

UNDER THE BIG BLACK SUN

California Art 1974-1981

I. BeLIEf

"[T]he failure of spirit...misrepresents truth," Chauncey Hare stated in 1981 about the purpose of his photographs.¹ The positive intent of his negatively phrased declaration implied that by remaining steadfast to the vital force of one's character (or spirit), individual and collective truths might both be sustained. Taking up that charge, between 1977 and 1981 Hare photographed workers at several industrial sites and other locations in the San Francisco Bay Area for his book *This Was Corporate America* (1984).² A chemical engineer with a degree from Columbia University who worked for the Standard Oil Company of California in Richmond for over two decades, Hare attended the San Francisco Art Institute from 1977 to 1979, eventually becoming a work and family therapist. He began photographing workers in March 1968 after meeting Orville W. England, a terminally ill, disabled former worker for the Richmond Standard Oil plant whose lungs had been burned by asbestos "snow," a hazard that the corporation never disclosed. Hare fought to have England compensated in repeated, unsuccessful attempts.³

Writing about and visually capturing the socially destructive impact of American corporatization, Hare wanted to convey "explicitly literary" images that could narrate a sitter's "own story" and elicit "an empathic viewer."⁴ His respectful but unflinching photographs of people in their homes and offices or traveling to and from work were intended "to protest and warn against the growing domination of working people and their families by multinational corporations and their elite owners and managers."⁵ Hare's photograph of a middle-age, overweight man in a business suit riding the Bay Area Rapid Transit system is just such a searing visual story. Included in *This Was Corporate America*, the photograph conveys the existential aloneness of an exhausted businessman in constant motion to identifiable destinations that are, nevertheless, meaningless abstractions (fig. 01). For Hare, the future of art and photography depended upon "the

necessity for restoring [their] moral and ethical values."⁶

Hare's determined approach to art and his observation about truth and spirit capture the intrinsically candid critical qualities of San Francisco Bay Area art during an expansive but elusive artistic period: 1974 to 1981. The tenor of those years has evaded description and, with a few prominent exceptions, has been largely ignored due to a combination of factors including the diversity of the art and the lack of a unifying movement. A more challenging reason is the intangible but vivid sense of purpose that underlies the collective character of the insistent individualism of Bay Area artists. By "purpose" or "collective," I do not mean to imply that Bay Area artists were united in intention or aims. On the contrary, most were resolutely dedicated to and protective of the renowned pluralism that animates Bay Area art. Most did not follow a unified cause or engage in passionate political action, although some did.

Given the lack of unanimity and the ardent insistence on heterogeneity, attempts to theorize a general aesthetic of Bay Area art during this highly idiosyncratic period must be circumspect. Nonetheless, a "negative affirmative" affect can be identified in a stunning range of Bay Area artworks. *BeLIEf* (1974) by Joe Rees is a good example (fig. 02). Spelling out the word in white (BE and F) and yellow (LIE) neon, Rees unmasked the onto-epistemological contradictions within the mental and emotional attachments required by belief. In this terse and elegant sculpture, Rees also exposed the cognitive and psychological instability of the internal structure of belief, which contains the lie of dogma.

From 1960 to 1980, the Bay Area was the site of rapidly altering beliefs, a situation that resulted from the compression of different generational counter-cultures between which the 1970s were pressed. The pessimism, anger, and rejection of mainstream American culture smoldering in the Beats skipped a generation to become punk abnegation, while hippie entrepreneurial impulses morphed into the



fig. 01



fig. 02

fig. 01 Chauncey Hare

Bay Area Rapid Transit Riders, from *This Was Corporate America*, 1977–79

Photographs printed from the original negatives in the Chauncey Hare Photograph Archive in The Bancroft Library Pictorial Collection, University of California, Berkeley

These photographs were made by Chauncey Hare to protest and warn against the growing domination of working people by multinational corporations and their elite owners and managers.

fig. 02 Joe Rees

BeLIEf, 1974/refabricated 2009

Glass, argon gas, mercury, and transformer

11 x 37 x 2 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Steven Wolf Fine Arts, San Francisco

upwardly mobile professionalization of yuppies. Most artists coexisted in this congested hyper-pluralism, such that their interaction produced effects "multiplicatively (one might even say chemically)."⁷ In addition, everyone knew everyone. Ideas cross-fertilized generations, groups, and communities, and artists intermingled fully with poets, musicians, filmmakers, photographers, critics, and scholars.

Moreover, bridge figures like Peter d'Agostino, Rolando Castellón, Bruce Conner, Lynn Herschman, Tom Marioni, Jim Melchert, Renny Pritikin, Jock Reynolds, V. Vale, and others reached out, bringing artists, writers, filmmakers, etc., together in ways that simply would not have happened without their efforts. Overlapping intersecting communities pulsed through the period with an earnest and simultaneously irreverent wry sense of collective purpose. Bay Area pluralism also internalized multiculturalism, the social effect of living in the midst of key historical and political events and struggles, from the Civil Rights to the Chicano, Asian American, and Native American movements. In exaggerated forms, these all flowed through each other, sharing the same small cultural space with gay liberation, feminism, and activism in a dark period of recent U.S. history.

For by 1974, the spirit of the 1967 Summer of Love was long gone, mind-expanding drugs having been replaced by an addictive culture of cocaine, heroin, and PCP. With the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, vets had returned as scapegoats to a hostile broken nation.⁸ The U.S. government had systematically dismantled revolutionary politics, especially the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California, and the FBI's secret operation COINTELPRO had infiltrated and suppressed the Alcatraz-Red Power movement.⁹ In this atmosphere, the Symbionese Liberation Army kidnapped media heiress Patty Hearst from her Berkeley, California, apartment in 1974. Four years later, on November 18, 1978, over nine hundred followers of cult leader Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple, which had been based in San Francisco but moved to Jonestown, Guyana,

were massacred in what was made to appear a mass suicide, preceded only a few hours earlier by the murder of California Democratic Congressman Leo Joseph Ryan Jr., then on a fact-finding mission to Jonestown to investigate the cult.¹⁰ Nine days after the Jonestown tragedy, Dan White murdered San Francisco Mayor George Moscone and City Supervisor Harvey Milk. When, in May 1979, the infamous "Twinkie Defense" succeeded in commuting White's sentence from first-degree murder to voluntary manslaughter, San Francisco erupted in mass street violence and protest, as Milk had been the first openly gay man to be elected to public office in California.¹¹

March 28, 1979, had witnessed the largest nuclear accident in U.S. history at Three Mile Island, Pennsylvania; November saw the capture of sixty-six U.S. citizens during the Iranian Revolution in Tehran; and December brought the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Ronald Reagan's election the following November 1980 was catastrophic for many who had endured him as a governor. By January 1981, when Reagan was sworn into office, the U.S. hostages in Iran had been released and the Cold War reignited. 1981 also saw the identification of the HIV/AIDS virus, but not before many Bay Area artists were infected and would die.

Truthful to the mood, ideas, and events of this troubled period, Bay Area artists represented their reality in deeply analytical and discerning works that diagnosed the full range of life in stark and haunting metaphors. Bruce Gluck's etching *EAT THE DEAD: Fight Visual Numbness* (c. 1978–79), signed "Fat Man," is among them (fig. 03). Summoning the taboo of cannibalism to combat synesthetic desensitization, a huge gas mask with empty eye sockets dominates the frame diagonally above a small round fat man peeing a big puddle, presumably satiated from devouring the anti-visual. Undaunted by the looming presence of death, Fat Man goes on living by consuming the threat.



fig. 03

fig. 03 **Bruce Gluck**
EAT THE DEAD: Fight Visual Numbness, c. 1978–79
Etching
29 7/8 x 22 inches
Private collection

fig. 04 **J.C. Garrett**
Splinter in Your Eye, 1980–81
Hand-printed silkscreen
11 x 17 inches
Collection of the artist

fig. 05 Club Foot LP promotional poster (Hugh Hefner, the Piltdown Woman, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Frank Sinatra) and cover of Club Foot LP by **J.C. Garrett**, 1980

fig. 06 **Gregory Cuijkshank** and **Victoria Lowe** on stage with Tuxedomoon, San Francisco, 1977
Photo: Lig (aka Lynn Brown)

II. The End

J. C. Garrett arrived in San Francisco in 1978, then twenty-two with a "punk aesthetic." Using found photographs and working in silkscreen, he aimed to visualize "the growing alienation w/in daily life and the decline of the individual."¹² Twenty-one years before the terrorist strike on September 11, 2001, in *Splinter in Your Eye* (1980–81), Garrett pictured the twin towers of the World Trade Center as a source of American hegemonic globalization (fig. 04). He borrowed the work's title from Theodor Adorno's *Minima Moralia* (1951; first English translation, 1974), a meditation on everyday existence in late capitalism, and appropriated a text for the silkscreen from Belgian Situationist philosopher Raoul Vaneigem's book *The Revolution of Everyday Life: Impossible Participation or Power as the Sum of Constraints* (1967). The text describes the revolt of "millions of people living in a huge building" charged with "upkeep of the lamps [and] the flow of oil."

Splinter in Your Eye was the result of a performance/installation that Garrett had planned but never realized in the San Francisco office building where he was living at the time. Viewers would have watched voyeuristically "through the glass [office] partition" while he lay on a cot in the next room projecting images and carrying on a fictive dialogue with such individuals as Adorno and Aldo Moro.¹³ Some other sources for the work included "Chris Marker's *La Jetée* and Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, Guy Debord, Oriana Fallaci, Bommi Baumann [and] Red Brigade propaganda." John Lennon's murder December 8, 1980, had focused Garrett's thoughts on topics ranging from celebrity and radical political action to anonymous art and "the further commodification of all creative expression."¹⁴

One year earlier, Garrett and artist Richard Kelly had launched Club Foot in a storefront on Third Street, making "every effort to parody the corporate culture that was rapidly compressing ideas."¹⁵ They showcased performance and experimental art and music, from punk to fringe jazz, and in 1980

THE SPLINTER IN YOUR EYE IS THE BEST MAGNIFYING GLASS

TO SURVIVE MILLIONS OF PEOPLE LIVING IN A HUGE BUILDING WITH NO DOORS OR WINDOWS, THE PERSE LIGHT OF COUNTLESS OIL LAMPS COMBATED WITH THE UNCHANGING DARKNESS. AS HAD BEEN THE CUSTOM SINCE REMOTEST ANTIQUITY, THE UNKEEP OF THE LAMPS WAS THE DUTY OF THE POOR, SO THAT THE FLOW OF OIL FOLLOWED THE ATTESTATION OF REDDIT AND PACIFICATION. ONE DAY A GENERAL INSURRECTION BROKE OUT. THE MOST VIOLENT THAT THIS PEOPLE HAD EVER KNOWN. ITS LEADERS DEMANDED A FAIR ALLOTMENT OF THE COSTS OF LIGHTING. A LARGE NUMBER OF REVOLUTIONARIES SAID THAT WHAT THEY CONSIDERED A PUBLIC UTILITY SHOULD BE FREE. A FEW EXTREMISTS WENT SO FAR AS TO CLAMOR FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF THE BUILDING, WHICH THEY CLAIMED WAS UNHEALTHY, EVEN UNFIT FOR HUMAN HABITATION. AS USUAL, THE MORE REASONABLE COMBATANTS FOUND THEMSELVES HELPLESS BEFORE THE VIOLENCE OF THE CONFLICT DURING A PARTICULARLY LUTELY CLASH WITH THE FORCES OF ORDER, A STRAY BULLET PERCEIVED THE OUTER WALL, LEAVING A CRACK THROUGH WHICH DAYLIGHT STREAMED IN. AFTER A MOMENT OF STUPOR, THIS FLOOD OF LIGHT WAS GREETED WITH CRIES OF VICTORY. THE SOLUTION HAD BEEN FOUND. ALL THEY HAD TO DO WAS TO MAKE SOME MORE HOLES. THE LAMPS WERE THROWN AWAY OR PUT IN MUSEUMS, AND POWER WENT TO THE WINDOW MAKERS. THE PARTISANS OF RADICAL DESTRUCTION WERE FORGOTTEN AND EVEN THEIR DISCREET LIGATION, IT SEEMS, WENT ALMOST UNNOTICED (EVERYONE WAS ARGUING ABOUT THE NUMBER AND POSITION OF THE WINDOWS). THEN, A CENTURY OR TWO LATER, THEIR NAMES WERE RESEMBLED WHEN THE PEOPLE THAT ETERNAL MALCONTENT HAD GROWN ACCUSTOMED TO PLATE-GLASS WINDOWS AND TOOK TO ASKING EXTRANEANT QUESTIONS: "TO CRAVE OUT YOUR DAYS IN A GREENHOUSE, IS THAT LITENET THEY ASKED."

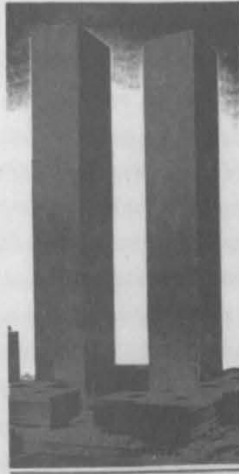


fig. 04



fig. 05

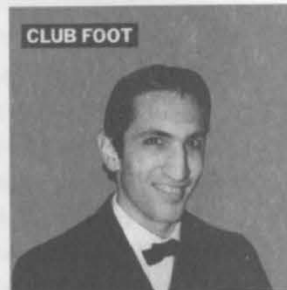


fig. 06

produced Club Foot's first LP compilation of four bands: Naked City, the Bay of Pigs, and the Longshoremen, as well as the Alterboys, to which Garrett belonged.¹⁶ Garrett designed the album cover and the poster that was inserted into the LP jacket. The poster featured Hugh Hefner, Friedrich Nietzsche, Frank Sinatra, and the Piltown Woman; each persona had been selected by a band to represent it (fig. 05). Tuxedomoon also played at Club Foot, mixing hippie-era psychedelic experimentalism and punk ethos with pioneering techno music.¹⁷ Founded in 1977, Tuxedomoon was an ever-changing collective that by 1979 included Steven Brown, Gregory Cruikshank, Peter Dachert, and Blaine R. Reininger performing with vocalist, artist, actor, and puppeteer Winston Tong (fig. 06). When not completely stoned, Tuxedomoon was one of the most original and electrifying bands of the period for its combination of multimedia performance; experimental use of saxophone, violin, and synthesizer; and emotional/urban sound.¹⁸ Tuxedomoon decamped to Europe in 1981.

While Club Foot took its name from a congenital deformity, Jet Wave used an upside-down peace sign as its logo, and destruction and survival were its constant themes, especially for Bruce Gluck, who wrote: "Art is a Cultural Survivor; the Artist Likewise."¹⁹ Founded by artists Gluck, Randy Hussong, Sabina Ott, and art historian Fredrica Drotos, Jet Wave opened in November 1979 at 1151 Market Street, an abandoned office building rented for four cents per square foot. Jet Wave programmed a wide range of events and exhibitions, dedicating itself to "FUTURE ARTISTS... IDEA, PROCESS, PAINTING, PUBLICATION, PERFORMANCE, AND INTELLECTUAL MAGIC."²⁰ Among the performances, installations, and exhibitions it presented was Hussong's *Is God a Triangle* (1980), a performance/installation "investigating the myth of creation and its effects on an American cultural aesthetic"²¹; it also screened the films of Austrian filmmaker Kurt Kren, who spoke at the event, and organized "Wall Drawings," an exhibition featuring twenty

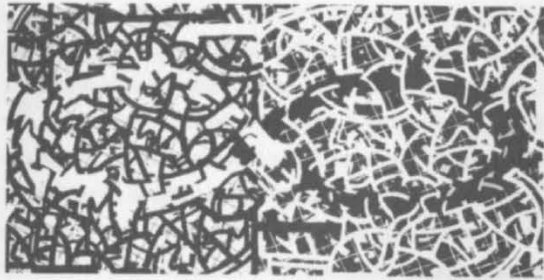


fig. 07



fig. 08



fig. 09

Bay Area artists, among them Helen Holt, Hussong, Masashi Matsumoto, Yong Soon Min, and Carlos Villa. Jet Wave also “broke with the tradition of conceptual art” then dominating the Bay Area by exhibiting paintings such as Ott’s *Untitled* (1979), intricate double abstractions with an embedded infinity loop²² (fig. 07), and German artist Roger Herman’s large-scale gestural pictures of “heads, helmets, and mountains” in 1980²³ (figs. 08 and 09). Another evening at Jet Wave had Herman performing a reading of Nietzsche while Gluck continually poured cement over Herman’s boots. The performance ended when Herman could no longer move, leaving the cemented German boots as its relic.

Club Foot and Jet Wave were just two of many punk spaces, each with its own identity: Club Generic, A.R.E. (Artists for Revolution in the Eighties), A-Hole, Hotel Utah, Co-Mizery Café, Art Grip, the Offensive, the Deaf Club, and Valencia Tool & Die. Many artists made their names at some of these venues, including Karen Finley, whose assertive feminist actions intended to break through the silence surrounding women’s abuse. Kathy Acker, experimental writer and proto-sex-positive feminist, could also be found in many of these punk and poetry scenes. Target Video—founded in 1977 by Rees in collaboration with Jackie Sharp, Jill Hoffman, Sam Edwards, and others—videotaped and filmed many of the punk bands playing in the Bay Area and had its own three-story building on Van Ness Avenue, providing office space for Brad Lapin’s punk newspaper *Damage: An Inventory*. But Mabuhay Gardens, a nightclub on Broadway in the topless district of North Beach, was the center of punk music and performances from California, New York, and around the world.

Bruce Conner was a key figure at Mabuhay, despite being characterized as a late-1950s Beat, assemblage, and funk artist and filmmaker. From 1977 to about 1979, Conner, then in his mid-forties, moshed, slam-danced, drank, and took photographs of the bands, the audience, and the intense chaotic atmosphere there. Conner contributed

some of his photographs, including several of the band Negative Trend, featured on the cover of issue six (1978), to the punk newspaper *Search & Destroy* (fig. 10), founded and published by V. Vale, then in his twenties. Vale not only collaborated with Conner, but while working at Beat poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s City Lights bookstore, Vale had launched *Search & Destroy* in 1977 with \$100 donated by Ferlinghetti and poet Allen Ginsberg. Including art, photography, interviews, and articles, the magazine was transformed by Vale and Andrea Juno in 1980 into *RE/Search*, an archive and oral history project that “continues the international Punk Rock Cultural Revolution”²⁴ and the legacy of Situationist International ideas.

The strong presence of Situationist-inspired groups, such as Perspective, the Council for the Eruption of the Marvelous, Contradiction, 1044, and Negation—all distributing publications in the Bay Area during the early to mid-1970s—anticipated the influential publication *Situationist International Anthology* (1981), edited by Ken Knabb (then also associated with Contradiction) and published by the group Bureau of Public Secrets in Berkeley, which Knabb financed. Club Foot aimed at a “Situationist-inspired message,”²⁵ and collectives like Survival Research Laboratories (SRL), conceived and founded by Mark Pauline in November 1978, employed Situationist-like *détournement*, or the diversion of cultural elements to new subversive purposes.

SRL dedicated itself “to re-directing the techniques, tools, and tenets of industry, science, and the military away from their typical manifestations in practicality, product or warfare” through staged mechanized events. Their spectacular presentations of “ritualized interactions between machines, robots, and special effects devices” constituted “socio-political satire.”²⁶ From 1979 through about 1980, SRL could be found performing illegal events in such places as under a freeway overpass, in an empty parking lot, or the like, in the early hours of the morning. Word of their guerrilla actions would travel, and dozens of people in the punk



fig. 10

fig. 07 **Sabina Ott**
Untitled, 1979
 Acrylic on canvas
 36 x 78 inches
 Location unknown

fig. 08 **Roger Herman**
Self-portrait, 1980
 Oil on canvas
 80 x 99 inches
 Collection of the artist

fig. 09 **Roger Herman** with paintings at Jet Wave,
 San Francisco, 1980

fig. 10 Cover of *Search & Destroy*, no. 6 (1978),
 with photograph by **Bruce Conner**

fig. 11 **Survival Research Laboratories**
Mysteries of the Reactionary Mind, 1981
 Performance at Fort Mason Center, San Francisco, 5 April 1981

fig. 12 **Randy Hussong**
Untitled, 1981

and art communities would assemble to watch the warring robots, explosives, ingeniously utilized roadkill, and all variety of sound, light, and technology. Soon, SRL achieved international renown for such massive displays as *Mysteries of the Reactionary Mind* (1981), events that were attended by a large public (fig. 11).

While SRL parodied spectacle, Hussong deconstructed it. In his San Francisco *Chronicle* series (1980–81), Hussong used whiteout correction fluid to overpaint the front page of the newspaper, visually altering the meaning of its content.²⁷ Hussong made a number of newspaper pieces related to Reagan's election. He also transformed the front page of the December 3, 1981, edition of the *Chronicle*, leaving visible one photograph of the opening reception for the new San Francisco convention center, named after slain Mayor George Moscone (fig. 12). Hussong whited-out the other photograph, which featured Robert Arneson's ceramic sculpture *Portrait of George* (1981) (figs. 13 and 14): the bust of the mayor—which was commissioned for installation in the center but rejected by the city's arts commission—sits on a pedestal featuring biographical anecdotes and symbols referring to Moscone's murder, including five bloody bullet holes and the words "BANG, BANG, BANG, BANG, BANG," "HARVEY MILK, TOO," "GAY," and "TWINKIES."²⁸ Hussong whited-out all of the text on the front page, leaving only the one photograph juxtaposed with the headline "New Furor on Art" above the obliterated image of the sculpture. Literally and metaphorically cleaning up the misinformation of the newspaper, Hussong affirmed the infamy of the murders and the rejection of Arneson's art.

Arneson attended Jet Wave events during the period that he worked on *Portrait of George*. He had removed his work during the controversy over its pedestal and added it to the show "Ceramic Sculpture and the Taste of California," which had opened at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York and traveled to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA). Hilton Kramer had reviewed the

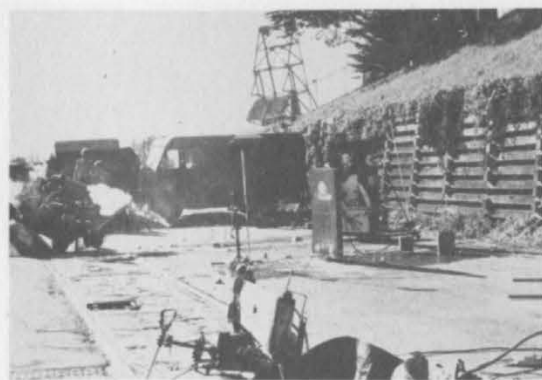


fig. 11

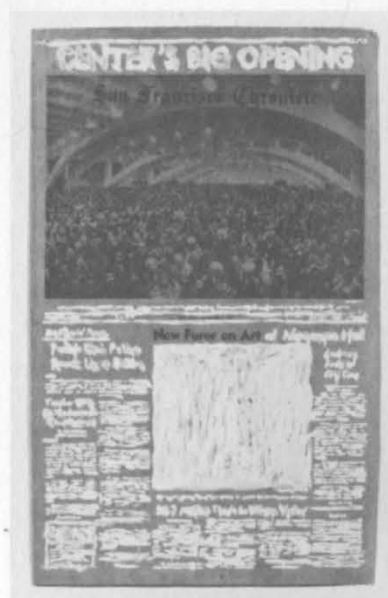


fig. 12



fig. 13

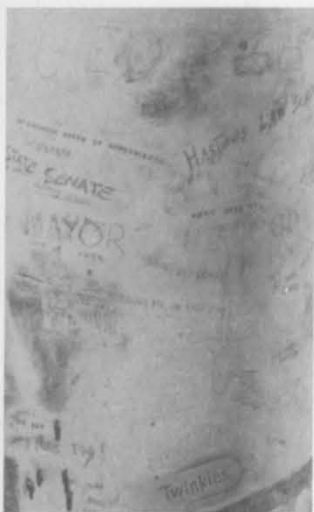


fig. 14

fig. 13 Robert Arneson's studio with *Portrait of George*, Benicia, California, 1981

fig. 14 Robert Arneson
Detail of *Portrait of George*, 1981

show, asking whether the work was "provincialism... [or] merely local and regional taste... or something more significant."²⁹ He then described the work of three of the six artists in the show (Arneson, David Gilhooly, and Richard Shaw) as characterized by "kitsch, low taste [and] sophomoric humor." Although deeming Arneson—who was on the faculty at University of California, Davis—a "star," Kramer suggested that the sculpture was "shaped by the art department gags of the university campus" and closed with the comment: "We are left with some dark thoughts about the fate of high art in the California sun."³⁰

Clouded by his own variety of provincialism, Kramer failed to grasp that Arneson, an urbane native of Northern California, had been nurtured under two California suns: the one Kramer characterized, and another—that "big black sun" about which the punk band X sang—that was able to scorch psychic, sexual, emotional, religious, political, social, and cultural hypocrisy with a caustic grin. Arneson later reflected: "The things that I'm really interested in as an artist are the things you can't do—and that's really to mix humor and fine art... I think humor is very serious—it points out the fallacies of our existence."³¹

Attacks on Bay Area artists were not limited to East Coast critics. William T. Wiley, Arneson's colleague, came under fire by Thomas Albright in a March 1981 *Art News* review that denigrated Wiley's work as "mannerism, parody and self-parody," the personal "mythology" of "nut artists," as well as "pseudo-backwoods Scholasticism."³² That year Wiley had produced *Acid Rain*, a tour de force of dense tangled lines comprising "a vast landscape" with lightning, rain, and "drop-like forms or tears." The work may have been a response to a Canadian series of films accusing the U.S. of generating acid rain that fell on Canada, claims that the Reagan administration classified as "political propaganda."³³

Wiley's belief that "art is an ethic" impressed his student, artist Bruce Nauman, who described Wiley as providing "an idea about moral commitment [and] the worth of being an artist."³⁴ The idea of the

ethical worth of an artist penetrated deep in the psyche of Bay Area artists, from the Beats to the punks, passing from generation to generation in various iterations through a host of great artist/teachers, a list of whom includes most of the "nut artists" in this essay.

While Arneson and Wiley taught at University of California, Davis, Robert Colescott taught in the Bay Area from 1970 until 1985. Colescott's painting *My Shadow* (1977) pictures a barefoot man in yellow pajamas and platinum blonde wearing a pink baby doll nightie and feathered high-heeled slippers. They glance lasciviously as their shadows intermingle while dancing a cha-cha in the direction of a single bed, which is decorated with Disney decals of Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse. The black man and white woman are doubled by a tan mouse scampering along the floor behind the couple and casting a black shadow that amplifies the theme of miscegenation. Colescott borrowed the work's title from Robert Louis Stevenson's children's verse "My Shadow" (1913), the beginning lyrics of which are pinned to the wall in the painting with an arrow: "I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me, / And what can be the use of him is more than I can see. / He is very, very like me from the heels up to the head; / And I see him jump before me, when I jump into my bed." The work also refers to the lyrics of the soft-shoe dance song "Me and My Shadow" (1927), co-written by Al Jolson: "Like the wallpaper sticks to the wall / Like the seashore clings to the sea / Like you'll never get rid of your shadow / You'll never get rid of me."

The pseudo-simplicity of the brightly rendered *My Shadow* belies the complexity of its maker's subtle, seditious intent, one in keeping with the negative affirmative ethos of the Bay Area. A master of appropriation who anticipated many later artists, Colescott's quotation of Stevenson and allusion to Jolson "mock[ed] the very notion of purity that he both raises and nullifies"³⁵ and took "aim at the myth of white female innocence."³⁶ Colescott strove to show how "Negroes [provided a]

threatening negative image to the whites' idealized images of themselves," as Ralph Ellison wrote in his 1985 essay "An Extravagance of Laughter."³⁷

III. The Beginning

The extremely vital period of punk emerged from the strong foundation in Bay Area conceptualism dominated by performance, installation, and video, as well as socially engaged art practices rooted in sources ranging from minority and feminist struggles to aspects of Minimalist art and photography. By 1974, the conceptual generation was already well established, and many of its artists were associated with the Museum of Conceptual Art (MOCA, 1970–84), founded by Tom Marioni in the South of Market area of San Francisco. Marioni had identified as a beatnik when he moved to San Francisco in 1959, then lived through the hippie era, emerging as a pivotal figure for many Bay Area artists.³⁸ Already by the mid-1970s, Marioni and others such as Terry Fox, Howard Fried, Lynn Hershman, David Ireland, Paul Kos, and Linda Montano had become canonical figures in the histories of conceptual and performance art, so much so that in 1975 Marioni mounted the exhibition "Second Generation" featuring Richard Alpert, Jim Pomeroy, Darryl Sapien, Irvin Tepper, and Stefan Weisser, once students of the artists in Marioni's circle. That same year, Marioni and Kathan Brown launched *Vision*, a journal published by Brown's Crown Point Press, and by 1976 they had brought out three special issues, including one on Eastern European performance and conceptual art, the first major publication of its kind on this subject.³⁹

Marioni's installation *From China to Czechoslovakia* (1976) is a conceptual record of his travels, a world mapped in beer bottles. This work is also a metonymic link to Marioni's social artwork *The Act of Drinking Beer with Friends Is the Highest Form of Art*, which he began in 1970 when, using the pseudonym Allan Fish, he invited sixteen friends to a beer-drinking party at the Oakland Museum on a day the museum was normally closed and then exhibited

the relics of the party the next day. After Marioni moved MOCA up Third Street to a larger building, every Wednesday from 1973 to 1974 he extended his social art action by providing free beer for friends while screening artists' videotapes. In 1976, he moved these activities downstairs to historic Breen's bar and restaurant and sent out cards announcing "Café Society" on Wednesdays from "twotofour."

Marioni's action *Now We'll Have a Party* (1978), performed at the International Performance Festival in Vienna, represented a synthesis of the two aspects of Marioni's art that are often overlooked: the relation between his social art of drinking beer with friends and his performative, solo, self-absorbed drumming and drawing. In the huge raw space in Vienna, he placed a small table and a refrigerator, leaving the audience to sit on the floor. Then, with his back to viewers, accompanied by jazz playing softly, Marioni polished a small rectangular space of light projected from a slide projector onto the dingy wall of the room. He polished until the wall shone like marble. Then, using Letraset, he pressed his name onto the rectangle of light, before opening the refrigerator full of beer and announcing a party (fig. 15). The performance combined the two aspects of his art: inward-turning meditation and affirmative celebration of the audience in a social gathering.

Art made in the context of MOCA was as pluralistic as the Bay Area itself. For example, when Lowell Darling launched his bid for governor of California in 1978, the media interviewed him downstairs from MOCA at Breen's. Darling was seen on television "acupuncture the state of California [to cure its] drought."⁴⁰ With a parodic platform of social critique, Darling suggested turning parking meters into slot machines to reduce air pollution (no one would drive); proposed zoo animals be returned to their natural habitats and artists be commissioned "to make wild animal costumes and hire the unemployed to wear them"; promised to ban the year 1984 "to reduce the mounting paranoia resulting from George Orwell's book"⁴¹; and advised



fig. 15

fig. 15 Tom Marioni
Now We'll Have a Party, 1978
Performance at the International Performance Festival, Vienna, 1978

implanting a video camera in the U.S. President's forehead so that "Americans will see what the President sees on their television sets at home."⁴² Darling garnered a surprising two percent of the statewide vote.

Illusion and sly humor also informed Paul Kos and Marlene Kos's work. In *Lightning* (1976), Kos videotaped his then-wife Marlene sitting in the front seat of a car during a severe thunder and lightning storm. In the video, she repeatedly looks out the front window and then turns to the camera in the back seat, commenting: "When I look for the lightning it never strikes; when I look away, it does." The viewer watches this pattern, as if evidence of her clairvoyance. But her psychic feat resulted from Kos's extensive research on the science of lightning and the fact that it takes "fifteen or twenty seconds for lightning to strike in the same place in the same part of the sky," he explained, "because the atmosphere has to re-ionize."⁴³ Kos scripted Marlene's statements accordingly. This work parallels Kos's keen analytic attention to the interrelationship between process and performance in every media, from sculpture and installation to video, and is a clever scientific nod to anomalous phenomena that affirms one as it negates the other.

Howard Fried also worked from a highly cerebral approach, itself matched by intense emotion and anxiety about decision-making, often in stream-of-consciousness thought that made it difficult to separate his art from his life. Already well known for his installation *All My Dirty Blue Clothes* (1969) in "The Pollution Show" at the Oakland Museum, Fried's tightly structured, highly crafted videos and films also drew broad attention. *The Burghers of Fort Worth* (1975–77) found him hiring four Texas golf pros to give him a lesson, presenting a ridiculous situation as "a metaphor for art education, where students attempt to follow the advice of several masters, who tend to speak in abstract, often contradictory terms."⁴⁴ In a wry twist on Auguste Rodin's famous *The Burghers of Calais* (1889), Fried's title affirms the failure of his "game" by his "pro" rescuers.



fig. 16

fig. 16 Tony Labat
Still from *The Gong Show*, 1978

Fried founded the San Francisco Art Institute's (SFAI) performance and video program in 1977 and famously observed: "Every Action is a Potential Mistake."⁴⁵ Perpetrating that conviction, in 1976 he acquired video Portapaks for his students at SFAI, and the institution promptly "punished" him and his students for working in video.⁴⁶ Tony Labat and Finley were among Fried's students, and Labat remembered being "banned" from the sculpture department for working with Fried, which, ironically, became "a sort of badge" of honor.⁴⁷ In 1978, at "the height of the punk scene," Labat recalled, "there was a lot of catharsis, transgressive behavior, a lot of razor blades." But he saw humorous and significant "parallels" between what he characterized as "anti-art" and the "anti-talent" being televised on the NBC amateur talent show *The Gong Show*. "I thought it was a genius, brilliant, amazing show [and] I wanted to be on television." Interested in "infiltrating and subverting a context," Labat and fellow student Bruce Pollack submitted an audition to *The Gong Show* that he described as "a very abstract, punk sort of dance" in which "Bruce would beat himself up" and Labat "would break pencils and throw them at him." The artists were invited to perform on the show and, after their performance, Chuck Barris, the MC, whispered to Labat, "You shouldn't have gotten so political." Labat was thrilled. Barris had understood the sedition of their act (fig. 16).

Three years earlier, the media was also the subject of conceptual artists' scrutiny in *The Eternal Frame* (1975), presented by T. R. Uthco (Truth Company, then comprising artists Doug Hall and Jody Procter) and the conceptual architectural collective Ant Farm (composed of Chip Lord and Doug Michels). A public spectacle and mock documentary, *The Eternal Frame* entailed the artists' reenactment of the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy at Dealey Plaza in Dallas. Basing the performance on Abraham Zapruder's Super-8 film footage of the tragedy, the artists transposed the flame of Kennedy's Arlington National Cemetery

memorial into the media frame through which one views the original and reenacted events. Hall, as President Kennedy, with Michels as Jacqueline Kennedy by his side, explained: "I am, in reality, only another image on your screen." This "grotesque juxtaposition of circus and tragedy" called into question "the gulf between reality and image" produced by "the media 'experience' and collective memory of the actual event."⁴⁸

The media was also a focus of Galería de la Raza, but its critique came from the powerful presence of the Chicano movement in the Bay Area (fig. 17). The name "La Raza" was chosen to avoid the Eurocentric associations of the term "Hispanic" and because the word "Chicano" did not reflect the dominant Latino make-up of the group, as Chicano is associated with those specifically descended from Mexico. Galería also opened in 1970, like MOCA, and although cofounded by numerous artists, Nicaraguan-born Rolando Castellón is often credited as the key founder and first director.⁴⁹ Peter Rodríguez suggested its name, and Ralph Maradiaga and René Yañez served as its codirectors. Galería organized community art workshops and a mural program, bringing together many influential Chicano/a artists, especially Las Mujeres Muralistas. Initially comprising Chicana artists Graciela Carrillo, Irene Pérez, and Patricia Rodríguez, with Venezuelan artist Consuelo Méndez, Las Mujeres Muralistas produced murals in the Mission District of San Francisco like *Latinoamérica* (1974), which "expressed a pan-American aesthetic where highly visible images of women and emphasis on ceremony, celebration, caretaking, harvest and a continental terrain [provided] memory of the everyday."⁵⁰ Another aim of Galería was to reclaim "images and practices from popular traditions that not only reflected but formed El Movimiento [as an] articulation of Chicano/a and Latino/a aesthetics."⁵¹ Carlos Villa's *Mask-Unmask* (1977) exemplifies this aesthetic in the artist's insistence on imagery expressing the anthropological conditions of multicultural identity traced to ceremonial practices and ritual



fig. 17



fig. 18

fig. 17 Left to right: **Ralph Maradiaga, Kate Connell, María Pineda, and René Yañez** in front of Galería de la Raza, San Francisco, 1982

fig. 18 **Rupert García**
Frida Kahlo, 1975
Silkscreen
23 x 17½ inches
Courtesy of the artist

elements, such as the weave of feathers through an otherwise contemporary Abstract Expressionist-like painting.

Galería de la Raza also worked to position Latino artists in the art historical canon. Rupert García's commanding 1975 silkscreen print of Frida Kahlo (fig. 18), her face heavily shadowed in what would become García's signature portrait style, was central to this effort and was the "first work by an American or Chicano artist to render symbolic homage to Kahlo."⁵² García also created the poster for the Mexican Museum's inaugural exhibition of Mexican and Chicano art in 1976, featuring the folk image of a crowing yellow cock. But his protest posters, like those of Malaquías Montoya or Maradiaga, "read like a history of the political events and causes."⁵³ Interested in the long history and design of Chicano poster art, García was equally committed to "the amplification of an ethnic minority identity crisis...in a context [of] historical domination."⁵⁴ Drawing on mass media to alter its history of "debased, exploitative" commercialism and "indifferen[ce] to human welfare," García aimed to create "a totally new moral context" for Chicano images,⁵⁵ one that addressed "racism, the Chicano movement, the struggle of the immigrant farmworker, and the poisoning of the environment."⁵⁶

Galería de la Raza and MOCA both anticipated the broad-based alternative space movement that exploded in San Francisco between 1974 and 1975, which artist Jim Pomeroy described as "the major aspect of change in the arts in this decade" in terms of how such spaces offered "alternatives to traditional norms." The alternative space movement acknowledged, he explained,

a relatively new stature, posture, attitude, or identity for the artist—a position which seizes a responsibility for autonomy, often clumsily but assertive nonetheless, and determination which previously resided in more remote and dominating roles. Principally, these roles were administrator, critic, curator, director, publisher, agent, and significant

audience. Most of these were not occupiable [sic] by artists, and seem to be closed to many others (like community representatives) as well.⁵⁷

Curator Renny Pritikin would later argue that such alternative spaces were an outgrowth of idealist grassroots concepts like that put forward in "The Port Huron Statement" embraced by Students for a Democratic Society in 1962, insofar as these artist spaces represented furthering such concepts as "participatory democracy," "collective decision making," and "self-determination."⁵⁸

1974 ushered in Southern Exposure as a new San Francisco exhibition venue, and in October and November a series of performances and installations called "South of the Slot" took place on the ground floor of a loft at 63 Bluxome Street. Pritikin cited this series as having "galvanized the feelings of many that SF needed its own alternative space to house this amazing new work."⁵⁹ That space would become 80 Langton Street, founded in 1975 on the first floor of a former coffin factory renovated by Reynolds and later led by Pritikin, long-time director (with Judy Moran) under the new name New Langton Arts. Pritikin also included SFAI's annual exhibition of emerging artists, which began in 1975, as another impetus for the thriving art community involved in performance, installation, video, and multimedia interdisciplinary projects. Both La Marmelle, Inc., founded by Carl E. Loeffler, and Site, Cite, Sight, founded by artist Alan Scarritt, opened in 1975, the former focusing on publishing as well as performance, video, art, and technology,⁶⁰ and the latter on process, performance, and installation, as exemplified in Scarritt's own double charcoal corner drawings *Minnesota Twins* (1980) (fig. 19). In this work, he explored the relationships among place, process, and performance, with the arch of the twin drawings being approximately seven feet wide, the span of Scarritt's reach, to visualize the centrality of the body in the production of art.

The year 1974 witnessed the emergence of the visionary *Crossroads Community* (*The Farm*), known as "the Farm." A social work of art and a working

farm situated on seven acres of traffic islands under a freeway interchange in South San Francisco, it was founded and directed by Bonnie Ora Sherk, a landscape architect, planner, educator, and performance and installation artist. This self-sustaining, site-specific, participatory environment and ecological system facilitated the study of and interaction among humans, animals, and nature in an urban setting (fig. 20). In 1980, the Farm became a public park.

1974 also found Lynn Hershman beginning to formulate her alternative persona, Roberta Breitmore (1974–78), as well as the Floating Museum (1975–78). This ephemeral venue presented a wide range of experimental projects and encouraged artists "to recycle existing spaces and resources as well as to transform local areas into temporary exhibition sites," including "rural landscapes, public buildings, city streets, prison courtyards, [and] non space such as air and sound waves"⁶¹ (fig. 21). Among the works the Floating Museum sponsored was the *San Quentin Mural Project*, produced by inmates of San Quentin prison. Hershman launched "Global Space Invasion Phase I," a show that had artists traveling to different countries to produce their work; "Global Space Invasion Phase II" included the "Global Passport" show at various locations including SFMOMA, where Hershman exhibited local, state, national, and international artists. "Global Space Invasion Phase II" included groups like Motion: Women's Movement Collective, a changing collective of women working across dance and performance that included such artists as Judith Barry, Joya Cory, Suzanne Hellmuth, and Nina Wise. Motion also collaborated with Reynolds in 1976 to perform *Fish*, an experimental installation and movement/theatrical presentation. During its lifetime, the Floating Museum presented many of the most significant artists of the period, and Hershman encouraged neo-Dada mail artists Anna Banana and Bill Gaglione, who published the first issue of *Vile* magazine in San Francisco in 1974. That year, Banana performed "Banana Olympics," and Gaglione continued to publish his magazine *Dadazine*. Banana and Gaglione

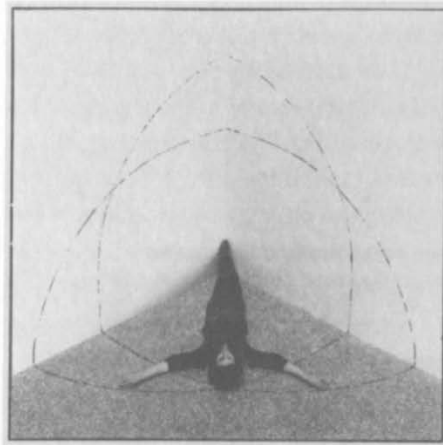


fig. 19



fig. 20

fig. 19 **Alan Scarritt**
Scarritt in his work *Minnesota Twins*, 1980
Two charcoal drawings on wall and floor
86½ x 8½ inches each
Courtesy of the artist
Installation at Minneapolis College of Art and Design,
Minneapolis, 1980

fig. 20 **Bonnie Ora Sherk**
Map from *Crossroads Community (The Farm)*, 1974–80

fig. 21 **Lynn Hershman**
Global Passport (1976), from the Floating Museum, 1975–78
Kristine Stiles Papers, Special Collections, Duke University Library

fig. 22 **Suzanne Hellmuth and Jock Reynolds**
Instruments of Culture, from *A State of the Union: Photographic Juxtapositions*, 1980

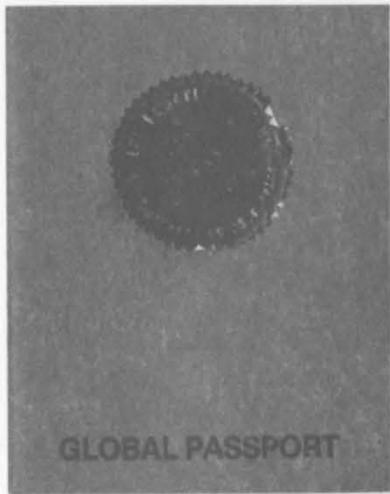


fig. 21

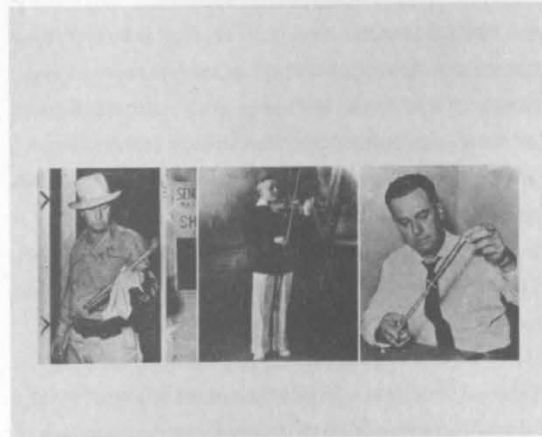


fig. 22

were as central to the history of Bay Area mail art as Mariononi was as a filter for Fluxus.⁶²

1974 also saw the founding of SF Camerawork and a burgeoning interest in conceptual and critical approaches to photography. Such artists as Mike Mandel and Larry Sultan, in their book *Evidence* (1977), and Hellmuth and Reynolds, in their photographic project *A State of the Union: Photographic Juxtapositions* (1980) (fig. 22), in different but complimentary ways, examined the opacity of images when viewed without context and captioning. While Mandel and Sultan assembled photographs from corporate archives and government agencies, stripping narrative and authorship to produce ambiguous indiscernible testimonies about secret research and development in U.S. corporations, Hellmuth and Reynolds juxtaposed a wide range of found photographs from popular culture and the media to explore the effect of context on photographic encounters and their “fictional performances.”⁶³ Hellmuth and Reynolds exhibited provocative pairings—such as *In the Name of...*, which features a picture of the lynching of a white man adjacent to a photograph of a statue of Christ, three children, and a priest—in innovative wall installations that disturbed normative hanging conventions to further disconnect the links their selections otherwise provided.

As these examples suggest, during this period Bay Area artists steeped themselves in photographic and film theory, semiotics, psychoanalysis, structuralism, and deconstruction. Photographers Lew Thomas and Donna-Lee Phillips (a cofounder of SF Camerawork) founded NFS Press in San Francisco in 1976, publishing such milestones in the history of conceptual photography as *Photography and Language* (1976), *Eros and Photography* (1977), *Structural(ism) and Photography* (1978), and *Still Photography: The Problematic Model* (1981), the latter co-edited with artist Peter d’Agostino.⁶⁴

NFS also published d’Agostino’s *ALPHA TRANS CHUNG—A Photographic Model: Semiotics, Film, and Interpretation* (1978). This book documented d’Agostino’s three installations *ALPHA*

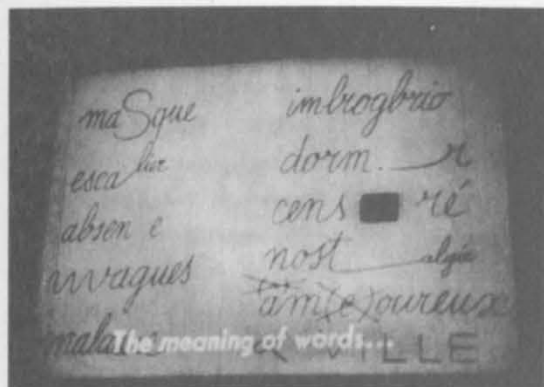


fig. 23

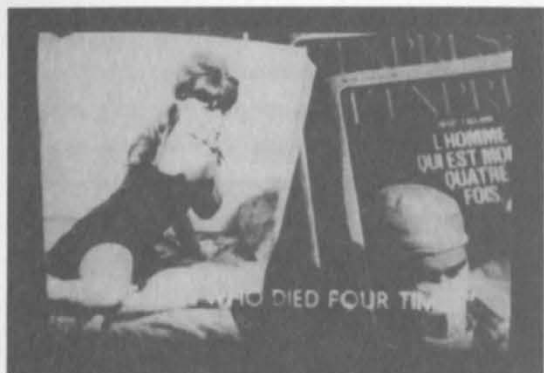


fig. 24

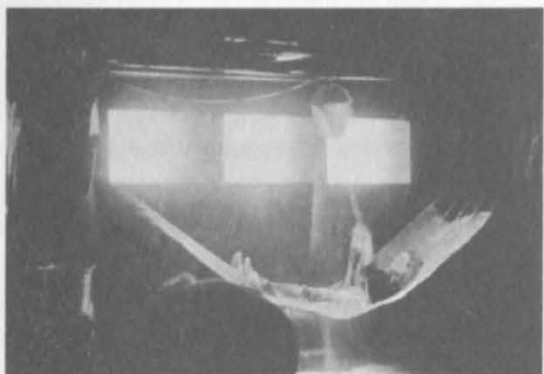


fig. 25

(1976) (fig. 23), *Trans-Europ Express* (1977), and *CHUNG: "Still" Another Meaning* (1977) (fig. 24). In these multimedia installations, which included still photographs, film, and video, he considered "the self-reflexive nature of film and photography," sustaining a semiotic analysis and translation of Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville* (1965), Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Trans-Europ-Express* (1966), and Michelangelo Antonioni's *Chung Kuo—Cina* (1972).⁶⁵ In the last, a documentary on the People's Republic of China, d'Agostino visually deconstructed the interrelated social context of the Chinese government's questions about Antonioni's film and the filmmaker's responses.

Both Judith Barry and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha were also deeply informed by semiotics, film theory, and psychoanalysis, and both studied with Bertrand Augst, a professor of comparative literature at University of California, Berkeley, and a seminal figure teaching film history and film theory at the time. During this period, many noted theorists visited the Berkeley campus, among them Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Robbe-Grillet. Both Barry and Cha also shared a feminist conscience, and Barry would publish (with Sandy Flitterman) the groundbreaking feminist analysis "Textual Strategies: The Politics of Art-Making" (1980), examining categories of women's art and arguing for a constructionist approach to representation.⁶⁶

Barry had studied architecture and art before coming to the Bay Area in 1974, where she studied performance with Fried at the SFAI. *Pastpresent-futuretense...ppft* (1977) was her first public performance/installation. The highly choreographed piece had Barry performing "gestural sculptures" as three backlit slide projections revealed her "hand-written fragments of narratives from women's lives over and over" along with sound fragments for two ten-minute segments. The performance ended when Barry lay in a hammock as four thousand pounds of silica sand poured onto her body through a slit she had previously made in the plastic holding the sand at the ceiling (fig. 25).

At Berkeley, Cha had initially studied ceramics with Peter Voulkos before working with Jim Melchert, who strongly affected and encouraged her work in performance. She knew Melchert's *Points of View*, slide projections featuring a different slide for two and a half hours that he projected on an outdoor wall of the Paramount Theater in Oakland each night for a week in November 1974. These slides featured everyday imagery, often in abstract forms and without context or commentary, and were hauntingly hallucinatory and oneiric.

Cha also studied film at the Centre d'Etudes Américain du Cinéma in Paris, where she worked with Raymond Bellour, Thierry Kuntzel, Christian Metz, and Monique Wittig. Cha was particularly concerned with the effects of condensation and displacement common to both psychoanalytic and film theories regarding the operation of dreams and the functioning of the filmic apparatus. For *Passages Paysages* (1978), Cha installed three video monitors that synchronized sounds to images and words that dissolved and changed, incorporating "displacement...not only in the content of the screen image, but in the formation of the 'screen' itself."⁶⁷

To capture the heady intellectual and multidimensional condition of Bay Area art at the end of the 1970s, Rolando Castellón, then also a curator at SFMOMA, invited Hershman, Marioni, and Loeffler to exhibit artists with whom they worked in the Floating Museum, MOCA, and La Mamelle, Inc. Castellón also charged them with "highlighting their roles as producer, promoter, and publisher" and asked them to incorporate "live events [that] transformed gallery space(s)—from a zine library of correspondence art to the social function of a simulated bar environment."⁶⁸ Hershman's "Global Passport" was among these. Castellón's series served to introduce Suzanne Foley's show "Space/Time/Sound—1970s: A Decade in the Bay Area," which closed the decade by opening in December 1979 with twenty-two artists working in such media as performance, installation, video, and slide projection.

For his contribution to "Space/Time/Sound—1970s," Jim Pomeroy created a critical conceptual dialogue, "Viewing the Museum: The Tale Wagging the Dog," consisting of enlarged reproductions of his correspondence with Foley, analyzing the differences between collecting institutions and artist-run spaces.⁶⁹ Beginning with a quote from artist Robert Smithson, Pomeroy emphasized his key point: "History is a facsimile of events held together by flimsy biographical information. Art history is less explosive than the rest of history, so it sinks faster into the pulverized regions of time." He followed the Smithson quote with his own reasoned and insightful exposé on the failure of exhibitions to convey the actual history of art and its institutions.

IV. Conviction

Joan Brown began intensively investigating metaphysical wisdom and a deeper spiritual union between art and life during the mid-1970s. An avid reader, Brown had studied ancient cultures, philosophy, and esoteric spiritual practices, from Theosophy and the Gnostics to religion, astrology, and the paranormal, especially focusing on the writings of Edgar Cayce and Paul Brunton.⁷⁰ Brown believed in reincarnation, explaining after a trip to Egypt that it had been "a very spiritual time in my many many lifetimes...that all of a sudden connected again."⁷¹ In 1979, she joined the Ananda Community in San Francisco devoted to Paramahansa Yogananda, a yoga master focused on self-realization. At Ananda, she met her future husband. They married the following spring and traveled to India. In anticipation of their trip, Brown painted several canvases on the subject of the Nanda Devi, the second-highest mountain in India and a sacred Himalayan home to Hindu gods, whose name means "bliss-giving goddess." Departing from her characteristically brightly colored, self-consciously naïve figuration and personal symbolism, *Nanda Devi #2* (1979) depicts the auratic mountain as an abstraction of peaks bathed in a pearlescent glow with violet and blue valleys. Equally



fig. 26

abstract, the monochrome surface of her painting *The Fan/Homage to Sai Baba* (1980) supports a ceiling fan twirling above an inactive switch, a symbol of an axiom of Sathya Sai Baba, Brown's spiritual guide: "[The] habit of thinking...when it is broken, it will continue for some time. The fan continues to revolve...even after the current is switched off."⁷²

Like many artists of the period, Brown had read Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism* (1975). Mark Thompson also read the book, against his background in science. By 1975, Thompson had already absorbed "like osmosis" living in the Bay Area, qualities associated with Eastern philosophy:

[In] Paul Kos's mountain climbing and his breath work; David Ireland's 500 Capp Street; my graduate and undergraduate experience with Jim Melchert, who had lived in Japan and who opened the door by emphasizing great sensitivity to performance practices; the notion that a conversation was as substantive as an artist needed to be, as in Tom Marioni's Café Society at Breen's Bar; Bonnie Sherk and the Farm; Terry Fox's work; my friendship with Theresa Cha.⁷³

While "not a practicing Buddhist or involved in Zen in any way," Thompson explained, their ideas "informed my work, its greatest concentration" were "bedrock base" and suited his "own natural inclinations," which included an abiding interest in and study of Shaker culture.

Thompson had begun working with honeybees as a sculptural medium in 1972. "I thought of myself as kind of physical sculpture, and realized that I could shape who I was and the rhythms of my life, and that the bees were collaborative in that process in relation to Eastern philosophies and patterns of living." Thompson's work with honeybees addressed questions of "time, space, physics, human communities, and interspecies communication" with a social insect that he permitted to "shape my life and sensibility."⁷⁴ His film *Immersion* (1973–76) is the magnum opus to that commitment (fig. 26).

fig. 23 **Peter d'Agostino**
Still from *ALPHA*, 1976
Photographs, video, and text
Dimensions and duration variable
Courtesy of the artist

fig. 24 **Peter d'Agostino**
Still from *Trans-Europ Expressed*, 1977
Photographs, video, and text
Dimensions and duration variable
Courtesy of the artist

fig. 25 **Judith Barry**
Detail from *pastpresentfuturetense...ppft*, 1977

fig. 26 **Mark Thompson**
Still from *Immersion*, 1973–76

Immersion opens with the sensation of great energy, as if one witnesses speeding particles in a subatomic field of blue.⁷⁵ As the camera pans in, honeybees become recognizable as the source of the motion. From the bottom of the frame, Thompson's head and upper torso gradually emerge as honeybees settle on and cover his head entirely, clinging to each other and falling around his shoulders like chainmail. The image also recalls the pocked and worked surfaces of Alberto Giacometti's sculpture, which inspired Thompson. *Honey Jars* (1976–88), eight bottles filled with honey harvested from his beekeeping activities, each have individual labels designed by the artist and relate to *Immersion*, as does his *Backpack Hive* (1977–79), which he realized immediately following completion of the film. Wearing a yellow wicker backpack with a live honeybee hive in it, Thompson undertook walks in various locations in California, moving at the exceedingly slow pace of the foraging bees so as not to disturb their home or rhythm. His goal was "to walk with another life form in an irregular way, creating a passage something akin to *Zazen*" and metaphorically altering the direct route represented by the technological, developmental movement of European culture to the West with gentle organic movement toward the East.⁷⁶

In an entirely different context but of related philosophical concern, Terry Fox studied the elaborate, eleven-circuit circular labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral (1193–1250) as a metaphor for life. In *The Labyrinth Scored for the Purrs of 11 Different Cats* (1976), Fox conjoined the Christian pilgrimage and penance ritual associated with the labyrinth with the pagan myth of the Minotaur, a tale of jealousy, murder, and bestiality. As a representation of walking the labyrinth, the tape loops feature ten seconds of each different cat purring until they culminate at the symbolic center in an undulating roar of purrs. Fox began the work in 1972 when he visited Chartres while participating in Documenta 5. "I am really sick of modern art," he wrote home, "in fact I don't like much of anything done since the decline of

painting and sculpture in the 1300s, with a few exceptions."⁷⁷ Several of Fox's works anticipated this mystical/spiritual piece, among them *Levitation* (1970), for which Fox lay on a mound of earth in the Richmond Art Center, attempting through meditation to levitate his body. Fox was also a commanding presence in Bay Area performance, which often resembled European action art, and was celebrated for his collaborations with Joseph Beuys.

David Ireland was also interested in Beuys, as his view of process and materials indicates. "The mere presence of the material *is*," Ireland remarked in 1976. "It is as it is and whatever I do to it destroys this idea because those are all arbitrary selections," adding, "I was trying to...give credence, give place to all things, give place to the uneducated image, give place to the earth, give place to everything."⁷⁸ With this attitude, Ireland undertook the restoration of a Victorian house that he purchased on Capp Street in the Mission District of San Francisco in 1975. The house had been built in 1886 by a ship's captain and had survived the 1906 earthquake. It had undergone many changes, including serving as a boarding house and the home and shop of a Swiss accordion maker.

While cleaning and becoming acquainted with his house throughout 1976, Ireland increasingly drew on his month-long experience that year at MOCA. Marioni had requested Ireland's assistance in restoring a part of MOCA that had been painted white for a performance by one of the artists in "Second Generation" a change that Marioni felt "interfered with the character of the space."⁷⁹ Ireland worked every day. He "scraped the white paint off the floor and rubbed it with printers' ink to stain it back to the original color," working "from photographs to match the colors and restore painted shapes that had been on the wall where the printing company had painted around equipment." Ireland also "replaced the moldings that had been cut away."⁸⁰ Marioni videotaped Ireland's progress, conceiving the joint effort as a "Photorealist painting" that became "a completely invisible

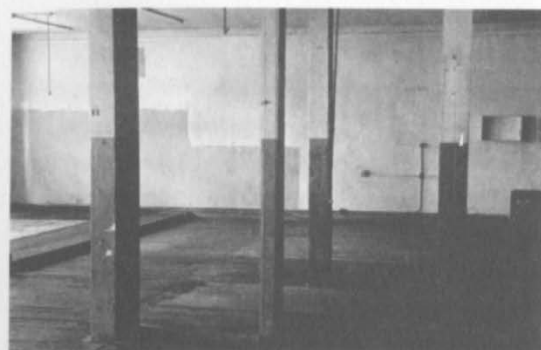


fig. 27



fig. 28

fig. 27 **Tom Marioni**
The Restoration of a Portion of the Back Wall, Ceiling, and Floor of the Main Gallery of the Museum of Conceptual Art (with David Ireland), 1976
 Performance at Museum of Conceptual Art, San Francisco, 1976

fig. 28 **David Ireland**
 Interior of 500 Capp Street, San Francisco, 1981

artwork,"⁸¹ which they titled *The Restoration of a Portion of the Back Wall, Ceiling, and Floor of the Main Gallery of the Museum of Conceptual Art (with David Ireland)* (1976) (fig. 27).

From Marioni's faithfulness to the thing in itself, Ireland learned to appreciate aspects of his own temperament, as well as his skills as a painter, recognizing that "the lively presence I was looking for in my paintings [and] the integrity I was looking for in my art was there on the walls and floors."⁸² Ireland considered his work on the house as "stabilization" and "maintenance,"⁸³ not aiming "to improve or remodel 500 Capp Street, but rather, to uncover its history as an artifact...of time [that] also offered evidence of his own imprint."⁸⁴ Working like an "anthropologist," he uncovered its human history beneath wallpaper, revealing "the original plaster walls...stress cracks, water stains, and other signs of aging."⁸⁵

The relics of his activities include such objects as *Broom Collection with Boom* (1978/88), an assembly of brooms used in the restoration of his home and held in place by a rod and cement boom, and "copper window," a broken window that he restored in 1981 with copper, a metal thought to be a good conductor of energy, balance, healing, love, luck, and protection. 500 Capp Street affirmed what had been negated by having not been there, bringing the present here from the there.

V. Afterword

This essay began with "belief" (falsity within truth) and ends with "conviction" (judgment within reason). Conviction is a hybrid term derived from legal action and its connection to the act of persuasion (to convince). Conviction, thus, implies a principle having to do with conduct, as well as a rationale for that conduct. In the myriad ways articulated above, I have suggested how during the period 1974–81, Bay Area artists worked with negative affirmative processes, inverting the positive and the negative to reveal the inner contradictions and dimensions of an historical period of great change and upheaval.

Circling around binary oppositions, Bay Area artists untangled meaning and created new purpose in the spirit of individual and collective truths.

Notes

1. Chauncey Hare, "This Was Corporate America (June 1981)," in *This Was Corporate America* (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1984), 16.
2. These included Standard Oil Company of California and the Social Security Administration's Western Program Service Center, both in Richmond; the Environmental Protection Agency in San Francisco; the electronics industry; and the Bay Area Rapid Transit system.
3. Hare, introduction to Steven Kasher and Jack von Euw, eds., *Protest Photographs* (New York: Steven Kasher Gallery; and Göttingen, Germany: Steidl, 2009), 12.
4. Hare, *Interior America* (Millerton, New York: Aperture, 1978), 19.
5. Hare, introduction to *Protest Photographs*, 25.
6. Hare, *Interior America*, 21.
7. Richard Edward DeLeon, *Left Coast City: Progressive Politics in San Francisco, 1975–1991* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 9, 13. See also Dennis J. Coyle, "The Balkans by the Bay," *The Public Interest*, no. 91 (spring 1988): 67–68.
8. The CIA undertook research on mind control in over a hundred highly classified projects, code name MK-ULTRA, establishing underground LSD labs in San Francisco and New York and instigating Operation Midnight Climax, which set up brothels in San Francisco, Marin County, and New York where prostitutes dosed unsuspecting patrons with high-grade government LSD as CIA agents watched surreptitiously. Seymour M. Hersh, "Huge C.I.A. Operation Reported in U.S. Against Antiwar Forces, Other Dissidents in Nixon Years," *New York Times*, 22 December 1974, front page.
9. The Red Power movement had grown, in part, from the 1969 Native American occupation of the deserted federal prison on Alcatraz Island in the San Francisco Bay. Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret Wars against Dissent in the United States* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 1990), 233–302. See also Churchill and Vander Wall's *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret Wars against the American Indian Movement and the Black Panther Party* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 1988).
10. Credible theories attribute Leo Joseph Ryan Jr.'s murder to the CIA, as Ryan was a vocal critic, authoring the Hughes-Ryan

Amendment that passed in 1974 requiring the president to report all covert operations of the CIA to one or more Congressional committees. See Michael Meiers, *Was Jonestown a CIA Medical Experiment?: A Review of the Evidence* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin E. Mellen Press, 1988); and Rebecca Moore, *Understanding Jonestown and Peoples Temple* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2009).

11. Neal Benezra, "Robert Arneson: A Retrospective," in *Robert Arneson: A Retrospective*, exh. cat. (Des Moines: Des Moines Art Center, 1986), 58.

12. J. C. Garrett, e-mail to the author, 10 December 2010.

13. Aldo Moro, one of Italy's longest-serving postwar prime ministers, was kidnapped on March 16, 1978, by the militant communist group Second Red Brigades and assassinated on May 9, 1978.

14. Garrett, e-mail to the author, 10 December 2010.

15. Ibid.

16. Garrett, e-mail to the author, 7 November 2010.

17. Isabelle Corbisier, *Music for Vagabonds: The Tuxedomoon Chronicles* (La Verne, Tennessee: Lightning Source and OpenMute, 2008), 5.

18. Garrett recalled of Tuxedomoon: "We got a lot of attitude from the band.... Lacking official dressing rooms, we often let performers use our upstairs apartment living quarters. They kinda trashed the place, shooting up in my bedroom and getting lots of blood all over my pillows and sheets. Someone (Steve Brown) dyed his hair and got the pigment all over the place. Later, they bitched that we ripped them off at the door.... The audience enjoyed the show, though." Garrett, e-mail to the author, 9 January 2011.

19. *Object* (Jet Wave, San Francisco), no. 2 (6 September 1979): front page.

20. A 1979 document in a compendium of unpublished archival material on Jet Wave, compiled by Fredrica Drotos, in the Kristine Stiles Collection and Papers, Duke University Library, Special Collections.

21. Ibid.

22. Sabina Ott, e-mail to the author, 8 December 2009.

23. Thomas Albright, "A Painter's Monumental Arenas of Action," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 28 May 1980.

24. RE/Search, "RE/Search History," available at http://researchpubs.com/Blog/?page_id=151.

25. Garrett, e-mail to the author, 7 November 2010.

26. "About," available on the Survival Research Laboratories website at <http://archive.srl.org/about>.

27. Bruce Gluck also worked with newspapers using a collage and punk design aesthetic, combining appropriated texts with his own extensive writings on a range of subjects, from art to politics.

28. Benezra, "Robert Arneson," 61.

29. Hilton Kramer, "Ceramic Sculpture and the Taste of California," *New York Times*, 20 December 1981, 31, 33.

30. Ibid.

31. Robert Arneson, in conversation with Suzaan Boettger, 28 December 1981, 6–7. Typescript courtesy of the artist, quoted in Benezra, 67.

32. Thomas Albright, "Lament for a Zen Cowboy," *Art News* 80, no. 3 (March 1981): 192–94, 200, quoted in Joann Moser, "What's It All Mean?," in Moser, ed., *What's It All Mean: William T. Wiley in Retrospect*, exh. cat. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press; and Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2009), 89.

33. Statement by the Ronald Reagan administration, quoted in Moser, "New Concerns in the 1980s," in *What's It All Mean*, 90.

34. Bruce Nauman, quoted in Beth Coffelt, "Beyond the Flesh, Beyond the Bone," *California Living* (magazine of the San Francisco *Sunday Examiner* and *Chronicle*), 29 May 1977.

35. Glenda R. Carpio, *Laughing Fit to Kill: Black Humor in the Fictions of Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 146.

36. Judith Wilson, "Optical Illusions: Images of Miscegenation in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century American Art," *American Art* 5, no. 3 (summer 1991): 103, 101.

37. Ralph Ellison, "An Extravagance of Laughter" (1985), in *Going to the Territory* (New York: Random House, 1986), 174, quoted in Carpio, 142.

38. Tom Marioni, *Beer, Art and Philosophy: A Memoir* (San Francisco: Crown Point Press, 2003).

39. Issue no. 1 (1975) of *Vision* was on California; no. 2 (1976) was on Eastern Europe; and no. 3 (1976) was on New York. Additional issues followed in the 1980s.

40. Steven Geer, "Lowell Darling: Campaign for Governor of California," ABC television news, Sacramento, California, 1978, available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BuMHesUnR68>. For information about Darling's current acupuncture projects, see <http://www.lowelldarling.com/worldacupuncture.html>.

41. Ruth Askey, "Barnstorming with Lowell Darling," *Artweek* 9 (29 April 1978): 4; and Darling, "One Thousand Dollar a Plate Dinner," *High Performance* 21, no. 1 (June 1978): 38–39, both reprinted in Carl E. Loeffler and Darlene Tong, eds., *Performance Anthology: Source Book of California Performance Art* (San Francisco: Last Gasp and Contemporary Arts Press, 1989), 290.

42. Ibid. The idea became a reality in 2010 when Iraqi American artist Wafaa Bilal created *The 3rd I* by having a video camera implanted on a titanium plate in the back of his own head to stream one image per minute for the year 2011 to the new Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha, Qatar. Ula Illytzyk, "Wafaa Bilal, NYU Artist, Gets Camera Implanted in Head," *HuffPost Social News* (23 November 2010), available at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/11/23/wafaa-bilal-nyu-artist-ge_n_787446.html.

43. Paul Kos, interview by Glenn Phillips, in Phillips, ed., *California Video: Artists and Histories*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute and the J. Paul Getty Museum, 2008), 144–45.

44. Bill Wheelock, interview by Phillips, in *California Video*, 90.

45. This comment was part of a text that accompanied the first public performance of *All My Dirty Blue Clothes* (1969).

Constance M. Lewallen, "Howard Fried," *Matrix* (Berkeley, California) 54 (October 1982): n.p.

46. Tony Labat, interview by Phillips, in *California Video*, 150.

47. Ibid., 151. Additional quotes by Labat are *ibid*.

48. Electronic Arts Intermix entry on *The Eternal Frame* (1975), available at <http://www.eai.org/title.htm?id=4109>.

49. Other founding members include Francisco X. Campis, Chuy Campusano, Graciela Carrillo, Luis Cervantes, Jerry Concha, Rupert García, Robert González, Carlos Loarca, Ralph Maradiaga, Gustavo Ramos Rivera, Peter Rodríguez, Manuel Villamor, and René Yañez.

50. Amalia Mesa-Bains, "Quest for Identity: Profile of Two Chicana Muralists," in Eva Sperling Cockcroft and Holly Barnett-Sanchez, eds., *Signs from the Heart: California Chicano Muralists* (Los Angeles: Social and Public Art Resource Center, 1990), 76, quoted in Alicia Gaspar de Alba, *Chicano Art: Inside/Outside the Master's House: Cultural Politics and the CARA Exhibition* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1998), 122.

51. "About Galería de la Raza," available on the Galería de la Raza, website, <http://www.galeriadelaraza.org/eng/about/index.php>.

52. Ramón Favela, "The Pastel Paintings of Rupert García: A Survey of the Art of the *Unfinished Man, Inside-Outside*," in *The Art of Rupert García: A Survey Exhibition*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: Chronicle Books and The Mexican Museum, 1987), 9.
53. Lucy R. Lippard, "Rupert García: Face to Face," in *Rupert García: Prints and Posters 1967–1990*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: The Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, 1990), 34.
54. Rupert García, "Oral history interview with Rupert García, 1995 Sept. 7–1996 June 24," interview by Paul J. Karlstrom, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, available at <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/garcia95.htm>.
55. García, quoted in Favela, "The Pastel Paintings of Rupert García," 19.
56. Peter Selz, *The Art of Engagement: Visual Politics in California and Beyond*, exh. cat. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press; and San Jose, California: San Jose Museum of Art, 2006), 45.
57. Jim Pomeroy, letter to Suzanne Foley, 13 September 1979, quoted in Tanya Zimbardo, "Jim Pomeroy—Viewing the Museum: The Tale Wagging the Dog," available at <http://blog.sfmoma.org/2009/10/tz-on-pomeroy/>.
58. Renny Pritikin, "The Port Huron Statement and the Origin of Artists' Organizations" (1986), in Kathy Brew, Maureen Keefe, Anne Marie MacDonald, and Peter Saidel, eds., *New Writing in Arts Criticism: 1986 Journal* (San Francisco: San Francisco Artspace, 1988), 37–40.
59. Pritikin, e-mail to the author, 9 October 2009. Additional quotes by Pritikin are *ibid*.
60. La Mamelles, Inc., came to national attention with its *Send/Receive* project, an early two-way satellite transmission between New York and San Francisco cable TV channels that it realized in collaboration with Willoughby Sharp and Liza Bear, publishers of *Avalanche* magazine in New York. Loeffler also published *La Mamelles Magazine: Art Contemporary* (1975), which became *Art Com* and then expanded to become a printing press during the early 1980s.
61. Lynn Hershman, *Global Passport*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: The Floating Museum, 1978), n.p. Today Hershman is known as Lynn Hershman Leeson.
62. On Marioni and Fluxus, see Marioni's *Beer, Art and Philosophy*, 94. See also Jennifer R. Gross, "Consider the Object as Evidence," in Karen Tsujimoto and Gross, *The Art of David Ireland: The Way Things Are*, exh. cat. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press; and Oakland, California: Oakland Museum of California, 2003). While not a Fluxus artist, Marioni knew Fluxus "event scores," and his *Piss Piece* (1970) recalls George Brecht's event score *Drip Music* (1959).
63. Suzanne Hellmuth and Jock Reynolds, in *Suzanne Hellmuth and Jock Reynolds: Photographs and Documents, 1975–1985*, exh. cat. (Santa Cruz, California: Mary Porter Sesnon Art Gallery, University of California, 1986), 22.
64. These books contained seminal critical essays in the history of conceptual photography, from James Hugunin's "Photography and Language" and Robert Leverant's "Ontology of the Snapshot" (both 1976) to Hal Fischer's groundbreaking study of gay visual coding *Gay Semiotics: A Photographic Study of Visual Coding Among Gay Men* (1977) and Allan Sekula's "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)" (1978). These books feature a host of photographers from the Bay Area and beyond, such as John Baldessari, Lutz Bacher, Ellen Brooks, John Gutmann, Robert Heineken, Barbara Kruger, Loeffler, Mike Mandel and Larry Sultan, Jim Melchert, Antonio Muntadas, Barbara Jo Revelle, Cindy Sherman, and Peter Joel Witkin.
65. Peter d'Agostino, *ALPHA TRANS CHUNG—A Photographic Model: Semiotics, Film, and Interpretation* (Dayton, Ohio: University Art Galleries, Wright State University; and San Francisco: NFS Press, 1978), 4.
66. Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman, "Textual Strategies: The Politics of Art-Making," *Screen* 21 (1980): 35–48.
67. Lewallen, "Theresa Hak Kyung Cha—Her Time and Place," in *The Dream of the Audience: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (1951–1982)*, exh. cat. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press; and Berkeley: Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, 2001), 27.
68. Zimbardo, "Jim Pomeroy—viewing the museum."
69. Pomeroy, "Viewing the Museum: The Tale Wagging the Dog," in *The New Arts Space: A Summary of Alternative Visual Arts Organizations Prepared in Conjunction with a Conference* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, 1978), 13–18.
70. Tsujimoto, "Painting as a Visual Diary: The Art of Joan Brown," in Tsujimoto and Jacquelyn Baas, *The Art of Joan Brown* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 146.
71. *Ibid.*, 152. This quote comes from a videotaped lecture given in San Diego to a group of Sai Baba devotees on August 6, 1985.
72. Samuel H. Sandweiss, *Sai Baba: The Holy Man... and the Psychiatrist* (San Diego, California: Birth Day Publishing Company, 1975), 69, quoted in Tsujimoto, 161.
73. Mark Thompson, conversation with the author, 15 March 2008.
74. Thompson, conversation with the author at Howard Terminal, Oakland, California, spring 1976.
75. Some sections here on Thompson's *Immersion* were first published in my essay "Irregular Ways of Being: Performance Art and the Experiential Present," in Alexandra Munroe, ed., *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860–1989*, exh. cat. (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2009), 340–41.
76. Thompson, e-mail to the author, 16 March 2008.
77. Terry Fox, postcard to Carol Lindsley, 21 June 1972, and letter to Lindsley and Brenda Richardson, not dated but written during the month of September 1972, quoted in Richardson, *Terry Fox*, exh. cat. (Berkeley, California: University Art Museum, 1973), n.p.
78. David Ireland, unpublished interview with Trudi Richards (August 1976), quoted in Tsujimoto, "Being in the World," in Tsujimoto and Gross, *The Art of David Ireland*, 11.
79. Marioni, *Beer, Art and Philosophy*, 113.
80. *Ibid.*, 114.
81. *Ibid.*
82. Ireland, in Diane Dorrans Saeks, "At Home with Artist David Ireland," *San Francisco* 23 (July 1981): 71, quoted in Tsujimoto, "Being in the World," 36–37.
83. *Ibid.*, 38.
84. *Ibid.*, 37.
85. *Ibid.*