YOKO SHAKING S I

97 →
Yoko Ono on the occasion of the opening of her exhibition *Yoko Ono—Insound/Instructure* and the Poetry Festival, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, August 25, 1990.



ONO—THE G N



AMANDA PARMER

Even in the most politically tense and difficult time, what we do, what we poets do . . . serves as a healing. The word is a very powerful weapon sometimes and sometimes is a powerful tool for healing. It is sharp as a knife, and we have to be very careful in how to use words, even when we write under the table and never show it to people. I think that what you write affects the world. I think that's how powerful our position is, and I think we should be very caring about it.

—Yoko Ono, at the opening of *Insound/Instructure*, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, August 25, 1990 (fig. 97 ↖)

The amplification and exacerbation of art and poetry as cultural and social forces with the capacity to effect material change is a critical point that underpinned Yoko Ono's midcareer retrospective, *Insound/Instructure* (1990), at Henie Onstad Kunstsenter. The selection of Ono's open-ended scripts, scores, invitations, and bronze casts from 1968 to 1990 included in the exhibition show a meaningful shift in Ono's practice: from the traces of ephemeral, immaterial, and translucent works to solid and opaque casts of these earlier objects, and from experimental film to the material arrangement of film stills and performance objects.[1]

In effect, the works collected in the exhibition reflect the shift within social relations and cultural production that is expressed in Ono's practice from the 1960s through the 1980s. This text sets up a dialogue between the exhibited works and the ideas of the philosophers and cultural theorists Roland Barthes, Stuart Hall, Katerina Kolozova, Audre Lorde, and Elizabeth Povinelli, which together offer a range of analytical lenses—symbolic, structural, affective, psychoanalytic, and anthropological—to think with and through Ono's work. Refracting Ono's oeuvre through that of these thinkers situates her work—historically, culturally, and theoretically—and frames her methodologies for cultural endurance and aesthetic strategy as necessary tools for maintaining agency in the way we make our world mean. As Barthes writes in his 1957 essay "Change the Object Itself," a shift such as the one we see in Ono's practice moves "not to change or purify the symbols but to challenge the symbolic itself."[2]

Films and Their Scores

Among the early works included in *Insound/Instructure* were Ono's films from the late 1960s, in which she uses social engagement and representations of the body to denaturalize and change social protocol. The artist's films, which were represented in the exhibition as photographic stills, employ formal elements that are resonant of activist strategies: directives, documents, petitions, and public service announcements among them. Ono refers to the film scripts as "scores," situating them within the context of her instruction-based practice, her relationship to the international art community of Fluxus, and the sociopolitical challenges as well as modes of activism of the time (fig. 98 ↗).

[1] The exhibition, initiated by Henie Onstad Kunstsenter and curated by Jon Hendricks and Ina Blom, traveled to the Pori Art Museum in Finland and the Reykjavík Art Museum in Iceland. First shown at Henie Onstad from August 25 to September 16, 1990, *Insound/Instructure* was the first in a series of exhibitions and events that took place throughout 1990 as part of Japan Today in Norway, an initiative to increase cultural exchange and enrich mutual interest between the two countries.

[2] Roland Barthes, "Change the Object Itself," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977), 165–78.

98 ↓
Installation view of the exhibition *Yoko Ono—Insound/Instructure*, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, 1990.



While Ono did produce several of these films, realizing the scores was not paramount to her practice. Scores reproduced in the catalogue and throughout the exhibition acted primarily as prompts for viewers, who could then make, or at least imagine making, the films themselves. As Ono herself writes:

> These scores were printed and made available to whoever was interested at the time or thereafter in making their own versions of the films, since these films, by their nature, became a reality only when they were repeated and realized by other film-makers.
>
> A dream you dream alone may be a dream but a dream two people dream together is a reality.[3]

Key examples include *Film No. 4 (Bottoms)* (1966–67), *Film No. 8 (Woman)* (1968), and *Film No. 6 (Rape)* (1969). These three films explicitly pinpoint modes of corporeal control. They consider the construction of sexuality and female subjectivity through the media, simultaneously owning and rebuking social and personal systems. Ono uses the films to focus the viewer's attention on what is occluded—rather than what is represented—in popular culture's depiction of our social worlds. In doing so, she makes these cultural blind spots intelligible. She then goes a step further, using the film format to convey instructions that prompt viewers to enact an alternative manifestation of these otherwise overdetermined aspects of our worlds.

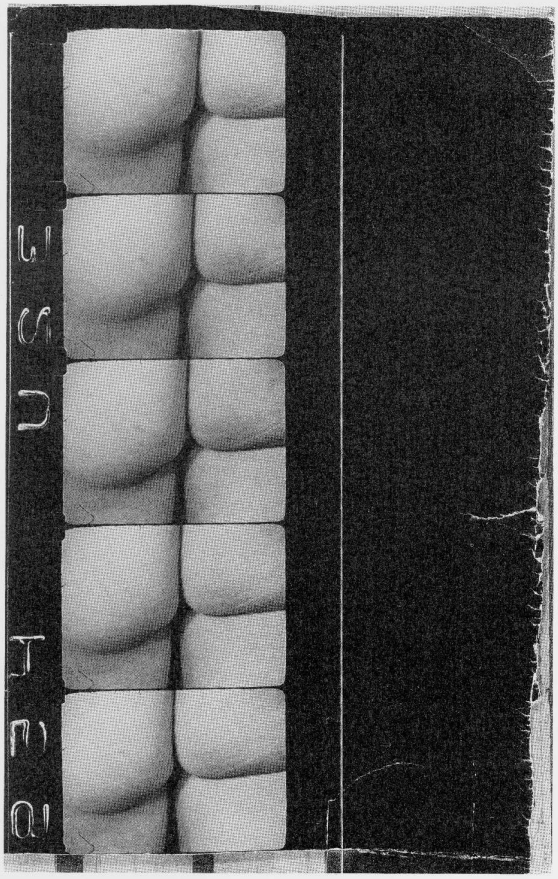
At the time of the exhibition, the best known among these works may have been *Film No. 4 (Bottoms)*, whose instructions read: "String bottoms together in place of signatures for petition for peace."[4] In the film made from Ono's written score, the bottoms of artists and friends from the London avant-garde—Susannah Campbell, Philip Corner, Anthony Cox, Bici Hendricks, Geoffery Hendricks, Kyoko Ono, Yoko Ono, Ben Patterson, Jeff Perkins, Susan Poland, Jerry Sablo, Carolee Schneeman, James Tenney, Pieter Vanderbeck, Verne Williams—continuously and sequentially fill the frame over the course of its five and a half minutes. However, when considered in tandem with production stills, the film reveals a different type of constructedness, and this jarring juxtaposition between the seemingly organic parade of rear ends and the control Ono exerted over their display is instructive of the way that she used her scores to isolate particularly meaningful exchanges and moments of everyday life. In one of the production stills, we see a room containing Ono, her camera operators, Anthony Cox and Jeff Perkins, and one of the actors, who stands half naked with her back to a 16 mm Bolex camera, facing a sheet, while the rest of the people on set playfully direct her (fig. 99 ↘).

The decontextualized cheeks in the black-and-white 16 mm film, on the other hand, are alluring in their simplistic, anticlimactic, rhythmic movement. One after the other, the bottoms divide the frame into four parts—each cheek lifting, shifting, and dropping from left to right, each one moving slightly faster or slower, being more or less droopy or hairy than the last. *Film No. 4 (Bottoms)* focuses our attention on the rhythm and changes that occur in the frame as the film moves from one individual's bottom to the next, humorously debunking any notion that bottoms are homogenous. It appears as if the film caught the individuals walking together as a group of distinct, yet commonly embodied, entities in this multimedia missive that Ono describes as a protest "for world peace."

This filmic petition was collaboratively produced with Yoko Ono's husband at the time, Anthony Cox, who was also on camera duties. Thanks to a series of tongue-in-cheek advertisements calling for "only intellectual bottoms" to be included in the film, the work was successful before it was even realized, walking a subversive line that was both lightly intellectual yet anti-intellectual enough for it to gain popularity with the masses through a series of daily news headlines.[5] This notoriety was amplified further when the British Board of Film Classification banned the film, leading Ono to protest against the censorship. With snowballing irony, the situation gained both visibility and celebrity for Ono when the news went on to run a full three minutes of the film on national television while announcing its censorship. Though the ban was ultimately repealed, the state was determined to mark the film's representations and its distribution as intolerable, demonstrating one of the many ways that desire and prohibition feed on one another.[6]

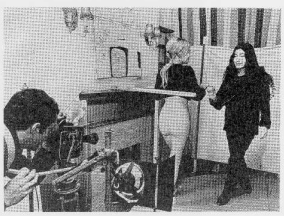
The score for one of Ono's unrealized films, *Film No. 8 (Woman)*, which appeared in the exhibition as a wall text, instructs that the film should include a cast of one: a pregnant woman. As Ono writes in the script, "The pregnant woman is the only person in the entire film, which symbolizes the lonely venture of conception." She describes how the camera should follow the way the woman is received in public and by the viewers of the films. Ono explains: "The audience becomes intimated with her skin, her swell, her vomit, her walk, her smile, everything about her except her exterior circumstances, such as whether or not she is

99 ↘
Yoko Ono, "On *Film No. 4 (Bottoms)*, 1967." In the catalogue for the exhibition *Yoko Ono—Insound/ Instructure*, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, 1990.



Film No.4 (Bottoms), 1966/67, filmstills

Yoko Ono directing her *Film no. 4 (Bottoms),* winter 1966/67 London, cameraman Tony Cox, performer unidentified.



photograph by John Drysdale

ON FILM NO. 4 (in taking the bottoms of 365 saints of our time)

I wonder why men can get serious at all. They have this delicate long thing hanging outside their bodies, which goes up and down by its own will. First of all, having it outside your body is terribly dangerous. If I were a man, I would have a fantastic castration complex to the point that I wouldn't be able to do a thing. Second, the inconsistency of it, like carrying a chance time alarm or something. If I were a man, I would always be laughing at myself. Humour is probably something the male of the species discovered through his own anatomy. But men are so serious. Why? Why violence? Why hatred? Why war? If people want to make war, they should make a colour war, and paint each others cities up during the night in pinks and greens. Men have an unusual talent for making a bore out of everything they touch. Art, painting, sculpture—like who wants a cast-iron woman, for instance.

The film world is becoming terribly aristocratic, too. It's professionalism all the way down the line. In any other field, painting,music, etc., people are starting to become iconoclastic. But in the film world--that's where nobody touches it except the director. The director carries the old mystery of the artist. He is creating a universe, a mood, he is unique, etc., etc. This film proves that anybody can be a director. A film-maker in San Francisco wrote to me and asked if he could make the San Francisco version of No. 4. That's OK with me. Somebody else wrote from New York; she wants to make a slow-motion version with her own behind. That's OK, too. I'm hoping that after seeing this film people will start to make their own home movies like crazy.

In 50 years or so, which is like 10 centuries from now, people will look at the film of the 60's. They will probably comment on Ingmar Bergman as meaningfully meaningful film-maker, Jean Luc Godard as the meaningfully meaningless, Antonioni as meaninglessly meaningful, etc., etc. Then they would come to the No. 4 film and see a sudden swarm of exposed bottoms, that these bottoms in fact belonged to people who represented the London scene. And I hope that they would see that the 60's was not only the age of achievements, but of laughter. This film, in fact, is like an aimless petition signed by people with their anuses. Next time we wish to make an appeal, we should send this film as the signature list.

My ultimate goal in film-making is to make a film which includes a smiling face snap of every single human being in the world. Of course, I cannot go around the whole world and take the shots myself. I need cooperation from something like the post offices of the world. If everybody would drop a snapshot of himself and his family to the post office of his town, or allow himself to be photographed by the nearest photographic studio, this would be soon accomplished. Of course, this film would need constant adding of footage. Probably nobody would like to see the whole film at once, so you could keep it in a library or something, and when you wanted to see some particular town's people's smiling faces you could go and check that section of film. We can also arrange it with a television network so that whenever you want to see faces of a particular location in the world, all you have to do is to press a button and there it is. This way, if Johnson wants to see what sort of people he killed in Vietnam that day, he only has to turn the channel. Before this you were just part of a figure in the newspapers, but after this you become a smiling face. And when you are born, you will know that if you want to, you will have in your life time to communicate with the whole world. That is more than most of us could ask for. Very soon, the age may come where we will not need photographs to communicate—like ESP, etc.; it will happen soon, but that will be *After the Film Age.*

Yoko Ono, London '67

On Film No.4, London 1967. As printed in *This Is Not Here,* 1971

FILM NO. 5

RAPE (or CHASE)

Rape with camera. 1½ hr. colour synchronized sound.

A cameraman will chase a girl on a street with a camera persistantly until he corners her in an alley, and, if possible, until she is in a falling position.

The cameraman will be taking a risk of offending the girl as the girl is somebody he picks up arbitrarily on the street, but there is a way to get around this.

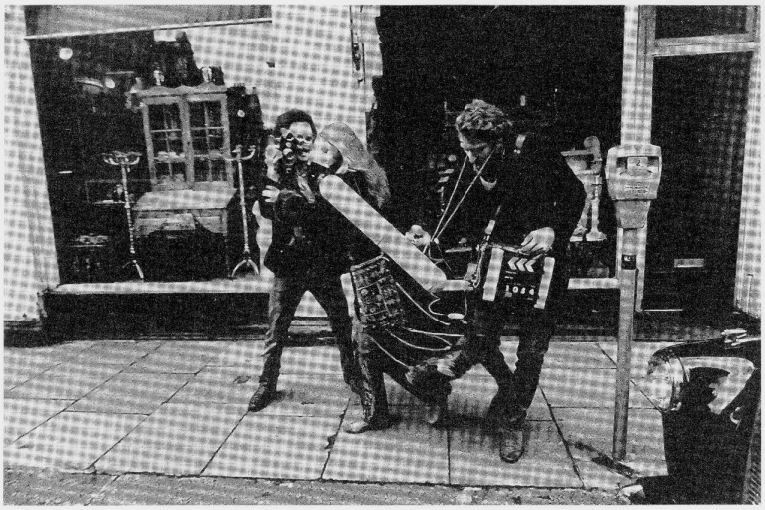
Depending on the budget, the chase should be made with girls of different age, etc. May chase boys and men as well.

As the film progresses, and as it goes towards the end, the chase and the running should become slower and slower like in a dream, using a highspeed camera.

by yoko ono copyright '68

Film No.5 — Rape (or Chase), 1968

Rape, 1969, being filmed. Actress Eva Majlata, camera Nick Knoland, sound Christian Wangler



ON FILM NO. 6 (RAPE)

Violence is a sad wind that, if channeled carefully, co bring seeds, chairs and all things pleasant to us.

We are all would-be Presidents of the World, and kids kicking the sky that doesn't listen.

What would you do if you had only one penis and a (way tube ticket and you wanted to fuck the whole n in one come?

I know a professor of philosophy whose hobby is to quiety crush biscuit boxes in a supermarket.

Maybe you could send signed, plastic lighters to peop place of your penis. But then some people might tak your lighter as a piece of sculpture and keep it up in living-room shelves.

So we go on eating and feeding frustration every day lollypops and stay being peeping-toms dreaming of b ing Jack-The-Ripper.

This film was shot by our cameraman, Nick, while w were in a hospital. Nick is a gentleman, who prefers ing clouds and floating pies to shooting *Rape.* Never less it was shot.

And as John says: *A is for parrot, which we can plain see.*

Yoko Ono, April '69, Londcn

On Film No.6 (Rape), April 1969. As printed in *This Is Not Here,* 1971

100 ←
Yoko Ono, "On *Film No. 6 (Rape)*, 1969." In the catalogue for the exhibition *Yoko Ono—Insound/Instructure*, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, 1990

married, if she has a job, etc." Ono thinks of the emphasis put on the way a woman's body changes during pregnancy and the shift in the social perception of her as the "solo dance movement of a pregnant woman." In this sense, Ono describes the nine-month pregnancy period as a choreography that a woman's body rhythmically measures and structures and whose changes are registered externally and socially by an uninvited audience that the woman cannot avoid. The visibility of the solitude of this experience Ono intended as a means of raising awareness of and changing the popular conception that "pregnancy is the most gratifying thing for women."[7] In *Film No. 8 (Woman)*, Ono proposes peeling away the fetish of pregnancy that masks the corporeal reality of this period and attending, instead, to the interrelated moments of a woman's internal, personally structured experience and those imposed on her externally during this time.

In every instance, Ono's works demand that we, as audiences, remain cognizant of the meaning we make of and bring to her work. In 1969, Ono's videographer, Nicholas Knowland, and sound recordist, Christian Wangler, followed and filmed a young woman in Highgate Cemetery in northern London for the score *Film No. 6 (Rape)* while Ono was in the hospital recovering from a miscarriage. The woman, Eva Majlata,[8] who was a Hungarian-born British model and friend of Ono's third husband, musician John Lennon, was unaware of why she was being filmed at the time. Majlata tries to talk with the cinematographer, inquiring if he speaks a long list of languages—she did not speak English—but receives no response. Her initially playful approach to the confusing situation turns to frustration, anger, and exhaustion. At times, the frame turns black and Knowland continues at her heels, until he finally follows her into her apartment, where Majlata collapses—physically and psychologically (fig. 100 ←).

While this film is often criticized for abusing its subject, it is also notable, as art historian Ina Blom points out, that "*Rape* focuses not so much on the way a cruel film team follows a woman until she breaks down, as on the audience's own projection into that situation."[9] An earlier iteration of this score, *Film No. 5 Rape (or Chase)* (1968), describes the nonconsensual, relentless, and dogged tracking and recording of Majlata's everyday experience as "rape with a camera." It reveals the intimacy we experience in the personal space of our everyday lives—how valuable that time and space is, although it may not be readily apparent and is largely taken for granted unless it is violated. As filmmaker and Ono's collaborator Jonas Mekas observed upon the film's premiere in New York, "Two things are interesting to watch as the film progresses: one is the girl—and the other is the audience."[10] In other words how are we, as an audience, complicit in treating the actress as an object?

Ono's film attends to the pressure that constant exposure and the demand to perform puts on individuals—both those watching and the watched— such as we see amplified through social media today. The objectification and alienation that *Film No. 6 (Rape)* exposes are some of the key terms of gendered subjectivity that feminist theory has, historically, worked to resist. As our culture increasingly compels us to think human subjects in objectified terms, it is worth considering how there may be a third way through this bifurcated conception of identity (as object or subject)—what Roland Barthes in "The Third Meaning" refers to as the "emotion-value": the ineffable aspect of an image that exceeds and escapes the bounds of language.[11]

Instructional scores—several of which appear in the exhibition catalogue—are also a hallmark of the international Fluxus movement, presenting a model for agency in the cultural production of knowledge. Such scores were simple instructions the required no expertise and often no special objects. They focused on everyday materials and asked the reader to engage with them in unconventional ways. By prompting minor, unorthodox relationships with quotidian objects, these scores instilled a magnitude of imaginative capacities across those that encountered them, providing exemplary behaviors of how one may imagine the world and our relationship to it to be "otherwise."

Just a few years before Ono's exhibition, the Marxist sociologist, cultural theorist, and activist Stuart Hall published a text addressing this anti-homogeneous engagement from a far more academic and philosophical perspective, which offers a productive lens to view Ono's work through here. Hall's essay, "Signification, Representation, Ideology," departs from philosopher Louis Althusser's adage that ideology only has the function of "reproducing the social relations of production" and goes on to expand it to address the dynamism of these relations.[12] Hall views Althusser's definition as being too limited and overdetermined as a model for thinking through the possibility, or impossibility, of effecting change in the world. That is, while incisive and useful for understanding certain moments of cultural production, Althusser's analysis also instills a sense of hopelessness—if we were to follow

Althusser to the letter, we would all find ourselves to be merely cogs in the wheel. By reassessing how Althusser's theoretical analysis manifested culturally, Hall builds on this work by explaining that "meanings which appear to have been fixed in place forever begin to lose their moorings" when "social movements develop a struggle around a particular program."[13] It is this assertion in tandem with his observation that people experience that world "in and through the systems of representation" that Hall keys into the transformative capacities of culture. It is this very system of representation that viewers are prompted to upend when they read Ono's instructive works—or any other Fluxus score for that matter. We upend by engaging "otherwise" with everyday objects that make up our worlds. Though it is unlikely Ono would ever be so didactic, it seems likely she made her works with the intention that viewers would experience the ease of access they have to difference, alterity, the somatic, and emotion-value. In short, such alternative engagement brings to the fore what may otherwise fade from perception as the normative, the everyday, the mundane. In this way, it becomes possible for viewers to not only think again about their relations but also recognize their agency in their relations. In such granular ways, Ono's works have the potential to upset and disorganize the contextualizing systems of everyday objects, such as apples, boxes, our own bodies, and the mirrors they appear in—that is to say, to upset everyday life. By presenting such objects in the context of the rarefied art museum, she takes them out of their quotidian circulation and resituates them on pedestals and walls, with labels and a quasi-secular code of silence, reframing what is most naturalized to us as fetish.

Everyday Catalysts

The sculptural works in the exhibition, many of which Ono made before she began working with film, are catalogued and arrested in a particular moment in time and space. *Apple* (1966, fig. 102 →), for example, is composed of an organic apple placed on a Plexiglas box accompanied by a brass plaque that names it. Another work, *Object in Three Parts* (1966), consists of a condom, birth control pill, and diaphragm displayed together (fig. 103). In the exhibition catalogue, Ono refers to these quotidian objects as simply "ideas" that she placed in glass vitrines for the exhibition, stopping their circulation as seemingly innocuous, ubiquitous, and thereby invisible commodities.[14] This performative gesture demonstrates her power and agency as an artist, as well as that of the institution to imbue these objects with greater meaning by virtue of their recognition in the hallowed halls of contemporary art. The social context of the museum also emphasized their roles as catalysts for encounters between not only visitors and objects but visitors, objects, and other visitors—offering them up as a social vector, which any work of art, of course, may be thought to be. Ono proposes a serious and multivalent consideration of one's relationship to these materials as well as the experiences they facilitate and direct. At the same time, she playfully points to the absurdity of their role in the museum, exposing a precious and precarious value system, putting it up for grabs for the duration of the exhibition and inviting viewers to bring their own relational value systems.

In the 1980s, after Ono began working in film, she returned again to the sculptural form, but this time through an alternative methodology. For the *Insound/Instructure* exhibition, Ono explains, she was responding to the challenges of the 1980s as a time marked by excessive, reified commodification that broke with the "breathless pride and joy of being alive" that she recalls embracing in the 1960s.[15] She conveys this viewpoint through a story about her trip to the restored Summer Palace just outside Leningrad. She quickly runs through how she first denied and then came to accept the blunt, frictionless challenges the period of the 1980s initially posed for her:

> I thought I had moved forward right into the eighties and further. But part of me was still holding onto the sixties sky. The eighties is an age of commodity and solidity. We don't hug strangers on the street, and we are also not breathless. When the two big boys shake hands at the summit, maybe it's better that they exchange bronze keys rather than glass ones. In my mind, bronze started to have a warm shimmer instead of the dead weight I had associated it with. Bronze is OK, I thought. Eighties is OK.[16]

This exemplifies the enduring efficacy Ono locates in art, poetry, and embodiment as sources of power to counter amplified oppressions and new, pervasive modes of reification. This cultural shift toward reified commodification is akin to what Audre Lorde describes, in her 1978 essay "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," as the "anti-erotic."

[13] Hall, "Signification, Representation, Ideology."

[14] Yoko Ono, "On Insound and Instructure" in Blom and Hendriks, *Yoko Ono: Insound/Instructure*, 2–11.

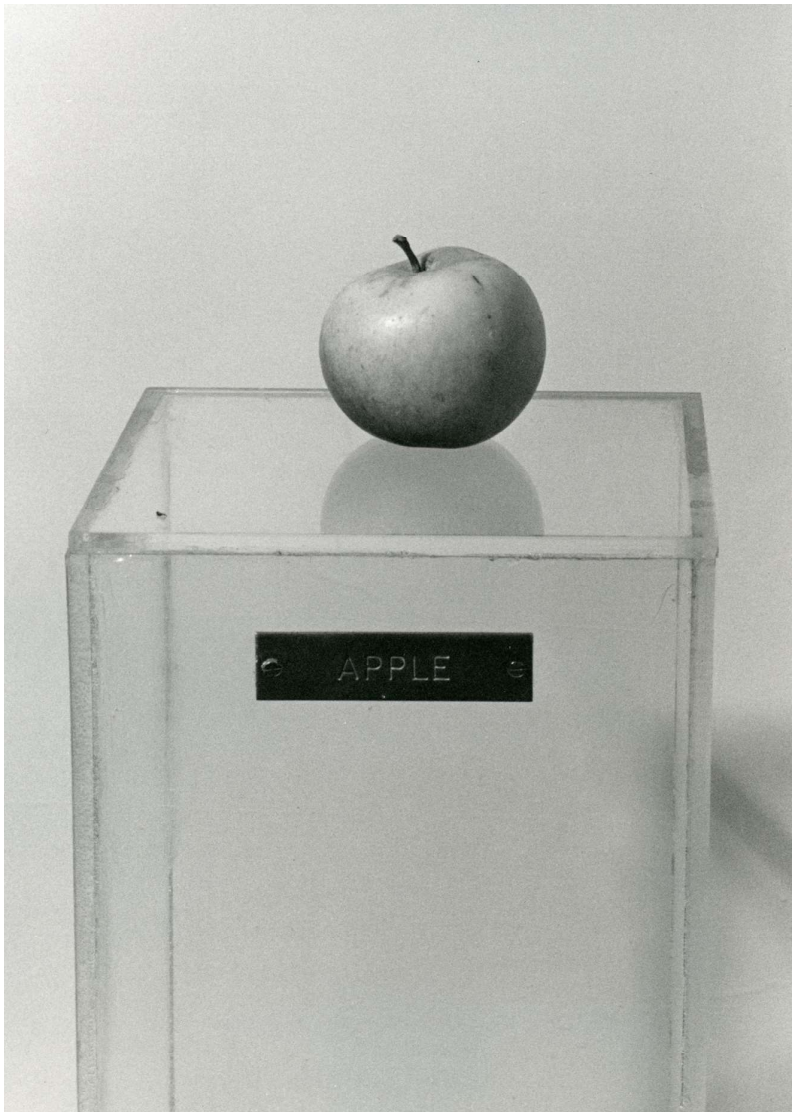
[15] Yoko Ono, "Bronze Age" (1988), in Blom and Hendriks, *Yoko Ono: Insound/Instructure*, 6.

[16] Ono, "Bronze Age," 6.

101 →
Yoko Ono, *Grapefruit* (London: Sphere Books, 1971). © Yoko Ono.



102 ↘
Yoko Ono, *Apple*, 1966. Installation view at Indica Gallery, London. Photo: Iain Macmillan. © Yoko Ono.



103 →
Yoko Ono, *Revolution: Object in Three Parts*, 1989, bronze cast version of 1966 original. Installation view in *Yoko Ono: Bronze Age*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Photo: David Behl. © Yoko Ono.



104 ↓
Yoko Ono looking at *Ceiling Painting (Yes Painting)*, 1966. Part of the exhibition *Yoko Ono—Insound/ Instructure*, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, 1990.



According to Lorde, anti-erotic societies define "human need to the exclusion of the psychic and emotional components of that need," thus focusing only on the physical—the reified—component of human existence, and ultimately "rob[bing] our work," meaning our reproduction of daily life from our salaried jobs to our personal aspirations, "of its erotic value, its erotic power and life appeal and fulfillment."[17] In Lorde's words, "The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling." She describes the spiritual as the bridge between the political and the erotic—which she defines further as the "sensual": those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us, being shared. It is this feeling and thus power within ourselves to effect cultural and political change that Lorde urges us to recognize. It is tapping into this feeling, rather than something outside ourselves in the systems of commodity and reproduction, that provides the catalyst—unleashing the unbridled force of the erotic—for us to produce transformative cultural and political change.

In the Henie Onstad exhibition, Ono displayed the found fetishes, whose recontextualization and scripted injunctions spur our erotic empowerment through being able to relate to them anew, next to the cast-bronze reproductions she made of them ten to fifteen years later.[18] With this juxtaposition, she contrasted the open signification and "shimmering" of the materials from the 1960s to the bronzified representations of culture in the 1980s. Referring to these bronze casts and the arrested cultural imaginaries of the latter decade, Ono explains, "That freedom [of the 1960s], all the hope and wishes are in some ways petrified."[19] In this case, the fragile, translucent, and ephemeral objects have become archetypes in the narrowing neoliberal reification of eros, or what Lorde has called "the personification of love in all its forms."[20] Remarkably, this transformation is not an end in itself for Ono, but a coda to think again about our subjective relationship to objects, as dialectically composed as and by objects ourselves.

Ono's narrative accounts, which appeared throughout the exhibition and are reproduced in the catalogue, evoke a foundation for understanding how corporeal intelligence perseveres through artworks and poetry. Lorde's text, as well, explicitly theorizes how the erotic as a deeply felt "*yes* within ourselves" must be recognized and shared to persist amid the naturalized forms of power that rest on the erotic's suppression and superficial manipulation. It is in this rethinking of eros and power that Ono and Lorde each make use of their contemporary irritants, alchemically fashioning affective and material tools and energies, and moving through them to an "open and fearless underlining of [one's] capacity for joy."[21] When thought together, the sculptural and film works of Ono's exhibition expose some of the ways that culture limits the erotic to a pornographic and physical exchange between two bodies. The limits of this understanding are readily brought into the realm of language by Lorde's articulation of the individually felt, corporeal sense of power and volition, as are the alternative cultural and political desires Ono's work stands to make intelligible.[22]

Pairings and Alignments

The anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli offers another lens through which we can see further facets of Ono's practice. Specifically, Povinelli's historical analysis uncovers how our current state of late liberalism came about through a deep intertwining of liberal multiculturalism and new forms of neoliberal economics in the 1960s and '70s.[23] In this sense, Ono's aesthetic choices anticipate the moment of a more fully installed late liberalism wherein cultural imaginaries and subjectivities are increasingly beholden to commodity forms. The curatorial choice to air Ono's "petrified" bronze objects next to their mass-produced archetypes amplifies an abrupt break with the seemingly immanent social transformations that are evoked in the artist's work of the 1960s and '70s.

Returning to the appropriated and cast objects, scores, and films mentioned earlier in the text (fig. 104 ←), we are able to glean needs otherwise obscured by social systems that privilege and protect patriarchal values—adequate maternity leave, childcare, parenthood, and partnership, to name just a few. The bronze works, by contrast, could be seen to be symbolic, on a visceral and emotional level, that such potential was held in abeyance in the petrified bronze age of the 1980s. At several points throughout the exhibition, the curators marked moments when Ono aired her ambivalent feelings about the reifying effects of the economy, political changes, and mainstream culture. "Bronze Age," a text Ono wrote in 1988, is reprinted in the exhibition catalogue. In it, she unpacks her fraught relationship with that particular metal in the context of recalling her trip to the Soviet Union in 1987 for a peace conference. She traces her trajectory from

[17] Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing, 1984), 55.

[18] Some of the bronze works in the show were produced for the 1989 exhibition *Yoko Ono: Objects, Films* at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and others for this traveling midcareer retrospective originating at Henie Onstad.

[19] Paul Taylor, "Yoko Ono's New Bronze Age at the Whitney," *New York Times*, February 5, 1989.

[20] Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," 55.

[21] Peggy Phelan, "The Returns of Touch: Feminist Performances, 1960–80," in *WACK!: Art and the Feminist Revolution*, ed. Cornelia Butler and Lisa Gabrielle Mark, exhibition catalogue (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007).

[22] Regarding Lorde's conception of the erotic, she writes, "But pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling." Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," 54.

[23] Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 29.

105 ↓
Installation view of the exhibition *Yoko Ono—Insound/Instructure*, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, 1990.



rejecting to embracing bronze, a material she cites as emblematic of the 1980s, which she calls "the age of commodity and solidity." Surprisingly, by the end of the text she lets go of her disdain for the new cultural influence that commodification wields—a sentiment materialized in her use of bronze as material. She alludes to this acceptance as a strategy of survival, writing, "It has to do. One day, I would become a person who could handle bronze with grace and ease."

Though this appears to be a damning assessment of an individual's capacity to make direct and explicit demands on the state under late liberalism, Ono works with this lack by extending the temporal life of these objects as spaces of reflection—an enduring reminder that we must find a new way, and new methodologies. Through accepting the terms of the present, she is able to begin grappling directly with the strange contradiction she foresaw: that these objects were no longer the open, translucent, ephemeral catalysts of the 1960s and '70s that she had plucked from everyday life and placed on pedestals as ideas. Rather, the bronzification of everyday life arrests such playfulness and exchange, leaving us together in our solitudes (fig. 105 ←).[24]

Of such "radical solitude," the philosopher and sociologist Katerina Kolozova writes: "Empathy with the radical solitude of the other by way of identifying one's own enacted state of radical solitude with that of the (imagined) other is an act made both of the event of 'having lived through' (*le vécu*) and of the event of the mediation provided by language (or the transcendental)."[25] In this way, we can see Ono's "word-spread" pieces as providing the transcendent thread that facilitates empathic understanding between discrete entities, for it is particularly in these works than the artist embraces an ephemeral nonmateriality. A 1963 letter about these early works addressed to Fluxus founding member George Maciunas, which is reprinted on the back of the *Insound/Instructure* catalogue, reads:

> Dear George:
> Most of my pieces are meant to be spread by word of mouth, therefore, do not have scores. This means is very important since the gradual change which occurs in the piece by word spreading is also part of the piece. [Nam June] Paik suggested that I send you a piece he likes which is one of the word spreading pieces. I have thought over quite a bit about it, since he was right to suggest the piece because it is also one

[24] While many media theorists focus on this topic, perhaps most prominent among them regarding this particular point is the sociologist Sherry Turkle.

[25] Katerina Kolozova, *Cut of the Real* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 123.

> of the very few pieces that is easy to perform. But I think I will not change my mind about maintaining the piece as a word-spread piece. .....*[26]

This question of mutable meanings and transparency that Ono describes in her letter to Maciunas was central to the works presented in *Insound/Instructure*. Ono's allegorical thinking in her bronze works, addressing endurance by thinking through the multiple meanings an object or idea can have in an increasingly reified world, gives agency to their material making and to their literal recasting as art objects. One can see how these objects manifest a "radical solitude" in their arresting of the seemingly open and intersubjective flow that was thought to exist throughout the 1960s and '70s.

In these ways, and through the exhibition, traces of the cultural, socioeconomic, and political shifts that occurred from the 1960s through the 1990s seem to foreclose the expansion of the erotic's radical potential as a deeply located and shared spiritual self-knowledge and awakening, as described by Lorde.[27] Contrary to what may seem to be a dead end in her work, Ono engages with these shifts in order to resist them, embracing the reification of formal meaning by playfully recasting ephemeral and fragile objects in heavy, opaque bronze and changing, instead, the way in which they are temporally located as bronze, a material particular notable for its endurance and material persistence across time. Ono uncovers modes of persistence that embrace and move past contemporary mediating hurdles, showing both the social masking of the erotic and its enduring cultural presence despite the attempts of late liberalism to nullify its individuating power.

The move by the exhibition's curators, Ina Blom and Jon Hendricks, to juxtapose the earlier sculptural works with the later cast-bronze pieces created an uncanny and jarring corporeal response. The simple gesture—for example, of installing *Cleaning Piece for A.P.* (1966), a clear Plexiglass cube accompanied by a soft cloth and the instruction "clean it," next to its bronzified cast (1988)—makes for an arresting sensory experience. The transparency of the original *Cleaning Piece for A.P.* allows one to see better—and better still, upon cleaning the work—both the sculpture's structure and what is within, below, and behind it. At every turn, there is a kind of absurdity that is amplified—there is no more to see beyond what is there. But the bronze cast of the work is solid, heavy, and opaque—there is nothing playful, open, or coy about the work, and its proximity to its original referent amplifies this emotional effect alongside the material effect.

These curatorial choices, surely made in close conversation with the artist, throw light on the agency that artists possess to direct the imbricated construction of subjectivity, history, and materiality. In these material shifts from ephemeral to eternal, from fragile to solid, from paper to celluloid, we see how the exhibition expressed Ono's changing methodologies. We can trace her trajectory as an artist and thinker through her objects, from the physically shape-shifting forms of the 1960s and early '70s to the allusive potential of fixed forms in the late '70s throughout the '80s. In her prompts to physical and imaginative enactment in the scores, films, and objects included in *Insound/Instructure*, Ono spurred her viewers to shake the sign of their own signification. As Barthes explains in "Change the Object Itself," there is a need to move toward unmasking our mythologies, a concept that Barthes saw much like how Hall saw ideology; that is to say, the systems of symbolic representations that we believe and use to navigate the world can be used "to challenge the symbolic itself." If we think about Ono's work in relation to Barthes's injunction, her practice may be seen to initiate viewers in the revelatory capacities and conundrums of creative, imaginative work—the acknowledgment that we are both the agents constructing the meaning of the symbols that organize our lives and that we are simultaneously constructed by them.[28]

It was in the affective cacophony of presenting these works in conversation with one another—the ephemera, the bronzes, the installations, performances, scores, and films—that *Insound/Instructure* expressed a catalytic moment in Ono's career. And it is through her enduring double moves with the erotic that we can trace the fluid and dynamic ways Ono shows us to navigate, survive, and come together, turning to the "deeply female and spiritual plane" that Lorde describes as the power of the erotic.[29] Through such double moves, Ono's practice embodies a third term, alighting on aesthetic alternatives for our necessarily collective imaginaries that are at once familiar, in their nonexpert vocabulary, and arrestingly foreign, in their seemingly simple capaciousness for meaning making.

[26] Yoko Ono, to George Maciunas, in Blom and Hendriks, *Yoko Ono: Insound/Instructure*, 40.

[27] Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," 53–59.

[28] Barthes, "Change the Object Itself," 165–78.

[29] Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," 53.

106 ↓
Yoko Ono performing during the Poetry Festival for the exhibition *Yoko Ono—Insound/Instructure*, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, 1990.



107 ↘
Yoko Ono performing during the Poetry Festival for the exhibition *Yoko Ono—Insound/Instructure*, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, 1990.

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