

ABSTRACT

Title of Document:

MASS MEDIA IS THE MESSAGE: YOKO
ONO AND JOHN LENNON'S 1969 YEAR OF
PEACE

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In 1969, against the backdrop of the Vietnam War, multimedia artist Yoko Ono and rock star John Lennon instigated a series of idiosyncratic artistic events designed to spread a universal message of peace. What all these events had in common was the couple's keen desire to act as catalysts for change and their willingness to exploit their own celebrity to do so. They had just survived a scandalous year in London in a fishbowl of publicity where the popular press savaged Ono and Lennon's love affair and resulting separate divorces. Dealing with the insatiable media had become part of their everyday lives. Why not use this pervasive attention to publicize their own cause and carry their message of peace throughout the world? This simple premise launched a private peace campaign whose artistic message has achieved cult status in our popular culture.

This dissertation examines how Yoko Ono and John Lennon's 1969 Year of Peace unfolded, how the media covered it at the time, and how people remember it

today. By considering the couple's art events within the context of the 1960s and then following the path of certain images as they wend their way to the present, Ono and Lennon's art acts as a core sample of sixties culture and its legacy. My study situates this artwork against the backdrop of Lennon's megawatt rock star celebrity, within the spirit of Fluxus (of which Ono was a founding member), and in the context of the anti-war movement of the time. In a larger cultural sense, I use Ono and Lennon's art as a touchstone to explore ideas about gender and ethnicity, the sixties counterculture, the language of everyday life, the nature of celebrity, the psychology of marketing, the role of mass media in society, and the control and manipulation of imagery.

MASS MEDIA IS THE MESSAGE: YOKO ONO AND JOHN LENNON'S 1969
YEAR OF PEACE

By

Martha Ann Bari

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2007

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Dedication

In memory of my precious parents, Ruth and Arthur Bari.

Acknowledgements

A dear friend once told me, “It takes a village to write a dissertation,” and in retrospect, I can think of no better way to describe the process of bringing this work to fruition. I am extremely grateful to the Department of Art History and Archaeology, my friends, my colleagues, and my family for the steadfast encouragement I received throughout the time it took to research and write this manuscript. A key player in ushering me through this process has been my advisor Renée Ater, who deserves special credit for her determined and unfailing support. Her benevolent professionalism made her ideal to work with, while her analytical skills and intellectual rigor were a source of inspiration to me.

My study of Yoko Ono began in a graduate art history seminar entitled “Feminist Interventions in the Production of Art,” taught by Josephine Withers. The research for the term paper I wrote in this class on Ono’s *Cut Piece* sparked a lifelong fascination with her artwork. I am indebted to Withers for her encouragement as I continued my research. She remained by my side first in her role as my advisor in the early stages of this dissertation and then as a valuable member of my dissertation committee. Thank you, as well, to the other members of my outstanding committee, Sally Promey, June Hargrove, and Martha Nell Smith, who graciously rearranged their schedules on short notice to accommodate my defense and brought to the table insightful and inventive critiques of this material that have sharpened and deepened its meaning and purpose,

I also would like to extend my gratitude to Peter Watkins and Carolee Schneemann for their collegiality and generous responses to my inquiries. Peter

Watkins went well beyond the call of duty in unpacking boxes after a move in search of a copy of a crucial letter required for my research. I'm thankful to Carolee Schneemann for her engrossing interviews and follow up phone calls in which she shared her experiences as a woman artist during the 1960s. With great respect and fondness, I also wish to pay tribute to Ann Truitt, who taught me in her graduate seminars the joys and difficulties of artistic expression, and who, when we last met, very deliberately set about recounting her memories of the sixties New York art scene for the benefit of this dissertation.

The tragedies, illnesses, and deaths that have affected my life during these last ten years have made it very difficult to proceed quickly to the finish line. I am overwhelmed by the great show of loyalty and confidence my family and friends have given me throughout this time. Although too numerous to mention in such a short acknowledgment, I am thankful to all those who have made a difference in the quality of my life as a scholar. Two friends, however, must be acknowledged by name—Gail Gorlitzz and Wendy Grossman—both of whom were my protectors, guides, and comrades-in-arms at all the right moments (including at 2:00 in the morning) as I neared completion of this manuscript. Finally, I wish to acknowledge my dear husband Mike DiPirro for his patience, unfaltering love, and continuous support that has always sustained me and given me strength,

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Fame is fickle food upon a shifting plate.

-- Emily Dickinson--

In 1969, against the backdrop of the Vietnam War, multimedia artist Yoko Ono and rock star John Lennon instigated a series of idiosyncratic artistic events designed to spread a universal message of peace. What all these events had in common was the couple's keen desire to act as catalysts for change and their willingness to exploit their own celebrity to do so. They had just survived a scandalous year in London in a fishbowl of publicity where the popular press savaged Ono and Lennon's love affair and resulting separate divorces. Dealing with the insatiable media had become part of their everyday lives. Why not use this pervasive attention to publicize their own cause and carry their message of peace throughout the world? This simple premise launched a private peace campaign whose artistic message has achieved cult status in our popular culture.

Ono and Lennon's call for peace was publicized by a multi-pronged media campaign during 1969 that included performance art; billboards, posters, and post cards; radio spots; television interviews; film; musical recordings; and rock concerts. In the name of "peace" the couple planted acorns. They appeared on television, gave numerous interviews, and attended events inside large cloth bags. They held marathon, week-long press conferences from hotel beds, and, in the process, composed two Top 40 hits about their experiences: the controversial "Ballad of John

and Yoko” and the well-known anthem “Give Peace a Chance.”¹ They made a pilgrimage to Ottawa to talk about peace with the Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and participated in a Toronto rock festival. They ended the year with a Christmas message of peace that appeared on billboards and broadcast on the radio throughout the world. Previously the public most identified the pair with the rock group The Beatles, as well as with some edgy experimental music they released together. John Lennon had only tentatively engaged in the rhetoric of peace, while Yoko Ono’s gentle protests virtually went unnoticed. But by the end of their year of constant activism, they became high-profile celebrities associated with the antiwar movement.

This dissertation examines how Yoko Ono and John Lennon’s 1969 Year of Peace unfolded, how the media covered it at the time, and how people remember it today. By situating the couple’s art events within the context of the 1960s and then following the path of certain images as they wend their way to the present, Ono and Lennon’s art acts as a core sample of sixties culture and its legacy. Therefore, I feel it is important to consider this artwork against the backdrop of Lennon’s megawatt rock star celebrity, within the spirit of Fluxus (of which Ono was a founding member), and in the context of the anti-war movement of the time. In a larger cultural sense, I use Ono and Lennon’s art as a touchstone to explore ideas about gender and ethnicity, the

¹ “The Ballad of John and Yoko” (released 30 May 1969) reached #1 in the UK and #8 on the U.S. charts, and “Give Peace a Chance” (released 4 July 1969) reached #2 in the UK and #14 on the US charts. *Graham Calkin’s Beatles Pages* [<http://www.jpgr.co.uk/r5786.html>; <http://www.jpgr.co.uk/apple13.html>] “Inductees: John Lennon, Performer,” *Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum* [<http://www.rockhall.com/hof/inductee.asp?id=143>] (both sites accessed 21 August 2006).

sixties counterculture, the language of everyday life, the nature of celebrity, the psychology of marketing, the role of mass media in society, and the control and manipulation of imagery.

The End of a Decade

Ono and Lennon's Year of Peace unfolded during the last ten months of the sixties, a decade that was marked by profound changes in values, culture, and lifestyles defined in large part by the ongoing U.S. war in Vietnam, the push for social equality, and the swelling numbers of post-World War II babies reaching young adulthood en masse. The nation had become polarized by the trauma of political assassinations along with continuing domestic violence on college campuses and in the city streets, a growing racial divide, and the escalating Vietnam War. By 1969, the civil rights movement had activated African Americans politically, while debates over issues of identity and culture had heightened group concerns. The women's liberation movement had raised consciousness about gender issues, and redress for widespread gender discrimination in the workplace had begun. Increasing social unrest caused fissures in American society, so that the final years of the sixties were plagued by deep divides between the "hawks" and the "doves," between generations, and between races.

The decade was marked by violence, the visual memory of which is still indelibly imprinted on the collective consciousness of the world. Imagery captured in photographs and on film was endlessly repeated in broadcasts over the television

airwaves, printed in newspapers and placed in picture magazines.² Such moments include the shooting death of President John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963, the surprised Lee Harvey Oswald being fatally shot in the stomach by Jack Ruby, and the solemn State funeral that memorialized a heart-breaking salute by Kennedy's toddler son as his father's flag-draped casket passed by. Other political assassinations followed, also heavily documented in photographs. On February 21, 1965, Malcolm X was shot in the Audubon Ballroom in York City. Three years later, in quick succession, came, first, the shooting death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who was killed in April 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee, when a sniper's bullet felled him on his hotel balcony. He was in Memphis trying to resolve a labor dispute between Black sanitation workers and the city. Second, two months later, was the death of Senator Robert F. Kennedy, who was shot in the head at the Hotel Ambassador after winning the California Democratic Primary.

The violence of war and civil unrest were regular features in the news by the end of the decade. Memorable daily images of the televised Vietnam War included battlefield footage, jungles set afire by U.S. bombs, villages torched by soldiers, Vietnamese shown as prisoners of war, burnt by napalm, or as frightened refugees, and American casualties encased in body bags, waiting to be airlifted back to the United States.

After Martin Luther King died in 1968, widespread riots broke out in poverty-stricken African American areas in hundreds of cities across the United States.

² For a fascinating meditation on the cultural impact of the twenty-six second home movie of the Kennedy assassination filmed by Abraham Zapruder, see David M. Lubin, *Shooting Kennedy: JFK and the Culture of Images* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2005).

Individual cities had been sites of sporadic riots earlier in the decade, but the fact that these numerous uprisings were happening concurrently put the television watching public in a frightened state. Press coverage emphasized Armageddon-type scenes of police and National Guardsmen clashing with African-Americans, all silhouetted against blocks upon blocks of burning buildings.

The U.S. public and the world got a ringside seat to a different kind of street violence during the televised moments when the Chicago Police and the National Guard randomly attacked anti-war protestors and innocent bystanders and beat them bloody during the August 1968 National Democratic Convention. Escalating violence toward students and other protestors again became the norm throughout 1969. In fact, during the Montreal *Bed-In*, Ono and Lennon tried to convince students not to embark on further protests to protect People's Park in Berkeley, California, from demolition. Broadcasting over the radio from their hotel room just fourteen days after police shot and killed one man, blinded another, and injured 128 people, they tried to convince their listeners that it was better for all to remain in bed or to engage in other alternative forms of protest rather than possibly face another deadly attack.³ Therefore, these examples demonstrate a political and cultural context of fear and uncertainty that counterbalance the optimistic tone of Ono and Lennon's 1969 Year of Peace. Without understanding the violent nature of the period, the couple's concerted effort to promote nonviolence loses some of its bite.

³ See the *Berkeley Barb* (May 30-June 5, 1969) for a transcription of Ono and Lennon's phone May 29 interview with radio station KSAN on the eve of the May 29 protest march to the park (p. 5) as well as for in-depth coverage of the events that unfolded at Berkeley. For a photographic history of the People's Park protests from March 6-28, 1969, see Alan Copeland, *People's Park* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1969).

Location Within the Literature

To date, no other academic analysis treats Yoko Ono and John Lennon's Year of Peace as one continuous event. An in-depth discussion of the complete campaign appears neither in scholarly works about the U.S. peace movement, nor in those covering Canadian or European anti-war activities of the time. Only one other study addresses this campaign: the documentary film produced by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation called *John and Yoko's Year of Peace*.⁴ This journalistic account chronicles events from the couple's marriage in Gibraltar in March through their *War Is Over (If You Want It)* billboard campaign that Christmas. However, with the exception of Ono and Lennon's marriage in Gibraltar and short film clips of the Amsterdam Bed-In, the documentary covers only events that took place in Canada. Directed at a popular rather than an academic audience, the video provides no discussion of how the peace events relates to the couple's artistic practices. Still, the video offers a good opportunity to view actual footage of Lennon and Ono campaigning for peace, making it clear just how essential certain aspects of spectacle and entertainment were in catching the attention of the media.

Perhaps the reason others have not placed Ono and Lennon's 1969 campaign activities into a cohesive framework is because of the difficulties in pulling these disparate, even eccentric personalized events into a coherent whole. The couple's joint artistic actions stood apart from other kinds of anti-war activities. In increasingly polarized and violent times, they imagined a gentle, overriding peace that would allow "the lion to lay down with the lamb," and where there would be no

⁴ Paul McGrath, director, *John and Yoko's Year of Peace*, videocassette (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting System, 2000).

racial or sexual prejudice, no ideology, and no national borders to cause divisiveness. They constantly collaborated with each other to find artistic expression for such utopian ideals in their public and private lives. Ono and Lennon refused to align themselves with any anti-war group or doctrine as a matter of principle, and their campaign was never directed at any one country, but was worldwide in scope. The art events themselves were never launched from the same place twice, and their locations changed with Lennon and Ono's itinerant travels throughout Europe and North America. With no single artistic, political, or national center, the 1969 peace campaign falls outside the realm of the many scholarly investigations that tend to choose either Ono or Lennon as their primary focus, specialize in the anti-Vietnam War movement, or concentrate on specific political or regional topics significant to the 1960s.

Although components such as the *Bed-Ins* or the billboard campaign (figures 1.1 and 1.2) are addressed in art historical literature concentrating on Yoko Ono (and in one instance, John Lennon), the way these parts fit into the overall structure of the Year of Peace has not.⁵ Yet within this larger structure that the couple's

⁵For example, in *Yes Yoko Ono*, the definitive catalog of Ono's work, the 1969 peace activities appear in a fragmented way, because the entries are thematic according to categories such as "events and performances" or "music" rather than chronological (a timeline is provided at the back of the book). Although this organization is extremely helpful in understanding Ono's life-long work, any theoretical connections between all the activities of the Year of Peace are lost. Only two of the events are placed sequentially (although in different categories): Kristine Stiles' entry for the Bed-Ins performed by Ono and Lennon in March and May 1969, followed by Kevin Concannon's entry for the billboard campaign launched in December. Both essays are sensitive and insightful, but they mainly cross-reference the Bed-Ins to the billboards and tread lightly, if at all, on other elements of 1969 peace activities. Kristine Stiles and Kevin Concannon in *Yes Yoko Ono*, exh. cat., eds. Alexandra Munroe and Jon Hendricks (New York: Japan Society and Harry N. Abrams, 2000),

collaborative, open-ended, conceptually-based events take on their fullest meaning, so that, for example, holding a press conference in bed, ordering tea and buttered toast from room service, or simultaneously renting billboards in various cities become overarching political and artistic acts. This study finds meaning in such actions by considering the importance of everyday life in their work, especially in terms of social construction and conventions of space.⁶

I also use as a critical framework Marshall McLuhan's ideas about the effect of electronic communication and his theory of art as "anti-environment" or "counter-environment" in the electronic age. His widely read books *Understanding the Media: The Extensions of Man* and *The Medium is the Message* from which this idea sprang, cast a long shadow over sixties popular culture.⁷ During their peace campaign, Ono and Lennon repeatedly explained that they intended to use the mass media to market peace. In one representative instance, John Lennon proclaimed in a radio interview, "We're holding a Bed-In for Peace, and we're selling peace like we're selling soap, and everybody's got to be aware that they can have peace if they want it and as soon as they want to do something about it!"⁸ Both often quoted the famous title of one of

172-173 and 190-193. For the one art catalog where John Lennon takes center stage, see Wulf Herzogenrath and Dorothee Hansen, eds., *John Lennon: Drawings, Performances, Films* exh. cat. (Ostifildern, Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995).

⁶ Especially useful in this regard is Henri LeFebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume II: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday* (1961), trans. John Moore (London and New York: Verso, 2002).

⁷ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw Hill Paperback, 1965) and *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects* (New York, London, and Toronto: Bantam Books, 1967).

⁸ Lennon, John, with Tom Campbell and Bill Holley. "The KYA 1969 Peace

the chapters in *Understanding the Media*, “The medium is the message,” or turned it around to “The message is the medium,” as shorthand for the work they were doing in 1969. McLuhan’s intellectual and popular studies of mass culture are key in bringing structure to the events that unfolded during their Year of Peace.

Among my concerns in constructing the meaning of Ono and Lennon’s peace events is the importance of the larger context of the popular culture of the 1960s in their formation. Lost from the discussions of Ono and Lennon’s art are the specifics of the cultural environment in which these events unfolded. This type of disconnection permits anachronisms and cultural bias to take hold. In a more obvious example of this phenomenon, thirty-three years after the fact, Geordie Greig wrote in *The Tatler* that when Yoko Ono first met John Lennon, she was a “rather kooky, Asian hippie artist,” a common misconception of Ono alive in today’s popular culture.⁹ Greig’s present-day generic use of the word “hippie” to signal an anti-establishment artist seems harmless enough. However, in 1966, to call Ono a hippie artist was to categorize her as part of a very specific emerging subculture of which she was emphatically not a member. Certainly her work did not resemble “hippie art,” which was inspired by psychedelic drugs, “acid rock” music, and an artistic aesthetic based on colorful organic forms influenced by Art Nouveau (figure 1.3). Instead, Ono was a determined avant-garde conceptual artist who had not yet connected her ideas to the popular culture.¹⁰ Ono frequently explained in interviews

Talk,” side one, 45 rpm record (San Francisco: KYA Radio 1260, 1969).

⁹ Geordie Greig, “All On Her Ono,” *The Tatler* 295, no. 11 (November 2000), 197.

that as an artist, she had barely heard of The Beatles and had not known what Lennon looked like.¹¹ “I was a person who was never interested in pop, really,” she explained.¹² If Ono had been a hippie, she surely would have recognized a Beatle, because one of the “self-evident givens” of the period was that the Beatles were synonymous with the emerging hippie culture in the United Kingdom and the United States.¹³ During the mid-sixties, the hippie lifestyle included smoking marijuana and

¹⁰ By the avant-garde, I am referring to a centralized, cohesive community of artists and audience in which “all participants are enmeshed in systems of personal and economic relations.” Bruce Altshuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art of the 20th Century* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 8. The artists “have a strong commitment to iconoclastic aesthetic values and . . . reject both popular culture and middle-class life-style. . . . Often esoteric, avant-garde art is purchased by a relatively small group of admirers who possess or have access to the expertise necessary to evaluate it.” Diana Crane, *The Transformation of the Avant-Garde: The New York Art World, 1940-1985* (Chicago and London: The Chicago University Press, 1987), 1.

¹¹ In one of many examples, in a 1968 interview with Betty Rollin, Ono talked about her career as an avant-garde artist before she met Lennon. She also described her first encounter with her future husband: “I didn’t know who he was. And when I found out, I didn’t care. I mean in the art world, a Beatle is—well, you know.” John described himself at the time as “always up in those days, trippin’. I was stoned. . . . That was my psychedelic period.” Betty Rollin, “Top Pop Merger: Lennon/Ono Inc.,” *Look* (18 March 1968), 37.

¹² Yoko Ono, 12 December 1968 interview conducted by Dutch writer Bram de Swaan for Dutch VARA-TV Channel Nederland 2’s “Rood Wit Blauw.” A version was aired 15 January 1969. *John Lennon Archives 1968-69*, DVD (Apple Films, Ltd., 2004).

¹³ *Time* magazine claimed in 1967 that The Beatles were “the major tastemakers in hippiedom.” “The Hippies,” *Time* (7 July 1967), 21. Rock critic Robert Christgau wrote in *Esquire* magazine that The Beatles “really started the whole long-haired hippie business...and, who knows whether they developed with it or it developed with them?” From Christgau’s December 1967 “Secular Music” *Esquire* column, reprinted in Robert Christgau, *Any Old Way You Choose It* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1973), 45.

experimenting with LSD and other “mind-expanding” psychedelic drugs.¹⁴ The Beatles’ recording *Revolver*, released three months before the couple’s November meeting, was a breakthrough album that helped usher in the age of psychedelic music.¹⁵ Any hippie at that time knew who John Lennon was because of the pleasure of listening to Beatles music whether “stoned” on marijuana or in a chemically altered state.¹⁶ On the surface, these lifestyle distinctions between an avant-garde artist and a hippie may seem petty, but claiming that Ono was a hippie when she met Lennon denies the actual social distinctions that were in place in the sixties as well as the heady creative mix that occurred when these two very different kinds of artists collaborated.

This investigation moves beyond previous studies of Ono and Lennon’s work to try to determine the more subtle cultural references in their art once so easily

¹⁴ See, for example, the San Francisco *Oracle* (1966-1968), which was one of the most famous hippie newspapers of the counterculture and was read internationally. The philosophy of the newspaper was based on the freedom to experiment with psychedelic drugs, and discussions about the quest for enlightenment through drugs appeared in some form in every issue.

¹⁵ With the initiation of psychedelic music came the “rock/pop divide,” in which experimental and self-expressive “acid” rock was differentiated by both fans and the media from overtly commercial popular music. Ian MacDonald goes so far as to claim that Lennon’s song “Tomorrow Never Knows” from *Revolver* “introduced LSD and Leary’s psychedelic revolution to the young of the Western world, becoming one of the most socially influential records The Beatles ever made.” Ian MacDonald, *Revolution in the Head: The Beatles’ Records and the Sixties* (London: Pimlico, 1994), 150.

¹⁶ *Revolver* was marked by experimental techniques where sounds were manipulated, processed on tape recorders, and electronically enhanced to cater to this state. Much of Lennon’s musical contributions to this album were written under the influence of LSD, and subtle and not so subtle references to drugs are interlaced with his song lyrics. Ray Coleman, *Lennon: The Definitive Biography* (New York: Harper Perennial ed., 1992), 392-393; MacDonald, 148-151.

understood and absorbed by their mass audience. Of course, one can never completely relive the experiences of another age, but material gathered from underground (counterculture) newspapers, radio interviews, popular magazines, rock music, and sixties ephemera help suggest for the first time the complex web of cultural meaning that once informed Ono and Lennon's efforts. For example, I will address how the countercultural vocabulary of long hair, rock music, be-ins and happenings, Eastern mysticism, and psychedelic drugs all parlayed into a message of peace in the course of *Bed-Ins*, and how Ono and Lennon's stark billboards arbitrarily declaring the end of war (if you want it) resonated with the philosophy of the counterculture. Taking such an approach, therefore, enables a reconnection to the intellectual, political, and popular trends of the time, resulting in a more sophisticated reading of Ono and Lennon's art within the context of the sixties.

An association with the counterculture was an important element of Ono and Lennon's peace campaign as the project gained momentum during 1969. In fact, the best-known components of the campaign—the two *Bed-Ins* and the “War Is Over” billboards—can never fully be appreciated in all their complexity without first recognizing how they utilize the language and power of the counterculture. Before delving into this vital connection in the dissertation, I must explain how I will employ the term “counterculture,” a word whose meaning has become politically charged with controversy since the Culture Wars of the Reagan era.

Although today mention of “The Counterculture” has become something of a flashpoint for political differences between liberals and conservatives, there is no doubt that this categorization was more a description of a populist movement during

the mid to late 1960s, and this is the way I prefer to use it. Sociologist and historian Theodore Roszak most famously studied and defined this social phenomenon for the older generations in his groundbreaking 1969 book called *The Making of a Counter Culture*, which actually brought this word into scholarly conversation as well as into the popular lexicon.¹⁷ Many people were fascinated, bewildered, alarmed, and even angered by this loose group of young people who were forging a lifestyle and belief system at odds with mainstream sixties society.¹⁸ The Counterculture was an amorphous, self-defined social affiliation, with membership determined primarily by one's rejection of mainstream lifestyles and ideology. Millions identified with the Counterculture as the decade unfolded, from groups as diverse as New Left¹⁹ activists from the civil rights and peace movements, "free love" proponents, hippies living on communes, psychedelic drugs users, neophytes of Eastern mysticism, and avid fans of rock music. Indeed, the proliferation of underground newspapers and radio stations by the end of the decade affirmed the growing self-awareness of the Counterculture

¹⁷ Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969).

¹⁸ Although some scholars insist that the counterculture was not political, while others such as Braustein and Doyle in *Imagine Nation* feel that politics and culture conjoined in the late sixties. The confusion may lay in the fact that both points of view were being espoused by those within the counterculture, see, Allen Katzman, ed., *Our Time: Interviews from The East Village Other*, Richard Goldstein's *Reporting the Counterculture*, Thomas King Forcade's *Underground Press Anthology*, David Horowitz, Michael P. Lerner, and Craig Pyes, eds., *Counterculture and Revolution*.

¹⁹ The New Left differentiated itself from the "old" left in that it rejected the Communist Party and was opposed to the politics of the Soviet Union. Michael P. Lerner, "Introduction," *Counterculture and Revolution*, David Horowitz, Michael P. Lerner, and Craig Pyes, eds. (New York: Random House, 1972) x.

as a social entity, as well as its determination to differentiate itself from the mores and values of what was considered the moribund “Establishment.”

By 1969, the underground’s alternative media swelled as underground newspapers proliferated and became interconnected, thanks to a new syndication system that was implemented. Political documentaries and films made by independent filmmakers were distributed outside the Hollywood system and viewed on college campuses, in auditoriums, bars, coffeeshops, churches, and community centers.²⁰ Underground radio on college campuses, on the FM band, and via “pirate” stations broadcasting from boats anchored offshore in international waters allowed those in the counterculture to listen to rock music without play lists, rigid programming formulas and schedules, or intrusive commercial breaks. The news also broke from the standard radio formats of the time. Gone was the quick hourly newsbreak in which stories segmented into a few minutes of global, national, regional, and local stories, followed by commercials, sports, and a weather forecast. Underground stations took poetic license with the standard news format. Copy was rewritten, reinterpreted and presented in a collage of news and personal opinions. Tim Powell, a pioneering programmer at underground American stations such as WABX, KMPX, and KLOS recalls this practice: “We rewrote copy as we saw fit. For example, instead of using the slanted and politically charged term ‘Viet Cong,’ we would change the word to ‘revolutionaries’ or ‘North Vietnamese.’ We used

²⁰ See for example, “Newsreel Catalog of Movement Films,” in Mitchell Goodman, ed., *The Movement Toward a New America* (Philadelphia and New York: Pilgrim Press and Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 404-405.

neutral words instead of ones used to inflame listeners. . . . We did an editorial asking that the marijuana prohibition be rethought. In retrospect, it was like playing a favorite record to our audience. News was designed to push the right buttons, too.²¹

Writing in 1969 for the underground newspaper *South End*, Art Johnson gave voice to the sense of empowerment many felt with the realization that the underground culture had become a viable force:

In the last couple years, our culture has experienced a rebirth. The Beatles and the Rolling Stones were the catalyst, some might say, that brought it all back to the USA. Rock and Roll is back to stay, and so is our culture We're living out our childhood fantasies now, and we aren't afraid no more. All those B movies we watched as kids, the music we listened to, the comic books we read – it formed our lives.

And millions of young people across America are just coming to realize that we have our own culture. This time we're building our own media to support our culture and spread it, so they can't shaft us again. We've got our own newspapers, our own radio stations and programs, we make our own movies, and draw our own comic books, and write and perform in our own plays, write our own books. And we're growing all the time. In three short years, our newspapers have grown from being six with combined circulation of under fifty thousand to over two hundred with a combined readership of over four million! While in the last 20 years, over four hundred established papers have gone under and more are failing every year.²²

I will demonstrate when discussing the events of their peace campaign how the ideas of the counterculture also became a symbolic system in which Ono and Lennon worked, as well as representing one of the branches of the media in which they sought to lodge their message of peace.

²¹ Interview in Michael C. Keith, *Voices in the Purple Haze; Underground Radio and the Sixties* Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 1997), 67-68.

²² Art Johnson, “Get Back to Where You Once Belonged,” in *Underground Press Anthology*, Thomas King Forcade, ed. (New York: Ace Books, 1972). 60. Originally printed in © 1969 *South End*.

When conducting research for this dissertation, special factors were taken into account when considering Ono's work. Lennon once notably described Ono as the "most famous unknown artist. Everybody knows her name, but nobody knows what she does."²³ In a 1968 interview, Ono made a similar characterization of herself. She explained, "I'm sure that more people know my name obviously not because of my work, but because of my connection with John Lennon, which is sort of a strange label for an artist. But I've always been a freak in the sense that even now they don't know what to say about me. So they sometimes say, 'a Japanese actress, Yoko Ono,' or 'composer,' or 'painter,' or anything. But it's very difficult to label a person, and nowadays art is so complex that you can't label somebody, really."²⁴ Thirty-eight years later, Ono is still difficult to categorize, because her art projects and celebrity status cut such a wide swath across our culture. How does an art historian address the work of this multi-faceted artist when her combined modes of expression (conceptual art, assemblage, graphic art, performance, commercial art, film, poetry, rock and experimental music) so inconveniently spill over the borders of the field and into other disciplines as such theater, film studies, literature, and popular culture?²⁵ What do we make of a woman whose celebrity demands as much scrutiny as her role as artist, and, indeed, at times becomes part of her artwork? How do we view her

²³ John Lennon, interviewed in Jonathan Cott, "Yoko Ono and Her Sixteen-Track Voice," in *The Ballad of John and Yoko*, eds. Jonathan Cott and Christine Doudna (Garden City, NY: Rolling Stone Press Book, 1982), 115.

²⁴ Ono, "Rood Wit Blauw" interview.

²⁵ Interestingly, other ground-breaking, multi-media women artists, such as Laurie Anderson and Carolee Schneemann, also suffer this kind of art historical confusion and consequently often are skimmed over or ignored in broad survey texts, where pre-1980s art is most often categorized within the general fields of painting or sculpture.

collaborative art with John Lennon in an art culture that stubbornly valorizes the “lone [male] genius” over other kinds of artistic partnerships? And how does one reconcile Ono’s ethnicity with her consistent outsider status in the sixties, whether living in Japan, the United States, or Great Britain? These dilemmas always have been at the root of how Ono’s work is received and why certain parts of her artistic production draw more attention than others. They are key components of the 1969 Year of Peace, as well, and so play an important part in this scholarly investigation.

This study concludes with consideration of the legacy of John Lennon and Yoko Ono’s 1969 peace campaign. Thirty-eight years after the campaign, fragmented imagery and songs have become firmly lodged in the popular culture. In every peace march, strains of the chorus (never the stanzas) of Lennon’s song, “Give Peace a Chance” fill the air, and at Christmastime, “War Is Over If You Want It” is piped into the department stores and supermarkets and broadcast over the radio. Still shots and clips of the *Bed-Ins* are ritually flashed whenever Lennon is remembered on television. Highlights of the campaign were reenacted in 2005 in *John Lennon: A Musical*, which had a brief run on Broadway, and clips of the *Bed-Ins* were conflated with Lennon’s later, more directed political activities in a recently released documentary *The US Versus John Lennon* (2006). Plucked out of time, endlessly reproduced, what do these mosaics of sound and imagery signify in today’s context? The dissertation ends with a discussion of the shifts in perception of the historical events that took place in 1969 and how the idea of the campaign functions in the popular culture today.

Chapter 2: Coming Together

A dream you dream alone is a dream, a dream you dream together is a reality.

— Yoko Ono, 1966 —

Many aspects of Yoko Ono and John Lennon's 1969 peace campaign are incomprehensible without a thorough understanding of the times in which they lived. The social pressures they endured upon becoming a couple, their prior personal and professional experiences, and the social mores and political environment of the times, especially as reflected in the music and arts scenes in Britain and the United States, all were influential in the conception and execution of the campaign. This chapter will systematically examine the nature of Ono and Lennon's working relationship and the social climate in which their collaborative art was first received, making clear many of the motives and inspirations for the events that unfolded in 1969.

Two Flowers on the Same Stem

A significant factor in understanding Ono and Lennon's 1969 peace campaign is the nature of their collaboration. The power as well as the quirkiness of Ono and Lennon's 1969 events owes much to the couple's romantic and intellectual fixation on each other. Their mutual obsession was a mark of what they felt was an intoxicating new love relationship that caused them to look at the world afresh and to search for novel ways to fuse their different artistic and musical interests into a united force. In a 1980 interview, Ono and Lennon recalled their joint decision to "step outside the circle" and freely experiment as a couple. "That's why we ended up

doing things like bed-ins, and Yoko ended up doing things like pop music,” Lennon recalled.

With our first attempts at being together and producing things together, whether they were bed-ins or posters or films, we crossed over into each other’s fields, like people do from country music to pop. We did it from avant-garde left field to rock ‘n’ roll left field. We tried to find a ground that was interesting to both of us. And we both got excited and stimulated by each other’s experiences.

The things we did together were all variations on a theme, really. We wanted to know what we could do together, because we wanted to be together. We want to work together. We don’t just want to be together on weekends. We want to be together and live together and work together.¹

Because of this cross-pollination of talent and interests, privileging one artist over the other in their collaborations becomes problematic. Yet, most studies tend to do so, or quickly skim over this period of intense joint activity without much comment, so that in some studies, Ono’s role shrinks to that of a maternal figure or of a muse to John Lennon, while in others, critics see Lennon as an artistic subordinate to Yoko Ono. Often, scholars diminish or eclipse Ono or Lennon’s creative role in order to accommodate a separate, heroic narrative for the other.² For my purposes,

¹ David Sheff with Barry Golson, ed., *The Playboy Interviews with John Lennon and Yoko Ono* (New York: Playboy Press, 1981), 6.

² For Ono as a “Mommy” figure, see, for example, Kristine Stiles, “Unbosoming Lennon: The Politics of Yoko Ono’s Experience,” *Art Criticism* 7, no. 2 (1992), 21-53. On the other hand, Francine Prose portrays Ono more as an impassive muse to Lennon and writes that “[m]uch of Ono’s art is, to put it bluntly, annoying.” Prose dismisses any idea of a beneficial creative partnership between the couple, declaring that “[t]he weakest work that John did during his time with Yoko is the most collaborative” Francine Prose, *The Lives of the Muses: Nine Women and Artists They Inspired* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 363 & 337. If Prose eclipses Ono’s contributions, then the 1997 exhibition catalog that accompanied a survey of Ono’s art at the Museum of Modern Art Oxford, does the same for Lennon. Curator Chrissie Iles’ introductory essay mentions the couple’s “symbiotic collaborative work” in a short paragraph about Ono’s three husbands and briefly mentions Lennon

however, recognizing the collaborative nature of these 1969 events is key. If not acknowledged, the core reason for the peace campaign would be obscured; that is, these collaborations represented to Ono and Lennon the collective force of the couple's love, one of the most powerful emotional bonds that can be forged between humans. For them, the logical extension and biggest gift of such an all-embracing love was peace. Looking back at the events of 1969 at a press conference that December, Lennon explained, "We met, we had to decide what our common goal was, we had one thing in common – we were in love. ...So we had to find what we wanted to do together – these two egos. ...What goes with love we thought was peace."³ For many in the art world, these matter-of-fact statements about how romantic love shaped Ono and Lennon's conceptual art were overly sentimental and at complete odds with the standards of taste in art. Later in this chapter, I will expand upon why their art did not fit the mold of mainstream or avant-garde art in the sixties, and why many were resistant to their work. Culturally entrenched concepts about the propriety of sentimental, romantic artwork can be traced back to ideas about taste that

only one more time in relation to their collaborative film *Rape* (1969). Even here, Lennon's creative co-ownership is eroded in Iles' footnote, which argues that Ono had conceived of the plot of the movie "some years before" Lennon came on the scene. The exhibition checklist at the back of this catalog lists only the title of each artwork without attribution, so that the implication is that Ono is the sole creator of them all. Chrissie Iles, "Yoko Ono," *Yoko Ono: Have You Seen the Horizon Lately?* (Oxford, UK: Museum of Modern Art Oxford, 1997), 24-25; 126; 140 (ftn. 42); 142-145. On the flip side, all of the Ono/Lennon artistic collaborations that appeared in a Kunsthalle Bremen show in 1995 were advertised under the misleading title *John Lennon: Drawings, Performances, Films* [Wulf Herzogenrath and Dorothee Hansen, eds., exh. cat. (Ostifildern, Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995)].

³ Ritchie Yorke, "John, Yoko & Year One," *Rolling Stone* (7 February 1969), 21. Quoted from a transcript Yorke provides of the Chateau Champlain Press Conference held in Montreal, Canada, on December 22, 1969.

were debated throughout the history of modern art. These attitudes as well as Ono and Lennon's associations with the sixties art world will be examined within a more theoretical framework.

In emphasizing artistic collaboration, I do not mean that recognizing the creative role of Ono or Lennon in any particular artwork is unproductive. In fact, this study will analyze influences from both artists in order to understand the special qualities of their peace activities. Putting a strong emphasis on communion, however, highlights the potent creative synergy that infused their work together. Their collaborative efforts served to unite them psychologically. For example, during their initial "honeymoon period," Yoko Ono explained, "I almost think that we are just one body, but just for convenience we are taking two bodies.... Do you understand? To have a dialogue you have to have two bodies," to which John Lennon responded, "Yin-yang."⁴ In another interview from 1969, Ono and Lennon were emphatic that neither one alone could take credit for their creations. Ono explained, "[A]ll the reporters, they usually first ask how much it costs, and whose idea was it? ...But especially in our case, it's unfair to say whose idea it was...because it's like a telepathy thing. Really!" to which Lennon added, "If it wasn't, you know, our egos wouldn't manage it."⁵

⁴ "Rood Wit Blauw" interview. For a poetic, visual expression of this idea of the united body double, see Ono and Lennon's 1968 film *Two Virgins*, which starts with a lingering shot of their superimposed faces, eventually draws back for a long-view of the couple gazing into each other's eyes, and then ends with the two joined in a kiss.

⁵ John Lennon, interview with radio journalist Howard Smith (Station WPLJ) during Montreal Bed-In, 28 May 1969. Howard Smith, *Peace Is Yours If You Want It: John Lennon Yoko Ono Interview 1969*, part 1, bootleg CD.

This sense of fusion was obvious to anyone who met the couple. For example, the editor of the British teen magazine *Rave* described this sensation when he interviewed Ono and Lennon in 1969: “They don’t interrupt each other and their ideas don’t clash or overlap. Instead their minds and their voices seem to interlock, each one taking the point of what they want to say that little bit further. It may sound weird, but it’s rather like the same person talking in stereo.”⁶ Irma Kurtz reported in *Avant-Garde* that “when John sat next to Yoko on the sofa a distinct resemblance between them … was obvious; they could have been two flowers on the same dark stem.”⁷

Ono and Lennon’s melding of talents affected the reception of their work in the musical and artistic circles within which they moved. On the one hand, much of the experimental, do-it-yourself quality of their events traces back to Yoko Ono’s Fluxus and conceptual art background. On the other hand, the overriding importance of an artistic partnership and the theme of romantic love built upon the highly successful creative formulas that catapulted John Lennon and The Beatles into superstardom. Such an odd hybrid of cross-disciplinary ideas, modes, and methods inevitably provoked confusion among Beatles fans and the general public and disdain in the underground art scene. In order to understand the resistance Ono and Lennon

⁶Colin Bostock-Smith, “John and Yoko and Peace: Face to Face With the Couple Who Make Headlines All Over the World,” *Rave* (November 1969), 14.

⁷ Irma Kurtz, “John and Yoko in Concert: At Home With the Lennons,” *Avant-Garde* 9 (November 1969), 40.

experienced, I examine the precepts of these quite different artistic and musical worlds.

Repercussions in the Popular Culture

When Yoko Ono and John Lennon first met at the Indica Gallery on November 9, 1966, London was in the midst of an exciting cultural explosion that had made the city an artistic and social mecca. The vitality of the scene reflected fundamental changes in British society in the post-World War II reconstruction period, including increased opportunities for the lower classes. As the first of the post-war generation began to come of age in the sixties, the atmosphere was one of “optimism, of wealth, health and leisure, of liberation and of youth.”⁸ The *Times* journalist Piri Halasz had just coined the term “Swinging London,” to describe the unique spirit of this intimate world where the rich and privileged aristocrats and politicians mixed with successful artists, writers, journalists, architects, photographers, filmmakers, fashion models, musicians, and other creative people freely socialized, regardless of social hierarchy or class.⁹

The cultural borders between Britain and America were extremely porous during the sixties, so that Americans in all walks of life were a constant presence in London. In terms of the fine arts, The Kasmin Gallery, which opened in 1963, showed American paintings of the Greenbergian School, whereas the Robert Fraser

⁸ Chris Stephens and Katharine Stout, “This Was Tomorrow,” in Chris Stephens and Katharine Stout, eds., *Art in the 60s: This Was Tomorrow,* exh. cat. (London: Tate, 2004), 9.

⁹Piri Halasz, “You Can Walk Across It On the Grass,” *Time Magazine, London: The Swinging City*, April 15, 1966.

Gallery, which also opened in the same year, took more risks, representing the major British and American Pop artists. These two galleries made it possible to see the most “cutting edge” American art in London. The Robert Fraser Gallery was also famous as a key social gathering place for such diverse groups as “avant-garde artists, wealthy collectors and celebrities, including American film stars like Marlon Brando as well as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones,” providing a great mixing pot that often sparked creative interchanges between disciplines.¹⁰ For example, it was Fraser who arranged for Pop artists Peter Blake and Jann Haworth to create the famous celebrity-driven collage that became the cover of the Beatles’ 1967 album *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* (figure 2.1).¹¹

This cultural “mixing bowl” in London enabled the serendipitous first meeting of Lennon, a working class Liverpudlian who acquired great wealth and fame with the success of The Beatles, and Ono, a rising artist who identified herself as both Japanese and American, and whose limited name recognition was confined to the avant-garde circles in which she moved. Ono’s bicultural outlook is a product of her life story. Born in Tokyo in 1933, she grew up in a powerful, well-connected Japanese banking family. Her father, Yeisuke Ono, traced his family back through a samurai lineage, but embraced Christianity and Western ways, while her mother

¹⁰ Stephens and Stout, 29.

¹¹ Harriet Vyner, *Groovy Bob: The Life and Times of Robert Fraser* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 171-175.

Isoko Yasuda was strictly Buddhist.¹² Her mother Isoko's family famously owned the Yasuda Bank and also ran one of the richest and most powerful business cartels in Japan.¹³ Ono would be raised with emphasis on both Asian and Western culture.

Although Ono grew up in an atmosphere of wealth and privilege, she led a peripatetic life as a child, moving back and forth from Japan to the United States as her father's business demanded, resulting in a schizophrenic education that bounced her from the exclusive Peers' School (Gakushuin), where only children from the members of the imperial family or the members of the parliament's House of Peers were allowed to join, to public schools in the United States where Japanese were in the minority.¹⁴ Therefore, Ono's early life was full of extremes. She was always expected to assimilate into new environments, moving between the restricted exclusivity of Japanese high society and the casual freedom of America, and between cultural hegemony and marginality. Ono discussed these years in a 1994 interview, observing, "I remember when I was very young in America, trying to explain to friends that the Japanese were not all bad. Then when I was in Japan, I was saying that not all Americans are bad. Strangely, that has become my fate, bridging gaps, for instance, between Japan and America and between avant-garde art and rock and roll."¹⁵

¹² Murray Sayle, "The Making of Yoko Ono, Prophet of the 1960s," in *Yes Yoko Ono*, 51; Donald Kirk, "In Tokyo," *The Ballad of John and Yoko* (New York: Rolling Stone Press Book, 1982), 14.

¹³ Kirk, 14.

¹⁴ Ono's maternal grandfather had been given Peers' status in 1915 (Sayle, 51).

¹⁵ Joan Crowder, "Mind Games," *Santa Barbara News-Press*, September 2, 1994, 8-10.

The Ono family moved back to Tokyo from San Francisco in 1941 as the war years began, where she was enrolled in a Christian academy that specifically welcomed Japanese children who had been educated abroad. However, she ultimately was tutored at home because of the escalation of the war. She wrote about this period in 1974, recalling, "There were several maids and private tutors beside me. I had one private tutor who read me the Bible and another foreign tutor who gave me piano lessons, and my attendant taught me Buddhism."¹⁶ After the American bombing of Tokyo in 1945, Ono's mother fled to the countryside with her children (her father was running a bank branch in Hanoi throughout the war).¹⁷ Ono and her brother were forced to attend the local country school, where their schoolmates harassed them for their courtly speech and manners.

The Ono family returned to Tokyo in 1946 as the American Occupation of Japan began in the aftermath of the U.S. atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the humiliating surrender by Emperor Hirohito. Yeisuke Ono became an executive in the Bank of Tokyo following the war and renewed his family's lifestyle of privilege. In what must have been a startling contrast to the rest of bombed-out Tokyo, Ono returned to the elegant Peers' School, now relocated on imperial property. Outside the walls of the compound, Tokyo was a blackened ruin, flattened from the American fire bombings of 1945, its citizens living close to starvation, in squalor, and in misery. As Murray Sayle observes of this post-war period, "Pacifism has been Japan's most enduring legacy of those years. 'Make love not war,' the

¹⁶ Kirk, 22. Quoted from an autobiographical account by Ono written in Japanese for the *Bungei Shunju* in 1974.

¹⁷ Sayle, 51.

slogan of the Western Sixties, well expresses the mood of Tokyo in 1956, as of starving Berlin in 1918. Right up to this day, ‘Peace’ (a brand of cigarette) and ‘Love’ (with an arrow-pierced heart) are English words almost every Japanese knows.”¹⁸ Ono’s lifelong commitment to peace is a product not only of her personal childhood experiences, but also of this Japanese pacifist impulse that entered the culture after World War II.

In 1952, Ono’s father was posted in the Manhattan branch of the Bank of Tokyo, and the Ono family moved to Scarsdale, New York. Ono enrolled in Sarah Lawrence College, majoring in music, but after spending only three years there, she left to marry the Japanese experimental composer Toshi Ichianagi. The marriage was not deemed acceptable by her parents, and so she was punished for ignoring their wishes by being cut off financially from her family.

Ono and Ichianagi subsequently moved to a loft on the lower east side of Manhattan, and in the summer of 1958, Ichianagi enrolled in experimental composition in a class conducted by John Cage at the New School for Social Research.¹⁹ Among Ichianagi’s classmates were George Brecht, Allan Kaprow, La Monte Young, and Jackson Mac Low; Ono attended some of the lectures as a guest.²⁰ Cage’s theory of music, influenced partly by Dada sound poetry, partly by Zen thought, proposed that all forms of sound should be used by a composer.²¹

¹⁸ Sayle, 53.

¹⁹ Alexandra Munroe, *Scream Against the Sky: Scream Against the Sky*, exh. cat. (New York: Harry N. Abrams), 217.

²⁰ Jerry Hopkins, *Yoko Ono* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986) 22.

Spontaneous noises in the room, including incidental conversation, sneezing, clearing of throats, creaking seats, and even individual thoughts of the audience, became part of the content of the piece. Such compositions therefore incorporated the ideas of chance, detachment, spontaneity, and transiency as part of musical composition. Even more important was the way in which Cage reoriented the audience, forcing them to become full participants in the creation of the work. Merging art and real life by using ambient sound and chance phenomena thus liberated the artist from a rigid structure. Art was transformed from the self-indulgent expression of one artist into a communal act at the exact moment when Abstract Expressionism was the apparent king in New York City. Yoko Ono later commented that Cage, "taught me that it's all right to do anything--his work was like seeing a big green light that said, "Go!"²²

From December 1960 to June 1961, Ono hosted the famous Chambers Street Series in her loft. La Monte Young organized the programs, and George Brecht developed a method for writing down these events in a drastically abbreviated "score," modeled after Zen koans.²³ Brecht felt that such scores should act as a catalyst, with the potential to spark an intuitive grasp of reality. The score therefore can be considered a symbolic map of a performance or as a conundrum for the mind, and is directly related to the conceptual "instructions" that would later accompany Fluxus pieces. The Chamber Street Series formed the seeds of Fluxus, a loose confederation of conceptual artists of which Ono became a key player in 1961.

²¹ Cage attended D. T. Suzuki's lectures on Zen Buddhism at the New School in 1947. Judith Spiegel, "Chaos and Order: A Skeletal History of Experimental Music," *High Performance* (Issue 31, 1985): 23.

²² McKenna, 80.

²³ Zen koans are terse phrases that serve as meditative thought problems to aid enlightenment.

Central to launching of the Fluxus movement was George Maciunas, a follower of Cage who befriended Ono when he began to attend performances in her loft. Fluxus will be discussed in more depth in the next section of this chapter entitled “Repercussions in the Art World.”

Ichiyanagi returned to Tokyo to pursue his music in 1961. When Ono joined him in 1962, she carried the seeds of the Fluxus movement to Japan, where it soon flourished. Her work during this period was extremely creative and risky, and gave rise to one of her most famous performances, *Cut Piece*. Ono’s thoughts of cutting began with an script she wrote in 1961 called *Painting Until It Becomes Marble*, in which she instructs the performer to take a piece of art work “that you like, Let visitors cut out their favorite parts and take them. . . . Ask many visitors to cut out their favorite parts until the whole thing is gone.”²⁴ In *Cut Piece*, Ono becomes this art object, and the piece is shaped around the balance of power as it shifts between the artist and her audiences as the program progresses. The performance was first enacted in Kyoto’s Yamaichi Concert Hall in 1964 and repeated a number of times in the West for the next two years. This emotionally complex act begins with Ono walking onto a bare stage in a black dress. She then sinks into a Japanese seated/kneeling position, stone-faced, and places a pair of scissors in front of her. She asks the audience to come up onstage, one-by-one, to cut off pieces of her clothing and take them away. As her clothes are cut into fragments, more and more of Ono’s nude body is revealed, until she is stripped bare. Witnessing Ono’s *Cut Piece* was unforgettable. It became her signature piece, and her performances brought her fame over the next two years.

²⁴ Yoko Ono, *Grapefruit* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1970), unpaginated.

Ono returned to New York from Japan in 1964 after having divorced Ichianagi, married the American jazz musician and filmmaker Anthony Cox, and given birth to a daughter named Kyoko. As a result of her strong lifelong identification with both Japan and the United States, Ono's art tends to have no boundaries when it comes to appropriating symbols or freely mixing imagery from both high and low culture and from both the East and West. Her fame performing *Cut Piece* in the mid-sixties, a work that shifts meaning with each venue and audience, is what ultimately brought her to London.

Yoko Ono came to London from New York in September 1966 in order to participate in an ambitious conference called the Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS), and stimulated by the art scene, she, her husband Anthony Cox, and their baby daughter remained in the city after the event was finished.²⁵ "The whole scene was, from the point of view of an American, very underground, very intimate, very high quality," she later recalled.²⁶ Certainly, more venues seemed open to her artwork than in New York, and her name and activities quickly appeared in the prominent London underground newspaper, *IT*. As an indication of how quickly and well her work was received, she was showing *Unfinished Paintings and Objects by*

²⁵ DIAS began with a three-day symposium on September 24-27, followed by several days of public lectures, concerts, and Happenings at different locations around London. She performed *Cut Piece* in a program called "Two Evenings with Yoko Ono" at the Africa Center, Sepember 28 and 29, 1966.

²⁶ Communication with Paul Trynka, quoted in Alan Clayson, with Barb Jungr and Robb Johnson, *Woman: The Incredible Life of Yoko Ono* (Surrey, UK: Chrome Dreams, 2004), 46.

Yoko Ono at the well-known Indica Gallery just two months after she arrived in Great Britain.

John Dunbar managed the Indica Gallery, a small experimental art space in Picadilly. Because Dunbar's wife was the singer Marianne Faithful, the gallery attracted many pop celebrities (Paul McCartney was one of its financial backers). Dunbar invited John Lennon to visit Yoko Ono's unusual solo show, promising a "happening." Lennon had little background in avant-garde art and hoped that a happening might include an orgy when he arrived at the gallery for a private preview on the night of November 9.²⁷ Instead, he had a chance encounter with Yoko Ono that famously changed his life.

Lennon immediately realized that there would be no orgy; nevertheless, he was captivated and intrigued by the strange, off-beat art that he found in the gallery. Some examples of the art exhibited by Ono included a large black bag with the caption, "with a member of the audience inside," something called a "sky T.V." that was a closed-circuit television set up in the gallery for looking at the sky, and an "eternal time clock" without hands (figure 2.2 and 2.3).²⁸

When Lennon got to Ono's *Ceiling Piece* (also called *Ceiling Painting*), the label instructed him to climb a stepladder to the ceiling, upon which were the tiny words, "Yes," meant to be read with the magnifying glass on hand (figure 2.4). John Lennon always recalled the thrill of the moment when he saw the words "yes." Ono

²⁷ Coleman, 416.

²⁸ Coleman, 417.

later recounted his reaction: “If that had said ‘no’ instead of ‘yes,’ he wouldn’t bother to see the show anymore. But that ‘yes’ was like an answer to him, you see?”²⁹

John Dunbar finally brought John Lennon to meet Ono, who was downstairs in the gallery, informing her, “this man wants to hammer a nail into your piece,” which was a freshly-painted white wood panel with a hammer suspended on a chain.³⁰ Visitors to the show were meant to hammer in nails at their whim, so that this artwork entitled *Painting to Hammer a Nail* was considered completed only after the show closed (figure 2.5). Ono was annoyed that her pristine painting was going to be marred by a nail before the show opened, and so she demanded five shillings for the privilege. Lennon wittily responded, “I’ll give you an imaginary five shillings if you’ll let me hammer the imaginary nail.”³¹ Ono later remembered this as the moment of recognition of a kindred spirit: “That was John Lennon, I thought, so I met a guy who plays the same game I played.”³²

It took months after this first meeting for Ono and Lennon’s ensuing relationship to slowly turn from friendship to a love affair. During this time, the two engaged in what Ray Coleman describes in his definitive biography of Lennon as an “artistic flirtation.”³³ Ono began by sending Lennon a copy of her small square book

²⁹ Rood Wit Blauw tape.

³⁰ Rood Wit Blauw tape.

³¹ Coleman, 420.

³² Yoko Ono, “Some Notes on the Lisson Gallery Show,” October 1967, in *Yes Yoko Ono*, 292.

³³ Coleman, 421.

called *Grapefruit*, which was filled with conceptual art scripts and instructions, the contents of which both annoyed him and piqued his imagination. Contact was accelerated when Ono started to persistently phone Lennon. Yoko Ono was a talented musician who was most at home composing and playing experimental avant-garde electronic music. Lennon invited her over to his mansion one evening to use his home studio to make some improvised recordings with him. The result was their first collaboration: a joint record album released under the title, *Unfinished Music No. 1: Two Virgins*, marking the occasion in May 1968 when they composed and recorded experimental electronic music in an all night session that ended in the morning with their first time making love, after which they became inseparable. At the time, Lennon took nude pictures with an automatic camera of himself with his new lover. Their decision to release the album that fall with these pictures on both the front and back album covers was what convinced many in the music world and a substantial number of fans that John Lennon had lost his sense of propriety and judgment because of his association with Yoko Ono (figure 2.5).

The covers caused immediately controversy and swift censorship. Apple Records distributed through E.M.I., causing E.M.I chairman Sir Joseph Lockwood, lectured Ono and Lennon about the implications of releasing such an album cover, “I’m not worried about the rich people, the duchesses and those people who follow you. But your mums and dads and girl fans will object strongly. You will be damaged and what will you gain? What’s the purpose of it?” to which Ono replied, “It’s art.”³⁴ Sir Lockwood would only agree to press the albums, but not to distribute

³⁴ Coleman, 474-475.

them, leaving the company unscathed when the records were impounded at the docks in New Jersey, where a judge ruled that about 3,300 album covers were obscene and ordered them to be ground into wallboard.³⁵ A compromise over the covers in which the nude figures were obscured was finally reached with the court, and the albums were distributed wrapped in brown paper with holes cut out to reveal Ono and Lennon's faces (figure 2.6).

This clash over artistic license exemplifies the tensions that arose when Ono, a strong, established female artist, entered the controlling corporate world of popular music. As one assistant in the Apple Corps offices observed of Ono's travails,

There was a lot going against Yoko Ono when she walked into the goldfish bowl. She was overeducated, spoke several languages, was highly proficient in the culinary arts and [was] a writer of verse and creator of sculpture. She was well versed in history and a survivor of the New York avant-garde scrap race. She was also an older woman and Japanese. Somehow she managed to carry it all with ease, as she did her hair, as part of the terrain.³⁶

In a world where the wives and girlfriends of the Beatles were expected to respect the hierarchies of masculinity and celebrity by quietly fading into the background, Yoko Ono was a raised nail that many felt the urge to hammer down. By December 1968, Ono and Lennon found that the tidal wave of negative publicity they received because of their personal relationship put them in what Dutch writer Bram de Swaan described as a “position of ambivalence,” in that they were “on the one hand, a strange symbol of publicity of everything that is going on in mass society,” and on the

³⁵ “Cameras Grind Raquel Into Myra,” *The Washington Post*, July 18, 1969, B13.

³⁶ Richard DiLello, *The Longest Cocktail Party: An Insider’s Diary of the Beatles, Their Million Dollar ‘Apple’ Empire and Its Wild Rise and Fall* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Mojo Books, 1972), 38.

other, considered outside of the mainstream.³⁷ “How do you feel about that position?” de Swaan asked Ono. “I mean, on the one hand, to be so publicized, and on the other, not to really belong there?”³⁸ Ono readily acknowledged de Swaan’s characterization: “We almost feel as if we’re on the top of a high tree where the wind is blowing very strong, and we’re just sort of holding onto each other and shivering—the insecurity bit—because the underground people obviously think that we’re established, and the establishment thinks we’re crazy, we’re freaks, you know.”³⁹

Repercussions in the Art World

When Ono began to collaborate with Lennon in 1968, she was an active member of the London avant-garde art world for two years. At the time, Ono was associated with an informal international coalition of artists, musicians, and writers known as Fluxus, an iconoclastic movement that sought to integrate art into everyday life, while working against the established, market-driven art world, with roots in “Dada and Futurist sound poetry, Futurist Brutalism, Luigi Russolo’s ‘Sound of Noise,’ Dada Theater, vaudeville, Marcel Duchamp’s Readymade, and the LEF and Novy LEF Constructivists of Russia,” all of which integrated art with modern life.⁴⁰

³⁷ Yoko Ono, 12 December 1968 interview conducted by Dutch writer Bram de Swaan for Dutch VARA-TV Channel Nederland 2’s “Rood Wit Blauw.” A version was aired 15 January 1969. *John Lennon Archives 1968-69*, DVD (Apple Films, Ltd., 2004).

³⁸ “Rood Wit Blauw” interview.

³⁹ “Rood Wit Blauw” interview.

⁴⁰ Jon Hendricks, “Yoko Ono and Fluxus,” *Yes Yoko Ono*, 39.

Lithuanian-born George Maciunas is credited with inventing the name of this loosely-organized movement, and he also acted as chief administrator, manager, and enabler of a tremendous number of Fluxus projects. Artists in the United States and Canada, Eastern and Western Europe, and Korea and Japan became members, but because of its anti-authoritarian nature, there was never any institutionalized headquarters for Fluxus. Ono began working with Maciunas in New York in 1961, and contributed to his projects for seventeen years until his death. After Lennon and she became a couple, he also collaborated on Fluxus projects with Maciunas.

One important Fluxus concept that was in part pioneered by Ono and later used in her collaborations with Lennon was the use of “intermedia.” Intermedia was a word coined by Fluxus member Dick Higgins in 1966 as a critical term to describe works located within the interstices of “the general idea of art media” (painting, poetry, performance, etc.) and “life media” (ambient sound, spontaneous or improvisational spoken words, physical constraints, etc.).⁴¹ Intermedia therefore creates a type of unpredictable meaning that arises when art moves into life situations. For example, in Ono’s 1961 *Painting to Shake Hands (Painting for Cowards)*, Ono wrote the instructions, “Drill a hole in a canvas and put your hand out from behind. Receive your guests in that position. Shake hands and converse with hands.”⁴² When Ono actualized these instructions by sitting behind a canvas with a hole in the middle, she became the embodiment of her painting, with which the viewers were to

⁴¹ Dick Higgins, “Intermedia,” *Something Else Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (1966): 1.

⁴² Yoko Ono, *Grapefruit: Works and drawings by Yoko Ono* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), no pagination.

physically interact. The spontaneous and improvisational interchange between artist and audience places Ono's painting between the media of painting and performance. By adding the "life media" of touch and sign language to the visual codes one commonly uses to "know" a painting, every viewing becomes a phenomenological experience that is shared by artist and audience.

Dick Higgins was quite aware of the rising presence of the mass media in the sixies, and in 1966 called for new ways to use the new technology of television, transistor radio, etc. for intermedia, because, "Simply talking about Viet Nam or the crisis in our Labor movements is no guarantee against sterility. We must find the ways to say what has to be said in the light of our new means of communicating. For this we will need new rostrums, organizations, sources of information. There is a great deal for us to do, perhaps more than ever. But we must now take the first steps."⁴³ Whether or not Ono and Lennon were aware of this call to arms by Higgins, they effectively appropriated the mass media as a new means of communicating and utilized intermedia concepts as they operated within the interstices of media events and art events.

Although working within the Fluxus spirit, Ono resisted being strictly labeled a Fluxus artist or a member of any group and struggled to forge her identity as an independent artist. Therefore, while joining into Fluxus activities and projects, Ono remained somewhat aloof from its community of artists. Art historian Hannah Higgins recognizes Ono's contributions in linking Fluxus to popular culture, but calls

⁴³ Dick Higgins, "Statement on Intermedia" in Wolf Vostell, ed., *Dé-coll/age (décollage)* (Frankfurt and New York: Typos Verlag and Something Else Press: July 1967), no pagination.

her a “very problematic figure in Fluxus, because she doesn’t really share any sort of social interest in the community of Fluxus people.”⁴⁴ Thus, while this dissertation makes connections to a Fluxus practices and mindset in Ono and Lennon’s peace events, Ono’s ambivalence toward this loosely organized group of artists also separates their work from Lennon and hers.

Considering Ono’s past work, it was a meaningful departure for her not only to collaborate publicly with John Lennon, but also to use their love affair as a legitimate form of artistic expression. As part of Ono’s efforts to forge her own artistic identity as an independent artist, she had always minimized any contributions to her art by her two previous husbands, Toshi Ichiyangagi and Anthony (Tony) Cox. Although she worked closely with both her first husband (experimental musician Toshi Ichiyanagi) and her second (artist, film producer and director Tony Cox), and each was associated with Fluxus during his marriages to Ono, she never publicly acknowledged their roles in creating, staging, or promoting her artwork.⁴⁵ After meeting Lennon, Ono further separated herself from her past by minimizing the

⁴⁴ Hannah Higgins is Dick Higgins daughter and noted Fluxus scholar. Quote from interview by Jeff Abell, “Hannah Higgins,” *Mouth to Mouth* electronic magazine (Winter 2004), <http://www.mouthtomouthmag.com/higgins.html> (accessed March 10, 2007).

⁴⁵ Ono and her previous two husbands’ artistic interests were closely associated. Her artistic associations during her first marriage to the Japanese experimental musician Ichiyanagi Toshi (married 1956-1963), involved producing avant-garde concerts and Fluxus events in New York and Tokyo, as well as in fabricating an exhibit of Ono’s instructional paintings at the Sogetsu Art Center in Tokyo in 1962. During her marriage to the American artist and filmmaker Tony Cox (married 1963-1969), they worked side-by-side to produce Fluxus events, collaborative environments, and collaborative films in New York, London, and Tokyo. Cox also actively promoted Ono’s artwork to galleries and the press.

manner in which her husbands were associated with her work. For example, in 1969 Ono analyzed her artistic relationship with Tony Cox as follows:

My career was going well, but my husband [Cox] and I were fighting about who would answer the phone. He wanted always to answer the phone so that he would be into everything. I always thought of him as my assistant, you see. But he wanted it to be like Judith Malina and her husband [of the Living Theater]. He wanted it to be both of us. You see, *then* all I wanted was someone who would be interested in my work. I needed a producer.”⁴⁶

Such concerns draw a sharp contrast with the Lennon’s working practices within The Beatles. Collaboration is the norm within rock bands in general, and when composing songs, with Paul McCartney and Lennon in particular. McCartney and Lennon were so musically intertwined that they agreed that no matter who originated a song, it would be credited to both of them.⁴⁷ Lennon so closely identified with McCartney that when he first heard McCartney’s song *Hey Jude* in 1968, he remembered saying, “‘Ah, it’s me!, it’s me,’ He [McCartney] says, ‘No, it’s me.’ I said, ‘Check, we’re going through the same bit.’”⁴⁸ This was a far cry from the customary artistic practices of Ono, which leads one to infer that Lennon would have viewed the couple’s collaboration as a very natural outcome of their closeness.

⁴⁶ Rollin, 37. Of course, realistically, Lennon was also Ono’s producer in that none of their events would have taken place without his financing along with the administrative and technical support of Apple Records (a division of Apple Corps Ltd., founded by The Beatles).

⁴⁷ This explains why *Give Peace a Chance*, a song that was a spontaneous product of the Montreal *Bed-In*, originally had the byline “Lennon-McCartney” (John Lennon and Paul McCartney). Lennon’s use of the credit “Lennon-McCartney” for his songs ceased with the demise of The Beatles.

⁴⁸ John Lennon, interviewed by Jonathan Cott, *Rolling Stone* (November 23, 1968), reprinted in Jonathan Cott and Christine Doudna, eds., *The Ballad of John and Yoko* (Garden City, NY: Rolling Stone Press Book, 1982), 50.

The artwork Ono created when married to her first two husbands was neither openly collaborative, nor political, emotional, or concerned with love. In fact, although Fluxus art is experiential in nature and powered by the interactions between the self and everyday objects and events, there is not a single Fluxus piece that celebrates a personal love relationship, nor is any of the artwork overtly political, even though these same Fluxus artists often held very strong private political beliefs.⁴⁹ For example, Fluxus member Jon Hendricks was very effective as an activist artist during the late sixties and early seventies, but he never associated his political actions with his Fluxus art. Along with Fluxus member Jean Toches, he formed the Guerrilla Art Action Group (GAAG). As artist activists, Hendricks and Toche are perhaps most famous for their “Blood Bath” demonstration at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1969 (figures 2.7), and their arrest and conviction (along with Faith Ringgold), for desecrating the American flag in a 1970 show at the Judson Memorial Church in New York City. Hendricks was also instrumental, along with Irving Petlin and Fraser Dougherty, in designing and distributing the famous Art Workers Coalition’s anti-war poster *Q: And Babies? A: And Babies* (1970) in protest against the My Lai massacre in Vietnam (figure 2.8). That Fluxus members avoided emotional sentimentality in their art and kept political activities separate from their avant-garde affiliations is representative of attitudes held by many artists and critics in the sixties. These attitudes will be examined more

⁴⁹ See, Lucy Lippard, *A Different War* (Seattle, WA: The Real Comet Press, 1990), 24-28 and Francis Frascina, *Art, Politics, and Dissent: Aspects of the Art Left in Sixties America* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 170-176.

closely to make sense of why Ono and Lennon's 1969 Year of Peace was not considered work of "serious" artists.

Ono and Lennon's political message of peace and their celebration of their love as a couple were appropriate in the world of rock music during the late sixties. However, open displays of unabashed sentimentality evoked disdain in artistic circles in this same period (as well as today). As seen with Jon Hendricks, many preferred to separate politics from their artistic affiliations.

In the sixties, the "cheap" emotions displayed by or encouraged in commercialized art and popular entertainment and disseminated through magazines, newspapers, advertisements, posters, records, movies, radio, and television, were considered to be the antithesis of serious intellectual expression.⁵⁰ Many in the art world joined into debates about consumerism and what was seen as its corrosive influence in the sixties. This artistic awareness of consumerism was especially brought forth in Pop Art, which was centered on mass-produced imagery from the popular culture. Pop Art, ironically embraced the cheap, sentimentalized emotions

⁵⁰ One example of this concern with anti-intellectualism in sixties popular culture was the fight for "quality" programming over the airwaves. On May 9, 1961, in the speech "Television and the Public Interest," FCC Chairman Newton Minow declared that the programs offered by the three commercial television networks had failed the public interest. Minow famously invited his audience to sit down and watch a day of television, where "I can assure you that you will observe a vast wasteland." This speech served as a catalyst for reforms that led to institutionalizing the national public television and radio system we have today. For a fascinating discussion and interview with Minow, see "Newton Minow and Television Today," *Talk of the Nation*, NPR, 6 September 2006.

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5775619>
(accessed 28 September 2006).

that were part and parcel of advertisements, the tabloids, and comic strips a form of critique of mass culture.

Previously in twentieth century discourses on art and society, discussions of avant-garde art and mass culture were hierarchically framed as “good” versus “bad” elements *within* the capitalist system, so that vanguard art was elevated to a superior position over mundane tastes.⁵¹ By the 1960s, however, intellectual discussions about high art had become uncoupled from a larger cultural context. Most important for understanding the dynamics behind Ono and Lennon’s artistic rejection is how this “art for art’s sake” attitude separated “good” art from the economic, political, or ideological conditions that make up the culture of a society.⁵² Such beliefs led certain artists to draw a clear line between art and politics. In one such instance, the abstract painter Ad Reinhardt dramatically declared in a 1967 radio debate on the effectiveness of protest art that, “In no case in recent decades has the statement [of purpose] of protest art had anything to do with the statement in the fine arts.”⁵³

⁵¹ In Greenberg’s discussion in “Avant-garde and Kitsch,” for example, he states, “One and the same civilization produces simultaneously two such different things as a poem by T.S. Eliot and a Tin Pan Alley song, or a painting by Braque and a *Saturday Evening Post* cover,” in Francis Frascina, ed., *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 48.

⁵² See, for example, Clement Greenberg’s influential “Modernist Painting” (1960), “After Abstract Expressionism” (1962), and “Post Painterly Abstraction (1964), reprinted in *Clement Greenberg, The Collected Essays and Criticism: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 85-93, 121-133, and 192-196. Jonathan Harris provides an excellent discussion of this phenomenon as well as the role Greenberg played in its development in “Part 2: Abstract Expressionism and the Politics of Criticism,” in *Modernism in Dispute: Art Since the Forties*, Paul Wood, Francis Frascina, eds. Jonathan Harris, and Charles Harrison (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993), 53-62.

Reinhardt made only one piece of political art called *No War* (1967) (figure 2.9), but simply considered it propaganda and made sure to differentiate it by style and medium from his signature paintings.⁵⁴ For Reinhardt, as for many others, in order for “high art” (or “fine art”) to preserve its integrity, it had to remain a self-contained system.⁵⁵ “Art is art-as-art,” he famously wrote, “and everything else is everything else.”⁵⁶

Concomitant with these assumptions about the autonomy of art was the leftist position that avant-garde art must remain outside the bounds of the mainstream culture as a political strategy. Herbert Marcuse, a major Frankfurt School theorist, articulated this approach in his extremely popular *One-Dimensional Man*. Published in 1964, this influential work was embraced by many in the New Left during the

⁵³ Transcript from a WBAI radio program broadcast on August 10, 1967, in which Reinhart was part of a panel discussion with artists Leon Golub, Allan D’Arcangelo, and Marc Morrell, moderated by Jeanne Siegel, entitled “How Effective is Social Protest Art?” Jeanne Siegel, ed., *Artwords: Discourse on the 60s and 70s* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 105.

⁵⁴ The piece was a print/poster composed of an airmail post card and lists of antiwar phrases beginning with the word “no,” created for an Artists and Writers Protest folio. Lucy Lippard, *A Different War: Vietnam in Art* (Seattle, Whatcome Museum of History and Art and the Real Comet Press, 1990), 17-18.

⁵⁵ Not all intellectuals embraced this idea. As early as 1958, British critic Lawrence Alloway, a proponent of Pop art, refuted the static viewpoint that “fine art” must be autonomous and separate. He proposed that the idea of the arts should be flexible enough to encompass “the whole complex of human activities,” and declared “the new role for the fine arts is to be one of the possible forms of communication in an expanding framework that also includes mass arts.” Lawrence Alloway, “The Arts and the Mass Media,” *Architectural Design* (February 1958), 35.

⁵⁶ Ad Reinhardt, “Art as Art” (1962) reprinted in *Art in Theory, 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1992), 806.

sixties.⁵⁷ Marcuse resisted the idea of making avant-garde art, music, and literature available to a wider popular audience. He argued that it was unhealthy to disseminate “higher culture” through the mass media in an advanced industrial society. Without the sharp division between “high” and “low” culture, he warned that both the capitalist and Soviet states could effectively flatten out “the antagonism between culture and social reality.” In other words, Marcuse, like others before him in the history of the avant-garde, felt that vanguard art should function like a social gadfly, and that this resistant critical position would be insidiously neutralized if co-opted and integrated into the popular culture.⁵⁸

Such a wholesale rejection of the mass media and its popular audience affected the way some of the more radical artists viewed their art in the sixties. Witness, for example, Carl Andre’s acerbic comment about mainstream culture quoted in *Art in America* in 1967: “Art is what we do. Culture is what is done to us.”⁵⁹ Andre thus articulates the mindset held by a sector of avant-garde artists of the time, where the integrity of his art relies upon its isolation from the predominant culture. Lucy Lippard recounts in *A Different War* how she helped organize a 1968 exhibition of important Minimalist artwork in which Andre was represented along

⁵⁷ The New Left differentiated itself from the “old” left in that it rejected the official Communist Party and was opposed to the politics of the Soviet Union. Michael P. Lerner, “Introduction,” *Counterculture and Revolution*, David Horowitz, Michael P. Lerner, and Craig Pyes, eds. (New York: Random House, 1972) x.

⁵⁸ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press: 1964), 56-83.

⁵⁹ Carl Andre, quoted in Barbara Rose and Irving Sandler, “Sensibility of the Sixties,” *Art in America* (January/February 1967), 45.

with Robert Ryman, Robert Morris, Jo Baer, and Donald Judd.⁶⁰ Held at the Paula Cooper Gallery in SoHo as a fundraiser for the Student Mobilization Against the War, the exhibition was presented in response to Vietnam, but “the content had absolutely nothing to do with the war.”⁶¹ In an attempt to clarify this complex positioning of politics and art, the organizers prudently crafted the following statement:

These 14 non-objective artists are against the war in Vietnam. They are supporting this commitment in the strongest manner open to them by contributing major examples of their current work. The artists and the individual pieces were selected to present a particular esthetic attitude, in the conviction that a cohesive group of important works makes the most forceful statement for peace.⁶²

Accordingly, whereas Carl Andre viewed himself as a political person, like others in his group, he envisioned his art as safely encapsulated in its own world. His motives for participating in the SoHo exhibition may have been political, but the intellectual content of his Minimalist sculptures was not.

Those in the Fluxus group to which Ono belonged before meeting Lennon also celebrated their outsider status and used their relative anonymity as a means to critique the mainstream art world. If Yoko Ono had kept her art separate from her relationship with John Lennon, she could have maintained this critical stance. Instead, her public alliance with a rock superstar dissolved her anonymity and threw her into the mainstream of popular culture. Ono’s shift in social position and her open collaboration with Lennon resulted in her new beliefs that art should be intertwined with the popular culture, and that the mass media could be

⁶⁰ Lippard, 18.

⁶¹ Lippard, 18.

⁶² Lippard, 18 and 20.

commandeered to serve the general good. But considering the prevailing attitudes in the art world, using the media to launch a peace campaign aimed at a popular audience was a risky business for any artist.

The stakes were raised even higher when Ono and Lennon declared that their collaborative projects were a result of an equitable exchange of ideas between lovers. Leveling the playing field between conceptual artist and rock musician, and wife and husband, was an anomaly in both the mainstream and alternative art scenes of the period. Open collaborations in the fine arts have never been the norm, and especially in the “cool” sixties, there was no place for such an equal artistic partnership based on emotional, romantic love that bordered on kitsch. What attracted significant and positive press coverage in art journals, newspapers, and magazines was a narrowly focused kind of art produced by what was essentially a “men’s club”: a stable of predominantly male artists whose work was pushed by powerful art critics and sold by a handful of select New York commercial galleries. In one representative example of how art was covered in the late sixties, *Artforum* editor Philip Lieder wrote with gravity about the “deadly seriousness and enormous difficulty of modern art in our times.” Like others in this period, he divided contemporary art into two parts: “high art” (abstract art) and “low art.” (most often, representational art).⁶³ On the one hand,

⁶³ As previously discussed, this dichotomy between “high” and “low” in American art stems from the writings of Clement Greenberg, arguably the most powerful art critic of the 1960s. People like Leider and Hilton Kramer, *The New York Times* art critic during the sixties, helped disseminate Greenberg’s ideas in both the art and popular press, while beginning in the later 1960s, followers such as Michael Fried and Rosalind Krauss espoused Greenberg’s views in academic circles (see Barbara M. Reise, “Greenberg and The Group: A Retrospective View” (1968), reprinted in *Art and Modern Culture*, 252-263). By the 1970s, however, this idea of a sharp division between abstraction and literalism began losing ground. For an excellent critical

lone male artists such as Morris Louis, Jules Olitski, Kenneth Noland, or Frank Stella personified “high art” for Leider. He lauded their art as “impersonal, formal, humorless, abstract, and cerebral.”⁶⁴ On the other hand, Leider claimed that “low art,” “disguise[d] its concern with art behind a facade of mock concern with ‘life,’” as exemplified by the male artists Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, and Edward Kienholz.⁶⁵ In such company, Ono and Lennon’s peace campaign would have had a distinct aroma of sentimentality without the prerequisite irony in that it was

debate about Greenberg’s writings between T.J. Clark and Michael Fried, see *Pollock and After*, 71-112. Also see Robert Storr, “No Joy in Mudville: Greenberg’s Modernism Then and Now,” in *Modern Art and Popular Culture: Readings in High & Low*, eds. Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik (New York: Museum of Modern Art & Harry N. Abrams, 1990), 160-190.

⁶⁴ Philip Leider, “Gallery ’68: High Art and Low Art,” *Look Special Issue on Sound and Fury in the Arts* (9 January 1968). 14. The implication here is that “high art” is Olympian, pure, and self-referential in that it is not “debased” by any references to the society-at-large. All of these “high” artists mentioned were represented by the André Emmerich Gallery, which had close ties to Clement Greenberg, whose ideas Leider was espousing, demonstrating how powerful critics and elite New York art galleries were complicit in promoting certain artists to collectors, museums, and the public. For a discussion of Leider’s commitment to Greenberg and his group, see Francis Frascina, *Art, Politics and Dissent: Aspects of the Art Left in Sixties America* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 142-146.

⁶⁵ Leider, 14. This is a cryptic way of saying that this Pop art is “contaminated” by references to mass culture, and therefore relegated to a lower rung (“low art”) in comparison to the intellectual and visual “purity” of abstraction (“high art”). What saves “low art” from becoming kitsch is the artist’s disengaged attitude toward the object, an attitude often laced with ironic humor. Once again, all of these “low” artists were interconnected in a closed system that included influential galleries and critics. The prestigious Leo Castelli Gallery in New York represented Claes Oldenberg and Roy Lichtenstein. Edward Kienholz was part of the West Coast avant-garde associated with Irving Blum’s Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles. Ferus (after 1966 called the Irving Blum Gallery) also famously represented New York-based Pop artists from the Leo Castelli Gallery. Until it relocated to New York in 1967, *Artforum* (and Leider as its editor) occupied upstairs offices in the same building as this Los Angeles gallery and was instrumental in making the gallery famous. Peter Plagens, “‘Ferus’: Gagosian Gallery, New York,” review in *Artforum* (December 2002), <http://www.artforum.com/inprint/issue=200210> (accessed 9 October 2006).

emotionally open and lacked a necessary “objective” stance to indicate a dispassionate remove that signaled, in Leider’s words, a “concern with art” over a “concern for life.” Instead, their collaborative artistic message never fit within the accepted parameters for “high” or “low” so-called “serious art” of the period, and, therefore, they were subject to critical indifference.⁶⁶

Ono and Lennon also were confronted with a hostile art scene that treated almost all women and outsiders with disdain and disrespect. The mainstream art culture in New York and London, the two cities in which Ono primarily worked, was decidedly misogynistic, Eurocentric, and often extremely cruel to women who were thought to have overstepped their bounds. When Ono submitted a detailed proposal in 1965 for a conceptual painting show at the trendy Leo Castelli Gallery in New York, she received a stinging response in which Ivan Karp wrote sarcastically, “Thank you so much for your urgent missive. It seems now, however, after your clarified and detailed exposition that the kind of show you have in mind fails to suit our temperament which is essentially restless, driven, aggressive, fiercely Western

⁶⁶ That some men had artistic partnerships with their wives was not a fact for public consumption during this period. Jeanne-Claude, for example, was not credited for her collaborations with her husband Christo during the sixties. Oldenburg’s first wife, Patty Mucha (then known as Pat Oldenburg), constructed and sewed all her husband’s large-scale soft sculptures on her Singer sewing machine in the early 1960s. Oldenburg continued to use this construction method throughout the decade. Only much later was Mucha’s creative partnership officially acknowledged. Since 1976, Oldenburg has collaborated with his second wife, Coosje van Bruggen, to create monumental public sculptures. “Recently Acquired: Claes Oldenburg Fagends – Small Version, 1968,” Richard Gray Gallery Newsletter, <http://www.richardgraygallery.com/> and the Oldenburg website, <http://www.oldenburgvanbruggen.com/> (both accessed 14 September 2006).

and concrete—not materialistic mind you – perish the thought—but terribly concrete.”⁶⁷

As in Karp’s letter to Ono, most men in the art world adopted this kind of combative “masculine” rhetoric during the sixties.⁶⁸ In this same period, work by women was generally marginalized or ignored. In two representative examples of how women were shunned, Judi Chicago wrote in her autobiography *Through the Flower* about receiving appalling treatment in 1960s Los Angeles and New York by male fellow artists who called her a “bitch” and a “castrator” behind her back, and by gallery owners who ignored or refused to look at her work: “...I was continually made to feel by men in the art world that there was something ‘wrong’ with me.”⁶⁹ Carolee Schneemann still feels scarred by the vituperative attacks and accusations of narcissism in New York in the sixties because of the way she used her own body in performances such as *Eye Body: 38 Transformative Actions*.⁷⁰

Even when a powerful inner circle of critics and galleries occasionally embraced a woman artist, assumptions about her femininity undermined the reception of her work. In a particularly egregious example of this dynamic, Anne Truitt’s masterfully painted wooden boxes were employed by Clement Greenberg as part of

⁶⁷ Excerpted from letter to Yoko Ono from Ivan Karp, New York, Leo Castelli Gallery, Winter 1965, in *Yes Yoko Ono*, exh. cat., eds. Alexandra Munroe and Jon Hendricks (New York: Japan Society and Harry N. Abrams, 2000), 287.

⁶⁸ For a discussion of the use of masculine language in the art world at this time, see Nicole Dubreuil-Blondin, “Feminism and Modernism: Paradoxes” (1983) excerpted in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1968-2000*, ed. Hillary Robinson (Oxford, UK & Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 493-495.

⁶⁹ Judy Chicago, *Through the Flower* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1975) 38-39.

⁷⁰ Carolee Schneemann in discussion with the author, September 9, 2004.

his polemical attack against Minimalist sculpture. As with Ono's work with Lennon, gender politics dictated the way in which Truitt's art was discerned.

Greenberg championed Truitt's abstract handmade works in the late 1960s for their “female sensibility” in order to reproach Minimalist artists such as Donald Judd and Robert Morris, whose work threatened to dislodge Greenberg's modernist theories.⁷¹ Judd, especially, had been dismissive of Truitt's work since 1963.⁷² By positioning her art as female *and* “Minimalist,” Greenberg played a macho game. He denigrated the male artists by inferring that the content of Minimalism was actually feminine, implying that the men sensed this and overcompensated with an exaggerated and theatrical masculine style to cover up what he called “*their* rather feminine sensibilities.”⁷³ Donald Judd responded, in part, by attacking Anne Truitt's work. Truitt recalled Greenberg's patronage during the 1960s with the dry comment, “Even I could see that I was at the center of a power game.”⁷⁴ Greenberg later

⁷¹ See Clement Greenberg, “Recentness of Sculpture” (1967) and “Changer: Anne Truitt” (1968 -- originally appearing in *Vogue* in 1967), reprinted in Greenberg, *Collected Essays*, 250-256 and 288-290. For the intricacies of this argument and the circumstances under which Truitt became a pawn in Greenberg's game, see James Meyer, “The Case for Truitt: Minimalism and Gender,” in *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 222-228.

⁷² For example, Judd quipped in 1963 that Truitt's art show at the André Emmerich Gallery “looks serious without being so.” Donald Judd, “Review for *Arts Magazine*: April-May/June 1963,” reprinted in *Complete Writings 1959-1975: Gallery Reviews, Book Reviews, Articles, Letters to the Editor, Reports, Statements, Complaints* (Halifax, Nova Scotia and New York: the Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and New York University Press, 2005), 85.

⁷³ Quoted from Greenberg's “Changer: Anne Truitt” (1967) in Meyer, *Minimalism*, 226.

dropped Truitt from his inner circle when she apparently did not live up to his expectations.⁷⁵ Recalling this virulent environment in New York during the sixties, she commented,

Men in those days were almost indescribable, an ‘ilk,’ who felt intrinsically superior to women, so that women were, *ipso facto*, discounted. They were turned into ‘cunts’ (that’s the way they talked about women). So these men, who were intent on their own superiority, would kill for it. They killed off women, the other men, and essentially turned them into the toad under the harrow. It happened to me, and so consequently, I know about it.⁷⁶

Anne Truitt typically bristled whenever anyone labeled her art “Minimalist,” or even classified her as a “woman artist.”⁷⁷ Throughout her career, she had to battle the “stereotype of female gentility, constructed as either a warm antidote to ‘cold’ minimalism, or as a kind of a minimalism ‘lite’.”⁷⁸ Obviously, during the sixties, most women artists would be inclined to try to avoid any hint of content that could cause her art to be typecast as female. Ono commented in a 1968 interview that other artists from the avant-garde had criticized her work for being “too soft,” which she

⁷⁴ James Meyer, “Grand Allusion: James Meyer Talks to Anne Truitt – Interview,” *Artforum* (May 2002), [http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_9_40/ai_86647180/pg_4], accessed 10 October 2006.

⁷⁵ Truitt commented in an interview with James Meyer, “He was not supportive all the way through; he was polite. I think he was disappointed—angry in a way—maybe because I didn’t do what he thought I should do. Perhaps he thought that I should pay attention to him and ask him what to do. I’m not quite sure what he wanted” (Meyer, “Grand Allusion”).

⁷⁶ Anne Truitt (1921-2004), who was famously refined, in an unusually frank discussion with the author, October 11, 2000.

⁷⁷ I witnessed this first-hand, having met Truitt in 1993 and remained in touch with her for about ten years.

⁷⁸ Meyer, *Minimalism*, 227.

equated with “feminine,” thus indicating that she, too, felt the pressure of these gender codes.⁷⁹ Against this backdrop, Yoko Ono’s decision in 1969 to create art that was based on her identity as the female half of a celebrity couple seems incredibly bold.

During the sixties, many artists found themselves in the spotlight when the all-encompassing media anointed their works interesting, worthy, or amusingly bizarre. In the quick-moving, fickle art market, an artist could achieve instant celebrity one day, only to be considered old news the next. Yet many were vying to be recognized much in the fashion of Andy Warhol, who never turned away publicity, no matter the form. As early as 1962, the kinetic artist Jean Tinguely acknowledged this trend, commenting that, “artists have become the new movie stars.”⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Kurtz, 41 (although this interview appeared in the September 1969 edition of *Avant Garde*, it was conducted at the same time as the 12 December 1968 interview conducted by Dutch writer Bram de Swaan for Dutch VARA-TV Channel Nederland 2’s “Rood Wit Blauw.”) Ono also recalled in 1996 that when she was living in New York in the early sixties, other members of Fluxus criticized her work as being “too dramatic,” a stereotypical description of excess that is usually leveled against women (and gay males). She dryly commented, “If you’re a good girl so to speak, kind of following the tradition of the avant-garde and using their vocabulary, then I think they’ll allow you to exist.” Michael Bracewell, “Give Yoko a Chance,” *The Guardian* (20 January 1996), <http://www.bd-studios.com/yoko/about/about_articles_1996_guardian.html>, accessed 2/12/03). In Japan, Ono remembers passing out flowers in the street in an art event: “That was my art and the avant-garde movement at that time were [sic] into things like cutting the heads off dogs in concert halls in front of people and pouring the blood into a cup and drinking it. That was their art. They thought my art was too delicate and silly.” Jamie Mandelkrau, “Interview Piece: Yoko Ono and Grapefruit,” *IT*, August 26, 1971, 15.

⁸⁰ Quoted in John Wulp, “The Night Senator and Mrs. Javits, Robert Rauschenberg, Niki de Saint-Phalle, Jean Tinguely, Merce Cunningham, the Stewed Prunes, *Life*, *Newsweek*, *Harper’s Bazaar* and *Show* magazines, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the Cream of New York’s Upper Bohemia All Saw, At Last, What

At the same time, many artists still harbored some contempt for those who practiced gratuitous self-promotion.⁸¹ It was one thing to win celebrity among one's peers and in the art press and quite another to become famous via the indiscriminate reporting of the popular press. Aggressively marketing one's own art was considered *déclassé* in the mainstream art world, and embracing public notoriety countered the goals of the avant-garde whose *modus operandi* was to work from the margins and against the grain of established art institutions while flying under the radar of the mass media.⁸² Yet, paradoxically, as the veteran arts journalist Sophy Burnham observed, "never before had contemporary art been so publicized and consumed with such gluttonous lust."⁸³ In terms of forging her own artistic reputation, Ono was particularly gifted in the art of self-promotion. She had gained an international reputation in the sixties in part by masterfully marketing herself almost as if she were

Was Happening," *Smiling Through the Apocalypse: Esquire's History of the Sixties*, ed. Harold Hayes (New York: Esquire Press: 1987) 534.

⁸¹ Robert Hughes discusses the changing values in the 1960s "as the art world gradually shed its idealist premises and its sense of outsidership and began to turn into Art Business" in "The Rise of Andy Warhol," *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 48.

⁸² Philip Lieder reflects the elitist attitudes of a mainstream art critic toward the public face of the art market when he laments that the gravity and formidability "of modern art in our times have been unfortunately blurred by the fashionableness of the milieu in which these artists create and exhibit – the 'art world.' Nothing could be further from what happens in the studio than the chic of the much-publicized 'scene' of sales, openings, cocktail parties and Sunday-supplement photographs. The art world is to the art that is created what a cheerleader is to a football game: one would never guess from her capers and her kickings that there are 22 men down there beating themselves bloody to make a point." Ironically, this elitist, sexist attack on the commercial art world is excerpted from Lieder's article on gallery trends in the middlebrow family magazine *Look* (Lieder, 14).

⁸³ Sophy Burnham, *The Art Crowd* (New York: David McKay Inc., 1973), 5.

a product, which included finessing name placement, commentary, and interviews in underground newspapers and journals, and coverage in the dailies and popular magazines.

For example, Ono was quite provocative in publicizing her 1967 *Film No. 4 (Bottoms)* and clearly understood how to create a media frenzy to help her cause when the British Board of Film Censors banned her film, making it impossible to release commercially. In this work, Ono presented an 80-minute succession of approximately 350 closely cropped naked buttocks, rhythmically jiggling and bouncing full screen as their owners walked in place (figure 2.10).⁸⁴ Ono lured publicity for her film with a titillating press release/program that began, “I wonder why men can get serious at all. They have this delicate long thing hanging outside their bodies, which goes up and down by its own will.” Naturally, her statement was widely quoted.⁸⁵

However, regardless of the tone of the publicity, *Bottoms* was never a lascivious cinematic romp, but a sensitive, abstract meditation on the body individually, in multiplication, and in nondifferentiation, as spectacle, and as artistic event.⁸⁶ For Ono, nudity also was key in order to make a social statement,

⁸⁴ A shorter 5-1/2 minute version, called either *Film No. 4* or *Fluxfilm 16*, was filmed in New York City in 1966. *Yes Yoko Ono*, 210.

⁸⁵ For the diverse appeal of this quote, see, for instance, Raymond Durgnat, review of “*Film No. 4* (Connoisseur movie), directed by Yoko Ono, produced by Anthony Cox,” in the esteemed *Films and Filming* (October 1967), 25; and the London underground newspaper *IT*, in which the entire press release was printed in a box next to the film review: “Yoko Onoism & Her Hairy Arseholes,” *IT [International Times]* (28 July–13 August 1967).

interpreting the bare buttocks as "the most defenseless part of the body," so that those who starred in the film were actively "showing faith to the world."⁸⁷

Yoko Ono received a serious critical review of her movie in the prestigious British magazine *Films and Filming*, in which the work was described as "almost a spiritual exercise for the spectator, an exercise in seeing the flesh, as it is, quite free from the pornographic, the puritan, and the derisive response."⁸⁸ Nevertheless, *Bottoms* was banned in Britain for obscenity, and Ono faced losing a valuable market for her film as well as the prospect of paying a hefty bill of fifty-seven pounds to defray the cost of the government's time spent making its decision.⁸⁹

What is of particular relevance to the subject of this dissertation is Ono's media-savvy response to her rejection by scheduling a rally outside the Film Censors' Office on March 10, 1967. Although she tried to convince others to join her protest, according to an eyewitness account by *New York Herald Tribune* journalist Sheldon Williams, only four young people showed up to help, although Leslie Hinton

⁸⁶ In terms of an artistic event, Ono even went so far as to describe the experience of filming *Bottoms* as a "happening." Chrissie Iles, "No. 4, 1966," in *Yes Yoko Ono*, 212.

⁸⁷ Scott MacDonald, "Yoko Ono: Ideas on Film (Interview/Scripts)." *Film Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (Fall 1989) 4. Ono's (and Lennon's) intellectual connection between nudity and social liberation was a common one within the counterculture and the peace movement in the sixties. Herbert Marcuse's influential *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955) in which he argued for a widened experience of *eros* to be expressed through sensuality, fantasy, and the arts provided a theoretical basis for this belief.

⁸⁸ Durnat, 24.

⁸⁹ Sheldon Williams, "Patterns in Today's Art: 1. Miniature Philosopher – The Trials of Yoko Ono," *Contemporary Review* 212, no. 1228 (May 1968), 268.

of the *Sun* put the number at about twenty.⁹⁰ Regardless, Ono speculated that 500 protestors would be present, causing seventeen policemen and “a battery” of press photographers to be on hand.⁹¹ Kevin Concannon has chronicled this clever manipulation of the media:

Ono protested in front of their [the British Board of Film Censor’s] London office, handing daffodils to passersby, telling reporters (who had been previously alerted to the protest) that the flowers – like the film itself – were “for peace.” Several prominent newspapers (including the *Sun* and the *Guardian*) published photographs of Ono’s flowery protest, and a week later she was featured in a cover story in the magazine *London Look*. The controversy also resulted in extensive television coverage of the film and its censorship – including the screening of clips from the film on Granada Television and Independent Television. By the month’s end, the film had been approved for public screening by the Greater London Council Licensing Committee (although still banned elsewhere). And by the time of its London premiere in August, it had benefited from an enormous amount of publicity.⁹²

⁹⁰ Williams, 268; Leslie Hinton, “An Indignant Protest, So Fragrantly Expressed,” *Sun* (11 March 1967), 12. Reiko Tomii and Kevin Concannon list this protest as a “solo event” in the *Yes Yoko Ono* catalog (*Yes Yoko Ono*, 314), although Hinton’s article indicates that Anthony Cox was present at the protest and seemed to be acting in partnership with Ono.

⁹¹ Williams, 268.

⁹² Kevin Concannon, “*War Is Over!*: John and Yoko’s Christmas Eve Happening, Tokyo, 1969,” in *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* (December 2005), 81. In addition, Williams quotes Ono connecting the film to the concept of peace in a comment to a [*London*] *Times* reporter: “The whole idea of my film is one of peace. It’s quite harmless; there’s no murder or violence in it. Why shouldn’t it be given a certificate?” (Williams, 268). It could be possible that Ono’s choice of daffodils “for peace” was meant to loosely link her event to the well-known peaceful student protest called the “Daffodil March,” held almost exactly one year before on March 17, 1966. London School of Economics (LSE) students and 1,500 students from other London universities peacefully marched down Fleet Street to protest the appointment of Walter Adams as LSE’s director, because he was connected to Ian Smith’s racist regime in Rhodesia. Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c. 1958-c. 1974* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 561-563.

Compare this press interest to the earlier reaction of art critic Grace Glueck in the *New York Times* when word spread that the film was being made. Without ever viewing the movie, she made the flippant comment, “Ho, hum. Anyone remember the short film whose star was Taylor Mead’s posterior? It was shown with Andy Warhol’s ‘My Hustler’ at the Cinemathéque last year. Will faces soon be passé?”⁹³ Obviously, Ono’s quest for publicity was imperative to generate the media “buzz” crucial for her film’s success. John Lennon proudly described Ono in a 1969 interview as “tough because she had to make it on her own in the art world, which is as snide as show business, if not more [so].”⁹⁴

By 1968, Ono had gotten used to seeing her name in the British newspapers and magazines. She mainly was portrayed as a “harmless eccentric” to “a wide section of the British public,”⁹⁵ but her bold public relations campaign seemed to have drawn criticism from some in the avant-garde who felt that perhaps she had compromised her principles by courting publicity to promote herself.⁹⁶ This was during the period she eventually nicknamed her “trial run” with fame. Ono recalled years later, “I was getting so famous that my sort of avant-garde friends said, well,

⁹³ Grace Glueck, “Art Notes: Bum Show,” *New York Times* (19 February 1967), 115.

⁹⁴ Leroy Aarons, “John and Yoko: Life in a ‘Fish Bowl,’” *The Washington Post* (15 June 1969), K9.

⁹⁵ Williams, 268.

⁹⁶ At the end of 1968, John Lennon obliquely commented on this rejection of Ono’s entrepreneurship: “It’s like any kind of artist has a product, unless he’s so pure that he’s gonna be a real purist like the Flux people. They should paint their paintings or do their poetry and then rip it up and not show it to anyone. If you’re going to show it, show it, show it to everybody.” “Rood Wit Blauw” interview.

we're not going to invite you to dinner anymore because you are in a different world. So I was feeling up in the air. I didn't have friends in the avant-garde, and I still didn't have friends elsewhere.”⁹⁷

When Ono and Lennon first appeared publicly as a couple in May 1968, they were not readily accepted into London's avant-garde where Ono had gained fame. Perhaps because Ono so obviously sought publicity for her artwork, and because her London artist friends had broken off with Ono, her much publicized liaison with such a famous rock superstar caused her life in the avant-garde to come to an impasse. Ono and Lennon were quickly made to feel like pariahs when they tried to participate in the clannish London art scene. When they appeared together at the reception for Ono's gallery show, it was as if a group decision had been made that Ono would be cut loose from this insular art world. In 1999, Ono recounted her difficulties with this art community in London:

[T]here was one time when there was a show at a kind of arts lab, meaning a kind of underground artistic...experimental place, and my work was in there. I had to go to the opening, and John would say, ‘Oh, let's go together.’ And this was before the whole world knew that we were together, but London knew, I think. And we arrived, and all the intellectual artsy -- well, great people, actually, my friends, all kind of turning their back towards us, you know, and sort of like pretending that they didn't notice that we came in.

And so John said, “Oh, let's sit here.” And we sat on kind of the middle of a staircase and looked down. And they were all just pretending we weren't there. And John was saying, ‘You know, when you're down like this, we just

⁹⁷ Yoko Ono, interviewed on *Larry King Live Weekend*, aired December 4, 1999, http://www.bdstudios.com/yoko/about/about_articles_1999_larryking.html (accessed 12 February 2003). John Lennon explained to Bram de Swaan in 1968 that Ono's “‘Flux’ people...wouldn't have anything to do with anybody that's vaguely made it.” Yoko agreed, “Yeah, it has to do with money” (“Rood Wit Blauw” interview).

have to keep our chins up, and just sort of ignore it all. Just let's look like we're fine,' you know?

And so he went downstairs, got some paper cup coffee for me, and brought it up to the staircase. And we just had paper cup coffee and that was it.⁹⁸

In 2005, Ono wrote of this incident, “This was the first time it was shown to us that together, we were NOT SO POPULAR!”⁹⁹

Shortly after this event, John Lennon, who was eager to express himself as an artist in his own right, created an exhibition called *You Are Here* at the Robert Fraser Gallery in London from July 1-August 3, 1968. As a sign of affiliation with Ono, Lennon dedicated the show to her, and then publicly announced his love for her at the opening.¹⁰⁰ The Robert Fraser Gallery, located in the Mayfair district, was one of London’s most exciting exhibition spaces as well as an exclusive gathering place where artists met and mixed socially with glamorous stage and screen actors, filmmakers, fashion designers, models, and rock stars.¹⁰¹ Its reputation for

⁹⁸ Yoko Ono on *Larry King Live Weekend*. Kevin Concannon speculates that this incident took place at the opening of *Water Show* at the Arts Lab in London, May 28-June 1, 1968. Kevin Christopher Concannon, “Unfinished Works and Aural Histories: Yoko Ono’s Conceptual Art,” Ph.D. diss., Virginia Commonwealth University, 2000, 132-133. Yoko Ono recounts a more emotional version of this story in the last essay in her book of remembrances of Lennon, in which she identifies the sculpture as *Mend Piece*. Yoko Ono Lennon, “Paper Cups,” in *Memories of John Lennon*, ed. Yoko Ono (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 301-302.

⁹⁹ Ono, “Paper Cups,” 302.

¹⁰⁰ Ono playfully responded to Lennon with her own clever title of her 1971 exhibition at the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, New York, called *This Is Not Here*. Dorothee Hansen, “You are Here: Exhibition at the Robert Fraser Gallery, London, July 1968,” in *John Lennon: Drawings, Performances, Films*, exh. cat., eds. Wulf Herzogenrath and Dorothee Hansen (Stuttgart: Cantz Verlag, 1995), 164.

¹⁰¹ In fact, Robert Fraser played a personal role in bringing these worlds together; for example, he persuaded The Beatles to commission artists Jann Haworth and Peter

groundbreaking shows made it famous for “the best of what the period was producing.”¹⁰²

Yet, the opening day of the exhibition must have appeared to some more like a sideshow than a serious artistic endeavor worthy of the Fraser Gallery, and the show was not critically well received. On the surface, it almost seemed as if John Lennon were disingenuously hawking his wares in order to draw in the crowds. A photograph taken at the July 1st opening shows two men posed in front of the gallery clutching huge bunches of white, helium-filled balloons while wearing printed posters on their shoulders with the words “you are here,” and sandwich boards that read: “Exhibition by John Lennon, Robert Fraser Gallery, 69 Duke Street” (figure 2.11)¹⁰³ Of course, the ironic humor in the use of these billboards and balloons to advertise the opening is that Lennon was so famous that there was no doubt the gallery would be inundated with visitors and press; yet, his point was that as an avant-garde artist, he was a complete unknown.

On this same day, 365 white balloons were inflated and post card-sized tags tied to them with the words “you are here” on one side, and a request to write to

Blake to design of the famous *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Heart’s Club Band* album cover, released in 1967 . Chris Stephens and Katherine Stout, eds. *Art & the 60s: This Was Tomorrow* (London: Tate, 2004), 137.

¹⁰² Vyner, xi. The gallery showcased British artists such as Jann Haworth, Peter Blake, Richard Hamilton, Gilbert and George, Eduardo Paolozzi, and Bridget Riley, and American imports such as Jim Dine, Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, and Ed Ruscha.

¹⁰³ The man wearing the sandwich boards on the left appears to be John Dunbar, co-owner of the Indica Gallery.

Lennon care of the Robert Fraser Gallery on the other (figure 2.12).¹⁰⁴ Lennon and Ono ceremonially launched these balloons as an art performance that became part of the opening festivities. One hundred people (accounting for 27% of the balloons) eventually wrote messages and posted back the cards they found after the balloons had landed, thus continuing the performance piece. This project has strong parallels to Fluxus mail art, whose antecedents lie in Dada. Mail art was created in the early sixties by artist Ray Johnson and still is practiced today. It is an alternative form of artistic expression that takes place outside the auspices of any art institution, where an envelope, letter, or post card serves as the medium for performance pieces set afloat each time a person responds, resends, or somehow intervenes in a mailed artistic message. Throughout the length of Lennon's exhibition, as the post cards gradually returned through the mail they were put in a random pile on display in the gallery, thus incorporating themes of spontaneity, chance, and change into the show.

According to Derek Taylor, The Beatles' press officer at the time, the majority of the messages on the cards were positive, but some were not, bearing sentiments such as "You should get a proper job."¹⁰⁵ Richard DeLillo, then an assistant working for Apple's press office, remembers that some returned cards begged for financial assistance, "while a disturbing number hurled racial and sexual slurs at John Lennon's and Yoko Ono's relationship."¹⁰⁶ Students from the Hornsey College of

¹⁰⁴ Hansen, 162.

¹⁰⁵ Vyner, 215.

Art playfully mailed Lennon a rusty bike with his white balloon and card attached. The card's message was "This exhibit was inadvertently left out." Of course, Lennon immediately installed the bike with card in his exhibition.¹⁰⁷

Whether positive or negative, with each new message that came back to the Fraser Gallery, another person's words were added to the artist's open-ended performance whose origins lay in launching the 365 airborne messages, "you are here." The growing pile of cards from the public therefore democratized the concept of art making while negating the commercial gallery system that relies on exclusivity to sell art. Lennon's inclusive, egalitarian approach and his propensity to challenge the social system in which art functioned provided some of the antecedents to Ono and Lennon's *Bed-In for Peace*.

Inside the gallery, Lennon positioned donation boxes—found objects normally placed on counters or at the entrances of shops—in an array on the floor. Some containers took the form of children or animals, while others were simply cans in which to deposit spare change. Each competed with the next with labels pleading for help to, for example, "fight cancer," "save the world's wildlife," for "spastics," or for the blind so "she might see the flowers" (figure 2.13 and 2.14). It is interesting that the word "help" occurs so many times in this installation in view of Lennon's

¹⁰⁶ Richard DiLello, *The Longest Cocktail Party: An Insider's Diary of The Beatles, Their Million-Dollar Apple Empire and Its Wild Rise and Fall* (Edinburgh: Mojo Books, 2000), 37.

¹⁰⁷ Anthony Fawcett, *John Lennon: One Day At a Time*, rev. ed. (New York: Grove Press, 1980), 36.

1965 hit song “HELP!” written for the film of the same name starring The Beatles.¹⁰⁸ In a series of interviews for *Playboy* in 1980, Lennon stated that he wrote “HELP!” while he was in the midst of a deep depression. He remembered feeling “boxed in” as a Beatle, and that “rock ‘n’ roll was not fun anymore,” observing, “[Although] I didn’t realize it at the time, . . . later, I knew I was really crying out for help.” Lennon marked his love affair with Ono as the moment “when things began to change. That’s when I started to free myself from the Beatles.”¹⁰⁹ When viewed collectively, then, the carefully arranged charity boxes become emblems not only of vulnerability, but also of potential change brought about by reaching out to others through small acts of compassion.¹¹⁰ Lennon expressed similar ideas about the power to change a situation through small gestures during the peace campaign, when he explained to reporters in December 1969, “Big scale isn’t the only way to do anything. We think if somebody wants peace, or wants to show that they’re for peace, all they need to do is put a poster in their own window to show their neighbor what they think. It’s gonna start from yourself on a small scale. There’s never gonna be—Zap!—peace.”

Wending their way through these charity donation boxes, visitors reached a large, white, circular canvas, six feet in diameter, which hung on the wall. In the

¹⁰⁸ *Help!*, a United Artists film directed by Richard Lester, was released in the U.K. on July 29 and in the U.S. on August 23, 1965. Tom Schultheiss, *The Beatles: A Day in the Life, The Day-By-Day Diary 1960-1970* (New York: Quick Fox, 1981), 136 and 140-141.

¹⁰⁹ Sheff, 6; 176-177; 104.

¹¹⁰ “Track 10: Lennon & Ono, Press Conference, Ontario Science Centre, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 1969,” CD: 12676, *In My Life: John Lennon & Paul McCartney* from *The Beatles Inside Interviews, 5 CD set*, written and narrated by Geoffrey Giuliano and Glenn A. Baker (Santa Monica, CA: Delta Records, 1995).

center, Lennon hand printed in tiny letters, “you are here.” The work has formal parallels to Ono’s *Yes Painting* that so captivated him upon their first meeting in 1967, including the idea of making a circuit to reach the canvas, and having a circular focus inside of which in small print is a positive message.¹¹¹ Lennon’s words were inspired by everyday maps often placed in the tourist areas of a city bearing markers orienting the reader with the message, “you are here.” On a mundane level, the work can be read as a diagrammatic map locating the visitor in the gallery, itself. But on a more abstract level, the very act of reading the words inscribed on the canvas conceptually integrates the viewer into the center of the work, so that time and space, and art and spectator become one within the circular piece, creating a Zen-like moment. In fact, the canvas functions much like the quintessential Zen painting called the *enso*, a circle made with a single brushstroke that symbolizes “the all, the void, and the moment of enlightenment.”¹¹² For Lennon, the viewers’ reactions once they read the canvas was “the whole point of the show—that was the art, that was the happening,” which he filmed with movie cameras behind a partition, *Candid Camera* style.¹¹³

An upturned white fedora hat and a large glass jar were displayed on two white pedestals set side-by-side in front of the canvas. The fedora bore a message

¹¹¹ Thanks to Reneé Ater for making this connection.

¹¹² Stephen Addiss, *The Art of Zen*, exh. cat. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989), 73.

¹¹³ “Frost on Saturday,” London Weekend Television (24 August 1968), <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/carousel/pob14.html> (October 31, 2006). The festivities of the gallery opening were also carefully filmed. Richard DiLello, 36.

inside its brim reading, “FOR THE ARTIST. THANK YOU.” The glass jar set close by was filled with white lapel buttons for the taking, each printed with the message “you are here” (figure 2.15). The upturned fedora symbolically separated John Lennon, the unknown *artist* who received no income from his artwork from John Lennon, the multi-millionaire rock star.¹¹⁴ Although some visitors tossed their small change into the hat, others tossed in trash, which actually reinforced the idea of Lennon as a “street artist” (figure 2.16).

The buttons had a different function altogether. Bearing the message “you are here” centered within a circular white background, they actually served as a schematic of Lennon’s painting (figure 2.17). The concept of the show was thus exported and spread throughout the city by gallery visitors wearing the pins, just as the balloons had exported the exhibit when they were released on opening day.

Using lapel buttons to advertise a concept or product was a common phenomenon during the sixties, and it was fashionable for the younger generation to both collect and wear buttons in the same way that message tee shirts are embraced today. For example, a publicity photograph of The Beatles circa May 1967 shows the seated Lennon and Paul McCartney jointly holding their newly released *Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band* album. George Harrison and Ringo Starr stand behind them, each prominently wearing a black button pinned on their wide lapels bearing a

¹¹⁴ Hansen, 164. This type of spontaneous “happening” brings to mind Ken Friedman’s 1966 Fluxus event score, *Mandatory Happening*, with the instructions, “You will decide to read or not read this instruction. Having made your decision, the happening is over.” From *Fluxus Performance Workbook*, eds. Ken Friedman, Owen Smith, and Lauren Sawchyn, Performance Research e-Publications, 2002. http://www.performance-research.net/documents/fluxus_workbook_print.pdf accessed 18 January 2007.

bright signature logo of a yellow submarine (figure 2.18). This button advertising The Beatles' latest movie *Yellow Submarine* not only served as a commercial tie-in between the groups' music and the film, but also contributed to a young, hip fashion statement made in conjunction with the rock musicians' ruffled and flowered shirts, paisley prints, shaggy hair, and mustaches. The idea was to inspire fans that identified with The Beatles' music and lifestyle to happily pin *Yellow Submarine* buttons onto their clothing and thus become walking advertisements for the film.

In this same vein, while those who chose to wear Lennon's "you are here" pin would have a fun, camp message to display, but by doing so, they were entering into a Faustian bargain to publicize the show everywhere they went. Thus, Lennon's own clever use of promotional buttons in his solo exhibition reveals his skill in wedging commercial methods learned in the music business to his own avant-garde concepts. His sophisticated grasp of marketing principles would be revealed once again in the 1969 peace campaign.

The circus atmosphere of the opening and Lennon's status as a Beatle led critics to ignore any merits of the show, instead dismissing Lennon's work as the efforts of a dilettante, an outsider who had used his rock star influence to get his art exhibited. In his first exclusive interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine that November, Lennon complained to Jonathan Cott that the critics were sneering that no one would have attended the *you are here* show if it had not been the work of John Lennon, the Beatle, to which Lennon responded, "But the point of it was—it was me. And they're using that as a reason to say why it didn't work. Work as what?"¹¹⁵

Looking back from the late 1990s, Ono considered the show interesting, original, and successful, but observed, “I don’t think that came through that well in the press because they were just writing about the fact of ‘John and Yoko,’ and it was ‘balloons’ etc., etc. I think they mostly caught the flashier side of it. And of course the press that was interested in writing about it were those that would usually write about the Beatles or famous people—not art people.”¹¹⁶ Once again the message was clear. Projects by John Lennon or Yoko Ono would not be embraced by the London art world.

In addition to their individual shows, the couple’s first joint performance piece also was snubbed, but because of Lennon’s huge celebrity, the incident received international press. The episode occurred on June 15 during the 1968 *National Sculpture Exhibition* held on the grounds of the Coventry Cathedral near Birmingham. The old church building had been badly damaged by Luftwaffe bombs in 1940 and so was preserved as an empty shell to commemorate the destructive power of war. Alongside the ruins, a new church was built and consecrated in 1962, combining with the old to create a “single living cathedral” and a modern-day symbol of faith and hope.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Jonathan Cott, “The First *Rolling Stone* Interview: November 23, 1968,” in *Ballad*, 54.

¹¹⁶ Vyner, 216. For example, obviously lacking an art background, Robin Turner of the London *Daily Express* described the contents of the exhibition as “joke art.” Robin Turner, “Yes. I Love Yoko, Says John Lennon.” *Daily Express*, 2 July 1968.

¹¹⁷ Historical information and quote from the British cultural heritage site, “Icons: A Portrait of England,” <http://www.icons.org.uk/nom/nominations/coventry-cathedral> (accessed September 30, 2006).

Ono and Lennon envisioned planting two acorns on the grounds of the sacred ruins during the press preview of the exhibition.¹¹⁸ This was the site where the most famous British sculptors in the show, such as Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth, would be exhibiting their work. Ono and Lennon assumed that their “living sculpture” would be installed alongside the works of these preeminent artists. Oriented along an east-west axis, the *Acorn Event* was meant to be a symbol of the generative power of the couple’s love as well as a conceptual joining of the East and West in peace. The instruction for this event was to watch the acorns grow, so a circular, white, cast-iron garden bench was provided to enclose the plantings and provide a quiet place to sit and pause for contemplation.

The event is significant in that it marks the first time that Ono and Lennon publicly broached the subject of peace as a couple. Ono was sure to credit Lennon with the original idea for *Acorn Event*, signaling to the world that John Lennon was a creative fellow artist and not just a passive participant in their collaborations.¹¹⁹ However, upon their arrival at Coventry, the supervising church official Canon Stephen Verney (who was highly concerned about the couple’s unmarried status) refused to let the event go forward on the grounds of this destroyed church charged with so much patriotic and moral symbolism. Verney’s excuse was that Ono and Lennon’s conceptual ideas did not take the form of a proper sculpture. A compromise was reached, and the location of piece was moved from its intended site,

¹¹⁸ Dorothee Hansen, “‘John’ by Yoko Ono and ‘Yoko’ by John Lennon” (*John Lennon: Drawings, Performances, Films*), 158-161.

¹¹⁹ Yoko Ono states in the leaflet handed out at the exhibition, “the piece is John’s, but it was so good that I stole it” (Hansen, 160).

where it would be in the company of the most well known British sculptors of the time, to a grassy area in front of the new cathedral building where the less famous artists were exhibiting their work (fig. 2.17).¹²⁰

Canon Verney also blocked *Acorn Event* from inclusion in the official catalog, and so Ono and Lennon were forced to provide their own explanatory brochure. In order to reinforce the event's concepts about their romantic love and the East and West joined in world peace, this folded leaflet utilized both Japanese and British-made paper. The title page consists of Keith McMillan's full-frame black-and-white photograph of Ono and Lennon in which the two pose looking straightforward, shoulder-to-shoulder (figure 2.19). Both are dressed in white and have their hair parted down the middle, and each is aligned behind a large white flowerpot.¹²¹ The camera angle cleverly encourages us to view this image with double vision.¹²² On the one hand, the two appear as strange intertwined flowers growing out of their twin pots. On the other hand, with their truncated torsos, long hair, white clothing, and white flowerpots, they playfully call to mind a surrealistic version of heroic 18th-century marble portrait busts that once graced the great mansions of the British aristocracy. When the photograph appeared in the brochure, above Lennon's head

¹²⁰ Hansen, “‘John’ by Yoko Ono”), 158.

¹²¹ During this period, Lennon and Ono were dressing in white and wearing similar hairstyles so that they could visually “emphasize their togetherness, artistically and as man and woman” (Coleman, 455).

¹²² Anthony Fawcett, who witnessed the photo session, explains that McMillan got this unusual angle by having the pair crouch behind one end of a long narrow table while placing the plastic pots at the other end, closest to the camera (Fawcett, 19 & 21).

was the printed legend, “‘John’ by Yoko Ono, and above Ono’s was the legend “‘Yoko’ by John Lennon.”

This separate brochure, too, caused controversy. The *New York Times* reported, “Mr. Lennon’s supporters say the cathedral refused to distribute the leaflets,” fearing that viewers “would think less about the growth of the acorns than the growth of the association between Mr. Lennon and Miss Ono,” neither of whom were divorced at the time.¹²³ In a prescient letter to Canon Verney on June 28, Lennon wrote, “Of course the piece is about Yoko and me – it’s also about you and me, and anyone else you care to mention – it’s about EVERYONE and EVERYTHING.”¹²⁴ Lennon’s short declaration of the meaning of his collaboration with Ono and Lennon’s would be the crux of the 1969 Year of Peace.

Acorn Event and the couple’s experiences in London pointed out some logistical problems that made public collaborations difficult. First, if Ono and Lennon confined their art to an institutional setting or small, experimental or trendy London galleries, then they would forever be subject to the whims of petty bureaucrats and a cliquish, elitist art crowd. Second, the hoards of British press, mostly interested in salacious details of their relationship, hounded their every step and made each public appearance an event, and each event a spectacle. Finally, the sheer number of Beatles fans who would go to any lengths to get close to their idol

¹²³ “John Lennon Squabbles With Church on Acorns,” *New York Times* (17 July 1968), 37.

¹²⁴ Thereafter, Ono and Lennon provided security guards to protect the site (Hansen, 159).

was an unpredictable and oftentimes destructive force for Lennon and Ono. At the Coventry Cathedral, for instance, Lennon's fans desecrated the site of *Acorn Event* by stealing onto the grounds in the middle of the night and snatching away the acorns as souvenirs.¹²⁵ It would take the combined talents of both Ono and Lennon to turn these negatives into positives in their innovative peace campaign of the following year.

¹²⁵ Fawcett, 24.

Chapter 3: Caculating the Media

It is impossible to understand social and cultural changes without a knowledge of the workings of media.¹

— Marshall McLuhan —

On March 20, 1969, Yoko Ono and John Lennon were secretly married in Gibraltar in a modest ten-minute ceremony. Although they had successfully avoided having this private moment violated by the press, they knew that the same scenario would not be possible for their honeymoon and that soon the clamoring paparazzi would be at their doors. After the wedding, Ono promised, “We’re going to stage many happenings and events together and this marriage was one of them. We’re planning a big happening in the next seven days or so. You’ll know soon enough what it is.”² Five days later, in a bold publicity stunt, they utilized their own newsworthiness to entice the press into their “honeymoon” suite to participate in a *Bed-In for Peace* from March 25-31 at the Amsterdam Hilton.

On the first day of the *Bed-In*, with the reporters and cameras pressing in around their bed, they announced that their event was a happening meant to protest war and violence. The rules were that they would remain in bed for seven days, and the press could have full access to them ten hours a day for unlimited interviews and photographs, but in return, Ono and Lennon would use the opportunity to promote

¹ Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (New York, London, and Toronto: Bantam Books, 1967), 8.

² From an unidentified newspaper clipping reproduced in “The Press” pamphlet included in Yoko Ono and John Lennon’s boxed *Wedding Album* (Apple SMAX-3361, released in the US on 20 October 1969 and the United Kingdom on 7 November 1969).

world peace. The couple performed the *Bed-In* a second time in Montreal's Queen Elizabeth Hotel, from May 26-June 2 as their peace campaign continued to gain momentum.

Although the initial event in Amsterdam appeared to have risen spontaneously from the situation surrounding Lennon and Ono's marriage in Gibraltar, the peace campaign actually was well planned and a logical extension of the couple's ongoing struggles with the popular press. This chapter section will address these problems, as well as the couples' artistic responses to them, in order to establish the social and personal forces at work when the campaign was conceived. An analysis of the methods by which Ono and Lennon engaged the press also will be provided, along with the political and social context for these actions.

Gathering Forces

Lennon had been conscious of the insidious relationship between celebrities and the media for some time and was so repelled by his experiences that since 1966, he avoided personal interviews with the press.³ His song "A Day in the Life" from The Beatles' album *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Heart's Club Band* (1967) is in part a searing critique of the mass media as a major force behind an alienated society. The lyrics were sparked by stories he read in the London tabloid the *Daily Mail*, starting

³ For example, in 1967, when Stephen Schneck of *Ramparts* magazine requested an interview to discuss Lennon's part as Private Gripweed in the new MGM movie *How I Won the War* (shot in 1966 and released in 1967), he was flatly refused. The director Richard Lester apologized, "Please don't be offended. I'm certain that you wouldn't misquote him, but he has had some ghastly experiences with journalists in the past." Stephen Schneck, "John Lennon Murders World War II," *Ramparts* 6, no 3 (1967): 34.

with an incident in which a Guinness beer heir died in a high-speed car crash.⁴

Although the man, Tara Browne, was a friend, Lennon's narration mimics the voyeuristic tone of a disengaged, deadened public, whose only interest in the incident revolves around the celebrity status of the dead man: "I heard the news today, oh, boy, about a lucky man who made the grade. And though the news was rather sad, well, I just had to laugh – I saw the photograph. He blew his mind out in a car. He didn't notice that the lights had changed. A crowd of people stood and stared. They'd seen his face before. Nobody was really sure if he was from the House of Lords."⁵ Lennon thus dramatizes the alienating effects of the media who had made death into a spectator's sport.⁶ The next verse, also sung with lassitude, connects Hollywood movies to the jingoistic promotion of war while making a veiled reference to Lennon's own participation in Richard Lester's anti-war film *How I Won the War* (1967): "I saw a film today oh, boy. The English army had just won the war. A crowd of people turned away. But I just had to look, having read the book."⁷

⁴ The Guinness heir incident was the main headline story. On the following page, there was a story about 4,000 potholes on the streets of Blackburn, Lancashire, which inspired the final verse of the song. David Sheff, *All We Are Saying: The Last Major Interview With John Lennon and Yoko Ono*, ed. G. Barry Golson (New York: St. Martin's Griffin), 183-184.

⁵ Lyrics quoted from "A Day in the Life," *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Heart's Club Band* (Capitol Records, 1967). The friend's name, Tara Browne, is identified in Ian MacDonald, *Revolution in the Head: The Beatles' Records and the Sixties* (London: Pimlico, 1994), 181.

⁶ One is reminded of Andy Warhol's *Stars, Death, and Disaster* series produced between 1962-64, which was a sustained meditation on the mass media and the morbid fascination with celebrities and death in American culture.

⁷ Quoted from "A Day in the Life."

Lennon's distrust of the press deepened after he and Ono became a couple. They immediately experienced the full destructive powers of the commercial media, first with news of Lennon's separation and then after a drug raid on their apartment on the night of October 18, 1968. He had been warned three weeks before by Don Short of the *Daily Mirror* that his home would be raided, and so he made sure it was drug-free.⁸ Therefore, when the police burst into the apartment and went directly to a large trunk full of clothes to find a small piece of hash, he was sure that it was planted. Lennon pleaded guilty to the charges in exchange for dropping those against Ono, who was not a British citizen. This act would have far-reaching effects, causing huge problems over the next six years.⁹

Ono and Lennon felt abused and duped by their initial arrest on trumped up charges of possessing marijuana, but it was the nastiness of the press and the extremes used to get the story that left the couple in a state of trauma. Both Lennon and Ono utilized incidents in their private lives as elements in their art even before they met. Now they would channel their raw emotions and feelings of vulnerability into their collaborative artwork in an effort to reclaim control of their lives.

⁸ Coleman, 459.

⁹ Because of the drug charges, in May 1969, Lennon was denied entry into the United States, where the couple had been planning to hold a second *Bed-In*. After the couple was given temporary U.S. visas to enter the United States in June 1971, Lennon landed on President Richard Nixon's "enemies list," and Ono and Lennon fought a four-year battle against deportation while under constant FBI surveillance and harassment. For a fascinating account of this period, see Jon Wiener, *Come Together: John Lennon in His Time* (Urbana and Chicago: university of Illinois Press, 1991).

Their album *Life With The Lions*, recorded in 1968 and released in May 1969, marks one of Ono and Lennon's first meditations on the power of the media.¹⁰ The title *Life With The Lions* refers to the ferocious and hungry media who stalked the couple's every move, and the content of the album ruminates on the intrusiveness and harshness of press coverage.¹¹ The album's cover photograph centers on a delicate-looking Ono bedridden in Queen Charlotte's Maternity Hospital with John Lennon sitting on the floor by her side (figure 3.1). On the back cover is a full-spread photograph from the *Daily Mirror* tabloid of the couple leaving Marylebone Magistrates Court on October 19th, surrounded by policemen and photographers (figure 3.2). Both pictures tell a personal tale. Ono, who had become pregnant in July, was exhausted and traumatized by the drug raid of the couple's home and the ensuing media crush after their arrest. The night of the arrest, she suffered complications from her pregnancy and was hospitalized the next day, only to suffer a miscarriage two weeks later.¹² In the relative quiet of the maternity ward, the couple tape-recorded their dying baby's heartbeat inside the womb. This recording appeared

¹⁰ *Unfinished Music No. 2: Life With the Lions* was released on 9 May 1969 by Apple Records (catalog number ZAPPLE 01).

¹¹ The title plays on the name of a popular British radio serial from Lennon's childhood called "Life with the Lyons." Ray Coleman, *Lennon: The Definitive Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 505.

¹² In one example of the cruelty of the press, in a December 1968 interview by Irma Kurtz of *Avant Garde*, Ono, still obviously distraught, mentioned the arrest as an example of how difficult the year had been for the couple. Kurtz cynically postulated, ". . . it was a distress, I believe, that arose less from the sordid nature of the incident than it did from the fact that a chink in their bubble was revealed; a little space through which the minions of society could enter. I would bet that Yoko cried on the night of their arrest." Irma Kurtz, "John and Yoko in Concert: At Home with the Lennons," *Avant Garde* 9 (November 1969): 41.

on the album sandwiched in between media-inspired performances: a recitation in song of an array of newspaper clippings about their intimate lives, and a track of manipulated radio noise. Thus, the first track on side two, entitled “No Bed for Beatle John,” consists of the couple singing newspaper reports of Ono’s hospitalization as well as press reactions to the nude *Two Virgins* album cover. Track two is called “Baby’s Heartbeat.” Track three, in a nod to John Cage’s famous *4’33”* as well as a sign of mourning, is simply two minutes of silence to commemorate the baby’s death. Track 4, “Radio Play,” is twelve-and-one-half minutes of a radio being quickly turned on and off to produce a disturbing “chopping” noise that drowns out Lennon’s voice as he goes about an everyday task of conducting business on the telephone, metaphorically equating these interfering dissonant sounds with the disruptive clamoring press.¹³

Media coverage of the couple’s personal lives prompted the second artistic work entitled *Film No. 5: Rape*, a powerful and disturbing 77-minute rumination on the violation of Ono’s privacy and sense of self. The film was meant to demonstrate symbolically the psychic toll of the unscrupulous practices of the paparazzi, but in

¹³ Ono later recalled this side of the album as “really reckless stuff” that played off of her theory that anything could comprise a song, even newspaper headlines, and Lennon’s experiments with “scratch kind of things with the radio.” Miya Masaoka, “Unfinished Music: A Conversation With Yoko Ono,” *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, 27 August 1997. “Radio Play” brings to mind George Brecht’s Fluxus piece called *Three Lamp Events* (1961) in which a lamp was to be turned on and off. In 1963, George Maciunas recreated the work in Wuppertal, Germany, where he put a card with Brecht’s instructions in front of a light switch at a Fluxus exhibition. The flickering lighting caused by this piece would have served both as a stimulus and an impediment to the viewer. Jon Hendricks, “George Brecht: Three Lamp Event,” *Fluxus Codex* (New York: The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection and Harry N. Abrams, Inc.: 1988), 213.

doing so, it emphasizes in conflicting ways the blunt mysogynistic and Xenophobic attitudes that Ono was protesting.¹⁴ A product of Ono and Lennon's two-week hospital stay before her miscarriage, Ono wrote a film score instructing a cameraman to "chase a girl on a street with a camera persistently until he corners her in an alley, and, if possible, until she is in a falling position."¹⁵ Lennon explained that the films that the couple was quickly producing around this time were "like a diary—some of them we're in, others we're not, like *Rape*. ...As Yoko's work is concept art, we've made 'concept films,' really. We just think of an idea and send the guy out—you don't need to be there with the camera."¹⁶ Ono had particularly suffered at the hands of the press during 1968. Journalists were not averse to using racist comments, such as the headline, "Jap Girl Named in Lennon Divorce Suit" from the *Yorkshire*

¹⁴ *Film No. 5: Rape*, directed by Yoko Ono and John Lennon, with cameraman Nic Knowlton, soundman Christian Wangler, and the young woman, Eva Majlata, was commissioned for Austrian ORF TV and first screened in Vienna on March 31, 1969.

¹⁵ Iles points out that conceptual artist Vito Acconci created a performance on similar grounds called *Following Piece* in 1969 [October 3-25], in which the artist randomly followed strangers on the city streets. Chrissie Iles, "Rape, 1969," in *Yes Yoko Ono*, exh. cat., edited by Alexandra Munroe and Jon Hendricks (New York: Japan Society and Harry N. Abrams, 2000), 216. The difference between the performance and the film is that Ono and Lennon's film is interpersonal and emotional, and violates the privacy of one pre-selected subject. Acconci anonymously followed random men and women on the street for a month, but always broke off when the person entered a private space. After each incident, he sent a typed description to a different person in the art community.

¹⁶ Four films by Ono and Lennon had been produced by that point: *Film No. 5: Smile*, *Two Virgins*, *You Are Here*, and *Rape*, all made in quick succession in 1968. *You Are Here* and *Rape* could be considered "concept films." Lennon quoted in B. P. Fallon, "Is the Real John Lennon Now Standing Up? Part 3," *Melody Maker* (26 April 1969): 17. *Melody Maker* (1926-2000) was Britain's oldest weekly music newspaper and a favorite venue for interviews by Ono and Lennon.

Evening Post.¹⁷ Looking back on the situation over thirty years later, Ono sensed she fell under attack in the British tabloids because “I’m not British, I’m not even, well, the white race. I’m from the Third World, as far as they’re concerned ..and then I was a woman. So I think it was a very convenient scapegoat.”¹⁸

The image of the foreign, female “Other” is incorporated into *Rape* in a truly disturbing and punishing manner. Under Ono and Lennon’s orders, cinematographer Nic Knowlton and his soundman secretly selected a twenty-one year old Hungarian actress named Eva Majlata to unknowingly participate in their film. The action begins when the filmmakers find her in a London park and follow her with their camera and microphone as she moves through the city back to her apartment (figure 3.3). Because she is not proficient in English, she tries to communicate with the mute cameraman and soundman in broken English, Italian, Hungarian, and German, but to no avail. Initially the young woman is amused with the filming, acting friendly and flattered by the attention, but eventually she becomes angry and then panics as she continues to be silently stalked. When she reaches her sister’s apartment, she is pursued inside (unknown to Majlata, her sister arranged for the crew to have access to a key to the front door), and the film ends with her on the floor, literally backed into a corner by the camera. With no subtitles in the film, this young woman’s pleas in

¹⁷ “Jap Girl Named in Lennon Divorce Suit,” *Yorkshire Evening Post* [Leeds, England], 22 August 1968.

¹⁸ Yoko Ono, interviewed on *Larry King Live Weekend* (aired December 4, 1999). For transcript of show, see http://www.bdstudios.com/yoko/about/about_articles_1999_larryking.html (accessed 12 February 2003).

Hungarian are rendered meaningless to most, forcing the audience into the role of voyeurs as she is tormented.

Rape reflects Ono's growing feelings of objectification and victimization as her sense of self ebbed away under the impossible public scrutiny she received as Lennon's Japanese "mistress." Indeed, the film's universal themes of female oppression and subordination under the camera's eye still make a powerful statement. But it also leads to questions as to why Ono, having been victimized herself by the paparazzi in such an egregious manner, would not recognize the ethical problems of imposing the same emotional trauma on another woman? The privileged life intrinsic to both Lennon's rock star celebrity and Ono's aristocratic upbringing could have contributed to the couple's sense of entitlement, making it legitimate in their eyes to "just think of an idea and send a guy out" to assail a stranger's personal space.

Another factor present may be Ono's troubled ambivalence toward her own position as a victim. As the author of the movie script, *Ono* is the agent of the visual "rape" of Majlata, so that when she directs that another foreign female in London should be assaulted, it gives rise to a sado-masochistic subtext in relation to her own experiences. But the film also serves to remove Ono's experiences from the personal realm and elevate her own helplessness to a broader political level. Majlata's Stateless persona becomes a surrogate for Ono, so that its violation by the camera turns Ono's hostile treatment by the press into a universal metaphor for the besieged foreign female body. Regardless of this feminist theme, and although Ono and Lennon received permission from Majlata to appear in the film after the fact, ethical questions still arise as to their method of filming *Rape*.

Like Getting Your Call-up Papers for Peace”

Because of Ono’s difficulties with the press, it seems all the more incredible that Ono and Lennon would subject themselves to unlimited media access in their first 1969 peace event, *Bed-In for Peace*. Although like *Rape*, it was focused on the power of the press, this event marked a sea change in the way the media was engaged. The couple no longer allowed themselves to be the victims of the tabloids, but instead were suddenly determined to harness their fame to promote a message of peace. The theatrics of the *Bed-In* both challenged and reinforced preconceptions of the couple’s celebrity status by exploiting the power of spectacle, the cult of the rock star, and ideas of what was “newsworthy” in the mainstream press. Part media circus, part consciousness-raising session, part pajama party, and part jam session, the Amsterdam and Montreal *Bed-Ins* transformed life into performance art. The artistic medium of these events was the press, the palette was the couple’s personal lives, and the message, always, was peace. The *Bed-Ins*, therefore, unabashedly manipulated the mass media in an effort to make it serve as Ono and Lennon’s messenger of peace. What caused this change in attitude toward the press? This idea, they claimed, was initiated by an important communiqué from the activist Peter Watkins.

In early 1969, Ono and Lennon received a form letter from the acclaimed filmmaker Peter Watkins, who was famous for his censorship battle with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) over *The War Game*.¹⁹ Curiously, this letter has

¹⁹ Peter Watkins sent out copies of this letter from the end of December 1968 through 1969. Ono and Lennon never stated the exact date they received the letter, but I estimate it was in February 1969 at the latest. *The War Game*, which made Watkins

been largely overlooked in the Ono and Lennon literature, even though the couple acknowledged in several 1969 interviews that it was the catalyst for their peace campaign.²⁰ Watkins opened the letter by explaining that his mass mailing was targeting “several hundred of the ‘communicators’ of Britain – people like yourself, who, directly or indirectly, contact and perhaps influence the public through the channels of mass-media, including films, show business, music, drama, literature, and so on.”²¹ Voicing his concern that Britain had been “allowed to fall asleep” and so had become deaf to the “desperate needs and concerns of our time,” he blamed the situation on the oblivious British mass media who had retreated into an escapist

famous, is an unsettling docu-drama about a nuclear war and its aftermath played out in the English countryside. Commissioned by the BBC television network in 1964-65, the British government and the BBC deemed the film too horrific to be aired. Watkins subsequently screened his film in art-house movie theaters, and it won the Oscar for Best Documentary in 1966. Today, *The War Game* is listed as 27 on the British Film Institute’s top 100 television programs; <http://www.bfi.org.uk/features/tv/100/index.html>, (accessed 23 October 2006).

²⁰ Thanks to Peter Watkins for generously sharing this letter with me so that for the first time it is possible to discuss its specific contents. Ono and Lennon publicly recognized Watkins’ letter in 1969 as the inspiration for their peace campaign on at least three separate occasions: in interviews with Patrick Wilson and with Marshall McLuhan, and at a press conference. These comments have been reprinted in various venues, such as newspapers, books, videos, and compact disks. See, for example, Yoko Ono and John Lennon’s interview by Patrick Wilson in “Montreal ‘Bed-In’ Highlights”; the McLuhan interview in “Interview with American Media Expert Marshall McLuhan on Saturday, December 20th 1969,” *John and Yoko’s Year of Peace*, videocassette, directed by Paul McGrath, (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting System, 2000); *Bagism* (Dressed to Kill: 1999), Compact Disk DRESS155; and Ritchie Yorke, 22 December Montreal press conference in “John Yoko & Year One,” *Rolling Stone*, 7 February 1970, 20. Yet, of all the Lennon and Ono scholarship, only Ray Coleman mentions the letter, but because he obviously did not read it, he incorrectly summarizes the contents; see Ray Coleman, *Lennon: The Definitive Biography* (New York: Harper Perennial), 1992), 494.

²¹ Page 1 of the same form letter sent to Ono and Lennon in 1969, in this case addressed to John Russell Taylor of *The Times* [of London] (20 December 1968), from the personal archives of Peter Watkins.

bubble with “one overriding philosophy – happiness, get away from it all, forget the outside world, swinging Britain, the Bonnie and Clyde smart set, scintillation, colour supplement photography, and so on.”²² Watkins cited pressing world concerns such as the US-Soviet nuclear arms race, potential biological warfare, and world hunger, and then posed the question: “What have we, the ‘communicators’ of Britain—of the world—done about these and other central problems of our time?”²³

What was needed, according to Watkins, was an enormous endeavor “to create some far-reaching degree of international concern and understanding, [an] endeavour which reaches far beyond the present barriers of national and political self-interest, all of which still bind the world into narrow, isolated zones, separated borders and land blocs, concerned only with themselves.”²⁴ The letter closed with Watkins’ request that those with access to the mass media “use ourselves as strongly as we can, now, each in our individual method of communication,” to start a public conversation about the state of the world in “the name of humanity.”²⁵

In a press conference in Montreal, John Lennon pointed to the Watkins letter as the one incident that triggered the peace campaign. “It was like getting your call up papers for peace, and we got it, and we thought about it for three weeks before we decided what we could do, and then we did the bed event.”²⁶ Ono and Lennon took

²² Watkins, 1 and 2.

²³ Watkins, 3.

²⁴ Watkins, 4.

²⁵ Watkins, 4 and 5.

Watkins' letter very seriously, and they recalled reviewing the contents again and again, wrestling with their consciences, and going back and forth over the merits of embarking on a public peace campaign. On each of the three occasions when the couple spoke about the Watkins letter, they defended themselves as having already been concerned with peace before the letter arrived. As proof that they were previously concerned with peace, they cited two examples: Ono's obscure sit-in in which she climbed into a bag in Trafalgar Square, and Lennon's 1967 Beatles song "All You Need Is Love," neither of which addressed world events in a way the public could understand nor with the specificity Watkins so fervently desired.²⁷ Inspired by Watkins' letter to push beyond these past oblique efforts, they now planned to express themselves publicly with unerring literalness so that their anti-war sentiments would be crystal clear. The difference between Watkins' vision and Ono and Lennon's, however, is that whereas Watkins was asking the two to address specific political

²⁶ Excerpted from transcription of 22 December 1969 press conference held at Chateau Champlain, Montreal (Yorke, 20).

²⁷ Although Lennon and Ono both refer to this incident in which Ono sat in a black bag in Trafalgar Square, I cannot find any independent documentation of the event. The only event listed in the definitive *Yes Yoko Ono* catalog that took place at Trafalgar Square was her *Lion Wrapping Event* on August 3, 1967 (Reiko Tomii and Kevin Concannon, "Chronology: Exhibitions, Concerts, Events, etc.," *Yes Yoko Ono*, 314). However, as late as 1996, Ono still commented, "even before I met John, I was in a bag in Trafalgar Square using the press for peace." Michael Bracewell, "Give Yoko A Chance," *The Guardian*, 20 January 1996, http://www.bd-studios.com/yoko/about/about_articles_1996_guardian.html (accessed 2/12/03). Perhaps Lennon thought of his song "All You Need Is Love" as anti-war because he was mentally associating it with the popular slogan of the day, "Make Love Not War." Other examples of the couples' peace-related work are Lennon's participation in Richard Lester's anti-war film *How I Won the War* (MGM, 1967) and Yoko Ono's *Play It By Trust* (1966), a chess set and board all painted white so it is impossible to play this game of war to its finish. To this (lack of) end, the artwork cleverly emphasizes the oneness of humanity and the futility in squaring off one against each other.

issues, such as the US-Soviet arms race, the couple's 1969 peace campaign celebrated the *concept* of peace rather than grappling with political realities. This important distinction became the object of criticism at the time and, ironically, is the reason why today, images of the *Bed-Ins* are such popular icons of the sixties anti-war movement. Both of these points will be addressed in greater detail in chapter five.

Using the Media

Watkins' call to use the mass media as a political mouthpiece is characteristic of the acute awareness of the power of the press in the 1960s. During this decade, as television came into maturity and newspapers, news magazines, fan magazines, and tabloids began to proliferate, there was an increasing demand for news copy and imagery that was not only entertaining, but also visually arresting. The *Bed-In* format responds to various media developments at the end of the sixties. It mirrors, for example, the "new journalism" style of this period, in which autobiography merges with current events. This new literary form was pioneered by authors such as Norman Mailer and Tom Wolfe and perfected by hip publications such as *Rolling Stone* and *Esquire*. Just as Norman Mailer declared himself "the protagonist" in his recounting of the 1967 anti-Vietnam March on the Pentagon in *Armies of the Night*, so Ono and Lennon became both story and storyteller in their *Bed-In* actions, intertwining social commentary with human interest.²⁸

In Chester J. Pach, Jr.'s study of 1960s Vietnam War coverage on the nightly news, he emphasizes the growing prevalence of human-interest stories. Even when

²⁸ Norman Mailer, *Armies of the Night* (New York: Signet Books, 1968).

reporting the war, there was more emphasis on individual soldiers than on the battles, themselves. Pach explains, “Human interest features reflected television’s tendency to entertain as well as inform. A personalized story, TV journalists believed, appealed to their mass audience, perhaps because it often simplified—or avoided—complex or controversial issues.”²⁹ In fact, by the late 1960s, shocking images of war or visions of bloody victims of police brutality were presented on television in a way that made them less disturbing to viewers, coinciding with the introduction of what was nicknamed “Happy Talk.” In Happy Talk, stories are no longer simply read out by a single newsreader, but integrated with the atmosphere of TV studio cheerfulness: friendly banter between presenters; improvised pleasantries about sports and weather; and the tactical use of a closing item on some up-beat heartwarming talk of ‘human interest.’ This style reduces any potential sense of critical disruption in social affairs by integrating disturbing pictures and information with a contrived atmosphere of normality.³⁰

The events of the 1969 peace campaign were designed to fit this “human interest” mold with an eye toward crafting a product with “G-rated” universal appeal. At the end of 1969, Lennon spoke of the *Bed-Ins* in this way: “The good thing about the idea is that it’s simple, and it is fairly inoffensive. You’ve got to be really freaky to take offense, or really have a valid point about two people staying in bed.”³¹

²⁹ Chester J. Pach, Jr., “Vietnam on the Nightly News,” in *The Sixties: From Memory to History*, by ed. David Farber (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 94.

³⁰ Tony Clark, *Art and Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: The Political Image in the Age of Mass Culture*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), 117.

³¹ Roger Keene, “John & Yoko Plan Music, Peace World Conference,” *Circus* (December 1969):16.

The idea that news can be packaged was famously examined by Daniel Boorstin's best-selling book *The Image* in 1961.³² In this study, the author pinpointed the growing phenomenon of what he called "pseudo-events," in which many reported news events were no longer natural occurrences, but something constructed to look like news. The pseudo-event is a contrived, highly structured and mostly scripted or pre-planned performance that is crafted to attract publicity, and thus the public's interest. It usually is arranged so that it appears as if reporters are getting a scoop or gathering facts rather than being fed information. These nonevents, such as interviews, press releases, press leaks, news conferences, photo opportunities, and publicity stunts, only take tangible form when reproduced via television broadcasts, in newspapers, in advertisements, or in other media forms. Boorstin's four characteristics of the pseudo-event perfectly profile Ono and Lennon's peace campaign, as discussed separately below.³³

- (1) It is not spontaneous, but comes about because someone has planned, planted, or incited it. Typically, it is not a train wreck or an earthquake, but an interview.

Indeed, Lennon perfected the art of the interview over his years as a Beatle. His quick wit and easy rapport with the press made him extremely quotable and caused the press to attend the peace campaign events in large numbers. Ono and Lennon, therefore, relied heavily upon the interview format throughout their 1969 campaign, either as part of their actual performances, as in the *Bed-Ins*, or in follow-ups on talk shows, in private interviews, or in scheduled news conferences after some action was

³² Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (1961; reprint. New York: Atheneum, 1977).

³³ Boorstin, 11-12.

taken. For example, Ono and Lennon set up their public relations headquarters at Apple, where they gave between ten and fifteen interviews almost daily during the summer of 1969 (figure 3.4).³⁴ The follow-up interview strategy demonstrates how one pseudo-event engenders another.

(2) It is planted primarily (not always exclusively) for the immediate purpose of being reported or reproduced. Therefore, its occurrence is arranged for the convenience of the reporting or reproducing media. Its success is measured by how widely it is reported. . . . The question, "Is it real?" is less important than, "Is it newsworthy?"

Ono and Lennon were particularly sensitive to the photo opportunity, staging the tableau of the *Bed-Ins* for the best camera angles. The situation was so controlled that virtually every photograph appears similar, causing newspaper and magazine images to have a uniform look immediately recognizable as the *Bed-In*. In the *War Is Over* series, whether handbills, posters, placement ads in newspapers, or huge billboards, the distinct graphics were the same (figure 3.5). Lennon also frequently responded to interview questions using the same wording and phrasing, again leading to a uniform final product to be reproduced in the media. The goal was to have the peace message reproduced with as little interpretation as possible in as many news venues as conceivable.

(3) Its relation to the underlying reality of the situation is ambiguous. Its interest arises largely from this very ambiguity. Concerning a pseudo-event the question, "What does it mean?" has a new dimension. While the news interest in a train wreck is in *what* happened and in the real consequences, the interest in an interview is always, in a sense, in *whether* it really happened and in what might have been the motives. Did the statement really mean what it said? Without some of this ambiguity a pseudo-event cannot be very interesting.

³⁴ Fawcett, 76.

One example of this use of ambiguity is the advertisements for the billboard campaign that were placed in music trade journals and newspapers with the same cryptic message “War Is Over If You Want It,” in bold headline type as seen in the billboard in figure 3.5. With no larger context or explanation, the cryptic messages were meant to provoke questions about their meaning that would help create a media buzz.³⁵

Another way Ono and Lennon used ambiguity was by working against their own public images. For example, the fame of their nude photographs on the *Two Virgins* album enticed the press to their bedside to cover the Amsterdam *Bed-In*. But by receiving the reporters in chaste nightclothes, the couple gave them something contradictory to write about. The press was puzzled by these inconsistencies and questioned Ono and Lennon’s authenticity, which helped generate copy and keep the *Bed-In* in the public eye.

Throughout 1969 reporters were often uncertain and, therefore, suspicious of the couples’ motives. In their first press conference after they returned to England from the Amsterdam *Bed-In*, Ono and Lennon were asked if the whole affair was not just a “big put-on?”³⁶ In Canada, a reporter suggested that the *Bed-Ins* were the lazy way out for multi-millionaires who did not want to bother with joining a political

³⁵ See, for example, the full page ad placed in the *New York Times* on December 21, 1969, with the message in large and smaller black type, “WAR IS OVER IF YOU WANT IT, Happy Christmas from John & Yoko Lennon” (Display Ad 122, E16).

³⁶ “John and Yoko’s Peace Gimmicks Do Make Sense,” *Melody Maker*, 12 April 1969, 4.

movement and were so rich that they did not have to work and so had time to spare.³⁷ *TV and Screenworld* even hired a psychiatrist to analyze Lennon's seemingly bizarre publicity-seeking behavior since his association with Ono in 1968. The diagnosis was that Lennon was "in danger of destroying himself because of his childish rebellion against society. If he continues in this manner, tragedy can only ensue."³⁸ Finally, the title of an article in *Melody Maker*, "John Lennon— Genius or Just a Bore?" expressed the ambivalence many were feeling after six months of covering the peace campaign. It concluded with the opinion that even though Lennon's work with Ono had excellent motives, he did more social good through his rock music as a Beatle, adding, "At the moment he's becoming a bore, which in view of his past accomplishments is thoroughly depressing."³⁹

Keeping the traditional press off balance was an intentional strategy by the couple to let their voices be heard. In an artistic statement written by Ono in 1971 for the Cannes Film Festival, she explained, "I like to fight the establishment by using methods that are so far removed from establishment-type thinking that the establishment doesn't know how to fight back."⁴⁰ To be sure, none of the scrutiny or

³⁷ Ritchie York, "Boosting Peace: John and Yoko in Canada," *Rolling Stone*, 28 June 1969, 6.

³⁸ Dr. Albert Frimm, "Behind the Beatle Headlines! A Psychiatrist's Intimate Analysis of John Lennon's Behavior," *TV and Screenworld* 3, no. 7 (March 1969), 37, 62, & 64. Quote from page 64.

³⁹ "John Lennon—Genius or Just a Bore?" *Melody Maker*, 20 September 1969, 13.

⁴⁰ Yoko Ono, "What Is the Relationship Between the World and the Artist?," submitted to the Cannes Film Festival, May 1971, published in *This is Not Here*, exh. cat. (Syracuse: Everson museum of Art, 1971), np.

condemnation by the media derailed Ono and Lennon, because they embraced the old adage, “there’s no such thing as bad publicity.” In a 1980 interview, Lennon proudly explained the dynamics of their pseudo-events. “When we did the *Bed-Ins*, we told the reporters [that we were doing commercials for peace] and they responded, ‘Uh-huh, yeah, sure . . .’ But it didn’t matter what the reporters said, because our commercial went out nonetheless. It was just like another TV commercial. Everybody puts them down but everybody knows them, listens to them, buy[s] the products.”⁴¹

(4) Usually it is intended to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. [Upon t]he hotel’s thirtieth-anniversary celebration, by saying that the hotel is a distinguished institution, actually makes it one.⁴²

Of course, promoting the slogan “War Is Over! (If You Want It)” was crafted specifically to be a self-fulfilling prophecy, but this rule also applies to the campaign in more subtle ways. Ono and Lennon began the year with the tarnished reputation as out of control exhibitionists who had shaken the confidence of Lennon’s popular base. Incredibly, by the end of 1969, Lennon was one of three selected for a British television program *Man of the Decade* (the other two were John F. Kennedy and Mao Zedong).⁴³ Both he and Ono were interviewed at Tittenhurst, their English mansion

⁴¹ David, G. Sheff, *The Playboy Interviews with John Lennon and Yoko Ono*, ed. Barry Golson (New York: Playboy Press, 1981), 39.

⁴² Boorstin, 11-12.

⁴³ Lennon was chosen to be interviewed by the imminent sociologist and anthropologist Desmond Morris, and their twenty minute segment was broadcast on December 30, 1969, as part of the show *Man of the Decade* on ATV in the United Kingdom,

outside of London, and the show was broadcast nationwide on December 30. After only nine months of repeating their anti-war sentiments, their self-proclaimed roles as peace ambassadors actually made them so on television.

Ono and Lennon were not the only ones who understood the power of the pseudo-event as political protest. The masters of this form of publicity were the Yippies.⁴⁴ This loosely organized, breakaway group of radicals described themselves as a fusion of hippies and the New Left.⁴⁵ They freely used grand, Dada-like gestures they called “guerilla theater” as a tactic to grab media attention.⁴⁶ The antics and political perspective of the Yippies were well publicized both in the United States and in the London underground newspapers *IT* and *OZ* in the late sixties.⁴⁷

http://www.beatlelinks.net/ubb/ultimatebb.php?ubb=get_topic;f=21;t=000039
(accessed 20 March 2004).

⁴⁴ The name “Yippies” was derived from the group called the “Youth International Party,” a party that never existed except as a spoof on the media, J. Anthony Lukass, “Yippies’ Leader Tells the Judge Just What His ‘Party’ Believes,” *The New York Times* (29 December 1969), 14.

⁴⁵ The New Left differentiated itself from the “old” left in that it rejected the official Communist Party and was opposed to the politics of the Soviet Union. Michael P. Lerner, “Introduction,” *Counterculture and Revolution*, David Horowitz, Michael P. Lerner, and Craig Pyes, eds. (New York: Random House, 1972) x.

⁴⁶ Carolee Schneemann remembers this period as one in which the “cultural ferment, the Vietnam War, and the political dissolution of the inherited traditions” drew performance art, theater, and politics together. “Our worlds were so close at that time. If we did a performance on a Tuesday night in which someone jumped through hoops, threw blue paint, one of the yippies or Weather People would have seen it. They would be at the Stock Exchange two days later in the balcony, blowing down dollar bills from a blue plastic sack. Creative energy was constantly breaking through class, race politics, and art structures.” Carolee Schneemann, “Interview with ND,” *Imaging Her Erotics, Essays, Interviews, Projects* (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: The MIT Press, 2002), 120.

In one famous Yippie political action, in which leaders Jerry Rubin and Abby Hoffman and ten others temporarily stopped trading at the American Stock Exchange on Wall Street. Their satiric performance about capitalism began when they strode into the Stock Exchange building and made their way up to the visitors' gallery above the main hall. Standing at the balcony, the Yippies denounced the evils of money and wanton greed to the brokers and traders working on the Stock Exchange floor below. Many laughed and applauded after the speech, but the mood suddenly changed when the protestors began throwing fistfuls of paper money over the balcony railing as photographers snapped picture after picture (figure 3.6). In Jerry Rubin's words: "We throw dollar bills over the ledge. Floating currency fills the air. Like wild animals, the stockbrokers climb all over each other to grab the money. 'This is what it's all about, real live money!!! Real dollar bills! People are starving in Biafra!' we shout."⁴⁸ Yippie member Stew Albert remembers the money slowly fluttering down to the excited brokers on the floor below as they piled one on top of the other, eagerly snatching at the bills:

Trading halted. The immense floor of hi-speed greed was now paying attention only to me and my new friends. I thought I had wandered into a surreal Italian film about modern alienation and charismatic despair. When we ran out of paper and started throwing coins we were greeted with boos and derision. The guards came out and told us to make way for the tourists. . . . I was joyous. This was a new way to demonstrate, a theatrical turn of politics, that invaded sacrosanct places and turned them into a stage set with great

⁴⁷ For an example of this type of coverage, see Jerry Rubin, "Emergency Yippie Report," *OZ* (February 1969), 6-7. Ono and Lennon had ties to both *IT* and *OZ*. The couple also became close to Yippie leader Jerry Rubin after they moved to New York City in 1971.

⁴⁸ Jerry Rubin, *Do It! Scenarios of the Revolution* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1970), 117.

props. Better yet, the demonstration against greed took only one night to organize on the radio and at a cost of about a hundred and fifty bucks.⁴⁹

Other famous Yippie actions include the October 21, 1967, mock attempt to levitate the Pentagon to exorcise evil spirits that supposedly were causing the Vietnam War. The event was advertised among peace groups and through underground newspapers around the country and drew a mixed crowd of old guard anti-war proponents, such as Dr. Spock, Naom Chomsky, the members of the Mothers Strike for Peace and the anti-nuclear war group SANE,⁵⁰ and the new faces of flower children, artists, poets, writers, and college students. Richard Honigman predicted in the famous counterculture newspaper the *San Francisco Oracle*, “the death of the old Liberal war protest and the beginnings of a new scene.” He proclaimed, “The old protestors . . . are probably going to do their old thing and make speeches, carry pickets, and so on, but they are also going to meet new comers to the scene who will be involved in street or guerilla theater and a religious exorcism ritual. . . All will perform in a spontaneous happening and religious rite to exorcise the traditional and actual symbol of evil—The Pentagon.”⁵¹ On the day of this planned event, at 11:00 a.m. about 50,000 protestors broke away from the two-day “Confront the War Makers” demonstration in Washington, DC, to cross the Memorial Bridge into Virginia and walk two and one-half miles to the Pentagon lawn. The group was

⁴⁹ Stew Albert, “Abby Hoffman Visits the Stock Exchange and Some Other Places,” from *Stew Albert’s Yippie! Reading Room*, <http://members.aol.com/stewa/abbiestock.html> (accessed 13 October 2002).

⁵⁰ The Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy (SANE), now known as Peace Action.

⁵¹ Richard J. Honigman, “Pentagon Rising,” *San Francisco Oracle* 10 (October 1967) 31.

met by 2,500 federal troops who formed a human barricade to protect government property. After some serious scuffles, thousands spent the night on the Pentagon grounds. Some tried to convince the troops to drop their guns and join them, while others put flowers in the soldiers' gun barrels (images of which became instant icons of "flower power"). Naturally, the press profusely documented the entire colorful spectacle (figure 3.7).⁵²

In another action, the Yippies attempted to nominate a pig for President at the 1968 Democratic Convention. The event took place on August 23 when a six month old, two hundred pound pig named Pegasus was brought to the Civic Center Plaza along with the signs "Vote Pig in '68" and "Live High On the Hog." Seven Yippies, including Jerry Rubin, Abby Hoffman, and folk singer Phil Ochs, were present. National and international press were waiting to cover the event, but the police ("the pigs" in countercultural vernacular) immediately intercepted the Yippies and their four-legged candidate and whisked all away in a van before the entourage could enter the Center.⁵³

Even in "real" (as opposed to pseudo-) events unfolding over this week of the Chicago convention, the demonstrators were acutely aware of the power of images. All the clashes between taunting young protestors versus crazed police and National Guardsmen almost immediately turned bloody, but the nineteen minutes of violence

⁵² For a full account of the March on the Pentagon, see Norman Mailer's *Armies of the Night*; and Abbie Hoffman [Free, pseud.], *Revolution for the Hell of It* (New York: Dial Press, 1968; Pocket Book, 1970), 27-54.

⁵³ See Rubin, 176-179; and "7 Yippies Arrested With Pig 'Candidate' at Chicago Center," *The New York Times* (24 August 1968), 19.

on the night of August 28 became the most famous episode because of heavy media coverage. That night, the police and the Illinois National Guard herded thousands of anti-war demonstrators to the front of the Hilton hotel (one of the designated hotels for the convention) and then began indiscriminately clubbing and Macing students, passersby, tourists, political volunteers, delegates, and members of the press (figures 3.8). Although previous skirmishes between police and antiwar advocates that week had been covered tangentially by a press more interested in the drama unfolding on the floor of the Democratic National Convention, when journalists also became prey to indiscriminate police violence on August 28, their personal involvement sparked breaking news coverage of the protests (figure 3.9). A video of the melée was looped through the convention floor monitors, disrupting the official proceedings and causing Abraham Ribicoff to interrupt his nominating speech for Senator Eugene McCarthy in order to accuse the mayor of Chicago of “Gestapo tactics.” Amid the bedlam on the street, when a middle-aged African American man was particularly singled out and viciously beaten by the police, the crowd chanted, “The whole world is watching! The whole world is watching!” Indeed, the violent, gory scenes were broadcast to millions of homes across America and overseas, triggering shock, condemnation, and widespread sympathy for the protestors.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ “Excerpts from the Full Report on Chicago as Presented to Panel,” *The New York Times* (2 December 1968), 39; Charles Kaiser, *1968 in America: Music, Politics, Chaos, Counterculture, and the Shaping of a Generation* (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 240. For a fascinating oral history of this incident, complete with recordings of the events as they unfold, listen to Walter Cronkite, “Recalling the Mayhem of ’68 Convention: Tensions Over Vietnam Upset Chicago Political Scene,” *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio (23 July 2004),

Like Ono and Lennon, the Yippies, or the Chicago protestors, the anti-war movement repeatedly involved the press to facilitate better news coverage.⁵⁵ This was true in the sixties not only in the United States, but also around the world. Pseudo-events became popular, because many noticed that although their political statements might appear in the press in garbled or truncated form—or not at all—an unusual, entertaining, dramatic, or bloody incident virtually guaranteed that television newscasters and photojournalists would cover the event. The broadcast images would speak for themselves, so that no matter how the media reported the incident, the activists' message had a chance of getting across. This, then, became part of what Todd Gitlin calls the “grammar of interaction” between the media and the anti-war movement, or one way in which the media and the movement “discovered and acted upon each other” as the decade unfolded.⁵⁶

The difference between these other political actions and Ono and Lennon's peace campaign, however, was in the couple's ability to fine tune their control of the

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=3613499> (accessed 12 September 2005).

⁵⁵ Guerilla Theater also was used in the nascent women's liberation movement during the late 1960s. Perhaps the most famous early political pseudo-events were those at the September 7, 1968, Miss America beauty pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey, where a live sheep was crowned Miss America, and “objects of female oppression” such as bras, girdles, high heels, false eyelashes, curlers, dish towels, and steno pads were symbolically thrown into a Freedom Trash Can. For a full account, see Robin Morgan, “Women Disrupt the Miss America Pageant,” in *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 62-67. Today, the feminist Guerilla Girls (formed in 1985) still use the pseudo-event as a strategy to publicize racism, sexism, and discrimination most specifically in the art world, and more generally in wider society.

⁵⁶ Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in The Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, & London: University of California Press, 1980), 22.

circumstances under which their message of peace was conveyed. From press conferences to concerts to strategically-placed billboards, Ono and Lennon's celebrity power, their large private bank account to fund their efforts, and their ready access to an administrative organization of paid personal assistants, the Apple corporate office, and enthusiastic fans allowed the couple to shape their campaign in ways unavailable to others.

Chapter 4: Engaging the Media

If you're in a fish bowl, so make use of it.

— John Lennon, 1969 —

The task of continually “advertise for peace” made the 1969 campaign a demanding affair, with Yoko Ono and John Lennon constantly stoking the fires of publicity to keep the momentum going. Ono explained in an interview in *Rolling Stone* magazine that summer, “People take war for granted, they are conditioned to accept it. So you’ve got to change their thinking. Like TV soap commercials, you have to keep pounding away with the message all the time. It’s a full scale campaign.”¹ Lennon commented later that autumn on their single-minded approach to the topic of love and peace: “When I get down to it, I’m only interested in Yoko and Peace, so if I can sing about them again and again, its only like I’m going through my blue period as a painter.”² Throughout 1969, the couple launched four art initiatives designed to engage the press and public in conversations about peace, while the media enjoyed unprecedeted access to the celebrity couple for interviews, press conferences, and photo opportunities.

This chapter details the various events of the *Bed-Ins*, *Bagism*, *Acorns for Peace*, and the *War is Over!* billboard campaign, examining them within the context of the times, with an eye toward Ono and Lennon’s larger goal of using art to alter the public consciousness about war. Although considered separately in individual

¹ Ritchie Yorke, “Boosting Peace: John and Yoko in Canada,” *Rolling Stone*, June 28, 1969, 6.

² Miles [sic], “The Beatles’ Come Together,” *OZ 24: The Beautiful Freaks*, October/November, 1969, 33.

sections within this chapter, the pieces that make up the 1969 Year of Peace first and foremost should be understood as one continuous event. When Ono was asked to define an “event” as opposed to a “happening” in 1971, she replied, “It [an event] is not ‘a get togetherness’ as most happenings are, but a dealing with oneself. Also, it has no script as happenings do, though it has something that starts it moving—the closest word for it may be a ‘wish’ or ‘hope.’”³ Of course, the ten-month Year of Peace event was a manifestation of Ono and Lennon’s efforts to “deal with” themselves as a married couple and as artistic partners, and the catalyst for this event was the wish and hope for peace.

The 1969 peace campaign was organized to take maximum advantage of the mass media to advertise Lennon and Ono’s message of peace. Lennon long had been very conscious of both the intrusive role of television and advertising in everyday life and the insidious relationship between celebrities and the media, both key themes incorporated into the peace campaign. For example, on the Beatles’ record album *Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Heart’s Club Band* (1967), Lennon blended an invasive repetitive jingle into the song “Good Morning” that mimics the background noise from inanely happy television commercials representative of a fake, plastic world.⁴ This jarring song follows the barren existence of a working class breadwinner, ending

³ Press release for the exhibition “Yoko Ono: This Is Not Here, October 9-27, 1971” (September 17, 1971), Archives of American Art, AA/PG Library Vertical Files: Ono, Yoko.

⁴ While Lennon worked with the television on, a particularly grating Kellogg’s Cornflakes commercial had inspired the jarring refrain of “Good morning, good morning, good morning!” Ian MacDonald, *Revolution in the Head* (London: Pimlico, 1995) 186.

with the calls of a string of barnyard animals, carefully sequenced to reflect the natural order in which the strong eats its weaker predecessor.⁵

Through his experience as a Beatle, Lennon was acutely aware of the mechanics of media manipulation and proved to be gifted at employing this knowledge during the peace campaign. His awareness of how public perception could be controlled through the media began early in his career, when the Beatles manager Brian Epstein made sure that reporters suppressed the fact that Lennon was married and a father so that his fan base would not be diminished. It continued with Epstein's policy of banning talk about politics in public, especially the Vietnam War, in order to avoid any controversy that could affect album sales. The two Beatles movies *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) and *HELP!* (1965) capitalized on stereotypes of the four musicians that already had been cultivated in the press. When Lennon was interviewed in 1968, he described their experience appearing in these films as not exactly acting as much as selling themselves like cereal. "In the Beatles films we were just—I don't know—they were wrong, somehow. We were just playing our old parts. You know, Cynical John, Cosy Ringo, Wide-eyed Paul, Skeleton George. Besides, I'm not really all *that* cynical. But there we were: one person, or four sides of one person's character—and pour in the porridge."⁶ Indeed, the pioneer video artists Nam June Paik and Jud Yalkut recognized the media-constructed images of the rock band and artistically exploited this phenomenon in a collaborative three-minute

⁵ MacDonald, 186.

⁶ Jean Antel, "Beatle on the Battlefront," *New York Times*, January 15, 1967: D13.

film called *Beatles Electroniques* (1966-69).⁷ The filmmakers utilized live and taped broadcasts of the Beatles that they manipulated and distorted, accompanied by a track of four electronically altered loops of Beatles sound material (figure 4.1).⁸ Film scholar Gene Youngblood describes the results as “an eerie portrait of the Beatles not as pop stars but rather as entities that exist solely in the world of electronic media.”⁹ The interchangeability of the commodified live Beatles with their electronic images was perhaps unintentionally made clear in a 1968 publicity photograph for the feature-length animated film *Yellow Submarine*, where the absent John Lennon was replaced by his cutout cartoon character from the movie, surrounded by the real Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, and George Harrison (figure 4.2). By 1969, Lennon understood the workings of the Beatles’ publicity machine, and most importantly, knew how to effectively interact with the media. Without this sophisticated knowledge, the peace campaign would never have had the impact that it did.

As discussed in chapter two, Ono also was extremely skillful in her limited dealings with the media before she met Lennon. However, the *Bed-In* was a direct reaction to the suffocating and often condemning media attention that went far beyond anything she had experienced before she met Lennon. Lennon and Ono were determined to use their celebrity and the media for their own ends. They clearly explained their motives in an interview in June 1969:

⁷ *Beatles Electroniques* (1966-1969), a collaborative 16mm. film by Nam June Paik and Jud Yalkuk, black and white, three minutes, with original soundtrack "Four Loops" by Kenneth Werner.

⁸ Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema* New York: P. Dutton & Co., 1970), 330.

⁹ Youngblood, 330.

If you're in a fish bowl, so make use of it. It's no good trying to put a fence around it. SO instead of all the cameras just being outside looking in, you've also got the cameras inside looking out. The things Yoko and I are doing are really that; projecting, bouncing back as fast as we can what happens to us from the outside. We put ourselves there in the fish bowls. And now that we're in that position—we use it for peace. And that's the only thing to do, really. Because it's no good working for money. And there is nothing else to do but work. So working for peace is an objective.¹⁰

Rather than becoming part of the burgeoning antiwar movement, the pair chose to separate themselves and use art as a vehicle for change. Ono explained to the Bram De Swaan in December 1968 that art belonged to the streets, not to galleries, and while she had no interest becoming a politician, which she equated to being “killed spiritually as a person,” both she and Lennon were “communicating just as well or better through [their] art.”¹¹ Ono announced in January that she felt that peace could be achieved by “creating more and more beautiful vibrations through art. I believe in revolution through vibration rather than violence. If there’s total communication, there’ll be no violence.” This theme of “total communication” was to become the leitmotif of their peace campaign. To achieve this objective, the couple utilized ideas about the media that had been made popular by the highly readable and quotable “communications prophet,” Marshall McLuhan. Throughout the campaign, Ono and Lennon discussed the media as an electronic entity that could be utilized through their art for social change, a theory McLuhan advocated in his books on the subject.¹² The

¹⁰ Leroy Aarons, “Jon and Yoko: Life in a ‘Fish Bowl,’” *The Washington Post* (15 June 1969), K1.

¹¹ Yoko Ono, 12 December 1968 interview conducted by Dutch writer Bram de Swaan for Dutch VARA-TV Channel Nederland 2’s “Rood Wit Blauw.” A version was aired 15 January 1969. *John Lennon Archives 1968-69*, DVD (Apple Films, Ltd., 2004).

couple often employed his famous catchphrase, “the media is the message” in their press interviews, making clear their intellectual association with McLuhan. This association was capitalized upon by CBS television (Canadian Broadcasting System) who arranged for McLuhan to interview Ono and Lennon at the end of the year. On December 20, the pair was summoned to McLuhan’s office at the University of Toronto’s Department of Culture and Technology for a forty-five minute televised interview. Ritchie Yorke enthusiastically reported, “It was a torrid 45 minutes for John and Yoko; McLuhan fired his messages like machine gun fire, and the couple had to be on their toes to keep up with it all.”¹³

In the excerpts that survive from the interview, it was obvious that McLuhan was quite excited to realize how his theories fit their activities. Among the topics covered was a discussion on how language and song could be used to structure a separate artistic environment “that involves everybody,” presumably to counteract what McLuhan described in *The Medium is the Message* as the Cold War as “real, total war” that is “the information war fought by subtle electronic informational media—under cold conditions, and constantly. The cold war is the real war front—a surround—involving everybody—all the time—everywhere.”¹⁴ Therefore, “wars, revolutions, civil uprisings are interfaces within the new environments created by

¹² See, for example, his *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw Hill Paperback, 1965) and *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects* (New York, London, and Toronto: Bantam Books, 1967).

¹³ Ritchie Yorke, “John, Yoko & Year One,” *Rolling Stone* (February 7, 1970): 18.

¹⁴ *Medium is the Message*, 138.

electronic media,” he declared.¹⁵ Ono and Lennon’s goal was to refract their message of peace through the prism of the popular culture, in which the information received would be altered and changed with each medium to create a mosaic of peace messages scattered far and wide.

To this end, the events of the peace campaign were only as effective as their newsworthiness, and they were constantly supplemented by news conferences and private interviews with the press in order to maintain a steady stream of information and entertainment that would keep the peace message in the news.

The Bed-Ins

Perhaps the most famous of Ono and Lennon’s 1969 peace projects was their Bed-In series, performed first in Amsterdam from March 25-31, and again in Montreal from May 26-June 2 (figure 4.3 and 4.24). These open-ended, free-flowing events unfolded as Ono and Lennon sat in a hotel bed while a steady stream of reporters, well-wishers, antagonists, and celebrity friends engaged them in free-ranging conversations about their politics of peace. Visitors were greeted with the spectacle of the famous rock star in plain white pajamas and avant-garde artist in a modest white nightgown, both reclining in bed, displayed against pure white sheets. This white field of bed linens and sleepwear functioned as a unifying agent that enhanced the combined figures of Ono and Lennon, setting the stage to transmit their universal message of love and peace that was meant to transcend race, gender, origin, privilege, and place.

¹⁵ *Medium is the Message*, 9.

The emphasis on subjectivity, authenticity, and identity mirrored concerns of the counterculture, that used such markers to distinguish itself from the war and the “straight” society who were its proponents, so that while the Bed-In unfolded on one level as a Fluxus-type multi-media event, on another it was a “meeting of the tribes” that joined together the countercultural formats of open theatre, rock concert, documentary video, “new journalism,” teach-ins, and be-ins.

One aspect of how Ono and Lennon structured their peace events is found in their concerted efforts to assimilate art within everyday life as a form of communication. Ono explained the advantage of using performance art rather than the theater or literature as a vehicle to express their views. She emphasized that she and Lennon were actually living their message of peace: “what we started to do was, instead of writing a play about it, we just started to do it in real life, so the whole world is a theatre actually, I mean, the Hilton was the stage, and it's a more direct kind of communication.¹⁶

That their performance arises from “real life” opens up the discussion of Ono and Lennon’s pieces to the element of time. The 1969 *Year of Peace* is precisely measured in socially structured time units, such the daily commitment to peace, the half-hour or hour-long press conference, the week duration of the *Bed-Ins*, or the Christmas season for the *War Is Over!* billboards. Such a framework emphasizes both the transient as well as ritual aspects of time as the calendar year falls away.¹⁷

¹⁶ Quoted from 1969 BBC documentary *The World of John and Yoko*, filmed from December 3-4, 1969, <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/carousel/pob05.html> (August 5, 2006)

Many aspects of the *Bed-Ins* reflect the importance of the structure of everyday life, so that the everyday functions as a connector, joining together issues and concerns that might otherwise seem to be disparate.¹⁸ Ono and Lennon connect activities such as listening to rock music or growing one's hair as a path toward peace, enabling social activities and social systems to have equal weight with politics. The *Bed-Ins* therefore provide a way to intertwine politics with the seamless web of everyday reality; by concentrating on the mundane, Ono and Lennon were attempting to reveal how the war was making a daily impact on their audience's lives.

The *Bed-Ins* also bore the hallmarks of a classic Fluxus action. They were ephemeral, nonprecious, and reproducible. In fact, Ono and Lennon consistently made the point of challenging their audience to hold their own Bed-Ins, explaining to the press that "anyone can do it!"¹⁹ Just as their Montreal Bed-In could never exactly replicate their Amsterdam experience, the intention behind this challenge was not to make copies of their work, but for something more radical. Theoretically, whenever others reproduced the Bed-In, it became a generative act that gave birth to new

¹⁷ Concentration on time can be traced back to Ono's Fluxus conceptual pieces, objects, and film projects and has connections with Zen thought. See, for example, her 1965 *Eternal Time Clock* (figure 2.3) or her 1966 high-speed film *No. 1 (Match)*.

¹⁸ Henri Lefebvre, "The Everyday and Everydayness," Christine Levich, trans., *Yale French Studies*, no. 73, *Everyday Life* (1987) 9.

¹⁹ According to Jon Hendricks, Ono first introduced the idea of "license" to George Maciunas in his AG gallery in New York in July 1961. As Hendricks points out, this idea that "anybody can do it" is an "anti-art maxim" thereafter employed by Fluxus members repeatedly. Jon Hendricks, "What's Fluxus? What's not! Why." In Jon Hendricks, ed., *What's Fluxus? What's Not! Why.*" (Rio de Janeiro, Detroit: Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Foundation, 2002), p. 15.

creative expression and innovation. Therefore, the message of peace was constantly in flux—never static—as it multiplied and gained force through growth and change.

Fluxus actions also had a long tradition in engaging with the everyday. Fluxus works were purposely of a mundane and ephemeral nature, in sharp contrast to art sold in exclusive commercial galleries or preserved in museums for posterity. Rather than separating art from the commonplace, Fluxus artists tried to reinforce its relationship to daily living. To this end, everyday items were customarily hijacked for a Fluxus performance, only to be restored to their normal settings soon afterward. Allison Knowles and Bracken Hendricks illustrated this principle in an interview for *Art Journal* by referring to Dick Higgins' performance of George Brecht's *Drip Music*, where Higgins needed a number of pitchers in order to pour water from the height of the top of a ladder.²⁰ The point of the piece was its concept, or the actual sound of dripping water, and not the particulars of each pitcher. Various pitchers were borrowed from different friends and then returned to them after the performance, so that a pitcher that was used one night in a performance would be back on the kitchen table the following morning holding orange juice for breakfast.²¹ In Fluxus, then, familiar objects and situations (such as pitchers, the act of pouring, or the sound of dripping water) oscillate between serving as vehicles for artistic

²⁰ Brecht wrote the following event score (performance script) for *Drip Music* in 1959: "For a single or multiple performance. A source of dripping water and an empty vessel are arranged so that the water falls into the vessel." From "George Brecht: Events," <<http://iaaaa.nl/cursusAA&AI/concept/brecht.html>> (accessed 12/29/06).

²¹ Janet Kaplan, with Bracken Hendricks, Geoffrey Hendricks, Hannah Higgins, and Alison Knowles, "Conversation: Flux Generations," *Art Journal* 59, no.2 (Summer 2000): 10.

expression and constituting the fabric of daily life, thus setting up a kind of creative synergy between art and the everyday that causes a heightened awareness of the mundane. The *Bed-In* follows in the spirit of Fluxus in that it is situated in the everyday. An entire hotel suite, complete with king-sized bed, is “borrowed,” only to be returned to its normal function when the event ended after seven days.

Marshall McLuhan was very interested in “environments,” which he defined as “not passive wrappings, but active processes, which are invisible.”²² He urged artists to use “the entire human environment as a work of art, as a teaching machine designed to maximize perception and to make everyday learning a process of discovery,” proposing that artists construct “anti-environments, or countersituations” in order to be able to understand more clearly the effects of the media on daily life.²³

Ono and Lennon’s *Wedding Album* (1969), exemplifies how the everyday provided a structure during the *Bed-In*. For example, a track called “Amsterdam” provides almost 25 minutes of recordings made during the *Bed-In* for Peace. The vignette begins with Ono’s chant for peace reverberating inside the hotel room, followed by an interval in which a crescendo of clicking camera shutters overlay the voices of Lennon, Ono, and various journalists as a press conference unfolds. It closes with a passage in which we hear the creak of a door opening, bed sheets rustling, and the couple ordering tea, and toast with jam from room service.²⁴

²² *Media is the Massage*, 68.

²³ *Media is the Massage*, 68.

²⁴ Amsterdam track (24:54), *Wedding Album*, Produced by John and Yoko (Bag Productions), Recorded at Hilton Hotel *Bed-In* For Peace, Amsterdam, 1969. Compact Disc (RCD10413), 1997

Therefore, the implication is that the meaning of the Amsterdam *Bed-In* is located not just in the overt political statements made in the interviews, but also in the environment in which they are made. The couple's political activities are purposely interwoven with ambient noise, so that the "everyday" becomes an important component of the *Bed-In* and key to understanding its structure.²⁵

Bed-In therefore unfolds within the parameters of Ono and Lennon's mundane lives while providing a public platform to present their political views. Other groups entering the political forum during this period also shared the strategy of joining private and public realms. For example, the Women's Movement and the Black Power Movement both connected personal experience to group concerns; indeed, one of the main catch phrases of feminism at the time was "the personal is the political." Like the consciousness raising sessions or teach-ins, one of the main assumptions of the *Bed-Ins* was that by recognizing the commonplace, others with similar experiences would make connections and understand that their perceptions were not isolated, but a shared social condition. *Bed-In* knits together many different aspects of artistic, social, and political thought of the sixties, forming a hybrid work that resists easy classification.

Bagism

Throughout 1969, Ono and Lennon enthusiastically promoted Bagism in a series of performances where either they or their proxies would climb inside a cloth bag and interact with an audience in an attempt to openly communicate their thoughts

²⁵ Mention John Cage...

about peace. The idea of performing inside a piece of fabric was first developed by Ono in 1961 in a piece called *AOS—To David Tudor*, where a person crawling around onstage underneath a large sheet of canvas made the fabric come alive with kinetic shapes that became the art piece (figure 4.5).²⁶ Conversely, when sitting perfectly still, the draped person became an inert object that resembled a stone.²⁷ By 1966, these concepts had developed into *Bag Piece*, in which Ono by herself or in conjunction with her husband Anthony Cox and other friends put on black fabric bags to perform in multimedia, interactive environments. The chance to perform inside a bag was also extended to the public, along with the opportunity to continue the experience by purchasing “bagware” to bring home.²⁸

Ono’s Zen-like explanation for her interest in these fabric bags was presented in a self-published program she provided for her 1966 Judson Gallery performance entitled *The Stone*: “I think it is nice to abandon what you have as much as possible, as many mental possessions as the physical ones, as they clutter your mind. It is nice to maintain a poverty of environment, sound thinking and belief. It is nice to keep oneself small, like a grain of rice, instead of expanding. Make yourself dispensable,

²⁶ Kristine Stiles, “*Bag Piece, 1964*,” in *Yes Yoko Ono*, exh. cat., edited by Alexandra Munroe and Jon Hendricks (New York: Japan Society and Harry N. Abrams, 2000), 162. These ideas in which the process becomes the form anticipate process art of the later 1960s, especially the work of Morris Lewis’ felt pieces, Linda Benglis’ corner paintings, and Richard Serra’s casting a splashing pieces.

²⁷ Jerry Hopkins, *Yoko Ono* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company), 51.

²⁸ See, for example, *The Stone*, performed March 10-27, 1966 at the Judson Gallery, and *Bag Piece* performed at the Paradox in July 1966 in New York City, Stiles, 162 and 164.

like paper. See little, hear little and think little.”²⁹ This concept of stripping away the material world was reinforced by Ono and Cox’s performance of *Bag Piece* in September 1966 at the Africa Center in London as part of the *Destruction in Art Symposium*. A rare tape recording of a witness who described the performance gives a sense of the hypnotic effect of the piece:

There is a lot of moving about, very slow sort of movements. . . . They can see [out of the bag], but you can’t see what’s happening in it. It’s sitting on this small stage. You see an arm sort of push and a foot, and it goes on like that for about twenty minutes. Every now and then another article of clothes will come out of the hole in the bag, until finally the movements become slower and slower, and oddly enough it really holds your attention, and you can assume that all the clothes are gone. I think another assistant comes and hands them robes. . . . So you don’t get to see any skin, at least then.³⁰

The concept of covering the body while exposing it to public scrutiny is one with particular potency when considered within the cultural context of Ono’s Japanese background. Anthropologist Anne Allison points out how in Japanese myth and social practice, covering or exposing the body can have powerful consequences.³¹ In Japanese myth, the effect of seeing female genitalia is often a source for dramatic change. In just one example, when the sun goddess Amateratsu shut herself inside a cave in a fit of anger, the world was thrown into darkness and chaos reigned. Many gods and goddesses gathered in front of the cave to plead for her return, but with no avail. Finally, one goddess raised her skirts and exposed her genitalia, which caused

²⁹ *To the Wesleyan People*, January 23, 1966, reprinted in *Yes Yoko Ono*, 291.

³⁰ Quoted from Stiles, 162. The source of the quote is an unidentified individual on a tape belonging to Tom Lopez (Stiles, 164).

³¹ Anne Allison, *Permitted and Prohibited Desires: Mothers, Comics, and Censorship in Japan* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 160-169.

such hilarity outside that Amateratsu opened the door in a pique of curiosity and was compelled to come out.³² Many other Japanese tales also center on viewing women's genitalia, resulting in witnesses becoming "stunned, awed, impressed, amused, startled, and transfixed."³³

Allison traces the modern Japanese taboo of exposing one's body in public to the enactment of the first obscenity laws in 1907 during Japan's period of modernization.³⁴ Before the Japanese modern era, bodily exposure through nursing or mixed public bathing, for example, was always viewed as a neutral act of nature. In part to gain respect and credibility from the world's most powerful nations, the Japanese adopted Judeo-Christian standards in the early twentieth century, causing public exposure to become charged with ambivalence, because Japanese awareness of cultural and racial difference from the West was "generated both from feelings of insecurity and protectionism around the self and from hostility as well as receptiveness toward the other."³⁵ From this ambivalence, a social taboo developed around public exposure that revealed pubic nudity. Today, this "fetish of pubic obscenity" is fixated solely on this body area, in which "the pubic zone stands for identity, body part, and sexuality, and is covered so as not to offend with its dirtiness, but also to protect what is 'real' from outside contamination."³⁶

³² Allison, 168.

³³ Allison, 168.

³⁴ Allison, 164.

³⁵ Allison, 164.

³⁶ Allison, 164.

The nudity implied in Ono's *Bag Piece* therefore becomes a form of potent hermetic knowledge of the "real" inner self because of its uncorrupted "pure" state when obscured inside the bag. By viewing these deeply private and hidden bodies covered, but in plain sight, the audience is confronted with the opposing realities of a personal versus a public self. As the moving, undulating fabric actualizes and then releases the forms of the solid figures inside the bag, the body may be seen as both a vessel to contain our "real" selves and as a continuously fluctuating exterior by which others perceive us.

Ono and Lennon's use of Bagism throughout the peace campaign, in which the couple climbed inside fabric bags at media events and concerts, can be traced back to this practice of wrapping and bagging the body in a number of Ono's previous works. In fact, Ono was already famous in London for her *Bag Piece* when she and Lennon first performed a version of the event on December 18, 1968, at the Royal Albert Hall. The performance was part of a fund-raising concert called *The Alchemical Wedding* for the Arts Lab on Drury Lane, in which poetry, art, and rock music were featured. The nerve center of London's counterculture, the Arts Lab warehouse complex included a gallery, theatre, macrobiotic restaurant, bookshop, studios, and avant-garde cinema. The Beatles were great supporters of the Arts Lab, and Ono and Lennon were personal friends of one of its co-founders, the American Jim Haynes.

On the night of December 18th, the Royal Albert Hall was packed with people as *The Alchemical Wedding* began to the beat of drums and the intoxicating chants of a group of Hare Krishna devotees. Soon the crowd was on its feet, dancing

ecstatically in front of the stage. Thus, the audience was already united when Ono and Lennon walked out into the middle of the stage and crawled into a large white bag (figure 4.6). Beginning seated and facing each other, the couple moved only twice over the duration of forty-five minutes so that they ended in a prone position inside the bag. They finally emerged from their cover to a roar of applause from the audience of about a thousand.³⁷ Ono and Lennon's movements while in the bag made many falsely think that they were making love on stage. This perception was heightened by the actions of an American student from Texas, who at one point spontaneously “slipped off her black dress and sat in the nude.”³⁸ The police were alerted and moved in to remove her, but crowds of people blocked their path and took off their clothes in sympathy until it was soon apparent that if the woman were arrested, the entire audience would strip naked. The incident ended peacefully with no arrests after the student put “a coat around her bare shoulders” in about a half an hour.³⁹ Lennon vividly remembered his experience inside the bag during the pandemonium:

We were just a part of it, there were people dancing around and the girl took off her clothes in the middle of what we were doing, it evolved on its own, that part of the event. But we didn't know what people were doing outside the bag. We just heard all this thumping and never knew what was going on until we saw a shaky old video of it. It was a beautiful thing, but very nerve

³⁷ “Girl in Audience Steps Out of Her Role,” *The Washington Post*, December 20, 1968, A25.

³⁸ “Girl in Audience,” A25.

³⁹ “Girl in Audience,” A25. The same phenomenon of coming together as a group to defy authority was experienced at the Woodstock concert in 1969 and described as “the gathering of the tribes.”

wracking. I mean I was scared shitless going into a bag you couldn't see out of. It was worse than singing, going on stage and doing that.⁴⁰

Looking back, Jim Haynes commented that the performance “meant a lot because it placed John and Yoko among us; it was as though they were with us. I think they enjoyed that feeling, and everyone there felt it’s us, it’s a community. It was one of those evenings.”⁴¹ The nude pictures of the Texan student were conjoined with accounts of Ono and Lennon’s performance to emphasize the weirdness of the event in front-page newspaper stories the next day. However, most eyewitness accounts of *The Alchemical Wedding* focus on these two incidents as proof of the extraordinary bond that connected the crowd that night.

Bill Levy and Jack Moore’s poster used to advertise *The Alchemical Wedding* underlines the promise that some sort of esoteric knowledge would be revealed at the concert. It depicts a drawing of a man raising one finger to his lips in a sign for secrecy while the skin on his head is peeled back to reveal his coiled brain matter (figure 4.7). As suggested in the poster, those who attended the concert felt validated and transformed by their experiences. Jim Harris, for example, commented:

There is a difference between what a person does and what happens by itself. You will set yourself a task with determination and tenacity and then, suddenly, a gust of wind will come from another world and everything changes. You seem to be used by the gods; and, in spite of yourself, you are part of the Myth.⁴²

⁴⁰ Jamie Mandelkau, “Interview Piece: Yoko Ono & *Grapefruit*,” *IT (International Times)*, August 12-26, 1971: 15.

⁴¹ Jim Haynes, *Thanks for Coming! An Autobiography* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber), 160.

⁴² Jim Harris, “The Footsoldier’s Tale” (1999), <http://www.leeharris.co.uk/LeeHarris/Works/afootsol.htm> (accessed February 16, 2007).

The impact of this magical and harmonious gathering was one that would stay with Ono and Lennon. Indeed, their steadfast belief that performing inside a bag could bring everyone together à la *The Alchemical Wedding* was at the heart of their promotion of Bagism during the peace campaign. Over the years, the myth has persisted that the couple made love on stage inside their bag. When David Sheff questioned Ono about these reports in 1980, she responded, “We never made love in a bag. People probably imagined that we were making love. It was just, all of us are in a bag, you know. The point was the outline of the bag, the movement of the bag, how much we see of a person. Inside there might be a lot going on. Or maybe nothing’s going on.”⁴³

Chrissie Isles correctly describes this body language in Ono’s *Bag Pieces* as “intensified communication through concealment and restriction” communicated through “a membrane concealing another, hidden, three-dimensional reality.”⁴⁴ Such a description has surprising parallels to Lennon and Ono’s own account of how the word “bagism” was invented, in which they hint of a private reality away from the prying media where “total communication” could take place. During the *Bed-in*, this deep and personal communion occurred only after they were hidden away in their room for the night and exhaustion had robbed them of their need to speak. Lying in

⁴³ David Sheff with Barry Golson, ed., *The Playboy Interviews with John Lennon and Yoko Ono* (New York: Playboy Press, 1981), 108.

⁴⁴ Chrissie Iles, “Yoko Ono,” *Yoko Ono: Have You Seen the Horizon Lately?* (Oxford, UK: Museum of Modern Art Oxford, 1997), 64.

bed and silently gazing through the hotel window at the sky above and the city below, the label “bagism” came to both simultaneously, without conversation.⁴⁵

After the grueling maximum public exposure of the Amsterdam *Bed-in*, Bagism could be considered the couple’s attempt to balance and heal the trauma of such extreme accessibility, so that they were compelled, so to speak, to counteract the yang of their grueling exposure to the bright hot lights, the shouting journalists, the microphones, and the unblinking camera lenses with the yin of a dark, moist, constricting, and concealing space. Ono explained the comforting experience of the bag to the television host David Frost, “You know, this life is speeded up so much, and the whole world is getting tenser and tenser because things are just going so fast, you know, so it’s so nice to slow down the rhythm of the whole world, just to make it peaceful. Like the bag, when you get in it, you see that it’s very peaceful and your movements are sort of limited.”⁴⁶ Perhaps Ono’s sense of security and comfort in such a situation is why, after leaving Amsterdam, Ono and John chose to hold a press conference in a bag.

On March 31, 1969, Lennon and Ono traveled to Vienna, Austria, from Amsterdam in order to meet the press at the Hotel Sacher. Their purpose was to promote their movie *Rape*, which was having its premiere on Austrian television that night. They also intended on turning the engagement into another art event for peace,

⁴⁵ Howard Smith, *Peace Is Yours If You Want It: John Lennon Yoko Ono Interview 1969*, part 2, bootleg CD.

⁴⁶ Excerpt from John Lennon and Yoko Ono, interviewed by David Frost on *The David Frost Show*, Stonebridge park Studios, broadcast to the United States on July 10, 1969,
http://www.beatlelinks.net/ubb/ultimatebb.php?ubb=get_topic;f=21;t=000041 (accessed August 5, 2006).

in which, once again, the press would become part of the work. When the journalists entered the hotel conference room, they were chagrined to find the couple sitting inside a massive white bag from which they could hear Lennon humming Johann Strauss' "Viennese Waltz" and Ono's soft giggles. The first question for the two was, "Will you come out?"

"NO!" shouted Lennon.

"Why not?" the reporters shouted back in unison.

"Because this is a bag event—total communication!"⁴⁷

With that, the confused members of the press began the hilarious process of attempting to interview the lumpy bag in front of them out of which came the muffled voices of Ono and Lennon. Lennon's disembodied voice explained that the press was looking at a "peace bag," or a "bag piece," and Ono added that the couple had decided to make Vienna the site of their "first announcement to the world of Bagism," to which one reporter responded, "My God, why?"⁴⁸ The interview remained on the most puerile level, with most questions falling into the category of "Do you get hot in there?" and "Would you come out if we gave you a sacher torte?"⁴⁹ But when someone tried to change the discussion by asking about *Rape*, Ono replied,

I think the film will explain itself, and I think that it's very important that we are communicating now just by words, and that we are making a total communication

⁴⁷ Track 9, "Lennon & Ono, Vienna, Austria Press Conference, 1969," *In My Life* CD.

⁴⁸ Track 9.

⁴⁹ Track 9.

without thinking . . . about what sort of face you have or what sort of taste you have in your clothes, etcetera. Those things usually disturb and lock the minds of people, and they can't communicate totally.⁵⁰

It was important to Ono that the journalists understood the couple was physically obscuring their bodies so that they could reveal their “real” selves to the media through their words. Many of the elements of celebrity, race, or gender on which the press typically concentrated to stereotype the two were no longer on display, so that the bag served as their protection and a refuge from the biases of the press. The large white bag effectively fused Ono and Lennon into one entity toward which the reporters had to point their microphones, forcing them to alter the way in which they related to the couple. Bagism therefore was intended as an artistic intervention into the fundamental format of the press conference, where the interview—one of the key methods the news industry used to gather facts—was de-centered. By trying to demonstrate how bias is formed, Ono and Lennon hoped the press might become more open to other points of view. Only then would they be able communicate with the mainstream public in a forum that allowed unencumbered access to their ideas about peace. In such an idealistic, nonjudgmental scenario, “total communication” could lead to world peace, as explained by Ono in 1971:

The job of an artist is not to destroy but to change the value of things. And by doing that, artists can change the world into a Utopia where there is total freedom for everybody. That can be achieved only when there is total communication in the world. Total communication equals peace. That is our aim. That is what artists can do for the world!⁵¹

⁵⁰ Track 9.

⁵¹ Yoko Ono, “What Is the Relationship Between the World and the Artist?,” submitted to the Cannes Film Festival, May 1971, published in *This is Not Here*, exh. cat. (Syracuse: Everson museum of Art, 1971), np.

When Ono and Lennon had invented the word “bagism” late one night in the Amsterdam Hilton after a exhausting day with the press, both seemed to have simultaneously imagined the future media coverage of the peace campaign in a comical vision of “these bags running all over the place!”⁵² That Bagism had been conceived during the *Bed-In* is significant, because it underlines how one project grew out of another, and therefore the fundamental interconnection between themselves and all their art events in the campaign. Lennon drew a cartoon that was later included in their *Wedding Album* (Apple Records, 1969) that beautifully illustrates this sense of blissful interconnection between Ono and Lennon that caused the peace campaign to materialize (figure 4.8). In this way, Bagism and the *Bed-In* were interchangeable in the couple’s mind, with Lennon going so far as to state that conducting a press conference in a bag in Vienna was “sort of a compressed” Amsterdam *Bed-In*, because “the Hilton Hotel was a bag, in a way.”⁵³

Yet, Lennon also was eager for the press to recognize and enjoy the absurdity of the Bagism performance and encouraged the reporters to view the couple’s actions as comical, commenting that “if the least we can do is give the world a laugh, we’re willing to be the world’s clowns That’s the least we can do because everybody’s talking about peace, but nobody’s doing anything about it in a peaceful way.”⁵⁴ Although Lennon was a quick wit, the connection between humor and Bagism was

⁵² Lennon quoted in Howard Smith, *Peace Is Yours If You Want It: John Lennon Yoko Ono Interview 1969*, part 2, bootleg CD.

⁵³ Track 9.

⁵⁴ Track 9.

not only personal, but also political. The sense of play was an important component of anti-war protests and a well-known strategy of groups such as the Yippies and others who sought to differentiate themselves from those in power. These protestors used humor to emphasize the absurdities of a social system designed to support a constant state of war.⁵⁵ Play was also a key component in the Fluxus movement, where artists often used games as a means of artistic interaction with their audiences. Marshall McLuhan's ruminations on the idea of play in his 1968 book *War and Peace in the Global Village* emphasized its components of "uncertainty and discovery" as an antidote to the "bureaucrat and the systems-builder whose ambition is to deal only with foregone conclusions. . . . Real play, like the whodunit, throws the stress on the process rather than on product, giving the audience the chance of being a maker rather than a mere consumer."⁵⁶

Ono consciously embraced absurdity as an artistic practice, and felt that climbing into a bag might help people "slow down."⁵⁷ Ono wrote her theory of utilizing the absurd in 1966, which was excerpted and reprinted in a January 1969 article that appeared in the teen magazine *Honey*, making these thoughts available to a mass audience:

⁵⁵ This sense of play should not be mistaken for the "game playing" described in Dr. Eric Berne's popularized version of transactional analysis published in the early sixties, although "authenticity" does seem to be the goal of both [Eric Berne, M.D., *Games People Play* (New York: Grove Press, 1964)].

⁵⁶ Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *War and Peace in the Global Village*, 1968 (Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press, 2001) 173.

⁵⁷ Quoted from *The David Frost Show*, website.

By adding all sorts of ridiculous action to their lives, people would be less frantic. If people made it a habit to do a somersault on every other street as they commute to their offices, took off their pants before they fought, shook hands with strangers whenever they felt like it, gave away flowers or part of their clothing on the street, and if politicians spent a day watching the fountain water dance at the nearest park before they discussed anything, the world business might slow down a little, but we might have peace.⁵⁸

Although the absurdity of the situation was quickly grasped, the social dynamics of the press conference at the Sacher Hotel never seemed to connect to the high goals of “total communication” or the high jinx of the bag format. Instead of slowing people down or inspiring free-flowing ideas or laughter, the circus-like spectacle of this large bag confronting the press effectively blocked serious communication between the celebrity couple and their audience. Without the benefit of face-to-face contact, the reporters were emboldened to snipe at Lennon by asking him, for example, whether he thought his wife was beautiful when it was known that comments about Ono’s looks were a source of annoyance to him.⁵⁹ Lennon, in return, felt free to rudely accuse the reporters of asking banal questions and inform them that “it’s only what I say that we’re here for” that counted.⁶⁰ Ultimately,

⁵⁸ Dorothy Bacon, “Yoko Ono: ‘Take a Tape of the Sounds of the Stars Moving,’” *Honey* (January 1969): 53. This quote was actually taken from Ono’s self-published 1966 “To the Wesleyan People.” See *Yes Yoko Ono*, 289.

⁵⁹ In Lennon’s last major interview before his death, he still remembered these attacks with irritation. He explained to David Sheff, “We just couldn’t understand it. I mean, if somebody starts saying, ‘Why are you with that ugly woman?’ or something, you say, ‘What do you *mean*? I am with this goddess of love and the fulfillment of my whole life! Why are you saying this?’” David G. Sheff, with Barry Golson, ed., *The Playboy Interviews with John Lennon and Yoko Ono* (New York: Playboy Press, 1981), 49.

⁶⁰ Track 9.

whether the press understood the meaning of Bagism or not was of no matter, as long as the media reported the event.

The next day, Ono and Lennon quickly followed up their event in Austria with a light-hearted appearance on a local television talk show in London called *Today*. They first appeared on screen in a white bag labeled “Bagism,” and then joined the show’s host Eamonn Andrews for an interview about their campaign in a bed decorated with artificial flowers and a sign labeled “Eamonn Peace” (figure 4.9).⁶¹ A few days later, Ono and Lennon appeared on Andrews’ evening television broadcast, *The Eamonn Andrews Show*, where the subject of Bagism became part of a hostile exchange between Lennon and a member of the television audience. After some tense and contentious exchanges between Lennon and the other guests on the show, a middle-aged man in the front row barked out a challenge to the couple’s peace campaign, declaring it “the biggest piece of rubbish that I’ve heard of this year. If I can add to it, when reading the story of them both being in the bag, I did actually wonder as to whether they were refugees from the Lambeth bus man’s strike.”⁶² Lennon’s immediate response was, “Did you have a laugh?”⁶³ The connection was

⁶¹ John Lennon and Yoko Ono on *Today*, with Eamonn Andrews, Thames Television, April 3, 1969, <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/carousel/pob18.html> (accessed January 6, 2007).

⁶² While the man was debating Lennon, older members of the audience laughed and applauded, sometimes drowning out Lennon’s responses, while younger members of the audience heckled the man, shouting “Get off!” Text and footnote information was taken from “The Beatles Ultimate Experience: Beatles Interview, Eamonn Andrews Show, transmitted by Thames Television, April 11, 1965, excerpts of interview,” <http://www.geocities.com/~beatleboy1/db41165.int.html> (accessed January 6, 2007).

⁶³ “The Beatles Ultimate Experience” website.

lost on the man, who complained about Ono and Lennon's "general attitude to the youngsters in this country, by the way you lead them, or tend to lead them, and try to make out that you're not trying to do anything about it. One, you tell us you're trying to create peace in this world, and everybody should be happy and joking, and the next minute you're telling us it's nothing."⁶⁴ The frustrated man's opinions reflected the general confusion and derision that surrounded Bagism throughout the year, with the over-the-edge quality of these appearances causing some of the cynical press to dub the pair "Joko."⁶⁵ In a 1971 interview, Ono and Lennon admitted that people would sometimes kick them when they were in their bag, revealing a hostility toward them that was often just below the surface when they performed their *Bag Piece*.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, Ono and Lennon continued to promote Bagism, with the couple promising on a number of occasions that societal problems stemming from social stereotyping could be solved through Bagism's "total communication." For example, Lennon glibly explained the meaning of Bagism on *The David Frost Show*, broadcast to America on June 14, 1969:

What's *Bagism*? It's like a tag for what we all do. We're all in a bag you know, and we realized that we came from two bags, I was in this pop bag going round and round in my little clique, and she was in her little avant-garde clique going round and round, and you're in your little telly clique and they're in their—you know? And we all sort of come out and look at each other every now and then,

⁶⁴ *The Eamonn Andrews Show* interview.

⁶⁵ Coleman, 499.

⁶⁶ Jamie Mandelkau, "Interview Piece: Yoko Ono & *Grapefruit*," *IT (International Times)*, August 12-26, 1971: 15. Interestingly, Mandelkau confessed during this interview that he felt like kicking Ono and Lennon at *The Alchemical Wedding*, because "it was a good ten minutes of people enjoying themselves and then becoming aware of enjoyment and when they looked at the lump on the stage they couldn't relate happiness to it." (Mandelkau, 15.)

but we don't communicate. And we all intellectualize about how there is no barrier between art, music, poetry. . . but we're still all—I'm a rock and roller, he's a poet. . . so we just came up with the word so you would ask us what bagism is, and we'd say, "WE'RE ALL IN A BAG, BABY! . . . If people did interviews for jobs in a bag, they wouldn't get turned away because they were black or green or long hair, you know, it's total communication.⁶⁷

Part of Lennon's charm was that he instinctively knew how to speak to David Frost's audience, in part the same American demographic that bought his Beatles records. By declaring that everyone was "in a bag," Lennon was playing on the hip phrase made popular through songs on the "Top 40" radio. James Brown's 1965 pioneering record "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag" was the crossover hit that put this term into the popular vernacular, and by 1969, "What's your bag?" had become a common way to inquire about someone's interests, life style, habits, leanings, causes, or biases.⁶⁸

Lennon repeatedly used the same phrase, "total communication" along with almost verbatim explanations to describe Bagism, whether on television or in print, adhering to the couple's agenda of talking about peace like a commercial that plays over and over again. Witness, for example, his comments to Leroy Aarons of *The Washington Post* five days after his appearance on *The David Frost Show*, in which he explains, "She was in an art bag, avant-garde—inverted commas. And I was in a pop bag—inverted commas. All of us, including us two, and all the other people in pop and theater and all that, intellectualizing about there's no barriers between the so-

⁶⁷ Excerpt from John Lennon and Yoko Ono, interviewed by David Frost on *The David Frost Show*, Stonebridge park Studios, broadcast to the United States on July 10, 1969,
http://www.beatlelinks.net/ubb/ultimatebb.php?ubb=get_topic;f=21;t=000041
(accessed August 5, 2006).

⁶⁸ "A Dictionary of Slang, <http://www.peevish.co.uk/slang/b.htm> (accessed March 3, 2007.

called arts. And nobody is actually doing anything. . . . It still is the same bag.”⁶⁹ Surprisingly, although Ono and Lennon could have made an obvious connection between Bagism and the Vietnam War, it was never mentioned. Yet, seeing someone covered head to toe in a large bag could not help but bring forth visual memories of the images of green plastic body bags containing dead soldiers that were telecast nightly on the evening news (figure 4.8). Evoking the war visually while ignoring it conceptually made for an odd kind of disconnection from the war images that were saturating the media at the time and created a situation where the use of bags seemed eccentric rather than relevant to peace. Ultimately, Bagism was really about Ono and Lennon’s own “bag,” summarized on *The David Frost Show* by a card they presented him, which said, “Love plus peace equals Bagism.”⁷⁰

Because it was so closely tailored to their own personalities, Bagism well illustrated the couples’ quirky sense of humor. For example, Lennon came to one news conference in Montreal at the end of 1969 carrying a red velvet bag that could be activated to play a “pre-recorded cackle,” imbuing Bagism with a madcap hilarity many associated with this former Beatle (figure 4.11).⁷¹ At *An Evening With John and Yoko*, a happening/film screening hosted by the London New Cinema Club on September 11, 1969, the event was mischievously planned so that a surprise guest

⁶⁹ Leroy Aarons, “John and Yoko: Life in a ‘Fish Bowl,’” *The Washington Post* (15 June 1969), K9.

⁷⁰ This slogan was written on a card the couple sent to David Frost, for example. See website. *David Frost Show* transcript.

⁷¹ See George Radwanski, “Beatle John Has a Brand New Bag,” *Montreal Gazette*, December 23, 1969, 2. The conference was held at the Chateau Champlain Hotel in Montreal, December 22, 1969.

“appearance” by Ono and Lennon was shrouded in mystery. Richard Williams, who attended the evening’s festivities, wrote that the audience got a “shock” when they were handed plates and spoons, after which a couple entered the hall, “both shrouded in a single white bag, open at the bottom to allow them to walk. They were helped along the aisles and up to the stage, where they sat, apparently huddled together, behind a pair of microphones. . . . They began to chant the ‘Hare Krishna’ mantra as Yoko’s *Dream No. 5* showed up on the screen, . . . [and] the audience were invited to bang their spoons and plates together in time with the mantra” (figure 4.12).⁷² As the film ended, the couple “sidled off, still hidden,” causing much speculation as to the true identity of the people inside the bag that night while creating a situation that slyly illustrated the “anyone can do it” concept that was key to the peace campaign.

Bagism was also a psychological projection of Ono and Lennon’s wants and needs during 1969, perhaps best understood as, in the words of Kristine Stiles, a “multivalent form of personal and public defense.”⁷³ For Ono, the cocoon-like bag was a creative vehicle that allowed her to give unguarded performances in public, whether at a press conference or in concert. For example, she appeared in a white bag during a pre-Christmas benefit concert for UNICEF in performance with John Lennon and the Plastic Ono Band, Lennon’s pick-up band that on this night consisted of George Harrison, Eric Clapton, Delaney and Bonnie, Billy Preston, Klaus

⁷² Richard Williams, “John Lennon—Genius or Just a Bore?” *Melody Maker*, September 20, 1969, 13.

⁷³ Christine Stiles, “Unbosoming Lennon: The Politics of Yoko Ono’s Experience,” *Art Criticism* 7.2 (Spring 1993): 29.

Voorman, and Allen White (figure 4.13).⁷⁴ Surrounding the group on stage were scores of “War Is Over!” posters as a reminder of the couple’s campaign. Moving rhythmically inside the bag at Lennon’s feet as he sang the first song, Ono writhed and swayed so that her animated form became a kinetic extension of the music. Afterwards, she climbed out of the bag to sing a half-hour version of “Don’t Worry, Kyoko, Mummy’s Only Looking For a Hand in the Snow,” described by Charles Alverson of the *Rolling Stone* as “by turns, the seemingly interminable number [that] was a delight and aural torment as Yoko screamed and howled into the mike and behind her this incredible array of talent blew like a gale.”⁷⁵ Alverson observed the hostility toward Ono during her performance:

One of the most interesting facets of the evening was the crowd’s reaction to Yoko. Yoko is all passion and unguarded innocence, but she acts as a magnet for whatever scorn and hatred the audience might like to heap on John if they didn’t love him.

They don’t love Yoko, and it shows. When someone in the front rows purposely batted a balloon up and hit Yoko in the head while she was singing, the malicious snickers and twisted grins were obvious.⁷⁶

When Ono asked that her *Box of Smiles* (a box with a mirror in the bottom) be passed around to the audience, assuring them that “there are smiles enough in the box for everyone,” the crowd reacted “with embarrassed looks and hip scorn.”⁷⁷ “The opinion of many,” Alverson reported, “is that Yoko is just too fey. Without John’s

⁷⁴ The concert was held at the Covent Garden Lyceum Ballroom in London.

⁷⁵ Charles Alverson, “Plastic: Wailing With Mrs. Lennon,” *Rolling Stone*, February 7, 1970, 13.

⁷⁶ Alverson, 13.

⁷⁷ Alverson, 13.

strong backing, she'd be crucified.”⁷⁸ The hostility toward Ono during this time period was palpable. She was accused of putting Lennon under her spell, of breaking up the Beatles and ruining Lennon’s career, and of being a con artist.⁷⁹ Ono recalled this period in a 1996 interview, commenting, “I think that the power of journalism is incredible, and that in those days I was an easy target and a scapegoat; they just wrote about me in a very unflattering way. They did it to John too, and to many people, but I think that the press carved the image. I’m sure all the DJs were saying, ‘Oh dear, that woman again’, but you get used to that and people get to think, ‘She’s just a punch bag’. I was the safest bet.”⁸⁰ Under these circumstances, Lennon’s fierce advocacy of Bagism during the 1969 peace campaign may be understood in part as a display of his protective love for Ono and a tool to deflect the many poison arrows flying in her direction. The bag therefore became personal shorthand for the couple’s consonance as well as a place for protection, for hiding difference, and for presenting a united public face.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Alverson, 13.

⁷⁹ Ono and Lennon’s feeling were still raw over these incidents eleven years later when they discussed the events of 1969 with David Sheff in their last major interview. See, for example, Sheff, 28-29, 115, 144-145.

⁸⁰ Michael Bracewell, “Give Yoko a Chance,” *The Guardian* (January 20, 1996), http://www.bd-studios.com/yoko/about/about_articles_1996_guardian.html (accessed February 12, 2003).

⁸¹ Ono and Lennon personally identified so strongly with the idea of the bag that on April 21, 1969, they formed a film and production company named Bag Productions, and when John Lennon opened an exhibition of intimate lithographs of he and his wife on their honeymoon on January 15, 1970, he named his show *Bag One*. Marie Clayton and Gareth Thomas, *John Lennon: Unseen Archives* (Bath, UK: Paragon Publishing, 2003), 376.

Acorns for Peace

Upon landing at the London Heathrow Airport after their *Bed-In* in Amsterdam and Bagism in Vienna, Ono and Lennon called a news conference on April 1, 1969, in order to unveil what they called *Acorns for Peace*—a permutation of their 1968 *Acorn Event* at Coventry Cathedral—as their “next move for peace.”⁸² Holding up a bundle of envelopes in front of the crowd of reporters, Lennon announced, “Yoko and I plan to send one of these envelopes containing two acorns to the head of every country. We want them to plant them for peace” (figure 4.14).⁸³ Some members of the press were amused by the initiative as evidenced in an article printed in the *Washington Post* the next day that acknowledged Ono and Lennon’s flair for publicity while dubbing the project “Nuts for Peace.”⁸⁴ Others were irritated by what seemed such a frivolous gesture in the face of world problems. “Handing nuts to the world leaders won’t solve any problems,” Alan Walsh complained in his column in *Melody Maker*, “whereas a good meal for a few thousand starving Biafran babies might convince people of Lennon’s altruism.”⁸⁵ Ono welcomed such varied mainstream press reactions to the couple’s projects as a sign of success. In 1971, she wrote of their whimsical and unpredictable protest art:

⁸² “John and Yoko’s Peace Gimmicks Do Make Sense,” *New Musical Express*, 12 April 1969, 4.

⁸³ “John and Yoko’s Peace Gimmicks,” 4.

⁸⁴ “Nuts for Peace,” in “Personalities,” *The Washington Post*, April 2, 1969, B3.

⁸⁵ Walsh, 7.

Why am I still an artist? And why am I not joining the violent revolutionaries? . . . I like to fight the establishment by using methods that are so far removed from establishment-type thinking that the establishment doesn't know how to fight back. For instance, they cannot stamp out John and Yoko events *Two Virgins*, *Bed Peace*, *Acorn Piece*, and *War is Over* poster event.⁸⁶

Whereas the memory of *Two Virgins*, the *Bed-Ins*, and the *War is Over* project are still alive today, *Acorns for Peace* proved much more ephemeral in nature. Almost thirty-eight years later, the event has left almost no impression in the collective consciousness of the art world or wider culture, which is perhaps why no scholar to date has seriously addressed this conceptual piece.⁸⁷ However, *Acorns for Peace* is recognizable as a logical extension of Ono and Lennon's previous artistic projects, evidence of their collaborative process, and a logical component of their peace campaign.

The premise of *Acorns for Peace*—that simple acts of fellowship (planting acorns) can solve world problems—may seem impossibly naive as a political

⁸⁶ Yoko Ono, "What Is the Relationship Between the Artist and the World?" (May 1971), reprinted in *Yes Yoko Ono*, exh. cat., eds. Alexandra Munroe and Jon Hendricks (New York: Japan Society and Harry N. Abrams, 2000), 293.

⁸⁷ In fact, it is conspicuously absent from any of the compilations of Ono and Lennon's work for the 1969 peace campaign, including the section on political action in Barbara Haskell and John G. Hanhardt, *Yoko Ono: Arias and Objects* (Salt Lake City, UH: Peregrine Smith Books, 1991); and although all other events of the 1969 Year of Peace are covered thoroughly by Ono scholars in the body of the *Yes Yoko Ono* catalogue, *Acorn for Peace* only appears in a chronology in the back as a brief entry for "mid April," Reiko Tomii and Kevin Concannon, "Chronology: Exhibitions, Concerts, Events, Etc.," in *Yes Yoko Ono*, exh. cat., eds. Alexandra Munroe and Jon Hendricks (New York: Japan Society and Harry N. Abrams, 2000), 316. It is briefly and incorrectly summarized by Dorothee Hansen in her account of Ono and Lennon's 1968 *Acorn Event* at Coventry Cathedral in *John Lennon: Drawings, Performances, Films*, exh. cat., eds. Wulf Herzogenrath and Dorothee Hansen, (Ostifildern, Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995), 160.

strategy, but if considered as an advertisement for peace, it perfectly served Ono and Lennon's 1969 campaign. Marshall McLuhan observed the trend in sixties advertisements "to manifest the product as an integral part of large social purposes and processes . . . to develop the ad into an icon, and icons are not specialist fragments or aspects but unified and compressed images of a complex kind."⁸⁸ The concept behind the acorn peace event has strong parallels to other iconic "world peace"-themed commercials from the late sixties and early seventies as seen on television or in print, which employed the peace dove (TWA) or flowers and "flower children" (Campbell Soup) as "metaphors for freedom, peace, and harmony."⁸⁹ Although appearing two years later, one of the most obvious ads that paralleled the premise of *Acorns for Peace* was Coca-Cola's 1971 television ad "I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke" (also known as the "Hilltop" ad), in which the act of drinking a Coke served as a common denominator that united the world in peace.⁹⁰ Ono and Lennon's *Acorns for Peace* shares with these ads a similar structure of signification called the product-image format, in which "the product [is] embedded or situated in a symbolic context," thus imparting meaning "beyond its constituent elements."⁹¹ In other

⁸⁸ McLuhan, *Understanding the Media*, 189.

⁸⁹ Hazel G. Warlaumont, *Advertising in the 60s: Turncoats, Traditionalists, and Waste Makers in America's Turbulent Decade* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 2001), 153.

⁹⁰ "The 'Hilltop' Ad: The Story of a Commercial," *American Memory: Fifty Years of Coca-Cola Television Advertisements*, Washington, D.C.: The Library of Congress, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ccmphtml/colaadv.html> (accessed February 2, 2007).

words, drinking a Coke, flying with a particular airline, or planting Ono and Lennon's acorns cannot stop war, but when connected to scenarios associated with peace, the products become psychologically interchangeable with this morally uplifting concept.

Convincing world leaders to collectively perform in a group art event such as *Acorns for Peace* was an idea that had intrigued Ono for some time. For example, at a 1968 press conference, she discussed her newly released *Film No. 5: Smile*, in which a close-up of Lennon's face becomes a 51-minute movie.⁹² Ono's private obsession with multiplying smiles was manifested in her artistic invention called *A Box of Smiles*, which she often gave as gifts. Produced numerous of times from the 1960s through the 1990s, the self-fulfilling title always appeared on the outside of a small box (figure 4.15). When the recipient lifted the lid and peered inside, a surprise mirror on the bottom drew a smile of delight along with a flash of understanding. Ono thought of these boxes as "a means to collect and carry smiles from one person to another."⁹³ Ono revealed that she originally planned to ask President Johnson, Chairman Mao Zedong, Prime Minister Harold Wilson, and other world leaders to participate in a film of smiles. The contagious smiles on these leaders' faces would cause others to smile, and therefore smiling would become the common denominator

⁹¹ William Leiss, Stephen Kline, and Sut Jhally, *Social Communicating in Advertising: Persons, Products, and Images of Well-Being*, 2nd ed. (Victoria, Australia: Nelson Canada), 244.

⁹² The movie was filmed at the high speed of 2,000 frames/second with a scientific camera that turned several of Lennon's facial expressions in a 51-minute meditation, allowing audiences to experience time in a totally different way. Chrissie Iles, "Erotic Conceptualism: The Films of Yoko Ono," in *Yes Yoko Ono*, exh. cat., eds. Alexandra Munroe and Jon Hendricks (New York: Japan Society and Harry N. Abrams, 2000), 202 and 214.

⁹³ Joan Ruthfuss, "A Box of Smiles, 1967," in *Yes Yoko Ono*, 130

that linked the world together.⁹⁴ “My ultimate goal was a long, long film with everybody in the world smiling, and I needed the cooperation of world governments,” she explained. “Then I met John, and I thought, why not use his smile?”⁹⁵

Conceptually, *Acorns for Peace* conjoins Ono’s unrealized notions for *Smile* with Lennon’s idea of planting acorns at Coventry Cathedral in the couple’s 1968 *Acorn Event*. In Coventry, as discussed at length in chapter two, the collaborative act of planting two acorns symbolized Ono and Lennon’s love and its power to unite the world in peace, the same principles that now defined their entire 1969 campaign.

Acorns for Peace was an elaboration of this message, in which the couple symbolically dispersed the seeds of love throughout the globe in the form of acorns. “Love is just a gift,” Lennon explained in a December 1969 news conference, “and it’s like a precious plant that you have to nurture and look after and all that.”⁹⁶ Any of the presidents, kings, and prime ministers who received and then planted these gifts of love would be nurturing peace through their cooperation with the event.

In a clever twist, the heads of government that participated in the event also automatically legitimized the generative power of Ono and Lennon’s love, because each time another of their two acorns were planted in the earth, the couple’s original

⁹⁴ The idea of spreading smiles seems to have been “in the air” at the end of the decade, best illustrated by the familiar yellow “smiley faces” that were introduced in 1963 and gained widespread popularity in the form of pins and other novelty items during the early 1970s. Kevin Nordin, “Smiley Face: How an In-House Campaign Became a Global Icon,” *Christian Science Monitor*, October 4, 2006, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/1004/p15s01-align.html> (accessed February 6, 2007).

⁹⁵ “Film to Show Beatific Beatle,” *The Washington Post*, August 2, 1968, A15.

⁹⁶ Ritchie Yorke, “John, Yoko & Year One,” *Rolling Stone*, (February 7, 1970): 21.

performance at the Coventry sculpture exhibition was reenacted. The connections between the two acorn events were made clear in a radio interview in May during the Montreal *Bed-In*, when Lennon referenced the couples' Coventry *Acorn Event* in order to explain why they wanted to send "a living sculpture to every head of state."⁹⁷

Inherent in the presumption of offering each world leader two acorns "for peace" is the subtext of gift giving as an artistic event and social action. From a sociological viewpoint, gift giving is viewed as a contract by which personal and political alliances are constructed. Opening a gift launches a tacit relationship of reciprocity that binds the giver to the recipient. There is no such thing as a gratuitous gift in that some sort of social exchange must occur. This is what anthropologist Marcel Mauss calls the "paradigm of the gift": to give, to accept, and to return, forming a circle of mutual indebtedness.⁹⁸ Ono and Lennon made use of this dynamic in *Acorns for Peace*, in which those heads of states who accepted their humble gift of acorns became obligated to literally cultivate and keep these symbols of peace alive. In John Lennon's words, "The acorn is a symbol of growth, and if you plant it, the tree will grow. But if you bomb it, it won't."⁹⁹ Caring for the acorns was therefore analogous to maintaining global peace.

⁹⁷ John Lennon, interviewed by radio journalist Howard Smith (Station WPLJ) during Montreal Bed-In, 28 May 1969 in Howard Smith, *Peace Is Yours If You Want It: John Lennon Yoko Ono Interview 1969*, part 1, bootleg CD.

⁹⁸ Alain "Notes on the Paradigm of the Gift," *Il Dono/The Gift: Generous Offerings, Threatening Hospitality*, exh. cat., eds, Gianfranco Maraniello, Sergio Risaliti, and Antonio Somaini (Milan: Charta, 2001), 251 and 263.

⁹⁹ Quoted from transcript of "The Eamon Andrews Show Broadcast Live," April 3, 1969, <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/carousel/pob18.html> (accessed August 5, 2006).

The “paradigm of the gift” was one with which Ono was certainly familiar. In Japan, this condition of reciprocity is especially valued in resolving and preventing conflicts, so that giving a carefully wrapped gift is a positive gesture that helps restore harmony and promote social cohesion.¹⁰⁰ Both wrapping (*tsutsumu*) and tying/binding (*musubu*) have ritual importance in Shinto beliefs, signifying purity and spiritual integrity.¹⁰¹ These associations are probably why the artful wrapping and tying of a present is considered as important as the gift itself and therefore bears strict rules of etiquette. These include, for example, choosing the correct color combinations, knowing the specific direction to overlap the wrapping paper, and selecting the appropriate knots, cords, or bows for the occasion.¹⁰² By following proper protocol, presenting an aesthetically wrapped gift communicates Japanese values such as harmony, tradition, and politeness that are important for the social order.¹⁰³

In this context, Ono understandably took great care in arranging the way the acorns were to be presented. Instead of simply sending them in the envelopes

¹⁰⁰ Angels Trias i Valls, “Chapter 3. Conflicts in Making the Town. Gifts and Conflict Resolution,” “Wrapped Gifts: Ritual Prestations and Social Obligations in Contemporary Japan” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Belfast, November 1999), http://lucy.ukc.ac.uk/csacpub/Mono19/Html/wrapped_gifts-3_a-4.html (accessed 29 January 2007).

¹⁰¹ “A Day in the Life,” *The Japan Forum Newsletter No. 10*, June 1998, <http://www.tjf.or.jp/eng/ge/ge06wrap.htm> (accessed June 29, 2005).

¹⁰² Boyé Lafayette de Mente, *Etiquette Guide to Japan* (Tokyo, Rutland, VT, and Singapore: Tuttle Publishing, 1990.), 68.

¹⁰³ Trias i Valls, “Chapter 2. *Giri* and the Problems of Obligation in Japan,” http://lucy.ukc.ac.uk/csacpub/Mono19/Html/wrapped_gifts-2_-4.html (accessed 29 January 2007).

displayed at the press conference, Ono designed an elegant presentation that made the mailing look more like an art object and gift. Round clear plastic containers were fabricated and filled with white cotton. A pair of acorns was ceremoniously placed in each box, and round white cards with black print reading “Acorn Peace by John and Yoko—Spring 1969” enclosed.¹⁰⁴ The containers were then placed inside cardboard boxes, precisely wrapped with brown fabric, and then tied with string to which were attached specially printed manila shipping tags. The final product exuded a kind of spare elegance that gave each package the understated charm and honest simplicity reminiscent of *wabi sabi*, a Japanese term that describes the beauty of things that are modest and humble—an aesthetic that is integral to the spirit of gift giving in *Acorns for Peace* (figure 4.16).¹⁰⁵

Small boxes containing objects that were significant to Ono and Lennon and meant to have interaction with others evoke the idea of Fluxkits (also known as Fluxboxes).¹⁰⁶ Fluxkits were mundane objects contained within a box; upon opening the box and interacting with these simple pieces, the users’ actions became an artistic event. In one famous multiple version of the Fluxkit, *Flux Year Box 2* (c. 1968),

¹⁰⁴ Richard DiLello, *The Longest Cocktail Party: An Insider’s Diary of The Beatles, Their Million-Dollar Apple Empire and Its Wild Rise and Fall* (Edinburgh: Mojo Books, 2000), 212.

¹⁰⁵ *Wabi sabi* has Zen Buddhist connotations and is associated with the basic philosophy of the Japanese tea ceremony. *Wabi sabi* also celebrates the beauty of things that are imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete. It is interesting that Apple hired an outside person to wrap these packages, which perhaps indicates the importance of maintaining the integrity of Ono’s design (DiLello, 212).

¹⁰⁶ The precedents for Fluxkits can be found in Marcel Duchamp’s 1934 *The Green Box*, and his 1939-41 *Boîte-en-valise*, a “traveling museum” of sixty-nine of the artist’s works in miniature in a small suitcase

George Maciunas used a wooden box with interior partitions to assemble the works of thirty-one different Fluxus artists (figure 4.17). A hand-cranked film viewer was included in order to view twelve separate film loops, among which was a small strip containing a version of Ono's film *Bottoms*. Hannah Higgins points out that the mundane objects contained within such a boxed format "is significant, for it is attributed with 'specialness' not only by the artist but also by the user of the Fluxkit or the performer of the Event."¹⁰⁷ The format, therefore, makes handling the objects in these Fluxkits special, just as the wrapped box makes handling Ono and Lennon's acorns special, causing interactions with everyday objects to be transformed into an artistic experience that sets up, in Higgins' words, "the potential for nondestructive knowing."¹⁰⁸

Carefully wrapping and binding the acorn packages also indicated that the boxes had personal associations for Ono, connecting them to her larger practice of wrapping and binding to symbolically muffle, heal, obscure, or hide.¹⁰⁹ In fact, one of Ono's most ambitious performances before her campaign for peace with Lennon was a wrapping event that took place in Trafalgar Square, London, on August 3, 1967, where she used tarpaulins and rope to wrap and unwrap one of the four colossal bronze lions that surround the column marking Admiral Nelson's victory at the Battle

¹⁰⁷ Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2002), 67.

¹⁰⁸ Higgins, 40.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, "Sky Piece for Jesus" (1965), "Wrapping Piece for London: Wrapped Chair" (1966), and "Fog Piece" (1967).

of Trafalgar in 1805 (figure 4.18). These proud lions, of course, are imperial symbols of Great Britain, situated around a monument that glorifies British warfare that is located in the heart of the capital (and, therefore, the nation). Trafalgar Square was a gathering point for the British counterculture in the 1960s; today it remains the traditional starting or ending point for protest marches. Large anti-war demonstrations, however, were not to take place in Britain until 1968.¹¹⁰ Under the circumstances, Ono's solo 1967 wrapping event in Trafalgar Square was associated at the time not so much with the peace movement as with an avant-garde performance held in a non-conventional space. The deep meaning of such a wrapping remained obscure, demonstrating the profoundly personal nature of Ono's concerns with peace as expressed through wrapping and bagging.

Ono and Lennon publicly explained their global plans for *Acorns for Peace* while leaving the logistics of the project to the Apple press office. This was the same strategy they used previously to make the 1968 film *Rape*, where others were asked matter-of-factly to carry out the couple's conceptual ideas. As can be imagined, the requirements for actualizing *Acorns for Peace* overwhelmed the small, unorganized

¹¹⁰ The Vietnam Solidarity Campaign and Vietnam Ad Hoc Committee were responsible for organizing large demonstrations in 1968 such as the March 17 Grosvenor Square demonstration in which 25,000 participated and the US Embassy was attacked; Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c. 1958-c. 1974* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 560 & 635. Although constantly asked throughout the sixties, Britain never sent combat troops to Vietnam, much to the United States's consternation. Pressure at home to denounce the war and pressure from the powerful United States to give full support to its war efforts caused significant diplomatic strains between the two countries; Jonathan Coleman, "Harold Wilson, Lyndon Johnson and the Vietnam War, 1964-68," *American Studies Today Online* (28 November 2005), <http://www.americanstc.org.uk/Online/Wilsonjohnson.htm> (accessed October 24, 2006).

Apple publicity office. The staff was already responsible that April for simultaneously promoting The Beatles' latest single "Get Back" and the singer Mary Hopkins' music.¹¹¹ They now had the nightmarish task of quickly gathering the mailing addresses of all the world leaders and fabricating the packaging of the acorn presentation. They also had the onerous duty of tracking down scores of acorns off-season in order to fulfill Lennon and Ono's specifications. After rejecting an offer to buy acorns for one British pound per nut, they eventually resorted to digging up squirrel caches in London parks.¹¹² Weeks quickly passed as they tried to solve each production problem. By late June, many packages still had not been wrapped, and an ongoing dispute with the printer about the aesthetic quality of the printed labels further stalled the campaign. Even though Ono and Lennon believed that the boxes had already been mailed, by the end of September, press assistant Richard DiLello still had packages hidden beneath his desk.¹¹³ Perhaps these problems explain why the specifics of the event seemed to shift and change throughout the year whenever reporters and interviewers asked the couple for progress reports.¹¹⁴ At a December

¹¹¹ Miles, 290.

¹¹² Lennon quoted in B. P. Fallon, "Is the Real John Lennon Now Standing Up? Part 3," *Melody Maker* (26 April 1969): 17. Barry Miles, "April 1969," *The Beatles: A Diary* (London: Omnibus Press, 1998), 290.

¹¹³ DiLello, 212 and 231.

¹¹⁴ Lennon on a number of occasions contradicted himself by stating that the plan was either to send or personally present the acorns to the leaders. See, for example, the John Lennon/Howard Smith interview; Roger Keene, "John & Yoko Plan Music, Peace World Conference," *Circus* (December 1969), 15-18; and track 10, "Lennon & Ono, Press Conference, Ontario Science Centre, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 1969," *In My Life: John Lennon & Paul McCartney* (CD: 12676), from *The Beatles Inside*

press conference in Ontario, Lennon summed up the project in a lackadaisical manner, claiming that only King Hussein had planted his acorns and stating that after sending the acorns to “all the world leaders’ addresses we could get together,” a mere twenty acknowledged their receipt. “I don’t know who [sic],” he exclaimed, “so it’s no use asking, because I don’t remember.”¹¹⁵

Although *Acorns for Peace* did not unfold as planned, in the end, making sure all the world leaders received and successfully planted their acorns was hardly crucial for its success, because each time this pseudo-event was discussed in an interview, it was granted another life in printed or spoken form and so directed the spotlight back onto the peace campaign. To paraphrase Daniel Boorstin, “Is it real?” became less important than “Is it newsworthy?”¹¹⁶ The overarching value of *Acorns for Peace* during 1969 lay not in its physical manifestation, but in its ability to maintain media interest in the peace campaign. As the months passed after the initial unveiling at the April press conference, Lennon and Ono found that the novelty of the event had not worn off. The fact that they were still fielding questions in late December meant that *Acorns for Peace* was still engaging the media, although its memory quickly faded after the 1969 peace campaign concluded.

War Is Over If You Want It! Billboard Campaign

Interviews, 5 CD set, written and narrated by Geoffrey Giuliano and Glenn A. Baker, Santa Monica, CA: Delta Records, 1995.

¹¹⁵ Excerpt, CD: 12676, *In My Life: John Lennon & Paul McCartney*.

¹¹⁶ Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (1961; reprint. New York: Atheneum, 1977), 11.

Ono and Lennon's final act of their 1969 peace campaign combined personal, conceptual, and community-oriented actions. The "War Is Over" ad campaign, launched on December 15 around Christmas time, trumpeted the message "War Is Over!/If you want it./Happy Christmas from John & Yoko" printed worldwide as display ads in newspapers, handbills, and posters (figure 4.19). Most important, the message appeared on large city billboards, functioning as an intervention into the commercial spaces of some of the world's most prominent cities (figure 4.20). Like their other projects throughout the year, this campaign promoted a vision of peace based on the collective power of their audience to make change. For example, Ono explained in January 1969, "We try to involve other people, to open their minds, to share understanding and enlightenment. Today everyone is a potential genius and everybody is ready to expand their minds. It is better to send a billion blank postcards to a billion people than to send a thousand pamphlets filled with words to relatively exclusive people."¹¹⁷ The billboards challenged the general feeling of helplessness that had permitted a state of war to become a permanent condition of the 20th century while positively endorsing of the peaceful millions who had rallied against the Vietnam War that year, especially the two massive national demonstrations that took place in the United States on October 15 and November 15, 1969. Calling for a moratorium against the war, an estimated 2 million people participated in these protests, making them by far the largest ever held in the United States.

¹¹⁷ Bacon, 53.

The billboard campaign began when volunteers in New York, Los Angeles, Montreal, Toronto, Port-of-Spain (Trinidad), London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, Athens, Tokyo, and Hong Kong posted thousands of placards in the stealth of the night, while huge billboards were unveiled in the city centers. On December 15, 1969, the world awoke to a united message spelled out in the local language of each host city: "War Is Over/If You Want It!/Happy Christmas/John and Yoko." The intentional element of surprise and novelty of the form made the campaign a newsworthy event, for only through newspapers, radio, and television reports would the cumulative effect of thousands of posters simultaneously appearing in various cities all over the world come into focus. Ono and Lennon again had cleverly employed McLuhan's ideas about the media as a key component of their artistic expression. By refracting their message through the mass media, they engineered a collective action that amplified local antiwar efforts into a simultaneous world message of peace, creating an organic unity best known as the "global village."¹¹⁸ In an end-of-the-year radio interview in Ontario with Marshall McLuhan, Lennon explained the philosophy behind the billboards: "We must be one country and stick together. You don't have to have badges to say we're together. We're together if we're together and no stamps or flags are going to make anybody together folks."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ McLuhan, *Understanding the Media*, 339. See also, Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 31.

¹¹⁹ John Lennon, December 1969 in John Lennon and Yoko Ono, radio interview conducted by Marshall McLuhan, Mirraussaga, Ontario, Canada.
http://www.beatlelinks.net/ubb/ultimatebb.php?ubb=get_topic;f=21;t=000003.

The idea of using posters as their artistic medium is one that originated with Ono in late summer of 1969.¹²⁰ As a conceptual artist and Fluxus collaborator, Ono had long used newspaper advertisements and posters as part of her artistic practice.¹²¹ However, it was Lennon who expanded this concept to include the billboards.¹²² The billboard aspect of the event greatly enhanced the dramatic impact as an artistic intervention into everyday life. For example, in New York City, the juxtaposition of their billboard against a nearby U.S. Armed Forces recruiting station charged the couple's peace message with an urgency and poignancy impossible to achieve merely with posters (figure 4.21).

The billboards also were key in establishing a type of product branding that distinguished their message in all its formats from the hundreds of hand bills and posters typically pasted up on city walls. This kind of grand scale merchandising of the peace message is typical of practices in the advertising industry and was used extensively in the marketing of Beatles products. Lennon had personal experience with product branding in one of his first business ventures, when he joined together

¹²⁰ “Beatles Ultimate Experience: Interview of Yoko Ono and John Lennon by Marshall McLuhan,” Missisauga, Ontario, Canada, 19 December 1969, <http://www.geocities.com/~beatleboy1/db121969.html> (accessed January 28, 2007).

¹²¹ Ono scholar Kevin Concannon is responsible for recognizing Ono’s strategic use of advertising as a venue for her conceptual art. For an excellent account of these activities, see Kevin Concannon, “Nothing IsReal: Yoko Ono’s Advertising Art,” in *Yes Yoko Ono*, 177-182.

¹²² Yoko Ono, interviewed in *The U.S. vs. John Lennon*, directed by David Leaf and John Scheinfeld (Lions Gate, 2006). This effect was appreciated by Ono, who would use the billboard format in the future for artistic expression, as discussed in chapter five.

with McCartney, Harrison, and Starr to finance the Apple Boutique in 1967.¹²³ The Boutique cultivated a psychedelic look made famous by its painted facade designed by Simon Poschuma and Marijke Koeger (known as Simon & Marijke). The “trippy,” brightly colored mural was an instant attraction that distinguished the store from the conservative buildings around it, signaling to its young patrons the type of products sold inside, and causing enough attention to make the store a tourist destination where spin-offs of the mural in poster and post cards forms could be bought as souvenirs (figure 4.22).

Like the mural for the Apple Boutique, the appearance of the billboards, posters, handbills and postcards for the *War Is Over!* campaign was also arresting in its difference from the surrounding city environment. The stark white background with heavy san serif type, reminiscent of Russian Constructivist or Bauhaus graphic design, commanded instant attention. Lennon explained to Marshall McLuhan in December that the look was inspired by the customized newspaper headlines that were sold at a novelty shop in Times Square, New York. At first, Ono and Lennon tried to think of a way for every newspaper to print the headline, “War is Over! Peace Declared!” in a *War of the Worlds* type scenario, but soon settled on the billboard and poster campaign they launched in December.¹²⁴

Lennon and Ono’s call for radical change in their “War Is Over” campaign was dramatically announced by its spontaneous materialization in the streets of major cities. City streets have long been political zones for public dissent, simultaneously

¹²³ The store had a short life of seven months, opening in December 4, 1967 and closing in June 31, 1968 (Coleman, 702 and 704).

¹²⁴ Marshall McLuhan interview.

representing the stuff of everyday life and potent spaces where the status quo might be overturned. In the sixties, they were the arenas in which the battle for civil rights and the marches against the Vietnam War were enacted in the US; and in Europe and Japan, where antiwar protests and struggles for the rights of workers and students unfolded. With the advent of the hippie movement in the mid-1960s, the street was celebrated as a mythic place of unleashed creativity and freedom, a promise that drew thousands of flower children to San Francisco and to the streets of the Haight-Ashbury district. Writing in the famous Haight-Ashbury underground newspaper the *Oracle* in 1967, Richard Honigman celebrated life on the street:

The street becomes where it's at. It is easy to get laid there, cop dope, find a friend or a mate. Books and ideas, acid and pot, the nearby park, or a pad full of music from a surreal montage of the constant weekend. The street can be a classroom, a zoo, a stage, an asphalt padded cell, a whorehouse, a folksong or the traverse of Scorpio.

What has developed already is exciting and positive. An explosion of creative energies directly related to the scene is deeply affecting all the arts in this country and revitalizing once dormant ones like poster art. Even more important however are the people on the street who have committed themselves to a creative life based on cultivating life and art, without a professional intent towards the latter, and a humane, spiritual or revolutionary orientation to society.¹²⁵

Ambiguous and indeterminate by nature, the city streets were places associated with flux and change, and so perfect locations for expressing new hopes and ideas. The twelve different global cities where the billboards simultaneously appeared therefore became synchronically linked in ways that defied history, politics or geography. Focusing on downtown business districts, such as Times Square in

¹²⁵ Richard Honigman, "Flower from the Street," *San Francisco Oracle* 9 (August 1967): 5, 25. The *Oracle* was read worldwide by members of the counterculture,

New York or Picadilly in London, Lennon and Ono constructed a situation in which the desire for peace was inscribed into the hearts of the world's cities. The novelty of the sudden and simultaneous appearance of these billboards and posters momentarily transformed these city streets into energized poetic spaces where the unrealized could become conceivable: when triggered by social action and imagination, war could be over "if you want it."

The very point of the billboard campaign was to suggest an imagined world to bring calm and peace to one's mind. Therefore, the message of "war is over if you want it" speaks only of the idea that war that can be ended, rather than the specifics of the Vietnam War, the Israel-Egypt War, or any other wars that were being fought at the moment. In this way, the message poetically communicates Ono and Lennon's dreams for a universal society that eschewed petty nationalism. Although perhaps naive in hindsight, the dream of universal peace was not uncommon for those in the antiwar movement at the time. Although Ono and Lennon were trying to utilize the mass media to confront the national and international forces of war, it also mobilized a "community-connection" of direct, person-to-person interaction of local organizing as well as the "virtual community" of the media culture. Thousands of volunteers covered the walls of the major cities in "War Is Over!" posters, and rock musician Ronnie Hawkins and music writer Ritchie Yorke, both of whom became friends with Ono and Lennon while they were in Canada, carried the posters around the world in 1970 in a "52,000 mile world tour" (figure 4.23).¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Kevin Concannon, "*War Is Over!*: John and Yoko's Christmas Eve Happening, Tokyo, 1969," in *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* (December 2005), 88.

Public display advertisements for peace were not unique to Ono and Lennon. Throughout the 1960s, advertisements in newspapers and in public venues became one form of antiwar protest. These advertisements were sometimes sites of contention, and those who placed them occasionally became victims of censorship or reprisal. For example, in Chicago, three women's peace groups fought three years for the right to publicly display an antiwar message addressed to President Johnson. They finally were permitted to post their ads in 25 downtown subway and elevated stations in January 1968. Printed in large type were the words: "War is not peace. Tyranny is not freedom. Hate is not love. End the war in Vietnam."¹²⁷ In another incident in 1967, controversy was sparked when university faculty members were denied promotion because their names appeared on an anti-Vietnam war ad printed in their campus newspaper.¹²⁸ In April 1968, a group of federal workers picketed *The Washington Post* for refusing to print their antiwar advertisement.¹²⁹ Not all newspaper ads caused so much conflict, however. In fact, as the sixties were coming to a close, full-page antiwar display advertisements became a familiar sight in the major newspapers, with many famous people lending their names to the cause.

¹²⁷ "Antiwar Ads Go Up in Chicago Subway," *The New York Times* (28 January 1968) 18.

¹²⁸ In this case, the Wisconsin State College Board of Regents overrode a decision to deny promotions to Elsie Adams from assistant to associate professor of English, and Ruth Schauer from associate to full professor of English, because they signed an antiwar advertisement that appeared in the student newspaper at the Wisconsin State University, Eau Claire. "Wisconsin Regents Promote 2 Who Signed Antiwar Ad," *The New York Times* (20 May 1967) 5.

¹²⁹ "Antiwar Ad Rejection Brings Pickets to the Post," *The Washington Post* (2 April 1968) B4.

The concept of declaring that war was over also had a precedent in other antiwar activities. Phil Ochs, a political activist who was best known for his protest songs, had mounted a “War Is Over” campaign in Los Angeles and New York in 1967. The well-known musician who performed such familiar antiwar anthems as “I Ain’t Marching Anymore” at countless antiwar rallies across the United States began to question the effectiveness of these forms of protests. He realized that the war was “so obviously immoral . . . a suicidal farce,” and yet, those who opposed it seemed to be using “the same old morality, the same phraseology” to express their outrage.¹³⁰ “To say the war is wrong is like saying absolutely nothing, the value of language is lost,” he declared.¹³¹ The United States Congress had never officially declared war on Vietnam, and so the government would only refer to the War as a “conflict.” In an action beyond the realm of demonstrations, Ochs made the conceptual leap of declaring that the war was over as a form of “mental disobedience”: “If they don’t have the courage of their reality to declare this war on, we should at least have the courage of our imagination to declare it over.”¹³²

Ochs organized a “War Is Over” celebration in Los Angeles at Cheviot Hills Park on June 23, 1967 (figure 4.24). In an article that appeared in the *Village Voice* later that year, he invited everyone to come to his New York celebration on November 25th in Washington Square Park, explaining,

¹³⁰ Quoted in David Cohen, *Phil Ochs: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1999), 20.

¹³¹ Cohen, 20.

¹³² Cohen, 20, and Phil Ochs, “Have You Heard? The War Is Over!” *Village Voice* (November 23, 1967): 38.

Demonstrations should turn people on, not off. The spiritually depraved American public has shown it won't stand for the blunt truth served on a negative platter, which it always defensively assumes is insult. Demonstrations should satisfy the demands of this electronic and cinematic age. A protest demonstration can become one act of negation against another, canceling each other out. We need a newer and more positive approach, a pro-life, joyful, energized, magnificently absurd demonstration against the sucking vacuum of war.¹³³

Spread throughout Greenwich Village were posters designed for the occasion announcing, "VD Day: A Celebration, The End of the War!" satirically illustrated by Alfred Eisenstaedt's famous photograph of a sailor kissing a nurse that had been taken in Times Square on VJ Day (figure 4.25).¹³⁴ The gathering was a great success, with a few thousand joining in an impromptu march to Times Square and then to the United Nations. Yippie Jerry Rubin described the scene as the crowd "surged through the streets screaming, 'The war is over!' Cab drivers honked their horns. People abandoned their cars to come ask us, 'What did you say?' Even pro-war types said, 'Is it really? How do you know?'"¹³⁵ However, a *New York Times* reporter observed, "At times it seemed that a few persons, listening to the satirical shouts that the war in Vietnam had ended and seeing the happy faces of the youngsters, almost believed it. But not for more than a moment, as they noticed the way the hippies in

¹³³ Ochs, 38.

¹³⁴ VJ Day (Victory Over Japan Day) was declared on August 14, 1945. The photograph appeared in *Life* magazine.

¹³⁵ Jerry Rubin, *Do It!* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1970), 139.

the march were dressed.”¹³⁶ Ochs was further inspired to write a song entitled “The War Is Over” in 1968, which ends with words that beautifully synchronize with the philosophy of Ono and Lennon’s billboard campaign: “You only are what you believe. And I believe the war is over, it’s over.”¹³⁷ The underground press also reflected such attitudes. For example, Thomas King Forcade, who ran the Underground Press Syndicate (later known as the Alternative Press Syndicate) explained these maverick publications as modes to set up “an alternate culture, an alternate reality, and a new world quantitatively different,” which prints “news of what ideas [have] been born, instead of who died, where instead of reality being fed downward from the top, reality [is] everybody’s.”¹³⁸

Ochs never was acknowledged in any of the press conferences and interviews the couple conducted during December 1969 after the unveiling of their project. Nor has this connection to Ochs appeared in any of the Ono/Lennon literature. In a radio interview with Elliot Mintz in 1971, Ono claimed that she had thought of the idea of announcing the end of war before she met Lennon, but had no way to express the idea on such a large scale. “I didn’t have the money to, and so forth; until I had John’s

¹³⁶ Murray Schumach, “Antiwar Demonstrators Stage Impromptu March,” *New York Times*, November 26, 1967, 6.

¹³⁷ *The War Is Over: Phil Ochs, His Songs and Guitar Arrangements—With Interviews, Photos, Poetry, and Comments* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971), 94.

¹³⁸ Thomas King Forcade, ed., *Underground Press Anthology* (New York: Ace Books) 7.

help, I couldn't have produced it, you know.”¹³⁹ Ono also claimed her rights to the idea in her 1971 *This Is Not Here* exhibition catalogue, in which was printed: “MESSAGE IS THE MEDIUM Y.O. '69; WAR IS OVER Y.O. '69.”¹⁴⁰ However, by ignoring the history or any attitudes of the antiwar movement or the counterculture in their work, the impression that the couple was isolated and egocentric in their actions became exacerbated in the underground press. Perhaps as a pointed barb toward Ono and Lennon, Jerry Rubin summarized Ochs “War Is Over!” event in his 1970 book *Do It!* with the comment, “Because theatre grows out of each situation, the key to theater is timing. In the summer of '67 it was appropriate to shout that the war was over. But then LBJ [President Lyndon Baines Johnson] pulled a theatrical trick on us; *he* said the war *is* over. The role of the Peace Movement during the Paris negotiations is to show people that the war is still *on*. The yippie demonstration in Chicago was the reverse of the War Is Over celebration. We ran through the streets shouting, ‘The war is on!’”¹⁴¹

While Ochs shared the same utopian vision as Ono and Lennon, the difference between his campaign and their billboard event is that the billboards were also conceived as an artistic intervention. In this way, adding “if you want it” to the war is over message approximates one of Ono’s “instruction paintings,” in which words

¹³⁹ Yoko Ono in an interview by Elliot Mintz, first transmitted on KLOS FM, October 10, 1971. A transcript of this interview also appeared in the *Los Angeles Free Press* (October 15-21, 1971).

¹⁴⁰ Yoko Ono in *This Is Not Here*, exh. ct. (Syracuse: Everson Museum of Art, 1971) as cited in “Anthology: Writings by Yoko Ono,” compiled by Jon Hendricks, in *Yes Yoko Ono*, 268-269.

¹⁴¹ Rubin, 140.

initiate a scenario to be completed in the audience's imagination. Ono explained in 1966 that her artistic interest in words lay in the ability to initiate a concept that would then be constructed "in your head": "Isn't a construction a beginning of a thing like a seed? Isn't it a segment of something larger, like an elephant's tail? Isn't it something just about to emerge—not quite structured. . . like an unfinished church with a sky ceiling?"¹⁴² The open-ended wording of the "war is over if you want it" message encouraged just such expansionist thinking for those who stopped to contemplate this proposal, turning the end of war into a creative act. The conceptual nature of Ono and Lennon's billboard campaign and its stark graphics were a unexpected combination of the ephemeral and reproducible, commercial and aesthetic, and individual and universal expressions of peace that ended a remarkably persistent campaign based on their artistic practices. "We'll keep promoting peace in the way we do, which, whichever way you look at it, is our way," said Lennon, "because we're artists and not politicians."¹⁴³ However, after the 1969 peace campaign, although the couple participated in organized demonstrations against war and social injustice, their efforts never again involved such an elaborate artistic program. The conclusion will examine the reasons for Ono and Lennon's abandonment of their campaign as well as the legacy that was left behind in the popular culture.

¹⁴² *To the Wesleyan People*, 288.

¹⁴³ Richard Williams, "Part Two: John and Yoko," *Melody Maker* (December 13, 1969): 19.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

People who are important enough to live their lives in the constant glare of the camera don't really have 'final chapters,' because when it's all over, their images are endlessly reprocessed and remixed into a kind of permanent simultaneity, like the jumble of birth, death, miracles and martyrdom one finds on a complex altarpiece.¹

— Philip Kennicott —

Was Ono and Lennon's peace campaign successful? Certainly more than any other celebrity activist, when superstar John Lennon wanted to broadcast to the world the couples' ideas about peace, the media paid attention. Ono and Lennon's messages of peace were in the form of artistic events and persistently apolitical in that they never concentrated on any specific world conflict. However, as the year drew to a close, culminating with Lennon being named "Man of the Decade" on British television and "Man of the Year" by *Rolling Stone* magazine, there was a rising impression that Lennon would take on a more definitive leadership role in the U.S. antiwar movement—something that he was unwilling, and, perhaps, incapable of doing.²

Perhaps most problematic of the coverage of the campaign was how the media ignored or minimized Ono's role in the peace campaign. In one representative example, when Jann Wenner nominated Lennon as "Man of the Year" in *Rolling Stone*, he justified the absence of Ono in such an award by stating, It has become impossible to speak of John without at once speaking of Yoko—truly the fifth Beatle,

¹ Philip Kennicott, "For Saddam's Page in History, A Final Link on YouTube," *The Washington Post* Style Section (Sunday, December 31, 2006: D7).

² Lennon's appearance as "Man of the Decade" on ATV on December 30, 1969 was discussed in chapter 3.

in an era when it sometimes appears that there are not longer even four Beatles. Thus, when we speak of John as the “Man of the Year,” we also mean Yoko, but feel a little foolish saying “Couple of the Year,” although they surely were.”³

Even before the peace campaign was conceived, Ono and Lennon were explaining their reasons for eschewing any specific political cause. Ono stated in December 1968 to Bram De Swaan, “If I become a politician, there’s so much red tape, and just to go through that, I’m just going to be killed as a person, spiritually as a person. So I think I’m communicating just as well or better through my work, which John is doing, too.⁴ At the end of 1969, the pair was still trying to define themselves as activist artists. In a typical pronouncement of their stance throughout their campaign, Lennon explained in a press conference at the end of the year,

If anybody thinks our campaign is naive, that’s their opinion, and that’s okay. Let them do anything else and if we like their ideas, we’ll join in with them. But until then, we’ll do it the way we are. We’re artists, not politicians. Not newspapermen, not anything. We do it in the way that suits us best, and this is the way we work. Publicity and things like that is our game. ‘Cos, I mean, the Beatles thing was that. And that was the trade I’ve learnt. This is my trade, and I’m using it to the best of my ability.⁵

When asked about traveling to Biafra, where there was war and widespread famine, Lennon responded, “We’re scared to go somewhere where it’s happening. ‘Cos we don’t want to be dead saints or martyrs. I’m scared of going to Vietnam and Biafra, and until I’m convinced that I can do better there than I can do outside of it, I’ll stay

³ Jann Wenner, “Man of the Year,” *Rolling Stone* (February 7, 1970): 24.

⁴ Yoko Ono, 12 December 1968 interview conducted by Dutch writer Bram de Swaan for Dutch VARA-TV Channel Nederland 2’s “Rood Wit Blauw.” A version was aired 15 January 1969. *John Lennon Archives 1968-69*, DVD (Apple Films, Ltd., 2004).

⁵ Excerpt from Ono and Lennon’s Chateau Champlain Press Conference, Montreal, December 22, 1969, in Ritchie Yorke, “John, Yoko & Year One,” *Rolling Stone* (7 February 1970): 20.

out of it.”⁶ At the press conference, Lennon was peppered with questions such as, “Do you have any sense of fright at the power you have?” “Don’t you worry about being identified as a father figure?” and “Your campaign seems so large and widespread. Don’t you think your chances of success would be improved by zeroing in on one smaller issue?”⁷ Lennon responded, “John and Yoko refuse to be the leaders of the youth movement for peace. That’s dictatorship. We want everybody to help us. We’re just saying listen, this is our flag: it’s a white flag. Is there anyone else here in the game? . . . We want to gather all the positiveness from everywhere [rather than concentrating on one war].”⁸

Each nonviolent action that year seemed to be answered with a violent one of equal proportion. The peaceful gathering of about 500,000 people for the three-day love-in and peace festival at Woodstock, New York, during August 1969 was counterbalanced by the shocking events in December at Altamont, the Rolling Stones’ free concert in California. Although intended to be a “Woodstock West,” among a crowd of 300,000, violence reigned, and Meredith Hunter, one of the few African Americans at the concert, was stabbed and stomped to death by Hell’s Angels members after a night of cruelty and mayhem.

The simple act of demonstrating for peace seemed to many to have higher and higher stakes. On the Berkeley campus, the National Guard and sheriffs carried guns with live ammunition during their confrontation with students over their People’s

⁶ Yorke, 20.

⁷ Yorke, 21.

⁸ Yorke, 21.

Park on May 15, 1969. Pepper spray was unleashed upon the crowds from helicopters overhead, and sheriff's deputies fired at onlookers, fatally wounding James Rector and permanently blinding Alan Blanchard. The huge, nationwide antiwar demonstrations organized by the New Mobilization Committee in October and November 1969 understandably was fraught with tension because of the constant threat of violence from law enforcement that seemingly needed little provocation to attack. The trend continued into the new year: on May 4, 1970, four students were killed and nine wounded by National Guardsmen trying to quell an antiwar demonstration at Kent State University in Ohio, and on May 14, two student protestors were killed and twelve wounded by city and state police on the campus of Jackson State College, Mississippi.

After examining the media coverage of the 1969 moratorium demonstrations in October, Michael Carpin notes that reporters began to differentiate for middle America the difference between “good” and “bad” demonstrations.⁹ On October 19, CBS pronounced that “Today’s protest was different. . . peaceful, within the law, and not confined to a radical minority,” as opposed to a minority breakaway group that was “too confrontational” when they tried to rush the White House grounds.¹⁰ With such all-embracing, yet amorphous plans for peace, Ono and Lennon’s campaign seemed harmless and safe compared to more radical actions by demonstrators, and so their media images were soon co-opted to represent generic, feel-good, and

⁹ Michael X. Delli Carpin, “US Media Coverage of the Vietnam Conflict in 1968,” in Michael Klein, ed., *The Vietnam Era: Media and Popular Culture in the US and Vietnam* (London, Winchester, MA: Pluto Press, 1990), 61.

¹⁰ Quoted in Carpin, 61.

uncontroversial symbols of peace and love in an increasingly violent culture. But as campus violence escalated in 1970, the feel-good images of flower children and staying in bed for peace increasingly looked weak and ineffective. The impression of many was that peaceful protests were no longer viable, and more militant rhetoric could be heard in speeches opposing war and social injustice. Ono and Lennon continued to embrace their nonviolent credo, but their formally organized campaign for peace came to an end. Lennon, in particular, began to change his political rhetoric, taking on more militant tones. On January 21, 1971, for example, he told Tariq Ali of the Marxist underground newspaper *The Red Mole*, “I would like to compose songs for the revolution, now,” after which he recorded and released “Power to the People.”¹¹

A Christmas advertisement placed in *Cash Box* magazine that year reveals Ono and Lennon’s changed attitudes (figure 5.1).¹² A photograph of the Statue of Liberty is altered so that instead of raising the torch of freedom, she raises a defiant clenched fist, associated with Black Power and other revolutionary movements. Underneath are the words, “Happy Xmas (war is over), Love, John & Yoko.” In 1971, Ono and Lennon appeared at a political rally in Ann Arbor, Michigan to free John Sinclair from prison. Lennon took the stage and pronounced, “We came here to show and to say to all of you that apathy isn’t it, that we *can* do something. Okay, so

¹¹ Interview reprinted in Tariq Ali, *Street Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 368. “Power to the People” was released on March 12, 1971.

¹² *Cash Box* was an American publication that tracked the sales of popular songs for the music industry,

flower power didn't work. So what. We start again," after which he galvanized the crowd with his new song, "John Sinclair."¹³ This was the moment when Lennon came to the attention of the FBI. As long as Ono and Lennon remained so nonspecific in their peace campaign, they were harmless, but as soon as Lennon allied himself with specific political causes, he became a threatening force in the eyes of the government because of his potential to sway opinions with his music. This power of the rock celebrity was tied to the sixties fans' perception that their loyalty to various groups signified their membership in a "rock community," so that, as Simon Firth points out, "buying records became an act of solidarity."¹⁴

The memories of the 1969 peace campaign survived in the public psyche, so that by the 1990s, Ono and Lennon as a couple became symbols of the impossible innocence and naive hopes of youth to those who had entered middle age. Apple Computer Company, therefore, successfully adopted a photograph of Ono and Lennon from the *Bed-In*, flowers in hand, in their "Think Different" campaign in the 1990s (figure 5.2). Now the couple's advertisement for peace became an advertisement for commerce, reducing the pair to iconic status that fed into the hagiography of John Lennon that had begun after his untimely murder in December 1980.¹⁵ Today, one can rent the same hotel room Ono and Lennon occupied for their

¹³ Jon Weiner, *Come Together: John Lennon in His Time* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), xvii.

¹⁴ Simon Firth, "Rock and the Politics of Memory," *The 60s Without Apology*, Sohnya Sayres, Anders Stephanson, Stanley Aronowitz, and Frederic Jameson, eds. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 66.

¹⁵ See Anthony Elliott, *The Mourning of John Lennon* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1999).

Montreal *Bed-In* at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel in Montreal. In a weekend getaway package that includes a menu of food ordered by the couple from room service, *Bed-In* photographs on the walls, staff who will regale their visitors with anecdotal stories for a mere \$600 a night (figure 5.3). The legacy of the 1969 peace campaign is larger than just its historical context, as Ono and Lennon's advertisements for peace continue to mutate and fracture into multiple meanings within our culture.

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