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Cellist, Catalyst, Collaborator: The Work of Charlotte Moorman

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CELLIST, CATALYST, COLLABORATOR:
THE WORK OF CHARLOTTE MOORMAN

by

SAISHA GRAYSON

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
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2018
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by

Saisha Grayson

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Art History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
ABSTRACT

Cellist, Catalyst, Collaboration: The Work of Charlotte Moorman

by

Saisha Grayson

Advisor: Claire Bishop

When classically trained cellist Charlotte Moorman (1933-1991) moved to New York City in 1957, she swiftly positioned herself at the intersection of experimental music, performance, video, and the visual arts. She interpreted works by composers like John Cage, collaborated with artists such as Nam June Paik, and founded and organized the New York Avant Garde Festival from 1963 to 1980. This dissertation argues that Moorman’s career sheds new light on what it meant to be an artist in this post-medium-specific moment and proposes that Moorman’s deterritorialization of authorship exerts pressure on traditional art histories. The generative dynamics of her collaborations with Cage, Paik, and festival participants instead suggest alternative models for understanding creative contributions in an art world increasingly marked by performance-oriented, open-structured, and participatory practices. The models offered in each chapter are: relayed authorship as a counterpoint to the autonomous composer; the inverse power of the submissive in consensual scenarios of domination; the performativity of self-presentation in a fully mediated world; and the relationally-constituted catalytic productivity of the curator. Moorman’s “minor history” demonstrates the vital work rendered invisible by the terms of major histories, and offers glimpses as paths not taken in regards to performance and curatorial practices that de-center singular authorship.
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Conclusion

Fig. 4.38 – Installation view of Rudi Fuchs-curated “Summer Display of the Museum’s Collection,” Van Abbemuseum, 1983. Works on display: Sol LeWitt, Pablo Picasso, Jan Dibbets. Photo Hans Biezen.

Fig. 4.39 – Installation views of Utopia Station, curated by Molly Nesbit, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Rirkrit Tiravanija, inclusive of platforms, talks, posters, online archives, etc. at the 50th Venice Biennale, 2003, curated by Francesco Bonomi.

Fig. 4.40 – Installation views of Okwui Enwezor curated multi-ennials including 56th Venice Biennale Art, Italy, 2015, with Jason Moran, Savoy Ballroom (2015) and Sonia Gomes, various work (top); and Documenta 11, Kassel, Germany, 2002, with Yinka Shonibare, Gallantry and Criminal Conversation (2002) and unidentified painter (bottom).

Fig. 4.41 – Charlotte Moorman surrounded by crowds, performing Jim McWilliams’ Sky Kiss, Sixth Festival, Central Park West, New York, 1968. Photo: Fred McDarrah.

Fig. C.1 - Charlotte Moorman, performance of Yoko Ono’s Cut Piece, 1988 at Emily Harvey Gallery with friends.

Fig. C.2 – Delegated performances: (top) Santiago Sierra, 250 cm Line Tattooed On 6 Paid People, Havana, Cuba, 1999; and (bottom) Phil Collins, They Shoot Horses, video, 2 projections, color and sound.

Fig. C.3 – Charlotte Moorman with her circle, (top) on the roof of her Pearl Street loft, New York, July 1980, Photo: Gisela Schneider, and (bottom), in purple sweater at birthday party, 1988, Emily Harvey Gallery, with chocolate cello.

Fig. C.4 – Charlotte Moorman performs Nam June Paik’s Zen Smiles, Asolo, Italy, 1974. Photo: Mario Parolin.
INTRODUCTION

OF AUTHORS AND OTHERS

I. Moorman and Me in the Archive

According to an apocryphal anecdote, shared often because it seems so in keeping with her character and the state of her archive, Charlotte Moorman (1933-1991) used her last breath to whisper to husband Frank Pileggi, “Don’t throw anything out.”¹ Her “archive” at the time was literally every bit of paper, prop, gift and scrap of fabric that had been implicated in over three decades of performing, organizing and socializing at the intersection of an international, interconnected avant-garde [Fig. I.1]. Captured in this 1971 photograph by Peter Moore, a close friend, collaborator and New York’s premier performance photographer, Moorman is shown on the day she was meant to move apartments. Though completely unpacked, she calmly smiles from the center of a fish-eye view of her already expansive, physically encroaching collection. The composition perfectly captures her self-positioning as a catalyst at the heart of intersecting scenes and her role as both a performer, always with some form of a cello by her side, and as a multi-media producer, notoriously disorganized and yet diligent, ambitious, and surprisingly effective in bringing together and sharing the massive output of her artistic communities.

Born in Little Rock, Arkansas, raised to be a debutant and trained as a classical cellist, Moorman found her calling in New York City as one of the most visible performers and

¹ This quote became the title for an archival exhibition organized by the Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University, which accompanied a larger touring exhibition, A Feast of Astonishments: Charlotte Moorman and the Avant-Garde, 1960s-1980s. Both opened in January 2016. For more on the archive and this anecdote, see curator Scott Krafft’s essay, “‘Don’t Throw Anything Out’: Charlotte Moorman’s Archive,” in Liza Graziouse Corrin and Corrine Granof, eds. A Feast of Astonishments: Charlotte Moorman and the Avant-Garde, 1960s-1980s (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2016), 185-196.
promoters of inter-media, performative art-making during the 1960s and 70s. Expansive, interdisciplinary and egalitarian, Moorman’s archive mirrored her practice in its audacious self-assurance of its own future historical import and its absolute refusal to pre-judge others’ historical significance. Ever the gracious Southern hostess, everyone who was in Moorman’s life was welcomed into her archive, much like her annual festivals. The truckload of boxes and bags that were once crammed into Moorman and Pileggi’s apartment eventually made their way to Northwestern University’s Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections in Evanston, Illinois. An intimidating lot for the most dedicated of archivists, these papers are a rare treasure for researchers, tracing the networks and exchanges of these years with no initial editorial oversight. If a letter was written, an appointment made or a name with any possible connection to the arts scribbled amongst her doodles by the phone, it is preserved here.

I knew this story, and had already spent several days combing through correspondence folders without a finalized finding aid, when the true breadth of the archive hit me in a very personal way. It was November 2013, and as I thumbed through yet another box, I was startled by a familiar name. Not a famous artist or composer; not even a secondary compatriot or festival volunteer. It was my stepfather’s name: “Jaroff, Joe.” Once an eager sculpture student, he had barely registered as a contender in the New York art game before leaving for a suburban life with my mom and me. I pulled out the folder and was astonished to find an image of me, age six, and him and my mother on their wedding day atop the folder’s content [Fig. I.2]. This photograph

2 In high school, Moorman was a member of the Southernaires, National Honors Society and a bookstore monitor. The Southernaires was a club meant to instill social etiquette and prepare young ladies for their future by having them serve as hostesses for school events. The Pix: Little Rock High School Yearbook (Little Rock, AR: Little Rock High School, 1951), 49. In the collection of Luigi Bonotto, Molvena, Italy.

3 Since Pileggi died shortly after Moorman, the challenge of sorting the chaos fell to Barbara Moore and Andrew Gurian, executors of Moorman’s estate. The scope and residual unfiltered nature of the archive is reflected in the offering package summary, which lists one hundred and sixteen bankers boxes of “sorted material” and another sixty to eighty unsorted boxes, as well as posters, oversized scores, ephemeral objects and albums. Moore and Gurian, “The Archive of Charlotte Moorman and the Annual Avant Garde Festival of New York,” undated (c. 2001), as found in the AS Box 335 - New York Avant Garde Festival, Hans Sohm Archive, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Germany.
was embedded into a thank you note, dutifully saved, along with European postcards from my stepfather to Moorman, a piece of a cardboard once shoved into a grated window with “Charlotte, call me!” scribbled in marker, and several notes asking after the whereabouts of his once-borrowed, never-returned car. The early postcards ask Moorman for introductions to collectors and cute girls in Italy; the later correspondence express concern over mounting health and debt problems that led Moorman and Pileggi to hide from collection agencies and sometimes friends too. It was heartbreaking. I saw the youthful exuberance of my stepfather come up against the inescapable poverty and retreat of Moorman’s final years battling cancer. And I saw myself in a flower-girl dress, staring back from the archive of the woman I had been researching and writing about for close to a decade.

When I first embarked on this project, it was with ambitions that, in true feminist fashion, intertwined the personal with the political. When Joe Jaroff moved to New York in 1982, Moorman was his primary connection to the avant-garde art scene. He had selected her from a list of New York State Council for the Arts-approved artists to perform at his art school, and after graduation, he became a regular visitor to her and Pileggi’s downtown loft. To my stepfather, she was a celebrity, an important artist renowned for work with Nam June Paik, Yoko Ono and others, a paragon of daring and innovation in the visual and performing arts. She passed away when I was 12, but my stepdad would often talk to me about her in reverent tones, particularly as my interest in art history developed throughout college. Upon entering graduate school, I looked out for her—catching her name in passing here, noting her image illustrating an article there—but was surprised by the almost complete lack of significant writing on this
woman who I had understood to be central to the midcentury arts scene that I was studying.\(^5\)

Having become sensitive to the occlusions that historians perpetrated on women artists in the past, I wanted to investigate this contradiction between what I had heard and what I was finding, and, hopefully, stage a politically valiant recovery of my stepfather’s underappreciated idol.

Once I took on this project, however, the issues at stake changed radically, as I realized the central concern was not the simple omission of an obviously overlooked artist. Rather, via Moorman’s example, I found an opportunity to address some of the thorniest questions facing artistic practices, art historical constructions and ideas of authorship as they each evolved in the second half of the twentieth century. The more I researched, the more it became apparent to me that Moorman’s virtual invisibility within the field of art history for the past half-century, despite a career of non-stop activity and popular media coverage, would necessitate an investigation into the discipline’s operative modes of categorizing and valorizing. To my stepfather, and many who witnessed Moorman’s performances over three decades of frenetic touring or participated in any of the thirteen annual New York Avant Garde Festival (NYAGF)’s she organized, she was a vital contributor to the key artistic movements of her day, working with some of the most famous artists of the twentieth century. However, in the hierarchical discourse of art history, Charlotte Moorman was not an artist, but a musician or performer. In a grant application in 1977, she checked the box for “multi-media,” and elaborated that, “For fifteen years my work has been to expand the traditional use of the cello with video, projections, films, lasers, ice, chocolate, water,

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\(^5\) To be clear, I am pointing to the absence of writing that takes up Moorman as an autonomous creative subject or that considers her as an independent contributor to the artistic movements she participated in. Within the expansive literature on Paik, there are numerous writers who acknowledge her critical presence at the center of several of his important projects. While these moments often include reference to their ongoing partnership, she is discussed only as an accomplice to his achievements, and only to the degree that it forwards an overview of, or argument about, Paik’s oeuvre. See for example, John Hanhardt et. al, *Nam June Paik* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1982), 94-98, and in David Ross’ included essay, “Nam June Paik’s Videotapes,” 103, 106; Hanhardt, *The Worlds of Nam June Paik* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 2000), 53-68; Edith Decker-Phillips, trans. Marie-Génivière Iselin, *Paik Video* (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 2010), 123-142; and Melissa Chu and Michelle Yun, eds. *Nam June Paik: Becoming Robot* (New York: Asia Society Museum, 2014), 21.
All of the pieces for which she is renowned are securely credited to other conceptual originators. The scores in her repertoire come from visual artists such as Joseph Beuys, Jim McWilliams, and Otto Piene; composers such as Giuseppe Chiari and Takehisa Kosugi, and those who blurred these distinctions such as Ono and Paik. Moorman did not challenge this crediting, but in fact, made the promotion of these new composers one of her primary goals, emphasizing them in public appearances and interviews, and bringing their work to new audiences through her international touring.

That the performances involved far more than Moorman’s musical talent should problematize this implicitly hierarchical designation, especially as regards those works that were predicated upon a specific mix of cello training, death-defying physicality, frank sexuality and an unwavering commitment to the avant-garde; that is, those created expressly for and dependent on Charlotte Moorman for their existence. These include her most famous works with Paik, including Variation on a Theme by Saint-Saëns (1965) [Fig. I.3] and Opera Sextronique (1967) [Fig. I.4], the performance of which led to her arrest and trial for indecent exposure; TV Bra for Living Sculpture (1969) [Fig. I.5], a piece which featured her playing a traditional cello with two.

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6 Correspondence – “CAPS Grant 1977-78” folder, CMA. How Moorman categorized herself by the end of her career is unclear. In a mimeographed biography found in The World of Charlotte Moorman, she is identified as “cellist, visual artist, Fluxus artist, composer and video artist who creates and performs environments, living sculptures, celebrations, performance art, action music, mixed media and video art worldwide…” However, when interviewing Barbara Moore and Andrew Gurian, executors of Moorman’s estate, they both agreed that the language did not sound like Moorman but was likely written by someone trying to help promote her. They both felt that her primary identity was always as a cellist, or, Moore offered, “performance art cellist.” Interviews with the author, April 29, 2009, and The World of Charlotte Moorman, ed. Barbara Moore, the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts edition, (New York: Bound and Unbound, 2000). In her final years, Moorman did produce visual artworks, in particular a series of cello-inspired sculptures and cut-outs, but this was a minor part of her practice and, according to Christo and Jeanne-Claude, motivated by financial necessity as much as artistic inspiration. Nam June Paik and Howard Weinberg, directors, “Topless Cellist” Charlotte Moorman, 1995, videocassette, 29 min. Electronic Arts Intermix, New York https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2aeH9FdtAgY

7 As will be noted in chapter 2, later in life she asserted that the Moorman/Paik collaborations were half hers in performance, if not on paper. She still never sought to place her name alongside his in the captions or programs accompanying their work. Gisela Gronemeyer, “Seriousness and Dedication: The American Avant-Garde Cellist Charlotte Moorman,” in Charlotte Moorman: Cello Anthology, ed. Gabriele Bonomo (Milan, Italy: Alga Marghen, 2006), unpaginated.
small screens protruding from her breasts; and *Cello Sonata for TV Cello* (1971) [Fig. I.6], in
which she plays three TV sets, stacked to form a cello-shape, thereby manipulating the
instrument’s sound and video output. As Paik once noted, to realize these works, he needed a
pretty girl with classical music training willing to strip—a very hard combination to find in the
1950s and early 60s.\(^8\) Not only did Moorman meet his criteria, she exceeded the requirements on
all fronts. A graduate of two musical conservatory programs, she was also a former beauty queen,
having been crowned Little Rock’s Miss City Beautiful in 1952.\(^9\) Throughout the raucous 1960s
and 70s, she dressed for performances in formal, unabashedly feminine concert gowns, paired
with carefully coiffed hair and full makeup, making the occasional nudity all the more striking.\(^10\)
This frisson, generated by her contrasting personas as well-bred, all-American Southern belle
and sexually liberated, self-possessed, intractable impresario, was something she consciously
cultivated and indelibly shaped the performance collaborations with Paik.

Equally premised on Moorman’s experience and skill-set were McWilliams’ series of
compositions that she performed each year at the NYAGF such as *Sky Kiss* (1968) [Fig. I.7],
when she floated down Central Park West suspended from helium balloons; *Ice Cello* (1972)
[Fig. I.8], in which she bowed at a cello-shaped ice block until it melted away; and *Flying Cello*
(1974) [Fig. I.9]; in which she and her cello were placed on opposite trapeze swings, connecting
for a note whenever they met in mid-air.\(^11\) In particular, *The Intravenous Feeding of Charlotte
Moorman*...
Moorman (1972) [Fig. I.10], though scored by McWilliams, seems to prefigure the painfully personal and physically demanding performances that would become vehicles for feminist self-expression amongst the next generation of performance artists.\(^{12}\) Staged on the dock of the South Street Seaport for the 9\(^{th}\) New York Avant Garde Festival, the work featured Moorman in a day-glo wetsuit with intake and exhaust tubes for breathing, plunging herself and her cello into a massive glass tank of water. Floodlights backlit her submerged silhouette as she studiously plucked and bowed at her instrument. The work makes visual reference to the life-support tubes that had sustained her through surgery a year before.\(^{13}\) Her tumors would return as breast cancer in 1979, necessitating a mastectomy, followed by twelve years of intermittent treatment and daily morphine injections until her death on November 8, 1991 at the age of 57. *The Intravenous Feeding of Charlotte Moorman* presented a hauntingly accurate metaphor of cello-playing as life-line: Moorman’s devotion to her work was what propelled her to pull herself out of the hospital/tank each time to deliver another daring performance.\(^{14}\) McWilliams’ visual tableau is unthinkable and illegible independent of Moorman.

**II. A Monographic in a Minor Key**

So, how does one, as an art historian, tackle an oeuvre that is not authorially discrete or disciplinarily defined? On one hand, the boundary-defying experimentation of the 1960s and 70s process and electronic manipulation of the mic’d drip sounds, that remake the piece into a new expressive force, again showing the importance of the individual performer in performance works of this nature. Barbara Moore, in a later interview, asserted that this attempt to revive Moorman’s repertoire had in fact produced a different piece altogether, highlighting the specificity of Moorman’s performance legacy, and the potential of relayed authorship, a concept central to chapter 1. Interview with the author, April 29, 2009.


\(^{14}\) For testimonials on the role art played in how she coped with illness, see video interviews in “Topless Cellist” *Charlotte Moorman*, and quotes in Rothfuss, 337-341.
meant that art history was forced, at this very moment, to expand its purview to include artists, regardless of medium or discipline, who were working in theoretical alignment with developments in what had previously been the plastic arts. Yet the definition of the role of the artist, whether in music, performance, video, film or painting and sculpture, remained tied to the one who originates an artistic idea. Taken to its logical extreme in the codification of Conceptual art, Sol LeWitt described a form of art in which “the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work... all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair.”\textsuperscript{15} While this privileging of “artist as idea-man” obscures the labor of anonymous art assistants and factory workers in the case of LeWitt and his Minimalist-to-Conceptualist colleagues, it seems a particularly problematic model to apply to the simultaneously emergent field of performance art. It is one thing to disavow the importance of the artist’s hand in favor of late capitalist modes of outsourced object production; it is another thing to disregard the importance of embodied execution in Body art. Yet, this all too familiar, inherently-gendered split which denigrates the physical realization of artistic productions versus their conceptual ideation—subtended by a binary structure that aligns mind with male and body with female—continues to be used for performative work as well.\textsuperscript{16} So while composers scoring pieces received in the context of happenings and performance art came to be considered artists in the more generic, post-medium sense, Moorman’s realization of these works did not precipitate a


\textsuperscript{16} For a useful overview of the Cartesian framework and the plurality of feminist concerns with its effect on contemporary culture, see Alison M. Jaggar and Susan Bordo, eds., \textit{Gender/body/knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing} (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989). For a historical account of the gendered reception of Descartes and access to his model of the universal intellectual subject in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, see Erica Hath, \textit{Cartesian Women: Versions and Subversions of Rational Discourse in the Old Regime} (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992); for an important discussion of where such author/performing body divergences in body art have led, see Claire Bishop, “Delegated Performance: Outsourcing Authenticity,” \textit{Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship} (London: Verso, 2012), 219-239.
critical transference of her role from performer to artist, with a capital A. As the enactor but not
the generator of each concept, Moorman was subject to having her contribution seen as akin to
that of an orchestra soloist—essential to the audience’s experience of a work but bracketed from
its creative origination or historical significance. Yet, while Moorman treated performances of
avant-garde and traditional scores with equal seriousness, as this dissertation will show, her
unique existence drove the production and development of her contemporary repertoire in a way
that has no analogy in the classical music world.

However, despite the increasing rarity of isolated artistic production, art history has
continued to operate predominantly through a tracing of ideas from one celebrated
artist/author/innovator to the next, with little time for putatively supporting characters like
Moorman. As a result, historical rescue attempts often take on the task of arguing for the
unrecognized brilliance of lesser-known artists and their right to enter the canon as it exists. Yet
as Michel Foucault argues in his classic essay, “What is an author?,” the status and significance
of a given author is directly tied to the discourse generated by their body of work, and not
inherent to it. Therefore, most monographic efforts to claim genius-status for an overlooked

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17 In the catalogue for the Whitney Museum’s 1982 Paik retrospective, within which Moorman performed several
times a week, the curator John Hanhardt does his best to hold these lines while acknowledging Moorman’s
importance. Of their trajectory, he writes, “Following her performances of Paik’s compositions and their active
collaboration on events, Paik made four works [TV Bra, TV Cello, TV Glasses and TV Bed] for Moorman,” which he
recognizes “can be considered independently but are best viewed when modeled and used by the person they were
created for.” (Emphasis mine) Hanhardt concludes discussion of these works reasserting a singular author, “Paik’s
video sculptures are a radical play on time, the real time during which they are worn and performed and the
synthesized times/images that are show on the screens,” without recognizing that such time-play only exists with
Moorman as an inextricable actor. Hanhardt et. al, Nam June Paik, 95-96.

18 Feminist critiques of the isolated artist-genius narrative, and its service in the production of a masculinist,
triumphantist canon were solidly launched by Linda Nochlin in “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?,”
ARTnews (January 1971): 22-39 and 67-71; more recently, the tenacity of this model, and a tentative attempt to
think beyond it, is offered in Helen Molesworth, “How to Install Art as a Feminist,” in Modern Women: Women

19 Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?,” Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Select Essays and Interviews,
individual reaffirm the values that sublend hierarchical canon-formation, while simultaneously proving how dependent such positioning is on subjective reception.

Instead, this dissertation identifies Moorman’s anti-authorial role as an opportunity to appreciate her as a “minor figure,” illuminating a “minor history,” as defined by art historian Branden Joseph. In his book *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts after Cage (A Minor History)*, Joseph seizes on Conrad’s peripatetic work as an artist, filmmaker and musician to open up “the more general problematic of constructing any oeuvre.” He argues that following such a figure, whose “historical reception has been hindered thus far by its appearance in seemingly incompatible contexts, its crossing of medium and disciplinary boundaries,” problematizes major histories, i.e. those “told according to the constants, even temporally changing constants, that it can extract: authorship, movement, period, style, genre, medium, discipline and so on.” Against this, Joseph proposes to build a minor history inspired by the minor literature ascribed to Franz Kafka by philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Deleuze and Guattari stress that Kafka’s literature is minor not in qualitative terms but because of its agonistic relation to the status quo; his writing as a Czech Jew deterritorializes the German language, politicizes seemingly private concerns and “forges the means for another consciousness and another sensibility” from within a dominant culture. Minor histories, by extension, are not unimportant; they are minor due to their irreducibility to majoritarian categories, their incommensurability with a progressive or dialectic narration of historical development, their disinterest in adding figures to a canon or arguing for their greatness, and

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21 Joseph, 50.
23 Deleuze and Guattari, 17.
their dependence on archives, from which they are “extractable only incompletely and with great difficulty.”24 At the same time, according to Joseph, these narratives maintain a parasitic relation to major histories and their discursive terms:

If ‘minor’ artists retain a place within major history—sometimes a central place—it is on account of their relation of proximity to the movements and categories engendered by major history and because of the unceasing pressure that they exert upon them. Their persistence within the historical record, as a remainder (via preterition or slightly awkward footnotes), is a mark or acknowledgement of their effect…. Appearing from the fringes of major movements or styles, [minor artists’] relation to [major histories] is one of deterritorialization… they take the category out of itself (if they are considered seriously), make it other than it is, transform it beyond recognition.25

I will show that Moorman, when considered seriously and expansively, emerges as just such a historical remainder. She exerts pressure on several key art historical categories, from movements to mediums to disciplinary boundaries. Most importantly, however, major histories emphatically require an ideological investment in authorship and the ability to firmly assign works and aesthetic developments to those celebrated by such histories. Therefore, it is Moorman’s deterritorialization of authorship—her unique transformation of its terms and assumptions in each of her collaborative undertakings— that constitutes the critical potentiality of her minor history and the fundamental stakes of this dissertation.

Deleuze and Guattari pointedly emphasize that Kafka’s status as a German-speaking Jew in Prague, “living in a language not his own,” was part of what created the revolutionary conditions for his literature.26 Moorman’s decision to operate as a classically-trained instrumentalist inside the avant-garde art world is a parallel kind of dislocation, and some of the incommensurability between her prolific practice and historical occlusion stems from producing in one disciplinary-culture while living inside another—one that does not have language for

24 Joseph, 50.
26 Deleuze and Guattari, 18-19.
recognizing virtuoso performers and soloists, nor institutional structures to employ or remunerate them. Yet this is also where the revolutionary potential of her internal otherness to the visual arts bears fruit. By pursuing “a minor practice of a major language from within,” she emphasizes gaps in disciplinary language and value-systems at a critical moment when visual arts and New Music communities were blurring their borders.\textsuperscript{27} This encourages art historians to recognize the shift in meaning and accent when certain tools, such as the score, are appropriated into the language of the visual arts, while other aspects of performing traditions, like soloists and repertoires remain un-translated.\textsuperscript{28}

Since the 1970s, feminist scholars have stressed that women’s insertion into art history should disrupt the discipline by upending the values that had naturalized their exclusion.\textsuperscript{29} As Amelia Jones powerfully demonstrated, re-reading Dada through the embodied radicality of Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven fundamentally alters our analysis of the earliest American avant-garde, which over the years has become reductively focused on Marcel Duchamp’s readymades.\textsuperscript{30} Moorman is similarly productive: an unsanctioned personification of neodada irrationality, she can serve as a rupturing force in the accepted midcentury story of conceptual innovators heroically triumphing over subjectivity by recourse to language and systems. Performing rather than creating roles, organizing and supporting rather than claiming and naming, serving as a vehicle for others’ visions without pushing one’s own—Moorman’s artistic activities are traditionally gendered as are the terms of their historicization. By

\textsuperscript{27} Deleuze and Guattari, 18.
\textsuperscript{28} In particular, a problematization of the liberatory potential of the score, as it moves from Cagean experimental music to conceptual art, will be the subject of Chapter 1.
\textsuperscript{30} Amelia Jones, \textit{Irrational Modernism: A Neuasthenic History of New York Dada} (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004). The parallels between the Baroness, a muse who was actually a catalyst and a close compatriot later effaced from histories from New York Dada, and Moorman in relation to New Music/Cage and Fluxus/Paik are striking, and worth further exploration at another time.
interrogating the complex ways that Moorman’s story is intertwined with issues of gender, we can appreciate the proscribed situation in which female artists of her time existed, and perhaps understand her strangely liminal position between muse and maker, organizer and object, liberated and subjugated, as her way of working within, rather than fighting against, limited options. Firmly staking out this uncharted, and still uncategorizable territory, she performed these traditionally female roles to such excess as to refute their normally devalued status, forcing a reconsideration of the importance of the body, the inspiration, the vehicle, the platform, and the producer in major art histories.

In the pages that follow, therefore, I argue that Moorman undermines narratives of individual artistic production and allows us to think anew about what it means (or could mean) to be an artist in this post-medium and -discipline specific moment. Moorman was not an author, in the modern sense, of the works she presented; nor was she a feminist performance artist developing creative vehicles for her own personal self-expression. Equally, she was no rote enactor of scores, but a sought-after collaborator. Moorman pried open spaces for creative agency within the hierarchies of the avant-garde, where the valorization of singular genius had not been eliminated by critiques of Abstract Expressionism but merely transported into the realms of composing, directing and critical discourse.31 As a performer and producer, Moorman’s limited presence in historical accounts of this period highlights the continued focus on traditional authorship even as art became more performance-oriented, open-structured and participatory. Over the course of this study, I show that Moorman did not simply offer unusual interpretations of pre-formed pieces, but that her engagement with these works (and their

31 As will be discussed further in Chapter 1, this can be seen clearly in what Julia Robinson terms John Cage’s “symbolic investiture” around his oeuvre, by which he shifts the locus of aesthetic control and critical reception from expressions or experiences intrinsic to his compositions to the self-authorizing discourse that he produced around them. Robinson, “John Cage and Investiture: Unmanning the System,” in John Cage: October Files, ed. Julia Robinson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 171-216.
authors) was vital to their existence and development. Similarly, I highlight how her Festivals, which were not planned around preselected pieces or curatorial conceits, posited a form of collaborative curating dependent on the interaction of the organizer, artists, context and publics.

Recent interest in Moorman seems indicative of renewed contemporary pressure within the field to account for the multiplicity of authorships involved in the production and reception of art. Moorman’s historical trajectory, therefore, offers an opportunity to consider a variety of cross-disciplinary models of creative engagement that might help us appreciate contributions that do not assert conceptual ownership. This project draws on theories of authorship and agency in curatorial, gender and media studies, masochism, musicology, and psychoanalysis to develop lenses through which the interface between concept and enactment in such work can be precisely analyzed. In addition to bringing her role into focus, these lenses open up new readings of important works, while critically challenging those major histories that have been seamlessly promulgated without her. Intentionally structured as a decentered monograph, the dissertation’s chapters each consider Moorman in relation to other, invariably better-known creative agents, whose practices are also explored and appear differently in light of their collaboration or comparison to her. As a performer, Moorman put into action ideas that were, more often than not, put into writing by others. While these texts are drawn into chapter discussion to place her practice in context, I equally position Moorman’s projects as unruly illustrations that force reconsideration of these theoretical positions swirling around her.

III. From Footnotes to Center Stage

Moorman’s treatment during her lifetime and her relegation to footnotes after, in fact, directly test the rhetorical claims of the avant-garde circles in which she operated, of the
colleagues she worked with, and of later critics and historians evaluating this period. Overviews of Fluxus, like Owen Smith’s *Fluxus: History of an Attitude* (1998) and Thomas Kellein’s *Fluxus* (1995), continually assert the centrality of Fluxus’ anti-authoritarian ethos, while delicately acknowledging the governing role of George Maciunas, who sought to manage Fluxus authorship via copyrighting, marketing and a policing of who was or was not Fluxus. In the literature on John Cage, from his famous essay collection *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (1961) to Joseph’s *Beyond the Dream Syndicate* (2008), the composer’s desubjectivizing strategies are positioned as liberating both the performer and audience, without fully accounting for the degree to which this freedom was constrained by expectations of a Zen-like renunciation of subjectivity on both of their parts. Maciunas’ dictatorial Flux-blacklisting of Moorman, and Cage’s disapproval of Moorman’s interpretation of his score bring these figures’ ideological inconsistencies into relief. By bringing an interdisciplinary lens to this material, it becomes clear that Moorman stands in a blind spot that allows art historians such as Liz Kotz to claim that Cagean-inspired collage or chance-derived scores “undermine the position of the author” in a book centered on authors and their texts. Moorman’s precarious position as a performer in this

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32 Owen Smith, *Fluxus History of an Attitude* (San Diego: San Diego State University, 1998) and Thomas Kellein’s *Fluxus* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995). In a telling exchange, Nam June Paik pleads for his freedom, begging Maciunas to “purge me from FLUXUS COMPLETELY,” while Maciunas defends his “striving for a common front & CENTRALIZATION,” which requires constant purging of “saboteurs & deviationists,” like the communist party. While undated, the letters reference Fluxus Newsletter #5, January 1, 1963, in which Maciunas demanded exclusive publishing rights for Fluxus editions. Box 31, fol. 21, Jean Brown Papers (JBP), Getty Research Institute, Special Collections, Los Angeles.


34 That the “flux-blacklisting” of Moorman stemmed from Maciunas’ jealousy and fear that the NYAGF were competing with Flux-events only makes his authoritarian desire to control and claim credit for this movement even more apparent. Smith, 157-9. Interestingly, his failure to follow through on this attempt to not only blacklist Moorman, but anyone who participated in her festivals was called out by Yoko Ono in an angry letter, years later, in which she equates his hypocrisy to Nixon and then Hitler. Ono to Maciunas, December 3, 1971, box 31, fol. 20, JBP. For her part, Moorman kept killing Maciunas with kindness, sending a postcard hoping they will cross paths in Italy, with a big heart around the note, on August 4, 1977, box 31, fol. 19, JBP.

language-saturated “performance art” scene is helpfully inflected, then, by understanding the relationship between performer and composer as regulated by the classical music score, which is Cage’s original frame of reference and yet infrequently brought into discussions of 1960s scored works.36

In the literature on Paik—from Calvin Tomkins’ 1977 “Video Visionary” profile that widely disseminated the official Paik narrative as “George Washington of Video Art,” to the Asia Society’s recent catalogue, Nam June Paik: Becoming Robot (2014)—critics invariably repeat his triumphant claims to have brought sexuality to music and humanized technology, with Moorman most often positioned as a well-tuned vehicle for these positivistic achievements.37 Yet much of Paik’s work depends on his relationship with Moorman for its form and development, and has a sharper critical edge when considered with her as a reciprocal force. Rather than simply echoing Paik’s promotional language implying that bringing sex into music is emancipatory or that humanizing technology makes it less threatening, my attention to Moorman’s contributions reveals far more complicated considerations of sexuality, power and technological progress at work. Finally, in reckoning with her Festival’s absence from emergent curatorial histories, we clearly see the field’s preference for strongly authored “curatorial statements,” despite the obviously multivocal nature of group exhibitions and ideological recourse to the discursive nature of “the curatorial.”38

36 Particularly helpful in this regard is Lydia Goehr, The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), which traces the emergence of the score along with the musical work-concept from the seventeenth century through to Cage’s seeming challenge to authorial control in the 1950s and 60s. In her conclusion Goehr observes that, despite a professed desire to “eliminate himself from his work, Cage “strives to maintain” in practice what he theoretically aims to dismantle. Goehr, 261.

37 Calvin Tomkins, “Video Visionary,” New Yorker (May 5, 1975), and Chu and Yun, eds.

38 These histories are traced within authoritative overviews, such as Paul O’Neill’s The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), or Bruce Altshuler’s Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions That Made Art History, 1962-2002 (London: Phaidon Press, 2013). However, the emphasis on curatorial authorship is most evident in the fact that most publishing in this field is done by curators or based in large part on interviews with famous curators, from Hans Ulrich Obrist’s Ways of Curating (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014).
In addition to pressuring the assumption of these major histories, the minor history traced here offers the first treatment of Moorman’s extended career from a simultaneously historical and theoretical perspective. Initiated when there was no serious scholarship on Moorman, this dissertation is now part of a wave of re-appraisals that have started to bring her story to light with increasing insistence. In 2000, Barbara Moore, a long-time friend and co-executor of Moorman’s estate, presented a small archival exhibition, “The World of Charlotte Moorman,” at her New York gallery/bookstore Bound and Unbound. The show was accompanied by an “archive catalogue,” a set of copied materials from Moorman’s archive, distributed as an edition of one hundred boxes full of loose pages. Without any new writing, these documents did little to place Moorman within art historical discourse, but were a vital resource for piecing together Moorman’s timeline when her archive was still in disarray. Then in 2007, an Italian record label released Charlotte Moorman: Cello Anthology, a four-CD set of audio from her performances with a compilation of previously untranslated or published texts and a brief introduction by the editor. With this, Gisela Gronemeyer’s featured essay “Seriousness and Dedication: The American Avant-Garde Cellist Charlotte Moorman,” originally published in a German music


39 I consulted the editions held at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, and at Fondazione Bonotto, Molvena, Italy.
magazine in 1992, joined the Paik-produced video “Topless Cellist” Charlotte Moorman (1995) as the only substantive profiles of the performer readily available.40

Since then, new scholarship has been building steam, in conjunction with the increasing accessibility of her archives.41 Benjamin Piekut’s study of New York’s musical avant-garde circa 1964, Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limit (2011), devotes a chapter, as do I, to Moorman’s interpretation of Cage’s 26’ 1.1499.” Piekut’s musicological perspective on this relationship provides generative entry points for my thinking as an art historian about the centrality of scores in twentieth century visual arts, and what the power struggle between Cage and Moorman reveals about conceptual ownership and gendered labor from this disciplinary vantage.42 Moorman and Paik’s televisual collaborations are also prominently featured in music scholar Holly Rogers’ Sounding the Gallery: Video and the Rise of Art-Music (2013); Moorman playing TV Cello graces the cover. However, Rogers’ discussion of their work primarily advances her argument about reclassifying video as “art-music” in order to better reflect the medium’s inherently audio/visual nature and the musical backgrounds of its early protagonists. While a fair point, such an approach has little new to say about Moorman and Paik’s obviously musically indebted projects.43

Most significantly, in 2014, former Walker Art Center curator Joan Rothfuss published the first book-length treatment of Moorman, Topless Cellist: The Improbable Life of Charlotte

40 Gronemeyer’s “Seriousness and Dedication,” had previously been published in Musik Texte: Zeitschrift für Neue Musik, no. 43 (February 1992).
41 Deering Library curator Scott Krafft recalls Moorman biographer Rothfuss first visiting the unprocessed archive in 2006 or 2007. Email to the author, July 27, 2017. Her first substantial writing on the subject, “The Ballad of Nam June and Charlotte: A Revisionist History,” appears in the exhibition catalogue, Sook-Kyung Lee and Susanne Rennert, Nam June Paik, (London: Tate Publishing, 2010). The impact of archival access can also be seen in Piekut’s study, which relies heavily on having access to Moorman’s marked up score of Cage’s 26’ 1.1499”, also in the CMA holdings.
Moorman. Meticulously assembled from over a decade of research, Rothfuss’s fluid narrative traces Moorman’s life from beginning till end, confidently taking the reader through her personal and professional journey. Full of smart, quick takeaways about the significance of Moorman’s various contributions, Rothfuss’s goal of providing a comprehensive biography for a general audience nevertheless keeps her from slowing down to attend to specific bodies of work, or zooming out to think through their disruptive potential for the field of art history writ large. This dissertation consciously builds on Rothfuss’s invaluable groundwork to open up the analytic and theoretical provocations embedded in Moorman’s life story. Such a biography also frees an analysis like mine to tightly focus on artistic developments rather than on providing a comprehensive chronology. Rothfuss was subsequently crucial to the development of a touring exhibition, *Feast of Astonishments: Charlotte Moorman and the Avant-Garde, 1960s-1980s*, which was organized by and debuted at the Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University in January 2016. Expanding from Moorman’s archives, housed at the University’s library, the exhibition did a fine job of bringing together artworks, ephemera and media documentation to give a sense of the abundant creative activity that spun out from Moorman’s centrifugal force. The catalogue features essays from the curatorial team, as well as art historians with adjacent specialties, showcasing a range of scholarly approaches to discrete aspects of Moorman’s oeuvre. While these perspectives are fragmented, each contribution represents the kind of serious writing that had previously not existed around her work. This dissertation benefits from this intellectual dialogue finally being underway, building on some entries, refuting or reframing others, to create a coherent argument for Moorman’s unique ontology.44 A forthcoming dissertation *Body, Law, Instrument: Charlotte Moorman’s Early*
Performances with Nam June Paik, by Sophie Landres, PhD candidate at Stony Book University, promises another intensive engagement with Moorman’s embodied practice, though delineated in scope to just the collaborations with Paik. As indicated by a recent essay in Art Journal, Landres also takes a more psychoanalytic approach to the material, interpreting Moorman’s role as a living art object in relation to the Freudian uncanny and automatons. This is an angle I have not pursued, choosing instead to focus on models of authorship that destabilized broader art historical categories, and artistic roles.

My aim, then, is to take an expansive view of Moorman’s artistic career, covering four important modes of creative collaboration from her earliest entry into the avant-garde to her haunting presence in Paik’s productions after her death. Yet, as a minor history, this project makes no claims for comprehensive coverage of Moorman’s life, nor the superlative quality of her work. I am far more interested in the power dynamics that her negotiations with creators and creative platforms elucidate, and how these simultaneously articulate the limits of anti-authorial claims and the essential role of non-authors in the production of contemporary art. As such, the scope of this study is determined by her most telling relationships and centers on her most productive years. Notably, this precludes close consideration of singular instances of engagement, such as her consistent re-performance of Ono’s Cut Piece (1964) [Fig. I.11-I.12], as well as her long-term but arms-length working relationship with McWilliams, who wrote scenarios that Moorman performed at her Festivals from 1968 onward. Likewise, rather than trying to cover all thirteen Festivals in depth, I focus on the creative development of Moorman’s organizational approach from 1963 through 1969, a year when several better-known curatorial narrative insights and theoretical grist which play into my discussions in Chapter 4 and Chapter 2 respectively. Feast of Astonishments, 61-91 and 169-185.

projects (including Lucy Lippard’s 557,087 and Harald Szeemann’s *Live in Your Head: Attitudes as Form*) have been credited—or critiqued—for their reconfiguration of curatorial and artistic authorship.

The first chapter, “Devotion or Defiance? Moorman and Cage,” focuses on Moorman’s engagement with John Cage’s *26’ 1.1499” for a String Player* (1955) [Fig I.13 – Fig. I.14], which remained a signature work in her repertoire for over two decades. Her discovery and initial performance of this demanding, aleatory work in 1963 marks the beginning of her journey from classical Julliard-trained soloist to interpreter of the avant-garde. A note in Cage’s score invited the performer to use “sounds from entirely other sources” than strings. Moorman enthusiastically took the opportunity to creatively shape a soundscape from her own imagination, playing whistles and trashcan lids, reciting news headlines and tampon instructions, spinning rock albums and shooting a BB gun during roughly two decades of performances.46 Yet, Cage was not impressed by the breadth of source material, and professed concern that Moorman did not show proper “devotion to the piece.” This not only suggests that the she had exceeded some boundaries that he still held regarding what the open-score authorized; it also undermines Cage’s philosophical position espousing a Zen-like detachment from specific outcomes—in art and life.47 This problematizes the cherished belief that Cage freed performers to “work from their own centers,” and by extension, that Cagean scores in the visual arts “[blur] the boundary between ‘composer’ and ‘interpreter’.”48 Scores, in fact, have helped composers commodify their ephemeral production since the late eighteenth century and clearly demarcate the aesthetic elements that they consider to be essential to their work, apart from the flourishes or failures of a given performer. Therefore, the importation of the score, via Cage, into contemporary art at this

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46 Piekut, 147-158.
47 Bonomo, unpaginated.
moment should be recognized as a strategy ensuring that dematerialized projects could still enter
the market as conceptually static objects with a singular author attached. Following musicology’s
own efforts to think beyond such hierarchies, I posit *relayed authorship* as a lens to appreciate
the radical possibility Moorman saw in Cage’s invitation and to develop alternative approaches
to historicizing performance art.⁴⁹

Paik and Moorman’s collaborative work is considered in two distinct but theoretically
linked chapters. In “Seduction and Submission: Moorman and Paik in Performance,” I analyze
the live collaborations between Paik and Moorman from 1964 through 1968. Evidencing a
particular combination of seriousness, eroticism, ridiculousness and risk-taking, these
collaborations clearly depend on a *pas de deux* between classically trained renegades intent on
sparking a sexual musical revolution that could reflect the changing technologies of
subjectivization imposed on post-war bodies, as deftly illustrated in their press photographs from
this period [Fig. I.15 – Fig. I.16]. Using theorizations of masochism to understand their
consensual power-play, I show that Moorman’s availability and pliability as a performer called
forth ever-more daring propositions from Paik [Fig. I.17 – Fig. I-19]. While her objectification in
these scenarios could make her seem like a prop, Moorman’s submission was an essential
generative force.⁵⁰ She spurred fantasies and then valiantly enacted them with such gusto that the
next prompt had to outstrip the last. In such a collaboration, the score becomes the ultimate
*masochistic contract* to which both partners are subservient, and the iterative performances
aestheticize rather than conceal a hierarchical, co-dependent relationship.⁵¹ The terms of this

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⁴⁹ For the theorization of *relayed authorship* in musicology, see Georgina Born, “On Musical Mediation: Ontology,
⁵⁰ For more on the generative nature of the submissive, see Michel Foucault, “Sexual Choice, Sexual Act” in *Ethics:
⁵¹ The *masochistic contract* is a core component of masochism in Deleuze, 75-80.
contractual relationship were legally challenged by the state when Moorman, but not Paik, was charged with indecency for appearing topless as required by Paik’s score for *Opera Sextronique* in 1967. Judge Milton Shalleck’s guilty verdict and lengthy opinion refuted Moorman’s right to assign agency over her body to Paik, while simultaneously proving the impossibly constrained nature of her agency within patriarchal capitalist society.

Carrying forward this masochistic interest in cultural constraints and self-objectification, the third chapter “Transformed in Transmission: Moorman’s Whole Life Video Art,” considers Moorman and Paik’s televisual collaborations. Tracing Moorman’s emergence as a “whole life video artist,” from early TV appearances in 1964 to Paik’s posthumous robotic reification of her in 1993, I emphasize her performance of a distributed subjectivity at the very moment when *closed-circuit consciousness* becomes a way of life. Critically unpacking Paik’s stated aspiration to “humanize technology,” I argue that these televisual collaborations constitute an early, protracted investigation of how performance and television would from now on be wedded, not only as dialectically linked mediums, but also within individuals’ identity construction and representations of themselves to the world. In works such as *TV Bra for Living Sculpture* (1969) and *TV Cello* (1971), in which live video footage of her performance is fed back to the screens on her body, Moorman is situated within a media relay that increasingly conflates surveillance and entertainment, communication and control. Moorman’s calibrated interaction with her image as a feedback loop foreshadows the creative deployment of the self in and as a form of

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52 The contractual nature of sadomasochistic and performance relationships is central to Kathy O’Dell’s *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art and the 1970s* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).
54 *Closed-circuit consciousness* is a term I propose for the society-wide shift instigated by knowing that one’s everyday actions could be caught on video replay, inviting all members of the population to prepare themselves for their potential media distribution or self-portrayal in a video-taped version of reality. While this wording appears once in Tony E. Jackson’s discussion of the Lacanian mirror stage, I believe it has value as an ontologically specific experience determining self-presentation and awareness after the advent of CCTV. Jackson *The Subject of Modernism: Narrative Alterations in the Fiction of Eliot, Conrad, Woolf, and Joyce* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 29.
performance in postmodern theory, art practices and contemporary “life-casting.”

Acknowledging the pessimistic undertones of Paik and media theorist Marshall McLuhan’s technologically-totalizing predictions, I frame Moorman as presciently demonstrating the human body as it will be caught in the communication feedback loop of a market-driven, fully-wired global capitalism. In doing so, Moorman prefigures the *cyborg feminism* that Donna Haraway will write about a decade later in “A Cyborg Manifesto,” in which hope is found in the same place as despair—with the ideological death of the transcendent self and illusions of autonomy (always truly reserved for white male elites), and the birth of an anti-binary, interconnected post-humanism.55

The fifth chapter, “Catalytic Curating: Moorman and the New York Avant Garde Festival,” circles back to consider Moorman’s role as founder and organizer of the NYAGF. The Festivals began in 1963 as a series of concerts [Fig. I.20 – Fig.-22], but quickly became massive, multivalent, free public events that were well covered by the daily press but are missing from art and exhibition histories of the time. Through these annual undertakings, Moorman introduced hundreds of artists to tens of thousands of people from all walks of life. She secured iconic locations, including Central Park (1966), Grand Central Terminal (1973), Shea Stadium (1974), the World Trade Center (1977) and, for the final year, the Passenger Ship Terminal (which now hosts the Armory Art Fair) (1980), providing evocative contexts to which artists could creatively respond [Fig. I.123 – Fig.I-25]. Focusing on the Festivals’ evolution during the 1960s, my discussion emphasizes how Moorman’s curatorial strategies supported the changing needs of her artistic community and their shared interest in connecting with diverse publics. While hardly recognizable as an art curator at the time, in hindsight Moorman can be seen as operating at the

cutting-edge of trends that would redefine the role of the curator, trends that are most often traced back to landmark exhibitions in 1969. In order to rethink exhibition-histories in formation, I put Moorman’s projects into dialogue with those of contemporaries Harald Szeemann and Lucy Lippard. Still considered the best-known independent curator of his day, Szeemann established a model of curatorial authorship that, while critiqued by many artists, encouraged the practice and its accompanying discourse to be dominated by outsized personalities and name-brand styles of curating. I argue that Moorman and Lippard represent another trajectory that is only recently being recognized and revalued: that of the catalytic curator, who provides the impetus and context for work to be made and encountered without putting their ideas (or themselves) front and center. I propose a reappraisal of the Festivals as early models for site-specific interventions in public space and for Moorman’s creative exhibition-staging as a precursor for dialogic forms of curatorial praxis, while again questioning the privileging of projects that emphasize the mind (in conceptual exhibitions) over the body (in performance festivals) when both dematerialized moves reflect the neoliberal information and experience economies.

In the conclusion, I review the models of creative agency Moorman can be seen exploring in the previous chapters: relayed authorship as a counterpoint to the autonomous composer; the inverse power of the submissive in consensual scenarios of domination; the performativity of self-presentation in fully mediated world; and the relationally-constituted

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56 Most exhibition histories mark 1969 as the year when object-based curating started to compete with more process-oriented, site-specific practices, citing Szeemann’s When Attitudes Become Form: Works – Concepts – Processes – Situations – Information, which invited artists to make works on site at Kunsthalle Bern; Seth Siegelaub’s January 5-31, 1969, which reconfigured the exhibition as catalogue; and Lippard’s 557,087, which realized projects based on artist-given instructions all around Seattle. See for example, O’ Neill, 16, and Altschuler, Biennials and Beyond, whose list of twenty-five most important exhibitions 1962-2002 includes these three, the most from any one year.

57 This is also a specific term I hope to forward through my discussion in chapter 4. While catalytic is often used as an adjective to describe curators that generally “make things happen,” a specifically catalytic curator is one focused on providing the elements necessary to enhance or enable other’s creative process, which are explicitly not subjugated, controlled, or authorially-inscribed by that agent.
catalytic productivity of the curator. I argue that her minor history demonstrates the vital contributions that are rendered invisible by the terms of major histories, and opens our eyes to these unusual angles from which to appreciate other kinds of essential activity. While such models are hard to map neatly across idiosyncratic practices, I show that in Moorman’s case, they function as provocative glimpses of paths not taken, standing in stark contrast to dominant trends in performance and curatorial practice today. Rather than disrupting singular authorship and narratives of individual genius, the postwar avant-garde’s dematerialized and collaborative turns are now neatly channeled into monographic, market-friendly configurations with the rise of delegated performance art and celebrity curators with dialogic branding. I hope that by elaborating Moorman’s minor history and decentering the monograph, this study contests inscription of singularity on works that call for an ecological analysis of art-making, while offering new ways to think about authorship in the 1960s and today.
CHAPTER 1
DEVOTION OR DEFIANCE: MOORMAN AND CAGE

I. Starting from Zero

It is hard to overstate the centrality of John Cage (1912-1992) in narratives of twentieth-century cultural history, particularly those that spin out from New York as the newly established center of the art world following World War II. In addition to revolutionizing classical music, his philosophical approach to art had an immediate and profound impact on his contemporaries working in other media. In particular, his exploration of chance composition techniques, his interest in found and recorded sound as musical elements (and the resulting theatricalization of musical performances), and his deployment of text-based scores open to significant interpretation on the part of the instrumentalist, inspired choreographers, painters, writers, filmmakers and others to find parallel approaches within their own art forms. This expansive translation and transmission of ideas created what has been termed “the Cage effect.”

The Cage effect could be identified amongst practitioners, particularly in New York, of almost any creative medium in the late 1950s and 1960s and continues to be perceptible in, if not foundational to, much global contemporary art practice today. A common thread between all these innovations attributed to Cage, and identified in work marked by the Cage effect, is the disruption of authorial control. Throughout there is the assumption that Cage himself provides us with an ideal model of a de-hierarchized musical practice and an alternate to the autonomous creative genius of the composer, as developed within romantic theories of art articulated at the

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end of the eighteenth century. However, as successful as Cage’s thinking has been in destabilizing assumptions around the proper form and processes for art-making, his monumental presence as a figure of authority should provoke some skepticism as to whether his own work actually problematized claims of individual authorship, and the degree to which he truly wished to relinquish control over his oeuvre.

In this chapter, I argue that close consideration of Charlotte Moorman’s long-term engagement with one of Cage’s signature works, 26’ 1.1499” for a String Player (1955) [Fig.1.1] —and his response to these performances—allows us to better understand the tension between Cage, the philosopher, and Cage, the composer, in matters pertaining to authorship, creative agency and control. A note in the score allowing for “sounds from entirely other sources” led Moorman to play whistles, straddle bombs, recite tampon instructions, and trigger recordings of concrete noises and rock songs during her performances [Fig 1.2]. Given that so many commentators on Cage note the openness of such instructions, the freedom afforded the performer in this case, it is significant that Cage publicly disapproved of Moorman’s lack of “devotion to the piece,” suggesting that her interpretation exceeded what he imagined to be authorized by his notational indeterminacy.

What might seem to be a simple matter of diverging tastes, however, will be reframed as a critical moment within the historic evolution of the musical “work-concept,” as traced by Lydia Goehr in The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works. At the end of her persuasive book, Goehr highlights the degree to which, despite Cage’s “attempt to create something revolutionary from within the institution,” his gestures remained limited in relation to the distribution of power

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between the composer and performer and the institutional reception of performances, such that “the performer is applauded and the composer granted recognition for the work.” I will propose that Moorman, unlike performers more closely aligned to Cage’s aesthetic as well as philosophical preferences, pressed Cage’s score towards the more radical implications of his stated philosophy, participating fully in the shaping of each iteration of 26’1.1499” That is, while Cage, against his own writings, clearly wanted to maintain some control over the final product, Moorman was elaborating a performance practice that fully embraced the potential for radical collaboration embedded in musical creations such as Cage’s. In this way, more than interpreters of whom Cage approved, Moorman’s performances started to undermine the regulatory stability of the musical “work-concept” itself.

More expansively, I will argue that the ontological complexity of the musical work-concept has significant implications for the visual arts movements closely associated with Cage, namely Happenings and Fluxus, which adopted the “score” as simultaneously a medium and a strategy for disseminating ephemeral performance-based practices. As Goehr summarizes, musical works have long been understood as “ontological mutants…not in any straightforward way physical, mental or ideal objects,” yet treated, since the early 1800s, as singular things that are “(a) created (b) performed many times in different places, (c) not exhaustively captured or fixed in notational form, yet (d) intimately related to their performances and scores.” Because Western culture had over a century dealing with this aberrant object in music, it was easy to smoothly channel reception of immaterial “works” into a discourse that treats them “as if” they were stable objects created by a single author. Against claims that Cagean scores “[blur] the

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63 Goehr, 264-5.
64 Goehr, 2-3.
65 As Goehrs puts it for classical music, “In its regulative capacity, the work-concept suggests to us, because of some quite peculiar aesthetic and musical reasons offered at a particular time, that we should talk of each individual
boundary between ‘composer’ and ‘interpreter,’” I will argue that, even as they invite the performer to radically expand their creative input, they can equally be used to preserve the boundary—as they have for centuries in music—between ideas attributed to the author and those potentially added by a particular interpreter, such as Moorman. While showing that Cage continued to imbue his scores with this de/authorizing function, I propose that Moorman dared to imagine them as the basis for *relayed authorship*, which musicologist Georgina Born delineates as creative exchanges in which a work can be picked up and run in unauthorized directions, while still retaining an explicit connection to its last author.

The importation of the work-concept and its regulatory mechanism, the score, from the musical sphere to visual arts discourse ultimately allowed for the conceptual claiming of vast swaths of daily life by individual authors and ensured that, at the very moment when art was becoming more dematerialized and collaborative, the art-world could still operate with a value system predicated on singular artistic geniuses, whose names, like those of the great composers, would impart value to a set of instructions, whether performed or not. As such, the work-concept helps us understand this period’s nominalism as no longer a Duchampian identification of already-existing objects as art, but the creation of conceptual art objects out of ephemeral experiences and everyday actions. This brings with it the power-structures and hierarchies that are instantiated by the work-concept in the musical field, placing composers of art-concepts above those that carry out their instructions and protecting the purity of the composer-artist’s work as if it were an object, as if it were a construction that existed over and above its performances and scores.” I would say the same has now become standard for performances in the visual arts since the 1950s. Goehr, 106.


67 Georgina Born describes distributed or relayed authorship, in which a starting set of information—be it an open score or the digitized song available for sampling and remixing—serves as a baton to be passed along and taken in unknown and undetermined directions in her article, “On Musical Mediation: Ontology, Technology and Creativity,” *twentieth-century music*, vol. 2, no. 1 (March 2005): 7-36.

initial vision from being sullied by the actual nature of participatory engagement and repeated performative actions, which necessarily has an evolutionary, intersubjective resistance to behaving as a stable, coherent object.

This means that, while embracing performance and ephemeral practices in the 1960s as a way to resist the commodification of the art object, the visual arts also simultaneously adopted the performing art world’s tools for promoting autonomous producers and commodifying ephemeral products. Moorman’s use of 26’ 1.1499” will be seen within this context as an important détourner of the classical music score’s function, away from maintaining the composer’s autonomy and a consistent enactment of their singular work; and towards serving as a platform for relayed collaboration and an umbrella structure for connecting an evolving series of events into an ongoing performance project.

II. Moorman Finds Cage

When Charlotte Moorman arrived in New York City to study at Julliard School of Music in 1957, she already had significant training in classical music, first at Centenary College in Louisiana and then at the University of Texas at Austin for her Masters degree. During her first years in New York, she studied at Julliard with Leonard Rose, one of the preeminent cello teachers of his generation, performed privately with classmates as the Leonia Trio [Fig. 1.3], and played with Jacob Glick’s Boccherini Players and the American Symphony Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski.69

69 It is interesting to note that these experiences in the classical world all had aspects of openness that would carry over into Moorman’s later career, from Rose’s reputation for encouraging his students to search for individuality and independence (Yoyo Ma, quoted in “Leonard Rose” obituary http://www.cello.org/cnc/rose.htm, accessed 4/30/14) to the American Symphony Orchestra’s egalitarian mission to “to offer concerts of great music within the means of everyone” (http://americansymphony.org/about/, accessed 4/30/14). Jacob Glick, in addition to organizing the classical Boccherini Players, was a compatriot of Moorman’s in pioneering works by living composers, and Moorman helped produce several of his performances of new music in the early 1960s. See “Letter
Exactly how and when Moorman began her engagement with new music may never be absolutely clear. While Moorman did not give a public performance of Cage’s 24’ 1.1499” until 1963, she reported wanting to perform the piece for a private juried recital at Juilliard in 1958. In a 1980 interview, she recalled the impetus for this (and her entire avant-garde career) as stemming from her boredom with the classical repertoire and her discovery of Cage:

While I was playing [the Kabalevsky Cello Concerto] solo [for the thirty-fifth time], I was wondering, …had I turned the gas off in my apartment in New York? …I realized, my God if my mind can wander like this, while I’m playing the solo and I’m bored to tears, imagine if the audience isn’t terribly bored too. So I started to look for contemporary music and I found it…. My whole life was influenced by a piece by John Cage, that was a string player piece, the title is 26’ 1.1499” for a String Player and it was not a score of notes, it’s a graph, a line for each string of the cello and then he had a very important line on the score for non-cello sounds, and that means I shoot guns, I cook, I play a bomb, I play television, just anything non-cello at that point…. At Julliard they didn’t want me to play that piece on my public recital.70

In January 1961, she went to see her classmate, the violinist, Kenji Kobayashi perform at the Chambers Street loft that Toshi Ichiyanagi and Yoko Ono, a married couple at the forefront of Japanese avant-garde music, famously turned into a vibrant salon for experimental performance.71 She immediately became influential in this scene, working with the established producer Norman Seaman to help organize, fund and promote concerts that brought this new music from private lofts to public recital halls. In 1961, she secured Kobayashi’s New York debut at Town Hall in April, which featured a new work composed for him by Ichiyanagi. That November she helped produce, and served as personal manager for, a full evening of works by

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70 The Kabalevsky piece referred to is likely Op. 49: Cello Concerto No. 1 in G minor (1948–1949). The private Julliard recital, the circumstances of which she goes on to narrate in detail, is hard to corroborate, and it is highly unlikely to have included the Cage piece, since the sheet music was not yet available in 1958, and she asks Kobayashi about the piece, as if it was entirely unfamiliar to her, in the 1963 letter quoted on the following page. However, the 1958 date given in the 1980 Fred Stern documentary is consistent with the testimony she gave to the same effect during her 1967 trial, People vs. Moorman (trial transcript, April 19, 1967, 6). Documentary footage https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xYcd4z7tTOc, (accessed 2/14/14).

71 Piekut, 144.
Ono at Carnegie Recital Hall. Performers in Ono’s program included such downtown luminaries as A-yo, George Brecht, Joseph Byrd, Philip Corner, Terry Jennings, Jackson Mac Low, Jonas Mekas, Yvonne Rainer, La Monte Young and for the first time in this context, Moorman herself. Reports of the concert are sketchy, but it seems likely that Moorman was one of the “musicians in the corner,” as described by Alan Rich in the New York Times, who “made their instruments go squeak and squawk,” during A Grapefruit in the world of Park (1961).

Following this performance, her connections to the downtown scene continued to expand and deepen, and, within the next year, she performed with or helped produce programs with Brecht, Byrd, Corner and Young. In a long letter to Kobayashi from early 1963, she wrote, “you’ve gotten me into a real contemporary music kick,” detailing an extensive list of performances she had been involved with, including several by violinist Jacob Glick and composer Richard Maxfield. She then mentions a program of entirely new music that she was planning for November (ultimately realized in April), including the “John Cage String Piece (the one you played).” In her post-script, she asked Kobayashi to “please write me about your performance of the Cage piece. Any information will help me to understand, prepare, and perform this work.”

Moorman was diligent in seeking guidance in preparing difficult pieces, and 26’1.1499” is from a period when Cage was producing some of his most technically challenging work, simultaneously requiring instrumental virtuosity, interpretive creativity and fastidious timekeeping. Her first confirmed performance of this work took place on April 15, 1963 at Carnegie Recital Hall. See “Correspondence – Kobayashi, Kenji” folder in Correspondence, CMA and “1961 Nov 24 Works by Yoko Ono. Carnegie Recital Hall, NYC” folder in Ephemera, CMA

72 See “Correspondence – Kobayashi, Kenji” folder in Correspondence, CMA and “1961 Nov 24 Works by Yoko Ono. Carnegie Recital Hall, NYC” folder in Ephemera, CMA
74 See “Correspondence – Kobayashi, Kenji” folder in Correspondence, CMA
75 Letter to Kenji Kobayshi, January 13, 1963, in “Correspondence – Kenji Kobayashi” folder, Correspondence, CMA
Corner’s loft on Pitt Street, which extended the tradition begun at Ono’s Chambers Street loft of allowing experimental work to be tried out amongst friends and aesthetically sympathetic audiences. In preparation for and following the performance at Corner’s, Moorman exchanged letters with Cage’s close collaborator and preferred pianist David Tudor. Tudor was to accompany her performance of Earle Brown’s *Music for Cello and Piano* (1955) on the first half of the April 15 program and she rightly regarded him as both an authority on performing Cage and a master musician in his own right. While her letters reveal little about how she performed at the loft, they make clear that, from the beginning, she was wrestling with the challenge of providing a diverse range of sounds while remaining true to the exacting durational structure of the piece. She ultimately decided to present an excerpt, noted on the program as 162.06” for *A String Player*, for this first performance.\(^{76}\) While there is no record of what she used for “other sounds,” it is likely that this would have been her most spare presentation, given the shortened score and limited preparation time.

Shortly after the loft program, at Tudor’s urging and clearly looking ahead to future expanded performances, she went over the piece with Cage himself. Writing to Tudor on June 11, she reports, “I did play for Mr. Cage as you suggested. He helped me so much. I was nervous playing for the creator of the music, but also very grateful to have the opportunity. I want to try making part (+ possibly all) of the other instruments on tape and control its playing with my foot.”\(^{77}\) Here we see what will evolve as her primary focus: assembling a vast array of surprising non-cello sounds and incorporating them with maximum control and efficiency. While tape would never replace all of the other instruments in her arsenal, the use of pre-recorded concrete

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\(^{76}\) This follows Cage’s notes for the work that segments could be presented as stand-alone pieces as long as the title was changed to match the duration of the excerpt. Program in “Charlotte Moorman with David Tudor. 2 Pitt St., NYC” folder. Ephemera - CMA

\(^{77}\) Piekut, 150.
sounds would become an important and thoroughly Cagean aspect of her later performances.

Moorman created an ideal opportunity to present a more extended performance of the work in the summer of 1963, when she organized “6 Concerts ’63,” the first of what would become her New York Avant Garde Festivals. Prompted by the presence in New York of pianist Frederic Rzewski, an interpreter of new music and pioneer of live electronic performance then living in Italy, Moorman approached Seaman, who in turn suggested she contact Tudor about representing her program from Corner’s loft. Tudor, who was on tour with Cage, let Moorman know Cage would be interested in doing a program as well. Moorman reached out to Edgar Varèse for an evening of electronic music, and so the festival’s first year was reportedly conceived and substantially programmed in twenty minutes.78 Now with a public platform at Judson Hall on West 57th Street, and an appropriate context of related programming in which to present the work, Moorman enlisted Tudor to accompany her by playing a section of Cage’s 34’ 46.776” For a Pianist along with her presentation of a longer section of the string piece.

Moorman’s September 3, 1963 program featured a range of downtown composers, including world premieres of works by Corner and jazz innovator Ornette Coleman, as well as pieces by Brown, Byrd, Cage and Young. Photographs of rehearsals for this performance show Moorman alternately assisted by Cage and a younger composer, James Tenney. In the first set, Moorman can be seen blowing into a recorder held by Cage, and then throwing a symbol across the stage. In the photographs with Tenney, a few more elements, including a trash can lid, a hammer, what looks like metal flashing or aluminum foil and a wastepaper basket (into which is it likely she broke a light bulb) are visible around her feet [Fig 1.4].79 Describing the

79 “First Avant-Garde Festival” Photographs file, Avant-Garde Festival Photographs, CMA and illustration in Piekut, 152.
performance itself for his *New Yorker* review, critic Winthrop Sargeant tries to open himself up for an evening of “anti-teleological music,” that is, music which intentionally seeks non-intentionality and refuses the use of music as a language. His report is enlightening:

To my surprises, the first number on the program, something called “Composition 1960 #13,” by La Monte Young, sounded suspiciously like eighteenth-century music. ‘Awfully teleological,’ I said to myself. But during the intermission, I had a chat with Charlotte Moorman the cellist who played it, and found that Mr. Young’s score had consisted of the words ‘Play anything you like.’ Miss Moorman happened to like Sammartini… Thus it appears that teleological music can form part of an anti-teleological program, the element of chance being present in the unpredictableness of the performers choice. (It strikes me that there is something slightly subversive of the anti-teleological position in this, but I can’t quite figure it out.)… Last came an extended composition called ‘34’46.776” for a Piano and String Player [sic],’ by John Cage himself, performed by David Tudor and Miss Moorman… Mr. Tudor, reading from a score that resembled a checkbook, was equipped with fifteen or twenty varieties of drumstick, and his piano with rocks—and heaven knows what else. Every once in a while, he would rise and peer into its interior, like a truck driver looking for a defective spark plug. Both he and Miss Moorman blew whistles from time to time, and several children’s balloons were burst in loud pops. At one point, Miss Moorman hurled a cymbal into the middle of the stage, where it landed with an imposing crash.

Like Moorman, Sargeant was attracted to novelty, professing that, while he was “a confirmed believer in teleology where music is concerned,” he found the festival program “a good deal less boring than many more pretentious examples of supposedly teleological music in our larger concert halls.” In addition to giving a good idea of what exactly happened on stage, his review also reminds one that Moorman’s preferences, as enacted in her *détournement* of Young as an excuse to play Giovanni Battisti Sammartini (c.1700-1755), are quite distant from the sounds she incorporated into her interpretation of Cage.

This positive notice aside, Moorman herself was deeply disappointed with her part in realizing Cage’s work. In a hand-written draft of a letter addressed to Tudor on September 7,

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80 Winthrop Sargeant, “Musical Event: It Just Is—or Is It?,” *The New Yorker*, September 14, 1963. Throughout, Sargeant refers to the terminology used by Leonard B. Meyer in his writings on music and meaning, in which he tackled the emergence of new forms of music (and art) via the binary between teleological art, which since the Renaissance has goals and can serve as a form of communication, and anti-teleological art, which is non-intentional and doesn’t seek to instrumentalize music for communicative or psychologically expressive functions.

81 Sargeant. The cymbal, whistle and balloon would remain components of her Cage interpretation over the years.
Moorman apologized:

You played so beautifully on Tuesday evening. I am sorry that I played so badly. John Cage’s piece is one of my favorite compositions in the entire literature—really hurts that I ruined it. I never thought I would recover from my bad performance, but fortunately, I’ve gotten some rest and am playing it like I wanted to that night. My mind [is] functioning and is connected to my body once again. I am between 3-4 minutes overtime and once I was only 1 minute over—using the indicated parts of my bow + following the dynamics. I only hope I will have another chance to some day play this beautiful piece with you. Love Charlotte

On the back, an additional, even more introspective observation follows:

I’ve learned a lot being associated with you + John in this festival. I’ve learned that music art is strictly a question of individuality
being an artist + performing
I forgot all about punishment + all about reward + all about self styled obligations and duties + responsibilities and remembered one thing only; that it was me – no one else – who determines my destiny and decides my fate.

TY,
love,
Charlotte

This is among the few direct commentaries Moorman made on her approach to and experience of performing indeterminate music. It is a curious artifact. On one hand, the words she uses would seem to point in the opposite direction from a Cagean approach to performance and life, in which individuality and likes and dislikes are transcended and a belief in destiny and control are anathema. On the other hand, forgetting “punishment” and “rewards,” as well as obligations and duties, and taking seriously the responsibility bestowed on her to make choices within a performance situation, suggests that she was working towards a psychological state of detachment from previous regimes of power and the habits of her musical training, in order to produce the necessary internal freedom to perform Cage’s work. After years of classical training geared towards mastery (reward) and the perfect fulfillment of a composer’s wishes (duty),

82 Draft of letter to David Tudor, undated; “1st Avant-Garde Festival– David Tudor” folder, NYAGF – CMA.
letting go of all this would be a prerequisite for finding opportunities within the open score that were not determined by her cello training or a continued sense of obligation to serve the desires of the composer, which obviously existed apart from the score.

That both Moorman and Cage, as will be shown, simultaneously maintained a clear sense of a good and bad performance of pieces supposedly composed without a care for results shows that they were in agreement that performing these works required something vastly different than an “anything goes” attitude. Moorman’s demurring letters, public declarations, and intensive notations on her score, also clearly rule out any sense that she was intentionally disrespectful or lacked discipline in her overall approach to performing Cage’s work. Yet, it is either a lack of discipline or a misconstrued “anything goes” interpretation of indeterminacy that Cage repeatedly cites as his main complaints with performers of his scores. Therefore, it can be deduced that Cage’s issue with Moorman’s interpretation stems from divergent understandings of shared principles rather than from divergent principles. That is, when faced with the unavoidable choices necessitated by contradictions in Cage’s philosophy and music, they were simply guided by personal tastes that are just more or less visibly marked in this historical context. As such, I believe it is fair to say that Moorman found possibilities within Cage’s oeuvre, ways of reading Cage against Cage, that are legitimate and valuably expand the significance of Cage’s legacy. This is the case even, or especially when, these choices were ones Cage himself did not quite sanction and went against his personal tastes. In fact, his registration of dismay emphasizes that he had not as successfully sublimated his own personal tastes as the


84 In light of feminist and postcolonial critiques of the universal unmarked subjectivity of white male authorship, the supposed neutrality of Cage’s intellectual interests should be seen as no less reflective of his subject position, as a well-educated white male Protestant, than Moorman’s seemingly “content-filled” and “embodied” interpretations.
hagiographic writings surrounding him would like to assume. As will be shown, the fault lines of
taste, for Cage, seemed to separate a “natural” world of sounds and the intellectually attuned,
emotionally disinterested subject from a sociopolitical world of sounds (however naturally they
may be part of the aural field) and any evidence of an embodied and sexualized subject (no
matter how intellectually attuned or emotionally disinterested).85

In 1964, Moorman debuted the entire piece as a solo performance at the Second Avant-
Garde Festival. This performance seems to have included an increasing array of alternate sounds,
and therefore ran even further overtime. A review in the Nation describes “an exasperated critic
[who] exclaimed from the back row against John Cage’s 26’ 1.1499” for lasting 41’2.0001” and
being tediously impeded by the cellist’s chores of putting down the bow to reach for a razor, or
blank pistol, or balloon pricker.”86 It was in response to this performance that Jasper Johns, by
then a successful painter and Cage’s long-time friend, wrote to the composer, “C. Moorman
should be kept off the stage. But I guess I’ll go again tonight.”87

It was also in planning for this 2nd NYAGF that Moorman first met Paik, who was a
recent arrival in New York. He was immediately drafted to perform as himself in Karlheinz
Stockhausen’s Originale (1961), which had its U.S. debut at the Festival, and also appeared on
the bill for Moorman’s solo Festival program on August 30, 1964, accompanying her on piano
for Stockhausen’s Plus-Minus (1963).88 Straightaway, Paik recognized in Moorman a partner
who was equally intent on overthrowing the inhibitions and strictures that their proper

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85 For an insightful critique of Cage’s “modesty,” as extending directly from the discourse of modernity and reason
that allowed some (white, Western males) “to make authoritative, objective claims about the world only to the extent
that they eliminated the contingencies of the social, the subjective and the human,” see Benjamin Piekut, “Sound’s
87 A letter from Johns to Cage, September 1, 1964, Box 5, Folder 1, Sleeve 25. John Cage Collection, Northwestern
Music Library, Evanston, IL (JCC).
88 The piano part was originally to be played by Paik’s radio-controlled robot K-456, but after successfully walking
across the stage at the front of the program, a mechanical problem forced Paik to take over in the second half. 
Piekut, Experimentalism Otherwise, 159-160.
upbringings and classical music training had imparted on them. While many of his pieces for Moorman aim to compensate for the lack of sexuality in classical music, as will be argued in the following chapters, their partnership problematized a wide-variety of expectations and assumptions surrounding classical concert performance. Their partnership would be marked by their shared flair for spectacle, ability to play with elements of surprise, seriousness and humor, and a commitment to reinventing each piece during the process of performance. It is not surprising then, that Cage’s 26’ 1.1499”, with its permissive lower register, would become one of their favorite platforms for experimentation.

Their first program as a duo at the Philadelphia College of Art on February 26, 1965 was promoted as “a concert by cellist Charlotte Moorman and assisted by Nam June Paik.” 89 The flyer included the “can you believe it?” list of sounds and objects to be utilized:

You will hear a cymbal, garbage can top, guero, contact mikes, sand, chains, shoes with sand paper glued to the soles, aluminum sheets, pie pans, hammer, drum sticks, snare drum brush, rubber band, glass chimes, wood chimes, balloons, straight pin, oriental bells, cow bells, antique cymbals, wood block, sleigh bells, beer cans, door bells, door chimes, door buzzer, pistol, light bulbs, wastebasket filled with bricks, whistles: police whistle, gym whistle, toy whistle, Halloween whistle and siren whistle; animal calls: duck call, crow call, squirrel call and predator call: tape recorders, mixer, amplifiers, speakers, taped sounds (Queen Mary departs blast, Big Ben chimes, ocean waves, cat in heat, tug boat, wasps, and a bomb exploding); fire engine siren and a plate of glass (which is broken during performance) ETC – plus many new cello sounds all of which Miss Moorman plays in tandem.90

It is important to emphasize at this point that this list is very close to what we know Moorman to have used just a few months before for her 1964 Festival performance, when she had only just met Paik. In preparation for that debut of the full-length work, Moorman had purchased a tape recorder and begun what would be an ongoing process of accumulating found

89 Program Notes for a Concert at Philadelphia College of Art, in CMA Ephemera folder, 1965 Concert – Philadelphia College of Art
90 Program Notes for a Concert at Philadelphia College of Art, in CMA Ephemera folder, 1965 Concert – Philadelphia College of Art
sounds for insertion into the piece. Listening to the radio re-broadcast of this program, one can confirm that Big Ben, cruise ship horns, a grandfather clock, a cat in heat, wasps and exploding bomb sounds were all featured in her pre-Paik interpretation, as well as a full battalion of whistles and chimes; metal, drum and wood striking, cracking, crackling, tinkling, breaking and scrapping sounds and several balloon pops and pistol shots.91 A year after their first Philadelphia concert, however, on a poster for a March 13, 1966 appearance at Philadelphia’s Times Auditorium (for which the two share equal billing), the same boiler-plate list begins, “You will hear and see a human cello, a film of Cage and Miss Moorman; records of rock and roll and jazz; a throat mike amplifying coca-cola and hot dogs, a cymbal, garbage can top…” and then continues as above.92 In a 1966 letter to Jim McWilliams, the Philadelphia College of Arts professor who organized both concerts and would become a frequent collaborator, Moorman also included a diagram of her stage set-up, with additional material needs including “1 raw chicken… Bed (squeaky) + one or two mikes connected to it” [Fig.1.5]. This even more embodied and pop culture-infused version, which could be seen as well as heard, had developed between her and Paik. Having evolved from performance to performance during their European tour in 1965, which included participating in Jean Jacques Lebel’s 2ième Festival de la Libre Expression in Paris and Wolf Vostell’s Fluxus-inspired 24 Stunden (24 Hour) festival in Wuppertal, Germany, it is unsurprising that their interpretation became more erotic, absurd, visceral and visual, all at the same time.

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91 The radio broadcast of her recital has been republished as part of Charlotte Moorman: Cello Anthology, (Milan: Alga Marghen, 2013). Cage’s full 26’ 1.1499” can be heard on CD 1, actual duration 32’ 36”.
92 It is unclear if it was meant as a correction or note for future editions of this list, but Moorman had also handwritten “an electric cooking skillet” in pen as an additional element of the performance. Her January 20, 1966 appearance on the Tonight Show had already included her frying an egg on a skillet. Poster for concert by Moorman and Paik at Philadelphia’s Times Auditorium, in CMA Ephemera folder, 1966 March 13 - Avant-Garde in Philadelphia
III. Making Cage Pop

It is not till 1967, after the piece had transformed into this full-scale, vaudevillian theater event, that there is documentary evidence of Cage’s own thoughts on Moorman’s embrace of his work. In a letter to another string player, Cage suggests they take on 26’ 1.1499", clarifying it as, “the one Charlotte Moorman has been murdering all along …I’d travel a long way to hear a proper performance!” Much later, in an interview with Gisela Gronemeyer after Moorman passed away in 1991, he elaborated his complaint further: “The striking thing was to take this piece of mine and play it in a way that didn’t have to do with the piece itself. I didn’t like it at all. And my publisher said, the best thing that could happen for you, would be that Charlotte Moorman would die.” Yet whether he liked it or not, in the years between 1963 and her passing, Moorman traveled to universities and art schools, festivals and happenings, concert halls and galleries, giving almost sixty documented performances of this piece—sharing her version of Cage with the world.

Moorman’s perspective on this situation is signaled in the program note she wrote for 24 Stunden in Wuppertal: “My interpretation of Cage’s ‘26’ 1.1499’ for a String Player’ is very American—a kind of pop music. Thank you Nam Jun [sic] Paik…I love you John Cage!” However Cage may have felt, Moorman continued to profess deep admiration for, and genuine gratefulness to, the composer for having produced a piece that, in her understanding, opened the door for her to think entirely differently about her role as an interpreter and performer. And while “pop” is not typically the word that Cage or his New Music cohort would use to describe

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93 John Cage to Bertram Turetzky, October 29, 1967, Box 7, Folder 13, Sleeve 41. JCC.
94 Gronemeyer, unpaginated.
95 The estimate of sixty performances came from the database of performances compiled by Moorman biographer Joan Rothfuss. Reported in an email from Rothfuss to the author, April 20, 2014.
their practices, I would argue that Moorman’s 26’ 1.1499” is “pop” in very much the same way as Robert Rauschenberg’s combines and collages: collecting, cutting and pasting the detritus of the moment into a form that is not directive but not without associations, that is not personally expressive or psychologizing but unabashedly reflective of a given sociocultural position and field of interests, and that insistently problematizes the high-low boundaries of the medium in which they are working, be it painting or music.97

Rauschenberg and Cage are often discussed as aesthetic accomplices, the potently full emptiness in the White Paintings (1951) [Fig. 1.6] and 4’ 33” (1952) [Fig. 1.7] being visual and sonic equivalents; Rauschenberg’s paintings reportedly pushed Cage to finally realize his idea for a “silent” piece.98 In 1961, Cage penned an essay extolling the radical importance of Rauschenberg’s practice, which by that time included paintings, combines, and combine-drawings which let the world in, not just as dust or light, but as newspaper clippings and magazine illustrations, bed sheets and old photos, radio noises and references to TV broadcasts [Fig 1.8]. Early in “On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work,” Cage writes, “Beauty is now underfoot wherever we take the trouble to look. (This is an American discovery).”99 In Rauschenberg’s assemblages of popular culture and painterly textures, Cage can recognize a co-conspirator against art that metaphorically “says something,” even as Rauschenberg’s surfaces fill with layer upon layer of content.

There is no more subject in a combine than there is in a page from a newspaper. Each thing that is there is a subject. It is a situation of multiplicity…Were he to say something in particular, he would have to focus the painting; as it is he simply focuses himself, and

97 This is to say, I believe her use of the lower-case "pop" acknowledges her investment in gleaning source materials from popular culture, rather than from an alignment with Pop Art, with its slick surfaces, advertising tropes and cool distancing effects. While happening later than Rauschenberg, who is also not considered a Pop artist, but whose "proto-Pop" mining of 1950s culture's detritus is often seen as an anticipating or opening space for the Pop artist's turn to consumer culture as both subject and aesthetic. 98 Kostelanetz, 71. 99 Cage, “On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work,” in Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University, 1973), 98.
everything, a pair of socks, is appropriate, appropriated to poetry, a poetry of infinite possibilities.100

It seems to me that this is exactly the approach Moorman took to assembling her collage of sounds, actions and mediated elements, dedicating herself to finding a cacophony of equally weighted everyday sources, for which Cage’s score served as an armature [Fig. 1.9]. A “poetry of infinite possibilities” is clearly on Moorman’s mind when she created a brainstorming list of approximately fifty sounds she might want to include via tape recorder in the performance. Taped to the back of her score, and categorized as Life, City, Animal, People, Water and unspecified sounds, these range from subway screeching to a cantor chanting, from cutting stone sculpture to hiccups, from toilet and dentist drill to orgasms and a crying newborn.101 Likewise, her record collection for the performance covers a wide sample of music likely to waft from passing car windows on the highway – snippets of The Beatles and The Rolling Stones for rock and roll, Thelonious Monk for jazz, radio hits like “Cool Jerk” (by the Capitols) and “Italiano” (by Frankie Avalon), as well light classical interludes, commercial jingles and recorded speeches.102 Perhaps her most radical addition to her battery of sounds was the inclusion of found text fragments from newspapers, packaging and advertisements. Helpfully compiled by Piekut, the following clippings—dense with the gendered, racial and cultural cues that interpolate contemporary subjects at every turn—were taped into the pages of her score:103

a set of instructions for Tampax tampons, printed in Italian, upon which Moorman had circled steps…having to do with insertion of the product (p.10); the headline from an advertisement for “comfortable panties” (partially obscured by hand-copied Icelandic

100 Cage, Silence, 103
101 Personal score for 26’ 1.1499”, CMA; for an accessible transcription of these notes, see Piekut, 154.
102 Piekut, 157; rock records, a coca-cola jingle and recording of both what sounds like a political speech and passages of TV-type dialogue between characters can be heard in the recording of a July 25, 1966 performance of 5’ 25” (listed on program as 4’ 1.1499”) in Aachen Germany. Charlotte Moorman: Cello Anthology CD 2.
lullaby, “Bí, bí og blaka,” that Moorman had written in phonetically; (p.11); a classified advertisement from Planned Parenthood for birth control (p. 16); the title typography from an ad for the 1965 film How to Murder Your Wife, starring Jack Lemon (p. 23); and a short undated newspaper story about an attempted rape that had been reported by a University of Illinois Student…(p. 75)… Moorman’s textual additions also referenced consumer culture (text for a Cadillac advertisement, p. 28); morality and obedience (a list of proper behavior for children including the directives, “I will always obey Mother and Dad,” “I will be truthful,” “I will go to bed on time,”…p. 16); political corruption (newspaper articles on Watergate, p. 23, and on G. Gordon Liddy’s sentencing, p. 57); Nixon’s domestic policies (articles on cutbacks to Medicare benefits for the elderly and on the failing of the antidrug campaign, p. 56); free speech (a short clipping on John Lennon’s deportation case…p. 50); and the black liberation struggle (probably a description of the copper-topped Malcolm X: “He often said he became a racist from the womb, because his grandmother was raped by a white man. That is how he got his red hair and [sic], p. 81).104

Piekut tracks these additions as happening over time, with some, such as the Icelandic and Italian phrases sourced during the 1965 European tour [Fig. 1.10], while several others, such as the Nixon, Watergate, Lennon and rape news items were all from 1973. He also notes that the lone “recognizably Cagean motif” in the score is a note card on page nineteen reading, “There is no such thing as silence. Something is always happening that makes a sound.”105 This, however, is only reflective of what was in her score when it went to the archive. In Jud Yalkut’s 1973 film of the piece [Fig. 1.11], at intervals throughout the performance, Moorman picks up and reads from a deck of cards with Cage-isms before making a phone call to his home and then the White House.106

Moorman’s discovery of art-worthy materials wherever she looked, including sources that allude to women’s everyday experiences and the political turmoil shaping the social landscape, may make her intrusions seem a pointed departure from Cage’s bird calls and prepared pianos, yet her treatment of these sources “as facts, not symbol” remains in line with

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104 Piekut, 151-153.
105 Piekut, 152.
106 Jud Yalkut, 26’ 1.1499" for a String Player, 42 min, color, sound (Electronic Arts Intermix: 1973).
Cage’s praise of Rauschenberg.107 There is no better way to “read” her performances of 26’ 1.1499” than as a newspaper with random stories accumulated on its front page, as Cage describes Rauschenberg’s canvases, or as a “work surface [that] stood for the mind itself- dump, reservoir, switching center, abundant with concrete references freely associated as in an internal monologue,” per the critic Leo Steinberg writing about Rauschenberg.108 Just as Moorman pushed Cage’s score towards more relayed authorship than he intended, her pop-infused interpretation also pushed Cage’s championship of Rauschenberg to a logical, but ultimately for him, uncomfortable consortium with an unfiltered, unfamiliar, mass culture and an embodied, socially-coded experience of the everyday.

While this can be understood as part of Cage’s notorious dismissal of all forms of popular culture and disdain for recorded music, it can also be considered in light of postmodernist critiques, such as Andrea Huyssen’s 1986 essay “Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other.”109 In this essay, Huyssen links the devaluation of mass culture, femininity, women, consumerism and pleasure to the construction of Modernism, which depended on that constellation as the negative binary used to police serious art’s borders from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. Importantly, his argument concludes that this structure was breaking down “as the [American] avant-garde’s attack on the autonomy aesthetic…created the climate in which the political aesthetic of feminism could thrive.” Yet Huyssen significantly noted that:

The aesthetic transgressions of happenings, actions and performances of the 1960s were clearly inspired by Dada, Informel, and action painting; and with few exceptions—the work of Valie EXPORT, Charlotte Moorman and Carolee Schneemann—these forms did

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107 Cage, *Silence*, 108. It also is very similar to Cage’s use in 1970s of cut up texts from thinkers he admired such as Henry Thoreau, Buckminster Fuller and Marshall McLuhan mixed with news reports. While these would be arranged by chance, the overall take away would be very reflective of Cage’s personal experiences and interests. Silverman, 263.
not transport feminist sensibilities or experiences. But it seems historically significant
that women artists increasingly used these forms in order to give voice to their experience.\footnote{Huyssen, 61.}

I think the stark difference between Cage’s reception of Rauschenberg’s and Moorman’s uses of
popular culture can in part be traced to this long association between women and a maligned
mass culture. As such, her transgressions of the high-low divide were perceived by him (and
others) as partaking in unacceptable ways in pleasure, populism and sensuality, rather than
battling Modernist pretenses with the boys.

Rauschenberg scholar Branden Joseph has argued that the play of multiplicity in a field
supposedly emptied of authorial intention linked Cage and Rauschenberg’s projects to new ideas
about subjectivity and its role in art making and interpretation.

This impulse to create works that underline such a differential reception, that make each
beholder aware of the role played by his or her individual history and subject position, is
what forms the crux of the neo-avant-garde project initiated by Rauschenberg and Cage.
Their work thus differs from that attributed to the historical avant-garde, for it
relinquishes the attempt, common to dada and constructivism, to address or forge a
collective political subject based on similarity, commonality, or exchange. …their work
does not presuppose any common denominator of subjectivity.\footnote{Branden Wayne Joseph, Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-avant-garde (MIT Press, 2003 ), 66.}

While in the abstract, both Cage and Rauschenberg can be seen to create work that does not
presuppose a common denominator of subjectivity and invites an infinite play of interpretation,
the facts of their world could be assumed to be shared by the primary makers and critical
consumers of their work. This safe, public homosociality need not be disrupted by their private
homosexuality, which as Caroline Jones and others have argued, made their aversion to speaking
from a specific subject position a strategic choice in the conservative climate of Cold War
women. To the predominantly elite, white, male audiences, then, the similarities between Moorman and Rauschenberg’s pop strategies would have been easy to miss. Rauschenberg’s coded hints of queer desire were hidden within a field of seemingly random objects, while any materials Moorman used related to women’s bodies, female sexuality and social upheaval would read to Cage and his cohort as diaristic intrusions of the personal, rather than as a set of “facts” gathered from a different subject position. And just as Cage and Rauschenberg’s “antiexpressive, antisubjective and antiauthoritarian artistic position was clearly in no small part a product of their being positioned beyond the official sanctioned norms of a heterosexist society,” the specific exuberance with which Moorman telegraphs not a psychologized subjectivity but the particularities of her subject-position is, I believe, a product of the permission women were starting to feel to counter the official white male perspective with their own set of social facts and norms.\(^{113}\) It is only in retrospect that the everyman character of Rauschenberg’s pop becomes as apparently particularized as Moorman’s: while his was constructed to sublimate sexuality behind a universalizing façade of Americana commodity culture, hers was staged, in all its baroque excess, at the less-familiar intersection of Southern Belle and Flower Power generation.

The final affront to Cage’s sensibilities, considering his well-documented Puritanism when it came to the public display of bodies and sexuality, would have been the erotic or emotive aspects of Moorman’s interpretation.\(^ {114}\) In particular, Moorman’s interactions with Paik during performances from 1964 on generally included her playing “the human cello” [Fig. 1.12],

\(^{113}\) Joseph, 67.

\(^{114}\) Piekut catalogues these well – from composer Henry Flynt’s assessment that “Cage’s goal was the perfectly sterile human being” to Cunningham-biographer Roger Copeland’s retelling of Cage confessing that he “never really liked dance”: “‘What do you mean,’ I asked in utter bewilderment: ‘Why Not?’ Adopting an expression of mock disgust, he shook [his] head and said simply, ‘All those faces, all those [and he paused for again for special emphasis]….bodies!’”. Piekut, 151 and 164.
which consisted of Paik leaning his naked torso between her knees with a string stretched across his back. Their rapport also included her striking or kicking him, not to mention the pre-recorded sounds of orgasms and the use of condoms as props. Over the same period, Cage would create scores with even more theatrical potential and even more active interpretation required by the performer. Yet, while he never explicitly restricts these choices, it seems that sexual references were an absolute redline as to what was and was not acceptable.

In a notorious 1975 incident that led Cage to several very un-Cagean declarations, composer and performer Julius Eastman presented the extremely open-ended *Song Books* [Fig. 1.13]—which includes sections for which the performer is to construct a list of verbs and nouns that they then interpret into actions—before a festival audience including Cage. As part of his interpretation, Eastman, who was openly gay, slowly undressed his boyfriend on stage. He also attempted to do the same to his sister, who protested, and he moved on. While there would be nothing in the score to suggest this kind of interpretation, there would also be no reason the verb “undress” could not be part of his list, in which case he was carrying out Cage’s score quite intently. However, Cage’s response was two-fold—to dress down the director (who knew nothing of what was in store) for not exerting more control and authority (despite having been told by Cage not to hold rehearsals in order to maintain spontaneity), and the following day, to delivery an angry lecture to a room full of music students. According to Peter Gena, a long-time Cage associate, “John pounded his fist on the desk and shouted, ‘I’m tired of people who think that they could do whatever they want with my music!’”

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Moorman and Paik were surely aware that their interpretation could be construed as “unfaithful” to Cage. They are cosignatories on a document, undated but likely from the early 1970s, titled “On Cagean interpretation of Cage,” which starts:

Semantically speaking, John Cage means “the ‘absence of a definition”
(Heintz-Klaus Metzger)
Therefore every recording of John Cage is the ash of John Cage.
Therefore the canonization of Cage commits a double-sin, like the Ex-anarchist Fascists.
“Loyal” Cageans have condemned Moorman-Paik’s realization of 26’ 1”1499 [sic] as “not faithful” to Cage…we are proud of not being Toscanini.
The essence of Cagean message is “Nature” …and if “sex” is not nature, what else is “Nature”? … That negligence was conspicuous also in SUZUKI.
“Zen Against Suzuki”…. a best seller in 1970’s.”

With Paik’s broken English as part of the flair, the two boldly reject the implicit puritanism of Cage’s own interpretation of Nature (and preferred form of Zen) and, more broadly, the notion of a proper Cagean interpretation hewing closely to Cage’s own canon. Pointing out that there could never be a definitive Cage, they also suggest that all performances of Cage, if not to be reduced to stale historical reenactment, would necessarily be co-produced out of the tension between a performer, who must be disloyal to be loyal, and a composer, who seeks intentional unintentionality.

IV. Cagean Composition and Philosophy

The pre-condition for this particular tension—between certain idealistic tendencies in New Music and a performer like Moorman who took them at their word—was necessarily the growing confidence and increasing experimentation amongst the New York School composers from the 1940s to the 1960s. With Cage as their foremost philosopher, this group included

117 Moorman and Paik, “On Cagean interpretation of Cage,” found in Gregory Battcock Archive, folder “Moorman-Paik,” as displayed at the 2014 Whitney Biennial, New York. While the document and folder are undated, the second part of the text refers to the 1960s being over. Since Paik and Moorman’s main period of collaborative performance ended by the mid-1970s, an early 1970s date seems most likely.
Morton Feldman, Earle Brown and Christian Wolff, and set out to challenge tenets, not only of classical music’s qualitative features—harmonics, melody, variation, progression, etc.—but also the ideological assumptions that had underpinned the making and performing of this music since it had claimed artistic autonomy around the end of the eighteenth century.

After dropping out of college and a youthful sojourn in Europe, Cage had been pursuing an idiosyncratic but single-minded interest in new, challenging forms of music since the early 1930s.\(^{118}\) Cage crisscrossed the country several times to study with innovative composers, first in New York with Adolph Weiss and Henry Cowell, students and colleagues of Arnold Schoenberg, and then in Los Angeles with Schoenberg himself, whose development of the twelve-tone method promised to be a “liberator from the shackles of tonality.”\(^{119}\) However, Schoenberg had not abandoned harmony as an essential component in structuring music, a limitation that, according to one of Cage’s oft-repeated anecdotes, brought his studies with Schoenberg to a close:

> Several times I tried to explain to Schoenberg that I had no feeling for harmony. He told me that without a feeling for harmony I would always encounter an obstacle, a wall through which I wouldn’t be able to pass. My reply was that in that case I would devote my life to beating my head against that wall—and maybe that’s what I’ve been doing ever since.\(^{120}\)

The realization that harmony was in fact the obstacle led Cage to shift his structuring parameter to duration and his auditory interests to percussive instruments and non-traditional sound-making objects. This in turn became the basis for his later exploitation of electronic sounds, found or concrete noises, words and silence as valuable compositional components. As he stated in 1940,

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\(^{120}\) Kostelanetz, 5.
“Percussion music is like an arrow pointing to the whole unexplored field of sound.” Having determined rhythmic structure and duration as the only correct basis for organizing musical works, Cage found his other aesthetic anchor in Eastern philosophy, which he was first introduced to in the late 1940’s by his student, the Indian musician Gita Sarabhai. He quickly expanded upon this introduction through readings that profoundly affected both his personal and artistic life, with Ananda K. Coomaraswamy’s *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (1934) having an immediate impact on his musical philosophy. A broadening interest in the spiritual would in turn lead him to Aldous Huxley’s compendium of mystical writings from across religious traditions, *The Perennial Philosophy*, and then to the medieval German mystic Meister Eckhart and, via the writings of Lao Tze, Chuang Tzu, Huang Po and lectures by D.T. Suzuki and Alan Watts, to Buddhism and Taoism. Cage ultimately developed a hybrid of metaphysical theology, heavily weighted towards Zen Buddhism, that he brought to both his daily life and aesthetics. Beginning in the 1946 article “The East in the West,” and then more fully articulated and summarized in 1948’s “In Defense of Satie,” Cage links his assertion that duration is the proper foundation for musical structure to his critique of Western harmonic structure as expressive of Western materialism. He ultimately calls for a rejection of these principles in favor of work created free of ego-attachment, without intentional melodic or

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121 Silverman, 33.
122 In exchange for lessons in Western music, Sarabhai, who had trained in Hindustani drumming, singing and music theory, shared what she knew of these traditions. In addition to this artistic exchanges, she gave Cage a copy of *The Gospels of Sri Ramakrishna*, the teachings of a 19th-century Hindu mystic. These influences, along with Coomaraswamy’s book, recommended by Joseph Campbell, form the first set of Eastern influences on Cage, and lead to evident references to rāgas (melodic moods that classical Indian music uses as the basis for both composition and improvisation), and rasas (the basis for Hindu aesthetic theory which categorizes artistic intentions and effects according to various essential “flavors”) in his work of the late 1940s. Silverman, 68-69.
123 Pritchett, 36-37. Huxley's compendium of mystical writings from across religious traditions included quotes from Meister Eckhart and Chuang Tzu.
In making this argument, Cage pointedly critiques Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), the canonical example of musical genius, whose work came to define the romantic view of the emotionally expressive, uniquely subjective, autonomous composer and is, not insignificantly, the figure credited with establishing the musical “work-concept.” While Cage’s primary point of contention is that Beethoven structured his work “by means of harmony” rather than rhythm, the larger, spiritual and philosophical stakes for this attack are clear in his conclusion to “Defense of Satie”:

Good music can act as a guide to good living. It is interesting to note that harmonic structure in music arises as Western materialism arises, disintegrates at the time that materialism comes to be questioned, and that the solution of rhythmic structure, traditional to the Orient, is arrived at with us just at the time that we profoundly sense our need for that other tradition of the Orient: peace of mind, self-knowledge.126

This is an early example of Cage’s ongoing equation between aesthetic forms and social forms, and clearly emphasizes shifting from harmonic to rhythmic structure in order to promote an “oriental” anti-materialism. However, his text glosses over the two-fold reason why the harmonic structures of Beethoven and his followers are linked to materialism. From an aesthetic viewpoint, Cage aligns harmony and melody with the subjective, metaphoric use of sound that encourages the listener to “imagine that sounds are not sounds at all but are Beethoven and that men are not men but are sounds.”127 This focus on individual expressivity, so central to the discourse of romanticism, became increasingly problematic for Cage. As his interest deepened in Zen and other philosophies opposed to an ego-driven engagement with the world through the 1950s, his commitment to detached, chance-derived forms of artistic production strengthened as well—

125 Pritchett, 39.
what Julia Robinson evocatively calls the “unmanning” of his musical compositions. However, from an economic point of view, the link between the romantic composer and materialism is more pragmatic. In tracing the emergence of the musical-work concept—that is, the regulatory notion in Western music “that we should talk of each individual work as if it were an object, as if it were a construction that existed over and above its performances and scores”—Goehr emphasizes that Beethoven’s significance is intimately tied to his historic moment and its fiscal realities. The early 1800s is precisely when ongoing institutional patronage and roles as Kapellmeister, or choir leader, are fading and composers are turning instead to the promotion of individual titled works, discreetly conceived and encoded in scores, as vehicles for monetizing ephemeral, conceptual work. Beethoven and his generation did this by sufficiently detailing their sonic intent to the extent that it could be published, sold and subject to copyright laws and royalty fees. The rhetoric of the romantic studio artist as a visionary individual who brings forth—in isolation—creative masterpieces was expressly coopted by nineteenth-century composers as they sought to participate in the emerging free market. Scores become their saleable product, a commodity to be exchanged as if they were paintings, or rather, instructions for paintings that could be executed by any reasonably skilled technician. The economic autonomy of the composer, then, depends on this aspect of the work-concept; that is, that the

128 Robinson, “John Cage and Investiture: Unmanning the System,” in The Anarchy of Silence: John Cage and Experimental Art (Barcelona, Spain: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Barcelona, 2010), 92. The gendered implications of “unmanning” are incredibly apt and poignant, as Robinson takes it from a case study in which a potential Supreme Court judge, “unable to assume [his] function at the pinnacle of patriarchal society,…fantasizes about having his masculinist role taken away.” Because such a crisis and subsequent divestment of subjectivity can only have critical resonance by stepping down from the heights of power, it is by definition a move unavailable to women in patriarchal society. As Huyssen points out, and I quote later in my main text, “The [Modernist] male, after all, can easily deny his own subjectivity for the benefit of a higher aesthetic goal, as long as he can take it for granted on an experiential level in everyday life.” Huyssen, 46.

129 Goehr, 96.

130 For the full expanse of this argument, see Goehr’s chapter, “After 1800: The Beethoven Paradigm,” 205-242.

131 In 1793, France changes copyright law to assert the composer's ownership rights over the publishers, with Germany and England following this model shortly after. Goehr, 218-20.

132 Goehr, 206-8.
musical idea has been authored by an individual who receives credit for all performances of the work. Their works, however, exist and can be judged separately from those realizations. Cage's “Defense of Satie” also exemplifies a consistent tendency in Cage’s aesthetic philosophy. Over the years, one finds an insistent focus on overturning the ideology of Western classical music through the composition process by working in a way that short-circuits intentionality and individual expressivity; however, this is accomplished without an examinations of how the basic language of the field—the score, the composer, the performer, the work, etc.—still carries assumptions of privilege and power that continue to support a materialistic and ego-driven institutional structuring of art and society. As Cage and his fellow composers increasingly opened space within and through the formal structures of the score that allowed instrumentalists to make choices that would alter the resulting sound and shape of the piece in performance, there was clearly the implication that this, in itself, was modeling “the good living”—a less repressive regime of control over the conductor or performer.¹³³

Yet, the privilege of composers, whose authorship and authorization hovers over all performances of their scores, remained unexamined and continued to separate their intangible creations from the corporeal labor of its realization. This Cartesian split between mind and body not only remained but was arguably exaggerated in the work of the New York School composers, where so much attention was focused on rules and structures meant to limit self-expression that those intellectual systems became the primary point of innovation, discussion and aesthetic recognition. As Robinson systematically lays out in her essay “John Cage and Investiture,” Cage

¹³³ See Cage, “Composition as Process,” in Silence, 37. For Cage, “good living,” when first noted in 1948, would have been closely associated with a non-materialistic, non-combative engagement with the world based on self-knowledge and self-determination. By the late 1960s, Cage’s long time distrust of the state became more clearly articulated, in sociopolitical terms, as a Henry David Thoreau-influenced “global practical anarchism,” illustrated at times by an analogy to an orchestra playing successfully without a conductor. See Silverman, 271-2.
very programmatically directed the terms by which he wanted his project, and individual pieces, received. She astutely observes, “As he removed the specter of the subject (author) from the act of composition, he *authorized* the composerly act externally through lectures and texts.”\(^{134}\)

Through decades of performatively deploying wide-ranging appropriated texts, philosophical aphorisms and supporting anecdotes, Cage not only invested himself with the symbolic power to justify the radical “unmanning” inherent in his compositional strategies while firmly asserting his authorial intentions. He also strongly conveyed a persona, full of likes and dislikes (notably, of personae and likes), that ties appreciation of his “works” to his authorizing ideas, regardless of how the works are performed. The paradox of retaining an Enlightenment dualism in musical circles dedicated to overthrowing Enlightenment aesthetics will be returned to below, in light of both the challenge that Moorman presents to this conception of creativity and the feminist critique of Cartesianism; namely, the masculinization (and valorization) of thought and the feminization (and devaluation) of the body in Western philosophy and culture.\(^{135}\) For now, it is enough to note that by questioning Western music’s materialism via its formal strategies and not its institutional structures and hierarchies, nor stepping back from his external authorizing control of his oeuvre, Cage was able to sidestep his own material position within the field and its dependence on the composer-genius-author paradigm so carefully carved out by Beethoven and ideologies of romanticism, and maintained, with little modification, by Cage’s generation as well. In 1960, Cage entrusted C.F. Peters Corporation to publish his complex scores, with the promise of advances and royalties for current and future work; coincidentally, C.F. Peters was founded in

\(^{134}\) Robinson, “John Cage and Investiture,” 57.

\(^{135}\) For a useful overview of the Cartesian framework and the plurality of feminist concerns with its effect on contemporary culture, see Alison M. Jaggar and Susan Bordo, eds., *Gender/body/knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989). For a historical account of the gendered reception of Descartes and access to his model of the universal intellectual subject in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, see Erica Hath, *Cartesian Women: Versions and Subversions of Rational Discourse in the Old Regime* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992)
1800 in Leipzig, establishing its early reputation by publishing Beethoven’s First Symphony and Second Piano Concerto. Fees for performance of Cage’s work were also professionally managed. In fact, not a day after Moorman first publicly performed 26’ in its entirety, she received a stern letter from the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, noting that they were “obliged to collect a performance fee whenever any of our members [sic] works are performed, in order for them to receive a royalty payments for performances.”

By 1950, Cage had settled more permanently in New York and connected with Feldman and Wolff [Fig. 1.14]. Through Feldman, Cage also was introduced to Tudor, who would become the most consistent and committed interpreter of Cage’s music, and the first link between Moorman and Cage. Cage’s biographer Kenneth Silverman reports on Cage’s first impressions of Tudor:

Altogether, Cage thought Tudor an extraordinary person. Many others found him mysterious—pleasant but remote. He resembled Cage in being at the same time attentive to the smallest detail and artistically adventurous. Indeed, Cage saw him as a kindred spirit, a lover of difficulty who in addition had a clear, sympathetic understanding of Cagean aesthetics. When writing to Cage, Tudor offered minutely detailed comments about Cage’s scores, sometimes offering suggestions for changes. (“I have revised the pedaling considerably...we’ll see how you like it.”) He also began to frequently perform Cage’s piano works in public.

The similarity in disposition, personality, and aesthetic between composer and preferred performer of course not only contrasts with Cage in comparison to Moorman—a dramatic, self-styled Southern Belle whom violinist Malcolm Goldstein described as a “very effusive, extravagant person...but not one for details.” It also problematizes the philosophical aspects of

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136 Silverman, 173. Silverman notes that in the first two years of this collaboration, this arrangement brought in six hundred dollars in royalties. In 1962, they embarked on bringing forth an eighty-page catalogue, which was also widely distributed. Silverman, 175.

137 They asked for her cooperation in submitting a full list of works performed, and sending $10 for the Cage piece. Correspondence – “American Society of Composers Authors and Publishers” File, CMA.

138 Silverman, 93.
Cage’s intentional non-intentionality. Ensuring that Tudor would be the preferred pianist for public performances of his work, Cage effectively controlled who would be taking up the choices left to the performer in his aleatory scores.

It was through his student Wolff that Cage was introduced to the mechanism most consistently employed thereafter to ensure disinterested decision-making in his compositional process. The English translation of the *I-Ching*, a three thousand year old Chinese book of divination, had been produced by Wolff’s parents’ publishing house, and he gave a copy to his teacher as a thank you gift in early 1951. Traditionally, the *I-Ching* would be consulted on a personal question by throwing three coins six times to produce a pattern that corresponded to one of sixty-four graphic line arrangements, which in turn were associated with texts offering wisdom and guidance. Cage instead saw these coin tosses as ways to arrive at a chance answer to all kinds of musical questions—which note or phrase should follow another, how long something should be held, whether it should be loud or soft, etc. He first used the *I-Ching* when composing *Concerto for Prepared Piano and Chamber Orchestra* (1950-51), tossing coins to order pre-determined musical “gamuts” or sonic events for the third movement. This might be considered only a half step towards relinquishing taste, since he had pre-selected the gamuts. Far more radical in its implications, *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* (1951), a piece for twelve radios, depended on two forms of randomness—using the *I-Ching* to select station and volume from the “gamut” source, radio broadcast, which would be different every time and place the piece was performed. This work also establishes two aspects intrinsic to much of Cage’s work going forward, from his famous “silent” piece, *4’33”* (1952) to his later “musicircuses,” like *HPSCHD* (1967-69) [Fig. 1.15]: the inherent theatricality of inviting a full spectrum of noises into the

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139 Goldstein goes on to add, “And I think that’s what bothered John. She wasn’t playing the details of his piece.” Piekutt,150.

140 Silverman, 101-102.
musical work, and the way this invitation implicates a world beyond the concert hall that may be randomly included but is not without meaning.

The piece that Moorman selected as her first and ultimately life-long connection to Cage was composed as part of a larger project begun in 1953, which Cage imagined would “always be in progress and will never be finished; at the same time, any part of it will be able to be performed once I have begun it.”\textsuperscript{141} Cage referred to this undertaking in his notes as “The Ten Thousand Things,” a nod to both the numerical structure he planned—a 100 units of 100 measures each—and the use of 10,000 in Chinese philosophy to stand for the infinite.\textsuperscript{142} Unlike earlier chance-derived works, like \textit{Concerto for Prepared Piano and Chamber Orchestra} and \textit{Music of Changes} (1951), which had used the \textit{I-Ching} to order musical materials that Cage had developed independently and therefore retained some musicality, for “Ten Thousand Things” all decisions regarding each sound (and silent interval) was determined using the \textit{I-Ching}. For 26’ 1.1.499” for a String Player, this meant that everything from pitch and timbre, to type of bowing and bow location, had been either rigorously subjected to the results of coin tosses or determined by Cage’s point-drawing technique, in which he marked imperfections found on a sheet of paper as “notes” on a score. As James W. Pritchett writes of this new approach:

\begin{quote}
\ldots the impression is given of a spontaneous eruption of activity, of figures that appear from nowhere and leave no traces behind. For this reason, “The Ten Thousand Things” is among Cage’s most demanding works for both audiences and performers… In “The Ten Thousand Things” the events are more diverse and complex, leaving listeners without landmarks, without a sense of musical shapes to hold onto. Instead, perhaps the best approach is to let oneself go adrift in this chaotic swarm.\textsuperscript{143}
\end{quote}

Given the strict application of chance techniques, impeding any intentionality that the composer may bring to organizing the sounds within each measure, it seems surprising that the bottom-

\textsuperscript{142} Pritchett, 96.
\textsuperscript{143} Pritchett, 104.
most band of this 1955 score is reserved for “sounds other than those produced on the strings.”\textsuperscript{144} While the timing of these sound events had been, like all else, pre-determined by chance operations, Cage’s performance notes for this register add that, “These [sounds] may issue from entirely other sources, e.g. Percussion instruments, whistles, radios, etc. Only high and low are indicated.”\textsuperscript{145} With this note, he seems to invite not chance into play, but an endlessly open field of options for the performer to explore. How they should make choices amongst the variety of non-string sounds available to them is not indicated.

This easy equanimity between rigid adherence to chance and the relinquishing of choice to another individual (the performer) may have felt less like a contradiction to Cage at the time of composition in no small part because of his relationship with Tudor [Fig. 1.16]. For \textit{Music of Changes} and multiple components of \textit{Ten Thousand Things}, Cage’s process closely involved Tudor, who tested the feasibility of incredibly challenging chance-derived arrangements and translated durations given as spatial lengths into stopwatch-time. As Silverman notes, “[Cage] could not, and perhaps would not, have composed \textit{Music of Changes} without what he called the ‘charmed help’ of David Tudor…. The work became as a sort of collaboration between them.”\textsuperscript{146}

By the fall of 1954, when he composed 34’46.776” for 2 Pianists, instead of using the \textit{I-Ching} to specify every detail of the prepared piano piece, he allowed chance to determine categories of materials—plastic, rubber, metal, etc.—and left the nature of the object to be inserted into the piano up to the performer. Additionally, he allowed for a random musical component, X, to enter into the composition: something he had not thought of, and which the performer might add.

Remarking on this development in his work in 1972, Cage said:

This giving of freedom to the individual performer began to interest me more and more.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{145} Cage, 26’ 1.1499 for a String Player.
\textsuperscript{146} Silverman, 106.
\end{flushright}
And given to a musician like David Tudor, of course, it provided results that were extraordinarily beautiful. When this freedom is given to people who are not disciplined and who do not start—as I’ve said in so many of my writings—from zero (by zero I mean the absence of likes and dislikes) who are not, in other words, changed individuals, but who remain people with particular likes and dislikes, then, of course, the giving of freedom is of no interest whatsoever.\footnote{Kostelanetz, Conversing with Cage, 72.}

That a lack of discipline or devotion to the piece is exactly what Cage cites as his disagreement with Moorman’s interpretation of 26’ 1.1499” leads us back to consideration of how she came to construe devotion, discipline and freedom so differently than Tudor, and how their differing notions of the ideal “Cagean interpretation of Cage” point to the changing ontologies of the work-concept at this historical juncture.

V. The Subjective Performer, The Subjective Composer

In one of her letters prior to the performance at Corner’s loft, Moorman reflected on the challenges she found in the exacting timing of the piece. Showing the vast difference between her personal inclination versus those of the composer and his chosen performer who meticulously calculated every second, she wrote, “I’m beginning to wonder if I’m not overly concerned with accuracy. I don’t feel that I have a right to add seconds to Cage’s Music any more than I do to add beats to the Boccherini Cello Concerto. As it is, the notes and rhythms turn out differently within the indicated seconds every time I play the piece.”\footnote{Charlotte Moorman to David Tudor, April 11, 1963, box 57, folder 2, David Tudor Papers, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.} As Piekut notes when investigating Cage’s distaste for Moorman’s performance, “turning out differently” would have been in keeping with Cage’s philosophy, while a change to duration and time structures would be a grave sin.\footnote{Piekut, 150.} However, as with many of Cage’s injunctions, it is possible that in practice these may often have come into conflict. Tudor, highly attuned to accuracy and precision like Cage,
reportedly worked out the intricacies of each “indeterminate” piano part in advance and played his pre-arranged version exactly as transcribed every time. The more Moorman worked on her performance, however, instead of becoming more accurate with timing, her fervent investment in the piece took a different direction. Following what she determined to be the most interesting aspect of Cage’s score, she focused her efforts on gathering and including a truly surprising array of sounds from other sources, privileging this over a precise completion of each action within the second assigned to it. In doing so, she found herself on the wrong side of what one discovers to be Cage’s personal preferences within the unavoidable contradictions that his philosophical positions and musical scores require performers to navigate.

The terms of this strange dance—between a demanding “anti-authoritarian” composer and a performer invited to discipline themselves—are productively analyzed by music scholar Joe Panzner in his 2003 article “John Cage: Crises of Authenticity.” Panzner argues that the lack of writing on Cagean performance practice is directly related to the inconsistency in Cage’s own “authoritative” statements and his “interactions with the performance community,” both of which make finding a definitive position on correct performances of indeterminate works seem impossible. In attempting to answer the question of how to tell the difference “between a good performance in which ‘the results don’t matter’ and a bad performance in which ‘the results don’t matter’,” Panzner comes back to the anti-expressionist desire for music in which “sounds

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Piekut, 56-58. Interestingly, here Piekut posits the idea of Tudor sharing “distributed authorship” with Cage, as his working out of each piece that is foundational to both its notational form and its sonic introduction to audiences. Yet it seems what he is really suggesting is a rather straightforward form of collaboration – co-creation in the same period of time and in the same direction. While Cage regularly acknowledges Tudor’s importance, the hierarchical structures of composer and performer that Cage left unchallenged has kept this co-creation from being recognized, since the compositions are credited solely to Cage. I see Moorman as the anti-Tudor in showing what a truly distributed or relayed authorship would look like, in which the outcome is actually surprising and not fully in line with the expectations and desires of the original composers. At the same time, as performers of unique ability who are intrinsic to the creation, development and reception of experimental compositions, the contributions of Moorman and Tudor are similarly obscured by the residual power of the work-concept and its hierarchical ontology. For a study that, through the archival record, rigorously document the give and take between Cage and Tudor, see Martin Iddon, *John Cage and David Tudor: Correspondence on Interpretation and Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
would be themselves,” which in turn requires that performers “engage in the same sort of suppression of the ego exhibited in Cage’s compositional techniques.”

In this arrangement, the performer and composer become co-conspirators against the influence of the self, the inherent tendencies toward preference, and the ingrained habits and intentions that subconsciously lock sounds into structures and predetermined patterns. Cage removes his preferences and compositional intentions by the derivation of open-ended processes in the form of scores indeterminate as to their performance… In order to preserve the aims of nonintention, the performer must submit to the score by following the instructions to the last detail and sacrificing as many “interpretative” decisions as possible to a strict execution of the score. Submission to the letter of the score does not represent submission to Cage’s will—and subsequently Cage’s preference—however as the processes are geared toward a random generation of parameters designed to keep Cage’s preference as removed as possible from the resultant musical performance. In this manner, the score emerges as a third party to which both parties sacrifice as much interpretive liberty as possible to transcend the confines of individual likes and dislikes. This degree of submission accounts for Cage’s emphases on “discipline”…

This, I believe, is the ideal to which Cage’s indeterminate scores aspire, and as such could be a model for what Georgina Born describes as “relayed authorship.” According to Born, this is when a starting set of musical information—be it an open score or the digitized song available for sampling and remixing—serves as a baton to be passed along and taken in unknown and undetermined directions. However, as Cage’s response to various iterations of his scores shows, he expected submission and non-intention to look the same when taken up by different performers, that is, to head in exactly the same direction as the one in which he had started. As such, he often failed his own test of submission, and exercised, through his choices of preferred performers and conductors, feedback during rehearsals or to performances, and well-circulated signals of appreciation or disapproval, a strong position of authority over his scores, so that one is rarely in doubt about which interpretations were more in line with his individual likes and

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151 What Panzer describes is close to the way I will position the score as a masochistic contract in Paik and Moorman’s collaborations: an agreement to which both submit. However, two key differences are that, as in a masochistic contract, theirs are drawn up to reflect, rather than ban, their desires; and that, as I argue here, Cage’s model of submission is based on his preference for self-abnegation and so is not in fact what it purports to be, a ridding of his likes, nor an instance of equal evacuation of desire on the part of composer and performer. Panzer, “Crisis of Authenticity,” unpaginated.
152 Born, 30.
dislikes.\footnote{See Panzer and Piekut, \textit{Experimentalism Otherwise}, 149-50. Robinson also concludes her discussion of how carefully notated, and “observably consistent” \textit{Music Walk} (1958) was when Tudor, Cage and Cunningham toured it over the course of two years, observing that “Cage cared very much how his work was performed, even as he espoused freedom through Indeterminacy,” and so “Indeterminacy had to be instituted with programmatic clarity.” Robinson, 107.}

Those close to Cage recognized that, in practice, he was not actually advocating for a complete overthrow of the composer’s authority. As fellow composer and regular collaborator Gordon Mumma noted:

Cage set up the architecture but then allowed the internal decor to be subject to chance operations… His works were like a field with a fence, in which one could move as one wished. But there was a line; you couldn’t just fool around. You had to do what he said you could do and not what he didn’t say you could do.\footnote{Miller, 159.}

Working with a group of like-minded practitioners, the results could therefore go beyond predictability in the literal sense, but not beyond what Cage might ideally anticipate. This makes it much trickier to determine the size fields he envisioned creating for his performers. However, the ability to move about within a fenced in field is hardly most people’s definition of freedom. That this movement was further restricted to whatever was not considered “fooling around” or beyond what “he said you could do” certainly undermines seeing this relationship as a model for self-determination within a de-hierarchized anarchistic society.\footnote{For a plethora of Cage quotes on anarchy as modeled in his music, and ideally extendable to society, see the chapter “Social Philosophy,” in Kostelanetz, \textit{Conversing with Cage}, 273-313. One particularly relevant example affirms his and Tudor’s co-performance as one such instance when “I’m not telling David Tudor what to do, nor was he telling me what to do, and anything that either of us did worked with everything the other did…. We do not need to have the laws that tell us not do this and to do something else.” Kostelanetz, 285.} It is here that Cage’s most cherished philosophical position—that of identifying, like Meister Eckhart, “with no matter what eventuality”—creates a paradox within his musical practice.\footnote{John Cage, “Indeterminacy,” in \textit{Silence}, 35-40.} Wanting to create works that extend from a Zen-like renunciation of control over eventualities, he still expected those performing them to hold fast to his personal aesthetic of non-intentionality—a kind of anti-ego
authoritarianism. As he writes of the proper performance mode for Wolff’s indeterminate piece, *Duo II for Pianists*, in his essay “Indeterminacy”:

> Turning away from himself and his ego-sense of separation from other beings and things, [the performer] faces the Ground of Meister Eckhart, from which all impermanencies flow and to which they return. …Each performer, when he performs in a way consistent with the composition as written, will let go of his feelings, his tastes, his automatism, his sense of the universal, not attaching himself to this or to that, leaving by his performance no traces, providing by his actions no interruptions to the fluency of nature. The performer therefore simply does what is to be done, not splitting his mind in two, not separating it from his body, which is kept ready for direct and instantaneous contact with his instrument.\(^{157}\)

Requiring performers to turn away from themselves is hardly the same as encouraging them to “work from their own centers,” as Joseph describes Cage’s legacy.\(^ {158}\) Further it betrays a quite specific investment by Cage in a particular outcome and is far from exemplifying the composer’s turning away from his tastes or attachments. Zen philosophy and the depersonalized aesthetic Cage derived from it were both indicators of Cage’s personal taste, and ultimately (perhaps ironically) became Cage’s aesthetic hallmark. On the other hand, to properly fulfill at least part of this mission, a performer such as Moorman would also have to rid herself of the classical training that taught her to place the composer’s likes and dislikes as the guideposts of her performance. Only by letting go of the fear of punishment and search for reward, instilled by a belief in the composer’s hierarchical control and authorization of their performance, would she be able to submit to the score and not the composer.

What goes unrecognized here, as well, is the unmarked universalizing position that underpins the anti-expressive impulse in so much aesthetic theorizing during this period. It presumes first that all individuals have had equal access to self-articulation and expression, and therefore, that renunciation of one’s own feelings, tastes, automatism, ability to interrupt nature,

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etc. in the making of art will signal the same bold progressive gesture against an entrenched individualism and aggrandized ego for all. However, if we imagine a female performer, instead of the male referenced throughout “Indeterminacy,” the turn away from herself is likely to be doubly impossible: her specificity as a female body in the male-dominated New Music scene would already mark her as separate from other beings and the undifferentiated ground of Meister Eckhart. Likewise, her turning away would not necessarily imply the heroic undoing of traditions of expressive genius, but rather neatly reinforce gendered expectations of her role as an empty vessel, naturally submissive and already rooted in an unthinking body, rather than an active mind that might split into two. As Andreas Huyssen cogently observes, considering the effect modernism’s hollowing out of subjectivity has had on female authors, “The male, after all, can easily deny his own subjectivity for the benefit of a higher aesthetic goal, as long as he can take it for granted on an experiential level in everyday life.”

As we can see in hindsight, Cage’s assumption that the seemingly random noises, bits of tape music, duck calls and other elements that find their way into his more theatrical pieces are uninflected by his own life experiences and socialization is itself based on his position as a well-educated, white Protestant male. When he plays kitchen equipment in Water Walk (1959), these items are seen to transcend their daily use and become surprising tools for sound production; in the hands of a women, they would take on resonance with stereotypical domestic tasks. Likewise, when Moorman incorporates ready-made elements found in the world, such as tampon instructions or news coverage of Nixon or sex crimes, into her theatricalized performance of 26’ 1.1499”, these were just as cut-and-paste, but from a world experienced as a young, politically-conscious female performer rather than that of a practicing Buddhist minimalist composer living in the woods. Ultimately, when Cage spoke of “starting from zero,” he imagined renouncing a

159 Huyssen, 46.
subjectivity that he took for granted and embracing what he believed to be an objective position vis-à-vis a universal Nature.\(^{160}\) When Moorman dedicates herself to the avant-garde, she too intends to start from zero, diligently setting out to unlearn the many forms of self-objectification that she had undergone as a woman coming of age in the 1950s, from her beauty queen days in Little Rock to her years as a diligent pupil of cello maestri. As a woman who had been trained to think of herself as a subservient performer and a good Southern girl, to become a co-creator of Cage’s work required linking mind to body and experience to interpretation, while simultaneously detaching herself from authoritarian musical or sexual mores, in order to find her own freedom within the performance space. By insistently choosing to explore this space in relation to Cage’s piece, rather than performing it as a work of her own, she sought to re-define the relation between composer and performer as mediated through the score, and in doing so, Moorman imagined a work-concept that facilitated lateral relayed creativity as supposed to hierarchical forms of control and commodification [Fig. 1.17].

VI. From Musical Work to Relayed Authorship

My interest in bringing the musical work-concept into this discussion, as noted above, is not only because this aesthetic paradigm shapes the institutional context for and training of Cage, Moorman, Paik and Tudor, as well as the terms of their various attempts at rebellion. It also stems from a sense that historicizing the work-concept, which came to govern certain strands of conceptual and performative art practice since the 1960s, permits art history to better grasp its own particular “ontological mutant.”\(^{161}\) Further, it allows us to identify when and why utopian, anarchic or otherwise aspirational claims for relations within our revised work-concept get

\(^{160}\) For an insightful critique of Cage’s vision of Nature, see Piekut, “Sound’s Modest Witness.”

\(^{161}\) After comparing the various theories of the work-concept’s ontological status, Goehr describes it as “an ontological mutant” that does not comfortably sit within any ideal theoretical construct. Goehr, 2.
confounded by broader capitalist structures, including the art market and critical field. It explains in particular how the composer/artist emerges unscathed as the valued side of a binary in which performers and producers, if they are not themselves composers or artists, are devalued, or more often than not, completely invisible. That the Cartesian dualism—in which the body and the particular are found on the lower register, and the intellect and its abstraction are elevated—carries forward even in the treatment of performance art, shows the pervasiveness of a cultural value system that seems unable to disentangle itself from patriarchal capitalism, even in a field inhabited by real, particular bodies and closely associated with the rise of feminist art and increasing visibility for women artists.

In her book, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, Goehr goes to great lengths to show how the work-concept is historically specific and not universal. This allows her to unpack the ideological and socio-political baggage it brings with it, especially when it is applied to music produced outside its own particular cultural formation, or, as in our case, in other performance practices and fields. Her argument links the emergence of the fully formed, regulatory work-concept to the Enlightenment, to the rise of a bourgeois professional class and to the romantic artistic ideals of early nineteenth century Europe. She does this by first showing how differently earlier European musicians thought about their craft, with composers producing “occasional music” for various royal and religious contexts that did not require fully detailed notation, as instrumentalists were also expected to provide variation and improvisational flourishes along the way. Then, she contrasts the pre-romantic output of Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) to that of Beethoven to show how the various features of what we now recognize as musical works gathered conceptual and practical force in the late eighteenth century.

These changes affected not only how composers thought about their work, but also how

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162 Goehr, 187.
they participated in a broader economy of publishing and royalties. Goehr emphasized how this shift allied the arts with legal concepts such as copyright, social prohibitions against plagiarism and expectations of “fidelity” on the part of performers and conductors:

All these changes shared a common aim. They marked a transition in practice, away from seeing music as a means to seeing it as an end. More specifically, they marked a move away from thinking about musical production, as comparable to extra-musical use of a general language that does not presuppose self-sufficiency, uniqueness, or ownership of any given expression. In place of that, musical production was now seen as the use of musical material resulting in complete and discrete, original and fixed, personally owned units. The units were musical works.

But as she notes:

What seemed to matter most to composers was their freedom from worldly demands. Their romantic role willingly adopted, composers enjoyed describing themselves and each other as divinely inspired creators—even God-like—whose sole task was to objectify in music something unique and personal and to express something transcendent.

As has been shown, it is the latter part of this statement that Cage and his cohort seemed intent on dismantling—and being free from worldly demands was primarily an economic state that protected creative autonomy. In order to participate in urban markets and join a professional class, composers needed the ability to put their name on a piece of paper with notes on it and have this be valuable, a value that accrued from their elevated status as a distinguished creator of whatever resulted from this abstraction. This economic necessity did not change with Cage’s generation; in fact, we could point out that since the notes on Cage’s score, unlike those of his predecessors, did not correspond to an identifiable melody or arrangement but were likely to

163 For example, while Bach was perennially employed as an institutional Kapellmeister or Cantor, Beethoven mixed dwindling patronage support with increasing income from publishing. Biographer Barry Cooper details how Beethoven’s brother Carl began managing his business in the early 1800s, raising prices for new works sold to publishers and releasing earlier material to the market as Ludwig’s fame increased. Cooper, Beethoven (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) 123-125.
164 Goehr, 206. Looking ahead, we can note what a significant thing it is to suddenly claim personal ownership of given expressions within a general language, such as “Exit” by George Brecht.
165 Goehr, 208.
produce an unknown sonic quantity, more than ever what is appreciated when experiencing (or expected when commissioning) a Cage work is the ability of his name to turn any soundscape into a work of art. In hindsight, the anti-romantic strain in avant-garde art after Abstract Expressionism, so closely associated with Cage and Rauschenberg and reaching its apotheosis in Minimalism and Conceptualism, seems to have assumed that doing away with personal expression would naturally deflate the transcendent power of the artist. In fact, what is ultimately revealed is the independence of this “author function,” such that the artist’s name can stand apart from any stable form or divergent interpretation, and still impart value. This permits artistic and economic autonomy not only from church and state as originally intended, but now from all the other people and institutions that might play a part in the realization and experience of work.

Goehr highlights that, as part of asserting their autonomy, “many composers became strategically uninterested in the performance of their works,” with Cage’s former teacher Schoenberg proudly declaring, “I am delighted to add another unplayable work to the repertoire.” Yet, unlike what will happen later in relation to linguistic scores in the visual arts, musical composers could not completely disregard the role performance played in bringing their works to audiences:

… given aesthetic attitudes of the time, musical works as abstract concepts required adequate realization in performance if they were to prove themselves worthy of being called ‘works of fine art.’ Adequate realization depended on there being interpreters of works devoted to the task of realizing works through the medium of performance. The ideal of Werktreue emerged to capture the new relation between work and performance as well as that between performer and composer. Performances and their performers were respectively subservient to works and their composers.

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167 Goehr, 229-31.
168 Goehr, 231. First emphasis mine. In contrast, we can now see that abstract concepts as delineated in works by George Brecht, Yoko Ono, Martha Wilson and even sculpture ideas such as those instructed by Lawrence Weiner, which do not require adequate realization or specialized interpreters to prove themselves as artwork. The concept, because it is given linguistically, can be addressed on its own.
However, even within these newly rigid and hierarchical relations, Werktreue (understood as “to be true to the work is to be true to the score”) needed to take account of performative interpretation. Rather than being celebrated for extemporaneous improvisation or flurries of virtuosity, as had been common in the eighteenth century, the most prized performers from the nineteenth century on were now those whose interpretations helped to disclose the “true” meaning of the work.

Given her classical training and repeated descriptions of herself as a soloist in service of Cage, Moorman approached all her scores with the notion of Werktreue still very much a part of her psyche. The contrast between Tudor’s interpretation of Cage versus Moorman’s (and later Moorman and Paik’s) I believe turns on their differently identifying what they saw as the real meaning of the work and to what they would, when faced with irreconcilable choices in structuring their performances, be most true. To Tudor, this remained the classical interpretation, being absolutely diligent in matching his tones, timing, and aesthetic, to Cage’s score so that his interpretation would “achieve complete transparency… and allow the work to ‘shine’ through.”¹⁶⁹ To Moorman and Paik, as their Cagean performance manifesto makes clear, the importance of Cage would only be kept alive if he was taken at his most anarchic; the real meaning of the work was thus an open invitation, an artistic relay, a platform for constantly changing and expanding experimentation. Ultimately, they tested how true Cage was to his own dictums that the work should never sound the same and that results didn’t matter.

In reflection, it was Moorman and Paik’s version of Cage, which stresses the mutable and multiple potentialities of his linguistic scores, that most influenced the circles of artists that

¹⁶⁹ Goehr, 232.
translated Cagean ideas into various disciplines and “intermedia” experiments.170 The transference of Cage’s philosophies, and their adaptation to a variety of score-based practices, can be most directly traced to Cage’s time at The New School for Social Research, where his experimental composition classes from 1956 to 1960 expanded his circle of influence far beyond music.171 The course famously inspired painters like Allan Kaprow and “artist-researcher” George Brecht to create works based on linguistic scores, designated respectively as Happenings and Events [Fig. 1.18]. These brought performative activities and their transcriptions within the purview and critical reception of the visual arts. Others, like poet-composer Dick Higgins, would take up the potential of the linguistic score to offer poetic invocations like “Find it. Attack it” that could double as as open-ended instructions for an endless variety of later Fluxus performances.172

However, it is also Cage’s exemplary ability to foreground open-ended proposals and frame otherwise un-authored situations and get full credit for the conceptual value of these creations—detached from the experience and particularities of each iteration or the other individuals involved in their realization—that has guided the economic exchange models of these ephemeral art practices. In trying to make sense of 1960s artists’ move away from the materially autonomous art object, as manifested by the rise of conceptual and performance-based art, the adaptation of musical work-concept ironically ensured a new kind of intellectual object for sale. This, in turn, made the work even more dependent on the genius-author to set it apart and give it value. The challenge to the classical aura of the singular, eternal fine art object and the

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170 Intermedia was a term brought into this context by Fluxus artist Dick Higgins, in his 1966 “Intermedia Chart,” and was used to describe much Fluxus work as well as aligned performance practices by artists such as Carolee Schneeman and LaMonte Young. See Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 2002), 91-99.


autonomous artist intended by these unstable, mutable, ephemeral Happenings, ready-made events and open-ended gestures was, in practice, negated by the distinct privileging of a linguistic conceit—transmitted via scores, instructions, and then artists statements and critical discourse—that emphasized a single coherent concept, within which all potential realizations would be subsumed. Ironically, then, the stabilizing author-function becomes even more important as the potential openness to interpretation increases.

In considering Cage as a lynchpin in transferring the notion of the work-concept to the visual arts, it then becomes quite significant that, as I have shown, his project successfully rejected the romantic aesthetics associated with the work-concept but in no way addressed itself to its economy of authorship and was not successful (and maybe never truly intended) to overthrow its hierarchical power structure (if this meant being rid of the composer and the presumption that performers would be devoted to his vision). Via this lineage, we can better understand how the work-concept currently in operation in the arts is both an extension of an eighteenth-century innovation in the musical field that allowed composers to get paid for immaterial work, and an ontological deviation that no longer depends on Werktreue-committed performers.

This disassociation between idea and enactment can also be traced to Cage, both in terms of the reception of 4’33”, which few heard performed but was easily appreciated as a conceptual gesture via description and the text-version of the score, and in the emphasis that his writings placed on his elaborate processes for producing aleatory, disinterested compositions, such that the sounds could be seen as of secondary interest to the intellectual rigor through which they were determined. The impact of Cage’s exemplary practice on the visual arts is reflected just a few years later in important statements by Conceptual artists such as Sol LeWitt, who in 1966
described the idea of a work as the engine that produces a visual byproduct [Fig. 1.19], and Lawrence Weiner’ 1968 statement that “the work need not be built” to fulfill the artist’s intent [Fig. 1.20]. Subsequently, in an art world comfortable with the notion that abstract concepts rendered in linguistic form do not “require adequate realization in performance…to prove themselves worthy of being called ‘works of fine art,’” performers of score-based works can be seen as even more subservient than before. Not because they are limited by Werktreue expectations to deliver a perfectly transparent performance, but because their performance—good or bad, wildly expressionistic or minimally rendered—is unnecessary and even unrelated to judgments of the work’s status as fine art and its essential form. The result is that despite an enormous amount of performance work created in the past century, there is little language in the art historical arsenal to deal with the fluid, unstable nature of these as they evolve from rehearsals through repetitions and transpositions. Instead, the stable core—the work-concept expressed by the score—has become the object of study, not it actual or potential iterations. Nor is there recognition of the embodied intelligence and experiential processing done by the performers of these works if they happen not to be the artist themselves.

In this context, Moorman’s interpretation of 26’ 1.1499” significantly disrupts the musical score’s traditional function as a tool for maintaining the composer’s autonomy and the work’s sonic consistency, and forces recognition of the performer’s agency and the work’s instability. Simultaneously, it contrasts with neo-avant-garde appropriations of the score as a tool for authoring concepts that could be treated separately from their realizations. Instead, her practice ideally illustrates the potentiality of the concept of relayed authorship in a performance

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174 Goehr, 231.
art paradigm, and its value as a model for appreciating creative interpreters like Moorman.

Fittingly, relayed authorship was put forward by Born in an essay, “On Musical Mediation: Ontology, Technology and Creativity,” that responds to Goehr’s book. Born observes that Goehr chronologically leaves off exactly as the work-concept is being challenged by figures such as Cage, who are producing indeterminate compositions that at least gesture toward horizontal relationships between performer and composer.175 While Goehr points out Cage’s failure to escape the institutional trappings of the work-concept, she fails to theorize what success would look like and what a productive replacement might be. Pointing to the impact of digital technologies which render music as code, and therefore always provisional, mediated and available for remixing, Born therefore seeks a new musical ontology that will express contemporary music’s “double mutability”—on one hand, as a code that oscillates between immaterial and embodied localized experience, and on the other, recognizing:

… the potential for relayed creativity, through cumulative hybridities, yielding a provisional musical work which both retains and blurs the traces and boundaries of individual and collective authorship…. This is a music in process, predicated on the suspension of any master discourse – an aesthetics of mutual encounter, of bridging and negotiating, not an aesthetics of appropriation and subsumption of another.176

Yet I would like to argue that this double mutability is not a digital invention, but is simply that which has been repressed by the fiction of the work-concept, as the score is itself already a form of code. It too negotiates between immaterial and embodied musical expressions, between performed iterations of compositions that have always been far more provisional than classical music theory wanted to admit. Cage laid this provisional nature bare, making the sonic content of 4’33” or Imaginary Landscape No. 4 entirely contingent on the localized moment when it is performed. Likewise, his indeterminate compositions open space for performers to

175 Born, 10.
176 Born, 29-30.
generate unique solutions from his notational algorithms. Yet, as we have shown, this “freedom”
was constrained by an expectation that the score will be decoded with the disinterested manner
of a computer, not subject to another creator, another layer of mediation or another round of
negotiation. In this context, then, Cage’s aesthetic of radical self-renunciation, itself an
expression of white male privilege in the 1960s, can also be seen as an attempt to insulate
himself. Despite making work that appeared to encourage negotiation of difference and lateral
creative exchange, demands for desubjectivization obscured his own specificity as an author with
an ego clearly still attached to the institutional hierarchies from which his authority emanated. It
also resisted confronting and accepting the otherness of those his compositions supposedly
recognized as participants rather than rote executors.

In Moorman’s relayed authorship, however, we see the radical refusal to play by
another’s rules, even while remaining insistently in dialogue with them. Here, the hierarchies are
disrupted, not in a limited field as proscribed by the empowered composer, but as an assertion of
equality in the moment of realizations. After the score is handed off, in fact, the performer has
the latitude to expand the terrain without the composer’s permission—to her mind, the point of
an open score in particular seemed to be that it encouraged demonstrative testing of this elasticity.
Since Moorman is the unusual body artist who is not both author and performer, we get to see
these roles cleaved apart in ways that do not match expected divisions of labor, and analyze work
that speaks with two voices (at least) simultaneously. Borrowing terms from DJ culture
referenced in Born’s article, we get to envision a performance art lineage of remixed classics and
mash-ups, where we might enjoy John Cage’s 26’ 1.1499” (Charlotte Moorman/ Nam June Paik
Extended Late-Night Campus Mix) as repurposed by art students weaving together an evening-
long set of scores, adding their unique spin to a chain of creative acts—each invocation and
alteration simultaneously devoted and defiant.

It is ironic that, at the time, Moorman’s performance practice was not recognizable as a challenge to anything more expansive than Cage’s individual authority and personal tastes, while scores that subsumed everyday experiences into singularly-authored events proliferated and were hailed as a provocation to the Modernist myth of the artist-genius. It is only now, with distance and increased pressure on this myth and its attendant world-view, that Moorman’s unique practice and idiosyncratic sensibility can be seen as the more subversive and defiant. Moorman, in her refusal to empty herself and submit to the personal preferences of the initiating author or the institutional expectations of a transparent performer, turned Cage’s score into an ideal vehicle for revealing the fiction of the work-concept, including those aspects to which Cage himself still clung. In doing so, she pushed 26’ 1.1499’” to its full potential as a model opportunity for relayed authorship between Cage, herself, Tudor, Paik, Yalkut, and all the other performers who have and will develop interpretations of this work, a palimpsest of voices echoed by the accumulated texts and props that distinguished her work [Fig. 1.21]. In this way, Moorman’s interpretations of Cage’s composition as code rather than contract prefigure the ontological reconsideration encouraged by digitized music.177 More expansively, her insistent enactment of the piece as an embodied experience to be endlessly remixed presents art history with an early example of an alternate performative ontology, premised on an aesthetics of mutual encounter and negotiation, that now seems both prescient and urgent.

CHAPTER 2

SEDUCTION AND SUBMISSION: MOORMAN AND PAIK IN PERFORMANCE

I. A Proposition

“All of these pieces are half-mine. That’s what the world finally has realized now. In performance, these are not Nam June Paik pieces, but Nam June Paik/Charlotte Moorman pieces. They are all collaborations,” Charlotte Moorman asserted in a 1980 interview with music critic Gisela Gronemeyer. This is the most straightforward declaration on record of Moorman’s conception of herself as an equal partner in the duo that has historically defined but also to a large degree eclipsed or erased her as an independent creative presence. Whether identifying her as Paik’s muse or failing to name her at all, history books, critical essays and even the concert programs she herself produced over the years have predominantly emphasized Paik as the sole conceptual generator of the pieces that he and Moorman performed together from 1964 to 1968 [Fig. 2.1]. Feminist artist and critic Martha Rosler, for example, publicly took Paik to task for his “fetishization of the female body as an instrument that plays itself.” Yet even Rosler’s formulation does not mention Moorman by name, thus contributing further to the obfuscation of Moorman’s personhood, creative participation, and the skillful inventiveness that she brought to playing her instruments—cello and body alike.

179 This traditional view has started to be productively revised in the recent publication of Joan Rothfuss’ Topless Cellist, and the Block Museum’s exhibition A Feast of Astonishments and its accompanying catalogue, which features several essays that consider Moorman’s creative role in their partnership. The analysis offered here builds on this work, yet uses the theoretical lens of masochism to reveal the hierarchies of their relationship and the aggressive sexual content of their work as intimately interwoven and essential to the meaning of their historically-specific critical intervention.
The art world’s turn towards a conceptually-defined authorship from the 1960s on, especially in dealing with performative, ephemeral and otherwise diffuse practices, continues to hamper discussions about the creative contributions of collaborators who are not traditional authors, and what this might do to an idealized concept of “the work.” Because Paik and Moorman’s partnership is a unique example of a sustained engagement by a credited author and a singular performer, it offers an important opportunity to reconsider whether a deterministic model of authorship adequately describes such practices. The Paik-Moorman relationship also invites us to productively rethink the portrayal of Moorman as an inanimate instrument, or passive, unthinking muse. How might we begin to see this body of work as half Moorman’s, despite what is written on the pages of the score, the programs and the history books? By seeing Moorman as malleable and masterful at the same time, we can not only explode an autonomous model of performance authorship, but also expand our idea of what constitutes creative activity. By appreciating her agentive power as the deliberate muse that forced Paik’s hand, we can profoundly reconsider collaborative and authorial intentionality.

In the previous chapter, we saw how Moorman’s engagement with John Cage’s 26’1.1499” challenged the fiction of the “work-concept” in classical music and beyond. Central to this challenge was Moorman’s treatment of Cage’s score as a code—a relayed starting point for her own interpretive creativity—rather than as a binding contract. This distinction, taken from musicological discussions of the work-concept, assumes a gap of space or time between the composer’s writing of the score for an abstract, unidentified performer, and its subsequent reception by a player who is expected to treat its terms as if set in stone. I argued that Moorman’s insistence on the works’ evolution through her embodied performances in varying contexts put forward an ontology of performance that emphasizes the existence and negotiation of disparate
authorial positions. This in turn allowed for multiple, co-existing subjectivities to operate in
dynamic tension within and through the work itself.

Here, I would like to take this model further, by examining the live collaborations
between Moorman and Paik, her primary creative partner over the decades. To this end, I
consider the ways the score might be reconceived in their work as a different kind of contract.
What Gilles Deleuze calls “the masochistic contract” can be a literal document outlining terms of
engagement, but it can also be an implicit agreement setting the restrictions and permissions that
allow for consensual, choreographed exchanges of power and courting of danger within the
erotic sphere. In the resulting relationship, one participant adopts a position of dominance
over the other during play, yet they are equally bound to submit to the contractually articulated
desires of the other. In this way, a masochistic contract affords those in structurally oppositional
roles the necessary conditions for pressing against their own limits, through an interaction of
bodies, minds, and the willingness to let go of will—to direct, discipline and demand, or to
become object, instrument and tableau. Because of the contract, masochism is not about
imposition but seduction, each partner having been persuaded to step into the role of unlikely
assailant or irreproachable victim for the other’s benefit. These contracts are always entered into
with a specific partner, premised on initial negotiations and consent, and often followed by
continual exploration and expansion of the preliminary boundaries. They establish the co-created
premises from which future erotic scenarios for the couple must emerge.

The idea of the masochistic contract is central to Gilles Deleuze theorization of masochism in 1967. Gilles
Deleuze and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty & Venus in Furs (New York: Zone
Books, 1991), 75. Noting that the contract can be figurative, Deleuze writes, “In any case, there is no doubt that
masochism cannot do without a contract, either actual or in the mind of the masochist,” 76. The contractual nature of
masochistic and performance relationships is central to Kathy O’Dell’s Contract with the Skin: Masochism,
Performance Art and the 1970s (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), though unlike here, her
primary focus is on the contractual relationship forged between the artist and the audience, rather than within a
creative partnership.
The evocation of this structure in Moorman and Paik’s unique creative relationship can be gleaned from the very beginning. In June 1964, meeting Moorman for the first time at a midtown diner, Paik immediately laid out a proposition that they become artistic partners.\textsuperscript{182} He began elaborating a series of fantasies—visions of a beautiful girl playing classical music while taking her clothes off or jumping into water—visions that had been with him for years that he now hoped she could help him bring into reality. As she later recounted:

\begin{quote}
I’m looking at him wondering, why do I need him for a partner? …I just, I can’t believe I’m sitting here talking to this Oriental man about these things. But there was something about him. He’s so serious and so strong, that I listened. And we became partners and everything in the world has happened now as a result.\textsuperscript{183}
\end{quote}

Their combined commitment to absurdity and eroticism as tools for strategic disruption—with a splash of humor—characterized all of their collaborative work from this point forward. While it was Paik who proposed the initial terms, it was their shared interest in addressing cultural shifts (especially around new technologies and sexual politics) by dissecting and disrupting the conventions of classical music that ultimately made the pact mutually satisfying. What Moorman recognized somewhere between her incredulous first response and her almost immediate agreement to sign on, was that they did in fact need each other in order to stage this sexual musical revolution and test what classical music could bear (or bare).\textsuperscript{184}

This phase of live collaboration and boundary-testing culminated in 1967 when the terms of their “contractual” relationship were tested by the judicial system proper. Moorman was arrested at New York’s Filmmakers’ Cinematheque on February 9, 1967 for appearing in a light-bulb bikini and then topless (while trying on masks and bowing with flowers) [Fig. 2.2], as

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\textsuperscript{182} Rothfuss, 81.
\textsuperscript{184} Moorman quote from Stern video interview, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzzAopn9TE
\end{flushright}
required by Paik’s score for *Opera Sextronique* [Fig. 2.3]. Questions of authorship and agency, risk and responsibility, conceptual versus embodied creation were forced into high relief through her trial and in the courts of public, and art world, opinion. While the judge, the artists and their supporters, and the public could agree on little in the flurry surrounding the case, Paik and Moorman’s stated goal of bringing “sex into music” seemed to have been clearly understood and achieved. Yet, despite decades of discussion around this event and Paik’s writings on the topic, the fundamental stakes of emphatically introducing sex into the concert hall have been left largely undertheorized. Contextualized within the burgeoning sexual revolution underway in the United States and the nascent feminist movement, as well as the prankster, neo-dada shock-aesthetics of Paik take on Fluxus, the motivations and implications of their particular juxtaposition of sex and music have been treated as self-evident. However the oft-quoted program notes for *Opera Sextronique*, proclaiming that “Music history needs its D.H. Lawrence, its Sigmund Freud,” position their project within the rich landscape of sexuality as an elemental but constantly conflicted, easily perverted instinctual drive; a psychologically and socially disruptive, even dangerous force motivated by the pursuit of pleasure but also self-obliteration. If, in disagreement with the judge’s ruling, one believes *Opera Sextronique* appealed to interests other than the purely prurient (or appealed to them with a complexity beyond a typical strip tease), then it is worth examining more precisely how eroticism is mobilized within their repertoire.

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185 In a recent essay, Sophie Landres goes some steps to address the cyclical complexities of repression and displacement by thinking through *Opera Sextronique* and related works via the Freudian uncanny. However, the duo’s efforts are typically explored in relation to the historical avant-garde strategies of disruption and feminist politics. Likewise, her analysis still sees their insertion of sex into music as primarily organized around shock and liberation, even if the resulting court case reasserted repression. Sophie Landres, “Indecent and Uncanny: The Case Against Charlotte Moorman,” *Art Journal*, vol. 76, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 49-69.

186 Judge Milton Shalleck, “People &C., v. Charlotte Moorman,” *New York Law Journal*, May 11, 1967. The precise issues raised by the ruling will be discussed in detail in the concluding section of this chapter, but in his conclusion
Using theorizations of masochistic consensual power-play, I argue that Moorman’s “yes” at that luncheonette in 1964 was the fundamental condition for Paik’s continued interest in and compositional exploration of “action music” during the years of their artistic partnership, much as it is the submissive’s consent that determines the forward motion of any masochistic engagement. Paik himself admitted that:

In 1961 I was going to quit my performance career… However after having arrived in the U.S. I met Charlotte Moorman. She re-kindled my interest in the performances…. She was the first woman who met both [my] qualifications, and had a musical technique, courageousness, beauty and artistic sensitivity… It was very difficult for her and was very lucky for me to find her… maybe the one and only candidate in the world.  

Paik’s plan to retire from performance to focus on electronic assemblages is something he often proclaimed. What I want to emphasize here is that it was not only meeting and being inspired by Moorman and her musical and physical attributes, but her repeated willingness to say “yes” to whatever terms Paik could dream up that kept him exploring in this direction. Counter-intuitively, it was her absolute acquiescence as the performer that propelled their collaboration, calling forth ever more daring boundary-pushing from the composer through her pliability. Viewed through the lens of masochism, we can appreciate the power of such submission to spark inventive new scenarios that emerge from both parties’ negotiated limits and desires. This understanding foregrounds Moorman as an essential co-generator—rather than a prop—who fearlessly enacted the fantasies she inspired in him. Likewise, I will show that Moorman enthusiastically embraced situations of heightened risk, whether physically dangerous or socially transgressive, in the pursuit of her art.  

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female body, of a classically-trained string player, even of a passive muse for the avant-garde, she sought out others throughout her career who would authorize these pursuits through their commands. By willingly embodying and then over-performing the requirements and contradictions of these roles to the point of absurdity, Moorman participated in the masochistic tradition of using cultural stereotypes to critically explore existing power dynamics.

Playing with these positions, she and Paik investigated their simultaneous existence as empowered subjects and obedient objects, finding that neither male nor female partner need be exclusively associated with one or the other experience, despite sociocultural conventions. While never a romantic couple, Paik and Moorman throughout their performances took turns enacting the fetishistic substitutions that allow for multiple, contradictory libidinal investments and the erotic interchangeability of persons, body parts and things. The resulting works aestheticize, rather than conceal, the composer’s exertion of power as well as his ultimate dependence on the performer’s compliance—a creative dynamic with implications for other instances of seemingly unequal collaboration. As will be discussed in more detail, the theoretical map of masochism ranges from Freudian psychoanalysis to queer literary studies, and its significance has been placed anywhere between the pathological and the emancipatory. Yet, there is consistent agreement that, despite displays to the contrary, substantial power is located in the submissive position and secured via the contract. It is these complex negotiations of self and other,

189 The interplay of sexual and aggressive tonalities, and desire for risk and denial of responsibility that this chapter explores is also thematized in Kristine Stiles’ essay, “‘Necessity’s Other’: Charlotte Moorman and the Plasticity of Denial and Consent,” in Feast of Astonishment, 169-183. Yet, Stiles’ argument focuses explicitly on Moorman’s navigation, personally and professionally, between Eros and Thanatos, whereas my hope here is to understand Moorman and Paik’s collaboration within the more formalized terms of masochism, where these forces are intentionally instrumentalized and explicitly related to hierarchies of power that impose on the individual from various directions.

190 “Masochism involves more fiction and illusion than nearly any other pattern of human behavior. On the surface, the dominant partner is in control… Yet often it is the masochist’s wishes and desires that determine the course of interaction.” Roy Baumeister, Masochism and the Self (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1989), 12. In addition see for example Deleuze, 21-23, Michel Foucault and James O’Higgins, “Sexual Choice, Sexual Act”
illusions and allusions, performed identities and performed objectification, and the simultaneous wielding and relinquishing of control within a co-created imaginative scenario, that I believe offer a useful alternate framework for rethinking seemingly hierarchical artistic exchanges.

One caveat before continuing: despite the psychoanalytically inflected language underpinning this argument, I want to be clear that I am not interested in pathological interpretations of either artist’s biography or sexual preferences, nor will I be imputing that either side of this dyad has tendencies towards clinical masochism. Further, I do not believe that masochism was an intentional reference point for their performance pieces or an area of particular interest for either performer.191 Rather, I turn to writings on masochism because they help us to more adequately understand Moorman and Paik’s performance of extreme power hierarchies. Because their roles were delineated and exchanged through agreement, power itself becomes marked as malleable, performative and illusory, even as it is emphasized as always at work and erotically charged. As such, masochism is not only useful for thinking about Paik and Moorman’s performances, but how these performances relate to the experiences of modern subjectivity and diffuse techniques of power that both practices address head on.

II. Setting the Scene (1959 – 1964)

It is fair to say that Moorman had come to a juncture in her career when she met Paik in the summer of 1964. She was still performing regularly in a classical context, but had been

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191 Photographer Eric Kroll, best known for his S&M photography but also a photographer for Paik and Moorman in the 1970s and 80s, shared that Paik was “fascinated by women, they were essential to him,” but that Paik did not express particular interest in sexual role-play or S&M during the time they knew each other. Moorman, according to him, was just a classical musician “taking the next step.” Yet, Paik knew Kroll’s connection to erotica well enough, as he asked Kroll to help find a Playboy “center-fold like model” for the video component of Reclining Buddha (1994). Kroll said he was a collaborator in that he “provided talent.” Phone interview with the author, July 11, 2016.
steadily increasing her involvement with the New Music and Fluxus scenes. She had produced numerous one-off concerts for friends and new colleagues since encountering the testing grounds of Yoko Ono’s and Philip Corner’s lofts in 1961. As part of a series of proto-Fluxus events in May 1963 that constituted the Yam Festival, Moorman programmed nearly twenty-four hours of performance at the Hardware Poet’s Playhouse, a venue above a hardware store on West 54th Street. “6 Concerts ’63,” as her first Festival was called, built on this momentum, and early on, she telegraphed her intentions for this series to spark an annual festival to participants and press. In terms of her development as an avant-garde performer, she had been working on an alternate repertoire for a little over a year. Her first evening-length program from April 1963 at Corner’s, which had included just a few minutes of the Cage piece, was repeated that September for the first Festival with a longer selection from 26’ 1.1499”. As we know from her letter to David Tudor, she was dissatisfied with this performance, but had immediately dedicated herself to improving on it. The complete version, which she was preparing to debut in the fall of 1964, would realize her ambitious idea to trigger tape recorded concrete “non-cello” sounds, including exploding bombs and cats in heat, and use props such as razors, pistols and the erotically suggestive—at least in her hands and mouth—slide whistle, among many others.

Her fateful meeting with Paik was the result of her organizing efforts for the 2nd Festival, which ramped up at the end of May and early June 1964, and in particular, a conversation with

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194 CM letter to David Tudor, Sept. 7, 1963 reflects on the Sept. 3 performance as well as private rehearsals since in which the piece was only 3-4 minutes over time. This is also the letter with drafted language on the back reporting that, she “forgot all about punishment + all about reward + all about self styled obligations and duties + responsibilities and remembered one thing only; that it was is me – no one else – who determines my destiny and decides my fate.”
Stockhausen and Mary Bauermeister to request permission to present *Originale.* That is, at the moment her and Paik’s paths intersected, Moorman was already well on her way in conceptualizing an annual, international, high-profile Festival, had been expanding her avant-garde intermedia performance repertoire, and was deep into developing her full-length, multimedia interpretation of 26’ 1.1499”. When Paik asked whether she’d like to be artistic partners, he was in some sense asking a question she had already answered: “Do you choose adventure? Are you ready to leap?” In fact, given that some of what he proposed included her aquatic submergence, this was not just the metaphoric implication, but quite literally a request for her to leap into new waters for/with him.

At this point in her career, she was also already familiar with the challenges faced by female artists seeking to be subjects in a culture premised on their objectification. In casting the New York *Originale*, which uses real people performing as themselves by fulfilling various professional roles, Moorman and the “Director” Allan Kaprow would have been seeking two female models to play themselves as “Models” [Fig. 2.4]. In this context, this would entail asking female subjects, in this case Fluxus-affiliated artists Letty Eisenhauer and Olga Adorno, to conflate their “original selves” with a profession premised on their value as sexual object or animate mannequin. Related concerns were also central to Moorman’s close friend Carolee Schneemann’s early projects. In *Eye-Body* (1963) [Fig. 2.5], Schneemann had her herself photographed as a collaged nude element staring back from within the layered surfaces of her paintings, and in *Meat Joy* (1964) [Fig. 2.6], Schneemann and a cast of scantily-clad youths rolled in wet paint and raw meat, blending associations of Abstract Expressionism and a nascent sexual revolution. Schneemann was at this time romantically involved with electronic composer

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195 A June 15, 1964 letter to a Mr. Breucher is written “at Stockhausen’s request” following a meeting, suggesting Moorman had *Originale* in mind some time earlier and had made overtures that allowed for a mid-June meeting. CM draft, correspondence with Karlheinz Stockhausen, Avant-Garde Festival Folders, Box 2, Folder 31 CMA.
and early Festival collaborator James Tenney, and confirmed that Moorman knew about these works at the time. Further, she reflected that she and Moorman “had some talk together about what our bodies brought to our work—both from our personal lived experience and from the crazy range of reactions within the masculine traditions.”\textsuperscript{196} That is, Moorman was quite aware that the female body in performance was a site of contestation. From her vantage point, she could see commodity culture and avant-garde composers alike using it as symbol and selling point. She also saw her fellow female creatives seeking strategies for claiming it as the locus of their subjective experience, which included the experience of being consistently objectified. She knew well that as a woman in either the classical field or the avant-garde, her female body would be simultaneously a novelty \textit{and} a hurdle to being equally valued.\textsuperscript{197} Paik’s proposal to use that double-bind to smash through artistic barriers suggested a path between these pre-given positions by over-performing her otherness.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Korean-born Paik began the 1960s securing his reputation as the \textit{enfant terrible} of the advanced music scene centered around Darmstadt, Germany. \textit{Hommage à John Cage: Music for Tape Recorder and Piano} [Fig. 2.7], which debuted in 1959 at Galerie 22 in Dusseldorf, was Paik’s response to Cage’s performance \textit{Music Walk, for One or More Pianos}, given at the same gallery the year before. Taking what he needed from Cage’s philosophy and ignoring the rest, Paik abandoned Schoenberg-inflected tonal compositions and began scoring action music assemblages, with himself as the featured performer. However, his sound sources were hardly randomly selected or structured by chance. Instead they were chosen and organized for their cultural resonances and opportunities for \textit{détournement}. In a letter outlining what would unfold over the ten minutes of \textit{Hommage à John

\textsuperscript{196} Scheenmann, cited in Stiles, ft. 20, 181.

\textsuperscript{197} Laura Weirtheim Joseph, “Messy Bodies and Frilly Valentines: Charlotte Moorman’s \textit{Opera Sextronique}” in \textit{Feast of Astonishments}, 47.
Cage. Paik outlined a first movement, associated with the early avant-garde, exploring “sublime” and “primitive” linguistics. The second movement was to be, “As bo-o-ring as possible; like Proust, Palestrina, Zen, Gregorian chant, Missa, Parisian café, life, sex and dog staring into the distance.” In the concluding section, quotes from Antonin Artaud and Arthur Rimbaud would play over loudspeakers as Paik carried out various “act gratuite” [sic]. These “gratuitous,” generally destructive acts, were to include “my piano…toppled over, glass is broken, eggs are thrown, paper torn, a live hen set free, and motor bike arrives.” Paik followed this composition with 1960’s Étude for Pianoforte [Fig. 2.8], in which he famously frightened Cage by leaping into the audience and cutting off the elder statesman’s tie before smothering shampoo over his and David Tudor’s heads. This was not a random lashing-out, but an expression of Paik’s disgust at Cage’s bourgeois attire, which he saw as at odds with his purportedly anarchic aesthetic philosophy. Paik then exited, leaving a motorcycle running in the tight quarters of Bauermeister’s studio and called from a bar sometime later to say the piece had ended—just when carbon monoxide poisoning and asphyxiation began to be a worry. Cage remarked about Paik performances that, “you get the feeling very clearly that anything can happen, even physically dangerous things.”

The violent intensity of Paik as a performer and his destructive attacks on various objects—in particular musical instruments and symbols of restrictive society, such as ties—is

198 Nam June Paik to Dr. Steinecke, May 2, 1959, an unsuccessful request to present Hommage a Cage at Darmstadt summer course; published in Nam June Paik, Niederschriften eines Kulturnomaden, Edith Decker (ed.), Cologne, 1992, p. 51–53. (accessed 7/20/16 http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/source-text/30/)
199 Nam June Paik to Dr. Steinecke.
200 Nam June Paik to Dr. Steinecke.
201 Nam June Paik to Dr. Steinecke.
202 Taehi Kang, Nam June Paik: Early Years (1958-1973) (Florida State University Dissertation, 1988), 36. The photo of them smiling together just after [Fig. 2.7] belies Cage’s initial shock and residual sense of Paik as a dangerous wild card.
often remarked on throughout these European performances and in the literature on his early years, as is his interest in bringing sex into music. These issues are often listed in serial fashion, as when Dieter Ronte, director of the Museum for Moderner Kunst, Vienna, writes of this period, “[Paik] demonstrated destruction, made sex and music part of happenings, and also directed aggression against musical instruments…” However, lists such as this gloss over what is most unique and least noted in Paik’s early work: the casual conflation of objects and bodies (in particular, female ones) as they are brought together in service of these interests - to be smashed, mistreated, dragged as directed by artistic fiat.

Paik’s later work in Germany vacillated between the primarily aggressive actions of these first performances and a kind of polymorphous sexual relationship to objects, animals and human genitals, enacted by himself as performer or given as instructions. Like other Fluxus event scores, his compositions place authorial claims on the stuff and activities of daily life. However, Paik’s scores seek to dictate to abstract elements, objects and actors alike, as if they could wield total control over the found world through words. By aiming to bring sex into music, Paik also could mark his distance from Cage and Fluxus-founder Maciunas (both of whom were opposed to overt sexuality in their own work and disliked it in their creative associates), and the conceptually driven tonal and electronic experimentation happening around West Deutsche Rundfunk’s Studio for Electronic Music (WDR) in Cologne, where Paik was studying. At the same time, this move placed Paik’s work in dialogue with currents in popular culture, from the postwar prominence of Freudian ideas (everywhere from commercial advertising to socialist...

205 See for example, Taehi Kang, 68, which dismisses a sadomasochistic connection out of hand; and Stiles, “Necessity’s Other,” which in more common fashion just lists them back to back as two coexisting, rather than overlaid, issues. In Feast of Astonishments, 173.
206 O’Dell, “Fluxus Feminus,” Drama Review, vol 41, no. 1 (Spring 1997), 47. For Paik on his effort to be first into the TV-art terrain, see Calvin Tomkins, “Video Visionary,” New Yorker (May 5, 1975).
philosophy), to the highly-publicized 1960 trial against the British publisher of D.H. Lawrence’s _Lady Chatterley’s Lover_. Notably, Freud and Lawrence are the two figures cited as the “missing” links severing serious music from the advances of the other arts when Paik lays out his “sex in music” manifesto on the flyer for 1967’s debut of _Opera Sextronique_.

Infantile sexuality and castration anxiety are uncomfortably juxtaposed with musical formulations in a series of early works. In 1961’s _Sonata quasi una Fantasia_, Paik sought to disrupt classical music staples, in this case Beethoven’s _Moonlight Sonata_ with the shock of an increasingly unclothed body. Performed by Paik himself, this prolonged strip tease between passages of piano playing attacked the expectations of a concert hall audience, but also undermined the socialization that presumed both a respect for Beethoven and the sublimation of sexual urges in cultured adults. His unperformed _Young Penis Symphony_ (c. 1961) instructed ten young men to show their genitals as disembodied specimens to an audience [Fig. 2.9].

Standing behind a huge sheet of white paper stretched across “the stage mouth,” the men’s members would penetrate through holes and be left dangling for inspection, a prospect that would presumably trigger fears of castration and inadequacy, while also suggesting the related dissociative break between the self and an imaginatively fragmented body. In the un-performable score _Danger Music for Dick Higgins_ (1961), Paik instructed the enactor to “Creep / into / vagina / of / live / female / whale,” invoking both sexual and infantile fantasies of returning to the engulfing space of female anatomy. Such infantile regression was further evoked in his 1962

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207 It is possible that an early interest in Marxism, later repudiated, might have led Paik to Herbert Marcuse’s _Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud_ (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), or the structuralist reworking of psychoanalysis by Lacan from this period. On the _Lady Chatterley’s Lover_ trial and international coverage, see Ben Yagoda, “Trial and Eros,” _The American Scholar_, September 1, 2010 https://theamericanscholar.org/trial-and-eros/#V9GFxk0rKih (accessed 8/15/2016). On the adoption of psychoanalysis in post-war advertising, see Lawrence R. Samuel, _Freud on Madison Avenue: Motivation Research and Subliminal Advertising in America_ (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2010).

208 The cited image is from a performance of this score that replaced penises with fingers, which can be seen poking through the screen. As such, I think it is fair to say that the Penis Symphony has yet to be fully realized.
performance, Simple, in which he smothered himself with shaving cream, wrapped his head in toilet paper and dunked himself fully into a bathtub, before emerging to play piano with a pacifier in his mouth.  

In other works, Paik turned his attention to how a female performer might differently leverage this psychosexual tension. His Serenade for Alison (1962), written for Alison Knowles, Higgins’s wife, continued to investigate the pleasures of delay and displacement encoded in the striptease format. For this version, allusions to classical music are set aside and replaced by a proto-Fluxus fixation on making everyday objects and actions absurd. In this neo-dada-burlesque, the performer removes a seemingly endless proliferation of differently colored panties. Then each is used to engage the audience in first enticing and then aggressive ways—from looking through white panties at the audience, to putting a red pair “in the pocket of a gentleman,” to stuffing a blood-stained pair “in the mouth of the worst music critic.” Daring both the audience and performer to confront that which has been repeatedly deferred, Paik’s instructions conclude, “If possible, show them that you have no more panties on.” Knowles declined to enact the final few provocations when she performed the piece in Amsterdam and Paris that fall. In photographs reproduced in Wolf Vostell’s journal de/collage 3 (1962) [Fig. 2.10], she appears in a shin-length bathrobe, revealing as little as possible as she squirms out of each layer. Throwing the garments into the audience, rather than implicating particular individuals in her actions, Knowles concluded the performance when “the ritual no longer amused me,” by leading the group out into the street. Retaining control over the performance and

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creatively “changing the piece so I could do it,” Knowles de-emphasized the work’s sexual and aggressive aspirations, essentially refusing the terms as outlined by Paik.\(^{210}\)

Nonetheless, Paik wrote another highly provocative piece for Knowles. *Chronicle of a Beautiful Paintress*, also from 1962, directs the performer to month-by-month stain various flags “with your own monthly blood.” This piece was purportedly realized by Knowles, with the results (presumably of only a few months) hung on the walls of Paik’s March 1963 solo exhibition *Exposition of Music- Electronic Television* in Wuppertal. As detailed in the score for *Sinfonie for 20 Rooms* (1961), which provided the model for the Wuppertal installation, these flags and “sexy underwears” were to be paired with a soundtrack of national anthems, a Nazi song and American and Russian marches in a room labeled “forte scherzando.”\(^{211}\) Elsewhere, in “fortissimo cellar I,” another sensorial assault is imagined, with “lighting as bright as possible 2) sine tone torture. High pitch, as loud as possible. 3) white reflexing wall 4) smell bomb (vinegar smelly) 5) small room 6) very strong wind 7) very hot stove”\(^{212}\) The mix of sensorial assault, the soundtrack of nationalistic militarism and fetishistic relics of female sexuality and fascist power in a cellar-setting is redolent of sadomasochistic clichés.

Violence, and its erotics, can be seen as an emerging theme in the year leading up to this exhibition as well. Paik debuted *One for Violin* in 1962, a piece in which the anticipation of violence transfixes the audience. They watch with bated breath as the performer, with painfully deliberate slowness, raises the instrument above their head before bringing it crashing down against a hard surface. The score for the closely-related but less well known work, *Dragging*

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\(^{212}\) Hanhardt, 88.
Suite, reads, “Drag by a string along streets, stairs, floors: large or small dolls, naked or clothed dolls, broken, bloody or new dolls, real man or woman, musical instruments, etc.” Most often dated to 1962, this text is particularly striking for the equivalency between dolls, bodies or instruments, and whether they are imagined clothed or naked, broken and bloody or new. The resultant damage, first assigned to a doll and then opened up to include a possible man or woman, is viscerally evoked, but then quickly displaced to the less directly anthropomorphic site of the instrument. As documented in photographs over the years, Dragging Suite seems to have become equivalent to Violin with String, a seemingly whimsical piece performed first in 1961 [Fig. 2.11]. Knowing the violin—with its vaguely female curvature—is just as easily substituted in Paik’s instructions for a human body or a Hans Bellmer-like dismembered doll, however, gives the piece a more sinister aspect.

Given that these scores were written around the time Paik famously dragged himself across a gallery floor for Zen for Head, the implicit sadism of Dragging Suite can also be seen as a displaced masochistic gesture in the artist’s treatment of his own body. In order to enact La Monte Young’s Composition 1960 No. 10 (“Draw a line and follow it”), Paik substituted his body for a paintbrush and, crawling backwards on hands and knees with his head down, pulled his ink and tomato juice-doused hair across a page, leaving a blood-like trail behind him [Fig. 2.12]. Yet this elective sublimation of the artist’s own body in service of another’s instructions, however, still feels quite different than his work’s aggressive objectification of Knowles’s body. This will remain an issue through his collaboration with Moorman, as her performed objectification relates explicitly to her female body—both in fragmented parts such as the celebrated but censored breast, and in its elision with nude statuary—while his is premised on his bodily substitution for inanimate objects, from the paint brush to the cello to the chair. As in
masochism, where existing stereotypes and tactics of control are exaggerated and eroticized, here we see such performative objectification remains highly inflected by the cultural conditions to which it responds. In a later score, *Sinfonie No. 5* (c. 1965), Paik lays out how he sees the human condition split by gender, cast in strikingly sexualized sadistic terms:

the eternity cult is the longest disease of mankind
what is the longest disease of womankind?
love ??
what is the longest profession of womankind ??
prostitution ????
what is the longest profession of mankind ???
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torture ?????????????????????????????????213
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Paik brought these various psychosexual-infantile-masochistic tendencies together under one roof in his 1963 immersive exhibition, *Exposition of Music- Electronic Television*. While most often discussed as a turning point in Paik’s career—from primarily musical performance towards his visual art assemblages and groundbreaking work with technology—the building-wide installation was infused with the same concerns found in Paik’s compositions of the period. Broken and damaged objects, riddled with sexual innuendos, are well represented amongst the altered television sets and audiotape elements. On the abused piano that is Paik’s *Klavier Integral* (1958-1963) [Fig. 2.13], one finds a phallic stuffed pink net bag, a feather duster and a large white bra on either side of the sheet music, an axe embedded in the piano keys and coils of razor wire that blend with piano wires which spill from the upright’s interior like disemboweled guts. In the sculpture *Zen for Walking* (1961) [Fig. 2.14], shoes dangle by chains from a hook below which a detached sculpted face is further ensnarled by the chains. An attached bell (“You make sound while walking”) affirms that these shackled sandals are to be imagined in use, necessarily dragging the face behind them. In addition to the room featuring Knowles’

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213 Nam June Paik, *Sinfonie No.5*, c.1965, NJPA, Box 13, Folder 16
menstrual-blood smeared flags [Fig. 2.15], visitors could also wander into a bathroom where a female mannequin, splintered in half and naked in the tub, evoked the quick disposal of a sexually assaulted murder victim [Fig. 2.16]. And the private performance, Listening to Music through the Mouth [Fig. 2.17], staged for photographer Manfred Montwé’s camera in the lead up to the exhibition, produced the unforgettable image of Paik fellating the arm of a record player.

From this brief survey, we can see Paik’s early work operating as an open field for acting out aggressive impulses, voyeuristic desires and fetishistic displacements, with a playful disregard for social mores. This pre-Oedipal erotic attachment to and acting out against animate and inanimate elements alike is evocative of Melanie Klein’s model of the early infant’s paranoid-schizoid relation to the world. This includes splitting that world into “good” and “bad” objects: those that the baby wants to incorporate into their own body (introjection) and those it imagines as the cause of all frustrations (projection) and then fantasizes about destroying. These impulses can be expressed in “phantasied oral-sadistic attacks” as well as a “desire to enter [the mother’s] body in order to control her from within.”214 This psychological response masks and manages the confusing reality that the same source, the mother’s breast or the child’s own body part, can cause both good and bad experiences in ways that defy the baby’s control or predictive capacity. As such, a binary understanding of the world is actually produced by this infantile anxiety and projected outward in compensation for the actual lack of stable distinctions between sources of pleasure and pain in these earliest experiences: “In hallucinatory gratification, therefore, two interrelated processes take place: the omnipotent conjuring of the ideal object and situation, and the equally omnipotent annihilation of the bad persecutory object and the painful

The invention of duality, idealization and hallucinatory fantasies—that is the earliest moments of imaginative thinking—are therefore born from the emergent self’s struggle to make sense of and control its environment. Paik’s scores seem to speak from this imagined position of omnipotent power, delineating ideal situations and designating objects for destruction, vacillating between the urge to incorporate and attack the world in quick succession.

My argument is not that Paik is infantile or psychically regressive. Rather, it is that his Dada-informed repudiation of adult civilization in its repressive 1950s formulation tapped into the polymorphous object-relations associated with pre-Oedipal development. Conflating people and things, lashing out or fellating found objects, attacking others or exposing oneself, are all strategies for mobilizing the energetic power of foundational sexual and violent urges that were believed to course beneath the civilizing constraints required for the subject’s entry into the social. Likewise, Paik’s interest in transcending duality through the intensity of performance led him to harken back to these hallucinatory moments of negotiating boundaries and relation of the self and the other. In the next phase of his work with Moorman, there is a shift in tenor: the aesthetic and erotic conflation of objects and subjects more closely echoes the way these infantile impulses are transmuted into fetishistic and sadomasochistic play within adult sexuality. Taken out of the realm of abstract instructions or acting out himself, Paik’s performance scores for and with Moorman center on the carefully choreographed staging of displaced desire and delay: extended demonstrations, negotiated exchanges, and the effects of power on the body.

Having set the stage for our players to meet, it remains to clarify some terms of the game. As noted earlier, masochism is a highly loaded and expansively interpreted field of interests and activities. To form a basis for discussing key features, however, we can turn to Deleuze’s 1967 book project *Masochism*, which paired his multi-chapter essay “Coldness and Cruelty” with a

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215 Klein, 7.
reprint of Sacher-Masoch’s pathology-defining 1870 novel, *Venus in Furs*. This publication, released in France the same year *Opéra Sextronique* debuted in New York, initiated a contemporary reconsideration of masochism within cultural rather than clinical studies.

Deleuze’s emphasis on the aesthetic nature of masochism has since become a shared point of reference for theorists of masochism. In laying out what he sees as the five fundamentals of the masochistic aesthetic, Deleuze draws the first four from characteristics laid out by Theodore Reik in *Masochism in Modern Man* (1941). Reik, in turn was seeking to replace Freud’s three forms of masochism (‘a certain attitude towards life,’ ‘the expression of femininity,’ and ‘a peculiarity of the mode of sexual excitation’) with clinically observed aspects that he deemed more neutral and ‘related to the sphere of life in which the masochistic instinctual expressions are active.’

From the start, Reik recognized that the human inclination to unconsciously or consciously seek and enjoy submission, suffering or humiliation is not an isolated sexual phenomenon but is expressed in various forms and to different degrees across many aspects of life. Reik’s characteristics, helpfully then, can be mapped onto masochism “as a perversion as well as in its desexualized forms.” As titled by Reik and summarized by Deleuze, they are:

1. The “special significance of fantasy,” that is the form of the fantasy (the fantasy experienced for its own sake, or the scene which is dreamed, dramatized, ritualized and which is an indispensable element of masochism).
2. The “suspense factor” (the waiting, the delay, expressing the way in which anxiety affects sexual tension and inhibits its discharge).
3. The “demonstration” or, more accurately, the persuasive feature (the particular way in which the masochist exhibits his suffering, embarrassment or humiliation).
4. The “provocative factor” (the masochistic aggressively demands punishment since it resolves anxiety and allows him to enjoy the forbidden pleasure).

To these four, Deleuze adds a fifth characteristic, one he highlights as central to Sacher-Masoch’s narrative: the masochistic contract, which invests the submissive position with

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217 Deleuze, 74-75
significant agency. This in part relates to Reik’s “provocative factor,” which to him was not an inherent characteristic but rather a means to bring about a masochistic interaction.218 “The masochist uses all possible means at his disposal to induce his partner to create for him that discomfort which he needs for attaining his pleasure. He forces another person to force him.”219 Like the contract, the provocation, is a way of inverting a power dynamic, forcing the enforcer to make one do exactly what one wanted to do in the first place. Yet for Deleuze, these aspects are not uncovered by a clinical analyst, but performatively mobilized by the partners and their own conceptualization of interactions. Deleuze suggests masochism, through ritual aestheticization, pursues a mystical transubstantiation of body into artwork:

It is therefore not surprising that masochism should seek historical and cultural confirmation in mystical or idealistic initiation rites. The naked body of the woman can only be contemplated in a mystical frame of mind…The ascent from the human body to the work of art and from the work of art to the Idea must take place under the shadow of the whip.220

With this in mind, one will see that all of these elements find direct correspondence in ways Moorman and Paik’s performances, which consistently employ fantasy, suspense, demonstrations of submission, and explicitly assign mystical import to the female body while seeking states of non-duality through performance.221 Looking at the relationship over the years, it will also become clear how their initial partnership agreement was renewed and refined as each new composition responded to Moorman’s provocations with ever more revealing or risky scenarios. Overall then, Paik’s aspiration to interject sex into music needs to be understood as emerging from his initial investigations into infantile states where self and other, object and

218 Reik, 90
219 Reik, 84. Emphasis mine.
220 Deleuze, 21-22.
subject, part and whole, pleasure and pain are processed through an unconstrained, hallucinatory imaginary. The subsequent deployment of masochistic aesthetics in his more formalized (and mature) collaborations with Moorman affirms that the real focus in these later works is not sex, per se, but the erotics of power, which stretch from primary fantasies of omnipotence and incorporation to adult desires to dominate and submit within the forces of social subjectivization.

III. Variations on a Theme (1964 – 1965)

In the first year of their partnership, Paik composed three works that each leveraged particular tropes of classical and new music, and masochistic elements of suspense, demonstration and provocation to affect their critique. The first piece Paik produced explicitly for Moorman, *Pop Sonata*, was written in the winter of 1964. It is structurally a variation on Paik’s 1962 *Sonata quasi una Fantasia*, in which Paik sporadically disrobed at the piano. The score for *Pop Sonata* requires the female performer to successively remove pieces of clothing between passages of cello playing. Both Paik’s sonatas are themselves variations on exceptionally famous pieces from the classical music canon. By the early 1960s, Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)’s *Piano Sonata No. 14 in C-sharp Minor “Quasi una fantasia”* (1801), also known as *Moonlight Sonata*, and J.S. Bach (1685-1750)’s *Suite No. 3 in C Major for Cello Solo* (c. 1720) were so popular as to have become clichés. Their melodies could emblematize “classical music” while also evoking its devolution into pop culture. Both classically trained, Paik and Moorman were attuned to the layered significance of works that were once artistically

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222 The Cello Suites had been a relatively recent discovery. Found by a young Pablo Casals around the turn of the century in a market, these previously unknown Bach scores were recorded when the Spanish cellist was at the height of his fame, from 1936-1939. Casals remains an interesting counterpoint throughout Moorman’s career, as he was cited by the judge in Moorman’s indecent exposure case as the exemplary classical cellist whose playing would presumably not be improved by nudity: this comment was later mocked by Jim McWilliams’ piece *C.Moorman in Drag*, in which Moorman performs wearing a Casals mask. Years later, Paik clipped a news article in which Casals references the case of the topless cellist, completing the circle.
innovative, and then part of status-affirming elitism before becoming redolent of banal commodification. As Moorman observed, by “changing the presentation,” she and Paik were able to reorient the trajectory of these played out works, setting them as the ground upon which their musical sexual revolution would begin.\textsuperscript{223}

Paik’s belief in the need for sexually explicit content to enter serious music was essentially teleological, a move he saw as necessary for the field to progress. As the flyer produced for \textit{Opera Sextronique} in 1967 [Fig. 2.18] declared:

After three emancipations in 20\textsuperscript{th} century music (serial-indeterministic, actional)….I have found that there is still one more chain to lose…that is…

\textbf{PRE-FREUDIAN HYPOCRISY}

Why is sex a predominant theme in art and literature prohibited ONLY in music? How long can New Music afford to be sixty years behind the times and still claim to be a serious art?

[…]

Music history needs its D.H. Lawrence its Sigmund Freud.\textsuperscript{224}

Placing nudity within performances of classical music’s most well known works would make this arc clear for all to see. Further, by inscribing these sexual enticements as notations into these Enlightenment-era scores, this interventionist structure emphasized the hierarchical relationship that classical music had first naturalized via the work-concept. As discussed in Chapter 1, the more the score was seen as an aesthetically complete, conceptually stabilized object created by a genius-composer, the more subservient the performer was expected to be. In Paik and Moorman’s striptease, this relationship was not resisted but amplified by the composer’s sexual demands. This in turn pointed to the erotic excitement of exerting power in general. In this context, it is important to note that the socioeconomic shifts in the eighteenth century that

\textsuperscript{223} According to Moorman, “Paik knows he can’t improve on Bach’s music. It would be wrong to change perfection. But what he can change is the presentation,” as quoted by Mike McGrady, “Going to a Happening,” \textit{Newsday}, Jan 30, 1965. Rothfuss, 112.

\textsuperscript{224} Flyer for \textit{Opera Sextronique}, 1967. Reproduced in Bonomo, unpaginated.
encouraged the marketing of intellectual property—and the increasing emphasis on bodies with differential values in that same marketplace—coincided with the emergence of masochism. According to Baumiester, masochism only became “a widespread and familiar feature of the sexual landscape during the 1700s.” While Bach and Beethoven’s pieces were likely chosen by Paik for their significance to a contemporary audience and their position in the classical canon, it is telling that they also exemplify this period of transition towards both the commodified contractual score and the subservient performing body.

The first full performance of *Pop Sonata* was on Jan 8, 1965 at the New School for Social Research [Fig. 2.19]. Precisely following her score, Moorman began by removing her accessories before moving on to her shoes and stockings, then skirt, shirt, and successive pairs of panties, à la *Serenade for Alison*. After taking off at least four pairs of underwear, only to reveal more below, she lay on her back on the floor in bra and panties with her cello resting on top of her torso to finish playing the sonata. This suggestive addition to the striptease format of *Quasi una fantasia*—which replaced infantile sexuality with implied adult coitus—was lifted by Paik from an improvisation originally performed by Moorman when she found her designated chair occupied during one night of that fall’s *Originale* [Fig. 2.20]. This pas de deux, whereby improvisation within performance leads to discoveries that are subsequently incorporated into the standard presentation of a work, would become a central strategy for advancing their repertoire. It also mirrors the role of masochistic provocation and negotiation, whereby both partners contribute to the form of the fantasy, through the images they inspire, the initial

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225 Baumiester, 53.
226 According to Jim McWilliams, and other recollections, the first attempted performance of this composition was at the Philadelphia College of Art on October 16, 1964, where McWilliams invited Paik and Moorman to perform. A “strip tease” was reportedly stopped midway by a nervous security guard, though whether the title *Pop Sonata* was attached to the piece yet is unclear. Rothfuss, 110.
agreement they forge, and the embodied communication through which they determine where and how far to go next.

To say that Paik placed “special significance” on the form of this fantasy would be an understatement. As Paik has stated, when he met Moorman, he had been looking for an ideal performer who was beautiful, willing to be nude and could play an instrument, in order to realize images and actions that he had been turning over in his head for years.\textsuperscript{227} His attempt to bring sex into music using his own body, as in the case of \textit{Quasi una fantasia}, had clearly not fulfilled what he had in mind. In general, the sexual elements in his early performances were attributed to a broader attack on high cultural and social mores. For German or American audiences encountering this piece in particular, Paik’s increasingly naked body on stage playing Beethoven would have likely triggered various racialized narratives about East meeting West, cultural imperialism and its critique, and recollections of unclothed Asian male bodies from World War II, the Korean War, and, later, the Vietnam conflict—rather than sexually-coded imagery. While violence and vulnerability were easily assigned to his body, his presence as a sexual being seems to have barely registered. For his “sex into music” fantasy to be properly realized, the “dramatized and ritualized” formalities of classical music needed to be properly disrupted by the equally “dramatized and ritualized” eroticism of the girlie striptease. Paik intuited that overlaying these structures would create a libidinal charge not only for him, but within larger patterns of desire and repression. That Moorman immediately and enthusiastically took on this project suggests that it fulfilled her fantasized goals as well—to upend the classical world that had bored her, to revolt against the prudishness around women’s sexuality, and to be a riveting solo performer advancing the cause of new music.

\textsuperscript{227} Paik, “Chance and Necessity,” 5, TEHFA.
And riveting these early performances must have been. The suspense factor, which is endemic to striptease, was heightened in the details of Moorman's hand-marked score. According to Paik, his variation on Bach’s score was originally communicated verbally to Moorman, who was therefore the sole agent for its realization. “This piece can not be played by another player because I cannot teach it. There is no notation. I must teach it with my mouth tact by tact, as oriental master did.” Art historian Kristine Stiles further notes that the concept of the piece was given in the most general terms: play a few bars of Bach, remove an item of clothing and repeat. Responding to this directive, Moorman’s personal notations show a nuanced understanding of how to best seduce the audience. She began with the most insignificant, unsexy of items, removing her watch just a bar and one note into the score. Then she left three bars uninterrupted before indicating the next accessory to be detached. The uneven distribution of the action across the two-page “Prelude,” as well as the redundancy of clothing, would have kept audiences guessing about what (and how much) would come off and when. Adding to this anticipatory tension, the lines marking off these arrhythmic removals were not placed gently at the end of phrases. Rather, they break up notes marked as part of one connected bowing motion, jolting apart the melody and keeping listeners on edge. On an extra-musical level, the anxiety in the room would have built to a pitch due to a shared knowledge that public nudity was not legal, and that testing such limits brought the risk of repercussions. These could range from being stopped by security, as seems to have happened at its first attempted performance in Philadelphia, to being publicly shamed, as when someone shouted, “Hey kid, does your mother know what you’re doing?,” at the New School, to the economic and legal

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228 Undated letter (c.1965-66) from Nam June Paik to Gordon Mumma, “Correspondence – Paik” Folder, CMA.
229 Stiles, “Necessity’s Other,” 169-70.
trouble that came later. As such, audience members, held in suspense, were also implicated in the scene. Eager voyeurs anticipating the ultimate reveal, they were also willing witnesses to a possible crime, expecting (maybe even desiring) the hand of the law to fall at any moment. For her part, Moorman in following the score was, with each progressive stanza, edging her increasingly exposed body further into uncharted, yet clearly restricted, legal, moral, and artistic terrain.

Moorman’s final move to the floor is a brilliant way to divert these expectations, refusing satisfaction of a direct view of bosom or genitals, but also raising the sexual temperature of the room. Demonstrating her subservience to the score—so much that she will not only undress, but place her nearly naked body on the floor and under her cello—she exhibits the literal depths to which she will go for art. The scene necessarily blurs the lines between her objectification, as she becomes entangled with an inanimate instrument, and the implied anthropomorphic agency of the cello as a reciprocating partner. She concludes by playing five full lines of uninterrupted melody. Moorman’s final shift to a prostrate position is deeply demonstrative, exhibiting the power and permissions animating this performance. Yet, as discussed above, historical accounts affirm that this tableau is one Moorman created herself. A fetishistic figuration that Paik picked up and placed as the capstone to his earlier imaginings, it is the moment when her creative agency is registered in terms of the score.

This moment, which Joan Rothfuss evocatively describes as the work’s “essential final image—a woman and her lover/cello consummating their ecstatic union on the floor, in classic

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230 On Philadelphia performance, see note 44 [Rothfuss, 110]. On the New School heckler, see Mike McGrady, “Going to a Happening,” quoted in Rothfuss, 112. Of the economic losses she suffered due to indecent exposure charges in 1967, Moorman’s confessed in a 1976 letter to Yoko Ono: “I built a steady income in the traditional [music] world….I was able to keep both worlds going until I was arrested…I was fired + blackballed from the traditional world. Even with all the losses, I’d play that performance again if I had it to do over. I feel that I did the right thing. After that night, the people who hated me hated me more + the people who respected me, respected me more, but my income stopped. Paik + I still had our word of mouth invitations to perform in American + European colleges + museums that only paid expenses.” CM to Ono, August 21, 1971, in “Correspondence – Ono,” CMA.
missionary positions,” evokes the merging of subject and object that can occur at the height of passion. This points towards one way that masochistic dynamics can support artistic goals, particularly in live collaborative scenarios. Throughout his performance career, Paik expressed interest in using art’s intensity to get at the sublime, to “overcome dualism” through ecstasy and to “GRASP ETERNITY,” one method of which is “To stop at the consummated or steril [sic] Zero-point.”\(^{231}\) Alongside his focus on sex and violence as tools for shocking the audience into a similarly intense state, these exhortations suggest a conscious alignment between the self-shattering potential of performance and sexual consummation. Moorman’s oft-repeated story of turning away from classical music because boredom during the performance allowed her mind to drift—“wondering had I turned the gas off”—points in an anecdotal way to her desire for performative *jouissance* as well.\(^{232}\) Aware that, at its best, a performance should entail losing oneself in the experience, her unsatisfying connection with the traditional cello repertoire is expressed in terms that sound strikingly like bad sex—the mechanics continuing while the woman makes to-do lists in her head.

Writing from very different perspectives in the late 1980s, social psychologist Roy Baumeister and literary theorist Leo Bersani both located the main import of masochistic sex as the undoing of the self as valorized by modern society. In *Masochism and The Self* (1989), Baumeister uses new data to argue for a reconsideration of sexual masochism, not as an

\(^{231}\) He mentioned the sublime as a theme of the first movement of *Hommage à John Cage*, (see Nam June Paik to Dr. Steinecke, May 2, 1959 (accessed 7/20/16 http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/source-text/30/); overcoming dualism and seeking ecstasy around the time of *Zen for Head*, in “Nam June Paik in Conversation with Justin Hoffman,” in *Exposition of Music Electronic Television Revisited* (Köln: Walter Konig and Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 2009), 84. The quote about eternity comes from “AFTERLUDE to the Exposition of EXPERIMENTAL TELEVISION,” http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/source-text/31/ (accessed 7/28/16); “on stage enlightenment and das aufheben [the cancelation] of various dualisms in your body and the world” are his early 1960s goals, per “Chance and Necessity,” 5. TEHFA.

\(^{232}\) CM quote from Fred Stern video interview, on discovering Cage, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xYcd4z7iT0c (accessed 8/12/16).
inexplicable deviancy, but as “an escapist response to the problematic nature of selfhood.”\textsuperscript{233} He goes on to note this “all out attack on the self” is really a deconstruction, one that “contradicts and undermines the meaningful definition of self, replacing these with a mere awareness of body… existing in the immediate present.”\textsuperscript{234} For his part, Bersani uses textual analysis of works from Freud to Bataille to Foucault and the media fall-out around the AIDS crisis to argue that “sexuality, at least in the [Freudian] mode in which it is constructed, may be a tautology for masochism.”\textsuperscript{235} That is, in its essence, “the sexual emerges as the \textit{jouissance} of exploded limits, as the ecstatic suffering into which the human organism momentarily plunges when it is ‘pressed’ beyond a certain threshold of endurance” and “the self is exuberantly discarded.”\textsuperscript{236} These descriptions suggest an experiential link between the loss of self through absolute embodiment that performers aspire to and the kind of sexual self-annihilation that is theorized as more accessible via masochism.

With this masochistic \textit{jouissance} in mind, the picture of Moorman energetically bowing on the floor illustrates similar ambiguities as those that literary critic John Noyes finds in the classic masochistic novel \textit{The Story of O} (1954):

The pursuit of pleasure casts subjectivity into an impossible position, where it can imagine itself only as a moment of pleasure in the act of disappearing. The masochistic subject ceases to be describable as a place either \textit{outside} or \textit{inside} this technology of control, this dialectic of reward or punishment, of pleasure or pain. The masochistic subject occupies an ambivalent position with respect to technologies of control and their intended sphere of power. In writing and in acting, she opens up a dialectic of self-abandonment to technologies of the body and self-reflection upon the act of abandonment. \textsuperscript{237}

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\textsuperscript{233} Roy Baumeister, \textit{Masochism and the Self} (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1989), x.
\textsuperscript{234} Baumeister, 26-28.
\textsuperscript{236} Bersani, 217-8.
\textsuperscript{237} Noyes, 49.
\end{flushright}
Recall that it was exactly through forgetting “all about punishment + all about reward + all about self styled obligations and duties + responsibilities,” that Moorman described feeling that it was “me – and no one else – who determines my destiny and fate.”

Imagining her true selfhood as one beyond such technologies of control, it is ironically in the moments when her body and mind are connected in service of the score that Moorman feels most in control of her destiny. It is also through this deep disappearance within the work that the unexpected can be seamlessly fed back into it. Occurring out of a symbiosis between performers, audience and environment—that is, when identity is least fixed or foregrounded—such improvisational accretions to a performance are irreconcilable with a notion of individual authorship securely tied to a score.

The next two erotically infused collaborations, debuted at Philadelphia College of Art on February 26, 1965, exemplify the shifting power dynamics particular to masochism. The first provocation was directed toward Cage, in the form of a discrete addition to their variation on his 26’ 1.1499” for a String Player. Given its own title as an autonomously-authored subsection, Paik’s Human Cello required him to strip to the waist and kneel between Moorman’s legs with his face between her breasts [Fig. 2.21]. Thus, Paik made his bare back available as a replacement for the momentarily displaced cello. Moorman, for her part, stretched a single string across this surface and bowed and plucked as if Paik were just another member of the stringed instrument family for which the score was written. As Rothfuss and others have drawn out, this imagery extends a lineage of anthropomorphized blurring between the sensuous curves of violins, cellos, and the (usually female) human body, exemplified by Man Ray’s Le Violin.

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238 Draft of letter to David Tudor, undated; “1st Avant-Garde Festival– David Tudor” folder, NYAGF – CMA.
239 Both their 1964 and 1965 performances at Philadelphia College of Art were at the invitation of design professor, and future Moorman-collaborator and NYAGF participant, Jim McWilliams. In his January 12, 1965 letter confirming this February performance, he wrote, “The contents of the concert should be of your own choosing. As far as I’m concerned, the wilder the better.” “Correspondence – Jim McWilliams” Folder, CMA.
d’Ingres (1924) [Fig. 2.22], but “adds some mild sadomasochism to the mix.”240 However, following the Deleuzian resistance to the conflation of sadism and masochism, I would argue that it is more precisely the masochistic scene that is brought into play here. Further, by flipping the gender, they posit Paik’s Asian male body as equally available for casual objectification as that of a nude woman, while underscoring the distinction between woman-with-cello, as presented in Pop Sonata, and woman-as-cello, as in works like Le Violin d’Ingres. With Moorman assertively in control and Paik turned into an instrument to be played as she likes (but at his request), they draw attention to the slippery, often deceptive, operations of power and role-play that distinguish masochism from sadism.

This is the first of many instances where presumed positions of empowerment are visually inverted so that whatever analogies might be made between Moorman and a submissive partner are equally true of Paik. On one hand, as the male partner and the composer, his position at the outset of 26’ seems dominant, as he stands physically to the side surveying the scene. Yet once on his knees, with shirt removed, his slender, hairless torso calls forth centuries of Western imagery propagating the stereotype of the effeminate, passive Asian man and problematizes the intersection of gender, race and sex and their culturally enforced associations. The implications of this bodily arrangement were sometimes amplified by Paik shouting, “Imperialist American should hit yellow man,” over his shoulder.241 Another reference for Paik could also be imperial Chinese whippings of Asian prisoners’ bare backs and the homoerotic potential of such punishments, as he received clipped images of these two scenarios from fellow artist Ray Johnson in 1963 and duly saved them in his archives [Fig. 2.23].242

240 Rothfuss, 113. I made a similar observation in a 2009 seminar paper on Moorman.
242 NJP Archive, Correspondance Ray Johnson
During the development of their performance routines, Paik willingly offered himself up as an inanimate object replacement—to be hit, sat on or spiked with a cello pin—with the first displacement coming as his idea, and the additional debasements emerging from shared improvisational moments. Their performance dynamic was also full of jabs and feints with Paik often playing up his role as harried assistant to Moorman’s out-of-control instrumentalist. Of this 1965 Philadelphia program, a reviewer observed:

Turning pages for [Moorman] while she performed was Nam June Paik, a Korean composer of avant-garde music. Paik is a nervous man. Every time Miss Moorman grabbed for a pistol and fired, he flinched. Then, when she swiped the hammer at a three-foot square of glass, Paik dove out of the way, knocking over a photographer. The glass didn’t break. Paik returned to his positions beside the music stand and Miss Moorman drew a squealing noise from the cello and punched him. He flinched again. Then reluctantly, he told her the glass had not been broken. She picked up the hammer again and Paik scurried out of the way. … Paik took off his shirt so that she could smack him on the bare back. At one point, he turned a page so jerkily it ripped off the book and fluttered to the floor. She smacked him again.243

With Paik as the pummeled, rebuked page-turner rather than exalted, all-powerful composer, this presentation of the Cage piece mirrors the picture of the happily servile male masochist toiling under the heel of a demanding female master, as figured by Sacher-Masoch’s protagonist in Venus in Furs. At the same time, it invokes other cultural stereotypes of male disempowerment, from the steamrolled husband to the self-effacing Asian servant and homoerotic whipping boy. The prevalence of social violence and its multiple sexual valences makes the ascription of one meaning impossible.244

244 Such fluidity of roleplaying also firmly aligns Moorman and Paik’s performance with the masochistic, rather than sadomasochistic, situation. In both the theorizations of Deleuze and clinical findings assembled by Baumeister, masochism is decoupled from sadism and understood as the primary and more popular tendency. According to Deleuze, only a partner coaxed into the dominant role can satisfy a masochist’s fantasy, while no sadist could be satisfied by a subject who desires their torture. This literary interpretation is supported by the research cited by Baumeister, which found that there were far more practitioners who identify as masochists than sadists, and that masochists report switching roles but sadists do not. Further, because of this imbalance, many who start in
Closing out the 1965 program in Philadelphia, the premiere of Variations on a Theme by Saint-Saëns was, according to Rothfuss, carefully managed to maximize audience anticipation, with no program notes offered and a mysterious oil drum added to the stage set-up. Moorman began by playing “The Swan” from Camille Saint-Saëns’s whimsical Carnival of the Animals (1886). The sweet melody of the most famous entry in Saint-Saëns’s parade of animals is meant to evoke a graceful swan, smoothly gliding atop the water’s surface. Yet halfway through, Moorman abruptly stopped her bowing. German scholar Evelyn Kreutzer, analyzing a 1982 performance recorded in Linz, Austria, notes that:

In musical terms, Moorman interrupts her own performance on the dominant D—the piece is in G major—and on the second beat, thus heightening the interruptive and disruptive quality of her performance…. In doing so, she emphasizes the silence, the break, and a sense of discomfort for an audience who does not have clearly defined social conventions to adhere to in this situation.245

Setting aside her cello at this most uncomfortable of musical moments, Moorman slowly climbed a stepladder to the top of the large drum. After pausing momentarily on the edge, she dropped feet first into its depths, emerging sopping wet from water that the audience could not see but for its effects on her full-length concert gown and cascading hair [Fig. 2.24].

The wide press coverage of the Philadelphia concert noted it concluded with a surprise, not only for the audience but also for both artists, when:

Emerging from the tank, the dripping artist hit her head on a [ceiling] pipe, opening a cut over her eye, but, undaunted, she complete the concert. […] As she rose to take a bow, blood streamed down her forehead and spilled onto her cello. Bravoes were shouted by the milling audience while Miss Moorman was given first-aid by a nurse.246

submissive roles later take up the responsibility of serving in a dominant role, which in Deleuzean terms cannot by definition be sadistic because it is for their partner’s enjoyment. Deleuze, 37-46. Baumeister, 20-26.


246 As quoted from several news reports in Rothfuss, 116. Coverage of the concert with a photograph of Moorman bleeding was syndicated by UPI and appeared in dozens of newspapers around the country, and was further remarked upon in end-of-year “odd news” wrap-ups. See for example, “Avant-Garde,” San Antonio Express, March,
Paik was reportedly thrilled by this turn of events, shouting “Beautiful, Beautiful!” Without making too much of this unintended but aesthetically vivid spilling of blood [Fig. 2.25], Moorman’s commitment to completing the score as instructed, whatever its impacts on her body, would be an ongoing theme across her career. Examples include getting frostbite by holding a cello-shaped block of ice to her body for hours for Jim McWilliams’s *Ice Cello* (1972) [Fig. 2.26] and swinging precariously from a trapeze for McWilliams’s *Sky Kiss* (1974) [Fig. 2.27]. She also continued wearing the signature *TV Bra* (1969) Paik made for her long after her breast cancer diagnosis, when questions about its radiation and carcinogenetic effects were still floating in the air.248 In each case, continuing under the watchful eye of the audience, despite physical discomfort, degradation or danger, became the ultimate demonstration of Moorman’s absolute subservience to the exacting demands of her master.

And it is here, that I believe, the true source of domination emerges, not as these individual composers or their specific tasks, but as the idea of the score itself. It is this culturally upheld mechanism of control—and by extension all kinds of social contracts, expectations and psycho-spiritual obligations—that requires Moorman’s full submission and, through that submission, for her to feel herself most free. As Noyes suggested in relation to *O*, the masochist’s pleasure is derived not from satisfying particular partners but from “self-abandonment to the technologies of the body and self-reflection upon the act of abandonment.” The partner only momentarily gives shape to forces that allow for this abandonment. It has been noted that Moorman was able to overcome her personal fears of heights, hospitals, even

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247 Rothfuss, 116.
248 In a helpful postscript to her biography of Moorman, Rothfuss was able to have a scientist evaluate the radiation emanating from the *TV Bra* in the Walker Arts Center collection. They found the level of radiation was lower than many normal household devices, putting this theory to rest, though it was still considered an open question during Moorman’s lifetime. Rothfuss, 358-360.
mortality when an action was framed within the terms of performance. Her husband Frank Pileggi, whom she met in 1966, remarked that his wife was “terrified of everything in life, but if you tell her it’s a performance, she’ll do anything.” 249 Significantly, in his quote and in her career, in order for this effect to take hold she required an outside force to define the performance terms to which she would then feel bound. Once called into service in this way, her personal preferences or fears could be transcended for the sake of art, rather than for herself. Very much in the model of religious martyrs—and specifically Edgard Varèse’s 1964 designation of her as “the Jeanne d’Arc of New Music”—Moorman’s bodily sacrifices proved her worthiness and affirmed her special relationship to this higher purpose. 250 Yet, in these moments when performance intersects with real bodily harm and legal sanctions, we are reminded of the slipperiness of masochism, in which potentially subversive scenarios derive directly from existing forms of social violence where the subjugation of women’s bodies has inescapable physical, sociocultural and legal consequences.

Potential injuries aside, it is striking how closely the structure of Variations on a Theme by Saint-Saëns follows the masochistic aesthetics discussed above. After the suspense and delay of the first section, emphasized by the dissonance of the broken musical phrase, Moorman returns to her task of playing “The Swan”: visually as well as musically now evoking the watery creature. Dripping, sometimes shivering (in the debut bleeding), and, in later iterations, nude under a clinging transparent plastic wrap (not to mention that one time, doused in the polluted waters of Venice’s Grand Canal), the second half of the piece becomes an extended demonstrative phase, the audience lingering on the signs of her unwavering devotion. Looking at these performances as structurally masochistic allows us to see beyond dada absurdism to the

249 Rothfuss, 281.
250 Rothfuss, 106.
precise peeling back of the erotics of power layered into artistic and other societal relations, as well as the codified expectations around classical music, proscenium performance, gendered bodies and their symbolic associations. The careful manipulation of these expectations for dramatic effects in turn creates a new vector of power emanating from the performer who teases out these stages of seduction and keeps the audience in a state of anxious anticipation.

With *Pop Sonata*, the sexed up 26’ 1.1499”, and *Variations on a Theme by Saint-Saëns* as signature pieces, the pair had a program ready to tour. Seeking both paying gigs and an opportunity to lay claim to this unique blend of classical music and confrontational eroticism, Paik began to reach out to his European contacts. Writing to Pierre Restany in late 1964, Paik was already enthusiastic about touring with his Robot, which “talks, walks, bows, shits, fucks, etc. and with a real girl, a progressive, aggressive, talented, famous cellist who can do every ‘comédie humaine’ with Cello. It will be great pleasure if we can ‘DO’ it at Galerie J.”

In this closing pun is the truth of what was on offer: Paik and Moorman set out to “do” Europe, penetrating its art spaces and music traditions, tied to socioeconomic and cultural hierarchies, with unsettling sexual dynamics exaggerated for the public’s complicit consumption. Able to explore the same structural fantasies over an extended period of time, the pair pushed the foundational agreements implied in the scores. By relying on these artistic contracts while constantly revising them, they found new ways to shock themselves along with their audiences, while challenging the very notion of these scores as pre-authored, stable works.

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251 Rothfuss, 119.
252 This improvisational escalation is something that Rothfuss draws out explicitly in an earlier essay, “The Ballad of Nam June and Charlotte: A Revisionist History,” published as part of catalogue, *Nam June Paik* (London: Tate, 2011), 145-168. She notes that, “Many of their most provocative ideas were developed during two tours of Europe in 1965 and 1966. These two tours might be thought of as an extended, itinerant jam session – not a one-way flow of information from composer to performer, but an ongoing duet between equals.” What she does not explore as expansively is how that provocation within their relationship and within the work was simultaneously co-constitutive and structured to heighten the sense of hierarchy and submission in their performance.

Beginning in Reykjavik, Iceland in May 1965, Moorman and Paik’s first performance of their European tour was their most tame, yet seems to have incited the most controversy. Presented by Musica Nova, an association formed only six years earlier to bring new music to Iceland, the event was held at a concert hall and advertised as simply “new and curious.” The papers reported incredulously on Moorman’s Variations on a Theme by Saint-Saëns, and described Paik’s revived performance of Étude platonique (1961-65), in which he “dropped his pants on stage, sat down in a chair, and turned slowly in circles while music was played from a tape.”253 According to Rothfuss, the fallout after the pair left Iceland was so bad that Musica Nova felt the need to publicly disavow their performance as an “unforeseen accident,” far from the organization’s own aesthetic interests.254

It was at Paik and Moorman’s next stop, in Paris, that earlier provocations were picked up and incorporated into their repertoire. As with her cello in flagrante at the end of Pop Sonata, the path to Moorman’s infamy as a nude avant-garde performer began, not with Paik, but with an improvised moment during the New York run of Originale. According to Schneemann, the first step was taken when Moorman complained that her gown kept getting caught as she dangled from a mezzanine railing over the audience. “Schneemann suggested wrapping [Moorman] in ‘a sheet,’ which would make her look like a flying angel. Fearing that the cloth would fly open to reveal her as ‘too fat,’ Moorman exclaimed, ‘I don’t want to be naked up there.’” Wryly commenting on this narrative, Fluxus scholar Kristine Stiles retorts, “Being up there naked is precisely what Moorman wanted to do,” laying out the many times Moorman coyly demurred

253 Rothfuss, 121.
254 Rothfuss, 122.
before “[getting] on with the business at hand: provocation at all costs.”\textsuperscript{255} Stiles links this earlier exposure to Paik’s story as to how Moorman came to perform “The Swan” in Paris wrapped only in a clear plastic “gown,” this time with him “as the agent who inspired her disrobing.”\textsuperscript{256} Again, in a last minute solution to a performance problem (Moorman had left her concert dress across town, and would be late if she retrieved it), Paik recalls:

…my eyes caught on something at the corner of the greenroom. There was a huge roll of clear plastic drop cloth…. I pointed it out. “How about that?” She could not guess what I said. I repeated, “This is your formal.” “Oh no,” she screamed, quite perplexed. I noticed a quick change in her expression—in a split second I sensed something was clicking in her mind—feminine mystique. Shyness, shame, success, success de scandale, again her southern upbringing. Her mother at Arkansas… her vacillation went up and down in waves in a very short time. Many years later, I analyzed Greta Garbo’s facial complexion and found that she can become a virgin, then a whore, then a saint and back to a virgin many times in a split second. I sensed that that kind of tension was passing through [Charlotte’s] mind in this fateful second—after all it was 1965. Even toplessness was forbidden everywhere in the world including in Paris strip joints, much less full nudity. It was not easy but she passed the Rubicon…. On that day, she got enlightened. She had been a rather stiff performer, self-conscious with a great amount of stage fright. But this baptism of nudity, uproar and straight scotch opened a new nerve center, which made her a sensitive and inspiring performer.\textsuperscript{257}

Yet, as Stiles points out, Paik was building on Moorman’s already risqué use of found drapery, and, given that their most scandalous work so far, \textit{Pop Sonata}, required Moorman to strip to bra and underwear, he might have expected she would keep these in place when donning a see-through gown. Stiles suggests that “[t]he ‘cellophane,’ as Moorman called it, was as transparent as her alleged split-second-decision to perform nude. It is more likely that she had been calculating the right moment to do so for some time.”\textsuperscript{258} Given the importance of provocation in Moorman and Paik’s dynamic, this wardrobe snafu could be reframed, as Reik described the

\textsuperscript{255} Stiles, 169.
\textsuperscript{256} Stiles, 171.
\textsuperscript{257} Paik, “Chance and Necessity,” 2-3.
\textsuperscript{258} Stiles, 172.
masochistic provocation, as her calculated way to “force another person to force [her].” While Paik may have pointed to the drop cloth, the indelible image of Moorman elegantly draped in clear plastic is one created by the delicate negotiations of partners picking up on signals and amending their contract/score with new stipulations as the scenario unfolds.

It is fitting that this baited baptism took place for the second annual *Festival de la Libre Expression* (Festival of Free Expression), organized by French artist and Happening-promoter, Jean-Jacques Lebel. The year before, in 1964, Schneemann had debuted *Meat Joy* at the Festival, writhing in wet paint and raw meat with her coed, underwear-clad cast. This year, Moorman and Paik’s program appeared before Lebel’s *Déchirex*, a closing-night Happening featuring a nude woman on a motorcycle chasing the crowd.²⁶⁰ Moorman’s entrance on Friday May 21 in plastic wrap, entirely nude underneath, was met with enthusiastic applause. The risk quickly earned its reward as she gained immediate recognition amongst the European avant-garde. According to Rothfuss, “After Paris, cellophane was her garb of choice whenever she performed *Variations on a Theme by Saint-Saëns*. She said later that it ‘felt like a snowsuit. […] I felt totally clothed.’”²⁶¹ As this counterintuitive description underscores, entering an intensified performance arena allowed Moorman to be completely in an embodied here-and-now. The typical chatter of her self-consciousness disappeared and was replaced by a psychic suit of armor [Fig. 2.28] — achieving simultaneous bodily immersion and self-renunciation similar to that sought by the masochist or ascetic.

²⁵⁹ Reik, 84.
²⁶⁰ Stiles, 172-73.
²⁶¹ Rothfuss, 124.
After stops in Cologne, Frankfurt and Aachen, Moorman and Paik arrived on June 5 in Wuppertal, Germany to participate in the now-legendary 24 Stunden (24 Hours) happening. Somewhere along the way, both the Cage piece and “The Swan” had gained in aggressive sexual content. In addition to recordings of cats-in-heat that Moorman had used in her first full rendition of 26’ 1.1499” at Judson Hall, she now played the sounds of her own orgasmic moans, and replaced the sounds of popping balloons with popping inflated condoms. And at some point, Moorman took to performing Saint-Saëns not only in completely see-through plastic, but seated on the back of a male assistant on hands and knees, while another helper lay on his back with his lips wrapped around the cello’s endpin [Fig. 2.29]. In some images, this figure also holds the sheet music, while in others a third audience member serves as music stand [Fig. 2.30]. From 1965 on, Paik or other willing participants would play these inanimate objects in performance. In her most direct acknowledgement of the darker side of their erotic imagery, Rothfuss describes this tableau as “an absurd sadomasochistic ménage à trois that cast the cellist as dominatrix, the weight of her body supported by one submissive and her end-pin-cum-spiked heel thrust into the mouth of the other.” Rothfuss considers these moves probably instigated by Paik, pointing to the note he wrote to Arthur Koepcke before they embarked for Europe. In it, Paik promised the

262 Prior to Wuppertal, Moorman and Paik gave a May 22 private concert at Galerie Zwirner in Cologne, where Cello Sonata no. 1, as the Bach strip tease was now titled, had its European debut. They skipped this piece, later called Cello Sonata for Adults Only, for their two university dates—June 2 at the Studentenhaus der Universität in Frankfurt, and June 3 at the Technische Hochschule, Aachen. 24 Stunden was a far more high-profile event, as they were joining some of the most high-profile Fluxus-associated artists in Germany and beyond, for a non-stop twenty-four hour Happening. The event was organized as the closing send-off for Galerie Parnass by its owner Rolf Jährling, and commemorated the D-Day Invasion of Allied Forces in World War II. Each artist or collaborative unit had a room to set up and perform—though they also wandered and took occasional naps—modeling a format for durational structuring and simultaneity in exhibiting performance that Moorman would mirror in her later New York Avant Garde Festivals. Well covered by the German media, it coincided with a moment when these artists were moving from underground agitators to well-known, even iconic figures, in particular Joseph Beuys, and has become a canonical example of the intersection of performance practices and experimental exhibition formats in European Fluxus. See Bogomir Ecker and Annette Tietenberg, eds., “24 Stunden” in Fotografien von Bodo Niederprüm (Heidelberg: Wunderhorn, 2016).

263 Rothfuss, 128.
264 Rothfuss, 128.
tour would feature “new action music with Charlotte—with sex and sadism.”

Rothfuss continues:

In the year since he had met her, in fact, Paik had made enormous progress on his project to correct what he called the ‘historic blunder’ that had kept sex out of classical music. Striptease, voyeurism, nudity and sadomasochism had all found their way into the compositions he wrote for her…. All these works feature one or more of his action music strategies—surprise, disappointment, tedium—but they also depend heavily on humor. Humor kept Paik’s sex-in-music from being merely salacious and allowed him to be serious but not pretentious.

I would argue by contrast that these sadomasochistic poses emerged along the way with input from both. The “seating solution” follows the pattern Moorman had established of taking momentary performance issues, and instantaneously turning them into opportunities (or excuses) to push into more outrageous terrain, while the figure on the floor is evocative of Paik’s prior appearance in Wuppertal, when he fellated the record player arm for *Listening to the Music with the Mouth* (1963). The playful quality of their repertoire was also equally dependent on their tuned-in rapport that allowed them to flip in tandem from seriousness to bawdy display and comedic bickering. This variability also underscored hierarchies that were relished, ironically overperformed and then irreverently inverted. In this way, they emphasized the inescapability of being caught within vectors of domination while illustrating that these effects were not unidirectional or without their pleasures (and dangers).

Tellingly, it is also in the catalogue for *24 Stunden* that Moorman offers one of her most direct statements on how she saw her performance practice in a politicized and international context. In the same text that identified her interpretation of Cage “as very American – a kind of pop music,” she discusses her performance of Giuseppe Chiari’s *Per Arco* (1964) [Fig. 3.31]. This piece, written for her by the Italian composer, combines the sounds of Germany bombing

265 Rothfuss 128. Original letter, undated, in NJPA, Box 2, Folder 20, is in German: “2) Neue actionmusic mit charlotte. Es ist mit sex und sadism.”

266 Rothfuss, 128.
Italy in the Second World War with directions for Moorman to play, emote, stroke and weep over the cello in reaction to this recording:

I have played Chiari’s “Per Arco”
in many countries but this time
I have quite a strange feeling because I am in the german country
that is bombing italy in the tape.
do you recognize your sounds

vietnam dominican republic
mississippi!!!

I can not keep from crying.
[…]

the horrible sounds compel me to
think about war – the audience is
thinking about sex as I touch my cello –
do all roads lead to sex?267

In an interview in 1978, Moorman described her home state of Arkansas, as “one of the worst states in America. More terrible than Arkansas is Mississippi, but we are next-to-the-worst.”268 As a Southern girl in 1965, she was drawing intimate connections between bombings in Mississippi, Vietnam and World War II. As a performer, she felt the slippage between mourning and moaning in her realization and the reception of Per Arco. Finally, as a woman in a world obsessed with sex and violence but in official disapproval of both, she was underscoring the way these factors pervade every corner of social relations, from classical music to international affairs. This critical approach to her own position helped her integrate into the milieu of serious established artists she met at 24 Stunden, despite being the sole female and American performer there [Fig. 2.31 – Fig. 2.32]. In the years to come, Joseph Beuys, Bazon Brock, Tomas Schmit and Wolf Vostell would contribute pieces to her festival (and in the case of Beuys and Vostell to

268 Groneymeyer, “Seriousness and Dedication,” in Bonomo, unpaginated.
her repertoire as well), as they collectively pressed forward on the work “we all are doing,” as Brock once wrote to Moorman.269

After the heady twenty-four hours in Wuppertal, Paik and Moorman headed to Berlin for a two-day, multi-program presentation coordinated with Galerie René Block. In addition to two evening programs at the gallery, they also planned an afternoon performance of Robot Opera with Paik’s junk-assembled Robot K-456 in front of the Brandenburg Gate. With the Berlin Wall having appeared overnight in August of 1961, the Brandenburg Gate was still a raw symbol of divided Cold War Germany. While their attempt was foiled, they continued elsewhere in a street performance partially captured in a Movietone newsreel, “There’s a Message There Somewhere.”270 The film shows Moorman, seated on an unknown assistant’s back and serenading K-456 with what sounds like the disjointed noise-events of the Cage piece [Fig. 2.34]. The Movietone narrator notes the robot is broadcasting “what are pompously described as ‘instructions to humanity,’” but fails to mention the voice is a recording of assassinated US President John F. Kennedy, whose speech in West Berlin just two years earlier had laid out the case for human progress towards democracy. This Robot Opera is a unique riff on the tensions explored throughout the tour, layering the bawdy and burlesque—Moorman’s “human chair” smiles for the camera and K-456’s twirls its metallic breasts in a close-up—with the ghosts of violence that haunted this particular site and speaker.

Moorman and Paik returned to Europe in the summer of 1966, and again, pushed each other to take greater risks in their collaborative effort to bring elements of anticipation, surprise, anxiety, danger and sex into music. In keeping with their interventionist strategy of interrupting high cultural pretenses with absurdist sexual content, they started the tour by inserting

269 Rothfuss, 132. Original letter, Bazon Brock to CM, undated [spring 1965], CMA.
themselves into the midst of the June 18 opening night events for the 33rd Venice Biennale. For this site-specific *Gondola Happening*, the two performed selections from their standard repertoire aboard the titular Venetian watercraft. In the photograph that serves as primary documentation of this event [Fig. 2.35], a striped-shirt gondolier towers over a deeply-focused, evening-gown clad Moorman, while Paik stands shirtless closer to the bow. The usual kitchen-sink set-up for 24’ 1.1499” bisects the boat, and Japanese artist Ay-O, tasked with throwing rose petals, is partially visible at the front. The boat and the figures on it are discernable thanks to bright lights along the Ponte di Rialto (Rialto Bridge) just out of view but reportedly packed with an audience of hundreds. This “exceptional coupling of the antique (the gondola) and the ultramodern (the music),” as described by *Oggia a Venezia*, culminated in a new variation on *Variations on a Theme by Saint-Saëns*. At the appointed break in the music, Moorman jumped not into a contained oil drum, but into the fetid aquatic highway of Venice’s Grand Canal, secured by a rope to supplement her limited swimming abilities.271 If ending the piece dripping wet in cellophane had become old hat, this was certainly a way to shake things up. The audience was left to wonder if she had fallen accidently and anxiously watch as she struggled back aboard. Paik, who claimed the plunge as his idea, also claimed to be shocked when she went through with it. Like Stiles’ incredulity around Moorman’s denial of her naked ambitions, I would argue that at this point, Paik knew Moorman was a partner awaiting just such a dare to bring their performances to the next edge. He also demonstrated his willingness to meet her in these moments, whether by undressing, objectifying or endangering his body as well—in this case by jumping in the canal right after her to complete the performance. Playing up the risk involved, but neglecting to mention his own participation, Paik later recalled that due to the “ten centuries

271 Rothfuss, 148.
of polluted water…[Moorman] had to go to the doctor for a typhoid shot.” 272 Completing this tale of shared suffering for their art, Rothfuss recounts that they were unable to find lodging that night, and so “slept on the cold marble steps of the Gallerie dell’Accademia… still damp from their dip in the canal.” 273

It seems another dare, or set of dares, set the wheels in motion for her subsequent notoriety as “the topless cellist.” After stops in Rome (with an apocryphal aborted performance for Pope Paul VI) and Cologne (with another appearance at Galerie Zwirner), the two arrived in West Berlin to perform again at the Galerie René Block on July 15, 1966. There, they presented a five-hour mélange of performance, experimental films and recorded music titled As Boring as Possible, which took different configurations in each city. With the help of Block, the European premiere of Erik Satie’s Vexations (c.1893) had also been arranged. Consisting of a one-minute theme played eight hundred and forty times by a succession of pianists over the course of fourteen hours, Vexation had first been realized under Cage’s direction in 1963 in New York.

The European debut commenced in the wee hours of July 17, 1964 at the Forum Theater, with six musicians performing in rotation, including Paik and Moorman. While the other performers approached this assignment in strict Werktreue manner, reflecting the stripped down quality of the score and producing a looping, lulling sound environment, Moorman prepared to deliver her usual jolt of sexuality. As reported in Berlin’s Die Zeit, “Miss Moorman took her place during the second shift—accompanied by a loud gasp from those who were still awake—in a long formal skirt, shoes, long brown hair and not much else.” 274 In an oddly ventriloquizing text written after Moorman’s arrest the following year, Paik writes about the

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272 Bourdon, 4. As with many of their stories emphasizing the dangers and sacrifices of the avant-garde, this anecdote remains unverified.
273 Rothfuss, 148.
genesis of this moment, supposedly relaying a conversation in which he addresses Moorman’s
self-doubt about her piano playing by pointing to other assets:

Paik looked at me: “your brunette is nice, but so is [first pianist Lissa Bauer a.k.a.] Ilse’s
blonde. Your lips are volutuous [sic] but some feels, Ilse’s thinner lips are more sexy.
Ilse’s style is not so grand, but so is your figure a la Rubens. Your piano technique contra
professional concert pianist Ilse,, is say like I am boxing against Muhammed Ali. ,, ,,,
but      but,,, Your bosom is a granite, like the heavy weight champion’s,,,,,,,,, play
topless!!!!”. I opened my mouth / I was petrified with shock, thrill, bashfulness,
Arkansas’ mother’s reproach …275

Whether this conversation actually took place, the idea was hatched somewhere between
Moorman’s desire for her performance to continue to be not only well received, but remarked
upon, and Paik’s consistent commitment to introducing an unflinching, almost crass, sexual
objectification into serious music’s most refined spheres. However, just after the event,
Moorman placed her provocation in a distinguished lineage, implicating several more instigators
to whom she was responding:

Satie liked nudity. When they put on his ballet Relâche in 1925 in Paris, Marcel
Duchamp had to undress completely. Paik believes that performing Vexations [this way]
is in the spirit of Satie. When I left New York John Cage bet me that I wouldn’t do it.
Now he owes me a hundred dollars.276

The phrasing tellingly emphasizes Duchamp—the original purveyor of purely conceptual artistic
authorship—being obliged to appear naked by the composer’s requirement, in parallel with the
challenge presented to Moorman by Cage. Regardless of one’s status, she suggested, advanced
art demanded that bodies be put into service, that individual concerns be set aside in the spirit of
aesthetic progress.

275 As can be seen, the final sentence was recycled for Paik’s description of Moorman’s response to his suggestion of
the cellophane wrap, indicating the predictable cycle between his scandalous proposals and her prompt prevarication
and consent. Nam June Paik, “Confessions of ‘topless’ (?) Cellist.” Typed manuscript in NJPA, Box 14, Folder 1.
276 Rothfuss, 153. Quoted from Paul Moor, “Music, die immer mehr in die Nahe von Theater ruckt,” Die Zeit, July
Once again, Moorman’s enthusiastic daring inspired Paik. Still writing from Moorman’s perspective, Paik describes himself, traveling through grey, quiet East Germany and thinking, “if there is progress in society and progression in mathematics, then why not the progressive progression in music???” Thus the *Opera sextronique* was born. lightless-topless-bottomless, sideless-backless-all-less-no-less (with fur coat). Two days later, as part of their program in Aachen, Moorman appeared as she had for Satie, topless with her long formal skirt, but now with her head swaddled in gauze. She began playing the German Christmas carol, *Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht* (*Silent Night*), stopping intermittently to place masks or sunglasses over her already obscured face [Fig. 2.37]. A variation on this, in which she played Johannes Brahms lullabies without the gauze and with even more props, would ultimately constitute the second aria of *Opera Sextronique*. When the full-length work debuted on February 9, 1967 in New York, she was arrested towards the end of this section [Fig. 2.38], leaving the third and fourth sections unperformed until a legal-defense fundraiser in June 1968. The entire piece debuted in Düsseldorf October 7, 1968, when they next returned to Germany [Fig. 2.39].

It is interesting that Paik’s flash vision of Moorman “all-less-no-less (with fur coat)” is inspired by an austere Eastern European landscape, not unlike that which informed Sacher-Masoch’s desire for a classical statue—a cold marble Venus—to come to life, don fur and enact his fantasy. Of course that fantasy most visibly involved his own submission, but as has become clear in analyses of masochism from Deleuze on, the imagined scene is really both his and his mistress’s subjection to the contract. In tracing masochism’s history, Noyes notes that nineteenth-century psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing, in deriving a diagnostic term from an author’s name, stripped Sacher-Masoch of his specificity in order to posit a universally

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277 “Confessions of ‘topless’ (?) Cellist,” NJPA, Box 14, Folder 1.
278 In Aachen, this piece was titled *Cello Sonata Opus 69*. Bonomo, unpaginated.
applicable pathology. Yet, Noyes argues, what made the novelist’s constellation of desires suddenly appear as symptoms, rather than (as previously seen) abnormal means to normal orgasmic ends, was their intersection with social and ideological conflicts. These include questions around individual will, nature versus civilization, and related theories of proper gender and ethnic roles in the nineteenth century:

What we are dealing with in Sacher-Masoch’s writing is not simply a personal predilection… On the contrary, Sacher-Masoch’s ‘masochistic’ thematics must be seen in the context of his preoccupations with the political climate of the day, and ultimately as a strategic response to the demands of a liberal history.\(^{280}\)

That is, masochism was only recognized as a pathology due to the historical significance of the inversions at work. Masochism in this moment distilled the ideological unacceptability (and therefore the perverse attraction) of men submitting to women, of a male not wanting to be in control, of a “civilized” subject wanting a force of nature to overcome his will at the height of European imperialism and the rigidly gendered Victorian age.

Believing that Paik and Moorman’s thematics should similarly be seen as a historically-specific response to the destabilization of these same ideologies, it is worth elaborating the deconstructive potential found in the mechanisms of masochism. As discussed earlier and detailed by Noyes, one aspect of masochism that has remained consistent is its use “as a means of displaying and attempting to resolve various conflicts in current discourses of subjectivity.”\(^{281}\) Another outcome, per Noyes, is a “liberal parody of liberal law,” with the contract “producing voluntary relations whose foundation is the very violence that the contract wants to banish.”\(^{282}\)

Of their own free will and in logical fashion, masochists invoke legalistic conditions under which

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279 The term “masochism” was first published in Krafft-Ebing’s 1886 encyclopedia of perversions, *Psychopathia Sexualis: eine Klinisch-Forensische Studie* (*Sexual Psychopathy: A Clinical-Forensic Study*), though some scholarship suggests he took the term from its existing usage by practitioners as found in advertisements of the day.  
280 Noyes, 53.  
281 Noyes, 55.  
282 Noyes, 71.
they propose to suspend the free will necessary to enter into such a contract. At the same time, these twisted machinations highlight free will itself as something that is everywhere constrained by social contracts, from interpersonal obligations and cultural expectations to inevitable psychological and economic trade-offs. From these competing claims, the body is necessarily revealed as a commodity whose use and value is determined within such exchanges. This inexorable contractual landscape is maintained by the threat of institutional violence and loss of freedom. As such, the masochistic embrace of these—not as possible negative outcomes but as that which is promised within the contract itself—becomes a powerful inquiry into the disciplinary regime of the capitalist, juridical modern state. Moorman and Paik’s masochistic approach to the score similarly stresses its role in establishing a legalistic framework and intellectual property rights within an artistic sphere, while formalizing complex exchanges of subjectivity and autonomy.

The third crucial effect of the masochistic game that Noyes emphasizes in particular is:

... a fictionalization of gender, a reduction of gender roles to a constellation of stereotypes that may be chosen and adopted at will... recasting [masochisms] central problems in terms of play, display and performance... it launches a process of parody, mimicking the production of the subject as a social being and historical being—a being whose biological foundation can express itself only within historically determined discourses of control.²⁸³

This interplay of gender and masquerade was important to the operations of Opera Sextronique from its conception. Cheap masks, atop a bare-breasted torso, are both a comedic parody and invocation of sexual role-playing, in which the unique individuality of a partner is literally effaced in favor of a free-play of stereotypical signifiers [Fig. 2.40]. They also bring to the fore the sense, developed significantly in later feminist theory, that gender roles and what it means to be a woman in particular are tied to a constant self-performativity in which roles are adopted and discarded as required—a survival strategy for meeting impossible expectations within a rigged

²⁸³ Noyes, 73.
system that then points to such maneuvers as evidence of the female lack of substance and coherent subjectivity. Further, the range of masks and other props used as substitutions for Moorman’s cello and bow during Opera Sextronique explicitly bring in social and historical factors that determine the power structures and ideological forces within which these performers and audiences were operating. In a text collaboratively written as a post-trial rejoinder, the creators explain:

The four basic elements in this section of the Opera: 1) computer music “INTERNATIONAL LULLABY,” by Matt Matthews of Bell Laboratories, in which a computer analyzes two lullabies (Japanese and Schubert) and changes from one to the other with probabilistic progressis [sic] rule; 2) live Greek female torso sitting still at a cello, semi-nude in a long, formal black skirt 3) six kinds of various masks, ranging from, a gas mask, to Picasso-type plastic masks, four kinds of prepared bows, and propellers (attached to my breasts in the last phrase) which symbolized, American “pop art”; 4) the well-known Brahms “lullaby”, arranged into variations for cello and piano by Paik. These four elements occur simultaneously - like feedback of Radio Free Europe and Radio Peking. As a whole, it is contrasts and combinations of the real and the unreal, true and false, and natural and unnatural, by means of a cello, piano, actions, costumes, taped music and a partially nude female. … So praising the beauty of womanhood (partially nude cellist) as contrasted to the falsity of life (i.e. through the masks)…

Caught in the feedback loop between nature and culture, East and West, exploring subjectivity and performing objectification, Moorman’s fragmented interpretation as beauty and the mask can only be read as the conflation, rather than contrast, of these roles. That these roles are performed in a context in which female beauty (exemplified by classical statuary!) could be uncritically trumpeted as a universal truth is indeed telling of the ideological sexism that their partnership did not explode, but staged and exaggerated. Meanwhile, the historical evocation of World War II in

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284 This conflation of woman and masquerade was first explicitly posited by psychoanalyst Joan Riviere in “Womanliness as a Masquerade,” The International Journal of Psychoanalysis, vol 10, (1929); 303-313. This original text, structured around a case study of a successful housewife and professional who is gripped by anxiety after public displays of intellectualism, is also fascinating to read in light of Moorman’s embrace of femininity while navigating competitive all-male artistic circles: “Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it.” The more expansive theory of gender performativity was developed through feminist and queer theory from the 1970s, reaching its most explicit formulation in Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990).

285 “An Artist in the Courtroom,” reprinted in Bonomo, unpaginated
the gasmasks and musical selection (Japanese and German lullabies and American pop) and the allusions to the American helicopter propellers ubiquitous in coverage of Vietnam, confront the audience with signs of socially sanctioned violence [2.41]. With a touch of the humorously absurd, these elements are all playfully put into service of the aesthetically erotic [2.42].286

In sum, it is clear that their amplification of societal hypocrisies in general, and in Opera Sextronique in particular, was not undertaken with a generic antiauthoritarian approach simply enacted through the intrusion of public nudity. Through the structure of their partnership and their methodical shifting between various binding requirements—from the legal, to the social, to the artistic, to the interpersonal—this culminating work in their performance repertoire was a precise invocation of the techniques of power (and the violence of the law) that masochism eroticizes. Yet as Noyes observes of masochism’s liberating claims, “Once the technologies of control become the objects of erotic attachment, who is to say whether control is subverted by eroticism, or whether eroticism is reintegrated into control?”287 In the end, the police raid, arrest and trial this piece provoked, the judge’s bizarre and lengthy opinion, the artists’ written response and the subsequent shift in their relationship, all come together to highlight the aspirational intentions and ultimate limitations of their reconfiguring of artistic and individual agency through the rubric of masochism [Fig. 2.43].

V. The Contract on Trial (1967 – 1968)

On Tuesday May 9, 1967, New York Criminal Court Judge Milton Shalleck found Charlotte Moorman guilty of indecent exposure. Though she could have received up to three years in prison for such a conviction, the Judge suspended the sentence on the grounds that the


287 Noyes, 14.
twenty-eight year old defendant was “weak and immature.”288 It seems, more than put Moorman in jail, what the judge wanted was to put her and the entire culture she symbolized back in their place.289 Noted for his “delightful sense of humor,” Judge Shalleck took this opportunity to offer a conservative counter-critique in which he loquaciously embraced his role as “the square” in a rambling ten thousand word opinion, which appeared the next day in New York Law Journal.290

As Moorman and Paik summarized in their equally lengthy essay, “An Artist in the Courtroom,” Shalleck expounded on everything from his ignorance about twentieth-century art to his dislike of new unfeminine fashion trends to his formative experiences in the South Pacific with bare breasts and a “manly” drink called Kava, “which very few of our sack-clothed, open-toe sandaled, draft-card burning ‘long hairs’ would dare even try.”291 Alongside these digressions, Paik and Moorman ruefully noted, “The judge also discussed the issues in the case.”292 Their textual rejoinders to Shalleck’s argument express complete surprise as to accusations of impropriety. They make recourse to the high art distinction between the celebration of “mysterious eternal womanhood” and prurient lewd interest in the female body, as if any sexual suggestiveness was entirely outside their intentions. This feigned innocence was certainly a public relations tactic, but it was also a strategy that allowed them to catalogue as thoroughly as possible the hypocrisies within the prosecution and judgment of their case. At the same time, their defensive remarks circle around questions of individual responsibility and empowerment,

289 A similar assessment is given by Moorman’s lawyer, Ernst Rosenberg, who suggested the judge “was looking to see himself in print,” hence the guilty verdict with a suspended sentence. Rothfuss, 201.
291 Shalleck, 18.
292 Moorman and Paik, “An Artist in the Courtroom (People vs. Moorman),” in Bonomo, unpaginated.
free choice and legal-, community- and self-censorship, and aesthetic and sexual discourses that are full of internal contradictions.

Adding to these entanglements are the strangely layered authorial approaches of both documents. “An Artist in the Courtroom (People vs. Moorman),” as it was found in her papers and later published, has a byline by Moorman, with a note at the end acknowledging the assistance of Paik and Pileggi. Based on drafts in Paik’s archives, however, it clearly draws on recycled ideas found in his ventriloquized “Confessions of a ‘topless’ (?) Cellist” and other related notes.293 In recent scholarship, all three participants are credited as authors.294 What has been less remarked upon is the oddness of Shalleck’s decision to write the first third of his opinion as if “I were Mr. Sterne’s Shandy.”295 Invoking Lawrence Sterne’s satirical eighteenth-century novel The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy became an excuse for embarking on a digressive, highly subjective assemblage of opinions and anecdotes. Like their antecedent, Shalleck’s comments are characterized “by mock erudition, linguistic exuberance, teasing bawdry, and inventive play on the discourses of the professions, from law to medicine to theology,” in this case with the odd language of the “avant-garde” given particular attention.296 This stance enabled both Sterne and Shalleck to ridicule practices that seemingly took themselves too seriously. Ironically, this opened space for the judge to use the aesthetics of exaggeration to tweak the noses of “that small group of rushing, impetuous persons (most of them youthful) wandering fretfully somewhere for some unknown goal of intangible value and

293 The pages headed by “Confessions of a ‘topless’ (?) Cellist” are proceeded by a page that could be seen as a table of contents for a possible book on their misadventures. “Confessions” would be chapter 1 of 7, with subsequent headings such as “3) How to succeed in showbusiness without,..... sleeping?” and “6) J’accuse Pablo Casals” etc. NJPA, Box 14, Fol 1.
294 “An Artist in the Courtroom” is credited equally to all three in Rothfuss’ Topless Cellist and the catalogue for Feast of Astonishments.
295 Shalleck, 18. Rothfuss (201) and Landres (57) briefly mention this rhetorical flourish as an excuse for verbosity and scorn.
for uncertain reasons.” Such a rhetorical approach mirrors Village Voice critic Carman Moore’s testimony before Shalleck’s court that Paik and Moorman’s Opera was “a tweaking… of the nose of a sexually unhealthy society” that simultaneously insisted on and punished the sexualization of the female body. It even allowed the judge to make naughty puns along with legal history, as he boasted of the “virgin legal territory” he was about to explore. One is left to wonder whether Shalleck knew that Sterne’s novel itself was attacked as indecent for being sexually explicit and full of moral hypocrisies. Not incidentally, Shandy’s “blind spots” to conventions of decency, which allowed Sterne to balance “sophisticated awareness and innocent naïveté,” were also cited as the sources of the novel’s critically humorous edge.

In asserting a Shandy-like perspective, Shalleck adopts his own carefully-chosen blind spots, insisting on a sort of cultural naïveté that claims not to be able to discern between topless waitresses and avant-garde performers, despite a cavalcade of expert witnesses and contextual evidence:

Was playing the cello with this bizarre nudity for self-aggrandizement with consequential later economic benefit or for the purpose of enticement in the sense of being obscene? …I, in substitute for a jury, have decided for a fact that [the performance’s] purpose was obscene. This, in the face of claims that it was ‘art’.

Through this gambit, the judge resolves all ambiguities stemming from such vagaries as “community standards,” “private parts,” and “prurient interests,” with the innocents’ assertion

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297 Shalleck, 18.
299 Shalleck, 18.
300 Another unintended irony emerges when one remembers that the original novel is practically an urtext of postmodern authorship, with a fictional yet self-conscious biographical narrator and appropriated passages from other writer’s works, as well as a thematic foregrounding of the unstable nature of subjective experience, whether the author’s, the narrator’s or the imagined readers, and the way this warps how one perceives purportedly objective events. Keymer, 3-18.
301 In a scholarly essay written a year before Shalleck’s opinion, Eugene Hnatko links Sterne’s wit with “a peculiar irony growing out of an adopted ‘blind spot’ and his “incapacity to comprehend a common sexual decency or conventional prudery which legislates against certain topics’ being discussed.” Eugene Hnatko, “Tristram Shandy’s Wit,” The Journal of English and Germanic Philology. vol 65 no. 1 (Jan., 1966): 47, 58-59.
302 Shalleck, 19.
that something new to him cannot be “standard,” any body part “willfully and lewdly exposed” should be private, and something that interests him on only a prurient level must have no other interest.\footnote{Shalleck, 18.} Towards the beginning of his musings on art and the female body he observes:

> In no poem, in no prose respected by the test of time, in no statue or bust accepted for its imagery, technique and beauty as art, have I seen, either visually described or portrayed a picture of a nude or ‘topless’ cellist in the act of playing that instrument—or for that matter, a similar description or portrayal of a ‘topless’ waitress with breast pendant over a plate of hot sour or cup of steaming coffee!... \footnote{Shalleck, 18. As Jud Yalkut catalogues in an article cited by Moorman and Paik in “Artist in a Courtroom,” Shalleck missed several lovely examples of bare-breasted string players in his art history education, from classical and neoclassical representations of the Orpheus myth to specific works like Eustache Le Sueur’s \textit{Melpomene, Erato, and Polyhymnia}, which features a topless cellist as the muse of sacred songs. “The Topless Muse – Censorship with Precedent,” \textit{West Side News}, June 22, 1967, 4. “Press Clippings 1963-68” Folder, CMA.}

And later resolves,

> …if I am to be a mirror of our community feeling here, my conclusion is that against the background of all the facts adduced in this case….then the dominate theme of the material presented by the defendant taken as a whole is lewd and appeals to prurient interests. This ‘appeal to prurient interests’ refers to the quality of the material itself: the capacity to attract individuals for a forbidden look.

Taken to its logical conclusion, then, Shalleck’s opinion is shockingly honest about the broad social sentiments that justified efforts to censor the female body. It is not the community’s obsession with and hypocritical pruritry around the subject that needs to be considered. Nor historical traditions that purport to celebrate while somehow containing idealized female forms. Shalleck asserts that there is something inherent to the material of the female body itself and its inevitable appeal to forbidden looks that makes “willful” exposure of absolutely any part subject to the close scrutiny of the law, which may deem that exposure lewd based on the degree to which it attracts and entices the examiner. Of course, the fact that being forbidden—a determination imposed on “the material itself”—is what makes it most tempting is conveniently overlooked. That this formulation specifically occludes the possibility of the woman having
control over the meaning of her body and her intentional deployment of it, since her lewd intentions are imputed from the experience of a “common” (male) viewer, puts into legal opinion what so many women experience in daily life—the inescapability of objectification in a sexist society. In this light, the recourse to the masochistic frame becomes a form of critique-through-exaggerated-capitulation. Knowing from experience that the power struggles around female embodiment were inescapable, Moorman choose to collaborate in exploring this predicament, rather than refuting it.

The leveraging of strategic blind spots is also important to Paik and Moorman’s overall critique. Alongside their use of displacement to produce erotic tension and of frustrated expectations to send-up musical and sexual conventions, their performances explicitly and consistently balance a “sophisticated awareness and innocent naiveté” when playing with these taboos. Their written response to the trial further amplifies this in order to emphasize the “inevitable hypocrisy which accompanies the ambiguity” on which Shalleck’s guilty verdict depends. They are confused that Moorman’s obligations to the score do not release her from individual responsibility in the eyes of New York State law.

Of course, each [element in ARIA NO.2] is an integral part of the composition; a part of the total structure, indicated in the score by its creator, Nam June Paik…. These works should not be performed in clothing other than specified by Paik, since they would then be different compositions from those created by the composer – such censorship would constitute a compromise with artistic requirements.

Yet, Shalleck in his opinion zeros in on exactly the ambiguity of authorship that their collaboration benefited from, but which here they would like to refute. Summarizing Moorman’s testimony in court, he reports:

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305 Hnatko, referring to Sterne, notes that his “nominalistic position is used to satirize, if anything, a prudish upholding of the taboo [against sexual references]…[and] the inevitable hypocrisy which accompanies the ambiguity”, Tristam Shandy’s Wit, 59.

306 “An Artist in the Courtroom,” emphasis in the original.
The script, written freehand on the score, told her what kind of costumes to wear... Not all of the actions were precisely noted. There was a certain inventiveness on the artist’s part. But the ‘electric bikini’ was made to cover her nipples and her pubic area... The dress and props were all provided for in the script. She was bound by it. She obeyed it.

Moorman and Paik just cannot believe that a performance advertised as providing music with “its D.H. Lawrence” might be censored. They balk at the possibility that the promise of artistic freedom and American democracy is not absolute:

I wondered: doesn’t censorship – crude suppression like that to which I was subjected, in the “cultural center of the world”, belie and debase the principles of democracy, freedom of expression and the basic individual freedoms for which we, by reflex, pay homage? If I cannot freely choose what work I will perform, who then can decide?

Moorman and Paik demand the right to exercise free will, but in the most circumscribed of ways: the right to choose to whom one will submit; to choose in what ways and for which purposes Moorman’s body’s inevitable sexuality will be instrumentalized. It is here that the poignancy of their explicitly hierarchical collaborative exchanges comes to the fore. By entering into a creative relationship in which she guided the course of action from below, responding to every Paik proposal with signals of her readiness for further provocation, with her own inventive embodiment and specific interpretations, she was an equal participant in driving their aesthetic experimentation and sexual boundary-testing. In her mind, however, she explicitly gave over responsibility for the requirements of nudity and risk-taking to Paik’s scored fantasies, daring him to dare her. This was in line not only with her training as a classical cellist but as a woman in a society in which male desires and projections were the ideological sea in which one swam, whether one acquiesced to it or not—as Judge Shalleck so forcefully demonstrated. Rather than fight that, as her friend Schneemann set out to do, she agreed to join Paik in playing with that reality, poking at its hypocrisies. The troubling result of this, however, is that she became

307 “An Artist in the Courtroom.”
invisible as a creative force and hyper visible as a sexualized object. She was, in the eyes of the court, considered solely responsible for her nudity, even as it insisted she was without agency in determining its meaning or purpose.

That Shalleck’s judgment of a sexually-driven satire of social conventions is itself a satirical appropriation of a bawdy eighteenth-century satire of prudish attitudes, all of them aping a naïve inability to understand the conventions of the other, seems to have been a tragicomedy not fully appreciated by the participants. Looking back, we can see the clash of multiple forms of authority fighting for control of the conventions that would control daily life. On both sides, however, the arguments dance between the inescapability of sexuality in modern society, and the social regulations that insist on denying its import or appropriateness anywhere outside the conjugal, heteronormative bedroom. The productive (rather than repressive) nature of sexual restrictions is the primary thesis of Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (1976). Foucault describes the way medical, psychoanalytical, legal and familial discourses construct sexuality as they proliferate pathologies and prohibitions. What appears as censorship, Foucault argues, is in fact what makes sexuality all-pervasive in modern society:

[These discourses have] the overall and apparent object of saying no to all wayward or unproductive sexualities, but the fact is that they functioned as mechanisms with a double impetus: pleasure and power. The pleasure that comes from exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light; and on the other hand, the pleasure that kindles at having to evade this power, flee from it, feed it or travesty it…. These attractions, these evasions, these circular incitements have traced around bodies and sexes, not boundaries not to be crossed, but *perpetual spirals of power and pleasure.*

As we have seen, masochism thematizes this circular relationship between technologies of control and technologies of the body. It also dramatizes and specifies the many points of power,

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the layers of regulations and expectations that are placed on sexuality and the body. Recognizing these dynamics as inescapable and energizing, Paik and Moorman’s repertoire drew much of its excitement from deliberately dancing at the edge of acceptability. More importantly, their performances derive critical insight from exploring sexuality not as a straightforward site of repression or natural state to be recovered, but as an endlessly contested site of self-construction and deconstruction. Sexuality emerges in their work as a creative response to constraints within specific social and historical contexts. Their collaborative efforts foregrounded hierarchical dynamics between idealization and embodiment, between author and enactor, between men and women, between subject and object, while underscoring the slippages and stereotypes that problematize assumptions of authority or authenticity within these categories. And, through recourse to a range of specific cultural symbols and value systems, they explicitly tied their interpersonal exchanges to broader networks of power in which individuals, countries and cultures cycle through moments of control and resistance. As Paik once mused, “As a responsible realist… how can I avoid Sex and Violence if it exists,, and if it exists in surplus quantities?”309 Likewise, Moorman often remarked that Chiari’s Per Arco, in which she “thinks about war” and the “audience thinks about sex,” was unfortunately perpetually relevant.310 Yet because of this same sociocultural realism, their work could not avoid the unequal distribution of real-world consequences onto their respective bodies and identities, with women endangered often by the men closest to them [Fig. 2.44]. Ultimately, Moorman and Paik resolved the “pre-Freudian hypocrisy” with the pre-Foucauldian recognition of sexuality as a historically-

309 This quote is from an unattributed manuscript in the NJP Papers, Box 15, Folder 24, with a footnote attributing this to a two-page typed statement by Paik dated Nov. 14, 1967, but before the archive was indexed.

310 Rothfuss, 128.
constituted technology of control that connects erotics of power that extend from the bedroom to
the battlefield, from the concert hall to the courtroom.311

While their particular dynamic of scores developing out of Moorman’s daring malleability is
unusual, masochistic modes of collaboration can be seen in Marina Abramović and Ulay’s
decade-plus partnership [Fig. 2.45] and in Laurel Nakadate’s deeply awkward videos made with
older male strangers [Fig. 2.46].312 Attention to the slippery power of the submissive in
collaboratively created scenarios also offers a new way to address muse and maker relations at
various points in art history. In considering the British performance group COUM Transmission,
art historian Siona Wilson highlights how issues of authorial agency, even in an “egalitarian”
collective, is riven by gender difference.313 The two primary members, Cosey Fanni Tutti and
Genesis P-Orridge, clearly differently positioned by society and by the collective’s photographic
practice, are shown to have unequal access to authorial agency and the active masculine
position—even when Tutti transgressed gender and genre expectations by signing pornographic
photographs for which she modeled [Fig. 2.47].314 Yet, Wilson notes, it is problematically Tutti
alone who is benefiting from feminist recuperation of work done under the auspices of
COUM.315 Thinking about masochistic authorship could also be useful when engaging work like
Vito Acconci’s filmed Conversions III performances (1971) [Fig. 2.48]. This six minute film—in
which Acconci hides his penis between his legs, but also “hides” it in the mouth of his
performing and romantic partner, Kathy Dillon, kneeling behind him—has provoked significant

311 Pre-freudian hypocrisy, again, being the capitalized, underlined headline of Paik’s manifesto on the flyer for
312 For more on Abramović and Ulay’s masochistic performances, see the chapter “His Mouth/Her Skin,” in O’Dell,
17-30; for more on Nakadate’s performance videos, see Eleanor Morgan, “Dancing with Strangers: The Disturbing
Videos of Performance Artist Laurel Nakadate,” The Guardian, October 8, 2011
313 Siona Wilson, “Prostitution and the Problem of Feminist Art,” in Art Labor, Sex Politics (Minneapolis, MN:
University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 93-137.
314 Wilson, 119.
315 Wilson, 130.
debate amongst feminist scholars as to the transgressive or regressive nature of his gender play, but also its dependence on Dillon, who is infrequently credited by name and partially blocked by his body in the shot.\textsuperscript{316} The masochistic model, which requires the participation of both partners, can help resist any clear divvying up of roles and effacing of essential enablers. Because it does not expect individual artists to transcend the gendered systems in which their bodies and authority are insistently differentiated, this approach recognizes that it is the dynamic between contested authors that brings the catalytic power of submission into focus, while emphatically refuting the fiction of equality in current conditions. In this way, a feminist art history could never be constructed of all-women artists, but would rather be a mapping of relevant subjectivizations, gendered-implications, and uncovered dependencies that traverse creative projects, and are the ground from and against which they become legible.

VI. Dénouement

A little over a year after Shalleck handed down his opinion, on June 10, 1968, Moorman and Paik presented \textit{Mixed Media Opera}, a “benefit for legal expenses” at Town Hall. This concert premiered the third (bottomless) and fourth (nude) arias of the \textit{Opera Sextronique}; appropriately the flyer design by McWilliams featured Moorman collaged between classical artworks depicting half-naked string players [Fig. 2.48]. Yet despite promises of such risqué content, the context had significantly changed. Between the time of Moorman’s arrest and her trial, New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller signed a revised statute on public lewdness, which explicitly exempted topless women “entertaining or performing in a play, exhibition, show or

\textsuperscript{316} For a reading of Acconci as transgressive and destabilizing of gender norms, see Amelia Jones, \textit{Body Art/Performing the Subject} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 143-144 and for a counter-argument attending to Dillon’s effacement and the desires for transgression inherent in Jones’ analysis, see Jane Blocker, \textit{What the Body Costs: Desire, History and Performance} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 8-14.
entertainment,” and became law just days after Shalleck’s verdict was handed down. In the months that followed, performances around New York stretched into this new space and beyond, with the October 1967 off-Broadway premiere of *Hair* featuring a fully-nude scene by a cast of exactly those “young, bearded, bathless ‘Beats’ whose hirsute talents” so offended Shalleck’s community standards. Without legally defined taboos to transgress, the performance’s frisson was gone. At the same time, Moorman and Paik’s proposal that the score was a contractually-binding mechanism, placing responsibility for one’s actions in another’s hands, had been tested and rejected by a legal system that insisted on its dominance in this regard. The repercussions were clearly not going to be shared equally, and Paik never composed anything requiring Moorman’s nudity again. Reflecting on an October 1967 performance in which Moorman played “lying on her back while Paik cut a fine line on his arm with a razor blade bringing forth beads of blood,” Geoffrey Hendricks asked, “Was this Nam June atoning for Charlotte’s arrest?”

With these bruising battles behind them, Paik was ready to move on. As he had intended before meeting Moorman, he now wanted to focus on the electronic experiments that had been sidelined by their performing and touring. On June 14, he typed a four-page “Dear John” letter to Moorman, laying out his reasons for concluding their four-year partnership, and outlining where he saw their future opportunities now that they had achieved the “important goal…to put the sex, the most importance fact of our life and death, into music.” For him, this was a move away

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317 As discussed in “An Artist in a Courtroom,” the team learned Governor Rockefeller signed the statute on April 21, 1967 and it would go into effect thirty days later, which Moorman tallied as May 18, 1967. Despite the obvious point that this was a sign of changing “community standards,” Judge Shalleck referenced this pending update only to deduce from various disjunctive phrases that breasts could still not be exposed if the performance itself was lewd. Given his conservative views, this basically invalidates the exemption, as a performance with exposed breasts would always by his definition be lewd. Bonomo, unpaginated; and Shalleck, 1967.

318 Shalleck, 1967.


from what he saw as the “outmoded” “Neo Dada of 1960,” and toward concentrated research into electronic media and composition. For Moorman, he suggested, this would be an opportunity to diversify her artistic partners “with more and better and newer talents.” Yet he does not propose their work together end so much as change its structure:

“I will try next two years to do another venture, which is more dangerous than SEX venture because it risks,, or rather seeks the oblivion by the grand public. […] Outwardly things will not change radically… I will keep composing colorful Cello pieces at least one a year, very probably more.. for long time to come.”

While these two thoughts were separate for Paik at that moment, they come together in the electronic living sculptures and video projects that Paik and Moorman continued to make together, which will be considered in the next chapter. Rather than representing an entirely new area, I will argue that their shift towards technology as a space of collaboration explicitly retains their interest in control, communication and the simultaneously instrumentalized and activated human subject. As the primary figure placed at the intersection of these forces, Moorman in turn is called on to elaborate a performance of the self in dialogue with the emerging technologies that are so often the site where conflicting notions of personal agency, social indoctrination and economic integration are tested. In fact, it could be argued that masochism does not disappear as a leitmotif in this next phase, but transforms from an encounter between two bodies to the confrontation between body and machine that, according to Noyes, inspired the nineteenth-century flourishing of masochism in the first place:

…the age of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch was obsessed with the interface of bodies and machines. The disciplined individual could be produced only by subjecting life processes to an increasingly unnatural—and hence perverse—regime of training and control….The masochistic perversion is like the Fordist dream of bodies and part-bodies attached to a productive technology. ‘From one point of view, such a fantasy projects a violent dismemberment of the human body and an emptying out of human agency, from another it projects a transcendence of the natural body and the extension of human agency

321 Nam June Paik to Charlotte Moorman, 3.
322 Nam June Paik to Charlotte Moorman, 2.
through the forms of technology that represent it.’ The invention of the term ‘masochism’
articulates the fin de siècle’s profound sense of crisis concerning sexuality and violence
and what it means to be human in the age of rapid technological developments.323

At the height of the nuclear age and the dawn of the digital, Paik’s project to “humanize
technology” and Moorman’s performance within the feedback loops of this fantasy address these
very same existential questions even as they were reshaped by the technological revolutions of
their day.

323 Noyes, 6-7.
CHAPTER 3
TRANSFORMED IN TRANSMISSION: MOORMAN’S WHOLE LIFE VIDEO ART

I. “She Becomes Video”

Kicking off a 1974 interview, curator Paul Schimmel asks Nam June Paik about his relationship with Charlotte Moorman, citing three recent video installations made explicitly “for her”—TV Bra (1969), TV Cello (1971), and TV Bed (1972) [Fig. 3.1 – Fig. 3.5]. Paik replies by framing Moorman’s significance not just in relation to himself or video art, but as exemplary of a new relationship of the self to the world instantiated by the TV screen:

Nam June Paik: I consider her to be a great video artist. Video art is not just a TV screen and tape—it is a whole life, a new way of life. The TV screen on her body is literally the embodiment of live video art.

Paul Schimmel: She becomes video.324

In this exchange, several elisions occur that will point the way for considering the import of Moorman and Paik’s video collaborations in an expanded light. First, her greatness as an artist is premised on her prescience in embodying a whole new way of life, rather than authoring discrete video works. Second, the relationship between screen and body is imagined to literally infuse life into a form that is otherwise considered inanimate, and simultaneously to transform her—this living, embodied human being—into video. Third, there is a constant slippage between video art, TV, tape and screens. While not uncommon in this period, this overlap underscores that for Moorman and Paik, the network content traditionally transmitted by these screens is always the

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324 Nam June Paik and Paul Schimmel, “Abstract Time,” Arts Magazine, December 1974, 52; box 1, fol. 8, Nam June Paik Archive (NJPA), Smithsonian American Art Museum, DC.
ground for their experimentation, even if the images are abstract or pre-taped.\textsuperscript{325} Finally, these works’ dependence on the specifically female body as the vehicle for exploring, fusing, and confusing human agency and technological determinism in order to evoke what this “new way of life” might feel like, goes totally unremarked. The ease with which the two men can imagine Moorman simply “becoming video” encapsulates a long history of female objectification in visual culture and overlooked female subjectivity in daily life. For our purposes, though, I want to zero in on the specific context for Moorman and Paik’s collaboration, in which the expanding cultural regime of television was simultaneously positioning women as privileged consumers of network programming, and as commodities for consumption: eternally useful sales tools, idealized and sprinkled across shows and commercials alike to keep eyeballs glued to screens. In this moment, Moorman embodied the “whole life” experience of being both a subject and object of constant televisual mediation in a way that only an attractive, young white woman could. Her ability to appear not just as a living sculpture, but as a plausible lingerie model, sitcom or soap opera star, nighttime talk show guest, as well as photogenic classical musician, is essential to the visual and verbal slippage between being on TV, being formed and informed by TV, and becoming TV that drive these works’ critical edge.

Because Moorman has so often slipped out of the picture in analyses of the video collaborations in which her gendered body is an unacknowledged yet essential operative force, past interpretations have over-accentuated the technological positivism of Paik’s statements. They have likewise underappreciated the prescience of Moorman’s performances of herself as a perpetually mediated being. By emphasizing Paik’s proclamations of the democratic potential of creating two-way video communication, too many critics have missed the underlying and

\textsuperscript{325} See David Joselit’s \textit{Feedback: Television Against Democracy} for expansive and productive discussion of television as the ground against which art figures itself in the postwar and early network period. (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2007).
ongoing pessimism that accompanies these demonstrations of an inevitable, all-encompassing mediated environment. Training our sights on Moorman, however, allows us to see the work otherwise: a human subject wrapped in screens, imbricated with commercial interests through which illusions of choice—in politics, products or personas—foment new desires and ideas of the self. It is here that the issues of power, control, communication and instrumentalization that were explored via erotic masochism in Moorman and Paik’s previous body of work are reconfigured. No longer a face-off between two individuals enacting vectors of power, these living video sculptures present the individual directly impacted by the technological mechanisms of subjectivization. Further, as art historian Siona Wilson has emphasized, a socio-historical contextualization of these technologies insists that video art’s ground is not just television, but the “formative experiences of sexual difference” that television instantiated in “the domestic family context.”

This chapter will reconsider Paik’s purported aspiration to “humanize technology” through his televisual collaborations with Moorman by reaffirming gender and sexuality as crucial aspect of these works. Rather than humanizing technology, these pieces constitute an early, protracted investigation of how performance and television would come to be wedded, not only as dialectically linked mediums, but within individuals’ identity construction and representations of themselves to the world. This insight could only be demonstrated by a body

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recognizable as the prime subject and object of televisual imagery and advertising campaigns. The complex interaction between the imaged, imagined and embodied self is on full view in works such as *Concerto for TV Cello* (1971), in which Moorman manipulates images on three stacked screens while wearing *TV Glasses* (1971) [Fig. 3.3 – Fig. 3.4]. By recording and replaying her performance via closed-circuit video on those same monitors, the work positions Moorman within a media relay that increasingly conflates surveillance and entertainment, cyborgian supplements and new subjectivities. This effect is exaggerated by Paik’s repetitive use of Moorman footage in video collages, which often then appeared on the TV-appendages and in related installations. In this light, Moorman’s calibrated interaction with feedback loops of her own image can be seen as foreshadowing the creative deployment of the self in and as a form of performance in postmodern theory and art practices. Further, we can now appreciate how these presage the subsequent closed-circuit consciousness fostered by reality TV, YouTube, and Facebook Live, in which all of life’s daily performances are inflected by their potential to be simultaneously captured and disseminated.

II. “*When Two Americans Make Love*”

In 1975, following several years of producing these performer-activated TV sculptures with Moorman, Paik declared, "What was most interesting was the intercourse [*les rapports*] between the body of Charlotte Moorman and the TV set. When two Americans like Moorman and TV make love together, you can't miss it.”328 Conflating Moorman’s living body and the inanimate TV set, and making equivalent her American personhood and the American-ness

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328 Translation from Joselit, *Feedback*, 62. “Ce qui était surtout intéressant c’étaient les rapports entre le corps de Charlotte Moorman et l’appareillage TV. Lorsque deux Américains comme Moorman et la TV font l’amour ensemble, on ne peut pas rater ça” originally from Irmeline Leeber, "Entretien avec Nam June Paik,” *Chroniques de l’art vivant* (February 1975), 33.
epitomized by TV, Paik’s statement also implies that it was his work that played matchmaker to these two lovers. Yet, to fully appreciate the greatness of Moorman as a “whole life” video artist, it is important to backdate the beginning of the affair. In 1964, she was invited onto Johnny Carson’s *The Tonight Show* after the *succès de scandale* of the *Originale* premiere at her second New York Avant Garde Festival. We can never know for sure if Paik saw this, her first time on TV, though it seems likely that watching his new performing partner on a national talk show would have been of great interest to the recent émigré. We do know he caught her next *Tonight Show* appearance on January 20, 1966, as he used his recently acquired Sony Portapak (the first portable video recorder for the consumer market) to document her being interviewed and then performing a version of the John Cage piece with Carson assisting.\footnote{329 In keeping with Cage’s instructions, this shorter segment was retitled *4’1.1499” for a String Player*. Joan Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist: The Improbably Life of Charlotte Moorman* (Cambridge: MIT, 2014), 142.} This is a lucky break for historians, as NBC recycled the tapes used for many of its 1960s broadcasts; Paik’s tape becomes the portal through which we can see the self-assured and self-aware performance Moorman gave that night [Fig. 3.6].

Primed by an American diet of 1950s talk shows and several years as her Festival’s primary spokeswoman, Moorman was, in the parlance of the genre, “camera-ready.” In a sleeveless form-fitting concert gown, she smiled and good-naturedly parried questions about the avant-garde and her unconventional career. When Carson asked if she was bothered by people laughing when she performs, she responded, “I would like it better if they understood what I’m doing and if they got real enjoyment from what I’m doing. But if they laugh out of embarrassment or lack of exposure, that’s not my problem.”\footnote{330 Paik, *Variations on Johnny Carson vs. Charlotte Moorman* (1966), video, CMA. This exchange is edited into Howard Weinberg and Nam June Paik, *Topless Cellist*, 1995, video, 29min, color, sound. Electronic Arts Intermix, NY. This echoes John Cage’s comment, before his own televised performance on *I’ve Got a Secret* in January 1960, that “overall he preferred laughter to tears” as a response to his work. Julia Robinson, “John Cage and Investiture:}
address this problem through such media appearances, Moorman was nevertheless consistently willing to play the sincere oddball artist to Carson’s (and other hosts’) mugging, eye-rolling stand-in for middle America. As a consequence, Moorman was regularly criticized by colleagues for repeatedly allowing herself (and the avant-garde) to be mocked in this way. Yet, as biographer Joan Rothfuss observes:

Talk shows are a codified discourse. Guests understand that, in exchange for a few minutes to plug their latest project on national television, they must submit to some teasing by their host. Carson was bound to make a laughing stock of Moorman, and she knew this was part of the game…. A decade and a dozen talk shows after her first appearance on *The Tonight Show* she told a reporter: “Television has its limitations but it’s worth putting up with the limitations because you know you are reaching so many people.”

Moorman was both willing to put up with the game and good at it, but knew that sacrifices—of purity, of complexity, of control—necessarily accompanied presenting herself (and being represented) in this format.

Moorman’s conscious attempt to intervene in this most generic of broadcast formats as an ambassador for the avant-garde evidences the same strategy of adapting radical messaging for new media environments as those advocated by Yippie activist Abbie Hoffman in the late 1960s. The Yippies were well known for developing theatrical “pseudo-events” that solicited extensive media coverage, providing them with free airtime that Hoffman described as “advertisements for the revolution.” Yet Hoffman was also criticized for going on late night television. Media

Unmanning the System,” in *The Anarchy of Silence: John Cage and Experimental Art* (Barcelona, Spain: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Barcelona, 2009), 109.

331 Rothfuss, 144.

332 This role, as variety show guest, is one Moorman would reprise in Paik’s various video works going forward. In *Global Groove* (1973), she is interviewed by Jud Yalkut about her *TV Cello* as if on a talk show. In 1977, she and Paik appeared on an international broadcast from Documenta 6 in Kassel Germany, where their performance, with silly props, canned dialogue and hamming it up for the camera is an avant-garde version of the Johnny Carson and Dick Cavett formula. See Nam June Paik and John Godfrey, *Global Groove*, 1973, video, 28:30 min, color, sound; and Joseph Beuys, Douglas Davis, and Nam June Paik, *Documenta 6 Satellite Telecast*, 1977, video, 30 min, color, sound. Electronic Arts Intermix, NY.

333 Joselit, 109-112. These tactics live on in contemporary practices of “culture jamming.”
activist Michael Shamberg, in his 1971 book, *Guerilla Television*, observed that Hoffman might have reached the masses via the Dick Cavett show but that, “The revolution ended when Abbie Hoffman shut up for the first commercial.”

That is, in acquiescing to the given structures of the medium, Hoffman, and by extension, Moorman, was caught in an impasse. As art historian David Joselit argues:

> The success of [Hoffman’s] media interventions brought him from the margins of public attention to the center... But exploiting this platform comes at a price, since the public space of television forces those who would occupy it into a kind of celebrity, which Hoffman, in any event, was never disposed to resist.

According to Carolee Schneemann, Moorman also found national television appearances “intoxicating,” which meant that both she and Hoffman were unlikely to achieve the “nearly impossible task of producing telegenic but oppositional content…while resisting absorption within [TV’s] institutional framework.”

Ironically, it is exactly this compromised fidelity and the near impossibility of resisting absorption that comes to the fore in Paik’s tape *Variations on Johnny Carson vs. Charlotte Moorman* (1966), and, I argue, becomes the subject of their televisual collaborations going forward. Alternately titled *Early Study* (1966), this version of the late night appearance was recorded off the television just four months after Paik used his new Portapak to capture Pope Paul VI’s visit to New York. Unlike Paik’s interim video experiment, *Mayor Lindsay* (1965), which was also captured off a television broadcast but modulated to freeze and loop the New York mayor’s face, the visual distortions of the Moorman/Carson tape were produced by the intervening with the recording platform. Edith Decker Phillips, the first art historian to attend

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335 Joselit, 115.
336 Schneemann, quoted in Rothfuss, 114; Joselit, 115.
exclusively to Paik’s video works, explains this “fine-grain flickering” is the result of Paik using magnetic tape from computers as a cheap alternative to video tape, which he would hand-wind around the recorder spools. While she attributes the distortions to irregular loading of the magnetic tape, curator David Ross asserts Paik took a more proactive role, finding an analogous operation for videotape as for prepared television sets. By laying a live wire across the recorded reel, he argues, Paik intentionally erased via electromagnetic charge whatever image was captured on the section of wound-tape directly under the wire:

What appears when the tape is replaced is the Carson-Moorman interview with a brief erasure at first every four seconds, but with increased frequencies as the tape nears the core of the reel. We are confronted with a work in which the artist literally reached in the program (albeit after the fact and in the privacy of his studio) and marked his presence, forcing a recognition that something had changed, that the order had been tampered with.

Of course, Ross overlooks the significance of Moorman herself entering into the heart of network programming and marking her presences before a live studio audience. What Decker-Phillips and Ross foreground in turn, however, is that early computer technology is already at work in this earliest encounter between Moorman and television and Paik and video, and the results underscore that at each point of media translation there is distortion, whether intentional or not. What the flickering image captures, I argue, is not Moorman’s failure to upset the power-dynamics of late night laughter or resist the program’s role for her. Instead, it suggests the grainy reprocessing of live action into image into data as analogous to the reprocessing of the self into a telegenic persona into an avatar.

It also intimates that breaking out of the network control of television—be this the one-way communication of the national broadcast system, the gatekeeping bookers of “celebrity”

guests, or the format of the talk show and commercial break—might not undermine but actually
expand the degree to which the codified telegenic persona infiltrates self-consciousness and self-
construction. The portable video recorder, individually operated and turned on the quotidian—
and its instant replay, as explored by Paik and other video pioneers—made immediately apparent
that the opening of two-way video communication brought with it the potential for anyone and
any aspect of life to appear on these screens. Closed-circuit video art installations, CCTV
surveillance, and, later, community-access, cable programming and guerrilla reporting cultivated
a new awareness of everyone’s video-visibility. As an alternative to top-down media dominance,
this reciprocity was championed by artists for its utopian, democratizing potential.339 Yet, it also
invited the public to ever more intently prepare for their “fifteen minutes of fame.” For, as Joselit
discerns, “[Andy] Warhol’s conviction that “TV” and “life” mutually de-realize one another….sugges
a kind of infinite regress where emotional dissociation is both produced and reproduced
in rebounding reflections between media and life, life and media.”340 While Paik frames his
video work as liberatory by opening up two-way communication, his collaborations with
Moorman tend to illustrate this infinite regress. Watching Moorman play Moorman, we confront
the closed feedback loop that two-way communication actually instantiates between media and
life, life and media and the birth of our contemporary closed-circuit consciousness and life-

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339 In a telling early conflation of two-way communication as liberatory, erotic and gendered, Paik wrote in 1968:
“As wife was just a sexmachine for her husband (before), public is just the Pavlovian dog for the network
(presently). The infinite potentials of TV, such as: two-way communication, audience participation, “electronic
democracy through instant referendum” (John J) ... is by far ignored or delicately suppressed.” What he and Cage
do not entertain here is the likelihood that this instant referendum will be used to democratize commercial popularity
contests (American Idol) rather than for meaningful modes of participatory self-governance or expression.
Originally written for the catalogue of The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age (Museum of Modern
Art, Syracuse, New York, 1974), unpaginated.

340 Joselit, 116-117. Joselit himself does not bring together Warhol’s notion of this mutual derealization and the
infinite regress he identifies in Moorman’s TV Cello. However, he moves toward a similar insight when he notes of
TV Cello’s installation: “the embrace of the audience within a media circuit is explored as the reversal (or more
accurately the degradation) of figure-ground relationships between a body and its representation” 60-62. Emphasis
mine.
casting culture.

With this in mind, I would like to inflect Joselit’s productive primary claims in *Feedback* about the “commodity-network” system established by television with media scholar Lynn Spigel’s attention to gender in these exchanges. In their contemporaneous publications, the authors start with claims potentially at odds. Joselit opens by asserting that “Art stands against television as figure stands against ground,” while Spigel traces the many ways these cultural products and producers were intertwined, problematizing this opposition in actual practice. Yet the two authors complement each other in thinking on the one hand formally and theoretically, and on the other pragmatically, about how television and art co-signify in this moment. Joselit begins his first chapter laying out his terms as follows:

The paradigm of information society is the network; an ever-expanding web of data resurfacing the globe…The paradigm of consumer society is the commodity: an objectified figure of desire… As the point of contact between networks and commodities, TV establishes an alternating current by which things expand into information as information contracts into things.

He further relates this mobility to ideas of “distributed” subjectivity in poststructuralist thinking, in which people, objects, and information derive meaning from their constant circulation through the network. Joselit observes that “a commodity’s information cloak—as communicated in advertising and packaging—is not simply an applique but a constitutive feature: its personality as it were,” and that it is this “public face,” rather than use value, that ultimately sells. As both Joselit and Spigel recognize in different ways, the television audience is itself a commodity, primarily envisioned as a female housewife, through whom these oscillations were expected to

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342 Joselit, xi.
343 Joselit, 3.
344 Joselit, 4.
345 Joselit, 15.
be constantly cycling: the commodity transformed into brand information, turning into purchases, that translate into a lifestyle brand for the consumer, who then feeds valuable information about themselves and their self-image back to the network, packaging themselves into segmented audiences ready for sale to advertisers. Joselit shows how this strategy was illustrated for the industry at the time by a cartoon of an empty female head filled with ideas by a small male worker, yet he summarizes the lesson—that viewers will end up “possessed body and soul”—in gender-neutral terms.346 Spigel goes further, reminding us that in addition to selling products and selling audiences, television helps sell viewers an idealized (and also commodified) image of themselves. Encouraged to identify with characters and products that align with their aspirational persona, female viewers in particular were seen as responsive to new cultural forms. This awareness, in turn, allowed them to acquire cultural capital and signal their membership in taste-based affinity groups. As Spigel summarizes,

On television, art and commerce were strange but faithful bedfellows….More than just peddling savory pork sausages or buttery “Bop” corn, television used modern art and graphic design to sell the public—and especially women—an image of themselves as progressive-minded citizen-consumers. In the new television culture, being an American meant being a taste-conscious, visually literate consumer....347

This network-era investment in the circulation of televisual ideas, images and products through the self-selection—and selection of self—by American women in particular makes Moorman’s presence at the center of these media relays essential to their significance.

When Moorman packaged herself as the Jeanne d’Arc of the avant-garde for prime time television, she was beginning her work as a “whole life” video artist. And when Paik repackaged

Variations on Johnny Carson vs. Charlotte Moorman as video art, he pointedly included the

346 Joselit, 24.
347 Spigel, 57, 66.
commercial breaks. In an era when the packaging of commodities was obviously expanding to include human commodities, Moorman was also a pioneering propagandist within the cultural field. Whether on behalf of the New York Avant Garde Festival, herself or her friends, she was one of the first (along with Warhol) to whole-heartedly embrace promotional tactics in service of experimental art. She assembled press lists, kept clip books, and diligently sent pitches and thank-yous to ensure coverage. As I will show in the next chapter, Moorman’s instinct for branding and promotion allowed her to develop new audiences for her community and events, but also helped give them the commodity-cloak necessary to compete for attention in a television-saturated cultural landscape.

While unpopular to admit, by the mid-1960s, the imperative to self-brand and stand out in the media marketplace had become a reality for most living artists, who found that developing a public face helped even within the elite metrics of the art world. As critic Rosalind Krauss bemoaned in 1976, connecting the birth of video art to this new reality:

That an artist’s work be published, reproduced and disseminated through the media has become, for the generation that matured in the course of the last decade, virtually the only means of verifying its existence as art. The demand for instant replay in the media—in fact the creation of work that literally does not exist outside of that replay, as is true of conceptual art and its nether side, body art—find its obvious correlative in an aesthetic mode by which the self is created through the electronic device of feedback.


This meant for Krauss that most video art was corrupted by a societal narcissism that should be vehemently, critically resisted. Paik however always evinced a deep pragmatism about how economic considerations impacted an artist’s life and work, and was quick to acknowledge the relation between media notoriety and gallery representation in his career. He regularly praised Moorman’s tireless advocacy work, and recognized her part in securing visibility for him as a newcomer to the New York art world. In an elegiac letter to *New York Times* arts critic Grace Glueck after Moorman’s passing, he tellingly asserted her importance via media impressions:

I believe she belongs to only a handful of women artists, who shaped the sensibility of [19]60-90. She is one of a very few artists whom russel baker [sic] devoted a full column. For me, she printed my name 12 times in your paper before I was picked up by the 57th street galleries. She featured in every kind of work of mine…video sculpture, videotapes, satellite art (over 100 million viewers) and of course, performances. Without her I may have had a good video career but a boring biography.350

This is the language of public relations firms: column length, viewership, dramatic biography.

By using the popularity metrics of a Hollywood agent to argue for Moorman’s significance as an artist, Paik refuses fine art pretensions that media attention is unimportant to how artists’ careers develop or are judged, or that those who seek it are shallow. Though John Cage likely intended decidedly mixed praise when he told Calvin Tomkins that “Charlotte’s real talent is for publicity,” for the future-oriented Paik, this was an increasingly necessary skill to be appreciated instead of denigrated, a perceptive adaptation to changing cultural realities.351 Moorman’s willingness to overtly “shape sensibilities” through media relations also added a layer to her performance as an artist of the electronic age, one able to immerse herself and intervene in the flows of information through which she would inevitably be seen.

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350 NJP draft letter to Grace Glueck, November 9, 1991, box 2, fol 19, NJPA.
III. The Intimate Software of TV Bra

Moorman’s performances within Paik’s TV-sculptures embodied the inevitable impact of technology on individuals at a biological and psychological level. Through this imbrication of the corporeal body into the technical apparatus, their collaborations from this period uniquely engage the predictions of the era’s leading media theorists, Norbert Weiner and Marshall McLuhan. Paik regularly cited both men in his extensive musings on his work and its historical context. In a note from the mid-1970s, Paik turned to Weiner to explain societal shifts under way:

The advent of the cybernetic age and post-industrialized society have changed everything. Our problem is not how to produce, but how to consume. Norbert Weiner declared, our problem is not “more power but the control of power”… hence the name of the game is not production but promotion, not hardware but software… not muscle but nerve, information, knowledge industry and media.352

We can easily map this description onto the vision of Moorman plugged into and playing her multichannel screen sculptures, one node among many controlling what information and consumptive messages will flow across her body. The parallels between biological, societal and mechanical feedback systems were at the heart of Weiner’s theorization of cybernetics in his 1948 publication, Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine, and were picked up and popularized by McLuhan’s 1964 bestseller, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man.353 McLuhan posited that each media invention allowed an “extension” of some physiological capability of man, such as the wheel extending the mobility of feet.354 He envisioned the oncoming, final phase extending human cognition through technology as an

352 Untitled note, box 15, fol. 2, NJPA. These two figures occupy a significant place in Paik’s media ideology, and are regularly cited throughout Paik’s media-inflected writing. Paik devoted the essay, “Norbert Weiner and Marshall McLuhan,” to comparing their statements, and relation to media art. First published in 1967 by the Institute of Contemporary Arts Bulletin, London, it is reprinted in Videa ‘n’ Videology, unpaginated.
354 McLuhan, 19, 164-165.
electronic nervous system wrapped around the globe and humanity as “an organism that now wears its brain outside its skull and its nerves on its hide.”\textsuperscript{355} Responding to these predictions, Paik and Moorman’s cyborgian installations therefore importantly shift their investigation of control, communication and feedback to the fraught negotiations between hardware, software, information networks and the human interface necessitated by the cybernetic age. As in the duo’s live collaborations, the erotic charge of these negotiations is also put on display.

Paik began working on the mechanics of \textit{TV Bra} in the winter of 1968/1969, shortly after feminists gathered to toss their bras (and high heels, girdles, etc.) into a “Freedom Trash Can” outside the Miss American Pageant in New Jersey.\textsuperscript{356} The piece was also conceived, of course, in the wake of Moorman’s own breasts sparking a media circus and legal showdown as questions of her autonomy intersected with the authority of the state, societal standards, and institutionalized authorship models within music and visual art. By ensuring miniature screens covered her prurient protrusions, Paik’s \textit{TV Bra} encouraged viewers to fixate on this very part of her body. A humorous retort to the hypocrisy of arbitrary legal constraints on sexual expression, the work also reasserted the inevitable eroticization of the female body by patriarchal society, regardless of how covered or uncovered its parts may be. Just as media mischaracterization of the feminist protestors as bra-burners (no fire was involved) insisted on identifying women of all political persuasions through their breast-presentation, whether unnaturally elevated or free hanging, the choice between the toplessness of \textit{Opera Sextronique} and the attention-grabbing coverage of \textit{TV Bra} was a false dichotomy, as both made Moorman’s bosom the center of attention. \textit{TV Bra}’s particular mix of sexual and technological titillation is nicely indicated in John Gruen’s \textit{New

\textsuperscript{355} McLuhan, 19, 57.  
\textsuperscript{356} For a thorough unpacking of the confluence of \textit{TV Bra} and the Miss America protests, and the myth of the “bra burners” resulting from a comparison between throwing these garments into a trash can and the contemporaneous trend of draft dodgers burning their draft cards above trash cans, see Sophie Landres, “Indecent and Uncanny: The Case Against Charlotte Moorman,” \textit{Art Journal}, vol 76, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 64-66.
York magazine review of the exhibition “TV as a Creative Medium” at the Howard Wise Gallery, which focuses almost entirely on the debut of this Paik-Moorman collaboration:

The sight of Charlotte Moorman seated on a small platform, her cello posed between her legs, and two tiny television sets in perfect working order affixed to her bare breasts is enough to make your realize the cathode tube has never had it so good. Miss Moorman—an avant-gardist with a genius for attracting attention—is part of the exhibit. She is in fact, the “Living Sculpture” in Nam June Paik’s witty contribution to the show titled TV Bra for Living Sculpture.357

For the exhibition’s opening on May 17, 1969, Moorman played for five hours, enthusiastically distorting the evening’s broadcast with each bow-stroke across her electrically wired, classical cello strings [Fig. 3.7]. Though TV Bra glowed with the tiniest of imaginable images, the apparatus itself was ungainly. The Plexiglas casing Paik had created for the cathode ray tubes were boxy and rigid, peeking awkwardly over the top of Moorman’s cello.358 They were visibly held in place by a transparent vinyl strap and safety pins. The whole contraption weighed approximately six pounds, generated heat, and carried “between five and ten thousand volts of electricity over [Moorman’s] bare skin.”359 In a photograph of Moorman and Howard Wise at the opening [Fig. 3.1], a cascade of wires stands out against her black concert dress and the black plinth on which she is elevated just a few inches off the ground. These plugged her into a warren of outlets, inputs and control mechanisms that allowed the TV Bra to feature a mix of content: current signal from the networks, closed-circuit video fed from the Portapak as Paik (or another operator) moved around the gallery, and prerecorded video collages. Moorman could control the input through a foot pedal that was part of this stage rig and, when present for performances, Paik could also select content from off-stage.

358 The cumbersome set-up can be seen being strapped on at the beginning of footage from their 1971 experimental recording with Jackie Cassen at WNET studios. Paik helps attach the TV Bra, which is then balanced atop the cello, while Moorman ensures her two foot-pedals are in the right place. See Moorman and Paik, Rare Performance Documents 1961-1994 Volume 1.
359 Rothfuss, 240.
The visual impact of the installation’s contrasting dark and light zones is more appreciable in a 16mm color film that Jud Yalkut, a Festival regular and ongoing collaborator with Moorman and Paik, made of the performance [Fig 3.8]. In this footage, Moorman’s skirt, plinth and the base of her cello almost disappear against the dark backdrop. Her bare arms appear starkly white and oddly detached, as the TV Bra obscures the very point where shoulders should meet chest. In fact, her body seems sawed in two by her bowing arm, the torso gleaming and vigorously animate, floating above a void. From various angles, particularly when she bends her head while playing, her long dark hair forms a cloak of invisibility over her face, further isolating the region where clavicles, electrodes and strings meet. Following this cue, Yalkut trains his camera almost entirely on the section from cello bridge to shoulder. He occasionally zooms out to capture her whole body and what looks to be Paik’s Participation TV on a taller plinth to her left, but mostly as a way to find new angles from which to zoom in to the highlighted region. Lingering on hands working the strings and the literal “boob tubes,” the leering camera work reminds the viewer that this is the intended effect: an invitation to ogle, with technology and sex as equal subjects of this acquisitive gaze.

Yalkut’s singular focus on Moorman’s cello-playing is followed by a short montage in which he cuts to a close-up on a cathode screen showing Moorman’s face, floating within swirling blue and purple patterns, as she smiles and sips a beverage. During the sip, he cuts back to a medium shot of Moorman in the gallery with the beer bottle at her lips. Yalkut zooms all the way in to her face and back out as she takes an appreciative pause, zooms back in as she takes another sip, and then out again as she smiles and hands the bottle off. This mix of out-there,

361 The fact that the documentation of her performance is silent only reinforces the primacy of her body for subsequent viewers, though this is not a surprising, as Yalkut seem to have only shot in silent 16mm in this period. http://www.eai.org/artists/jud-yalkut/titles (accessed January 4, 2017).
avant-garde performance and the aesthetic language of advertising is one that Moorman and Yalkut had explored together before. In 1966, Moorman had the idea that they should create a commercial pitch for Coca-Cola. The sixty-second spot, shot by Yalkut and an assistant, aimed to leveraged Moorman’s visibility as a representative of “the new”—thanks to appearances such as the one on Carson—and media-stoked, public curiosity about Happenings. Deploying a similar roving camera as used at the debut of TV Bra, Yalkut captured Moorman performing Cage’s 26’1.1499” for a String Player, with particular attention to the moment when she drinks deeply from a Coke bottle while holding a mic to her pale throat. Following this ultimate “American Pop” reference in her interpretation, the proposed commercial ends with the pithy tagline, “When Things Are Happening, Things Go Better with Coke.”

This edited pitch, apparently never finalized or sent, and the footage from “TV as a Creative Medium” both show a keen awareness of advertising tropes, particularly the tactile transference evoked through women’s mouths and hands. In 1979, Erving Goffman would isolate “the feminine touch” motif in his influential book Gender Advertisements. This Madison Avenue strategy was illustrated with a three-page spread of commercial close-ups of women, hands to their faces or framing various objects, “to effect a ‘just barely touching’ of the kind that might be significant between two electrically charged bodies” [Fig. 3.9]. Likewise, Moorman’s filmed performances are cropped, collaged and massaged with the purpose of drawing attention

362 Rothfuss, 146.
363 Footage of this proposed Coke commercial was included in the exhibition A Feast of Astonishments: Charlotte Moorman and the Avant-Garde, 1960s-1980s, on view January 16, 2016–July 17, 2016 at the Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill. 1966 was also the year Andy Warhol shot Screen Test: Lou Reed [ST263] in which the Velvet Underground frontman slowly enjoys a coke-cola throughout his five-minute film portrait. Whether either set of filmmakers and performers were aware of the other is not clear, but the differences are illuminating, if unsurprising: Reed is posed before a static camera and exudes composed cool, while Moorman is a whirl of activity, with Yalkut’s mobile camera accentuating her movements and body parts. Warhol, Screen Test: Lou Reed https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Avne-hIBncI (accessed December 15, 2017 – soundtrack is not original).
simultaneously to the appeal of the model and the product being pitched, whether it be soda pop or advances in artistic technology. The emotive affection of humans for things, signified by the gentle caress of female fingers, and the electrical charge of such fetishistic desires is, in *TV Bra*, amplified by the always-eroticized stance of the female cellist. As Gruen observed, Moorman’s arms, legs, and electrical nipples cannot help but wrap around her instrument’s curvaceous wooden body (yet another object with which she has been regularly conflated). The role of media in adding to this blurring between the humanized commodity and the commodified human is underscored by the layering of Moorman’s body between various screens and recording devices—the TV monitor behind her, the screens of *TV Bra* in front of her, the eye of Yalkut’s film camera (or at other times Paik’s PortaPak) facing her.365

This mise-en-abyme and its reliance on gender constructions performed, reflected and reinforced by media circulation demands a reexamination of Paik’s oft-repeated statement that he aims to “humanize technology.” These two words quickly turned into a shorthand manifesto for critics and historians seeking to summarize Paik’s technological approach going forward. They are excerpted, however, from a longer statement published in the brochure for “TV as a Creative Medium,” where the universalizing discourse of humanism is awkwardly grafted onto shifting subject positions:

The real issue implied in ‘Art and Technology’ is not to make another scientific toy, but how to humanize the technology and the electronic medium, which is progressing rapidly—too rapidly. Progress has already outstripped ability to program […]

TV Brassiere for Living Sculpture (Charlotte Moorman) is also one sharp example to humanize electronics… and technology. By using TV as bra… the most intimate belonging of human being, we will demonstrate the human use of technology, and also stimulate viewers NOT for something mean but stimulate their phantasy to look for the

365 This circuit of media subject self-reflexivity is literalized when we learn that, at times, a mirror was propped in front of Moorman so she could watch broadcasts on her bosoms while playing. Stephanie Harrington, “TV Awaiting a Genius,” *The Village Voice*, May 29, 1969. A Kinetic History: The EAI Archives Online. [http://www.eai.org/supporting-documents/185/w.1164.0](http://www.eai.org/supporting-documents/185/w.1164.0) (accessed January 4, 2017).
new, imaginative and humanistic ways of using our technology.  

How do we untangle the significance of identifying the brassiere—a specifically feminine undergarment that was at this moment being challenged as a technology for enforcing male beauty standards—as the most intimate belonging of human beings writ large? On one hand, we can note that, though often of great interest for men, the garment itself tends to belong only to women. On the other hand, as a technology designed to allow women’s bodies to maintain shapes that nature could not be counted on to provide, it is a prime example of the way the coproduction and adoption of “human enhancement” strategies intersect with different subjects in different ways. What is an achievement or advancement for some may be a restriction or additional burden for others. The statement also raises questions about how universal the “we” is that gets to direct this intimacy with technology as it is tailored to suit particular bodies, and whose fantasies are stimulated and towards what kind of new use by this demonstration of “our” technology.

This repressed power dynamic, and its nationalistic as well as gendered divisions, was accentuated when the piece was next presented. Moorman and the *TV Bra* were among the few additions made to London’s Institute of Contemporary Art’s exhibition, “Cybernetic Serendipity,” when it traveled to Washington D.C.’s Corcoran Gallery. Fortuitously, the Corcoran’s July 16 opening preview coincided with the launch of Apollo 11, with its mission to put a man on the moon. In a draft letter to Grace Glueck, who reviewed the exhibition for the *New York Times*, Moorman apologized for being caught up in the moment:

> I’m so sorry I couldn’t stop performing Paik’s *TV Bra* to speak to you before you left. But I was performing for the most marvelous cross-section of people—computer experts, men who build missiles, mothers and their children, NBC and Metro Media TV, *Popular Photography* magazine, artist, tourist, etc.—with the space takeoff program on each

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breast. They asked me such things as what I thought the future of TV and art is? How my TV Bra worked mechanically? What is the connection of the space flight and my TV Bra?367

On July 20, 1969, Moorman was in the Corcoran Galleries with her TV Bra broadcasting the moment when American astronauts landed on the moon, after which Moorman noted an appreciable shift in how audiences related to the piece. As Decker-Phillips relates:

While previously TV Bra at best had been seen as a joke, after the landing on the moon the visitors seemed much more attentive and asked more serious questions following her performances. The landing on the moon had realized an old dream of humanity, and subsequently Americans became more open to new technologies as well as their use in the realm of the arts. Television as a medium had played an essential role in transmitting the images during the landing on the moon and therefore gained in significance.368

Television had indeed entered a new era of significance with the lunar landing. The medium had relayed an event of literally astronomical proportions, with relevance for the entire globe—even though everyone was not yet able to tune in. The event’s relevance would also differ depending on one’s placement in the world and position in society. Decker-Philips’ reference to the “dream of humanity” being achieved and therefore shifting American attitudes towards technology is a good reminder that—as in Paik’s statement on TV Bra—recourse to the universal often occludes the gendered, nationalist, race or class dependencies that are actually in operation. This reality, however, is in fact what the actual artwork puts on view, perhaps at no time more powerfully than with the moon landing broadcasting through it. While Neil Armstrong’s famed declaration of “one small step for [a] man, one giant leap for mankind.” would not have been heard in the gallery, as TV Bra had no speakers, the visuals of this moment would have conveyed the message sufficiently. Technology was drastically and rapidly (“too rapidly”?) changing all

367 CM to Grace Glueck, undated, in Corcoran Gallery file, CMA. One viewer likened Moorman’s explanatory banter with the audience as “Like a hostess at a Texas barbeque.” Rothfuss, 243.
368 Decker-Philips, 124.
human interactions with the known world. The “electronic nervous system” described by McLuhan was rewiring the internal processing of the mind as it adapted to information overload, and the skies were no longer the limit of human ambition. The evidence that day in the gallery, however, illustrated the vectors along which this shared reality was being enacted. Here was Moorman, diligently fulfilling Paik’s desire to domesticate these advances, taking them to her bosom, familiarizing visitors with their mechanisms and meaning. Playing camera-ready spokesperson for the television revolution, she “humanizes” by feminizing society’s relation to the broadcast era. Here also was Armstrong, tiny but heroic with his U.S. flag, transmitting on behalf of mankind from outer space, fulfilling President John F. Kennedy’s promise that American manifest destiny would propel us into the Space Age. Conflating humanity’s interests with the imperialist propensity to use technology to discover and then dominate, Armstrong’s gesture implicitly raises the question, for whom is the cybernetic future serendipitous?

The sense that these two scales, the intimate and the extraterrestrial, were two ends of a spectrum that also ran along gendered lines would have been so obvious as to be unremarkable for viewers at that time. Yet, Paik’s goals for the piece would not have been achievable without this implicit understanding of women’s place in this evolving media ecology. That women would be most impacted by technology as an apparatus that wrapped around their bodies, asking them to adapt their behavior to suit its imperatives, simply expanded on existing societal expectations. Paik’s laid out a vision of what progress along these lines might look like in a 1965 letter to engineer and soon-to-be founder of Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.) Billy Klüver:

Someday more elaborate scanning system and something similar to matrix circuit and rectangle modulation of color TV will enable to send much more information on a single carrier band, f.i. audio, video, pulse, temperature, moisture, pressure, movement of your body combined ,, whole parameter of personality and situation.

369 “…the electronic medium, which is progressing rapidly—too rapidly,” as Paik noted in his statement for TV as Creative Medium, 1969.
If connected with a robot, made of rubber foam, expandable-shrinkable cathode ray tube, etc.,
And if it is “une peteite [sic] robotine’,,
please, TELE-FUCK

with your lover in RIO.\(^{370}\)

Since it is of course “une petite robotine,” the artist envisions sex with a fembot. This proposal has been widely reproduced with little attention to its accurate prediction that stimulating male sexual fantasies will be a primary economic driver and use to which advances in communications and media production will be put. (This extends from pornography’s dominance in video sales after the introduction of the VCR, to the Internet’s entangled history of military- and porn-spurred innovations.)\(^{371}\) How Paik’s predictive vision intersects with ideas of humanizing technology is also only generally and generically referenced. Yet when closely considered, Paik’s erotic erosion of human and machine is continually figured as a process in which men remain full of human agency and women increasingly become interchangeable with their cybersex function. In another iteration of this idea, Paik promotes sales of a future “TELE-PET…which can take any form,” and promises a corresponding NBC “telepet” station featuring “Naughty late-late show” so “you can caress her.” By contrast, during news conferences, the TELE-PET can provide an outlet if “you think like your president is lying…hit him!”\(^{372}\)

Even more strikingly, at the height of the Cold War, Paik promises “tele-fucking” will bring world peace. In his previously cited interview with Paul Schimmel, Paik makes clear the

\(^{370}\) Nam June Paik, *Sonata quasi una fantasia. For Billie Klüver*. 1965, box 13, fol. 18, NJPA. Several themes raised in this letter, including picture-telephones leading to cybersex and later comments on choosing colored lasers for one’s death are resurrected in an interview between Paik and Jud Yalkut for *Arts Magazine*, April 1968 and republished in *Videab n’ Videology*, unpaginated.

http://www.medialit.org/reading-room/video-here-stay (accessed April 12, 2017);

\(^{372}\) Untitled, undated typed note, box 13, fol. 19, NJPA. Another imagined iteration of his Tele-pet concept can be found in a documented titled “Paik Robot/Tele-pet Flyer,” 1964, also from the NJPA (box 19, fol. 11) and reproduced in Chu and Yun, 4.
importance he assigns to the erotics of technology, travel, communication and the way his collaborations with Moorman are intended to manage these. Asked about the connection between *TV Bra* and *Train Bra* (1973) [Fig. 3.10], Paik suggests that new interfaces between man and machine can “solve the energy crisis,” a theme he repeated often when selling the social and economic benefits of a technology-saturated future.\(^{373}\) Arguing that transportation and telecommunication are intertwined, Paik asserts:

> People travel to *communicate* something, either for pleasure or profit. In the case of pleasure driving, they are subconsciously communicating with themselves *via machines*… What we need is a substitute technology to travel. Here the role of video artists as the pioneer-experimenters in telecommunication-transportation trade-offs is great. Charlotte Moorman showed us this impending conversion in the most elegant way, by adorning herself with *TV Bra* and *Train Bra*.\(^{374}\)

The substitute technology for travel, then, is autoerotic stimulation via feminized mechanical simulacra. Moorman is seen as a video pioneer because she converts herself into the medium through which self-discovery and subjective desires might be satisfied. Lest we think that this eroticism is limited to pleasure driving, Paik answers the next question about the meaning of *TV Bed* by quoting the “telefuck” section of his Klüver letter, before continuing:

> Global promiscuity is the easiest guarantee for the world peace. If 100 top Americans have their tele-fuck-mates in U.S.S.R. (100 top Russian’s wives), we can sleep a bit safer. Video art is an art of social engagement, because it deals with energy and peace.\(^ {375}\)

Taken together, what emerges in Paik’s eccentric prognostications is the plausible possibility that

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\(^{373}\) *Train Bra* consisted of two toy trains apparently emerging from Moorman’s chest and was created for the 1973 NYAGF, which took place on a platform and in train cars Grand Central Station. The debut performance there was titled *Music is a Mass Transit Too- So Is the Bra*. We can infer, from Paik’s statement to Schimmel, that the bra is mass transit because Paik imagines that it propels the masses into motion.


\(^{375}\) Battcock, 126. It is interesting to note that for all that Paik got right, in terms of predicting the “Electronic Super Highway” and information overload, his assertions that travel and the energy crisis would be reduced by digital connectivity has proved overly optimistic. Tele-fucking has not replaced in-person sex, but has instead created a global sexual marketplace that drives both internet traffic and international sex tourism, with its non-insignificant carbon-footprint.
the humanization of technology will equal the transubstantiation of female sexuality and
servitude to pure code. In this future, bodies that already tend to be equated with their exchange
value will be translated into idealized identity cloaks, the better to circulate through globalized
commodity networks. Another probability is the interpolation of technological mediation into
what had previously been treated as particularly humanizing and expanding experiences—from
sexual intimacy to the serendipitous interpersonal encounters of global travel. As I will explore
in relation to TV Cello and the Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer, these darker interpretations connect
to Paik’s proffering of technological integration as a balm for certain dehumanizing affects of
late capitalism. In these moments, he not only suggests enticing (even sexy) interfaces as ways to
manage social fragmentation, isolation, and global antagonism; he also recommends channeling
desires for participation and personal expression through hardware that would stimulate the
economy, and software that would absorb energies that could otherwise lead to social unrest.

IV. The Pesky Pessimism of Paik and McLuhan

In a 1966 interview, McLuhan tried to correct a growing misconception about the outlook
or intention of his work. “Many people seem to think that if you talk about something recent,
you’re in favor of it. The exact opposite is true in my case. Anything I talk about is almost
certainly something I’m resolutely against.”376 In 1967, perhaps recognizing the challenges both
would face in terms of reception, Paik made a work that sees the philosopher entirely at the
mercy of televisual reception. The title, McLuhan Caged, nods to Paik’s two great influences
(McLuhan and John Cage) but it also reflects the potential capture and manipulation of

376 From the interview “Predicting Communication via the Internet,” with Robert Fulford for the Canadian
Broadcasting Corporation; reprinted in Herbert Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Me: Lectures and Interviews,
eds. Stephanie McLuhan and David Staines  (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2010), 102.
McLuhan’s ideas by the mainstream. Looping video footage taped from an NBC documentary about McLuhan, *McLuhan Caged* [Fig. 3.11] shows the theorist repeatedly stating:

Movies tend to be the content of TV, and books and novels used to be the content of movies. So every time a new medium arrives, the old medium is the content. And it is highly observable – the real ‘massaging’ done by the new medium – it is ignored.\(^{377}\)

While recording the broadcast, Paik “massaged” McLuhan’s face; “I put various electromagnets on the set and turned McLuhan right and left.”\(^{378}\) Paik’s actions enact McLuhan’s notion of remediation, but also demonstrate the loss of control over content as it enters the public sphere.

Reception of Paik’s engagement with technology has encountered a similar problem, with fixation mistaken for admiration in most interpretations of his work. While in neither case do I intend to refute the aspirational proclamations that these two writers offer at various points in their oeuvres, this section considers the infrequently acknowledged pessimism that runs throughout their work as well. In doing so, we can recover Paik and McLuhan as analysts rather than advocates of the impending global technological takeover. For example, while Paik’s images of cybersexual servitude are delivered with seeming enthusiasm for what lies ahead, I do not read his proposals as recommended prescriptions, but rather as invitations to examine where then-current developments might lead. This important distinction is easily misrepresented if the humanization of technology is accepted as a stable and affirmative animating principle of Paik’s oeuvre. While sometimes unabashedly technophilic, Paik was also known to make proclamations such as, “I use technology in order to more properly hate it,” and “Best television is no television.

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\(^{377}\) Dieter Daniels, “Touching Television: Participation Media with Marshall McLuhan, John Cage and Nam June Paik.” In *TV Commune, de-inter-trans*, edited by Lee, Chaeyoung Kim (Korea: Nam June Paik Center, 2012), 176. This work was shown in Paik’s solo exhibition “Electronic Arts II,” in 1968 at Galeria Bonino in New York, before the *TV Bra* debut in 1969.

Like his distortions of mainstream televisual images, Paik’s use of language is contradictory, idiosyncratic and enigmatic; it is another artistic medium for his antics. Full of humor, irony, and sarcasm, as well as serious scholarly research and wide-ranging citations, his writing evinces a desire to shock readers and indulge in wordplay that often supersedes logical argumentation. His non-native syntax and concrete poetry-style spacing couch ideas in contradictory, kōan-like structures. In his writings on technology, he has a tendency to follow a thought-experiment through a range of sometimes exciting, sometimes troubling future scenarios with the amoral zeal of a scientist seeking lab results. It is thus important to balance other writers’ emphasis on his utopianism with broader awareness of his equivalent tendency to towards the dystopian.

The slippage from playful proposal, to detached speculation, to unvarnished forecasts about the future, is on full display in the rest of Paik’s rambling missive to Klüver. In his “best idea of all,” Paik imagines a room full of hidden electromagnets with “adequate rift to pass through magnet power like the cleft in TV yoke or human vagina.”

Turned on and off in rhythmic pulsation, the magnetism could push, pull, or shake an individual in metal attire, even sucking him to the ceiling. Paik goes on to ponder how “we” could send “waves directly to the brain” like “electronic LSD” to enlighten, or “use various human body parts as plus minus poles” for electrocution. Demonstrating an equanimity between contemplating electromagnetic surges to enlighten or torture, he blithely observes that the South Korean police under Syngman Ree used prisoners’ wrists as electrical poles during interrogations, while the French in Algeria used

379 Paik, Video n Videology, unpagedinated, and Joseph Beuys, Douglas Davis, and Nam June Paik, Documenta 6 Satellite Telecast, 1977, 30 min, color, sound, Electronic Arts Intermix, NY.
380 Paik, Sonata quasi una fantasia. For Billie Klüver.
a hand-driven generator attached to genitals for portable torture. Such indifferent, panoramic considerations of cross-cultural and historical uses of power, and schizophrenic tonal switches between boyish enthusiasm and professorial lecturing are common in his less-cited—and in this case, private—musings on technology.

On the next page of his letter to Klüver, Paik pivots to contemplate art’s role alongside technology in keeping capitalist markets buzzing. He asserts that the continual aestheticization of lifestyle options, from consumer products to art styles to personality signifiers, requires an unthinking embrace of innovation. Invoking the “Taoistic maxim ‘the use of uselessness,’” he cites everything from the Avant Garde Festival “(including myself)” to “vitamin consumption and Vietnam consumption” as “all junks & jewels” that serve to keep Western economies booming. He goes on to imagine how:

In 21 century, you can choose not only life or death, but which color of death. you can choose yellow, or blue, or green, death or even transparent death, by shooting yourself with the laser-gun of equivalent clor [sic]. Color in death will become as important as color in life in 20th century. what a leaping augmentation of freedom in free society.

This sarcastic, struck-through punchline is indicative of Paik’s lifelong skepticism about the degree of freedom afforded in capitalist Western democracies. Distracted by the “junks and jewels” of the red line in white toothpaste or the purportedly empowering decision of what color to adopt for one’s death-by-laser, these societies fail to question the value or consequences of these “leaping augmentations,” let alone the mechanisms that direct and constrain these systemic offerings.

381 Paik, For Billie Klüver. The letter cites Syngman Rhenn’s police, presumably a typo in referencing South Korean statesman and first president, Syngman Ree, whose security forces were known to torture suspected Communists. His description of its effect is particular resonant with the discussion of masochism in the previous chapter, imagining how the police would “let man verbally swing, like a kid on the swing..., of pleasure. of pain.”
382 Paik, For Billie Klüver.
383 Paik, For Billie Klüver.
Whether Paik’s proposals to Klüver appear utopian or dystopian is inflected by one’s vantage point, but Paik shows unequivocal pragmatism about man’s capacity to exert conscience control regarding the course of “progress.” To humanize technology, to interject it into all our most intimate moments, might necessarily degrade human interactions in undesired ways. But in a capitalist system, driven by technological advancement stoking consumptive desires, who has the power to resist? What Paik and Moorman offer, then, is a homeopathic preparation of the viewers’ system for the inevitable enmeshment of man (or more often woman) and machine, and for the increasingly insidious forms of technological determinism disguised as choice. Paik states this quite explicitly in his early treatise “Cybernetic Art”: “if Pasteur and Robespierre are right that we can resist poison only through certain built-in poison, then some specific frustrations, caused by cybernated life, require accordingly cybernated shock and catharsis.”

Paik’s matter-of-fact assessment of the emerging technological opportunities of the present, and resigned signaling of their potential negative fallouts, perfectly aligns with the role that McLuhan imagined for the artist in his hugely influential Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man. This 1964 bestseller catapulted McLuhan’s name to celebrity status as the “oracle of the electric age.” And like the ancient oracles who saw a future already written in stone, he dismissed moralizing about technology. His official position was that newly introduced media were not inherently good or bad, but simply profoundly powerful in changing “the sense ratios” of human consciousness. His goal through media analysis was to draw attention to the cause and effects of technologies on our consciousness and hence encourage a more thoughtful “stock-taking” before diving into new technological ventures. However, his description of the

385 This moniker from Life Magazine is reproduced on the cover of the 1964 Signet edition of Understanding Media.
386 McLuhan, 66.
current situation was hardly presented in neutral terms: “The new media and technologies by which we amplify and extend ourselves constitute huge collective surgery carried out on the social body with complete disregard for antiseptics.”\textsuperscript{387} While McLuhan’s overarching premise was that all media, from the written word to the development of roads, have greatly impacted human consciousness and therefore societal organization, he casts the current transformation as the most drastic. Previous media had extended aspects of human physiology—wheels amplifying the work of feet, houses extending the temperature-control of skin, and so on. The digital revolution, which would put “our physical bodies inside our extended nervous system,” promised a system that would reshape the use of all previous technological extensions in ways that few could foresee or forestall. McLuhan warns, “Electronic technology requires utter human docility and quiescence of meditation such as befits an organism that now wears its brain outside its skull and its nerves on its hide.” Like other extensions of man’s physical capacities, such as the canoe or the book, electric technology will demand “servo-mechanistic fidelity,” as societies and individual sense-ratios conform to the requirements of its use. But whereas “previous technologies were partial and fragmentary… the electric is total and inclusive.”\textsuperscript{388}

Facing this eventuality, McLuhan encouraged society to finally change its attitudes toward artists and recognize experimental art as providing “exact information about how to rearrange one’s psyche in order to anticipate the next blow from our own extended faculties.”\textsuperscript{389} Yet, while McLuhan in one sentence hopefully asserts that artists are now moving from “the ivory tower to the control tower,” in the next he remembers all the ways society has consistently ignored their insights.\textsuperscript{390} McLuhan believes that advanced art offers critical guidance on

\textsuperscript{387} McLuhan, 64.
\textsuperscript{388} McLuhan, 57.
\textsuperscript{389} McLuhan, 66.
\textsuperscript{390} McLuhan, 65.
navigating the new forms of life that electronic technologies create, and coping with their violent psychiatric and social fallout. McLuhan holds out little hope that the artist will be the canary that empties the mine; at best, they are the warning system that suggests protective gear might be necessary.

In the next few passages, McLuhan points to the profound closure of choice that technological “opening” inevitably brings with it. Acknowledging the dark side of his pithy slogan, “the medium is the message,” he considers how each technology, once introduced, creates a society-wide dependency that has nothing to do with its content. Like eyesight, as long as it is available, this electronic extension will be a sensory resource we instinctually turn to. Asking what “the public” wants in terms of media content, he argues, is like asking what they would like to see in their surroundings—and imagining they would walk around with eyes closed if the view did not conform to these wishes. The sudden accessibility of humanity’s central nervous system to such non-stop, unfiltered external input is presented by McLuhan in fairly dystopian terms. To quote his frighteningly prescient pronouncement at length:

> Once we have surrendered our sense and nervous systems to the private manipulation of those who would benefit from taking a lease on our eyes and ears and nerves, we don’t really have any rights left. Leasing our eyes and ears and nerves to commercial interests is like handing over common speech to a private corporation, or like giving the earth’s atmosphere as a monopoly…. Archimedes once said, “Give me a place to stand and I will move the world.” Today he would have pointed to our electric media and said, “I will stand on your eyes, your ears, your nerves and your brain, and the world will move in any tempo or pattern I choose.” We have leased these “places to stand” to private corporations.

In imagining the way forward, McLuhan asserts that we must avoid “futurism and archaism as

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392 McLuhan, 66.
393 McLuhan, 67.
394 McLuhan, 68.
395 McLuhan, 68.
strategies for encountering radical change,” and again privileges the role of artists in preparing for present actualities.\textsuperscript{396} In the 1967 follow-up, \textit{The Medium is the Massage} [sic], a streamlined illustrated explication of his main theories, McLuhan and his designer Quentin Fiore featured few recognizable artists or artworks in their pages, favoring abstract close-ups, environments or graphic ideograms. Yet, before she ever donned an electronic bikini, Moorman is the rare exception. She is pictured under a quote from Montaigne, smiling and wrapped in her translucent plastic gown, dripping wet after a performance of Paik’s \textit{Variations on a Theme by Saint-Saëns} [Fig. 3.12].

The unfolding technological actualities explicated by McLuhan were the same that Paik and Moorman were addressing in their living televiusal sculptures. In fact, from the 1960s onwards, Paik produced works with Moorman and on his own that emphasized the vulnerability of a society in which eyes, ears, nerves and brains are conditioned continually to take in electronic stimulus, the content of which is predominantly produced in the service of private corporations. Using an aesthetic of information overkill, he amplified the implications of the present. As Paik’s video editing and installations becomes increasingly overwhelming, we see the mounting inability of even the most TV-averse citizen to sidestep the impact of a new hybrid sensory system linking individual brains to a networked society.\textsuperscript{397} In a book proposal on Japanese media coverage of the United States, Paik describes television as a primary mechanism for controlling the subconscious in “free” countries. “By virtue of this medium-bath we tune our screen to the big stations and thanks to this 50 c/s [synchronized pulse] permanence, when

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{396}] McLuhan, 70.
\item[\textsuperscript{397}] Paik demonstrates many of these concepts in his 1973 video \textit{Global Groove}. Beginning with an authoritarian voice over predicting a future in which “the \textit{TV Guide} will be as fat as the Manhattan telephone booth,” the tightly edited sequences of cultural mash-ups, layered with psychedelic effects, imagines a world in which all global cultures are subsumed and reprocessed through TV. Midway through, Paik’s voice commands the viewer to close their eyes, then open them, then close them three-quarters, then open them two-thirds. Whether the viewer follows or ignores the instructions, the swirling patterns and reprocessed reality continue. See Nam June Paik and John Godfrey, \textit{Global Groove}, 1973, video, 28:30 min, color, sound, Electronic Arts Intermix, NY.
\end{itemize}
Johnny Carson laughs, 50 million Americans laugh. When Lucy cries, 30 million Americans cry.”

He also notes the effects of cultural and commercial self-interest on the supposedly free press. Observing how the media’s celebration of the Apollo moon landing managed to gloss over the Nazi past of lead engineer Wernher von Braun, Paik noted that news coverage in America “has to presuppose a sort of public consensus before reporting. […] The narcissistic instinct of the consumer is much stronger than the First Amendment.”

His pessimism becomes increasingly unvarnished in the conclusion:

We are living in an image-oriented age inside a package-oriented society… The War of Icons is being waged on a global scale… America, who is destined to be the world policeman of this century, has to polish her image mentally and physically….Computer and moonlanding are not panaceas. The Vietnam is the first war fought by computer and the first war lost by America.

This television news content, produced for subconscious control, would serve as key ingredients in Paik’s video works from Mayor Lindsay on, reflecting the narcissistic instincts, and cultural and commercial interests of society back to itself via self-packaging repackaged as art.

At the same time, Paik’s writings often dodge McLuhan’s ultimate implication: once the control mechanism is in place, the content is already beside the point. With the balance of power always in favor of commercial interests, and the individual unable to shut down this new sensory input, two-way communication platforms and avant-garde materials can only be homeopathic.

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398 Nam June Paik, “Peacology,” unpublished book proposal, 27-29, box 14, fol. 27, NJPA.
399 Nam June Paik, “Peacology,” 35. Vietnam was also the first televised war, and the first war America lost because it lost control of the images of the war. Since the horrific daily broadcasts from the first fully televised war, the U.S. military has never allowed similar access to battlefields and soldiers in body bags. As Paik implies, in the War of Icons, it is the cleaned-up image that will be key to future world-police operations.
400 This news and commercial content is increasingly presented in Paik’s fast-paced “overkill” editing and installation style within overwhelmingly-scaled sculptures made of dozens and later hundreds of monitors. This shift towards immersion in a televsional landscape begins with TV Garden, first installed at Paik’s 1982 solo at the Whitney Museum of Art and featuring the videotaped content of Global Groove, which was later remixed and added to. By 1988, he produced a looming 1,003-monitor tower, The More the Better, which showed broadcasts of the Olympic games from Seoul on twelve different national channels. While on one hand this can be seen as an effort to bring multiple perspectives together, it also showcases, per his quote, the distorting nationalist chauvinism that governs each country’s coverage of the Games. See Decker-Phillips on his multi-monitor installations and their evolution, 94-123.
fortifications or “junks and jewels” supporting the smooth continuation of advanced capitalism. When soliciting funds for experimental public television programming or the Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer (1969-1970), Paik would often foreground the benefits of offering artistic content as an alternate to commercial content streams. Yet his installations, especially those with Moorman, suggest he had absorbed the truth of McLuhan’s warnings, offering a frank vision of circumscribed choice and participation channeled towards, rather than resistant to, the media-bath of modern life. Individuals and artists may select high culture programming or commercial channels from around the globe, remix their various feeds, play with patterns and set screen-walls to match their mood, but there is no choice to opt out of this corporation-dominated nervous system. This is the final result of humanized technology, and this is what Moorman’s performance as a screen-covered cyborg captures at the instant this reality was coming into focus.

V. Self-Selection and Self-Surveillance with TV Cello

On November 23, 1971, “Electronic Art III” opened at Galeria Bonino in New York City. Ostensibly a solo exhibition by Nam June Paik, this presentation focused on two major collaborations: the Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer [Fig. 3.13], which he developed over two years with electronic engineer Shuya Abe, and TV Cello [Fig. 3.3]. While typically credited to Paik as sole creator, TV Cello was born from Moorman’s specific request, earlier that year, for Paik to make her a TV cello. Paik’s solution was not what she had expected (screens inserted into a traditional cello body), and over the next five years she requested modifications to the design to make it more playable and even more evocative of the original instrument. For the debut performance, billed as Concerto for TV Cello and Videotapes, Moorman played her new cello

401 Rothfuss, 265.
402 Rothfuss, 268.
while wearing another Paik invention, *TV Glasses*, on her face. As assembled by Paik, *TV Cello* consists of three stacked screens, each in Plexiglas casing, with their front-facing surfaces slightly rounded like popular living room models of the time. Together, these three cubes mimic the silhouette of a traditional cello: a large box on top, a small one in the middle, and another large one on the bottom describe the hourglass outline that is itself evocative of the female playing it. A tailpiece appropriated from a traditional wooden instrument is used to keep this cello-body off the ground and secures at the bottom the single string stretched across the screens in this earliest iteration.  

From the uppermost box, a thin rectangular piece of Plexiglas extends upwards, imitating a cello neck. *TV Glasses* was even more basic, consisting of two tiny screens simply attached to the side of dark aviator sunglasses.

At Galerie Bonino, the visual content appearing on the various screens could be mixed from prerecorded video tapes, the concurrent broadcast signal available, and live CCTV footage of Moorman, the audience and the surrounding video installations in the gallery, which are themselves playing these sources en-abyme. As seen in footage from this debut, the array of glowing screens is again set off against the dark outline of Moorman in concert gown [Fig. 3.14]. Yet this time, her face is also obscured. Her sight is seemingly cut off or at least limited by the shaded lenses that make her entire form now subservient to the images broadcasting from it. Her eyes have literally been leased to the networks, as the talking heads and logo of Channel 7 News flicker across her surfaces. The content of her torso is regularly replaced by silent close-ups of John Cage and pop star Janis Joplin.  

In these pre-edited tapes, Cage is tellingly represented

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403 As can be seen in Fig. 3.3, this version had no attachment for the string at the top. Moorman had to hold the string in place by looping it at the top and pressing it against the surface of the largest screen with her fingering hand.

playing a 1969 piano composition titled *Cheap Imitation*, while Joplin is seen belting her heart out, emotions pressed up against the glass. Also cycling across *TV Cello*’s screens was imagery generated by the Paik-Abe Synthesizer on view nearby, including glimpses of Paik and others in the gallery. Red-hued lighting from below cast colorful shadows of Moorman into the corner against which she was silhouetted, filmed and reprocessed back onto herself.

As in *TV Bra for Living Sculpture*, Moorman’s bowing, plucking and slapping of strings in her extended performances caused visual interference on the screens, as a pick-up microphone amplified and translated her sounds into electronic feedback that caused distortions in the video signal. Moorman’s improvisations disrupted not only the image, but also the presumed quietude of the gallery. Intermittently mellow and aggressive, slowly resonant and frantically staccato, her virtuous playing drew attention to the variation between “traditional cello sounds” and “TV cello sounds,” as she called them.\(^{405}\) Within this matrix, as music and media scholar Holly Rogers emphasizes, Moorman was the primary author of the experience at a given moment, as she became “both composer and artist in an immediate, *intermedial* way” since “the aural and the visual components of the *Concerto*...were born simultaneously.”\(^{406}\) Additionally, Moorman controlled her own self-presentation, which as always she modulated to the particular site and her sensibility in the moment. Sometimes she would retreat behind a beatific smile—a stereotypical classical musician transported by the music. At other times, she would directly engage with curious viewers—the approachable hostess at a technology trade fair. Yet, these choices were made within the predetermined structures and in dialogue with the preexisting content of this circuit, in which she provided live feed content but was not an entirely

\(^{405}\) See Moorman interviewed by Jud Yalkut in Nam June Paik and John Godfrey, *Global Groove*, 1973, video, 28:30 min, color, sound.

autonomous agent.  

In another revealing yet under-examined statement accompanying the exhibition, Paik declared that his new work with Moorman represented the “liberation of TV from the TV box.” This is of course, true enough. The cathode ray tubes are out of their typical television frame (though now in translucent boxes), and have metastasized to cover much of Moorman’s body, which carries them into various environmental situations. In her reading of this moment, Rothfuss paints this picture:

Think of it: three iconic performers, one live and two virtual, whose bodies all have been transformed by video. Cage and Joplin were rendered silent and reduced to light (“cheap imitations”) while Moorman’s flesh-and-blood corpus accomplished the liberation Paik had predicted: her skin became a projection screen and her eyes both received images and transmitted them.

In both Paik’s statement and the installation’s configuration, it is important to make clear the implications of what is being accomplished and how. The constitution of Moorman’s body as a node in a network achieves the liberation of TV and not the human subject. Her flesh-and-blood body legitimates and authenticates the televisual experience as a support. At the same time, the televisual relay problematizes the distinction between imitation and real life, producing a constant vacillation between the self and its broadcast-ready simulacrum. Moorman’s own image rotates with Cage and Joplin’s on the screens, effectively illustrating the interplay between live, continual self-performance and captured, replayed mediated performance [Fig. 3.15].

Observing Moorman here at the start of the 1970s—deeply invested in the musical milieu initiated by Cage and notoriously associated with the overt female sensuality exemplified by

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407 It is interesting to note that Siona Wilson’s rejoinder to Krauss’s emphasis on the visual evidence of narcissism in video art is to attend to the significance of sound. This move allows her to consider the repetition with difference performed by Echo, the mythic female counterpart to the self-absorbed male beauty, Narcissus. Moorman’s TV Cello enacts this echo—taking in, fragmenting and retransmitting both images and sounds, in a way that registers those around her, the space in which the performance happens, the media landscape which they share, etc.—that is, there is an opening out through repetition with difference that implicates the total situation through which subjects are constantly positioning and redefining themselves. Wilson, 54.

408 Rothfuss, 267.
Joplin—we see the image of a subject constituting itself in relation to other mediated subjects. Triangulating her own position with theirs, Moorman in turn feeds new iconic possibilities back into the cultural zeitgeist, authoring the role of “whole life video artist” that will supply imagery for Paik’s video collages for decades to come. Appearing on her cello-screens in infinite regression, she is both a silent reduced copy of the live performer in the gallery and an illuminated, liberated TV avatar. The possible cost of this doubling, though, is hinted at by the haunting specter of Joplin’s youthful face, exuberantly singing about love and heartbreak just a year after her overdose at age twenty-seven. As Moorman bows with equal sincerity, the chimeras on her TV Cello flicker and ripple, underscoring their vulnerability. For, of course, at any moment, the channel can be changed and the avatar disappeared.409

On the other side of the gallery, the Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer invited a different kind of engagement with the mediated future. Promoted as a “video piano,” or more colorfully in the opening announcement as “the long-awaited video magic machine,” the synthesizer allowed the user to layer patterns, kaleidoscopic effects or color washes over a given televisual image (broadcast or pre-taped) to produce a unique electronic mélange on screen in real time.410 At Galeria Bonino, images appeared on a grid of four screens [Fig. 3.16]. Promoting this new device in a 1971 letter to his contacts at the Rockefeller Foundation, Paik suggests it could single-handedly save American manufacturing and end the marijuana epidemic.411 Blaming the 1970s recession on the lack of new large appliances since the introduction of color TV, Paik

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409 Moorman was sensitive to her own mortality, having turned thirty-eight the week before and already having had major surgery to remove numerous uterine fibroid tumors the year before.
411 For someone in the arts in New York of the 1960s and 70s, Paik was strangely and strongly averse to the normalization of drug use among his peers and the general population. His concern is peppered throughout his writings. In subsequent articles on the synthesizer, he argues that “drug is a short cut effort to recover as sense of participation,” and his invention offers this ontology, “without…inherent danger of drug overdose.” See “The Video Synthesizer Plus,” first published in Radical Software #2, reproduced in Videa ‘n’ Videology, unpaginated.
promises that the synthesizer will help the nascent videocassette market. Predicting that few will want to watch John Wayne over and over, he imagines they will be more satisfied by visuals with “the density of at least Janis Joplin… if not Arnold Schoenberg.” Since the invention of the camera, he posits, people crave uncomplicated modes of production in which everyone can be their own artist and create their own self-portrait: “The reason why camera industry (100 years old) became 1000 bigger than the art market (5000 years old) is that camera made everyone an artist. Mr. Johns will rather make a bad picture of himself than going to museum to see Leonardo.”412 He then argues that it is the desire for more participation that leads people to use pot. Hence, “video synthesizers role cannot be over-estimated, since it pierce [sic] the core of today’s social problem (drug) and economic program (sluggish consumer spending).”413 At the bottom of the page, he pasted a newspaper clipping. In it, a former NBC executive predicts the end of networks by 1980 due to the burgeoning cable industry, linking Paik’s ideas of participation and personal expression with the plurality of choice promised by cable television and its advocates.

This pitch combines several assumptions that are infrequently promoted by the avant-garde artist-as-social-critic, but make far more sense from the perspective of McLuhan’s artist-as-predictive-canary. The first and most important is that the endless cycle of consumption and novelty that drives Western capitalism is a given, and the artist serves this reality, whether through artistic innovation or industrial re-envisioning. The second is that widespread access to technologies of reproduction, with everyone acting as an artist, leads to a media-amplified narcissism, which would replace the cult of Leonardo with an undiscerning enthusiasm for self-portraiture. As the tools for self-expression are deskilled and disseminated via photography,

412 Nam June Paik, Letter to Messrs. Lloyd and Klein at the Rockefeller Foundation, February 10, 1971, box 2, fol. 18, NJPA.
413 Nam June Paik, Letter to Messrs. Lloyd and Klein.
video, and maybe video synthesizer, these would-be artists are recast as participant-consumers who can be counted on to purchase new gadgets, upload new content, and maybe do fewer drugs if they can be entertained by their own engagement with these apparatuses. Regardless of whether what they produce is “bad,” genius, or indifferent, Paik anticipates that the lure of individuated participatory production is the future of selling widgets and social connectivity. Enticing technology-based aesthetic play, in place of religion or pot, can serve as an opiate of the people.414

This brings us back to how the valorization of participation and choice gets redirected into the proliferation of lifestyle products, personas and niche programming in the advocacy around cable in its infancy. The early 1970s were a turning point in the media landscape with cable technologies being proffered as both an empowering opportunity for community-centered and responsive programming and the next great opportunity for capitalist and commercial expansion.415 In a 1969 brochure, *Tune in on the Wonderful World of Cable TV*, the National Cable Television Association (NCTA) enumerates the benefits of this technology’s ever expanding choice and increasing quality thanks to competition among channels and advertisers [Fig. 3.17].416 Acknowledging each station’s desire to “bring its programs to as many people as

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414 This prescient insight is affirmed in the elevation of Instagram celebrities and SnapChat channels, but its connection to a kind of cyborg-becoming is most strikingly portended in the merging of selfie-modifications via filters and bodily modifications via plastic surgery in the culture surrounding China’s photoediting app Meitu (“beautiful picture”) and its related videosharing platform Meipai. See Jiayang Fan, “China’s Selfie Obsession: Meitu’s apps are changing what it means to be beautiful in the most populous country on earth,” *New Yorker*, December 18, 2017. [https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/12/18/chinas-selfie-obsession](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/12/18/chinas-selfie-obsession) (accessed January 4, 2018)

415 The complexity of this moment are well captured by the “cable television” research folders assembled by Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T), which bring together a 1969 brochure by the National Cable Television Association (NCTA), a statement of goals for the “Producer’s Conference” convened in 1970 by the Sloan Commission on Cable Television, and the February 1971 issue of Black Communicator, a bulletin considering industry news from an African American perspective. Box 40, fol. 5-6, (“Video and Television Research, 1969-1972), Experiments in Art and Technology Records, 1966-1993 (EATR), Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession number 940003.

possible,” the lobbying group touts cable’s ability to deliver clear content to the smallest pockets of rural America and into dense urban centers, ensuring that no eyeballs remain unreachable.⁴¹⁷

Concluding by conflating the rhetoric of consumer choice and nationalistic ideals, the brochure promises that CATV “help[s] to carry out the intent of the Federal Communications Act that radio and television be employed for the greatest possible benefit of the greatest possible number of Americans.”⁴¹⁸

Evidencing similar interest in aligning cable with a common good but with more skepticism about likely outcomes, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation convened a yearlong “Commission on Cable Communications” in 1970. A memo addressed to the Commission’s “Producer’s Conference” lays out pressing concerns for the emergent industry:

To the extent that we describe cable as a decentralizing mechanism, we establish a responsibility to the citizens of the communities in which we live and work. Many of you say you are committed to programming for “the community.” What, exactly, does that mean? How does one define the community? What role, if any, do you see for professionals in community cable programming? To what extent will community cable allow for a diversity of voices within the community? Will there be no limit to the views expressed? Who will impose the limits?⁴¹⁹

Here questions of choice and community are acknowledged to intersect with the realities of capitalism, as diverse, de-hierarchized programming possibilities meet concerns regarding unfettered speech and desire for professional standards. Financial considerations further constrain the picture, as assumptions of “a cable system open to your programming (or the

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⁴¹⁷ This expansionist mission of cable is a suggestive context within which to deepen the analysis provided by Anne Wagner of Vito Acconci’s 1971 performance for video, Pryings. Instead of focusing on narcissism, Wagner points to the aggressively coercive position taken by artists demanding viewers’ eyeballs. This is exemplified by Acconci’s videotaped failed attempt to pry his girlfriend’s tightly shut eyes open over the course of seventeen minutes. Wagner locates the import of such work as “describing the technological effects of contemporaneity as simultaneously alienating and intimate, and how much aesthetic expectations are themselves refigured by such technological terms of address.” In light of the push to secure access to all the eyeballs, the coercive aspect of video art an also be seen as a critique by capitulation; an acknowledgement that the attention-economy is coming for all of us. Anne M. Wagner, “Performance, Video and the Rhetoric of Presence,” October, vol. 9 (Winter, 2000): 79.

⁴¹⁸ Tune in on the Wonderful World of Cable TV, unpaginated.

⁴¹⁹ Arthur Alpert, “The Producer’s Conference,” for the Sloan Commission on Cable Television. Box 40, fol 5-6, EATR.
community’s)…is hardly a foregone conclusion.” In addition to wondering what institutions and funding models would maximize access, freedom, and diversity, the memo invites comment on how ownership and regulation affect programming. Written at a moment of possibility, it concludes with the hope that, through this process, CATV criteria can be established “that would permit you to program freely, creatively and in the public interest.” Haunting this desire, however, is the ease with which these aspirations are reducible to the logic of market segmentation and the need for increasingly tailored content to fill an expanding roster of channels—enough to perhaps make a TV Guide as fat as the Manhattan phone book, as Paik predicted in the voiceover to his video, *Global Groove* (1973). Based on his letter extolling the Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer, inclusive of the news clipping celebrating cable television’s take over, it seems that Paik saw his invention operating along these lines as well. Users could program creatively for the public good, channeling their extra attention through a proliferation of constrained choices, because it was in the service of the economic good and social stability at the same time.

Simultaneous to the push for communities to think about how they would like to see themselves reflected on TV, closed-circuit television relays, like those with which Paik and Moorman experimented in *TV Cello* and *TV Bra*, were being deployed for the first time in public surveillance systems in the U.S. In 1968, the small city of Olean in upstate New York was reportedly the leader in installing cameras in its downtown to fight crime; in 1969, security cameras were installed in the New York City Municipal Building. In February 1971, Mt. Vernon, NY installed “the nation’s first police-operated low-light level television system to

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420 Alpert.
421 Paik and Godfrey, *Global Groove*.
provide ‘all-around-the-clock remote surveillance.’ This news was reported in *Black Communicator* under the headline, “Police Use TV to Watch…?” indicating that the question of who would be watched and to what end was immediately raised by African Americans in the telecommunications industry. That is, at the same time that choice was being emphasized within the consumerist framework, another model of enforced participation within public space was being slowly normalized.

In November 1971, audience members for Moorman’s performance were at the brink of these two expansions—widespread CCTV surveillance and CATV creatively targeted to their desired self-image—that would increasingly encourage them to think of themselves as reflected on televisual platforms. For now, this was still a novelty that *Concerto for TV Cello* allowed them to explore as a playful, preparatory aesthetic experience. As the video camera intermittently turned to take in visitors to Galeria Bonino, Rogers highlights how “they became active participants, with the ability to change the visual display.” Yet she goes on to note that “The [TV Cello] installation then, was not merely played or watched; spreading itself into its surroundings, it became both immersive and hypermedial environment.” Hypermediality, a term borrowed from Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin’s theory of remediation, here serves to emphasize that while audiences are physically imbricated they remain conscious of the mediating apparatus (in contrast to losing oneself in a cinematic trance, for example). This was, in some way, true of most CCTV installations presented in galleries in this period. For example, in “TV as a Creative Medium,” Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider presented *Wipe Cycle* (1969), a bank of TV monitors playing a mix of audience-captured CCTV imagery and broadcast television, replayed immediately or delayed eight or sixteen seconds [Fig. 3.18]. The artists saw this as a way “to

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423 “Police Use TV to Watch…?”, *Black Communicator*, February 1971, 9, Box 40, fol. 5-6, EATR.
demonstrate that you’re as much a piece of information as tomorrow morning’s headlines.”

But left to their own devices, participants in these situations were unlikely to do anything that suggested they would be newsworthy—either as criminals or celebrities. As Allan Kaprow quipped about another Gillette/Schneider installation, there was a misplaced belief that “if people are given a privileged place and some sophisticated toys to play with, they will naturally do something enlightening, when in fact they usually don’t.”

Gillette/Schneider participants were also empowered to walk away from the *Wipe/Cycle* interface whenever they liked. With *TV Cello*, the audience was made acutely aware of their immersion in this situation, but it was left up to Moorman’s intermedial exchanges with her screens and self-image to provide enlightening insight. This reading pushes against one offered by Paul Ryan, another early video pioneer, who wrote about these two works in his “A Genealogy of Video.”

Ryan saw *TV Bra* having a social commentary only in so far as it addressed sexual mores. Alternately, he singled out *Wipe Cycle* and his own *Everyman’s Mobius Strip*, as “concerning themselves with the systemics of communication.” It is unclear if he did not realize footage was being fed back to the brassier or if this was not a complex enough interaction to qualify. Either way, I would argue that his contrast represents a particular masculinist perspective wherein feedback is only visible via electronic mechanisms but not social technologies of control. As such, Ryan neglects the bigger loop of self-construction and re-mediation that my argument is focused on. Moorman’s performative interaction with her video icons and her own avatar uniquely demonstrated how the opening of two-way communication—towards decentralized content production and towards surveillance—would impact individuals as they thought of themselves as both information

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transmitter and receiver. Totally imbricated within the nexus of screens and wires, she also more accurately demonstrated the kind of compulsory performing within and for media that was to come. A virtuosic player, she improvises, interacts, poses and emotes, but for the duration of the work, she has to remain within the feedback loop.

The dynamic of increased choice amongst media outlets and gadgets, and diminishing choice as to whether and how to participate provides a poignant subtext to a photograph of Moorman’s friend Yoko Ono and her husband John Lennon interacting with TV Cello at Galerie Bonino [Fig. 3.4]. Since getting together in 1968, the famous couple had been subject to inescapable media attention and harassment, a violating form of non-governmental surveillance that Ono thematized in her cinéma vérité piece Rape (score 1968/film 1969) [3.19]. At the same time, they quickly adapted to this reality as full time (or “whole life”) media performers, turning their 1969 honeymoon into “Bed-ins for Piece”—essentially weeks-long commercials against the Vietnam War [Fig. 3.20]. Facing TV Cello, Lennon draws Moorman’s bow across screens showing Cage, Joplin or Moorman, all of whom experienced some level of notoriety and found themselves forced to play with their own public image in some way.428 In preparing the general audience for a future in which even the most mundane amongst them will be crafting mediated persona for the public, these famous figures staring at screens staring back at them effectively announce a new media mantra, “no choice but choice,” that will guide participation in this shared electronic nervous system going forward.429 Like the city-dweller who still uses their sense of sight despite an unsightly environment, the individual has no choice but to navigate this media-

428 In a June 26, 1974 letter to Wulf Herzogenrath, regarding the presentation of TV Cello at Projekt ‘74 at Kölnischen Kunstverein in Cologne Germany, Paik is explicit about this relationship, when listing equipment needs including a camera “in order to put V I Ps faces in her cello.” Letter reproduced in Cello Anthology, unpagedinated.
429 In his book, No One Makes You Shop at Wal-Mart: The Surprising Deceptions of Individual Choice, Tom Slee gives a “Short Modern History of Choice” that tags the rising emphasis in the U.S. on individual choice and unfettered markets (in place of communal ideals) to the economic slowdown of the 1970s. His history ends with the same conclusion that Moorman and Paik’s projects suggest: “no choice but choice.” (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006), 3-8.
saturated landscape. Their new sensory extension plugs into information networks through which societal and personal identities are constituted via choices that register in this all-encompassing feedback loop, whether one intends to participate or not.

This points to another truth that Paik tends to elide in his writings, but that Moorman’s performances in these installations make clear. Concluding his 1965 essay “Cybernetic Art,” in which he cites both McLuhan and Weiner emphasizing cybernetics as the “science of pure relationships,” in larger bold font, Paik declares, “We are in open circuits.” Yet as Paik well knew, and wrote in a later discussion of larger global feedback loops of war and peace, “feedback never occurs in an open circuit. CLOSED CYCLE is the unconditional pre-requisite for this happening.” The imagined liberation of “open circuits” and two-way communication is simply the expansion from a relatively closed feedback loop to a larger circuit that could someday be inclusive of all aspects of daily life. In TV Cello, the closed-circuit feedback of Moorman and her audience appearing on screen is a tightened version of the public surveillance loops and paparazzi capture of real life, while the “open circuit” invoking screen content from the outside world, such as Cage, Joplin and the news, becomes visible as just a larger loop into and out of Moorman’s self-construction as a performer. In the staged photograph with Ono and Lennon, as with many of the other publicity shots from the premiere, we stumble upon another circuit as the live performance about media saturation is packaged for dissemination to the general interest and art media outlets, which will in turn influence what cultural producers do next. As the “whole life” video artist at the center of these relays, Moorman is not just a neutral link where these intersections are made visible; she is the ur-figure, self-authored to amplify the many facets of this future self-modeling—TV talk show guest become chatty video-art hostess;

430 Nam June Paik, “Cybernated Art,” in Video ’n’ Videology, unpaginated.
431 Nam June Paik, “Peacology,” 7.
PR promoter become press photograph; avant-garde artist become television avatar; tabloid topic become minor celebrity; sassy Southern belle, spliced with a little Cage and Joplin, become cyborg.

VI. **TV Bed, Fragile Bodies and Cyborg Immortality**

The third work referenced by Paul Schimmel as one of the installations “made for Moorman” was *TV Bed* (1972) [Fig. 3.5]. Like all these televisual collaborations, *TV Bed* was deployed in response to specific aspects of Moorman’s embodied experience—*TV Bra*, honoring her (in)famous bosoms; *TV Cello*, her classically trained comportment; *TV Bed*, her ongoing ailments. In the summer and fall of 1972, Paik and Moorman had committed to exhibitions at the Kitchen in New York City and at the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, where Moorman was to play within the installation space. When gallstones necessitated an emergency surgery in May 1972, Paik proposed *TV Bed* as an alternate installation that would allow her to recline while playing during the June 29 opening at the Kitchen.432 This first iteration of *TV Bed* was created by placing six television monitors, screens face towards the ceiling, in a rectangular wooden bedframe to approximate the size of a single mattress. A glass or Plexiglas piece was fitted to sit on top of the TV sets to provide an even surface. At one end, a smaller box with two monitors facing outward was placed perpendicular and higher than this horizontal platform to mimic a headboard [Fig. 3.21]. Moorman became part of this presentation lying atop the hard glass pane, positioning her prostrate body along a central-spine implied by the edges of the lined-up monitors. The screens were all programmed to play the same image at once, created a blanket of

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432 It seems that Paik had a general idea of a video-bed earlier than this timeline by Moorman and Rothfuss suggests. In a Jan 8, 1972 letter to “friends at Radical Software,” he writes, “Some cable or public TV should air ‘TV to sleep with…’ What comes after waterbed??? Video-bed. Ralph Hocking and I ware making a video-bed to sleep on.” Reproduced in *Videa ‘n’ Videology*, unpaginated.
moving imagery against which Moorman would be foregrounded. In installation photos taken from above, she appears beatific. Her pose is evocative of a saint on a cross, or an angelic medieval martyr atop a funeral bier. Her face is turned upward, a magnanimous half-smile on her lips. A plaque is leaned against the foot of her bed; presumably, this offers the title of the work but it reads unnervingly like a headstone as well.

Moorman was not diagnosed with the breast cancer that killed her until 1979, yet her gallbladder surgery was one of many health incidents that impacted her artistic endeavors over the course of the 1970s. In September 1970, uterine fibroid tumors necessitated surgery and a two-week hospital stay. When she traveled to Cologne to perform at Swiss curator Harold Szeemann’s “Happenings & Fluxus” exhibition opening that November, she was still recovering. During her subsequent tour, she made a pit stop at a Berlin emergency room when her abdominal stitches came undone. Given her injuries, it is startling to contemplate that the “Happenings & Fluxus” opening was the context in which she debuted Peace Sonata [Fig. 3.22]. This performance work, scored for her by Paik, consisted of Moorman doing a belly-dragging, military-style crawl across a stage or room in army camouflages with a cello strapped like a machine gun across her back. While the timeliness of an American performing this commentary on war at the height of the Vietnam conflict is clear, Moorman’s willingness to undertake this in her post-surgery condition further exemplifies her masochistic commitment to her art.435

433 Rothfuss, 252.
434 Rothfuss, 255.
435 This dynamic was present again in 1972, when shortly after performing prostrate on TV Bed at the Kitchen, she traveled in August to London to perform in the International Carnival of Experimental Sounds (ICES). Still recovering from gallbladder surgery, she debuted Jim McWilliam’s score for her, Ice Music, for which she held a cello-shaped ice-block to her naked body, bowing at it until it melted and fell away. While the sounds of the dripping constituted the music, the physical toll of this lengthy performance was such that she had to take a prescribed antihistamine to prevent frostbite. Reflecting on this recently, McWilliams denied having intentions to create works that were dangerous, but acknowledges that understanding the Moorman “enjoyed ‘suffering for her art’,” he started incorporating these possibilities into his work for her. Rothfuss, 277-281.
Understanding her self-sacrificing submissiveness to a score and the toll this took on her often-aggrieved body, Paik’s seems to intentionally position her as a both a sacrificial and sexual object in TV Bed, the work that had prompted Paik’s comments about Cold War “tele-fuck” mistresses securing global peace. It was also first shown in conjunction with TV Penis, an attempt to translate TV Bra to male anatomy [Fig. 3.23]. In this configuration, actor Stuart Craig Wood was to pose like Michelangelo’s David with a small screen positioned “like a fig leaf” over his genitals. Considering TV Penis as a “serious joke,” Rothfuss observes that, “If one thinks of TV Glasses as a version of the novelty ‘X-ray glasses’ used by boys who were hoping to see through girls’ clothing, then TV Penis could be its sinister cousin, a device for visually penetrating a woman’s deeper secrets.” But what Moorman so aptly demonstrates in all these interpolative constellations is that there is no depth, no secret, no return to the womb (and the originary wholeness promised there) to be found in the surface effects of character as produced and reproduced in the networked age.

Writing two decades later about Cindy Sherman’s Film Stills (1977-1980), Krauss would embrace Sherman’s postmodernist critique of the self, as elaborated by this series of faux cinematic promotional photographs. Each image stars Sherman, continually recast in each tableau through surface details as a different, familiar, yet unspecific character in a recognizable directorial style [Fig. 3.24]. Arguing for the work’s effective “de-myth-ification” of the autonomous, originary self, Krauss sees Film Stills as proving that there is “no free-standing character, so to speak, but only a concatenation of signifiers so that the persona is released—

436 TV Penis was only performed once, and seems not to have enjoyed much popularity. In a surviving photograph, perhaps taken before the official performance began, Wood is wearing a robe and smiling in a goofy, un-David-like manner. Rothfuss, 271.
437 Rothfuss, 271. Moorman clearly played with these sexual innuendos. In film from her performance of TV Bed at Everson, Moorman can be heard calling for her friend, the pianist David Berman, to join her in her horizontal pose, “David, let’s go to bed together!” He gamely joins her. See Moorman and Paik, Rare Performance Documents 1961-1994 Volume 1.
conceived, embodied, established—by the very act of cutting out the signifiers, making “her” a pure function of framing, lighting, distance, camera angle” within the realm of representation. What Sherman is recognized for carefully staging in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Moorman was already embodying in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Moorman’s performed interactions with herself and other media avatars, and the general audiences caught between her and the CCTV, affirm that from this point on, we are all within representation. As people conceive and embody themselves increasingly in relation to memories of, and affinities for, mediated representations, they are further inclined to disseminate imaged selves that conform to—and are to be read as—fragmentary, momentary concatenations of recognizable, simulacral identities. Because “woman” is so emphatically the subject of purely visual representational coding, it is through Moorman and Sherman’s attractive, youthful female bodies, which seamlessly conform to mass-circulated stereotypes of femininity, that this phenomenon can be effectively confronted. Yet, their critique of the imagined transcendent subject should not be seen as only relevant to women; rather, it is Woman’s already implied exclusion from this category that makes this masculinist fantasy most easily punctured from a feminist perspective. In fact, what they call attention to is exactly the system-wide reorientation of global consciousness that McLuhan predicted would be unavoidable as electronic media became an extension of the self. The post-Enlightenment orientation towards wholeness, the construction of meaning through stable binaries, and the world established by these ontologies was now under pressure, and Moorman was charting a course through choppy waters.

438 Rosalind Krauss, Cindy Sherman, 1975-1993 (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 32. In another context, further comparison could be made to Krauss’ emphasis on the desublimation enacted by Sherman’s “horizontals” (from the Centerfolds series) and the horizontal orientation which TV Bed ensures and which is redoubled by Moorman being photographed from a very similar flattening bird’s eye perspective as we see Sherman lying on various beds and floors in works such as Untitled 91 and 96 (1981).
A pioneering explorer of this emergent distributed subjectivity, Moorman presented herself as gloriously replicative. She instantiated her own rippling ephemerality throughout her televisual live performances and in taped performances which would then be re-edited into video collages that appeared across Paik’s platforms. This can most clearly be seen in her multiple manifestations in Paik’s pivotal video, *Global Groove* (1973) [Fig. 3.25]. She is first seen as a poised interview subject, recalling her talk-show appearances, pontificating into a microphone about the invention of *TV Cello*. She is then featured as a refined musician, playing in duet with the classical cellist Alan Schulman, both of whom start appearing in triplicate on her *TV Cello* screens, until synthesizer-saturated and chroma-keyed layering of Moorman expand and contract in a seemingly endless proliferation of mediated portraiture. At one particularly disorienting moment, an enormous rendering of her hand reaches down to play the whole screen on which these concatenated Moorman’s exist. After an edited interlude of other performers tap-dancing and playing Korean drums, Moorman returns as floating figure, zooming in and out of psychedelically scrambled, green-screen sutured, digitally outlined signifiers of herself while playing her signature solo from Saint-Saëns’s *The Swan*. As we see her playing the *TV Cello*, we also see on its screens pre-taped footage of her playing a regular cello while wearing *Chroma Key Bra* (1971). The two circular disks of this variation on *TV Bra* show the same footage endlessly miniaturized on her breast. Finally, after a commercial interlude and another round of interview questions, *Global Groove* shows Moorman as the anti-war, free-love icon and avant-garde masochist and martyr. In clips from a 1971 session at WNET studios, Moorman is shown crawling through *Peace Sonata*, and wearing *TV Bra* while playing her bomb-cello and smacking Paik as the *Human Cello*. 
In all these sequences, we see her reveling in her ability to play with, play up, play against but never play entirely outside of mediation. She foregrounds herself as a hybrid creature of media icons, screen inputs, and embodied self; of classical music, visual arts, and cybernetic exchanges; of high art, mass media and self-branding. That is, in *Global Groove* as in her career, she is emphatically a “whole life” video artist made up of irreconcilable, unstable, surface effects that refuse to cohere into a single character. As such, in contrast to Sherman and the later Pictures Generations artists who Krauss aligns with post-structuralist critiques of Enlightenment subjectivity, Moorman’s critical intervention does not render the subject through absence and false consciousness, nor propose to replace a myth with a vacuum. Instead, I would like to suggest that Moorman was crucially performing the possibilities of a new mythic construction, a self-aware model of self-authorship that prolifically, even promiscuously, generates overlapping avatars in response to a networked environment. Of all the alternative models of creativity explored in this dissertation, the mediated deployment of the self in and as a form of performance is the most clearly mappable onto other contemporary art practices, from Adrian Piper’s *Mythic Being* series (1972-1975) [Fig. 3.25] to the fabricated Instagram feed of Amalia Ulman’s *Excellences & Perfections* (2014) [Fig. 3.26]. However, Moorman remains unique in the degree to which there is no opposition between an authoring self and inauthentic performances of otherness. While Sherman embodies cinema tropes of an earlier era, Piper

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adopts the identity of a “third-world, working-class, overtly hostile male,” and Ulman’s *Excellence & Perfections* constitutes a “‘boycott’ of her own online persona,” Moorman is never a character other than herself, even as she multiplies.441

The full complexity and political valence of Moorman’s innovative approach was not given a theoretical armature until the 1984 publication of Donna Haraway’s groundbreaking “A Cyborg Manifesto.” While the text is subtitled “An ironic dream of a common language for women in the integrated circuit,” Haraway makes clear that her proposed socialist-feminist “world-changing fiction” is meant for all as a productive replacement, in the face of ubiquitous changing social conditions, for masculinist ideologies bent on annihilation.442 She declares this ubiquity, as well as the already-existent features to which her theory responds, at the outset: “By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs.”443

While Haraway’s text does not deal with art, her writing and this manifesto in particular have gone on to influence subsequent generations of artists attempting to think past binaries and towards a non-anthropomorphically defined, but not technologically-phobic, future.444 I want to put her in dialogue with Paik and Moorman’s significantly earlier, yet highly resonant exploration of this terrain because I see their visions meeting at a crucial but hard to isolate point of possibility. Much of this chapter has sought to balance the positivist readings of Paik’s humanized technology with the darker implications of his and Moorman’s televisional...

443 Haraway, 150.
444 In 2016, ArtReview placed Haraway at 43 on their “Power 100” list, for her ongoing influence on contemporary artists’ work and her role on the Honorary Advisory Committee of dOCUMENTA (13), which featured numerous installations inspired by her ecological approach and for which she wrote the catalogue essay/notebook, “SF: Spekulative Fabulation und String-Figuren,” published by Hatje Catz in 2013. “Power 100,” https://artreview.com/power_100/donna_haraway/ (Accessed July 6, 2017).
collaborations. Haraway’s manifesto, on the other hand, was her attempt to rebalance the feminist utopianism she saw around her, which cast technology as pure evil and aspired to a matriarchal spiritualism rooted in a return to a mythic idea of nature. Recognizing as Paik, Moorman and McLuhan had before her that technology itself was amoral, but was unavoidably altering the experience of being human, Haraway premises her aspirational vision on the very inescapability of this reconfigured subjectivity. Moorman’s cyborgian performances, as I see them, sit at the exact intersection of these ideological turns—where Paik’s positivist fantasy gives up on the humanist subject, and where Haraway finds hope in this collapse.

For Haraway, an embrace of a feminist cyborg future can help bring about the end of humanism and the destructive ontological formations that have accompanied its hold on the world. Declaring that, “In the traditions of ‘Western’ science and politics… the relation between organism and machine has been a border war,” Haraway glosses this tradition within a racist, sexist capitalism that demands progress, which sees nature only as a resource for production, and which defines the self only in contrast to others. To replace this toxic oppositional ideology, she argues for, “pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction.” Pleasure in the confusion of boundaries is what Moorman excelled at throughout her oeuvre, but it is exactly this possibility that she performs most explicitly in the integrated network of the television sculptures. A visual exemplar of the cyborg, who is replicative rather than reproductive, regenerating rather than giving birth, Moorman does not need to claim originary status over her image, the artwork or herself. Instead she relishes the proliferation of appearances across videos, installation screens, during performance, and long after. Moorman’s post-humanist presentation of fluid self-constitution from textual parts—

445 Haraway, 150.
446 Haraway, 150. Emphasis in original.
organic, mechanical and electromagnetic—likewise resists illusions of “unalienated labor or other seductions to organic wholeness.”447 Dancing at the transcendent subject’s deathbed, Moorman refuses to mourn the loss of a privileged position she never would have had access to anyway.

Haraway also casts the cyborg as the ironic apotheosis of “the West’s escalating dominations of abstract individuation, an ultimate self untied at last from all dependency, a man in space.”448 This observation is startlingly in keeping with Moorman’s TV Bra performance during the moon landing, as each suggests that the race for technologically-aided autonomy produces only new dependencies, acknowledged or not. Haraway adds:

> From one perspective, a cyborg world is about the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet … From another perspective, a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints.449

This refusal of single-point perspective is particularly important, as Haraway’s theory, like her cyborg, rejects totalizing figurations, remaining “committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity.”450

As previously noted, Moorman and Paik’s collaborative work is itself characterized by partiality, irony, intimacy and perversity. In putting forward her “ironic political myth,” Haraway asserts irony’s value in “holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true.”451 Moorman and Paik also constantly present incompatible truths in the guise of irreverent amalgams of the old and new. This is why the cyborg vision of Moorman can be simultaneously seen as a performative capitulation to the realities of the day and a critical

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447 Haraway, 150.
448 Haraway, 151.
449 Haraway, 154.
450 Haraway, 151.
451 Haraway, 149.
feminist determination to maneuver within feedback loops instead of fantasizing about floating free. Like masochism as a strategy for examining the erotics of power, cyborg feminism starts from an acknowledgement of existing realities and their discontents. The hope is that a clear-eyed engagement with systemic constraints might provoke more tactical responses by those most harmed by myths of the liberated, autonomous individual.

It is Moorman’s performance within this constellation as the “whole life” video artist that enables the duo to address the particular ironies of the cyborgian future, and for Paik’s TV works to evolve. It is her presence within these integrated circuits that complicates fantasies of operator independence—exemplified by the stand-alone magnets and microphones creating feedback in Participation TV [Fig. 3.27], or the nobs and slides of the Paik-Abe Synthesizer, where “resistance” is imagined as creating static in signal (broadcast) without noting the smooth contribution of the avant-garde artist/participant to the larger feedback loop of self-constitution and consumption. It is only through Moorman’s imbricated embodiment—her cyborg self-authoring as muse, model, operator, avatar, artwork, self-portraitist and promoter that these pieces speak of the incompatible truths of who we are in the constant state of becoming, in endless communication with the systems that surround us. While most often seen in these works as a creature of Paik’s creation, this cyborg sensibility is one that only Moorman brings to the fore. If Paik imagined her as a living sculpture, positioned on a plinth as the ironic, sexualized humanization of technology, in reality, Moorman became the living network, not only in her mediated performances, but as a touring, transient signal, constantly reappearing in live and digital replay. She traveled the world, TV Bra and TV Cello in tow, broadcasting a new acknowledgement of the self-mediated self as simultaneously commodity and construction. With her multimodal performances, she made clear both the inevitable, dystopian collapse of the myth
of autonomous Man, and the utopian potential to be found in dissolving this category, against which all Others (marked by fixed gender, race, class, and species designations) have been defined and subdivided. Because such a cyborg figuration “does not seek unitary identity,” it can lead away from the binary definitions that generate “antagonistic dualisms without end (or until the world ends).”

Addressing one foundational irony present in Paik and Moorman’s work as well as her manifesto, Haraway notes, “The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential.” Paik often remarked that television technology stems from military radars, and of course, his proposals for Moorman all exploit the easy commodification of female sexuality. Paik’s proposal for tele-fuck peacekeeping mistresses and Moorman’s TV Bra performance during the moon landing neatly emphasize how closely these cyborg fathers are intertwined throughout this work. And yet both of them sincerely believed in creative communication as a means to turn militaristic and capitalist tools towards other ends, even if the ties to these roots and logics could not be neatly severed.

As the presumed father of these works, Paik may not appear inessential either. Yet, Moorman’s embrace of the mediated reality in which she extended her spatial and temporal presence can be seen as exceeding the parameters of his objectifying frame. She also complicates his presentation of technologically-aided self-portraiture as a deskilled process. Moorman’s calibrated engagement with her self-imaging bespeaks of the machine skills of the cyborg, which

452 Haraway, 180.
453 Haraway, 151.
454 Nam June Paik, “Peacology,” 36. Here he discusses the roots of radar scanning as early two-way video communication, shortly before noting that America had made Japan, “bare and strip.”
can become a source of pleasure and responsibility when these technologies of control are fully recognized “as an aspect of our embodiment” in the electronic age. In a world “no longer structured by the polarity of the public and private,” Moorman’s total commitment to her art as a whole life video artist, and use of it as a lifeline when ill, pushed into territories of overexposure that Paik could never have imagined. Like Haraway’s cyborg, who “refuses to disappear on cue,” Moorman continued to perform works long after they were considered edgy or appropriate, using them for her own purposes as she saw fit. Most shockingly for her audiences, she continued to perform TV Bra and the revealing, vulnerable Cut Piece after her first mastectomy in 1979 and after the cancer’s return and metastization in 1981 [Fig. 3.28]. This ongoing raw performance of illness and death, according to Rothfuss, was the final transgression in a life of transgressions that many could not accept. “She did not go quietly or privately…She would not let her friends turn away.” Such a breached boundary between private experience and public presentation is of course now a dominant characterization of our avatar-laden existence in the Internet age. The right to draw a portrait of oneself that flouts the lines of propriety is one key way in which our cyborgian lives are rewriting human consciousness and sociality. Ironically, imagining oneself as cyborg also defies mortality; if the public presentation does not mask a true, ineffable soul, then the outward signs that make up the shifting code out of which we are constituted can continue circulation of a cybernetic self long after we are gone.

Paik promised as much during a visit to Moorman’s hospital room in August 1982, in words she copied into her diary: “Video is stronger than anything. Video guarantees eternal life—that is most important thing.” Moorman had found the lump that signaled her final

455 Haraway, 18.
456 Haraway, 150
457 Rothfuss, 349-350.
458 Rothfuss, 343.
stretch of illness on November 16, 1981. However, as before, her art came first. She did not
schedule a biopsy until after Paik’s big retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art,
where she had committed to playing three times a week throughout the spring of 1982. It was
only after the show closed that she saw a doctor, and even then, resisted any treatments that she
felt would damage her performing abilities.459 She had two relatively active years after the
biopsy revealed that her breast cancer had spread to her lymph nodes. Then in 1984, it was found
in her bones, which caused enormous pain but not immediate death. She turned to morphine,
which she received on a regular basis for the next seven years.460

In the final years of her life, Moorman made a series of visual artworks that all use the
cello silhouette as their formal starting point, functioning as metaphoric self-portraits that
continue the longstanding conflation of her body and that of her cello [Fig. 3.29]. The most
poignant of these, Syringe Cello (1988), also can be seen as a cyborg self-portrait, conflating her
body with the medical technologies through which it was both sustained and subjugated. Having
accumulated hundreds of used hypodermic needles over the course of her treatment, Moorman
sought to turn them into art, pasting them onto translucent Plexiglas cut into a flat outline of a
cello form [Fig. 3.30].461 The result is a bristly covering that reads from far away as porcupine
needles or pubic hair. These medicalized self-portraits were shown, along with other cello
cutouts, at a final exhibition, “Child of the Cello,” organized by the Emily Harvey Gallery in
New York in 1990 [Fig. 3.31 – Fig. 3.32]. There, to many people’s discomfort, Moorman played
a final performance on her TV Cello and Paik submitted to be a Human Cello one last time [Fig.

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459 Rothfuss, 341-343.
460 Rothfuss, 345.
461 Rothfuss, 352. This project of turning illness, its bodily impact and medical responses into art, and specifically
self-portraiture, is echoed a few years later in Hannah Wilke’s Intra Venus photographs and works on paper from
1991-1992. Like Moorman, Wilke’s self-knowing deployment of sexuality during the 1970s put her at odds with
some feminist critics. Wilke died of cancer in January 1993. For more on how this last project inflects appreciation
of Wilke’s oeuvre, see Amelia Jones, "Intra Venus and Hannah Wilke’s Feminine Narcissism" in Intra Venus (New
3.33]. She also insisted her surgeries become documented performances, calling on her friend, the filmmaker Andrew Gurian, to film her procedures, prevailing as usual against all the rules and regulations that would normally ensure privacy in the operating room.463

After her death in 1991, Paik made his own explicitly cyborg portraits of her. In two robot portraits, *Charlotte Moorman* (1991, private collection) and *Charlotte Moorman II* (1995; Rose Museum of Art) [Fig. 3.34] he reconstitutes her as a concatenation of parts. In the Rose Museum edition, the body of a traditional cello stands for Moorman’s torso and hips. Exactly where *TV Bra* would have sat on this “chest,” two small monitors are embedded in the wooden front piece. Her limbs are constructed of early portable televisions, two for each appendage. One arm is bent, the television consoles joined at an angle, so she can bow across her own body, essentially playing herself. Her other arm holds a disemboweled viola; its front face has been removed to reveal a warren of colorful wires, gears, speakers and circuit boards, suggesting all instruments are some amalgam of organic and electrical elements. Balanced atop her television-shoulders, an antique living room set sits on a stand that doubles as a neck. Its wood paneled casing matches the cello body and sprouts black wire hair from the top. In the photograph from the Museum, Moorman appears via video playback in the center of this circular screen that serves as her cyborg face. She is seated, wearing *Chroma Key Bra*; on each breast one can barely make out two smaller images of Moorman, presumably with smaller renditions again broadcasting from her chest.

On one hand, Moorman being reconstituted as a completely animatronic object of Paik’s creation completes the trajectory that began with their 1964 debut performance as a duo in *Robot Opera*, and the subsequent exploratory merging of her body and instruments, stringed or

462 Rothfuss, 352.
463 Weinberg and Paik, *Topless Cellist.*
electronic. As Moorman remarked in a later interview: “Sometimes I feel Paik doesn’t really think of me as Charlotte Moorman. He looks on me as a work of his.” On the other, this individuated portrait continues the series of anthropomorphic assemblages titled *Family of Robot* that Paik started in 1986. In these, each familial role is delineated using found electronics that might be older or younger, larger or smaller, rounder (for the female family members) or angular (for the males), and looped video programming evocative of their personality [Fig. 3.35]. Paik adapted this approach for portraits throughout the 1990s, ranging from other artist-friends like Joseph Beuys (1990) to historical figures like Genghis Khan (1993). Writing in the catalogue for Paik’s recent solo exhibition, *Nam June Paik: Becoming Robot* (2014), curator Melissa Chu contrasts Paik’s TV robots with the humanity-crushing cyborgs of the 1984 blockbuster *Terminator*. She asserts that the series “portrays a benign relationship between the family unit and technological advancements.” Yet as Wulf Herzogenrath observed of this series in 1988, while these robot-relatives no longer threaten to take our jobs, they present viewers with a different ominous premonition. Recognizing that human experiences, memories and events are increasingly determined by, recorded from and played back via electronic representation, Herzogenrath sees Paik’s robots as “the nice relatives whose flesh and blood equals we are increasingly becoming, or perhaps have already become.”

Seen in this light, these images of people are more malicious and revealing—for they are images not of robots, but of us, of people in the electronic age at the transition to the twenty-first century. With these friendly, harmless, nostalgic, playful forms, Paik has created an image of man, which, with its collaged surrogates and predetermined pictorial pattern, is frightening and subversive. He uses electronic means in order to expose those means ironically.

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464 Tomkins, 75.
Before these benign yet maliciously revealing robots brought this fact of twenty-first century life to the fore, it was Moorman who made this future explicit in her playful, ironic, subversive performances as the first full-fledged whole life video artist. Reveling in her proliferating cyborg figurations, Moorman refuted the existence of an originary subject and instead explored the emergence of a distributed self made of ever-changing flows of information, exchanges of signals and code. As such, she was able to imagine herself (and be imagined by Paik) as potentially immortal, existing in the ether and reappearing ad infinitum on video screens as the ghost animating sculptures that are conceptually completed by her flesh, even after her physical body has disappeared. In this way, Moorman is both an ambassador of video immortality and the cyborg promise of replication instead of rebirth. Yet, as her slippage in and out of historical focus makes clear, this evanescence of the individual guarantees immaterial potentiality rather than immanence; the code has to be called upon in order to continue to operate. Someone (or some thing?) has to be tuned to the right frequency for the signal to register and resonate for future beings that might want to make this information part of their self-constituting feedback loop. Hence the importance of recalling Moorman’s prescient self-authoring of mediated and performative personae at this moment. Closed-circuit consciousness has reached a new apogee with live-stream life-casting, and online avatars have become self-branding requirements for many workers in the precarious information economy. With Moorman’s re-theorized cyborg significance in mind, we can start to think about our own experiences as likewise suggesting a way “out of the dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves.”

Most pressingly, in addition to challenging oppositions between mortality and immortality or animate and inanimate, the cyborg self modeled by Moorman refutes the binary between

467 Haraway, 181.
emancipation and dependency that remains the primary roadblock to a planetary future of
comingled co-existence, rather than exploitation and annihilation.
CHAPTER 4

CATALYTIC CURATING: MOORMAN AND THE NEW YORK AVANT GARDE FESTIVAL

I. A Condition of Continuous Festival

While Charlotte Moorman’s perpetual work on and in relation to the New York Avant Garde Festival (NYAGF, 1963-1980) has been touched on throughout this dissertation, this chapter will focus exclusively on this aspect of her practice. As her close friend Yoko Ono said in an interview after Moorman’s passing, the Festival was seen by many as Moorman’s true work of art.\(^{468}\) In the course of her fifteen Festivals, Moorman introduced hundreds of artists to tens of thousands of people in sites like Central Park (1966), Grand Central Terminal (1973) and The World Trade Center (1977). These massive, multivalent events were well covered by the daily press, but barely figure in art historical narratives.\(^{469}\)

As early precedents for site-specific commissions and interventions in public space, however, they invite a reappraisal of Moorman’s creative exhibition-staging as a precursor for contemporary forms of curatorial authorship. In particular, the Festivals extend her working method as a performer, collaborator and instigator, producing something innovative and unimaginable without her, but over which she made no claims of total control or mastery. Instead, she relished her ability to help make possible the artistic aspirations of those she collected into her sphere. On that basis, however, I will claim that her approach to organizing the Festivals produced a model of relationally constituted co-creation that is instructive for


\(^{469}\) This dissertation joins Joan Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist: The Improbable Life of Charlotte Moorman* (Cambridge, London: MIT, 2014) and the catalogue, *Feast of Astonishment: Charlotte Moorman and the Avant-Garde, 1960s-1980s* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 2016) in addressing this absence, but it remains to be seen how these monographic projects will impact general histories of this period.
understanding independent, itinerant curatorial projects today, which often purport to be in
service of the artists but which are most often identified by the curator’s name. Considering the
Festivals in the context of exhibition histories, I will present them as part of an important
alternative lineage for less authorial forms of exhibition-making that, from where we stand now,
are increasingly valorized in discourse but infrequently recognized in practice.470

Beginning in the 1960s, Moorman eschewed the then-prevalent model of the museum
curator who presented exhibitions using pre-existing works—as in traditional collection
curators—or around pre-determined parameters—as in the standard thematic institutional show
or in the artist-organized, movement-defined Flux-fests.471 Instead she developed the role of
curator-as-instigator, providing the impetus and context for work to be made and encountered.
By creating the conditions for new practices to evolve without predetermining the results, and
inviting artists to respond to specific sites and changing configurations of the public in those
spaces, Moorman’s Festivals catalyzed works and exchanges within and beyond her community.
As in her creative performative engagement with John Cage and Nam June Paik, she was
thoroughly committed to collaboration rather than control. Moorman’s invitations to artists were
wide open and their proposals almost always accepted with only logistical oversight from
festival managers. Moorman also worked with co-organizers, more immersed in jazz or film for

470 To use a famous example, the distinction I see here is between a platform that itself feels unauthored, such as
Moorman’s Festivals, where each iteration is impossible to evaluate apart from the resulting constellation of works
and context, and curatorial platforms, such as curators Molly Nesbit, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Rikrit Tiravanija’s “Utopia
Station” at the 2003 Venice Biennale, where a highly authored conceptual object exists apart from whatever its
structure might have called forth. Alex Farquharson zeroed in on the ironic results of this shift, starting in the early
2000s, from curators offering tightly organized statement shows to foregrounding dialogic, unstable, catalytic “sign
structures.” As he recognizes, these still “relegate[e] artists to the role of delivering the curators’ conceptual premise,
while the curatorial conceit itself acquires the status of quasi-artwork…””, from Farquharson, “I curate, you curate,
we curate,” Art Monthly (September 2003), 10.
471 See for example Maciunas’ Fluxus festivals, organized around the same time as the first NYAGF, in which only
artists predetermined to be working within the bounds of his idea of Fluxus could be invited. The degree of control
is clear in his response to Paik’s desire to include Karlheizen Stockhausen in Festum Fluxorum, held February 2-3,
1963. Maciunas wants to see the score of what Stockhausen might propose, to ensure it is not too Wagner-esque, as
he reports also rejecting a suggestion of Frank Trowbridge by Beuys as also not flux-enough. Maciunas to Paik, c.
1963, box 31, fol. 21, Jean Brown Papers (JBP), Getty Research Institute, Special Collections, Los Angeles.
example, to drive programming in those areas, a dispersal of curatorial authorship that is increasingly deployed in large scale exhibition planning.\(^{472}\) The Festival's durability as a platform for presenting non-traditional art forms also invites consideration of Moorman within the important legacy of women who reshaped the New York art world in the 1970s through the creation of sustained alternative venues for experiencing art.\(^{473}\) As such, this chapter aims to re-situate Moorman’s development of the NYAGF in a field of contemporaneous and future models of curatorial practice and alternative institution-building so that we can better appreciate the radical nature of her undertaking.

To understand Moorman’s approach to presenting art, I trace the creative development of the Festival from 1963 through 1969. While these annual events continued until 1980, it is during these early years that we see Moorman rapidly developing the Festival’s format in accord with the changing requirements of her artists. This chronology closes with discussion of the Tenth Annual Festival in 1973 in relation to a simultaneous boom in alternative arts institutions and changing economic circumstances in New York at that time. To appreciate the degree to which the Festivals are both innovative and overlooked in broader exhibition histories, I then consider them in relation to other process-oriented, city-based exhibitions that spring up in 1969 and after.\(^{474}\) By first comparing Moorman’s Festivals to the Numbers exhibitions (1969-1972)

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\(^{472}\) The first edition of Manifesta, the itenant European biennial, in 1996 was organized by chief curator Rosa Martinez and four associated curators; in 2002, Okwui Enwezor led Documenta 11, which emphasized the global contemporary by engaging a team of six geographically dispersed curators; and in 2003, Francesco Bonami directed the 2003 Venice Biennale, which reacted to the “persona” of Harald Szeemann (who had directed the previous two editions) by invoking “community curating.” (“Utopia Station” was itself one example of the curatorial sub-sections). David Balzer, *Curationism: How Curating Took Over the Art World and Everything Else* (London: Pluto Press, 2015), 63-64.

\(^{473}\) These include the Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Inc. (later PS1, founded 1971, Alanna Heiss); Artists Space (founded 1972, Trudie Grace with Irving Sandler); Creative Time (founded 1973, Karin Bacon, Susan Henshaw Jones and Anita Contini), Franklin Furnace (founded 1976, Martha Wilson), New Museum of Contemporary Art (founded 1977, Marcia Tucker), and The Kitchen (founded 1972, Steina and Woody Vasulka) and Public Art Fund (founded 1977, Doris C. Freedman).

\(^{474}\) Moorman’s creative maneuvering from concert hall to open-ended, site-specific platform prefigures the pivotal year, 1969, when canonical exhibition histories typically celebrate the innovations of Szeemann’s “When Attitudes...
organized by New York compatriot Lucy R. Lippard—which also reimagined relations between curator, artist, and site but amongst a very different artistic community—I explore the catalytic value of the curator-as-instigator. The Numbers exhibitions, populated by projects conceived explicitly for Lippard’s show and often created by helpers following instructions, have noteworthy resonances with Moorman’s Festivals but have received significantly more critical attention. By bringing these examples together, I want to highlight the surprising overlaps in curatorial approach, while suggesting that a familiar binary is at play in their reception. Once again, formal innovations that emphasize art-as-idea or information—appreciated in the privileged realm of the intellect—are highly prized and thoroughly historicized, and those that emphasize art-as-experience—appreciated through embodied interaction and shared social spaces—are dismissed as irrelevant due to their association with popular culture and entertainment. However, I argue both tendencies are related to the contemporaneous shift in the United States from object-oriented production towards either information-based or experience-driven economies. As such, Moorman and Lippard’s projects benefit from being considered together as highly perceptive, if oppositional, responses to their historical moment.

I then briefly turn to Swiss curator Harald Szeemann’s 1972 Documenta—which notoriously emblematized the ascension of curatorial authorship over the protests of artists—in order to open onto larger debates about curatorial authorship and the value-system evidenced by developing canonical exhibition histories. As these continue to privilege curators, like Szeemann, who put their own voice and ideas front and center, they often render practices dedicated to the

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Become Form: Works – Concepts – Processes – Situations – Information,” which invited artists to make works on site at Kunsthalle Bern; Wim Beeren’s “Op losse schroeven (On Loose Screws),” which activated Amsterdam’s Stedelijk Museum galleries and beyond; Seth Siegelaub’s “January 5-31, 1969,” which reconfigured the exhibition as catalogue; and Lippard’s “557,087,” which realized projects based on instructions given by artists all around Seattle. See for example, Paul O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), 16.
supportive, sustained care of art and artists—without extensive personal commentary—secondary, if not invisible. Given the increasing prominence of scholarship dealing with exhibition and curatorial histories, the absence of the Festival as an early progenitor of the site-specific, city-based, short-term, participatory, media-oriented annual arts events that have proliferated in the intervening decades represents a major oversight with significant implications for who is valued, and for what, within these new discursive frames. Not only do the Festival’s wrestle with, and provide unusual answers, for questions of who speaks and what is to be conveyed through the exhibition-form; they also reckon with the urgent issue, surfacing across the American cultural landscape at this time, of whom art should be for, and which of its possible “publics” are deemed to matter most.

Further, as the contemporary field of curating becomes less object oriented and the art-world a more globally dispersed network, Moorman’s identification and cultivation of intersecting communities of artists emerges as a prescient curatorial venture. Caring for individuals and creating the conditions for their ideas to be realized and encountered, rather than eternally preserving a collection of objects, is an increasingly central responsibility of the contemporary curator. Going further, one could argue that by bringing artists together as an assemblage over many years so they became recognizable as a community, Moorman’s practice implied an innovative reconsideration of “the collection.” For her, artists, rather than works, were the precious elements to be gathered, supported and given space for display, and it is the catalytic relationships between them, rather than objects, that the group exhibition makes visible. In this way, I want to posit catalytic curating as analogous to the chemistry experiments it evokes; for each Festival, Moorman brought together never-before combined ingredients—from untested public venues untested to unseen works and just met friends-of-friends—and then set these
combustible reactions into motion towards unknown ends to see what energies would be released. Rather than define a movement or thematize a trend, Moorman's Festivals were experimental efforts to resolve contradictory aspirations emerging within her community at this moment. On one hand, she brought an intermedia avant-garde together, creating a space where they felt they could take risks and collaborate across disciplinary lines and without institutional constraints. And at the same time, she brought experimental practices burgeoning within (and initially intended for) an elite art audience into contact with an increasingly diverse, democratically idealized public. As such, she served a vital role in shaping New York as it assumed its position as a cultural capital—that would in subsequent decades go on to capitalize on this culture.

II. Chaotic Concerts to Criminal Happenings, 1963-1965

As touched on in Chapter 1, Moorman's first three Festivals grew organically out of her involvement with the downtown loft scene and the relationships she was building with the musicians, artists, and dancers who were trying out and developing new work in these spaces. From the outset, the Festivals also fostered the exchange of ideas between a globally imagined avant-garde and New York's creative community. First accessed through New Music connections stretching from New York to Darmstadt to Tokyo, this network soon became intertwined with intermedia experimenters across disciplines. Moorman perceptively and unflaggingly pursued new spaces and structures to support these developments. This commitment to her artists was rivaled only by her belief in their role in public life. With a religious zeal that earned her the moniker “Jeanne d’Arc of New Music” from French composer

Edgard Varèse, she sought from the very beginning to build bridges between her avant-garde community and an unfiltered audience [Fig. 4.1]. Moorman conscientiously laid the foundation for attendees to move from confusion to appreciation through carefully structured programming (emphasizing related aesthetic tendencies and historical precedents), press releases, outreach and interviews for mainstream media, and location choices that interjected art into people’s lived experience of the city. While the conception of “the public” and its modes of address would change over the years, Moorman’s Festivals never reflected the elitist position that adventurous artists are necessarily constrained by or in conflict with the uninitiated masses. Rather, Moorman pursued a strategy of hospitality: welcoming all, offering proper introductions and hoping familiarity would lead to the discovery of common ground on both sides.

With this highly ambitious mission, it is unsurprising that in the first three years the range of works included in Moorman’s programming expanded as did the scale of the endeavor and the scope of international invitations. What would become the NYAGF began in 1963 as “6 Concerts ’63,” a six-night engagement for experimental, musically conceived performances at Judson Hall (now CAMI Hall), a recital space on West 57th Street near Carnegie Hall [Fig. 4.2]. The bill came together around the opportunity to showcase the New Music pianist Frederic Rzewski who was studying in Italy at the time, and premiered works by American, European and Asian composers. Through a few well-placed phone calls, Moorman built this into a series that included an evening with Cage and David Tudor, an expansive electronic concert, an ensemble conducted by Earle Brown and Cage—and Moorman’s solo program from her April

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476 Rothfuss, 106.
appearance at Philip Corner’s loft. In future Festival materials, she would often credit Cage, Brown, Varèse, Rzewski and Morton Feldman as having helped to conceive this first Festival. Yet Moorman emphasizes that it was she who realized the idea by “choosing the program, contracting for composers, designing a brochure, addressing and stuffing envelopes, coordinating rehearsal schedules, holding press conferences and borrowing electronic equipment all by myself.” In addition to ensuring significant previews and reviews of the concerts, she set her sights on audiences beyond the hall by securing two nights of re-broadcast programs on WBAI, a non-commercial radio station in New York. In her archives, eleven handwritten draft pages reflect Moorman’s preparations to contextualize the concerts for listeners at home. These thoughtful introductions for each composer and work, as well as to musical concepts that may be unfamiliar, are preserved along with her notes transcribing sections from art histories of Dada and Surrealism that Moorman absorbed at this time. This prodigious auto-didacticism in visual art traditions not likely to have been part of her musical training signals that early on she was anticipating a merging of art forms in her Festival. Further, it shows a sense of responsibility for her role as a mediating force, introducing these tendencies and their ideological underpinnings to mainstream audiences.

Despite having lost money on this initial venture, Moorman’s financial backer, concert promoter Norman Seaman, allowed her to book Judson Hall for ten nights the following year. The 1964 Festival was structured as five nights of experimental music, followed by five repeat performances of German composer Karl Stockhausen’s *Originale* (1961) in its US premiere.

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478 For example, see CM letter to the Edgar M. Leventritt Foundation, May 19, 1965. CMA.
479 CM letter to Leventritt Foundation.
480 In this same folder, one finds hand-transcribed passages from “A History of Dadaism” by Richard Huelsenbeck, published in Robert Motherwell’s anthology *Dada Painters & Poets* (1951); excerpts and notes from Alfred H. Barr and Georges Hugnet’s catalogue for the 1936 MoMA exhibition, *Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism*; and a copied interview with Varèse with heavily underlined quotes. A typed essay “Edgard Varèse” by Jean Roy is also preserved here, presumably sent to her as part of this research. CMA, AGFF, Box 1, Folder 18.
Each of the first five programs opened and closed with James Tenney’s tape recorded interpretations of George Brecht’s Fluxus scores *Entrance/Exit Music* (1961), and included a preamble performance by Robot K-456 in Paik’s *Robot Opera* (1964) [Fig. 4.3]. Joan Rothfuss attributes this artistic direction to Moorman, noting that, "Beginning each evening of the festival with the same two works was an inspired bit of programming. It gave the series a leitmotif—better a theme song—that linked the sections of its desultory narrative and suggested the hand of an auteur who wanted to the whole to have continuity and shape."

Inspired by reports of Kuniharu Akiyama and Toshi Ichiyanagi’s 1962 *International Graphic Scores Exhibition* in Tokyo, Moorman solicited visually compelling scores from several composers to display at Judson Hall during the Festival. This was an astute way to emphasize a rising fluidity between forms, as composers produced pages that looked like drawings or diagrams rather than traditional notation. It could also help new audiences grasp the radical changes taking place on the pages of the scores, so the transition from musical staffs to event plots or chance configurations might be visually previewed before watching a performer interpret similarly abstract scores on stage.

Moorman also created an arc for the festival. The 1964 edition began with her own program debuting her full length (or longer) 24’ 1.1499”, followed by a mixed electronic music selection. For the next offering, she invited Gordon Mumma and Robert Ashley of ONCE, who founded a New Music festival in Ann Arbor in 1961, to program an evening introducing New Yorkers to their scene. Tenney then conducted a full evening of Varèse, known as the “Father of Electronic Music,” to a sold-out crowd of "young intellectuals," a salute that the *New York..."
Times applauded as "long in coming." Finally, as a prelude to the Happening-like Originale, the last mixed program highlighted the crossover between performative visual art explorations and increasingly interactive musical forms. The Times reviewer Howard Klein enthusiastically received this "fusion of pop art and music," describing Brecht's Exhibit 27 as "a fun-for-all, free-for-all work that began with a nylon rope's being passed from the balcony rail to the left-rear rows," and ended with "wild cheering," about ten minutes later when the rope had fully snaked across the audience.

Moorman's intention for the Festival to introduce key figures and works from abroad is exemplified by her ambitious realization of Stockhausen's groundbreaking theater piece, Originale [Fig. 4.4]. Moorman's request to present this work in particular, which had featured an art-star-studded cast when first performed in Cologne, allowed Moorman to engage an entire network of leading lights across the Atlantic in her second Festival. The elaborate production hinges on the conceit that, for predetermined amounts of time, a cast of “original” real people play themselves according to professional identifiers. As such, staging it required the services of a range of art world insiders—including Paik who alone could play the role of Action Composer—as well as a child and a chimpanzee. It also attracted the ire of musician Henry Flynt and Fluxus leader George Maciunas, who for their very different reasons, encouraged others to join them in picketing against Stockhausen’s purported “Cultural Imperialism;” this only added to the sense of the Festival as a significant addition to New York’s cultural

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486 In New York, the role of the Director, and the directing, was undertaken by Allan Kaprow, while Allen Ginsberg “played” the Poet by reciting poetry, and so on. For the full casts of each production since its premier, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Originale
calendar. In closing out the earlier *Times* review, Klein acknowledged the value of this burgeoning annual event:

The festival seems to be part of the city's musical life, for there are already plans for one next year... No matter how forced some of the attempts may seem, or how senseless some of the antics are, the festival is a good thing. If nothing else it transplants Village cabaret happenings to an uptown concert hall. And the uptowners should know what's happening in music.

From its second year, then, the Festival was doing important curatorial work in the field of performance. Bringing uptowners and downtowners, as well as young intellectuals and the Fluxus-fans, and (not insignificantly) readers of the *New York Times* into the know, the Festival radically expanded the scene’s reach, hitherto limited to SoHo lofts and friends of friends. Moorman herself was talent scouting, supporting artists in developing or presenting their work, introducing related but far-flung practices, and contextualizing these works through program organization and press promotion. Perhaps most importantly, she was sharing these creative endeavors with a mixed audience that could evaluate for themselves the merits of new music, art and its multimedia hybrid offspring.

In an unsuccessful grant application to the Edgar M. Leventritt Foundation seeking support for the third festival to be held in 1965, Moorman clearly outlines her emerging vision for an ongoing performance platform. She asserts the event’s unique role in the international cultural landscape, and her own curatorial intentions:

The American avant-garde has achieved world-wide recognition. My concern is to bring before the public the newest and best of experimental works, both American and

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487 Flynt’s charges of “cultural imperialism” stemmed from Stockhausen’s denigration of American jazz, and Moorman’s privileging of European composers. Maciunas relished the opportunity to attack an event he saw as a Fluxfest competitor. For more on the controversy and New York *Originale*, see Rothfuss, 96-105, and Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, in chapters on Henry Flynt and Charlotte Moorman. Starting the next year, however, Moorman included a jazz line-up consistently in her programs, and her featured composer in 1965 was the all-American John Cage. See NYAGF Folders, CMA for annual programs.

International. This policy has been followed with enormous success by the Museum of Modern Art's traveling American pop art show, Merce Cunningham's world tour, the Living Theater and the Whitney Museum's 1965 sculpture show. Such programs, when presented here and abroad, have awakened widespread interest in the avant-garde. Our festival alone turned away hundreds last season because of capacity.

There are many twentieth-century series which supposedly encompass all trends, from the conservative to the most radical. In reality, they weigh towards the already established, conservative artists, with very little new, experimental work. It is historically important that the avant-garde get as fair a hearing as is possible in our culture. Only after the public has been exposed to it can it accept or reject it.489

She goes on to list important European music festivals, stating that there are no equivalents in New York, before signing off, “I speak for 47 composers, 81 performers and 6 publishers when I say we will be most grateful for any consideration you might be able to give us.”490 This rhetorical invocation of the entire community of those benefiting from this annual institution, for which she is but a channel, would remain a trademark of her Festival communications. By the 1970s, the numbers involved reached well into the hundreds.491

The 1965 Festival, the last to be held at Judson Hall, was already bursting the space’s seams and testing the "concert series" format. Selling out the three hundred-seat theater for thirteen evenings, the lineup included not only New Music and associated scored events, but also now jazz, postmodern dance, structuralist film, and poetry [Fig. 4.5].492 At the back of the Hall, a small exhibition curated by Moorman of related visual arts material featured "a selection of international avant-garde publications, a musical sculpture by Joe Jones and three of Paik’s altered televisions;" this was the first extended exhibition of Paik’s electronic sculptures in the

489 CM to the Leventritt Foundation, May 19, 1965. AGFF, Box 3, Folder 30, CMA.
490 Ibid.
491 In thanking the NEA for support, she notes that “over 400 artists from 24 countries” were able to present work at Shea Stadium; see Letter to Brian O’Doherty, November 29, 1974, Box 27, Folder 22, AGFF, CMA.
US. Moorman again carefully structured the sequence of events, with monographic evenings dedicated to important composers interspersed with six genre- or media-specific programs. These included evenings featuring Judson Dance Theater choreographers Lucinda Childs, Judith Dunn, John Herbert McDowell, Yvonne Rainer [Fig. 4.6], Beverly Schmidt, Carolee Schneemann and James Waring; a film night with work by Stan Brakhage, Robert Breer, Bruce Conner, Jack Smith and Stan VanDerBeek; and a jazz program guest curated by Don Heckman, a sax player and composer who had performed in *Originale* the year before. This began Moorman's shrewd practice of inviting experts in genres or fields she was less immersed in to select those sections of the Festival. This model of dispersed curators working under an artistic director, whether structured by genre or geographical expertise, has increasingly guided the orchestration of large-scale global and/or cross-disciplinary biennial productions.

Following her plan from the year before, Moorman closed the Third Festival with five nights dedicated to a major work – this time, John Cage's *Theater Piece* (1960) [Fig. 4.7]. She also structured these nights to be paired offerings: Cage's proto-happening shared billing each night with works by his followers in this intermedia zone. These included Philip Corner, Al Hansen, Dick Higgins, Allan Kaprow, Takehisa Kosugi and Jackson Mac Low [Fig. 4.8]. Hansen, Higgins, Kaprow and Mac Low were in fact all students in Cage's Experimental Composition classes at the New School in the late 1950s. I would argue that such generational juxtapositions on a performance bill echo the gallery practice of installing works by a master and his school in proximity. Moorman in this way was developing her own pedagogical strategies for...

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493 Rothfuss, 137. Paik's altered televisions had been shown for one-night only alongside his and Moorman’s collaborative January 8, 1965 program at the New School, which more famously debuted the *Pop Sonata* strip tease. Rothfuss, 110.
494 Rothfuss, 135.
performance curating, guiding the public through aesthetic histories in formation, without recourse to wall text.

It was the evening that combined Cage’s *Theater Piece* with Kaprow’s *Push and Pull* (1963), directed by Moorman’s good friend Carolee Schneemann, that pushed the Festival out onto the streets, both that night and for the years to come. At intermission, Schneemann invited the audience to gather materials from the streets, which would then be used for Kaprow’s participatory Happening. But the audience’s enthusiasm for discovering “found” materials brought the police to Judson Hall for the second year in a row.496 According to Schneemann, the audience “had gone on a rampage, pulling hubcaps off cars…attacking the ordinary fixtures of their culture.” 497 Moorman characteristically recalls it as more of a misunderstanding, in which the police saw people inexplicably bringing trash into the Hall, and decided to follow them. Typical of Moorman’s diplomatic skills, some combination of apologies, Southern charm and a promise to never allow this specific thing to ever happen again got them out of official charges and allowed the last few nights of the Festival to go on. However, Moorman signed an agreement with Judson Hall barring participatory projects from future Festivals. This meant the venue would no longer be appropriate for the kinds of work her artists were interested in testing out.498

It is fair to say that the Festival was already being pulled, before this incident, into the public arena by the artistic trajectories of Moorman’s merry band of travelers. At the same time, this move outside responded to the surprising level of demand from audiences eager to experience new art forms that, whether touted or mocked, had received significant media

496 The police had been called in 1964 by Moorman herself when Paik was handcuffed to the set of *Originale* by two antagonistic audience members. Fred Stern interview, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-yzzAopn9TE (accessed 4/11/16).
497 Rothfuss, 139.
498 Rothfuss, 139. Rothfuss notes that Moorman often said that Judson Hall banned them, but that she could find proof that they could not have returned if they were willing to comply with this agreement.
attention but were not readily accessible. As Michael Kirby wrote in his introduction to TDR’s 1965 issue devoted to Happenings, “Once people have read about Happenings, there is the problem of finding one to see.” Moorman rejected the expectations both in the press and among cultural gatekeepers that Happenings and such were the exclusive province of ‘the “In” people’ or the “artiest alcoves of Manhattan.” Having identified her festival as an otherwise-absent arena for an undefined, but presumably non-insider “public” to give experimental work a “fair hearing,” Moorman’s sense of where this might best be achieved had already led her to consider Central Park the year before. Still, the raucous response to Push and Pull underscores the challenges Moorman successfully navigated as she opened her festival to broader and broader audiences, liaised with authorities from police to city officials, and went on showing participatory, at times anarchic, work in unwieldy environments.

III. Dada Picnic to Intermedia Parade, 1966-1968

Over the next few years, the form of the Festival changed in dialogue with the cultural revolutions playing out in American society and in response to carefully selected sites that supported this exchange. The timing for Moorman’s move to the great outdoors could not have been better. Under the newly elected Democratic mayor John Lindsay, the city parks were


502 For quote, see again CM to the Leventritt Foundation, CMA; and for earlier park application, Rothfuss, 166.
entrusted to Commissioner Thomas P. F. Hoving, better known in art circles as a curator of medieval art at, and later Director of, the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Inspired by the endurance festivals she had participated in during her European tours, such as 24 Stunden (24 hours) in June 1965, Moorman hoped the proceedings could last from sunrise to sunrise. Instead, they agreed on Friday September 9 from dawn till midnight. For this freely accessible event, she further promised to not program anything with nudity or “heavy politics.” This did not prevent several works with political resonance from taking place, but Moorman played the game that many international curators regularly engage in, navigating local politics in such a way as to present critical contemporary art without closing down the channels that allow it to appear.

In addition to the large gesture of moving outdoors, Moorman employed two framing devices that gave the 4th NYAGF some cohesion, without over-determining the work the artists could produce. First, out of the many diverse locales encompassed by Central Park, she selected the Conservatory Pond as the Festival’s site, a whimsical space where sculptures of Alice in Wonderland, the Mad Hatter and Hans Christian Anderson would be watching over the artists (and audiences) at play. At this popular destination for the city’s children, the family-friendly exuberance of environmentally embedded Happenings was amplified throughout the day. Both

503 More current examples of this include the need to avoid directly confronting the Cuban government at the Havana Biennial or showing offensive material at the Sharjah Bienniale in the United Arab Emirates, while still showing work with a critical pedigree. These constraints are most visible when they are overstepped, as in the 2011 firing of the Sharjah Biennial curator or Tania Brugera’s censure for presenting Tatlin’s Whisper, seen as “a blow at the Cuban Revolution,” in the 2009 Havana Biennial. While New York in 1966 was not quite this extreme of a scenario, Moorman was impressively able to retain the cooperation of local bureaucracies for her counter-cultural happenings throughout the morally contentious and economically depressed 1970s. See discussions of overstep examples in Hanan Toukan, “Boat Rocking in the Art Islands, Politics, Plots and Dismissals in Sharjah’s Tenth Biennial,” Jadaliyya, May 2, 2011 http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/1389/boat-rocking-in-the-art-islands_politics-plots-and (accessed 8/4/2017) and Mostafa Heddaya, “The 12th Havana Biennial’s Neoliberal Arrival,” BlouinArtinfo.com, June 16, 2015 http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1180089/the-12th-havana-biennials-neoliberal-arrival (accessed 8/4/2017).

504 While Jefferson Airplane’s iconic “White Rabbit” song linking Alice’s experience to LSD came out in 1967, it is entirely possible that the implied drug references in Lewis Caroll’s original books added to the counter-culture frisson of the site as well. However, promoting mind-altering drugs, rather than mind-bending art, was never something Moorman referenced in her festival planning.
reviewers for the *New York Times* (one covering day, one covering night) highlighted the intergenerational engagement. Dan Sullivan observed:

> As noon approached, wherever you looked, things were swinging. The adults were stringing toilet paper in the trees, and the children kicking balloons around in Charles Frazier’s collapsible spacedrome and even the policemen were trying to be with it. ‘You gotta understand these people, gotta be enlightened.’

Reporting later in the day, his colleague Richard Shepard wrote, “Kids, too young yet to rebel against the older rebels, had their moment in the sun… There were several hundred people, all sizes, shapes, hairdos and ages…” Moorman explained the event’s ethos to Sullivan, “We’re trying to express ourselves… Something older people too often forget.”

The other curatorial framing device was Moorman’s decision to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Cabaret Voltaire, the birthplace of Dada in Zurich, by including several works by original Dada artists. As such, Moorman was part of a critical wave recognizing the significance of Dada for contemporary avant-garde practices and for the modernist story, writ large. Her choice to make this anniversary part of the Festival’s public messaging also added historical context to the proceedings, rejuvenating older works in front of new audiences for live art, while lending legitimacy to younger artists with a similar anti-art sensibility. Impressively, through her burgeoning connections in the German avant-garde, Moorman obtained the score for and presented the world premier of a piece by Kurt Schwitters, written in 1924 but never

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507 Sullivan, 19.
508 This increasing historical recognition kicked off with Robert Motherwell’s anthology *Dada Painters & Poets* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1951), the same source Moorman transcribed passages from in preparation for her radio broadcast in 1963. See fn 4.13.
509 This strategy of suggesting “historical anchors,” for contemporary performance practices has since been taken up by RosaLee Goldberg in presenting the Performa biennial rosters, which have had Surrealism, Futurism, Russian Constructivism and, of course, Dada as themes that tie today’s work to urgencies of the past. See for example, the 2009 edition catalogue, *Performa 09: Back to Futurism* (New York: Performa Publications, 2011).
performed.\textsuperscript{510} 

*Class Struggle Opera* was a clearly political yet absurdist drama that in its simplicity was able to speak across generations and nationalities. It consisted of a divided cast, each half of which alternates shouting “Up!” or “Down!” at the other for an hour; in this inaugural realization, a dozen of the performers were perched on stepladders, literalizing the idea of social and spatial hierarchies. According to the *Times*, the audience “got into the spirit and shouted back. Nothing was settled.”\textsuperscript{511} The German Dadaist and New York transplant, Richard Huelsenbeck contributed as he had the year before to the poetry offerings of the day, and films by Hans Richter were shown as part of Robert Breer’s curated film program later that evening. Huelsenbeck affirmed the solidarity between the historic and contemporary avant-gardes in a speech to the assembled crowd: “I express sympathy for all you are doing.”\textsuperscript{512} Discrete performances, like the Schwitters’, and Breer’s film program followed a loose schedule (invariably running late), while many durational, audience-engagement projects and installations, like Frazier’s *Spacedome* (1966) [Fig. 4.9], were accessible throughout.\textsuperscript{513} The crowd, which naturally ebbed, flowed and changed composition as day turned to night, was estimated by Moorman to be approximately 15,000.\textsuperscript{514}

Schwitters’ *Class Struggle Opera* found its closest offspring in a shockingly visceral piece conceived by Jim McWilliams. For *American Picnic* (1966) [Fig. 4.10], McWilliams and his student Robert Burridge set themselves the task of eating hot dogs, watermelon and Coke

\textsuperscript{510} Rothfuss notes it likely came through Wolf Vostell or Thomas Schmit; the work was referenced in letters by them to her in 1965 and 1966 respectively. See footnote 13.12, 398.

\textsuperscript{511} Shepard, 19.

\textsuperscript{512} Sullivan, 19.

\textsuperscript{513} Sullivan noted the Festival was to start at 6am but little seemed to happen before 8am, when Moorman arrived late to her own festival. However, Ono’s *Sunrise Event* was likely unrecognized as art but occurring right on schedule. Sullivan, 19.

Cola until they vomited, with the intention that the sight and smell would induce a chain reaction amongst viewers.\footnote{Stephen Varble, “Interview with Charlotte Moorman on the Avant-Garde Festivals,” in \textit{Critical Mass: Happenings, Fluxus, Performance, Intermedia and Rutgers University: 1958-1972}, ed. Geoffrey Hendricks (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 2003), 176. A more graphic description is part of her 1969 interview with Harvey Matusow, BBC (accessed 5/4/2016 at \url{https://archive.org/details/CharlotteMoorman1970})} A not-so-subtle commentary on overconsumption and a less affirmative twist on participatory art, the mixed references to heartland ballgame hotdogs and the racially inflected history of watermelon-eating by the queer-identified McWilliams also pointed to the hypocrisy at the core of the nation’s self-congratulatory rhetoric around democracy and equality. Geoffrey Hendricks’s \textit{Dumping}, in which a garbage can of flower petals was released into the Pond, Allan Kaprow’s \textit{Towers}, in which used tires were rolled downhill by children, and Takehisa Kosugi’s \textit{Piano ’66} [Fig. 4.11] which drifted a paper piano across the pond, can be read as modeling more ecologically responsible and aesthetically pleasurable interactions with nature. Several pieces similarly drew together the imaginative reframing of the Duchampian readymade and a kind of innocent enchantment with the everyday. Ono’s \textit{Sunrise Event} started the day by subtly claiming the dawn as a work, Alison Knowles’s invited people to talk about their shoes, and Bici Hendricks’s stamped attendees’ hands with the word \textit{if}, in order to inspire “new ways of seeing.”\footnote{Artist quoted in Sullivan.} Perhaps most serendipitously, “The Blessed Event,” listed in the program as a work by Peter and Barbara Moore, took place when their child was born in a hospital overlooking the Park on the day of the Festival.\footnote{1966 Festival program, and Barbara Moore, presentation at the opening of \textit{Feast of Astonishments}, January 16, 2016, Block Museum, Evanston, IL. Shuttling back and forth between the hospital and the park, Peter Moore, the primary performance photographer for 1960s and 70s New York and official documentarian of the Festivals, still managed to capture an impressive portfolio of the day’s events. Barbara Moore often notes that Peter is the only person other than Charlotte who attended all thirteen Festivals.}

These two framing elements—Dada and childhood—are ideologically intermingled. The seriousness with which Dada and subsequent Happenings, Fluxus and performance artists pursued the absurd recombination of everyday materials and experiences was closely tied to their
critiques of “adult” values. In their eyes, reason, logic and progress had proven themselves bankrupt, having produced endless cycles of war and oppression from World War I to Vietnam. Artists in both contexts felt compelled to counter this logic in their work, and instead sought to provoke child-like openness to “new ways of seeing” while also attacking an adult world that might need to be torn down to be remade. As Huelsenbeck observed to another reporter, “The New Dadaism may seem idiotic but it is really a very healthy response to our collectivized, technological times.”518 The Central Park Festival emphasized the idyllic, playful aspects of Moorman’s assembled artists alongside the critical political stakes and historical contingencies that encouraged these artists to re-deploy the strategies of Dada during the upheaval of the 1960s. Presented outdoors as an overlapping set of offerings, Moorman’s festival presumed the public to be capable of encountering a range of artistic positions, and taking from the experience whatever resonated for them, whether creative play or political commentary. It also confirmed the importance of site-specificity in the Festival’s future development as an annual event. Public spaces served the artists’ desire to create work responsive to “real world” contexts and Moorman’s intention for the widest possible audiences. It also became a deft curatorial strategy for Moorman, with the site selection serving as a subtle structuring device. Each location would go on to provide an affective as well as implicit ideological frame. The sites become interpretive prompts for artists to pick up on or not as they choose, informing the type of work, medium and messages that abounded in a given year, without explicitly directing their production. Perhaps less obvious, but equally important, they also determine a particular set of circumstances within which the shape of “the public” might be reconsidered and alternately addressed.

In front of densely packed crowds in the Park that September day, Moorman herself performed two politically charged pieces—both works by German artists whom she had met over the summer and who had given her permission to premier their works in New York.\footnote{The large audience for these particular performances can be seen in some of Peter Moore’s photos at CMA as well as in Jud Yalkut’s film, \textit{4th Annual New York Avant Garde Festive} (1966-1972), assembled from documentary footage of the day. Electronic Arts Intermix, New York.} While not surprising in a concert context, the transience of scored works was something her Festivals would continue to take advantage of, and indeed foreground, as they evolved into outdoor intermedia events. For example, Joseph Beuys, who refused to enter the United States during the Vietnam War and who otherwise has no record of creating pieces for others, allowed Moorman to perform a cello version of his 1966 \textit{Infiltration Homogen für Konzertflügel} (\textit{Homogenous Infiltration for Grand Piano}) \footnote{Rothfuss, 170.} [Fig. 4.12]. For this somber piece, Moorman meditatively attached a red cross, symbol of emergency and aid, to her felt covered cello, introducing a general audience and the New York press to Beuys’ work by proxy. \textit{Infiltration Homogen für Cello} (\textit{Homogenous Infiltration for Cello}), [Fig. 4.13] became a regular part of her repertoire years before Beuys stepped foot in the country. Her second debut, \textit{Morning Glory} (1963) by Wolf Vostell, featured Moorman blending up pages of the \textit{New York Times} with perfume until it was reduced to a grey liquid form [Fig. 4.14]. As Rachel Jans points out, this performance, illustrated in the \textit{New York Times} the following day, can be read as emblematic of the complex relationship Moorman maintained with the media: actively soliciting press coverage while also critical of their conservative tendencies and often frustrated by the way she, her fellow artists and her festival were represented.\footnote{Rachel Jans, “I Love Germany and Germany Loves Me,” in \textit{Feast of Astonishments}, 143.}

This disjuncture was on full view in the press coverage surrounding the Fifth NYAGF, for which Moorman, against all odds, secured another historically resonant, highly trafficked
site. Held aboard the John F. Kennedy Staten Island Ferryboat from 11:30pm on September 29, 1967 to 11:30pm on September 30, the Ferry was packed to the gills with unusual artistic occurrences and curious audiences, made up of those who had come specifically for the Festival as well as those who found their daily commute surprisingly augmented [Fig. 4.15].\(^{522}\) The media situation, which led Moorman to pen a letter begging the Daily News to “write with more respect,” was surely made worse by Moorman’s new notoriety as the “topless cellist.”\(^{523}\) However, the repeated references to “hippies” and “nuts” in the press headlines presaged social antagonisms reaching their boiling point in 1967 and 1968, and were symptomatic of the media’s attempt to frame counter-cultural trends as a kind of insanity.\(^{524}\) Yet as Moorman lays out via expansive biographic credentials in the press release, aboard the JFK that day were works by some of the most important artists, musicians, filmmakers, and writers operating in the international avant-garde [Fig. 4.16].\(^{525}\) Indeed, the Fifth Festival stands out as uniquely expressive of a zeitgeist in a way that did not require a curatorial statement to make its point. Moorman emphatically tied the intentions of the assembled artists, and the Festival overall, to the aptly named ship, which she selected as the physical and ideological context to which they would

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\(^{522}\) Her arrest for “lewd exposure” had been in February of this year, and the trial in April, with significant press and major TV appearances by Moorman happening between. That the “Topless Cellist” had been granted permission to use the Ferry was seized on by The Daily News and conservative local politicians. New York Marine and Aviation Commissioner Herbert Halberg stood by his decision, with the department’s press release justifying the ferryboat’s use for this purpose as an opportunity “to dramatically focus attention on the place of the harbor in the economic life of the city.” Department of Marine and Aviation, “For Release,” September 21, 1967. AGFF, Box 5, Folder 25, CMA.

\(^{523}\) She asks New York’s Marine and Aviation Commissioner Herbert Halberg to intercede with the press on her behalf in her September 21, 1967 letter to Halberg. AGFF Box 5, Folder 25, CMA.


\(^{525}\) Letter to Halberg, September 21, 1967. Moorman’s letter also details the prestigious colleges, museum collections, and even international press outlets that have respected the work of the artists being disparaged by the muckraking of the Daily News.
respond: “Our generation, with the assassination of Kennedy, the war, the bomb—well, in times like this you just can’t expect the kind of art you had before.”526

In addition to requesting the presidentially-named boat, in her letter to Marine and Aviation Commissioner Herbert Halberg, Moorman asks that the ferry “travel to the Statue of Liberty and back approximately every three hours.”527 Ultimately, the ship traveled its usual course from lower Manhattan to Staten Island and back the entire twenty-four hours. Yet as Moorman was clearly aware, this trip itself opened onto vistas of this symbol of the US’s promise of liberty and New York’s historic receptivity to artworks, ideas and immigrants from abroad. Her press release stresses the internationalism of the hundred and twenty artists involved, “from Japan, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Belgium, France, Sweden, Chili, Argentina, Korea, Canada, Iceland, Switzerland and the US,” represented by performances, films and tapes sent in from all over, and compositions and event scores that may or may not have been enacted in any way recognizable to the average attendee.528

Like the childlike yet rowdy Dadaist atmosphere encouraged by Central Park’s Conservatory Pond, the JFK became a springboard for individual artists to collectively respond to patriotism, nationalism and internationalism, as well as the ebbs and flows of the harbor, where nature, people and goods are in constant motion. Ay-O, who Moorman proudly promoted as just having returned from representing Japan at the 1966 Venice Biennale, created the beautifully optimistic performance Statue in Rainbow and textile piece Rainbow Flag [Fig. 4.17]. Replacing national flags with a 300-foot rainbow-striped banner of peace, and an untouchable

526 Quoted in Jay Levin, “Where It’s Happening—On the Hippiest Ferry,” New York Post, September 30, 1967. In Moorman’s August 18, 1967 letter requesting this specific ship from Halberg, she gives an alternate logic for this selection: “Because no one has done more for the Arts than the late President Kennedy, we would be most honored if we could hold our Festival on the ferry boat named after him.” AGFF Box 5, Folder 25, CMA.
527 “5th Annual New York Avant-Garde Festival,” Press Release, AGFF Box 5, Folder 15, CMA.
bronze sculpture with a living, interactive beauty wrapped in rainbow cloth, Ay-O’s works affirmed a global yearning for harmony and freedom. Elsewhere on the boat, Brooklyn-born Ralph (Montañez) Ortiz took a different view of Lady Liberty. As witnessed by The Village Voice’s Leticia Kent,

Ortiz, a destructivist artist, sliced at an image of the Statue of Liberty that he had projected on a white sheet of paper. Red dye ran, like blood from the razor cuts and drew grasps from passengers…

A direct retort to “immigrant-nation” rhetoric and “a response to the pervading will to kill” by the future founder of El Museo del Barrio, Melting Pot (or Operation Liberty) certainly showed the degree to which Moorman allowed her artists to push into political territory despite promises to city officials. Taking a more abstract approach to the site, artist Ken Dewey called on his authority as special projects director for the State Arts Council to secure a fireboat, which accompanied the JFK on its maiden midnight voyage to perform his Water Curtain II. Adapting a water-and-light display that the fireboat was occasionally asked to execute for patrons aboard luxury liners, Dewey added color filters to the ships’ spotlights and directed the rhythm of illumination and spray by radio from the control center of the JFK. As Dewey described it days later:

We made light patterns with the fireboat sprays, like gigantic moving foundations, starting with boat-shape-obscuring forms and moving into plume and tail feature forms. It passed the Statue of Liberty crested with a water-light Indian headdress, then dropped

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529 Fluxus-associate Veronika Pietkiewicz roamed the boat as Lady Liberty wearing a multicolored flowing dress that matched the rainbow-colored flag streaming behind her and across the deck of the boat. Higgins, Feast of Astonishments, 75.
530 Leticia Kent, “Almost Freaking Out on the Staten Is. Ferry,” The Village Voice, October 5, 1967. CMA. According to Ortiz, it was real blood, which he squeezed onto the words “OK, USA, JFK, COOL, PAID” as written by Al Hansen. Jud Yalkut, “Crossing the Great Water,” The Westside News, October 19, 1967. CMA
behind the ferry ...The crew were extremely enthusiastic. It’s about time fireman took over a modern art festival.533

In this way, the fireboat’s festive light show, typically deployed to impress corporate yachts, was reimagined as a collaborative work between an artist-administrator and a crew of firemen-sailor-environmental-light-artists.

Without it being explicitly suggested as a theme, many other participants in the ferry Festival either created or submitted existing works with water as a central metaphor. Performers in Takehisa Kosugi’s *Catch Wave*, produced “spatial electronic music” by playing catch with electronic elements. The film program featured the public debut of *Wavelength*, a foundational work of structuralist cinema in which a long, slow zoom across a loft ends by dissolving into a photo of the bay off South Ferry.534 The score for La Monte Young’s *Composition 1960 #15 (To Richard Huelsenbeck)*, listed amongst the 24-hour performances, reads: “This piece is little whirlpools in the middle of the ocean.”535 This earlier score framed a potential scenario that, in the context of the festival, was suddenly site-specific.536 Attending to a different kind of site-specificity, Schneemann, rightly guessing that the twenty-four hour, multimedia journey might lead to sensory overload, created *Nightcrawlers II*. The pink, puffy polyurethane environment offered “a series of rest chambers for people to get away from things.”537

533 Dewey continues, “I’m really waiting for the construction workers, space technicians, and chemists to take a day every so often just to use their tools as artistic instruments.” Quoted in Yalkut, “Crossing the Great Water,” CMA.
534 For Kaprow and Kosugi descriptions, see “5th Annual” Press Release, CMA; for details regarding Snow’s film, see Ruthfuss, footnote 16.6, 404.
535 On the program for the ferry festival, works and artists are listed in six categories: “24 hour performances,” “for many hours,” “shorter pieces,” “electronic & computer music,” “films,” and then “jazz,” and “poetry will be read by,” list participants but not works. The durational format of the music, film and readings are not specified but based on limited footage, it seems they each had their own sequential program. “5th New York Annual Avant Garde Festival programs,” AGFF Box 5, Folder 2, CMA.
537 Quoted in Yalkut, “Crossing the Great Water,” CMA.
In reflecting on the festival experience, Schneemann added, “The most interesting people for me were the boat workers, one of whom said, I hope you get the love people today, because we usually get the hate people who are mad because the ferry service is being cut down.”

Photographs and film from the day show an overwhelmingly engaged, smiling, all-ages crowd, and total attendance was 40,000—29,000 more than would have normally used the weekend Ferry. In line with a newly critical class-consciousness among artists, Moorman and collaborators repeatedly sought to connect with segments of the public imagined as traditionally unreceptive to avant-garde experimentation. They emphasized the appropriateness of these events for the broadest and least pre-defined audience and sought to make them accessible not through dumbing down or over explaining, but through interactive spaces and projects, public outreach and promotion. Moorman also mobilized a range of entry points: from popular music, such as Sun Ra and his Astro Infinity Music, to Ortiz’ aggressive but symbolically legible performances to abstract, durational entries that one could follow for hours or pass over with a glance. Lil Picard, who performed *Ballad of Sweet Peas (Peace) and Lollipops* with a three-piece band on the upper deck, felt the Festival allowed for “one of my best experiences in happenings, because so many real people were participants, people from all walks of life who would ordinarily never be found in a gallery.” There was a consensus within the lineup Moorman had assembled that “it is important for the artist to get out and share the current art processes with the general public, and in particular with those in government.” Therefore, it should not be seen as accidental that the spaces Moorman sought for her Festivals, which placed

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538 Quoted in Yalkut.
539 See 16mm film footage by Rene Casteran (https://youtu.be/ci6eCRQB30Q), and CM interview with Harvey Matusow, 1969, BBC (accessed 5/4/2016 at https://archive.org/details/CharlotteMoorman1970). The high attendance estimates of Moorman’s Park festival suddenly seem more likely, as these tens-of-thousands were tabulated by nickel-fares collected as people boarded.
540 Quoted in Yalkut. CMA.
541 Ken Dewey, quoted in Yalkut, “Crossing the Great Water,” CMA.
the artists in the way of everyday park-goers or commuters, also placed the avant-garde community in a cooperative dialogue with the civic leadership of a city that, “like Paris in the 20s,” stood to benefit from an outpouring of artistic activity, an influx of international creative energy, and a culturally-driven local economy.542

This does not mean Moorman felt that art or artists should not be confrontational—as noted, some of the work on board the JFK was pointedly political. Moorman and many of her cohort had participated in Angry Art Weeks in January 1967, using their art to protest the United States’ escalating involvement in Vietnam.543 For her Festivals, though, she sought to get beyond the cliché of an a priori, perpetual antagonism between the avant-garde, the public and those in power. In 1973, she confessed, “I’m very bored with the concept that art is for a few people—the chosen few… I have a secret love for reaching people who don’t get to museums or concerts normally.”544 Ironically, while this kind of populism is often dismissed by more radical leftist positions, Moorman’s approach took seriously art’s power to reach across barriers instead of reifying them.

The Sixth Annual Avant Garde Festival on September 14, 1968 remained true to this belief, despite changing public manifestations of the counterculture. Taking the form of a float-driven, nighttime parade, the Festival proceeded down Central Park West just three weeks after the Chicago Democratic Convention. There, Yippies, in their version of street theater, had nominated and publicly paraded their candidate, a pig named “Pigasus,” and massive protests had turned to riots, with police beating demonstrators while the whole world watched on TV.545

542 “5th Annual New York Avant-Garde Festival,” Press Release, CMA. In her fundraising and promotional materials for years to come, Moorman would often use a version of this analogy, “Since NYC is the center of the art world as Paris was in the 20’s, artist will join from all over the world.”
543 Rothfuss, 209.
544 Varble, 179.
In a prescient letter dated August 19, four days before Pegasus’s nomination, Ely Raman, a participating artist from the 1967 Festival, wrote:

The idea of a parade festival sounds great—but I question whether 1968 is the time and place for such a format. As I see it, parades at the moment have strong political overtones and although much of what artists do is apolitical, it is strange enough to the average sidewalk walker to be misinterpreted. One or two such misinterpretations and we could have a rather nasty situation on our hands. Also, it is not unrealistic to expect that some ‘special interest’ groups might use the festival for activities other than artistic… And the fuzz is uptight enough about non-conformist activities without us setting a stage for them to have an excuse to start bashing skulls. – Maybe in a few years the tensions will be of a different order and a happy, interesting parade might be wonderful.546

Moorman clearly disagreed, maybe feeling that for all those reasons, 1968 was the perfect time and place to bring the city together for a particularly carnivalesque Festival. After all, the year for New Yorkers’ had begun with a nine-day Sanitation Strike, the spring had seen race riots narrowly avoided after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the summer had started with snipers guarding Mayor Lindsay after a knife attack.547

Moorman’s ability to carry out an arts festival in such an environment corroborates the almost mystical powers of persuasion with which she was credited by her admirers.548 To garner this support, Fluxus scholar Hannah Higgins highlights that:

In addition to a prodigious letter-writing campaign, Moorman did extensive work preparing the police department and Con Edison for the kinds of activity imagined for the parade, effectively providing them the educative framework that would make a general public open to the work and less likely endanger the project by going on the kind of destructive spree [during Push/Pull] that nearly ruined the festival’s prospects in 1965.

This included creating, with Al Hansen, a delightful set of Styrofoam models of the various floats [Fig. 4.18]. These mock-ups not only allowed Moorman to choreograph the experiential flow of works but, as Higgins notes, helped her share that vision with stakeholders by “play[ing]

546 Ely Raman, Letter to CM, August 19, 1968. CMA
548 See video testimonials in Weinberg and Paik, Topless Cellist.
in the proverbial sandbox of official culture, alongside city management reviewing the sequence of floats and activities.”549 Moorman secured corporate support from not only Con Ed—which provided generators, 40,000 watts of lights and produced a television ad shown during baseball game broadcasts—but also in-kind donations of the flatbed floats from Hertz Rental.550

The complete convoy included fifteen flatbed trucks, as well as a felt-wrapped piano by Beuys, Kaprow’s *Metallic Ballet* of painted oil drums rolled by the children who painted them, and several artist-altered cars including Geoffrey Hendricks’ celestially camouflaged Volkswagen *Sky Bus* (1968) and Christo’s wrapped truck. Among these, Argentinian artist Liliana Porter’s *Chairmen*—a white car dragging flat silver-painted silhouettes of men in chairs behind it—and Uruguayan émigré Luis Camnitzer’s station wagon with a red-stained bandage-like protrusion atop, were pointedly evocative of ongoing political violence abroad and in the US.551 Al Hansen’s balloon sculpture and Gilles Larrain’s “huge plastic rectangle filled with orange smoke…fiery and gorgeous” floated to musical accompaniment from two jazz floats, Joe Jones’ musical tricycle with birdcage, and computer music scored by IBM punch cards.552 Willoughby Sharp, at the time an emerging curator and budding media artist, and Jud Yalkut both oversaw floats with sub-curated film selections. Sharp’s super-8 program was projected onto a forty-by-eighty foot helium-inflated balloon to create an ethereal “kinetic, environmental”

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550 Festival Posters, *Feast of Astonishments*, 98. The 1968 program also thanks Experiments in Art and Technology, Judson Memorial Church, Filmmaker’s Coop, Fluxus and Howard Wise Gallery for their involvement, but it is not clear if this was for financial support. The list of Festival “supporters” would continue to grow each year, but support beyond in-kind donations or volunteered time remained elusive throughout.
551 Jill Johnston, “The Avant Garde Has a Float-In,” *The Village Voice*, September 19, 1968. CMA. Little more is known about their entries, but Porter and Camnitzer regularly addressed the South American dictatorships and US imperialism in their work at this time.
552 Larrain description from Varble interview of CM, *Critical Mass*, 178; computer music and musical bike descriptions from Johnston, “The Avant Garde Has a Float-In.”
Moorman herself floated along the avenue, buoyed by a cluster of balloons, for the first iteration of Jim McWilliams’s *Sky Kiss* [Fig. 4.19]

Courting the most controversy was Jean Toche’s *Carcan*. This activated sculpture consisted of a mobile crucifix, onto which the artist had himself tied. Sirens and lights adorned the cross, as did the word “Chicago.” According to Moorman, Toche was pulled off the parade by police “afraid he’d be a target for being shot,” sidestepping the possibility that the police might have been more concerned about the piece’s critique of police brutality in Chicago than Toche’s safety. Further threatening to violate the Festival’s “no politics, no nudity” rule was Yayoi Kusama, who apparently crashed the proceedings with a gang of polka-dotted accomplices who everyone expected to, but never actually, disrobed. Kusama herself may have burned a few flags along the route.

Reflecting the festival’s embrace of new technologies and aesthetics, Les Levine’s *Photon Two* [Fig. 4.20], a flatbed with six-foot tall neon tubes around its perimeter illuminated the proceedings both on and off the truck. According to Johnston, the float was “decorated with seven pretty girls” and “[Levine] in the middle of his harem in a gold shiny shirt.” While Levine’s project anticipated the disco aesthetic of the 1970s, the Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.) float presented a computer art collaboration between Bell Labs’ Peter Neumann and Fluxus poet Emmett Williams; this was two years before Jack Burnham’s

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553 Sharp description from “CM notes on Willoughby Sharp participation,” AGFF, Box 6, Folder 33.
554 *Critical Mass, 178*. Toche, increasingly frustrated with the disconnect between the purported liberalism of the art world and its willingness to make substantive change, went on to start the Guerilla Art Action Group (GAAG) in 1969 with Jon Hendricks (who he met addressing envelopes for the 1967 NYAGF) and Poppy Johnson. After being a publicly critical participant in the 1969 Festival, Toche and GAAG would encourage a boycott of the 1972 Festival, problematizing its benign cooperation with government.
555 Concerned that Kusama’s group would violate the Festival’s no nudity policy, Moorman tried without success to get them expelled. However, Jill Johnston recalls seeing Kusama “burning a Russian flag and an American flag,” which could have led to far more trouble had the wrong people witnessed it. Johnston, “Avant Garde Has a Float-In.” For Kusama’s version of events, including Moorman’s alleged attack on her, see, “Letters to the Editor: Ladies, Please!” *The Village Voice*, September 19, 1968. CMA.
556 Johnston.
Software - Information Technology: Its New Meaning for Art tackled this theme at the Jewish Museum.\textsuperscript{557}

From the pointedly political, like Toche or Porter, to the peace-and-love overtones of Hendricks and Levine, to the “look what we can make when we all get along” message of Kaprow and E.A.T., no one seems to have missed the cultural significance of presenting the Festival in this form at this time. As one attendee wrote, “After a year of mass assassinations, riots, political mayhem and international disorder, New York City took time to show the world that life is the most important thing…this is the most beautiful free show I ever witnessed in my many years in this city.”\textsuperscript{558} Concluding her first-person account of the evening, Johnston signed off, “It was all good fun and it came off remarkably well, and it adds to my accumulating wish that all power politics be replaced by a condition of continuous festival.”\textsuperscript{559}

In addition to the power politics of a nation in turmoil, Johnston’s comment can also be taken to relate to the power politics of curatorial ventures. The condition of continuous festival that Moorman established, whereby a light infrastructure and loose thematics instantiate an experience that is co-constructed between organizer, participants, and interacting audience on a cyclical, evolving basis is diametrically opposed to the hierarchically directed, theoretically anchored, individually attributed exhibitions that signal the “rise of the curator” beginning in 1969.\textsuperscript{560} Writing in 1968, Johnston signals a desire amongst the creative class that continues from her moment to ours—to believe that communitarian models for exhibition- and art-making

\textsuperscript{557} According to Johnston, this collaboration between computer scientist Peter Neumann and Williams resulted in, “a carton box in the rear of the car…filled with one mile of 15-inch wide paper which will be ejected as the car moves along as a kind of carpet along the street. The mile of paper is a printed poem in diamond shapes that were structured by the computer into over-all patterns of HO_HO and UH_OH. Each diamond is a combine of five words: Parade, Fiesta, Hello, Goodbye, Allez.” Johnston. CMA Also see Correspondence - Peter Neumann, AGFF, Box 6, Folder 27 for examples of the printouts.

\textsuperscript{558} Draft letter from Leon Levitt to Con Ed Chairman, Miscellaneous correspondence, AGFF Box 6, Folder 41

\textsuperscript{559} Johnston.

\textsuperscript{560} See O’Neill, 14.
might in turn serve as a prefigurative political program, leading to new forms of sociality.\footnote{For original discussion of prefigurative politics, see Carl Boggs, “Marxism, prefigurative communism and the problem of workers’ control,” \textit{Radical America}, 6 (Winter 1977), 99–122.} In different ways, Moorman’s condition of continuous festival also presages the exhibitionary experiments grouped under “relational aesthetics” in the 1990s, which supposedly offered glimpses of micro-utopias through social gatherings and interaction-as-art; and the rhetoric of emancipatory creativity and self-reliant collectivity that undergirds the “art cars” and kinetic sculptures that appear yearly at Burning Man—though importantly both these experiments are geared towards and only available to particular, self-selecting groups.\footnote{See Nicholas Bourriaud, \textit{Relational Aesthetics} (Dijon : Les Presses du Réel, 2002) and one of many critiques of this formulation in Claire Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” \textit{October}, no.110 (Fall 2004), 51-79; as well as her larger survey of the limits of ethical criteria and emancipatory claims for participatory art in Bishop, \textit{Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectactorship} (London/New York: Verso, 2012). For Burning Man and its art as social model vs. neoliberal symptomatic see Jennifer Raiser,\textit{ Burning Man: Art on Fire} (New York: Race Point Publishing, 2014) and Keith A. Spencer, “Why the Rich Love Burning Man,” https://www.jacobianmag.com/2015/08/burning-man-one-percent-silicon-valley-tech/} Moorman’s deployment of these relations is importantly distinct, as it does not make grand claims for these internal art-politics to expand and overtake actual politics; in fact, she studiously avoided overt statements attributable to the Festival itself. Rather, the process of realizing each required a rapprochement between the requirements of “power politics” and the freewheeling anarchy of the Festivals, the imagined conservatism of the public and the privileged autonomy of the confrontational artist, between the status quo and the avant-garde. That is, while some of her artists might express revolutionary politics, \textit{her work} was premised not on art’s disruptive role, but its diplomatic capacity—a different, if no less utopian, aspiration.

\section*{IV. The Global Village and the Changing City, 1969-1973}

The Seventh Annual Festival in 1969, promoted as a mini-World’s Fair of the Avant-Garde, nevertheless, showed the limits of art as a forum for bringing the city together or...
reforming real-world inequalities. Wanting to highlight the intersecting developments between performative, ephemeral practices and more static, physically immersive installation-based works, Moorman decided to experiment with a fixed, durational exhibition format that would allow Festival artists to undertake more permanent set-ups. The extended festival schedule, from September 28 through October 4, would also give audiences a full week to travel to an out-of-the-way location. While Moorman had initially hoped to present a series of international pavilions on Ellis Island, the historic gateway for new arrivals to the United States, she instead found herself working with two islands in the East River. Wards Island, which had been conjoined in the early 1960s with the better-known Randall’s Island to the north, was the main site for the festival, accessible only by a footbridge that connected to public housing projects in East Harlem. This area was also known as Spanish Harlem because of its predominantly Puerto Rican population. Mill Rock Island, just to the south and reachable only by boat, was reserved for large-scale works intended to be seen from afar. The city had trouble maintaining electricity on the sites, which was problematic as new media works constituted a significant part of the Festival’s McLuhanesque mix [Fig. 4.21].

The location was physically distant from the downtown base for most of these artists and their audiences, and from the midtown cultural institutions that had framed the Festival’s early days. Most problematic, however, was the dissonance between the positivist technological utopia the festival was attempting to promote and the realities of the local context into which they were intervening.

This context was one that artists and cultural workers, as they were starting to self-identify, were beginning to grapple with as extensions of their own critiques of elitist,

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563 CM 1969 interview with Harvey Matusow, BBC (accessed 5/4/2016 at https://archive.org/details/CharlotteMoorman1970). Moorman’s invocation of McLuhan as the ideological center for this festival is clear in her note to his son Eric McLuhan requesting a tape of his father that could be played “on loud speaker in helium filled balloon with his lectures!” Correspondence – Eric McLuhan. AGFF, Box 7, Folder 58
authoritarian institutions, and of the critiques of “high” art itself by excluded groups with whom the artists sympathized. In fact, the Seventh Festival was but one of several flashpoints in 1969, instigated or seized upon by artists, that forced the art world to consider its relationship to minority and underserved communities. At the opening it was reported that “[Moorman] and her colleagues had selected Ward’s Island Park...because it is ‘used by poor people’ and ‘we want to get to know them better’.”\(^5\)\(^6\) While the historical record suggests that Moorman had limited choices regarding the Festival site, her belief in the capacity of art to reach new audiences cannot be overstated. She pursued plans for this festival with equal ambition as previous years, and with some sensitivity to the socio-cultural context. In correspondence with artists, it is clear Moorman was eager to offer Spanish versions of text pieces for the large Puerto Rican community, though there is no evidence such translations were made [Fig. 2.22].\(^6\)\(^5\)

A handful of artists consciously reflected on the poverty or lack of access to basic necessities in these areas, with Ralph Ortiz distributing rat traps throughout the surprisingly picturesque island, and Bici Hendricks contributing *Vital Functions/ Refreshments*, that is “chemical johns” and drinking fountains, as functional sculptures. Yet the majority of artists were inclined to pursue their usual practice, be it land art, pyrotechnics, or conceptual gestures. Taking advantage of, and responding to the geographic potential of the site, Moorman strove to add important artists working in various sculptural and environmental media to her core intermedia artists. New participant Mary Miss contributed a rope piece that “defined the


\(^6\)\(^5\) In a note to Ono, Moorman expresses the desire to translate a poem from *Grapefruit*, reproduced as a large banner or handout, into Spanish. In other correspondence, Jan Van Raay says she is unable to afford to reset and print her *Grok Piece* in Spanish as well as English. Ironically, Peter Neumann and Emmett Williams’s computer poem for this year, *Tribute to Guillaume Apollinaire*, declared in hard-to-read graphic print outs, “O mouths, mankind is in search of a new form of speech with which no grammarian of any language will be able to speak.” Correspondence – Yoko Ono, AGFF Box 7, Folder 62; Correspondence – Jan Van Raay, AGFF Box 8, Folder 20, CMA; Correspondence – Neumann, AGFF, Box 8, Folder 30, CMA.
continuation of surface tension from water to land” along the edge of Wards Island, and minimalist sculptor Tal Streeter created *Floating Red Line* [Fig. 4.22] in Hell’s Gate, the channel between the two islands. Returning artists also embraced technological interventions, with Frazier attempting to create a man-made cloud, while Ray Johnson had hotdogs dropped from a helicopter. In typical fashion, Moorman enthused, “It excites me to get all these artists together and let them do what they want.”

Yet, over the course of the installation, the exhibition week, and in later reflections, the difficulties of cross-cultural translation and the problem of a universally-imagined art viewer would come into high relief for Moorman and the festival participants. This event, ultimately, was one example among many during this pivotal year that challenged the New York art world’s assumptions about audiences and access. When the Festival began installing in the limited public greenspace available to the young residents of the East Harlem projects, there was immediate misalignment between what kinds of participation could or would be allowed over the course of this artistic intervention. This led to ongoing clashes with youth from the neighborhood, for whom Wards Island was their primary playground. Artworks were damaged, including a Buckminster Fuller geodesic dome, equipment was stolen, and participants harassed.

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566 CM notes on Mary Miss proposal, Box 7, Folder 60; and CM notes and proposal from Tal Streeter, Box 8, Folder 15; both AGFF-CMA.
567 Correspondence from Charles Frazier, AGFF, Box 7, Folder 26, CMA; CM notes on Ray Johnson proposal, Box 7, Folder 44, CMA.
569 In January 1969, the Art Workers Coalition came together to challenge MoMA, and more broadly, the presumed universality of museums and those that control them. That same month, the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition was formed by artists and curators to respond to the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s just-opened, highly controversial exhibition, *Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900–1968*. Also that month, the relatively new Brooklyn Museum Community Gallery opened the first show of Puerto Rican contemporary art at a New York Museum; Ralph Ortiz and several others featured in the exhibition joined forces to found El Taller Alma Boricua/The Puerto Rican Workshop in 1970, and El Museo del Barrio, which began operations in summer 1969. For more on the Art Workers Coalition, see Julia Bryan-Willson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); for more on black artists’ challenges to New York museums (and the Brooklyn Museum community gallery and El Museo), see Susan E. Cahan, *Mounting Frustration: The Art Museum in the Age of Black Power* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).
Moorman, who reportedly stayed on the islands overnight to discourage vandalism, was threatened with a shovel at some point, after which police reinforcements were called in for more protection. According to Jean Toche’s public statement distributed after the festival, this led to “a Vietnam in the name of Kulture-and-Order,” while “the feeling of the kids could be summarized in two sentences, ‘They are only here one day and they already think they own the place.’ and ‘You are leaving. Good! We hope you never come back.’”

At the time, Moorman tried to diffuse the implications that the artists were a special target, suggesting this was part of these tough kids’ “normal play behavior,” and that it was “romantic and arrogant to think they were rebelling against us.” In hindsight, though, Moorman would describe this Festival as:

…one of the most terrible undertakings I’ve ever had to do. To fight the elements, go to a place that doesn’t have electricity, go to a neighborhood where the children don’t have food or television sets in their homes. How can they look at TV artwork and appreciate it when they don’t even have a TV in their house?  

Here she not only acknowledges challenges faced by this Festival, but also problematizes democratizing claims around video art—as produced by the first “TV generation”—that failed to recognize race and class distributions regarding who had television sets in the last 1960s, not to mention as children in the 1950s.

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571 October 9, 1969, Correspondence – Jean Toche, Box 8, Folder 15. Hinting at the surprisingly friendly relationship Toche and Moorman seemed to have maintained, the statement appears in the archive with the handwritten intro, “Dear Charlotte, Hope you will not be mad with the statement. I just had to write my impressions from what took place. It repeats what I told you at the time. Love, Toche.” In 1971, when he was facing forced psychological evaluation for his Guerilla Art Action Group activities, Moorman’s archive documents her committed campaign to raise funds for his defense. See AGFF Box 10-12, CMA.
572 Glueck, “En Avant!”
573 Varble, 178.
574 See for example, the first line of Deirdre Boyle’s history of guerilla television: “For children growing up in the ‘50s, television was a family member…” and continues, “Video offered the first TV generation a means to challenge the authority of the ‘boob tube’…” before discussing Paik’s first adventure with the portapak. Boyle, Subject to Change: Guerilla Television Revisited (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3-4.
That said, the dominant narrative of uniform antagonism between the artists and local populace is also misleading. It flattens the complexities and even opportunities that these misrecognition and difficult encounters provoked. In Peter Moore’s contact sheets for the 1969 Festival, black and Hispanic children are seen playing, participating and posing with the artists, sculptures and visitors to their island. Moorman, in an undated note to Grace Glueck who reported on the conflict, writes, “I thought you might be interested in these photos, especially where the children are helping us.” She follows by attesting to the neighborhood kids “marvelous” assistance in handing out poems and events, “waiting each day for Jackie Cassen to bring her strobe so they could dance in front of it,” and their love of the film program, to which one lady and her five children came every night. In another letter, artist Oliver Andrews enthused about reports that his Mylar floating sculpture “was taken from the ocean by the festival participants and carried into Harlem in the form of clothing and banners.” The reality was probably somewhere between the pictures offered by Moore and Moorman, and Toche and Glueck. In retrospect, it seems important to reckon with both the aggressive rejection of the Festival by some area residents and the positive experiences or eye-opening interactions it offered for others—residents and artists alike. Examining the privileged assumptions that underpinned expectations of universal legibility for art was a simultaneous painful and productive process for the avant-garde art community, as well as the institutional art world. They were suddenly interacting with an audience that was not just broadly defined, but truly diverse and equipped with a different set of cultural conventions. This brought to life the pressures that, in more theoretical terms, the discourse of civil rights, anti-colonialism, and women’s liberation had placed on their Eurocentric, Enlightenment models of fine art. Staging a confrontation

575 CM to Grace Glueck, n.d. Correspondence – Jackson Mac Low, Box 7, Folder 57 (mistakenly in this folder due to the Mac Low proposal on which it is written).
between McLuhan’s imagined global village and the inequalities at the heart of America’s cities. Moorman’s last festival of the 1960s was a provocative, if unintentional, encapsulation of the dreams and disappointments of the decade past, and a preview of the challenging cultural negotiations of the decades to come.

Given her experience with Wards Island, as well as health problems and exhaustion, Moorman did not plan a festival for the following year. Instead, in the fall of 1970, she got married, had surgery to remove uterine fibroid tumors, and then flew to Cologne to participate in the three-day festival that opened Harald Szeemann’s _Happenings & Fluxus_ [Fig. 4.23]. On the heels of his process-oriented, reputation-making _When Attitudes Become Form_ (1969), Szeemann was eager to present the first major museum exhibition of a genre and movement which Moorman had been tracking, presenting and promoting for over seven years. Featuring a network of artists in which Moorman was a crucial node, the show itself was a static installation of ephemera and documentation. For the opening, however, Szeemann had programmed something very similar to the lineup of contextually-contingent, live experiences that Moorman had developed and would continue to convene through her annual Festivals until her retirement in 1980.576

Throughout her biography of Moorman, Joan Rothfuss makes a point of noting the Festival’s connections and contributions to a constellation of related events. Concluding her chapter on the Fourth Festival, she writes:

As a public, multimedia, outdoor art event attended by thousands, Moorman’s Central Park Festival was virtually unprecedented. The European festivals in which she had taken part—Rolf Jarhling’s _24 Hours_, Jean-Jacques Lebel’s Festival of Free Expression, Giuseppe Chiari’s Gruppo ’70 Festival—had given her ideas about what was possible, but they had been staged in galleries, theaters or cultural centers and advertised mostly to the art world. Fluxus events and Happenings were important precedents for her festivals and often staged outdoors, but they were not aggressively market to the general public (or

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576 Rothfuss, 255.
anyone, for that matter)… Moorman’s festival was the culmination of all these precedents, and her events in turn laid the foundation for dozens of similar arts and music festivals that exist today, from all-night mixed-media spectacles such as *Nuit Blanche* to New York City’s monthlong annual showcase of live art, Performa.577

Distinct from the early European festivals cited by Rothfuss, however, Moorman’s Festivals were a consistent, if cyclical, presence in the city, extending over two decades. They appeared in iconic locations and were actively promoted so that a general public could reengage with them from year to year. And unlike Performa, in which a new roster of artists is expected each time, Moorman’s festivals grew by accumulation, knitting together the community of artists who had pioneered SoHo and studied with Cage with the hungry new arrivals and rising stars. Later festival line-ups reached into the hundreds, with first generation Fluxus and New Music contributors like Hendricks and Ono augmented by media artists such as Shirley Clark and Pulsa, dance and theater companies, and early appearances by those who would shape the 1980s scene, such as Bill Viola (in 1973) and Dara Birnbaum (in 1980). Moorman’s inclusive Festival community, from the outset more diverse than its counter-parts in the conceptual and post-minimalist realms, also more quickly reflected an increasingly professionalized base of women artists, from initial participants such as Schneemann, Knowles and Shigeko Kubota and composers such as Pauline Oliveros and Meiko Shiomi, to conceptual art/performance crossovers such as Eleanor Antin, Jacki Apple, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles, and international feminist artists such as Marta Minujin and Regina Vater.

By the end of the 1960s, Moorman’s festival had methodically woven diverse strands of the international intermedia avant-garde together and into the very fabric of the world’s new cultural capital. Resilient, highly visible, and with a clear and unique mission, the Festival in this way functioned as an early forerunner of the alternative art institutions, many of them led by

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577 Rothfuss, 171-2.
women, that reshaped New York in the 1970s. Developed expressly in response to the needs of new art forms, new economic realities, and the desire to escape pristine gallery and proscenium settings, alternative arts organizations were not always venue specific, but included iterant models like Creative Time’s use of donated commercial and civic spaces, the Institute of Art and Urban Resources (IAUR) use of abandoned sites (before permanently inhabiting the closed schoolhouse PS1), and The Public Art Fund’s support for and siting of new works in public places. Before any of these had come into existence though, Moorman had already situated contemporary art in Central Park, on the Staten Island ferryboat, down an avenue on the Upper West Side, and in the middle of the East River.578 In 1971, the year IAUR and The Kitchen were born, Moorman filled the 69th Street Armory with her most technologically dazzling display [Fig. 4.24], nodding to the original Armory show in 1913 and E.A.T.’s Nine Evenings held there in 1966. In 1972, the year Artists Space and A.I.R. Gallery opened, Moorman held her Festival on and around the Alexander Hamilton riverboat at the South Street Seaport [Fig. 4.25]. When Creative Time started in 1973, with a focus on revitalizing this same downtown business district through the arts, the Festival was turning ten and had already produced two major events in that area. Moorman had had years of contact with Karin Bacon, one of Creative Time’s founder and a staffer at the Department of Cultural Affairs under Doris Freedman, who founded the Public Art Fund, meaning they were all intimately aware of Moorman’s work as they formed their own mobile public art platforms in the 1970s.579 Given the personal ties and institutional overlaps between these organizations and the Festivals, it is once again hard to understand their complete

578 In 1967, Chicago announced its plans to site a gigantic bronze Picasso sculpture in a downtown plaza and the year the National Endowment for Arts its “Art in Public Places” program. Yet, Tom Finkelpearl notes that, “While several laws were in place earlier, the national move towards public art came in the 1970s, just after the nadir of urban despair,” a strategy that was highly visible in New York at exactly this time. Tom Finkelpearl, “Introduction: City as Site,” in Dialogues in Public Art (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 21-22.
579 Doris Freedman and her staffer Karin Bacon offered to help with permitting for the 1969 Festival. Correspondence – Doris Freedman, Box 7, Folder 27, CMA
absence from the recent historicization of alternative and artist-led organizations in New York City from the 1960s through the 1980s as anything other than collective amnesia.⁵⁸⁰ Reflecting on this, Moorman’s friend and composer Charles Morrow reflected, “She grew a community around her…she was part of the soil from which the alternative arts movement grew.”⁵⁸¹ For Schneemann this historical oversight continues a gendered dismissal of Moorman’s approach: “Had she been a guy, this [organizing] would have had such authority and weight to it, because through her will and crazy vision she created the avant-garde community, the most extensive one that we have.”⁵⁸² The increasing pressures towards “professionalization” amongst the next generation of alternative institutions could also be seen as part of this gendered rebuke, as crazy visionary communal models had to become hierarchically structured organizations pursuing board-authorized programs to ensure tax-deductible and grant-based funding.⁵⁸³

When the Tenth Annual Avant-Garde Festival was held in Grand Central Station in 1973, several articles mused on the question of how radical something could still be after a decade. In his *New York Times* review, “When Festival is 10, Is It Avant-Garde?,” Michael Kaufman waved aside these concerns, observing, “while it may be that there is something oxymoronic about a

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⁵⁸⁰ This historicization has taken place through several recent exhibitions and publications, beginning with the 1996 exhibition *Cultural Economies: Histories from the Alternative Arts Movement, NYC* at the Drawing Center, which led to the later catalogue Julie Ault, ed. *Alternative Art New York, 1965-1985*, (New York, Minnesota: Drawing Center and University of Minnesota, 2002); followed by Anne Pasternak and Ruth A. Peltason, eds. *Creative Time: The Book - 33 Years of Public Art in New York City* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007) and Lauren Rosati and Mary Staniszewski eds., *Alternative Histories: New York Art Spaces, 1960-2010* (New York, Cambridge: Exit Art and MIT Press, 2012) and the 2010 exhibition of the same name. This final publication does mention the Festival, though as an example of the “eclectic projects” Electronic Arts Intermix sponsored as an umbrella organization, 136.

⁵⁸¹ Rothfuss, 306.

⁵⁸² Rothfuss, 306.

⁵⁸³ For more on this evolution, see Brian Wallis, “Public Funding and Alternative Spaces,” in *Alternative Art New York, 1965-1985*, 161-181. At the same time, an argument could be made that this history of alternative arts platforms founded by women remains one of the most impactful legacies of feminist demands to open up and alter the very fabric of cultural institutions. This is in comparison to frustratingly limited effects on major museums, where occasional “all-women” shows or token female additions to canonical galleries have been incorporated into an otherwise business-as-usual approach. See for example the projects grouped under the Modern Women heading at MoMA; Cornelia Butler, and Alexandra Schwartz, eds. *Modern Women: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: MoMA, 2010).
Tenth Annual Festival of the Avant-Garde, something like a futurist retrospective, no one seemed to mind.\textsuperscript{584} In \textit{Art in America}, Peter Frank, a regular participant as well as public champion of the Festival, reflected that the tenth Festival “seemed to mark the institutionalization of that which should not be institutionalized.” Yet, he implies that the Festivals avoid this by taking the form of an annual gesamtkunstwerk:

\begin{quote}
It is widely and mistakenly believed that the Avant Garde Festival purports to give exposure (as suggested by its title) to all the newest manifestations of non-traditional art, a kind of cyberneticized Salon des Independents. As organized by its creator and mastermind Charlotte Moorman, however, the Festival is not a mere anthology of the Best New Art, but a self-sufficient whole that is the serendipitous sum of its parts.\textsuperscript{585}
\end{quote}

While Frank acknowledges its longevity, the Festival transcends institutionalization because each iteration is a unique sum of parts that cannot be stabilized. Indeed, this refusal to stabilize, whether as an aesthetic object or as formal organization is both what makes the Festival a unique curatorial venture and an example of resolute non-conformity within an increasingly corporatized alternative arts movement. As Brian Wallis traces in his essay “Public Funding and Alternative Spaces,” the National Endowment for the Arts’ support for these ventures, beginning in 1972:

\begin{quote}
…strategically compelled alternative spaces to become more institutionalized, to seek and rely on greater and greater amounts of funding, to redefine the role of contemporary artists as professional workers and to qualify the types of art being made and shown. Those everyday practices of social control, while less obvious than the blunt force of conservative politicians, may ultimately have exacted a far greater price from the original mission of the alternative space.\textsuperscript{586}
\end{quote}

To the exasperation of those who worked with her, from her lawyer Jerald Ordover who first advised her to register as a non-profit in 1967, to Howard Wise, the gallerist whose non-profit

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{585}{Peter Frank, “The Avant Garde Festival: And Now, Shea Stadium,” \textit{Art in America} (November/December 1974), 102.}
\footnotetext{586}{Wallis, 164.}
\end{footnotes}
Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI) provided fiscal sponsorship for Festival grants, Moorman did not get the paperwork completed until 1971.\(^\text{587}\) While the Festival did receive a few hail-Mary grants from the NEA through EAI, unlike the artist-led groups that grew from scrappy community endeavors into established, bureaucratic organizations in the later 1970s and 80s, Moorman’s Festival never stopped functioning as a DIY, volunteer-run escapade. Writing to a patron on Moorman’s behalf following creditor suits from the 1967 Festival, Paik declared, “Charlotte Moorman is in grave danger… this time not for her far-out performances, but because of her devotion to OTHER people.”\(^\text{588}\) Constantly prioritizing the presentation of more artists over covering costs, let alone establishing a year-round base of operations, Moorman ran the Festivals as if the rules of financial engagement were an open score that she could reinterpret or ignore as she liked.

While Moorman did seek corporate support and government grants, she never built the infrastructure to deliver on what would come to be the standard expectations of those relationships—VIP events, advanced brochures, public signage with logos, etc. As a result, she was far less successful in this arena than those organizations that came after and tailored their operations to explicitly align cultural and economic interests in revitalizing the city.\(^\text{589}\) Describing her approach in 1978, she wrote to a colleague, “The Festival cannot run like a machine or an oil company… It runs on love and it works.”\(^\text{590}\) As Willis points out, while this communitarian ethos was the common starting point for most alternative arts organizations, the

\(^{587}\) Rothfuss, 220.
\(^{588}\) Rothfuss, 219.
\(^{589}\) It is telling that Creative Time’s first projects took place not in public spaces, but in empty corporate real estate, offered as in-kind donations from Sylvan Lawrence Company, Inc. This partnership was promoted by Lawrence and Creative Time as a “prototype, a unique program designed to provide cultural and recreational activities during lunch time for employees in the world’s busiest—and densest—business district.” The opening for “Craft in Action,” at 100 Williams Street is promoted “for members of the Downtown Lower Manhattan Association, other business colleagues, and the press,” followed by a public parade. Press Release in advance of February 19, 1974. Creative Time Archives, Box 1, Folder 1, Fales Library, NYU.
\(^{590}\) Rothfuss, 307.
majority either closed or learned how to operate like a machine or oil company during the 1970s. By the 1980s, many even learned how to work with oil companies to grow their operations. It is striking, standing on the other side of decades of corporate cash flooding into the arts in the 1980s and then slowly draining out since the 1990s, to see the early impact that these funding streams had on the New York art ecology. The subtle recalibrations these changing economic circumstances necessitated are at the heart of current concerns around what interests are “oiled” when neoliberal cultural institutions are dependent on, and therefore influenced by, the soft power of big money. At the same time, the economic revival of downtown, sparked in no small part by these same artists and organizations, quickly meant that the romanticism of working on collective, creative endeavors lost its shine in the face of struggles to afford rent. Having infused postindustrial New York with performance, conceptual and new media artists, the Festivals also paved the way for it current state as a “creative capital” in which artists are pushed to the edge by systems architects and conceptual financiers.

While Moorman’s artist-centered, love-run, always-underfunded model may not be one that many want to follow, it is one that stayed true to the anti-gatekeeper, anti-bureaucratic, chaotic collectivity that drove the first generation of artist-run organizations. Moorman’s Festival was an annual highwire act: trying to balance an appeal to the broadest possible audience with creative carte blanche for her artists; attempting to garner support from moneyed interests and government officials without conforming to their managerial expectations; hoping to elicit serious consideration for herself and her artists without ever conceding to the qualitative evaluations that secure art world hierarchies. Since Moorman remained synonymous with the

592 Wallis, 165
Festivals, when her health deteriorated following a mastectomy in 1979, this precarious dance immediately came to a halt, and when she retreated from public view during the 1980s, the Festivals too faded from memory. Without brochures, annual reports, formal proposals and approval processes, scholarly articles or serious critical coverage, after Moorman’s death there was a lacuna of institutional documentation marking the enormous efforts and impact of the Festivals. Moorman herself never wrote down reflections on her own process, and frequently drafted, but never published, a history of the festivals. Without such authorial statements, Moorman failed to secure a legacy for herself as a curatorial innovator and her Festivals as a sustained alternative venture. It is only since the opening of her personal archives to researchers that such a resolutely ephemeral, performance-oriented institution can be reconstructed, and reconsideration of her anti-authorial curatorial practice and antiauthoritarian organizational model can begin.  

V. “Care and Feeding Daily:” Moorman and Lippard’s Numbers Shows

I would now like to consider Moorman’s contributions alongside those of Lucy R. Lippard, one of Moorman’s rare female counterparts in this period, as a way to tease out what I see as the model of catalytic curating that their experimental presentations pioneered in comparable but distinct ways. Specifically, I will focus on a series of Numbers exhibitions that Lippard organized from 1969-1974. These shows will be put into dialogue with the Festivals as curatorial projects that are similarly driven by the changing needs of their artistic communities and that presciently register cultural shifts reflective of the emerging neoliberal information- and

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593 Moorman’s expansive archive was acquired by Northwestern University’s Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections in 2001, and has been being processed for over a decade. When I first visited in 2013, the finding aids for several sections were still unfinished and other sections not yet available; in preparation for her book, Rothfuss was given special access to the unsorted materials.
experience-based economy. Given growing recognition of Lippard as a significant figure within canonical exhibition histories, I hope that by highlighting the ways in which their approaches overlap, Moorman’s practice can be more directly mapped onto what is currently being lauded as historically significant curatorial work. At the same time, reflecting on the divergences in their reception allows for certain values imbedded in art history to come into relief—in particular, preference for an aesthetics of administration versus an aesthetic of spectacle, and the privileging of practices that easily accommodate the medium of critics and historians (that is, linguistic analysis), versus those that solicit sensory experiences not easily generalized or put into words.594 These opposing aesthetics are typically associated with a male-coded unemotional rationalism and a female-coded unthinking embodiment, mirroring the problematic binary that hails cerebral composers and devalues performers of body art.595 The canonization of Lippard’s Numbers shows suggests that even in praising certain women’s curatorial ventures over others, masculinist principles are reinforced.596

594 See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh. “Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions.” October 55 (1990), 105-43; and a more recent critique of these shifts in Eve Meltzer, Systems We Have Loved: Conceptual Art, Affect and the Antihumanist Turn (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2013).

595 See this argument around performance art valuations in Chapter 1 of this dissertation and for its historical background and a plurality of feminist concerns with its effect on contemporary culture, see Alison M. Jaggar and Susan Bordo, eds., Gender/body/knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

596 Lippard provides a very interesting case study for this, as her conceptual art exhibitions are by far the most highly praised, with writing regarding her curatorial work trailing off after c.7,500, the all-women conceptual artists exhibition that ended the Numbers series. (See Cornelia Butler, ed. From Conceptualism to Feminism: Lucy Lippard’s Numbers Shows 1969-1974 (London: Afterall, 2012); Catherine Morris and Vincent Bonin, eds, Materializing Six Years: Lucy R. Lippard and the Emergence of Conceptual Art (Cambridge/Brooklyn: MIT/Brooklyn Museum, 2012) which covers her career from 1966 through 1974; to the explicit mentions of only her Numbers exhibitions in O’Neill, The Culture of Curating...). After this, her increasing commitment to feminism takes priority and she refuses to use male-art-world barometers of aesthetic innovation as a criteria in assembling checklists or modeling exhibition structures. As such, her work is praised for its activist intentions, but is no longer discussed in curatorial histories, despite their pioneering role in specifically bringing a political analysis that rejects existing art world criteria to exhibitions still seeking art world recognition. (For example, see the thirty-seven page interview in Hans Ulrich Obrist’s A Brief History of Curating, in which she mentions curating some 50-odd feminist exhibitions in the 1970s-80s, only one of which is very briefly discussed, compared to dozens of pages on the Numbers exhibitions and Six Years. Obrist, A Brief History of Curating (JRP Ringier: Zurich, 2011), 196-233).
Because of their divergent aesthetic affiliations, few who knew Lippard and Moorman or their projects would identify them as having parallel practices. Although being close in age (b. 1937 and 1933 respectively) and arriving onto New York’s cultural scene around the same time (1958 and 1957), the two women do not appear to have interacted in any official way. While Moorman’s primary community was an intermedial, performance-oriented avant-garde, Lippard’s circled around minimalism and conceptual art. Like Moorman, Lippard entered the art world wearing a different hat, setting out to be a writer and art critic; her curatorial endeavors too were spurred by her close relationships with artists. Attuned to creative currents not yet visible at the institutional level, she sought channels for her artist-community for the same reasons that Moorman worked to introduce the SoHo loft-scene to uptown audiences—because she thought the work deserved public consideration. During the same period that Moorman’s festivals developed from a concert series to a mini-World’s Fair, Lippard tracked the changing frames needed for her art community as their work shifted from minimalist sculpture and painting to conceptual dematerialization. Inspired by the possibilities that such art, “emphasizing the thinking process almost exclusively” opened up for distribution and viewing, in 1968 Lippard began developing the Numbers shows.

597 They did occasionally work with overlapping artists. Ralph Ortiz was a repeated Festival participant with Moorman and an Art Workers Coalition co-organizer with Lippard. Festival artists Marjorie Strider, Jan Van Raay, Frank Lincoln Viner and Tal Streeter all appear in Lippard exhibitions as well. In Moorman’s notes from a conversation with Streeter for the 1969 Festival, she scribbled “Lucy Lepard,” but there is no sign of follow-up. CM notes – Tal Streeter, AGFF Box 8, Folder 15, CMA.

598 Lippard started working at MoMA in 1958 as a library page, where she met minimalist painter and future husband Robert Ryman, and close friend and conceptual artist, Sol Lewitt, both of whom were working at security guards. Lucy R. Lippard, “Escape Attempts,” in Six Years: the dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972..., (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California, 1997), viii.

“557,087” takes its odd title from the total population of Seattle, the city where it was to be staged. This gesture both affirmed an idealistic notion of the intended audience—the entire city—while resisting the convention of giving those audiences a pithy summary of an exhibition’s subject or scope through its title. It also allowed for a formulaic transformation of the title as related exhibitions were installed in Vancouver (population/title “955,000”) and Buenos Aires (population/title “2,972,453”). Moorman had similarly described the audience for her Central Park festival as “nothing less than the entire city of New York,” and had decided early on to keep the titles for the Festivals generic and simple.600 Without thematic titles or definitive statements, the public’s experience of these presentations then was largely determined by the physical and ideological context of the sites, and, to a crucial degree, by the time, attentiveness and curiosity that each visitor brought with them [Fig. 4.26].

Besides their titles, the defining feature of Lippard’s Numbers shows was their dual-use of index cards solicited from each of the participating artists. Along with a few cards by Lippard, this artist-designed deck of cards constituted the idiosyncratic, unbound catalogue for the exhibition [Fig. 4.27]. For projects which were entirely dematerialized—like Robert Barry’s “All the things I know, but of which I am not at the moment thinking” (1969)—these texts are the locus of the art experience, making the catalogue itself an exhibition space for concepts activated by the reader’s mind.601 The majority of cards, however, were instructions or simple descriptions of artworks to be included, which Lippard used to realize these pieces on site. This way, despite miniscule shipping and travel budgets, Lippard could involve the full roster of dispersed but

600 The 1963 festival had been billed as “6 Concerts ’63”. Once it became an annual event, the title changed to record the number of recurrences, she ditched “concerts” for the less restrictive “festival,” and included “Avant Garde” begrudgingly to keep Mozart-fans from suing her. Rothfuss, 116 and Varble, 173.

601 Moorman’s festivals included many similarly dematerialized works, such as the previously cited La Monte Young composition, which exists as text and concept. Yet because their inclusion is only noted in press releases, now accessibly only in archives, these works are arguably far more dematerialized (and invisible to a general audience and historians) in her instantiation of them than in the permanent catalogues produced by Lippard. See CMA Festival Programs.
likeminded artists that she was identifying as an aesthetic community. Moorman employed a similar strategy to turn her festival into a global interchange, as artists from abroad regularly sent scores, and Moorman would arrange their enactment. The card format, which foregrounded the transmission of art-as-idea, matched the impulse of artists investigating dematerialization, much as the Festival’s affective spaces befitted artists exploring embodied experience. The card catalogues were also an effective mode for consolidating and making collectable the totality of experimental, site-specific, and ephemeral practices that happened under the umbrella of the Numbers exhibitions. Moorman, working entirely outside institutional affiliations and with no experience in publishing, did not have a parallel ambition for translating the Festivals into a static form. Perhaps apropos of the Festival’s fleeting nature, the only attempt to convey Festival content can be found in the press releases that Moorman wrote and distributed starting in 1967.

Ultimately, the Seattle and Vancouver Numbers exhibitions included a mix of entirely text-based works, instruction-pieces carried out from afar by Lippard or local assistants, physical objects or installations that the artists themselves were still involved in making, and a substantial film program—a mix very much like that found in the later Festivals.602 Since, like Moorman, Lippard’s only restriction on proposals was financial feasibility, the majority of works were newly conceived for and responsive to their given context. Rather than the thematic site-specificity that the Festival locations inspired, artists in the Number’s shows attended to institutional structures such as the physical architecture of the gallery—as in Barry Le Va’s tracing of a wall with *Meat Cleavers* (1969-70) [Fig. 4.28]—or the socioeconomics of the host city—as in John Baldessari and George Nicolaïdis problematic instructions to mark ghetto

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602 For a full list of participating artists, film program and annotated illustrations from “557,087” and “955,000,” see Butler, 100-181. The third Numbers show, “2,972, 453” (1971) in Buenos Aires, had anomalies that make it discontinuous with these first two examples; similarly, “c. 7,500” (1973-4) used a related structure but invited only women conceptual artists, presenting a different curatorial conceit.
boundaries (*Ghetto Boundaries, 1969*) with stickers [Fig. 4.29]603 Despite these different manifestations, the two women’s emphasis on spatial framing as a guiding principle signals their sensitivity to their respective creative communities’ growing desire for their work to be seen as less autonomous and more integrated with daily life. Moorman and Lippard expressly developed exhibitionary platforms that allowed for encounters with non-art audiences in non-art spaces, instantiating unique opportunities for people to be jolted into a new awareness of their everyday surroundings—whether by stumbling upon pigeons eating “ART,” spelled in birdseed by Al Hansen for the Central Park festival [Fig. 4.30] or mirrors placed on someone’s lawn by N.E. Thing & Co in Seattle [Fig. 4.31].604 Of course, Lippard’s exhibitions used sparsely installed galleries and prosaic outdoor locations to underscore the “anti-visual” aesthetics of her artists [Fig. 4.32 – Fig. 4.34], in high contrast to the colorful, chaotic environments produced by the Festivals [Fig. 4.35 – Fig. 4.36]. Yet operationally, Lippard and Moorman can be thought of as similarly mirroring their artists’ oppositional tendencies. Exploring the far ends of the aesthetic spectrum, they arrived at divergent presentational solutions through shared investment in an artist-led model of collaborative, catalytic curating.

Each approach created unique possibilities but also challenges in terms of their expressed populist aspiration: Lippard’s model afforded easy dissemination and a residual format for later discovery, but struggled to overcome its austere impression on uninitiated audiences; Moorman’s Festivals offered easy engagement and a range of potential individual experiences, but limited traction for artists seeking more critical reflection or writers considering the events from a distance. Looking back on this period, Lippard acknowledged her side of this dilemma, while parenthetically indicating Moorman’s:

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603 For specific projects, see “557,087” in Butler, 162-3.
Communication (but not community) and distribution (but not accessibility) were inherent in Conceptual art. Although the forms pointed toward democratic outreach, the content did not. However rebellious the escape attempts, most of the work remained art-referential, and neither economic nor aesthetic ties to the art world were fully severed (though at times we liked to think they were hanging by a thread). Contact with a broader audience was vague and undeveloped.  

As an example of this conundrum, visitors to “557, 087” at the Seattle Art Museum Pavilion received a map identifying projects scattered across a fifty-mile radius, challenging expectations of where art might be found as well as what might be asked of an audience. Curator and art historian Cornelia Butler argues that “The way [Lippard] prioritized the accessibility of art, by moving it outside the museum... and the manner in which she courted the public’s active and responsible viewership, through asking museum visitors to explore beyond, is unprecedented.”

Yet this quote also underscores the ideological negotiations of an art world eager to take this strand of artmaking at its word: praising it for being accessible (free and outdoors) and simultaneously demanding, requiring a multi-day trek to difficult-to-discern installations from a responsible viewer willing to work hard for their enlightenment. In contrast, Moorman’s Festivals (free and outdoors since 1966) offered a precedent for presenting high art beyond gallery walls, but in a conveniently condensed format for an often capricious public rather than an imaged, ideal reader.

Finally, challenging the model of the curator-as-gatekeeper, Lippard described “557,087” “as an exercise in ‘anti-taste,’… a compendium of varied work so large that the public would have to make up its own mind about ideas to which it had not been previously exposed…”

This idea that the public should be able to encounter a broad spectrum of work without curatorial mediation or categorization closely echoes Moorman’s mission for the Festivals. Lippard’s

606 Butler, 32
607 Lippard, Six Years, 111.
deference to artists and inclusivity parallel Moorman’s, though the former’s anti-taste was more expressly a proto-feminist political stance and less consistently implemented. Moorman was naturally inclined to keep an open-door policy for Festival participation, arguably to a fault, whereas Lippard admittedly kept qualitative evaluations part of her invitation process.608 In both cases, their work of bringing together community, caring for the artists and their work, and their desire to connect beyond art world categories and audiences, is consciously described in feminized, maternal language by later critics. Writing about the 1967 Staten Island Ferryboat festival, Rothfuss observes:

With this festival Moorman became the matchmaker, the networker, the knitter of the avant-garde. These metaphors purposely suggest traditionally female work to emphasize that her approach was organically different from that of George Maciunas, Wolf Vostell, Dick Higgins and other male event organizers of the day. These men spent lots of time arguing about who was doing what, how they were doing it and which labels should or should not be applied to a given artist’s work. Moorman had no interest in this. She was neither given to debate nor concerned about situating her work within a complex theoretical framework. Her goal, to bring advanced art to the wider public was basic and broad, and she always kept it in sight. 609

Likewise, Butler, discussing “557,087,” highlights Lippard’s resistance to the institutionalizing logic and egotism of the traditional art world:

Lippard’s interest in locations like Seattle, off the grid of the East Coast art establishment…indicates a curatorial emphasis on accessibility and a search for a broad public for her exhibition projects… Lippard also produced a document titled ‘Care and Feeding: Daily’, which is a two-page, typewritten instruction manual for the ongoing upkeep of the show. This project was closely her own, and always describing her own toil in gendered and iterant terms of a devoted and daily beat, she was a conscientious, if not maternal, overseer of her projects and artists.610

608 Moorman reportedly explained her process to friend David Bourdon as “My friends, Paik’s friends, Kaprow’s friends, your friends, people we mutually respect,” while Lippard noted years later, “I was too much a creature of the art world to give up selectivity all together, for all my bitching about prevailing concepts of ‘quality’.” See David Bourdon, “A Letter to Charlotte Moorman,” Art in American, June 2000; and “Lucy Lippard in correspondence with Antony Hudek,” in Butler, 71. Originally published in Flash Art, no. 281 (Nov-Dec 2011), 58-61.
609 Rothfuss, 211.
610 Butler, 28-29.
Lippard herself, in a 2011 interview, notes, “I’d rather choose the artist than choose the work, and let her loose on the subject at hand. Curating means ‘caring for’ in both senses – love and house-keeping.” In this context, it is worth noting that Lippard and Moorman’s identification with the feminized aspects of this work, the self-effacing daily care of a collection or community, comes as ascendant independent curators like Szeemann proclaim their primary roles as “exhibition-makers.” With globetrotting celebrity curators increasingly defining the profession, the feminized housekeeping associated with institutional and communal maintenance has simultaneously become a lower order of labor, infrequently recognized or valorized in discussions of the “curatorial.”

Further, while some saw Lippard and Moorman’s creative platform-making as their form artistic practice, neither imposed an authorial voice onto the proceedings. Ono’s statement that the Festivals were Moorman’s ultimate creation is clarified by Peter Frank’s more specific celebration of each as “a self-sufficient whole that is the serendipitous sum of its parts.” Likewise, turning the tables on Peter Plagens, who wrote of “557,087” that “there is a total style to the show, a style so pervasive as to invite the conclusion that Lucy Lippard is in fact the artist and that her medium is other artists,” Lippard affirmed that artists are always the medium of the critic, “critics are the original appropriators.” Both saw the creative power inherent in the role of compiler, coordinator, and catalyst, without requiring this curatorial dimension to be

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611 Hudek in Butler, 75
612 O’Neill, 14.
613 See for example Jean-Paul Martinon, The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), in which grand theories of “the curatorial” abound against or uninterested in the practicalities of what most those with the job-title “curator” have to do as their daily work. Also consider the first-person narrative of innovative curatorial projects generated and then self-historicized by Hans Ulrich Obrist in his Ways of Curating (New York: Faber and Faber, 2014).
614 For Moorman, see Ono’s statement to Fred Stern that the Festival was Moorman’s work of art was echoed by many of her friends and collaborators. For Lippard, see Butler, 46, and Peter Plagens, “557,087,” Artnet vol. 8, no. 3 (November 1969), 64–67.
recognizable or stand apart. Of Lippard, Butler writes, “She insists on the curatorial premise as a subtext emerging from the production of art, not as a narrative, commentary or argument being imposed on or superseding it.”

This seems even truer for Moorman, who did not have a separate authorial practice from which to reflect on or reconstruct her curatorial motivations, a difference that has greatly impacted their entries into exhibition histories. Hopefully, with increased attention, Moorman’s method can be recognized as part of an important alternative lineage, along with Lippard’s, of catalytic curating. As Schneemann reflected in a 1980 letter to Moorman, “This I always felt was one of your particular gifts—and one which has never been sufficiently appreciated: to establish a community, to have given us all a focused communality, an equity in which we shared, participated, developed a body of MUTUAL concerns, aesthetically, personally,” through “collaboration with you/the arena you made possible [sic].” The arena, which was indistinguishable from Moorman, instigated creative community, creative practices and created equity in ways that are only now ready to be seen.

Feminist scholars in the last decade have raised Lippard’s profile by insisting on her constitutive role as both a writer and curator in the development of Conceptual art. They have also highlighted her less domineering, relationally-driven curatorial style as “contribut[ing] significantly to subsequent interdisciplinary, site-specific, participatory, interventional, performance and community based art,” as practiced and presented today. While not dissimilar to Moorman in this respect, Lippard’s curatorial reputation nevertheless underscores that while interdisciplinary inclusiveness, communal generosity—even maternal care—and a gentle curatorial imprint are now able to be re-valued and even seen as prescient, Moorman still lands

617 Butler, 46.
618 Carolee Schneemann letter to CM, September 26, 1980. CMA.
619 Butler, 8.
on the wrong side of another gendered divide. Having pioneered populist, raucous art events that responded to the needs of artists working with their bodies, with light, sound and new technologies that were viscerally stimulating, Moorman was working in opposition to what has been deemed by art cognoscenti as the most important tendencies of this moment—the aesthetically reductive, analytically-framed practices of Conceptual art. By ignoring Moorman’s “cyberneticized Salon des Independents” as problematic spectacle, while celebrating the distilled data of dematerialized exhibitions, however, we have failed to connect these as two sides of the same coin. Seen together and with equal seriousness, the simultaneous emergence of the Festivals and Conceptual art exhibitions can be recognized as significantly thematizing the post-Fordist turn from object-oriented production towards either information-based or experience-driven economies that was happening at this very moment.620 If anything, Conceptual art’s subsequent success in the market and prefiguration of a service-based labor model should disabuse current scholars from imagining this form of dematerialization as more resistant or disruptive to capitalist exchange than the other.621 Instead, by rejecting the historical privileging of mind over body in the battle to “decommodify” the art object, we can better appreciate how


621 The essence of this shift is captured in LeWitt’s first ever wall drawings, which was shown in Lippard’s 1968 exhibition Benefit for the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam at Paula Cooper Gallery. This work is celebrated as a “revelation” in “its frank temporality, its seeming obliviousness to commercial viability, and in its conceptualizer’s denial of the exclusivity of the authorial execution of a handmade artwork,” in a 2000 retrospective catalogue. Yet, this assessment seems to intentionally overlook that this piece was submitted to raise money for a cause, and that on the pricelist for the show, after Sol LeWitt’s name it says “per hour,” kicking off the shift from paying for artist’s plastic creations to paying for their concepts, and whatever support labor each realization requires, much in keeping with both an information and service-based economy. For expansive discussion of this work’s complex relation to the market, without references the hourly pricing, see Brenda Richardson, “Unexpected Directions: Sol LeWitt’s Wall Drawings,” in Sol LeWitt: A Retrospective, ed. Gary Garrels (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 37; and for an image of the pricelist, see Morris and Bonin, 144.
both tendencies were unwittingly reflective of, and commensurate with, a neoliberal reordering of the world and art’s place within it.

VI. Curator as Author, Curator as Catalyst

In her 2007 article, "What is a Curator?", Claire Bishop highlights the tension between curatorial and artistic control that emerges along with dematerialized practices in the 1960s and 70s by focusing on the fallout from Szeemann's Documenta 5 (1972) [Fig. 4.37]. Documenta 5, broadly titled “Questions of Reality: The Image-World Today,” was Szeemann's next large international exhibition following “When Attitudes Become Form” (1969) and “Happenings and Fluxus” (1970), and the first of many city-based multi-ennial exhibitions he would go on to curate. On the one hand, Bishop notes that Szeemann is "today celebrated as the first independent curator" and that, due to the "eccentric structure" of his Documenta, which "stamped Szeemann's identity over the exhibition," Documentas ever since have been identified by the lead curator's name. For the rest of the essay, on the other, she details how it is exactly this personal stamp of the curator that many artists vehemently opposed at the time. Writing in the catalogue, participating artist Daniel Buren, protested that:

More and more, the subject of an exhibition tends not be the display of artworks, but the exhibition of the exhibition as a work of art.... The works presented are carefully chosen touches of color in the tableau that composes each section... a tableau whose author is none other than the exhibition organizer.

622 Considered one of the most important international art exhibitions since its founding in 1955, Documenta brings together modern and contemporary artists every five years in Kassel, Germany. Since 1972, it has also represented the ultimate curatorial opportunity to make a statement about art at a given moment, as a different artistic director is given the reigns for each iteration, which is centrally organized (rather than emphasizing national pavilion as in the Venice Biennale), multidisciplinary and, by the late 20th century, increasingly global. (http://www.biennalfoundation.org/biennials/documenta/, accessed 4/11/16).
In similar fashion, Robert Smithson's catalogue essay "Cultural Confinement," begins:

"Cultural confinement takes place when a curator imposes his own limits on an art exhibition, rather than asking an artist to set his limits.... Museums, like asylums and jails, have wards and cells—in other words, neutral rooms called "galleries."... The function of the warden-curator is to separate art from the rest of society."625

Finally, Bishop sums up Robert Morris's May 1972 letter of withdrawal from the exhibition, noting, "What Morris wants from a curator is someone who respects the artist's wishes, communicates clearly, and is available for negotiation. In other words, a figure who is subservient to the artist and who does not contest his/her authorship."626 That is, the very things that would go on to be celebrated about the first generation of independent curators—their unmistakable stamping of exhibitions in their image—was exactly what artists invested in process, installation, performance, site, etc. were immediately critical of when this way of working first appeared.

This suggests that curators should be cautious as they write their own history grounded, as Robert Storr notes, in Szeemann's "patriarchal status at the center of a pool of curatorial talent"—conspicuously white, male and Eurocentric—"that has shaped the general perception of experimental art in the post-war era."627 Paul O’Neill traces this emerging history in his book, *On the Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture*. He highlights how Szeemann’s generation of exhibition-makers was followed in the 1980s by a string of noted curators and curatorial projects that unabashedly embraced the curator-as-author model, emphasizing a singular statement made out of idiosyncratic juxtapositions, surprising spatial arrangements, and narrative devices within which the artists’ individual works would be subsumed [Fig. 4.38]. By the 1990s,

626 Bishop, 1.
then, the rise of the curator had led inevitably to the “era of the curator.” Across the field, there was an increasing sense that thematically-framed group exhibitions—the primary means through which new works are introduced to the public—were being critically discussed first and foremost as curatorial gestures, with individual works rarely considered except as buttresses to that larger argument. The simultaneous explosion of biennial exhibitions in cities around the world created international, large-scale platforms on which to trade these grand arguments [Fig. 4.39]. Competition amongst biennials further increased the importance of being able to identify authorial intention behind these mega-productions, in which no one viewer could expect to see everything. The curatorial statement became the one thing that all critics could equally (or easily) evaluate and that attendees could hold onto for orientation. Perhaps more importantly, as these events became instrumentalized for cultural tourism and local development, the importance of selecting a recognizable name from amongst a pool of now-famous international curators—and promising their brand of cultural experience and preferred roster of artists—became a necessary strategy for securing investments and attention [Fig. 4.40]. Cultural marketing across the board, in fact, benefits from imagining curators as masterful individuals who can be banked on to deliver distinctive experiences and large audiences.

O’Neill points out in the third section of his book that this vision of the autonomous curator is currently under pressure. In contemporary practices, the dialogic realities of producing group exhibitions are regularly foregrounded, even thematized, and dispersed curatorial models with teams, collaborators, agents, and nominated artist-nominators continue to proliferate. This turn, he argues, responds to artists’ desires to enter a situation without pre-determined limits

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628 O’Neill, 32-38
629 O’Neill, 60-70
630 O’Neill, 88-129.
or categories, in which the work engages the public in terms that are negotiated through the process of exhibition-planning and staging. As O’Neill concludes:

Such a shift in the understanding of art’s authorship, as something beyond the hand of one individual, acknowledges that art is not produced in isolation and that it should not be understood as being autonomous from the rest of life. Exhibitions are coproductive, spatial medium, resulting from negotiation, relationality, adaptation and collaboration between subjects and objects, across space and time.631

That such catalytic curating was consistently on view in the under-recognized histories of Moorman and Lippard becomes clear in light of these present priorities. Arguments against the autonomous artwork and for the coproduction of meaning have also been in circulation since the 1960s. Yet the pressures identified above to stand out in a crowded cultural field continue to make name-recognition and branded curatorial production powerful forces. The emphasis on the contingent and collaborative, in fact, is most conspicuously found in books on the curatorial and the curatorial statements to which they refer, which whether authored by an individual or collective remain crucial to the marketing of their projects. In a somber coda to a book full of ahistorical philosophical musings about the disruptive, connective potential of “the curatorial,” museum director and curator Charles Esche opines that in most recent exhibition materials, “the curatorial is indistinguishable from raw marketing propaganda and there is little in the way of self-reflection or visible recognition of the compromised condition in which the practice is operating.”632 In this light, trumpeting new exhibition frameworks as co-productive and iterative seems in keeping with management trends of the twenty-first century, and rather than diminishing the role of the curator, reaffirms its critical connection to generating deliverables in the cultural sphere.

631 O’Neill, 129.
In addition to recognizing Moorman’s formal innovations, then, I hope to point to the politics embedded in her particular resistance to an authorial curatorial position, which would have placed her interpretation and ideas over those of her artists or summarized the Festivals as her productions for consumption. As a pioneer in creatively addressing the challenges of exhibiting performance-driven, ephemeral work, Moorman can also be appreciated for offering platforms for relational, adaptive and collaborative work that never needed to conform to a preexistent concept or curatorial statement that would then redound to Moorman’s reputation. As one of the earliest promoters of an evanescent engagement of art with a city and the public with art, she built communal connections amongst her artists, with the city, and with the wide and varied audiences that she invited to have a personal, participatory relationship to the work. We can see the impact this groundwork had on the later institutionalization of New York’s alternative arts scene, and consider how these strategies morphed into an experience-driven culture industry, characterized by the global biennial circuit and a constant cycle of temporary public art commissions. Perhaps most importantly, her work never lost the emphasis on the ongoing, sustained care provided by the behind-the-scene’s enabler. Her focus continued to be the cultivation of an interdisciplinary artistic community, simultaneously producing and introducing an avant-garde to itself and to its constantly reconstituted publics. Moorman remains an outlier, an extreme alternative to equating curatorial labor with the exertion of authorial control. Instead, she catalyzed work within the exhibition context and amongst creative communities within a changing city [Fig. 4.41]. It is only in hindsight that we can see how this work would in turn become a tool for catalyzing a new economy built around experience, information and the creative convergences of these within urban daily life.
CONCLUSION

A PATH LESS TAKEN

Writing in remembrance of Charlotte Moorman, dance critic Jill Johnston describes her 1988 performance of Yoko Ono’s *Cut Piece* [Fig. C.1], observing:

There was great pathos there. I simply wouldn’t cut the dress myself. I saw a valiant victim in Charlotte, ever a champion of the forces that felled her, and I couldn’t participate in it. If Barbara Kruger ever remade *Your Body is a Battleground*, Charlotte’s image would surely be an appropriate illustration for it.633

This is a moving portrayal of the paradoxes that Moorman could be seen to embody. Yet from a more distanced vantage and with more threads connecting her to the major histories to which she remains peripheral, I hope the picture offered in this dissertation avoids this easy collapsing of Moorman’s minor status into tragic victimization.

Rather, I contend that we can value Moorman without artificially elevating her importance, and we can recognize the precarious positions she navigated without assuming she was laid low. For in each of the cases explored, we see not necessarily triumphs or failures, but alternate configurations of the way creative production might have gone on to function. Just because those openings never flourished into avenues (in fact, in many instances, they never even took hold), Moorman’s embodiment of that potentiality endows her legacy with productive insights into how the field has evolved and what forces have tended to prevail. Seen through the lens of authorship, Moorman’s practice is defined by the unconventional opportunities she found and exploited in the shifting grounds of art and agency in 1960s and 70s. That the art world we now operate in, the one that actively forgot Moorman, smoothed over these seismic cracks in very different ways only makes her minor history that much more enlightening.

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On one hand, Moorman’s idiosyncratic responses to postwar art’s performative, conceptual turn foreground the transformative power of a skilled performer on works that require distributed production and multiple instantiations. On the other, they precisely draw attention to the way existing instruments of control and hierarchical relations remain in play even, or especially, at the moment new, purportedly radical, modes of artist creation and agency are imagined into being. In pressing John Cage’s open-score for *26’ 1.1499” for a String Player* into service as a creative baton with which she could run in her own direction, Moorman clearly demonstrated the incredible latitude and creative tensions that such relayed authorship could produce. Thanks to the extremes of her interpretation and Cage’s disapproval, she simultaneously cast into relief the conservative effects of importing the score and work-concept from classical music into the sphere of contemporary art, where instruction-based pieces now enter permanent collections as stable ideational forms dependent on contract labor for enactment.

Moorman’s idiosyncratic negotiations of Paik’s artistic contracts, in turn, coyly played up the expected submission of the performer in classical music and of the sexually objectified woman in patriarchal society. Utterly dependent on Moorman as sparing partner for its development, this body of work inflected the purported liberations of the 1960s with masochistic demonstrations of the psychosocial constraints that still bind “free” subjects and artistic expression alike. The televisual collaborations between Paik and Moorman likewise complicate utopian claims for the democratizing power of two-way communication and hinge on the specificity of Moorman as a whole life video artist, constantly authoring herself as a subject at the intersection of multiple media flows. Her presence is essential to transforming Paik’s assemblages of monitors into a dynamic vision of the closed-circuit consciousness and avatar production that will reconfigure ideas of the autonomous, transcendent subject into the
imbricated, distributed cyborg. Significantly, the self-authoring cyborg—built from existing parts to iterate within networked feedback—demonstrates that even autogenesis is always dependent and dialogical. In each of these models, then, we confront the paradox that Moorman’s creative contributions, on one hand, are more apparently entangled with patriarchal capitalism than the heroic avant-garde auteur, who promises to overthrow and resist; yet her counter-example only highlights how much that myth serves the same system by disavowing dependency, collectivity and the existing conditions and constraints within which we all operate.

Though never the originator of her performance pieces, we can clearly see that Moorman fundamentally impacted how these projects evolved, reached audiences and were understood and historicized. She brought Cage’s 26’ 1.1499” to campuses across the country, festivals around the world and onto late night talk shows; Paik’s career can not be fully presented without extensive invocation of Moorman’s performances. Yet while the open-score or the composer-performer partnership or the two-way media installation all explicitly claim to leave room for other participants’ creative agency, we can see in hindsight that Moorman is actually a very isolated example of a performer trying to turn that space into her own artistic playground. The absence of language (such as relayed authorship) to recognize such layered creative acts, suggests that a classical music model, with “composers” continuing to hold on to their perceived autonomy, has remained useful to the visual arts field. Cage’s public disapproval of Moorman’s interpretive liberties made clear that such sharing of terrain and control was apparently not really where the composer-artists or arts institutions wanted this experiment to go—or there would now be several generations of liberated performance practitioners, recognized for bringing their whole-selves to interpretative realizations, like DJs famous for their remixes. Instead, as Claire Bishop has demonstrated, the legacies of “body art, Fluxus, Judson Dance and docu-drama” are
identifiable in the various manifestations of what she terms “delegated performance” that has gained visibility in contemporary art since the 1990s.634 Moorman, interestingly, does not sit comfortably in the description Bishop offers of the dominant trends of the 70s or what they become in the 90s, again affirming the way she troubles major histories while being deeply informative about paths taken and untaken. Moorman expressly performed other people’s work as their delegate, yet her presence was very specific and irreplaceable.635 She could not, as in contemporary delegated performance, be outsourced to any member of a collective social or professional group. In a way we could say she set out to be the first, dedicated “delegated performance performance artist,” but instead became a prototype that helped isolate design-flaws on the way to bringing these practices to the market. The globally dispersed, spectacle-hungry, billion dollar art industry would obviously be better served if autonomous artist-authors could sell scenarios for live experiences to collectors without requiring the services of uniquely creative interpreters or the artist’s own presence.636 This allows art history to remain comfortably focused on ideas and authors, and give little attention to the embodied knowledge and creative efficacy of unique performers [C.2].637 As Bishop pointedly notes, this outsourced shift work

634 Claire Bishop, Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectacle (London: Verso, 2012), 220. These I would argue are also all aspects of Moorman’s practice, with the docu-drama relating closely the closed-circuit consciousness of her whole live video art existence.

635 Bishop contrasts these moments in performance art, noting “[Delegated performance’s] hallmark is the hiring of non-professional performers, rather than these events being undertaken by the artists themselves (as was the case in the majority of body art works of the 1960s to 1980s: think of Marina Abramović, Chris Burden, Gina Pane or Vito Acconci). If this tradition valorized live presence and immediacy via the artist’s own body, in the last decade this presence is no longer attached to the single performer but instead to the collective body of a social group.” Bishop, 219. In a later note to this author, Bishop notes that her examples are predominantly active in the 1970s and 80s, with the 1960s event scores and intermedia experiments falling into an earlier period and trend in performance.

636 Paik certainly understood market-preferences, in relation to their video performances, when he noted, “Both artists and distributors are concentrating on videotape-making, which is more convenient, whereas my live video art with Charlotte is expensive, clumsy, and as an art object, almost unsaleable—like a piece of truth.” Nam June Paik and Paul Schimmel, “Abstract Time,” Arts Magazine, December 1974, 52; box 1, fol. 8, Nam June Paik Archive (NJPA), Smithsonian American Art Museum, DC.

637 This is aided by delegated performance’s reliance on the availability of easily identifiable types to fulfill given requirements and instructions that—if followed—keep the work consistently in line with the original author’s intentions. While select projects draw on trained performers of various backgrounds, they most commonly recruit representational delegates of identity-based constituencies or professions outside the arts. Bishop, 219-230.
allows delegated performance to function in “gallery time”—on view throughout the public hours of an exhibition—and relies upon and reproduces the precarity of contemporary working conditions, as performers are unceremoniously disbanded when the piece is “de-installed.”

She goes on to think through these conditions in explicitly Sadean terms, with the delegator “exploiting because he/she knows from experience that this exploitation and self-display can itself be a form of pleasure” and the participant experiencing “occult pleasure…in exploiting his subordination in these works of art.” It is worth contrasting this with the similar but more fluid masochistic subordinations that Moorman and Paik’s shared participation in a delegated practice enabled, but which an arms-length administrative form of institutional delegation protects against. Bishop argues, and I agree, the “tension between structure and agency, particular and universal, spontaneous and scripted, voyeur and voyant, is key to the aesthetic effect and social import of the best examples of delegated performance.” But I would add that it is only in Moorman’s masochistic model, where she is a co-participant in determining the terms of her submission and the moments of its inversion, that these vectors of power are posited as oscillating in both directions. Perhaps a preference for top-down demonstrations of exploitation should be added to the more obvious economic reasoning that has made the Sadean version of delegated performance the art world’s darling and left Moorman’s on the shelf. Likewise, the reframing of subjects and their subjectivities as material for the originating artist to deploy rather than to contend with makes possible the flourishing of works that can be performed by lots of people but whose value can again be entirely attributed to the single figure. The driver of major histories, the owner of an oeuvre and the centering node for authorial discourse, the artistic genius emerges unencumbered and uncontaminated from the rhetorical storm of his

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638 Bishop, 231.
639 Bishop, 236.
640 Bishop, 237.
deconstruction. Meanwhile the careful arrangements and displays of people, as a malleable, meaning-rich entertainment resource, is a reminder of our newly pervasive, often perversely pleasurable form of mediated self-exploitation. The careful cultivation and performance of “authentic” selves is now so much grist for the cultural content we constantly, almost compulsively, produce—the fungible value of which inevitably accrues to someone above and out of sight.

The attempt to merge this self-authoring function of modern cybernated life with the more traditional authorship of one who produces an oeuvre can arguable be seen at the core, then, of the explosion of “the curatorial” as a privileged form of production.\footnote{For a book-length contemplation of the many forms that “the curatorial” as a mode of knowledge-production can take, with or without art, artists or historic context, see Jean-Paul Martinon, ed. The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).} In a culture in which the self is understood to be formed and expressed through a constellation of pre-existing signifiers, the possibility of arranging other cultural materials or expressive agents and putting one’s name on the results has its own perverse logic. In elevating the free labor of self-authoring to the recognized cultural authorship status that spurs discourses, the curatorial has spilled over from the arts to encourage people in a range of fields to turn their personal sensibility and approach to meaning-making into a branded, bankable style. This is a fascinating moment to return to Moorman’s Festivals, then, exactly because they represent a curatorial project that seemingly manages to have no authoring subject at its expressive center. As noted in the final chapter, this catalytic approach has parallels in both Lucy Lippard’s contemporaneous exhibition-making and today’s curatorial statements affirming dialogic processes and spontaneous forms of collectivity. Yet in both cases, in accompanying and reflective materials, we can almost always find a curatorial subject explicating intentions or offering notes on the structure or process that guided them, a subject who benefits from the critical appreciation of
these conceits apart from whatever their combustible combinations create. While Moorman was
the powerful force that brought elements together and made the Festivals happen, her choices
and her voice are not put forward by her, or privileged by others, in their reception. While many
colleagues saw the festivals as “her work,” like her collaborative performance practice, there is
no way to image these experiences as individual utterances. At no point do we see her using
other people’s materials (or presence) to produce a meaning that is now recognizably hers.
Rather, her work, like so much unrecognizable, unrewarded, but absolutely necessary work in
our society, only finds its significance in an ecological view of what it makes possible. In a
society in which individual choice (within a closed system) is both a compulsory, commercial
experience and now the privileged form of self-expression and self-commodification,
Moorman’s abdication of this prerogative is not just unusual; it suggests an entirely different
value system [Fig. C.3]. It declines to make one’s judgment of others’ work one’s own form of
work or means of self-articulation. Importantly, it is able to avoid such qualitative considerations
by not presuming scarcity. The possibility that this philosophy too could have something to offer
is so anathema to our contemporary cultural landscape that it is even hard to use the word
curating to describe an activity that is not premised on evaluation and selection. And yet, a
discourse in which the curatorial can only be celebrated as—in fact, can only be thought of as—
the exertion of choice over a vast field that must be culled is so beholden to capitalist values that
it has literally redefined its subject to exclude the care and maintenance that was the curator’s
original purview. Like art histories narrated as succession of individual geniuses (even as they
engage vast numbers of collaborators in carrying out their projects), the exhibition-histories now
being studiously produced are major histories, moving from innovation to innovation, visionary
to visionary. I do not believe Moorman’s minor history necessarily offers a viable alternate to
this mode of storytelling or the current competitive field of independent curating; I am not advocating for a surge of judgment-free curating. By insistently inserting her Festivals into this discourse, I aim simply to denaturalize the values upheld by her and so many others’ categorical exclusion. With so many art projects and practices seeking to critique various aspects of capitalism, it seems important to keep asking how the broader field of cultural production itself remains structured by patriarchal capitalist ideologies that make other projects and practices unrecognizable, unthinkable or unspeakable. Moorman’s example does not in any way propose to undo capitalism or offer a way out of its closed-system; it just offers glimpses of what might have flourished if we did not judge all efforts by its logic [Fig. C.4].
INTRODUCTION – FIGURES

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Fig. 1.18: Charlotte Moorman performing Aria 4 of Nam June Paik’s Opera Sextronique, Düsseldorf, West Germany, 1968.
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WALL DRAWING
BOSTON MUSEUM

On a wall surface, any
continuous stretch of wall,
using a hard pencil, place
fifty points at random.
The points should be evenly
distributed over the area
of the wall. All of the
points should be connected
by straight lines.

SOL LEWITT
Wall drawing, Boston Museum
Pencil

Fig. 1.19 – Sol LeWitt, Wall Drawing for the School of the MFA Boston, 1971. Text. (left)

Fig 1.20 - Lawrence Weiner, TWO MINUTES OF SPRAY PAINT DIRECTLY UPON THE FLOOR FROM A STANDARD AEROSOL SPRAY CAN, 1968, language and the materials referred to, dimensions variable. Photo: Sol LeWitt’s Hester Street studio floor, New York, late 1960s. (right)
Fig. 1.20 – Charlotte Moorman’s set-up for a performance of John Cage’s 26’ 1.1499” for a String Player at WNET-TV studio, 1973, the performance that became the basis for Jud Yalkut, 26’ 1.1499”, 1973, 42 min, color sound. (This video includes the following credit information below the description on the Electronic Arts Intermix website: A Video Realization by Jud Yalkut of the Concert Realization by Charlotte Moorman and Nam June Paik of the Composition by John Cage. Video Camera: Jeni Engel, Donna Grob. Video: John Godfrey. Sound: Knut Olberg. Thanks: Frank Pileggi, Shridhar Bapat.)
CHAPTER 2 - FIGURES

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Fig. 2.49 – Jim McWilliams, Flyer for *Mixed Media Opera* concert at Town Hall, New York, 1968. Black offset on white paper, 17 x 8 ¼ inches.
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Fig. 3.33 – Installation views of “Child of the Cello” at Emily Harvey Gallery, February 24- March 17, 1990, NY.
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CHAPTER 4 – FIGURES

Fig 4.1 – Charlotte Moorman with New Music composers and Edgard Varèse at his Greenwich Village, NY home, 1963. Left to right in back: unidentified, Morton Feldman, Frederic Rzewski. Photo: William Lovelace.

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Fig. 4.6 – Peter Moore, Yvonne Rainer performing in her *Three Satie Spoons*, Third Festival, 1965.
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Avant-Garde Day in Park Goes On and On

Day Shift

BY DAN SULLIVAN

Avant-garde people are not early risers. The festival was supposed to start at 6 A.M., but until 7 nothing happened but some quiet gasping. Maybe 100 people were around.

About 7, Parks Commissioner Thomas P. Hoving appeared and fell into conversation with a wild-looking girl in jeans and pretty leather boots, who turned out to be an interviewer from the B.B.C.

The Commissioner said he was pleased with everything and had purposely kept hands off festival programming. Leave art to the artists, etc.

However, he was moved to try his hands gently on the shoulder of Don Heckman, a newspaperman, who was waiting for "Morning Improvisation" to his partner, Ed Rumback, across the pond. Better cool it until 8 A.M., the Commissioner suggested. They cooled it.

Eight o'clock, and Charlotte Moorman appeared, two hours late for her own festival. That's nothing, she said—she was late for her wedding! Anyway, now things begin to happen.

No less happening "Cut Piece" put two men in black suits. The audience cut them out of the suits with scissors. This was the United States version of "Cut Piece." It ended up having a good time rolling up a bag at the Waterfront, Bill Dixon and fellow musicians played "Ground Speed," a collaboration for music and dance. The last part performed by Judith Dunn, who held some front-sitting little girls' spellbound, although they

Night Shift

BY RICHARD F. SHEPARD

Kids, too young yet to rebel against the older rebels, had their moment in the sun, which came out bright and warm after lunch time yesterday. There were several hundred people, all ages, shapes, hairdos and ages, wandering about asking what would be the pond's Left Bank if you were looking southward.

The kids played with balloons inside a plastic dome—very happy, no great thoughts coming through. A little later, Allan Kaprow, a happenings specialist, did the Under Dan bit with the biddies. He lined them up for tire-rolling on the Central Park lawn, and it may well beat White House eggrolling. They took 150 reject tires and rolled them down, knocking over wooden posts with plastic on top. Every time a pole fell, a boat horn blasted. Great sport.

After everything went down, Mr. Kaprow, a red-haired host, made them stack it all in a pile and tie it down with cord.

"What did it all accomplish?" asked 15-year-old Borgia, who came with friends from Astoria, Queens, for a spell in the park area and had up having a good time rolling tires. "Is it like op art?" No cogent answer from anybody.

Chopping Handles to Ears

Meanwhile, back at the waterfront, Bill Dixon and fellow musicians played "Ground Speed," a collaboration for music and dance. The last part performed by Judith Dunn, who held some front-sitting little girls' spellbound, although they

Fig. 4.15 – Coverage of the Fifth New York Avant Garde Festival in the *Staten Island Advance* (left) and the *Village Voice* (right), September 30 1967. CMA.
Fig. 4.16 – Peter Moore, Publicity photograph for Fifth New York Avant Garde Festival, with Nam June Paik, Don Heckman, Carolee Schneemann, Charlotte Moorman and Jud Yalkut, 1967.

Fig. 4.17 – Peter Moore, Ay-O, *Statue in Rainbow* and *Rainbow Flag*, at Fifth New York Avant Garde Festival, 1967.
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Fig. 4.29 – John Baldessari and George Nicolaidis, *Ghetto Boundaries*, 1969 catalogue card.
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Fig. 4.38 - Installation view of Rudi Fuchs-curated “Summer Display of the Museum’s Collection,” Van Abbemuseum, 1983. Works on display: Sol LeWitt, Pablo Picasso, Jan Dibbets. Photo Hans Biezen.
Fig. 4.39 – Installation views of *Utopia Station*, curated by Molly Nesbit, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Rirkrit Tiravanija, inclusive of platforms, talks, posters, online archives, etc. at the 50th Venice Biennale, 2003, curated by Francesco Bonomi.
Fig. 4.41 – Charlotte Moorman surrounded by crowds, performing Jim McWilliams, Sky Kiss, 6th New York Avant Garde Festival, Central Park West, New York, 1968. Photo: Fred McDarrah.
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Fig. C.1 - Charlotte Moorman, performance of Yoko Ono’s Cut Piece, 1988 at Emily Harvey Gallery with friends. Top right: Lil Picard; bottom left: Nam June Paik.
Fig. C.2 – Delegated performances: (top) Santiago Sierra, *250 cm Line Tattooed On 6 Paid People*, Havana, Cuba, 1999; and (bottom) Phil Collins, *They Shoot Horses*, video, 2 projections, color and sound.
Fig. C.3 – Charlotte Moorman with her circle, (top) on the roof of her Pearl Street loft, New York, July 1980, Photo: Gisela Schneider, and (bottom), in purple sweater at birthday party, 1988, Emily Harvey Gallery, with chocolate cello.
Fig. C.4 – Charlotte Moorman performs Nam June Paik’s *Zen Smiles*, Asolo, Italy, 1974. Photo: Mario Parolin.
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