

## The Pedagogy of Art as Agency: Or the Influence of a West Coast Feminist Art Program on an East Coast Pioneering Reflection on Performance Art

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“We could be ‘teaching’ future art—not what’s already been made, and not necessarily in institutions. We could be propagating the sources and contexts of the art that hasn’t been made yet.”<sup>1</sup>

—Lucy Lippard

In unpublished conversations with feminist artist Suzanne Lacy and historian Moira Roth,<sup>2</sup> Allan Kaprow looks back at the reasons behind his interest in the Feminist Art Program (FAP), which he encountered at CalArts, in Los Angeles, where he taught between 1970 and 1973. He reflects at length on the program’s influence on his own work and teachings.

That a West Coast alternative pedagogy fuelled by the political events of the late 1960s and an author of a pioneering reflection on performance art could find common ground might come as a surprise. How could Kaprow maintain an artistic and intellectual standpoint that aimed to remain apolitical in many ways, while finding inspiration in FAP’s militant feminist principles?

As with John Cage, his master, Zen Buddhist meditation played a central role in Kaprow’s life and research. The founding father of the happening had internalized the master’s aphorism: *to improve the world will only make matters worse*. Cage, who found the emancipation movements of the time—whether Afro-American, Latino, feminist, or homosexual—irritating, was critical of what he perceived in the actions of minorities as a reiteration of existing forms of authority.<sup>3</sup>

On the West Coast, at the heart of the very events Cage criticized, Kaprow carried on with meditation. The corporal and spiritual ascetic technique allowed

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<sup>1</sup> Lucy Lippard, “Looking Around: Where We are, Where We Could Be,” in *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, ed. Suzanne Lacy (Seattle: Bay Area Press, 1995), 129.

<sup>2</sup> Handwritten transcriptions of these exchanges are preserved in Allan Kaprow’s personal archive, part of which is kept at the Getty Research Center in Los Angeles.

<sup>3</sup> See: John Cage, *Silence* (London: Marion Boyars, 1994).

him to experience, personally and professionally, a form of withdrawal from the current circumstances of life and history, particularly non-pacifist ones. Oddly, however, and although he remained unswervingly attached to Zen Buddhism throughout, Kaprow willingly admits how impressed and convinced he was at the time by the performative power of the pedagogic and aesthetic actions of the FAP, actions that were inspired by radical political positions, such as separatism.

To better understand Kaprow's seemingly antithetical position, we must explore the particular history of the FAP and attempt to identify whether this alternative pedagogy (on the West Coast) was merely one factor of influence on the rethinking of performance (on the East Coast), or whether it truly contributed to a paradigmatic change in the conception and practice of happenings.

### **The Prolegomena of the Feminist Art Program**

If post-war New York had grown to become the artistic center of the United States, Los Angeles, with its lack of recognized artistic infrastructure, gave artists a space to experiment somewhat protected from professional and economic constraints.<sup>4</sup> It is against this backdrop that the FAP was founded in 1969 by Judy Chicago at Fresno College, not far from Los Angeles, before being integrated into the CalArts curriculum. In 1971, artist Miriam Shapiro joined Chicago, and together they directed the FAP's flagship project, off-site from CalArts: the *Womanhouse* (1972).

Toward the end of the 1960s, Chicago, a young artist who had achieved national recognition for her minimalist paintings and objects, nevertheless deplored having to relinquish her identity as a woman—a direct consequence, she felt, of her self-affirmation as an artist:

In an attempt to compensate for the often uncomprehending responses [of men], the woman artist tries to prove that she's as good as a man. She gains attention by creating work that is extreme in scale, ambition, or scope... She resists being identified with woman because to be

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<sup>4</sup> See: David E. James, ed., *The Sons and Daughters of Los Angeles, Culture and Community in L.A.* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003).

female is to be an object of contempt. And the brutal fact is that in the process of fighting for her life, she loses herself.<sup>5</sup>

Chicago identifies this personal experience as a damaging loss of identity. It lead her to question the sovereignty of the artist subject, on the basis of the critical gap in the one who is both artist *and* woman, a position de-subjectivized at the time.

Bringing this social injunction (i.e., having to disappear as a gendered individual in order to exist as an artist) to light became one of the foundational concerns of the FAP. The program had to be an antidote to the education Chicago had received at UCLA and beyond, by insisting on taking into account the point of view of the female students and by adapting a Marxist learning methodology in order to do so: a Pedagogy of the Oppressed.<sup>6</sup>

### **A Pedagogy of the Oppressed**

The feminist interpellation of Chicago, a decisive experience in the genesis of the FAP, was not just the result of a feminist momentum (Women's Liberation), it was also an extension of an older experiment: the *praxis* of class difference.<sup>7</sup>

According to Fredric Jameson,<sup>8</sup> taking into account the point of view of women in this way, which was hitherto unheard of—thus creating new strains of knowledge against the specific backdrop of feminist and separatist discussion groups<sup>9</sup>—has to be re-contextualized with regard to Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*. Jameson sees Lukács's book as essential to the understanding of feminist issues. The treatise, for the first time, placed the production of knowledge coming from the collective activity at the fringe of

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<sup>5</sup> Judy Chicago as quoted by Laura Meyer, "The Woman's Building and the Feminist Art Community," in *The Sons and Daughters of Los Angeles*, 41.

<sup>6</sup> See: Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972).

<sup>7</sup> See: Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971).

<sup>8</sup> See: Fredric Jameson "History and Class Consciousness as an 'Unfinished Project,'" in Sandra Harding, *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 143–52.

<sup>9</sup> "These feminist areas of knowledge not only produce an understanding of women, but also come to qualify the 'true knowledge', and disrupt the economy of knowledge itself and the distinction between the subject and object of knowledge. [...] In that sense, feminist knowledge can be defined as a genealogy, as per Michel Foucault" writes Elsa Dorlin (trans. Clémentine Bobin) in "Épistémologies féministes," in *Sexe, genre et sexualités* (Paris: PUF, 2008), 13–14.

industrialized societies first. In turn, the Marxist need to reveal different genealogical strata of knowledge through proletarian discussion groups spread to Chicago's feminist pedagogy of art, though not without difficulties early on.

In the first months of the FAP, Chicago admits she was "terrified" of her first group of students, young women talking of fashion, relationships, and other banalities.<sup>10</sup> Such preoccupations were at odds with the original project of a future feminist and artistic consciousness. The anecdote, as told by the artist herself, exemplifies Lukács's argument that it is not enough to identify oneself as a subject at the fringe of industrialized societies: one has to constitute oneself as a minority subject and, against the tide, create *forms of consciousness*.

For Lukács, to convey the perception of someone else, of others, before developing one's own would be unthinkable without taking into account the situation of that other, or others. According to him, truth is born from the constant friction between different points of view apprehended in a conception of history in the making, drawing on both what can be seen and felt (the materiality of things), and what can be perceived (the artificiality of the materiality of things). These constant points of friction meet through a proletarian *praxis* that reveals capitalism and the bourgeoisie as fabrications.<sup>11</sup> From the moment of their inscription into a collective, and not merely from an individual position, a member of the proletariat is the object of a ghost-like reality, since they are subjected to its atomizing and oppressive effects. At the same time, their inscription into that reality turns them into a subject capable of creating knowledge that will be theirs and theirs only. The proletarian *praxis* thus requires a twin positioning as an object of oppression and subject of oppression, always considered from the point of view of the collective, of the co-presence of another or others.<sup>12</sup>

Following Chicago's stance, once an artist-and-woman subject in the making has identified herself as a *sans-part* (to borrow Jacques Rancière's phrasing),<sup>13</sup> the next step consists in encouraging her to speak up. To sanction

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<sup>10</sup> Judy Chicago, *Through The Flower: My Struggle as A Woman Artist* (New York: Doublebay & Company, 1982), 74.

<sup>11</sup> See: Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 250.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>13</sup> The critical approach initiated by Chicago constitutes, in my opinion, an instance of Rancière's *tort*, in which the foundational ambiguity of the republican project rests on rhetorical narrations with performative virtues, conveying divine or moral principles such

oneself to *speak* when such self-expression had little or no legitimacy beforehand or was effectively inaudible becomes a necessity. Chicago thus encouraged her students to introduce themselves to each other without limiting their account to a first name, and invited them to situate themselves within the collective from a detailed presentation of their identity, in all its complexity. The exercise constituted the first step toward transforming the classroom into a laboratory of *consciousness*, a device borrowed from the methodology of the Brazilian Marxist pedagogue Paulo Freire.<sup>14</sup>

Freire's pedagogic principles derive from a proposition that: the *Oppressed* is not just oppressed, he or she is also both actor and subject of a story he or she can transform through a situated practice of alterity, catalyzing in turn another culture, another mindscape, other material forms.<sup>15</sup> In providing literacy classes to populations in deprived and colonized neighborhoods, Freire favored a circular classroom layout to ensure an even distribution of speech. The students' oral participation and the awakening of their critical consciousness were supported by the use of "generative words," according to Freire's own terminology—words singled out during individual interviews with participants, and retained for their ability to evoke the latter's identity inscription within a sociocultural context. As with pictograms, these words encouraged illiterate learners to de-codify them through self-expression, and fueled their desire to learn.

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as "rights and freedom for all" that set out an equality between those who own parts (or more than the others) and those who are *sans-parts*, who do not own parts (or less than the others).

Reclaiming this egalitarian principle as beholden to the *sans-parts* therefore only perpetuates the constitutional tension of equalitarian politics, which identifies the *sans-parts* as fully-fledged citizens while condemning them to invisibility. It is therefore necessary to keep invoking this *tort*, via situations in which the *disagreement* becomes apparent and new ways of dividing material reality can be sketched out. See: Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

This philosophical concern for the *sans-parts* was, according to my research, anticipated by Chicago in the early days of the FAP. An original reading, which enables us to further the reflection on *tort*, *disagreement*, and the *sans-parts* with a feminist consideration for the artist-and-woman subject—a critical dimension, feminism, lacking in Rancière's *Disagreement*.

<sup>14</sup> See: Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Suzanne Lacy brought this pedagogical source, crucial to the elaboration of the FAP, to my attention during a meeting in Los Angeles in November 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Although Paulo Freire draws inspiration from the analysis of Franz Fanon regarding the complex and gradual modes of internalization of oppression and domination, he substitutes emancipation through an armed struggle with emancipation through the production of knowledge and culture (oral, written, or visual).

When Kaprow arrives at CalArts in 1970 at the invitation of dean Herbert Blau, he is no stranger to *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which Chicago is adapting to fit the needs of the FAP. Not long before, in May 1969, amidst sociopolitical upheavals in the Bay Area, he had experienced firsthand such a learning program, which had been elaborated from his practice of happenings: the *Other Ways* project.

As early as 1967, in written preparatory notes for an alternative pedagogy project, Kaprow saw happenings as an artistic process appropriate for the educative playing field:

As acknowledged contemporary culture, they [happenings] deserve a place in contemporary public education—along with abstract painting, concrete poetry and electronic music. As a uniquely *social art*, Happenings mark a growing trend in the arts, away from traditional intellectual alienation, and toward interpersonal relationships.<sup>16</sup>

After a series of unsuccessful letters to the dean of Stony Brook University (on the East Coast), where Kaprow was teaching at the time, the *Other Ways* project was greeted favorably and enthusiastically by Herbert Kohl,<sup>17</sup> a philosopher of the educational sciences, a Marxist militant, and an activist in the revolutionary movements in Bay Area universities. Kohl believed that art bore the possible seeds for a reform of primary schools.

Toward the end of 1969, the *Other Ways* project was set up at the heart of the network of primary schools in Berkeley, California. At the time, Berkeley had become the scene of major social upheaval. In the second half of 1969, the armed forces were occupying the city on Governor Reagan's orders, and were attempting to control the demonstrations and erase them from public space. Kaprow could not extract himself from this "political and personal"<sup>18</sup> context.

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<sup>16</sup> Allan Kaprow Papers, Getty Research Center, Los Angeles.

<sup>17</sup> For the *Other Ways* program, Herbert Kohl taught courses on such topics as "conscious/unconscious" decision-making as a student and "the questions raised by responsibility." Allan Kaprow Papers, Getty Research Center, Los Angeles.

<sup>18</sup> "The personal is political" remains the symbol of feminist consciousness and refers, on the one hand, to a historicization of a power relation and, on the other hand, to its

At the time, Berkeley, along with nearby Oakland and San Francisco, was the scene of massive social upheaval, and armed forces were everywhere. It is important to mention this because our activities rarely addressed the conflict directly, yet they reflected its paranoia and powerful energies, as well as the surge of utopian fervor that fueled it. Most of our efforts, in fact, focused on learning staples such as reading/writing, math, and community studies, and we believed that the arts could foster them. But no one could ignore the tension and the smell of tear gas, and our experiments sometimes approached the edges of social boundaries.<sup>19</sup>

The *Other Ways* project was formed as an agency combining the skills and motivations of the administrative staff, and the teachers and their students, while having the latter collaborate with young poets, storytellers, artists, architects, or even athletes.

Twenty-five years later, what Kaprow particularly remembered from the project was his experience with young children that had been considered illiterate and “beyond help” by the education system they were part of.<sup>20</sup> The artist gave them as many cheap cameras and rolls of film as necessary and encouraged them to walk the city streets taking as many pictures as they wanted. They first took pictures of each other, before many turned their attention to graffiti adorning local buildings. Kaprow had wondered why, if they were illiterate, they were so interested in such inscriptions. He came to understand that the students could read what he would later politely call “the four letters”<sup>21</sup> and could correlate them precisely to the drawings. Can one still talk of illiteracy then?

Kohl and Kaprow asked them to bring all the pictures back to the classroom, stick them on a wall, paint them, draw on and around them, and establish connections. Among the graffiti pictures, names had been identified:

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consciencization. See: Elsa Dorlin, “Épistémologies féministes,” in *Sexe, genre et sexualités*, 10.

<sup>19</sup> Allan Kaprow, “Success or Failure When Art Changes,” in ed. Suzanne Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain*, 154–60.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

Bobby Huey, an active member of the Black Panthers, then in prison, Hugo Chavez, then leader of the Bolivian Revolution, Bobo, head of a Chicano gang, etc. In the following days, students began telling stories, real and fictive, and those who could began writing them down. Later, Kaprow and Kohl scavenged some copies of an old reading textbook, *Dick and Jane*, which had become obsolete due to its “racist and sexist” nature, writes Kaprow.<sup>22</sup> They encouraged students, the majority of whom were Afro-American or Latino, to redo the illustrations. The characters of Dick and Jane were turned into monsters. The original images were cut out and replaced with drawings and satirical rewrites. An exhibition of the textbooks finally convinced the entire teaching staff to reintegrate the students back into the general classroom environment.

The *Other Ways* project internalized Paulo Freire’s concept of de-hierarchization between teachers and learners and confirmed, for Kaprow, the possibility of transposing the happening onto alternative pedagogical forms. The happening would act as a catalyst for the early stages of an alternative education that made it possible to consider producing knowledge and creating culture starting from small-scale groups. The situations of difference that Kaprow encountered—illiteracy, class, and race—would be legitimized and put at the core of the learning process by way of visual representations associated with narratives.

*Other Ways* created an unexpected confluence between Chicago and Kaprow, who were both teaching performance at CalArts in 1970. The latter was astonished to discover the participative and reflexive power of the consciousness-raising practices of the FAP. This unique convergence between, on the one hand, an artist molded by the apolitical McCarthy years,<sup>23</sup> and, on the other hand, a group of radical female teachers and students, not only disrupted Kaprow’s

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>23</sup> “It is important to remember that [Kaprow] came of age during the 1950s, when American artists were generally apolitical. The legacy of the Stalinist betrayal of communist ideals and the McCarthy witch hunts of the 1950s helped imbue in many artists, especially the Abstract Expressionists, a prejudice against joining anything or trusting anyone other than themselves. Kaprow had internalized this mistrust of ideology at a young age, and he was uncomfortable with the idea of jumping on the feminist political bandwagon.” Jeff Kelley, *Childsplay, The Art of Allan Kaprow* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 155.

conception and practice of art, but also later considerably influenced a number of feminist artists.<sup>24</sup>

### **Consciousness-Raising: An Experimental Platform**

According to Jeff Kelley, what best characterizes what Kaprow took with him from feminist performance and its teaching are the sessions of consciousness-raising.<sup>25</sup> Kaprow took a particular interest in the process in the wake of a workshop he shared with Chicago and her students in 1972.

During a session Kaprow was leading, Faith Wilding interrupted him sharply to rebuke his de-gendered conception of the daily activities he transposed into his happenings. When, for Kaprow, an action as mundane as mopping the floor was a way to embrace art and life, according to Wilding, it embodied a domestic activity affecting a great number of women and symbolized as such a patriarchal act of oppression. Lively discussions ensued, with Kaprow surprised to see himself become an active participant in his own propositions. Kaprow realized that participants could discuss their own experiences together, as well as the latter's social and political implications. He glimpsed a possible way of avoiding certain negative effects of his own happenings' popularity. In retrospect, Kaprow saw this discussion as a turning point, which left a mark on his work for many years.

For several years, the fame of his work and the propagation of anecdotes spread by participants had led to a certain mythologization of his work and, in the New York art world, given rise to a cumbersome counter-cultural reputation. Throughout the 1960s, Kaprow felt the reputation was taking precedence over his experimental work and becoming a medium in itself, . What he initially saw as mere gossip around his work had eventually created an “aura of infamy”<sup>26</sup> around his happenings, thus reducing the “human impact”<sup>27</sup> of happenings.

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<sup>24</sup> See: Martha Rosler, “The Private and the Public: Feminist Art in California,” *Artforum* (September 1977): 30–9; Peggy Phelan and Helena Reckitt, *Art and Feminism* (New York and London: Phaidon, 2002); and Géraldine Gourbe, “Prolégomènes à une réflexion sur l'être-ensemble, la performance sur la côte ouest des années 70 aux années 90” (PhD thesis, Université Paris X, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> Jeff Kelley, *Childsplay*, 155.

<sup>27</sup> Jeff Kelley, *Childsplay*, 155.

As a device, consciousness-raising—the flagship practice of Women’s Lib, transposed to the pedagogical sphere by Chicago and Shapiro—appeared to Kaprow as a genuine platform for his future research.

The expression “consciousness-raising” was coined by Kathie Sarachild in November 1967, during the first international conference of the Women’s Lib movement in Chicago, in a newsletter entitled “Radical Feminist Consciousness-Raising.”<sup>28</sup> The term was then picked up by a New York-based group of radical feminists, the Redstockings. According to both, the potential for action of consciousness-raising represented a feminist *weapon*, and thus, its radical and subversive potential relied on the legitimacy of women-only groups.

Consciousness-raising allowed for the creation of *free space*,<sup>29</sup> women organized themselves into groups and mutually supported each other to reveal personal experiences—stories hitherto unheard. Just like the role of the group in the revolutionary *praxis* or in the pedagogy of the oppressed, the group in consciousness-raising became the place where one could give an “account of oneself.”<sup>30</sup> From Chicago’s situations of interpellation, FAP participants gave an account of themselves to others.

Judith Butler calls this extension of interpellation the “rhetorical conditions for responsibility.”<sup>31</sup> In the context of the FAP, these *rhetorical conditions for responsibility* meant that each student and teacher engaged in a reflexive activity while also expressing themselves to others, while constructing a relationship with others through language. The focus was not on the role of truth in the story but on the storytelling itself, Judith Butler explains,<sup>32</sup> and on the way

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<sup>28</sup> Under the editorship of Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone, *Radical Feminism* (New York: Quadrangle, 1973).

<sup>29</sup> “Free Space” as written by Pamela Allen, an American feminist and author of one of the first manifestos advocating the practice of consciousness-raising to record in writing the main elements of the process, which was later picked up by many feminist (but not necessarily women only) groups. See: Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone, *Radical Feminism*, 271–9.

<sup>30</sup> Judith Butler, *Giving An Account Of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005). Butler formulated this concept from the methods of psychotherapy, specifically the point at which the transfer has occurred for the patient. Looking at the modalities of self-expression in consciousness-raising, it is surprising how closely related the characteristics of the Butlerian concept are to the methods of feminist separatist exchange groups.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 51

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

the latter enabled other forms of consciousness (G. Lukas) or of conscientization (P. Freire).

The practice of consciousness-raising within the FAP revealed singular experiences that were enshrined in a reality informed by a differentialist discourse of equality,<sup>33</sup> but also departed from it. Step by step, a methodological principle of inclusion from the point of view of Her/story was elaborated within His/story. While putting them at work in an original way through a pedagogical practice, the FAP therefore anticipated, in that sense, the recommendations of art historian and feminist Linda Nochlin in her landmark article: “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?”<sup>34</sup> which called for the activists of sit-ins advocating for equality between men and women artists to use their situation as representatives<sup>35</sup> of art toward the deconstruction of dominant and essentialist discourses of art history, such as the archetype of artistic genius. Both the FAP and Nochlin sought not only to address the issue of the delineation of the natural and the cultural within the articulation between sexes, gender, and art, but also to tackle the “principles, postulates or ideological, political and epistemological implications of this delineation”,<sup>36</sup> in that, they prefigured the formulation of *situated knowledges*, as conceptualized in the 1980s by the Marxist feminist Donna Haraway.<sup>37</sup>

This original use of consciousness-raising by the feminist avant-garde of the FAP was decisive for Kaprow, who intuitively perceived its epistemological novelty and understood the ethical necessity of including in his experimental processes what had long been presented as a cumbersome and superficial subjectivity.

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<sup>33</sup> See: Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*.

<sup>34</sup> Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?,” *Art News* vol. 69, no. 9 (1971): 23–33.

<sup>35</sup> See: Xavier Vert, “De(s)générations: édito figure, figurants,” *de(s)générations* no. 9 (September 2009): 1.

<sup>36</sup> See: Elsa Dorlin, “Introduction,” in *Sexe, genre et sexualités*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> “To consider feminism—and not just the sciences—as a technology (with its narratives, discourses, and representations) is to implement the lessons of the ‘situated knowledges’ (one of the seminal texts in cultural and feminist epistemology) and of what Sandra Harding called ‘critical reflexivity.’ Objects and subjects of knowledge must be rigorously reviewed.” Marie-Helene Bourcier (trans. Clémentine Bobin), “Préface: Cyborg plutôt que déesse: comment Donna Haraway a révolutionné la science et le féminisme” [Preface: A Cyborg rather than a goddess: How Donna Haraway revolutionized science and feminism], in Donna Haraway, *Des singes, des cyborgs et des femmes*, trans. Oristelle Bonis (Paris: Jacqueline Chambon, 2009), 14.

The stories emerging from the FAP's consciousness-raising sessions began to concentrate on the gendered labor of women, until the narratives around domestic chores progressively turned them into performative tasks. This interest for tasks as performative processes coincided with Kaprow's arrival on the CalArts campus, and overlapped with his own pedagogical and experimental concerns.

### **A Common Interest in Tasks**

The Marxist notion of labor was a key analytical tool in the early stages of constituting consciousness-raising groups. Publications such as *The Dialectic of Sex*<sup>38</sup> and *The Feminine Mystique*,<sup>39</sup> in particular, were decisive to early articulations between feminist practice and theory. Members of the FAP transformed a Marxist feminist conception of labor into an original collective experience of life and art: the *Womanhouse*.

Chicago formulated her pedagogy of responsibility toward one another, toward others, via the renovation of a derelict house, which was chosen as a site of collective production. The members of the collective cleaned, sanded, repaired, and knocked down and put up walls and learned plastering, woodwork, electrics, and plumbing. They would share their knowledge and skills while de-hierarchizing the relation between teacher and learner. A few students failed to grasp the pedagogical value of the experience, however, and decided to leave the program, denouncing the toughness of the work and its disconnection from artistic creation.<sup>40</sup>

Once the house had been renovated, and on Shapiro's initiative,<sup>41</sup> the kitchen was used as a workshop for a session of consciousness-raising to discuss memories linked to the family kitchen. These self-narratives exposed the kitchen as, often, the scene of arguments and as a space where the personal and the political played out. Therefore, they created a kitchen both volatile and nourishing, highlighting that a gendered space could open the way to gendered technologies

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<sup>39</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1963).

<sup>40</sup> Judy Chicago, *Through the Flowers*, 104–5.

<sup>41</sup> See: Miriam Schapiro, "The Education of Women as Artists: Project Womanhouse," *Art Journal*, no. 32 (Summer 1973): 45–51.

of the body, an analysis that was not without consequences for the author of *Semiotics of the Kitchen*.<sup>42</sup>

Consciousness-raising sessions were repeated in each room of the *Womanhouse* until it became a wholesome environment, a “repertory of women’s experiences and dreams.”<sup>43</sup> Chicago set up an intervention in the bathroom with *Menstruation Bathroom*, with tampons soaked in menstrual blood piled up in the bin and on the shelves. Camille Grey created the *Lipstick Bathroom* by painting the space and its contents red, and installing a hundred or so lipstick tubes. Kathy Huberland’s *The Bridal Staircase*, a smiling female mannequin, wearing a bridal gown and covered in ribbons, was placed at the top of the stairs like a sacrifice on an altar, her long white bridal train getting progressively greyer as it snaked down the steps. Finally, in Sandra Orgel’s *Linen Closet*, a female mannequin was built into a closet, its body cut and segmented, and reassembled as if it were inseparable from the piles of linen. The domestic space became a prosthetic extension of female bodies. As the FAP moved forward, from its inception, to with the collective experiment of the *Womanhouse*, the space of the classroom transformed itself into a living space and a working community.

In parallel, Kaprow’s projects and classes since his arrival at CalArts were increasingly connected to the Marxist and feminist ideas of the time. In their form and method, the pedagogical projects of Kaprow, too, focused on the activity of work, while also crystallizing a community atmosphere.

For an early pedagogical project at CalArts, *Publicity* (1970), Kaprow took several students and colleagues to the rocky desert of Vasquez Rock, north of Los Angeles, a location famous for its role in many Hollywood movies and advertising shoots. Once on location, students were instructed to get into work teams, select pieces of wood, pick an area, and freely create a wooden structure. The teams’ activities were captured with portable cameras and broadcast on monitors,<sup>44</sup> with a slight delay. In combining collaborative activities and new technologies, Kaprow’s underlying pedagogical intent was to observe the affect of

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<sup>42</sup> See: Martha Rosler, “The Private and the Public: Feminist Art in California,” *Artforum* (September 1977): 30–9.

<sup>43</sup> Judy Chicago, *Through the Flowers*, 15.

<sup>44</sup> Nam June Paik was involved in the technical aspects.

images on the inter-group work relations of the collective: the leadership shifts, the new ideas lead to other constructions, leading in turn to new recordings.

The apparent gratuitousness of the activity—in contrast with the more tedious tasks of the domestic activities described and then performed in the FAP experimental framework—was nevertheless not immune from the sociopolitical context of the late 1960s and early 1970s. According to Jeff Kelley, Kaprow found it striking to witness the connivance between interventions in public space and the subsequent media coverage. The Vietnam War protests had encouraged a complex and hitherto unseen intertwining between anti-establishment public events and their media diffusion. Television cameras not only covered the sit-ins, the public demonstrations, the strikes; they also interacted with them, helping them actuate and multiply. These new technologies, with strong media infrastructure, were influencing the routes of marches, the choices of slogans, and the very nature of civil disobedience.<sup>45</sup> In contact with the sociopolitical environment of the West Coast and with the Marxist and feminist alternative pedagogical propositions, Kaprow's happenings moved away from protocols and toward randomness. They became formally less and less akin to theatre. Kelley points out that the happenings were no longer events to which many were invited, but rather more intimate activities, constructed around tasks, and performed by volunteers. A decade or so later, Kaprow reflected on this kind of activity, both intimate and collaborative, giving it a particular status in his process of experimentation:

The plan was to concentrate on a hitherto marginal aspect of my creative work, namely the private experiments I had over the years made for colleagues and friends, but which I had not paid much attention to. [...]

In the private works, however, I would base the pieces on the unique circumstances of each situation. [...] As a result, these art works [...] were, it turned out upon reflection, my most artistically experimental efforts, since institutional and critical constraints were absent. [...] [I]n those many pieces lay the keys to some of the

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<sup>45</sup> See: Jeff Kelley, *Childsplay*, 152.

roots of my participatory art, and the source of many of its innovations.<sup>46</sup>

Immersed in this alternative artistic and pedagogical environment, Kaprow narrowed the practice of happenings around the work-in-progress activities of micro-groups. In *Publicity*, the shared collaborative task, within a setting that was both natural and over-exploited in cinematic and commercial productions, had no other purpose than its gratuitousness—contrasting with the FAP’s interest in domestic tasks as performative processes.

Beyond their common interest in taking into account the participants’ point of view and in transposing daily tasks onto the experimental setting of performance, this invention blurring new technologies and activity<sup>47</sup> shows one more connection between Kaprow and a characteristic of the FAP: the reception of performed activity.

### **The Reception of Performed Activity**

By combining performed activity and new technologies, Kaprow gave the students participating in *Publicity* the means to experiment, exchange, and later conceptualize individually and collectively the question of the reception of actions made during a happening. Kaprow’s interest in new technologies did not lie in the restitution of primary sources through producing a live activity archive, since he wanted to preserve the happening from mythologization and, above all, prevent its spread through hearsay. What he saw in new technologies was the possibility of an audiovisual transcription of a work in progress. The first purpose of these recordings, dematerialized and nearly instantaneous, was therefore to provide an account of a given participative activity to those contributing to it.

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<sup>46</sup> Allan Kaprow, letter to John Miles, dated January 29, 1982, Allan Kaprow Papers, Getty Research Center, Los Angeles.

“At CalArts, Kaprow began thinking of his work as forms of teaching. Unlike the Happenings of the previous decade, which were enacted for and with a public audience, the works in and around CalArts were tailored for a select group of students in the context of an educational experiment.” Jeff Kelley, *Childsplay*, op. cit., 157.

<sup>47</sup> For a history of video art practices in California, see the catalogue of the exhibition Glen Phillips curated at the Getty Museum: *California Video: Artists and Histories* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2008).

Through this original use of new technologies, in the context of art in general and specifically the ephemeral context of instantaneous action, Kaprow anticipated (and later joined in with) one of the experiments on performed activity that was central to the FAP's consciousness-raising sessions: namely, making accounts, practically and theoretically, of the reception of a finished task by the participants themselves, primarily orally.

This third common ground—after a consideration for the situated knowledges of the students-participants and a collaborative activity around performative tasks—furthered the historic convergence between Cagien-Zen Kaprow and the Marxist-feminist separatists Chicago and Shapiro; an event leading to major aesthetic reorientations, which later proved decisive for feminist artists as much as for Kaprow.

Chicago, Shapiro, and their students had discussed the question of the reception of their performances by an audience, a reception that they wanted to be active, even participative. As a result, they constructed a critical system of reception enacted following the performances that were held in different rooms of the *Womanhouse*, for instance *Cock and Cunt* (1970–1972).

*Cock and Cunt* was a performative work that enabled the FAP to become fully aware of the twin function of production and reception in feminist performance. Faith Wilding performed the part of He/Cock and Janice Lesterat that of She/Cunt. Both performers wore black overalls onto which had been attached, in the groin area, two pink appendages: one shaped like a penis, the other a vagina. Wilding/He spoke in a deep voice and repeated staccato movements like a puppet while Lesterat/She adopted a high-pitched voice while moving laterally.<sup>48</sup> In the three acts, She/Cunt would ask He/Cock for his assistance with chores or for him to help her reach orgasm, but He/Cock would constantly remind her of her biological status, as well as her natural predisposition to a certain kind of work. This satirical comedy on the allocation of labor, based on sex differences, ended with an emasculation attempt by She/Cunt, at which point He/Cock's phallus would suddenly come off and become a threatening and violent object that then turned against Cunt.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Judy Chicago, *Through the Flowers*, 208.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

Chicago saw in this performance a destabilizing and initiating potential expanding on the methodology of consciousness-raising. This new tool of performance was addressed to the members of the FAP, but also to the audience, while trying to reverse the codes of separation between actors and spectators, as the director Augusto Boal—another source of inspiration for the FAP—had advocated.<sup>50</sup>

Chicago conceptualized the performative games opposing Cunt and Cock as three guided workshops. The first workshop split participants into two groups according to gender, in which they were lead to read the *Cock and Cunt* script out loud in choral-like exercises. The second invited men and women to mix: they would form a line, before moving into a circle in the room, as in consciousness-raising sessions. While walking at a different pace, each participant could make one of the parts their own by performing it. Then, split into teams, all had to perform alternatively Cunt and Cock. Finally, the third workshop gave participants the possibility of forming pairs and internalizing the performance of the puppet-like characters. One or more of the groups then volunteered to showcase their interpretation. Each of these group techniques was systematically followed by a consciousness-raising moment in which each participant was asked to express their response to the contents of the play.<sup>51</sup> The theater of the *Womanhouse* therefore had a twin function: that of an experimentation platform for gendered performative tasks, and that of a critical space for their reception.

What was ultimately at stake in the pedagogy of the FAP did not so much lie in the making and showcasing of artistic objects, reflecting a feminist momentum and exhibited in a house; instead, it lay in the material and critical modalities of participating in an epistemology of *points of view*, and in the constitution of *situated knowledges* during collective experiences of the *representations* intertwining ethics and aesthetics. These modalities cleverly tied consciousness-raising to the practice of performance, installation, and display and found their conclusion in a collaborative system of reception of the showcased performances and environments.

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<sup>50</sup> See: Géraldine Gourbe, “Prolégomènes à une réflexion sur l’être-ensemble, la performance sur la côte ouest des années 70 aux années 90,” 160–79

<sup>51</sup> See: Judy Chicago, *Through the Flowers*, 208.

Kaprow collaborated in the FAP's experiments and adhered to the consciousness-raising questions of the post-performance, i.e., during the oral articulation, both practical and theoretical, of its reception by the participants themselves: "Kaprow didn't realize it at the time, but his decision to invite participants to meet in follow-up sessions and discuss their experiences was the beginning of an oral, if not quite literary, dimension to his work that would continue and crystallize in subsequent decades."<sup>52</sup>

The appropriation of the feminist practice of consciousness-raising by the Zen Buddhist coincided, in his evolution as an artist and pedagogue, with the emergence of a new configuration between action and new technologies. This configuration, in turn, paved the way for performative and media-based collaborative projects on a larger scale.<sup>53</sup>

This 'encounter of the third kind', so to speak, between the feminist artists teaching at CalArts and Kaprow is not just the result of a random simultaneity at CalArts in the early 1970s, and cannot be reduced to a "concession to utopian imperatives,"<sup>54</sup> in the words of Jeff Kelley. The lengthy transcriptions of unpublished conversations between Suzanne Lacy, Moira Roth, and Kaprow indeed attest to the significance of this event, one that goes beyond the alternative-fuelled enchanted interlude of CalArts, which ended in 1973 when Kaprow left the institution to teach at the University of San Diego. On the contrary, this unexpected convergence between two practices and theories of performance was to last.<sup>55</sup>

With the FAP, Chicago invented one of the first pedagogies of empowerment within an art curriculum. A pioneering figure, she was the first feminist to envision the pedagogy of art as agency. By positioning her feminist activism around power structures and knowledge-acquisition techniques, she cast

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<sup>52</sup> See: Jeff Kelley, *Childsplay*, 155.

<sup>53</sup> Such as *In Mourning and In Rage* (1977), by feminist artists Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Lebowitz, a large-scale performative event about feminism and the media, which later lead to several artistic experiences in the mediatized mobilization against AIDS. See: Géraldine Gourbe, "Prolégomènes à une réflexion sur l'être-ensemble, la performance sur la côte ouest des années 70 aux années 90," 258–80.

<sup>55</sup> As the unpublished 1983 exchanges with Moira Roth and Suzanne Lacy will attest. The content of these archives is not widely available due to the lack of publication, and therefore have not had the level of scrutiny that would have cast a light on this decisive encounter for the history and theory of performance.

a light on their archaeologies and genealogies and incited students to seize a certain agency.<sup>56</sup> This played a part in deconstructing the dominant discourses at work in the fabrication of art history and reiterated in art theory, practice, and education; Chicago offered a demythologized reading of artistic genius and developed in action a criticism of the supposedly neutral figure of the artist, at the crossroads of history, philosophy, sociology, and artistic practice.

These early steps toward an ethical feminist body of thought opened the way for new participative configurations of performance and original experiments around their reception by participants. This innovative Marxist and feminist pedagogy overlapped with Kaprow's experiments, which were increasingly leading toward an ethical *praxis* of the *un-artist*.

However, Kaprow understood this ethical practice of the artist—free from the romantic myth of the artistic genius<sup>57</sup>—not as a laboratory for the transformation of public consciousness, but as a catalyst for the transformation of artists themselves.<sup>58</sup> All that mattered in his view was the change in the representation of the role of the artist and his or her field of action. In the sociopolitical context of the late 1960s, the new identity given to the artist by Kaprow—the *un-artist*—increased the artist's ability to switch jobs while role-playing like a child between socio-professional categories.<sup>59</sup>

John Cage's aphorism took a new significance with Kaprow, with an emphasis on the word *worse*: "To improve the world will only make matters

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<sup>56</sup> "In the words of Judith Butler, in her 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*, 'There is no political position purified of power, and perhaps that impurity is what produces agency as the potential interruption and reversal of regulatory regimes.' With regard to discourse, it means that words are not 'tainted' by domination; regardless of what some might say, the situation of domination does not in any way stop us from developing agency: it is from the inside of words of power that we can criticize the domination they can also carry, in the way political movements may claim for themselves the very words that exclude them, like women have done, reclaiming the civic rights denied to them, or minorities, subverting the derogative terms used to refer to them." Charlotte Nordmann (trans. Clémentine Bobin), "Lexique: Agency," in Judith Butler, *Le Pouvoir des mots: politique du performatif*, trans. Charlotte Nordmann (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2004), 275–6.

<sup>57</sup> Kaprow saw in the charismatic figure of Marcel Duchamp an example of an artist neither demiurgic nor cursed, the *un-artist*.

<sup>58</sup> "It's not only the transformation of the public consciousness that we are interested in, but it's our own transformation as artists that's just as important." Allan Kaprow, as quoted by Suzanne Lacy, "Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys," in *Mapping The Terrain*, 34.

<sup>59</sup> See: Jeff Kelley, *Childsplay*, 158.

worse.” In that respect, Kaprow was in disagreement with Chicago, who defended authoritatively her aesthetic and feminist positions.<sup>60</sup>

After the *Womanhouse*, large-scale political and aesthetic challenges eventually ended the rich collaboration between the two teacher-artists and proved divisive among students. Held in a closed environment around a singular kind of womanhood (hetero-centered and white), with the essentialist forms of women’s art (Cunt Art and Central Core Imagery<sup>61</sup>), and addressing the limited audience of the art and feminist worlds, the experience of the FAP turned into one of a *communauté œuvrée* [community with an end]<sup>62</sup>—something that was anticipated by Kaprow and bemoaned by, among others, Miriam Schapiro and Suzanne Lacy.

If the FAP explored new porosities between art and life that had a significant influence on the course of the history of art and performance, like any pioneering work, it lacked a broader perspective of aesthetic and ethical possibilities. A vast field that, to this day, is still being mapped.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Several *Womanhouse* performances had been thought up, written, and directed according to the methods of Augusto Boal’s Theater of the Oppressed; a point of reference that could not be further removed from Kaprow’s *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, in which he defends happenings as a radical alternative to the corruption of the free intentions of the artist, in an endemic context of academization and capitalization. Kaprow, in his seminal experiments with happenings, turned his back on theater to put in its place a new form, the happening, as opposed to Chicago and Schapiro who opted to retain certain fundamental elements of theater only to reinvest them from a feminist point of view. On the later point, Jeff Kelley speaks of the FAP as having a “sociopolitical agenda” that did not coincide with the aesthetic and ethical intentions of Kaprow, when the reality is significantly more complex, as this essay demonstrates.

<sup>61</sup> Pioneering North American forms of feminist art that were particularly criticized by Griselda Pollock and Mary Kelly, notably in *Screen*, on account of a certain feminist essentialism. See: Amelia Jones, *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago’s Dinner Party in Feminist Art History* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>62</sup> See: Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

With the *Womanhouse*, the FAP sought to achieve some sort of radicalism. But by focusing on a fantasized representation of women in private space, also codified by a homogeneous identity (white, heterosexual, and middle class), the FAP feminist *praxis* was repeating in turn another discourse of the self-contained *sensus communis*. In that sense, one can see FAP as a *communauté œuvrée* [community with an end], i.e., unitary, utopian, multiplying, and sketching out and spreading the sovereignty of the Identical subject to the community as a whole.

<sup>63</sup> I would like to warmly thank Elisabeth Lebovici and Valérie Mavridorakis for their kind support during my research in California, as well as John Welchman for the exchanges that followed my initial communication, which helped me flesh out my initial research intentions.