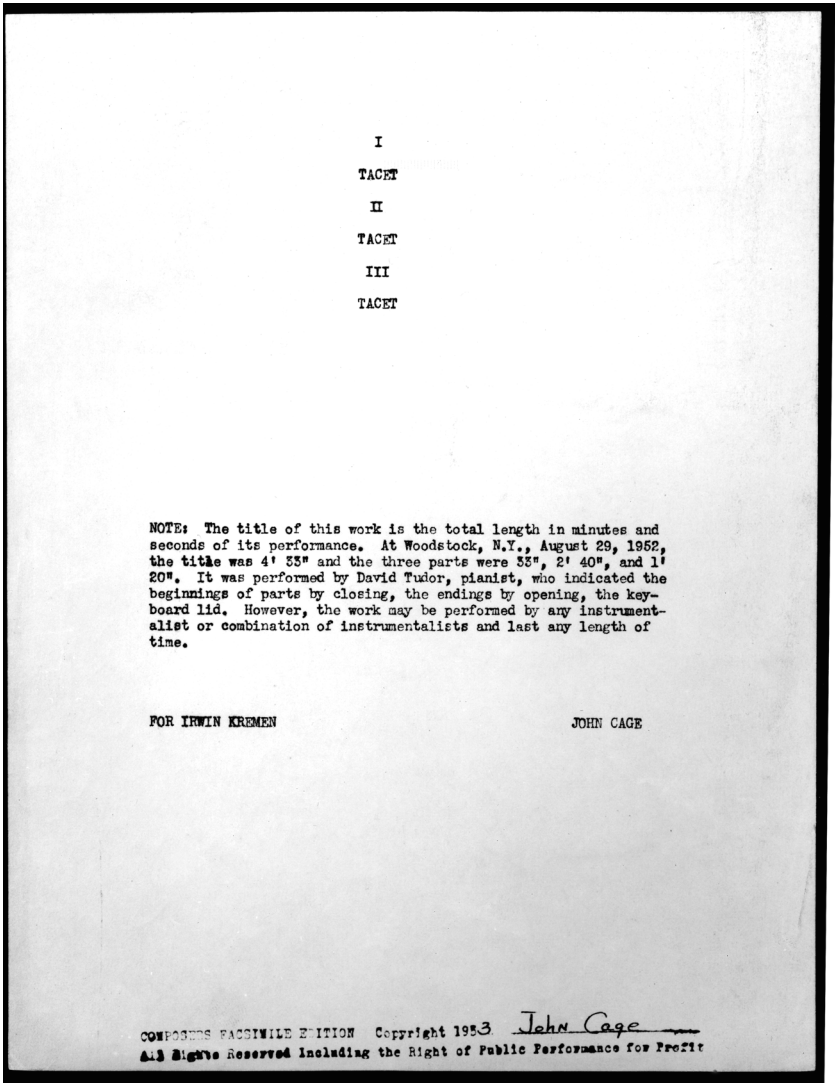
Within this collection of different notations, the typewritten text score has had a particularly strange status. Despite its influence on visual art and conceptual projects, there has been a long-standing tendency to dismiss it as a secondary, later adaptation, and instead view the graphic score as more authentic and "original."[16] This is a curious claim, since the prior existence of a conventionally notated version suggests that neither published version could be held to be original, whatever such a concept might mean in this context.[17]

As various commentators have observed, only the time brackets for the graphic version correspond to the original printed program, while the more frequently used text version records a different set of movements: 33", 2'40", and 1'20". The published version of the text score carries the copyright date of 1960, the year Cage signed with music publisher C. F. Peters, leading many observers to assume that it was written in 1960, even though many of Cage's

earlier scores also carry a copyright date of that year.[18] In his book on Cage, James W. Pritchett describes *4'33"* as having been "revised . . . sometime around 1960, creating a wholly different work."[19] And the text score's ambivalent note that the work "may last any length of time" indeed seems to open the door to the popular conception of the piece as simply an exercise in activated listening.

While trying to trace out the relation of Cage's text score to subsequent word-based compositions, I have at times considered that the early event scores of George Brecht and La Monte Young, composed in 1959–1960, might have triggered the straightforward typewritten notation. Yet this sequence appears unlikely, given that Brecht, in his July 17, 1958, notes for Cage's class in experimental composition at the New School, refers to Cage's "4 min 33 sec" as "Silence. Tacet"—a jotted record that suggests Cage already referred to or notated the work in linguistic terms.[20] Nonetheless, I was surprised to find in the David Tudor Papers a copy of the typewritten score, nearly identical to the one issued by Peters, dated 1953. Of course, this dating may be far from conclusive. Several copies of scores in Tudor's collection that date prior to Cage's signing with Peters are similarly stamped "COMPOSERS FACSIMILE EDITION copyright 195_" with the exact date handwritten in. The fact that the handwriting on this copy of *4'33"* does not appear to be Cage's (it could be Tudor's) makes it possible that it was backdated to 1953, the year of the graphic score.[21]

We will probably never know exactly when Cage produced the typewritten notation for *4'33",* but the tendency among many musicians and musicologists to discount or denigrate this version strikes me as curious. That it was likely produced *after* the two earlier versions of the score—the grand staff notation, and the graphic score—is no reason to treat it as secondary or a corruption of the conceptual purity of the initial composition. Instead, the fact that *4'33"* can be inscribed as a time signature on staff paper, vertical lines on otherwise-blank pages, or a terse set of verbal instructions is integral to the work. That the existence of three distinctly notated scores of *4'33"* is no mere historical accident is confirmed in Young's better-known series *Composition 1960 #7, Composition 1960 #9,* and *Composition 1960 #10,* which explicitly renders the "same" structure as a musical note, a straight line on an index card,



I

TACET

II

TACET

III

TACET

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

FOR IRWIN KREMEN

JOHN CAGE

COMPOSERS FACSIMILE EDITION Copyright 1953 John Cage
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Figure 1.5 Cage, typewritten score of *4'33"* (1952) © 1953. Courtesy of the Getty Research Library. © 1960 by Henmar Press Inc., New York. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

and a verbal inscription. While unaware of the three versions of *4'33",* Young cites Cage's and Sylvano Bussotti's graphic scores as inspirations for his awareness that a line or a drawing was "something you could play."[22]

The typewritten text score consists of minimal indications for the performer of an unnamed instrument, presenting simply three sections "I," "II," and "III," each marked "TACET." This term is generally used in orchestral music, and particularly in percussion parts, to indicate a rest performed by one player while others continue to play their instruments. Thus, it indicates a bracketed silence while other things are going on—and not, say, an absolute silence or the absence of a work altogether. Centered on the page and vertically stacked, the three numbered movements are sparsely rendered and suspended in white space. This centrality inverts the norm in which words have remained visually and structurally marginal in the musical score. Besides indicating a title and an author, written language generally serves only as annotation, as a means of specifying aspects of the realization for orchestral performances like tempo, mood, and instrumentation (aspects Cage leaves unspecified). Hence, displacing the signs of musical notation with words in a sense involves a historical inversion, as almost all codified forms of musical notation are themselves modeled, structurally and materially, on a culture's existing written language.[23]

Perhaps most surprisingly, the score carries no title. Instead, a typed "NOTE" below the main notation declares that "the title of this work is the total length in minutes and seconds of its performance," and records that the debut performance was "4' 33"," and the three parts were 33', 2' 40", and 1' 20" (figures that do not accord with the 1952 program)—adding "the work may be performed by any instrumentalist or combination of instrumentalists and last any length of time." This practice of retitling the work based on contingent factors of performance resembles the instructions used for *Water Music,* which debuted at the New School in May 1952, and initially carried the title of the date or place of its performance—for example, "66 W. 12" or later "Aug. 12, 1952."[24] This constant retitling (later suspended) was presumably designed to name each performance a distinct "work" (hence the work carries the title "aug. 29, 1952" on the Woodstock program).[25] In addition, it is precisely the text score's apparent evacuation of structure—the idea that the

work can last "any length of time" rather than consisting of precise durations—that understandably leads critics like Pritchett to conclude it could not have been written before 1957 or 1958. For as we will see, the principle that organized Cage's compositions from the late 1930s through the mid-1950s was duration.

Durational Structures

By the early 1960s, Cage would promulgate a free-form version of *4'33"* that he could "perform" in the woods while searching for mushrooms; it could last any amount of time and consisted simply of attentively listening to the world around one—as if the score simply read "listen." Given Cage's growing discomfort with any imposed structure, many of his later remarks effectively denied the formal specificity of *4'33"* as a composed work with three movements consisting of externally generated durations. Cage himself even compared *4'33"* less favorably to his 1962 refashioning of it as *0'00",* judging the earlier piece "a more conventional musical work in the sense that it marks its own temporal limitation, and has a time signature."[26]

Going against Cage's own rewriting of the project to instead situate *4'33"* in his long-term work with durational structures and sustained experimentation with both sound and notation, we can retrieve another, perhaps more useful reading of the piece: one in which performance is by no means a formless "anything that happens," but the activation of a text. And this text, significantly, describes a time structure. Whichever score is employed, a performance of *4'33"* is a structured experience in three movements that occurs in relation to a written inscription. In a 1989 interview, Tudor comments, regarding his performance using one of the conventionally notated versions he prepared, "It's important that you *read* the score as you're performing it, so there are these pages you use. So you wait, and then turn the page. I know it sounds very straight, but in the end it makes a difference."[27]

In its three chance-composed movements, the compositional structure of *4'33"* presents time as a kind of neutral container, like an empty frame that could contain whatever events or sounds might happen during its course. While it is most evident in an abstract work like *4'33",* Cage's practice of

structuring compositions according to preestablished lengths of time began with his percussion works of the late 1930s. While Cage's organization of compositions by means of lengths of time may initially resemble more traditional uses of musical meter and phrasing, he gradually adopts arbitrary quantification schemata structurally unrelated to his unconventional sound materials.[28] Cage termed this practice "rhythmic structure" or "structural rhythm." Its emergence had far-reaching implications for his work. By breaking the "organic" relation between the sound material and their overall structure, these "time brackets" gradually evacuate the internal syntax of the work and disrupt the function of notation.

Works like *First Construction (in Metal*) and *Imaginary Landscape No. 1* (both 1939) drop clusters of percussion sounds into predetermined temporal grids, organized by a macrocosmic/microcosmic structure. It is beginning with these works, Pritchett argues, that "musical structures based on lengths of time . . . became the basis of all Cage's percussion music from 1939 onwards," which relied on "the conception of compositions or performances as time structures."[29] As Paul Griffiths notes, "The advantage of structuring music by lengths of time rather than harmonic system . . . is not only that silence can be treated according to the same rules as sound but also that those rules can be applied indifferently to pitched sounds and to noises, as they are in the *First Construction*."[30]

As Cage moved increasingly toward unorthodox nontonal instruments, clusters of uncodifiable and fundamentally unstructured sound events displaced the pitched, timed, conventionally defined musical note. *First Construction (in Metal)* saw the fragmentation and dispersion of sound events into a complex, mathematically derived structure, relying exclusively on percussion instruments. In Pritchett's reconstructed diagram, we can see how the *First Construction* is broken down into a series of arbitrary yet systematic phrase lengths: in Cage's early efforts to produce form with such disparate materials, a macrocosmic/microcosmic patterning requires that each bar obeys the same 4–3–2–3–4 structure used to organize the piece as a whole. As Pritchett explains, "The piece consists of 16 units, each with a duration of 16 measures, for a total of 256 measures."[31]

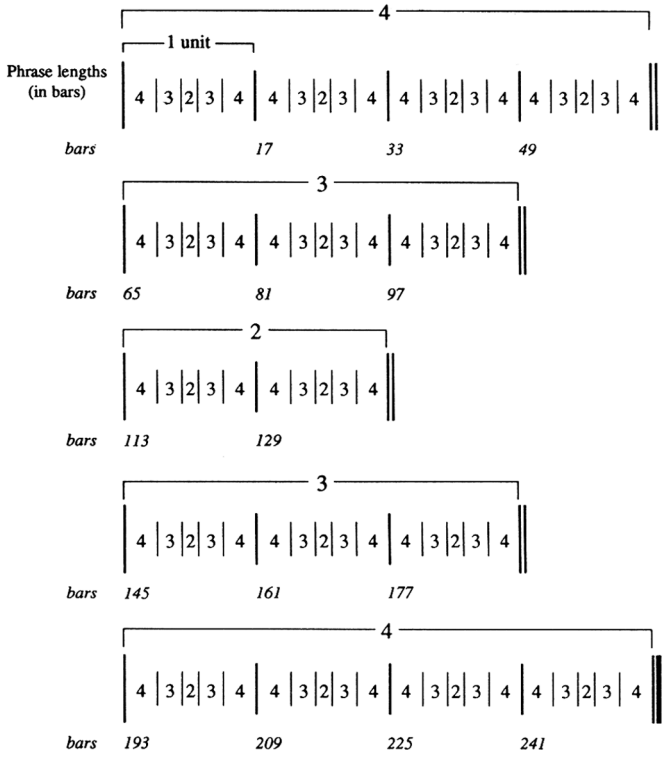


Figure 1.6 Cage, *First Construction (in Metal)* (1939). James Pritchett, reconstruction of time brackets with microscopic/macroscopic structure. From Pritchett, *Music of John Cage.*

It would soon be followed by the more aggressively futurist *Imaginary Landscape No. 1,* "for Records of Constant and Variable Frequency, Large Chinese Cymbal and String Piano," which as Cage later stated, was "to be performed as a recording or broadcast."[32] As Cage observed, the *Imaginary Landscapes* series "employed records of constant and variable frequencies on turntables, the speed of which could be varied. Durations were controlled by lowering or raising the pick-up. This was a use of recording equipment for creative rather than customary reproducing purposes," including the use of "small sounds which to be heard required amplification."[33] In addition, we might note how the unorthodox instrumentation makes Cage's score increasingly dependent on verbal annotation.

The gridlike form of Cage's rhythmic structure, initially imposed on both the overall (macrocosmic) and note-to-note (microcosmic) levels, is a system that works independently of and indifferently to sounding material. Within this system, any audible material may function as a sound event, even test-tone records, musical notes, or snippets of prefabricated musical material, as in the *Imaginary Landscapes.* Thus, it is the very rigidity of the predetermined durational structures of the earlier works that permits the apparent freedom of much of Cage's subsequent efforts. As Griffiths elucidates, regarding the peculiar coexistence of rigid quantification and apparent "free play" in Cage's compositions of the 1940s, "With a fixed framework, fixed materials, and fixed ways of working, Cage allowed himself freedom in how he placed events within the durational grid." As early as 1941, in *Third Construction,* the "internal division of the sections show no regularity. . . . [This] was to be the pattern of the future."[34]

This reconceptualization of the musical composition as a predetermined time structure, available to be filled by any content, inevitably recalls the operations of a sound recording mechanism, in the way that a disc or tape makes available a preset, predetermined quantity of time to be filled with whatever happens to occur during that time. Yet Cage, whose antipathy to sound recording is well-known, certainly does not present it as such. And musicologists generally take at face value Cage's claims that such temporal structures arose from his work with percussion instruments and composing for modern dancers, and his retrospective attribution of this "correct structural

means" to Erik Satie and Anton Webern.[35] In contrast, Griffiths suggests that the idea of using blocks of time to structure a larger composition may have come from the American composer George Antheil, proposing Antheil's 1924 *Ballet Mecanique* as a model for *First Construction,* via "its dependence on what Antheil called the 'time-space' principle, by which musical structure is geared to lengths of time as a building to its girder."[36] The comparison to Antheil introduces the analogy to structures of industrially produced architecture—structures paradoxically characterized by both standardization and arbitrariness, a type of contextualization that is quite atypical in accounts of Cage's work.

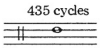
Cage's 1937/1940 manifesto, "The Future of Music: Credo," explicitly relates his interest in durational structures to emerging technical capacities—electric instruments that enabled complete control of overtone structures, frequency, amplitude, and duration, and new film-based recording capacities that made it possible to measure minute time brackets—and calls for centers of experimental music that would provide "the new materials, oscillators, turntables, generators, means of amplifying small sounds, film phonographs, etc., available for use" in order to allow modern composers "to capture and control these sounds, to use them not as sound effects but as musical instruments."[37] Seeing percussion music as "a contemporary transition from keyboard influenced music to the all-sound music of the future," Cage predicts that in the future, the composer will be faced "*not only with the entire field of sound but also with the entire field of time.*"[38]

As David E. Nicholls's detailed comparison of Cage's manifestos to the writings of futurist composers Luigi Russolo and Carlos Chávez makes clear, in the late 1930s Cage was less an originator than an enthusiastic champion of the more unorthodox currents of an increasingly international musical modernism.[39] Yet Cage's use of percussion to move from the "keyboard influenced music" of the past to the "all-sound music of the future" compelled a complete rethinking of the nature of sound, abandoning what Cage termed the "cautious stepping" of discrete notes for the continuous "field" made possible by the new technologies of amplification, microphony, radio, and magnetic tape. In this language of discrete steps and continuous properties, we cannot fail to recognize the transition from a conventionally based, linguistic

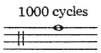
ORCHESTRA

Player 1:

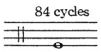
Victor Frequency Record 84522 B at 33-1/3 RPM



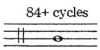
Victor Frequency Record 84522 B at 78 RPM



Victor Constant Note Record No. 24 (84519 B) at 33-1/3 RPM



Victor Constant Note Record No. 24 (84519 B) at 78 RPM



Play on a single turntable provided with a clutch for change of speed. Initiate change with change of notation. Play rhythms indicated by raising and lowering needle.

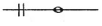
Player 2: Victor Frequency Record 84522 A



Play on a single turntable provided with a clutch for change of speed. (33-1/3 — 78 RPM). Begin at 33-1/3. Thereafter shift clutch with each (×) appearing in score.

This composition is written to be performed in a radio studio.
Two microphones are required. One microphone picks up the performance of Players 1 & 2.
The other that of Players 3 & 4. The relative dynamics are controlled by an assistant in the control room.
The performance may then be broadcast and/or recorded.

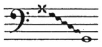
Player 3: Large Chinese Cymbal



Player 4: String piano



Mute strings with palm of hand. To be played very evenly, without accents except where indicated.



Sweep bass strings with gong beater.

Figure 1.7 Cage, *Imaginary Landscape No. 1* (1939). Instrumentation and first page of score. © 1960 by Henmar Press Inc., New York. All rights reserved. Used by permission.


4 parts
MUSI
1ART5029
IMAGINARY LANDSCAPE NO. 1
John Cage
(1939)
♩=60
A
PLAYER 1
PLAYER 2
PLAYER 3
PLAYER 4
pp
p
p
mf
B
mf
mf
p
mf
f
mf
f
C
ff
pp
ff
mf
D
mf
mf
ff
mf
E
p
p
f
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Edition Peters 6716

system to the operations of the mechanically (re)produced index—with all the challenges to the production of meaning that this latter introduces.

Although generated by metrical counting rather than clock time until the early 1950s, the arbitrary, external nature of Cage's mathematically generated time brackets paradoxically permitted the greatest autonomy to the sound materials, since no internal, organic relation links compositional structure and sonic material. This move has been diagnosed musicologically as a response to the breakdown of the tonal system in the early twentieth century. For instance, Robert P. Morgan decries this systemic breakdown in terms of the "absence of a 'given' material required by a preordained musical system," noting that

> in response, Cage sought to construct, or "invent," a unique sound corpus for each composition. Moreover, he expressly stressed the "arbitrary" nature of his choices by avoiding any connection between the sounds chosen and the structures devised to contain them. In a rejection of traditional beliefs in the mutual interaction of form and content, Cage's materials had no influence on the structures that contained them, nor did his structures influence the materials. Form was reduced to a neutral receptacle, a sequence of empty durational lengths regulated by a set of numerical proportions."[40]

Morgan's perceptive analysis, however, is couched purely within the terms of the internal linguistic transformations of Western classical music, a breakdown of defining musical conventions that results in the proliferation of compositional pluralisms of the present—an accurate assessment of the current moment, but one that cannot go outside the canons of classical music to ask under what conditions one might "invent" a "unique sound corpus for each composition," or why form might be "reduced to a neutral receptacle." Yet in the context of Cage's vision of how new technical means would present the composer with "the entire field of sound and the entire field of time," it seems clear that these strategies mimic the structural effects of the mechanical recording device. Cage's insistent focus on the autonomy of sound,

as de-hierarchized phenomena divorced from human sentiment and meaning, and the autonomy of listening, as an independent perceptual activity, occurs precisely in this historical context. For it is not only musical syntax that Cage will call into question but a whole series of regulatory relations—between graphic inscription and a produced sound, between a harmonic scale and a body of instrumentation, between a composer and a performer, between a work and a performance—which are condensed in conventional musical notation.[41] However we are to understand this problem, it engages structural transformations far more extensive than the abandonment of tonality.

Cage's insistence on what he terms "sounds in themselves" or "the spirit inherent in materials," and his extreme aversion to sounds being determined by position or system, appears to partake of an expressive essentialism fundamentally at odds with a semiotic or differential understanding of sounds. This orientation was already evident in his 1937 talk "Listening to Modern Music," in which he lambasted the belief "that music is not made of sound, but rather the relationships of the sounds, and that in order to appreciate it we must understand its structure."[42] Combining a radical musical empiricism (which prefigures his later emphasis on "sounds in themselves") with an incipient project of artistic de-skilling, Cage proclaims: "Let us take a premise which seems apparent and elementary: music is made of sound. Everyone with ears may hear it."[43] Cage's compositional practice would not only employ highly unorthodox sound materials but sought to present them as *autonomous perceptual experiences,* unencumbered by human sentiment, communicative function, or internal compositional relationships. Suppressing conventional structural relationships built on harmony, tonality, or melody, Cage's compositions increasingly constructed sounds as discrete individual entities, "sounds in themselves," "each sound unique and centered on itself," rather than relationally defined properties that acquire their meaning and importance from their placement within an ordering compositional syntax.

As Cage's early supporter Pierre Boulez understood all too well, such depletion of music's syntactic and semantic dimensions would undermine any necessary relation between written notation and performed/perceived sound. For Cage's "gamut technique," which gathers individual sound events from a potentially unlimited continuum of aural phenomena, notation can

only work as indication, direction, or specification—much as one can point to an unlimited number of things in the world, or produce, through precise or imprecise instructions, a potentially limitless array of sound experiences, from striking a gong, piano key, or ashtray, to quickly spinning a radio dial or selecting by chance from a series of columns of mathematically determined sound parameters. Such uncodifiable materials, by their nature, cannot be subject to internally derived syntactic ordering principles, yet their very uniqueness produces a sense of monotony over the length of a work, as Boulez noted in reference to Cage's 1946–1948 *Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano.*[44]

The culmination of nearly a decade of work with the prepared piano, the *Sonatas and Interludes* saw Cage abandon the mathematically generated relations of whole to parts used in earlier compositions like the *Constructions* and *Imaginary Landscapes,* to adopt procedures representing what he would later describe as "the shift from music as structure to music as process."[45] In "Forerunners of Modern Music" (written after completing the *Sonatas and Interludes*), Cage proposes a model of "coincidences of free events with structural time points" in which specific events occur within, but independent of, the larger temporal container:

> Rhythm in the structural instance is relationships of lengths of time. . . . In the case of a year, rhythmic structure is a matter of seasons, months, weeks, and days. Other time lengths such as that taken by a fire or the playing of a piece of music occur accidentally or freely without explicit recognition of an all-embracing order, but nevertheless within that order. . . . Any sounds of any qualities and pitches . . . any contexts of these, simple or multiple, are natural and conceivable within a rhythmic structure which also embraces silence."[46]

Abandoning earlier efforts to impose complex formal relationships, by 1949 Cage announces the complete independence of "event" and "structure": events are now fully singular entities, which do not rely on position within the structure or relation to one another. We can see how this concept of the sound event itself emerges from this use of structure as a preexisting matrix that functions solely as a container, an all-inclusive temporal frame that

can embrace all sounds, including silence. Rather than actively imposing a structure, organization, or hierarchy on these elements, time instead is a neutral container within which anything can happen—as Cage demonstrates in his 1950 "Lecture on Nothing," given as a formalized delivery within preestablished rhythmic structures: "As you can see, I can say anything."[47] Structure is refashioned as a kind of necessary discipline, a framing and focusing of attention on sounds and events in their instantaneous form, a disinterested, detached mode of perception made possible by the very emptiness of rhythmic structure: like "something seen momentarily, as though through a window while traveling . . . each moment presents what happens."[48] It is this new antihierarchical antisyntactic model, of "one thing after another," that prepares the way for Cage's embrace of both "chance" and "silence." In his 1951 "Lecture on Something," Cage articulates this new principle of what he calls "no-continuity": an arbitrary and unwilled ordering that simply occurs, without internal relations between parts or even preconceived sequential relations. In Cage's terms, "accepting the continuity that happens," rather than imposing an ordering that excludes all others.[49]

Toward Indeterminacy

Cage's earlier compositions had already generated unpredictable sound materials only partially determined by their detailed scores, but it was not until 1951 that he adopted overt chance procedures with the *Concerto for Prepared Piano and Chamber Orchestra* and *Music of Changes.* His turn to unforeseeable results is evident in the later *Imaginary Landscapes* (1939–1952), as the inclusion of randomly selected broadcasts, for instance, introduced into the compositional grid, "not abstract sound effects but prefabricated material," as the radio "introduces whatever happens to be on the air at the time," including vast, initially unanticipated blocks of silence.[50] Cage's programmatic indeterminacy, however, would have no relation to improvisation, as his extraordinarily precise and detailed instructions were designed to completely suppress individual choice and decisions based on taste.[51]

At the first performance of *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* (1951), the piece was played late at night at the end of a long concert, at a time when many of the radio stations had gone off the air—an occasion that unintentionally

brought long stretches of silence. While Cage's colleague Henry Cowell objected that "the 'instruments' were unable to capture programs diversified enough to produce a really interesting specific result," he reports that Cage's own attitude "was one of complete indifference, since he believes the concept to be more interesting than the result of any single performance."[52] As Griffiths attests, "Cage was not concerned with a 'specific result,' rather with making a 'musical composition the continuity of which is free of individual taste and memory' (psychology) and also of literature and 'traditions' of the art."[53] Or in Cage's words, "A 'mistake' is beside the point, for once anything happens it authentically is."[54]

Rather than viewing this serene acceptance of unanticipated results as a purely ethical or philosophical stance, however, we must acknowledge it as a structurally logical outcome of Cage's rejection of discrete, conventionally defined and linguistically structured musical notes for the "all-sound music of the future."[55] This crucial shift in the role of notation is already evident in his works for prepared piano. Although Cage's score for the *Sonatas and Interludes* still looks conventional, the function of notation has begun to move away from representing sounds toward an operational model, indicating actions. The work's "preparation" entailed an extraordinarily detailed supplementary notation that significantly recasts these figures, taking the form of a carefully diagrammed and measured "table of preparations." Not surprisingly, it is this second "score," the graphic, gridlike table of preparations, that is often reproduced as an illustration of the work, as the explicatory functions of annotation—historically, the province of parenthetical linguistic and mathematical instructions on how a score is to be performed—increasingly overtake the representational functions of musical notation proper. In its precise tabulation of measurements, materials, and methods of placement, the table of preparations exemplifies the shift toward notation as the specification of actions, objects, and procedures.

What Cage terms indeterminacy is, first and foremost, a relation between notation and realization. It represents one outcome of this reconfiguring of notation, from an idealized representation to something resembling an operational model, like a list of instructions or a set of procedures. Although subsequent artistic projects of the 1960s, such as the proto-Fluxus event

scores, would associate this instructional or procedural function with *language,* it is important to note that this operational mode first arises within conventional-looking musical notation, and is only later transferred to numbers, graphic inscription, and written text. In a 1970 interview with Daniel Charles, Cage states, "Once I developed the prepared piano, notation became a way to produce something."[56] If notation is now a way to do a job, any tools—writing, graphics, diagrams, and even musical bars and notes—can be used.

Cage's use of proportional graphic marks to notate time structures—such as those used in the graphic version of *4'33"*—emerged from working with magnetic tape in the early 1950s. This experience would be decisive for remapping his understanding of sound and transforming his measure of time from conventional metrical counting to one based on spatial extension. In the long run, it would not only completely transform Cage's scores but also move him fully toward indeterminacy, as he took his failure to achieve technical control as an "omen to go to the unfixed." It is in the context of magnetic tape that Cage describes the discrete properties of scales, modes, counterpoint, and harmony as "musical habits" that behave like a "cautious stepping" inconsistent with the continuous nature of sound:

> In mathematical terms these all concern discrete steps. They resemble walking—in the case of pitches, on steppingstones twelve in number. This cautious stepping is not characteristic of the possibilities of magnetic tape, which is revealing to us that musical action or existence can occur at any point or along any line or curve or what have you in total sound-space; that we are, in fact, technically equipped to transform our contemporary awareness of nature's manner of operation into art.[57]

Cage presciently understood that with the Allies' discovery of German magnetic sound-recording technologies in the final days of World War II, the expanded artistic control over the means of sound production long called for by experimental composers was now technically feasible. As with his earlier work with radio and turntables, Cage rigorously explored new technologies

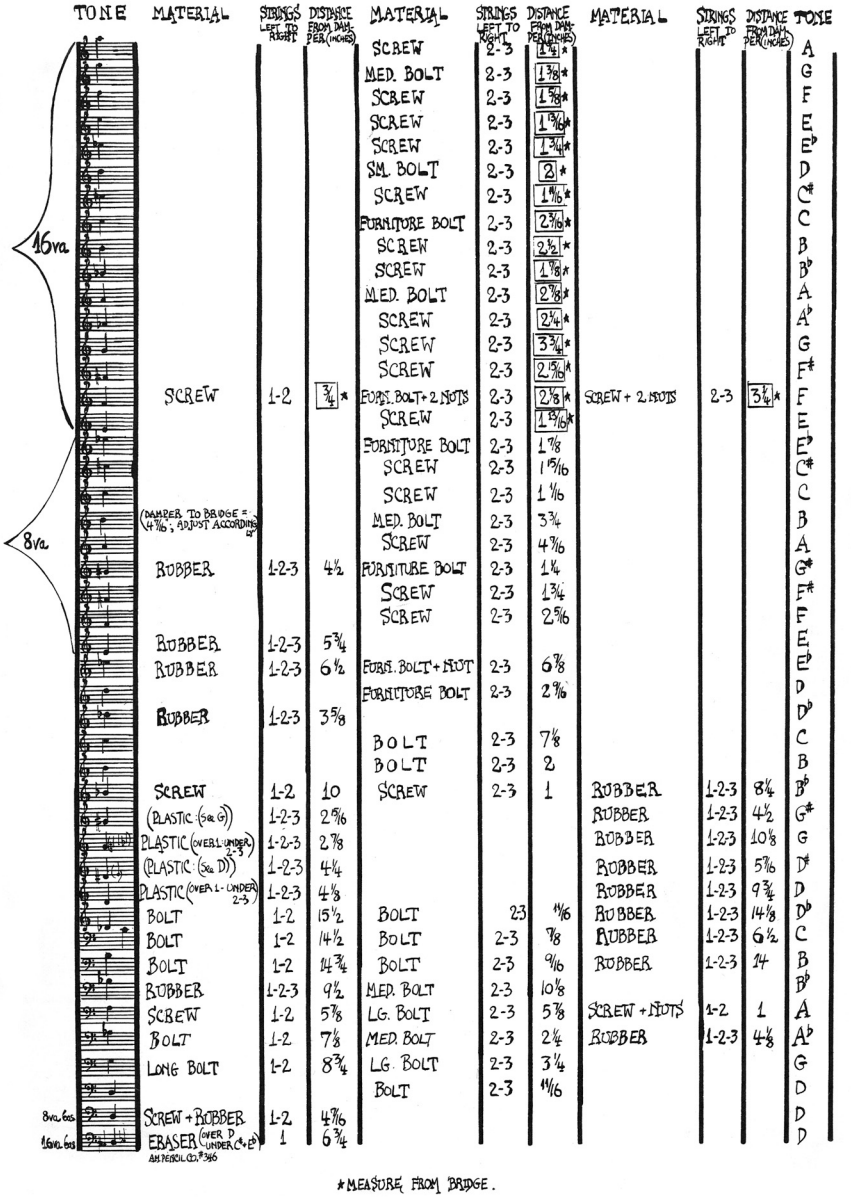
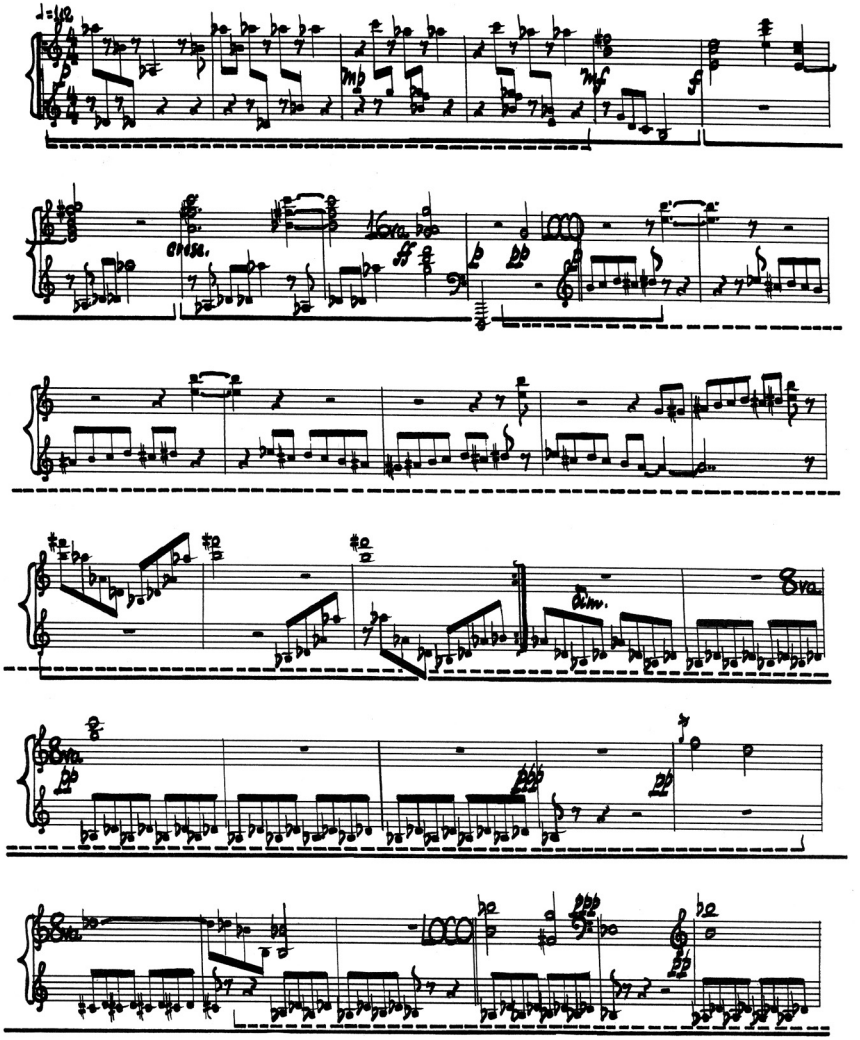


Figure 1.8 Cage, Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano (1946–1948). Table of preparations and first page of Sonata XI. © 1960 by Henmar Press Inc., New York. All rights reserved. Used by permission.



as means to produce, shape, and manipulate—and not simply reproduce—sounds. Outlining the capacities of filters, circuits, microphony, and other devices to alter the characteristics of a sound, Cage was acutely aware of the noise and distortion inherent to the recording device, noting how "splicing . . . like rerecording, brings about alterations of any or all of the original physical characteristics" in order to conclude that "the situation made available by these means is essentially a total sound-space."[58]

As early as the 1951 *Music of Changes,* Cage had moved toward a spatial notation of time modeled on audiotape, retrospectively declaring "the notation expresses a relation between time and space such as exists in the case of sound recorded on magnetic tape."[59] To compose the *Music of Changes,* Cage adopted a model of "sound parameters" to graph all dimensions of sound including amplitude, tempo, and pitch into individual tables, and then subjected each to selection based on laborious chance operations in order to arrive at a collection (still noted in half notes and quarter notes) whose rhythmic irregularity and complexity were nearly unplayable. To perform the work, Tudor carefully measured each element and mapped out the score, "in order to translate those tempo indications into actual time."[60] As a result of observing Tudor's preparations, which translated notation from metrical time into clock time, Cage recalls that after *Music of Changes,* "I dropped all notion of meter and went directly into plain space equals time, which has enormously facilitated the writing of new music."[61]

Looking back on the work during his 1958 lecture "Composition as Process," Cage famously decried the rigidity of such notation, which imposed tremendous constraints on the performer:

> The function of the performer in the case of *Music of Changes* is that of a contractor who, following an architect's blueprint, constructs a building. That the *Music of Changes* was composed by means of chance operations identifies the composer with no matter what eventuality. But that its notation is in all respects determinate does not permit the performer any such identification: his work is specifically laid out before him. He is therefore not able to perform from his own center but must identify himself insofar

> as possible with the center of the work as written . . . an object more inhuman than human.[62]

But it was with the *Williams Mix* (1952), "a score . . . for making music on magnetic tape," that Cage had his most sustained encounter with the technology. Cage's work with audiotape altered his understanding of the nature of sound and time, and decisively transformed his use of notation. By its material structure, tape manifests time as a spatial continuum and renders it subject to intense manipulation. Yet frustrated by his failure to achieve control through tape splicing and synching, Cage paradoxically found in audiotape "an omen to go unfixed" and move toward more process-based procedures.

By all accounts, the process of collecting and hand splicing the recorded sounds that make up the work was arduous: "It took about a year, with help, to splice the *Williams Mix,* which was itself a little over four minutes of music."[63] Cage's intensive fragmentation of sound materials arose from his desire to integrate the new technical means of magnetic tape into the process of composition, rather than use such means to make anything resembling conventional music—an aesthetic conservatism that he routinely critiqued in the works of other early tape-music composers. Christian Wolff recalls, for instance, that Cage was familiar with the work of Oscar Luening and Vladimir Ussachevsky at Columbia University, but found it wanting: "It may have been interesting because of using the tape, but musically they were using tape in ways that seemed too much like other kinds of music. This was the whole problem with the earlier tape music; one really had to rethink the whole process because of the technology."[64]

Working in the studio of recording engineers Louis and Bebe Barron, and with the assistance of composer Earle Brown, Cage insisted not only on subjecting each sound parameter to laboriously conducted chance determinations but on working physically, by hand, with the audiotape, manipulating attacks and decays, and exploring "ways of changing the sound not with dials but, rather, by physically cutting the tape."[65] While it may be a truism that new sound technologies potentially decompose the discrete note or unit of time, Cage's experiences with *Williams Mix* illustrates this graphically: "What was so fascinating about tape was that a second, which we had always thought was

THE RHYTHMIC STRUCTURE, 3·5·6¾·6¾·5·3⅛, IS EXPRESSED IN CHANGING TEMPI (INDICATED BY LARGE NUMBERS) (BEATS PER MINUTE). A NUMBER REPEATED AT THE SUCCEEDING STRUCTURAL POINT INDICATES A MAINTAINED TEMPO. ACCELERANDOS AND RITARDS ARE TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH THE RHYTHMIC STRUCTURE, RATHER THAN WITH THE SOUNDS THAT HAPPEN IN IT.

THE NOTATION OF DURATIONS IS IN SPACE. 2½ CM. = ♩. A SOUND BEGINS AT THE POINT IN TIME CORRESPONDING TO THE POINT IN SPACE OF THE STEM OF THE NOTE (NOT THE NOTE-HEAD). IN THE CASE OF A SINGLE WHOLE NOTE THIS STEM-POINT IS IMAGINED BEFORE THE NOTE (AS 𝄫), IN THE CASE OF ADJACENT-IN-PITCH WHOLE NOTES, BETWEEN THEM (AS 𝄪), IN THE CASE OF A GLISSANDO, IN THE CENTER OF THE DURATION INDICATED. A STACCATO MARK INDICATES A SHORT DURATION OF NO SPECIFIC LENGTH. A CROSS (+) ABOVE AN 𝅝 OR AT THE END OF A PEDAL NOTATION INDICATES THE POINT OF STOPPING SOUND AND DOES NOT HAVE ANY DURATION VALUE. FRACTIONS ARE OF A ♩ OR OF 2½ CM.

PEDALS ARE INDICATED: ⌴ = SUSTAINING; ⌴ = AFTER THE ATTACK, SUSTAINING OVERTONES; ⌴ = UNA CORDA; ⌴ = SOSTENUTO.

NOTE:

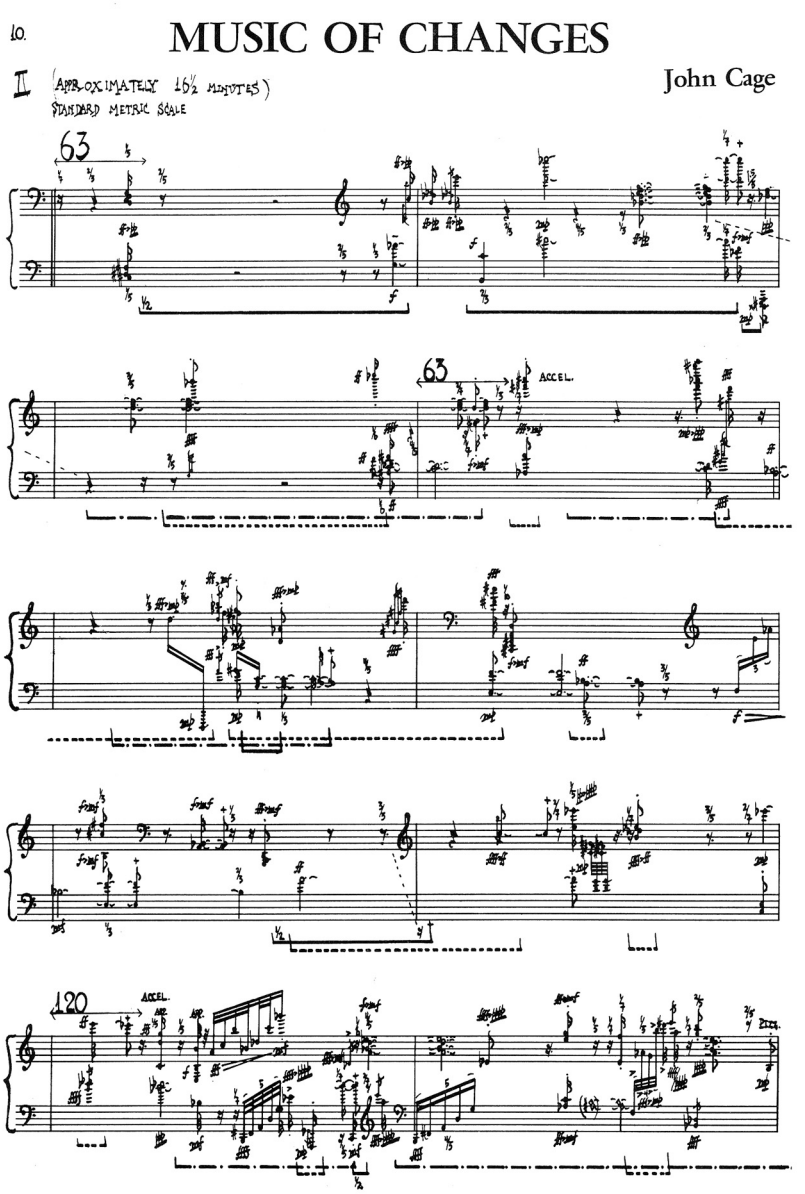
ACCIDENTALS APPLY ONLY TO THE TONES THEY DIRECTLY PRECEDE. ♦ (A DIAMOND) = A KEY DEPRESSED BUT NOT SOUNDED. TONE-CLUSTERS ARE NOTATED AS IN THE WORK OF HENRY COWELL.

DYNAMICS ARE BETWEEN 𝆑𝆑𝆑 AND 𝆏𝆏𝆏. ACCENTS ARE INDICATED BY A LOUDER DYNAMIC FOLLOWED BY A SOFTER ONE; E.G. 𝆑>𝆒 IS A 𝆑 SOUND ACCENTED LESS THAN 𝆑>𝆑.

IT WILL BE FOUND IN MANY PLACES THAT THE NOTATION IS IRRATIONAL; IN SUCH INSTANCES THE PERFORMER IS TO EMPLOY HIS OWN DISCRETION.

Univ. of Minn. Music Library

Figure 1.9 Cage, *Music of Changes* (1951). Note and first page of score. © 1960 by Henmar Press Inc., New York. All rights reserved. Used by permission.


10.
MUSIC OF CHANGES
II (APPROXIMATELY 16½ MINUTES)
STANDARD METRIC SCALE
John Cage
63
63
ACCEL.
120
ACCEL.

a relatively short space of time, became fifteen inches. It became something quite long that could be cut up. Morty Feldman . . . took a quarter of an inch and asked us to put 1,097 sounds in it, and we did it—we *actually* did it."[66]

The score, which came to 192 pages, was never published; Cage describes it as "like a dressmaker's pattern—it literally shows where the tape shall be cut, and you lay the tape on the score itself."[67] Yet the extremely detailed composition, rather than working as an exercise in control, instead produced the opposite: sounds became distorted, measurements were never quite the same twice, and sections that were supposed to sync up would be off by small but perceptible increments. While this was partly due to the arcane procedures and primitive technologies employed, Cage evidently came to understand such discrepancies as intrinsic to the apparatus. He would later declare that during the *Williams Mix:*

> I began to move away from the whole idea of control, even control by chance operations. It was a crossroads for me. I took our failure to achieve synchronization as an omen to go to the unfixed, rather than change my methods so as to make it more fixed. Now of course they have equipment that makes possible much more precise control, and a lot of people are using it to go in that direction.[68]

Thus, over a decade before the first sustained experiments with tape phasing would be carried out by Tony Conrad, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, and others, Cage would interpret this failure to achieve perfect synchronization, even with complex, multitracked tapes, as a license to free up the relationships between simultaneous elements in order to permit unplanned superimposition and chance encounters.

The Work of Art as Notation and Realization

What is it about Cage's work—and *4′33″* in particular—that would prove such a potent model? The most compelling reception of this work, I believe, occurs in the visual arts, where the concept of the work as a neutral time

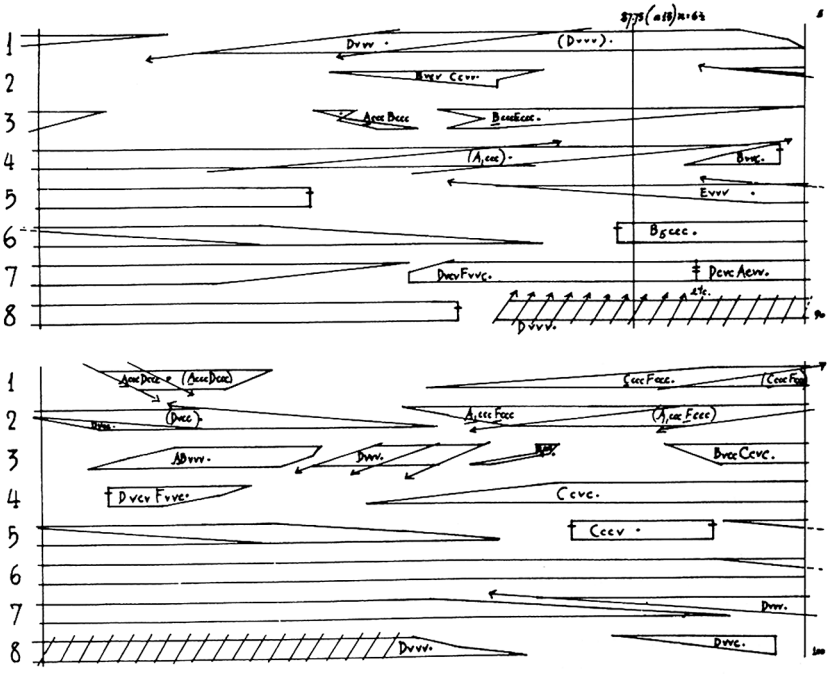


Figure 1.10 Cage, *Williams Mix* (1952). Manuscript fragment. © 1960 by Henmar Press Inc., New York. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

structure, and an inscription to be activated, could be applied to all manner of materials and procedures.

By prying open the regulatory relation between sign and realization, Cagean indeterminacy repositioned writing as a kind of productive mechanism, thereby giving notation a functional and aesthetic autonomy—an autonomy that opened the door for the scores, instructions, or snippets of language to themselves *be* the work, while individual realizations occur as "instances," "samples," or "examples" of it. From the vantage point of Conceptual art, this strategy could appear as the elevation of the concept or idea over the sensuous material or temporal realization, or as an understanding of the produced object, mark, or enactment primarily as the execution or testing out of a conceptual premise or linguistic proposition—as in Sol LeWitt's oft-cited words, "The idea becomes a machine that makes the art." LeWitt adds that "all the intervening steps—scribbles, sketches, drawings, failed works, models, studies, thoughts, conversations—are of interest," acknowledging that "preparatory" materials may be as interesting or even more so than the produced work.[69] Thus, as postwar compositional experiments bring the forms and functions of notation to a kind of crisis within music, the proliferation of forms they generate allowed models from musical practice to disseminate out into other art forms.[70]

As this notational function is adapted to diverse media beyond music—to work in language, sculpture, performance, video, photography, and beyond—the crucial model is indeed *4'33",* in which the most widely circulated notation is comprised mostly of words. While many readings of *4'33"* emphasize its gestural, visual, and theatrical qualities, or its minimally structured focus on nonart experiences, others target the work's inherently linguistic dimensions, reading it as the activation of a text, mobilizing the capacity of a simple structure to generate multiple realizations, and situating the listener or reader as a kind of performer. Language is central to the expanded concept of notation, in which the simplicity and reduction of the list, for instance, will become a paradigmatic form of the work or score.

If the musical score no longer aspires to "represent" sounding material or tightly control the realization of a work, what does notation do? The generativity of notation comes from its contingency, as a flexible template or

schema that can be used to produce more realizations. As Roman Ingarden contended, writing in the late 1920s, the score is a kind of schema that "fixes the musical work only incompletely." It is precisely this "incomplete determination of the work by the score" that is its advantage over recording technologies since it permits, "on the one hand, the 'fixed' relatively invariant schema, and on the other hand, the multiplicity of possible profiles through which the work manifests itself."[71] As already evident in Cage's compositions of the late 1950s, language, graphic inscription, and diagrams all provide a means of defining parameters or indicting a structure, while retaining sufficient ambiguity to permit distinct performances or instantiations.

As postwar composers sought ways of expanding musical notation to incorporate materials, actions, and types of inscription that went far beyond what one usually thinks of as music, their experiments intersected with those of practitioners in other disciplines. Propelled by the highly public graphic scores of postwar experimental music, the 1960s saw a wider discourse on the "score function" or "score practices" that related musical notation to myriad other notational schemata or symbolization practices. The notion of score practices, for instance, was formalized and extended in the influential work of landscape architect and environmental designer Lawrence Halprin, a former student of Walter Gropius at Harvard and the husband of the choreographer Ann Halprin. In his 1969 treatise *The RSVP Cycles,* Halprin proposes that "scores are symbolizations of processes which extend over time. The most familiar kind of 'score' is a musical one, but I have extended this meaning to include 'scores' in all fields of human endeavor. Even a grocery list or a calendar . . . are scores." Working with materials as diverse as architectural blueprints, diagrams, stage directions, and tabulations, Halprin argues that "planning for future events is the essential purpose of a scoring mechanism. Scores are notations which use symbols to describe processes over a period of time. . . . Scores are devices used for controlling events, of influencing what is to occur." [72]

For Cage, a certain notational hybridity emerged from efforts to symbolize processes that not only take place in time but also involve incompatible materials and procedures that cannot be completely formalized. As H. Wiley Hitchcock observes,

> Radical notations of a diversity that defies generalization arose out of the happenings, mixed-media events, and conceptual and performance art of the 1960s (as did a view of music as process and action as much as sound). Each work seemed to demand its own, unique graphic representation, which, no longer a score in any traditional sense, is simply a catalyst for action or a program for activity.[73]

Cage's own experimentation with "score-producing methods" plays with the productivity of translating between systems, transposing works from one notation into another—or tossing coins and translating the results into diagrams based on the *I Ching* while composing the *Music of Changes.* Despite Cage's legendary concern for careful measurement and painstaking accuracy, the motivation for such arcane procedures was the impossibility of predicting the results. As Cage stated in a late interview, "I don't hear music when I write it. I write in order to hear something I haven't heard yet. My writing is almost always characterized by having something unusual in the notation. The notation is about something that is not familiar."[74]

These upheavals in musical notation represent only an instance of the larger redefinition of writing in the twentieth century, as diverse new media of recording, registration, reproduction, and transmission challenged its status as a privileged technology of inscription.[75] With the introduction of electric, electronic, and computer-based means into experimental music, by the 1960s, anything from circuit diagrams to punch cards to simple drawings and verbal instructions could arguably function as scores or notational devices. Cage's stance is contradictory. On the one hand, his essentialized "sounds in themselves" appear to precede any inscription; yet by reconceptualizing sound as something akin to a "perceptual readymade," he understands it as something that a written work organizes or frames—as notation becomes "a way to produce something." In this context, *4'33"* represents the zero degree of notation: a writing that comprises little more than an author, a title, and a time structure (and at times not even that). Why write the piece at all, if not to inscribe it within a tradition and a set of conventions—in effect, to establish it

as a written sign in order to access the generativity of multiple readings and realizations? At its core, *4'33"* is an inscription that activates a performance.

Unlike the extraordinary calligraphic complexity of the score for *Water Music,* which includes an array of musical, textual, and numerical figures, the text-based score of *4'33",* composed entirely of typewritten numbers and words, focuses on the central (if sparse) role of written language in composition. Comparing the two roughly contemporaneous works foregrounds two opposite tendencies in Cage's scores, both of which emerge from his turn to everyday (nonmusical) materials and forms of action notation. *Water Music,* composed "for a pianist, using also a radio, whistles, water containers, a deck of cards, a wooden stick, and objects for preparing a piano," was arguably the first of Cage's "theater pieces," predating the untitled "Theater Event" at Black Mountain College by three months.[76] Pritchett notes that Cage incorporated deliberately theatrical actions into the charts used to compose the piece (for example, at one point the pianist deals playing cards into the strings of the piano). In addition, *Water Music* was "the first piece in which Cage used clock time rather than metrical time in his durations."[77] Mounted as a poster to be viewed by the audience during the performance, the idiosyncratic format crystallized Cage's use of the musical score as a unique visual object that resists translation into conventional notation. Calling it "a prime example of the calligraphic beauty of his scores," Fetterman asserts that the published score is "a reproduction of Cage's calligraphy, rather than a type-set re-notation from manuscript." Yet despite its unorthodox appearance, the "three basic notation systems employed in the score—numbers, natural language (English) and standard western music notation" are all conventional signs.[78] Of the forty-one events notated in the score, twenty are in linguistic notation, and twenty-one in standard piano notation, suggesting the extent to which the score for *Water Music* prefigures some of the vernacular, language-based strategies of the text version of *4'33".*

Yet the typewritten score for *4'33"* represents an opposing notational strategy: reconstituted in vernacular signs so repeatable and translatable that no original appears to exist, it disseminates into the culture by reproduction, reputation, hearsay, and verbal accounts whose reach far exceeds the circulation

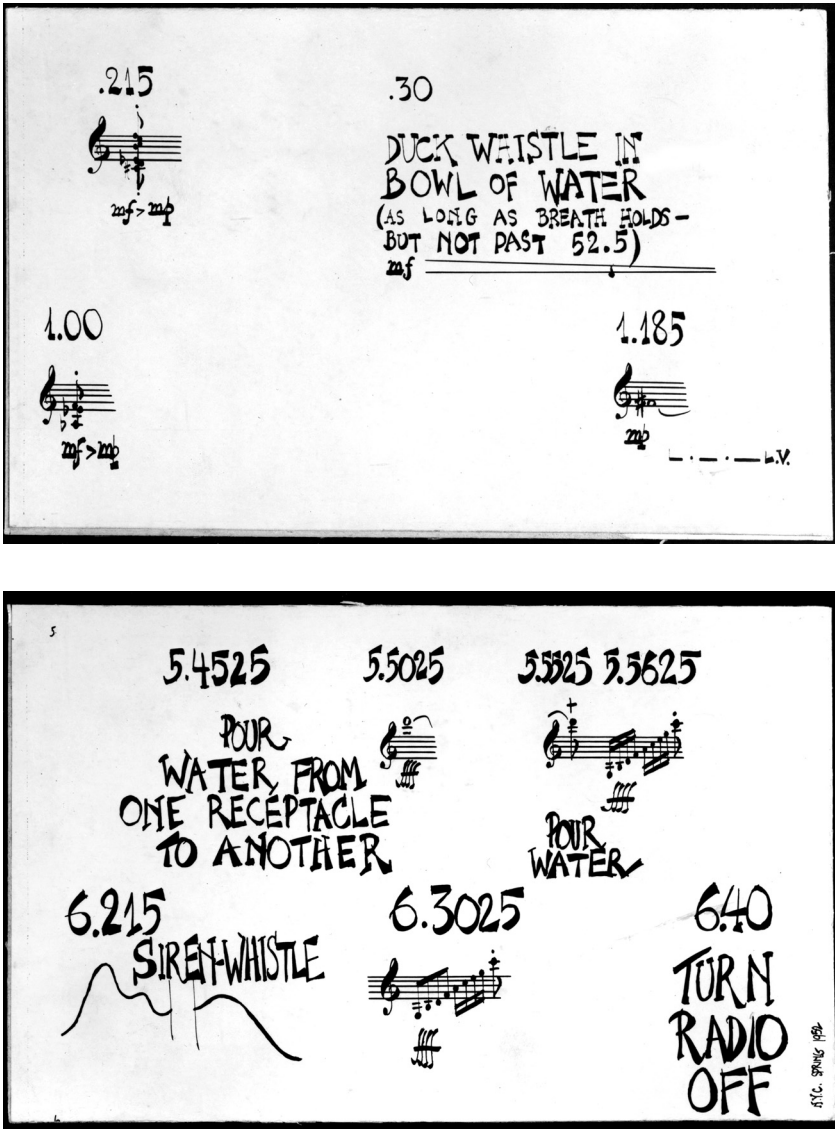


Figure 1.11 Cage, Score parts from *Water Music* (1952). © 1960 by Henmar Press Inc., New York. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

THE TEN ACCOMPANYING SHEETS CONSTITUTE
THE MATERIAL FOR A SINGLE SHEET OF MUSIC
FOR A PIANIST-MUSICIAN, THE TITLE OF WHICH
CHANGES TO BE THAT OF THE PLACE OR DATE
OF ITS PERFORMANCE. DAVID TUDOR FIRST
PERFORMED IT AT THE NEW SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL
RESEARCH IN NEW YORK CITY AND IT WAS EN-
TITLED 66 W. 12; AT WOODSTOCK, N. Y. IT
WAS ENTITLED AUGUST 29, 1952.
GENERALLY PROGRAMMED AS WATER MUSIC

THE TEN SHEETS ARE NUMBERED, FIVE OF THEM
AT THE RIGHT CORNERS, FIVE OF THEM AT THE
LEFT CORNERS. WHEN THE SAME NUMBERS ARE
ADJACENT, THE SHEETS ARE IN ORDER AND A
SINGLE PAGE MAY BE MADE BY MOUNTING THESE
ON A CARDBOARD APPROXIMATELY 34 INCHES WIDE
AND 55 INCHES HIGH. FOR A PERFORMANCE,
THESE MOUNTED SHEETS SHOULD BE SUITABLY
SUSPENDED OR AFFIXED SO THAT THE NOTATION
IS VISIBLE TO THE PIANIST AND TO THE AUDIENCE.

THREE WHISTLES ARE REQUIRED: WATER WARBLER,
SIREN AND DUCK (PLASTIC) WHISTLES OBTAINABLE
IN TOY OR FIVE AND DIME STORES; A BOWL OF
WATER; TWO RECEPTACLES FOR RECEIVING AND POURING
WATER; A RADIO; A PACK OF PLAYING CARDS; A WOODEN
STICK; AND 4 (FOUR) OBJECTS FOR PREPARING A PIANO
(E.G., BOLTS, SCREWS, RUBBER STRIPS, ETC.).

Univ. of Minn. Music Library

John Cage

THE NUMBERS REFER TO THE TIME OF INITIATING
EACH SOUND OR GROUP OF SOUNDS, THE NUMBERS
PRECEDING A POINT BEING MINUTES, THOSE FOLLOWING
SECONDS. THERE ARE TWO HALF-SYSTEMS ON EACH OF
THE TEN SHEETS; A FULL SYSTEM EQUALS 40 SECONDS.
A WATCH WITH A SECOND HAND IS USEFUL IN A
PERFORMANCE

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NEW YORK 16, N.Y.

of any of the score versions or score copies. However hermetically, it offers a set of *instructions to the performer,* a set of *words to be read.* By its nature, this unregulated circulation permits considerable deviation, degradation, and factual "inaccuracies"—a complex dissemination made possible by the concision and simplicity of the piece. By tapping into the power of the vernacular and the productivity of such proliferation, *4′33″* carries a capacity for rereading and reuse that potentially exceeds the more programmatic indeterminacy of Cage's other works. In its sparse presentation as well as its minimal, elegantly condensed structure, *4′33″* is the most important model and precedent for much subsequent work in other media.

Thus, as the communicative and representational functions of conventional musical notation break down, two options present themselves: the fetishization of the mark as a beautiful, handcrafted inscription, a unique object that resists translation or transcription to present fundamentally "unreadable" signs for visual contemplation; or the instrumentalization of the communicative function made possible by abandoning the specialized class of musical inscriptions in favor of standardized, everyday, vernacular languages that presumably can be read by all. *Water Music,* of course, exemplifies Cage's turn toward the complexity and calligraphic uniqueness of a private language. Not surprisingly, the original manuscript was among the first of Cage's scores to be exhibited as visual art and collected as a unique visual object. Whereas the relative simplicity of *4′33″*—so translatable and transposable that it can be indicated in a range of notational sign systems—renders it available to continual re-creation and reuse, allowing it to go out into the culture in ways that presumably would not have been authorized by Cage. While my own interests lie in this second option, it is clear that both the fetishistic and instrumental modes emerge inseparably from the fragmentation of a functioning language system; the multiple score versions of *4′33″* attest to this, as does, in another context, the peculiar coexistence within conceptual art practices of visually fetishized and purely instrumentalized signs. This potential for semiotic breakdown inhabits any sign system—as the French symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé understood long ago, concrete poetry and journalism are two sides of the same coin.

By the late 1950s when he taught at the New School, Cage generated graphic inscriptions whose fundamental ambiguity left nearly all definition to the performer, resulting in realizations whose relation to the score was almost arbitrary. As Cage insisted, "Any given performance of any chord is but a 'snapshot' of it in one of its possible states. . . . The composer resembles the maker of a camera who allows someone else to take the picture."[79] In Pritchett's analysis, "In the pieces composed from 1958 to 1961, he ceased making musical *scores* in any sense of the term, and began making what I refer to as 'tools': works which do not describe events in either a determinate or an indeterminate way, but which instead present a procedure by which to *create* any number of such descriptions or scores." As Pritchett elaborates, "Throughout the 1950s Cage had become more and more aware of the act of composition as being a process; now he extended this principle so that the work itself exists solely as a process" in which the composer is now "a designer of compositional systems . . . it is the system that is the work's identity."[80]

The score for *Fontana Mix* (1958) freely invented a complex, quasi-topographical graphic notation that seems highly obscure, yet is in fact one of the more operational of Cage's scores. This work helped energize a burgeoning body of experimental compositions using freely invented notational systems, including the types of graphic works found in some conceptual art. Yet this "notational virtuosity" perhaps represents the return of certain repressed compositional legacies Cage had seemingly eliminated from his work: the artist as the one who issues a set of mysterious and opaque codes, which are magically animated by the performer. Although designed to open up the relation between the written sign and the performed realization, Cagean indeterminacy hardly meant the complete severing of relations between sign and realization—indeed, Cage repeatedly condemned undisciplined performances of his music as "realizations in no way consistent with the notation." Thus notation is no mere matter of work preservation: in Cagean practice, music must emerge precisely in relation to a structured written notation, rather than simply occurring as unstructured improvisation.[81]

For Cage's self-consciously experimental practice, performance of a composition was a necessary testing of the productivity of the work, a process

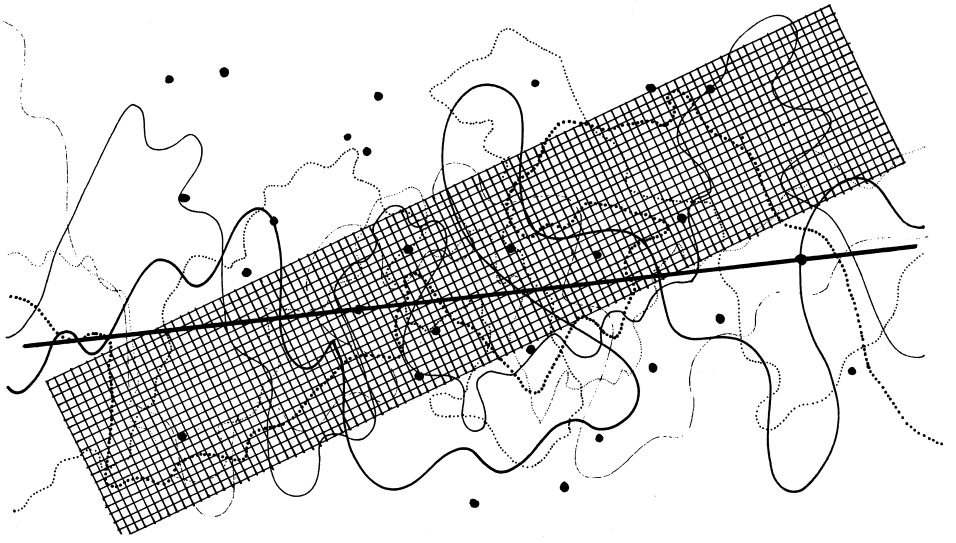


Figure 1.12 Cage, graphic notation for *Fontana Mix* (1958). © 1960 by Henmar Press Inc., New York. All rights reserved.

of execution and realization in order to hear the (largely unanticipated) results—and to send those results out in the world, where they would encounter unforeseen recipients and unpredictable receptions. As Wolff recalled in a 1992 interview, Cage "never regarded a piece as finished until it was performed. It was all very well and good to put it down on paper, but it was pointless unless it got out there somehow to somebody."[82] And despite the tendency to treat *4'33"* as a purely conceptual project, an idea for which realization is superfluous, Cage's own accounts of the piece always insist on the need to actively *perform* the work, rather than see it as a conceptual idea: "But what really pleases me in that silent piece is that it can be played any time, but it only comes alive when you play it. And each time you do, it is an experience of being very very much alive."[83]

2

Post-Cagean Aesthetics and the Event Score

Around 1960, in New York City, a type of work began to appear that consisted of short, instruction-like texts proposing one or more actions. Frequently referred to under the rubric of event scores or "word pieces," they represent one response to the work of John Cage—bringing the form of the score from music into the visual arts:

> COMPOSITION 1960 #10
> To Bob Morris
>
> Draw a straight line and follow it.
>
> October 1960 —La Monte Young (1960)

> WORD EVENT
>
> • Exit
>
> spring 1961 —George Brecht (1961)

> VOICE PIECE FOR SOPRANO
> to Simone Morris
>
> Scream.
>
> 1. against the wind
> 2. against the wall
> 3. against the sky
>
> y.o. 1961 autumn —Yoko Ono (1961)

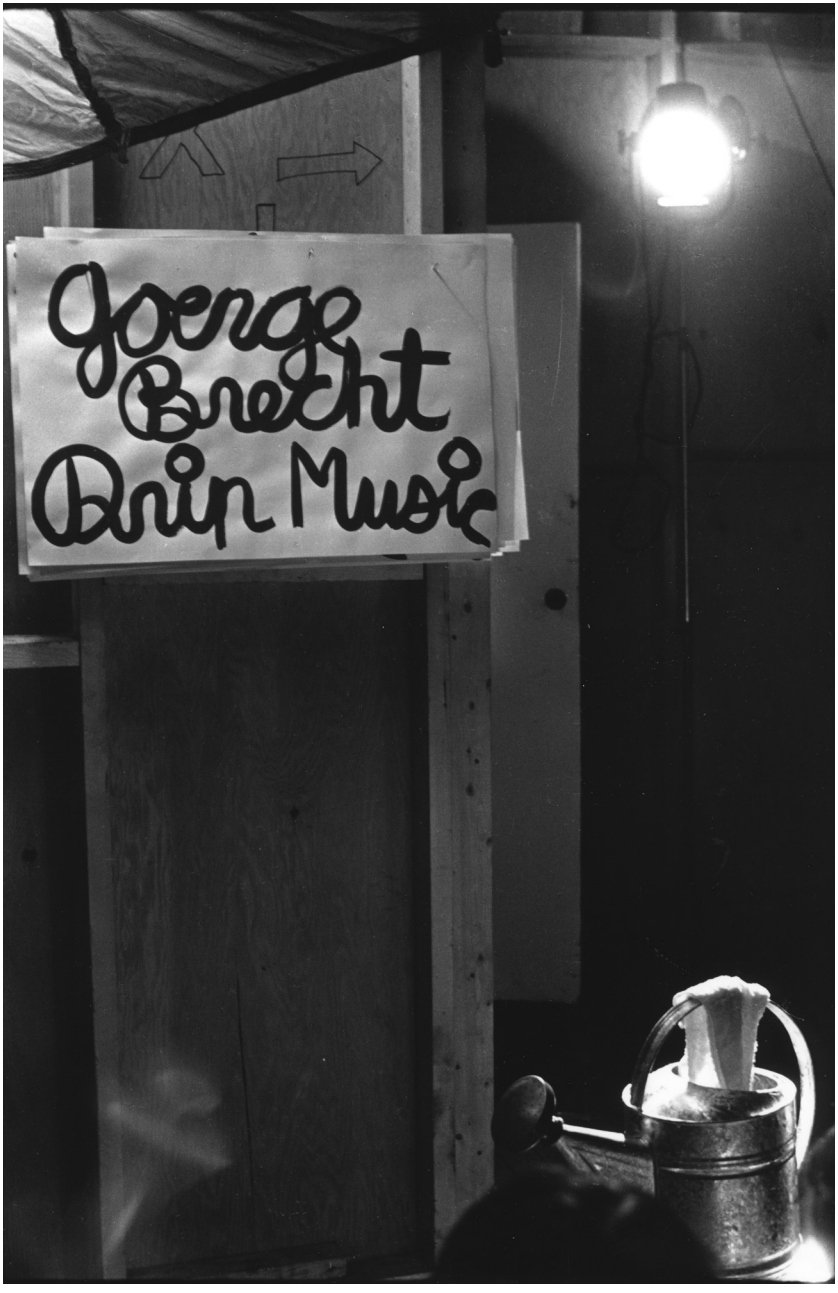


Figure 2.1 Prop for performance of Brecht's *Drip Music* at the Fluxhall/Fluxshop, New York City (1964). Photo by Peter Moore © Estate of Peter Moore/VAGA, New York City.

Made by artists active in New York's interdisciplinary neo-avant-garde, these pieces emerged from an expanded sense of both music and an expanded sense of medium. Many of Young's early compositions were performed live at downtown venues, including the now-legendary Chambers Street series he organized at Yoko Ono's downtown loft in spring 1961.[1] Several scores, including *Composition 1960 #10,* were subsequently printed in *An Anthology of Chance Operations* (1961–1963),[2] the influential compendium of new art that Young published with the assistance of the poet Jackson Mac Low and designer George Maciunas—a publication that Maciunas would take as a model when he assembled his own avant-garde movement and publication, to be called Fluxus.[2]

Brecht, who engaged in perhaps the most systematic work with these short enigmatic texts he called event scores, initially wrote them as performance instructions, and began mailing them to friends and receptive acquaintances. On at least a couple of occasions, he also displayed scores in gallery settings.[3] About fifty-five of these texts were assembled as small printed cards in a box, in *Water Yam* (1963), the first of a series of envisioned Fluxus editions Maciunas had planned offering artists' "collected works" in a cheap, widely available form. Many of Ono's texts initially took the form of instructions for paintings she exhibited at Maciunas's AG Gallery in July 1961—instructions she later exhibited at the Sogetsu Art Center in Tokyo in May 1962, in the form of hand-lettered sheets calligraphed in Japanese by her husband, Toshi Ichiyanagi, a composer and former student of Cage's.[4] Ono quickly expanded the idea to produce many short instruction-like and meditative texts, which she privately published in 1964 as the book *Grapefruit* during a two-year stay in Japan. Reissued in 1971 by Simon and Schuster in the wake of Ono's marriage to John Lennon, *Grapefruit* would bring the form to wider, if quizzical, audiences, and something resembling popular culture.[5]

What are these texts? They can be read (and have been read) under a number of rubrics: music scores, visual art, poetic texts, performance instructions, or proposals for some kind of action or procedure. Most often, when they are read at all, these "short-form" scores are seen as tools for something else, as scripts for a performance, project, or production that is the "real" art—even as commentators note the extent to which, for both Brecht and Ono,

this work frequently shifts away from realizable directions toward an activity that takes place mostly internally, in the act of reading or observing. This conceptual ambiguity derives from the use of the text as score, inseparably both writing/printed object and performance/realization. This use of notation to define a concept or action derives from Cage's work of the 1950s, appearing in its most condensed form in his landmark composition *4'33"* (1952), which directs the performer to remain silent during three movements of chance-determined durations. As we have seen, replacing conventional musical notation with a condensed set of typewritten numbers and words, the text version of *4'33"* (dating from the mid- to late 1950s) inaugurated the model of the score as an independent graphic/textual object, inseparably *words to be read* and *actions to be performed*. While this model was initiated by Cage, it was left to others to develop in a series of projects from 1959 to 1962.

In their direct invitation to enactment and performed response, event scores could seem like almost absurd literalizations of 1960s' critical claims for reading as an "activity of production." Yet the concrete, operational dimension of such scores engages an overt *transitivity,* a potential acting on materials, completely counter to the self-enclosed activity of the irreducibly plural "text" proposed by Roland Barthes in his 1967 call for a kind of writing, "intransitive" and "performative," in which "only language acts, 'performs,' and not me."[6] Taking music as a model for a renovated textuality, Umberto Eco's poetics of the "open work" reinterpreted radical literary practices in view of the experiments with "open form" by Luciano Berio, Henri Pousseur, and other postwar European composers.[7] As Barthes would subsequently propose in "From Work to Text" (1971): "We know today that post-serial music has radically altered the role of the 'interpreter,' who is called on to be in some sense the co-author of the score, completing it rather than giving it 'expression.' The Text is very much a score of this new kind: it asks of the reader a practical collaboration."[8]

However resonant, to read event scores through these models of newly activated textuality risks a certain circularity, since the very postserial compositions they cite as aesthetic precedents were partly historical products of the European reception of Cage's aleatory procedures and indeterminate strategies, practices that themselves hinge on a peculiar relation to writing.[9]

The theoretical impasse confronting both musicology and performance studies regarding the relative status of the written score or script—long held to preserve the essential properties of the work—and its various performances, seen as secondary, suggests the enormous difficulty of reading the relays among author, performer, text, reader, and audience. While the musical work was once attributed a prior existence, as an intentional ideal or construct that preceded its inscription, postwar music increasingly asked performers and listeners to actively interpret or realize a notation to produce a work. And as Eco was well aware, the "practical intervention" of the instrumentalist or actor is quite different from that of "an interpreter in the sense of a consumer," even as he proceeds to assimilate them.[10]

In the case of these event scores, their oddly condensed and inscrutable form perhaps facilitated their rapid circulation between performance, publication, and exhibition formats: small, strange, and belonging to no definable genre, they could go anywhere. Their reproduction, in the various broadsheets and little magazines of the time, had a provocative leveling effect: reproduced in the space of the page, all words become simply writing, "print." Apparent differences between autonomous works of word art or poetry, instrumental forms of performance instruction, program note or score, and even critical essays and diagrams become indistinct. As the theoretical interrogations of literary genre in the 1960s and 1970s suggest, this potential mutability and transposability is intrinsic to language as a material.[11]

Complicating this already-ambiguous dual structure—inseparably language and performance—intrinsic to the notion of the text as score, we must factor in a third mode: the relation of these texts to object production. From the manipulation of everyday materials as props and sound-generating devices in Young's early compositions, to the sculptural production undertaken by Brecht, Ono, and others, many word pieces could take an object form or produce a material residue—objects potentially presented for exhibition, just as the scores themselves could be (and were) exhibited. An implicitly tripartite structure—which allows them to be "realized" as language, object, and performance—anticipates subsequent projects by artists like Robert Morris and Joseph Kosuth that explicitly investigate the tripartite structure of the sign. By setting up chains of substitutions (but also bifurcations, hesitations,

and unravelings) among word, sign, object, action, and so forth, *all contained within just one word,* a perplexing little text like Brecht's *Exit* opens a door to the entry of linguistic structures and materials into the visual art of the 1960s.

How might such a sparse, focused practice emerge from or alongside the programmatic cacophony of late 1950s experimental art? And why would it occur under the guise of music? In its unorthodox design and extreme heterogeneity of format, material, and genre, *An Anthology* provided a key site for this textual indeterminacy and interpenetration—one that structurally replicated in printed form the productive collisions between dance, music, sculpture, poetry, lecture, and so on, that occurred in the performance and event-based programs of the time. Among the materials collected in *An Anthology* are all manner of neo-Dadaist concrete poetry, sound poetry, chance compositions, and simultaneities—many of which could be performed live. Event scores, however, were rarely read aloud; the linguistic performativity they propose is closer to that of the iterability of the sign than to an overtly oral (and more conventionally literary) performance poetics.[12] Rather than pulverizing language into sonorous fragments, these event scores focus on the instructions themselves as poetic material. This alternate poetics, of deeply prosaic everyday statements, comprised of short, simple vernacular words, presented in the form of lists and instructions, emerges in the postwar era as a countermodel to the earlier avant-garde practices of asyntacticality, musicality, and semiotic disruption. Yet this poetics by no means represents a simple departure from or rejection of collage aesthetics; instead, as we shall see, it entails a complex transformation of this semiotic engagement, one that pursues the logic of the fragment to unprecedented levels of isolation and reduction.

Physically modest and de-skilled, these scores represent an artistic practice driven by, but also counter to, the recording and reproductive technologies that would increasingly restructure sound and language in the postwar era. The project of semiotics is both an effect and a motor of this historical process, in which language, sound, image, and time become objects of decomposition, quantification, recombination, and analysis—an earlier phase of which is already evident in the breakdown of representation and sign in cubism and Dada. Yet the diverse techniques and technologies generated during World War II, from cybernetics and information theory to the perfection

of magnetic audiotape, markedly intensify this process, reducing complex information to transmissible series of binary digits, and proliferating indexical signs whose distance from syntax potentially reduces signification to "the mute presence of an uncoded event."[13] Under the pervasive pressure of (mechanical, electronic, and later digital) technologies of recording, reproduction, and transmission, *the perceptual conditions of explicitly temporal and repeatable media* (phonograph, film, and later audiotape and videotape) come increasingly to inflect apparently static materials (objects, images, and printed text) in the postwar era, while also turning the previously ephemeral into a kind of object (for instance, the long-playing record). Given its structural reliance on continual reenactment and its deep historical implication in systems of inscription, language is a special case, a kind of model—of which the event score is but one example.

The Cage Class: Models of Experimental Music in the 1950s

In an essay on Young and the early 1960s' interdisciplinary avant-garde, Henry Flynt protests that "Fluxus, as it is remembered today, grew out of an art of insignificant and silly gestures mainly due to George Brecht."[14] He may well be right. Brecht's event scores were eagerly embraced by Maciunas, who adopted them as a sort of signature form for Fluxus performance. Brecht's myriad game- or kit-type objects were subsequently adapted, semistandardized, and proliferated in Maciunas's endless FluxBoxes and early Fluxus editions. Even Brecht's single-page broadsheet *V TRE* (1963) turned into the Fluxus newspaper *ccV TRE.* So it is not surprising that when Brecht's role is historically acknowledged, it is almost always within the context of Fluxus—a critical approach that unfortunately tends to homogenize Fluxus production, flatten Brecht's work into a preconceived notion of performance, and neglect the reception or impact of his work outside Fluxus.

Brecht's work with language arose directly out of his involvement in Cage's New School class on experimental composition, which he attended from June 1958 to August 1959.[15] Before then, Brecht's art production had mostly consisted of paintings and drawings made according to some version of chance procedures—drawings based on charts of random numbers, and

paintings made through staining sheets with ink, all somewhat pictorial in orientation. In a brief written addendum to his 1957 essay *Chance Imagery,* Brecht states that although he was aware of Cage's work since 1951, his model for chance operations during the 1950s came primarily from the work of Jackson Pollock.[16] As the title of this key essay suggests, Brecht's initial goal was to use chance methods to generate what he termed "affective images." And according to fellow New School classmate Dick Higgins, at the time of entering Cage's class, Brecht still described himself as, "you might say, a painter."[17] Living in New Jersey, where he worked as a research chemist, Brecht often attended the class with Allan Kaprow, who he knew through the artist Robert Watts.

According to Higgins's accounts of the class in *Jefferson's Birthday/Postface* (1964), Brecht and Cage shared certain concerns that largely escaped the rest of the class:

> The usual format of our sessions would be that, before the class began, Cage and George Brecht would get into a conversation, usually about "spiritual virtuosity," instead of the virtuosity of technique, physique, etc. . . . The best thing that happened in Cage's class was the sense he gave that "anything goes," at least potentially. Only George Brecht seemed to share Cage's fascination with the various theories of impersonality, anonymity and the life of processes outside their perceivers, makers or anyone else.[18]

As Higgins's somewhat-mocking tone implies, Brecht's miniaturized, self-effacing compositions shared Cage's interest in de-subjectivization and self-restraint at a time when many of the other class members—especially Kaprow, Higgins, and Al Hansen—were drawn to the more expressionistic "anything goes" aesthetic that came to characterize happenings. Yet Higgins goes on to state that Cage's real gift was to allow each member of the class to pursue their own project and sensibility, adding that "in the same way, Brecht picked up from Cage an understanding of his own love of complete anonymity, simplicity and noninvolvement with what he does."[19]

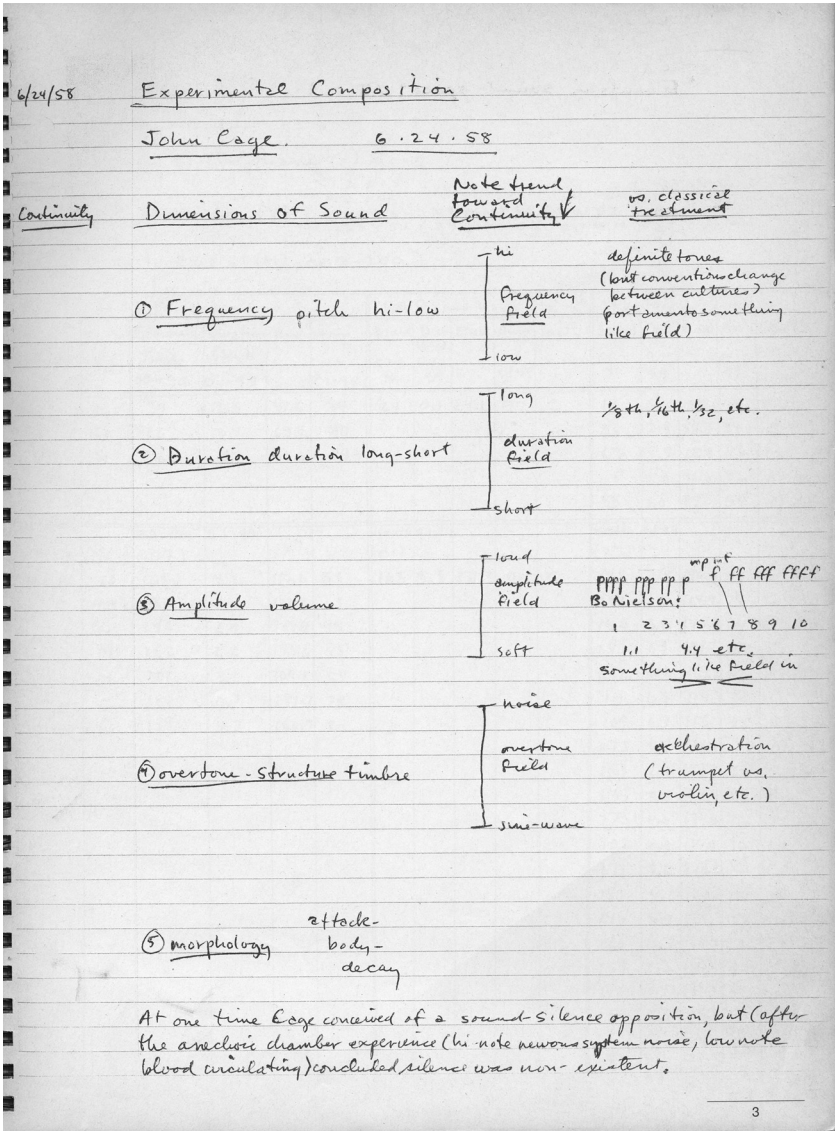


Figure 2.2 Brecht, "Experimental Composition," in vol. 1, *Notebooks,* June 24, 1958. © George Brecht. Courtesy of the artist and publisher, Walther König, Cologne.

In Brecht's notebooks from the class, the initial lessons breaking down the properties of sound employ a vocabulary that could have come straight out of *Die Reihe,* the influential German music journal edited by Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen: "Dimensions of Sound: Frequency, Duration, Amplitude, Overtone-structure, Morphology." In his careful, precise notes, presumably following Cage's directives, Brecht graphs out each as a quantitatively mapped, continuous *field*—"frequency field" (high/low), "duration field" (long/short), and so forth. "*Note trend towards continuity,*" he records, "*vs. classical treatment*."[20] The next page notes "'Events in sound-space.' (J. C.)," and in many of the exercises that follow, Brecht diagrams phenomena carefully in mathematical notation.

This is not the picture of Cage's class we have received from the far more free-form, anecdotal accounts of Hansen or Higgins. Not only do Brecht's notes record the constant stream of assignments and projects being produced for the workshop-style class but they also show how Cage grounded these nascent multimedia experiments through an analysis of sound phenomena.[21] Cage brought in scores from friends like Earle Brown and Morton Feldman, and referred students to articles and debates in experimental music. Teaching students to approach sound through measurable sound parameters and the like provided a way to get out a strictly musical vernacular, and opened the door to bringing analogous organizing principles and rule-based structures to bear on other phenomena, like light waves, actions, or objects. Thus, the conceptual models we find elaborated in Brecht's notebooks are not so much Cage's own compositional methods as products of the scientific breakdown of sound properties into quantifiable spectra—strategies that date, in one form or another, to the early nineteenth century, and that were systematically researched and disseminated in *Die Reihe*.[22]

Die Reihe's project for a scientifically grounded practice of electronic music is laid out in an early introduction by Eimert, the artistic director of Cologne Radio. Closely allied with Werner Meyer-Eppler and German academics and artists drawn to the new, instrumentalized American models of communications, acoustics, and information theory, Eimert was engaged in research on the psychology of perception and the physics of sound as well as the development of new electronic sound technologies, for which Cologne

Radio was an important sponsor.[23] In the essay "What Is Electronic Music?" published in the inaugural issue of *Die Reihe* (1955), Eimert outlines a program for positivist research into sound as the basis for new musical composition, calling for "the disruption by electronic means, of the sound world as we have known it," and for the use of the technologies of broadcasting (tape recorder, loudspeaker, and so on) "transformed into a compositional means."[24]

The analytic capacities made possible by these new technologies, such as the analysis of frequencies and overtone curves, provide not just new material for composition but the model for the very ways of conceiving of sound and its (artistic) organization: "New ways of generating sound stipulate new compositional ideas; these may only be derived from sound itself which in its turn must be derived from the general 'material.'"[25] Naturally, such fundamentally restructured sound properties will also require radically reconfigured notions of the score. "The multiplicity of forms of electronic elements far exceeds the possibilities of graphic notation," Eimert argues, proposing a new mathematically notated method: "Thus 'scores' of electronic compositions resemble precise acoustical diagrams with their coordinates, frequencies (cycles per second), intensity levels (measured in decibels) and time (cm. p.s.)."[26]

Passages from Brecht's *Notebooks* suggest that he read texts and scores by Boulez, Stockhausen, and other composers, adapting them to his own concerns. Perhaps from electronic-music composer Richard Maxfield, who occasionally substituted at the New School when Cage was away, Brecht notes perceptual phenomena like the relationality of pitch and amplitude, and their proportional relation to the experiential time of duration—concerns articulated by Stockhausen in essays in *Die Reihe*.[27] While preparing an early version of *The Cabinet* (July 1958), an assemblage featuring lights and sounds, Brecht's notes read "minimal perceptible levels for duration, pitch, amplitude." For *Confetti Music* (July 1958), in which card colors determine source (gong, prepared guitar, gamelan, and so forth), Brecht notes that "each sound [has] natural duration depending on source and amplitude," and proposes an indexical model of sound production: "each sound becomes a projection of the record of a state (like an abstract expressionist painting). The cards represent a record of a more or less momentary state."[28] In a notebook

draft for an unpublished essay on experimental music, Brecht compares Stockhausen's *Piano Piece No. 11* with Earle Brown's *Four Systems* on the basis of what he terms "a scale of *situation participation*": "the extent to which the sound structure of the piece . . . partakes of the situation in which it occurs, as opposed to its arising from some pre-existent structure (score notation/symbolism/arrangement)."[29]

However incongruous they may appear in relation to his funky, rather low-tech rearrangeable assemblages, Brecht's recurrent recourse to quantitative models is not merely a period style. Not unlike some of Cage's quixotic efforts to combine art and technology in the 1930s and 1940s, Brecht repeatedly sought to bring scientific concepts into dialogue with artistic practice, referring to all his work of the period as "research." Working as a chemist at Johnson and Johnson, Brecht was moderately active as a scientific inventor—a calling reminiscent of Cage's less-than-successful inventor father.[30]

Yet like Cagean "indifference," modeled on a recording apparatus it overtly disavows, Brecht's work represses the pivotal role of these technicist models. Except for occasional references to his pre-Cagean work with probability, random number tables, and statistical models of chance in the 1950s, later statements by Brecht never mention his fascination with quantificatory schemata—in contrast, for instance, to Young's obsessive experiments since the 1960s with just intonation, producing works whose very titles comprise lengthy mathematical calculations of their precise harmonic frequencies. Brecht's own rhetoric instead stresses the liberatory, antitechnological, and anti-instrumental nature of his project—to a sometimes-absurd degree. Nevertheless, the conceptual apparatus he adopts, moving from "sound-silence opposition" to "model of field/continuity," is a product of the remapping of sound via recording technologies and quantitative analysis—for example, the musical dissolution of *pitch,* from a series of discrete, articulated notes along a scale, into *frequency,* which operates as a continuity, defined quantitatively. As theorists from Jacques Attali to Friedrich Kittler have argued, this fundamental rupture in the nature of sound is only comprehensible under the pressure of recorded sound.[31]

As Kittler observes, "The phonograph does not hear as do ears that have been trained immediately to filter voices, words, and sounds out of noise.

Articulateness becomes a second-order exception in a spectrum of noise."[32] The perceptual availability of this spectrum—of sound outside the coded domains of music or speech—Kittler implicitly argues, is a product of modern recording technologies, emphasizing precisely the extent to which sound recording, by bypassing traditional methods of "alphabetic storage" (the musical score and written notation) permitted new, nonlinearized and nonlinguistic models of sound, and by extension, musical temporality. Prior to this nineteenth-century innovation, Kittler insists, the representation of temporal experience was dependent on the "symbolic bottleneck" of the letter: "Texts and scores: Europe had no other means of storing time."[33]

Thus, the very joining of written text and musical score in Cagean practice—and so important in postwar poetry as well—is paradoxically predicated on the dissolution of what had previously linked them: a shared dependence on the letter. Musical notation, as used in the West, had relied on the tempered duodecimal harmonic system, itself a series of discrete notes, arranged in a linear sequence by metrical count. It is against the enormous constraints of this system that radical twentieth-century musicians would turn to the disruptive acoustic potential of noise, to the world of sound resting outside the parameters of music, from the liberation of dissonance in Schoenberg to a host of experiments with microtones, nonmusical instruments, and unconventional, nonmetrical time structures by composers from Alois Hába to Edgard Varèse.

For the musical score to become available as a generalized time structure or event notation, it had to be unhinged not only from *sound* as a system of discrete notes but also from *time* as a graphically plotted system of rhythmic measure. In experimental music of the 1950s, these notational properties would gradually be replaced by the new positivities of quantitative measure: pitch as frequency (vibrations per second) and time as mechanical time, clock time. No longer mere supplemental annotation, language enters the space of a musical score voided of its internal linguistic structure. Comprised of written performance instructions—tacet—organized in predetermined time brackets, *4'33"* employs the score as a kind of temporal container, one that can potentially be filled with any material. Such a structural shift necessarily entailed new forms of notation, and indeed Cage was famous (or infamous)

throughout the 1950s for his experimentation with unconventional and graphic scores. Yet the conceptual simplicity of *4'33",* which made it such a compelling model to other artists, rests on its use of conventional typewritten language and numbers as notation—public, vernacular forms—rather than the graphic esotericism of many of Cage's subsequent works, in which programmatic indeterminacy would produce an almost entirely arbitrary relation between score and performance (and whose mannerist anticonventionality could at times result in something like a private language).

What Is an Event?

> What are the conditions that make an event possible? Events are produced in a chaos, in a chaotic multiplicity, but only under conditions that a sort of screen intervenes.
>
> —*Gilles Deleuze,* The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque

As these notational forms emerged out of 1950s' experimental music, they were quickly adopted and disseminated by a number of figures working in new cross-disciplinary forms. Two key sites for this work were in New York City, around Cage, and in the San Francisco Bay Area, where artists and performers like Young, Simone Forti (then Simone Morris), and Robert Morris worked with the dancer and choreographer Ann Halprin. As we will see through looking at works by Brecht, Forti, and Young, this emerging score form allowed a focused, discrete structure—a concept or an event—to emerge out of an often-cacophonous array of mixed-media practices.

Brecht's initial performance scores of 1959–1960, referred to as "card events," consisted of small printed instructions that outlined detailed procedures for a variety of loosely synchronized actions: raising and lowering the volume of radios, changing the tuning, and so forth, for indeterminate durations based on natural processes such as the burning of a candle (*Candle Piece for Radios,* summer 1959); or turning on and off various lights and signals, sounding horns, sirens, or bells, opening or closing doors, windows, or engine hoods, and so on (*Motor Vehicle Sundown [Event],* spring–summer 1960). All

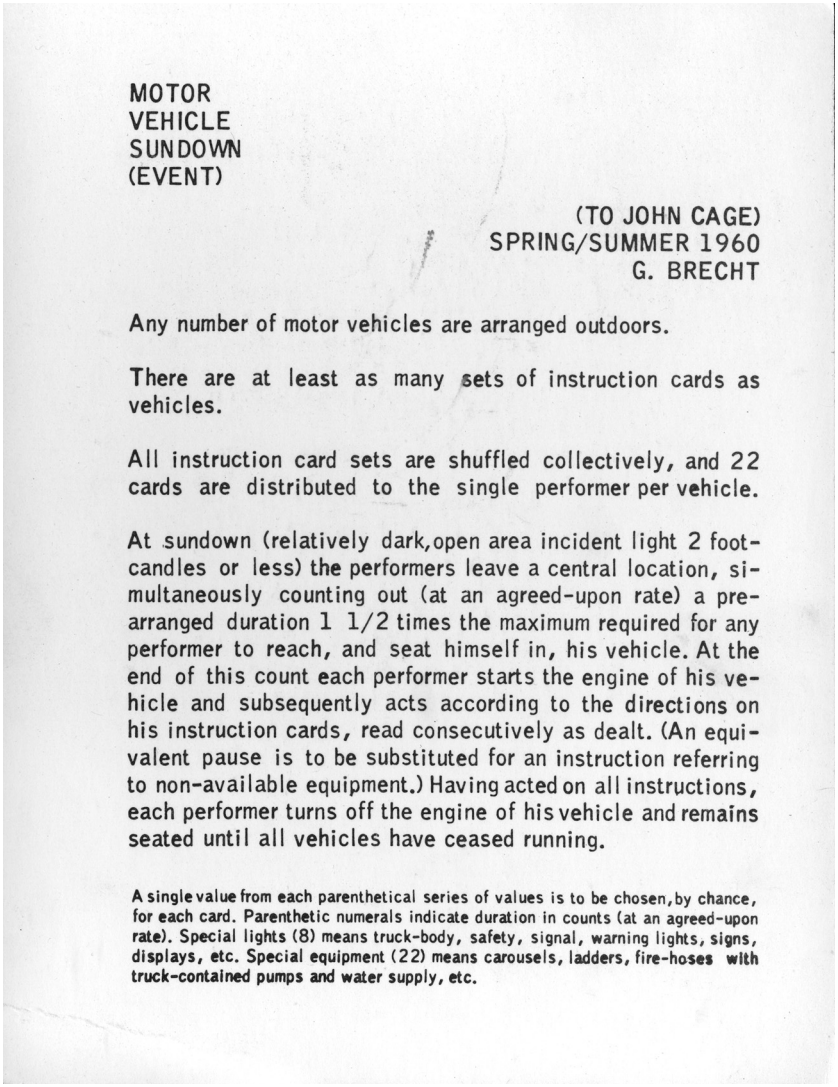
involve long, fairly detailed instructions designed for a group situation, concerned, in a more typically "Cagean" model, not so much with focus as with a sense of dilation and dispersal. In their complex orchestration of simultaneous acts and chance interactions, these pieces resemble the Dadaist "simultaneities" of the early twentieth century; diffuse, multifocal, chaotic, they are extensions of collage aesthetics.

Brecht's 1970 statement "The Origin of Events" recounts his work at the time of Cage's class:

> My interests then were in making musical pieces with built-in chance durations rather than predetermined ones (*Candle Piece for Radios*) or using game elements such as playing cards as musical scores (*Card Piece for Voice*). The pieces turned out as interesting visually, atmospherically, as aurally, though they were performed with as little fuss, as economically, as possible.[34]

Finding himself "increasingly dissatisfied with the purely aural qualities of a situation," Brecht gravitated to a less musically defined type of experience: "The word 'event' seemed closer to describing the total, multi-sensory experience I was interested in."[35] The text retrospectively describes the genesis of events from the observation of mundane situations of daily life:

> In the Spring of 1960, standing in the woods in East Brunswick, New Jersey, where I lived at the time, waiting for my wife to come from the house, standing behind my English Ford station wagon, the motor running and the left turn-signal blinking, it occurred to me that a wholly "event" piece could be drawn from the situation. Three months later the first piece explicitly titled an "event" was finished, the *Motor Vehicle Sundown (Event)*. The event scores arrived in quantity for a few years after that, the later ones becoming very private, like little enlightenments I wanted to communicate to my friends who would know what to do with them, unlike the *Motor Vehicle Sundown,* which had more the quality of an elaborate public performance. Later on, rather to my



MOTOR
VEHICLE
SUNDOWN
(EVENT)

(TO JOHN CAGE)
SPRING/SUMMER 1960
G. BRECHT

Any number of motor vehicles are arranged outdoors.

There are at least as many sets of instruction cards as vehicles.

All instruction card sets are shuffled collectively, and 22 cards are distributed to the single performer per vehicle.

At sundown (relatively dark, open area incident light 2 foot-candles or less) the performers leave a central location, simultaneously counting out (at an agreed-upon rate) a prearranged duration 1 1/2 times the maximum required for any performer to reach, and seat himself in, his vehicle. At the end of this count each performer starts the engine of his vehicle and subsequently acts according to the directions on his instruction cards, read consecutively as dealt. (An equivalent pause is to be substituted for an instruction referring to non-available equipment.) Having acted on all instructions, each performer turns off the engine of his vehicle and remains seated until all vehicles have ceased running.

A single value from each parenthetical series of values is to be chosen, by chance, for each card. Parenthetic numerals indicate duration in counts (at an agreed-upon rate). Special lights (8) means truck-body, safety, signal, warning lights, signs, displays, etc. Special equipment (22) means carousels, ladders, fire-hoses with truck-contained pumps and water supply, etc.

Figure 2.3 Brecht, *Motor Vehicle Sundown (Event)* (1960). Courtesy of the artist.

INSTRUCTION CARDS (44 per set):

1. Head lights (high beam, low beam) on (1-5), off.
2. Parking lights on (1-11), off.
3. Foot-brake lights on (1-3), off.
4. (Right, left) directional signals on (1-7), off.
5. Inside light on (1-5), off.
6. Glove-compartment light on. Open (or close) glove compartment (quickly, with moderate speed, slowly).
7. Spot-lamp on (1-11), move (vertically, horizontally, randomly), (quickly, with moderate speed, slowly), off.
8. Special lights on (1-9), off.
9. Sound horn (1-11).
10. Sound siren (1-15).
11. Sound bell(s) (1-7).
12. Accelerate motor (1-3).
13. Wind-shield wipers on (1-5), off.
14. Radio on, maximum volume, (1-7), off. Change tuning.
15. Strike hand on dashboard.
16. Strike a window with knuckles.
17. Fold a seat or seat-back (quickly, with moderate speed, slowly). Replace.
18. Open (or close) a window (quickly, with moderate speed, slowly).
19. Open (or close) a door (quickly, with moderate speed, slowly).
20. Open (or close) engine-hood, opening and closing vehicle door, if necessary.
21. Trunk light on. Open (or close) trunk lid (if a car), rear-panel (if a truck or station-wagon), or equivalent. Trunk light off.
22. Operate special equipment (1-15), off.

23-44. Pause (1-13).

> surprise, I learned that George Maciunas in Germany and France, Cornelius Cardew and Robin Page in England, Kosugi, Kubota, Shiomi in Japan, and others had made public realizations of the pieces I had always waited to notice occurring.[36]

Thus by spring 1961, the experiential diffusion of the early scores has been pared down to small, enigmatic fragments such as *Two Durations* and *Event*.[37] Scores like these represent the emergence of the event out of a wider Cagean practice. "Cage," Brecht recalls, "was the great liberator for me. . . . But at the same time, he remained a musician, a composer. . . . I wanted to make music that wouldn't only be for the ears. Music isn't just what you hear or what you listen to, but everything that happens. . . . Events are an extension of music."[38]

Kaprow recalls that "'events' was a word that Cage was using—borrowing from science, from physics"—although in Cage's work the individual sonic events, the "sounds in themselves," remain embedded in a larger musical composition and an acoustic model.[39] Along with its complex vernacular resonances, the term event has a number of quite precise meanings in scientific, philosophical, and historical discourses. The concept often emerges in the wake of structural models and reconfigured temporalities, from the reconceptualization of the event undertaken in Annales school histories of the long duration, to the efforts of philosophers such as Deleuze and Michel Foucault to articulate modes of individuation as events rather than essences, as "incorporeal transformations" or "statements" that are both singular and repeatable. Arguing against the commonsense, mass media idea of an event, Deleuze pinpoints two qualities that will be relevant in this context: "even a short or instantaneous event is something going on," and "events always involve periods when nothing happens."[40]

In scientific discourses, mundane phenomena such as turning on a light or lighting a match represent almost generic examples of physical events. In physics, an event is precisely "a point taken from three-dimensions to four-dimensions."[41] The concept addresses perceptual problems articulated in relativity theory that occur as phenomena move closer to the speed of light; in an introductory course on physics, for instance, "a light bulb goes on" would

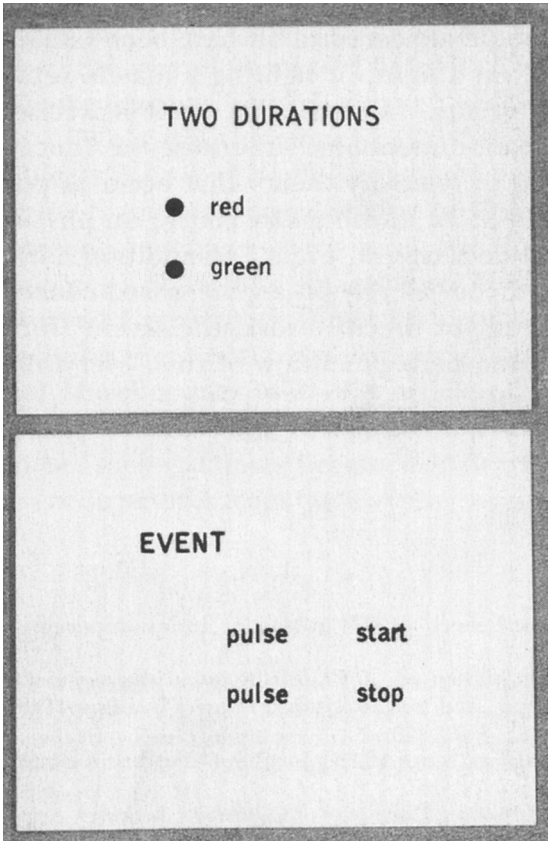


Figure 2.4 Brecht, *Two Durations* and *Event* (circa 1961). Courtesy of the artist.

be a typical event. In addition, information theory, statistics, and probability theory all rely on a generalized concept of the event as an unspecified occurrence. In Brecht's work, the event form works like a little device for cutting into the perceptual flow of this "everything that happens."

As they take shape in 1960–1961, Brecht's events represent both an extension and a focusing of the Cagean project: an *extension* because not only sound and hearing but "everything that happens" provides potential materials, and a *focusing* because singularity rather than multiplicity or simultaneity will be the result. The programmatic chaos Cage provided was tremendously generative for Brecht and other artists, who would take the discrete or individual unit as the goal, rather than the overall, dispersed field of chance encounters that in Cage's work, is still the transparent "screen" through which to see.[42]

Tasklike exercises employing mundane objects found at home or bought at the dime store—playing cards, whistles, and toys—formed an ongoing part of Cage's class, where students were expected to present new pieces each week for (low-cost, low-preparation, generally unrehearsed) classroom enactment. Some of these nonmusical materials also entered Cage's more theatrical compositions, such as the 1952 work *Water Music,* which includes the sounds of water being poured from one vessel to another. As Jan van der Marck argues, "Instead of being preparations for increasingly complex compositions, as undoubtedly Cage meant for them to be, such exercises became for Brecht ends in themselves," in effect "isolating event-structures from Cage's programmed performances."[43] Thus, a sort of protominimalism can be traced in the work of Brecht, Young, and other artists working at this time.

More improvisatory activities, using props, obstacles, sound, and speech to generate movement, were used in Bay Area choreographer Ann Halprin's Dancer's Workshop, which Young, Forti, Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, and Robert Morris all participated in during the summer of 1960. Rainer recounts that "Halprin had a tremendous flair for the dramatic. Her emphasis was on using tasks to generate movement, which were then transformed into dance. Simone simply kept the exercises themselves, as complete pieces."[44] In a manner parallel to Brecht's relation with Cage, Forti's early use of task structures was adapted from her work with Halprin. Several of Forti's accounts of

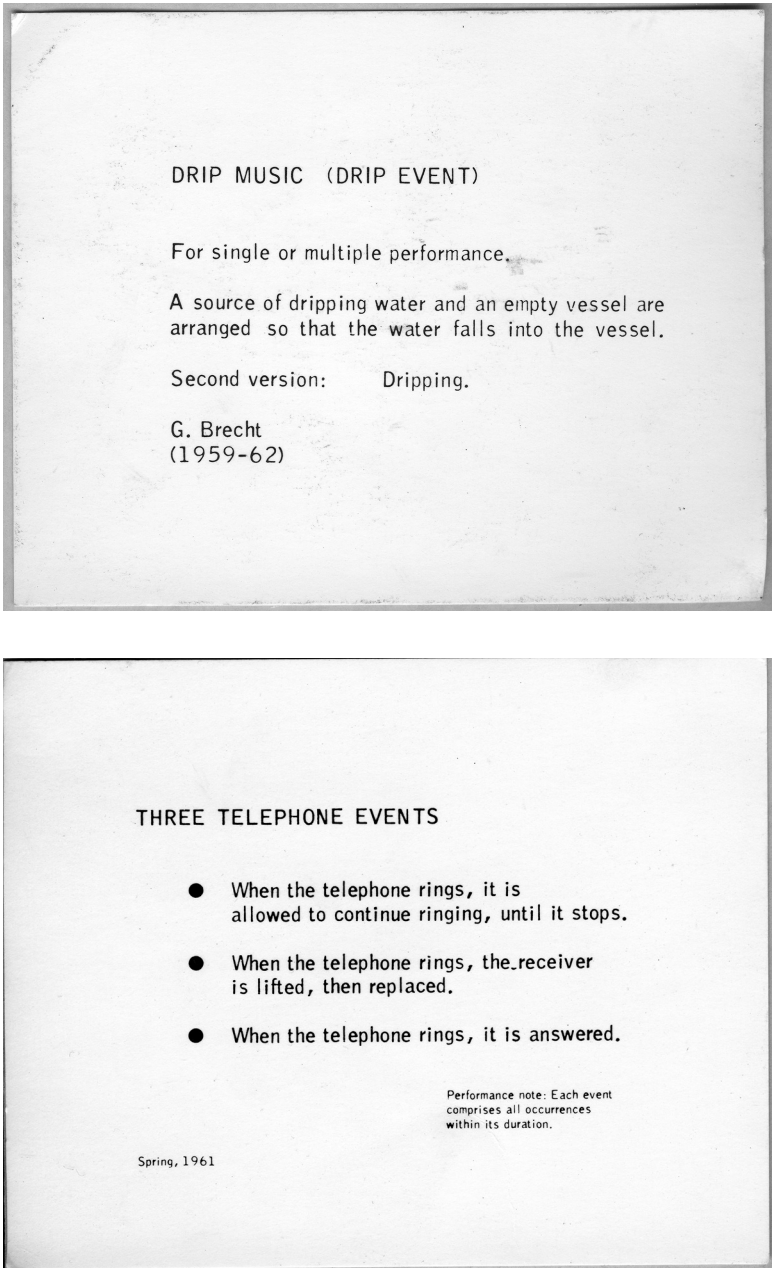


Figure 2.5 Brecht, *Drip Music* (1959–1962) and *Three Telephone Events* (1961). Courtesy of the artist.

everyday movement in her "dance reports," "dance constructions," and "instructions" were published in *An Anthology,* including the following:

INSTRUCTIONS FOR A DANCE:

One man is told that he must lie on the floor during the entire piece. The other man is told that during the piece he must tie the first man to the wall.

Although undated, the piece was included in Forti's May 1961 program at Young's Chambers Street series.[45] Dance historian Sally Banes reports that Forti's early rule pieces emerged from Robert Dunn's 1960–61 composition class, where she worked with Cage's scores.[46] Both Forti and Brecht knew Young's early text scores, and may have known of one another's work, through Young or the dancer Jimmy Waring.[47] More important than trying to disentangle instances of historical influence, however, is the larger sense that at the same moment, a number of different figures were drawing similar clues from certain environments, and then taking them to different ends:

THREE TELEPHONE EVENTS

- When the telephone rings, it is allowed to continue ringing, until it stops.
- When the telephone rings, the receiver is lifted, then replaced.
- When the telephone rings, it is answered.

Spring 1961

While Brecht's lengthy "performance note," "Each event comprises all occurrences within its duration," inscribes his practice within an explicitly Cagean framework, Forti's visceral, potentially violent piece is structured by a level of conflict systematically excluded from Cage's project. This aggressive, bodily dimension also surfaces in Young's use of sustained tones played at

DANCE REPORT:
An onion which had begun to sprout was set on its side on the mouth of a bottle. As the days passed it transfered more and more of its matter from the bulb to the green part until it had so shifted its weight that it fell off.

DANCE REPORT:
Straining, four young boys pushed a ball of snow up a snow covered hill. The boys then let the ball roll down. As the ball rolled it increased its size and the boys ran after it. While rolling, the sphere split into two half spheres, the flat surfaces facing upward. The boys climbed into these halves and made them rock about. And then they went away.

DANCE CONSTRUCTION:
A group of seven or eight people stand together in a very close huddle. One member of the group climbs up the mass of people and then down again becoming once more a part of the mass. Immediately another is climbing. The movement must be constant but not hurried. Sometimes it happens that there are two climbing at once. That's all right. The dance construction should be continued "long enough", perhaps ten minutes.

DANCE CONSTRUCTION:
Three people move on a 8 by 8 foot square platform inclined at 45°, using for support five or six ropes which hang from the top of the incline. Each person keeps moving from side to side and from top to bottom of the plane picking up and dropping different ropes as needed. No one is to get off the board during an alloted time of about 10 or 15 minutes. Any mover may rest whenever tired using the ropes in any way to facilitate resting. It is suggested that the movers wear tennis shoes.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR A DANCE:
One man is told that he must lie on the floor during the entire piece.
The other man is told that during the piece he must tie the first man to the wall.

Figure 2.6 Forti, *Dance Constructions* and *Instructions for a Dance* (1961). Reproduced with permission from *An Anthology* (1963). © 1963, 1970 La Monte Young and Jackson Mac Low.

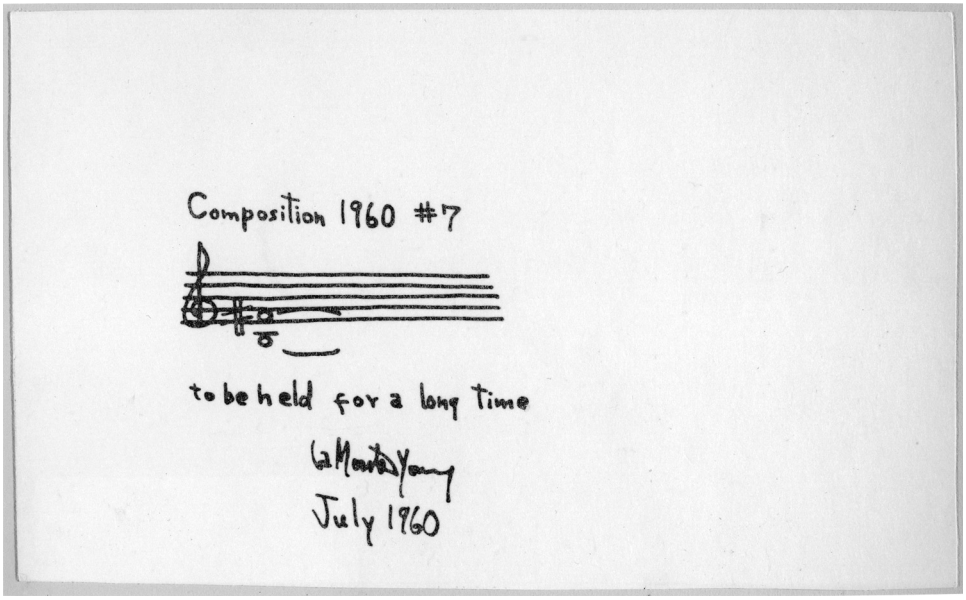
intense volumes, which would allow listeners, in Young's words, "to get inside of a sound"—to develop a visceral, bodily relationship to sound through immersion over extended periods of time.[48] In Flynt's analysis, the goal of this immersion in "constant sound" was "the production of an altered state through narrowed attention and perceptual fatigue or saturation," drawing the listener into the work through the sheer force of structured sensation.[49] In a role reminiscent of Cage's work as a percussionist for dance groups, Young worked with the composer Terry Riley as musical codirectors for Halprin in 1959–1960. At this time, Young began to compose influential pieces such as his *Poem for Chairs, Tables, and Benches, Etc., or Other Sound Sources* (January 1960), which featured irregular, harsh, screeching noises created by dragging heavy pieces of furniture across the floor. In his "Lecture 1960," Young recounted that "when the sounds are very long, as many of those we made at Ann Halprin's were, it can be easier to get inside of them. . . . I began to see how each sound was its own world and that this world was similar to our world only in that we experienced it through our own bodies, that is, in our own terms."[50] By 1962, Young turned to the systematic exploration of "drone music," minimally varied tones played at sometimes extreme volumes for extended durations—a project he has pursued since the 1960s.[51]

Young began working with Halprin at Cage's suggestion, after returning from the 1959 Darmstadt summer session, where he participated in Stockhausen's advanced composition seminar, and had his first sustained encounter with Cage's aleatory and indeterminate work through the presence of the pianist Tudor, who would subsequently perform several of Young's compositions.[52] By May 1960, Young began to compose the short word pieces subsequently published in *An Anthology*. Although these texts were circulated informally, Flynt suggests that they "crystallized a new genre" of quickly proliferating language works.[53] In their near inaudibility, dispersion, and apparent whimsy, Young's earliest text pieces most reflect Cage's impact: *Composition 1960 #2* begins "Build a fire in front of the audience"; and *Composition 1960 #5* proposes "Turn a butterfly (or any number of butterflies) loose in the performance area." In a 1966 interview, however, Young is at pains to differentiate his project from Cage's practice:

> Although there is no question that my exposure to John Cage's work had an immediate impact on aspects of my Fall, 1959, and 1960 work, such as the use of random digits as a method for determining the inception and termination of the sounds in *Vision* [1959] and *Poem for Chairs, Tables, and Benches, Etc., or Other Sound Sources* [1960] and my presentation of what traditionally would have been considered a non- or semi-musical event in a classical concert setting, I felt that I was taking these ideas a step further. Since most of his pieces up to that time, like the early futurist and Dadaist concerts and events . . . were generally realized as a complex of programmed sounds and activities over a prolonged period of time with events coming and going, I was perhaps the first to concentrate on and delimit the work to be a single event or object in these less traditionally musical areas.[54]

Young's insistence on the *singularity of the event,* the idea that it is "one thing," is crucial. It isolates certain structural qualities that reemerge in durational film and video, and suggests how Ono's more varied and provocative scores often diverge from this protominimal event project. Like Deleuze's analysis of the event as including both "something going on" and "periods when nothing happens," Young's programmatic monotony reduces a structure to a single basic element, which is extended or repeated, potentially endlessly. In Flynt's view, minimalism works precisely through such "saturation of uniformity": Young "stripped the form to a core element and saturated the field with that element."[55]

If for Brecht the event takes paradigmatic form in single word scores like *Exit,* for Young the model is the line. Encapsulating a long-term involvement with sustained tones, Young's *Composition 1960 #7* instructs the performer to hold an open fifth "for a long time." Young soon supplemented it with another piece, *Composition 1960 #9,* circulated to friends (and published in *An Anthology*) as a straight horizontal line on a three-by-five card. The two scores elegantly diagram analogous structures: the temporal extension of the sustained tone, and the graphic inscription of the drawn line. *Composition*



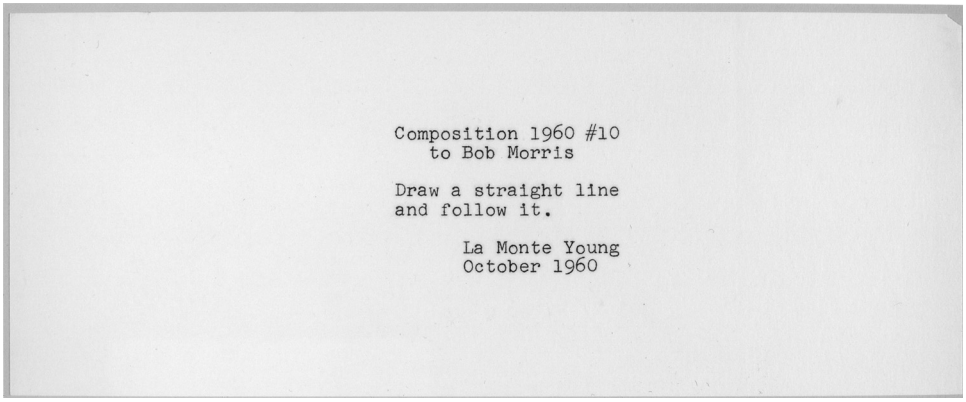


Figure 2.7 Young, *Composition 1960 #7 July 1960* (1960). © 1963, 2006 La Monte Young. Copyright and licensing information appear on the copyright page.

Figure 2.8 Young, *Composition 1960 #10 October 1960* (1960). © 1963, 2006 La Monte Young. Copyright and licensing information appear on the copyright page.

1960 #10 transfers this structure into its linguistic analogue: "Draw a straight line and follow it." As Young described the project in 1966,

> I have been interested in the study of a singular event, in terms of both pitch and other kinds of sensory situations. I felt that a line was one of the more sparse, singular expressions of oneness, although it is certainly not the final expression. Somebody might choose a point. However, the line was interesting because it was continuous—it existed in time.[56]

The singularity of the event does not preclude its repeatability but in fact permits it. Drawing out the conceptual ramifications of "the idea of this sort of singular event," in 1961 Young decided to repeat *Composition 1960 #10* twenty-nine times, with individual works evenly distributed to comprise a full year's work. The resulting *Compositions 1961 #s 1–29* premiered in March 1961 at a Harvard concert organized by Flynt, in which Young along with his friend and collaborator Robert Morris arduously traced a line twenty-nine times using a plumb line.[57] The piece was restaged in May at the Chambers Street series, and eventually published by Maciunas as the book *LY 1961* in 1963. As Young recalls, "It can be performed in many ways. At that time, I employed a style in which we used plumb lines. I sighted with them, and then drew along the floor with chalk. . . . I drew over the same line each time, and each time it invariably came out differently. The technique I was using at the time was not good enough."[58] Like most task-structured works, the duration was not fixed prior to performance but simply entailed the time it took to complete the job; "a whole performance must have taken a few hours," with the audience coming and going.[59]

Like Young's ongoing efforts to get inside a sound, the repetition of a simple, durational action over an extended period of time creates a specific mode of attention. Laboriously performing the line piece as a repeated, real-time task structure, Young would not only concretely link certain spatial models—transferring the line from the graphic space of the card to the three-dimensional architectural container—but bring into focus an altered perceptual/spectatorial position in the process. When critics of minimalism

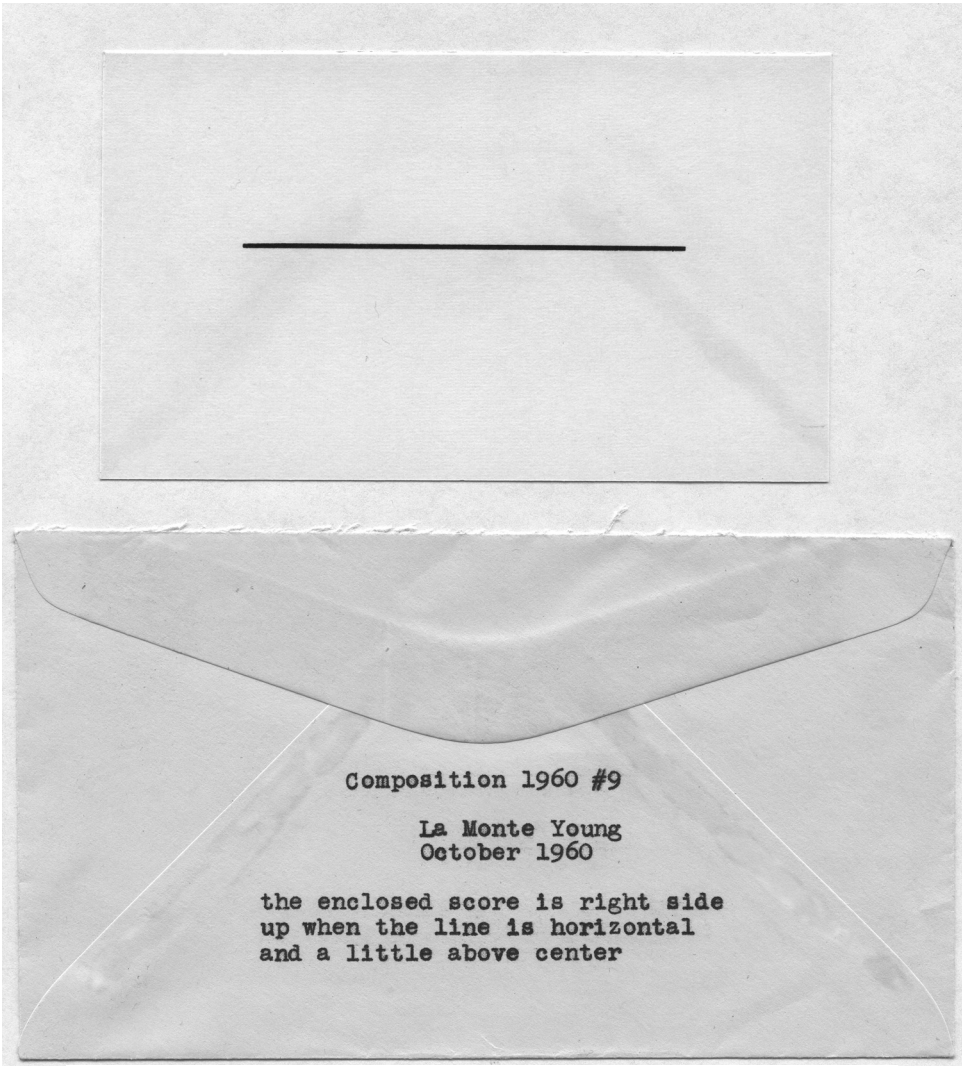


Figure 2.9 Young, *Composition 1960 #9 October 1960* (1960). © 1963, 2006 La Monte Young. Copyright and licensing information appear on the copyright page.

use the awkward metaphor of theatricality to describe a certain focused perceptual and bodily relation to objects in real time and space, it is Young's 1961 work (first performed with Morris) that is perhaps the template.

"Readymade Aesthetics" and the Return of the Reader

> Now, Duchamp thought mainly about readymade objects. John Cage extended it to readymade sounds. George Brecht extended it furthermore . . . into readymade actions, everyday actions, so for instance a piece of George Brecht where he turned a light on and off, okay? That's the piece. Turn the light on and then off. Now you do that every day, right?
>
> —*George Maciunas, 1978 interview with Larry Miller*

If the event can be repeated, it can be repeated by anyone, not just its "author." In both Young's and Brecht's scores, a condition of "maximal availability" is most effectively created through the most minimal means. The simplest structure could produce the most varied results, while still retaining a certain conceptual unity and structural integrity. An extraordinarily compressed verbal inscription, like "Exit" or "Draw a straight line," provides a structure that other artists could use to produce diverse interpretations or realizations, thereby creating new pieces, and effectively blurring the boundary between composer and interpreter far more decisively than, for example, musical scores that simply allow performers to select among or rearrange existing sections. In perhaps the best-known instance of this reauthoring, Nam June Paik made an unorthodox realization of Young's *Composition 1960 #10* at one of the early Fluxus Festivals by dipping his head in a bowl of ink and tomato juice, and using it to draw a straight line on an unrolled sheet of paper in his 1962 performance *Zen for Head*.

Brecht's realizations of his own and others' scores were characteristically spare, disciplined, and antimonumental, often permitting such events to remain unseen or barely perceived. He performed Young's *Composition 1960 #2* ("Build a fire in front of the audience . . .) by simply lighting a book of



Figure 2.10 Brecht performing Young's *Composition 1960 #2* at the Fluxhall/Fluxshop, New York City (1964). Photos by Peter Moore. © Estate of Peter Moore/VAGA, New York City.

matches placed on an upturned glass on a stool at an evening at Maciunas's Canal Street Fluxshop in 1964. In a 1964 radio discussion with Kaprow, Brecht claimed that "the occurrence that would be of most interest to me would be the little occurrences on the street."[60] While others might seek to re-create chaotic urban experiences in elaborately staged interactive environments or happenings, Brecht's event structure would isolate simple, unified everyday occurrences as something analogous to *perceptual ready-mades.* As Michael Nyman argues, "Brecht isolated the single, observed occurrence and projects it . . . into a performance activity, which he calls an 'event.'"[61]

What does it mean to see such events as perceptual readymades? A host of ambiguities emerge. While a score like *Drip Music* was performed by Brecht and others as a public act before an audience, it is also an event that occurs everywhere, all the time. Certain consequences of the event as a linguistically framed readymade become apparent in Fluxus activities, as these were staged and interpreted by Maciunas. Although Brecht himself did not participate in any of the 1962–1963 European events, Maciunas had sought him out quite early on as a model for Fluxus production, viewing Brecht's pieces as inclusive, democratic, antihierarchical, and easily disseminated. Quite tellingly, Maciunas would later compare Brecht's increasingly compressed language-based events to the structure of the joke, when he contrasts the "monomorphism" of Fluxus performance to the more "baroque" Happenings in a 1978 interview conducted shortly before his death:

> Now monomorphism . . . that's where it differs from Happenings. See, Happenings are polymorphic, which means many things . . . happening at the same time. That's fine, that's like baroque theater. You know, there would be everything going on: horses jumping and fireworks and waterplay and somebody reciting poems and Louis XIV eating a dinner at the same time. So, that's polymorphism. Means many, many forms. Monomorphism, that means one form. Now, reason for that is, you see, lot of Fluxus is gag-like. That's part of the humor, it's like a gag. . . . Now, you can't tell a joke in multi-forms. In other words, you can't have six

> jokers telling you six jokes simultaneously. It wouldn't work. Has to be *one joke at a time.*[61]

While Maciunas's retrospective comments do not differentiate the frequently language-based American Fluxus works from the more improvisatory, expressionistic European performances, the structuring role of text was a distinction he was well aware of at the time—writing to Brecht, in fall 1962, that European performers like Wolf Vostell and Daniel Spoerri "do not write down their happenings but improvise them on the spot."[63] Like his often-contradictory manifestos and statements, Maciunas's aesthetic was far from consistent, embracing both the spectacular, even vaudevillian aspects of performance as "visual comedy," and the near imperceptibility of works such as Brecht's, where the gag is more internal. Yet his reference to the structure of joke, and the readymade, suggests an intrinsic tension between Brecht's stated understanding of his events as "an extension of music" opening on to a kind of total, multisensorial perceptual experience, and the experience of the scores as compressed linguistic structures that produce a more cognitive, even conceptual response.

In the 1964 letter to Tomas Schmidt that includes Maciunas's oft-cited comparisons of Fluxus objectives to those of the Soviet LEF group as "*social* (not aesthetic)," Maciunas argues that

> the best Fluxus "composition" is a most non-personal, "ready-made" one like Brecht's "Exit"—it does not require any of us to perform it since it happens daily without any "special" performance of it. Thus our festivals will eliminate themselves (and our need to participate) when they become total readymades (like Brecht's exit).[64]

And in correspondence with Brecht, Maciunas approvingly recalls events like *Piano Piece* (1962, "a vase of flowers on(to) a piano") as occurring virtually unnoticed—unperceived as a separate work. Maciunas describes this falling back into the continuum of everyday existence in terms of a readymade or "nonart" event:

> By non-art I mean anything not created by an artist with intent to provide "art" experience. So your events are non-art since you did not create the events—they exist all the time. You call attention to them. I did not mind at all that some of your events were "lost" in our festivals. The more lost or unnoticeable the more truly non artificial they were. Very few ever thought the vase of flowers over piano was meant to be a piece & they all wanted a "piece" to follow.[65]

Maciunas proceeds to distinguish perceptual pieces like Brecht's from art, which "may use readymade sign, exit, etc," but that transforms them, since the "situation is *not* readymade (or event is not readymade)."[66] The Fluxus politicization of the readymade, as a strategy leading to an eventual elimination of the author function, was at least partially shared by Brecht, who later insists that "all I do is bring things into evidence. But they're already there."[67] Thus, if Young's events intensify a single sensation to the point of total environmental control, Brecht's scores tend toward the unseen, toward things that can pass unnoticed or disappear back into the quotidian.[68]

This procedure of "bringing things into evidence" by means of language extends the performative and linguistic potential of the readymade—as an act of framing that need not be limited to the types of physical objects that characterized Duchamp's production. The ambivalently performative potential of the readymade, read as a nominating linguistic gesture, an act of naming or categorizing, has been extensively discussed in the Duchamp literature, most notably by Thierry de Duve.[69] Yet this nominalist model alone doesn't account for the intrinsic doubleness of the readymade structure, its dual existence as both manufactured object and linguistic act, as Benjamin Buchloh has contended.[70] In the historical recovery of Duchampian legacies in the late 1950s, of which Brecht was intimately aware, the readymade provided a model to move from an aesthetics of dispersion and chance juxtaposition toward a simple linguistic structure focusing attention on existing things. Brecht's transfer of this strategy from the manufactured object to the temporal perception occurs, as Maciunas suggests, via Cage; as Brecht would cryptically comment in a 1967 interview, "Duchamp alone is one thing, but

Duchamp plus Cage is something else."[71] More critically, however, the transfer of the ready-made structure to perceptual phenomena propels the gradual interiorization of performance in the event scores.

Brecht's distance from conceptual art can be seen in his retrospective description of *Six Exhibits* (1961, " • ceiling / • first wall / • second wall / • third wall / • fourth wall / • floor") as a kind of music: "If we perform it right now, for example, we can look at the ceiling, the walls, and the floor and at the same time we'll hear sounds: our voices, the birds outside, and so forth. All of that belongs to the same whole, and that's the event."[72] In this account, we are invited to actively perform the piece as if listening to Cage's *4'33"*—inadvertently demonstrating the conservatism of this perceptual model, grounded in the express intentions of a centered subjectivity. Yet Brecht's events implicitly use language as a kind of *naming* that singles out and isolates perceptual phenomena in ways that exceed subjective intention. By focusing on things that are happening all the time whether noticed or not—signs posted, faucets dripping, phones ringing, and substances existing in states whose change is too slow to perceive—Brecht aligns the temporality of language with that of the event: continual, recurring, and agentless. In scores such as *Exit* and *Two Signs* (" • Silence / • No Vacancy"), the event is *internal to the score* and *the reading of the score,* so that actual performance, although possible, is no longer necessary to "enact" or complete" the piece. As Brecht remarks, "There isn't any way in which *Exit* should be performed. There's only an 'exit' sign hanging over the door."[73]

This shift is accomplished through language. While an earlier score like *Motor Vehicle Sundown (Event)* used imperative verbs to direct the actions of a subject external to language—"11. Sound bells," "12. Accelerate motor"—its listlike, numbered, vertically arranged form structurally equates these commands with descriptions—"1. Head lights . . . on, off," "Parking lights on . . . off." Although Young's and Ono's scores primarily use imperative verb forms, Brecht, after his early works, eliminates them; instead, a mere gerund ("dripping"), noun ("water"), or preposition ("on," "off") is enough to indicate action or process. In others, such as *Exit* or *Silence,* a single word occurs endlessly in a continuous oscillation of verbal form. By 1961, most of the scores feature condensed, almost telegraphic uses of language: brief phrases

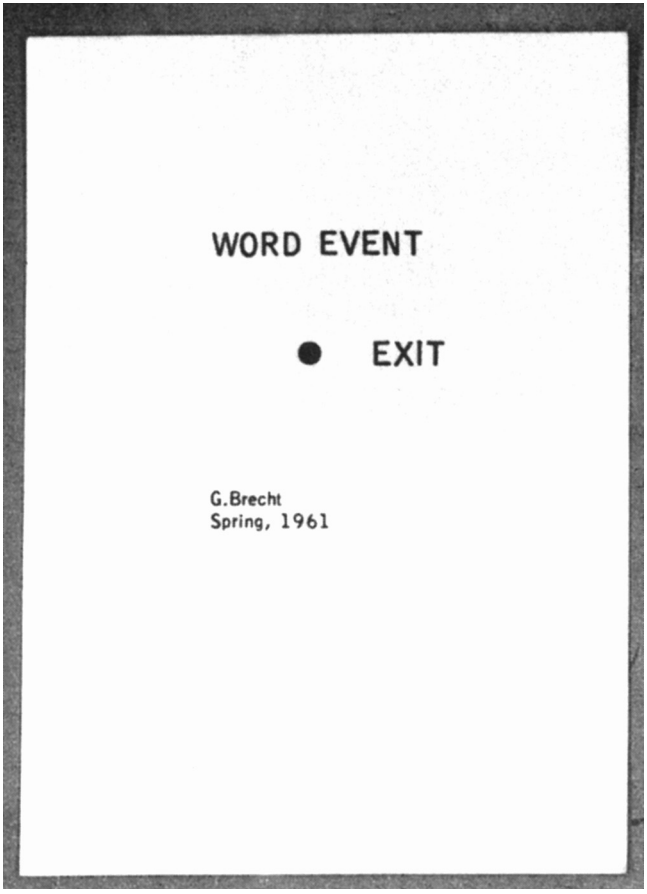


Figure 2.11 Brecht, *Word Event* (1961). From *WaterYam* (1963). Courtesy of the artist.

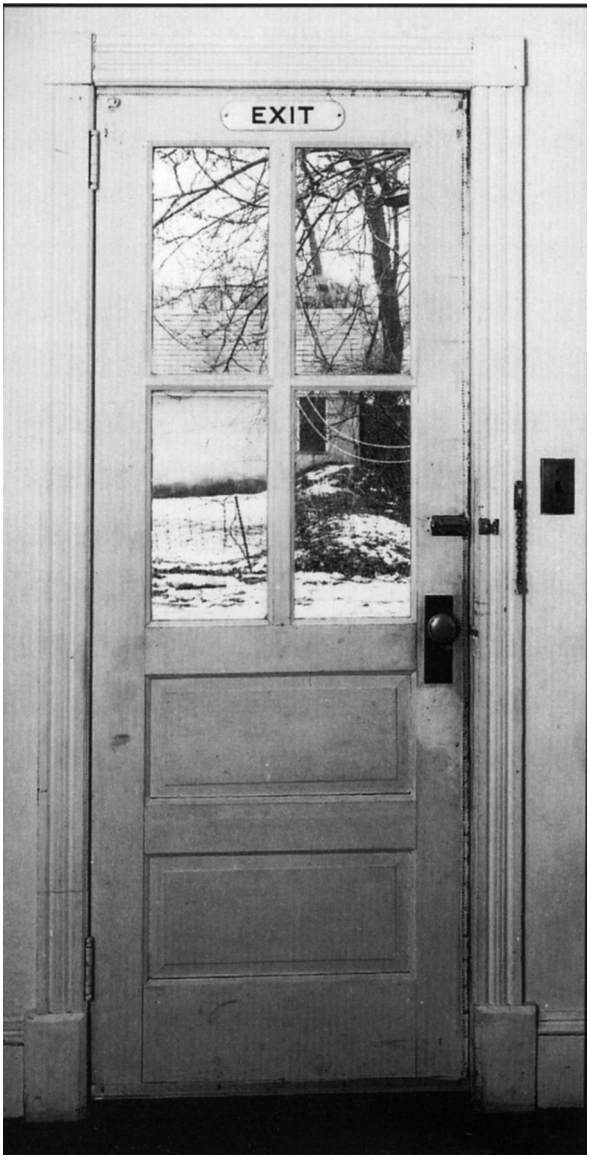
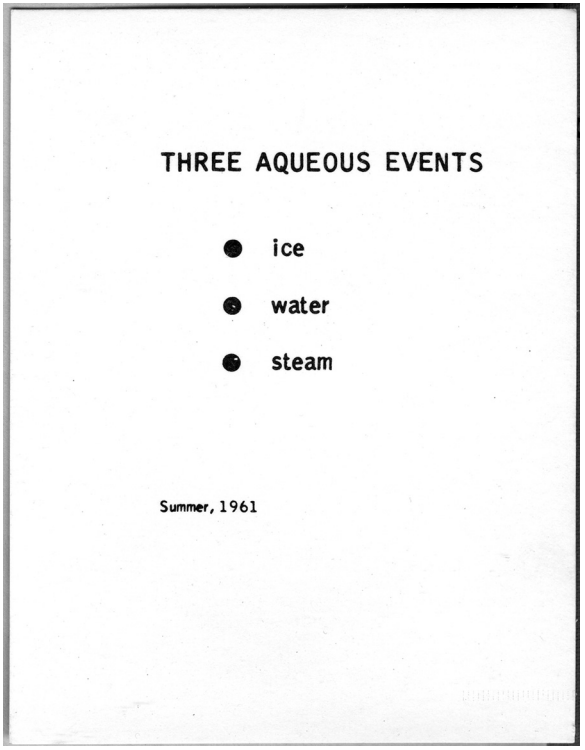


Figure 2.12 Brecht, Realization of *Word Event* (1962). Courtesy of the artist.

and single words, presented vertically, with minimal punctuation. Where punctuation does occur, it functions almost algebraically—as if to reduce language to a set of spatial relations—or more operationally, as if to qualify an action. Everything extraneous is omitted.[74]

As realized in the Maciunas-designed edition *Water Yam,* Brecht's precise, graphic formats increasingly cross the musical model of the score with the visual space of printed ephemera. In these cards, the implicit reference is not so much to the linear, sequential structure of the line or sentence but to the gridded two-dimensionality of the ad, poster, or flyer, the printed instruction card, sales ticket, or receipt, which inserts condensed snippets of text into a visually defined field. This is not the textual "spacing" of the book or the bodily pause of poetic "breath" but the space of modern graphic design in its complete interpenetration of visual and textual materials—a space that programmatically invades poetry since Mallarmé.[75] And reminiscent of the elaborate Mallarméan protocols for reading, Brecht's scores would go out into the world in a series of boxes whose idiosyncratic format (and silly name) would claim a ludic domain of esoteric "play" while refusing any reinsertion into instrumental forms of culture.[76]

Despite the deep esotericism that marks so many subsequent Fluxus projects, we can nonetheless draw a different series of lessons about the focused, relentless, and potentially unlimited capacities of a single word or extended single sound. In their use of language as a device to cut into the evanescent everyday, Brecht's "insignificant and silly gestures" open an infinite universe of possibilities, just as Young's precise operations move into the zones of the minimal and the series, of the same but inevitably different because extended virtually interminably—the line or the sound would go on in some sense "forever." In both, the event is pared down to a minimum: a simple, basic structure that can be endlessly reenacted and reinscribed in new contexts, different in each instance and yet retaining a certain coherence. Inevitably calling to mind Lawrence Weiner's highly condensed and yet generalizable "statements," Brecht's and Young's most interesting scores reduce language to a kind of object, but also establish it as a kind of repeatable, replaceable structure, open to unlimited, unforeseeable realizations.



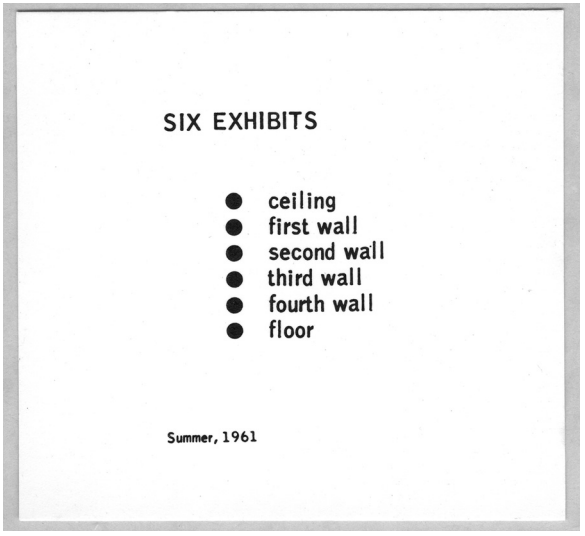


Figure 2.13 Brecht, *Three Aqueous Events* (1961) and *Six Exhibits* (1961). Courtesy of the artist.

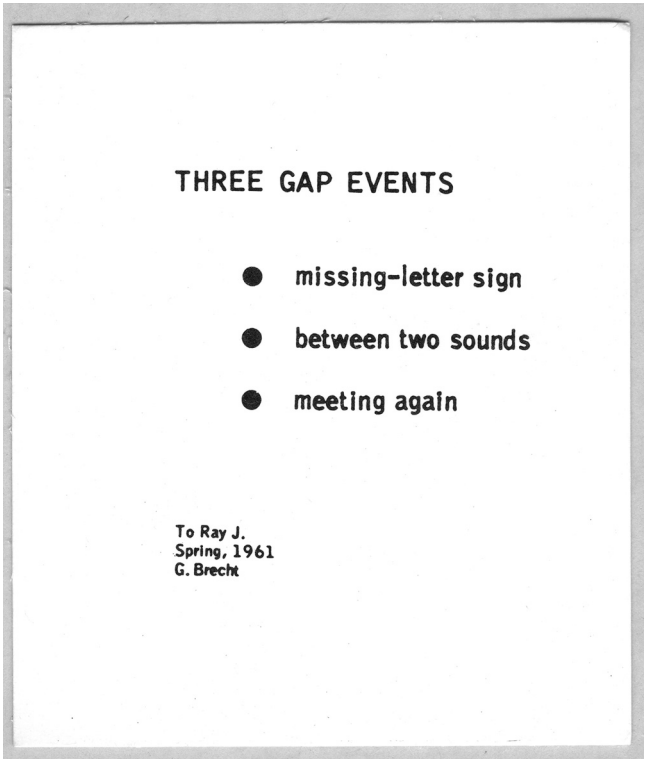


Figure 2.14 Brecht, *Three Gap Events* (1961). Courtesy of the artist.

My reference to Weiner here is not innocent. While the public memory of Fluxus continues to be of the almost vaudevillian European concerts and peculiarly fetishistic editions, the event scores and related projects clearly offered a different model—one that was widely, if erratically, disseminated.[77] If I am, in effect, reading Brecht through Weiner, it is because I believe that Weiner's explicit activation of the receiver is modeled on the implicitly performative positioning of the viewer/reader/listener in these post-Cagean projects, just as his repeated statements that "there's no way to build a piece incorrectly" inevitably echo a wider ethic of indeterminacy.[78]

When it engages these questions at all (that is, in its most progressive versions), modernist art history has emphatically located this "return of the reader" in the linguistically oriented forms of late 1960s' conceptual art by Weiner, Joseph Kosuth, Dan Graham, and so on. But for this model to emerge as a radical rupture within neo-avant-garde art, the innovations of the postwar interdisciplinary activities around Cage must be momentarily acknowledged and then quickly repressed—just as Lucy R. Lippard, in her 1973 *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object,* starts her chronology with Brecht's pamphlet *Chance Imagery* (1957/1966), citing some of his early events as among those projects that "anticipate a stricter 'conceptual art' since around 1960."[79] While critics continue to argue that the conceptual use of language as an artistic medium propels something like a "withdrawal of visuality" or "dematerialization" of art, and a current generation of artists often seems intent on trawling the 1960s for remnants of ephemeral practices that can be turned into commercially successful objects, the event scores of Brecht and Young present language as a model for a different kind of materiality, one structured from the outset by repetition, temporality, and delay—conditions that Jacques Derrida has termed the iterability of the mark. This practice had enormous implications for visual art in the late twentieth century; as Vito Acconci quipped, "Language: it seemed like the perfect multiple."[80]

3

The Poetics of Chance and Collage

In a 1974 conversation in the journal *Boundary 2,* the poet, critic, and anthologist Jerome Rothenberg proposed that a new model for American poetry had emerged after World War II: "Since the 1950s . . . we have been working increasingly with a performance model of the poem, for which the written versions serve as the notation of the score."[1] Rothenberg's own interest lies in the poem as a vehicle for collective participatory ritual. Yet the notion of poetry as a notation—as language that is inseparably instruction, record, and activated inscription—introduces possibilities that are by no means bound to oral realization. Instead, some of the most innovative poetic experiments turned to experimental music as a model, seeking to redefine poetry as an expanded field of language analogous to composer John Cage's redefinition of music as an expanded field of sound.

This expanded field of sound, it is important to remember, implied not only new materials and new structuring properties but a shift from the intentions of the composer toward the perceptual capacities of the listener. While twentieth-century composers from Charles Ives to George Antheil had incorporated everything from police sirens and birdcalls to folk songs in an expanded modernist aesthetic, Cage went further in not simply incorporating nonmusical sounds but using them to dismantle the syntactic continuity and structural underpinnings of Western compositional practice. His compositions of the 1930s and 1940s assembled clusters of unpitched percussive sounds and fragmented found materials, and increasingly suspended these in long stretches of silence. And by the early 1950s, Cage turned to chance-based procedures to open music up to a wider world of unforeseen and unintended sounds as well as a larger ethics of listening—"accepting that

continuity that happens," he proposed in "Lecture on Something," rather than imposing a particular continuity that excludes all others.[2]

In so doing, Cage's work grappled with the deeper implications of collage strategies—implications that go far beyond the jarring effects of juxtaposed fragments of vernacular materials. In their structural openness to found and preexisting materials, collage practices implicitly undermine the position of the author, and erode distinctions between writing and reading, between production and reception. As we will see, this intuition will haunt even the most far-reaching poetic experiments with found materials.

As poetry came into contact with experimental music and other art forms in the postwar era, two distinct types of practice emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s. One model, discussed in chapter 2, adopted from musical notation the format of the short, enigmatic instructional text. The condensed event scores or word pieces of artists like George Brecht, Simone Forti, Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Yoko Ono, Mieko Shiomi, and La Monte Young propose some kind of action, process, or experience for the reader/performer. Their language is usually colloquial, even instrumental, consisting of deeply prosaic everyday statements comprised of short, simple vernacular words, often presented without syntactic disruption, temporal formalization, or other overtly poetic devices or effects.[3]

The second strategy, most closely identified with the work of Jackson Mac Low, almost directly transfers into poetry a set of Cagean musical strategies: chance composition and indeterminate performance, juxtapositions and superimpositions of preexisting material, the isolation of individual units in distended fields of time and space, and the generation of textual forms "activated" in performance. Echoing strategies used by Cage in talks like "Composition as Process," such work appears allied with the composer's own understanding of poetry as "not prose . . . simply because poetry is one way or another formalized. It is not poetry by virtue of its content or ambiguity, but by reason of allowing musical elements (time, sound) to be introduced into the world of words."[4] But while Cage's admittedly idiosyncratic lectures retained vital communicative functions despite his use of "rhythmic structures," Mac Low in particular used the musical score to relocate poetry as something akin to performed sound.[5]

To understand these efforts to transpose Cagean musical strategies into language, we need to place Mac Low's chance-composed poems of the 1950s in relation to the better-known and more loosely aleatory work of John Ashbery. Discussing these two poets side by side inevitably evokes a set of institutional polarities. Ashbery, winner of every major literary prize and widely regarded as "the most important living American poet," has successfully negotiated the transitions from Yale younger poet to avant-garde marginality to literary canonicity, as his fifty-year poetic output has spawned an ever-expanding industry of publication, criticism, and scholarship. Mac Low, several years his senior, was the almost-archetypal underground poet whose early works received delayed publication in the most marginal of venues, and who, despite his fifty-year involvement in New York's downtown art world, attained relative visibility only through the belated (and in some respects problematic) embrace of his work by the loose grouping of experimental writers referred to as "language poets."[6] In the 1950s, however, these institutional disparities were not yet evident, as both writers undertook a series of experiments with found materials and aleatory compositional strategies, significantly informed by contemporary art and music.

In a series of poems from the late 1950s published in his second book, *The Tennis Court Oath,* Ashbery famously employed improvisatory techniques to cull fragments of prior texts into fractured compositions understood in analogy to abstract expressionist painting as "a sort of record of its own coming-into-existence."[7] A few years earlier, Mac Low had begun devising systematic methods for selecting and organizing fragments from published "source texts" in order to generate shattered poems designed for collaborative public performance and bodily enactment. The dominant critical receptions of both projects—the assimilation of Mac Low into a purely oral "performance poetry," and the emphatic inscription of Ashbery's poems within a Western lyric tradition of agonistic self-discovery and displaced autobiography—privilege a quasi-atavistic "orality" or a highly contrived poetic "voice," neither of which can account for their procedural reanimation of existing texts.

Instead, taken together, Ashbery and Mac Low's 1950s' experiments represent a crucial moment in the transformation of collage aesthetics into

process-based models in postwar American literature. Both Mac Low's 1954–1955 "5 biblical poems" and Ashbery's 1958 long poem "Europe" borrow from existing texts to fragment sentences, fracture syntax, and isolate individual words in expanses of blank space, eroding meaning and poetic form to an extent rarely seen in American poetry. Despite their frequent dismissal as "inconsequential nonsense" and "meaningless banality," these works are by no means without signification. Through operations of selection, recombination, and reenactment, questions of subjectivity and historicity surface persistently in both poets' works. Their poems require modes of analysis targeted at the apparently desubjectifying strategies employed—the improvisatory and procedural generation of one text from another—that position the author as something other than the conventional source of the work or bypass writing altogether.

One could, of course, argue that the programmatic samplings of Ashbery and Mac Low merely foreground operations of citationality and reuse inherent in all textuality. By its constitution as a collection of repeatable signs, language is already a found object. In Bakhtinian terms, the word always "belongs to another."[8] Yet unlike the submerged citationality that inhabits and defines all language, Ashbery's and Mac Low's collage-based poems refuse to smooth the "joins" or reproduce the continuous utterances that would reconstitute the author as the apparent subject and origin of a continuous, coherent discourse. Instead, by retaining elements of punctuation, spacing, and incomplete phrases from their sources, Ashbery and Mac Low present their borrowed words as disembedded from other texts, whose printed marks they retain and recirculate. The broken syntax, isolated words, and aggressive spacings of their collage-based poems make no effort to erase the shattering effects of this dislodging.

This historical return to practices of collage and appropriation emerged as a radical challenge to the then-dominant poetic models in the United States—models, as Marjorie Perloff has claimed, of a highly conventionalized British and American lyric: the purified, unified voice of a distinct authorial subject, one that if no longer following distinctive structures of sound patterning, meter, and versification, nonetheless achieved, through codified forms of "free verse," a structural coherence and mastery of tone and variation consistent with the lyric subject.[9] Of course, these lyric conventions had

already been questioned and even dismantled by, among others, the radically antisyntactic and collage-based works of Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, and Kurt Schwitters. Yet this alternative tradition remained repressed in a mainstream Anglo-American verse culture deeply invested in meaning, intention, and personal expression—and averse to breaking down language, syntax, and the very processes of meaning production. As postwar American poets gradually reengaged with cubism, Dada, and the historical legacies of early twentieth-century avant-gardes, for many these strategies were crucially reanimated by the experimental music.

Resonate Fragments

In a literary tempest that has long since become legend, Ashbery's inclusion of "Europe" and similar poems in his 1962 volume *The Tennis Court Oath* set off a critical firestorm in the pages of mainstream venues including the *New York Times,* the *Christian Science Monitor,* and *Saturday Review.*[10] Viewed in retrospect, the public controversy exhibits a ludicrous degree of hyperbole. In the *Hudson Review,* John Simon famously protested, "Mr. Ashbery has perfected his verse to the point where it almost never deviates into—nothing so square as sense!—sensibility, sensuality, or sentences."[11] Harold Bloom famously termed "the long spiel called 'Europe,'" "a fearful disaster," declaring that such linguistic fragments could not qualify as poetry:

> Poems may be like pictures, or like music, or like what you will, but if they *are* paintings or musical works, they will not be poems. The Ashbery of *The Tennis Court Oath* may have been moved by De Kooning and Kline, Webern and Cage, but he was not moved to the writing of poems. Nor can I accept the notion that this was a necessary phase in the poet's development, for who can hope to find any necessity in this calculated incoherence?"[12]

In the decades since its publication, *The Tennis Court Oath* has acquired a legendary status, serving as the object of all-too-neatly polarized critical and aesthetic claims: dismissed by more traditional academic critics like Bloom and Helen Vendler, who prefer the later, more meditative Ashbery whose

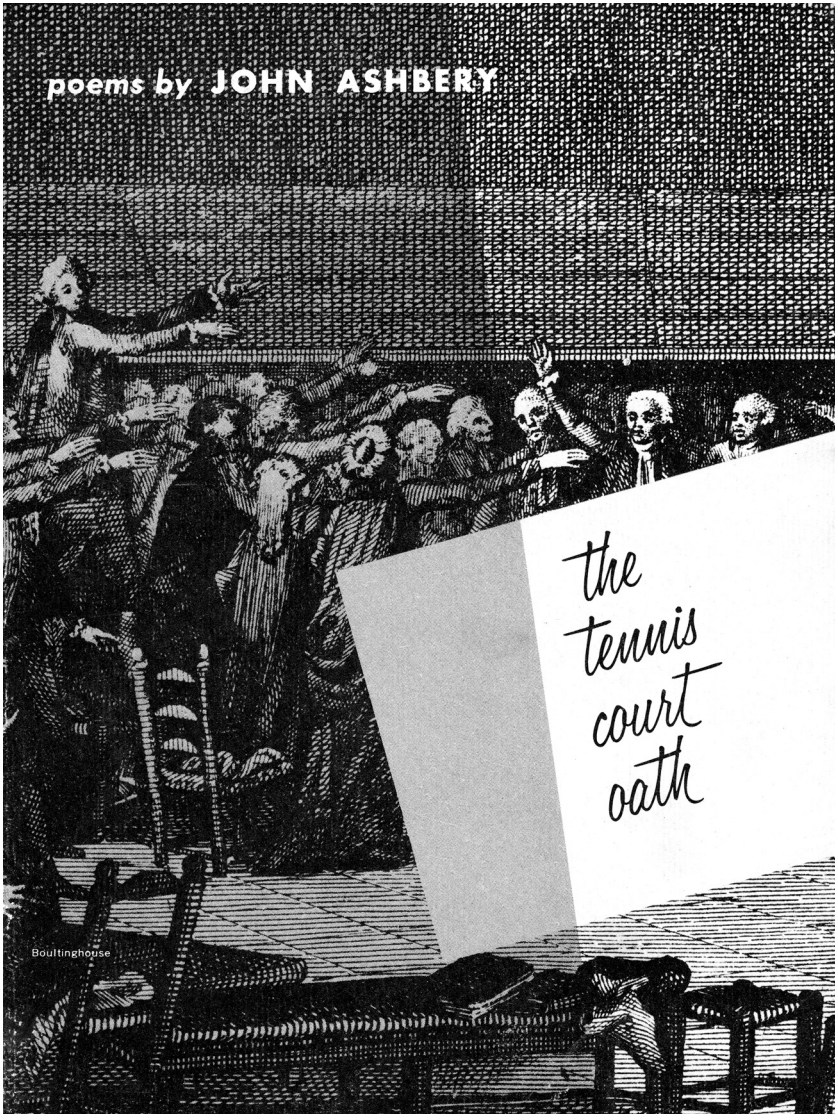
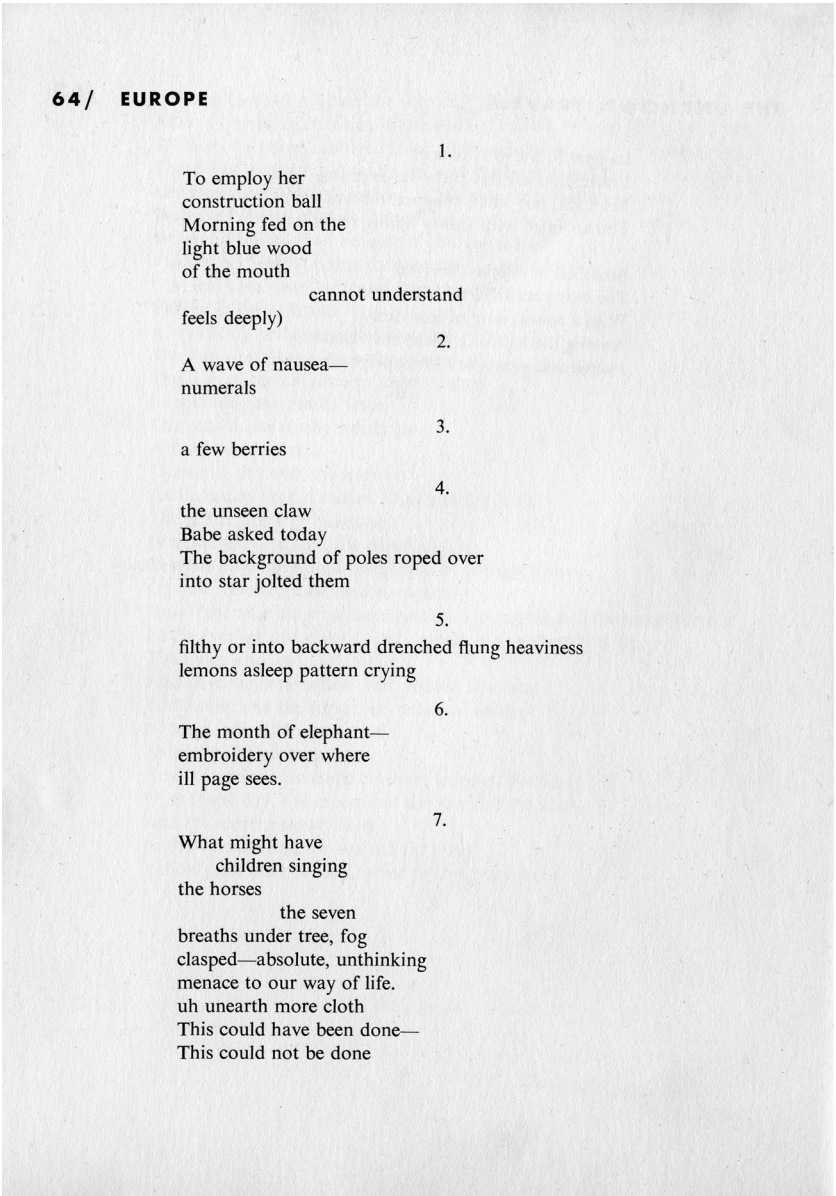


Figure 3.1 Ashbery, *The Tennis Court Oath* (1962). Front cover. © 1962 John Ashbery. Reprinted by permission of Wesleyan University Press.



64/ EUROPE

1.

To employ her
construction ball
Morning fed on the
light blue wood
of the mouth
cannot understand
feels deeply)

2.

A wave of nausea—
numerals

3.

a few berries

4.

the unseen claw
Babe asked today
The background of poles roped over
into star jolted them

5.

filthy or into backward drenched flung heaviness
lemons asleep pattern crying

6.

The month of elephant—
embroidery over where
ill page sees.

7.

What might have
children singing
the horses
the seven
breaths under tree, fog
clasped—absolute, unthinking
menace to our way of life.
uh unearth more cloth
This could have been done—
This could not be done

Figure 3.2 Ashbery, first page of "Europe," from *The Tennis Court Oath*. © 1962 John Ashbery. Reprinted by permission of Wesleyan University Press.

work continues in the line of lyrical American modernists like Wallace Stevens, the book's more radical experiments have been enthusiastically embraced by language poets and others in search of a more aggressively dissonant strain of American (post)modernism. It has become a critical doxa that it is not a question of reading Ashbery but of which Ashbery one reads, "early" or "late."

Given these stakes, how does one read a poem such as "Europe"? The twenty-two-page text is aggressively cut into 111 numbered sections, comprised of mostly short, elliptical lines, as in these from the opening:

1.

To employ her
construction ball
Morning fed on the
light blue wood
of the mouth
cannot understand
feels deeply)

2.

A wave of nausea—
numerals

3.

a few berries

4.

the unseen claw
Babe asked today
The background of poles roped over
into star jolted them

5.

filthy or into backward drenched flung heaviness
lemons asleep pattern crying

(*TCO,* 64)

Yet such sequences alternate with, for instance, paragraphs of apparently intact prose:

> 8.
>
> In the falling twilight of the wintry afternoon all looked dull and cheerless. The car stood outside with Ronald Pryor and Collins attending to some slight engine trouble—the fast, open car which Ronnie sometimes used to such advantage. It was covered with mud, after the long run from Suffolk, for they had started from Harbury long before daylight, and, until an hour ago, had been moving swiftly up the Great North Road, by way of Stafford, Grantham and Doncaster to York. There they had turned away to Ripon, where, for an hour, they had eaten and rested. In a basket the waiter had placed some cold food with some bread and a bottle of wine, and this had been duly transferred to the car.
>
> All was now ready for the continuance of the journey. (*TCO,* 65)

And typical of Ashbery, self-reflexive lines, including:

> 10.
>
> He had mistaken his book for garbage. (*TCO,* 65)

"Europe" was, in critic John Shoptaw's words, "scaffolded on a forgotten novel"—composed of sections taken from a World War I era British children's book, *Beryl of the Biplane* by William Le Queax, that Ashbery "picked up by accident" on a Paris quay.[13] Direct comparisons with its source material, provided in Shoptaw's 1994 study *On the Outside Looking Out,* allow us to observe Ashbery's culling, cutting, and reordering of snippets of text, typed up in his manuscript with capitalization, page placement, and punctuation largely intact. It is the poem's ordering devices—the numerical sequencing, division into stanzas, and carefully spaced lineation—that impose a degree of formalization, of conventions of reading, on to what might initially appear as linguistic chaos.

The difficulty encountered in any attempt to mark the stresses of the more disjunctive lines, much less read them aloud, quickly confirms that Ashbery's poetics here is a poetics of the page, not of voice, speech, or oral performance. His collage draws from explicitly printed sources, and is composed to be read or scanned visually on the page. Yet despite the jagged edges and uneven lines, "Europe" has little of the dynamic, dispersive energy of literary precedents such as Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dès.* Instead the shattered text feels immobilized, as if trapped by the implacable series of numbers. Uneven indentation, irregular spacing, and scraps of punctuation rendered dysfunctional by incompletion reinforce this effect of textual "fixing," which is made explicit in the atypical gridded section near the end:

104.

blaze			aviators	
	out		dastardly	

(*TCO,* 82)

As we know from statements by Ashbery, the poem was composed in the fall of 1958 at the Paris home of Henry Mathews, the expatriate American experimental novelist and publisher of *Locus Solus* who helped found the Oulipo group in 1960.[14] Traveling in Europe without a good grasp of French, Ashbery found both foreign and his "own" language rendered strangely impenetrable and inaccessible to him. In a 1976 interview, he recounts how while writing other poems in *The Tennis Court Oath,* he used vernacular source materials as a spur for improvisation:

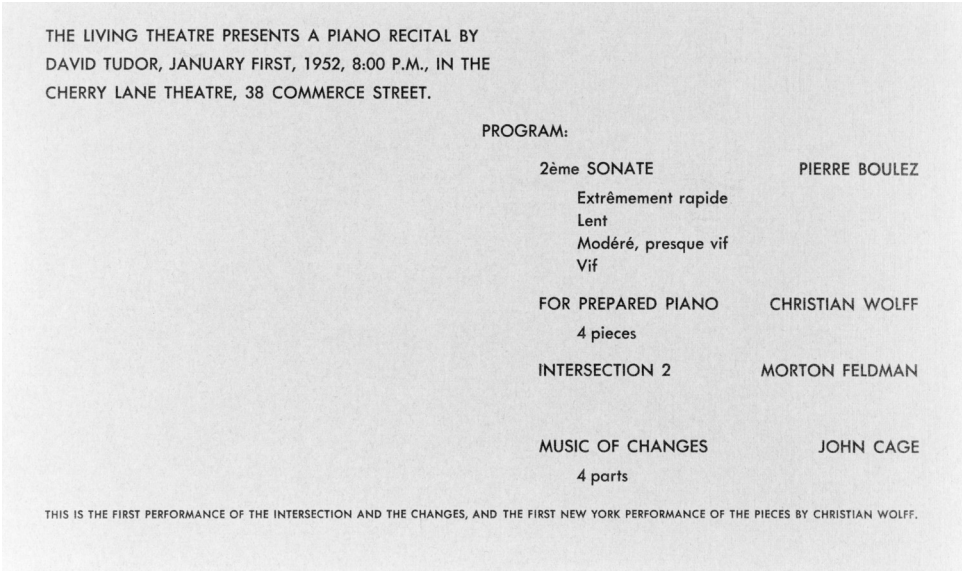
> I remember writing it in this state of confusion about what I wanted to do. I would sit down and cover pages without really knowing what I had written. I'd get American magazines like *Esquire,* open the pages, get a phrase from it, and then start writing on my own. When I'd run out, I'd go back to the magazine. It was pure experimentation. I didn't really consider these to be poems.[15]

Alongside other possible influences, models, and sources of permission for this project—from Stein, Raymond Roussel, and Giorgio de Chirico's *Hebdomeros* to postwar American painting—Ashbery singles out, on a number of occasions, the enormous impact of his encounter with the music of John Cage. In the 1976 interview, he recalls:

> In the early fifties I went through a period of intense depression and doubt. I couldn't write for a couple of years. I don't know why. It did coincide with the beginnings of the Korean War, the Rosenbergs case, and McCarthyism. Though I was not an intensely political person, it was impossible to be happy in that kind of climate. It was a nadir.
>
> I was jolted out of this by going with Frank O'Hara—I think it was New Year's Day, 1952—to a concert by David Tudor of John Cage's *Music of Changes.* Have you ever heard that piece? It hasn't been recorded. It was a series of dissonant chords, mostly loud, with irregular rhythm. It went on for over an hour and seemed infinitely extendable. The feeling was *an open determinism*—that what happened was meant to happen, no matter how random or rough or patchy it seemed to be. I felt profoundly refreshed after listening to that. I started to write again shortly afterwards. I felt that I could be as singular in my art as Cage was in his.[16]

This account echoes an earlier recollection, in his introduction to Frank O'Hara's posthumous *Collected Poems,* in which Ashbery describes *Music for Changes* as

> a piano work lasting over an hour and consisting, as I recall, entirely of autonomous tone-clusters struck seemingly at random all over the keyboard. It was aleatory music, written by throwing coins in a method adapted from the *I Ching.* The actual mechanics of the method escaped me then as it does now: what mattered was that chance elements could combine to produce so beautiful and cogent a work. It was further, perhaps for us, ultimate proof not so much of "Anything goes" but "Anything can come out."[17]



THE LIVING THEATRE PRESENTS A PIANO RECITAL BY
DAVID TUDOR, JANUARY FIRST, 1952, 8:00 P.M., IN THE
CHERRY LANE THEATRE, 38 COMMERCE STREET.

PROGRAM:

2ème SONATE	PIERRE BOULEZ
Extrêmement rapide Lent Modéré, presque vif Vif	
FOR PREPARED PIANO	CHRISTIAN WOLFF
4 pieces	
INTERSECTION 2	MORTON FELDMAN
MUSIC OF CHANGES	JOHN CAGE
4 parts	

THIS IS THE FIRST PERFORMANCE OF THE INTERSECTION AND THE CHANGES, AND THE FIRST NEW YORK PERFORMANCE OF THE PIECES BY CHRISTIAN WOLFF.

Figure 3.3 The Living Theatre program, January 1, 1952. Courtesy of the Getty Research Library.

These last remarks alert us to certain aspects of Ashbery's encounter with Cage: his interest is in material and aesthetic *effects,* not in the compositional *operations* used to obtain them, much less the philosophical rationale behind these—a difference underscored by Ashbery's use of improvisation rather than strict chance procedures, with their greater suppression of ego and artistic control. In particular, Ashbery singles out the relative *autonomy* of sounds, their temporal extension and syntactic independence, subsequently recounting: "I also got the idea from Anton Webern to isolate a particular word, as you would isolate a particular note, in order to feel it in a new way."[18]

Ashbery's comments suggest that even if his effects momentarily resembled the chance-derived structures of Cage, Mac Low, and others, he was far from sharing their systematically desubjectifying impulses. While Ashbery adopted improvisatory and chance-related practices to disrupt habit, break his stasis, and get his writing going again, this was a step toward a larger renovation and reconstruction of poetic practice. Regarding his early experiments, Ashbery insists,

> I didn't want to write the poetry that was coming naturally to me then . . . and I succeeded in writing something that wasn't the poetry I didn't want to write, and yet was not the poetry I did want to write. For me, this was a period of examining my ideas about poetry—sort of tearing it apart with the idea that I would put it back together.[19]

Throughout the 1970s, when he was publishing the more accessible and discursive works that would bring him a wider readership and public acclaim, Ashbery's references to *The Tennis Court Oath* verged on disavowal: "therapy," "an accident," "a transitional phase," "made up primarily of sketches and experiments," and "a kind of experiment which I did not mean to be a permanent thing"[20] "sort of a throwaway when I was writing it";[21] and "more in the line of sketches I thought I would recycle into something more finished."[22] Regarding the book's publication—apparently made possible by the poet Donald Hall, who was then serving on Wesleyan's editorial committee—Ashbery claimed in 1980 that "the opportunity came about very suddenly,

and when it did, I simply sent what I had been doing. But I never expected these poems to see the light of day."[23] Thus, it comes as a surprise to find Ashbery admitting in a 1985 interview conducted after preparing his *Selected Poems* that he "hadn't read most of the poems in *The Tennis Court Oath*—my second book, the one everybody throws up their hands over—in about twenty-five years. And some of them are a lot better than I thought. . . . I was surprised at how really interesting they are, because I'd concluded that they probably weren't very good."[24]

What makes *The Tennis Court Oath* so difficult to assimilate into Ashbery's own narrative, or that of postwar American poetry more generally? As Andrew Ross reminds us, regardless of whether one assesses the book as a generative "transitional period" or an "aesthetic failure," "the epistemological model for . . . these kinds of critical pronouncements is, of course, that of the unified, coherent field of the 'author,' replete with a recognizable career trajectory"—a notion of authorship that the poems themselves put into question.[25]

At stake in poems such as "Europe" is the complex historical renegotiation of avant-garde legacies carried out amid the postwar conditions of mass culture and reification—in which the shards and scraps of once-radical aesthetic projects quickly become absorbed into publicity, advertising, fashion, and the mass media. As Ross notes, Ashbery's appropriation of collage strategies cannot be read merely as a matter of formal resemblance—the dominant discourse of even many sympathetic literary-critical accounts—but must be seen as one of historical citation and reconstruction carried out under the conditions of the modern mass media. The recycling of early twentieth-century poetic strategies occurs within a culture of mechanical reproduction that *The Tennis Court Oath* both participates in and actively resists. Working in the 1950s, both Ashbery and Mac Low inhabit this historical tension, between the operations of fragmentation and reproducibility that animated cubism and emerging forms of Pop Art, and the quasi-romantic gestural spontaneity promised by action painting, already complicated by an implicit indexicality. As we will see, both writers negotiate these conflicts by inverting conventional relations between orality and print, action and artifact.

Let us return, as it were, to "Europe." Comprised of unevenly indented yet systematically numbered sections, with both words and punctuation scattered across the page, the poem resists reconstitution into the transparent self-

disclosing voice of the lyric subject. Indeed, it presents what feel like remnants of a shattered manuscript, isolating individual words in highly elliptical but narratively resonant passages such as the following:

26.

water

thinking

a

27.

A notice:

28.

wishing you were a
the bottle really before the washed
handed over to her:
hundreds
light over her
hanging her
you can remember

(*TCO,* 68)

This precise spatial arrangement attests to Ashbery's use of a typewriter to compose the poem—corroborated by Shoptaw's reproduction of a page of the typed manuscript, with its minimal handwritten corrections.[26] In their replication of punctuation, placement, and spacing from the source text, Ashbery's careful renderings register not only words but also gaps and absences as a kind of textual sign. Situated in 1950s' poetic practice, the poem's typewritten form inevitably calls to mind Charles Olson's famous pronouncement, in his 1950 manifesto "Projective Verse," that the typewriter will offer poets capacities for the notation of time and sound resembling those of the musical score:

> It is the advantage of the typewriter that, due to its rigidity and its space precisions, it can, for a poet, indicate exactly the breath, the pauses, the suspensions even of syllables, the juxtapositions, even

> of part of phrases, which he intends. For the first time the poet has the stave and bar a musician has had. For the first he can, without the convention of rime and meter, record the listening he has done to his own speech.[27]

Olson presents the typewriter as the recording medium of the spontaneous rhythms of poetic speech and kinetic experience—a mechanical device that paradoxically restores to the writer the somatic energies of language systematically purged by the industrial standardization of print culture. Against the "closed" academic verse, "that verse which print bred," he calls for a new "composition by field" that will engage all the "projectile," "percussive," and "prospective" energies of human speech, breath, and life. In Olson's poetry, this pulsational, bodily dimension surfaces in a spatially dispersed line whose discontinuities and disrupted syntax register the poet's vital breath: "*All* parts of speech suddenly, in composition by field, are fresh for both sound and percussive use."[28] Yet as Michael Davidson reminds us, this oral imperative contributes to an idealized immediacy and "pervasive phonocentrism" that represses the discursive and technical infrastructure of experimental poetries.[29] While Olson can acknowledge the role of the machine (in the relatively anodyne form of the typewriter) in such notation, he cannot address the larger conditions of the mechanical recording, reproduction, and transmission of speech—technologies of phonography and audiotape that are the precise historical conditions under which a poet can, "without the convention of rime and meter, record the listening he has done to his own speech." Such reproductive media, Davidson observes, would seem "the very antithesis to any poetics of unmediated presence."[30]

Olson's manifesto, of course, does not describe Ashbery's project, which can hardly be said to entail recording the listening he has done to his own speech. Yet despite the obvious discrepancies, its terms illuminate crucial aspects of Ashbery's work. The shifting, pulsing rhythms registered in "Europe" are not those of bodily breath or poetic voice but the peculiar energies and intensities of print itself—what 1960s' critical theorists will identify as the immanent generativity and structural iterability of all writing.[31] In "Europe," Ashbery employs the typewriter as a notational device, one that allows him

to record these fragments of shattered text and reorchestrate them through an arbitrarily imposed numerical schema. It is the numbers that provide the "notational" function, modulating the text's pacing and visual dispersion. Asked about their meaning, Ashbery replies,

> They're just a way of breaking it up into short, discrete fragments, so that the poem wouldn't be read as a continuous whole. I was aiming at making a lot of splintered fragments, and collecting them all under a series of numbers. It is rather discouraging to look ahead and see how many are still to come. This kind of discouragement—which affects you, for instance, when you open a foreign grammar and see how many lessons are ahead—is one thing that I wanted to get into it.[32]

Rather than carrying semantic or hierarchical significance, the typed numbers are a pure ordering principle, analogous to Cage's externally generated time brackets. Just as Cage's subjection of sounds to mathematically generated measures served to dissociate structure and materials, Ashbery's subjection of his splintered fragments to arbitrary numerical ordering dislodges them from the conventional linearity of text. What makes this device compelling is that it is generated from within the linguistic materials themselves, since the structure of the series, of "one thing after another," is immanent to language.[33] Overt serial ordering of these compiled scraps activates inherent properties of dissociation, deferral, and delay. As Ashbery's analogy to a grammar book suggests, the numbers introduce into the poem a kind of durational measure that disrupts readerly immersion—not unlike the experimental film viewer who looks back toward the projector to see how much film is left to run.

It is this sense of the poem as an open container, a notational structure that permits any number or kind of textual fragment or spacing, that may be Ashbery's true debt to Cage. Just as Cagean principles of non-continuity propose that even when no order is imposed on sounds in a temporal sequence, one will emerge anyway, Ashbery insists that "a bunch of words strung together loosely" can carry meaning and affect.[34] Let us recall Ashbery's description of

Music of Changes as "a series of dissonant chords, mostly loud, with irregular rhythm. It went on for over an hour and seemed infinitely extendable. The feeling was *an open determinism*—that what happened was meant to happen, no matter how rough or patchy it seemed to be." These words provide a better description of "Europe" than almost any existing critical account.

What we encounter in "Europe" is the uneasy transition from an earlier collage aesthetics of semiotic disruption and fragmentation to an emerging process-based or procedural model, which understands the poem as the record of a process. Ashbery relates his quest for an "open form," in which the process of writing poetry becomes the poem, to the example of Jackson Pollock's paintings.[35] A reading of Pollock's paintings, produced on the floor through improvisatory movements, as a kind of indexical trace or record had emerged by 1950 with Robert Rauschenberg's body prints on blueprint paper (made with Susan Weil) and in the *Automobile Tire Print* executed with Cage, and was popularized in critical accounts like Allan Kaprow's 1956/1958 essay "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock." Even when Ashbery dismisses the poems as transitional experiments, he describes them as "preserved" in *The Tennis Court Oath*. And indeed, "Europe" represents a kind of visual artifact, like a snapshot of the ceaseless activity of textuality, an instantaneous recording of language made possible by the typewriter.

This precise inscription and reproduction of mechanically reproduced words arguably aligns Ashbery with emerging forms of proto–Pop art—particularly those of Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, which understood images, absences, and gestural procedures as reproducible signs.[36] In a landscape already saturated with signs, actions of cutting and elimination would take on particular significance; as Ashbery recounted his fascination with Rauschenberg's 1951 *Erased de Kooning Drawing:* "Wouldn't there be enough left that there would be some *thing*? If so, how much? Or if not, how much could be erased and still have the 'sense' of the original left?"[37]

Through culling and radical ellipsis, "Europe" plays with the effects of such erasure: despite its apparent dismantling, the feeling of the source text remains, as inchoate impressions of paranoia and suspense hover among the ruins. Ashbery, however, never pursues the productivity of silence or negation to the degrees that Cage and Rauschenberg would at least momentarily

attempt. Instead, in *The Tennis Court Oath,* he stages both the mark and its absence as signs, as conventions that can be activated, repeated, and manipulated. In so doing, Ashbery establishes as great a distance from Olson's projective verse of bodily pulsation and breath as Rauschenberg and Johns do from the apparent gestural spontaneity of Willem de Kooning or Pollock. While the speech-based New American Poetry embraced spontaneity, instantaneity, and presence in the face of a larger culture of reproducibility and sign-exchange value, as Ross notes, "there is little in Ashbery's work, early or late, that could be characterized in terms of an 'instantist' poetics."[38] Rather, it is the very citationality of Ashbery's poetry—with its endless deft allusions and sinuous montaging of found materials and styles—that will paradoxically emerge as something like his signature style.

Yet the turn Ashbery's work later took, fashioning an identifiable poetic voice from a collection of found fragments, tends to foreclose other possibilities contained in "Europe." Just as pop artists like Andy Warhol pursued the "transformation of photo-montage aesthetics," in Benjamin Buchloh's terms, from the intensive fragmentation and semiotic disruption of Dada collage, to the paratactic and serial accumulation of singularized images, "Europe" suspends single words or groupings of words within the serially organized numerical sequence. While other poems, like "America," have numbered sections, these function more like conventional stanzas, simply demarcating parts. Only "Europe" generates real tension between the implacable seriality of the numbers and the apparently chaotic scattering of snippets of text. Yet to pursue these implicit serial or systems logics would arguably take one far from poetry.[39] Despite Ashbery's sense of a dialectic between meaning and randomness, ultimately he is more interested in aesthetic effects than procedural operations.

"Europe" employs a variety of meters, lines, dictions, and syntaxes to create an open field of dispersed fragments—snippets of texts whose narrative and mood shift and scatter. Although the strict numerical sequencing and severed phrases play with the arbitrariness and anonymity that haunts all language, the fragments are too resonant not to make sense, carefully providing enough pieces and clues to permit readers to assemble their own tantalizing narratives. Despite its apparent opacity, the poem yields perhaps all too easily

to conventional techniques of close reading and textual analysis. For instance, by exhuming a buried narrative from once-unintelligible fragments, Shoptaw's "homotextual" reading suggests that for all its associational syntax, spatial displacement, and dispersed, suggestive imagery, *The Tennis Court Oath* is a unified text, one employing Poundian devices of free-ranging collage that flirt with complete incoherence, but eventually produce a relatively readable set of associations.[40]

Against Syntax

Perhaps inevitably, readings of "Europe" that situate it within Ashbery's larger poetic production tend to downplay precisely what makes it relevant here: the radically antisyntactic elements that were taken up by experimental poets like Clark Coolidge and Vito Acconci in the mid-1960s, and by a multitude of "language poetries" in the 1970s and 1980s. While Ashbery has remarked on more than one occasion that his second book was the one he felt least close to, "Europe" provided a compelling text to 1960s' writers seeking alternatives to the speech-based poetics dominant at the time—including the young poet Acconci, who in the early 1960s, sought models of "poetry as language and language play" rather than the narrative and expressive practices more frequently associated with New York school poets and artists.[41] Acconci, in fact, would claim Ashbery as "my first model. . . . I read *Tennis Court Oath* and didn't have any idea what it meant. . . . Ashbery allowed words to remain words."[42] For Coolidge as well, it was not the suppressed "narrative ghost" that made "Europe" thrilling but the sparse constellations of almost-isolated words: "I thought, wow, he's doing something with almost nothing!"[43]

Acconci coedited the magazine *0 to 9* with the poet Bernadette Mayer, producing six issues from 1967 to 1969. They published work by Mac Low and a host of 1960s' poets—such as Coolidge, Aram Saroyan, Hannah Weiner, and John Giorno—situating them alongside texts by conceptually oriented art world figures like Dan Graham, Jasper Johns, Sol LeWitt, Adrian Piper, Yvonne Rainer, Robert Smithson, and Lawrence Weiner, and musicians Philip Corner and Morton Feldman. In retrospect, it is perhaps not surprising that anomalous poets such as Mac Low, Coolidge, and Mayer would later

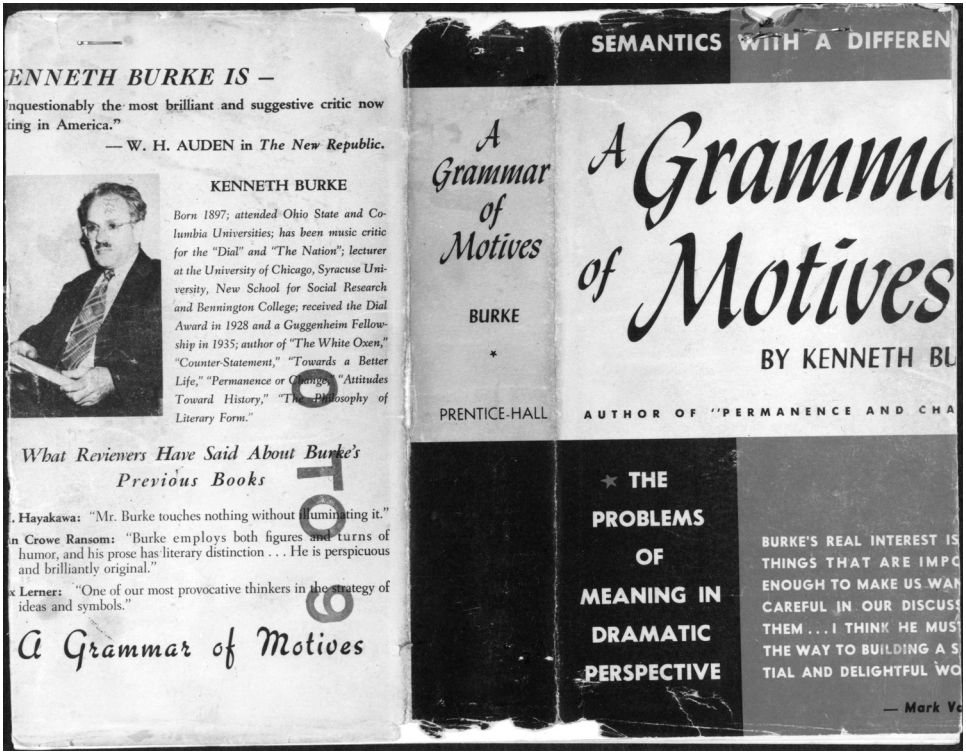


Figure 3.4 Cover of *0 to 9* 4 (1968). Courtesy of Vito Acconci and the Getty Research Library.

find themselves claimed as models of a more dissonant, disjunctive poetics by the practitioners and theorists of "Language poetry." As poet and critic Bruce Andrews recalls, Mac Low in particular offered a model of "extremely jarring and disjunctive sequences of words . . . not seen since Stein."[44] Already well versed in early twentieth-century avant-gardes, Mac Low turned to chance-based methods in the mid-1950s in order to explore their effects on language. Working at a time when radical Beat and Black Mountain poets aspired to complete creative freedom, Mac Low instead sought to suppress overt personal expression through procedural means.

Let us begin at this project's inception, with the first and final stanzas of Mac Low's first biblical poem, "7.1.11.1.11.9.3!11.6.7!4., a biblical poem," composed from the text of Genesis 1:1, numbers 34:22, on December 31, 1954 to January 1, 1955:

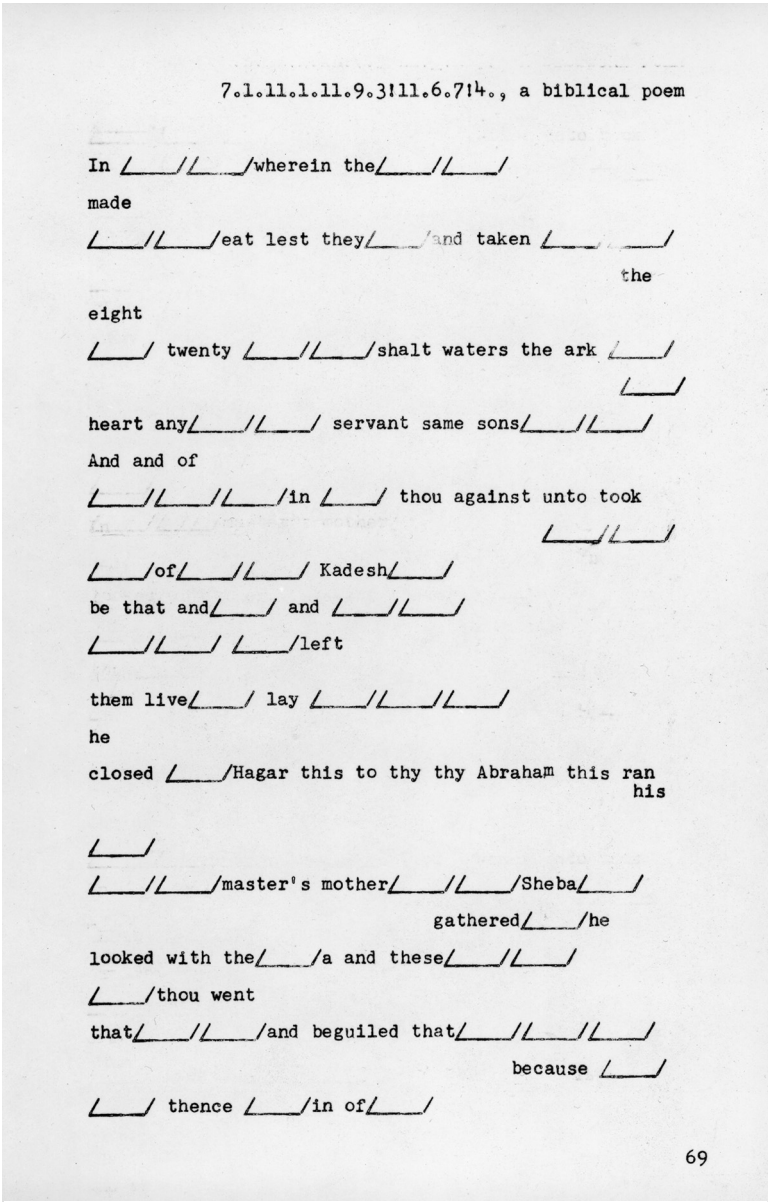
In/____/____/wherein the/____/____/
made
/____/____/eat lest they/____/and taken/____/____/the
eight
/____/twenty/____/____/shalt waters the ark/____/____/____/
heart any/____/____/servant same sons/____/____/
And and of
/____/____/____/in/____/thou against unto took/____/____/
/____/of/____/____/Kadesh/____/
be that and/____/and/____/____/
/____/____/____/left

And/____/____/them to/____/families:
of
/____/____/____/____/____/____/____/the daughter,/____/
/____/____/
the
with/____/____/thou the/____/____/____/And/____/for
This/____/____/make kings/____/____/____/____/
/____/the/____/

Moses. /____/____/____/____/of And of /____/____/____/
/____/that /____/stages Rephidim /____/
/____/____/And land/____/____/____/
/____/____/of Jogli.[45]

Although the poem was not published until 1968, archival records support Mac Low's dating of the composition, as he showed it to friends and enclosed copies of the first three "biblical poems" in letters sent to Cage and M. C. Richards on February 1, 1955.[46] All the biblical poems were meant to be read aloud, and Mac Low would designate the "5th biblical poem," a "simultaneity," as "the first biblical play," to be performed through collaborative vocal enactment. The poems were initially envisioned to include piano tones, and although this idea was evidently dropped, they were conceived on a musical model as "time-structured chance-works for speaking voice."[47] Yet these poems also exist as we first encounter them, as words, spaces, and marks on a page.

How do we read such a poem? We are perhaps initially struck by the intrusive slashes—typographic notations that Mac Low terms "boxes"—that indicate "silent durations" during the oral delivery of the poem. On the page, these produce a kind of "Mad-lib" quality of fragmentation and removal of information. Yet despite this emptied-out quality, unexpected continuities emerge and take on unexpected weight through what Mac Low calls "phrase accretion": "shalt waters the ark," "servant same sons," "And and of," "Thou against unto took." Lacking conventional syntactic or semantic regularities that would generate meaning, interpretation quickly gravitates to the handful of substantives, which immediately establish the narrative context of the Old Testament: waters, ark, heart, servant, sons, Kadesh. Although intended as temporal markers for oral delivery, the boxes also read as blanks, suppressions, elisions—placeholders for words and phrases that have been removed, or that we read silently in their place. We might see them as breaking up the continuous drone of the biblical speaker, or as reminiscent of the kinds of gaps, tatters, and fragments one finds in manuscripts of Sappho, with their holes as a sign of history as ruin.



7.1.11.1.11.9.3!11.6.7!4., a biblical poem

In /____//____/wherein the/____//____/
made
/____//____/eat lest they/____/and taken /____/____/
the
eight
/____/ twenty /____//____/shalt waters the ark /____/
/____/
heart any/____//____/ servant same sons/____//____/
And and of
/____//____//____/in /____/ thou against unto took
/____//____/
/____/of/____//____/ Kadesh/____/
be that and/____/ and /____//____/
/____//____/ /____/left

them live/____/ lay /____//____//____/
he
closed /____/Hagar this to thy thy Abraham this ran
his

/____/
/____//____/master's mother/____//____/Sheba/____/
gathered/____/he
looked with the/____/a and these/____//____/
/____/thou went
that/____//____/and beguiled that/____//____//____/
because /____/
/____/ thence /____/in of/____/

69

Figure 3.5 Mac Low, "first biblical poem," *0 to 9* 4 (1968): 69. © 1968 Jackson Mac Low. Courtesy of Anne Tardos.

One is also struck by the profusion of shifters, articles, and other connective words: thither, the, they, them, this, thou, that, there, and, of. The accumulation of articles without substantives, prepositions without objects, and piled-up conjunctions has strange effects. By isolating and dysfunctioning words that usually generate syntactic relationships, Mac Low's shattered syntax foregrounds the very linguistic functions they cannot serve: pointing, linking, subordinating, addressing, designating. Repetition heightens this effect. With the "of And of" of the final stanza echoing the "And and of" of the first, the most anonymous and flexible of words invite us to ponder their resonances: connection (this *and* that), accumulation, listing, the linking of people, objects, and events; and then, location (*of* Jogli), lineage (son *of*), agency (hand *of* god), belonging, derivation. In such a context, "of And of" can generate meanings like "from and belonging to," "paternity and possession," or any number of the most basic relationships between people and their world. Thus, despite the poem's aggressive shattering of its source text, it retains something of its core. Although Mac Low will later change his selection rules to eliminate such repetition, privileging words with what he terms "lexical weight," in everyday and biblical contexts these minor words carry enormous significance.[48]

Of course, there is a certain irony in asking "how to read" these poems, since Mac Low, in his own lengthy and highly detailed instructions, would appear to be only too happy to tell us. For instance, as his notes direct us,

> All words must be audible and intelligible to everyone present. Readers must listen intently to their own voices . . . and to those other readers, and to all ambient sounds audible during a reading, including those of the audience. . . . Words must be read soberly and seriously, but without fake solemnity or any other artificial type of delivery. *Silences must never be hurried.* In simultaneities, *all must begin together.*[50]

Rather than providing any kind of pointers for interpretation, for reading in the literary or hermeneutic sense, Mac Low's explanatory texts are methods, instructions that tell us how to perform the works. In places, they echo Cage's

concern for "serious," attentive performance, yet the linguistic—and specifically biblical—material, combined with the directive that "readers must listen intently to their own voices," compels other associations: with prayer, litany, chanting, and paradoxically, with much older poetic forms.

To tease out the implications of these compositional strategies, let us situate them in relation to some of Mac Low's subsequent compositions. In "Night Walk," Mac Low introduces chance-generated notational devices to regulate oral delivery. The poem was composed in February 1960, from a list of one hundred words, all "representing objects, actions, states of mind remembered as having figured in an actual situation. All of the words may function as nouns. i.e., be subjects, or objects of sentences."[51] A series of annotative letters and numbers prescribe tempo (from "Very Very Slow" [vvs] to "Very Very Rapid" [vvr]) and dynamics/loudness (from "ppp" [to be read "very very softly"] to "f" [for sections to be read "Loud"]), with a number at the end of each line "indicating the number of seconds of silence which shd follow that line."[52] On the page, these notations impinge on the poem, as in the beginning of section 1 of "Night Walk":

ms/ppp standing halflight 41

vs/p water woman silence 7
s/ppp two o'clock friends 10
vr/ppp cold hills 6
vs/mp twigs darkness talking 49

mr/p needing meaning memory 3
m/mf meaning finding 2
r/mp hair two o'clock 7
ms/mp man teeth revealing 24

m/p slipping learning finding 4
vvs/p air fingers 2
r/p touching freezing 2
vvr/ppp trees sky hearing 19

s/p standing quiet 51[52]

Despite the intrusion of the auxiliary notations, the poem has an oblique romanticism, with intonations of loss, betrayal, secrecy, and abandonment. And within the indicated tempos and dynamics, the reader has tremendous latitude as to readings, by introducing pauses and verbal stresses to render arbitrary sequences into variously meaningful phrases. Mac Low insists that "the lines of 'Night Walk' are unpunctuated in order that readers may freely group the words within them in any ways they see fit. The attempt shd be *made,* however, to *group* words, & not merely to read single words mechanically throughout the poem."[53] For all the pulverization of syntax and apparent fragmentation of language, the emotionally loaded snippets create resonant mental images, as if to demonstrate how the referential and associational dimensions of language persevere despite disordering. The text calls to mind Roman Jakobson's research on aphasic disorders of speech, which preserve the metaphoric axis while severing the metonymic. When presented in oral performance, the fractured phrases take on a pulsational quality, of bodily palpitation, as vocal variations of sonority and pacing add expressivity to fleeting images.

Mac Low is perhaps best known for his invention of "reading through" compositions, which produce poems by using prechosen word sequences to "draw words" from an existing text, and then arrange them into lines and stanzas.[54] These devices, which he terms "index words" or "seed phrases," usually comprise a name, title, or selected phrase. Each letter selects a word or word string from the text that begins with the same letter. The number of letters in each word of the phrase then determines the length of lines and stanzas. The poem's length simply depends on when the chosen method runs out of material in the selected text. The mechanism allowed Mac Low to get rid of the labor-intensive chance procedures, such as tossing dice, that he had used in composing the "5 biblical poems." By using the title or a simple phrase, Mac Low notes, he could generate poems from "practically everything I happened to be reading from May thru October, 1960."[55] In Mac Low's book-length *Stanzas for Iris Lezak,* the "6 Gitanjali for Iris" reconstitute the "Gitanjali" ("Offerings") of the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore via the memorable acrostic, "My girl's the greatest fuck in town, I love to fuck my girl":

I

My you
Gain is rainy life
See
The Here end
Gain rainy end again the end see the
Feet. Utter. Cry know
Is Now,
The outside when Now,

(18 seconds of silence)

Is
Life outside void end
The outside
Feet. Utter. Cry know
My you
Gain is rainy life[56]

Culling words from Tagore's text without eliminating repeated words, the procedures of writing through allows the musical repetition of phrases that Mac Low retains within each stanza; in subsequent stanzas, "g-i-r-l" will yield "Gifts is river, light," "God is renew life," and "Ground is resting languidly." The lyric effect is more apparent here. Even without the seed phrase, the words function as, in effect, a love poem—reflecting the nature of the source text.

Along with instructions for performing the poems as simultaneities, Mac Low's "Notes on the Methods Used in Composing & Performing *Stanzas for Iris Lezak*" details diverse procedures used to compose the 396-page collection, which was not published in full until 1972.[57] One can make a case, as poet and performer Ellen Zweig has, that such writing through poems, however initially opaque, can hold deeply personal resonances; we are, after all, reading Mac Low's books with him while he selects the words.[58] And these are never "strict" chance procedures, since Mac Low, like Cage, constantly makes and revises decisions about method, as regards source materials, repe-

tition of words, word strings, and so on—procedures developed, again much like Cage, via trial and error, in relation to how "interesting" he considered the results to be.

How do we account for such poems? Despite differences in compositional method and aesthetic result, all result from Mac Low's 1954 adoption of nonintentional procedures that suppress conventional forms of authorship. Mac Low recalls his turn to chance methods with much of the sense of crisis and stagnation that characterize Ashbery's references to "Europe":

> It was two days before New Years, 1955. I was very depressed. I'd been invited to a New Year's party in Stony Point and had decided not to go, so I was sitting in my kitchen on Avenue C. For a year or so I'd been talking a lot to John Cage about chance music, as well as hearing his early chance-composed works, and I'd done several chance-generated piano pieces that I didn't much like.[59]

Like Ashbery, Mac Low singles out Cage's 1951 *Music of Changes* for its extraordinary aesthetic effects: "I became interested in the whole field because of the stunning use John Cage made of chance operations, notably, the magnificent 'Music of Changes' for solo piano."[60] Unlike Ashbery's collage poem "Europe," however, whose semiotic indeterminacy as the textual record of a process nonetheless results in a text to be read on the page, the very object of analysis in Mac Low's work is harder to specify. In all these poems, the instability of the interface between source text, compositional method, resulting text, and performed oral realization creates unexpected obstacles to analysis, since the question of where one locates the "work" resists determination. Barrett Watten, for instance, argues that Mac Low's procedures effectively translate from a source text to "the final target form, the work's performance."[61] Yet even Mac Low's own accounts of why he began "to view performance as central and texts as primarily notations for performance (if only by a silent reader)" do not necessarily imply that such notations for performance must be approached only as scores for live performance, rather than as realizations enacted by reading words on a page.[62] As I have suggested in relation to the

proto-Fluxus event scores, it is the implicit duality of the text as score—inseparably words on the page and actions to be performed—that needs to be addressed.

While performance is key to Mac Low's overall project, the emphasis on live enactment as Mac Low's "target form" tends to overdetermine readings of the texts.[63] And although focusing on the poem as an artifact may neglect procedural dimensions, to overlook this level risks transforming Mac Low into a designer of systems rather than a poet.[64] For it is the dynamic interplay between predetermined methods and their unexpected results that animates Mac Low's work. We can read the "5 biblical poems," like "Europe," as traces of operations, of readings and rewritings, that continue without end.[65] Mac Low's compositional and performance protocols are methods for radically decontextualizing and fragmenting a text, subjecting it to stanzaic form, and inserting what Cage calls "musical elements (time, sound)" into the world of words. Mac Low's procedures are machines for turning any text into a kind of poetry.[66]

What kind of poetry, though, could this possibly be? It is poetry without an intact author, without a coherent narrative or enunciative subject, although its words are paradoxically reembodied through the performing voice or voices. It is emptied of conventional meaning, though not of rhythm, diction, and associative qualities. And it is poetry in which once-organic structures of vocalization and rhythm are now produced mechanistically, through an arbitrarily imposed method: as Mac Low recalls, "Using chance operations & similar means, using *words* as John & other composers . . . were using sounds in the early 50s," and "systematically finding ways of getting sound events into compositions & performances without the composer making the choices" by inventing methods "to extract materials selected in some other way."[67] By treating words analogously to musical sound events, Mac Low's poetry tests out the effects of translating compositional procedures and structures from one medium to another.[68] His own accounts emphasize his use of chance methods to select textual materials.[69] Yet these number systems and seed words are most important as counting devices. By establishing how many words are contained in each line, and how many lines in each stanza, they determine form. In compositions like the *Music of Changes,* Cage

used externally generated time structures to organize complex clusters of sound divorced from any conventional syntax or musical continuity. In a similar fashion, Mac Low's ordering devices generate the architectural infrastructure that produces poems as quantitatively structured "neutral containers" for a number of individual "events." For instance, for the "5 biblical poems," Mac Low used dice to generate series of integers, which he then used to construct schemata that dislodge words from their linguistic and textual underpinnings, and recorded in the title for each poem—for example, "7.1.11.1.11.9.3!11.6.7!4., a biblical poem."[70]

As Mac Low explains in "Methods for Reading the '5 biblical poems,'" "The numbers in the title refer to the stanzaic structure of each poem, arrived at via strict chance procedures": "the integers show how many *events* (single words or silences) occur in each line of a stanza."[71] Mac Low translates the Cagean sound event, which can incorporate both sound and silence, into a kind of language event, which can either be a word or its absence. Although this terminology quickly slides over to refer to the recursive and performative aspects of Mac Low's poems—for instance, Steve McCaffery's notion of "self-generating language events"—it initially describes a quantificatory model derived from Cage's "time structures" and use of tables to compile a set of unique sound materials. The event is an externally generated unit of measure that replaces conventional poetic measures of syllable, word, accent, or metrical beat.[72]

Yet unlike the pitch of sounds, which can be mathematically graphed as frequency, written language has no internal infrastructure susceptible to precise quantification. Like the stress marks used to determine poetic meter, properties of volume and rapidity occur only in vocalization, and can be recorded on the page through some form of supplementary system, using methods like Cage's space=time notation (which Mac Low does not employ) or numerical annotations like those inserted in "Night Walk." Applying Cagean structuring devices to words rather than sounds produces quite different effects, since resonance and association cling to the most minimal lexical fragment or sequence. Composed of conventionally defined units—letters, phonemes, and words—written language can produce "nonsense" but not "noise."

While in works like his 1961 "Word Event for George Brecht," Mac Low pulverizes language down to the level of the phoneme and letter, his poetry generally retains the word as an intact unit. And Mac Low insists that "I never think of it as only sound—as long as you've got words, you've got meaning, inescapable. Whether it's the lexical meaning of the single words or whole sentences. I never think of it in terms of pure sound."[73] Nonetheless, such chance procedures wreck ordinary operations of signification. This partial emptying out of meaning, however, allows other things to come through—what Mac Low describes as his turn to "working in ways that . . . emphasized the intrinsic qualities of language and sound aside from whatever works made with them might express or say."[74]

Within Mac Low's musically derived structure, all events are equalized: words and silences hold equal "weight." Without syntax, reference and parts of speech are partly destabilized, and new continuities or possible "word strings" emerge. In his February 1, 1955 letter to Cage, Mac Low describes "writing—if one can call it writing—I dont know what to call it—the biblical poems & a number of other different chance poems." Given his desire to "reveal the poetry latent everywhere," he notes that "Sometimes they just seem a passel of damn nonsense but at other times they seem truly poetry, tho hardly 'my' poetry in any sense."[75] We can see these ambivalences at work as Mac Low works out the realization of the "5 biblical poems" in his February 1, 1955 letter to M. C. Richards. He discusses possible methods for performing the work in great detail:

> One is to take every word as a unit of equal duration temporally. So that one wd say that necessary wd be like 4 16th notes & one like one quarter-note. & the same for each silence.—I thought at first to use pulse beats. . . .Another possibility is not to use metronomic beat at all & have it read strictly like language. Faster & slower like you'd read language on paper in print I mean & both the silences & the words wd be unequal but all wd still exist somehow as signifying & nonsignifying units & the time of reading wd depend upon breathing convenience, rapidity of eye-movement & phrase-accretion, which is what I just decided to call it when

> several words seem to form mysteriously meaningful phrases & sometimes even whole sentences & many mottoes & exhortations (like "Bear up/ /mule/ /"). So either strict time or exact is a possible reading-way.[76]

The alternative methods for reading the poems concretely negotiate how best to adopt musical strategies to linguistic materials. The first option, which most overtly tries to conform words to musical measures, is soon rejected in favor of a greater flexibility accommodating the varying speeds and rhythms of speech, as well as the inevitable "effects of meaning" generated by the most random assortments of words. These "unintended effects" are an integral part of the compositional process, which entails "translating" a system or procedure from musical to textual notation.[77]

The overt suppression of authorial agency in Mac Low's compositional methods, though, leaves room for other, more otherworldly forces to intervene. Designed as "ways to let in other forces than oneself,"[78] such chance procedures carry potential mystical overtones. While Mac Low's letter to fellow poet Richards details methods and procedures, his communication to Cage invokes explicitly spiritual dimensions (not cited here) as he describes how the texts created unintended and yet provocative meanings:

> Also the phenomenon I noticed often—of the words of the poem quite often seeming to have a direct relevance to what I was thinking as I made them altho my method made any direct influence, except thru some sort of unknown ESP phenomenon, . . . quite out of the question. On the other hand I'm neither egotistic enough nor trivial enough to believe that *God* is doing anything in the way of directly revealing something thru these. That is, anything other than reveal the poetry latent everywhere just everywhere, not just in the bible but everywhere, even the title page of a French dictionary may be a poem! (If translated properly—there are correspondences everywhere & I bet G de Nerval never thought of this possibility of finding them & revealing them).[79]

Such an account seems unthinkable from Ashbery, whose activation of language has no room for the hand of God, even a Protestant one. This mystical dimension extends to Mac Low's emphasis on the vocal bodily enactment of the texts, in which the word is yet again "made flesh." The lingering sense of a hidden inscription buried beneath an existing text—mystical writings liberated by Mac Low's "excavations"—carries biblical overtones.

By literally rather than figuratively producing a new text from the reading of an existing one, Mac Low does not overtly engage the palimpsestual procedures of manuscript cultures. Yet his poems convey a nearly exegetical zeal for revitalizing prior inscriptions—conducted through arbitrary fragmentation and elision rather than scholarly reconstruction. Steve McCaffery proposes that Mac Low's poems perform "a reading that is redoubled through a writing," in effect excavating "a suppressed tendency within another text."[80] Mac Low's consistent use of a single source text differentiates his found sources from those of Cage, whose *Imaginary Landscapes,* for instance, always draw on a wide assortment of materials. To restructure an entire "world of sounds," which may include bars of Beethoven in its broadcast forms, is very different than rewriting a prior composition. Each of Mac Low's poems results from a set of operations executed on a single source. Not unlike Ashbery's "Europe," Mac Low's poems translate and preserve an existing text that they also dismember. While the obscurity of Ashbery's pulp novel could not be further from the cultural authority of Genesis, each poem performs an overt rewriting that produces meaning in relation to a prior text or set of generic conventions.

Yet Mac Low's poems are arguably not open to the kinds of readings performed on Ashbery's work, to reconstruct a buried narrative or buried subjectivity via textual fragments. Unlike "Europe," there is no sense of something hidden, no "crypt words" to exhume, no "shadow text" to reconstruct: everything is there, on the surface, with the sources plainly indicated. While gaping holes testify to systematic elision, this does not necessarily read as a secret or symptom of repression. Thus, unlike Shoptaw's careful hermeneutic analysis of "Europe" and other poems, uncovering crossed-out words in Ashbery's original manuscripts and identifying plausible subjects for otherwise-impervious passages, Mac Low's poems do not lend themselves to a certain

kind of interpretation. Instead, by restricting their vocabularies to a limited set of terms, they explore the relationships that can be established within the most limited lexicon.

Perhaps the failure of a hermeneutic approach has led many of Mac Low's supporters to ground his texts' meaning in oral delivery and live performance.[81] Such accounts of course echo Mac Low's desire to reactivate community through collaborative performance, embracing historical avant-garde strategies, with all their collective political dimensions, as still fully credible in the postwar period. The peculiar crux of Mac Low's project is this desire to return poetry to its ritual origins in oral performance through the vehicle of the printed word. Rather than sounding words aloud to reanimate the codified rhythms and metrical patterns of traditional verse, or the bodily breath and pulsation of New American Poetry, Mac Low recirculates into oral delivery a fractured series of words that have been mechanically removed from any authorial or even textual source. Yet it is unclear what the effects of this recombination are: does oral performance dismantle meaning by transforming shattered texts into performed sounds, or does it allow meaning to be contingently relocated in the body of a speaking subject?

Hence, although on the page Mac Low's work appears similar to that of Ashbery in "Europe," the two poets' projects polarize over the question of oral enactment, a mode that Ashbery rejects, preferring in later works to transfer speech into textuality rather than to reanimate texts via speech. Describing his own work, Ashbery states, "I enjoy reading it rather than hearing it read," and elaborates: "On the one hand, the input for my poetry seems to come from colloquial talk and the inaccurate ways we present our ideas to other people and yet succeed in doing so despite our sloppiness. On the other hand, I don't really like to hear it, I would rather see it. I can hear it better when I see it. I seldom go to poetry readings, and I don't like performance poetry." Citing a line in de Chirico's *Hebdomeros,* "It made him flee like Orestes pursued by the Furies," Ashbery quips: "The word 'performance' has that effect on me."[82]

For all his evident horror of oral delivery and collaborative spectacle, Ashbery's work proposes a different type of enactment embedded within the text, one animated, as many commentators have noted, through Ashbery's

unusually slippery use of pronouns, which escape a stable reference. Shoptaw refers to this as Ashbery's "postal or communication system," in which the "you" constantly shifts functions. In Shoptaw's analysis, "This relational network requires a messenger (who may also be the sender), a message, and a receiver" to keep its terms in continual circulation.[83] To those who have decried the "treachery" of this flexible I, which tricks the reader by promising identifications it soon withdraws, Ashbery protests, "But doesn't this open up a book and make it more available?"—which seems a fair question, indeed.[84]

However different the strategies Ashbery and Mac Low propose, what both poets share is precisely their continued affirmation of an identity as poets, their affirmation of their work as poetry. However radical the formal strategies and, in Mac Low's case, the political commitments, both projects ultimately rein in the formal and aesthetic possibilities of "language in general" as much as they expand it. By remaining within the orbit of poetry, anthologized alongside Olson, Pound, or contemporary Language poetry, even radical poetic practices tend to reaffirm a set of conventions that were elsewhere thrown into question. Just as Cage's work, in the words of George Brecht, "remained music," so too did these radical experiments of Ashbery and Mac Low "remain poetry." It was up to artists such as Carl Andre, Acconci, On Kawara, Lawrence Weiner, and Warhol to follow through on the implications of these experiments.

4

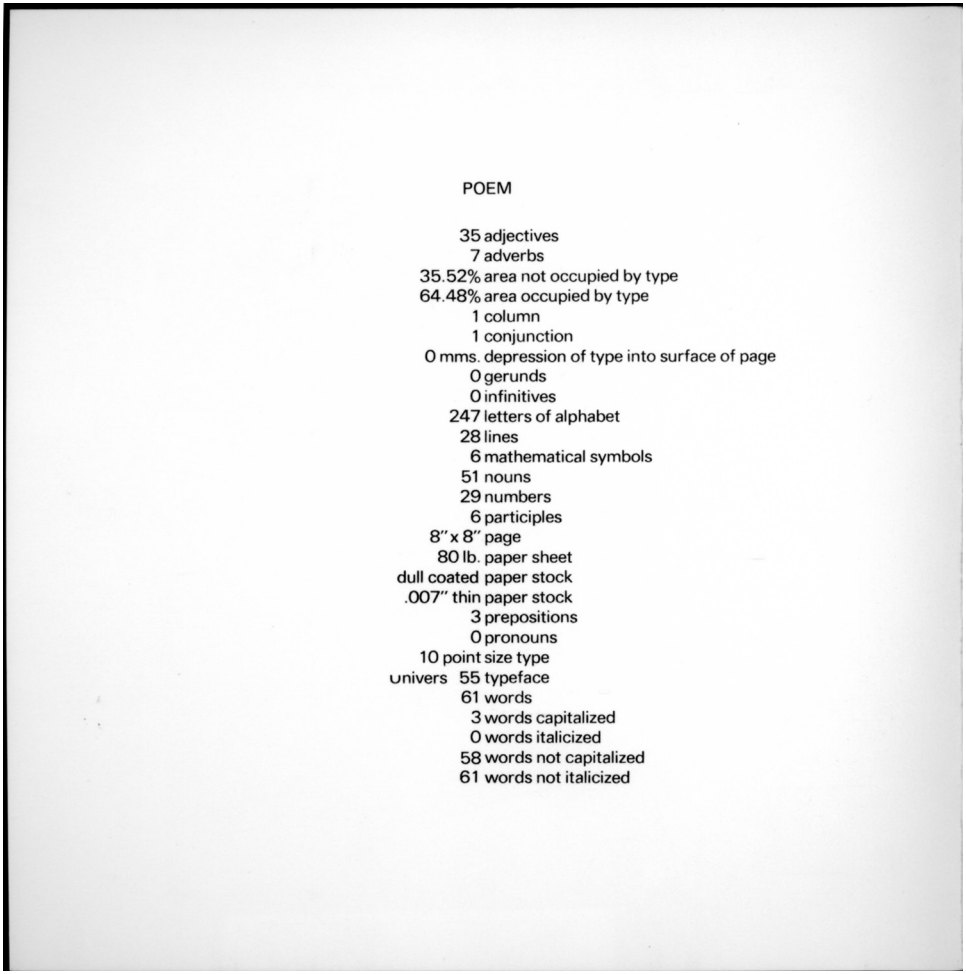
Poetry from Object to Action

In his 1985 essay "My Works for Magazine Pages: 'A History of Conceptual Art,'" the artist Dan Graham describes his decision to make works specifically for the magazine page as a response to the contradictions in art practice between Pop and Minimal art. If Pop "referred to the surrounding world of media culture" as its framework, minimalism addressed the physical space of the gallery—the architectural container—as its material support. Graham was well aware of the economic and institutional interdependence of art galleries and magazines. For a work to attain the status of art, it had to be not only exhibited but also reproduced as a photograph and written about in publications. These "accretions of information after the fact" were almost part of the artwork insofar as they helped frame and define it.[1] Graham sought to design artworks that would take the magazine page and information media as their support.

Thus in *Schema (March 1966),* Graham designed a self-generating structure that would incorporate and comment on its publication context: "*Schema (March 1966)* only exists by its presence in the functional structure of the magazine and can only be exhibited in a gallery second-hand."[2] Published in various magazines and catalogues in the late 1960s, *Schema* famously presents itself as a structure that catalogues information about its presentation, compiling the number of adjectives, adverbs, columns, and so forth, according to the form given by each editor in each printed instance. As Alexander Alberro notes, it is a work about self-referentiality in which "each variant is reduced to a purely descriptive analysis of itself."[3] As a system, *Schema* is always the same, but as a catalogue of results, it constantly varies depending on each realization.



Figure 4.1 Graham, *Poem, March 1966* (1966). Courtesy of Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.



POEM

35 adjectives
7 adverbs
35.52% area not occupied by type
64.48% area occupied by type
1 column
1 conjunction
0 mms. depression of type into surface of page
0 gerunds
0 infinitives
247 letters of alphabet
28 lines
6 mathematical symbols
51 nouns
29 numbers
6 participles
8" x 8" page
80 lb. paper sheet
dull coated paper stock
.007" thin paper stock
3 prepositions
0 pronouns
10 point size type
Univers 55 typeface
61 words
3 words capitalized
0 words italicized
58 words not capitalized
61 words not italicized

Although in most versions it is described as a "Schema for a set of pages," in its first appearance, in the magazine *Aspen* 5–6, the work was titled *Poem, March 1966* and described as a "Schema for a set of poems whose component pages are specifically published as individual poems in various publications." In the mid-1960s, before he had fully decided that he was an artist and not only a writer, Graham also saw himself as a poet and provisionally considered several of his early works—including *Scheme* (1965) and *Schema (March 1966)*—to be "poems," so labeling them in at least some instances.[4] These early works lay on the boundary of genres, partaking of concrete poetry, quasi-scientific systems, and the types of linguistic and numerical scores that had emerged out of experimental music and Fluxus.

Graham's self-identification as a poet suggests the extent to which poetry appeared, in the 1960s art world, as a potential field for investigating language as such and, in particular for exploring the behavior of words on the page. In this context, language is increasingly understood not just as a material but as a kind of "site." The page is a visual, physical container—an 8 1/2 x 11 inch white rectangle analogous to the white cube of the gallery—and also a place for action and a publication context. This site is implicitly relational and dynamic: words on a page operate in relation to other texts and statements, since language as a system is perpetually in circulation. Viewed in this way, conventional poetic forms, and especially individual lyric utterances, are but a small part of a much wider field. Understood in its most general sense, as "language art," poetry is a form that explores the aesthetics, structures, and operations of language as much as any specific content. In the postwar era, various types of concrete and visual poetry, in particular, promised to probe the space of the typographic page and link contemporary literature with the visual arts. Yet a reliance on rather quaint illustrational or pictorial modes—as in poems that take on the shape of their subjects—left much concrete poetry out of touch with changing paradigms in the visual arts and the wider conditions of language in modernity.[5] In their turn to compositional procedures that sampled existing texts and fractured syntax, John Ashbery and Jackson Mac Low generated works whose extreme fragmentation of language seemed to divorce the utterance from the expression of any single speaker. Their collage-based treatment of words as found objects opened the

door to much wider investigations of nonliterary uses of language, yet ultimately their works tended to recontain these experiments back into something all-too-recognizable as poetic form. If Ashbery's work rejoined a high-modernist lyric revitalized with the resources of nonliterary language, and Mac Low's poems ultimately reconventionalized Cagean procedures within traditional models of oral performance, what other possibilities might one envision for work with language emerging out of poetry?

Alongside Graham, whose involvement with poetry was relatively short-lived, the crucial figures here are Carl Andre and Vito Acconci, two artists far better known for their work in other forms: sculpture for Andre; performance, video, and later architecture for Acconci. For both Andre and Acconci, their work with language is foundational for their larger projects: Acconci, as is well-known, began as a poet before he took up work in performance, and Andre produced much of his early poetry during the crucial period, 1960–1965, when he developed the core sculptural strategies that produced landmark works of Minimal art. In Andre's case, unpacking the relationship between sculpture and language requires looking closely at a critical but little-known part of his production, the *Seven Books of Poetry* he privately published in 1969 with the Dwan Gallery and Seth Siegelaub.

Even though much of Acconci's work has remained unpublished, the practical obstacles to addressing Andre's poetry are even greater. Even before the recent publication of Acconci's early, mostly unpublished poetry, a provocative sampling of his work has been available in journals, catalogues, and books as well as in the pages of the magazine he coedited with Bernadette Meyer, *0 to 9* (1967–1969).[6] Although the six numbers of *0 to 9* and accompanying book works were only issued in modest print runs of 250 to 300 copies, the magazine was well-known and remarkably influential, and the very structure of Acconci's work has always been to engage public channels of dissemination.[7] To the contrary, to my knowledge, only two sets of Andre's *Seven Books of Poetry* are in public collections at the Museum of Modern Art Library in New York City and The Tate Gallery in London. Over the past decade, series of exhibitions—at the Paula Cooper Gallery in New York, the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas, the Cabinet des Estampes in Geneva, and elsewhere—have displayed the original pages of Andre's poems as unique art

objects in specially designed cases. Few of the poems, however, are available in reproduction, in the form of the book page—the form that would seem to be the logical destination for them, and certainly the easiest format for reading and studying them. A handful of individual poems have been reproduced in catalogues, books, and magazines over the years, yet these are but a small sampling, and give little sense of the range or internal complexity of the *Seven Books.*[8] Despite having published these volumes nearly forty years ago, more recently Andre has been exceedingly reluctant to permit the reproduction or publication of his poems, preferring these be encountered as original objects. No images are printed here for that reason. Therefore, I will describe and cite from them, and hope that readers will have a chance to view them elsewhere. I am all too aware of the limitations of, for example, citing from a concrete poem whose form is as much about its material and visual organization as the words employed, yet at present it may be the only way of discussing this work. If Acconci has always been legendarily casual about copyright, Andre's relation to his poetry has always been marked by authorial control.

Nonetheless, consideration of Andre's and Acconci's poetic production, is essential not only to discussions of 1960s' poetry but also to analysis of the tensions among object, site and performance that structure 1960s art. My goal here is not just to use visual art to understand this poetry but also to use the work with language to understand sculptural practice and, in Acconci's work, the turn to performance—and in so doing, to reexamine the terms of this "shift," from minimal to postminimal art, by looking at it through linguistic production. Untangling some of the relations between poetry and sculpture in the work of artists like Andre, Acconci, and Graham will also clarify how their projects depart from fundamentally different assumptions than, for instance, the 1950s' poetry of Ashbery or Mac Low.

Down to Words

Acconci cites Ashbery's work in *The Tennis Court Oath* as an impetus to "get it down to words"—to generate a poetry that would not be about lyric expression but about the properties of language and language play. A far more systematic execution of this urge to get it down to words is found in work by

Andre, who presented what he termed his "First Five Poems" (1960) as a series of five single lowercase words—"green / five / horn / eye / sound"—centered on each of five pages. These single-word poems are interspersed among other poems in Andre's book *A Theory of Poetry: 1960–1965,* where they have a curious effect: suspended in white space, they arrest the reader's attention on the fact of the single word.[9] Recalling these poems in a 1963 dialogue with the photographer and filmmaker Hollis Frampton, Andre states:

> They are not the first poems I ever wrote. . . . But they are the first poems in which I took the English language for subject matter. All my earlier poems originated in some conceit or observation or sentiment of my own. These poems begin in the qualities of words. Whole poems are made out of the many single poems we call words.[10]

Andre has repeated this last sentence in other conversations and remarks, and it represents something of a leitmotif for him—one of a series of principles that he returns to and uses to ground his practice. It implies a set of assumptions—the word in isolation, out of syntax—that inform Andre's vast poetic production. For both Andre and Frampton, this isolation of the word is understood not simply as a selection of individual words but as what Andre terms a "cut"—an analogy not only to the literal, physical cuts in Andre's 1958–1960 "negative sculptures" but also to the cut in film editing, as an operation that divides yet also potentially joins and reassembles a series of fragments or particles. This "cut in language" yields a series of elements that have been *removed* from an existing text or set. As Frampton proposes to Andre in their exchange,

> A dictionary contains all dictions. It contains all the elements of all the possible fields, and is "closed" in the sense that an operation (alphabetization) has been performed on those elements. Now am I to understand that you have performed a different operation upon the sum of dictions in the *O.E.D.,* namely removed all but five of the poems?[11]

This notion of the single word as both a discrete unit and an element removed from a larger set underlies Andre's poetry. In a manner that recalls John Cage's desire to "get rid of the glue" in order to work with "sounds in themselves," Andre has stated that "I try to boil out the grammar."[12] The early dialogues with Frampton help elucidate this approach. After Frampton proposes an alternate set—"blue / six / hair / ear / light"—Andre responds that

> both sets are radically different from the poem: "*I am a red pansy.*" These latter five words relate most strongly to each other and depart very far from the specificity of their referents. In fact we may presume that the five words together share one super-referent. The five words of my *first Five Poems* very purposely do not share a referent. My green is a square of that color or a village's common land.[13]

"I have gotten rid of the overriding super-referent," Andre insists, then asks, "Is that a valuable thing to do?"[14]

It is a key question. What Andre describes as the superreferent is the larger meaning of a phrase or sentence. Syntax is a set of rules by which signs can be combined to make statements. When we use language to communicate, syntax subordinates individual elements—words—to a larger message. A syntagm is a chain or string of elements that are linked together to serve a larger function. For this chain to work, the individuality of its elements must be suppressed. In the example Andre provides, "I am a red pansy," there is no question that the richness and particularity of "I," "am," and "red" are lost and subsumed in the larger, and quite banal, statement that they make possible. By focusing on the particle, Andre's "First Five Poems" attempt to renovate language by salvaging these misused materials, and recovering the material complexity and semiotic multivalence of the individual word. Hence, we encounter a single word—sound—suspended in the middle of a blank page of paper. An extraordinarily simple and common thing, it is presented for our contemplation: the look and shape of its letters, the sound, all the possible meanings and associations it evokes. "The great natural poem about anything is its name," Andre insists.[15] Yet to atomize language, to treat it as a collection

of particles, a collection of names, is quite perverse. To treat words in a sense as things is to repress all the other ways words operate, since words accrue their meanings in relation to other words.[16]

Part of the peculiarity of Andre's practice is his use of what might seem to be the most impersonal of methods—isolation, repetition, listing, gridding, scattering, alphabetic arrangement, and so forth—on fragments of language charged with great personal and historical meaning. In so doing, Andre's goal is not to suspend referentiality but to foreground the palpable, tactile, and material qualities of words. Throughout his poetry, Andre is powerfully drawn to nouns and proper names. Reference, memory, and association cling to language in his work, and Andre repeatedly links literature to inner speech, to the verbalizations we make to ourselves.[17] If anything, the dissolution of syntax in his poems produces a heightened referentiality, as the *thingness* of the isolated word makes the qualities it stands for vivid, concrete, and yet almost unfathomable, recalling Russian futurist critic Victor Shklovsky's claim that art exists to defamiliarize and renovate perception, "to make the stone stoney."[18]

Andre's early 1960s' work with language emerged closely from his work with objects and materials. Frampton recalls how in the fall of 1960, Andre "began taking given texts and 'cutting' directly from them as from a timber, mapping upon words what he had learned from sculpture," before shifting to the "modular and isometric structures" he used in sculptures after 1963/1964.[19] Many of these early sculptures were lost or abandoned, and often the only record we have of them are Frampton's black-and-white photos, which show the beautiful, totemlike objects in the rooms where they were made and help make palpable Andre's processes of making them. *Negative Sculpture* (1958) is a large block of translucent Plexiglas with multiple holes drilled through it; *First Ladder* and *Last Ladder* (1958–1959) are large vertical wooden timbers with series of uniform cavities chiseled out of them. As Frampton notes, these sculptures were followed by Andre's turn to forms that no longer relied on cutting or artificial means of joining elements—sculptures that used the basic material properties of elements as he found them, and that could be assembled through stacking and basic operations of carpentry (such as notched joints) that don't require screws, nails or glue. Emblematic

of this move were the wooden *Pyramids* Andre assembled in 1959, stacking eighteen tiers of four interlocking fir two by fours to construct roughly human-scale columns.

Although Andre has always credited these core principles of what would become Minimal art to his close friendship with the painter Frank Stella, he forcefully resists simplistic readings of surface similarities between his work and Stella's:

> It was not basically the appearance of Stella's paintings that influenced my sculpture but his practice. The prevailing convention of abstract painting in 1959 was gestural and rhythmic. Frank set off in an entirely different direction—neutralizing gesture by using uniform brush strokes that trace a metrical pattern over the whole canvas. By increments of identical gestures the ground of the canvas was transformed into the field of the painting. My *Pyramid* has the cross section of [Constantin] Brancusi's *Endless Column,* but the method of building it with identical, repeated segments of 2 x 4 lumber derives from Stella.[20]

These principles of incremental identical units and of generating a form from the properties of the materials themselves have grounded Andre's practice in both sculpture and poetry, and require closer scrutiny. In a somewhat-idiosyncratic definition, Andre terms these principles "constructivist"—a term referring to the Soviet art movement of the 1920s, but also, in Andre's account, to radical modernist practitioners like Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein as well as minimalists like Stella. As he explains to Frampton,

> Let me indicate some shadow of what I mean by a Constructivist aesthetic. Frank Stella is a Constructivist. He makes paintings by combining identical, discrete units. Those units are not stripes, but brush strokes. We have both watched Frank Stella paint a picture. He fills in a pattern with uniform elements. His stripe designs are the result of the shape and limitation of his primary unit. A brick

> wall is a Constructivist execution. The various overall bond patterns are a result of the shape of the individual bricks. . . . My Constructivism is the generation of overall designs by the multiplication of the qualities of the individual constituent elements.[21]

And, as Andre articulated in a 1970 interview:

> My first problem has always been to find a set of particles—a set of units and then to combine them according to laws which are particular to each particle, rather than a law which is applied to the whole set, like glue or riveting or welding. They are nonstructural combinations of particles and these particles particularly are combined in laws which have no more than the qualities that any one particle might have.[22]

In Andre's sculptures, common industrial materials like fire bricks, metal plates, or even bales of hay can indeed function as a set of particles, as "identical, discrete units" that can be stacked, lined up, or placed in a grid, without joining or other "structural" means. When these same or similar operations are used on words, however, quite different things happen. As Andre repeatedly notes, "Words always connect when they are placed together."[23] Of course, modernist poetry depends on the fact that when dislodged from conventional syntax or the prose sentence, the ways that words connect and combine are far from predictable or straightforward.

Some of Andre's poems work by massing, lining up, or dispersing a singular referential word in ruled typewritten forms. In *One Hundred Sonnets (I . . . Flower)* (1963/1969), Andre presents each single noun in a gridlike block of letters composed on a typewriter—"the kind of grid that a typewriter produced in a very machine-like way."[24] Each block is about two by three inches and is suspended a bit above the middle of an otherwise-blank page. The format is straightforward, and I can provide a rough approximation of one such block here. True to their sonnet form, all blocks are fourteen lines long (although the number of times each word is repeated horizontally in

each line varies; unlike a classic sonnet, line-lengths are determined visually, not by number of syllables):

youyouyouyouyouyouyouyouyou
youyouyouyouyouyouyouyouyou
youyouyouyouyouyouyouyouyou
youyouyouyouyouyouyouyouyou
youyouyouyouyouyouyouyouyou
youyouyouyouyouyouyouyouyou
youyouyouyouyouyouyouyouyou
youyouyouyouyouyouyouyouyou
youyouyouyouyouyouyouyouyou

Of course, what a modern typography cannot replicate—is the tactile quality of letters typed on a manual typewriter, with their inevitable variations in ink density, sharpness, and force of impression. Even though Andre has clearly strived for a uniformity of appearance, the inevitable slight variations—the differences within repetition—give the massed blocks a vulnerability and poignancy. The uniformity is never exact. As Rob Weiner points out, "The repetition of single words commands the page by forming a sequence of fields."[25] This massing of a single element recalls Henry Flynt's definition of minimalism as a "saturation of uniformity" that "stripped the form to a core element and saturated the field with that element."[26] The one hundred sonnets move progressively from pronouns—I / you / he / she / it—to body parts and fluids—head / hair / face / eye . . . blood / urine / sweat—to colors, numbers, minerals, and basic elements of the landscape—sun / moon / star / cloud / rain—as if to assemble a set of basic material properties analogous to those of Andre's sculpture.

In a 1975 talk, Andre described the relation of his poetic project to his sculpture as follows:

> I have been accused of trying to treat words as things, though I know very well that words are not things. But words do have palpable tactile qualities that we feel when we speak them, when we write them, or when we hear them . . . certainly my interest in el-

> ements or particles in sculpture is paralleled by my interest in words as particles of language. I use words in units which are different from sentences, grammatical sentences, but of course words always connect when they are placed together if they are not nonsense words. I have attempted to write poetry in which the sentence is not the dominant form but the word is the dominant form.[27]

Describing poetry as "language mapped on an extraneous art," Andre proposes that "formerly it was language mapped on music, I think it is now language mapped on some aspect of the visual arts" such as sculpture or painting.[28] To grasp the import of Andre's statement, we must understand how greatly his models of visual art differ from the pictorial or gestural models used to relate poetry to painting. In Andre's case, not only is language mapped on sculpture but the reverse is also true. Andre's use in sculpture of what he terms "clastic structures," employing "identical units of easily obtainable, everyday, functional materials" subject to continual arrangement and rearrangement, could be seen to derive in part from his work with language.[29] The early massing or gridlike poems of *Passport* (1960) and *One Hundred Sonnets* precede Andre's better-known sculptural work with analogous forms, and suggest that Andre's experience handling and massing blocklike readymade words may have helped spur his subsequent move to arranging blocklike readymade industrial objects. In his many stories, Andre more often relates this sculptural strategy—"taking identical units, or close to identical units, and shifting them around"—to his job working as a brakeman on the Pennsylvania Railroad.[30] Yet the sense that the ruled typewritten page may have been analogical to the space of the gallery gives us a quite different perspective on this work.

At times, it may be all too easy to observe morphological similarities between Andre's work with objects and his work with words—for instance, relating the repeated forms of his carved wood "ladders" to the loosely alphabetized "ladder" poems like "Essay on Sculpture for EC Gossen, 1964," which presents two columns of nouns in carefully arranged sawtooth edges, beginning with the following:

```
arc
arch          plane
aisle         hull
bridge        oar
bench         lens
ball          plank
bin           square
beam          range
booth         line
flange        peg
cairn         mast
bell          ridge
```

The alphabetization is far from strict, and shape is clearly the governing principle—an effort to give form to the materials that Andre has described as using "the appearance on the page . . . to impose a metric on the words."[31] Yet despite their undeniable visual impact, poems like these strike me as among Andre's more conventional in that they hew closely to the familiar tradition of "shaped poems." More interesting as experiments in visual poetry are the works gathered in the book *Shape and Structure* (1960–1965), which presents a series of massed poems and constellations using individual words, letters, and typographic symbols, in which the graphic effect outweighs any semantic weight.[32] Some are scattered in almost-circular shapes, others gridded, and one of the most beautiful consists only of two rows of slightly skewed lines of periods, which cross to create extraordinary series of perceptual effects–a kind of visual noise that produces colors, shapes, and a moiré-like impression of movement. In another, an entire page is covered with nothing but a grid of asterisks, yet the effect is not one of uniformity but of lightness, delicacy, and constant variation—a constant interplay between order and disorder. Rob Weiner describes how, in *Shape and Structure,*

> Andre relieved punctuation of all grammatical responsibility, and avoided words altogether. In this series periods, dashes, and asterisks become the tools for creating pure design. These poems are

> like delicate drawings: line and space are created by the incessant banging out of punctuation. Dashes are typed in a triangular formation, or in vertical stripes broken by irregular spaces. The effect looks like a sheet of rain. Periods are arranged in two large grids, one slightly overlapping the other, causing a moiré. Asterisks float across the page like snow.[33]

In overall effect, the pages are far closer to being drawings, composed of punctuation marks and letters, than what we think of as poems.

Divorced from the context of the book-length projects—which provide an overall structure and complexity of intercutting not unlike a filmic montage—Andre's poetry sometimes acquires a static visual quality that his more dynamic sculptural works move beyond, particularly in their shifts from what Andre has termed "sculpture as shape," to "sculpture as structure," to "sculpture as place."[34] What might a parallel series of shifts in language look like, from "language as shape," to "language as structure," to "language as place"?

In sculptures and installations of the mid- and late 1960s, by selecting the most "neutral" and generic industrial materials—cinderblocks, bricks, and the like—Andre sought to minimize the metaphoric associations of objects in order to activate a latent operationality of scale, mass, number, and arrangement: cement bricks lined up one after another, to extend out from a wall; steel tiles placed in a gridlike formation, to cover a floor; gigantic Styrofoam planks stacked up to take over a room; and small plastic blocks emptied from a sack, to scatter across the floor. Regarding the works he presented at the 1965 exhibition Shape and Structure at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery, Andre states that he set out "to seize and hold the space of the gallery—not simply fill it," with a set of timbers so heavy they had to be moved to keep the floor from buckling.[35] His subsequent installation featured stacked Styrofoam planks so massive that the three sculptures forced viewers to the edges of the room, where they were unable to take in the work as a whole.[36] Describing his sculpture *Reef,* shown at the Whitney Museum's Anti-Illusion exhibition and later installed at the Guggenheim, Andre states, "I had destructuralized my work and I wanted to use the Styrofoam in a way that would become place-generating. So I did a piece . . . where the Styrofoam is used to generate a

kind of negative place, a place of no access, a plateau as it were. . . . It excludes the viewer from occupying the space."[37]

Placement displaces, it is an activity that generates effects in a larger site. As Andre famously intoned, "A thing is a hole in a thing it is not."[38] These key installations foreground an aggressivity and attention to site elsewhere latent in Andre's work. Andre's attention to sculpture as an object that fills and overcrowds the space of the gallery recalls earlier poems that cover the space of the page, simultaneously filling and obliterating it. This formula, of language to cover a space rather than uncover a meaning," is one of the most oft-quoted phrases Acconci uses to describe his own, quite different poetry.[39] Yet I think we can read Andre against the grain or, in effect, read Andre through Acconci to foreground the performative and operational dimensions that underlie some of Andre's most interesting work.

Art historians have tended to read Andre's project in by-now-conventional minimalist terms—as suppressing meaning and reference, and eschewing overt engagement with narrative or history. Thus, it may be surprising to learn that his most substantial series of poems of the 1960s concerned King Philip's War, a series of battles that took place in 1675–1676 in Massachusetts that were among the bloodiest in early US history. The war's outcome devastated the traditional way of life of the native peoples of New England—a history Andre felt personally having grown up in Quincy, Massachusetts. Andre repeatedly returned to one source text, E. W. Pierce's 1878 *Indian History and Genealogy,* which he was given by his friend Michael Chapman in 1957. As Frampton recalls, Andre's "Long History" comprised "an alphabetization of all the words of the *Urtext*"; the "Short History" (1960) yielded "52 terms in four suits or seasons," made by mapping the words against the conventional sequences of a deck of playing cards.[40] Andre asserts that "the only dissociation complete enough for my purposes was the reduction of Pierce's text into its smallest constituent elements: the isolation of each word." The resulting suite of poems was "not a narrative poem or a history. What I wanted was the isolation of the terms of war, and then a recombining of these words to produce a poem."[41]

Over a process of several years, Andre subjected the book to a series of operations: culling words and phrases, gridding them, isolating key terms that

he then ordered alphabetically using file cards, and so forth. In addition, he used "this whole kind of statistical analysis of texts and diction . . . founded through biblical study at the beginning of the nineteenth century" to subject the text to quantitative analysis, analyzing words by their frequency of appearance in the book. As he explains, "Each of us has a distinct diction in our writing and in our speech, which is the range of words available to us at any one time, and the ones we prefer to use, that is quite distinct."[42] For Andre, these methods provide a way of reading something like the suppressed or unconscious core of a poem, the shape, the "curve of distribution of words." In an interview, he recalled that "I found I had ceased to be interested in what I had to express, even ceased to be interested in what the text expressed, but . . . I tried to boil away narrative and grammar, so I could get at what the *words* have to say." He relates this approach, with its extreme pulverization of syntax, to the work of Gertrude Stein, stating that "she wanted to find out . . . what *language* says."[43]

Having broken language down to the level of the word, down to a set of particles, Andre then sought "a suitable operation for recombining them" in such a way as to produce a poem."[44] Subjecting the alphabetized list, the "Long History of King Philips War," to a series of repeating prime numbers, Andre came up with the short poem "King Philips War Primer," and then produced the extended "Ode on King Philips War," which was published in the book *Lyrics and Odes* (1969). Andre composed the twenty-three-page poem by subjecting short phrases drawn from Pierce's book to a simple permutational structure.[45] Having already pulverized the terms of the *Indian History and Genealogy* into all manner of lists and combinations, Andre explains that "the idea of mapping my terms against the natural numbers comes directly from my understanding of Godel's method in his famous Proof."[46] In discussion with Frampton, Andre explicitly positions his methods as impersonal, as operating to eliminate his own authorship:

> The poetry I am trying to write is poetry which eliminates the poet, or at least makes the poet transparent in relation to the light cast upon his subject. . . .What I want to illuminate in my poetry are not those things which only I can see, but those things which

> any man can see. I am interested in those poems which you can go back to Manhattan and duplicate."[47]

Reading the poem, we can work backward to reconstruct both the numerical schema and the phrases Andre used, which include "woods lands meadows rivers brooks to them and their heirs forever," "am not willing at present to sell all they do desire," and "dead whose bones for several years unburied unbleached in the sun."[48] The permutational scheme, which generates eleven lines of six words each, is as follows:

1	1	2	1	2	3
2	3	4	4	5	6
3	5	6	7	8	9
4	8	9	10	11	1
5	9	10	2	3	4
6	11	1	5	6	7
7	2	3	8	9	10
8	4	5	11	1	2
9	6	7	3	4	5
10	8	9	6	7	8
11	10	11	9	10	11

> woods lands meadows rivers brooks to them and their heirs forever (1)
> am not willing at present to sell all they do desire (4)
> dead whose bones for several years unburied unbleached in the sun (23)

Although the method seems simple, it yields results that are emotionally and poetically complex:

```
woods  woods  lands  woods  lands  meadows
lands  meadows  rivers  rivers  brooks  to
meadows  brooks  to  them  and  their
rivers  then  and  heirs  forever  woods
brooks  their  heirs  lands  meadows  rivers
to  forever  woods  brooks  to  them
```

them lands meadows and their heirs
and rivers brooks forever woods lands
their to them meadows rivers brooks
heirs and their to them and
forever heirs forever their heirs forever[49]

Andre's method breaks up the syntax of each line, forcing us to read one word at a time, going forward, then going back. This advances and retards the narrative, producing a repetition and stuttering that is quite moving. On different pages, the abundant repetition produces effects that uncannily mirror the content: a cataloguing of landscape, an oppressive sameness, stuttered insistence, an evocation of mourning. Likewise, the gradual introduction of new terms provokes a visceral sense of action and accumulation that somehow allows the tragic impact of the narrative to unfold.

Like the "Ode," many of Andre's poems utilize mechanisms of removal and rearrangement, extracting words from a historical source in order to construct a lexicon, which is then reassembled through a series of procedures—for instance, alternating words, lines, or lists of terms taken from two different texts—as "a way of analyzing a text to discover tendencies which are not immediately apparent even to the author."[50] Nonetheless, one could argue that while these series of isolated words, primarily nouns, have a dynamic effect in relation to the prior source and its meanings, they are results of processes not the processes themselves. However massed, they are lists, not actions. A studied avoidance of the overtly relational or transactional may indeed be a characteristic of Andre's work—evidenced by Andre's preference, in poetry, for the bounded and enclosed page of the catalogue or privately printed book over the more contaminated public space of the magazine. Andre himself recollected how "some critic said that Richard Serra's sculptures were a verb, and that Carl Andre's were nouns: that's really good. Verbs are relational. I prefer nouns."[51] As we now turn to a consideration of Acconci's poetry, it should not surprise us that Acconci himself has often recalled how important Richard Serra's prop pieces were to him in the late 1960s, as he tried to figure out how to go beyond minimalism, because they suggested an agent and an action latent in minimal forms.

Words to Cover a Page

While Andre's poetic precedents lie in the classic modernism of Pound and Stein, working in the 1960s Acconci's project emerged out of the conflicting imperatives of post–New York School poetry and visual art. In her concision and attention to placement, Stein was very important to Acconci, but Acconci was also aware of the work of poets like Ashbery and Mac Low as well as contemporaries like Clark Coolidge, Bernadette Meyer Aram Saroyan who were seeking to find alternatives to the gestural models of the New York School poetry. Trained as a poet, Acconci returned to New York from the Iowa writer's workshop just as minimalism was breaking to produce poems like the following:

```
(here)(       )(   )
(    )(there)(                    )
(    )(             )(here and there—I say here)
(                          )(I do not say now)(        )
(I do not say it now)(               )(                  )
(                  )(then and there—I say there)(      )
```

This excerpt from "R.E" (1967) might seem to recall Mac Low's 1954–1955 "5 biblical poems": series of parentheses of varying lengths circle around, some empty and others enclosing short snippets of repetitive text. The snippets of language are themselves highly circumscribed: mostly deictics or pointing words—like "here" and "there"—and other short phrases that reflect back on the conditions of utterance—"I say here," "I do not say now," "that is not to say," and so forth. While the spatial dispersion and isolation of elements resemble chance-generated poetries, the tightly controlled structure implies an underlying logic or system of operations, however obscure. Blank spaces predominate—but these do not read as elision of a prior text or as silence during a reading. The parentheses, which recall Mac Low's boxes, invite a filling in, but also evoke mathematical symbols and structures of confinement and substitution.[52] To the extent that Acconci may have been informed by Mac Low's poems, he reads these against the grain as strategies for isolating words and setting up physical relations among them. While Mac Low's

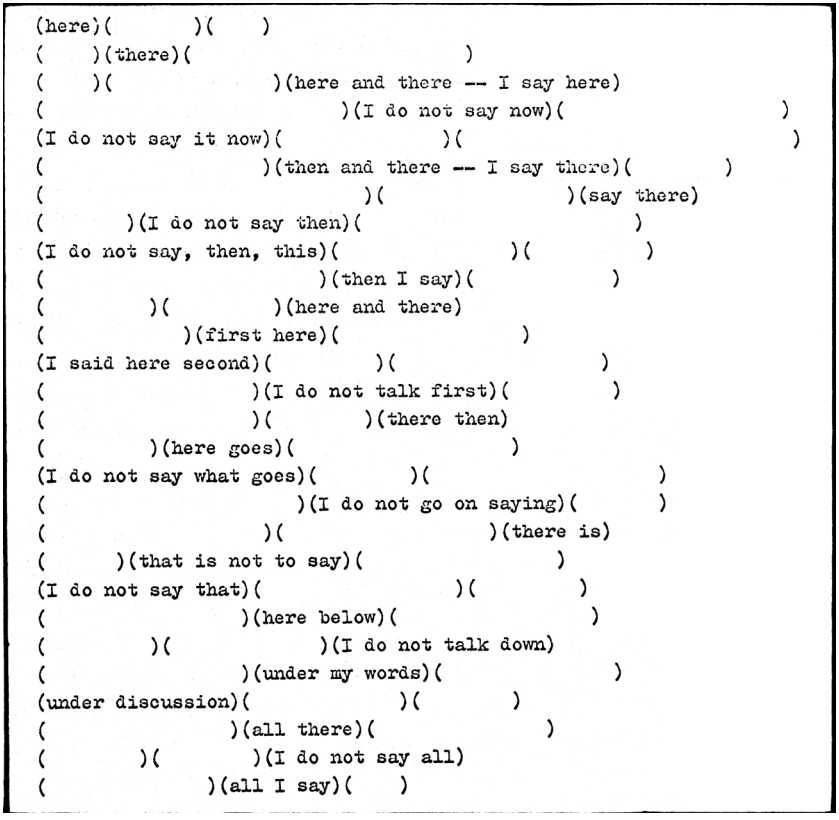


Figure 4.2 Acconci, "RE" (1967). © Vito Acconci. Courtesy of the artist.

obsession with procedures for composition and/or performance effectively represses what happens on the page, Acconci presents words in a present-tense "space of encounter" that cannot be superseded by prior encounters with another text, or future encounters with an audience or group of performers.

Reading sculptures by Andre, Robert Morris, and others as challenges to use "language to cover a page, rather than uncover meaning" in poems like "RE," Acconci's work with language systematically plumbs these more confrontational and aggressive dimensions. An "installation" of words on the physical space of the page analogous to an installation of objects in the physical space of a room, his poems use words as objects to be accumulated, arranged, stacked, dispersed, and moved. In order to render poetry as "an analogue to minimalist sculpture" in all its "objectivity" and refusal of reference, Acconci notoriously sought to preserve the "literalness" of the page by restricting himself to words that would refer to themselves, language, or the process of writing.[53] Unlike Andre's impulse to break language down to basic particles of nouns and single words, Acconci gradually reduced language to shifters and punctuation marks. In a 1993 interview, he recalls:

> It started to *seem* impossible to use on the page a word like "tree," a word like "chair," because this referred to another space, a space off the page. Whereas I *could* use words like "there," "then," "at that time," . . . words that referred to my activity on the page, my act of writing on the page. So, in fact, toward the end of the time I was writing, I was driving myself into a corner, into a kind of dead end, when in order to preserve the literalness of the page the only thing I could use on the page were commas, periods, punctuation points.[54]

While the total refusal of language's referential and associational dimensions could seem a "dead end," such experiments with language as a self-referential system stripped it down to a set of relational, transactional operations that Acconci would rehearse in his poetry of the late 1960s and then transfer into various forms of performance.

Unlike Andre's fascination with the dictionary—that compendium of all possible word choices—Acconci targets the thesaurus, a compendium

Vito Hannibal Acconci

he-had-gone-and-was-still-(had)-going-about-just-(about)-at
the-time-when-(he)-you-saw-him-(when)-as-he-(was)-is-now-(as)
that-he-goes-through-(that)-it,-you-(saw)-see,-(you)-he-is
(just)-still-(gone)-going-through-with-it

NOTE he is coming back

N.B. he -- yes, he is around and coming, quickly,
back ... to a man

NOTED he---yes,-HE-IS-around-and-GOMING,-quickly,
BACK-...-to-a-man -- at _____ (one) on _____
(his own) in _____ (case) among _____ (friends)
between _____ (themselves) beside _____ (him-
self) here (AT LAST) now (AT THE END)

Figure 4.3 Acconci, *Untitled* ("he had gone"), *0 to 9* 4 (1968): 51. © Vito Acconci. Courtesy of the artist.



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BOOK

TRANSFERENCE: RO-
GET'S THESAURUS

Vito Hannibal Acconci

pages 1-35

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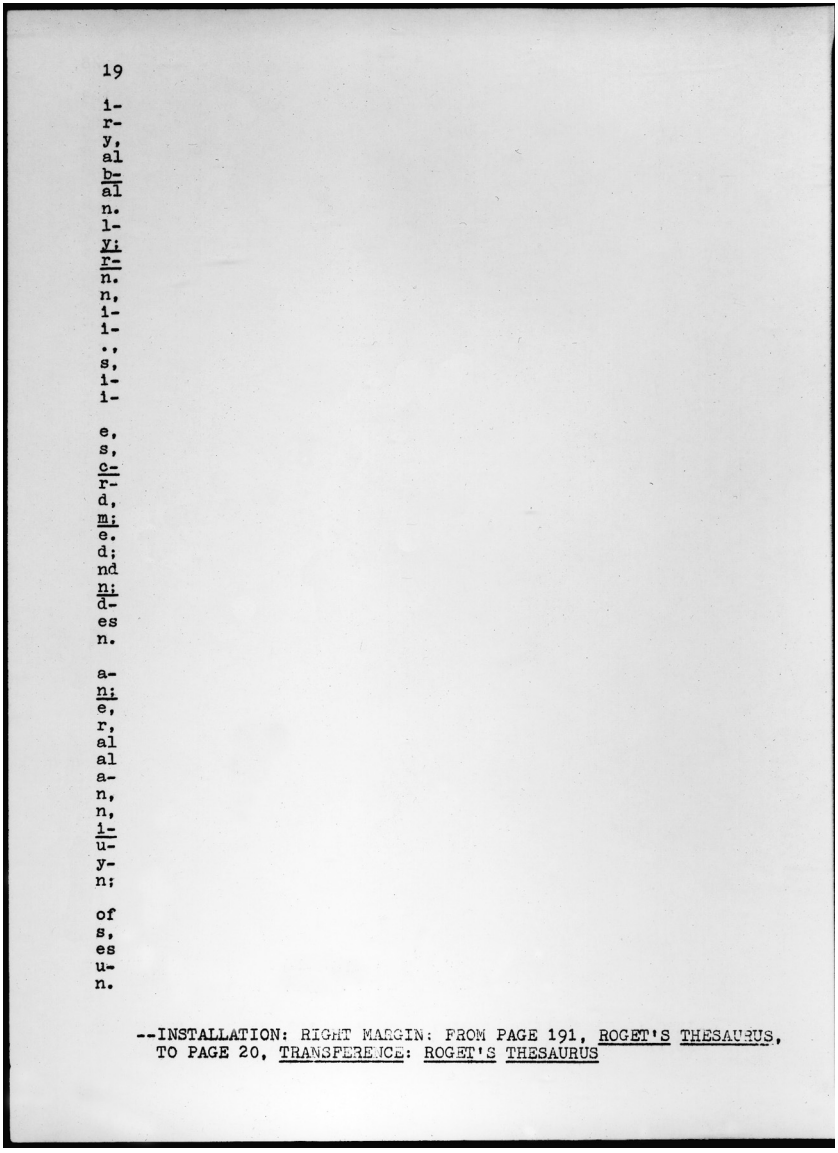
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Figure 4.4 Acconci, *Transference/Roget's Thesaurus* (1969), cover and page 19. ©Vito Acconci. Courtesy of the artist.



19

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--INSTALLATION: RIGHT MARGIN: FROM PAGE 191, ROGET'S THESAURUS, TO PAGE 20, TRANSPERENCE: ROGET'S THESAURUS

of possible word uses, which he proceeds to demolish through a series of "relocations." If Acconci's first book work, *Four Book* (1968), compiled language as a series of clichés and self-referential conventions, in his subsequent project, *Transference/Roget's Thesaurus* (1969), relocated columns of text—most only one to two letters thick—are aligned along the far right or left edge of the page, shattering any meaning or function.[55] Yet like the activation of site implicit in Andre's massing poems, what Acconci's "transference" frames is the space of the page, which is here left almost entirely empty.

In *0 to 9,* Acconci's fragmented writing through projects spill from page to page, sometimes intrusively interrupting works by other authors. For instance, in *0 to 9* 3 (1968), Acconci's sixteen-page poem "ON (a magazine version of a section of a long prose)" sprawls throughout the magazine, its pages appearing between works by Guillaume Apollinaire, Aram Saroyan, John Giorno, and Clark Coolidge, like some strange interstitial material. The right-hand column gathers words from whatever text it happens to be next to, in a parasitic manner that suggests "ON" could only exist among other materials. Unlike Andre, who works on a prior source, but whose poems exist in pristine isolation, Acconci's magazine projects, like Graham's, work *on* a site, in relation to other texts, in a profoundly social and relational practice.

In *0 to 9* 5, in 1969, Acconci performed a series of word transfers, in which he would "move" the final word of other contributors' texts down to the bottom right corner of the page and in effect reauthor it as a work of his own. Thus, on the final page of Sol LeWitt's "Sentences on Conceptual Art," Acconci has relocated the word "art," appending the notation "moving art /—V.H.A." on the bottom right corner of the page. That Acconci performed such works with full awareness of contemporaneous developments in the visual arts is attested to by the double-page spread that follows the next contribution, in which a relocation performed on one of Jerome Rothenberg's "Seneca Songs" appears next to a reproduction of Robert Smithson's "Non-Site Map of Mono-Lake, California." In these transference works and magazine projects, Acconci's poems reveal the repressed aggressivity of Mac Low's and Cage's writing through projects, which frame their borrowings as honorific gestures of reappropriation—acts of homage typically performed on classic and long-dead authors—and recontain them within single, bounded works.[56]

Vito Hannibal Acconci

on(to this, that is, to the s
um of it all, they move on un
til they have something on hi
m, and another on her, and mo
re on you, and most of all((i
t all))on me, that is to say,
on one and all((it all)), unt
il then, and then it was that
they could move only on and o
ff, and this it was((all this
, it has been said))that they
did on and on. They did it up
. No, they did it up. No but'
s about it, it was the day th
at did it up.

But at least they half-did
it up. "The smallest in size,
in degree, in importance, the
y have done it up((just as mu
ch as they, at least, half-di
d it up there))when they moun
ted a ladder to climb into th
e saddle((they did it up here
))to go upstairs."

--Continued on Page 11--

ON(a magazine version of a
section of a long prose)

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unto enormous
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that refuge
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the

--Continued--

4

Figure 4.5 Acconci, excerpt from "ON (a magazine version of a section of a long prose)," *0 to 9* 3. (1968): 4. © Vito Acconci. Courtesy of the artist.

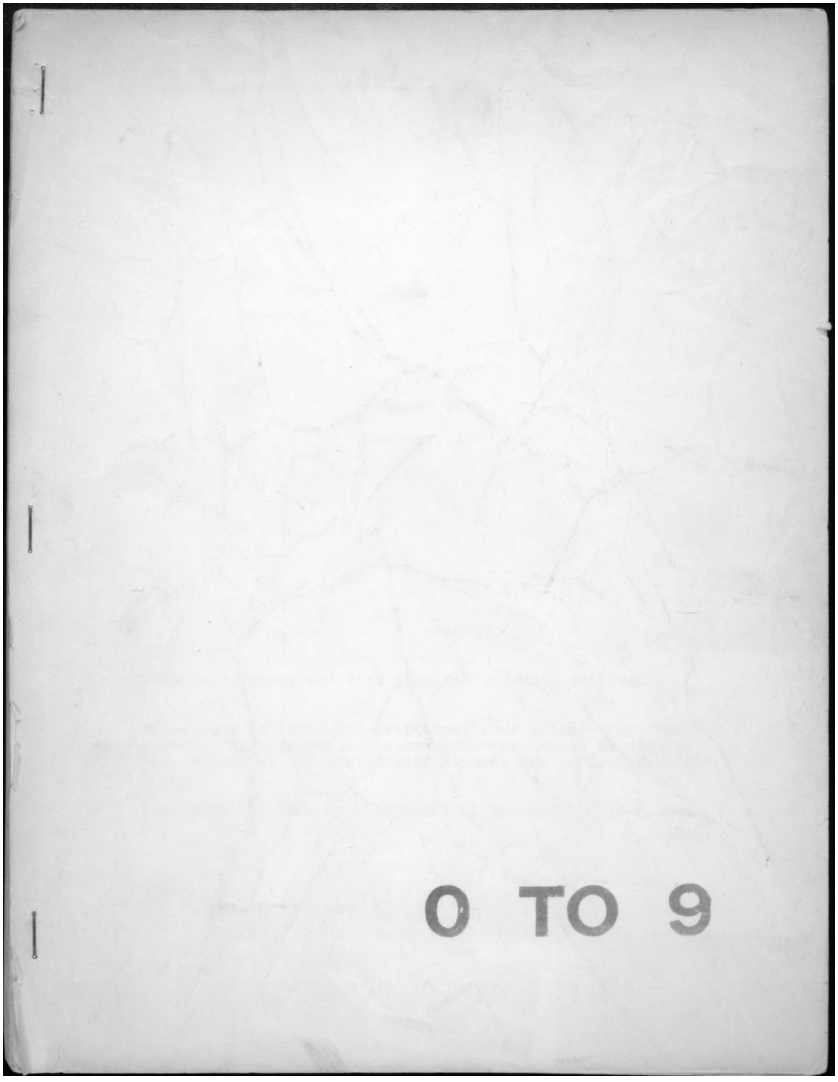


Figure 4.6 Cover of *0 to 9* 5 (1969), and Acconci, detail of "moving art" (5). Courtesy of Vito Acconci and The Getty Research Library.

may be used as ideas for new works.

29. The process is mechanical and should not be tampered with. It should run its course.

30. There are many elements involved in a work of art. The most important are the most obvious.

31. If an artist uses the same form in a group of works, and changes the material, one would assume the artist's concept involved the material.

32. Banal ideas cannot be rescued by beautiful execution.

33. It is difficult to bungle a good idea.

34. When an artist learns his craft too well he makes slick art.

35. These sentences comment on art but are not art.

---

moving art
-V.H.A.

5

Unlike the burgeoning movement of 1960s' "performance poetry" designed to be read aloud, Acconci constructs the poem itself as a highly enclosed "performance" space, a present-tense space of encounter in which the reader has little option but to retrace the path laid out by the poet: "I was thinking of the page, the book, almost as a field for me, as writer, to travel over. Then, in turn, this page would be a field for you, as reader, to move over, to travel over."[57] His growing concern for extreme literalness confines both reading and writing, as "Text" (1969) demonstrates:

> READ THIS WORD THEN READ THIS WORD READ THIS
> WORD NEXT READ THIS WORD NOW SEE ONE WORD
> SEE ONE WORD NEXT SEE ONE WORD NOW AND THEN
> SEE ONE WORD AGAIN LOOK AT THREE WORDS HERE
> LOOK AT THREE WORDS NOW LOOK AT THREE WORDS
> NOW TOO TAKE IN FIVE WORDS AGAIN TAKE IN FIVE
> WORDS SO TAKE IN FIVE WORDS DO IT NOW SEE
> THESE WORDS AT A GLANCE SEE THESE WORDS AT
> THIS GLANCE AT THIS GLANCE HOLD THIS LINE IN
> VIEW HOLD THIS LINE IN ANOTHER VIEW AND IN A

Rather than opening the poem out on to the world through communal vocal realization, Acconci's notion of the poem as a "field for action" opposes the collaborative, emancipatory dynamics of the oral poetics movement almost point for point. In earlier poems such as "RE," Acconci orchestrates language as a self-enclosed set of operations of placement and replacement with almost no point of entry for the reader, constricting the page into a perversely conceived "arena in which to act" with no apparent human agency.[58] And in "Text," the readerly performance is so tightly controlled that no room is left for interpretation or individual variation. As Acconci outlines his procedures in the journal *Avalanche,*

> The page has to be narrowed in on, treated as a chamber space separated from its surroundings. 1. Use words that play on each other and so circle back on themselves, remaining confined on

> the page. 2. Use material that exists only as it's spoken, that exists only in language (for example, use idioms . . . drawing attention to the language used).[59]

For the page to work as a field of operations, it must be staked out, specified, and tested:

> Once the limits of the field are determined, a system of flows and stopping places can be established. . . . The page has to recede, pull back: it doesn't compete with elements outside but is used, instead, alongside them. Use this page as the start of an event that keeps going, off the page; use the page to fix the boundary of an event, or a series of events, that take place in some outside space.[60]

The operative distinction here is not between written and oral forms, nor between text and performance. For Acconci, speech, like all language, is an extension of pragmatic human action and interaction, not a codified aesthetic sphere; it is a field of force, a field of encounter. Performance in Acconci's work has no resemblance to a strategic resuscitation of theater's archaic roots in ritual. Instead, *working from language,* Acconci is among the handful of artists who helped generate a new, entirely nontheatrical performance of the human body as a material subjected to physical and durational operations.

Acconci's poems performed actions resembling the quintessential procedures of postminimal sculpture: cutting, moving, removing, interrupting, joining, separating, displacing, confining, dispersing, tearing, lifting, and breaking. Increasingly moving off the page, Acconci's performances realized related actions with and on his body: lifting, pulling, displacing, and joining. From 1969 to 1971, these shift from the simple, externally directed operations of "Early Work: Moving My Body into Place"—throwing a ball, slapping a microphone—to the self-directed actions of "Body as Place: Moving in on Myself, Performing Myself," which often involved inscribing marks on his own body—rubbing, burning, biting, and plucking—to work with surrogates in "People Space—Performing Myself Through Another Agent" and "Occupied Zone—Moving in, Performing on Another Agent," in which

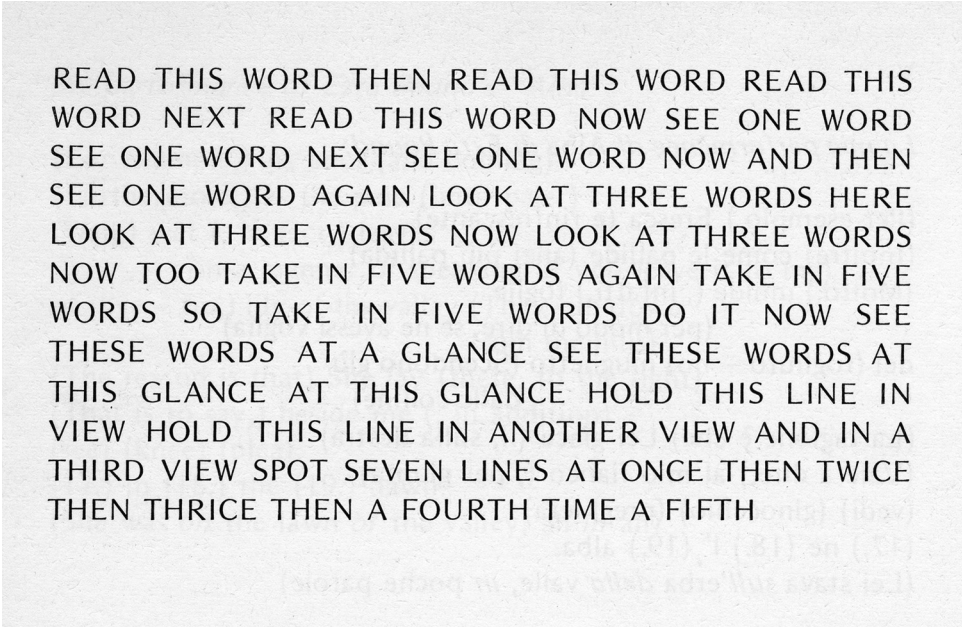


Figure 4.7 Acconci, "Text" (1969). © Vito Acconci. Courtesy of the artist.

Acconci attempts to control audience members or a fellow performer through increasingly aggressive physical actions—in installations like *Claim* (1971) and videos like *Prying, Pull,* and *Remote Control* (all 1971).[61]

While many actions do not entail speech or talk, language is preserved at another level, to generate conventions that structure actions: a subject acts on an object, acts on itself, uses other subjects as surrogates to act, acts on other subjects, and so forth. We could not be further from Cage's or Mac Low's desire to make poetry and performance models for an idealized anarchist society, or from Ashbery's sense of ironic detachment and aesthetic contemplation. Instead, like various corridor pieces and installations made by Bruce Nauman in 1968–1970, Acconci minimizes apparent freedom of movement in order to probe language and performance as inherently disciplinary fields of force and control. Despite appearances, however, this is not a total suppression of chance and indeterminacy but a necessary repositioning of them: rather than being arbitrarily generated through rather-contrived procedures, the unforeseen and unpredictable arise as unavoidable by-products of any system. If in Nauman's durational performances bodily fatigue and loss of concentration cause repetitive systems to go awry, for Acconci the instabilities and incongruities of written and spoken language and performed actions perpetually disrupt procedural rigor.

As Craig Dworkin observes, a tendency to read Acconci's trajectory as a move from the page to the "real space" of the external world obscures the profound continuity between Acconci's poetic and performance work. Instead, Dworkin argues that "Acconci's body art is an explicit continuation of, rather than a 'going beyond' . . . the poetic function," and that "poetic works—as Acconci's own poetry makes clear—exist in a 'real space,' in the world."[62] As Acconci declared in the journal *Avalanche* in 1972, "My involvement with poetry was with movement on a page, the page as a field for action . . . [to] use language to cover a space rather than uncover a meaning. . . . I consider that work now a series of scores for more current work: I can consider my use of the page as a model space, a performance area in miniature."[63] This notion of the score resembles the short, instrumental texts of George Brecht, Simone Forti, and La Monte Young far more than the musical, notational forms of Mac Low, Dick Higgins, or other poets and artists composing with language as performed sound.

Vito Acconci

STEP PIECE

Apartment 6B, 102 Christopher Street, New York City.

8AM each day; 1970: February, April, July, November.

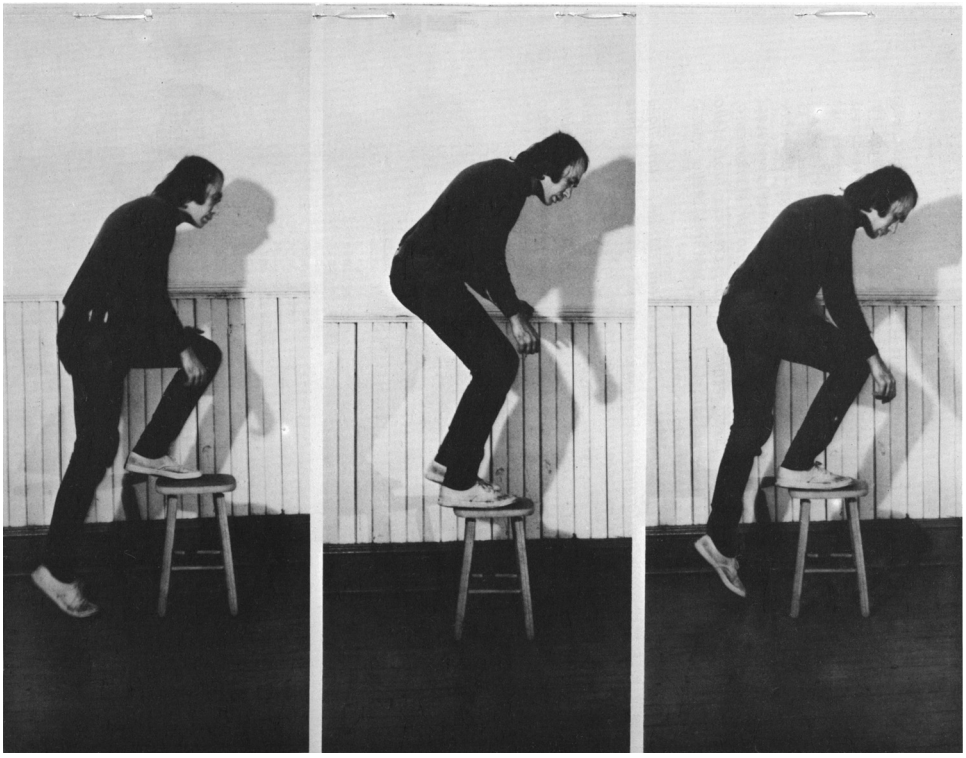
Project:
An 18-inch stool is set up in my apartment and used as a step. Each morning, during the designated months, I step up and down the stool at the rate of 30 steps a minute; each morning, the activity lasts as long as I can perform it without stopping.

Progress Report: daily record of performance time:
Third month (July, 1970):

Date	Duration
July 1	8 min.
2	9 min. 30 sec.
3	7 min.
4	12 min. 20 sec.
5	13 min.
6	14 min. 34 sec.
7	15 min. 10 sec.
8	15 min.
9	15 min. 46 sec.
10	15 min.
11	15 min. 24 sec.
12	15 min. 30 sec.
13	15 min. 10 sec.
14	15 min. 46 sec.
15	16 min.
16	14 min. 50 sec.
17	16 min. 20 sec.
18	16 min. 44 sec.
19	17 min.
20	17 min.
21	17 min. 18 sec.
22	18 min.
23	18 min. 56 sec.
24	18 min. 42 sec.
25	18 min. 50 sec.
26	18 min. 10 sec.
27	18 min. 4 sec.
28	19 min. 20 sec.
29	20 min.
30	20 min. 6 sec.
31	19 min. 20 sec.

Fourth series of performances: November 1970; 8 AM each day.
The public can see the activity performed, in my apartment, any morning during the performance-month; whenever I cannot be home, I will perform the activity wherever I happen to be.

Figure 4.8 Acconci, *Step Piece* (1970). Text and photographs. © Vito Acconci. Courtesy of the artist.



In Acconci's notations for performances, short gerund-based descriptions specify a core action or series of actions—for example, *Following Piece* (1969): "Daily scheme: choosing a person at random, in the street, any location; following him wherever he goes, however long or far he travels (the activity ends when he enters a private place—his home, office, etc.)."[64] While a work like *Following Piece* employs language only at the initial stage—to state the general schema that will then be realized under different conditions each time—it extends the operations of text-based projects like *Transference Roget's Thesaurus* into far more highly charged realms of urban public space. In other performances, like *Step Piece* (1970), language occurs both at the outset, as the set of instructions, and as part of the result, in the table that catalogues his efforts.

While the he/she dyad of videos like *Pull* and *Pryings* (performed with Kathy Dillon) permits viewers to watch while Acconci attempts to coerce a female performance partner, in a series of videos from 1972 to 1973 Acconci uses the paired shifters I/you to lure an ever-changing addressee into a never-ending series of language games embedded in the endlessly repeated presence of mechanically recorded speech.[65] In *Theme Song* (1973), he lies cozily on the living room floor, his head nearly filling the monitor. Acconci talks to us in a deep, resonant voice, inviting us to come join him: "I need somebody. I just need a body next to me. Come in here, I'll wrap around you. You need it as much as I do, we both need it. . . . My body's here, your body could be here." And so on, for the thirty-three minutes of the tape, as Acconci accompanies his monologue with songs of the Doors, Bob Dylan, Van Morrison, and others, noisily flipping the tapes in and out. Although recorded over thirty years ago, the perversely intimate address spins a web—a present-tense space of encounter—in which any viewer can be the "you" who Acconci implores to join him, the "you" who will complete his longings: "How long do I have to wait for you?"

Theme Song, which employs language as a paradigmatic space of human interaction, would be one of Acconci's last projects to use words before he would shift toward overtly architectural containers. As he recalls in an interview from 1984, in moving from poetry to a general art practice, he no longer oriented himself to specific materials, but to transferable procedures not bound to a particular setting or media:



Figure 4.9 Acconci, *Theme Song* (1973). Video still. © Vito Acconci. Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts Intermix.

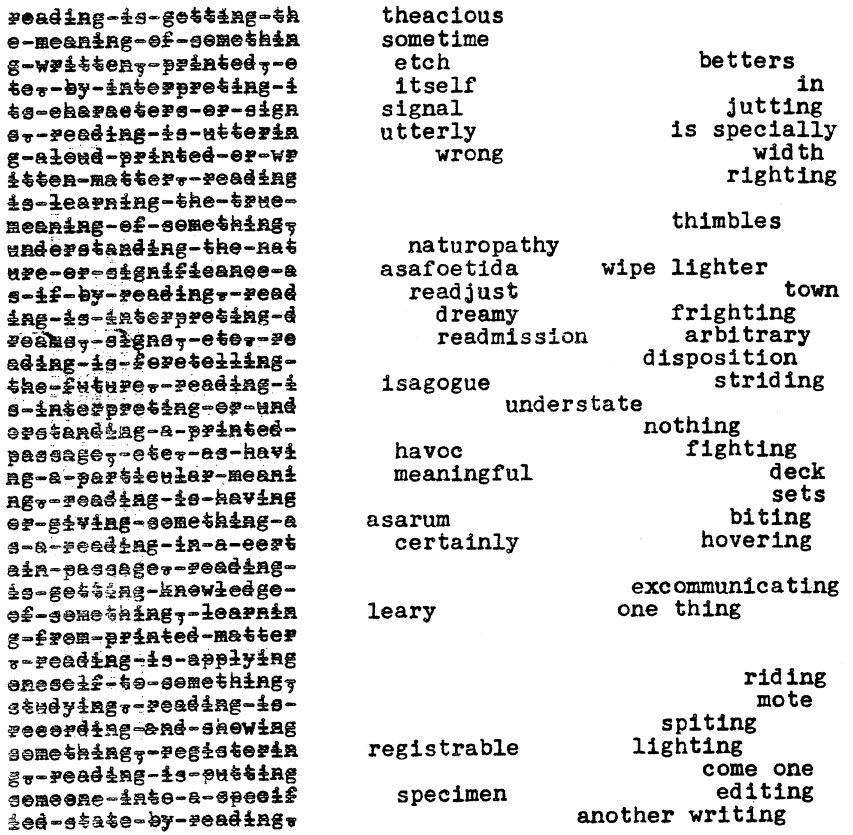


Figure 4.10 Acconci, *Untitled* ("reading") and *Untitled* ("writing"), *0 to 9* 4 (1968): 54–55. ©Vito Acconci. Courtesy of the artist.

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writing.-writing-is-c
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g-in-writing.-writing
is-communicating-with
someone-in-writing,-w
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wrongdoer
checkbook
etch
wrongdoing
covering letter
communication
sometimes
wrongful
notebook
wrongheaded
entity
somersault
wroth
undesigning

arm
belt
car
ceiling
chair
chest
chin
cigarette
concrete
desk
door
dress
ear
eye
floor
forehead
grass
hand
lamp
leg
mouth
neck
nose
pants
pencil
radio
rug
shirt
shoe
shoulder
sink
skirt
sky
table
wall
window

> My work shifted from a literary to an art context because I had gotten to the point where it didn't seem to me that the page was useful and at first I thought, 'OK, I can chose something else that will be a replacement.' However, since I'd gotten to that point, I realized that I could probably assume that any medium I chose would at some time in the future not be useful. Therefore, rather than focus on a particular ground, it seemed to make more sense to shift that emphasis to the instruments that worked *on* that ground. Why not shift that emphasis to me, then I could work on whatever ground happened to be available at that time.[66]

Noting that his "exploration of the ground" began with poetry, Acconci elaborates that "when I was writing, I was interested in the page as a space: how you go left margin to right margin, how you go from one page to another page. It occurred to me that if I'm so interested in this question of space and movement over a page, why am I confining this movement to an $8^1/_2$ x 11 inch piece of paper?"[67] Yet despite Acconci's efforts in site-based and architectural projects to construct three-dimensional spaces for actual human interaction, the immense range of media, resources, and settings employed do not necessarily make these encounters more compelling than the exceedingly simple yet complex actions played out by words on a page. Indeed, these actions of language form the underlying basis of all his later work. However peculiar Acconci's text-based works may be, the frequency with which such antireferential, apparently dysfunctional language systems appear in late 1960s' projects by artists like Kosuth, LeWitt, and Adrian Piper suggests that these gestures of extreme linguistic reduction provided a necessary vehicle for testing out the spatial, contingent, and contextual properties of language—strategies that would later be used to generate overtly politicized analyses of discursive and institutional systems by Hans Haacke, Piper, Martha Rosler, and others.

5

Language between Performance and Photography

In efforts to theorize the emergence of what can properly be called Conceptual art, one of the most vexing problems has been in considering its relation to the linguistic, poetic, and performative practices associated with the prior moment of Happenings and Fluxus. More is at stake here than historicist questions of influence or precedent. The tendency to take at face value various claims—about the conceptualist suppression of the object in favor of analytic statements or "information"—obscures what may be some of the most important accomplishments of this work.

To understand how the use of language in Conceptual art both emerges from and breaks with a more object-based notion of process as well as an overtly performance-based model of spectatorial interaction, we must understand it in a crucial historical context: the larger shift from the perception-oriented and "participatory" post-Cagean paradigms of the early 1960s to the overtly representational, systematized, and self-reflexive structures of Conceptual art. Despite the tendency to see language as something like the "signature style" of conceptual art, it is essential to remember that the turn to language as an artistic material occurs earlier, with the profusion of text-based scores, instructions, and performance notations that surround the context of Happenings and Fluxus. Only in acknowledging this relation can we understand what is different, what is distinct, about the emergence of more explicit and self-consciously "conceptual" uses of language, which employed it as both iterative structure and representational medium.

This turn to language, I will argue, occurs alongside a pervasive logic structuring 1960s' artistic production, in which a "general" template or idea potentially generates multiple "specific" realizations—whether these take the

form of performed act, sculptural objects, or linguistic statement. This logic, embedded in the early event scores of artists like George Brecht, Yoko Ono, and La Monte Young, only comes to the fore in the later 1960s' work of Lawrence Weiner, On Kawara, Dan Graham, and other artists, whose readings of the "linguistic" underpinnings of minimal art allows them to comprehend the potential equivalence of different forms of signifiers—object, photograph, and text—that can be subjected to analogous operations of reduction, placement, replacement, and iteration.

In what follows, I would like to propose one trajectory through this art, in which uses of language vector toward the conditions of "photography" or toward the conditions of "performance"—not that these are clearly separable, as we will see. To map this out, I will begin by comparing two very different projects: Brecht's *Three Chair Events* (1961) and Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* (1965). The first is a relatively little-known work associated with the moment of Happenings and (proto) Fluxus, and the second is a canonical and much-reproduced landmark of early Conceptual art. Both could be said to explore the relationship between language and the object by playing it off a third term—in Brecht's case, performance, and in Kosuth's, photography. Not only will comparing these two artists destabilize movement-based approaches; the terms performance and photography will themselves slip in unexpected ways.

From Participatory Aesthetics to Representational Media

Best known through his affiliation with Fluxus, Brecht was active in New York's downtown art scene since the late 1950s, when he attended John Cage's class in experimental composition at the New School. Inspired by works such as Cage's legendary 1952 "silent" composition *4'33",* which directs the performer to remain silent for the duration of the piece, as described earlier, Brecht pursued a focus on the spontaneous unfolding of everyday events, a heightened perceptual attention that would open diverse phenomena—performances, but also objects and installations—to different kinds of participation and potential interaction. While still in Cage's class, Brecht began making the "rearrangeable assemblages" that later served as prototypes for

the endless editions of FluxBoxes, kits, and games. Most consisted of cabinets or cases of small everyday objects such as blocks, cards, bells, and balls that could be physically manipulated and played with, introducing the various tactile, auditory, and ludic dimensions characteristic of Fluxus object production.

Brecht also produced a number of more prosaic table and chair pieces that point more toward something like minimalism. In the fall 1961 exhibit Environments, Situations, Spaces at the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York, Brecht presented one of his ongoing series of chair pieces or chair "events." In a 1973 interview, Brecht recalled the initial gallery installation:

> They [chairs] interest me because they can pass unnoticed: you can't tell if they're works of art or not. One day, again in 1960 [*sic*] at Martha Jackson's, I showed three chairs . . . one black, one white, one yellow. The white one was presented under a spotlight, very theatrically, like a work of art. The black chair was in the bathroom and I have the impression that no one noticed that it was part of the exhibition. But the most beautiful event happened to the yellow chair that was outside on the side-walk in front of the gallery. When I arrived there was a very lovely woman wearing a large hat comfortably sitting in the chair and talking to friends. And do you know who it was? It was Claes Oldenburg's mother.[1]

The piece was a realization of Brecht's *Three Chair Events*—one of the many event scores that he composed in the early 1960s and circulated in printed form. Like other Brecht pieces of the time, *Three Chair Events* could be realized in any number of ways: by actually orchestrating it, making it happen, as Brecht did at Martha Jackson's, or by simply noticing it taking place in the world, as a kind of perceptual ready-made—in keeping with other scores in which simple everyday occurrences (faucets dripping, phones ringing, or "exit" and "no smoking" signs) were reframed as events. Indeed, the object and performance modes of Brecht's events are so nearly fused—"every object is an event . . . and every event has an object-like quality"—that I may be tendentious in distinguishing them, in order to propose an implicit three-part



Figure 5.1 Brecht, *Blair* (1959).
Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 5.2 Brecht, *Three Chair Events,* installed at Environments, Situations, Spaces exhibition, Martha Jackson Gallery (1961). Photo by Robert McElroy. © Robert R. McElroy/VAGA, New York.

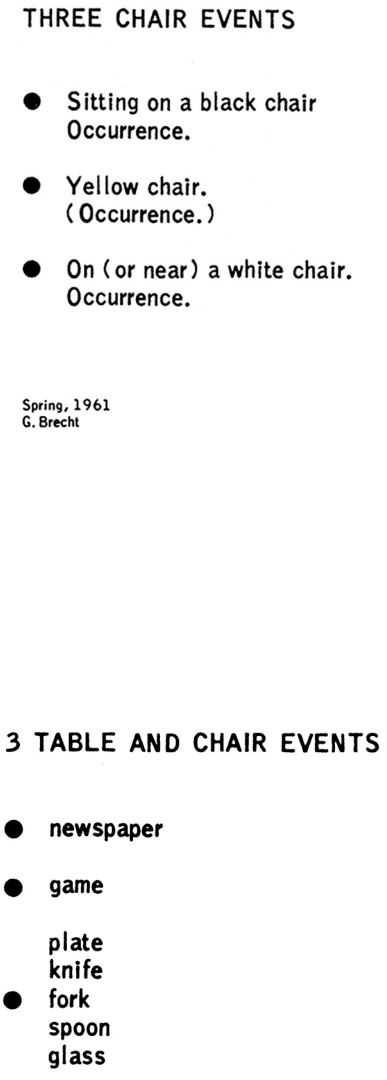


Figure 5.3 Brecht, *Three Chair Events* (1961) and *3 Table and Chair Events* (1961). Courtesy of the artist.

structure internal to Brecht's works and many related proto-Fluxus projects.[2] Such an analysis, conceptually separating out dimensions—the temporal performance and the material prop or residue—that are programmatically merged in Brecht's work, is enabled by the very mechanisms of preservation and documentation that convey Brecht's work to the present: museum exhibitions and photography, each of which tend to produce an original (the actual chair or the initial gallery staging) that the ongoing temporality of the event effaces. What are the stakes, then, of comparing it with the elegantly articulated tripartite structure of Kosuth's early *Proto-Investigations?*

Viewed in retrospect, from the perspective of late 1960s' Conceptual art, one is struck by the relative *repression* of photography in most proto-Fluxus and Fluxus-related work. Although many early and mid-1960s' performances were photographed—by Peter Moore, Manfred Leve, George Maciunas, and others—photography was rarely systematically employed or addressed by Brecht or other Fluxus artists, who apparently regarded photographs as secondary, documentary records of an experience that was primarily *perceptual* and *temporal*—not representational and static.[3] An almost moralistic aversion to the photographic reduction of experience was widespread around minimal art as well, as evident in Carl Andre's comment that "art is a direct experience with something in the world, and photography is just a rumor, a kind of pornography of art."[4] In a sense, Cagean and minimalist projects were united by an ambivalence toward inscriptive technologies and representational media: despite Cage's use of radio broadcasts and magnetic tape in certain compositions, he famously refused to own phonographic records since he viewed these as falsifications of music, and many of his own performance protocols (the orientation to the visual and theatrical, environmental sound, and so forth) focus precisely on those elements that evade sound recording. Despite Hans Namuth's widely circulated 1950 photographs of Pollock painting, or Yves Klein's staged *Leap into the Void* of 1960, the artistic investigation of postwar conditions of representational media and "publicity" was gradual, intermittent, and highly resistant. It is this hierarchical relationship, between what Seth Siegelaub referred to as "primary information" and "secondary information," that will be programmatically inverted (and perhaps deconstructed) in Conceptual art.[5]

In 1965, Kosuth had just moved to New York and was a twenty-year-old student at the School of the Visual Arts when he made, or at least initially envisioned, several of what were to become foundational works of American Conceptual art. The dating of some of these early works remains contested, since many were not actually fabricated, or publicly shown, until considerably later. *One and Three Chairs* appears among a series of works that combine objects, photographs, and enlarged photostats of dictionary definitions, from the *One and Three Brooms* to *One and Five Clocks.* These works were retrospectively titled the *Proto-Investigations* only after Kosuth initiated his late 1960s' *Investigations,* in which basic properties of art, meaning, intention, and reference were systematically probed in procedures drawn from logical positivism and linguistic philosophy—mapping out categories, establishing definitions, diagramming statements and relationships, testing out contexts of use, and so forth.

Anne Rorimer describes Kosuth's *Proto-Investigations* as extensions of the readymade principle, in which functional, everyday objects are situated within a tripartite system:

> Having been extracted from the "real" world of use and re-placed to function within the world of art, the objects re-present themselves. Kosuth thereby represented the idea of representation per se through photographic and/or linguistic means. As the combination of three equal parts, a photograph, an object, and a text, these works are statements of fact, not simply about external reality, but about the means to represent it.[6]

In his extended essay on Conceptual art, Benjamin Buchloh argues that what Kosuth's three-part structure systematizes and simplifies is precisely the "tripartite division of the aesthetic signifier—its separation into object, linguistic sign, and photographic reproduction"—earlier found in Robert Morris's *I-Box* (1962), which presents a grinning nude photo of the artist behind a door shaped like the letter I.[7] While any number of previous assemblage-based projects collocated language, object, and photograph within a single work (Joseph Cornell's boxes or Rauschenberg's combines), the pared-down,



Figure 5.4 Kosuth, *One and Three Chairs* (1965). Courtesy of the artist and Sean Kelly Gallery, New York.

unified form of Morris or Kosuth structurally *equates* these terms, positioning them as comparable or substitutable equivalents for one another. In *One and Three Chairs,* to adopt Rorimer's terms, the object "re-presents" itself: it functions photographically, as a sign pointing to itself, as well as quasi-linguistically, offering something like the statement "this is a chair, presented as art." Despite Kosuth's tight calibration, the three terms are precisely *not* exact equivalents; what makes the tripartite structure compelling is the simultaneous *redundancy* and *divergence* among the "messages."

A recent overview of conceptual art describes Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* as

> an example of documentation, where the "real" work is the concept—"What is a chair?" "How do we represent a chair?" And hence "What is art?" and "What is representation?" It seems a tautology: a chair is a chair is a chair, much as he claimed that "art is art is art" was tautologous. The three elements that we can actually see . . . are ancillary to it.[8]

This account, I think, is exactly how the piece is conventionally understood: as a collection of three states or examples of the "chair," which then produces a reflection on the conditions of representation of this or any object, and on art in general. This ascending spiral of abstraction is, of course, what is authorized by both Kosuth's own statements on his work, and his subsequent trajectory in which the object would be eliminated altogether in favor of first the photograph and then the photographically reproduced text.[9] Yet one could read, for instance, Marcel Broodthaers's witty and rather nasty "museum fictions"—particularly the 1972 *Musée d'art moderne, département des aigles, section publicité,* with its ragtag assortment of every manner of eagle insignia, object, figurine, photograph, and image, accompanied by the incessant labels "fig. 1" and "This is not a work of art"—as a different excavation of the implications of Kosuth's *Proto-Investigations,* one that systematically probes and proliferates the semiotic instabilities that Kosuth's "idea" attempts to reign in.

In a 1969 self-interview, Kosuth described his turn away from working with objects and materials as a result of the inherent difficulty of controlling

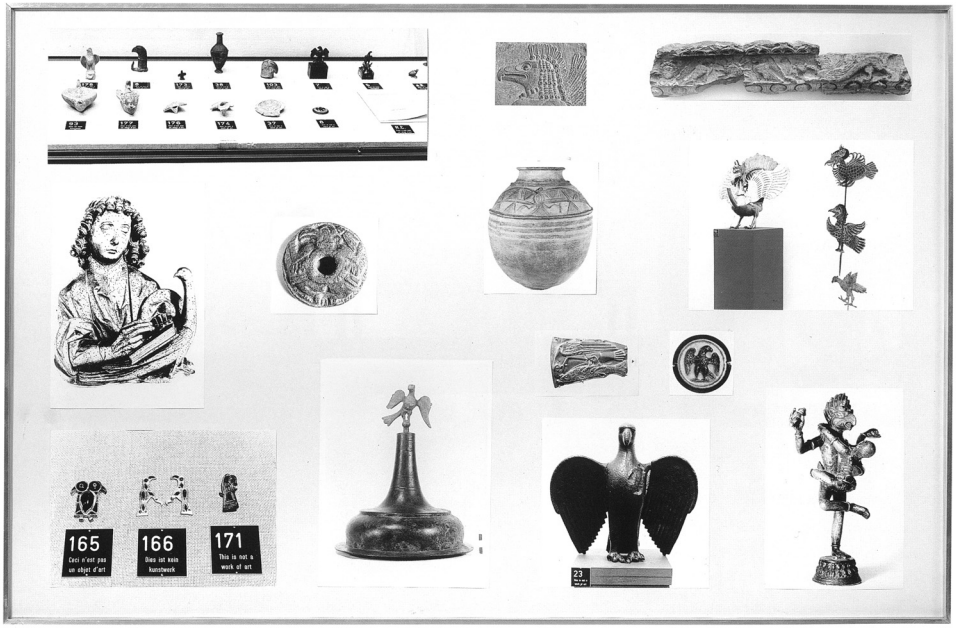


Figure 5.5 Marcel Broodthaers, *Musée d'art moderne, département des aigles, section publicité* (1972). Courtesy of Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

their meanings and reception: "The separation between one's own ideas and one's use of materials . . . becomes almost uncommunicatively wide when confronted by a viewer. I wanted to eliminate that gap."[10] Noting that "there is always something hopelessly real about materials" that prevents them from functioning as bearers of abstract ideas, Kosuth described his adoption of language as a more effective means of transmitting a kind of "art information" that could be increasingly detached from any concrete, material condition:

> It was the feeling I had about the gap between materials and ideas that led me to present a series of photostats of the dictionary definitions of water. I was interested in just presenting the *idea* of water. I had used actual water earlier because I liked its colorless, formless quality. I didn't consider the photostat as a work of art; only the idea was art. The words in the definition supplied the *art information;* just as the shape and color of a work could be considered its art information. . . . In this series, I went from presenting an abstraction of a particular (water, air) to abstractions of abstractions (meaning, empty, universal, nothing, time).[11]

In this peculiar process of reduction, first a basic material (water) and then a linguistic abstraction (meaning) is pared down to its idea, as represented by a dictionary definition—a format that inevitably (and fundamentally inadequately) defines it in relation to other words, in an unending circuit of references that the photostat conveniently crops and "stills." Just as Rosalind Krauss insisted on the immense *irrationality* of LeWitt's *Incomplete Open Cubes,* with their implacable demonstration of every single instance of a permutational model, Kosuth's seemingly invincible logic of ever-increasing abstraction begs the question of just what kind of materiality is being abandoned, and why.[12] It is tempting to decry this logic for its repression of the very historicity and semiotic materiality of language, as in Mel Bochner's famous 1970 piece *Language Is Not Transparent,* which perhaps all-too-easily reads as a rejoinder to Kosuth, his former student. Indeed, Kosuth's work would seem to serve as the template for the kind of Conceptual art that aims, in Buchloh's

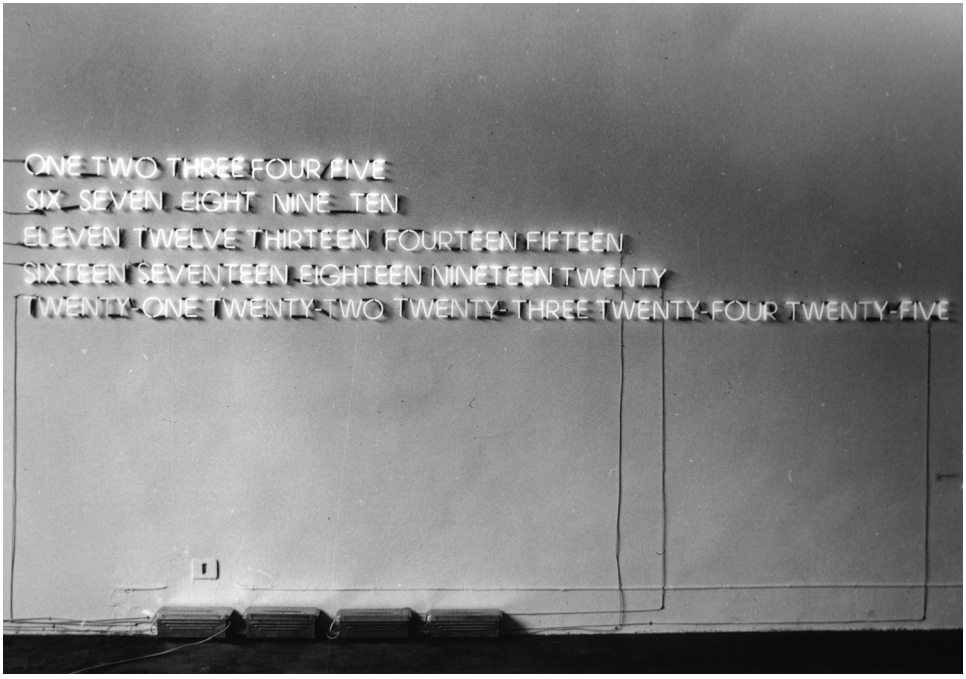


Figure 5.6 Kosuth, *Five Fives (to Donald Judd)* (1965). Courtesy of the artist and Sean Kelly Gallery, New York.

terms, "to replace the object of spatial and perceptual experience by linguistic definition alone."[13] Yet the interest of such efforts—by Adrian Piper, Robert Barry, LeWitt, or Kosuth—is their inevitable failure; to rephrase Hollis Frampton, language is not a substitute for anything.[14]

For all its powerful referential dimensions and capacities to point to and indicate things like objects and experiences, language structurally entails certain gaps, between "word" and "thing," between "meaning" and "intention," that cannot be eliminated in even the most precise communicative act or philosophical proposition. What Kosuth termed "the gap between materials and ideas" persists in language as well, despite his dogged determination to subject linguistic categories to the operations of a "perceptual positivism" analogous to the "systematic reduction and empirical validation of the perceptual data of a visual structure" that has historically characterized abstract painting from Piet Mondrian to Ad Reinhardt.[15] As Michel Foucault proposed in 1966 in *The Order of Things,* the search for purely formal languages of logic,

> transparent to the forms of knowledge, initiated by Bertrand Russell, is a paradoxical result of the nineteenth-century attention to phonology and the specific historicity and material density of languages. Both represent the fragmented condition of language in modernity, no longer identical to the objects it represents, after the break-up of classical forms of knowledge.[16]

Rather than taking Kosuth's famed tautologies at face value, however, we can instead read the three-part system of *One and Three* Chairs as diagramming the structural specificity of each element—language, object, and photographic inscription—in their radical incommensurability, and as providing terms that permit us to better assess how the use of linguistic materials shifts from performance-based or "performative" modes to explicitly "photographic" models. Despite the enormous differences in their tripartite structures, *both* Brecht and Kosuth implicitly privilege language over the material concreteness and variability of the other terms. Although Kosuth, like most conceptualists, appears to dismiss any relation to work associated with

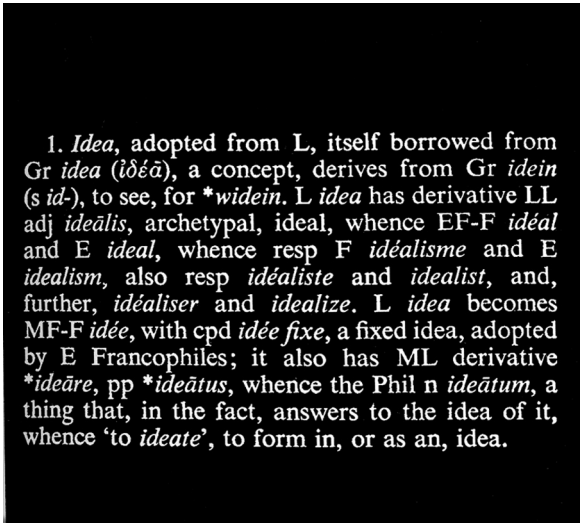


Figure 5.7 Kosuth, *Titled (Art as Idea as Idea) "Idea"* (1967). Courtesy of the artist and Sean Kelly Gallery, New York.

Fluxus, making it pointless to speculate about relations of influence, the shifts between the two pieces manifest a crucial series of transformations that occur in 1960s art, from the heightened perceptual attention to phenomena and participatory models of post-Cagean projects, to the systematic and self-reflexive investigation of representational media characteristic of self-consciously conceptual engagements. Brecht's model is explicitly *temporal:* the pieces are events, not timeless ideas, concepts, or definitions. Drawing on scientific understandings of matter as energy, Brecht's scores shift what appear to be inert objects or materials into a context of process, duration, or imperceptible change, as in his 1961 *Three Aqueous Events,* which reads simply " • ice / • water / • steam."[17] And Brecht's increasingly pared-down texts emphasize the implicitly performative, eventlike nature of language as well as the temporal, eventlike structure of materials. Yet as we look closer, the apparent dichotomy between performative and photographic modes becomes complicated.

For Brecht, the printed score retains the identity of the piece across any number of ephemeral realizations that may be performed by others, somewhat analogously to the way that a musical score retains its identity across unlimited performances or none—except that, in many of his works, the ongoing perceptual experience *precedes* the writing of the events, which provide a kind of linguistic frame that directs attention to preexisting phenomena. Thus, the event score unexpectedly aligns with the operation of the index, the gathering of a sample from an underlying continuum—functioning much like "the way the word *this* accompanied by a pointing gesture isolates a piece of the real world and fills itself up with meaning by becoming, for that moment, the transitory label of a natural event."[18] Brecht's extension of the Duchampian ready-made model from objects to temporal and perceptual phenomena derives from Cage's aesthetics of indifference, in which meaning is constructed by the listener or receiver, not the artist or author. From the outset, Brecht's realizations emphasized the near imperceptibility of the objectively staged events—a quality that Donald Judd picked up on when he compared the "extreme understatement" of Brecht's sculptural pieces to Morris's early plywood constructions in their ordinariness, antihierarchical attitude, and near nonpresence as art. Yet Judd carefully differentiates between

the deliberateness of Morris's sculptures—"made on purpose, not found, to be minimal, unimportant, relatively unordered objects"—and the ready-made structure of works like Brecht's, which extend "the importance of art . . . to everything, most of which is slight, ordinary and unconsidered."[19]

If Brecht is programmatically unable to recognize the extent to which the indexicality of events structurally aligns them with the photograph, Kosuth's *Proto-Investigations* rest on an unacknowledged relation to something like performance. Kosuth himself is continually at pains to elaborate that "only the *idea* was art," not any of the temporary physical manifestations: "The idea with the photostats was that they could be thrown away and then re-made—if need be—as part of an irrelevant procedure connected with the form of presentation, but not with the 'art.'"[20] These particular materials are merely *specific presentations*—Kosuth later uses the term "props"—for a general *idea* that is the work. To the extent that this idea can be instantiated, it presumably exists in language, although some descriptions approach the pure interiority of mental intention, as in Kosuth's early statement that "all I make are models. The actual works of art are ideas . . . the models are a visual approximation of a particular art object I have in mind."[21] And although Kosuth makes certain assertions that the published pieces, for instance, may be used however others see fit—"it can be dealt with by being torn out of its publication and inserted into a notebook or stapled to the wall . . . but any such decision is unrelated to the art. My role as the artist ends with the work's publication"[22]—they remain grounded in a model of authorship that Brecht disclaims in his repeated assertions that "any realization is acceptable to me."

As specific material presentations of a general linguistic idea, Kosuth's conceptual art structurally resembles certain aspects of Brecht's events. Yet for the *Proto-Investigations* to function, they must be realized in material form—that is, constructed and exhibited—since they operate as representational materials in a display context (while the events can exist in, and as, language alone). For Kosuth, it is precisely through photography that the performative, temporal operation enters what is presented as a static, tautological structure; since the photograph documents the actual object in its specific exhibition location, the *Proto-Investigations* have a dimension that is both site specific and temporally re-created. While the idea of *One and Three Chairs* remains fixed,



Figure 5.8 Kosuth, *The Second Investigation* (1968), installation at Leo Castelli Gallery (1969). Courtesy of the artist and Sean Kelly Gallery, New York.

what Kosuth terms the "form of presentation" is remade each time it is shown. A statement from his studio, replying to my questions, elucidates this as follows:

> When you say that a piece is largely re-made in each site what is actually remade is the "form of presentation." The reason to have the "form of presentation" remade at each site is so that the chair (or photograph, table, or other objects used in this series) can be photographed in the exact location where it will be installed in the exhibition. This way the specific conditions, i.e., the wall, floor, lighting, etc., will be correctly incorporated into the photographic component. The date of the "form of presentation" is immaterial because the certificate is the constant.[23]

Hence, behind Kosuth's apparent equivalence of object, photography, and text, there is *another text:* the "production instructions" or drawings that double as a certificate of ownership, and are not exhibited. In a 1996 essay, Kosuth explains, "I've made it clear that these certificates are never to be exhibited, and they rarely are. The art itself, which is neither the props with which the idea is communicated, nor the signed certificate, is only the *idea* in and of the work."[24] For Kosuth, the general linguistic "statement" that permits specific realizations lies on the boundary between the music score/performance "instruction" and the (mythical) minimalist model of the fabrication order telephoned or sent to the factory, or the certificates of ownership that certain minimal artists such as Dan Flavin and Donald Judd used to authenticate works that could be reconstructed. A similar ambiguity haunts LeWitt's instructions for wall drawings. That these very models, of performance instruction and production instruction, are not fully separable points to the performative and linguistic underpinnings of the minimalist "specific object"—iterative dimensions that become overtly apparent in the post-minimal art of Bruce Nauman or Richard Serra, or the conceptual art of Lawrence Weiner.

If, as Rosalind Krauss has argued, the breakdown of the medium-based practices provides one model of a historical shift from "specific" to "general"

forms of art, another logic is at play right alongside it, in which *a "general" template or notational system*—be it musical scores, fabrication instructions, architectural blueprints or diagrams, or schematic representations—*generates "specific" realizations in different contexts.* While I have traced this model from the use of the text as a score, this wider duality between template and realization ceaselessly structures 1960s' projects, from Graham's *Schema (March 1966)* that systematically records its production in a range of concrete publication contexts, to Weiner's ubiquitous "Statements," Douglas Huebler's location, duration, and variable "pieces," and On Kawara's endless series of postcards, telegraphs, journals, and paintings.

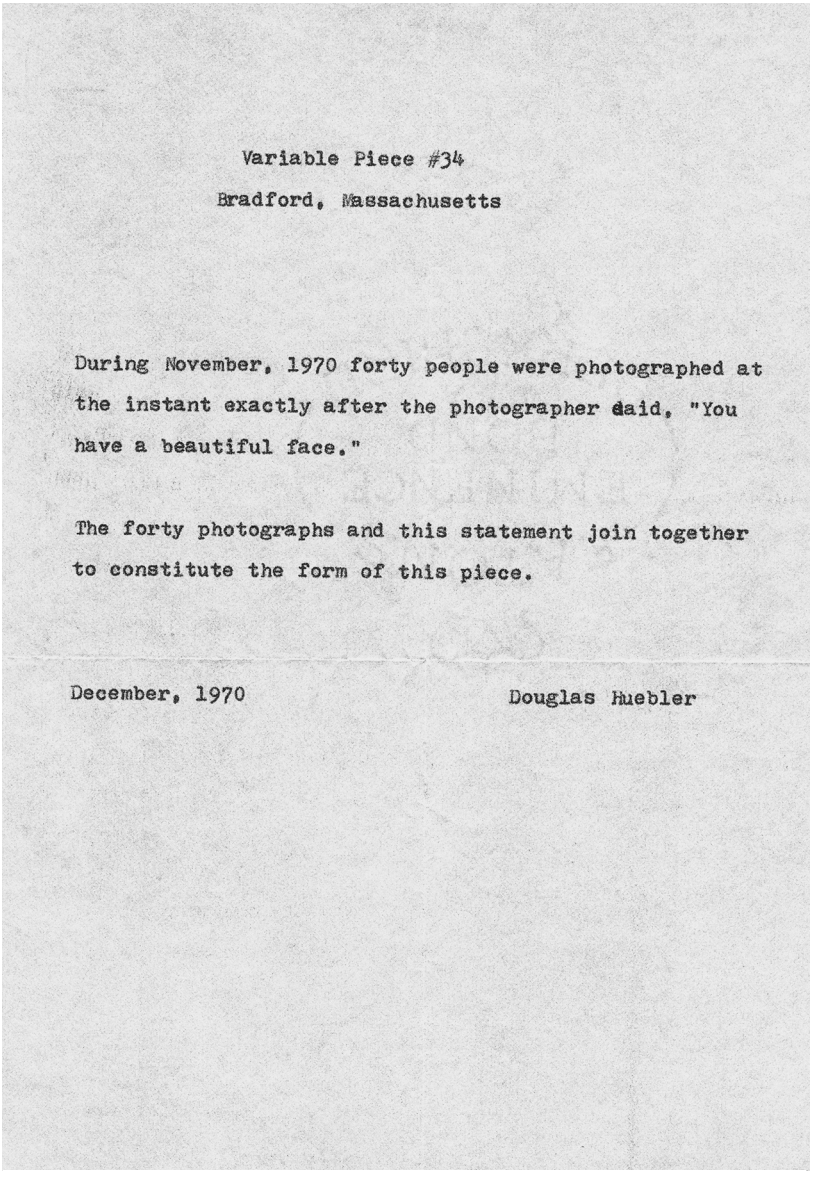
Unlike the photographic logic of original and copy, the relation between a notational system and a realization is not one of representation or reproduction but of *specification:* the template, schema, or score is usually not considered the locus of the work, but merely a tool to produce it; and while the work must conform to certain specifications or configurations, its production necessarily differs from realization to realization.[25] As we can see in projects like Edward Ruscha's *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations,* Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs,* and Huebler's *Variable Pieces,* such notational systems dislocate photography from the *reproductive logic* of original and copy to reposition it as a *recording mechanism* for specific realizations of general schemata. If photography as a means of documentation is so ubiquitous in late 1960s' art, this is not simply due to the proliferation of earthworks, conceptual practices, site-specific projects, and ephemeral realizations but a result of the fact that the work of art has been reconfigured as a specific realization of a general proposition.[26]

From the Specific Object to the Realization

By 1960, an already quite developed program of participatory and interactive aesthetics could be found in certain of Johns's and Rauschenberg's constructions, Brecht's assemblages, Kaprow's Happenings and environments, and any number of other related neo-Dada projects. And yet, these earlier, more utopian efforts to dismantle the conventionality of art through direct, participatory interaction do not yet "comprehend" the kind of structural equivalence between object, language, photograph, *and self* found condensed in Morris's



Figure 5.9 Kawara, *4 Mars 1973* (1973). Courtesy of the artist and David Zwirner Gallery, New York.



Variable Piece #34

Bradford, Massachusetts

During November, 1970 forty people were photographed at the instant exactly after the photographer said, "You have a beautiful face."

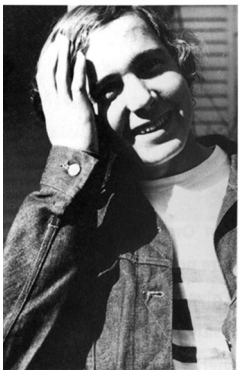
The forty photographs and this statement join together to constitute the form of this piece.

December, 1970 Douglas Huebler

Figure 5.10 Huebler, *Variable Piece 34* (1970). © 2006 Estate of Douglas Huebler/Artists Rights Society, New York.








I-Box (in which the hinged door is almost a parody of the "interactive" objects of Johns and others). It is no historical accident that self-consciously conceptual and linguistically oriented art emerged from prolonged engagements with minimalism, rather than directly from Cagean or neo-Dada practices.[27] Perhaps more than its situational or perceiver-centered aesthetics, the systematic structures and repetitive forms of Minimal sculpture represent a crucial intervention, which allows the conditions of the (industrially produced, repeatable, contextually determined) readymade to be read as a general principle of all experience.[28]

As subsequent controversies around authentication and refabrication have made all-too-clear, the inherent reproducibility of Minimal sculpture implicitly links it to the iterative structure of the post-Cagean event, introducing linguistic dimensions on several levels: (1) the works are composed of separable units, re-arranged and manipulated analogously to linguistic units like words or letters; (2) the work is repeatable, replaceable, analogous to the way that a statement is re-created in each specific utterance; (3) the works acquire their meaning contextually, contingently, in relation to site and viewer, the way a linguistic statement accrues meaning in specific use; (4) the work operates within a set of artistic conventions in relation to which it forms a kind of statement about art; and (5) the works also exist as fabrication instructions, written plan or certificate of ownership, presented in the form of language, blueprints, drawings and/or diagrams. Conceptual art transfers these iterative principles from industrially produced objects encountered in the space of the gallery to the mechanically reproduced images and signs, including language, typically encountered in the space of the page and the informational context of mass media. Part of the paradox of Weiner's work, in this context, rests with his insistence on using language explicitly positioned within a *communicative* function while nonetheless remaining sculpture—a contradiction he acknowledges when he states that "the only thing that interested me was the attempt to deal with the presentation of information by use of materials—paint, canvas, steel, stone, etc.—which had nothing to do with the presentation of information."[29]

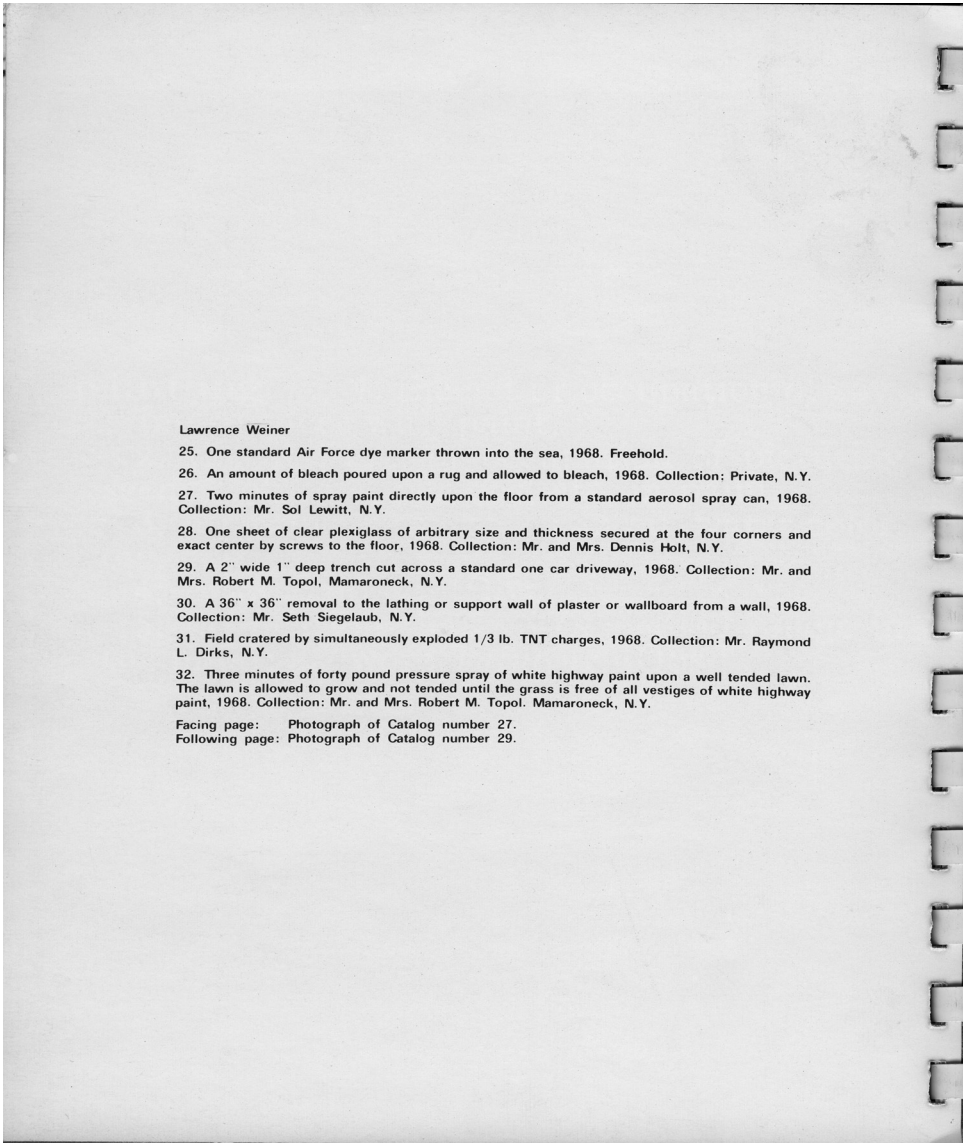
Within the discourse of Conceptual art, the classic articulation of the work as a specific realization of a general proposition is Weiner's 1968 "State-

ment of Intent," which declared that "1. The artist may construct the piece. 2. The piece may be fabricated. 3. The piece need not be built."[30] Yet when Weiner decrees that "the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the condition of receivership," he adopts the terms of postwar media theory, a communicative model that although aimed at securing the faithful transmission of information, effectively displaces the locus of meaning of an utterance from the private intentionality of an author (or source) to the public contextuality of channels of transmission and reception.[31] As Dieter Schwarz has argued, Weiner's tersely worded protocol

> defines a structure, and within it, the positions of the artist, the work, and the recipient. The construction of a work is not contingent upon the person of the artist; it is a function of reception. *The statement of intent is the logical consequence of insight into the linguistic form of artistic production.* If the work is to function linguistically, then every executed piece acquires the passing significance of a specific context that embraces both artist and user.[32]

Weiner insists, in a 1971 interview, that "the work itself is information," elaborating that "it would be a fascist gesture on my part if I were to say, you can accept things only on a verbal information level (type on the page). . . . If the information is conveyed, then the piece exists. And it doesn't matter if it's physically conveyed or whether it's conveyed verbally or orally."[33] Thus, like Kosuth, the information of a piece is understood as something that can be abstracted from any individual manifestation. Nevertheless, while Kosuth's concern is to extricate his production from any specific, "morphological" definition of art—for instance, the aesthetic "formalisms" of Clement Greenberg, Michael Fried, and others—Weiner targets the underlying structures of meaning production:

> Anyone who imposes a unique condition for receivership, for interpretation, for seeing a work, is placing art within a context that is almost 19th century. There is the specific, unique, emotional object produced by a prophet, produced by the only person who



Lawrence Weiner

25. One standard Air Force dye marker thrown into the sea, 1968. Freehold.

26. An amount of bleach poured upon a rug and allowed to bleach, 1968. Collection: Private, N.Y.

27. Two minutes of spray paint directly upon the floor from a standard aerosol spray can, 1968. Collection: Mr. Sol Lewitt, N.Y.

28. One sheet of clear plexiglass of arbitrary size and thickness secured at the four corners and exact center by screws to the floor, 1968. Collection: Mr. and Mrs. Dennis Holt, N.Y.

29. A 2" wide 1" deep trench cut across a standard one car driveway, 1968. Collection: Mr. and Mrs. Robert M. Topol, Mamaroneck, N.Y.

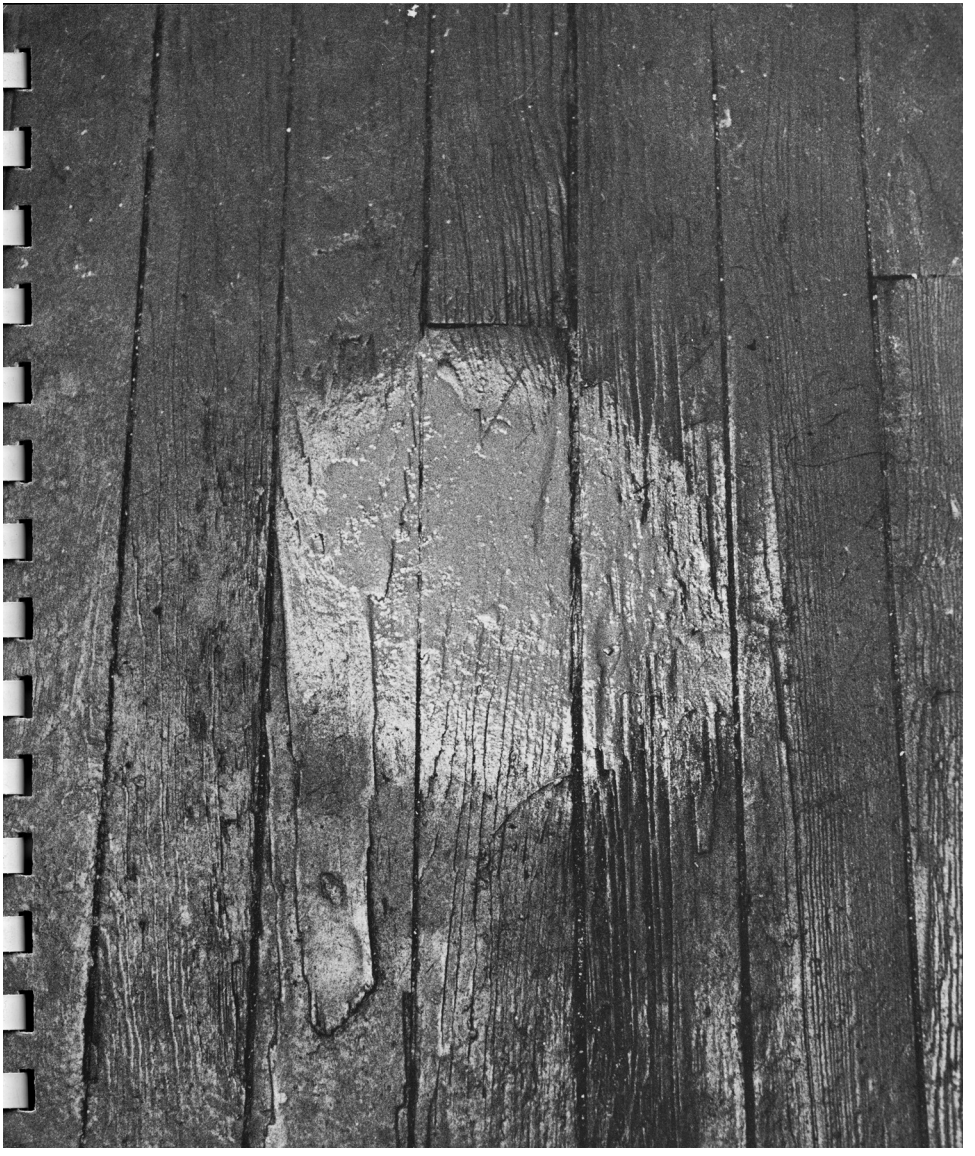
30. A 36" x 36" removal to the lathing or support wall of plaster or wallboard from a wall, 1968. Collection: Mr. Seth Siegelaub, N.Y.

31. Field cratered by simultaneously exploded 1/3 lb. TNT charges, 1968. Collection: Mr. Raymond L. Dirks, N.Y.

32. Three minutes of forty pound pressure spray of white highway paint upon a well tended lawn. The lawn is allowed to grow and not tended until the grass is free of all vestiges of white highway paint, 1968. Collection: Mr. and Mrs. Robert M. Topol. Mamaroneck, N.Y.

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Following page: Photograph of Catalog number 29.

Figure 5.11 Weiner, pages from the catalogue *January 5–31, 1969*. Courtesy of the Moved Pictures Archive.



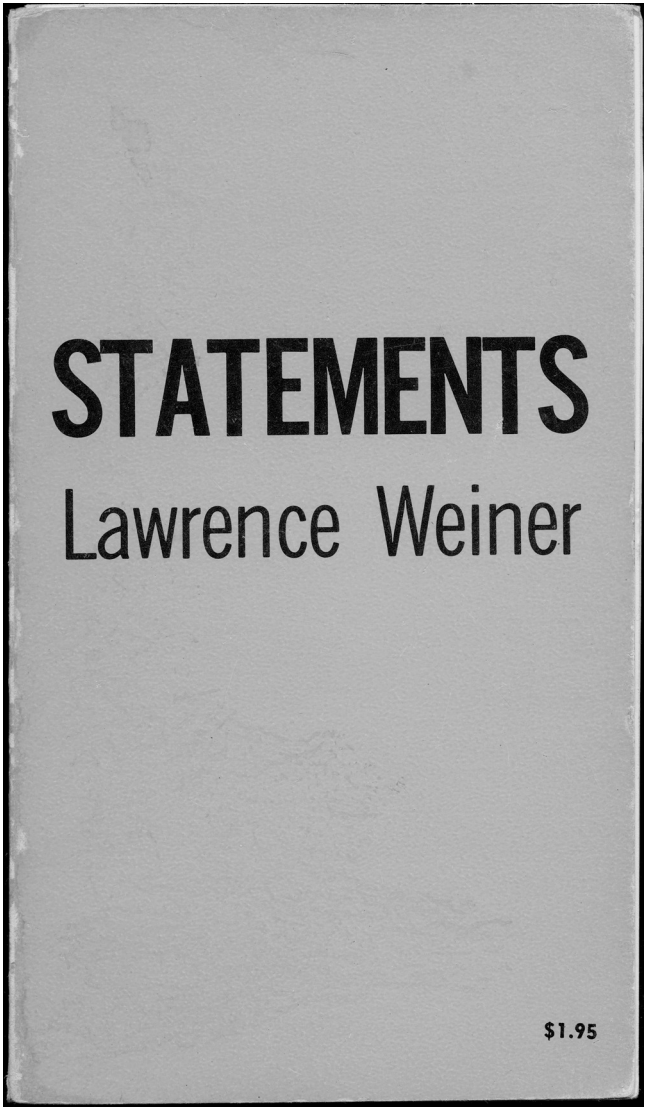
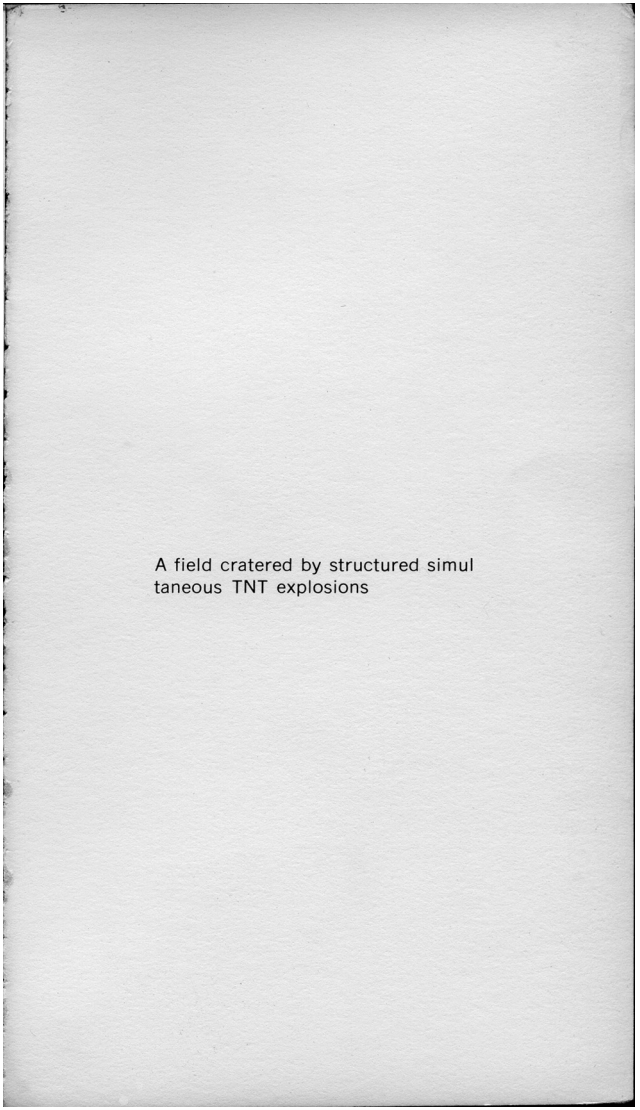
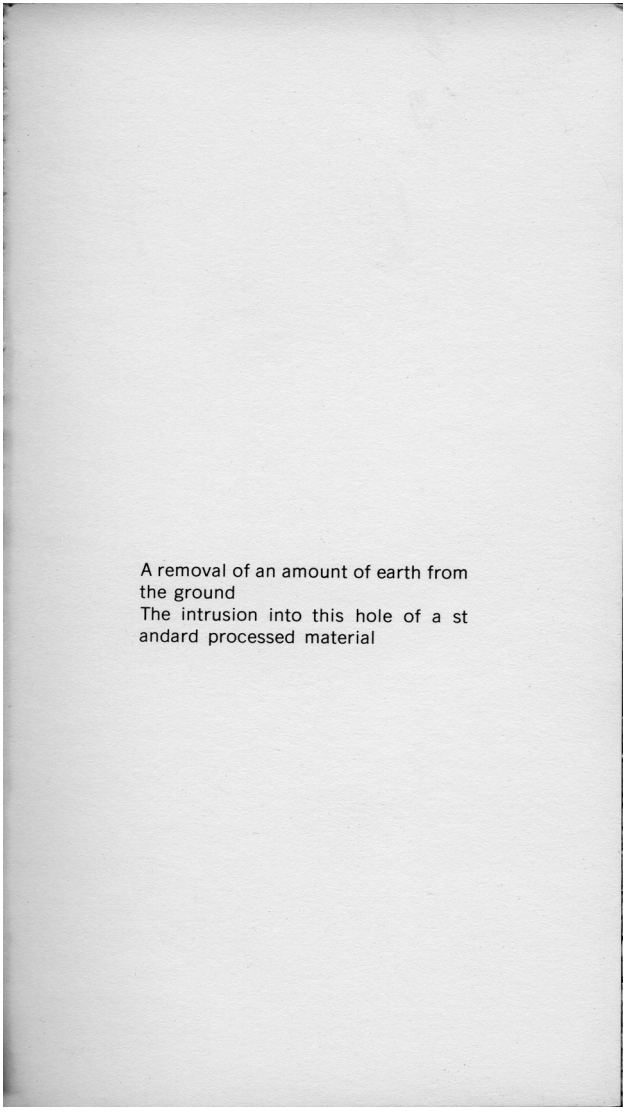


Figure 5.12 Weiner, *Statements* (1968). Courtesy of the Moved Pictures Archive.


A field cratered by structured simul
taneous TNT explosions


A removal of an amount of earth from
the ground
The intrusion into this hole of a st
andard processed material

> can make this. . . .Aesthetically, it is not viable in 1971 . . . to have a prophetic object which insists that its uniqueness constitutes its artness.[34]

As Buchloh maintains, Weiner "detached sculpture from the mythical promise of providing access to pure phenomenological space and primary matter by insisting on the universal common availability of language as the truly contemporary medium of simultaneous collective reception."[35] By adopting as his form "an abstract formulation that allows unlimited realizations," Weiner opens his practice up to a temporality, contextuality, and constant possibility of reinterpretation frequently foreclosed in versions of conceptual art that pursued the linguistic certainty of an entirely self-enclosed, self-defined system.[36] In so doing, Weiner implicitly draws on Cagean principles of indeterminacy that animate Brecht's work and other performance practices. Schwarz, in his account, links Weiner's work to the interactive modes that emerged around Cage, arguing that "Weiner's statement of intent is aligned with the development of reception-oriented artistic practices, exemplified in the United States by the rise of the Happening in the late fifties."[37]

Legend has it that Weiner articulated this model after a 1968 exhibition at Windham College, in which his project, an outdoor installation of posts and strings, was destroyed—a situation that led him to decide that the work still existed as a basic structure or idea, regardless of its material state. In his 1968 book *Statements,* Weiner presents a series of short past-participle phrases describing uses of materials, many of which he had previously constructed, including *One quart exterior green enamel thrown on a brick wall, One aerosol can of enamel sprayed to conclusion directly upon the floor, One standard dye marker thrown into the sea, A field cratered by structured simultaneous TNT explosions,* and *A removal to the lathing or support wall of plaster or wall board from a wall.*[38] Subsequent works include *The residue of a flare ignited upon a boundary,* realized on the Amsterdam city boundary for the 1969 exhibition Op Losse Schroeven. Language thus permitted Weiner to create a work that could retain its identity across multiple manifestations and was not subject to the uniqueness of the traditional art object, whether painting or sculpture. Weiner's transition from the minimalist specific object to linguistic representation has parallels with

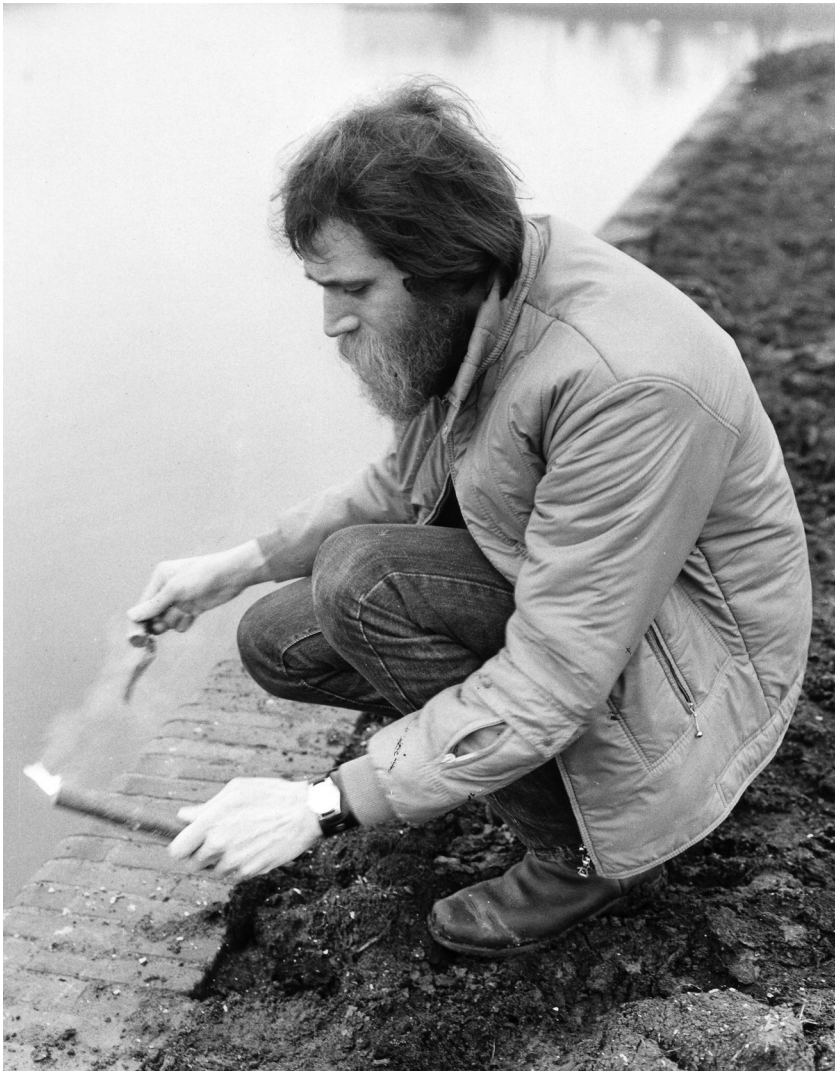


Figure 5.13 Weiner, realization of THE RESIDUE OF A FLARE IGNITED UPON A BOUNDARY (1968), Op Losse Schroeven exhibition, Amsterdam, 1969. Courtesy of the Moved Pictures Archive.





both the event score and Kosuth's ideas. Yet Weiner's works are also sculptures (since 1972, each piece is described as "language + the materials referred to"). They have a basis in the procedural use of materials, in doing things with objects, that links them to postminimal art.

As Kosuth has argued, Weiner's work with materials around 1967–1968 potentially allied him with postminimalist artists like Serra, Nauman, or Barry LeVa.[39] While Weiner would publicly deny any relation to antiform works ("they are primarily concerned with making objects for display—which has nothing to do with the intent of my work"), certain affinities between his early statements and Serra's 1967–1968 *Verb List* suggest how Weiner's linguistically performative model emerged from, and broke with, a more object-based notion of process.[40] Serra's handwritten list of one-hundred-plus procedures are mostly written as infinitive verbs: "to roll, to crease, to fold, to store, to bend, to shorten, to twist."[41] First published in *Avalanche* in 1971, they inevitably call to mind the fifty isolated verbs, presented in the past participle, that Weiner published in his 1970 book *Traces:* "ignited, fermented, displaced, transferred, breached, painted, smudged, flushed."[42] And both artists would construct pieces that involved these material, sculptural processes—except that for Weiner, the abstract formulation, in its continual openness to rearticulation, takes precedence over the realization, however transitory or compelling.[43]

In a 1977 interview, Serra described writing down the verb list "as a way of applying various activities to unspecified materials. . . . The language structured my activities in relation to materials which had the same function as transitive verbs."[44] Serra relates these sculptural procedures to *drawing* as methods in which the expressive dimension "results from the act of doing"; he elaborates that "the making of the form itself, whether lead rolls or poles for the *Prop Pieces,* was implied . . . within the physical transformation of material from one state to another."[45] For Serra, this emphasis on the not fully foreseeable results of physical procedures linked his project with his friend Robert Smithson's interests in site and entropy, in their shared exploration beyond the "closed systems" of Minimal art, which in their view, left "no room for anything than could not substantiate a general proposition."[46]

Unlike Kosuth's efforts to effectively control signification, to fix ideas in dictionary definitions and self-enclosed, self-referential systems, Weiner's

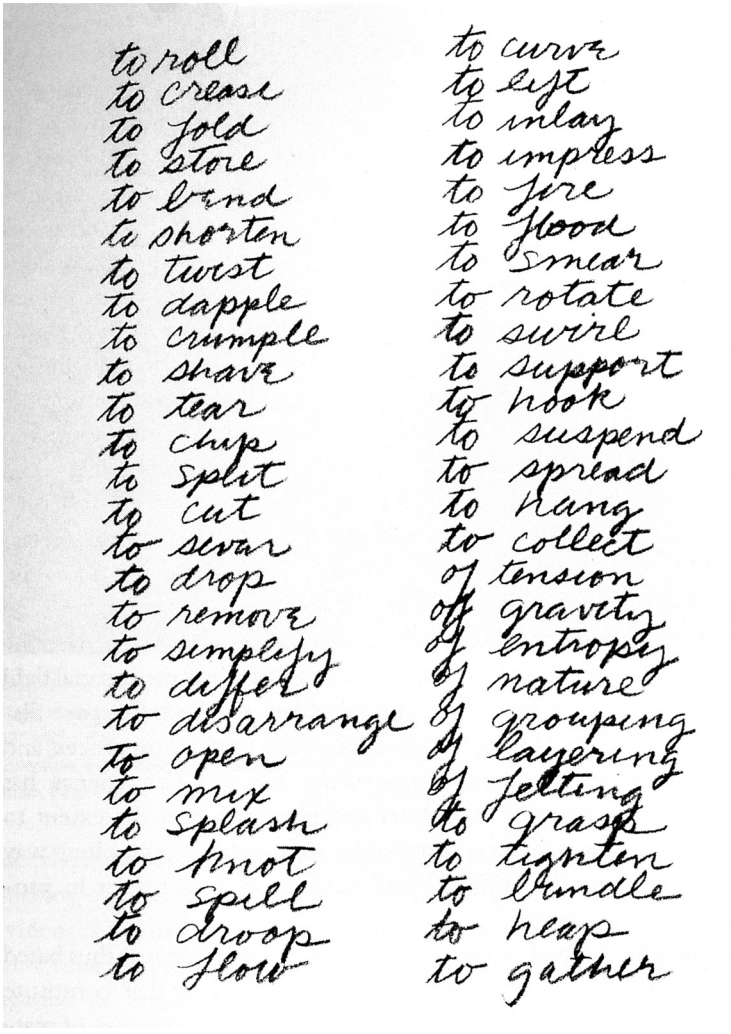
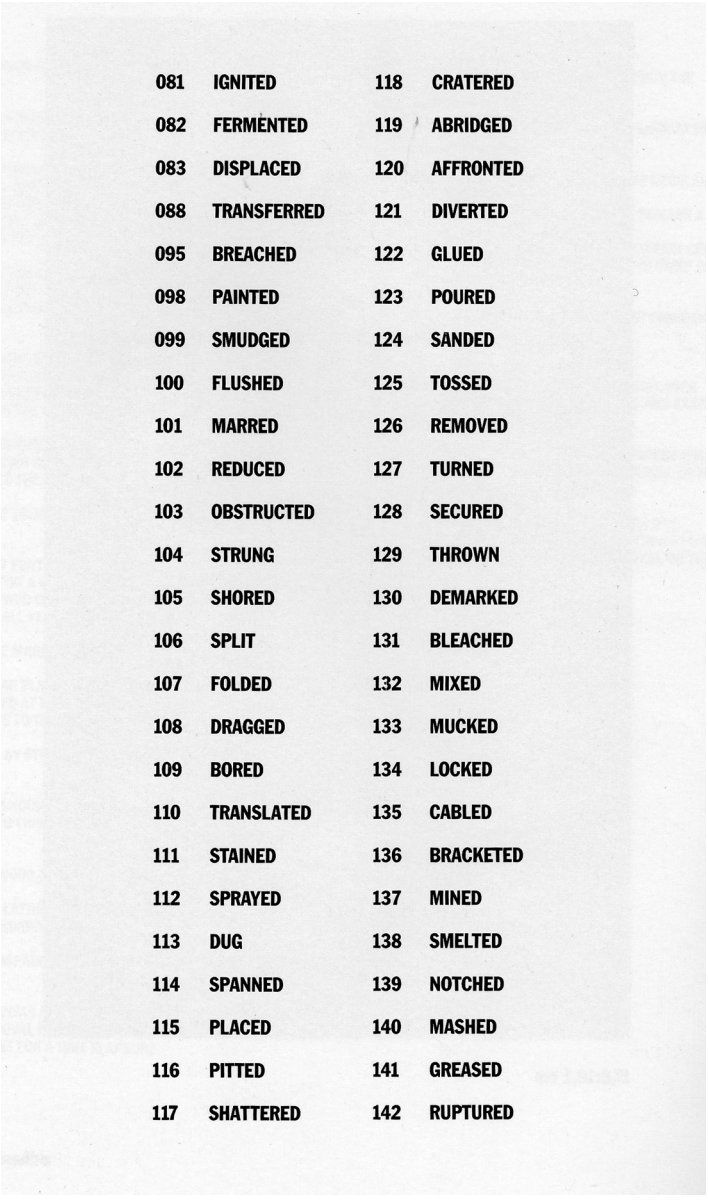


Figure 5.14 Serra, *Verb List* (1967–1968). © 2006 Richard Serra/Artists Rights Society, New York.



081	IGNITED	118	CRATERED
082	FERMENTED	119	ABRIDGED
083	DISPLACED	120	AFFRONTED
088	TRANSFERRED	121	DIVERTED
095	BREACHED	122	GLUED
098	PAINTED	123	POURED
099	SMUDGED	124	SANDED
100	FLUSHED	125	TOSSED
101	MARRED	126	REMOVED
102	REDUCED	127	TURNED
103	OBSTRUCTED	128	SECURED
104	STRUNG	129	THROWN
105	SHORED	130	DEMARKED
106	SPLIT	131	BLEACHED
107	FOLDED	132	MIXED
108	DRAGGED	133	MUCKED
109	BORED	134	LOCKED
110	TRANSLATED	135	CABLED
111	STAINED	136	BRACKETED
112	SPRAYED	137	MINED
113	DUG	138	SMELTED
114	SPANNED	139	NOTCHED
115	PLACED	140	MASHED
116	PITTED	141	GREASED
117	SHATTERED	142	RUPTURED

Figure 5.15 Weiner, *Tracce/Traces* (1970). Courtesy of the Moved Pictures Archive.

statements programmatically accept the inherent abstraction of language, the relative instability of reference, and the capacity of utterances to signify differently in each act of enunciation. Paradoxically, Weiner achieves this through reduction, since it is the most minimal structures that permit the most diverse uses or realizations: "broken off," "to the sea," "over and under," and "over and over." As Schwarz notes, "If a piece functions linguistically, each performance will draw its momentary significance from a specific context. The more abstract a piece, the greater its potential to reach beyond the present."[47] It is this openness to the unanticipated, to the uncontrollable effects of time, change, erosion, and decay, that links Weiner's work to postminimalist artists like Smithson, Serra, and Nauman, and that marks the reemergence of Cagean models in the visual art of the late 1960s. In this reengagement with temporal and perceptual phenomena, a wide range of conceptually oriented artists would situate their explorations of process at least partly within the space of representational media, whether in the photographic "nonsites" of Smithson, Serra's films, or the videotaped performances of Acconci, Nauman, Weiner, and many others.[48] This performative mode returns with a difference—no longer the unique live performance, it reemerges as marked by the properties of reproductive media, as structurally subject to inscription, iteration, and repetition.

6

Text and Image: Rereading Conceptual Art

In 1969, the artist Douglas Huebler famously asserted, "I use the camera as a 'dumb' copying device that only serves to document whatever phenomena appears before it through the conditions set by a system. No 'aesthetic' choices are possible."[1] Likewise, Ed Ruscha, discussing the images in his 1960s' photo books, disclaimed any relation to art photography, insisting that "they are technical data like industrial photography . . . nothing more than snapshots."[2]

Such statements are not atypical. The view of photography they advance, as a seemingly neutral means of recording information, underlies much art of the 1960s and 1970s. This turn to photography was part of an overarching tendency to use mechanical recording and reproduction technologies—tape recorders, video, Xerox machines, and so on—to make art. Such technologies promised a machinelike impersonality and distance from conventional modes of self-expression. This adoption of indexical models in turn greatly impacted the use and function of language in this art. For as we will see, in the shift to media- and information-based paradigms, words often moved from instruction, description, and record to a more conventional, if also ambivalent, status as caption. Yet alongside this more familiar text-image relation, a different logic emerged in which language became subject to the form of the archive or catalogue.

Viewed from the present-day art world, where monumentally scaled color photographs seem poised to displace painting as the most visually spectacular and commercially successful artistic medium, it is hard to imagine the radical promise and threat that photography seemed to hold in the 1960s. Works by artists such as Huebler, Ruscha, Vito Acconci, Victor Burgin, Dan Graham, and Bruce Nauman not only pushed photography to a new



Figure 6.1 Graham, *Homes for America* (1966). Courtesy of the Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.



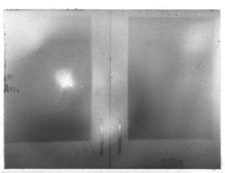
Interior of Model Home, Staten Island, N.Y.

Each block of houses is a self-contained sequence — there is no development — selected from the possible acceptable arrangements. As an example, if a section was to contain eight houses of which four model types were to be used, any of these permutational possibilities could be used:

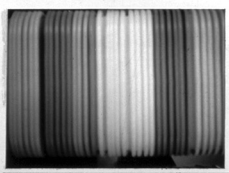


Bedroom of Model Home, S.I., N.Y.

AABBCCDD	ABCDABCD
AABBDDCC	ABDCABDC
AACCBBDD	ACBDACBD
AACCDDBB	ACDBACDB
AADDCCBB	ADBCADBC
AADDBBCC	ADCBADCB
BBAADDCC	BACDBACD
BBCCAADD	BCADBCAD
BBCCDDAA	BCDABCDA
BBDDAACC	BDACBDAC
BBDDCCAA	BDCABDCA
CCAABBDD	CABDCABD
CCAADDBB	CADBCADB
CCBBDDAA	CBADCBAD
CCBBAADD	CBDACBDA
CCDDAABB	CDABCDAB
CCDDBBAA	CDBACDBA
DDAABBCC	DACBDACB
DDAACCBB	DABCDABC
DDBBAACC	DBACDBAC
DDBBCCAA	DBCADBCA
DDCCAABB	DCABDCAB
DDCCBBAA	DCBADCBA



Basement Area, House, New Jersey



'Discount Store', Swedesboro, New Jersey

The 8 color variables were equally distributed among the house exteriors. The first buyers were more likely to have obtained their first choice in color. Family units had to make a choice based on the available colors which also took account of both husband and wife's likes and dislikes. Adult male and female color likes and dislikes were compared in a survey of the homeowners:

'Like'

Male	Female
Skyway	Skyway Blue
Colonial Red	Lawn Green
Patio White	Nickle
Yellow Chiffon	Colonial Red
Lawn Green	Yellow Chiffon
Nickle	Patio White
Fawn	Moonstone Grey
Moonstone Grey	Fawn



Two Family Units, Staten Island, N.Y.

Dislike

Male	Female
Lawn Green	Patio White
Colonial Red	Fawn
Patio White	Colonial Red
Moonstone Grey	Moonstone Grey
Fawn	Yellow Chiffon
Yellow Chiffon	Lawn Green
Nickle	Skyway blue
Skyway Blue	Nickle



Car Hop, Jersey City, N.J.

A given development might use, perhaps, *four* of these possibilities as an arbitrary scheme for different sectors; then select four from another scheme which utilizes the remaining four unused models and colors; then select four from another scheme which utilizes all eight models and eight colors; then four from another scheme which utilizes a single model and all eight colors (or four or two colors); and finally utilize that single scheme for one model and one color. This serial logic might follow consistently until, at the edges, it is abruptly terminated by pre-existent highways, bowling alleys, shopping plazas, car hops, discount houses, lumber yards or factories.

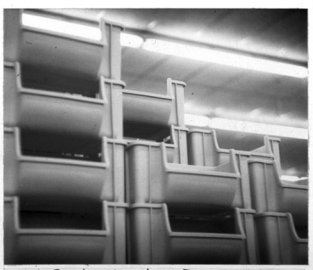


'Split-Level', 'Two Home Homes', Jersey City, N.J.



'Ground-Level', 'Two Home Homes', Jersey City, N.J.

Although there is perhaps some aesthetic precedence in the row houses which are indigenous to many older cities along the east coast, and built with uniform façades and set-backs early this century, housing developments as an architectural phenomenon seem peculiarly gratuitous. They exist apart from prior standards of 'good' architecture. They were not built to satisfy individual needs or tastes. The owner is completely tangential to the product's completion. His home isn't really possessable in the old sense; it wasn't designed to 'last for generations'; and outside of its immediate 'here and now' context it is useless, designed to be thrown away. Both architecture and craftsmanship as values are subverted by the dependence on simplified and easily duplicated techniques of fabrication and standardized modular plans. Contingencies such as mass production technology and land use economics make the final decisions, denying the architect his former 'unique' role. Developments stand in an altered relationship to their environment. Designed to fill in 'dead' land areas, the houses needn't adapt to or attempt to withstand Nature. There is no organic unity connecting the land site and the home. Both are without roots — separate parts in a larger, predetermined, synthetic order.



Kitchen Trays, 'Discount House', New Jersey

ARTS MAGAZINE/December 1966-January 1967

Dan Graham

centrality in visual art practice but also adopted its quasi-mechanistic means of image making in order to disrupt the very position and status of the precious, unique, and handcrafted art object. Using the camera as a simple tool for accumulating images or documenting actions, 1960s' artists generated models of photography not assimilable to existing traditions of photojournalism or art photography. While photographs were used to document all manner of performances, land art, and site-based projects, it was through what came to be called Conceptual art that the most systematic work with and on photography occurred, as artists adopted it as a means to move beyond the object to work directly on representation and cultural sign systems.

Embracing the flat look of amateur, snapshot, and industrial photography, these conceptual uses of photography implicitly posed themselves against the canon of Modernist "art photography" that was being institutionally codified at the same moment. This high art lineage sought to legitimize photography by grounding it in traditional aesthetic values of originality, creative self-expression, visual splendor, and technical virtuosity. Countering these terms almost point by point, 1960s' artists embraced the photographic document as a straightforward means of presenting information, a "'dumb' copying device" that could presumably be employed by anybody. As critic John Roberts observes, in opposition to "the concurrent development of photographic modernism . . . conceptual art openly embraced photography's functional and anti-aesthetic character, whereas Modernism actively suppressed this through aestheticism"—even if, in most cases, this functional or informational look would strategically be severed from any actual social or pedagogical function.[3] With the exception of Graham's magazine works, Roberts notes, "the opening period of conceptual art embraces the culturally disruptive function of photographic reportage only to withdraw it from the social world."[4]

Although the self-referential and self-critical aims of much 1960s art initially precluded the direct depiction of political events and issues, photography nonetheless offered a means to reengage with the social and cultural upheaval of the 1960s—not only through the referentiality that photographic images inevitably entail, but also through the ways in which photography provided a tool to investigate the worlds of image culture and the mass media. The

photographer and critic Victor Burgin recalls his turn to photography as growing directly out of his disenchantment with the perceived isolation of art:

> Photography offered a window on the world . . . a window through which you could punch a hole in the gallery wall and bring into the gallery issues that had previously been considered not proper within the gallery. . . . I think it's hard to imagine how shocking it was to see writing and photographs on gallery walls in the late sixties.[5]

Burgin's reference to writing here is not incidental. Indeed, it was this linking of photography to language that marks the crucial innovation of Conceptual art. In countless late 1960s' and early 1970s' projects, photography appears with language as a kind of dyad: text and image (a perennial pairing that later resurfaced in so much "postmodern" art of the 1980s). This pairing, of course, was by no means new or unprecedented. Since the rise of the illustrated press in the early twentieth century, the joining of words and photographic images has been among the core elements of modern visual culture. In almost all public uses of photography—printed matter, books or magazines, posters, publicity, and even cinema—photographic images appear with language, as caption, headline, surrounding text, intertitle, or spoken voice-over or dialogue. This relation, however remained repressed in modernist photography (with the exception of photomontage-based work), and ignored in critical and theoretical models that sought to understand the "purely visual" world of images as operating according to fundamentally different laws from those governing linguistic materials.

Against such approaches, Burgin would later argue that

> although photography is a "visual medium," it is not a "purely visual" medium . . . even the uncaptioned "art" photograph, framed and isolated on the gallery wall is invaded by language in the very moment it is looked at: in memory, in association, snatches of words and images continually intermingle and exchange one for the other.[6]

During the 1960s, critics such as Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco proposed that photographs be read as discursive and rhetorical, as forms of coded messages that could be analyzed according to quasi-linguistic models. In Barthes' analysis, not only does language work to attach cultural "connotations" to "denotational" photographic images but the repetition, sequencing, and ordering of images creates meaning contextually and contiguously, in ways somewhat analogous to the syntactic arrangements of words.[7]

This interrelation between language and the photograph is central to 1960s art, and many of the theoretical models that emerged at the time. Yet its complexity remains little explored. One of the paradoxes of this period is that while in rapidly diffusing semiotic and structural models, photographic images—along with much else—came to be understood as structured "like a language," in visual art, language in many cases would be used "like photography," as if it too could serve as a neutral recording apparatus, documenting the results of a preexisting system. Thus, the work of artists like Acconci, Hamish Fulton, and Kawara as well as the group Art + Language is full of typewritten lists and tables that use words and numbers to catalogue their experiments and investigations. Part of the enormous productivity of this period came from artists' efforts to bring together heterogeneous and even incompatible models, translating gestural and pictorial approaches from painting, or performance or process-based approaches from sculpture, to the forms and materials of print culture. The instrumental uses of photography and language as tools for other types of projects helped to dislodge both media from their conventional functions and genres, and set them into new types of relations with each other.

Perhaps more than any other artists associated with Conceptual art, Huebler and Burgin produced systematic and sustained bodies of work that juxtapose texts and photographic images. Through a comparison of their projects, we can trace a crucial shift from a perceptual and phenomenological analysis (emerging out of minimal sculpture) to an overtly semiotic analysis (engaging with the forms of media culture). This historical trajectory moves from the classic period of New York–based conceptualism to its reception and gradual reformulation in Britain in the 1970s, where Burgin's efforts to go "beyond conceptual art" led him and other artists to participate

in more avowedly political projects of feminist critique and media activism, and embrace the semiotic and psychoanalytic modes of "film theory" that would come to be associated with the London-based *Screen* magazine. Yet, to understand the stakes of this shift—and also appreciate some of what is lost in this shift from perceptual to semiotic models—we need to consider their work in context by outlining some of the conflicting imperatives evident during the formative period of conceptual practice.

The Look of Information

Around 1966–1968, just before the emergence of a consciously articulated practice of Conceptual art, a number of projects implicitly interfaced with Pop art by appropriating mass media forms such as advertisements, newspaper photos, and photojournalistic essays—formats that could be either transferred to another medium, as in John Baldessari's paintings, or produced for actual publication, like Graham's celebrated 1966 photo essay *Homes for America* or Robert Smithson's mock travelogue "The Monuments of Passaic," which appeared in *Artforum* in December 1967.[8] Unlike the subsequent adoption of quasi-scientific formats, the pairings of photo and text in this transitional period were modeled on print media and other mass cultural forms. Graham's analysis of suburban tract housing operates on multiple tracks: while his laconic prose mimics the flattest sociological reportage, the layout sets off the commercial lingo—the lists of developments, model names, and color selections—in blocks of text; intercut with Graham's vernacular photos of grim, repetitive rows of nearly identical housing units, the cultural pretensions of these pastoral names—Colonial Manor, Fair Haven, Greenfields Village, and Pleasant Grove—dissolve into a pathos of failed aspiration.

Smithson's article, with its parody of "grand tour" motifs and ironic references to an American landscape sublime, is explicitly literary and allegorical. But the travelogue's juxtaposition of language and image, like Graham's, works by attaching sentimental fragments of language to black-and-white snapshots of the most degraded postindustrial landscapes. In both projects, language appears as a quotation or set of borrowed terms, emphasizing its rhetorical, persuasive, and even visual dimensions. Yet both artists use photographs



The Fountain Monument—Bird's-Eye View. (Photo: Robert Smithson)

Figure 6.2 Smithson, *The Fountain Monument: Side View,* from "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey" (1967). © Estate of Robert Smithson. Licensed by VAGA, New York.

whose informal snapshot aesthetic implies straightforward documentation, although they do so with a tone so ironic that their works can be read as parodying the conventions of photojournalism.[9] The boundary between Pop and Conceptual practices is still permeable here: if the seductive visuality of Ruscha's paintings of product logos and commercial signs aligns them with Pop, his 1962 book *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* is retroactively read as a work of proto–Conceptual Art, since the simple, serially ordered black-and-white photographs operate like a neutral presentation of information.

In subsequent, more overtly conceptual projects, image-text works often adopt the form of bureaucratic records and scientific documentation: from the maps, diagrams, and instructions of Huebler's *Location, Duration,* and *Variable* "pieces" and Adrian Piper's assembled documents and notations presented in three-ring binders, to the carefully typed financial records of Hans Haacke's 1971 *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings: A Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* and the massive file cabinets of Art + Language's *Index 001* (1972). Such works suppress an overtly pop engagement with mass culture, and employ language as an apparently transparent vehicle of meaning and historical evidence. Yet the very precision with which they mimic and even fetishize the visual and linguistic forms of technoscientific culture suggests that the look of pure information also functions as a style, whether consciously or not—a tendency that Benjamin Buchloh famously termed Conceptual art's "aesthetic of administration."[10] Smithson's sci-fi-tinged photo essays, particularly his 1966 collaboration with Mel Bochner, "Domain of the Great Bear," already explored the display systems of outdated science as objects of kitsch attachment, just as Bochner's 1966 *Working Drawings* exhibition presented all manner of diagrams, work sheets, and technical notations as objects of aesthetic fascination—despite the ambivalent subtitle that these were "visible things on paper not necessarily meant to be viewed as art." The striking black-and-white photostated texts of Joseph Kosuth's 1965–1967 *Proto-Investigations* and *Titled (Art as Idea as Idea)* series rest uneasily on the boundary between conceptual uses of media and the visuality of advertising and corporate insignia—a condition that Jeff Wall later critiqued as presenting "a condensed image of the instrumentalized 'value free' academic disciplines characteristic of American-type universities (empiricist sociology,

information theory, positivist language philosophy) in the form of 1960s' high corporate or bureaucratic design."[11]

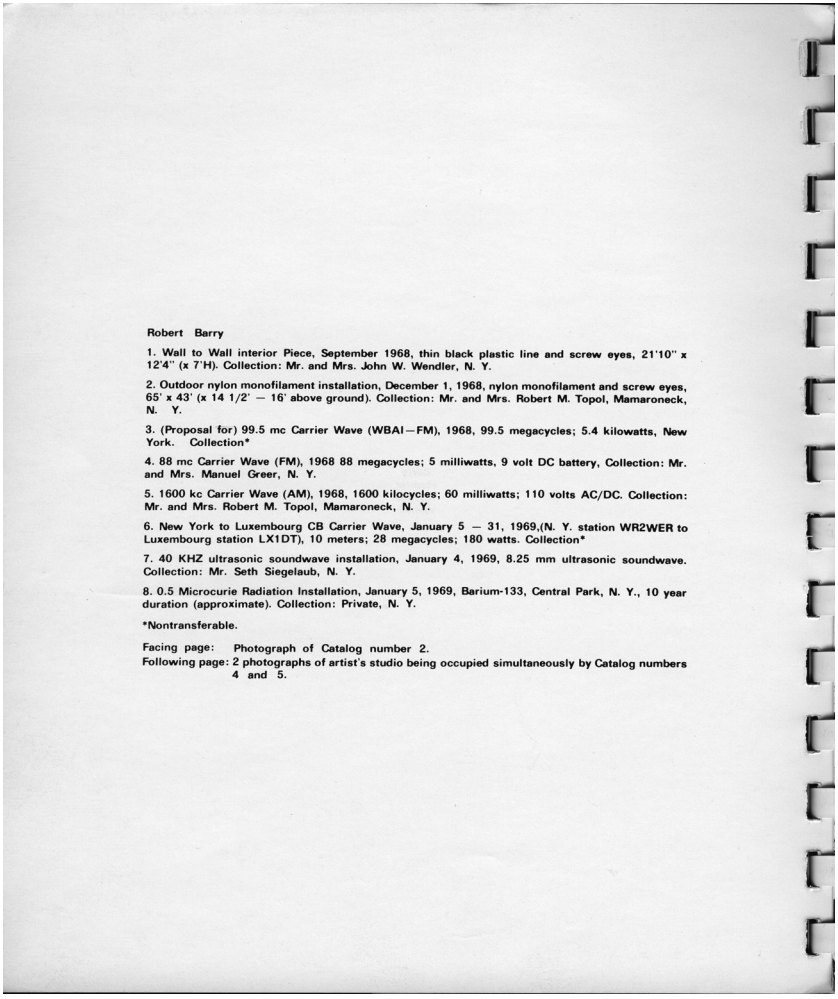
Despite this repressed entanglement in the visual forms of media culture, the systematic exploitation of both text and photography as documentation aspired to the conditions of a neutral recording apparatus that would operate with complete indifference to aesthetic qualities, as Huebler's remark attests. Paradoxically, both words and images were often understood to function transparently, as if they could provide direct, unmediated access to the things they represent. Such a focus on the photograph's evidentiary status might seem to emphasize photography's *difference* from language: as a seemingly raw, purely denotational image, without overt symbolic, ideological, or artistic connotation, the photograph appears as a purely indexical sign—an uncoded trace, unlike the inherently arbitrary, figural, coded nature of the linguistic sign. Repressing these figural dimensions, however, language was often used quasi-photographically, as a straightforward means of inscription and recording, as seen in the tables and lists that accompany, for instance, Vito Acconci's performance documents of the early 1970s. Often words convey information that a photograph cannot, as in Robert Barry's work, where language is used to describe projects that quickly move from the most minimal visuality—hanging nylon threads and the like—to complete invisibility—gases, precise frequencies of radio waves, and internal mental states.

The extent to which language became modeled on photography (as a form of inscription) is perhaps clearest in linguistically based works without photographic images—Robert Morris's 1962 *Card File,* On Kawara's date paintings and *I am still alive* telegrams, Dan Graham's *Schema (March 1966),* Hanne Darboven's obsessive journals, or Barry's 1969 *Closed Gallery* Piece—whose implicit reference is also to bureaucratic/scientific record keeping. Each employs language as a means of quasi-systematic inscription or documentation, however perverse or apparently nonfunctional. These indexical uses of language structurally link it with photography, as types of signs (indexes) that occur through physical trace or imprint, to adopt the terminology of C. S. Peirce's influential writings on semiotics.[12] As Rosalind Krauss argued in her 1977 essay "Notes on the Index," the widespread turn to indexical forms like photography necessitated text, since "the reduction of the conventional sign

to a trace . . . then produces the need for a supplemental discourse."[13] Given the uncoded facticity of the photographic image, language *anchors* the sign, renders it readable and intelligible, as Barthes proposes in his classic 1964 analysis "Rhetoric of the Image."[14]

This semiotic model—the convergence of language with photography in the communicative space of the mass media—aligns these artistic projects with the models of structural analysis emerging at the time. Barthes' early 1960s' essays examined photography and language through the medium of the press photograph, understood as a form of mass communications: as a "message . . . formed by a source of emission, a channel of transmission and a point of reception," produced and interpreted via different types of cultural codes that allow both image and text to carry complex social meanings, and be read as meaningful.[15] While we recognize this approach as characteristic of the French structural/semiotic analyses of the 1960s, we perhaps tend to forget the extent to which the underlying model of communicative function derives from U.S. (and British) research conducted during and after World War II in cryptography, cybernetics, systems theory, public persuasion (that is, propaganda), and mass communications technologies, all of which hinged on processes of "information transmission."[16] For instance, it is in the context of the spatially distanced dissemination of messages via technologies of radio, telephone, and television that new analytic models like information theory responded to the need to improve the transmission of signals over lines subject to electrical interference, or "noise," by finding ways to package data more efficiently. Read in this context, 1960s' artists' recurrent obsession with the most minimal, redundant, and empty of messages can be seen as an effort to foreground the channels of transmission and the conditions of reception in these new communications media.

Critical theorists have perhaps not sufficiently addressed the deeply *ambivalent* status of language in the postwar period. While academic disciplines were undergoing the so-called linguistic turn of classic structuralism, communications media shifted to models of information based on the electronic transmission of mathematically quantifiable properties. In one sense, phonetic language was both the anchor and model for all the other coding operations, from television pixels to digitalization, which reduce complex information



Robert Barry

1. Wall to Wall interior Piece, September 1968, thin black plastic line and screw eyes, 21'10" x 12'4" (x 7'H). Collection: Mr. and Mrs. John W. Wendler, N. Y.

2. Outdoor nylon monofilament installation, December 1, 1968, nylon monofilament and screw eyes, 65' x 43' (x 14 1/2' – 16' above ground). Collection: Mr. and Mrs. Robert M. Topol, Mamaroneck, N. Y.

3. (Proposal for) 99.5 mc Carrier Wave (WBAI–FM), 1968, 99.5 megacycles; 5.4 kilowatts, New York. Collection*

4. 88 mc Carrier Wave (FM), 1968 88 megacycles; 5 milliwatts, 9 volt DC battery, Collection: Mr. and Mrs. Manuel Greer, N. Y.

5. 1600 kc Carrier Wave (AM), 1968, 1600 kilocycles; 60 milliwatts; 110 volts AC/DC. Collection: Mr. and Mrs. Robert M. Topol, Mamaroneck, N. Y.

6. New York to Luxembourg CB Carrier Wave, January 5 – 31, 1969,(N. Y. station WR2WER to Luxembourg station LX1DT), 10 meters; 28 megacycles; 180 watts. Collection*

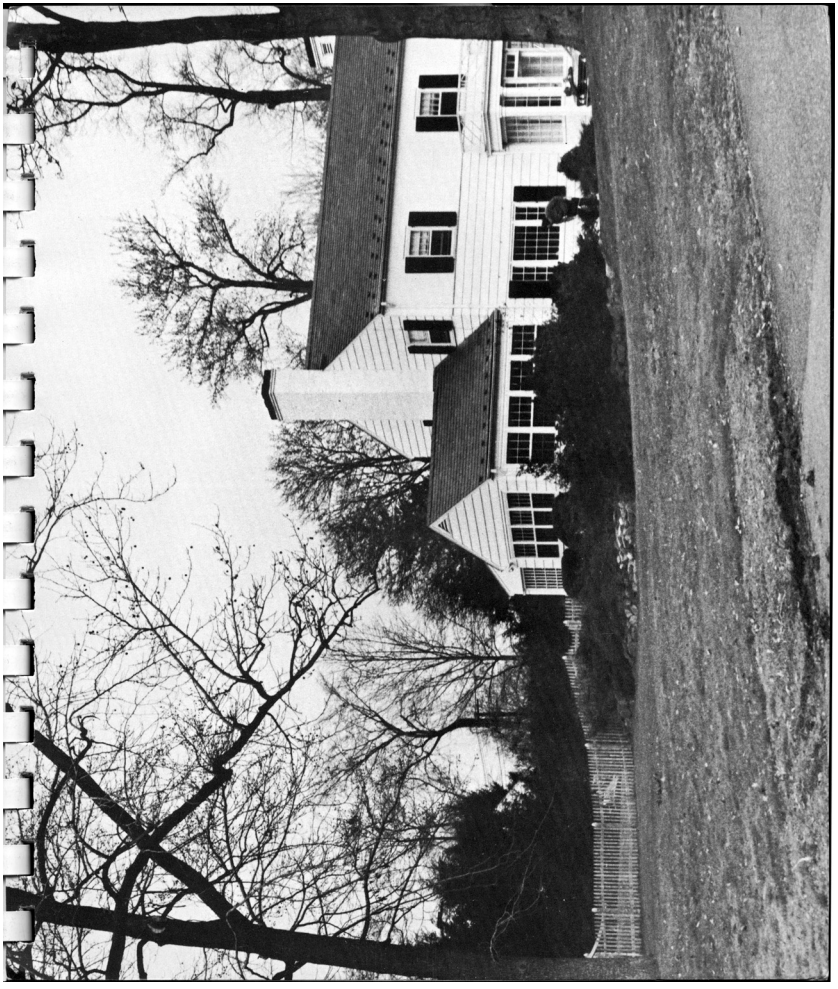
7. 40 KHZ ultrasonic soundwave installation, January 4, 1969, 8.25 mm ultrasonic soundwave. Collection: Mr. Seth Siegelaub, N. Y.

8. 0.5 Microcurie Radiation Installation, January 5, 1969, Barium-133, Central Park, N. Y., 10 year duration (approximate). Collection: Private, N. Y.

*Nontransferable.

Facing page: Photograph of Catalog number 2.
Following page: 2 photographs of artist's studio being occupied simultaneously by Catalog numbers 4 and 5.

Figure 6.3 Barry, pages from the catalogue *January 5–31, 1969*. Courtesy of the artist and Yvon Lambert, Paris.



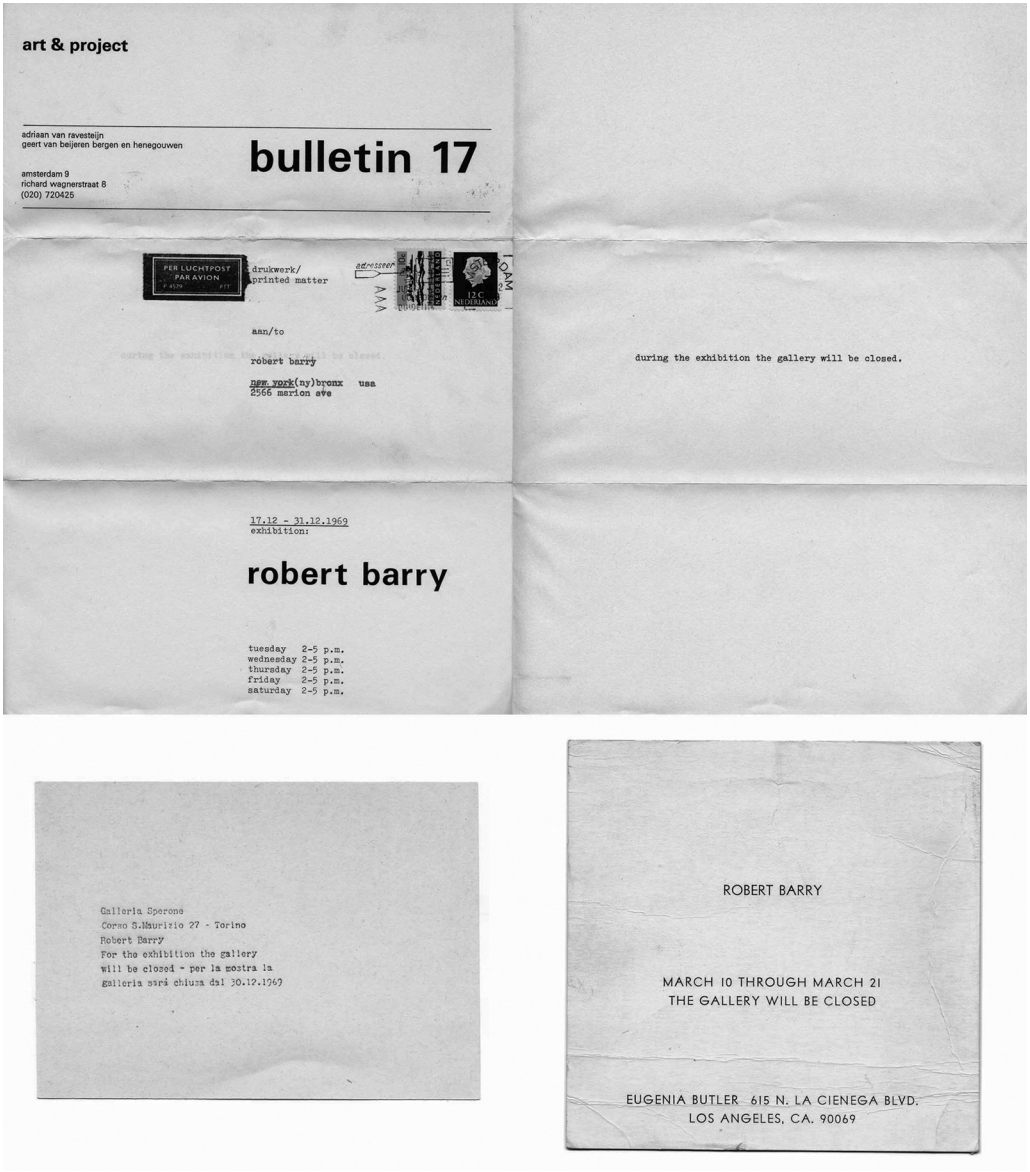


Figure 6.4 Barry, *Closed Gallery Piece* (1969). Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Bugdahn und Kaimer, Düsseldorf.

to articulable series of transmissible units. Yet the communicative capacities of language, structurally dependent on metaphor, connotation, and historical convention, increasingly appear deficient in comparison to the apparently more precise, verifiable data of quantified empirical science and mechanical inscription technologies—epistemological pressures already registered in philosophical projects of phenomenology and logical positivism.[17]

As Krauss notes, just as the photograph requires a caption to function effectively as evidence or information, a certain anticonventional use of objects or materials in art would, since Duchamp's readymades (mass-produced objects he appropriated and signed as art in the 1910s), require a linguistic supplement to be readable and intelligible.[18] Nevertheless, what is so perverse about so much of late 1960s' art is not the use of text as explanatory discourse, as a kind of caption, but the desire to reduce language itself to something like "the mute presence of an uncoded event"—to the kind of pure facticity and presence of the photograph or indexical mark, whose ultimate message, Krauss asserts, is "I am here."[19] Thus, we see in Piper's *Here and Now* (1968) an effort to reduce the signifying properties of language to a self-enclosed, self-descriptive system: each of sixty-four square sheets contains a short typed text that describes its place within one of sixty-four gridded quadrants—for example, "HERE: the square area in 4th row from top, left side of page." As Ann Goldstein suggests, "The work was constructed to refer continuously to itself, and through the activity of examining the sheets, the self-referential aspect of the work remains indexed to the present as it incorporates the participation of the viewer."[20] A similar principle (without the participatory aspect) animates Kosuth's *Five Words in Blue Neon* (1965) and other tautological projects, in which language "systems" aspire to a degree of precision, certainty, and continual self-presence only possible when any external referent has been abandoned.

Such artworks reflect what Stephen Melville has termed "the extraordinary epistemologism of the sixties—the general belief that art was a mode of knowledge and that its particularity as such lay in its self-reference."[21] Yet the contradictory and potentially solipsistic aspects of this self-referential pursuit of analytic rigor were quite evident at the time, as in Sol LeWitt's 1966

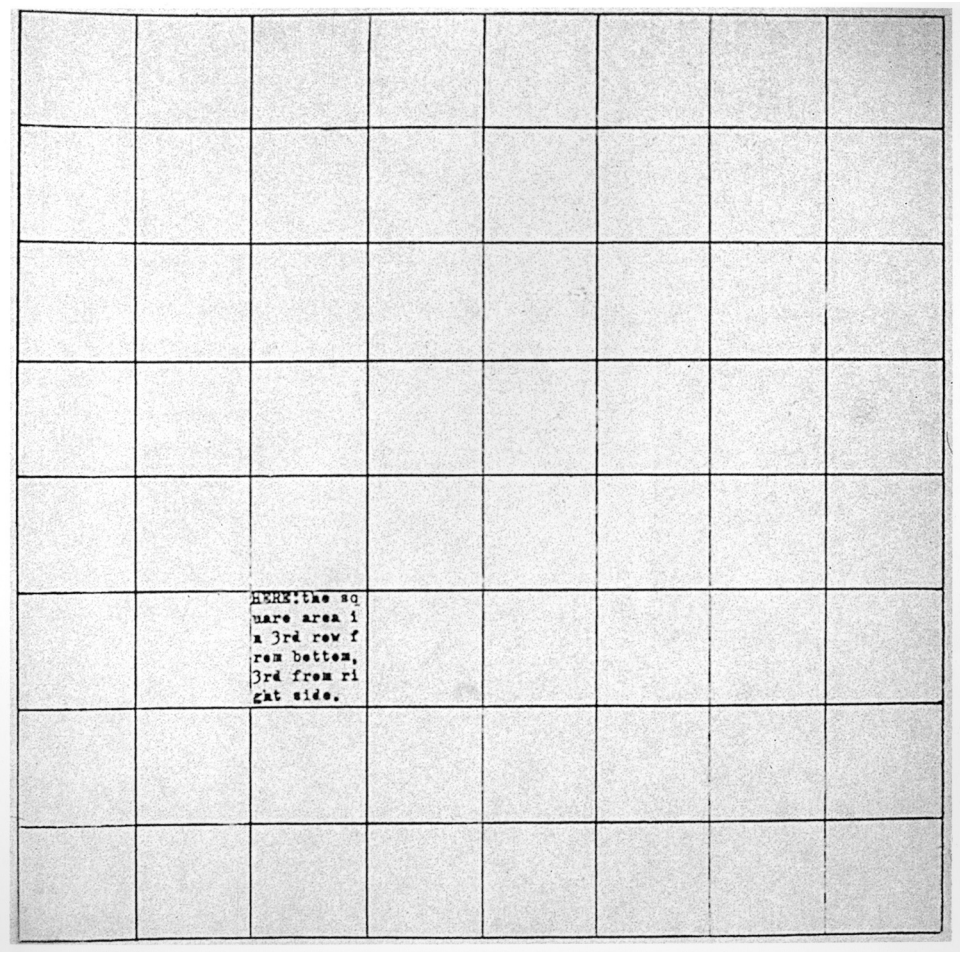


Figure 6.5 Piper, *Here and Now* (1968). © Adrian Piper Research Archive 2006.

statement that "the aim of the artist would not be to instruct the viewer but to give him information. Whether the viewer understands this information is incidental. . . . The serial artist does not attempt to produce a beautiful or mysterious object but functions merely as a clerk cataloguing the results of the premise."[22] Language is reduced to recording the results of a system, even, in works such as Darboven's, to "an arbitrary, abstract principle of pure quantification."[23] Although often couched in a rationalist discourse of communicative function and empirical facts, these uses of language as inscription device or representational system that claim to operate "like" photography are themselves deeply conflicted and often patently non- or antifunctional, products of a modernist repression of referentiality as much as a fetishized positivism. That this nonfunctional condition is not incidental but somehow a requirement of their being considered art is suggested by the enormous institutional difficulties and censorship that Haacke's "real-time systems" encountered when they sought to present specific information about concrete social situations in an intelligible manner. Black-and-white photos of tenement apartment buildings had been a mainstay of street photography for decades, but such veiled political critique was no longer acceptable to mainstream art institutions when it was accompanied by prosaic lists documenting exactly who owned the properties and how they came to be in their present condition.

It is therefore clear that it is not just the indexical and referential capacities of photography that would make the medium central in these disputes but the very specific ways in which language attaches to the image to direct and specify its meaning. Yet even in Haacke's *Shapolsky* project, where the use of photography and text arguably resembles more conventional journalistic practices, there is a process-based element, documenting a system over time, that links it to projects like Huebler's. The fact that compiled textual information is labeled "as of May 1, 1971" implies a potentially ongoing process, the accumulation and cataloguing of an ongoing archive. These temporal, procedural dimensions that actively involve the viewer/reader in the construction of the work, however, were gradually eliminated from the more politically oriented and message-driven works undertaken by Haacke, Burgin,



216 E 3 St.
Block 385 Lot 11
5 story walk-up old law tenement

Owned by Harpmel Realty Inc., 608 E 11 St., NYC
Contracts signed by Harry J. Shapolsky, President('63)
Martin Shapolsky, President('64)
Principal Harry J. Shapolsky(according to Real Estate Directory of Manhattan)

Acquired 8-21-1963 from John the Baptist Foundation, c/o The Bank of New York, 48 Wall St., NYC for $237 600.-(also 7 other bldgs.)

$150 000.- mortgage @ 6% interest, 8-19-1963, due 8-19-1968, held by The Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board of the American Baptist Convention, 475 Riverside Drive, NYC (also on 7 other bldgs.)

Assessed land value $25 000.-, total $75 000.- (including 212-14 E 3 St.) (1971)

228 E 3 St.
Block 385 Lot 19
24 x 105' 5 story walk-up old law tenement

Owned by Harpmel Realty Inc. 608 E 11 St. NYC
Contracts signed by Harry J. Shapolsky, President('63)
Martin Shapolsky, President('64)

Acquired from John The Baptist Foundation
c/o The Bank of New York, 48 Wall St. NYC
for $237 000.- (also 5 other properties) , 8-21-1963

$150 000.- mortgage (also on 5 other properties) at 6% interest as of 8-19-1963 due 8-19-1968
held by The Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board of The American Baptist Convention, 475 Riverside Dr. NYC

Assessed land value $8 000.- total $28 000.-(1971)

Figure 6.6 Haacke, Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings: A Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971 (1971). Detail. Photograph by Fred Seruton. © 2006 Artists Rights Society: New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

and other artists in the 1970s. In Haacke's work, for instance, the incomplete and open-ended uses of language in the "real time social systems" gave way to the fixity and inertness of words on advertising placards. Haacke's adoption of the forms and insignia of corporate media was a strategic effort to engage these formats along with the structures of power they represent. By the late 1970s, some version of this move—the use of mass media forms to mount message-based projects addressing wider publics—indeed became the dominant path for politically engaged art making. What gets lost in this renewed focus on the message was precisely the interrogation of the conditions of reception that characterized earlier, more process-based projects of Conceptual art. Drawing on the legacy of minimal sculpture, a very different model, based on the phenomenological encounter with the viewer, provided a set of strategies for articulating something like a politics of language and representation. Moving from sculptural objects and sites to the forms of print culture, both Burgin and Huebler sought to integrate aspects of semiotic analysis into their work, using language to frame perceptual experiences and alter our relation to images.

A Politics of Representation?

Around 1967, both Huebler and Burgin turned to photography as part of a rethinking of the object in the wake of Minimal art, adopting practices in which, in Burgin's words, "aesthetic *systems* are designed, capable of generating objects, rather than individual objects themselves."[24] For many artists, photographs became crucial as a means of documenting the results of such systems. For Huebler, this shift occurred in 1968, with his first solo "exhibition" with the dealer Seth Siegelaub—an exhibition that famously appeared only in the form of a catalogue.[25] Abandoning the minimalist-informed sculptures he had made in the mid-1960s, Huebler proclaimed, "I choose not to make objects anymore. Instead I try to create a quality of experience that locates itself 'in the world.' . . . I now make work that consists of 'documents' that form the structure of an idea or system whose function is to create a conceptual 'frame' around a space/time content."[26] We can see how Huebler in effect struggled to transfer the phenomenological dimensions of Minimal

art—focusing on the viewer's encounter with an object in a specific time and space—out of the gallery context and into "the world."

In a 1992 interview, Huebler recalled how, during his preparation for the Siegelaub show, his work was in the process of turning to forms whose vastness and ephemerality required that they could only be presented through documentation:

> When I began work on the catalogue my work was very much in a state of transition, moving back and forth between making specific objects to the fabrication of nothing that qualified as any kind of an object. The catalogue includes examples of both types, for instance, a snow sculpture piece designed to be placed where there would be heating elements installed in the ground which, when heated, would melt snow thereby forming a (minimal) sculptural configuration. That kind of thinking was but a step away from driving long nails into the earth. Or placing self sticking paper 'markers' on urban surfaces, etc. Which described geometric (minimal) spaces so vast that there is no way to actually *see* the forms—even from the air.[27]

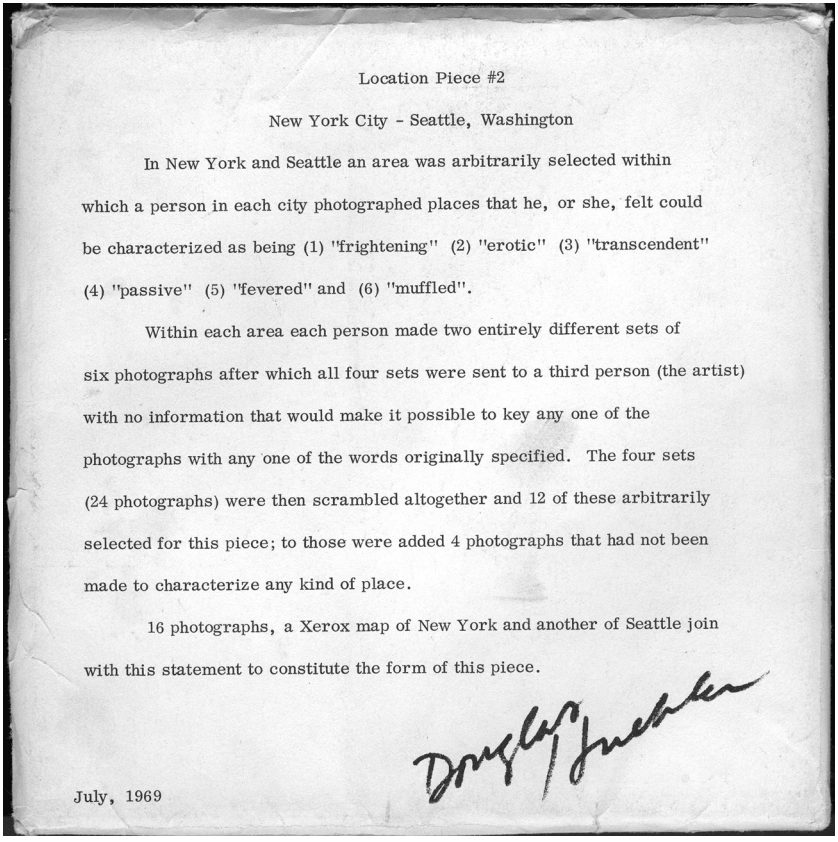
If minimal sculpture had been scaled to the one-to-one relation between the object and the human body, Huebler's decision to work on a perceptually vast scale subverted this straightforward encounter. By expanding the scale of object experience beyond what could be presented in a gallery space—or beyond a scale that could even be seen—such pieces served to strategically suspend visual experience. Yet unlike the "earth artists" who would construct massive site-based projects in remote, nearly inaccessible rural locations and display photographs and other documents back in the gallery, Huebler's work largely remained located in publicly accessible urban space, and was constructed in such a way that did not visibly or permanently alter that space but instead constructed spatial and temporal relations that were made perceptible only through the viewer's encounter with his assembled documentation, thus rendering "vision" and "perception" dependent on

the viewer's activity of reading, conceptualizing, and mentally constructing the works.[28]

Huebler's "location" pieces quickly shift from concrete physical or geographic locales to more discursive or conceptual types of sites, thoroughly interpenetrating these realms. Since the phenomena he wished to document, such as trips, processes, and geographic borders, could not be represented with visual means alone, Huebler adopted preexisting sign systems, such as maps and diagrams, which combine visual and textual information:

> The pieces I made then could not be seen, but it is possible to *know* the existence of such phenomena by combining language with various kinds of visual signs. Of course, I'm talking about the job maps perform. Not just geographic maps: charts, graphs, architectural drawings, geometric propositions, all represent the kind of conceptual model I mean to employ in the construction of my work.[29]

A collection of such pieces comprised the catalog, including works such as "Site Sculpture Project, Boston–New York Exchange Shape," in which a list of six Boston sites—"'marked' between 12:30–4:48 p.m., August 27, 1968"—are juxtaposed with a list of six comparable New York sites—"'marked' between 10:30 a.m.–4:10 p.m., September 9, 1968." The work consists of its documentation: twelve photographs and the typewritten page describing the method of making the piece, which notes that "each site was photographed at the time the marker was placed with no attempt made for a more or less interesting or picturesque representation of the location."[30] The project is typical of many of Huebler's early photo-text pieces, in which the text functions as both description and instruction, outlining the series of procedures undertaken to make the work. In other works, such as the untitled drawings made in 1967–1968 and later published in the *Xerox Book,* text would operate somewhat differently, not so much detailing the making of the piece as framing it for the viewer—in effect, using language to anchor an otherwise-ambiguous visual sign or provide verbal cues for imagining



Location Piece #2

New York City - Seattle, Washington

In New York and Seattle an area was arbitrarily selected within which a person in each city photographed places that he, or she, felt could be characterized as being (1) "frightening" (2) "erotic" (3) "transcendent" (4) "passive" (5) "fevered" and (6) "muffled".

Within each area each person made two entirely different sets of six photographs after which all four sets were sent to a third person (the artist) with no information that would make it possible to key any one of the photographs with any one of the words originally specified. The four sets (24 photographs) were then scrambled altogether and 12 of these arbitrarily selected for this piece; to those were added 4 photographs that had not been made to characterize any kind of place.

16 photographs, a Xerox map of New York and another of Seattle join with this statement to constitute the form of this piece.

Douglas Huebler

July, 1969

Figure 6.7 Huebler, *Location Piece #2* (1969). © 2006 Estate of Douglas Huebler/Artists Rights Society, New York.


Location Piece # 2
Seattle-New York
Area within which photographs were made. 1969
HOBOKEN
JERSEY CITY
Greenwich Village
Chinatown
LINCOLN TUNNEL
HOLLAND TUNNEL
QUEENS MIDTOWN TUNNEL
W. 30TH ST. HELIPORT
NEW YORK SKYPORTS INC
GULF MANHATTAN MARINA INC
WILLIAMSBURG BRIDGE
MANHATTAN BRIDGE





otherwise-unrepresentable spatial entities, such as "a point located in the exact center of this page," or a piece consisting of a point situated at the center of the page, to another point, describing "the end of a line located on the picture plane and extending in space toward infinity."[31]

Although better known for his later text-image works drawing on advertising and mass media, Burgin's earlier more sculptural projects also focused attention on perceptual processes. After finishing his degree at Yale University in 1967, Burgin made a series of works that consisted solely of verbal notations on note cards. The most famous of these, *Photopath* (1967–1969), was realized in 1969. In it, Burgin affixed large black-and-white photographs of wood flooring to the floor itself, so that the images appeared "perfectly congruent with their objects."[32] Presented at the London ICA's version of the landmark exhibit When Attitudes Become Form in 1969, the work is an extension of classic Minimalist concerns with site and context, foregrounding the viewer's apprehension of the object through a decidedly post-minimal embrace of ephemerality and self-effacement. As Burgin explains, "It was a piece of 'sculpture' in as much as it was material on the floor of the gallery, and had no other function than to be looked at by an art audience. It was very ephemeral at the same time—just paper—photographs that only showed what was already there."[33] The very redundancy of the images—showing what was already there—made the work a pointed reflection about photography and the act of looking.

In a more recent interview, Burgin employs terms that recall Huebler's well-known pronouncements, to recount how "this method developed in *Photopath* was . . . a gesture to draw attention to the conditions of perception without actually altering the environment too much."[34] Unlike the other site-based pieces featured in the exhibition, though, the fact that Burgin's work consisted of photographs completely altered its relation to minimalist sculpture. On the one hand, the piece is reductive and blank, focusing attention on the mute facticity of the photograph—"what you see is what you see"—and its relation to its context. Yet on the other hand, the piece is photographic, and hence inherently about illusion, representation, and the way that images not only represent reality but also substitute for and even literally obscure it. Through its uncanny duplication of the flooring on which it lay,

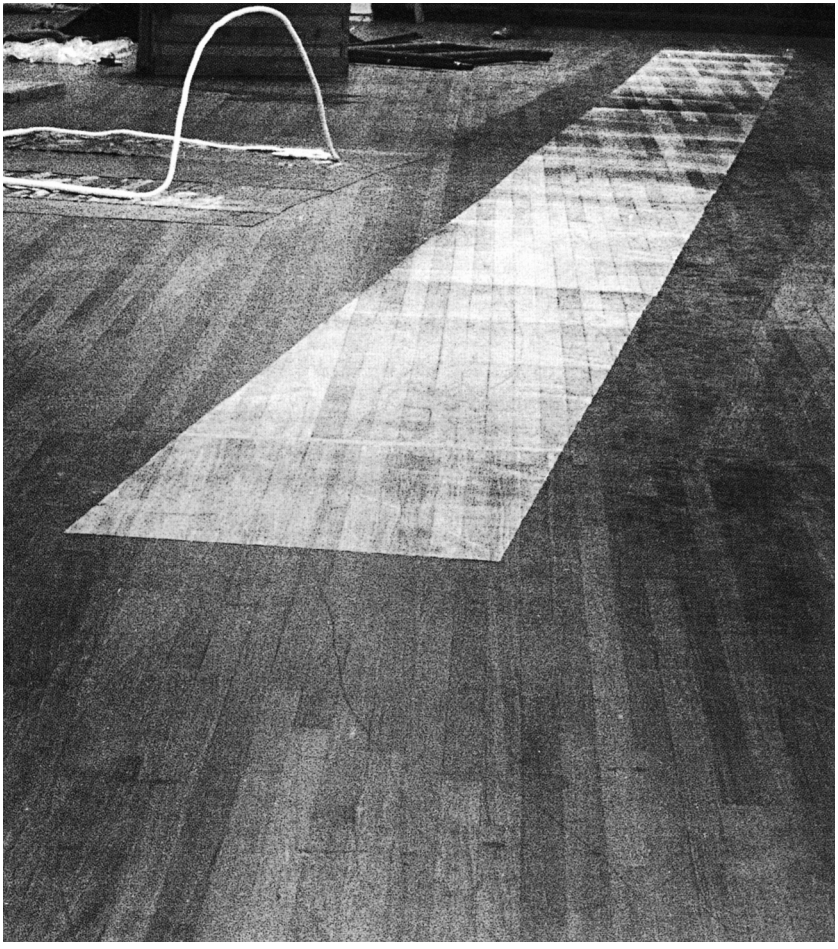


Figure 6.8 Burgin, *Photopath* (1967), instruction card. Courtesy of the artist.

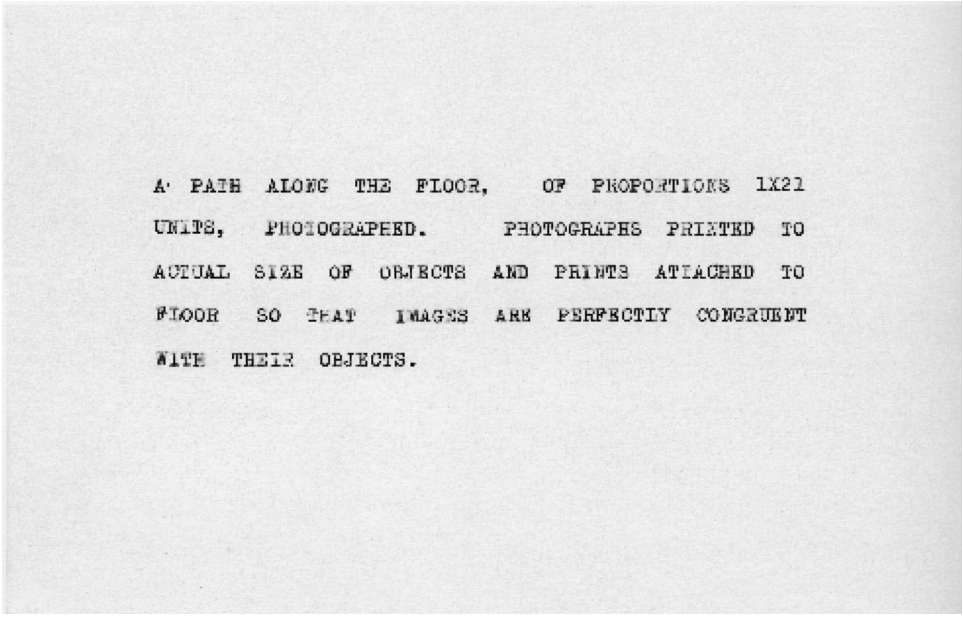


Figure 6.9 Burgin, *Photopath* (1967–1969), installed at the exhibition When Attitudes Become Form, Institute for Contemporary Art, London, 1969. Courtesy of the artist.

Photopath foregrounded conditions of perception, forcing viewers to disentangle representation from physical reality. Its implicit interrogation of both site and viewer contained elements that Burgin would later explore in works that went "beyond conceptual art" to incorporate "a systematic attention to the *politics of representation,*" including a theory of the subject.[35]

The very doubleness of photography would lead Burgin to consider how objects exist not only physically, as objects in the world, but psychologically, as mental and social constructs articulated in and through language. As he proposed in his 1969 essay "Situational Aesthetics," an object such as *Photopath* is "contingent upon the details of the situation for which it is designed." As a consequence of the viewer's apprehension of them, "through attention to time, objects formed are intentionally located partly in real, exterior space and partly in psychological, interior space."[36]

These increasingly psychological concerns surface pointedly in the text piece "Room," which Burgin exhibited at the Camden Arts Centre in 1970, in which "typewritten sentences . . . focused your attention on the condition of being in the room and adopting a mode of cognition which is traditionally rooted in the spectatorship of art."[37] Presented in eighteen parts, a series of statements accumulate in an apparently systematic manner that gradually takes on increasingly personal, social, and narrative resonances. The work begins with what appear to be purely perceptual concerns, moving from "1 ALL SUBSTANTIAL THINGS WHICH CONSTITUTE THIS ROOM" to "2 ALL THE DURATION OF 1" to "3 THE PRESENT MOMENT AND ONLY THE PRESENT MOMENT" and then reprised in "4 ALL APPEARANCES OF 1 DIRECTLY EXPERIENCED BY YOU AT 3." But by 8 and 9 we arrive at "ALL BODILY ACTS PERFORMED BY YOU AT 3 WHICH YOU KNOW TO BE DIRECTLY EXPERIENCED BY PERSONS OTHER THAN YOURSELF" and "ALL BODILY ACTS DIRECTLY EXPERIENCED BY YOU AT 3 PERFORMED BY PERSONS OTHER THAN YOURSELF."

As subsequent sentences catalogue or propose bodily sensations, contact, emotions, and inner experiences, the nature of the "all substantial things which constitute this room" changes from sculptural materials or physical site to possible social interactions and psychological states. Despite the complete abstraction of the sentences, as Burgin insists, "'Objects' may be generated

through the perceptual behavior" created by verbal instructions: "An immaterial object is created, which is solely a function of perceptual behavior."[38] Thus early on, the viewer Burgin addresses is understood as a desiring subject, as a subject of fantasy, and not simply a viewer perceiving a preexisting physical reality. This subject, as "Room" makes clear, is constituted in language. While works by Huebler and Barry also foreground the linguistic underpinnings of perception, at least initially their terms are more strictly cognitive and descriptive, whereas Burgin's gamelike lists create strange narrative and psychological resonances that invite readers to fill in fragments of a story or imagine a set of complex personal relations underneath a generic language of "events," "acts," and "criteria."

Although process-based structures were by no means unusual at the time, Burgin was one of the few artists to address the viewer as a subject not just of concrete spatial-temporal experience but as a subject of fantasy—and to systematically explore these perceptual, semiotic, and phantasmatic operations as occurring in photography as a medium. While many artists used photographs, they tended to employ them as a tool, in seemingly conscious ignorance or avoidance of, for instance, the critical and historical issues surrounding documentary photography or the intensifying construction of subjectivity through images in the modern mass media. Burgin, however, increasingly oriented his work—as an artist and a critic—toward the analysis of the photographic image and image culture, helping to initiate a type of practice that was also taken up by photo-based artist-critics such as Martha Rosler and Allan Sekula.

For Huebler, photographs seem to retain a nearly neutral status as "document" or transparent recording of "appearance"—a tool that he would strategically employ to strip off the mythical residues that language attaches to an image. In a 1977 interview, he states, "I am interested in freeing nature from the imposition of language, mythology and literature," adding, "I set the quality of association and then I strip it away. . . . The structure of the work butts a natural event or natural appearance up against a cultural event, the language. . . . The photography is simply a metaphor for nature, a metaphor for appearance."[39] Although Huebler recounts having read Barthes and Alain Robbe-Grillet in the 1960s, his project of semiotic "demythologization" does

not yet comprise an articulated analysis of the *rhetoric* of photography. As the artist Mike Kelley, a student of Huebler's at the California Institute of the Arts in the late 1970s, notes,

> In effect, Doug is telling us that his photographs are transparent. . . . It is possible, because the photos are 'non-aesthetic,' to look through them directly into the system they exemplify. I could never accept this proposition. . . . It is this problem of transparency that I believe primarily separates the first generation of Conceptual artists from the so-called second generation.[40]

Huebler's deceptively naive use of photography nonetheless belies a deep engagement with the structures of the medium, emphasizing the larger procedural elements created by a work rather than focusing in on the internal structure or analysis of specific individual images. His celebrated work *Variable Piece #70* (1971) "Global" pushes photography to the limits of representation. In its laconically worded statement, Huebler embraces the underlying structure of the photographic archive to absurd extremes: "Throughout the remainder of the artist's lifetime he will photographically document, to the extent of his capacity, the existence of everyone alive in order to produce the most authentic and inclusive representation of the human species that may be assembled in that manner."

The premise to photograph "everyone alive" recalls the curious combination of rigorous completeness and arbitrary sampling characteristic of early Conceptual art—evident, for instance, in Ruscha's books documenting *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* (1962) or *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1965). Drawing on Cagean principles of random accumulation and nonhierarchical presentation, *Variable Piece #70* enacts the structure of the archive—a collection of equal documents, gathered without regard for quality or aesthetic value. And like Burgin's *Photopath,* it posits a one-to-one correspondence between object and image, playing on the impossible fantasy of a representation adequate to its object.

Within the rubric of this piece, Huebler then created an ongoing series of works that would combine photographs of people with captions drawn

Variable Piece # 70 (In Process)
Global

Throughout the remainder of the artist's lifetime he will photographically document, to the extent of his capacity, the existence of everyone alive in order to produce the most authentic and inclusive representation of the human species that may be assembled in that manner.

Editions of this work will be periodically issued in a variety of topical modes: "100,000 people", "1,000,000 people", "10,000,000 people", "people personally known by the artist", "look-alikes", "overlaps", etc.

November, 1971

Figure 6.10 Huebler, *Variable Piece #70* (1971). © 2006 Estate of Douglas Huebler/Artists Rights Society, New York.

from clichés, proverbs, and other found language—for example, street scenes of people, accompanied by labels reading: "Represented above is at least one person who would do anything for a laugh, . . . whose life is an open book, . . . who has not yet begun to fight." The presentation provides no pointers to suggest which figures to attach the captions to, and viewers gradually grasp that the pieces revolve precisely on the *arbitrary* nature of the relation between caption and photo, chance juxtapositions that nonetheless lead us to try to desire and construct a meaningful relation between image and text. Huebler explains that "as in all my work this project is meant to put the question to its audience about how willing it is—and anyone else—to accept arbitrarily constructed relationships between language and appearance."[41] Elsewhere Huebler insists that his work is "about the equation between the language you are reading and the image you are seeing. . . . It is an effort to try to make the equation occur in the present moment," presumably so that by occurring in the present moment, this equation can be made perceptible and accessible to questioning.[42]

The desire to invoke and continually undercut the pointing function of language, its capacity to direct our reading of an image, differentiates Huebler's work from artists like Burgin who increasingly sought to use text- and image-based work to construct far more directed meanings, whose veiled allusions and ambiguities resemble the seductions of advertising campaigns. Burgin notes how he eventually became dissatisfied with *Photopath*'s strategy "because it appeared that the spectator wasn't being given enough guidance"; instead, he began using texts that provided something like "a series of prompts where the spectator is urged to look at certain things."[43] Thus, in his celebrated poster *Possession* (1976), which mimicked the visual forms of advertising and was installed "on site" in various urban settings, the semantic linkages between the photo and texts, while initially enigmatic, nevertheless generate a set of fairly coherent allusions to the British class system, commodity culture, romantic possession, and the like. Such works presage the strategies of many photo-text works of the 1980s in which the text effectively represses the image, directing our reading, rather than setting off a series of unstable relays between word and picture.

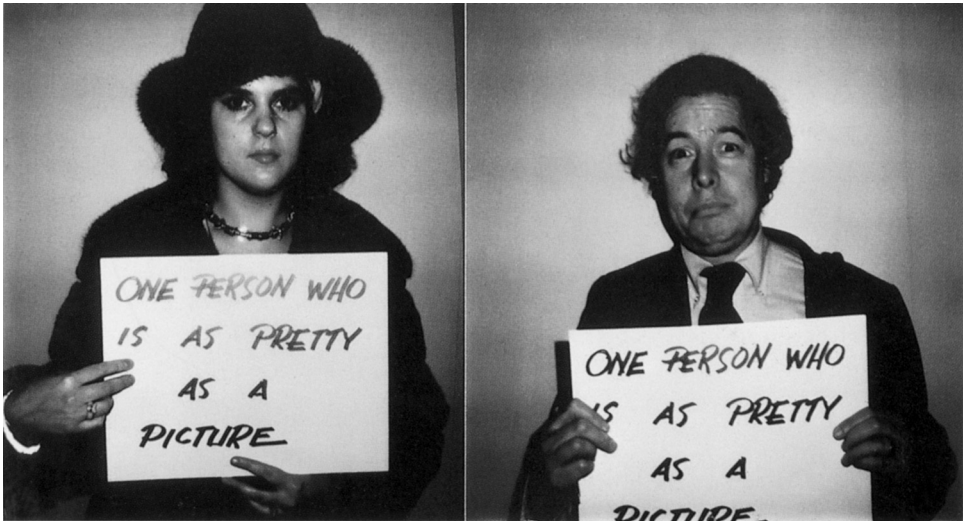


Figure 6.11 Huebler, *100 E/Variable Piece #70: 1971,* "one person who is as pretty as a picture" (1977).
© 2006 Estate of Douglas Huebler/Artists Rights Society, New York.

The directive approach, which ultimately closes down meaning around a preestablished, if buried, message, is absent from Huebler's more genuinely deconstructive work. In a 1977 project linked with *Variable Piece #70,* Huebler photographed people holding cards with various clichés printed on them: "at least one person who is beautiful but dumb," "one person who is as pretty as a picture," and so forth. In this game structure, the cards were distributed randomly, thereby entailing a risk for those who pose of being associated with a negative or unpleasant description that would then seem attached to them. Huebler recalled the paradoxes of this participatory work, where the random process nonetheless creates quite poignant results: "The desire of people to play this game is extraordinary. They all know it isn't for real, and when it's finished you can look at these associations and say, 'Ah yes, he got one that matches.'"[44]

What makes these works moving? Each cliché, however generic and shopworn, takes on a strange meaning and relevance when attached to the particularity of a face. And of course, the looks of those who pose are, in their own way, generic too; cataloged photographically, faces inevitably fall into types and genres, familiar tropes. By pairing the arbitrary repeated text with the singularity of the face, Huebler's images cross and contaminate their logics. Part of the power of Huebler's work is how it not only exposes the mechanisms of photograph and caption but in so doing, also illuminates how our sense of self—and our senses of others—are so often propped on these operations of image and language.

Subjectivity and the Archive

It would be tempting to make an argument, in parallel to Benjamin Buchloh's analysis of Conceptual art, tracing a movement from something like an "aesthetic of the index" to an explicit "politics of representation." Yet while I have traced a rough trajectory from perceptual to semiotic models, the most interesting projects bridge these terms, combining an analysis of the workings of image and language with a speculative and open-ended address to the viewer/reader. One key to the disruptive force of such works rests in their capacity to address us as "individuals" while invoking deeply shared, if not

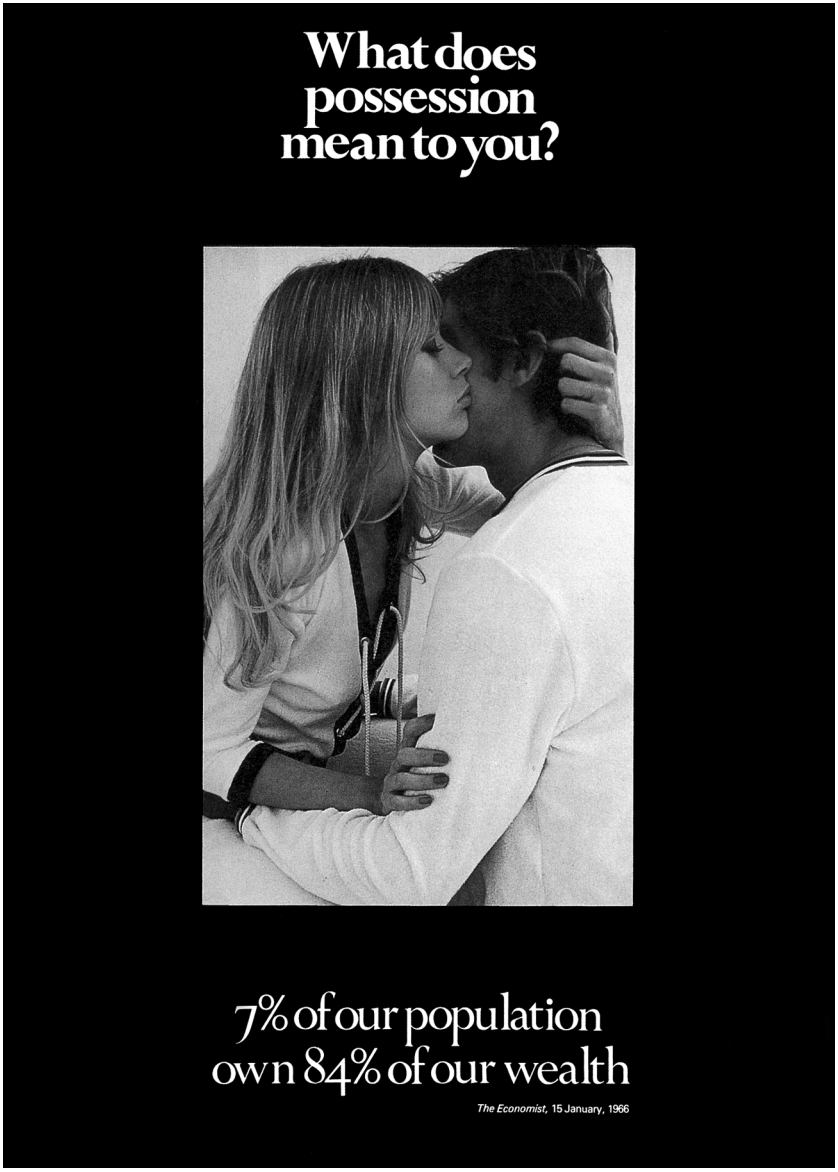


Figure 6.12 Burgin, *Possession* (1976). Courtesy of the artist.

universal, structures of perception—in effect, to cross those things that feel most personal with those that are most anonymous. Burgin's poster *Possession,* after all, asks, "What does possession mean to you?" And even if the image and subhead offer, respectively, a romantic cliché and a nugget of publicly available information, all addressed to any anonymous passerby, we still take these messages personally.

In a not dissimilar way, Huebler's *Variable Piece #70* engages an ambivalence at the heart of archival forms of organization. Huebler's proposal to photographically document everyone alive foregrounds how an archival logic renders images (and people) equal and interchangeable, while also being particular. If this structure is poignant, Huebler's work suggests, it is because this conflict between equivalence and singularity structures human subjectivity as well. This tension emerges powerfully in Huebler's *Variable Piece #4: New York City* (1969), which invited visitors to the "Software" exhibition at the Jewish Museum to "participate in the transposition of information from one location to another" by sharing their secrets.[45] While many works in the famous 1970 exhibition celebrated or explored the emerging forms of computer-based culture, Huebler addressed something far more primal, yet also deeply relevant to emerging forms of information management, surveillance, and social control. The work asks visitors to "write or print on this paper an authentic personal secret that you have never revealed before: of course, do not sign it," and then invites them to complete the exchange by receiving a photocopy of someone else's secret.

Huebler then compiled these submissions into his 1973 artist's book, *Secrets,* which notes, "Nearly 1,800 'secrets' were submitted for exchange and have been transcribed exactly as written except that surnames have been edited: all are printed in this book and join with this statement as final form of this piece."[46] Needless to say, eighteen hundred entries is an awful lot of secrets—and as one reads the short statements, a sense of sameness and repetition accrues amid the variation and singularity:

I am afraid of people

I love Todd M.

I love hash

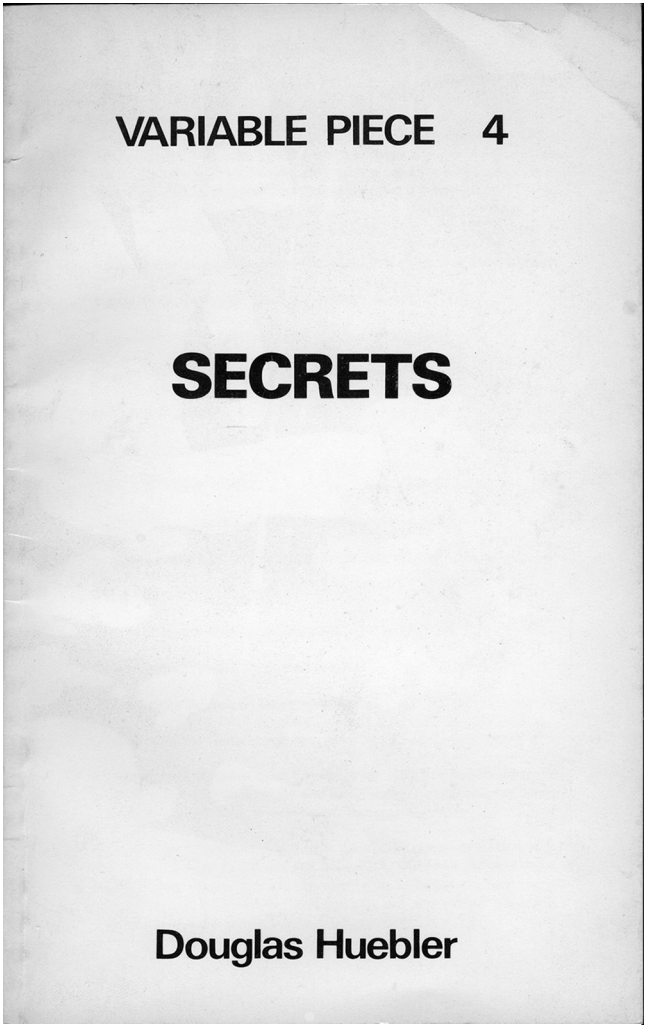


Figure 6.13 Huebler, *Secrets: Variable Piece 4* (1973). © 2006 Estate of Douglas Huebler/Artists Rights Society, New York.

VARIBLE PIECE 4
NEW YORK CITY.

Visitors to the SOFTWARE exhibition are invited to participate in the transposition of information from one location to another by following the procedure described below:

1. Write or print on this paper an authentic personal secret that you have never revealed before: of course, do not sign it.
2. Slip the paper into the slot of the box provided at this location. Complete the exchange of your secret for that of another person by requesting a photo-copy of one previously submitted.

(To insure your anonymity incoming secrets will remain within the box for 24 hours before being removed to be photo-copied and joining the "library" of secrets for future exchange.)

May 1969 Douglas Huebler

Forms on which the above directions were printed were made available to all visitors at the exhibition SOFTWARE (Jewish Museum, NYC, September 16-November 8, 1970).

Nearly 1,800 "secrets" were submitted for exchange and have been transcribed exactly as written except that surnames have been edited: all are printed in this book and join with this statement as final form of this piece.

March, 1973 Douglas Huebler

Girls with proportionately developed (i.e. finely shaped as opposed to just big) breasts walking down a street without a bra turn me on. Since this is an individual viewpoint and must be taken in perspective I'll sign it as: a 23 year old white Protestant male.

I am afraid of people.

I always wondered what doing a thing with a chick was like (A chick)

I stepped on and broke George's glasses.

I love Todd M.

I have been sleeping with Dr. T's mistress

I like movies about orphans

I never swam naked

I am in love with myself.

Tricked you— I have no secret and you revealed yours.

You will be robbed 2/4/71 at 2:00 P.M. signed: the black gang

I wet the bed until I was 10

2nd Adulterous experiment last week

I love bobby, Frederick, Jib, and Mr R.

There's coke in a match box in my room.

I broke a bottle in my brook.

I just received 10 lbs of marijauna from Mexico. For your honesty in playing this insane game there will be an ounce bag waiting for you under the United Press International Teletype Machine

I was a green dwarf until age 7 then I got some glasses and from that time on I found it hard to see without glasses. My sight was perhaps impaired by the strong glasses, but I began to grow at a normal rate and my skin became sort of a composite caucasian plus red, and yellow and black.

I am really shy

I hate you

I like Lawrence Welk

I believe Angela Davis isn't that guilty but I'm afraid to speak up

Sex bores me

Lucy is pregnant

Douglas Huebler has often secretly seemed to me to be a failed poet a failed painter a failed concept "and yet"

I have never let any boy fuck me

I shoplifted from Bloomingdales

Secretly I'm afraid that Negroes carry knives and will cut me someday

I've been married 16 years and never made love with anyone except my husband and I can't help but wonder what it would be like with others.

No doubt the book reads as a collective portrait of the neuroses of the New York art world, circa 1970. Yet it is much more than a sociological document. It is an aesthetic form or, to adopt Burgin's terms, an aesthetic system. By its organizational structure, the list imposes equivalence and interchangeability on even the most disparate of materials. And Huebler's methods ensure a random accumulation of sentiments without narrative build or overarching structure.[47] Yet by virtue of volume, *Secrets* generates a sense of the generic and generality. Any citation can only be a sampling, an arbitrary selection from a vast flow of speech that does not permit certain kinds of internal differentiation. Like the all-over composition or implacable one-thing-after-another logic of minimal sculpture, there is no way that any one part can be "better" or "more important" than another. Reading Huebler's text, we become aware of the structure of utterances as such, and the durational experience of reading carries an undeniable emotional load.

Forty years after the heyday of minimal art, we may be all-too-accustomed to strategies of accumulation and repetition in painting and sculpture. Yet to impose such equivalence on *language*—particularly on the most private of utterances—still seems strange indeed. Severed from their speakers and the intimacy of private exchange, such disclosures become not meaningless but oddly unmoored from meaning. If text appears to attach meaning to an image and words seem to disclose our deepest thoughts, Huebler's stated desire is to do the reverse: to subtract meaning, to empty things out, in a manner that is both ethical and political. In a 1977 interview, he described the underlying logic of his project as "an effort to empty the work of what appears to be the content. It is not to fill the work with content. It is to empty it, to empty it of history, to empty it of mythology, to empty it of literature and to allow it to speak by being empty."[48] He concludes that "there is an enormous amount of irresponsible filling of content into the events of the world and into the appearance of the world . . . in other words, I'm speaking against the irresponsibility of language."[49]

Conclusion: An Aesthetics of the Index?

> Andy believed the tape recorder could change writing as much as the camera had changed painting.
>
> —*Victor Bockris*

> In those days practically no one tape-recorded news interviews; they took notes instead. I liked that better because when it got written up, it would always be different from what I'd actually said.
>
> —*Andy Warhol*

Published by Grove Press in 1968, Andy Warhol's *a: a novel* consists of the taped and transcribed recordings of twenty-four hours of Warhol and his superstar Ondine on speed as they travel between the Factory, downtown venues, and uptown parties, in what is presented as one long day-and-night's journey into babble and delirium. Initiated in August 1965, the taping was not completed until some two years later; hence, the continuous nature of the recording is somewhat faked by splicing together different takes, not unlike the looping and refilming Warhol employed in his 1963 film *Eat*.[1] While many aspects of the novel's making are recorded within the text, as participants like Ondine, Billy Name, and Stephen Shore discuss the taping as it occurs, the only extended accounts we have are provided by Warhol himself in his 1980 memoir *POPism: The Warhol 60s* as well as by Warhol associates and biographers Victor Bockris and Bob Colacello, and in scattered recollections of some of the participants in the stream of memoirs published since Warhol's death in 1987.[2]

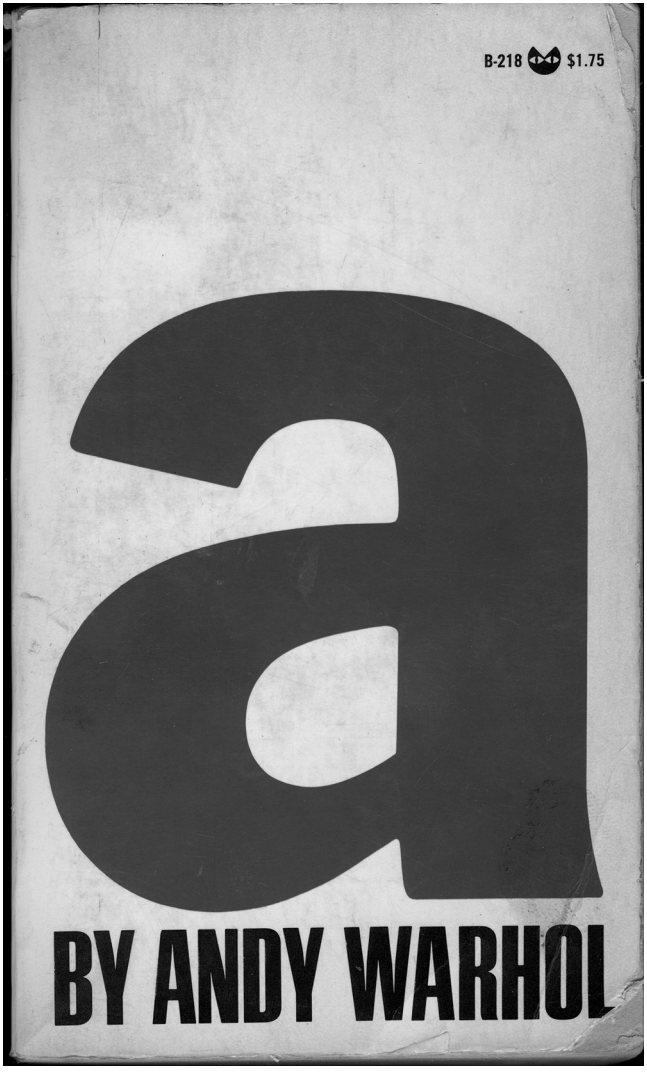


Figure 7.1 Warhol, *a: a novel* (1968), cover. © 2006 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts/Artists Rights Society, New York.

If one trusts the accounts of the legions of associates who passed through Warhol's life from the early 1950s until his death, one encounters a paradox: that Warhol, perhaps the most famous artist of the second half of the twentieth century, did not do anything, have any ideas of his own, or make any of his own work. This picture is echoed by art-historical accounts in which every move Warhol made merely replicates the pictorial strategies of Cubism or painterly procedures of other postwar painters. Even Jackson Mac Low earnestly claims his published score for the never-realized *Tree Movie* as the direct inspiration for Warhol's static camera-roll films—although Mac Low at least acknowledges that La Monte Young's durational pieces were a common precedent for both. Warhol himself hardly contests such impressions, through his endless use of surrogates to speak for him and even act as him.[3] It is no coincidence that the only books in which Warhol says "I" were written by others. However we are to approach this production, conventional models of authorship will not quite work. The lines between the author, the subject of the enunciation, the subject of the utterance, and the character—"Warhol"—have never been so blurred.[4]

In *POPism*—coauthored, transcribed, and perhaps ventriloquized by Pat Hackett—Warhol (or is it "Warhol"?) recalls how he "wanted to do a 'bad book,' the way I'd done 'bad movies' and 'bad art,' because when you do something exactly wrong, you always end up with something right."[5] According to mainstream critics, Warhol succeeded all too well. An unnamed reviewer in the *New Yorker* notes that despite passing resemblances to classic works by no less than James Joyce, Leo Tolstoy, Marcel Proust, and Gertrude Stein, "the book has nothing else in common with those illustrious works, however, since it is an unreadable, and thus a totally boring, jumble."[6]

Unfavorably comparing *a: a novel* to Robert Pinget's novel *Inquisitory,* "since the books are similar in intention, and related in technique," Sally Beauman in the *New York Times Book Review* declares that "'Inquisitory' is a brilliant, dazzling success, showing up Warhol's 'a' for the cheapjack, shoddy, derivative $10's worth of incomprehensible yelpings and yowlings that it is."[7] Like many reviewers, Beauman points out superficial similarities to other modernist projects in order to better dismiss Warhol's irrelevance and pretense.

Measured against the artful re-creation of speech and intricate, puzzlelike structure of the French nouveau romaniste, *a: a novel* can only be deficient: "Pinget's book, is, like Warhol's, entirely written in the form of conversation . . . 'a' consists of 24 hours of talk—there are strangely few silences—tape-recorded from the life of Ondine, a Warhol sidekick who is homosexual, high on amphetamines and loquacious."[8] The result is a complete breakdown of the novelistic conventions of readerly engagement: "a backlash of sheer coruscating boredom began with Warhol's book on about page 14, and continued for the duration. Warhol does not, like Pinget, turn the reader's expectations and weaknesses to his advantage; he has not managed to suggest the fallibility of art enough." Oddly, even the partial illegibility of the text provides grounds to dismiss its realism; everything about the text seems to compel disgust:

> Ironically, 'a' is not ultimately even realistic. Most of it—I suspect because the tapes didn't pick up connecting pieces of conversation—is incomprehensible snippets and gobbets of talk. Because Ondine's brain seems irretrievably addled with amphetamine, most of what he says takes the form of grunts, squeals and bad puns. It's frightening to think that one can be bored by this sort of willful self-destruction, but one can. On film, Warhol's people live; they evoke responses; pruned down to a transcript they lose all identity, they all sound alike, they evoke nothing, not even compassion. . . . It would all be the more bearable, too, if it weren't so pretentious. Typos in the script are left uncorrected; there are awful little pseudo-Biblical running heads at the top of each page. . . . Ondine's last soliloquy has been deliberately fractured, letters being attached to the wrong words, presumably in an attempt at Joycean-looking profundity.[9]

Only slightly more sympathetic, Robert Mazzocco in the *New York Review of Books* quickly dismisses *a*'s formal threats by simultaneously asserting the reassuring "familiarity" of its contents and the sordid depravity of its characters:

> What is *a* about? If one were to take *a* seriously, one would have to say it is about the degradation of sex, the degradation of feeling, the degradation of values, and the super-degradation of language; that in its errant pages can be heard the death of American literature, at least from *The Scarlet Letter* onward. Actually, it's about people who talk about Les Crane and Merv Griffin. . . . Throughout *a* they chat on the phone and they chat in the cab, they chat in the restaurant . . . they chat especially when stoned. *A* is a bacchanalian coffee-klatch. . . . Sterile and insentient and instantly dated, void and verbose, they instantly proliferate themselves and each other.[10]

Despite earnest efforts by the *Times* reviewer to equate Warhol's project with more conventional texts that present themselves as representations of speech, *a: a novel* is emphatically not "written in the form of conversation." Recalling his early years with *Andy Warhol's Interview,* Bockris notes Warhol's decidedly unorthodox insistence on approaching interview subjects

> with as empty a mind as possible. . . . This way, the interviewer will get the most accurate and revealing image of the subject via the topics he or she chooses to discuss, as well as the grammar, syntax and vocabulary used. If a tape is transcribed very accurately with each "uhm," "err" and "but" included, what is redacted is a voice portrait.[11]

Bockris's reference to an "empty mind" parodies John Cage's Zen-laced pronouncements, revealing their structural resemblance to the more mundane recording devices Warhol employed—and their link to the indiscriminate cultural affirmation of Warhol's incessant "Oh, wow." But it is precisely in the operations of *transcription,* and Warhol's maddening refusal to edit, that Bockris locates Warhol's art—practices that replicate Cage's nonselective acceptance of the results of experimental procedures. Bockris's slightly varying accounts provide the most extensive descriptions of the taping and transcription of *a: a novel,* which preceded Warhol's published interviews and provided

the model for their precisely redacted "voice portraits." Mentioning with considerable understatement that "a number of inconsistencies occurred in the process of transcribing the tapes" of recorded conversation, Bockris observes, "Throughout the transcription words are misspelt, including 'and' and 'but,' and the grammar is confused; sometimes there are sixteen columns in a row or paragraphs with six brackets that open but never close."[12] According to Bockris, Warhol's initial decision to write a novel using the cassette tape recorder he received in the mail from Philips Recording Company in August 1965 met with protests even from Factory colleagues, who declared "that's not writing, that's recording." But it was Warhol's decision, two years later, to accept the haphazardly produced typewritten pages as he received them, and publish them without further editing or textual normalization, that met with the most sustained outcry—transforming the book "from a good idea into literature."[13]

> In August of 1967, Warhol was handed the six hundred page manuscript to read in preparation for publishing the book. He was astounded by what he received, but contrary to what was expected, rather than take the pages to someone and have them properly retyped, Warhol embraced the transcription exactly as it was. This is fantastic, he said, this is great. He read it six times from beginning to end.[14]

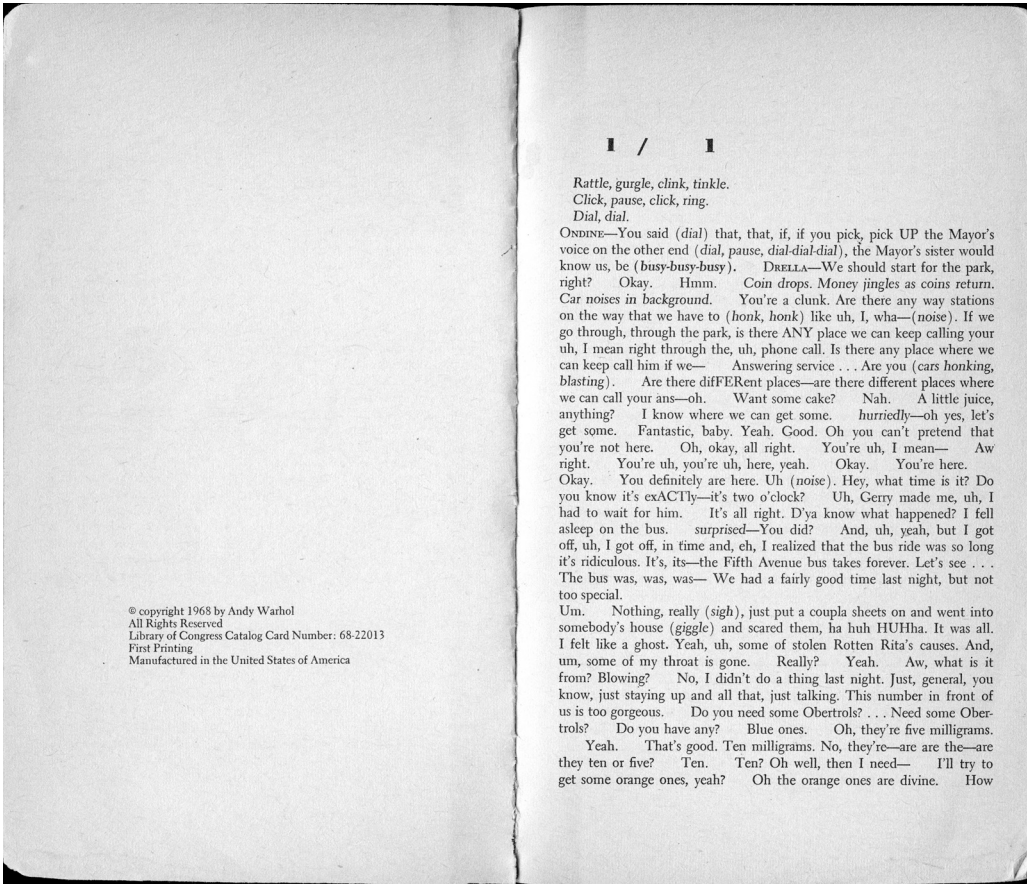
In Bockris's view, in Warhol's refusal to normalize the manuscript according to the dictates of conventional novelistic or even journalistic procedures—generic professional standards all-too-evident in Warhol's subsequent, more successful books like *Philosophy* and *POPism*—Warhol not only preserved the "aura" of the Factory but presented the raw babble and incoherence of speech as actually spoken rather than contrived by authors writing "in the form of conversation":

> In preserving the manuscript's shattered state Warhol was actually preserving the precise aura of the conversations. Because as we

> know, people don't actually speak in sentences, and there aren't always periods of complete silence when one person speaks and others are supposed to be listening. Instead, there is always some sort of babble going on . . . language is broken. . . . Andy created an accurate picture of a day in the life of the factory in the 60s.[15]

Let us turn to the text. From its vast archive of recorded speech, one cannot presume to select artistic high points or even paradigmatic passages but merely sample arbitrarily chosen instances from a potentially limitless field of material. However foreign this may be to the logic of the literary and even its supposedly all-encompassing genre, the novel, this archival impulse can be found in any number of 1960s' Conceptual art projects that either select an arbitrary sample of a larger set—as in Ed Ruscha's *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations, Thirty Four Los Angeles Parking Lots,* and *Various Small Fires*—or attempt to represent every single instance of a quantitatively vast or even infinite number of phenomena—as in On Kawara's *One Million Years* (1966–present) or Douglas Huebler's *Variable Piece #70* (1971), which famously proposed that "throughout the remainder of the artist's lifetime he will photographically document, to the extent of his capacity, the existence of everyone alive in order to produce the most authentic and inclusive representation of the human species that may be assembled in that manner."

By pushing its logic to an unrealizable extreme, these projects implode the representational function, dysfunctioning all the selection operations by which an exemplary or representative part can be said to stand for a larger whole.[16] Coming to the fore in the 1960s, such arbitrary sampling procedures have deep roots and resonances in the twentieth-century avant-garde, from Duchamp's 1913 *Three Standard Stoppages*—a set of three measuring instruments produced by dropping lengths of string and recording where they fell—and his subsequent series of ready-mades to Cage's *4'33"*. Like Huebler's *Variable Pieces* and Kawara's endless series, *a: a novel* obeys Sol LeWitt's dictum, in "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," that "the idea" becomes "a machine that makes art."[17] Of course, Warhol's implacable machines proceed without the high seriousness or metadiscursive apparatus that so often framed



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I / I

Rattle, gurgle, clink, tinkle.
Click, pause, click, ring.
Dial, dial.

ONDINE—You said (*dial*) that, that, if, if you pick, pick UP the Mayor's voice on the other end (*dial, pause, dial-dial-dial*), the Mayor's sister would know us, be (**busy-busy-busy**). DRELLA—We should start for the park, right? Okay. Hmm. *Coin drops. Money jingles as coins return. Car noises in background.* You're a clunk. Are there any way stations on the way that we have to (*honk, honk*) like uh, I, wha—(*noise*). If we go through, through the park, is there ANY place we can keep calling your uh, I mean right through the, uh, phone call. Is there any place where we can keep call him if we— Answering service . . . Are you (*cars honking, blasting*). Are there difFERent places—are there different places where we can call your ans—oh. Want some cake? Nah. A little juice, anything? I know where we can get some. *hurriedly*—oh yes, let's get some. Fantastic, baby. Yeah. Good. Oh you can't pretend that you're not here. Oh, okay, all right. You're uh, I mean— Aw right. You're uh, you're uh, here, yeah. Okay. You're here. Okay. You definitely are here. Uh (*noise*). Hey, what time is it? Do you know it's exACTly—it's two o'clock? Uh, Gerry made me, uh, I had to wait for him. It's all right. D'ya know what happened? I fell asleep on the bus. *surprised*—You did? And, uh, yeah, but I got off, uh, I got off, in time and, eh, I realized that the bus ride was so long it's ridiculous. It's, its—the Fifth Avenue bus takes forever. Let's see . . . The bus was, was, was— We had a fairly good time last night, but not too special.

Um. Nothing, really (*sigh*), just put a coupla sheets on and went into somebody's house (*giggle*) and scared them, ha huh HUHha. It was all. I felt like a ghost. Yeah, uh, some of stolen Rotten Rita's causes. And, um, some of my throat is gone. Really? Yeah. Aw, what is it from? Blowing? No, I didn't do a thing last night. Just, general, you know, just staying up and all that, just talking. This number in front of us is too gorgeous. Do you need some Obertrols? . . . Need some Obertrols? Do you have any? Blue ones. Oh, they're five milligrams. Yeah. That's good. Ten milligrams. No, they're—are are the—are they ten or five? Ten. Ten? Oh well, then I need— I'll try to get some orange ones, yeah? Oh the orange ones are divine. How

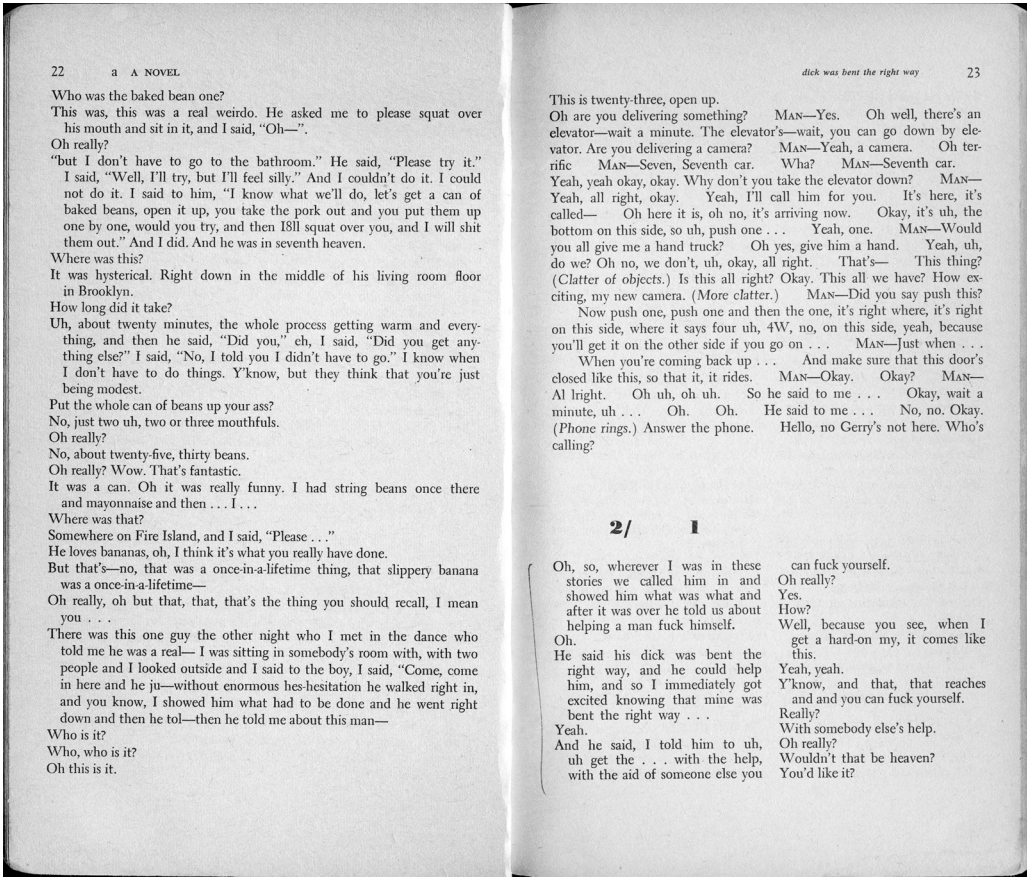
Figure 7.2 Warhol, *a: a novel* (1968). © 2006 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts/Artists Right Society, New York.

Conceptual art's procedures as rational and self-consciously critical artistic operations—although his subjects provide their own ludic moments of self-reflexive commentary:

> O—Well, we could even, we could make up a game that would be even better. Games are so . . .
> T—Well, you know
> O—The only way to talk is to talk in games, it's just so fabulous.
> T—Ondine has games that no one understands.
> O—It's wonderful (laughter)[18]

Yet it is in the flow of text, of page after page of text, that *a: a novel* works—a durational project that must be undergone to be understood. Like Michel Foucault's "continuous streaming of language," a ceaseless and incessant babble that precedes a subject "enveloped in words," quotations from *a* are but a series of snapshots.[19] Nonetheless, from a handful of pages we can get a sense of how the shattered text compiles and reproduces in fragmented, accidental form almost every aesthetic device of twentieth-century avant-garde and experimental poetic practice. Through errors of transcription and redaction, the endless babble of conversation is pulverized into fractured typographic utterances. Sentences jump from topic to topic and speaker to speaker, often without indication or clear attribution. Punctuation, from ellipses to question marks to parentheses, proliferates without regulated usage or readily apparent function, sometimes suspending large blanks of space in the midst of text. Rampant misspellings pulverize words, and asyntactic passages of loosely rendered conversation and interruption nearly parody Dada poetry. Casual wordplay, punning, and incoherence abound, as do "experimental" devices like numbered paragraphs, doubled columns, and the occasional different typeface. And on a deeper level, the endless repetitions and digressions of speech render the text a late twentieth-century version of Stein's legendarily durational "long book," *The Making of Americans.*

While Warhol was no doubt sufficiently informed about modernist and avant-garde poetics to recognize their resonances in the jumbled manuscript delivered to him, these devices nevertheless occur accidentally, unintended,



22 a A NOVEL

Who was the baked bean one?
This was, this was a real weirdo. He asked me to please squat over his mouth and sit in it, and I said, "Oh—".
Oh really?
"but I don't have to go to the bathroom." He said, "Please try it." I said, "Well, I'll try, but I'll feel silly." And I couldn't do it. I could not do it. I said to him, "I know what we'll do, let's get a can of baked beans, open it up, you take the pork out and you put them up one by one, would you try, and then I8ll squat over you, and I will shit them out." And I did. And he was in seventh heaven.
Where was this?
It was hysterical. Right down in the middle of his living room floor in Brooklyn.
How long did it take?
Uh, about twenty minutes, the whole process getting warm and everything, and then he said, "Did you," eh, I said, "Did you get anything else?" I said, "No, I told you I didn't have to go." I know when I don't have to do things. Y'know, but they think that you're just being modest.
Put the whole can of beans up your ass?
No, just two uh, two or three mouthfuls.
Oh really?
No, about twenty-five, thirty beans.
Oh really? Wow. That's fantastic.
It was a can. Oh it was really funny. I had string beans once there and mayonnaise and then . . . I . . .
Where was that?
Somewhere on Fire Island, and I said, "Please . . ."
He loves bananas, oh, I think it's what you really have done.
But that's—no, that was a once-in-a-lifetime thing, that slippery banana was a once-in-a-lifetime—
Oh really, oh but that, that, that's the thing you should recall, I mean you . . .
There was this one guy the other night who I met in the dance who told me he was a real— I was sitting in somebody's room with, with two people and I looked outside and I said to the boy, I said, "Come, come in here and he ju—without enormous hes-hesitation he walked right in, and you know, I showed him what had to be done and he went right down and then he tol—then he told me about this man—
Who is it?
Who, who is it?
Oh this is it.

dick was bent the right way 23

This is twenty-three, open up.
Oh are you delivering something? MAN—Yes. Oh well, there's an elevator—wait a minute. The elevator's—wait, you can go down by elevator. Are you delivering a camera? MAN—Yeah, a camera. Oh terrific MAN—Seven, Seventh car. Wha? MAN—Seventh car. Yeah, yeah okay, okay. Why don't you take the elevator down? MAN—Yeah, all right, okay. Yeah, I'll call him for you. It's here, it's called— Oh here it is, oh no, it's arriving now. Okay, it's uh, the bottom on this side, so uh, push one . . . Yeah, one. MAN—Would you all give me a hand truck? Oh yes, give him a hand. Yeah, uh, do we? Oh no, we don't, uh, okay, all right. That's— This thing? (*Clatter of objects.*) Is this all right? Okay. This all we have? How exciting, my new camera. (*More clatter.*) MAN—Did you say push this?

Now push one, push one and then the one, it's right where, it's right on this side, where it says four uh, 4W, no, on this side, yeah, because you'll get it on the other side if you go on . . . MAN—Just when . . .

When you're coming back up . . . And make sure that this door's closed like this, so that it, it rides. MAN—Okay. Okay? MAN—Al lright. Oh uh, oh uh. So he said to me . . . Okay, wait a minute, uh . . . Oh. Oh. He said to me . . . No, no. Okay. (*Phone rings.*) Answer the phone. Hello, no Gerry's not here. Who's calling?

2/ 1

Oh, so, wherever I was in these stories we called him in and showed him what was what and after it was over he told us about helping a man fuck himself.
Oh.
He said his dick was bent the right way, and he could help him, and so I immediately got excited knowing that mine was bent the right way . . .
Yeah.
And he said, I told him to uh, uh get the . . . with the help, with the aid of someone else you can fuck yourself.
Oh really?
Yes.
How?
Well, because you see, when I get a hard-on my, it comes like this.
Yeah, yeah.
Y'know, and that, that reaches and and you can fuck yourself.
Really?
With somebody else's help.
Oh really?
Wouldn't that be heaven?
You'd like it?

Figure 7.3 Warhol, *a: a novel* (1968), 22–23. © 2006 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts/Artists Rights Society.

through the unforeseen distortions and deviations introduced in the text's production. In the face of such compilation, even the chance-generated and collage practices of Ashbery, Mac Low, and other postwar experimental poetries appear relatively mannered and contrived.

However perverse, the 451-page novel incorporates and extends the postwar practices we have read as extensions of the readymade principle: (1) the use of the recording mechanism, without apparent criteria of selection or importance, to sample from a potentially uninterrupted flow of existing material—in this case, twenty-four-hours of conversation; (2) the use of durational structures based on externally or arbitrarily determined time brackets, and the use of existing technologies of transcription and transmission without correction for distortions and imperfections; and (3) the use of predetermined or chance-based processes, executed in a quasi-mechanistic manner, to produce unanticipated and largely uncontrolled results, in a manner that largely cedes conventional functions of authorship, creation, and expression to a simple device.

All these procedures—the selection of ready-made materials, the use of indexical procedures of inscription, the investigation of noise, dirt, and distortion, and the larger project of suppressing artistic subjectivity and control, in favor of an aesthetics of indifference or indeterminacy—all these strategies, are fully legible in other aesthetic spheres, particularly in that field we still call visual art (however debatable the status of the visible is in such production). Yet such procedures remain almost completely unintelligible and unreadable within the field of literature or writing. We could simply chalk this up to the extraordinary conservatism of the literary establishment in the United States, which routinely recycles the aesthetic interventions and even the clichés of twentieth-century literary modernism in each generation's supposedly experimental work—a temptation all-too-easily confirmed by responses to *a* in mainstream literary venues then and now.[20]

Such difficulty invites us to look deeper, at the structural obstacles such a work presents—a difficulty and illegibility that hinges, in part, precisely on subjecting language to certain mechanisms of recording and transcription. As semiotic analyses have noted, the structural properties of language—as a set of coded, discrete signs—distinguish it from other representational media like

photographs or films. For Barthes, this structural difference accounts for the difficulty of producing something like a "true semiotics" of film or photography, leading him to declare in his famous, if problematic, pronouncement that photography offers "a message without a code."[21] Whatever difficulties the "continuous sign" poses for semiotics, its inevitable redundancy allows it to transmit at least some of its message despite considerable noise, distortion, and loss of image quality; as we know from Warhol's silk screens and films, a degraded image can still be (at least partly) read. The once-aggressively antiaesthetic blurs, gaps, and smears in Warhol's classic silk-screened paintings function all too smoothly now as screens for ever-varying emotional investments and critical projections—contemplative and auratic responses authorized by their canny presentation as painted canvases.

Yet degraded language—haphazardly recorded or transmitted fragments of arbitrary and discrete signs—quickly falls back into unintelligibility and noise. Its linear structure demands that we read it in a temporally directed sequence, preventing us from the operations of scanning and selective focus that permit us to interpret an obscure image or watch a boring film. By subjecting language itself to this aesthetics of the index, Warhol relocates reading as an experience of this murmur and babble, the lapses of attention and intelligibility, and the starts and stops of talk and noise and interruption that are the condition of meaning, but also its constant undoing. It is also a stunning aesthetic experience, one that represents the logical extension of the ready-made principle to language and speech, and does so on a scale that takes on language in its unceasing variety and profusion, rather than in the highly aestheticized fragments we recognize as poetry or art.

Notes

Introduction

1. Jeanne Siegel, "Carl Andre: Art Worker," *Studio International* (November 1970): 178.
2. Cited in Nancy Holt, ed., *The Writings of Robert Smithson* (New York: New York University Press, 1979), 104.
3. In "A Heap of Language: Robert Smithson and American Hieroglyphics," Richard Sieburth provocatively reads the work as both a drawing and a poem that partakes of the tradition of visual and concrete poetry; in Eugenie Tsai, ed., *Robert Smithson* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).
4. Cited in Holt, *Writings of Robert Smithson,* 104.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. In 1960s' art, the range of such dislocations is quite rich indeed. In his 1968 article "A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art," Smithson surveys artists' work with language. He notes how Robert Morris "enjoys putting sham 'mistakes' into his language systems," and proposes that "Carl Andre's writings bury the mind under rigorous incantatory arrangements" that radically disorient grammar, concluding "each poem is a 'grave,' so to speak, for his metaphors." Other artists he addresses—Dan Graham and Sol LeWitt—treat language as slippery, inconsistent, and inherently unreliable. Reprinted in Holt, *Writings of Robert Smithson,* 67–68.
8. Or 33", 2'40", and 1'20", depending on which version of the score one follows.
9. In Charles Sanders Peirce's influential writings on semiotics, "indexes" are types of signs that occur through physical trace or imprint, including phenomena like footprints and symptoms. By extension, forms of photographic and sound recording have come to be understood as indexical signs, since they are produced by the imprints of, for instance, light rays or air vibrations.
10. Jerome Rothenberg, "Preface," Jackson Mac Low, *Representative Works 1938–1985* (New York: Roof Books/Segue Foundation, 1986), ix.

Chapter 1

1. The term acousmatic stems from French musique concrète composer Pierre Schaeffer and writer Jérôme Peignot; the concept has disseminated through the work of, among others, François Bayle and R. Murray Schaeffer as well as film theorist Michel Chion. I thank Eric Drott for his insights here.
2. Most accounts of the debut performance of *4'33"* rely on Cage's recollections of the performance (independent audience accounts are quite rare): see Calvin Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors: Five Masters of the Avant-Garde* (New York: Viking Press, 1965), and *Off the Wall: Robert Rauschenberg and the Art World of Our Time* (New York: Doubleday Books, 1980); Cage's various interviews, many of which are collected in Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *Conversing with Cage* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1988); the much later and quite different description Cage gave in his 1988–89 Harvard University lectures, collected in *John Cage I–VI* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 20–25. Certain key discrepancies will be addressed below.
3. John Cage, "A Composer's Confessions" (1948), in *John Cage: Writer,* ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Limelight Editions, 1993), 43.
4. John Holzaepfel, "Cage and Tudor," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage,* ed. David E. Nicholls (London: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 174.
5. Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage,* 66–68.
6. Even if we are to accept, for instance, Douglas Kahn's diagnosis that Cage offered a series of "end game" strategies that merely "performed the last possible modernist renovation of Western art music," the use of these strategies in other contexts appears far from exhausted. Douglas Kahn, "Track Organology," *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 71.
7. Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (New York: Schirmer, 1974), 3.
8. Ian Pepper, "From the 'Aesthetics of Indifference' to 'Negative Aesthetics': John Cage in Germany, 1958–1972," *October* 82 (Fall 1997): 33.
9. In *John Cage's Theatre Pieces: Notations and Performances* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996), William Fetterman provides the most sustained account of the different scores and dates the "linguistically notated version" to 1960. Yet he subsequently acknowledged that this was an assumption made without any evidence beyond the copyright (Fetterman, letter to the author, March 2001). The single-page manuscript held in the Cage archives at the New York Public Library is considered the original typewritten score, though who produced it—or when—is unclear. And complicating this scenario, the text score was later reissued by Peters in 1986 in a version printed in Cage's distinctive handwriting; the current version, printed as a booklet, has been typeset with each movement on a separate page.
10. For conflicting accounts of these versions, see Fetterman, *John Cage's Theatre Pieces,* 69–84; Larry J. Solomon, "The Sounds of Silence: John Cage and *4'33"* (1998), at

<http://solomonsmusic.net/4min33se.htm>; Irwin Kremen's 1996 account of the graphic score, available in the online archives of "Silence: The John Cage Discussion List" at <http://newalbion.com/artists/cagej/silence/>;Tudor's recollections in "Interview with Reinhard Oehlschägel," translated by Daniel Wolf, in *MusikTexte* 69/70 (1997): 69–72. While I had tended to read the billing of *4'33"* on the Woodstock program as a misprint, Tudor scholar John Holzaepfel disagrees: "Since Tudor selected the program and arranged the order, and Cage was presumably involved in preparations for the concert, what would have led the printer to think there were four pieces unless someone made it clear that each of the three movements constituted one piece and all of them, together, a fourth?" (email to the author, August 20, 2005).

11. The most insistent critic arguing for such contextualization is Douglas Kahn, who in a series of essays culminating in *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), proposes that Cage's reaction to the modern conditions of aurality was a fundamentally conservative or recuperative strategy that sought to musicalize all sound by minimizing or eliminating its associative, social dimensions, thus contributing to a project of what Kahn terms "noise abatement."
12. Cage, *John Cage I–VI,* 20–22; punctuation in the original. In an interview with William Fetterman, Cage reiterated that "I wrote it note by note, just like the *Music of Changes. . . .* That's how I knew how long it was, when I added all the notes up. It was done just like a piece of music, except that there were no sounds—but there were durations" (Fetterman, *John Cage's Theatre Pieces,* 72).
13. Fetterman, interview with David Tudor, June 21, 1989 (*John Cage's Theatre Pieces,* 72).
14. John Holzaepfel, "David Tudor, John Cage, and Comparative Indeterminacy" (lecture, the Art of David Tudor: Indeterminacy and Performance in Postwar Culture conference, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, May 2001).
15. Tudor, "Interview," 70.
16. In his 1998 essay "The Sounds of Silence," Solomon goes so far as to decry the text version as "bogus"—and a notion of the graphic score as the original goes back to the 1960s, since it was often preferred by musicians who embraced the abstraction and indeterminacy of proportional visual notation. In *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction,* 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1988), H. Wiley Hitchcock writes: "The original version of *4'33",* which shows its relation to the earlier (non-experimental) music by Cage and is quite different from the published 'score,' is reproduced in *Source* 1/2 (July 1967)" (266).
17. Solomon's argument that the graphic score, in which long vertical lines on an otherwise-blank page indicate the three temporal "movements," visually resembles the vertical panels of Rauschenberg's white paintings is valid, and acknowledges the role of the proportionately notated graphic score as an analogue to painting. This similarity is also noted by Branden W. Joseph, who reproduces a portion of the graphic

score in "White on White," *Critical Inquiry* 27 (Autumn 2000), 90–121. Complicating this resemblance is the fact that unlike the rigidity and detail of Cage's strict space-time notation, the visual format of the 1953 Kremen manuscript more closely resembles the graphic scores produced as early as 1950–1951 by Morton Feldman.

18. In a July 7, 1960 letter to Tudor, Cage notes that he has just signed a contract with C. F. Peters/Henmar Press and is now recording this copyright on all his compositions: "Together with the words Copyright c. 1960 by etc, I have been writing that on everything: title pages and first music pages (scores and parts) for a week now." Getty Research Library, David Tudor Papers.
19. James W. Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 208n22.
20. George Brecht, *George Brecht Notebooks (June 1958–August 1959),* ed. Dieter Daniels with Hermann Braun (Cologne: Walther König, 1991), 1:48.
21. This was Holzaepfel's suggestion (email to the author, August 20, 2005). Pritchett (email to the author, August 25, 2005) elaborates that he considers the text score "a rethink of the work": "the 'original' *4′33″* is very much of a piece with the rest of Cage's work in the early 50s," while "the text version reflects his abandonment of structure in the late 50s," and therefore must date to 1957 or later. I take his comments seriously, although I am aware that in the past, everyone assumed that the typewritten version dated from 1960 simply because of the copyright.
22. John Holzaepfel, "La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela, New York City, July 25, 1999" (unpublished interview).
23. Musical notation, Ian Bent notes, "rarely fashioned its own signs"; instead it has "generally been content to take over systems in use for other purposes" including signs of language, speech inflection, and arithmetic. These provide not just materials but structural devices: "The ordering of letters in an alphabet offers a ready-made base for notation, as it can be directly related to the intrinsic acoustical order of musical sound," Bent adds. This relation extends to its implicit visual graphing of time: "The act of writing a succession of notational syllables is graphic because it traces a path across the writing surface. That path is the analogue of the passage of music through time. The direction of the path tends to follow the prevailing direction of writing." Ian Bent, David Hiley, Margaret Bent, and Geoffrey Chew, "Notation," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians,* ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), 13:336, 341.
24. See Robert Dunn, ed., *John Cage* (New York: Henmar Press, 1962), 43.
25. This inscription of the contingency of each specific realization into the work inevitably recalls later works like Dan Graham's 1966 "poem" *Schema,* and subsequent site-based projects that self-reflexively seek to inscribe their physical and institutional location.

26. John Cage and Daniel Charles, *For the Birds: John Cage in Conversation with Daniel Charles* (London: Marian Boyars, 1981), 169.
27. Cited in Fetterman, *John Cage's Theatre Pieces,* 75.
28. Cage's terms "rhythmic structure" and "structural rhythm" are confusing, since his practice eliminates the regularized time beats usually connoted by the term "rhythm." In fact, Cage's aversion to regularized time beats was the stated basis for his repeated dismissal of jazz, and his use of externally generated durational structures emerged hand in hand with the complete evacuation or suppression of the pulsational dimension of time—indeed, the most striking quality one encounters in listening to Cage's otherwise-heterogeneous music is a general absence of beat or propulsive energy.
29. Pritchett, *Music of John Cage,* 13.
30. Paul Griffiths, *John Cage* (London: Oxford University Press, 1981), 12–13.
31. Pritchett, *Music of John Cage,* 16.
32. John Cage, "Notes on Compositions I (1933–1948)," in *John Cage: Writer,* ed. Richard Kostelanetz (1948; repr., New York: Limelight Editions, 1993), 7.
33. John Cage, "A Composer's Confessions" (1948), in *John Cage: Writer,* ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Limelight Editions, 1993), 33.
34. Griffiths, *John Cage,* 12.
35. Kostelanetz, *John Cage: Writer,* 34. In "Defense of Satie" (1948), Cage famously described his method as based in the music of Satie and Webern in order to claim duration as the fundamental principle of music, equalizing (previous considered antinomies) of sound and silence, proclaiming: "There can be no right making of music that does not structure itself from the very roots of sounds and silence—lengths of time"; in Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *John Cage: An Anthology* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1981), 81–82.
36. Griffiths, *John Cage,* 11.
37. John Cage, *Silence* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 6, 3 (although commonly dated 1937, this manifesto has recently been redated to 1940).
38. Ibid., 5 (emphasis added).
39. David E. Nicholls, *American Experimental Music, 1890–1940* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
40. Robert P. Morgan, "Rethinking Musical Culture: Canonic Reformulations in a Post-Tonal Age," in *Disciplining Music: Musicology and Its Canons,* ed. Katherine Bergeron and Phillip V. Bohlman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 51.
41. A classic (if unintentionally ironic) defense of these regulatory functions can be found in Nelson Goodman's definition of a musical "work" as a function of "score compliance": "a score must define a work, marking off performances that belong to the work from those that do not"; *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), 128. Goodman insists that a score must not only

"uniquely determine the class of performances belonging to the work, but the score (as a class of copies or inscriptions that so define the work) must be uniquely determined" (130–131). Given the inevitable variations in score copies and individual performances, Goodman argues that only "true copies" consisting of "unambiguous inscriptions" can preserve the "identity of the work," and that only "complete compliance" with the score can yield "a genuine instance of a work," "a proper rendering"—an anxious repression of the productivity of difference that yields this wonderfully paranoid fantasy: "If we allow the least deviation, all assurance of work-preservation and score-preservation is lost; for by a series of one-note errors of omission, addition, and modification, we can go all the way from Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* to *Three Blind Mice*" (186–187).

42. Kostelanetz, *John Cage: Writer,* 15.
43. Ibid., 17. This reconceptualization of music as a *perceptual, phenomenal experience of listening* precedes Cage's involvements with Zen and other Asian philosophies. In context, it may have represented a rejection of Arnold Schoenberg's emphasis on the carefully trained reading of internal formal relations within a musical work conceived as "an intensely expressive structural integrity" (in Rose Rosengard Subotnik's terms)—and more broadly, as a critique of an entire Western concert tradition that isolates the autonomous work as a tightly structured relational composition, and programmatically elevates the written score over the heard sound.
44. In his introduction to a 1949 performance of the *Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano,* Boulez would single out for criticism precisely this emphasis on giving "an individuality to each sound," contrasting it with Webern's more differential model. Jean-Jacques Nattiez, ed., *The Boulez-Cage Correspondence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 31–32.
45. Cited in Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage,* 162.
46. Cage, *Silence,* 65.
47. Ibid., 112.
48. Ibid., 110.
49. Ibid., 130. While this emerging use of arbitrary and chance-based principles to order events met with incomprehension and dismissal from Boulez, it offers a precedent for future minimalist practice—for example, Donald Judd's "one thing after another," or Yvonne Rainer's "I just remember: do something, then do someone else." As perhaps opposed, though, to a classic minimalist desire to suppress any relation between parts, Cage notes that relations do inevitably emerge between events, but they are unanticipated and undirected.
50. Griffiths, *John Cage,* 14–15.
51. In "Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives" (*Black Music Research Journal* 16 [1996]), 91–122, the composer George F. Lewis argues that

improvisational techniques in jazz provided crucial models for the "indeterminate" practices of Cage and other postwar experimental composers. Lewis reads Cage's insistent dismissal of "improvisation" as a disavowal of the vernacular and African American roots of his practice, noting that "after a gap of nearly one hundred and fifty years, during which real-time generation of musical structure had been nearly eliminated from the musical activity of this Western or 'pan-European' tradition," Cage's rejection of close-at-hand precedents in jazz in favor of archaic European practices like figured bass seems forced: "Despite Cage's disavowal of jazz . . . the historical timeline shows that Cage's radical emphasis upon spontaneity and uniqueness—not generally found in either American or European music before Cage—arrives some eight to ten years after the innovations of bebop" (91, 99).

52. "Current Chronicle," *Musical Quarterly* (January 1952), reprinted in *John Cage: An Anthology,* ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Da Capo Press, 1981), 97.
53. Griffiths, *John Cage,* 25.
54. Cage, *Silence,* 59.
55. Regarding the May 1951 performance of *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* at Columbia University that he helped execute, Christian Wolff insists on the exactitude of Cage's procedures: "It's a hard piece to play, because you have these very precise instructions. You have to turn number one to 11.7 and so on. In fact, it was so complicated that there were two people on each radio." He remembers the piece as "beautiful" and "very austere": "there was a lot of static, and quiet sounds and occasional voices." David W. Patterson, "Cage and Beyond: An Annotated Interview with Christian Wolff," *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 67, 68.
56. Cage and Charles, *For the Birds,* 160.
57. John Cage, "Experimental Music" (1957), in *Silence* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 9.
58. Ibid.
59. Kostelanetz, *John Cage: Writer,* 52.
60. Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage,* 64.
61. Ibid., 164. In a 1965 discussion with Michael Kirby and Richard Schechner, Cage declared that after *Music of Changes,* "I altered my way of composing: I didn't write in tempos but always in time. By the time I was teaching at the New School this was one of the facts of my work, and they—the students—caught on readily because it gives one enormous facility in the field of time to know by means of a clock when something's got to start" (64).
62. Cage, *Silence,* 36. In 1975, he would tell interviewers Cole Gagne and Tracy Caras, "Nothing could be more strict than graphic notation, since you could take a ruler, as I took it, and find out exactly what was to be played. In fact, that notation is so strict, that I felt that I was putting the performer in a strait jacket. It was that tendency, which

is exhibited also in the *Music of Changes,* that was one of the things that led me toward greater indeterminacy, leaving freedom for the performer" (cited in Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage,* 91). The type of graphic notation Cage refers to is the deterministic scores of early the 1950s, not the considerably looser forms of later compositions such as *Fontana Mix* (1958).

63. Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage,* 162.
64. Patterson, "Cage and Beyond," 64. Cage apparently first encountered audiotape technology in 1948, when he met musique concrète composer Pierre Schaeffer, but wasn't receptive to its use until around 1950. Wolff recalls Cage's attitude toward Schaeffer's work as extremely critical.
65. Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage,* 162. Wolff confirms that "in Cage's work, he wanted sounds that could not be done on a recording, and, for example, he discovered that if you cut the tape at an angle, it would affect the decay envelope of the sound. So when he composed *Williams Mix,* the angle of the cut at which the splice was made became part of the composition" (cited in Patterson, "Cage and Beyond," 65).
66. Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage,* 164.
67. Ibid., 163. In 1997–2001, composer Larry Austin produced his *Williams [re]Mix[ed],* for octophonic computer music system, based on a copy of Cage's score obtained from the Cage Trust; it is to my knowledge the only effort to use the score to actually produce a new realization.
68. Cited in Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors,* 116.
69. Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (Summer 1967): 80. 82.
70. For a concise account of the changing nature and role of musical notation in the United States, see H. Wiley Hitchcock, "Notation," in vol. 3, *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music,* ed. H. Wiley Hitchcock and Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1986). A more historically extensive and comparative overview can be found in Bent, Hiley, Bent, and Chew, "Notation," 333–420.
71. Roman Ingarden, *The Work of Music and the Problem of Its Identity,* trans. Adam Czerniawski (1928; repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 157, 158.
72. Lawrence Halprin, *The RSVP Cycles: Creative Processes in the Human Environment* (New York: George Brazillier, 1969), 1, 5.
73. Hitchcock, "Notation," 387. Of course, a "unique graphic representation" that is simply a "catalyst for action" can barely be thought of as a score at all. In contrast, in his 1968 book *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols,* Nelson Goodman argues that a true score or notation must "define a work" via the precise and "unambiguous inscriptions" provided by coded discrete properties, rather than schematic or analogue models like maps, diagrams, sketches, scale drawings, and so on—thus disqualifying, for instance, Cage's graphic inscriptions for *Concert for Piano and Orchestra*

(1958) from functioning as a score, since "the system in question furnishes no means of identifying a work from performance to performance or even a character from mark to mark. Nothing can be determined to be a true copy of Cage's autograph diagram or to be a performance of it. There are only copies *after* and performances *after* that unique object as there are only drawings and paintings after a sketch" (189–190).

74. Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage,* 63.
75. In music, the stakes of this redefinition of writing surface in the legal arena, where the establishment of authorship was long codified in terms of the medium of inscription. In the United States, revisions to copyright law in the early twentieth century excluded mechanically recorded forms like sound recordings from the category of legally protected writings—in particular, the congressional acts of 1909 and 1912, and the 1917 Supreme Court *Carpenter* decision; see William Lichtenwanger, "Copyright," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians,* ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980). Although midcentury laws finally included both optical sound recording for film and the imprinted grooves of shellac records, they did so under the peculiar criteria that such inscriptions were themselves "visible," even though they could be effectively "read" only by machine. Despite multiple revisions, it was not until the comprehensive 1976 Copyright Act that legal protection was explicitly extended to "*original works of authorship fixed in any tangible medium of expression*" (cited in ibid., 505). As electroacoustic composer Gordon Mumma observes, in the *New Grove* entry on "Sound Recording," prior to the 1976 act, legal protection had been restricted to registrations readable by (or visible to) the human eye: "Previous legislation had provided protection against the unauthorized copying of both notated musical scores and of recordings that stored their sounds in a form of visible patterns (such as discs and optical film soundtracks). The new law extended copyright protection to magnetic recordings (in which the patterns are not ordinarily visible), and made that [protection] for recordings of performances of music not represented by notation more secure" (270).
76. Fetterman, *John Cage's Theatre Pieces,* 25.
77. Pritchett, *Music of John Cage,* 89.
78. Fetterman, *John Cage's Theatre Pieces,* 29–30.
79. Cage, *Silence,* 11.
80. Pritchett, *Music of John Cage,* 126, 128.
81. Holzaepfel's painstaking reconstructions of Tudor's preparatory procedures makes clear to what extent such indeterminate scores exert extreme demands of physical dexterity, technical rigor, and conceptual invention on the performer—a challenge that Tudor responded to by thoroughly transcribing and functionally rewriting the works, entailing unprecedented degrees of interpretative intervention "to make the notation . . . yield information necessary for performance"; John Holzaepfel, "David

Tudor and the Performance of American Experimental Music, 1950–1959" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 1994), 100.

82. Cited in Patterson, "Cage and Beyond," 71.
83. Cage and Charles, *For the Birds,* 153.

Chapter 2

1. The Chambers Street series, held from December 1960 to June 1961, presented performances of music by composers Terry Jennings, Toshi Ichiyanagi, Joseph Byrd, Richard Maxfield, Henry Flynt, and La Monte Young; poetry and theater by Jackson Mac Low; dance by Simone Forti; and an "environment" by sculptor Robert Morris.
2. La Monte Young, ed., *An Anthology of Chance Operations, Indeterminacy, Concept Art, Anti-Art, Meaningless Work, Natural Disasters, Stories, Poetry, Essays, Diagrams, Music, Dance Constructions, Plans of Action, Mathematics, Compositions,* by George Brecht, Claus Bremer, Earle Brown, Joseph Byrd, John Cage, David Degner, Walter De Maria, Henry Flynt, Yoko Ono, Dick Higgins, Toshi Ichiyanagi, Terry Jennings, George Maciunas, Ray Johnson, Jackson Mac Low, Richard Maxfield, Malka Safro, Simone Forti, Nam June Paik, Terry Riley, Diter Rot, James Waring, Emmett Williams, Christian Wolff, La Monte Young, George Maciunas, designer (New York: La Monte Young and Jackson Mac Low, 1963; reprinted in 1970 by Heiner Friedrich).
3. There are two essential monographs on Brecht's work: Henry Martin, *An Introduction to George Brecht's "Book of the Tumbler on Fire"* (Milan: Multhipla Edizioni, 1978), which although focused on Brecht's post-1964 *Book of the Tumbler on Fire* project, reprints some of Brecht's earlier writings and several important interviews from the 1960s and 1970s; and Julia Robinson et al. (ed. Alfred M. Fisher), *George Brecht Events: A Heterospective* (Cologne: Walther König, 2005), which includes additional texts by Brecht. Robinson's essay "In the Event of George Brecht" provides the most detailed account of Brecht's event scores.
4. For accounts of these exhibitions and other aspects of Ono's early work, see Jon Hendricks, ed., *Paintings and Drawings by Yoko Ono, July 17–30, 1961/Instructions for Paintings by Yoko Ono, May 24, 1962,* vols. 1 and 2 (Budapest: Galeria 56, 1993); Alexandra Munroe, ed., *Yes Yoko Ono* (New York: Japan Society/Abrams, 2000); Kevin Concannon, "Unfinished Works and Aural Histories: Yoko Ono's Conceptual Art" (PhD diss., Virginia Commonwealth University, 2000); Midori Yoshimoto, *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).
5. Yoko Ono, *Grapefruit* (bilingual ed.; Tokyo: Wunternaum Press, 1964), and *Grapefruit: A Book of Instructions + Drawings by Yoko Ono,* intro. John Lennon (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971).

6. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image/Music/Text,* trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 143.
7. Umberto Eco, *Opera Aperta* (Milan: Fabri, 1962); partially trans., *The Open Work* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).
8. Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in *Image/Music/Text,* trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 163. While Barthes' own sources are more frequently in the "modern text" of Stéphane Mallarmé or the *Nouveau Roman,* music is also a model for this writing that must be operated, performed, and written anew. In "From Work to Text," the postwar aesthetic upheavals in music and art are posed as reversing or modifying a historical trajectory of bourgeois culture in which the participation of practicing amateurs has given way, first to a class of surrogate interpreters, and then to the passive consumption of fully professionalized works in technically reproduced forms—as "the gramophone record takes the place of the piano" in the bourgeois home.
9. Even the publication of Barthes' "The Death of the Author" in *Aspen* 5–6 in 1967, often credited with injecting certain poststructural concerns into the context of U.S. conceptual art, could arguably be posed partly as a circuitous reimportation of Cagean models of de-subjectivization and indeterminacy.
10. Umberto Eco, "The Poetics of the Open Work," in *The Open Work* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 251n1. Eco proceeds to argue that "for the purpose of aesthetic analysis, however, both cases can be seen as different manifestations of the same interpretative attitude. Every 'reading,' 'contemplation,' or 'enjoyment' of a work of art represents a tacit or private form of 'performance'" (ibid.).
11. These event scores have received little attention as literature, despite David Antin's detailed consideration of what it would mean to read Brecht's work into the category of poetry; "The Stranger at the Door," in *Postmodern Genres,* ed. Marjorie Perloff (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988).
12. We might find their closest literary precedent in Tristan Tzara's instructions for making chance poems out of words clipped from newspapers in "To Make a Dadaist Poem," a text published in Robert Motherwell's widely disseminated *Dada Painters and Poets* anthology of 1951. Yet in Tzara's model, the poem produced is the result of the procedure, a randomly generated collection of words, disjunctive, asyntactic, and evacuated of clear-cut meaning, designed to dismantle the rigidly gridded instrumental discourse of the newspaper, not the instructions themselves. See Tristan Tzara, "Seven Dada Manifestoes" (1916–1920), trans. Ralph Mannheim, in Robert Motherwell, ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1951), 9.
13. Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index, Part II," in *On the Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 212.

14. Henry Flynt, "Mutations of the Vanguard: Pre-Fluxus, during Fluxus, Late Fluxus," in *Ubi Fluxus ibi motus 1990–1962,* ed. Gino Di Maggio (Milan: Mazzotta, 1990), 99.
15. George Brecht, *George Brecht Notebooks (June 1958–August 1959),* ed. Dieter Daniels with Hermann Braun, vols. 1–3 (Cologne: Walther König, 1991), *George Brecht Notebooks (September 1959–March 1960),* ed. Hermann Braun, vol. 4 (Cologne: Walther König, 1998), *George Brecht Notebooks (March–June 1961),* ed. Hermann Braun, vol. 6 (Cologne: Walther König, 2005), and *George Brecht Notebooks (June 1961–September 1962),* ed. Hermann Braun, vol. 7 (Cologne: Walther König, 2005).
16. George Brecht, *Chance Imagery* (New York: Something Else Press, 1966); although not published until 1966, Brecht circulated the 1957 essay in mimeograph to friends and colleagues.
17. Dick Higgins, *Jefferson's Birthday / Postface* (New York: Something Else Press, 1964), 49.
18. Ibid., 50–51.
19. Ibid., 51. Other members of the class included Toshi Ichiyanagi and Jackson Mac Low.
20. Brecht, *Notebooks,* vol. 1, 3–4 (June 24, 1958).
21. In a 1988 interview, Tudor recalls that "John's proposition for teaching was to teach people how to make compositions dealing with the world of parameters and coordinating various parameters together" (An Interview with David Tudor by Teddy Hultberg, Dusseldorf, May 17–18, 1988, at <http://www.emf.org/tudor/articles/hultberg.html>). According to Bruce Altshuler, Cage in a late 1980s' interview recalled that "the impetus for the New School class was aroused by his recent work at the new music festival in Darmstadt, Germany, and . . . he felt that he should make these ideas available in America." Bruce Altshuler, "The Cage Class," in *FluxAttitudes,* ed. Cornelia Lauf and Susan Hapgood (Gent: Imschoot Uitgevers, 1991), 17.
22. Originally published from 1955 to 1962; *Die Reihe* [*The Row*] was issued in an English-language edition from 1957 to 1968 by the Theodore Presser Company/Universal Edition (Bryn Mawr, PA). Brecht's notes record Cage's mention of it, and many American musicians (and artists, including Dan Graham and LeWitt) read the journal during the 1960s.
23. However neutralized they appear in postwar accounts, all these projects had certain military entanglements. Just as U.S. research into cybernetics, cryptography, mass communication, and electronic signal transmission were all propelled by government sponsorship during World War II, German technical innovations in electroacoustic recording, audiotape, microphony, and broadcast technology were in part developed for military applications. It is perhaps no coincidence that Cologne and Paris (where Pierre Schaeffer's studio at Radiodiffusion Télévision France began informally in 1942) became the centers of postwar experimental music. The influential Darmstadt International Summer Course in New Music, first held in 1946, was part of the im-

mediate postwar efforts of reconstruction culture; nearby Wiesbaden also had a military base where in 1962, Maciunas came to work as a designer.

24. Herbert Eimert, "What Is Experimental Music?" *Die Reihe* 1 (1955); cited from English-language edition (Bryn Mawr, PA: Theodore Presser Company/Universal Edition, 1957), 1, 3.
25. Ibid. Eimert elaborates: "By the radical technical nature of its technical apparatus, electronic music is compelled to deal with sound phenomena unknown to musicians of earlier times" (1). "Tape recorder and loud-speaker are no longer 'passive' transmitters; they become active factors in the preparation of the tape. This is the essential secret of electro-musical technique" (3).
26. Ibid., 3.
27. After Cage left the New School in 1960, Maxfield began a course in electronic music that included Maciunas, Mac Low, and Young as students.
28. Brecht, *Notebooks,* 1:22.
29. Ibid., 1:65–67.
30. In the 1960 report "Innovational Research," which he initially proposed to Johnson and Johnson as "a suggested prototype for an innovational research program," Brecht cites scientific theorist H. G. Barnett's idea of innovation as "an arbitrary range of recombinations at one end of a continuous series," as well as neo-Kantian philosopher Ernst Cassirer on naming as a "process of concentration and condensation." George Brecht, "Innovational Research," Fall 1960, typed/mimeographed document, sixteen pages, Artist's File, Museum of Modern Art Library.
31. See Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music,* trans. Brian Massumi (1977; repr., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985). While Attali is markedly more *critical* of this process, seeing the phonograph as the template for a culture of mass-produced repetition, his observation that "it makes the stockpiling of time possible" (101) nonetheless echoes Kittler's.
32. Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter,* trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Hurtz (1986; repr., Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 23. Yet Kittler also points out that models for this "anti-musical" understanding of sound itself precede the invention of the phonograph, with scientific experimentation with noise going back at least to the early nineteenth century. In their introduction, Winthrop-Young and Hurtz elaborate on this relation between inscription technologies and an aesthetics of "indifference," noting that gramophone and film "both recorded indiscriminately what was within the range of microphones or camera lenses, and both thereby sifted the boundaries that distinguished noise from meaningful sounds, random visual data from meaningful picture sequences, unconscious and unintentional inscriptions from their conscious and intention counterparts" (xxvi).

33. Ibid., 4. This problem is by no means specific to music, since any "continuous" material—sound, light, time, or the photograph—has the potential to profoundly disrupt signification. As Roland Barthes maintains, semiology "cannot admit a continuous difference" since "meaning is articulation"; *Elements of Semiology,* trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (1964; repr., New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), 53.
34. George Brecht, "The Origin of Events" (one-page typed, mimeographed statement, Artist's File, Museum of Modern Art Library, August 1970).
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Tracing the genesis of these pieces in Brecht's *Notebooks,* both scores emerge out of class projects consisting of mechanical devices that would flash colored lights according to various randomly generated time sequences. Originally designed as musical pieces for classroom exercises, only later were they pared down into their final, linguistic form.
38. George Brecht, "An Interview with George Brecht by Irmeline Lebeer" (1973) in *An Introduction to George Brecht's "Book of the Tumbler,"* Henry Martin (Milan: Multipla Edizioni, 1978), 84.
39. "Interview with Allan Kaprow," in *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde, 1957–1963,* ed. Joan Marter (Newark, NJ: Newark Museum/Rutger's University Press, 1999), 132.
40. Gilles Deleuze, "On Leibniz," in *Negotiations,* trans. Martin Joughin (1988; repr., New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 159–160.
41. Liz Kotz, Interview with Donald Backer, Department of Astronomy, University of California at Berkeley, August 2000.
42. Douglas Kahn provocatively reads *Drip Music* in relation to the transition from Pollock to Cage, suggesting that "the laboratory techniques through which *Drip Music* developed provided a means to isolate a single gesture from gesture painting . . . and a *sound-in-itself* from all the competing sounds in a Cage composition"; *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 283.
43. Jan van der Marck, "George Brecht: An Art of Multiple Implications," *Art in America* (July–August 1974): 56.
44. Liz Kotz, Yvonne Rainer, conversation with the author, New York City, January 22, 1999.
45. Simone Forti, *Handbook in Motion* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1974), 56–57.
46. Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 25.
47. In an interview, Forti did not recall knowing Brecht's work at the time but admitted that her memory was quite shaky, since she also hadn't remembered that her pieces

were published in *An Anthology.* She described the assignments in Dunn's workshop as more "conceptual" than "improvisational," a "very direct seeing of how the concept would work out." She relates this conceptual orientation to Duchamp's focus on both measurement and convention; recalling that his *Three Standard Stoppages* was particularly important to her, she connects it to Young's project as well: "It covers both what feels to me like the reality of the *arbitrariness* of any measure, and at the same time, the *humanness* of establishing a measure. Especially the arbitrariness of measurement as seen in our civilization, so that you have La Monte working with how sound *really does break down,* which is different than the tones from the western scale, it's a very arbitrary measurement . . . and going more to the physics of sound, which I guess is *not* arbitrary. And when you question a convention, you isolate it, and become aware of it, and then that becomes your topic" (cited in Liz Kotz, Simone Forti, conversation with the author, Los Angeles, October 26, 2000).

48. La Monte Young, "Lecture 1960," *Tulane Drama Review* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1965): 81.
49. Henry Flynt, "La Monte Young in New York, 1960–1962," in *Sound and Light: La Monte Young, Marian Zazeela,* ed. William Duckworth and Richard Fleming (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1996), 59. Earlier, he contends, "*Lecture 1960* announced Young's aesthetic of immersion in a constant sound. The listener was no longer, as with Cage, an attentive observer bemused by dispersed sounds. The sound program was viscerally compelling, and produced, through narrowed attention and perceptual fatigue or saturation, an altered state" (53).
50. La Monte Young, "Lecture 1960," 81.
51. In the early 1960s, musicians Angus MacLise, Marian Zazeela, Tony Conrad, and John Cale (later of the Velvet Underground) collaborated with Young in these experiments—a collaboration that eventually led to the long-running dispute between Conrad and Young over authorship of this work as well as control of the audio recordings Young made at the time.
52. Only twenty-four, Young's musical preparation had been quite compressed. With a background in jazz, and an attachment to the static structures of medieval chant and Indian classical music, he had studied Webern's work with Leonard Stein (Schoenberg's former assistant and later director of the Schoenberg Institute) and composed serial pieces as an undergraduate in Los Angeles. Before starting graduate study in music at the University of California at Berkeley, Young composed *Trio for Strings* (1958), which employed long tones and concurrent harmonies to an almost total suppression of melody. Thus, even before moving to New York City in October 1960 to attend Maxfield's class at the New School, Young had encountered a complex of models quite similar to those documented in Brecht's notebooks.
53. Flynt, "La Monte Young in New York," 52. Flynt recounts that on his arrival in New York City in October 1960, Young (with help from Mac Low) "set about assembling

a scene comprised of Cage's students and of young Californians. . . .Young sent his word pieces to George Brecht in fall 1960, and Brecht acknowledged his receipt of them . . . in a letter of November 11. One notices that composers other than Young produced a flood of word pieces with the date 1961; some of us were consciously responding to Young's example" (55).

54. La Monte Young, "La Monte Young," in *Theatre of Mixed Means,* ed. Richard Kostelanetz (1966; repr., New York: Dial Press, 1968), 194–195.
55. Flynt, "La Monte Young in New York," 77.
56. Young, "La Monte Young," 204.
57. Flynt records that Morris premiered *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* at this concert. "La Monte Young in New York," 61.
58. As Young's remark about technique suggests, the direction he would pursue led toward precision and control. In an undated letter to Tudor (circa October 1961), Young describes the realization in detail, noting, "I wanted this performance to be very mathematical, and workmanlike with the performers just doing what they had to do + working very hard at getting each line very straight + then bowing between each completed piece. . . .We worked very hard at getting each line straight and by the end of the concert each line followed practically the same path but at the beginning it was interesting to watch how in spite of our efforts they sometimes took slightly different paths or made little jogs as: x---x----x we got good by the end though (practice does it!)." David Tudor Papers, 980039, Getty Research Library.
59. Young, "La Monte Young," 205. In a letter to Tudor, Cage reports, "We had a beautiful program by La Monte Young. He and Bob Dunn drew 30 straight lines using a string with a weight in the manner somewhat of surveying. By the time La Monte finished, not only had all the audience left, but Bob Dunn too had left exhausted. The next evening the project was shortened by shortening the line. Even then it took 3 hours." David Tudor Papers, 980039, Getty Research Library.
60. George Brecht, "Excerpts from a Discussion between George Brecht and Allan Kaprow Entitled 'Happenings and Events' Broadcast by WBAI Sometime during May," *ccV TRE* 3 (June 1964): 1.
61. Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (New York: Schirmer, 1974), 62.
62. Larry Miller, "Interview with George Maciunas, March 24, 1978," in *Fluxus Etc./ Addenda I: The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection,* ed. Jon Hendricks (New York: Ink &, 1983), 26.
63. George Maciunas, Letter to George Brecht, circa September–October 1962, Jean Brown Papers, 890164, Getty Research Library.
64. Partially reproduced in Jon Hendricks, ed., *Fluxus Etc./Addenda II: The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection* (Pasadena, CA: Baxter Art Gallery, 1983), 166–167.
65. George Maciunas, Letter to George Brecht, circa fall 1962, Jean Brown Papers, 890164, Getty Research Library.

66. Ibid.
67. George Brecht, "A Conversation about Something Else: An Interview with George Brecht by Ben Vautier and Marcel Alocco," in *An Introduction to George Brecht's "Book of the Tumbler on Fire,"* ed. Henry Martin (1965; repr., Milan: Multipla Edizioni, 1978), 67.
68. This capacity for reabsorption into the everyday apparently was structured into Brecht's work; in a note to Dick Higgins, dated January 16, 1977, he writes: "My work has been disappearing since I started to make it. First wife threw out all early drawings and paintings, ladder stolen from Bianchis, other work abandoned by Al [Hansen], etc." Dick Higgins Papers, 870613, Getty Research Library.
69. See Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), and *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).
70. Benjamin Buchloh, "Ready Made, Objet Trouvé, Idée Reçue," in *Dissent: The Idea of Modern Art in Boston* (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1985).
71. Brecht, "An Interview with Henry Martin," in *An Introduction to George Brecht's "Book of the Tumbler on Fire,"* Henry Martin (Milan: Multipla Edizioni, 1978), 79. Brecht was also drawn to Duchamp's writings, newly available in the 1959 Robert Lebel monograph and Richard Hamilton's 1960 typographic rendition of the *Notes for the Large Glass.* Alongside Japanese poetic models such as haiku, Duchamp's brief, cryptic notes, with their spare, attenuated use of language and attention to paradox, perhaps provided a further impetus for the increasingly compressed event scores.
72. Brecht, "An Interview with George Brecht by Irmeline Lebeer," 84. Brecht has often been at pains to distinguish his goals from what he perceives to be those of conceptual art: "It depends on where you put the emphasis because concept art has to do, by definition, with the conceptualizing faculty of the mind, whereas to me the events are total experiences. There's no more emphasis on conceptualizing than there is on perception or memory or thinking in general or unconscious association. There's no special emphasis, it's a global experience. I've seen conceptual art pieces that look a lot like my scores in *Water Yam,* so it's possible that these people knew of my event scores and took them as concept pieces, but from my point of view they're not. Calling them conceptual pieces would be using a very narrow view of them" (117).
73. George Brecht, "An Interview with George Brecht by Gislind Nabakowski" (1974), in *An Introduction to George Brecht's "Book of the Tumbler on Fire,"* ed. Henry Martin (Milan: Multipla Edizioni, 1978), 93.
74. This process of paring down is verified by notes from 1961, in which handwritten notebook drafts are edited and blocks of more explanatory text are crossed out; Dick Higgins Papers, 870163, Getty Research Library.
75. In postwar experimental music, the poetry and writings of Mallarmé also provided a crucial model for new permutational and performance procedures, evident in the early texts by Boulez in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* and Hans Rudolf Zeller's

much-cited essay in *Die Reihe* 6 (1960–1962), 5–32. "Mallarmé and Serialist Thought," facilitated by the publication of Mallarmé's notes on the structure of the book in Jacques Schérer, *Le "Livre" de Mallarmé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957).

76. The name *Water Yam* evidently came from "Yam Day," a series of events Brecht loosely co-organized with Robert Watts in May 1963, so titled "because Yam is May spelled backwards."
77. Alongside Cage's 1961 compilation *Silence,* Young's *An Anthology* was one of the key books of the early 1960s, and Brecht's *Water Yam* scores—small, cheap, popular, and easily reproducible—were eventually among the better disseminated of the Fluxus editions, despite the enormous limits of Maciunas's commercial efforts.
78. Willoughby Sharp, "Lawrence Weiner at Amsterdam," *Avalanche* 4 (Spring 1972): 69.
79. Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object, 1966–1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973), 11. That this entry is immediately followed by one for Kaprow's 1966 compendium *Assemblages, Environments, and Happenings* suggests the extent to which the specificity of early event practices, with their protominimal and proto-conceptual elements, would be immediately elided into the more conventionally theatrical and expressive rubric of Happenings. A similar dynamic, I think, is at play in the 1994 *October* roundtable, "Conceptual Art and the Reception of Duchamp," in which the role of Cage, Brecht, and others is momentarily introduced, and then eliminated—partly through recourse to homogenizing notions of Fluxus. Benjamin Buchloh's rhetorical question, "Would it be more historically accurate to say: It is not the Duchamp reception that one has to look at when one wants to study the beginnings of proto- and Conceptual art, but it is the Cage reception one would have to concentrate on?" is never addressed; in *October* 70 (Fall 1994): 138–139.
80. Liz Kotz, Vito Acconci, interview with the author, Brooklyn, October 25, 1995.

Chapter 3

1. Jerome Rothenberg and William Spanos, "A Dialogue on Oral Poetry," *Boundary 2* 3, no. 3 (Spring 1975): 509–548; reprinted in Jerome Rothenberg, *Pre-Faces and Other Writings* (New York: New Directions, 1981), 21.
2. John Cage, "Lecture on Something" (c. 1951), in *Silence* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 132.
3. Of course, even if these event scores were not usually considered poetry, they were not without poetic precedents—Ono and Young both wrote haiku, and the artists affiliated with the Fluxus movement were aware of, for instance, Zen koans and Dadaist models such as Tzara's manifestos, Kurt Schwitters's sound poetry, and Duchamp's notebooks and writings.
4. John Cage, cited in "Preface to *Indeterminacy*" (1959), in *John Cage: Writer,* ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Limelight Editions, 1993), 76.

5. Although informed by 1950s' experimental music, Mac Low's work draws deeply from earlier Dadaist poetics and its politically oriented project to pulverize syntax and foreground the materiality of the signifier at the cost of communicative signification. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, a variety of such neo-Dada practices—sound poetry, chance poetry, simultaneities, and collage—would proliferate in downtown cafés, loft concerts, and small magazines, particularly in visual art and performance-based contexts. These activities nonetheless remained invisible in mainstream American poetry.
6. The term language poetry describes an avowedly avant-garde group of American poets whose work first emerged around 1971 in the journal *This* (1971–1982, edited by Robert Grenier and Barrett Watten) and later became associated with the magazine *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* (1978–1981, edited by Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein), whose title gave the movement its name. Poets affiliated with the movement were known for rebelling against the speech-based or oral poetics associated with Black Mountain and Beat poetries; instead, they followed the example of poets like Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, and Louis Zukofsky to reinvigorate an older modernist emphasis on procedure, process, and the antireferential opacity of language. A partial archive of early language publications can be accessed at Craig Dworkin's Eclipse Web site, <http://www.princeton.edu/eclipse>.
7. Peter Stitt, "John Ashbery," in *Poets at Work: The Paris Review Interviews,* ed. George Plimpton (1980; repr., New York: Penguin, 1989), 410.
8. Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays,* trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 88.
9. See Marjorie Perloff, *The Dance of the Intellect: Studies in the Poetry of the Pound Tradition* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
10. John Ashbery, *The Tennis Court Oath* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1962); hereafter cited as *TCO.* In "The Lonesomeness of Words," Fred Moramarco provides a concise account of the book's initial public reception; in *Beyond Amazement: New Essays on John Ashbery,* ed. David Lehman (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 278.
11. John Simon, "More Brass than Enduring," *Hudson Review* (Fall 1962): 458.
12. Harold Bloom, "The Charity of the Hard Moments," in *Figures of Capable Imagination* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 172, 174.
13. John Shoptaw, *On the Outside Looking Out* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 57.
14. Ibid., 59. Although other critical accounts sometimes date the poem to 1960, I am relying here on Shoptaw's attribution, given his access to Ashbery's manuscripts, correspondence, and private communications. Ashbery discusses his time in Paris in Louis A. Osti, "The Craft of John Ashbery," *Confrontation* (Fall 1974): 84–96; Stitt, "John Ashbery."

15. Cited in Richard Kostelanetz, "How to Be a Difficult Poet," *New York Times Magazine,* May 23, 1976, reprinted in *The Old Poetries and the New* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981), 96.
16. Ibid., 93.
17. John Ashbery, introduction to *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara,* ed. Donald Allen (New York: Knopf, 1971), xi.
18. Cited in Kostelanetz, "How to Be a Difficult Poet," 96.
19. Ibid., 97–98. Elsewhere, he refers to this work as "a way of trying to obliterate the poetry that at the time was coming naturally to me, and which I didn't like. It was an attempt to shuffle the cards before dealing them again . . . more of a therapy for me than anything that was meant to go into print" (Osti, "The Craft of John Ashbery," 94).
20. Sue Gangel, "John Ashbery," ed. Joe David Bellamy, in *American Poetry Observed: Poets on Their Work* (1977; repr., Urbana: Illinois University Press, 1988), 13.
21. A. Poulin Jr., "The Experience of Experience: A Conversation with John Ashbery," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 20, no. 3 (1981): 249.
22. John Koethe, "An Interview with John Ashbery," *SubStance* 37, no. 8 (1983): 181.
23. Stitt, "John Ashbery," 411.
24. John Tranter, "An Interview with John Ashbery," *Scripsi* 4, no. 1 (July 1986): 95. Nonetheless, a gradual rapprochement with his early linguistic experimentation is evident in *Flow Chart* (New York: Knopf, 1991) and *Hotel Lautreamont* (New York: Knopf, 1992), which as Fred Moramarco notes, largely "revert to the kind of disjunctive language characteristic of his earlier work, a language in which words are unhinged from their traditional referents and seem to float on the swells and ebbs of their meanings"; "Coming Full Circle: John Ashbery's Later Poetry," in *The Tribe of John Ashbery and Contemporary Poetry,* ed. Susan Schultz (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 41.
25. Andrew Ross, "Taking the Tennis Court Oath," in *The Tribe of John: Ashbery and Contemporary Poetry,* ed. Susan Schultz, 201. Many of these arguments were developed in Ross's earlier analysis of Ashbery in *The Failure of Modernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).
26. As Shoptaw notes, "The preservation of published line-endings and random word-clusters gave 'Europe' and 'Idaho' an explicit textual appearance; the quoted material remained more or less 'in quotes'" (*On the Outside,* 95).
27. Charles Olson, "Projective Verse," in *The Poetics of the New American Poetry,* ed. Donald Allen and Warren Tallman (1950; repr., New York: Grove Press, 1973), 153–154. Olson cites as examples e. e. cummings, Pound, and William Carlos Williams, each of whom "already used the machine as a scoring to his composing, as a script to its vocalization" (152).
28. Ibid., 147, 153.

29. Michael Davidson, *Ghostlier Demarcations: Modern Poetry and the Material World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 196. Davidson notes, "Whereas the Pound/Williams generation used the typewriter to create a new visual aesthetic—the word as image or object—poets who followed them utilized that same technology in the service of an emerging oral impulse" (14).
30. Ibid., 197.
31. Ashbery was loosely affiliated with *Tèl Quel* circles via his friendship with Marcelin Pleynet—and Pleynet, Julia Kristeva, and Phillipe Sollers were, like Ashbery, actively reading marginalized and dissident modernist authors like Arthur Rimbaud, Paul Lautremont, Raymond Roussel, and Antonin Artaud.
32. Osti, "The Craft of John Ashbery," 94.
33. One thinks of the larger "poetics of the list" that emerges in the visual arts in the 1960s, evident in projects like Carl Andre's poetry, Dan Graham's 1966 *Schema,* Richard Serra's 1967–1968 *Verb List,* Lawrence Weiner's early statements, and Robert Barry's work.
34. Osti, "The Craft of John Ashbery," 95. As Ashbery is aware, such noncontinuity may be easier to accept in temporal forms like sound or film than in language: "The poetry is just what it says. It sets up a kind of imaginary field and moves around in it, in an almost cinematic way. . . . [O]ne might accept something in a movie just because one sees it unrolling: whereas, one might find it harder to accept something on a page because it doesn't seem to go with what has gone on before. But I guess I don't think that things go together in the sense that many critics do when they are analyzing a poem" (87).
35. Poulin, "The Experience of Experience," 250.
36. Shoptaw's detailed historical account reports that "Ashbery saw Rauschenberg's early college work and the first exhibition of Jasper Johns's paintings in New York during the winter of 1957–58" (*On the Outside,* 359n35).
37. Cited in Fred Moramarco, "John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara: The Painterly Poets," *Journal of Modern Literature* 5, no. 3 (September 1976): 454.
38. Ross, "Taking the Tennis Court Oath," 196.
39. Other options suggested in "Europe" would be to pursue this serial or systems logic toward the list as a kind of self-generating structure (for instance, Graham's 1966 *Schema*) or a device of nearly arbitrary accumulation (Ed Ruscha's 1962 book *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations*); or alternately, to follow the logic of "words covering a page" toward what Acconci termed "movement on a page, the page as a field for action" in "Early Work: Movement over a Page," *Avalanche* 6 (Fall 1972): 4.
40. The critical turn, to read residues of subjectivity and identity in literary works that had previously been viewed (positively or negatively) as models of semiotic disruption and dispersal, echoes similar projects in art history to provide gendered or politicized

readings of any number of crucial 1950s' and 1960s' projects—such as Cage's *4'33",* Rauschenberg's combines, or minimalist sculpture—that had historically been understood to operate precisely by blocking or refusing any such metaphoric or associative content. While such critical projects undo certain levels of repression—the refusal to read the gay resonances of O'Hara's or Hart Crane's lyrics, or to understand Cage's systematic use of desubjectifying strategies in relation to specific histories of repression—our rush to retrieve meaning from these once-opaque materials requires, in turn, a capacity to ignore or de-emphasize those elements that block or refuse meaning (or to read them reductively, by for instance reducing Cagean silence to something like "the closet"). It also requires the reconsolidation of a set of authorial functions, as the subject in the world, the subject who writes, and the subject of enunciation once again fuse. See Anna Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts Magazine* 64, no. 5 (January 1990): 44–63; Carolyn Jones, "Finishing School: John Cage and the Abstract Expressionist Ego," *Critical Inquiry* 19 (Summer 1993): 628–665; Kenneth Silver, "Modes of Disclosure: The Construction of Gay Identity and the Ruse of Pop Art," in *Hand-Painted Pop,* ed. Russell Ferguson (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1993).

41. Liz Kotz, Vito Acconci, interview with the author, Brooklyn, October 25, 1995.
42. Ibid. In contrast, for example, to Acconci's more hesitant attraction to O'Hara's poetry, which also offered "something concrete, but more at the level of the anecdote. . . .You couldn't get it down to words. You could play on the anecdote, but not on the level of the words themselves."
43. In a 1977 talk, Coolidge recalls "*Europe* was absolutely the poem that turned me on and mystified me. . . . All I saw were these constellations of words"; "Arrangement," in *Talking Poetics at the Naropa Institute: Annals of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics,* ed. Anne Waldman and Marilyn Webb (Boulder, CO: Shambala Publications, 1978), 1:164.
44. Liz Kotz, Bruce Andrews, interview with the author, New York City, September 4, 1998. While Mac Low's concerns were focused on the implications of process, on how the works were constructed, the "Language" reception of Mac Low would focus more on aesthetics, on the highly asyntactic and disruptive effects generated by chance procedures—and the challenge these offered to models of "colloquial language" and "speech" that had become calcified by the late 1960s. Andrew's primary criticism of Mac Low hinged on his failure to account for the reader—in effect, his failure to edit his work—noting in particular that the problem with chance-generated and deterministic structures, after their initially liberating impact, is their capacity to generate endless material, especially once pursued with the aid of computer programs, as both Mac Low and Cage would eventually employ.

45. Jackson Mac Low, "5 biblical poems," *0 to 9* 4 (1968): 70–74. Reprinted in Jackson Mac Low, *Representative Works: 1938–1985* (New York: Roof Books/Segue Foundation, 1986), 18–21.
46. Jackson Mac Low, letter to Mary Caroline Richards, February 1, 1955, with an undated letter to John Cage enclosed (presumably February 1, 1955), M. C. Richards Papers, 960036, Getty Research Library.
47. In a letter to Cage, Mac Low describes them as "works for speaking-voice and piano, separately & together—chance-poems-or-music—I find it difficult to separate one another as always." Yet he adds that "the piano part is not yet complete." Jackson Mac Low, undated letter to John Cage (early January 1955), Mandeville Special Collections, University of California at San Diego. Later, in "Craft Interview with Jackson Mac Low" (1972), he states that "at the point I started using chance operations, the music and poetry came together, so the same works are very often music and poetry"; in William Packard, ed., *The Craft of Poetry: Interviews from the New York Quarterly* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 227.
48. However unintentionally produced, the 1954–1965 "biblical poems" even echo some of Mac Low's 1946 series of "19 cubist poems," all based on the irregular permutation of a small set of words: "& The" opens: "At tear the & when the & when the. / And. // At tear the & when the at tear the: / And the at, where, // At the"; Mac Low, *Representative Works,* 12.
49. Jackson Mac Low, "Methods for Reading the '5 biblical poems,'" in *Representative Works,* 17.
50. All details come from Mac Low's "Night Walk: Reading Directions, Structure, and Vocabulary," in *Representative Works,* 52–55; Mac Low's abbreviations "shd," "wd," and "cd" as well as his use of ampersands are, of course, marks of his allegiance to Pound.
51. In works with unorthodox notation, the texts' unusual formats and semiotic depletion potentially inhibit interpretive freedom rather than expand it. Mac Low's lengthy performance protocols have a compensatory quality that overdetermines the reading of the works. And his notational innovations have a contrived quality, as the boxes, numbers, and time signatures clutter the texts. Yet like Cage's arcane procedures and opaque, idiolectic scores, these obstructions reflect the difficulty of inventing practices for which no conventional symbolizations exist. Describing Mac Low's efforts to "relocate poetry as performed sounds," John Perreault notes that since poetry has "no performance notation" for aural presentation, Mac Low's "insistence that poetry is a performance art has produced works in print that no doubt irritate and confound readers expecting poems as texts rather than poems as scripts or scores"; "The Language Performances of Jackson Mac Low," *Parnassus* (1988): 210, 202.
52. Mac Low, *Representative Works,* 55.

53. Mac Low, *Representative Works,* 53.
54. Although Cage's writing through poems may have become better known, it was Mac Low who originated the procedure in 1960.
55. Mac Low, *Representative Works,* 75.
56. Jackson Mac Low, "6 Gitanjali for Iris," *Stanzas for Iris Lezak,* in *Representative Works,* 86.
57. Jackson Mac Low, *Stanzas for Iris Lezak* (1960) (Barton, VT: Something Else Press, 1972).
58. Ellen Zweig, "Jackson Mac Low: The Limits of Formalism," *Precisely* 13–14–15–16 (Summer 1982): 79–86.
59. Cited in Barry Alpert, "Interview with Jackson Mac Low," *Vort* 3, no. 2 (1975): 77.
60. "Interview with Brenda Uchman," *Oculus* (1995); cited in Jackson Mac Low, letter to Douglas Messerli, Sun and Moon Press, September 14, 1995.
61. Barrett Watten, "New Meaning and Poetic Vocabulary: From Coleridge to Jackson Mac Low," *Poetics Today* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 174.
62. Jackson Mac Low, introduction to *Representative Works: 1938–1985* (New York: Roof Books/Segue Foundation, 1986), sxvi.
63. Tyrus Miller argues that critical emphasis on Mac Low's poems as "bounded texts" tends to neglect their implication in compositional procedures and collaborative performances, just as procedural and performance-oriented approaches can downplay the poems' formal and textual dimensions. Instead, these "self-generating language events" (as Steve McCaffery eloquently termed them) are, Miller contends, "encompassed in Mac Low's work by two open-ended spaces of encounter, at once immanently referential and implicitly political: the spaces of composition and the spaces of performance." See Tyrus Miller, "Singular Examples: Exemplary Politics of the Neo-Avant-Garde" (manuscript, 2001), 194.
64. Citing Dick Higgins's model of "matrix" or "blank form" works that generate their own particulars, Zweig proposes that "in this sort of art, the specifics are unimportant compared to the structure or set of rules designed to produce these specifics" ("Jackson Mac Low," 81). Yet in a review of Mac Low's *Asymmetries,* Higgins complains that he hears "a lot of nonsense about Mac Low not being the author so much of works as of processes"—before proceeding to note the poet's "obsession with the act of writing"; "Driven by His Vision," *American Book Review* (December–January 1994): 18.
65. The poet and critic Charles Bernstein relates this to a Cagean model, proposing that "the Mac Lowian systematic poem foregrounds the sense of language speaking for itself, making its own sense rather than a sense imposed from outside. Words and their combinations are exhibited, just as 'sound' is exhibited in Cage, and allowed to find whatever sense . . . they make in systems of organization decisively removed from standard syntactical and grammatical arrangements"; *Content's Dream: Essays, 1975–1984* (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1986), 253.

66. The mechanism—and mechanistic indifference—of these reading through procedures points toward Warhol's use of tape recording as a way of producing writing in his 1968: *a: a novel,* and Mac Low's later use of computer algorithms to compose poetry.
67. Jackson Mac Low, "The Poetics of Chance and the Politics of Spontaneity, or Sacred Heart of Jesus (Revised and Abridged)" [July 12, 1975], in *Talking Poetics at the Naropa Institute: Annals of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics,* ed. Anne Waldman and Marilyn Webb (Boulder, CO: Shambala Publications, 1978), 1:171–172.
68. This "translation" is most overt in poems like *Mauchault* (1955)—composed by "translating the pitches of Guillaume Machault's motet *Quant Theseus* . . . into a gamut of words from a nineteenth-century children's book." See Mac Low, *Representative Works,* 35–40.
69. As Mac Low notes "The words were there in the text waiting for me to find them"; such selection was "not a matter of 'chance' but of correctly carrying out a procedure whose results are unpredictable" (letter to Douglas Messerli, October 24, 1996).
70. In a letter to Cage, Mac Low explicitly positions the composition of the "5 biblical poems" as an outgrowth of collage practice, noting that in the previous fall his "investigations mainly took the form of collages & constructions composed of found objects of all sorts," and also "treatments & mistreatments of surfaces," before adding that "since Jan 1st . . . I have been using a certain found object, a small red die . . . which I wrenched from a collage" to compose the poems; undated letter to John Cage (early January 1955), Mandeville Special Collections, University of California at San Diego.
71. Jackson Mac Low, "Methods for Reading the '5 biblical poems,'" *0 to 9* 4 (1968): 65 (emphasis in original); reprinted (in a revised version) in Mac Low, *Representative Works,* 16–18.
72. Certain poetic structures are defined in purely quantitative terms: In "Night Walk," "a *line* is defined as a group of 1 to 10 successive words followed by a silence of 1–10 seconds. . . . A *stanza* is defined as a group of 1 to 10 lines followed by a silence from 11 to 70 seconds," providing a chance-generated number to indicate the length of silence following each line/stanza. He later terms this practice " 'eventual verse,' meaning that in place of the foot or the syllable or other units used in traditional verse, one used the 'event' "—explaining that the die determined "the number of events per line & the number of lines per stanza"; Mac Low, "The Poetics of Chance," 174.
73. Packard, *The Craft of Poetry,* 232. In a provocative reading of Isadore Isou's Lettrist poetry, Rosemarie Waldrop argues that experiments that break language down beyond the level of the word "leave literature" to become something else: "Isou's poems have to be recited or seen. The experiment with phonetics leaves literature proper for a quasi-musical or quasi-theatrical performance. The experiments with letters, likewise, leads to a new mixed genre. In the extreme case it leads to pure graphic art

which happens to use the shapes of letters as its elements"; *Against Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972), 70.

74. Jackson Mac Low, *Philly Talks* 12 (1998): 14, at <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/levy/>.
75. Jackson Mac Low, letter to John Cage, undated (presumably February 1, 1955), M. C. Richards Papers, 960036, Getty Research Library.
76. Jackson Mac Low, letter to Mary Caroline Richards, February 1, 1955, M. C. Richards Papers, 960036, Getty Research Library.
77. Despite Mac Low's later protests that there had been "too much pairing of John's and my work," Cage provided Mac Low with not only musical strategies but practical help for realizations: according to Mac Low, he, Cage, and Richards gave "a private performance of the '5th biblical poem' " in the Spring of 1955 for the composer Henry Cowell, and Mac Low started regularly performing his work in Cage's New School class; "The Poetics of Chance," 178.
78. Ibid., 175.
79. Jackson Mac Low, letter to John Cage, undated (presumably February 1, 1955), M. C. Richards Papers, 960036, Getty Research Library.
80. Steve McCaffery, "Mac Low's *Asymmetries,*" in *North of Intention: Critical Writings, 1972–1986* (New York: Roof Books, 1986), 225.
81. Charles Bernstein and Barrett Watten, respectively, argue that performance "actualizes the possibilities inherent in the text by grounding it . . . expressively and particularly in a sounding or voicing" (Bernstein, *Content's Dream,* 255), and that "the ethical consequences of Mac Low's work are in how they are to be performed in real time" (Watten, "New Meaning," 174).
82. Koethe, "An Interview with John Ashbery," 185–186.
83. Shoptaw, *On the Outside,* 12.
84. Richard Jackson, "John Ashbery, 1981: The Immanence of a Revelation," in *Acts of Mind: Conversations with Contemporary Poets* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1983), 71.

Chapter 4

1. Dan Graham, "My Works for Magazine Pages: 'A History of Conceptual Art,' " in *Dan Graham,* ed. Gloria Moure (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1997), 63.
2. Ibid., 64.
3. Alexander Alberro, "Structure as Content: Dan Graham's *Schema (March, 1966)* and the Emergence of Conceptual Art," in *Dan Graham,* ed. Gloria Moure (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1997), 21. He observes that "every version of *Schema* consists of a columnar list that self-referentially inventories the internal grammatical structure and external physical appearance of the specific printed matter context in which it is placed" (21).

4. Curiously, Graham's 2001 catalogue raisonné incorrectly indicates that his 1965 work *Scheme* was titled "Discrete Poem without memory" when first published in *0 to 9* 4 (1968), even though it was actually titled "Discrete Scheme without memory" in that publication. Dan Graham, *Dan Graham: Works, 1965–2000* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2001), 90–91.
5. Exceptions cold no doubt be made here for many poets, including some of Eugen Gomringer's work, as well as for projects by Emmett Williams and Dieter Roth, both of whom were loosely affiliated with the Fluxus group. Yet there is no question that many artists dismissed concrete poetry as deeply pictorial and irrelevant. When Joseph Kosuth describes the work of artists like Graham or Acconci as resembling concrete poetry, there is no question that he means it as a term of derision.
6. Vito Acconci, *Language to Cover a Page: The Early Writings of Vito Acconci,* ed. Craig Dworkin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).
7. Although long available mostly only in the special collections of libraries at the Museum of Modern Art, Getty Research Library, New York University and elsewhere, a reprint edition of *0 to 9* was published by Brooklyn's Ugly Ducking Press in 2006.
8. James Meyer's recent volume, *Carl Andre, Cuts: Texts, 1959–2004* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), usefully resuscitates Andre the writer, but provides only a small sampling of Andre's poems.
9. Carl Andre, *A Theory of Poetry: 1960–1965,* published as part of the *Seven Books of Poetry* (New York: Dwan Gallery/Seth Siegelaub, 1969).
10. Carl Andre and Hollis Frampton, "On Certain Poems and Consecutive Matters" (March 3, 1963), in *12 Dialogues: 1962–1963,* ed. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1980), 75.
11. Ibid.
12. Carl Andre, interview with the author, April 10, 2005.
13. Andre and Frampton, "On Certain Poems and Consecutive Matters," 75.
14. Ibid.
15. Carl Andre and Hollis Frampton, "On Painting and Consecutive Matter" (November 4, 1962), in *12 Dialogues: 1962–1963* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1980), 38.
16. This tension is also discussed by Dominic Rahtz in his essay "Literality and Absence of Self in the Work of Carl Andre," *Oxford Art Journal* 27, no. 1 (2004): 61–78.
17. In "On Literature and Consecutive Matters" (December 8, 1962), Andre insists that "literature is an art because its products occupy at least in part the same kind of psychological space which our own thoughts occupy. Literature is not about the phenomenal world but our relationship to the phenomenal world." Carl Andre and Hollis Frampton, *12 Dialogues: 1962–1963* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1980), 49.

18. Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique" (1917) in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays,* ed. and trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 4.
19. Hollis Frampton, "Letter to Enno Develing," in *Carl Andre* (The Hague: Haags Gemeentemuseum, 1969), 10.
20. Carl Andre, "Reflections on *BLAM!*" in *Cuts: Texts, 1959–2004,* ed. James Mayer (1984; repr., Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 170. Andre stresses that it was both the properties of the wood timbers themselves and the tool he was using—his father's radial-arm saw—that generated the forms: "Each pass of the saw blade through the block reminded me of Stella laying down a brushstroke" (171).
21. Andre and Frampton, "On Painting and Consecutive Matters," 37.
22. Phyllis Tuchman, "An Interview with Carl Andre," *Artforum* 8, no. 10 (June 1970): 55.
23. Andre, "Transcription," 15.
24. Carl Andre, *One Hundred Sonnets* [1963], published as part of the *Seven Books of Poetry* (New York: Dwan Gallery/Seth Siegelaub, 1969), and "Transcription of the Tape Made by Carl Andre for the Exhibition of His Poems at the Lisson Gallery, London, and the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, July 1975," transcribed and edited by Lynda Morris (London: Audio Arts, 1975), 2.
25. Rob Weiner, *On Carl Andre's Poems* (Marfa: Chinati Foundation, 1997). n.p. Weiner describes the effect as "a vast and emotionally complex view of humanity as described by isolated fragments." Brief analyses of Andre's poetry can be found in Valerie Mavridorakis, "Poesie, Sculpture/Identique, Interchangeable: Remarques sur la poesie de Carl Andre," *Faces* (Spring 1995): 44–47; Lynda Morris, review of *Carl Andre, Poems, 1958–1974,* by Carl Andre, *Studio International* (September–October 1975): 160–161. For Andre's comments on the work, see "Transcription", and "Notes on the Properties of Words" (1964), in *Carl Andre* (Munich: Galerie Schoettle, 1973).
26. Henry Flynt, "La Monte Young in New York, 1960–1962," in *Sound and Light: La Monte Young, Marian Zazeela,* ed. William Duckworth and Richard Fleming (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1996), 77.
27. Andre, "Transcription," 14, 15.
28. Ibid., 4.
29. Carl Andre, "Carl Andre," *Avalanche* 1 (Fall 1970): 19. Andre articulates these principles in Tuchman, "An Interview with Carl Andre," 55–61; Paul Cummings, "Carl Andre," in *Artists in Their Own Words* (1972; repr., New York: St. Martin's, 1979). For diverging critical accounts of the effects of these clastic structures, see Eva Meyer-Hermann, "Places and Possibilities," in *Carl Andre: Sculptor, 1996* (Stuttgart: Oktagon Verlag, 1996); Jeffrey Inaba, "Carl Andre's Same Old Stuff," *Assemblage* 39 (1999): 36–61.
30. Cited in Cummings, "Carl Andre," 191.
31. Letter to Rene Odlin, March 13, 1964, in Andre, *Cuts,* 208.

32. Shape and Structure was the name of a show, curated by Henry Geldzahler at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery in January 1965, where Andre first publicly exhibited his work; it also included works by Donald Judd and Robert Morris.
33. Weiner, *On Carl Andre's Poems,* n.p.
34. Tuchman, "An Interview with Carl Andre," 550.
35. Cited in Tuchman, "An Interview with Carl Andre," 61.
36. Critics noted that *Crib* partially obstructed the entrance and imprisoned the space of the gallery. And Lucy Lippard protested that "there was only room for the determined viewer to edge around the forms, and vantage points were denied." Lucy R. Lippard, "New York Letter," *Art International* (September 1965): 58.
37. Tuchman, "An Interview with Carl Andre," 61. In another celebrated example, Andre in effect remade the installation of *Equivalents* (1966, Tibor de Nagy Gallery) by substituting series of *removals* for what had previously been discrete shapes, exhibiting at the Dwan Gallery a continuous surface of concrete blocks, from which he removed eight rectangular sections (the 1967 installation *Cuts*).
38. Lucy Lippard, "Bradford Junior College Symposium, February 8, 1968," in *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object, 1966–1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973), 40.
39. Vito Acconci, "Early Work: Movement Over a Page," *Avalanche* 6 (Fall 1972): 4.
40. Andre and Frampton, "On Certain Poems and Consecutive Matters," 77.
41. Ibid., 77, 78.
42. Andre, "Transcription," 9.
43. Carl Andre, interview with the author, April 10, 2005.
44. Andre and Frampton, "On Certain Poems and Consecutive Matters," 77.
45. Andre was probably drawn to permutational structures as much through music as mathematics. In addition to his love of Bach's music, with its retrogrades and inversions, Andre was well informed about postserial and experimental music. He has also described his use of permutational devices as "a satire on the random methods employed in the late 1950s and in the 1960s. John Cage and so forth used allegedly random methods in order to compose works of music and painting. . . . But the irony is that any method you use to produce random results automatically closed down the possibility of randomness" (Andre, "Transcription," xx).
46. Andre and Frampton, "On Certain Poems and Consecutive Matters," 79.
47. Ibid.
48. Carl Andre, "Ode on King Philips War," in *Lyrics and Odes,* published as part of the *Seven Books of Poetry* (New York: Dwan Gallery/Seth Siegelaub, 1969), 1, 4, 23.
49. Ibid., 1.
50. Andre, "Transcription," 6.
51. Andre, interview with the author, April 10, 2005.
52. While Acconci's works resemble early poems by Coolidge, as Acconci notes, although they initially looked similar "on the page, . . . we read very differently, he was very

jazzy, like a person improvising . . . an attempt to make music" drawn from authors like Jack Kerouac and Olson, while Acconci remembers himself as "more mechanical, flatter . . . the poems were not meant to be read [aloud] but looked at on the page"; cited in Liz Kotz, interview with the author, Brooklyn, October 25, 1995.

53. Martin Kunz, "Interview with Vito Acconci," in *Vito Acconci* (Lucerne: Kunstmuseum Luzern, 1978), n.p.
54. Hans-Ulrich Obrist, "Interview with Vito Acconci," in *Self-Construction* (Vienna: Museum für Moderne Kunst, 1995), 113.
55. See Vito Acconci, *Four Book* (New York: 0 to 9 Books, 1968), and *Transference/Roget's Thesaurus* (New York: 0 to 9 Books, 1969).
56. Only in the case of their writing through texts drawn from Pound's poetries would either Cage or Mac Low overtly address the shattering effects of such procedures.
57. Cited in Obrist, "Interview with Vito Acconci," 113.
58. To adopt the terms of Harold Rosenberg's 1952 essay "The American Painters."
59. Vito Acconci, "Early Work: Movement over a Page," *Avalanche* 6 (Fall 1972): 4.
60. Ibid.
61. These categories and chronologies are taken from Acconci's write-ups published in *Avalanche* 6 (1972).
62. Craig Dworkin, "Fugitive Signs," *October* 95 (Spring 2001): 99. Other analyses of Acconci's work with language can be found in Catherine Quéloz, "Vito Acconci: Langage in situ," *Cahiers du Musée National d'Art Moderne* 48 (Summer 1994): 101–113; Eve Meltzer, "What's the Matter with Words? Vito Acconci's L-l-l-language of the Written Text," *Fort da* 9, no. 2 (2003): 27–47. In "Vito Acconci: Language and Space," Judith Russi Kirshner provides a useful chronology of Acconci's work through 1980; in *Vito Acconci: A Retrospective, 1969–1980* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1980). Kate Linker's *Vito Acconci* (New York: Rizzoli, 1994) gives a more extended consideration of Acconci's work, but addresses his language-based works only in passing.
63. Acconci, "Early Work," 4.
64. Ibid., 31.
65. Acconci's notion of video as an intimate one-to-one encounter or a "home companion" is outlined in a number of his essays, including "Some Notes on Video as a Base (1974)," in *The New Television: A Public/Private Art,* ed. Douglas Davis and Allison Simmons (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978); "10-Point Plan for Video," in *Video Art: An Anthology,* ed. Ira Schneider and Beryl Korot (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976); "Television, Furniture, and Sculpture: The Room with an American View," in *The Luminous Image* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1984), reprinted in *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art,* ed. Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer (New York: Aperture/San Francisco: Bay Area Video Coalition, 1990).

66. Cited in Florence Gilbard, "An Interview with Vito Acconci: Video Works, 1970–1978," *Afterimage* (November 1984): 9.
67. Ibid.

Chapter 5

1. Irmeline Lebeer, "Interview with George Brecht," (1973), reprinted in Henry Martin, *An Introduction to George Brecht's "Book of the Tumbler on Fire"* (Milan: Edizioni Multipla, 1978), 87. Despite Brecht's recollection of the piece as occurring in 1960 (when he participated in two group shows at Martha Jackson Gallery), documentation shows that *Three Chair Events* was part of Jackson's exhibition Environments, Situations, Spaces, held in fall 1961; an undated page from Brecht's notebook of spring 1961 shows him working out the piece, and available photographs and the score all date the piece to 1961. My thanks to Julia Robinson for her assistance with materials on Brecht's work.
2. George Brecht, "An Interview with George Brecht by Michael Nyman" (1976), in *An Introduction to George Brecht's "Book of the Tumbler on Fire,"* ed. Henry Martin (Milan: Multipla Edizioni, 1978), 106.
3. This exclusion of photography is by no means total: Robert Watts used photography extensively, and even Brecht used photographic and mechanically reproduced materials in his rearrangeable boxes and objects such as *Blair,* and his September 1959 notes contain extensive breakdowns of materials whose "treatment" is "photographic"/"reproductive" (newspaper, magazine, book, maps . . . playing card, signs, and stamp pad), "autographic" (that is, self-writing: crayon, pencil, watercolor, tempera, ink, lacquer, oil paint, typewriter) and "in-itself" (that is, objects). See George Brecht, *George Brecht Notebooks (September 1959–March 1960),* ed. Hermann Braun (Cologne: Walther König, 1998), 4:11, 25. Yet Brecht's sustained interest in printed materials, and his subsequent reconceptualization of his boxes as "pages" of the ongoing *Book of the Tumbler on Fire* project, suggest that he would fundamentally try to align photographs to the (three-dimensional, tactile, interactive) space of the object rather than vice versa.
4. Carl Andre, "Carl Andre," *Avalanche* 1 (Fall 1970): 24.
5. Seth Siegelaub, "On Exhibitions and the World at Large," *Studio International* (December 1969): 202.
6. Anne Rorimer, "Joseph Kosuth," in *Reconsidering the Object of Art, 1965–1975,* ed. Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 150.
7. Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art, 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 117.
8. Tony Godfrey, *Conceptual Art* (London: Phaidon, 1998), 10.

9. In subsequent projects through the mid-1970s, Kosuth would almost exclusively pursue the linguistic, dictionary (and later thesaurus) material: the enlarged photostats of "Art as Art as Idea" would for a time become a kind of signature material for Kosuth, before he abandoned them in the early 1970s for fear that they had simply turned into another form of paintings. In addition, Kosuth's reputation would increasingly rest on his polemical and theoretical writings, such as the highly influential "Art after Philosophy," published in three parts in *Studio International* in 1969. While it may be problematic to attempt to separate Kosuth's art production from his critical writings—given the very nature of his project interrogating the status and definition of art—it is surprising to what extent Kosuth's writings have not only directed the reading of his artworks but completely overshadowed them. Critical accounts of his work usually focus on the texts, and actual readings of individual pieces or projects are still rare.
10. Joseph Kosuth [Arthur R. Rose, pseudo.], "Four Interviews," *Arts Magazine* (February 1969): 23.
11. Ibid.
12. See Rosalind Krauss, "LeWitt in Progress," in *On the Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 244–258.
13. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art, 1962–1969," 107.
14. Frampton's celebrated remark (from his published dialogues with Carl Andre) that "photography is not a substitute for anything" was later recited and reused in a project by Sherrie Levine and Louise Lawler.
15. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art, 1962–1969," 111.
16. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things,* in French (New York: Random House, 1970), 299.
17. Despite the counterexample of *Three Aqueous Events,* modeled on the three distinct physical states of an element, Brecht's frequent inclination for three-part structures appears more aesthetic than structural—there is no internal reason for there to be three chairs, three gap events, three light events, and so on. Like Yvonne Rainer's *Three Satie Spoons,* these are probably modeled on Duchamp's *3 Standard Stoppages* (1913) or the three movements of Cage's *4'33"*. Yet as Judith F. Rodenbeck notes, "Three makes a system, where two only makes an opposition"; "Re: Language," e-mail to the author, March 18, 2001.
18. Rosalind Krauss, "Notes of the Index, Part II," in *On the Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 216.
19. Donald Judd, "Robert Morris" (Green Gallery, February 1965), 165, and "Nationwide Reports: Hartford" (March 1964), 118, both in *Complete Writings, 1959–1975* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975).
20. Joseph Kosuth, "Art after Philosophy," in *Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966–1990,* ed. Gabriele Guercio (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 31.

21. Joseph Kosuth, "Statement," in *Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966–1990,* ed. Gabriele Guercio (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 3.
27. Kosuth, "Four Interviews," 23.
23. Joseph Kosuth New York Studio, fax to the author, November 30, 2000. The memo proceeds to note: "The certificates have instructions as to how to produce the 'form of presentation' but the studio usually assists in the fine points of reproducing these for museum and other exhibitions." A follow-up letter from Kosuth cites a wall label from his recent retrospective at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, produced under his supervision, that declares: "It is the intention of the artist that the photographs be made and remade, so that the object itself takes on *no importance other than as the conveyor of an idea.* That is, as a 'form of presentation.' Thus, the perceptual change permits the viewer to continually see the 'same' work." Joseph Kosuth, fax to the author, December 14, 2000, 1 (emphasis added). Kosuth explains that rephotography is necessary so that "when you look at the object and the photo of it you should see the same thing," but then qualifies this: "For a few of them, such as 'One and Three Photographs,' it is not necessary."
24. Joseph Kosuth, "Intention(s)," *Art Bulletin* 78, no. 3 (September 1996); reprinted in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds., *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 466.
25. In this context, we can better understand Siegelaub's early 1970s' advocacy of an organization like ASCAP for visual artists that would collect royalties for artists whenever their work is shown, or require museums, for instance, to pay rental fees—since he understands art to operate analogously to the commercial performance or recording of music.
26. Thus, the endless complaint by more traditionally oriented critics that the work of art is no longer fully available to immediate sensuous perception—that we must read the score or understand the concept or compositional procedures to appreciate a work—is not because the work now is merely an idea or intellectual exercise but because the work itself implicitly consists of a plan and its realization, even in projects like abstract painting that explicitly disavow this serial logic of production. The fact that there may be only one instantiation, as in architecture, does not mean that this relation to a plan or template is not present. The programmatic dismissal of the material realizations of a work by many conceptual artists merely reverses this culturally normative expectation of sensuous plenitude. Regarding projects by Huebler and other artists, Siegelaub describes the photographs and other aspects of the material realization as completely inessential: "Because all this is a record of the work of art, which is right behind it, in a way. It's not the work of art"; "Seth Siegelaub, April 17, 1969," in Alexander Alberro and Patricia Norvell, eds., *Recording Conceptual Art: Early Interviews* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 34.

27. As Kosuth and other younger artists were aware, Morris's repeated plywood constructions—"made on purpose, not found, to be minimal, unimportant, relatively unordered objects"—function like a linguistic proposition, like an idea realized in specific but replaceable material forms. These conceptual or linguistic aspects of minimal art were not only apparent to sympathetic younger artists, since it was precisely on such terms that Clement Greenberg protested that "Minimal works are readable as art, as almost anything is today—including a door, a table, or a blank sheet of paper. Yet it would seem that a kind of art nearer the condition of non-art could not be envisaged or ideated at this moment. That, precisely, is the trouble. Minimal art remains too much a feat of ideation, and not enough anything else. It remains an idea, something deduced instead of felt and discovered"; "Recentness of Sculpture" (1966), in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology,* ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968), 183.
28. In "The Crux of Minimalism," Hal Foster reads minimalist sculpture as instituting this general structure of repetition, and releasing temporal, perceptual, and situational concerns into art. Yet minimal sculpture may ultimately be a fairly odd place to look for a perceiver-centered or temporally driven aesthetics, particularly given the more powerful precedents of, for example, Cage's work, or Young's extended experiments with loud single tones and durational structures. Minimalism is where these diverse temporal, perceptual, and site-based procedures are recondensed *back into the sculptural object,* thus accounting for the contradictions in Morris's account, such as his otherwise-peculiar assertion "that the space of the room becomes of such importance does not mean that an environmental situation is being created." Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 2" (1966), in *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 16.
29. Lynn Gumpert, "Interview with Lawrence Weiner," in *Early Work* (New York: New Museum, 1982), 47.
30. Lawrence Weiner, in Seth Siegelaub's, *January 5–31, 1969* (New York: Seth Siegelaub, 1969), n.p.
31. Ibid.
32. Dieter Schwarz, "Learn to Read Art: Lawrence Weiner's Books," in *Lawrence Weiner Books, 1968–1989: Catalogue Raisonné* (Cologne: Walther König, 1989), 142 (emphasis added). As Weiner insists, for this dynamic to work, his sculptures must be realizable in order to function: "If they were not possible to be built, they would negate the choice of the receiver as to whether to build them or not"; statement for *Prospect '69* exhibit, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf.
33. "Lawrence Weiner at Amsterdam," *Avalanche* 4 (Spring 1972): 66. Weiner appears to equivocate greatly about the formalization required by ownership, declaring, "There is never a document that passes that's signed. Quite often, I'll give a piece of paper

with the piece written on it, but that's just, you know, my own little quirk in case they forget the exact wording. But it's never signed. It's only got my name in block letters, which is the assumption of responsibility, or it's on a typed piece of paper. . . . The only record that someone owns the piece is filed with a lawyer on a typewritten sheet" ("Lawrence Weiner, June 3, 1969," in Alberro and Norvell, *Recording Conceptual Art,* 102). And he consistently poses the purchase of his work as a moral commitment rather than a commercial transaction: "What I'm doing is setting up a situation where any way that the piece is built is alright. . . . If you were to purchase it, all you would be doing would be to accept responsibility for my product, which is a moral commitment, rather than a narrowly aesthetic commitment" ("Lawrence Weiner at Amsterdam," 69), even likening it to signing a petition: "The fact of buying one of my works is comparable to a signature at the bottom of a petition and is, in this sense, to accept responsibility that the conclusions . . . are correct"; cited in Michel Claura, "Interview with Lawrence Weiner," *VH-101* 5 (Spring 1971): 65.

34. "Lawrence Weiner at Amsterdam," 70.
35. Benjamin Buchloh, "Benjamin Buchloh in Conversation with Lawrence Weiner," in *Lawrence Weiner* (London: Phaidon, 1998), 19.
36. Schwarz, "Learn to Read Art," 131.
37. Ibid., 142.
38. Lawrence Weiner, *Statements* (New York: Seth Siegelaub/Louis Kellner Foundation, 1968), n.p.
39. In "Influences: The Difference between 'How' and 'Why' " (1970), Kosuth even suggests that Weiner's early "process" pieces were a direct influence on Serra's work, recounting: "I suppose that his [Weiner's] desire to lean toward conceptualization and lean away from materialization had in part to do with his failure to get the recognition he deserved for the 'process' or 'anti-form' pieces. (Robert Morris has since told me that Weiner wasn't included in those shows because he felt Weiner's work was 'too pretentious and gestural'; although I took Morris to Weiner's studio as early as November of 1968, and Richard Serra's liquid lead pieces came out of Morris's transfer of that information)"; in *Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966–1990,* ed. Gabriele Guercio (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 81.
40. Weiner, cited in Kosuth, "Four Interviews," 23.
41. Richard Serra, "Verb List Compilation, 1967–68," *Avalanche* 2 (Winter 1971): 20.
42. Lawrence Weiner, *Tracce/Traces* (Torino: Sperone editore, 1970).
43. While Weiner often dismisses the photographic documentation of his works—whether in early sculptural enactments, or a wide range of installation and publication formats—the collection of such images in catalogs like *Lawrence Weiner (Obras): En La Corriente/In the Stream* (Valencia: IVAM, 1995) nonetheless offers an essential sense of Weiner's work as it functions in diverse settings and contexts.

44. Richard Serra, "About Drawing," in *Richard Serra: Interviews, Etc., 1970–1980* (Yonkers, NY: Hudson River Museum, 1980), 77.
45. Ibid.
46. Richard Serra, "Interview by Bernard Lamarche-Vadel," in *Richard Serra: Interviews, Etc., 1970–1980* (Yonkers, NY: Hudson River Museum, 1980), 135.
47. Dieter Schwarz, "Moved Pictures: Film and Videos of Lawrence Weiner," in *Show and Tell: The Films and Video of Lawrence Weiner, a Catalogue Raisonne,* ed. Bartomeu Mari (Gent: Imschoot, Uitgevers, 1992), 96.
48. Serra's 1973 video *Television Delivers People* is his only independent "word piece," composed entirely of language; the political analysis it offers, of individual viewers as the unwitting commercial "product" of mass communications media, disallows any meaningful interface between artistic processes and the telecommunications industry—perhaps marking the end of the 1960s' era "media optimism" that propelled conceptual artists to engage with mass media forms and techniques.

Chapter 6

1. Douglas Huebler, *Prospect 69* exhibition catalog statement, October, 1969, cited in Jack Burnham, "Alice's Head: Reflections on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* (February 1970): 41.
2. Cited in John Coplans, "Ed Ruscha Discusses His Perplexing Publications," *Artforum* (February 1965): 25.
3. John Roberts, "Photography, Iconophobia, and the Ruins of Conceptual Art," in *The Impossible Document: Photography and Conceptual Art in Britain, 1966–1976* (London: Camerawork, 1997), 24–25.
4. Ibid., 26.
5. Victor Burgin, "Interview with Victor Burgin," in *The Impossible Document: Photography and Conceptual Art in Britain, 1966–1976,* by John Roberts (London: Camerawork, 1997), 84.
6. Victor Burgin, "Seeing Sense," *Artforum* (February 1980): 64.
7. See, for instance, the essays collected in Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text,* trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977); Victor Burgin, ed., *Thinking Photography* (London: Macmillan, 1982).
8. Despite the resemblance of Baldessari's work to certain conceptual strategies, Kosuth would dismiss it with the remark that "although the amusingly pop paintings of John Baldessari allude to this sort of work by being 'conceptual' cartoons of actual conceptual art, they are not really relevant to this discussion"; "Art after Philosophy" (1969), reprinted in *Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966–1990,* ed. Gabriele Guercio (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 29.

9. In " 'Marks of Indifference': Aspects of Photography on, or as, Conceptual Art," the artist and critic Jeff Wall reads Graham's and Smithson's publication projects as explicit *parodies* of journalism, and specifically as parodies of what he terms "the art-concept of photojournalism"—the historical reliance of modernist photography on instrumental forms of press photography and reportage. Wall concludes that it is paradoxically by the "strictest imitation of the non-autonomous"—by abandonment of the aestheticized "reportage" of modernist photography for a more sustained mimesis of industrial, utilitarian, and amateur modes—that "photoconceptualism led toward the complete acceptance of photography as art." Wall proposes Graham's *Homes for America* as "a canonical instance of the new kind of anti-autonomous yet autonomous work of art. The photographs in it oscillate at the threshold of the autonomous work." In Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer, eds., *Reconsidering the Object of Art, 1965–1975* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 252, 257.
10. Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990), 105–143.
11. Jeff Wall, *Dan Graham's Kammerspiel* (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1991), 13.
12. In Peirce's schema, an "index," or "indexical" sign, "refers to an Object by virtue of being really affected by that Object"—that is, by physical impact or imprint, including phenomena like footprints, symptoms, or smoke (a sign of a fire); indexes are distinguished from "icons" that refer to an object through resemblance or analogy (for example, images or diagrams), and "symbols" that work by means of law, convention, or historically forged association (for instance, the cross as symbolic of Christianity). While these functions often overlap within a single sign, in general language is the symbolic, "arbitrary" sign par excellence. See Charles Sanders Peirce, "Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs," in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce,* ed. Justus Buchler (New York: Dover, 1995).
13. Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index, Part II" (1977), in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 211.
14. Roland Barthes, *Image—Music—Text,* trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang), 39.
15. Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message" [1961], in *Image, Music, Text,* 15. See also Roland Barthes, "The Rhetoric of Photography" [1964], in *Image, Music, Text;* Roland Barthes, "Elements of Semiology," in *Elements of Semiology,* trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (1964; repr., New York: Hill and Wang, 1968).
16. See Claude E. Shannon and Warren Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1949).
17. In "Aspects," Stephen Melville discusses the ambivalent attraction to positivist models evident in the 1960s' embrace of Ludwig Wittgenstein. He suggests that in this context, "Wittgenstein, both early and late, offered ambiguous resources for imagining

art's place between the promise and threat of positivism, while the propositional style of the early work and the aphoristic or experimental style of the later seemed to give permission to take one's Wittgenstein as one found (or wanted to find) it, rendering fluid the distinction between the logical concerns of the early work and the grammatical focus of the later. Given these broad readerly permissions and uncertainties, what Wittgenstein seemed to license was a certain practice of self-reference that could nonetheless count as rigorous, as measuring up to a more certain (albeit obscure) standard of objectivity that would let art count as a mode of investigation more or less on a par with . . . modern science." In Goldstein and Rorimer, *Reconsidering the Object of Art,* 234–235.

18. Krauss ("Notes on the Index") draws this point from the immense textual apparatus that accompanies Duchamp's deeply hermetic *Large Glass* (1915–1923), but the same analysis can be extended backward to earlier projects like the ready-mades and *Three Standard Stoppages* (1913), which remain unintelligible without some kind of verbal explanation or textual supplement (even if only a title or signature).
19. Ibid., 212.
20. Ann Goldstein, "Adrian Piper," in *Reconsidering the Object of Art, 1965–1975,* ed. Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 196.
21. Melville, "Aspects," 235. As Melville notes, a countertendency more open to phenomenological and semiotic models also emerged at the time, distinguished by what he terms "its refusal of this fundamentally epistemological orientation (a refusal, then, to identify self-criticism with self-reference) in favor of a different imagination of how language matters for an apprehension of the visual: language is more nearly taken as a condition of a thing or a work's appearing (its being what it is) than as the screen, transparent or opaque, that stands between us and things, ever threatening to supplant them" (236).
22. Sol LeWitt, "Serial Project No. 1, 1966," *Aspen* 5–6 (1967), in *Sol LeWitt: Critical Texts,* ed. Adachiara Zevi (Rome: Editrice Inonia, 1995), 75.
23. Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art, 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 122.
24. Victor Burgin, "Situational Aesthetics," *Studio International* 178, no. 915 (October 1969): 119.
25. See Douglas Huebler, *Douglas Huebler: November, 1968* (New York: Seth Siegelaub, 1968).
26. Douglas Huebler, letter to Jack Burham, 1969, in *Douglas Huebler: "Variable," etc.* (Limousin: FRAC, 1993), 173.
27. Douglas Huebler, interview by Frédéric Paul, Truro, Massachusetts, 1992, in *Douglas Huebler: "Variable," etc.* (Limousin: FRAC, 1993), 127.
28. In a 1969 statement, Huebler notes, "My work is concerned with determining the form of art when the role traditionally played by visual experience is mitigated or

eliminated. In a number of works I have done so by first bringing 'appearance' into the foreground of the piece and then suspending the visual experience of it by having it actually function as a document that exists to serve as a structural part of a conceptual system"; *Artists and Photographs* (New York: Multiple, Inc., 1969), in *Douglas Huebler: "Variable," etc.* (Limousin: FRAC, 1993), 173.

29. Huebler, interview by Frédéric Paul, 127. In a 1978 statement, he elaborated: "By late 1967, I was looking for an alternative to object-making and I found it in the idea of the map: the perfect conceptual model, with its reduced visual signs juxtaposed with descriptive language. I created a new body of work which added photographic 'documentation' to the implications of mapping" (175). Huebler's wartime experiences with maps, monitors, and reconnaissance information gathering suggest the historical stakes of this displacement, focused not so much on the processes of information transmission as on the target site of reception.
30. Douglas Huebler, *Douglas Huebler: November, 1968* (New York: Seth Siegelaub, 1968).
31. See Carl Andre et al., *The Xerox Book* (New York: Siegelaub/Wendler, 1968), n.p.
32. Victor Burgin, written instruction for *Photopath,* in "Situational Aesthetics," 120.
33. Cited in Tony Godfrey, "Interview with Victor Burgin," *Block* 9 (1982), cited in Peter Osborne, ed., *Conceptual Art* (London: Phaidon, 2002), 126.
34. Victor Burgin, "Interview with Victor Burgin," in *The Impossible Document: Photography and Conceptual Art in Britain, 1966–1976,* by John Roberts (London: Camerawork, 1997), 82.
35. Victor Burgin, "The Absence of Presence: Conceptualism and Postmodernisms," in *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1986), 39. Peter Osborne forcefully argues for reading Burgin's political photo-text works of the mid-1970s in continuity with his early work of 1967–1972, proposing "Burgin's work of a politicized photographic practice is best understood not as a rejection of a primarily conceptual art, but as the practical pursuit of its expanded conception"; "Everywhere, or Not at All: Victor Burgin and Conceptual Art," in *Relocating Victor Burgin,* by Victor Burgin (Bristol: Arnolfini, 2002), 63.
36. Burgin, "Situational Aesthetics," 119.
37. Burgin, "Interview with Victor Burgin," 82.
38. Burgin, "Situational Aesthetics," 119. As Catsou Roberts notes, "Composed in a 'performative' mode of address . . . these propositions drew the viewer's attention to the very act of seeing, and highlighted the role of memory in perception"; "Some Introductory Information Leading to the Possible Location of Victor Burgin," in *Relocating Victor Burgin* (Bristol: Arnolfini, 2002), 16. Peter Osborne suggests, "The accumulative articulation of internal relations between the eighteen numbered propositions give *Room* something of the appearance of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*"; "Everywhere, or Not at All," 71.

39. Cited in Michael Auping, "Talking with Douglas Huebler," *LAICA Journal* 15 (July–August 1977): 38.
40. Mike Kelley, "Shall We Kill Daddy?" *Origin and Destination: Alighiero E Boetti and Douglas Huebler,* ed. Marianne Van Leeuw and Anne Pontégnie (Brussels: Société des Expositions du Palais des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles, 1997), 163.
41. Cited in Marianne Van Leeuw and Anne Pontégrie, eds., *Origin and Destination: Alighiero E Boetti and Douglas Huebler* (Brussels: Société des Expositions du Palais des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles, 1997), 134.
42. Auping, "Talking with Douglas Huebler," 37.
43. Burgin, "Interview with Victor Burgin," 82–83.
44. Auping, "Talking with Douglas Huebler," 42.
45. Douglas Huebler, *Variable Piece 4: Secrets* (New York: Printed Matter, 1973), back cover.
46. Douglas Huebler, *Variable Piece 4: Secrets* (New York: Printed Matter, 1973).
47. Kosuth recalls Huebler's desire, going back to his early Formica sculptures, "to do work that had 'no inside and no outside.' This meant in the photo-based projects that the fictive space of narrative—which a work employing time unavoidably constructs—had to be subverted. Doug's work has a narrative so flat it comes without a story, without even narrative desire." Joseph Kosuth, "Times of Our Lives: Joseph Kosuth on Douglas Huebler," *Artforum* (November 1997): 16.
48. Cited Auping, "Talking with Douglas Huebler," 37.
49. Ibid., 38.

Conclusion

1. In his glossary to the 1998 edition of *a: a novel,* Victor Bockris details several taping sessions that can be roughly excavated from the novel's intensively fractured narrative: "The novel purports to be a recording of twenty-four hours in the life of Warhol superstar Ondine, but actually it was recorded in four or five different sessions. The first twelve-hour session was recorded in August 1965. Thereafter, there were at least three separate taping sessions in the summer of 1966, and a final one in May 1967"; "a: A Glossary," in *a: a novel,* by Andy Warhol, 2nd ed. (New York: Grove Press, 1998), 453. According to Branden W. Joseph, who catalogued *Sleep* (1963) for the Warhol Film Project, the sequences were not actually loop printed but strips of film developed and edited together.
2. Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *POPism: The Warhol 60s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980). Warhol also discusses his ubiquitous Sony tape recorder in the 1970s in *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1975), in which he refers to it as "my wife, Sony." For Victor Bokris's slightly varying

accounts, see *The Life and Death of Andy Warhol* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989), "Andy Warhol: The Writer," in *Who Is Andy Warhol,* ed. Colin McCabe (London: British Film Institute, 1997), 17–21, and "a: A Glossary." Bob Colacello's account, which focuses on the 1970s, also discusses the early years of *Andy Warhol's Interview* in some detail; *Holy Terror: Andy Warhol Close-Up* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990). Although Reva Wolf's study of Warhol's interface with downtown literary and poetic practices in *Andy Warhol, Poetry, and Gossip in the 1960s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) addresses *a* briefly, it largely concentrates on his relations with more conventional New York School figures and the emerging café poetry scene, about which Gerard Malanga was an important conduit of information to Warhol. More extended critical responses to *a* can be found in Bruce Hainley, "New York Conversation," *Frieze* 39 (1998); Peter Krapp, *Déjà vu: Aberrations of Cultural Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Lynne Tillman, "The Last Words Are Andy Warhol," *Grey Room* 21 (Fall 2005): 38–45; Craig Dworkin, "Whereof One Cannot Speak," *Grey Room* 21 (Fall 2005): 46–69.

The burgeoning subgenre of Factory memoirs includes Nat Finkelstein, *Andy Warhol: The Factory Years, 1964–1967* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989); Billy Name, *All Tomorrow's Parties: Billy Name's Photographs of Andy Warhol's Factory* (New York: Power House, 1997); Stephen Shore and Lynne Tillman, *The Velvet Years: Warhol's Factory, 1965–1967* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1995); Jean Stein, *Edie: An American Biography,* ed. George Plimpton (New York: Dell, 1982); Ultra Violet, *Famous for 15 Minutes: My Years with Andy Warhol* (New York: Dell, 1994); Mary Woronov, *Swimming Underground: My Years with the Warhol Factory* (Boston: Journey Editions, 1995). Fleeting references to *a: novel* also appear in the interviews (particularly with Ondine) collected in Patrick Smith, *Andy Warhol's Art and Films* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986).

3. I thank Nicholas de Villiers for focusing on this repeated tendency in Warhol's statements and interviews as a pervasive strategy of proxy and deferral. The tape recorder provided a perfect vehicle for Warhol to both appear and disappear. As Warhol notes in his *Philosophy,* "The acquisition of my tape recorder finally really finished whatever emotional life I might have had, but I was glad to see it go. Nothing was ever a problem again because a problem just means a good tape, and when a problem transforms itself into a good tape it's not a problem anymore. An interesting problem was an interesting tape. Everyone knew that and performed for the tape. You couldn't tell which problems were real and which problems were exaggerated for the tape. Better yet, the people telling you the problems couldn't decide any more if they were really having the problems or if they were just performing" (26–27). He later claims a perverse identification with the apparatus: "My mind is like a tape recorder with one button—Erase" (199).

4. Thomas Crow outlines three distinct "Warhols," describing the most famous of these as Warhol's "persona": "the self-created . . . product of his famous pronouncements and of the allowed representations of his life and milieu"; "Saturday Disasters: Trace and Reference in Early Warhol," in *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal, 1954–1965,* ed. Serge Guilbaut (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 311. Yet by separating these "allowed representations of his life and milieu" from Warhol's artistic production and the underground practices he "authorized," Crow cannot identify common structures cutting across such lines.
5. Warhol, *POPism,* 287.
6. "Briefly Noted: Andy Warhol, *a: a novel,*" *New Yorker,* January 4, 1969, 82.
7. Sally Beauman, review of *a: a novel, New York Times Book Review,* January 4, 1969, 4.
8. Ibid.,
9. Ibid., 32.
10. Robert Mazzocco, "a a a a a a . . . ," review of *a: a novel, New York Review of Books,* April 24, 1969, 36.
11. Bockris, "Andy Warhol: The Writer," 17. As Bockris's account suggests, Warhol's redacted "voice portraits," which faithfully transcribe every nuance and accident of speech, without editorial correction or touching up, represent the precise flip side of his notoriously syncophantic 1970s' portraits, whose intense flattery to the sitter at any cost nearly eradicates visual recognizability. That these *two portrait forms*—the raw redacted interviews and the extensively touched-up paintings—were both presented in the early *Interview,* reinforces the extent to which they need to be thought of together, as an inseparable unit—although the voice portraits are rarely mentioned in the extensive critical accounts of Warhol's painted celebrity portraits.
12. Ibid., 18, 19: "It is in this sense the 'worst' book ever written, just as Warhol's films are the 'worst' films ever made. . . . *a* is just as important a book as *The Chelsea Girls* is a film or *The Velvet Underground and Nico* is a record, and should be recognized as among the most accurate, creative, influential novels of the 60s."
13. Ibid., 18. In the more extended account in the 1998 glossary, Bockris recounts: "The book then found its own voice, taking on a life of its own when the twenty-four one-hour tapes were transcribed by four women. . . . All four shared a disinclination to spell correctly or apply the rules of grammar. This was due in part to the difficulty of transcribing tapes in which so many voices were talking at the same time. Furthermore, speed was of the essence, and it was presumed that after the first rough draft, corrections would be made. However, on first reading the entire original transcript of the book, Warhol was delighted by the mistakes and decided to let them stand" (453). Changing the names of almost all the characters, Warhol also "randomly [changed] comments he liked or disliked," before delegating Billy Name to oversee the publication: "The job of making sure the final galleys were delivered to Grove in

the form Warhol requested was given to the Factory's foreman, Billy Name. According to Name, the *a* both refers to amphetamine and was used as an homage to e. e. cummings. Name also felt that the novel fell into the surrealist genre personified by Andre Breton's automatic writing, since it was automatic talking" (453).

14. Ibid., 19.
15. Ibid.
16. The procedures that generate *a: a novel* also structurally resemble those of Warhol's better-known 1960s' projects, such as his silk-screened canvases and sixteen-millimeter films, in which, for instance, an existing press photograph of Marilyn Monroe is selected, cropped, and reproduced via silk screen on to a series of canvases that preserve all the blurring, streaking, and dirt introduced by the process, with all their capacities to degrade, disrupt, and obscure the image, or in which a series of camera rolls record an action or subject—the Empire State Building, couples kissing, or the myriad "screen tests"—for the duration of the film stock, or for an arbitrarily chosen length of time, in which all the "errors" and "distortions" of filming—harsh lighting, out-of-focus shots, subjects moving in and out of audibility, the light bleed and glare at the beginning and end of each roll, and so forth—are faithfully retained in the finished work.
17. Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (Summer 1967): 80.
18. Andy Warhol, *a: a novel* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 121.
19. Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language,* trans. A. M. Sheridan-Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 215.
20. And in the present-day university, a division of labor between literary and theoretical orientations helps preserve *a*'s unreadability. In a graduate seminar on Warhol, my critical theory–oriented students, who have no problem devoting hours to disentangling Jacques Derrida or Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, found *a*'s textual obstacles nearly insurmountable. In addition, my efforts to read it into the history of the modernist novel met with relative incomprehension, as it turned out that only a single student had read James Joyce's *Ulysses* or anything by Gertrude Stein.
21. Roland Barthes, *Image—Music—Text,* trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 19.

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