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*The Message
Is the Medium:
The Communication Art
of Yoko Ono*

I realized then, that it was not enough in life to just wake up in the morning, eat, talk, walk, and go to sleep. Art and music were necessities. But they were not enough, either. We needed new rituals, in order to keep our sanity.

—Yoko Ono, e-mail to the author,
September 13, 1999

Shortly after turning twenty years old, Yoko Ono discovered art out of necessity. “Art is a means of survival,” Ono claims repeatedly today when reflecting back on the role of art in her life from early on.¹ Artmaking helped her overcome many hardships that she encountered throughout her life. During World War II, for example, she often played a game with her siblings to imagine foods that they could not obtain. Using one’s imagination to find hope in life became the point of departure for Ono’s art. One of her earliest artistic expressions, *Lighting Piece* (1955), took the form of a performance as well as an “instruction” consisting of simple words. Although this piece directly grew out of Ono’s personal ritual to calm herself, later — when its instruction was written and performed in front of audience — the piece became Ono’s message to people, to encourage them to contemplate their lives.

As evident in Ono’s concept during the 1970s — that “the message is the

medium — she became aware that her ideas and imagination could become art via language.² As early as the mid-1950s Ono started writing “scores” or “instructions,” in simple words, that were designated for realization by viewers as performances or imagination exercises. In recent scholarship, Ono’s work has been reevaluated as one of the earliest examples of conceptual art, one that preceded that of Joseph Kosuth and others.³ Unlike most conceptual art, however, Ono’s work does not always center on institutional critique and deconstruction of traditional aesthetics; such ideological concerns are secondary to Ono’s main interest. She prefers to call her work “con art” — a pun between “conceptual” and “con,” suggesting the deceptive playfulness that underlies her art.⁴ Rather than directing her work at the art crowd, who would understand her critical take on traditional art, Ono attempts to reach a wider audience, ultimately seeking spiritual and intellectual communication with the viewer.

The basis of Ono’s art was founded in the early 1960s and developed into different forms in the following four decades. Rather than discussing all periods of her activities over the years, my discussions will concentrate on her formative years and early development in the 1960s. Focal points throughout this chapter are Ono’s feminist concerns, the development of her performance-related works, and her role in catalyzing artistic exchanges between Japan and the United States. In the first section, I will summarize Ono’s biographical background and her interrelations with New York avant-garde artists, and investigate how she reached instructions and performance. The second section will focus on the time that she spent in Japan between 1962 and 1964, during which she performed in many places and was active in the Tokyo avant-garde circle. The third section will be on her artistic activities in New York between 1964 and 1966, including involvement with the group Fluxus, and the fourth section will be on her activities in London between 1966 and 1970, which will include discussions about a shift in Ono’s artistic activities, due largely to her marriage to John Lennon. Finally, the last section will be a summary of her art and life of the past three decades.

The Formative Years: The Birth of “Instructions” and Performance

As if to anticipate her career, Ono’s life was performative and conscious of the public from the start. Born the eldest daughter of a distinguished banker’s family, Ono was always expected to perform. Her first memory was of feeling alone in the large garden outside her home in a high-class residential neighborhood in Tokyo, being watched by her family maids. She was brought up among aristocrats, given the most sophisticated education and musical training that one could obtain in Japan in the 1930s and 1940s. Her kindergarten, Jiyū Gakuen, was open only to those who were associated with the imperial family or the Japanese House of Peers. There she began piano les-

sons at the age of four and was taught to listen for and notate everyday sounds and noises by her school teacher.⁵ While going to a Christian primary school, she also took private lessons at home in the Bible, Buddhism, and the piano. Because her father was transferred to San Francisco, and subsequently to New York, Ono lived briefly in the United States in 1935–1937 and 1940–1941. In American public school, she felt a constant pressure to be an exemplary student since her mother even told her that she represented the nation of Japan.⁶ The performance of a life negotiating between the private and public self may have started at that time.

Ono’s hybrid identity suffered hardship during the World War II. In the spring of 1941, right before Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor, Ono and her family sailed back to Japan while her father was sent to Hanoi, Vietnam. After their house was bombed by an air raid in 1945, the Onos escaped to the countryside for shelter and food. Local farmers were not hospitable to them, however, ostracizing them as a rich, Americanized family. Ono experienced hardship in daily life for the first time, such as the antagonism against strangers (she and her family) and a lack of food. After the war, Ono returned to Tokyo with her younger brother and sister, and found her hometown bombed to ruins. Upon seeing the devastation, she did not, surprisingly, feel despair, but instead hope for rebirth. Compared to the hard country life that she had been living, she felt optimistic about restarting her life in Tokyo. Finding hope in the hardest possible situations would become an underlying theme in Ono’s art and life.

After the war, Ono started pursuing her own interests in earnest. When she was fourteen, she announced to her parents that she wanted to become a composer. Her father, a talented pianist himself, persuaded Ono not to pursue a composer’s career because it was “a field that’s too hard for women.”⁷ He then encouraged her to become an opera singer, but in 1952, against his wish, Ono entered the philosophy department at Gakushūin University as the first female student. One year later, the Ono family moved to Scarsdale, New York, to join her father, who was then working in the Manhattan branch of the Bank of Tokyo. Between 1953 and 1956 Ono studied music composition and literature at Sarah Lawrence College. Apart from studying at school, she independently created poems and some novellas and tried to publish them. Her poem, *Of a Grapefruit in the World of Park*, which was later developed into a score for a performance event, was originally published in the Sarah Lawrence College newspaper, *The Campus*, in 1955.⁸

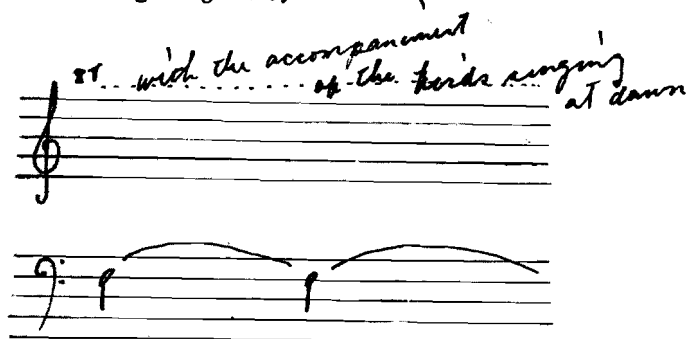
Soon Ono incorporated her literary interests into music. Having acquired classical musical training earlier in Japan, she was not interested in repeating it in college, and was instead more inclined toward contemporary music, such as the twelve-tone compositions of Anton von Webern, Arnold Schoenberg, and Alban Berg. One of her professors pointed out that Ono might find interest in the works by the avant-garde composers’ circle in New York, including John Cage, but she was not interested in learning about other

SECRET PIECE

Decide on one note that you want to play.
Play it with the following accompaniment:

The woods from 5 a.m. to 8 a.m.
in summer.

(The above is the later revision of the
following original.)



1953 summer

30. Yoko Ono, *Secret Piece*, 1953. First version (bottom) and second version (top). Photo courtesy of Lenono Photo Archive, New York.

people at that point.⁹ After attempting to translate birds' singing into musical notes, she realized the limitation of conventional musical scores and began inserting words in scores in a poetic form.¹⁰ One of Ono's earliest word scores, *Secret Piece*, which was composed in 1953 and scored later, simply had one base note and a short description, "with the accompaniment of the birds singing at dawn" (see fig. 30, bottom). Shortly later, it was translated into words without a score, with the instructions, "Decide on one note that you want to play. Play it with the following accompaniment: The woods from 5 a.m. to 8 a.m. in summer" (see fig. 30, top). While the former version was still based on a conventional musical score, the latter radically departed from it. Because of the imperative-sentence format, Ono called this type of work an "instruction."

Ono's instructions can be compared to the "event scores" or word pieces of her future peers, George Brecht and La Monte Young, who individually reached the format around 1960. Both Brecht and Young shared an interest in Cage's unconventional music compositions. Brecht's earliest event score, *Time-Table Music* (1959), instructs the performers to stand in the train station



31. Yoko Ono performing *Lighting Piece* at Sōgetsu Art Center, Tokyo, May 24, 1962. Photo by Ysuihiro Yoshioka, courtesy of Lenono Photo Archive, New York.

and make noise individually according to different train schedules.¹¹ It is similar to the second version of Ono's *Secret Piece* in the way it only defines the place and allows performers to decide what and how to play. Young's series of compositions in 1960 also have close affinities with Ono's early pieces. One of them, *Composition 1960 #5*, instructs a performer to "turn a butterfly loose in a performance area" and the piece is finished when "the butterfly flies away" through a window or door. His interest in incorporating nature into music strikes a chord with Ono's.

While Brecht and Young conceived their early events as conceptual music pieces, some of Ono's works, such as *Lighting Piece* (see fig. 31), evolved directly from her personal rituals. Because of her oversensitivity to sound and light, Ono sometimes had to stuff her ears with sanitary pads, wrap her head in gauze, and stay in a dark room. One day around 1955, she discovered that lighting a match and watching the flame extinguish seemed to give her a moment of relief. She repeated it, sometimes in front of her sister, until she became calm. Although it was a visual experience, the act somehow also had an aural effect on her in that the sounds in her mind disappeared as the light went off.¹² In addition, watching the match flame made her compare its short life to that of humans, which made her feel serene.¹³ When she realized the effect of this action, she wrote it out as an instruction: "Light a match and watch till it goes out." As Ono once stated in an interview, she began creating works mostly for a therapeutic purpose, in order to keep herself sane.¹⁴ Both physically and psychologically, she was compelled to recognize the necessity of the "additional act" that was for her "something more than paint-

ing, poetry, and music. In other words, Ono's hybrid artistic expression was born in the course of her survival. Only after connecting with the similarly "far-out" experimental artists in downtown New York did she learned to share such personal experiences with other people and allow her works to become of public performances.

Shortly after leaving college and moving to New York City in 1956, Ono joined the avant-garde circle surrounding Cage. Her first husband, Toshi Ichianagi, to whom she was married from 1956 to 1962, was a Japanese pianist/composer studying at the Julliard School of Music. Around 1958, he met Cage at Merce Cunningham's dance studio, where Ichianagi sometimes worked as a piano accompanist. Cage was then teaching a music composition class at the New School for Social Research. His students included those who would become key figures of the Happenings and Fluxus movements, such as George Brecht, Al Hansen, Dick Higgins, Allan Kaprow, and Jackson MacLow.¹⁶ Soon after befriending Cage, Ichianagi introduced Ono to him. Upon their meeting, Ono asked Ichianagi, "Do you realize this is it?" Ono was excited at finding her kindred spirit; besides, Cage's interest in Eastern philosophy stimulated Ono. Around 1958 Cage invited her to attend a lecture by the Zen philosopher Daisetsu Suzuki at Columbia University. Although she had already heard Suzuki lecture at Sarah Lawrence College, she did not decline Cage's invitation.¹⁷ Ono soon realized many of her American friends, including Cage, were interested in Zen philosophy and other Asian thoughts with which she was already familiar. For Ono, who learned both Western and Japanese culture and arts, merging the two was a natural process. While Ono does not today recognize any particular influence from Cage, she still credits him for influencing her "in the things he opened up, in emphasizing that it was all right to be unique,"¹⁸ which points out how Cage acknowledged Ono's Japanese heritage as significant and encouraged her explorations of it.

By the late 1950s, Ono, having been brought up around artists in her family, including her mother and her uncles, took up painting as a means of artistic experimentation. By then, Abstract Expressionism had entered the realm of the academy and artists such as Willem de Kooning had become intimidating to young artists. As if intended to make a reference to Marcel Duchamp's adding a mustache to Leonardo da Vinci's acclaimed *Mona Lisa*, Robert Rauschenberg erased a drawing by de Kooning and declared the erased paper as his own art in 1953. Ono's early painting practices and a remark she made in 1967 seem to relate to these two "anti-art" actions. "The ultimate goal for me," she said, "is a situation in this society, where ordinary housewives visiting each other and waiting in the living room, will say, 'I was just adding some circles to your beautiful de Kooning painting.'" ¹⁹ While Ono's comment reflected her reaction against the Abstract Expressionist, the underlying message was to reduce the value of an artwork and to bring down the status of artistic creation to the level of everyday life. In addition, by turn-

ing "ordinary housewives" into potential avant-garde artists, Ono comically subverted, with a feminist spirit, the machismo associated with the avant-garde. Further criticizing the "strange false value that people create on art-work," she claimed that "art should be almost free like water and light." As it was clear in the former quote, democratization of art was a goal as well as a starting point for Ono's art.

The impulse to break down the boundaries between art and life was in the air. Happenings initiated by Jim Dine, Allan Kaprow, and Claes Oldenburg, among others, were perhaps the most literal realization of this impulse and played an important role in disseminating it.²⁰ By placing the audience in the middle of their performances, they were able to have the audience experience what was happening. Because of their detailed scores, however, Happenings seemed theatrical. After 1960, reacting against the theatricality of Happenings, some — such as Brecht and future Fluxus artists — began creating events that concentrated on only a few simple actions derived from everyday life. Modern dancers including Trisha Brown and Yvonne Rainer, who were among the founding members of the Judson Dance Theater in 1962, also started experimenting with repetitive, reduced movements inspired by everyday actions. Ono was in the middle of this dynamic milieu.

From 1960 on, Ono increasingly became a central figure in the New York downtown art scene. She turned her loft at 112 Chambers Street into a performance space, alternative to classic concert halls uptown; it functioned as a lively forum for a mélange of experimental artists. Many artists, including sculptor Walter de Maria, sculptor Robert Morris, dancer Simone Morris, and composer La Monte Young, moved from California to New York and needed a place to present their work. For Ono as for others, the loft served as a testing ground for artistic exploration and a place for artistic exchange. More important, the early form of performance art, which Fluxus would later call "events," was given a home at Ono's loft. In the winter of 1960–1961, in collaboration with Young, Ono hosted a series of New York's first loft performance series — namely, presentations of experimental works in music and poetry, and events. In addition to the aforementioned artists from the West Coast, the artists presented there included Joseph Byrd, Henry Flynt, Toshi Ichianagi, Terry Jennings, Jackson MacLow, Richard Maxfield, Robert Morris, Simone Morris, and La Monte Young. Among the audience members were John Cage, Marcel Duchamp, Peggy Guggenheim, and David Tudor. The so-called Chambers Street concert series proved to be quite influential because it inspired George Maciunas to organize his own concert series, which became the base for Fluxus, the international experimental artists' group that Maciunas founded. As Maciunas once recalled, "This whole series gave me an idea to imitate it and make an even more extensive series at our new gallery."²¹

Despite Ono's initiative in realizing this performance series with Young, her importance has been underrated. Young has been usually credited as the

organizer and Ono was only mentioned as the “owner” of the loft in many historical accounts. A Morris installation within her loft became far more renowned than Ono’s role as the organizer of the performance series. Regarding this, Ono has remarked,

Being a woman and doing my thing in the loft days was especially hard because I was a woman. Most of my friends were all male and they tried to stop me being an artist. They tried to shut my mouth and tried to get me as an owner of the loft who helped in concerts. I had a constant fight with one of the artists who were organizing the concert series. He tried to really shut me up. I had to say “I know you are a very talented artist. All you have to do is to reciprocate that and just realize that I am also a talented artist. You don’t introduce to the critics that this chick is a chick who owns this loft. You don’t say to the reporter. ‘Let’s come to my loft.’” I was not seriously taken as an artist because I was a woman.²²

The reason why Ono has not been properly credited may be mainly because she did not perform her own work in the series. She performed only in Ichiyonagi’s *IBM for Merce Cunningham* on January 7 and 8, 1961. Her poetry was slated to be recited in future programs, but the recitation was later dropped.²³

A couple of accounts, however, mention Ono’s performances of her own works. According to one of her interviews, she once performed *Pea Piece*, in which she threw peas from a bag at people while swinging her hair around. Although its inspiration came from a Japanese ritual for the month of February,²⁴ she conceived the movement of her hair and sounds of peas as a sort of music.²⁵ In addition, Beate Sirota Gordon, the former director of the Japan Society in New York, gives an account of two of Ono’s performances in combination, *Kitchen Piece* and *Smoke Painting*. “Yoko ran to the refrigerator,” she writes, “took out some eggs, ran to a wall covered with a huge piece of white paper and hurled eggs onto the paper. Then she ran back and got some jello which she threw at the wall. Then she splattered some sumi-ink on the paper and used her hands as paint brushes. When the painting was completed, she took a match and set fire to the paper. . . . Luckily, John Cage had warned Yoko to put a fire retardant on the paper so it burned slowly, and we escaped a fiery death.”²⁶ The action of splattering food materials and sumi ink onto a canvas was the performance of *Kitchen Piece*, and the action of burning it was *Smoke Painting*; and while the former seems to relate to French nouveau realist Daniel Spoerri’s assemblages of dishes on tabletops, started around 1960,²⁷ the latter can be compared to Jean Tinguely’s destruction of a gigantic kinetic sculpture, *Homage to New York*, that was performed at the Museum of Modern Art in 1960. Rather than preserving a complete painting like Spoerri, however, Ono immediately destroyed it, like



32. Yoko Ono, *Painting to be Stepped On* at her exhibition *Paintings and Drawings by Yoko Ono*, AG Gallery, New York, 1961. Photo by George Maciunas, The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection, Detroit, Michigan.

Tinguely. Aside from observing the movement of smoke, the intension of *Smoke Painting* seemed to make a point that her painting was based more on performance and the idea of a painting than its object body.

While *Kitchen Piece* and *Smoke Painting* were performed by Ono herself, other works that Ono conceived around 1960–1961 required viewers’ actions to be complete. *Painting to be Stepped On* (see fig. 32), for example, was just a scrap of canvas that was placed on the floor, waiting to be marked with footprints. By focusing solely on the footprints and leaving the canvas unstretched on the floor, Ono clearly undermined the elevated “fine art” status of painting and the notion of the artist as the one with artistic agency. Once Duchamp was among the visitors, and Ono anticipated that he would notice her work lying on the floor, but he did not.²⁸ Ono, who was aware that Duchamp was her predecessor in using chance elements to complete a work, took one step further than Duchamp toward the demythologization of art by requiring others to participate in its making. Ono called such works “instruction paintings.”

For two weeks in July 1961, fifteen "instruction paintings" were shown to the public at the exhibition *Paintings and Drawings by Yoko Ono* at Maciunas's AG Gallery on Madison Avenue. By this time Ono had stopped hosting the performance series at her loft because she felt it had started to become "an establishment."²⁹ Meanwhile, in the spring of 1961, Maciunas began his own concert series and soon became an important supporter of Ono's art.³⁰ Among the works exhibited at AG Gallery were *Painting to Be Stepped On* (see fig. 32); *Painting in Three Stanzas*; *Water Drip Painting*; and *Smoke Painting*.³¹ In notes for the exhibition, Ono described these paintings as "all different shades of charcoal-gray pieces of canvas un-mounted and hung (or laid on floor). But the colors created a definite visual effect, and because of that it was easy to mistake them as monochromatic paintings in se-date gray colouring."³² Although Ono was conscious that her paintings might be misidentified with Minimalist painting, which was emerging around 1960, her presentation method deviated far from that of contemporary avant-garde painters. She left all of her paintings unmounted and hung or laid directly on the floor. Being closer to Japanese calligraphy in their format, these paintings can be seen as Ono's statement against the Western conventional format of the framed canvas.

Many paintings in this exhibition stressed their ephemeral quality and allusions to nature. An example of a painting on the floor, *Water Drip Painting* was described by one visitor as "a bottle of sumi-ink which hung from the ceiling upside down and slowly dripped ink onto a wetted burlap cloth on the floor."³³ For this, Ono perhaps drew an inspiration directly from raindrops. Another nature-inspired painting was *Shadow Painting*, a sumi-stained piece of canvas that hung on the wall and incorporated natural shadows as a figurative element of the painting. These paintings clearly manifested the importance of the ephemeral actions over the art object. A review of this exhibition in *Art News* described *Smoke Painting* and *Painting in Three Stanzas*, noting, "Yoko Ono has made a 'smoke' painting. It consists of a grimy unstrung canvas with a hole in it. Into the hole she stuck a burning candle, withdrawing it when the canvas began to smolder and smoke on its own. The painting's limited life was shortened by half a minute for this report, its living presence snuffed out by a damp cloth as soon as the idea became clear. Another picture was accompanied by a poem about life, about death and about the replacement of the ivy growing through two holes in it. \$75-400."³⁴

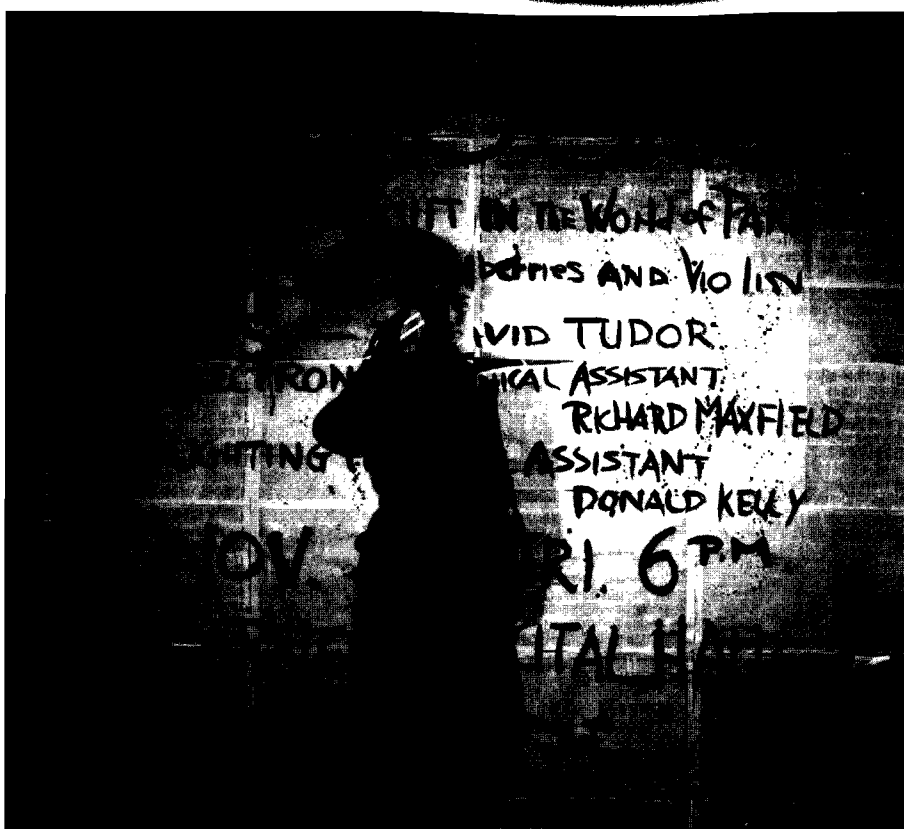
As this review documented, Ono was often present in the gallery in order to give verbal instructions for some paintings to the visitors, and in a few cases, to demonstrate the piece for them. Some paintings were accompanied by written instructions as to how the paintings could be completed. The instruction of *Painting in Three Stanzas*, for example, read, "It ends when its covered with leaves, It ends when the leaves wither, It ends when it turns to ashes, And a new vine will grow, — — —."³⁵ Although this writing seemed more like a poem than an instruction, as an accompaniment to a canvas with live vines sticking out from two holes, it also provided viewers with the clues

to complete the painting in their own imaginations. Through these unconventional methods of presentation, Ono made it clear that her visual artworks should be participatory to the spectators, rather than being static objects to be viewed.

In order to engage more spectators in her art, Ono soon conceived stage-performance pieces, most of which involved her avant-garde colleagues as performers in collaboration with her. She premiered her first stage piece, *Of a Grapefruit in the World of Park*, in a three-person concert, *An Evening of Contemporary Japanese Music and Poetry*, at the Village Gate in New York on April 3, 1961. Ono staged and narrated a poem, to which various instrumentalists responded with their improvisations. Her collaborators included pianists Ichianagi, Toshiro Mayuzumi, and David Tudor; violinists LaMar Alsop and Kenji Kobayashi; violist Jacob Glick; and cellist David Soyer.³⁶ According to a review in the *New York Times*, the piece "called for instrumentalists to improvise sounds according to written, rather than notated, instructions, and their effects were supplemented by the amplified flushing of a sanitary facility." For the flushing noise, Ono had asked organizer David Johnson to go into a bathroom with a stopwatch and microphone and flush the toilet at certain intervals.³⁷ Human voice, instrumental sounds, and the flushing noise were rather spontaneously intermixed to make a lively composition.

Of a Grapefruit in the World of Park was originally a poem published during her college years, but later it was turned into a score for an opera-like stage performance. Retaining the mysterious flavor of the original text, the score took a form of a conversation between a mother and daughter about a grapefruit, clams, and many other nonrelational subjects, intermixed with seemingly nonsensical and mysterious comments such as "would you like to speak to the dead? oh, no I only come here to peel the grapefruit."³⁸ When the piece was performed at the International Week of Today's Music in Montreal in August of 1961, a local paper provided a detailed account, writing, "The work by Yoko Ono took the form of a recitation delivered by the author with her back to the audience. On the top of the dimly lit stage was what appeared to be a canebrake, and the only one decorative item was a garden hat, sprinkled with flowers, and suspended from twenty feet above the stage. As Miss Ono read her poem (picked at random from the script), she was accompanied by a large number of loudspeakers through which was played a tape recording of what might have been the cries of some creature in a terminal stage of idiocy. Sample lines from Miss Ono's script: 'Let's count the hairs of the dead child,' 'Drink Pepsi-Cola.'"³⁹ This account suggests that Ono used loudspeakers instead of instrumentalists in this performance. These speakers would play her experimental vocal pieces, some of which sounded like "cries of some creature." On principle, Ono's performances always slightly changed in each presentation, depending on factors such as the availability of performers and the size of the theater.

When the same work was presented at Ono's first solo recital, *Works by*



33. Yoko Ono and her calligraphy, image intended as poster for *Works by Yoko Ono*, Carnegie Recital Hall, New York, 1961. Photo by George Maciunas, The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection, Detroit, Michigan

Yoko Ono at the Carnegie Recital Hall on November 24, 1961 (see fig. 33), she had many collaborators again, including George Brecht, Joseph Byrd, Philip Corner, Jonas Mekas, and La Monte Young for voice and instruments and Trisha Brown and Yvonne Rainer for movement. According to Jill Johnston of the *Village Voice*, Ono's "theatre of events" presented two other pieces, *A Piece for Strawberries and Violin* and *AOS—to David Tudor*, combining "electronic sounds, vocal and instrumental sounds, body movement, and movement of properties."⁴⁰ The "properties" referred to objects such as a table, chair, toilet bowl, and an assortment of boxes. The week before the performance Ono "had given instructions to everyone as to what they should do, so that there would be a feeling of togetherness based on alienation, since no one knew the other person's instructions."⁴¹ Although there were scripts for her events, they were not as structured as those of Kaprow's early Happenings. Ono's instructions allowed the performers' own interpretations and improvisations, which as a whole would create tensions.

In order to help the audience sense such tensions, Ono set the lighting of the stage very dim. In so doing she urged the audience to strain their five senses, as in real life where people "have to strain to read other people's

minds." Instead of dramatic movements and sounds found in the conventional theater performances, Ono sought to realize such strained movements as "two men tied up together with lots of empty cans and bottles around them" to "move from one end of the stage to the other very quietly and slowly without making any sounds" and "a sound that almost doesn't come out," or "sounds of people's fears and stuttering."⁴² The electronic technical assistance by composer Richard Maxfield enabled Ono to attach contact microphones to the performers, which transmitted the subtle sounds of their movements and even their panting. The review by Johnston confirmed the effect of such devices: "I was alternately stupefied and aroused, with longer stretches of stupor, as one might feel when relaxing into a doze induced by a persistent mumble of low-toned voices."⁴³ In terms of music, Ono was moving toward more human voices rather than the electronic sounds used by her contemporary composers such as John Cage, Morton Feldman, and Stephen Wolpe. Regarding dance, Ono's taste for extremely strained movements matched that of Brown and Rainer, who were concurrently extracting simple movements from everyday life.

With this recital, Ono broke down the conventional boundaries among music, art, dance, theater, and poetry by presenting her performance pieces with artists from different fields. Such an interdisciplinary format of performance presentation became a part of the basis for Fluxus concerts and events. In fact, Maciunas, who was involved in the production of this concert, would organize Fluxus concerts in a similar format in Europe the following year and at the same Carnegie Recital Hall several years later. Likewise, Charlotte Moorman, then a cellist at the Julliard School of Music, who assisted the production of this concert and played cello in one of the events, was inspired to become an avant-garde performer through this experience and would organize New York's annual Avant-Garde Art Festivals from 1963.

Several months prior to Ono's recital, during her exhibition at AG Gallery, Maciunas was trying to name the movement that he felt was emerging from the group of avant-garde composers, poets, and visual artists around him. Maciunas asked Ono for an idea, but she was not interested in grouping artists. She felt that all of the artists, including herself, were "independent, each one with a different background" and that the formation of a group would constrict their activities.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, Ono was listed in Maciunas's *News-Policy-Letter No. 2 (Fluxus Festival Only)*, among the members of the festival planning committee for the Fluxus Internationale Festspiele Nuester Musik in Wiesbaden in September 1962, the first major Fluxus performance series.⁴⁵ By the end of 1961, Maciunas moved to Germany and invited some New York artists, including Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles, to perform under the name of Fluxus. Ono, on the other hand, decided to go to Japan in 1962, because Ichiyanagi had moved back to Japan earlier and set up an opportunity for her to have a concert in Tokyo. In addition, Ono started to feel that the avant-garde circle around her in New York was becoming a sort of establishment, and needed to keep herself independent from affiliat-

ing with any particular group. Ironically, due to her ten-year stay in the United States, Ono would find herself more a stranger in her native country than in her adapted country.

The Stranger in Japan, 1962 to 1964

Ono's original intention in going to Japan was just "to stay there for two weeks to do a concert,"⁴⁶ but she ended up remaining there for two and half years. Although Japan was a difficult environment in which to find opportunities to present her experimental artworks, Ono's stay in Japan was fruitful in terms of meeting similar-minded contemporary Japanese artists. Also, many pieces that she would later perform in New York and London were "inspired directly from the environment in Japan" comprised of its society, culture, and nature. Ono adds, "Had I stayed in New York I would have become one of those grande dames of the avant-garde, repeating what I was doing."⁴⁷ Leaving New York for a while allowed her to reflect upon her artistic direction through fresh eyes.

Ono returned to Japan during one of the most active period of the post-war Japanese avant-garde art. Many artists were radically breaking away from traditions and exploring new expressions through various media. The first venue of Ono's performance in Japan was the Sōgetsu Art Center, which had been actively introducing experimental art and music since the late 1950s.⁴⁸ Prior to the event, on May 24, 1962, the Japanese press treated Ono as a novelty, a young female avant-garde composer who had come back from New York after ten years. While *Works of Yoko Ono* consisted of four multimedia sections — events, music, poems, and instructions for paintings, the performance of the events and music left stronger impressions on Japanese audience than the exhibition sections.

The exhibition sections, which were displayed in a lobby adjacent to the concert hall for a longer duration of time, included *Touch Poems*, a handmade book with human hair inserted between blank pages, that was intended for viewers to touch, and *Instructions for Paintings*, about thirty-eight sheets of paper with instructional text in Japanese neatly handprinted by Ichiyanagi.⁴⁹ One of the instructions was *Kowareta mishin no tame no e* (*Painting for a Broken Sewing Machine*) (see fig. 34). A translation of its Japanese text reads, "Put a broken sewing machine in a glass water tank that is about ten times or twenty times larger than the sewing machine. Once a year on a snowy day, take it out in an open space, and have everybody throws stones at it." The poetic yet seemingly nonsensical content of such *Instructions* were not appreciated by many viewers at the time, but they marked Ono's significant departure from the art object; exhibiting only texts as work of art was a big step toward conceptual art. Ono recalled that nobody but critic Yoshiaki Tōno recognized the importance of her *Instructions* back then.⁵⁰

As at her concert at Carnegie Recital Hall, many avant-garde artists par-

こわれたミシンのための絵
こわれたミシンをもう十倍より
くはせ傷むのかうすの水槽に
れて一年に一回、雪の日に広
場に置いてみんなで石をなげろ

34. Yoko Ono, *Kowareta Mishin no tame no e* (*Painting for a Broken Sewing Machine*), approximately 10 inches, hand printed by Toshi Ichiyanagi, 1962. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection, Detroit, Michigan.

ticipated in the events and music portions of *Works of Yoko Ono*, making it more a collaborative work than a one-person show.⁵¹ As the program noted, Ono's works were performed by over thirty vanguard luminaries, including artist Genpei Akasegawa, music critic Kuniharu Akiyama, composer Takehisa Kosugi, dancer Tatsumi Hijikata, and art critic Yoshiaki Tōno. These essential members of the Tokyo avant-garde art community became witnesses to Ono's debut in Japan.

One event, AOS — *To David Tudor*, was called by Tōno an "opera without the sound of instruments." This "opera" proceeded as follows: performers read newspapers in different languages by the light of flashlights or match flames; several men bound by rope to different objects proceeded from one side of the stage to the other and back; speeches of historic figures such as Adolf Hitler and the Japanese emperor were played on a tape recorder; and Tōno and pantomimist Théo Lèsoualch gave a twenty-minute French lesson while women's hands and legs moved through openings in a curtain at the back of the stage. The succession of these disparate actions and sounds were suggestive of the chaos in the human life during and after the World War II. At the end of AOS, "all the participants lined up on the stage and watched members of the audience becoming [themselves] the 'audience'"⁵² (see fig. 10, in chapter 1). Ono later scored this piece as *Audience Piece*, in which a performer is instructed to watch a different member of the audience until

that person averts his eyes, and then to repeat the same action with a different audience target. While most of the audience left quickly, some people remained for a long time. One of them abruptly came up to the stage to pinch the nose of all the performers, which caused a fight with one of the performers. In the end, exhausted, most of the performers were lying down on the stage. It was after one o'clock in the morning when the event finally ended by order of the concert hall's administrator.⁵³ With *Audience Piece*, Ono sought to subvert the conventional relationship between performer and audience. The audience—which is usually supposed to just watch the performers—is now being looked at by the performers as if expected to perform.⁵⁴

Throughout the evening, Ono tried to break away from the traditional one-way relationship between performer and audience by urging the audience to assume an active role. To challenge the audience's capacity for perception, the entire concert was conducted in darkness, only partially lit by flashlights or spotlights, or even a match, and sounds were often very subtle. Although most of the reviews criticized this aspect, one unidentified reviewer commented in more positive terms, writing, "The audience seems to have had unusual experiences . . . seeing the sequence of these apparently senseless mundane acts. It is not an art that has already been completed, but an art from which the audience can receive something by witnessing the unfolding of nonsense acts, experiencing the process together with the performers."⁵⁵ As this reviewer rightly pointed out, Ono intended her art to be always "unfinished" in a sense that required audience participation. According to Ichiyanagi, Ono insisted that "the work is not something for me to present but for them [the audience] to seek out," and that the audience member should "have his/her unique experience by feeling an 'atmosphere' and a 'flow of air' in the darkness, or by seeing what one wishes to see by lighting matches, or by walking to grope for performers."⁵⁶ In other words, to appreciate Ono's work, the audience had to take an active role, filling in the invisible or inaudible parts through its own imagination or by participating in the performance.

As many press reviews documented, Ono's events were received as eccentric, and she was seen as responsible for the introduction of a new American trend, Happenings.⁵⁷ After her concert, artists and critics popularized the word *hapuningu* (a phonetic translation of *happening*) because it was flashier than the word *ibento* (event). Ono's events, however, developed partially in critical response to Happenings. With dim lighting, and subtle sounds and movements, she intended to intrigue the audience and have them use their own senses to interact with her performances. She expected the Japanese audience to share an acute sensibility to catch hidden messages in her pieces. Ono wished that even in the darkness, the audience would grope for the invisible *kehai*, or vibration.⁵⁸ Since most Japanese critics at the time were concerned with introducing new Western artists and new Western artistic trends, they easily overlooked the potential of domestic artistic sources.

Critic Donald Richie strongly denounced Ono's concert, claiming that

she stole ideas from John Cage.⁵⁹ As Ichiyanagi claimed in response to Richie in another article, Ono's music was far from Cage's.⁶⁰ In fact, her essay "Kyokōsha no gen" ("The Word of a Fabricator"), which was written prior to the concert, implicitly criticizes Cage's chance operation as "an attempt to raise men's [*sic*] stature to that of nature, by regarding nature's chance operational characteristic as superior to men's own fictional order, and succumbing to and adopting the chance operation as men's own."⁶¹ Ono found "chance operation" too simplistic because contemporary humankind is "soaked to the bones with a fabricator called consciousness." Instead she believed that "only the most fictional rules" might enable people to transcend their consciousness. Her performances were composed of what she called "the most fictional rules." She did not use chance operations like Cage, but instead extracted some actions from daily life and arranged them in a fictional way. Ono's critical intentions, however, did not communicate to the Japanese audience as much as she had hoped they would.

Disappointment and isolation from the Japanese art world led Ono to a nervous breakdown in the summer of 1962. By this time, she was feeling overshadowed by her successful husband and depressed that she was nothing other than a famous composer's wife. In her isolation and depression, she attempted suicide. After this traumatic incident, she admitted herself to a psychiatric hospital.⁶² It was American filmmaker Anthony Cox who often visited her in the sanatorium and aided in her recovery. Supposedly Cox had seen Ono's art in New York and came to Japan to look for her. Cox provided psychological support for Ono to regain confidence. During her hospitalization, Ono started compiling her early instruction pieces in order to publish a book. Her earlier hardship perhaps made her realize the need to express herself more. After leaving the hospital, Ono and Cox moved into an apartment in Shibuya, a central district in Tokyo where many non-Japanese lived.

By early October, Ono was well enough to perform in the Japanese tour of John Cage and David Tudor, which Ichiyanagi and Ono helped to realize. In Cage's *Music Walk*, which was performed in the middle of *An Evening of John Cage/Sōgetsu Contemporary Series 17* at Tokyo Bunka Kaikan Hall, Ono improvised and laid herself on the top of the piano with her head toward the audience (see fig. 11, in chapter 1). It was her interpretation to make "music walk" into a "conceptual walk."⁶³ For its outrageousness, the photograph documenting this piece was the one most often reproduced in reviews, but Ono's action was not considered her own improvisation. Similarly, the press ignored Ono's voice contribution to Cage's *Aria and Solo for Piano with Fontana Mix*, which opened the *An Evening of David Tudor* the following day.⁶⁴ In addition, in *Flying Chair Piece*—Ono's own idea but mistaken as Cage's work—she sat on a chair that hung from the ceiling of the stage.⁶⁵ Most critics not only ignored her presence, but some also criticized her acts as merely eccentric.

In 1963, after marrying Cox and while working odd jobs, Ono continued to create her works. Meanwhile, Ono's and Cox's daughter Kyoko was born

in August. In July of 1964, Ono self-published *Grapefruit*, an anthology of her instruction pieces in a limited edition of five hundred. The book was originally planned to be published through Fluxus by Maciunas, but his plan fell through. Maciunas nonetheless helped the book's distribution through his Fluxus connections.⁶⁶ *Grapefruit* thus helped disseminate Ono's early instruction art to a wider audience in the United States, Europe, and Japan. The text was bilingual: about one-third of its 150 works were also accompanied by Japanese versions. In general, the Japanese texts were more abstract in terms of wording while the English versions had more specifications.⁶⁷ Some of the Japanese pieces had different titles from the English versions,⁶⁸ suggesting that the Japanese texts did not always serve as literal translations of the English texts. Ono conceived most of her works in English in the United States, but she often worked directly in Japanese while living in Japan.⁶⁹ The works in *Grapefruit* were divided into five sections: music, painting, event, poetry, and object.⁷⁰ These categories did not, however, strictly define the format of each work; her music could easily be read as an event, and poetry as an object. The interdisciplinary nature of Ono's art as reflected in *Grapefruit* was close to that which Fluxus artist Dick Higgins would later call *intermedia* in 1966.⁷¹

Early 1964 turned to be the most productive period for Ono. She often presented her works and events at the Naiqua Gallery in Tokyo, owned by a doctor of internal medicine (*naiqua* in Japanese) who had considerable interest in avant-garde art. Through this gallery Ono became more connected with avant-garde artists in Tokyo. Regular participants in her events included Nam June Paik and future members of Fluxus such as Takehisa Kosugi, Shigeo Kubota, and Chieko Shiomi. In February, Ono held an event, *Touch Piece*, there. One of the participants, Takahiko Imura, noted that a group of people including Ono sat in a circle and touched each other in silence.⁷² Paik joined the event from his home by ringing a telephone in the gallery in a serial manner.⁷³ On April 25, 1964, Ono's *Fly* was also performed at Naiqua by invited participants including Kosugi, Kubota, and Paik, who were asked to "come with preparations to fly." Ono was absent; she intentionally did not attend in order to make a point that her piece was designated for other people to activate, and that she could also realize it in her mind. Participants jumped from a ladder that was prepared at the gallery; Ono heard later that they seriously discussed whether flying was the same as falling or dying.⁷⁴ She encouraged such a free discussion among the participants as a means of expanding the meaning of her work.

Besides these physical performance events, there were conceptual ones. The event 9 A.M. to 11 A.M., later called *Morning Event*, took place on the roof of the gallery building on May 24, and on the roof of Ono's apartment on May 31, 1964. According to Ono's notice for the event, "people were asked to wash their ears before they came" and "each person was asked to pay the price of 'morning'" (see fig. 35). Fifteen people came to the event and bought

NOTICE

EVENT "9 a.m. to 11 a.m." took place on both May 24 and 31st, 1964.

(First day: NAIQUA GALLERY ROOF Second day: YOKO ONO ROOF) People were asked to wash their ears before they came.
Each person was asked to pay the price of "Morning".

Also, other "Mornings" were on SALE, and they were sold as follows.

"morning" PRICE LIST

Jan. 1st, 1992	10 yen ✓✓
Feb. 3rd, 1987	15 yen ✓
Feb. 4th, 1991	25 yen ✓
Feb. 12th, 1991	50 25 yen ✓
March 3rd, 1991	50 yen ✓
May 24th 1992	50 yen ✓
June 11th, 1991	100 yen ✓✓✓ SOLD OUT
August 3rd, 1995	1000 yen ✓
September 8th, 1995	500 yen ✓✓
November 16th 1996	500 yen ✓✓
December 27th, 1999	1000 yen

"Morning" byers

TAKEHISA KOSUGI
SHIGEKO KUBOTA
YASUNAO TONE
CHIEKO SHIOMI
GENPEI AKASEGAWA
SHO KAZAKURA
MASAO ADACHI
MIKIO DOI
MIYORI HAYASHI
SHOICHI TANIKAWA
TATSU IZUMI
NAM JUNE PAIK
DAN RICHTER
JED CURTIS
TONY COX

TYPES

- A until sunrise
- B after sunrise
- C all morning

(THE PRICE does not change by the Type)

ONLY 33 "MORNINGS" WERE Made.
SINCE 15 were sold as above,
I have 18 left.

When you order it by mail,
make clear what date and
type you want, will send you
by mail. (include cash.)

you can see the sky through it.
Also, wear gloves when you handle
so you will not hurt your fingers.

Yoko Ono

Shibuya, Tokyo



order sheet

name

address

DATE OF "MORNING"

TYPE OF "MORNING"

OTHERS

35. Yoko Ono, notice with a price list for *Morning Event*, 1964. Photo courtesy of Lenono Photo Archive, New York.



36. Yoko Ono, performing *Bag Piece* with Tony Cox, Tokyo, 1964. Photo by Minoru Hirota.

different “mornings” in the future for various prices. Shards of broken milk bottles with tags were given as tokens. Many people actually paid arbitrary prices in exchange for these glass shards, but some payment must have been imaginary. For example, Paik gave one morning a price of three yen and fifty sen, obsolete currency that he would never be able to pay.⁷⁵ Participants understood the work’s conceptual content. After the event, in order to sell eighteen leftover mornings, Ono made a mail-order sheet with the instruction, “When you order it by mail, make clear what date and type you want (include cash.) Will send you by mail.” “Types” of the mornings were: (A) until sunrise; (B) after sunrise; and (C) all morning. The sheet also included how to handle the morning: “you can see the sky through it. Also, wear gloves when you handle so you will not hurt your fingers.”⁷⁶ The entire event, including the mail-order aspect, was conducted on the premise of a mind game.

The roof of Ono and Cox’s apartment became a site for other performances, though only a few have been documented. One of the rare extant photographs, taken by Minoru Hirata, who was recording many artists’ performances at the time, shows Ono and Cox demonstrating Ono’s new work, *Bag Piece* (see fig. 36), in front of him. In *Bag Piece*, two performers usually enter a large black bag and take off their clothes and put them back on before exiting the bag. The photograph vividly illustrates how Ono’s artistic expression grew out of everyday life and performance was integral to her daily activities.

In July 1964, Ono, with the help of Cox and their friend Al Wonderick (currently Wunderich), realized a three-day program comprised of a concert, an event, and a symposium presenting her work at three different locations in Kyoto. The *Insound/Instructure: Contemporary American Music* concert at Yamaichi Hall consisted of three sections—“Sprout,” “Motional,” and “Whisper”—but which section referred to which pieces was not clear. Performances included *Fly Piece*, *Bag Piece*, *Striptease for Three*, *Word of Mouth Piece*, and *Cut Piece*.⁷⁷ For this version of *Fly Piece* several ladders of different heights were set up onstage for the

audience to come and fly from. Ono and Wonderick performed *Bag Piece* in the same way that Ono and Cox had demonstrated it on the roof of their apartment. Although it seemed suggestive of a sexual activity, Ono’s message of the piece was “what you receive is in your mind”—that our perception is not necessarily reality.

Similarly, Ono alluded to eroticism in *Striptease for Three*, but the piece presented just three chairs in a row without any performer. After a curtain raise, the chairs remained under spotlights for several minutes. Ono explained that “chairs can be as erotic as women,” and “if it is a chair or stone or woman, it is the same thing.”⁷⁸ Again, Ono intended to demonstrate that the audience can imagine what they want to see in their minds rather than solely depending on what they see. In other words, the piece was meant to be a “stripping of the mind.” The title *Striptease* may have been a pun on the words *strip* and *tease*, and Ono “teased” the viewers’ expectation to see a conventional striptease by “stripping” their minds. The Japanese audience, however, hardly grasped her pun. Later, Ono amusingly noted that “the High Monk” was dissatisfied with her “striptease” because he expected an avant-garde composer to present music rather than doing things similar to Zen practices.

Word of Mouth Piece may have been based on the American children’s “telephone game” or a similar Japanese game. As a word gets passed through the performers and the audience, it gradually changes and the final outcome may deviate far from the original. What words were actually passed around at the performance is not known, but the action of a word spreading itself seems to have been essential. In a letter to George Maciunas that was published in the beginning of her *Grapefruit*, Ono stated, “Most of my pieces are meant to be spread by word of mouth [and] therefore, do not have scores. This means is very important since the gradual change which occurs [sic] in the piece by word spreading is also part of the piece.”⁷⁹ *Word of Mouth Piece* summarized Ono’s concept of art. Her instruction pieces were originally ideas sometimes accompanied by objects or performances, and they could be spread through word of mouth and changed over a period of time. Even after they were written as scores, Ono would often create different variations of similar concepts, as seen in *Grapefruit*, cherishing her works’ natural evolutions.

The same Kyoto concert ended with the most sensational work, *Cut Piece*, in which audience members were invited to come up to the stage and cut a piece of the seated performer’s clothing with scissors (see fig. 37). As stated in its score, the piece could have been featured anybody—including a man—and not necessarily the artist or a female performer. However, as it featured Ono in this case, the piece created an enormous tension between her and the audience primarily because the audience was unexpectedly put in a position of committing themselves to a taboo behavior. Since the subject was a woman, the act of stripping her piece by piece resembled a rape.



37. Yoko Ono, *Cut Piece*, 1964. Photo by Minoru Niizuma, courtesy of Lenono Photo Archive, New York.

The invitation triggered the voyeuristic desire among the audience even though most of them felt restrained from participating in the event and wanted to avoid a troublesome confrontation. The audience was left restless in an inner conflict between desire and repulsion.

Cut Piece demanded an action from the audience, reversing the conventional passive role of the audience to the active one of the performer. At the same time, it provoked a wide range of emotions among audience members. Some members unexpectedly found violent impulses in their minds while others remained restrained. The most tension rose in the theater when a Japanese man raised a pair of scissors above Ono as if he were going to stab her. It turned out to be just a theatrical gesture, but such an action revealed how vulnerable the performer was in the eyes of audience. By continuing to sit still in a manner of Zen meditation, however, Ono projected an image of a controlled and confident person. Showing almost no emotion, she functioned as a mirror reflecting the feelings of audience members; through watching the performance, the audience discovered voyeurism or violence within itself.

Ono originally drew inspiration for *Cut Piece* from a story of Prince Mahasattva (the future Buddha) that is depicted in one of the panels of the Tamamushi Shrine, located at Hōryū-ji, the oldest extant Buddhist temple in Japan.⁸⁰ In this tale, called "Hungry Tigress of Jataka," Prince Mahasattva jumped off a cliff to offer his body to a hungry tiger. The prince was out on his spiritual journey after abandoning his privileges. Every time he encountered needy animals, he gave whatever was requested of him. Sacrificing his flesh was an ultimate act of giving. By wearing the best possible outfit she

had for the performance, Ono offered to the audience not only her physical self, but also her mental self. In fact, in later performances of *Cut Piece* she held a scrolled poster with the words, "My body is the scar of my mind." In a later statement, she explained that "People went on cutting the parts they do not like of me, [and] finally . . . only the stone remained of me that was in me, but they were still not satisfied and wanted to know what it's like in the stone."⁸¹ The stone here seems to be a metaphor for the heart, the core of the human existence; even such a private and delicate part of an individual can easily be violated by others. Through intense exchanges between the performers and participants, *Cut Piece* eloquently addressed the issues of the self versus others — namely, private versus public — and violence versus giving.

In its self-sacrificial determination, *Cut Piece* unmistakably echoed the attitude of nonviolence maintained by the Indian pacifist Mahatma Gandhi. Although such pacifist intention may have been overridden with recent feminist interpretation of the piece, it was made clear when Ono performed *Cut Piece* in Paris in 2003, thirty-seven years later. In the statement that accompanied this event, she stated that the performance was an expression of her "hope for World Peace" and related it to how "some people went to Palestine to act as human shields" during the war on Iraq.⁸² Ono's protofeminist consciousness about imposed passivity on women is certainly reflected in *Cut Piece*, but it was only one of many motivations behind the piece. Since there is no recorded public response to this original performance in Kyoto, it is impossible to discuss its reception there.⁸³

The Tokyo presentation of *Cut Piece* at the *Yoko Ono Sayonara Concert: Strip-Tease Show* on August 11, 1964, was at least reviewed by several critics, but only indirectly. Ono realized this event with the assistance of Cox and another American artist, Jeff Perkins, at Sōgetsu Art Center in Tokyo. The program was similar to that of the Kyoto concert. According to one of the press reviews, the first piece was *Bag Piece* and the second *Cut Piece*.⁸⁴ Another review noted that the performance also included *Chair Piece*, *Clock Piece*, and *Snake Piece*.⁸⁵ The audience's reaction varied. While one audience member was impressed that "a clue of the substance was performed," others asked to get back the admission fee because "there was no music."⁸⁶ As an explanation of the title *Strip-Tease Show*, Ono told one reviewer that "the ultimate subject that humans want to express is a strip," and that "art has come to the point where it has to reveal its private parts."⁸⁷ She also mentioned that her stripping was not "to reveal to others," but for the audience to "see something hidden in humans."⁸⁸ Nonetheless, most of the reviews only ridiculed the concert, with such headlines as "Is this art?"⁸⁹

This concert literally became Ono's farewell to Japan, ending her eventful sojourn. Two years in Japan offered Ono opportunities to affirm her cultural roots and to become involved in one of the most active periods of the Japanese avant-garde. Her exploration of extrasensory perceptions that had begun earlier in New York found roots in the Japanese life style, Zen philosophy and aesthetics, and Japanese traditional arts such as *Noh* theater. Partly

due to the dramatic changes of seasons, the Japanese have developed over centuries a lifestyle and culture that are extremely sensitive to nature and environment. The Japanese mode of communication itself requires "reading between lines," or speculating the meaning hidden behind what i actually said or written. During her stay, Ono realized that what she and her New York peers were attracted to partially had its origins in Japan. Her interactions with the Japanese avant-garde also helped her affirm her artistic direction. Ono's daring presentations of events, in turn, inspired some Japanese artists to move to New York, hoping to challenge the international art scene.

These positive aspects of her days in Japan were not enough to counterbalance the negative ones. For many reasons, Ono chose to return to New York, judging that it was difficult for her to continue her artistic activities in Japan. Her dissatisfaction with the Japanese art world was one of the main factors for her decision. In an interview, she made a critical comment on Japanese art critics: "Japanese critics were, in those days, so influenced by Western Europe and the United States that their main work was to introduce artists who were featured in American art magazines. They were just picking and writing on Japanese artists whose works were in a similar style to American trends, such as Neo-Dada and Pop. It was natural then that they maintained a brother-in-law-like attitude to me, being very indifferent to everything I did."⁹⁰ As Ono pointed out, most Japanese critics at that time merely followed the trends in Western art without exploring critical contexts of their own. Because they borrowed the art-historical discourse from the West, they could only write about Japanese artists whose works fit Western criteria. Unable to find the right vocabulary to describe Ono's works, many journalists and critics instead ridiculed or ignored her art as merely following John Cage.

Other reasons for her departure included financial hardship. Before leaving, she commented, "It is easier to do artistic activities in the United States than in Japan. I will continue making works while working as an office girl."⁹¹ Another and most compelling reason was her feeling of being a stranger in Tokyo. In an interview, she told that she was determined to live in New York for the rest of her life partially because she could not become accustomed to Tokyo and wanted to escape from it.⁹² Her feeling of unfamiliarity in Tokyo was not only due to her hometown's transformation into a megalopolis, but also due to the change in the political climate. While American occupation was welcomed as a democratizing force in Japan during the years immediately after World War II, it became the focus of protests by the late 1950s, resulting in the 1960 mass riot by students against the renewal of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty. By this time, the Japanese had become disillusioned with the United States in terms of its strong influence on materialistic culture and politics. America's continuous nuclear experiments, especially, made them furious and brought protest against America's further militarization of Japan. Ono's hybridity of being both Japanese and American suffered from the reemerging hostility between the two countries. The feeling of being a

stranger in her home country made Ono decide to move back to her adopted country. Ono's departure from Haneda Airport in 1964, in which she was seen off by many artist friends, was recorded in a documentary television program on Japanese avant-garde art. Ono told her friends that she was "going home" to New York City, where she belonged.⁹³

In and out of Fluxus: The New York Years, 1964–1966

Ono's subsequent two-year period in New York was filled with both Fluxus-related activities and her independent activities. Even though she was physically absent for the first two years of Fluxus activities, she was considered one of the movement's founding members. Some of her pieces had been played in Fluxus concerts in Europe. When Ono returned to New York City, she immediately found herself in the middle of the Fluxus circle. Maciunas was ready to produce her works in Fluxus publications and concerts and to promote them.⁹⁴ "Ono's Sales List," a half-conceptual sales list the artist composed in 1965, listed several objects that she offered to distribute through the Fluxus network. Among the realized pieces in the list, *Self-Portrait* was the earliest to be made into a Fluxus work. Consisting of a small mirror in a manila envelope, the work was inserted in some copies of *Fluxus I*, the three-dimensional anthology of works by Fluxus artists started in 1964.⁹⁵ One of her simplest yet most provocative works, *Self-Portrait* invited the viewer to open the envelope to look into a mirrored reflection of herself. The Fluxus objects actually executed by Ono were few; Maciunas often executed objects on his own, realizing Ono's and other artists' ideas.

One of the earliest of Ono's participations in collective Fluxus events was at the *Perpetual Fluxfest* held at Cinematheque in London's East End Theater, which started in 1964. The festival, which was to present nine Fluxus artists' events on different days, included Ono's events on June 27, 1965. Ono performed *Bag Piece* and *Beat Piece* with other artists including Kubota and Paik. Maciunas performed her *Wall Piece for Orchestra* by literally following the instruction to "hit a wall with your head," and nearly killed himself.⁹⁶ Although Maciunas considered Ono one of the principal members of Fluxus, Ono remained ambivalent about associating herself with the group; as a "purist" believing in artist's individual creativity, she was still against the idea of a movement. She pointed out that "Fluxus was George and George was Fluxus. He would list all the names sometimes without the permission of the artists and then drop a name or two because he'd had a personal fight with them. He was headstrong and so was I."⁹⁷ Like some other members of Fluxus, Ono continued her independent activities outside of Fluxus. While joining some Fluxus activities, she simultaneously presented her works with Charlotte Moorman, the organizer of the Annual Avant-Garde Art Festival, who was considered Maciunas's rival.

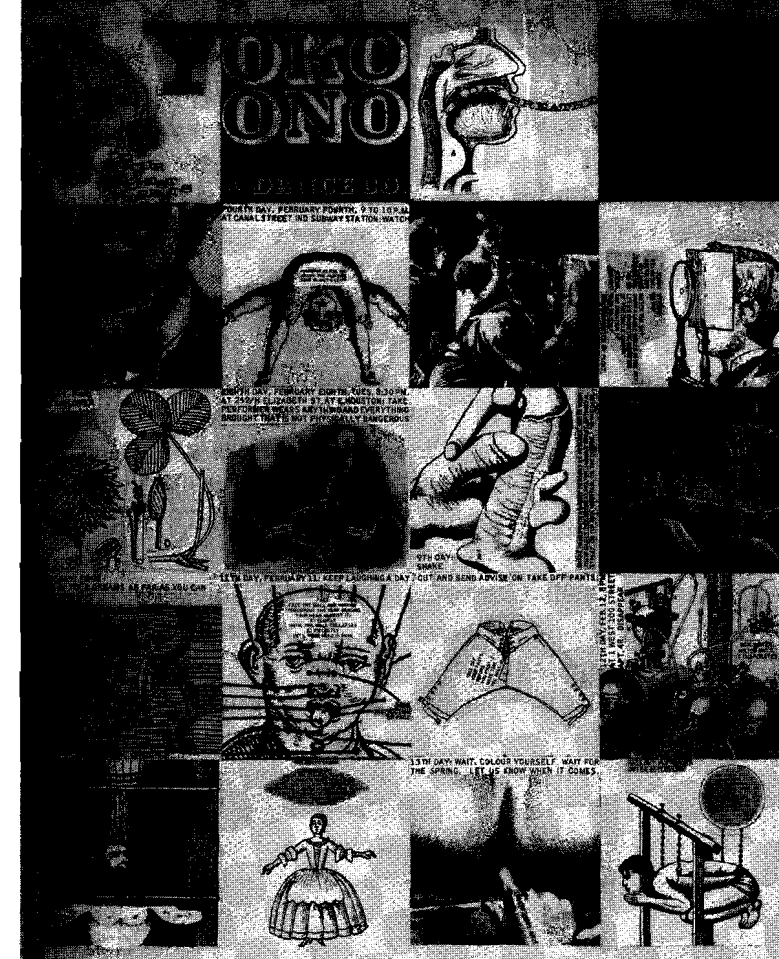
Preceding the *Perpetual Fluxfest*, on March 21, 1965, Ono held a solo con-

cert, separate from Fluxus activities, for the second time at Carnegie Recital Hall. The concert featured five pieces, most of which had been performed in Japan earlier: *Bag Piece*, *Striptease for Three*, *Cut Piece*, an untitled piece, and *Clock Piece*. *Clock Piece* asked the audience to wait for an alarm clock to go off, yet nobody knew for what time it was set. Since the hall was only rented until 11 P.M. and the clock had not rung, the producer asked Ono to close the show. Some members of the audience, however, resisted in order to finish the piece and tried to attack the producer.⁹⁸

In September of the same year, a Fluxus concert was held at Carnegie Recital Hall for the second time. Among sixteen pieces played in the concert, Ono's contributions were *4 Pieces for Orchestra — To La Monte Young* and *Sky Piece for Jesus Christ*. Different from Ono's other compositions, the former utilized actual string instruments, though they were played in unconventional ways: by rubbing a dowel, screwdriver, or file across the hole of any string instrument, by rubbing an eraser on the surface of a wind instrument, and by peeling off tape which had been adhered to the instrument.⁹⁹ A unique mixture of tools that Ono chose may have been what she thought as attributes to Young. In *Sky Piece for Jesus Christ*, a chamber orchestra was gradually wrapped in gauze bandages while it performed classical music (see fig. 38). Since John Cage was sometimes called Jesus Christ of the same initials by his friends, this piece also referred to Cage.¹⁰⁰ The act of silencing musicians with bandages also referenced Cage's explorations of silence.



38. Yoko Ono, *Sky Piece for Jesus Christ*, Carnegie Recital Hall, New York, 1965. Photo by Peter Moore, © Estate of Peter Moore/VAGA, New York.



39. Yoko Ono, *Do It Yourself Fluxfest P*, Yoko Ono and Dan Flavin, 1966. Mechanical artist's page in *Fluxus* newspaper no. 7, c. 1966. Photo by George Maciunas. Courtesy of the Gilman Collection, Detroit, Michigan.

Compared to the earlier works Ono performed independently, these two works had more ties with conventional music concerts, and might have been specifically designed for the Fluxus concert.

In February 1966, Ono organized the thirteen-day “Do It Yourself” Dance Festival as a part of *Fluxfest*, another festival of Fluxus events. The program, whose graphic design was executed by Maciunas, functioned as day-to-day instructions (see fig. 39). For example, it instructed one to “breathe” for the first three days, to “watch” at a Canal Street subway station on the fourth day, and to “boil water” and “watch until it evaporates” on the twelfth day. Although some of the instructions were impossible or hard to realize, such as “Face the wall and imagine throughout the year banging your head against it,” many instructions were actually performed. On the twelfth day, for example, some people gathered at Ono's apartment at 1 West 100th Street to watch water evaporate. Placed in the center of a white room was a “disappearing machine”—a still in the form of an elaborate contraption with glass pipes, created in collaboration with Maciunas. As the water in the machine evaporated, the room was to conceptually turn upside down. Just before the

audience came, Ono attached several statements to various surfaces, which included "This is the floor" on the ceiling; "This is the ceiling" on the floor; and "This window is 2000ft wide" on the windowsill. These playful texts became main components of her *Blue Room Event*, which would be installed in various places after 1966.¹⁰¹

Ono's venues for presenting her work further expanded to the rooftops, street corners, the Judson Gallery of the Judson Memorial Church, and a restaurant. At the Judson Memorial Church Hall and later at a Japanese macrobiotic restaurant called Paradox in the East Village, Ono was involved in presenting a multimedia environment piece, *Stone*, which was developed in collaboration with Tony Cox, Jon Hendricks, and Jeff Perkins. According to one audience member at Paradox, Takahiko Iimura, the audience members were instructed to, one at a time, enter a white room and then a black bag. From inside of the bag, each could see rings of light turning around the room.¹⁰² Ono's contribution was the large black bag, derived from her *Bag Piece*. Cox and Hendricks were involved in the concept and realization; sound was provided by Michael Mason; and film projection was by Jeff Perkins. Following the conception of another environment piece, *Blue Room Event*, *Stone* marked Ono's engagement in environmental works.

After her return from Japan, the vibrant avant-garde communities in New York City helped Ono regain a sense of belonging and affirmation. While she felt like a stranger in Tokyo, she was welcomed as one of the leading artists within New York avant-garde circles, including Fluxus. Dynamics within these groups stimulated her to experiment with new forms such as multimedia environments. While exploring presentation venues in and out of the Fluxus circle, Ono started to look into possible European venues. A timely invitation arrived from London to participate in a three-day Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) and its following events in September of 1966. Just as Ono's sojourn to Japan had been extended, she would remain in London for several years in order to explore new artistic directions.

The London Years, 1966–1970

Ono was invited to London by one of the DIAS organizing committee members, Mario Amaya, the editor of the new publication *Art and Artists*. Through his connection, Ono was also offered an opportunity to have a solo exhibition of recently created objects at the Indica Gallery, which was housed in an underground bookstore owned by another committee member of DIAS. Although Ono wanted to visit London alone for a change, her then husband Cox and daughter Kyoko came along and stayed together far longer than the two weeks originally planned. London was totally an unknown city to Ono, but she became known to the general public in the course of only a year.

DIAS originated from the idea of the "autodestructive" artist Gustav Metzger to bring together artists from throughout the world to discuss the use of destruction in art and society with the broad range of public. With the help of committee members who were influential in London underground art world, the symposium expanded and drew the attention of the public media such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and television. Although the symposium proper was held only for three days, it was followed by numerous Happenings, concerts, and discussions by the invited artists, including Al Hansen, Yoko Ono, and Raphael Ortiz from America; John Latham and Otto Muhl from Vienna; and Enrico Baj and Sergio Dangelo from Italy. In *Two Evenings with Yoko Ono* at the Africa Center on September 28 and 29, 1966, Ono presented more than fifteen pieces, most of which required audience participation. Among these pieces, *Cut Piece* was received as the most controversial. A female reviewer made a careful observation on the audience's response in *Cut Piece*:

Some gentle, some vicious participants obey their inner wishes, until Miss Ono is left bare, hiding her nudity with her arms. The audience was hushed and people seemed a little hesitant to cut; one man quietly cut off a button, others deliberately cut the dress in order to expose the body in some self-satisfying erotic manner . . . one aggressive man rushed up to the stage and fiercely chopped off a large part of Miss Ono's dress, exposing the breast; his work was spoiled by the next participant who, with shaking hands, stitched on his handkerchief to cover the naked flesh. What inward aggressions were allowed expression in these people? Both the man who snipped a button and the man greedily cut the final material from her panties were releasing sexual aggression — one treated her as a naughty child would his mother, the other as a prostitute . . . both appeared to have little feeling for Miss Ono herself, and neither had any spiritual contact with her.¹⁰³

Because the reviewer was a woman, she could critically point out that male participants were releasing their sexual aggressions without trying to understand intentions behind the performance. The way people came up to the stage, how they cut the piece of clothing, and what facial expressions they had when cutting — all of these responses directly reflected individual personalities. The performance functioned like a mirror to reflect a person's inner self.

Such a reflective quality contrasts Ono's *Cut Piece* from the male artists' drastic destruction art represented by Ortiz's piano destruction and a bloody ritual by Hermann Nitsch. Comparing "destruction art" by men and women, Kristine Stiles made the insightful observation, "While male artists have explored the relationship of that body to the objects and technologies of destruction as well as the assertion and recuperation of identity, women artists

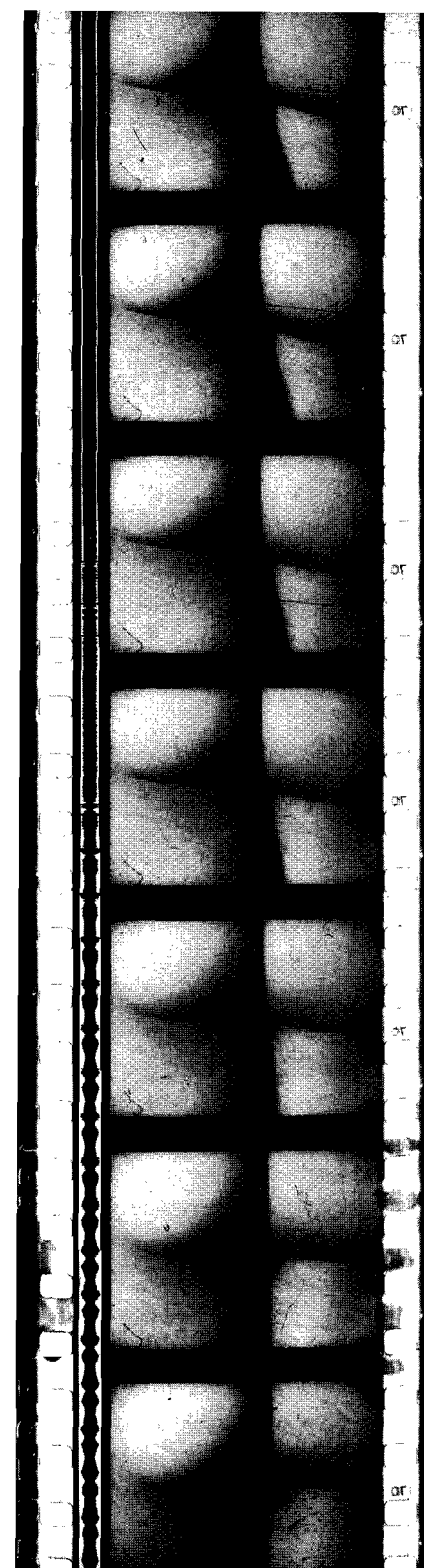
have regularly confined their investigations to the reconstruction of the self.” Stiles noted further that “the vast majority of women’s desctruction art explores the problem of the obliteration of identity and the decentering of the self,”¹⁰⁴ because female identity is often in danger of being obliterated in patriarchal society. In this context, *Cut Piece* offers a good comparison to Yayoi Kusama’s *Self-Obliteration* performance (see fig. 28, in chapter 2) in which the artist covers herself and others with polka dots. If Kusama’s performance was an expression of her mental illness, Ono’s was also an expression of her emotional pain and suffering. For both artists, however, the reconstruction of the self was not the main objective; rather than narcissistically concentrating on themselves, they offered opportunities to the audience to participate in the obliterating act and to reflect upon itself as audience. Specifically, the contemplative atmosphere that permeated Ono’s *Cut Piece* intensified the viewer’s self-reflective experience.

Sharing a transformative experience with viewers has long been a key component of Ono’s art. In November 1966, Ono held her first solo exhibition in London, *Unfinished Paintings and Objects*, at the Indica Gallery. Among exhibited works were audience participation pieces such as *Add Colour Painting*, *Ceiling Painting*, and *Mend Painting*; and contemplation pieces such as *Object in Three Parts*, *You and Me*, and *Eternal Time Clock*.¹⁰⁵ Mario Amaya wrote in the *Financial Times* that Ono’s exhibition might “provide an important first step towards finding our way back to the world of imagination and fantasy away from hog-tied reverence.”¹⁰⁶ This exhibition also led to Ono’s meeting with John Lennon, who visited the opening of her exhibition because he was a friend of the gallery owner. Understanding the ideas behind her works almost instantly, Lennon was to give an important support as well as to collaborate with Ono thereafter.

Shortly after her exhibition, Ono was able to create another version of her film, *No. 4 (Bottoms)*, “sequences of buttock movement of various walking performers,” which was begun earlier as a “Fluxfilm” in New York (see fig. 40).¹⁰⁷ Ono’s newspaper advertisement invited only “intellectual bottoms” to participate in the film, but her message was that there are no intellectual bottoms and that bottoms can reveal one’s true self regardless of social status.¹⁰⁸ Ono’s objective was to make a petition for peace using people’s bottoms instead of signatures. When stripped down to bottoms, people of different social backgrounds looked all similar and innocent. As soon as the news spread over London through mass media as well as the mouths of participants, a curious crowd consisting of actors, artists, businessmen, and others gathered in a house temporarily lent to Ono by a patron for the film’s shooting. Over two hundred people’s bottoms were taken within ten days. After editing, the film became nearly ninety minutes long, consisting of about a twenty-second sequence for each person’s bottom. The repetitive sequences of the close-up view of the bottoms were accompanied by an unsynchronized sound recording of the people being interviewed about their bottoms

while they were being filmed. The publicity about the film and its struggle with the British Board of Film Censors made Ono a celebrity in London. While the Board of Film Censors banned the film, Ono and her friends protested against it and finally won a mature rating certificate and special permission. When the film was finally released at the West End Theater, its box office recorded the third highest sales ever at that time.¹⁰⁹

With such good publicity, Ono was now more successful than ever in realizing her works, which ranged from events to objects. Her *Wrapping Piece*, in which she wrapped a lion sculpture in Trafalgar Square in August 1967 attracted a large audience, including many members of the press. Wrapping may have originally stemmed from the artist’s childhood experience of wrapping gauze around her head to hold in sanitary pads in order to block out sound; to Ono, the act of wrapping meant protection and healing. In her *Piece for Chair IV*, performed at Tokyo’s Sōgetsu Art Center in 1962, several participants were wrapped in gauze and stacked on top of each other like dead corpses. In her *Sky Piece for Jesus Christ*, presented at the Fluxus concert at Carnegie Recital Hall in 1965 (see fig. 37), Ono had wrapped the orchestra members in gauze. There was also a chair wrapped in gauze in her exhibition at the Indica Gallery. Extending the idea of wrapping, the event at Trafalgar Square applied it to a political end as an antiwar protest that nullified a part of a war



monument. Chrissie Iles has interpreted the event further as a “symbolic castration of a phallic war monument.”¹¹⁰

Ono's second exhibition in London, *Half-a-Wind*, at the Lisson Gallery in October 1967, presented her environments grouped together for the first time. Two of the four environments — *Stone*, a white room made of translucent paper and a black bag with lights inside, and *Blue Room*, a white room installed with texts — had been realized earlier in New York. *Blue Room* was made minimal in this installation, with only a text that read “Stay until the room is blue” because the room was like an alcove without any window. Ono instead installed other texts such as “This window is 2000ft wide” in the *Half-a-Wind* room in the front of the gallery. *Half-a-Wind* consisted of a roomful of white furniture — such as a bed, a chest, and a chair — that was all cut in half. Ono mentioned in an interview that the initial inspiration came from the difficulty in her marriage, and the fact that a human is a half-being, the other half of which needs to be filled. The exclusive use of the white color was partially inspired by the Japanese bridal kimono, which, as Ono put it, alluded to the metaphor that “women can be dyed any color.”¹¹¹ *Art and Artists* commented that Ono transformed the gallery into “a tangible vehicle for contemplating the illogicalities of the ‘concrete’ and ‘infinite.’”¹¹²

Besides this exhibition, Ono held events at Bluecoat Chambers, Liverpool, in September, and the Jeanetta Cochrane Theatre in London in November. Both venues met with a packed audience. The pieces presented that mostly overlapped with those shown at the Africa Center earlier, including *Fly Piece* and *Bag Piece*, but new pieces were also included. One reviewer of the Liverpool performance called Ono “the high priestess of the Happening.”¹¹³ Ono, in fact, did not mind the press using the word *happening*, which had been introduced as a product of the American avant-garde to England by artists such as Adrian Henri.¹¹⁴

Her close involvement with and eventual marriage to John Lennon, one of the foremost popular music stars of the period, brought significant changes in Ono's artistic activities and her attitudes toward the general public after 1967. Brought up in a working-class family in Liverpool, Lennon was more familiar with the public culture at large and aware of how to exploit the power of the masses.¹¹⁵ From Ono's avant-garde artist's point of view, becoming popular and accepted by the mass was a step down, but Lennon influenced Ono to find populist tactics applicable to her art. Ono recalled how she was before meeting Lennon: “I came from a tradition where if you do a work of yours on the stage and the audience — all of it — walks out on you, then it's a very successful concert, because that means that your work is so controversial, so far out that the audience could not accept it. If you did a piece that everybody could just enjoy and sit relaxed through until the end, then you were hitting the oldest chord in them. My work wasn't immediate, it didn't have a sense of immediacy in terms of popularity.”¹¹⁶ By the time she had made the film *No. 4 (Bottoms)*, Ono had already realized the limits within the closed avant-garde circle. Many avant-garde artists considered her film commercial



41. Yoko Ono and John Lennon, *Bed-In for Peace*, 1969. Photo courtesy of Lenono Photo Archive, New York.

and an attempt to sell her name to the public. Through Lennon, Ono learned about popular, mass culture, which was mainly sustained by the working class as opposed to the avant-garde of the upper middle class. The commercialism and populism of rock'n'roll music gradually made sense to her as a means of communicating with a large number of people.¹¹⁷

Blended with Lennon's populist tactics, Ono's urge to communicate to the public produced several major peace campaigns, including *Acorn for Peace*, *Bed-in for Peace*, and *War Is Over!* At their *Bed-in for Peace* event in Amsterdam in 1969 (see fig. 41), the couple explained their intention: “Bed-ins are something that everybody can do and they're so simple. We're willing to be the world's clowns to make people realize it.”¹¹⁸ They believed that showing a couple in bed on TV rather than showing atrocities of the Vietnam War would contribute to peacemaking. Their message for peace was more evident in the billboard campaign — *War Is Over!* — that Ono and Lennon enfolded in major cities in the world. The simple and precise style of the message derived from Ono's earlier conceptual art. The slogan “War Is Over! If You Want It” urged the public to realize that they have the power to change the course of the history if they really wished to do so. Although these events in 1969 were made scandalous by the press and often misunderstood, the public image of Ono and Lennon's going against the establishment and trying to communicate the message of love soon pervaded:

Ono's impact on Lennon was enormous and visible. As Stiles has dis-

cussed extensively, Ono reeducated Lennon, who was basically a “working-class macho guy” without a clue about women’s lives.¹¹⁹ From the day Lennon met Ono, she demanded “equal time, equal space, equal rights.” Such demands were hard on Lennon at first, but he gradually gave in and came to understand a woman’s position in society, eventually composing songs that even addressed feminist issues. The couple’s mutual influence led to a unique union of talented individuals who constantly challenged the public image of themselves.

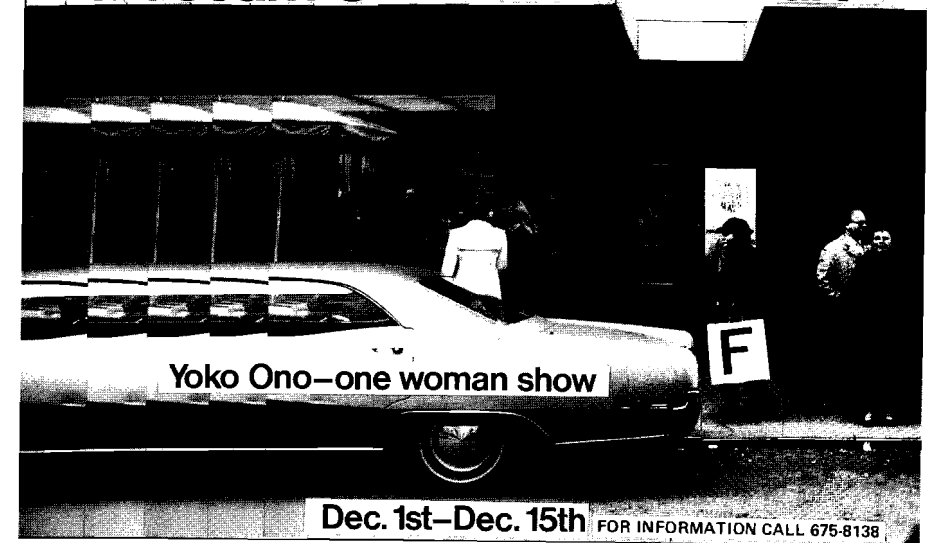
Back in New York, from 1970 to the Present

In 1970 the couple came to New York City to make two films, and partially to contribute their works to a Fluxfest. The series of events, called *Fluxfest Presents John & Yoko +*, was held over three months, from April through and June. For all events, however, Ono and Lennon were absent. The festival consisted of events that were mostly based on either Ono’s or Lennon’s ideas, but some were realized differently by other Fluxus artists.¹²⁰ Since Maciunas was also producing Ono’s art objects, to be included in her retrospective exhibition at the Everson Museum in Syracuse, he exhibited some of the completed pieces during this festival.

This Is Not Here, the exhibition at the Everson Museum, was the first retrospective of Ono’s works; since it publicized Lennon as a guest artist, the exhibition met with high attendance throughout its run. Featuring a variety of media ranging from two-dimensional works to three-dimensional works, participation pieces, and environments, the exhibition offered the general public an opportunity to learn about Ono’s philosophy and vision. Although many concepts of the pieces had been realized before, most of the objects were produced for this exhibition by Maciunas on Ono’s commission with the assistance of Syracuse University students and others. Three floors of the museum were filled with Ono’s and Lennon’s works: the ground floor housed large three-dimensional works including *Amaze*, a transparent plexiglass labyrinth that contained a toilet chamber in the center; the first floor was filled with instructions and conceptual paintings; the second floor contained two rooms: *Weight Room* and *Water Room*, which consisted of other artists’ contributions to Ono’s ideas. In conjunction with the exhibition, Ono, Lennon, and Mekas appeared in a television program in which they performed several pieces by Ono, including *Fly*.¹²¹

While the exhibition drew the public’s attention in general, it also garnered art critics’ reviews that tried to situate Ono within the existing art-historical frame. Lawrence Alloway was critical of the commercialism of the Everson show and its failure in accommodating audience participation, but he stressed the fact that Ono’s conceptual works were created early in the 1960s.¹²² Emily Wasserman of *Artforum* wrote the most comprehensive and concise review; while criticizing Lennon’s involvement in the show, which

Museum Of Modern art



42. Yoko Ono, *Yoko Ono—One Woman Show* advertised in the *Village Voice*, 1971. Photo courtesy of Lenono Photo Archive, New York.

“diverted proper attention” to Ono’s works, she noted the fact that the show gave Ono her due regard.¹²³

The subsequent exhibition in 1971 became totally conceptual, fictitiously held at New York’s Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). Although Ono did not have the consent of the museum, she advertised her show and catalog in the *Village Voice* (see fig. 42). She hired a man to walk in front of the museum wearing a sandwich board that read, “flies were put in a glass container the same volume as yoko’s body the same perfume as the one yoko uses was put in the glass container the container was then placed in the exact center of the museum the lid was opened the flies were released photographer who has been invited over from england specially for the task is now going around the city to see how far the flies flew the flies are distinguishable by the odour which is equivalent to yokos join us in the search observation & flight.”¹²⁴ Ono’s seven-minute film *The Museum of Modern Art Show* documents the responses of visitors to the exhibition, some of whom seemed to know that the exhibition was totally imaginary. In her self-published catalog, pseudo-documentary photographs show the flies being released, their flights, and MoMA’s ticket booth, which put up a cutout of Ono’s advertisement from the *Village Voice* with the message “This is not here,” referring to Ono’s earlier exhibition at the Everson Museum as well as to *The Blue Room*. Although the exhibition was completely conceptual, some museum visitors were deceived into believing that the exhibition was real.

In contrast to Yayoi Kusama’s earlier performance with her models at the Museum of Modern Art, Ono’s event took place rather quietly without the

presence of the artist. While both Kusama and Ono intended to comically assault the male-dominated art world by holding their unauthorized performances, their approaches were quite different. Kusama attacked the museum by breaking the taboo against showing nudity in a public space; Ono, on the other hand, did not employ shocking methods, but experimented with the deceptive use of texts. Through effective use of advertising media and documentary materials, Ono turned an imaginary exhibition into a real event. The event pronounced the conceptual nature and anti-institution stance of Ono's art.

After this event until 1989, Ono did not have any major museum or gallery exhibition of her works. While she continued artmaking and participated in such events as the Avant-Garde Art Festival in New York during the 1970s, her overall attention shifted to her music and her involvement in the women's liberation movement. The birth of Ono and Lennon's first child Sean in 1975 also led the couple to retreat into a protected private life until Lennon was assassinated in 1980. After Lennon's death, Ono's life continued to concentrate on nurturing her son; creating music, including popular songs such as *Walking on Thin Ice* (1981);¹²⁵ and managing Lennon's estate. With the exhibition *Yoko Ono: Objects, Film* at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1989, Ono returned to full and active participation in the art world. Since then Ono has had numerous exhibitions of her work worldwide, including the recent retrospective at the Japan Society in New York, which traveled extensively throughout North America, South Korea, and Japan.

While Yoko Ono has certainly been one of the most recognizable public personalities in the world since the late 1960s, her artistic creativity has become overshadowed by the celebrity status brought on by her marriage to Lennon. Rather than being constricted by her situation, however, Ono turned her disadvantage to advantage by utilizing mass media and populist tactics to communicate her messages to a wider audience; her peace campaign with Lennon is one of the most successful examples. Today, Ono keeps the peace campaign active through publicizing her messages in newspapers and visiting places all over the world to present her works. Whether it was the tragedy of Mexican workers who died of dehydration in a locked truck, or of Palestine people who lost their residences, Ono has drawn inspiration from world events and created many works as her hope for peace. Regardless of whether Ono's work takes the form of an instruction, an object, or a performance, it is always intended to become a catalyst of exchange between her and her audience. "All my things have to do with the inner life, inner communication and transformation," Ono stresses. As such, the enactment of her object or event pieces is intended to "cause an inner, contemplative reaction" in the spectator.¹²⁶ Her art of wishes transcends national boundaries and reaches out to increasingly a wider audience in the world.

Playful Spirit: The Interactive Art of Takako Saito

Fluxus embraced Event, Music, Mailart, Performance, Minimal art, Game art, Conceptual art, Non-art, Theater art, Anti-art, and . . . I think that was the positive thing about Fluxus, and very important for me.

— Takako Saito,
"Korrektur für Artikel"

As she is, perhaps, the most elusive among the five artists of this study, Takako Saito's art and life have been difficult for any scholar to study for a two obvious reasons. One is her nomadic lifestyle, which has naturally scattered records of her activities across different languages and places. The other is her lack of interest in writing or speaking about her work. Unlike the other artists in this volume, Saito has rarely employed language as a means of expression. She is not verbally expressive, and she intentionally keeps her ego transparent in terms of the presentation of her works. She believes that others can seek meaning in her works themselves, and that she should not impose any fixed interpretation. Her works are open-ended, and there is a plenty of room for the audience to play. These self-imposed traits may seem disadvantageous in promoting one's art, but this attitude has served her purpose well; that is, it has kept her life quiet and allowed her to concentrate on artmaking.

Just as her artwork is open-ended, so is Saito's life, and she has taken many chances at various turning points. She has, essentially, followed the direction