

YAYOI KUSAMA: BIOGRAPHY AND CULTURAL CONFRONTATION,
1945-1969

by

MIDORI YAMAMURA

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York

2012

©2012
MIDORI YAMAMURA
All Rights Reserved

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

Anna C. Chave

Date

Chair of Examining Committee

Kevin Murphy

Date

Executive Officer

Mona Hadler

Claire Bishop

Julie Nelson Davis

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

YAYOI KUSAMA: BIOGRAPHY AND CULTURAL CONFRONTATION, 1945-1969

by
Midori Yamamura

Adviser: Professor Anna C. Chave

Yayoi Kusama (b.1929) was among the first Japanese artists to rise to international prominence after World War II. She emerged when wartime modern nation-state formations and national identity in the former Axis Alliance countries quickly lost ground to U.S.-led Allied control, enforcing a U.S.-centered model of democracy and capitalism. As a result, the art world became increasingly internationalized. This interdisciplinary study is the first attempt to comparatively examine postwar artistic developments in Japan, the United States, and Europe, through a focus on Kusama. I consider Kusama not so much in terms that seek to aggrandize the uniqueness of the individual, but that assess her entry into and position within an historical sequence, namely the radical changes which took place after the war. Mine is a material investigation, which addresses how personal and cultural memories may be embedded in objects. By examining her breakthrough work against the backdrop of her milieu, this feminist study will illuminate particular issues Kusama might have encountered in society and analyze how her experiences uniquely shaped her practice. I will also analyze works by Kusama's peers that help to illuminate the scope and nature of the problems that she encountered.

Growing up under Japan's militaristic totalitarian regime, Kusama embraced art as a non-conformist pursuit. Her defiance of fanatic chauvinism propelled her,

after the war, to seek a career overseas. She arrived in 1958 in New York, where a burgeoning cosmopolitanism contributed to her initial success with five nearly identical white *Net* paintings. Beginning in 1960, the artists affiliated with the German Zero group invited Kusama to exhibit in Europe. By 1962, she had shown with the future Pop and Minimal artists in New York. As New York's art market became more firmly established, however, multiculturalism tended to become less embraced there. By 1966, this drove Kusama to drop out of the commercial art world. She began creating politically charged site-specific installations and Happenings where the theme of liberatory sexuality was key. But around 1969, as the gallery-money-power-structure became an unchallengeable fact, she ceased her activity in New York.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation emerged out of a seminar paper that I produced for my dissertation adviser, Professor Anna C. Chave, at the CUNY Graduate Center. Ever since, my work has developed in dialogue with her teaching, research, and writing. Throughout writing this dissertation, she has been the most critically perceptive reader of my work. At the same time, she was extremely patient with my progress, encouraged my original thinking, and was unwaveringly supportive of this project. Without Professor Chave, my dissertation would never have taken shape. My foremost gratitude for this study goes to her.

I am equally indebted to the artist Yayoi Kusama and the staff of Kusama Yayoi Studio for allowing me an unprecedented access to her personal archives, which opened my eyes to a whole host of issues that had been buried in received histories. History is in part a process of editing and post-1945 art history has been centered mostly on white, male, and US-born or based artists.

This project would have never occurred if Akie Terai, my mother, who grew up in Kusama's hometown, did not send me the Japanese version of *Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama*. Based on Kusama's biography, I researched her career in New York and noticed that she was quite central to the 1960s New York art scene, yet never enjoyed the same recognition as her male counterparts. This made me question a system that would diminish women artists of color, which became an initial motivation for this feminist study. I am very grateful to my mother for calling my attention to Kusama and for her limitless help while I did research for my dissertation

in Matsumoto.

Because Kusama's own narrative of the role of mental illness in her practice has posed limits to the interpretation of her work, I began developing an alternative approach without, however, losing sight of the complexities of artist's experience and psychology. I undertook to critically examine Kusama's biography. And it was Reiko Tomii, the Senior Research Associate for Kusama's 1989 retrospective, who coined the term, "critical biography" for my method. Dr. Tomii has been selfless, sharing her research and her ideas with me, and advising me on Kusama-related archives. Without her expertise, my work would have been limited. Dr. Tomii deserves my most sincere gratitude. She also invited me to contribute an essay from my research to a Japan Society exhibition catalogue, *Making A Home*. This helped me grow as a writer.

During the course of writing this dissertation, I have benefited from the support of a great number of individuals. I thank profusely my dissertation committee members, Professors Claire Bishop, Julie Nelson Davis, and Mona Hadler. I would also like to thank those individuals who read and offered valuable comments on this dissertation at various stages of its evolution, or shared their works and insights: Valerie Allen, Jerome Feldman, Sujatha Fernandes, Yuko Fujii, Kathleen Friello, Jen Giesecking, Amelia Goerlitz, Franck Gautherot, Jaap Guldemond, David Harvey, Peter Hitchcock, Hiroko Ikegami, Azusa Kaburagi, Jennifer Katanic, Jonathan Katz, Laura Katzmann, Joe Ketner, Seungduk Kim, Pascale Montadert, Juliet Mitchell, Louise Neri, Mignon Nixon, Franklin Odo, Joan Pachner, Ruth Anne Philips, Theodore Powers, Anna Salamone, Karen Shelby, Judith Stein, Margaret Stenz, Molleen Theodore, Jennifer Tobias, Barbera van Kooij, Harriet Walker, Carl Watson, Kathy

Wentrack, Michael Wenyon, Hyewon Yi, and Midori Yoshimoto. I am also grateful to the following individuals who helped translate the Dutch and the German texts to English: Mrieken Cochijs, Silke Gondolf, and Edgar Honetschläger.

Research for this dissertation has been enabled by many people and I am grateful to the following individuals and institutions: Akron Art Museum; Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College; Eiko Sakaguchi of Gordon W. Prange Collection; Kerry Brougher of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; Takako Fujibayashi, Yoko Kawasaki, Isao Takakura, and Megumi Takasugi of Kusama Yayoi Studio; Takako Matsumoto; Akira Shibutami of Matsumoto City Museum of Art; Michelle Harvey of the MoMA Archives; Henk Peeters; Cynthia Mills and Virginia Mecklenburg of the Smithsonian American Art Museum; The Smithsonian Archives of American Art; Michiel Nijhoff of the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam Archive; Colin Huizing of the Stedelijk Museum, Schiedam; Aldo Tambellini; Frances Morris and Rachel Taylor of Tate Modern; Kevin Concannon, formerly of the University of Akron; Blanton Museum and Fine Art Library, The University of Texas, Austin; Caroline Westenholz; Phillipe Sauve of the Yves Klein Foundation; Tijs Visser of Zero Foundation.

The research for this dissertation would not have been possible without the financial support of a Terra Foundation Predoctoral Fellowship at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, a Ford Foundation Travel Grant at the CUNY Graduate Center, The CUNY Graduate Center Research and Travel Grant, a Mellon Foundation Predoctoral Fellowship at the Center for the Humanities, The CUNY Graduate Center, and a predoctoral fellowship from the Center for Place, Culture, and Politics at the

CUNY Graduate Center. I am also grateful to the Museum of Modern Art, where I work as a contractual lecturer. I am especially grateful to Laura Belles, Sara Bodinson, Jean Mary Bongiorno, Pablo Helguera, Tomoko Mikawa, the volunteers there, as well as to my audiences, whose support and feedback have been helping me to grow as an art historian.

I am grateful, too, to my fellow fellows at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, at the Center for the Humanities at the CUNY, and at CUNY's Center for Place, Culture, and Politics, who commented on my work and who stimulated my thinking during our weekly seminars and symposia. I also thank the Art History Department at the CUNY Graduate Center, especially, Professor Kevin Murphy, the Executive Officer, and Andrea Appel, the chief administrator.

Earlier versions of Chapter One appeared in *Making A Home* (New York: The Japan Foundation and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), *Yayoi Kusama* (London: Tate Modern, 2012) and in Spanish in *Yayoi Kusama* (Madrid: Museo Reina Sofia, 2011). Earlier versions of Chapter Two appeared in *Yayoi Kusama* (New York: Gagosian Gallery, 2009) and *The Dutch Avant-Garde Nul* (Rotterdam: NAI Publisher, 2011). An earlier version of Chapter Three appeared in *Yayoi Kusama, Mirrored Years* (Dijon: Les Presses du Reel; Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2009).

Last but not least, I would like to sincerely thank my in-laws, Susan O. Francia, Judith Francia Reyes, and Ewaldus Reyes for their support during my tenure at the Smithsonian. Of all the individuals with whom the ideas in this dissertation have been shared, however, I must single out my husband, the poet and writer Luis H.

Francia, who read this manuscript at every stage, gave me indispensable editorial suggestions, and shared his experience as a writer, which was a great encouragement for me during the most difficult and lonesome times of writing this work. This dissertation is for Luis, and for my dissertation adviser, Anna Chave.

CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	xiii
INTRODUCTION	1
Review of Literature: Some Problems with Biography	6
Feminism, Postmodernism, and Women's Social Distress	15
Critical Biography	18
Chapter Outline	21
CHAPTER	
1. 1945-1957: RISING FROM TOTALITARIANISM	27
A Sketchbook from 1945	29
<i>Lingering Dream</i> and Kusama's Awakening	50
<i>On the Table</i>	60
<i>Flower Spirit</i> : Early Oil Painting	68
<i>Gill</i>	75
2. 1958-1962: INFINITY, THE ARTS OF SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT	92
1958: Kusama's Initial Development in New York	98
1958-1959: <i>Pacific Ocean</i>	106
Vestigial War, Zero, Nul, and Azimuth: The Intersection of European Vanguards, 1957-1961	109
1959: Emergence of the Nets	118
Transforming Dadaism	126
Zero and Nul: A New Collaborative Model in Postwar Society	129
1961: <i>Infinity Nets</i> and Becoming	133
Pure Beginning to Infinity: <i>Zero-Edition, Exposition, Demonstration</i>	139
“Tentoonstelling Nul”	147
<i>Salle de Glace</i>	150
<i>Salle Obscure</i>	154
<i>Salle de Lumière</i>	156
3. 1960-1966: OBJECTS INTO ART: THE CANONIZATION OF AMERICAN POP AND THE CASE OF KUSAMA	163
Cultural Diversity: The New York Art World in the Immediate Postwar Years	163
Dadaism Resurgent: An Early History of Leo Castelli Gallery	171

Objects into Art: A Global Intersection	177
Making a Myth of American Art: Donald Judd and the Nineteenth Street Loft	183
The Archrival	193
Soft Sculpture	200
The Age of Anxiety	212
Rooms	221
1964 Venice Biennale: Canonization of American Pop Art	223
<i>Narcissus Garden</i>	237
4. 1965-1969: EROS AND LIBERATION	244
Brave New World	248
The Doors of Perception	253
<i>Flower Umbrella: Aspiring to Bring Art to the Street</i>	265
<i>Walking Piece</i> and <i>14th Street Happening: Eros and Alienation in Urban Space</i>	272
New York, Circa 1966: Expanded Media and Psychedelia	279
Drugs, Celebrities, and Objectification of Women: Andy Warhol's Dom	285
Flower Power: Hippies and the New Left	295
Kusama's <i>Self-Obliteration</i>	300
<i>Body Festival</i>	305
Audio-Visual-Light Performances	308
<i>Naked Happenings</i>	313
<i>Kusama's Self-Obliteration (Play)</i>	318
The Medium is the Message: Kusama's Press Happenings	321
Kusama's <i>Mass Erotic Happenings</i>	325
CONCLUSION	333
Toward a New Feminist Historiography	338
BIBLIOGRAPHY	349
ILLUSTRATIONS	374

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figures

1.1	Yayoi Kusama, Notebook Cover, 1945	374
1.2	Kusama, Notebook (pp. 1-2), 1945	375
1.3	Kusama, Notebook (pp. 61-62), 1945	375
1.4	Kusama, Notebook (pp. 35-36), 1945	376
1.5	Kusama, Notebook (pp. 41-42), 1945	376
1.6	Kusama, Notebook (Pp. 23-24), 1949	377
1.7	Kusama, Notebook (P. 75), 1949	377
1.8	Kusama, <i>Minori (Harvest)</i> , 1945	378
1.9	Kusama, <i>Zanmu (Lingering Dream)</i> , 1949	379
1.10	Murakami Kagaku, <i>Rafuzu (Nude)</i> , 1920	380
1.11	Kusama, <i>Lingering Dreams (Original)</i> , 1949	381
1.12	Hayami Gyoshū, <i>Himawari (Sun Flowers)</i> , 1922	382
1.13	Hayami Gyoshū, <i>Kyō no Maiko (Apprentice Geisha in Kyoto)</i> , 1920	383
1.14	Gyoshū, <i>Jumoku (Tree)</i> , 1925	384
1.15	Gyoshū, <i>Egiputo no Kangai (Irrigation in Egypt)</i> , 1931	384
1.16	Unknown artist, Balinese art, n.d.	385
1.17	Kusama, <i>Tamanegi (Onions)</i> , 1948	385
1.18	“ <i>Asu Kusama-san no koten hiraku</i> ” (“Kusama exhibition opens tomorrow”),	

<i>Shinano Mainichi</i> , March 17, 1952	386
1.19 “Kusama Yayoi koten” (“Yayoi Kusama solo exhibition”), <i>Atelier</i> (January) 1953	386
1.20 Kusama, <i>On the Table (Kijō)</i> , 1950	387
1.21 Kusama’s first solo exhibition, Matsumoto Civic Hall, 1952	388
1.22 Kusama’s second solo exhibition, October 31-November 2, 1952	388
1.23 Kusama, <i>Untitled</i> , ca. 1953	389
1.24 Kusama, <i>Glass Painting</i> , ca. 1954	389
1.25 Kusama, <i>Hananosei (Flower Spirit)</i> , dated ca. 1948, considered ca. 1955/ca. 1973-75	390
1.26 Kusama, <i>Hananosei (Flower Spirit)</i> , as appears in a slide taken in 1956; the work is dated 1955 on the slide mount	390
1.27 Kusama, <i>Hananosei (Flower Spirit)</i> , the slide mount from 1956	391
1.28 Kusama, title unknown, 1952	391
1.29 Kusama’s first solo exhibition, Matsumoto City Civic Hall, 1952	392
1.30 Kusama, <i>Bud</i> , c. 1950	393
1.31 Kusama, <i>Gill</i> , 1955	394
1.32 Kusama, <i>Yūwaku sareru taiyō (Tempted Sun)</i> , 1954	395
1.33 Takiguchi Shūzō, <i>Phantom of Matthias Grunewald</i> , ca. 1960	396
1.34 Oscar Dominquez, <i>Untitled</i> , 1936	396

1.35	United States Information Agency, “Information Media Services,” in <i>1949 United States Advisory Commission on Information</i>	397
1.36	Kenneth Callahan, <i>Rose</i> , 1959	398
1.37	A clipping enclosed in Yayoi Kusama letter to Neil Meitzler, 22 February 1956	398
1.38	Morris Graves, <i>Little Known Bird of the Inner Eye</i> , 1941	399
Chapter Two		
2.1	Kusama with <i>A. B. White Z.</i> , 1959	400
2.2	Kusama, preparing a canvas for <i>White B. S. Q.</i> , ca. 1960	401
2.3	Kusama, posing in front of <i>A, B. & Z.</i> , ca. fall, 1959	402
2.4	Kusama with <i>White B. S. Q.</i> , 1961	403
2.5	Illustration “Zero to Infinity” in <i>Zero 3</i>	404
2.6	Joseph Beuys at <i>Zero—Edition-Demonstration-Exposition</i> , July 5, 1961	405
2.7	Kenneth Van Sickle, Kusama at 12 th Street loft, ca. December 1958	406
2.8	“Pīpuru” [“People”], <i>Geijutsu Shinchō</i> [<i>The new current in art</i>] (June 1959): 31	407
2.9	Van Sickle, Kusama at her 12 th Street studio, ca. December 1958	408
2.10	Kusama, <i>Pacific Ocean</i> , 1958	409
2.11	Kusama, Unknown Work, 1958	410
2.12	Van Sickle, Kusama at her 12 th Street studio, ca. December 1958	411

2.13	Jackson Pollock at his studio, 1950	411
2.14	Kusama, <i>Work No. 11</i> , 1959	412
2.15	Van Sickle, Kusama at 70 East 12 th Street studio ca. March, 1959	413
2.16	Kusama, <i>Pacific Ocean</i> (later version), 1959	414
2.17	Kusama, <i>A Flower</i> , 1952	414
2.18	Shunsuke Agatsuka, Tomio Miki at work, Tokyo, 1963	415
2.19	Günther Uecker at his studio, 1963	415
2.20	Armando, <i>Espace Criminal</i> , 1958	416
2.21.a	Jan Schoonhoven, the work reproduced in <i>Azimuth 1</i> , 1959	417
2.21.b	Schoonhoven, the reproduced in <i>Azimuth 2</i> , 1960	417
2.22.a	Piero Manzoni <i>Composition</i> , 1957	418
2.22.b	Manzoni, <i>Achrome</i> , 1958	418
2.23	Yves Klein, <i>Proposte monocrome, epoca blu</i> , Galleria Apollinaire, Milan, January 2-12, 1957	419
2.24	Klein, <i>Yves: Propositions monochromes</i> , Galerie Schmela, Düsseldorf, May 31-June 23, 1957	420
2.25	Unidentified photographer, Kusama at 30 th Street studio, ca. April 1959	421
2.26	Barnett Newman, <i>The Name II</i> , 1950	422
2.27	Newman, <i>The Voice</i> , 1950	423
2.28	Lock Huey, Kusama with Newman and Mark Rothko at Alexander Calder	

Exhibition opening, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1964	424
2.29 Kusama, <i>F</i> , 1959	425
2.30 Ike Taiga, <i>Twelve Months Landscape Screen</i> (details), Edo Period	426
2.31 Unidentified photographer, Kusama at her 30th Street studio, 1960	427
2.32 Unidentified photographer, Kusama posing in front of <i>Pacific Ocean</i> (1958), at Nova Gallery, Boston, November 1959	428
2.33 Kusama, Radich Gallery Floor Plan, ca. 1960	429
2.34 Unidentified photographer, Kusama posing in front of the east-side wall of Stephen Radich Gallery with <i>White XXA</i> , 1961	430
2.35.a Kusama, with <i>Work Number B IV</i> (1961), 1961	431
2.35.b Kusama, with <i>Work Number III</i> (1959), 1961	431
2.36 Kusama, posing in front of the north-side wall of Stephen Radich Gallery, May 1961	432
2.37 Klein, <i>Le Vide</i> (The Void), Iris Clert Gallery, 1958	433
2.38 Illustration from <i>Zero 3</i> , 1961	434
2.39 Jan van Eldik, “Zero Party,” Galerie A, Arnhem, 9-30 December 1961	435
2.40 Günther Uecker at <i>Zero—Exhibition Demonstration</i> , marking a zero zone in front of the boarded Galerie Schmela, Düsseldorf, 5 July 1961	435
2.41 Alfred Schmela and the boarded Galerie Schmela, Düsseldorf, 5 July 1961	436

- 2.42 *Zero—Exhibition Demonstration*, Düsseldorf, 5 July 1961 436
- 2.43 Otto Piene, “Hot Air Balloon,” at *Zero-Edition, Exhibition Demonstration*, in front of Galerie Schlema (marked by a huge arrow), Düsseldorf, 5 July 1961 437
- 2.44 A girl looking through a hole on a barricade, *Zero—Exhibition Demonstration*, Galerie Schlema, Düsseldorf, 5 July 1961 437
- 2.45 Nam June Paik and Joseph Beuys looking at artworks, *Zero—Exhibition Demonstration*, Galerie Schlema, Düsseldorf, 5 July 1961 438
- 2.46 Paik, *One for Violin*, “Neo-Dada in der Musik” (Neo-Dada in Music), Düsseldorf, Germany, 16 June 1962 439
- 2.47 Installation view, *Exposition of Music-Electric-Television* Galerie Parnass, Wuppertal, 11-20 March 1963 440
- 2.48 Herman Goefert, *Optophonium*, 1961-62 441
- 2.49 Christian Megert, installation plan, *Tentoonstelling Nul*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 9-25 March 1962 442
- 2.50 Megert, installation plan, *Salle de glace, Tentoonstelling Nul*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 9-25 March 1962 442
- 2.51 The work presumably similar to the installation plan No. 2. *Tentoonstelling Nul*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 9-25 March 1962 443
- 2.52 Megert, *Spiegelbuch mit loch* (Book of fragmented mirrors) (1962), shown at *Tentoonstelling Nul*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 9-25 March 1962 444

2.53	Megert, <i>Book of Mirrors</i> (1962), shown at <i>Tentoonstelling Nul</i> , Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 9-25 March 1962	444
2.54	Megert, <i>Wall With the Hanging Mirrors</i> (1962) in <i>Salle de glace</i> , <i>Tentoonstelling Nul</i> , Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 9-25 March 1962	445
2.55	Armando, installation view of “Tires” (1962), <i>Tentoonstelling Nul</i> , Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 9-25 March 1962	446
2.56	Armando, <i>13 Bolts</i> , 1961	447
2.57	Armando, <i>Cords of Barbed Wire</i> , c. 1962	447
2.58	Heinz Mack, Otto Piene, and Günther Uecker, <i>Salle de lumière</i> , <i>Tentoonstelling Nul</i> , Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 9-25 March 1962	448
2.59	Mack, Piene, and Uecker, an installation presumably similar to <i>Salle de lumière</i> , <i>Europäische Avantgarde</i> , Frankfurt, 1963	449
2.60	The members of group Zero (Mack, Piene, and Uecker), in front of <i>Please Turn</i> (1962), <i>Tentoonstelling Nul</i> , Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 9-25 March 1962	450
2.61	Marcel Duchamp, <i>Avez vous déjà mis la moëlle de l'épée dans le poêle de l'aimée?</i> (Have you ever put the marrow of the sword in the oven of your beloved?), 1926	450
2.62	Henk Peeters, <i>Zero on Sea</i> (photo montage of the Scheveningen Pier, the Netherlands, on view are the works by Yves Klein and Motonaga Sadamasa), 1965	451

Chapter Three

3.1	<i>New Forms—New Media</i> , Martha Jackson Gallery, June 1960	452
3.2	<i>New Forms—New Media</i> , Martha Jackson Gallery, June 1960	452
3.3	<i>The New Realists</i> , Sidney Janis Gallery, 1963	453
3.4	Kusama, <i>Untitled</i> , 1960	454
3.5.a	Andy Warhol, <i>Telephone</i> , 1961	455
3.5.b	Warhol, <i>Typewriter</i> , 1961	455
3.6	Kusama at her 19th Street Studio with <i>Accumulation #2</i> (1962) and <i>Tentoostelling Nul</i> catalogue (pasted on the rear wall with a large numeral “0”). The photo taken after September 1962	456
3.7	Kusama, <i>Accumulation No. 18 a</i> , 1962	457
3.8	Eva Hesse, <i>Compass</i> , 1967	457
3.9	Donald Judd, <i>Untitled (DSS 14)</i> , 1961	458
3.10	Kusama, <i>Dressing Table</i> (no longer extant), 1963	458
3.11	Judd, <i>Untitled (DSS 2)</i> , 1960	459
3.12	Judd, <i>Untitled (DSS 26)</i> , 1961	459
3.13	Judd <i>Untitled</i> , 1966	460
3.14	Judd, <i>Untitled (DSS 37)</i> , 1963	460
3.15	Enrico Casatellani, <i>Spazio Ambiente (Environmental Space)</i> (detail), 1970	

	461
3.16.a Judd, <i>Untitled (DSS 15)</i> , 1961	461
3.16.b Klein, <i>Blue Monochrome</i> , 1961	462
3.17 Kusama, <i>Aggregation: One Thousand Boats Show</i> Gertrude Stein Gallery, New York, December 1963-January 1964	463
3.18 Kusama, <i>Accumulation of Stamps No. 63</i> , 1962	464
3.19.a Warhol, Campbell's Soup Can clipping, 1961	465
3.19.b Warhol, Campbell's Soup Can clipping, 1961	465
3.19.c Campbell's corporate logo	465
3.20 Warhol, <i>Campbell's Soup Can (The Mönchengladbach Type)</i> , ca. 1961	466
3.21 Warhol, <i>S&H Green Stamps</i> , 1962	467
3.22 Warhol, <i>Red Airmail Stamps</i> , 1962	467
3.23 Warhol, <i>192 One-Dollar Bills</i> , 1962	468
3.24 Installation view at Green Gallery group show, New York, June 1962. In the rear, Warhol's <i>192 One-Dollar Bills</i> (1962) and Kusama's <i>Accumulation #2</i> (1962)	468
3.25 Installation view at Green Gallery group show, New York, June 1962. Oldenburg's <i>Suit</i> (left) with Kusama's <i>Accumulation #1</i> (rear right)	469
3.26 Yves Tanguy, <i>From The Other Side of the Bridge</i> , 1936	469
3.27.a Salvador Dali, "Mannequin show," <i>International Exhibition of Surrealism</i> ,	

Galerie Beaux Arts, Paris, January 1938	470
3.27.b Wolfgang Paalen, “Mannequin show,” <i>International Exhibition of Surrealism</i> , Galerie Beaux Arts, Paris, January 1938	470
3.28 Kusama, <i>Macaroni Girl</i> , 1963	471
3.29 Kusama, with <i>Accumulation No. 1</i> and <i>Egg Carton Assemblage</i> , 1962	472
3.30 Kusama, holding a spoon with phallic form attached, ca. 1966	472
3.31 Claes Oldenburg using the space of Green Gallery closed for summer for making his version of sewn-soft sculpture pieces. New York, ca. August 1962	473
3.32 Kusama with her works from 1958-62, photographed in 1962	474
3.33 Kusama, <i>Driving Image Show</i> , Richard Castellane Gallery, New York, 20 April-9 May 1964	475
3.34 Kusama, <i>Driving Image Show</i> , Richard Castellane Gallery, New York, 21 April-9 May 1964	476
3.35 Warhol with the <i>Campbell’s Soup Can</i> series, ca. March 1961	477
3.36 Warhol, Stable Gallery Exhibition, New York, 21 April-9 May 1964	477
3.37 Billy Name-Linich, production scene of Warhol’s box sculptures, ca. March 1964	478
3.38 Name-Linich, Andy Warhol completing his box sculptures, ca. March 1964	478
3.39 Warhol, installation view, “Andy Warhol” exhibition, Leo Castelli, New York,	

1966	479
3.40 Warhol, a base image for <i>Cow Wallpaper</i> (above left) and the artist working on a design (above right)	480
3.41 Oldenburg, <i>Bedroom Ensemble 1</i> , Sidney Janis Gallery, New York, January 1964	481
3.42 Lucas Samaras, <i>Room #1</i> , Green Gallery, New York, 16 September-10 October, 1964	482
3.43 Advertisement for Leo Castelli Gallery, <i>Art International</i> , July 1964	483
3.44 Bottom: Andy Warhol exhibition at Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, 1964; Middle: A color reproduction of a row of the 24 x 24" <i>Flowers series</i> (top, the second from the top, nos.1347-1336)	484
3.45 An article from <i>Modern Photography</i> and Warhol's reinterpretation, 1964	485
3.46 Elaine Sturtevant, solo exhibition, Bianchini Gallery, 1965	486
3.47 Warhol working on the <i>Flowers series</i> , ca. 1964	487
3.48 Warhol, coloring the <i>Flowers Series</i> , ca. 1964	488
3.49 Kusama standing in <i>Narcissus Garden</i> , site specific installation, XXXIII Venice Biennale, 1966	489
3.50 Kusama, three performances in <i>Narcissus Garden</i> , site specific installation, XXXIII Venice Biennale, 1966	490
3.51 Samaras, <i>Mirror Room</i> , 1966	491

Chapter Four

- 4.1 Kusama, a plan for *Love Forever*, March 1966 492
- 4.2 Kusama, the artist with the “Love Forever” campaign pins, March 1966 492
- 4.3 Kusama, *Kusama’s Peep Show* (later re-titled as *Endless Love Show*), exterior view (left), interior view (above), 1966 493
- 4.4 Unknown photographer, *Kusama’s Self-Obliteration*, June 1967 494
- 4.5 Kusama with Eikoh Hosoe, *Kusama in Infinity Mirror Room*, ca. September 1965 495
- 4.6 Kusama with Eikoh Hosoe, *Kusama in Infinity Mirror Room*, ca. September 1965 495
- 4.7 Eikoh Hosoe, *Barakei No. 19*, 1961 496
- 4.8 Kusama with Eikoh Hosoe, *14th Street Happening*, ca. August 1966 497
- 4.9 Unknown photographer, *Kusama in Infinity Mirror Room*, ca. November 1965 498
- 4.10 Buchsbaum Architect, the plan for *Infinity Mirror Room*, with Kusama’s *Love Forever* (octagonal room), 3 October 1965 499
- 4.11 Hiro, *My Flower Bed*, in *Art Voice* 4, no. 1 (Winter 1965) 500
- 4.12 Peter Moore, *Lying on My Flower Bed*, ca. September 1965 500
- 4.13.a Attributed to Moore, Yayoi Kusama with the Empire State Building, ca.

September 1965	501
4.13.b Attributed to Moore, Kusama, with the Pan Am Building, ca. September 1965	501
4.14.a Kusama with Eikoh Hosoe, <i>Walking Piece</i> , ca. August 1966	502
4.14.b Kusama with Eikoh Hosoe, <i>Walking Piece</i> , ca. August 1966	502
4.15 Klein, <i>Sculpture Aérostatique (Aerostatic Sculpture)</i> , also known as <i>vernissage époque bleue</i> (opening of the blue epoch), Galerie Iris Clert, Paris, 10 May 1957	503
4.16 Kusama with Eikoh Hosoe, <i>Walking Piece</i> , ca. August 1966	504
4.17 Hosoe, <i>Kamaitachi</i> , 1965-1968, published in 1969	505
4.18 Kusama with Hosoe, <i>14th Street Happening</i> , ca. August 1966	506
4.19 Kusama with Hosoe, <i>14th Street Happening</i> , ca. August 1966	507
4.20 Kusama with Hosoe, <i>14th Street Happening</i> , ca. August 1966	507
4.21 Kusama with Hosoe, <i>14th Street Happening</i> , ca. August 1966	508
4.22 Kusama with Hosoe, <i>14th Street Happening</i> , ca. August 1966	508
4.23.a Kusama with Hosoe, <i>Walking Piece</i> , ca. August 1966	509
4.23.b Kusama with Hosoe, <i>Walking Piece</i> , ca. August 1966	509
4.24.a Kusama with Hosoe, <i>Walking Piece</i> , ca. August 1966	510
4.24.b Kusama with Hosoe, <i>Walking Piece</i> , ca. August 1966	510
4.25 Kusama with Hosoe, <i>Walking Piece</i> , ca. August 1966	511
4.26 Kusama with Hosoe, <i>Walking Piece</i> , ca. August 1966	512

4.27	Kusama with Hosoe, <i>Walking Piece</i> , ca. August 1966	512
4.28	Kusama with Hosoe, <i>Walking Piece</i> , ca. August 1966	513
4.29	Kusama with Hosoe, <i>Walking Piece</i> , ca. August 1966	513
4.30	Aldo Tambellini, <i>Black Zero</i> , original 1965, reproduced as part of “Performa 2009,” 2009	514
4.31	Gerard Malanga, “Whip Dance” with the Velvet Underground, 1966	515
4.32	Warhol at the Dom’s light gallery, April 1966	515
4.33	Francis Keaveny, <i>Yayoi Kusama</i> , ca. Spring 1967	516
4.34	Hal Reiff, <i>Yayoi Kusama</i> , ca. Spring 1966	517
4.35	Fred McDarrah, <i>Kusama Portrait</i> , ca. Spring 1967	517
4.36	Seymour Wally, “Call Her Dotty,” <i>Sunday News</i> , August 13, 1967	518
4.37	Unknown photographer, <i>Kusama’s Self-Obliteration</i> June 1967	518
4.38	Kusama, <i>I am Here but Nothing</i> , 2000	519
4.39	Kusama with Jud Yalkut, <i>Kusama’s Self-Obliteration</i> , 1967	519
4.40	Kusama with Jud Yalkut, <i>Kusama’s Self-Obliteration</i> , 1967	520
4.41	Kusama with Jud Yalkut, <i>Kusama’s Self-Obliteration</i> , 1967	520
4.42	Kusama, <i>Body Festival</i> , Tompkins Square Park, New York, 16 July 1967	521
4.43	Kusama, <i>Body Festival</i> , Tomkins Square Park, New York, 16 July 1967	522
4.44	Kusama, <i>Body Festival</i> at Washington Square Park, Summer 1967	522
4.45	The light gallery at Electric Circus	523

- 4.46 Charles Forberg, a stretch tent designed for Electric Circus, ca. 1967 523
- 4.47 Fillmore East, Light Gallery (left), Fillmore East stage projection with the performers (above), ca. 1968 524
- 4.48 Kusama, *Infinity Polka Dot Room*, November 1967 524
- 4.49 Kusama, *Infinity Polka Dot Room*, the artist posing for a television shoot, 3 November 1967 525
- 4.50 Kusama and Schoonhoven at Novum Jazz, Delft, the Netherlands, 3 November 1967 525
- 4.51 Yvonne Rainer, Contribution to *Judson Flag Show*, Judson Church, New York, September 1970 526
- 4.52 Kusama, *Kusama's Self-Obliteration*, Cooper Square Arts Theater, 1-2 March 1968 527
- 4.53 Kusama, *Kusama's Self-Obliteration*, Cooper Square Arts Theater, 1-2 March 1968 527
- 4.54 Kusama, *Kusama's Self-Obliteration*, Cooper Square Arts Theater, 1-2 March 1968 528
- 4.55 Kusama, *Kusama's Self-Obliteration*, Cooper Square Arts Theater, 1-2 March 1968 529
- 4.56 Kusama, *Anatomic Explosion*, Liberty Island, 17 July 1968 530
- 4.57 Piene and Tambellini, *Black Gate Cologne* (the world's first television

broadcast art), 1968	530
4.58 Kusama, <i>Self-Obliteration</i> , Fillmore East Auditorium, New York, 6-7 December 1968	531
4.59 Kusama, three stills for Kusama Poster Enterprise, 1969	532
4.60 Kusama, the models wearing clothes for Kusama Fashion Institute, 1969	532
4.61 Kusama, <i>Grand Orgy to Awaken the Dead at MoMA</i> , 24 August 1969	533

Conclusion

5.1 Kusama and Louis Abolafia, <i>Easter Sunday Bust-Out</i> , 6 April 1969	534
---	-----

INTRODUCTION

Yayoi Kusama was one of the first Japanese artists—indeed, one of the first artists from outside the Euro-American field—to rise to a degree of international prominence in the period following World War II. She emerged during a significant moment, when Japan’s pre-World War II and wartime modern nation-state formations and national identity quickly lost ground to the U.S.-led Allied occupation. This was not unique to Japan, however. After the war, the Allied Powers systematically propagated a U.S.-centered model of industrial, economic, and cultural development in all Occupied territories. As a result, the key foreign cultural influence in the former Axis Alliance (Germany, Japan, Italy, and their territories) rapidly shifted from Western Europe toward the United States. For her part, with the help of the American Cultural Center in Tokyo, Kusama established contact with artists of the Pacific Northwest, leaving Japan for Seattle in 1957 before moving to New York in 1958.

Between 1958 and 1973, while Kusama lived and worked in New York, she showed with the Pop and Minimal artists during their formative years. Beginning in 1960, she also exhibited with the Dutch Nul (1961-65) and the German Zero (1957-66), artists’ groups in Europe. Well recognized by her peers, Kusama may, as suggested by some critics, have had considerable influence on the work of Donald Judd, Claes Oldenburg, Lucas Samaras, and Andy Warhol, among others.¹ However,

Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Japanese are by the author.

the level of recognition enjoyed by her white male peers in the art world establishment has long eluded her, and her status as a Japanese woman has certainly contributed to this oversight. After her permanent return to Japan in 1973, Kusama was virtually forgotten in the United States until the late 1980s.

Her historical reassessment began retroactively, when an art historical canon was already established, leaving little room for her. In her major retrospectives in 1989 and 1998, held in the United States, Kusama's influence was dismissed,² and an opportunity for subtle historical investigation slipped away. This is owing, in significant part, to her self-proclaimed mental illness and to the fact of her voluntary residence in a mental health facility since 1977—a choice which Kusama attributes to her being troubled with “depersonalization.”³ “She was recurrently afflicted by hallucinations, and by visions of repetitive and proliferating patterns of dots, nets, or

The first-time citation from the Center for International Contemporary Arts (CICA), Oral History Archive housed at the Fine Arts Library, the University of Texas at Austin will be indicated by an ID code beginning with CICA/ATT/001, which corresponds with “Oral Documentation,” in *Yayoi Kusama: A Retrospective*, ed. Bhupendra Karia, exh. cat. (New York: Center for International Contemporary Arts, 1989), 134 (hereafter cited as Karia, ed., *Kusama*).

¹ See, for example, Leslie Camhi, “Yayoi Kusama Returns Right on Time,” *The Village Voice*, 14 July 1998; Kim Levin, “Odd Woman Out,” *The Village Voice* 34, no. 44, 31 October 1989, p. 109; Roberta Smith, “Intense Personal Visions of a Fragile Japanese Artist,” *The New York Times*, 20 October 1989; clippings in artist file, “Yayoi Kusama,” The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York.

² Alexandra Munroe, “Obsession, Fantasy and Outrage: The Art of Yayoi Kusama,” in Karia ed., *Kusama*, 20, 24; Lynn Zelevansky, “Driving Image: Yayoi Kusama in New York,” in *Love Forever: Yayoi Kusama, 1958-1968*, ed. Thomas Frick, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1998), 14-15, 31 (hereafter cited as *Love Forever*).

³ Yayoi Kusama, “*Waga Tamashī no Henreki to Tatakai*” [“Odyssey of My Struggling Soul”], *Geijutsu Seikatsu [Art Life]* (November 1975): 96.

flowers which spread over her surroundings and threatened to dissolve her own self,” is how curator Alexandra Munroe introduced Kusama in the catalogue of the artist’s 1989 retrospective exhibition, attributing Kusama’s artistic vision to her aberrant mental condition.⁴ There have been some efforts made to re-contextualize Kusama since her second U.S. retrospective in 1998. Still, “Yayoi Kusama’s legend is based on a famous childhood memory which links the beginning of her artistic life to a hallucination,”⁵ is how Chantal Berét, the curator of Kusama’s 2011 Paris retrospective introduced Kusama, without calling into question the artist’s autobiographical narrative.

From time to time, Kusama does suffer from anxiety neurosis.⁶ It is a mild disturbance of the mind accompanied by unpleasant, distressing emotions. This condition is caused by the body releasing adrenaline and cortisone into the bloodstream as a response to stressful situations, which quickens the heart rate.⁷ In interviews, Kusama often mentions suffering from heart palpitations. But heart

⁴ Munroe, Karia, ed., *Kusama*, 13-14.

⁵ Wall text that introduced the exhibition, “Yayoi Kusama,” Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2011.

⁶ Audiotape of Yayoi Kusama, interview by Alexandra Munroe, Tokyo, 14 December 1988, CICA/ATT/001.01.

⁷ Kusama said that while growing up “I got anxiety neurosis” because “I was [left] with [a] nurse” for a long time and “my mother did not take care of me.” Audiotape of Yayoi Kusama, interview by Bhupendra Karia and Alexandra Munroe, Tokyo, 17 December 1988, CICA/ATT/001.06. The term “anxiety neurosis” is now seldom used: the current classification of chronic anxiety of this nature is generalized anxiety disorder. *The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology and Behavioral Science*, ed. W. Edward Craighead and Charles B. Nemeroff (New York: John Wiley & Son, 2001), vol.1, 123.

palpitations are not the same as having hallucinations. Still, except for a few recent articles, the existing literature on Kusama in both English and Japanese mostly either positions her work as symptomatic of her illness, in a way that effectively makes her an outsider to the dominant histories of painting and sculpture,⁸ or neglects her biography entirely and focuses narrowly on her work.⁹ A review of the materials in Kusama's archive made clear to me, however, that her own narrative of her life has shifted over time in relation to her experience. On one level, it may be argued, all human consciousness is continuously shaped and reshaped in relation to social experience: so the Existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre convincingly posited in his 1943 masterwork, *Being and Nothingness*.¹⁰ In Kusama's case, her social encounters enabled her to give form to what the feminist art historian Anna C. Chave calls an "authentically different art, marked by women's experience."¹¹ And her

⁸ See, for example, Munroe, Karia, ed., *Kusama*, 34; J. F. Rodenbeck, "Yayoi Kusama·surface·stitch·skin," in *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art: In, Of, and From the Feminine*, ed. Catherine deZegher, exh. cat. (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1996), 154; Helaine Posner, "Negotiating Boundaries in the Art of Yayoi Kusama, Ana Mendieta, and Francesca Woodman," *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation*, exh. cat., (Cambridge, MA: The MIT List Center, 1998), 160; Dehara Hitoshi, "The Creative Evolution of Yayoi Kusama in New York," in *Yayoi Kusama*, exh. cat. (Tokyo: The National Museum of Modern Art, 2004), 26 (hereafter cited as *Yayoi Kusama*); Midori Yoshimoto, "Performing the Self: Yayoi Kusama and Her Ever-Expanding Universe," in *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 46, 51.

⁹ See Amelia Jones, "Yayoi Kusama," in *Feminism—Art Theory—An Anthology, 1968-2000*, ed. Hilary Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 570-74; Zelevansky, *Love Forever*, 11-41.

¹⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Pocket Books, 1966), 320.

¹¹ Anna C. Chave, "'I Object': Hannah Wilke's Feminism," *Art in America* (March

work's metamorphoses visibly occurred in tandem with her life's most difficult events.

The present text is not principally aimed either at interpreting Kusama's art in relation to her autobiographical narratives, or at isolating her art from her history, biography, and psychology. Rather, I will approach Kusama through a material investigation, considering how personal and cultural memories may be embedded in things. I will consider Kusama's art in light of her social encounters, and position her breakthrough work against the backdrop of her milieu, which I reconstruct from archival sources. Since her social encounters were part of larger social histories, I will position Kusama's experiences in cultural, economic, political, and social contexts, while addressing the roles played by government, institutions, art dealers, critics, and her artist peers—in an approach that I term critical biography.¹² Unraveling the personal history of this transnational Japanese woman artist, between 1945—the final year of World War II—and 1969, the last year she actively worked in New York, will help me to construct postwar art history differently from received models, which have been developed by centering on white male artists and following a nation by nation structure.¹³

2009): 104. In context, Chave is not applying this phrase specifically to Kusama, but is outlining it as an aim of feminist art practice.

¹² I am indebted to Reiko Tomii for suggesting this term.

¹³ Due to nation-based thinking, the emergent literature on modern Japanese art is generally framed in terms of binary oppositions—such as East-West, or between nations. For instance, Bert Winther-Tamaki looked at mutual influences between Japanese art and the art of the United States. Bert Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations: Japanese and American Artists in the Early Postwar Years* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001). Also, one of Yoshimoto's "aims" was

Review of Literature: Some Problems with Biography

While preparing for her 2011 Tate Modern retrospective, in June 2010, Kusama re-edited the autobiographical narrative that she had previously supplied for official purposes and deleted a line describing her “hallucinatory visions.”¹⁴ Prior to this change, the standard biographies of the artist were based on her 1975 essay, “Odyssey of My Struggling Soul.” This article was Kusama’s written protest against her reputation as a “scandal maker” in the early 1970s in Japan.¹⁵ Kusama went back to Japan for three weeks in 1970, after twelve years of living and working in New York. The purpose of this visit was to bring the sexual revolution back home by staging orgiastic Happenings at Expo ’70 in Osaka. She unfortunately was arrested for the first Happening that she staged in Tokyo, and she never got to Osaka.¹⁶ By the time of Kusama’s permanent return to Japan in 1973, this event, together with various articles in Japanese that described her erotic Happenings in New York, besmirched her reputation; not a single gallery in Japan offered her an exhibition until 1975. This outright neglect distressed her and she suffered a serious nervous breakdown in 1975. Still, with her innate strength and wit, even though she was acutely ill and often

“to fill in gaps in the history of the avant-garde art by bringing the East and West” to a discussion of five Japanese women who worked in postwar New York. Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 3.

¹⁴ Yayoi Kusama, “Press Release,” June 2010.

¹⁵ Kusama, “Odyssey of My Struggling Soul,” 96.

¹⁶ “*Happuningu no jouō Kusama Yayoi no Banpaku Sanka Sengen*” [“A Happening queen, Yayoi Kusama’s Expo participation manifesto”], *Shūkan Post* [*Weekly Post*] 12, no. 12, (30 March 1969): 26.

bloated with medication, Kusama came up with a solution. In November 1975, a month before her first solo exhibition at Nishimura Gallery in Tokyo, she published what would become a key autobiographical essay, “Odyssey of My Struggling Soul,” in the art magazine *Geijutsu Seikatsu (Art Life)*, examining her neurosis, which she traced to her childhood.

Artists’ autobiographies are often integral to their commercial fortunes, and there has long been an avid market for narratives concerning mentally ill artists. Soon after the publication of “Odyssey of My Struggling Soul,” Kusama’s dealers began exaggerating its contents in order to sell her work. By 1988, a year before her first United States retrospective, Kusama’s biography in the catalogue accompanying her solo exhibition at Fuji Television Gallery stated that in her adolescence, she was “able to see an aurora around objects,” and that she “created many works out of her hallucinatory vision.”¹⁷ Although “Odyssey of My Struggling Soul” made no mention of the “dots” and “nets” that Kusama featured early on in her paintings in New York, in elaboration of that autobiographical narrative, these prominent motifs in her art became increasingly identified with her mental illness. In part, evidently, as a consequence, her work characterized by dots and nets began selling especially well. As the interpretation of her work became more and more linked with her putative psychosis, Kusama’s commercial prospects in Japan rapidly improved, while her works’ contents became increasingly obscured.

The dealers’ new promotional gimmicks, together with an interview Kusama

¹⁷ “Kusama Yayoi Biography” in *Soul Burning Flashes*, exh. cat. (Tokyo: Fuji Television Gallery, 1988), n.p.

herself gave in 1988, profoundly influenced her first United States retrospective. In her 1989 catalogue essay, "Obsession, Fantasy and Outrage: The Art of Yayoi Kusama," Munroe discussed Kusama's art as symptomatic of what she believed were Kusama's "obsessive-compulsive and hysteric tendencies." She noted that "the all over polka-dot and net patterns which characterized her [Kusama's] later work" were already evident in Kusama's fifth grade drawings. Munroe's catalogue text strongly influenced a successive generation of scholars and journalists. Though in the 1960s Kusama's art was never discussed in terms of hallucinations or mental illness, a majority of journalistic articles published after 1989 somehow characterized Kusama as a mentally ill artist.¹⁸ And among scholarly writings, Judith Rodenbeck's "Yayoi Kusama, surface, stitch, skin" (1996) and Midori Yoshimoto's "Performing the Self: Yayoi Kusama and Her Ever-Expanding Universe" (2005), for example, both postulated Kusama's work as indicative of her illness.¹⁹

Of course, some scholars have approached Kusama's art without reference to the complexities of her personal or historical contexts. British art historian Jo Applin's 2012 essay, "I am Here but Nothing" for instance, is a formal analysis of Kusama's *Infinity Mirror Room*. Applin positions this forty-seven-year old work within the present-day category of relational aesthetics, without paying attention to the historical context of Kusama's writings (which she also references), or to the

¹⁸ For example, see Camhi, "Woman on the Verge," 37; Kay Larson, "Social Work," *New York* (6 November 1989): 114; Levin, "Odd Woman Out," 109; Roberta Smith, "60's Minimalism, Looking Handmade," *The New York Times*, 24 May 1996, C 29; Mimi Thompson, "Yayoi Kusama," *Bomb* (Summer 98): 91.

¹⁹ Rodenbeck, "Yayoi Kusama," 154; Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 46.

work's intended function.²⁰ But this tendency to interpret Kusama's artwork without referencing social history or biography initially became salient among feminist writers focused on Kusama's persona as captured in photographs. For example, Amelia Jones's "Body Art: Performing the Subject" (1998) and Lynn Zelevansky's "Driving Image: Kusama in New York" (1998), both focused on Kusama's "stereotypical representation of femininity," as Zelevansky put it.²¹ Without specifics of history and biography, both writers could comment only abstractly on Kusama's situation. Jones, for example, wrote that Kusama enacted a stereotypical "*representation*" of a Japanese woman against the grain of a "normative subject (the straight, white, upper-middle-class, male subject coincident with the category 'artist' in Western culture)," which helped to expose "the hidden logic of exclusionism underlying modernist art history and criticism."²² But without discussing Kusama's particular situation, the article could not substantiate how that hidden logic functioned, and actually served to further exclude Kusama from the position of the normative subject.

Citing the film theorist Mary Anne Doane, Zelevansky argued, regarding the theatrical aspects of Kusama's practice: "The image is manipulable, producible, and readable by [itself]," although Kusama's true subjectivity and her intention is

²⁰ Jo Applin, "I'm Here but Nothing: Yayoi Kusama's Environments," in *Yayoi Kusama*, ed. Frances Morris (London: Tate Publishing, 2012), 186-191 (hereafter cited as Morris, ed., *Kusama*).

²¹ Zelevansky, *Love Forever*, 22.

²² Jones, "Yayoi Kusama," 572. Emphasis as in original.

unknowable.²³ A similarly open-ended interpretation can be found in Izumi Nakajima's 2006 essay, "Yayoi Kusama between Abstraction and Pathology," which invokes the feminist psycho-theorist, Bracha Ettinger's theory of the "matrixial feminine."²⁴ Promising "to present a reading of the Net painting as a visual signification that has been produced by a specific individual who is sexually and racially 'different,'"²⁵ yet "avoiding...the biography of the artist" and relying on feminist psycho-theory, Nakajima concluded her treatise by writing that Kusama's *Net* paintings "may be read as an artistic figuration" built on a different psychic economy, which gives "un-form to this matrixial fantasy that does not belong to the phallic Symbolic."²⁶ Both Zelevansky and Nakajima, with their open-ended discussions, assigned greater interpretive responsibilities to their readers. This type of argument belongs to a particular domain of postmodernism. As demonstrated in the following section, these postmodern discourses have produced a countervailing effect to 1970s politically-charged feminist axioms.

During the 1960s, while Kusama lived and worked in New York, her art was associated with various art movements, such as Pop art, Happenings, and Eccentric

²³ Zelevansky, *Love Forever*, 23.

²⁴ Izumi Nakajima, "Yayoi Kusama between Abstraction and Pathology," in *Psychoanalysis and the Image's Transdisciplinary Perspective on Subjectivity, Sexual Difference, and Aesthetics*, ed. Griselda Pollock (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publisher, 2006), 127-60.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 128.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 154.

Abstraction.²⁷ After Kusama's second U.S. retrospective in 1998, curators and scholars began making efforts to re-contextualize Kusama within different historical movements.²⁸ The earliest attempt of this sort was in 1998, when the curator Paul Schimmel included Kusama in his groundbreaking survey of performance art, "Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Objects, 1949-1979."²⁹ Seven years later, in 2005, Christoph Grunenberg presented Kusama's *Peep Show* (1966) as an example of 1960s psychedelic art in his pioneering exhibition, "Summer of Love, Art of the Psychedelic Era."³⁰ In his landmark exhibition, "Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture" from 2010, Jonathan D. Katz claimed Kusama's *Homosexual Wedding* (1968) as an early example of gay and lesbian art.³¹ Also in 2010, Kalliopi Minioudaki and Sid Sachs, the curators of "Seductive Subversions: Women Pop Artists, 1958-1968" considered Kusama as one among other, largely neglected, female Pop artists.³² These thematic exhibitions were broadly-based,

²⁷ Allan Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environment & Happenings* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1966); Lucy Lippard, *Pop Art* (New York: Praeger, 1966); *Idem.*, "Eccentric Abstraction," *Art International* 10, no. 9 (Nov. 1966): 28, 34-40.

²⁸ The Los Angeles County Museum initiated Kusama's second retrospective exhibition, "Love Forever, Yayoi Kusama: 1958-1968."

²⁹ Paul Schimmel, ed., *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Objects, 1949-1979*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Arts, Los Angeles 1998).

³⁰ Christoph Grunenberg, ed., *Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era*, exh. cat. (London: Tate Publishing, 2005).

³¹ Jonathan D. Katz and David C. Ward, eds., *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: The National Portrait Gallery, 2010).

³² Kalliopi Minioudaki and Sid Sachs, eds., *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists*,

seminal efforts, however, and failed to provide close analyses of Kusama's artwork.

The above re-contextualizations of Kusama suggest that her art does not neatly fit into the dominant 1960s categories of Pop or Minimalist art. Thus in 1999, the British art historian, Briony Fer revisited the historically under-appreciated 1966 exhibition, "Eccentric Abstraction." Though Kusama was not actually part of this exhibition, Fer discussed her *Accumulation* series in relation to the works featured in the show and observed that her work evinces a "bodily materiality."³³ In 2000, using the British psychoanalyst Melanie Klein's term the "part object," feminist art historian Mignon Nixon argued for the bodily associations of Kusama's work in "Posing the Phallus." Nixon considered Kusama's *Accumulation* sculptures as part of a newly emerging artistic trend since the mid-1950s whereby, with the fragmenting of the "phallic symbol as an emblem of patriarchal authority," Kusama attempted to alter our conventional idea of patriarchy.³⁴

In her 2004 *The Infinite Line: Re-making Art After Modernism*, Fer further extrapolated on the bodily materiality that she observed in certain contemporary sculptures. She described the repetitive phallic images in Kusama's *One Thousand Boat Show* as "the body-in-pieces" and postulated her

1958-1968, exh. cat. (University of the Arts, Philadelphia 2010).

³³ Critic Lucy Lippard curated "Eccentric Abstraction" in 1966. Kusama's name appears in Lippard's earlier article that introduced this new tendency. Lippard, "Eccentric Abstraction," 28, 34-40; Briony Fer, "Objects Beyond Objecthood," *Oxford Art Journal* 22, no.2 (1999): 25-36.

³⁴ Mignon Nixon, "Posing the Phallus," *October* 92 (Spring 2000): 103, 108, 111-114.

work as a “partial object.”³⁵ The following year, in an exhibition called “Part Object, Part Sculpture,” the curator Helen Molesworth proposed to interpret the “bodily repetition” observed by Fer and Nixon as being of Duchampian origin—more specifically tied to the “Duchamp of the 1950s, who spent the final decades of his career pursuing an abiding interest in the ties binding desire to the body and to things.”³⁶

In 2006, Anna Chave placed Kusama among female artists of the late 1960s and ‘70s who, on account of the “daunting odds against them” in society, sought radically different modes of expression by unfixing, dissolving, or expanding conventional expressive modes. She argued that such efforts were necessary for women hoping “to break a founding rule of the avant-garde itself, namely, that of its own homosocial homogeneity.” Thus these women’s artworks entailed implicitly political motivations, which rendered their art proto-feminist.³⁷ In 2012, Mignon Nixon similarly discussed the new pictorial modes that emerged from female artists in the 1960s and assessed Kusama’s art from that period as a mode of “protest art.”³⁸ Also in 2012, the British feminist psycho-theorist Juliet Mitchell analyzed Kusama’s

³⁵ Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line: Re-Making Art After Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 93-94.

³⁶ Helen Molesworth, ed., *Part Object, Part Sculpture*, exh. cat. (Columbus, OH: Wexner Center for the Arts, 2005), 19, 25.

³⁷ Anna C. Chave, “Outlaws: Women, Abstraction, and Painting in New York, 1967-1975,” in Katy Siegel, ed., *High Times Hard Times: New York Painting 1967-1975*, exh. cat. (New York: Independent Curators International, 2006), 133, 137-8.

³⁸ Mignon Nixon, “Infinity Politics,” in Morris ed., *Kusama*, 176-187.

work and her self-representation as captured in photographs, and argued that Kusama, who does not believe in socially imposed ideas of sexuality, counteracted such received ideas with “the vibrancy of sexuality, which is the force at the center of the ‘life drive.’” Kusama, therefore, is said to have made sexuality “the place of growth and energy” that invigorates her practice.³⁹

With respect to Kusama’s biographical narrative of hallucinatory visions, it was not until my own essay, “Re-Viewing Kusama, 1950-1975: Biography of Things,” published on the occasion of her 2009 retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, that the argument was made that the most important sources of Kusama’s art lay elsewhere than in her symptoms.⁴⁰ Based on a careful study of her works and on archival materials, my article discussed Kusama’s tendency to rework and repaint earlier works, which indicated that her “all over polka-dot and net patterns” were not necessarily drawn from her hallucinatory visions. By studying her calendar diary, with its casual notations of her appointments with psychiatrists, names of tranquilizers, and dates of hospitalizations, it did become evident to me that Kusama suffered from what she termed (evidently on the advice of professionals) anxiety neurosis. These notations, however, began only after her November 1962 nervous breakdown, which was evidently triggered in significant part by her intense sense of artistic rivalry with Claes Oldenburg over their respective sewn-soft

³⁹ Juliet Mitchell, “Portrait of the Artist as a Young Flower,” in Morris, ed., *Kusama, 195-197*.

⁴⁰ Midori Yamamura, “Re-Viewing Kusama, 1950-1975: Biography of Things,” in *Yayoi Kusama, Mirrored Years*, ed. Franck Gautherot, exh. cat. (Dijon: Les Presses du Reel, 2009), 62-109 (hereafter cited as *Mirrored Years*).

sculptures.⁴¹ Clearly, Kusama's neurosis was intimately linked with social experiences that in turn gave unique shape to her work: for example, she began employing mechanical processes only after the tranquilizers prescribed as a treatment for her neurosis began limiting her mobility. After my essay was published, Kusama decided to delete her reference to her experience of "hallucinatory visions" from the official, summary biography that she circulates.⁴² Taken as a whole, my work exposed the problems with taking an artist's autobiographical accounts as the definitive basis for an art historical approach and underscored how Kusama's experience of being a Japanese woman in a patriarchal society distinctively shaped her work and writing.

Feminism, Postmodernism, and Women's Social Distress

In my view, the Marxist geographer and social theorist, David Harvey's analysis of postmodernism best explains how certain postmodern discourses have

⁴¹ Just three months after Kusama premiered her distinctive version of sewn soft sculpture in a group exhibition at Green Gallery that included Oldenburg, in September 1962 Oldenburg premiered his version of soft sculpture sewn by his wife, Patty Mucha Oldenburg. This exhibition brought Oldenburg international recognition. This event led to Kusama's deep distress. She collapsed and was hospitalized in November 1962. In 1989, Oldenburg told Alexandra Munroe that the date of the Green Gallery group show was in 1963. Audiotape of Yayoi Kusama, interview by Alexandra Munroe and Reiko Tomii, tape recording, 21 February 1989, CICA/ATT/001.47. However, when the art historian Julia Robinson went over with Oldenburg the photo-documentation from the 1962 Green Gallery (based on my research), he told her that it is totally possible that Kusama was his influence. Julia Robinson, e-mail to the author, 26 March 2010.

⁴² However, while finalizing plans for her 2011-12 traveling exhibition initiated by Tate Modern, despite the new biographical statement she released in 2010, she forbade curators to remove references to her "hallucinatory visions" entirely from the exhibition's catalogue and wall texts.

closed down possibilities for social transcendence, which have been a common goal of all feminisms. In *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (1990), Harvey argued that Michel Foucault's idea of "heterotopias" best represents the unique condition of postmodernity.⁴³ Foucault's 1967 text, "Of Other Spaces" described "utopias" as "sites with no real place."⁴⁴ Just to be clear, utopia was an essential premise of Marxism, which considered the working class (the largest sector in capitalist society) as the potential agent of liberation from bourgeois sovereignty and repression. What Foucault promoted instead was the idea of "heterotopias."⁴⁵ According to Foucault, heterotopias consist in a large number of coexisting, concrete, yet disparate spaces within the reality we inhabit. Unlike the historically coherent space of the Enlightenment, these spaces exist only in "juxtaposition," "the near and the far," "the side-by-side," and "the dispersed," in accordance with "simultaneity."⁴⁶ They thus infinitely proliferate without reconnecting with each other. The only thing that is "irreducible in Foucault's scheme of things," Harvey observed, is "the human body."⁴⁷ Still, Harvey explained that

⁴³ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, Mass. and Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1990), 48.

⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" (1967) in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 239. In the field of art history, the prominent writer Rosalind Krauss turned "utopia," in her account, into "euphoria." Rosalind E. Krauss, "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum" (1990) in *Minimalism*, ed. James Meyer (London: Phaidon Press, 2000), 287-88.

⁴⁵ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 239.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 237.

⁴⁷ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 45.

postmodern subjectivity is fragmented.⁴⁸

Denying utopia, and refusing the notion of a self-contained identity, Harvey wrote that, “postmodernism can judge the spectacle only in terms of how spectacular it is.”⁴⁹ It thus overrules possibilities for transcendence, most significantly by incorporating the individual into an indifferent homogenous whole that continues to advance the governing principles of modernity. Hence, referencing Frederic Jameson,⁵⁰ Harvey concluded that postmodernism is “nothing more than the cultural logic of late capitalism.”⁵¹

Postmodernism, as represented by Foucault’s heterotopias, appears at a glance to be all-inclusive. However, from a feminist perspective, it rejects a certain dimension of society. This becomes apparent, for example, in Chave’s discussion of the social dimension of women’s illness. In her treatise “‘Normal Ills’: On

⁴⁸ Citing from Charles Baudelaire’s seminal essay, “The painter of modern life” (1863), in which Baudelaire described “modernity” as a dual formulation, conjoining the “ephemeral” and “eternal,” Harvey discusses the postmodern in its purported relation to the modern and deems “its total acceptance of the ephemerality, fragmentation, discontinuity, and the chaotic” as half of Baudelaire’s concept of modernity. He further explains that “postmodernism responds to the fact of that in a very particular way. It does not try to transcend it, counteract it, or even to define the ‘eternal and immutable’ elements that might lie within it.” Ibid., 9, 11, 41, 44.

⁴⁹ Harvey further writes: “Though Foucault might reasonably respond that only struggles fought in” a multifaceted and pluralistic attack upon localized practices of repression can “challenge all forms of power-discourse.” However, “what happens at each site cannot be understood” without an appeal to some overarching general theory. Ibid., 45-46, 56.

⁵⁰ Frederic Jameson, “Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 88.

⁵¹ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 11, 44, 45, 48.

Embodiment, Victimization, and the Origins of Feminist Art” (2006), Chave observed that, even “in a time of some post-ness for feminism,” in order to achieve “fitness for employment or [job] advancement,” women are still widely required to conform to patriarchal norms, a practice which can culminate in illness.⁵² She also pointed out that women can become ill as a cost of resisting (as well as, as a consequence of conforming to) social constraints. Kusama was not alone: Yoko Ono, Yvonne Rainer, Carolee Schneemann, and Atsuko Tanaka, all suffered nervous breakdowns when they challenged women’s social limits. Women are still generally re-making themselves to fit masculinist social norms, notwithstanding the significant improvements in women’s social status achieved by 1970s feminism and its legacy. This is in part because women’s social advancement has often been framed in terms of women getting to play, what Yoko Ono insightfully called in 1971, “the same game that men have played for centuries.”⁵³

Critical Biography

How then can feminists shift centuries-old ways of thinking? This is not an easy task because, as Foucault pointed out in 1969 in “What Is an Author?,” our visions are unfailingly mediated by society so that the author is as much a social,

⁵² Anna C. Chave, “‘Normal Ills’: On Embodiment, Victimization, and the Origins of Feminist Art,” in *Trauma, Visuality, and Modernity*, ed. Lisa Saltzman and Eric Rosenberg (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2006), 143-144.

⁵³ Yoko Ono, “The Feminization of Society” (1971), in *Yes Yoko Ono*, ed. Alexandra Munroe, exh. cat. (with Jon Hendricks) (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000), 300.

historical, and cultural construct as an autonomous individual.⁵⁴ Writing in 1998, Zelevansky in a way confirmed Foucault's hypothesis. She struggled to interpret Kusama's work in the context of the 1960s: "With hindsight, it can be difficult to accept the romanticized excesses of that time, its utopian belief in the infallibility of the individual and the power of unmediated feelings."⁵⁵ Instead, she discussed Kusama's work according to contemporary, feminist psychological theory.

Of course, all critical interpretation is affected by the critic's own milieu. In 1955, when modernist paradigms elevated individuality and originality in art, the critic Takachiyo Uemura enthusiastically praised Kusama's fifth solo exhibition in Tokyo as being of "singular originality."⁵⁶ But once Kusama had arrived in New York and was exposed to its vanguard scene, she herself noted that the concept of originality was in a way passé,⁵⁷ and began challenging it with a series of *Net* paintings. Defying conventions of painterly composition, her new work entailed an accumulation of a (pictorial) module—that collectively formed what she called a "net"—(fig. 2.1) which would by 1965 be seen as a novel innovation in the New York art scene. Despite her open resistance to notions of originality, in his review of Kusama's 1959 exhibition, Donald Judd, an *ARTnews* critic and Abstract

⁵⁴ Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" (1969), in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 101-20.

⁵⁵ Zelevansky, *Love Forever*, 27.

⁵⁶ Uemura Takachiyo, "Koseiteki na Eikyū to Kusama Yayoi" ["Originality of Eikyū and Yayoi Kusama"], newspaper clipping on her Takemiya Gallery exhibition, in folder "1955," Yayoi Kusama Papers, Tokyo, Kusama Yayoi Studio. Hereafter referred to as Kusama Papers.

⁵⁷ Kusama, Notebook No. 1, Kusama Papers.

Expressionist painter at that time, projected his own value system on her art and praised her as an “original painter.”⁵⁸

In the present study, I propose that an insightful perspective on Kusama’s achievement can be obtained through an examination of her work in light of the evidence to be found in her personal archive, to which she granted me unprecedented access. Such an examination makes clear that her work most dynamically shifted during the 1960s when she met the greatest challenges in her life. From her calendar diary, I discovered that each of her shifts in artistic strategy was unfailingly punctuated by illness. Kusama’s art and her psyche were indeed intimately connected. In my critical biography, I will scrutinize key, transformative moments of Kusama’s artwork that followed in part from episodes of social distress. In radically departing from tradition, and vehemently shaping her work against the grain of her time, Kusama inevitably encountered particular issues and biases of that time, which she attempted to transcend. In the text that follows, I seek to illuminate the links between her ideas and her situation, in part by reconstituting the milieu in which she made her work, on the basis of such diverse evidence as her calendar/diary, sketchbooks, notebooks, articles in the popular media, newsreels, and government documents, among other sources. I will analyze the thinking animating her creative process as evidenced by her sketchbooks, notebooks, and the photo-documentations of her work and her studio, as well as, of course, by the works themselves.

Since human experience is personal as well as collective, I will consider Kusama not so much in terms that seek to aggrandize the uniqueness of the

⁵⁸ Donald Judd, “Yayoi Kusama,” *Art News* 58, no. 6 (October 1959): 17.

individual—the basis of hagiographic biography—but in terms of her entry into and position within an historical sequence, namely the radical changes which took place in the arenas she occupied after World War II. I will also examine works by Kusama’s peers that help to illuminate the nature of the problems that she encountered. Through a close reading of objects, I hope to spotlight particular issues and problems that Kusama encountered, issues that make her an especially convincing subject for feminist scholarship and help to establish her standing as an important precursor of the feminist art movement in the United States.

Chapter Outline

In the four chapters that follow, I consider Kusama’s work in relation to a succession of crucial social and ideological factors: militaristic totalitarianism, the idea of infinity, monopoly capitalism, and the psychedelic movement.

“Chapter One: 1945-1957, Rising from Totalitarianism” will discuss the rise of the totalitarian state and how it affected Kusama’s early practice. I will focus on five of her transitional works. These unsettled works can be seen as the material testimonies of Kusama’s response to Japan’s tumultuous entry into the war and the post-war period, variously inscribed with traces of Japan’s cultural, economic, political, and social conditions. Kusama was born in Matsumoto City, Nagano Prefecture, in central Japan in 1929, the year of the Great Depression, to an affluent family that owned a plant nursery. Her childhood was spent in tumultuous times, as a global economic decline led Japan into a chain of wars, now known as the Fifteen-Year War (1931-45). During this period, military fascism—adopted from

German models⁵⁹—controlled every aspect of civic life. In its drive to instigate a fanatic nationalism, the government promoted *Nihonga* (fig. 1.10), a modern Japanese style of painting, which became the only sanctioned art form available at her school when Kusama began painting at the age of thirteen. She embraced art as a non-conformist pursuit, however. Her defiance of the country’s fanatic chauvinism propelled her, after the war, to seek a career overseas. During the Occupation (1945-52), as the United States-led Allied Powers took control over Japan, and touted United States art, Kusama became interested in the Pacific Northwest School of artists. With their help, she left for the United States in 1957.

“Chapter Two, 1958-1962: Infinity, the Arts of Active Social Engagement” investigates the idea of infinity—a postwar concept of the attainment of liberation and a human-centered society through the enrichment of humanity by the power of aesthetics in ways opposed to fascism and its propagandistic art forms—through a comparative study of works by Kusama, Barnett Newman, and the artists associated with the German Zero and the Dutch Nul (or zero, in English). Fascism led many artists and intellectuals to question totalitarian society. As a result, differing ideas of liberation emerged. As one example, a founder of Zero, Otto Piene was convinced that

⁵⁹ According to Andrew Gordon, “European fascist models inspired the men who came to rule Japan in the 1930s.” In fact, Japan “consciously drew on fascist models, such as the 1934 Nazi Law for the Organization of National Labor.” The ruling elite in Germany, Italy, and Japan all shared the “objective of funneling the energies of a glorified national body” into a “quest for military hegemony, a closed economic empire, and anti-democratic, hierarchic domestic politics, culture, and economy.” Andrew Gordon, “The Depression Crisis and Responses,” in *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 195, 202-3.

art's "transformative energy" could ultimately "refresh and renew human initiative"⁶⁰ and could thereby provide the individual a break from totalitarian models. Frustrated also by the nationalism and chauvinism endemic in the war, Zero and Nul artists, envisioning possibilities for international collaboration after the war, began curating their exhibitions by including works that strongly appealed to them. They invited Newman and Kusama, among others, to participate in the 1962 Nul exhibition held at Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum. Many of the artworks shown in the exhibition provided spectators with an experience designed to unfold in actual time and space, with a view to helping each spectator become freshly aware of his or her self. The new postwar society that the artists in question envisioned was not a legalistic one, but one organically committed to justice and the capacity for moral judgment by unique individuals who could think independently and act responsibly toward others.

If globalization has entailed the erosion of some spatial barriers due to innovative transport and communication systems, it would, by the same token, render unique locations and the concept of a local or national art less relevant. But the postwar art that we know best today is still predominantly that of white, western male artists. "Chapter Three, 1960-1966: Objects into Art, the Canonization of Pop Art and the Case of Kusama," investigates the development and influence of works by Kusama and the future Pop and Minimalist artists—especially Flavin, Judd, Oldenburg, Frank Stella, and Warhol—within their cultural, economic, political, and social milieus, between 1960 and 1966. Kusama initially emerged in New York's

⁶⁰ Otto Piene, response to author's question at "Propositions: Ute Meta Bauer," unrecorded, New Museum, New York, 27 February 2010.

downtown art scene, during a multicultural period when, after Martha Jackson Gallery's influential "New Forms—New Media" exhibition (1960), many up and coming artists grappled with the idea of creating objects by incorporating industrial materials, found objects, and commercial images. At the same time U.S. dealers were beginning to establish themselves globally. By 1964, the leading art dealer of the 1960s, Leo Castelli, with a coterie of international buyers, effectively established a monopoly market for his gallery artists, by carefully branding them as a unique version of American art—centering on native-born, white, male artists.

Once people began seeing the Pop art Castelli promoted as uniquely American, multiculturalism in the United States began to be marginalized. Moreover, monopoly capitalism in an expanded global art market started commodifying art to a greater degree, which, notwithstanding Pop art's borrowings from low culture, facilitated its absorption of by high culture. Being excluded from the mainstream art scene, Kusama was driven to bouts of depression. The process of overcoming her illness, however, helped to prompt the transition of her art from gallery environments to outdoor site-specific installations and performance art. Thus with *Narcissus Garden*, she began publicly protesting against the recent shifts in the cultural politics of Pop and critiqued the increasing professionalization of the art market.

"Chapter Four, 1965-1969: Eros and Liberation" scrutinizes some of Kusama's politically charged psychedelic Happenings that were documented in photography, comparing her endeavors with Warhol's psychedelic spectacle, the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, as well as with the initiatives of one of two founders of German Zero, Otto Piene and his collaborator, a U.S.-born artist who grew up in fascist Italy, Aldo

Tambellini. After her independent participation in the 1966 Venice Biennale, the rampant success of Pop art led Kusama to drop out of the marketplace completely. Shifting her conception of spectators from an elite to a mass public, Kusama became active in the psychedelic movement, which comprised a would-be anti-capitalist revolution. This was also a time when Frankfurt School philosopher Herbert Marcuse, an intellectual guru popular with the young, encouraged the fusion of art and life as an expression of revolt against the profit system and its commodity culture. Marcuse identified “real” art with anti-capitalism, and anti-capitalist art with the New Left.⁶¹ During this late sixties period, Kusama ceased creating paintings and sculptures. Converting her political aspirations into action, she created numerous psychedelic audio-visual-light shows, which were designed to activate the dormant part of the brain and to help alter human perception of the world from the imposition of capitalist values.⁶² She also staged various anti-Vietnam War demonstrations at different Manhattan landmarks and attempted to promote sexual liberation with her orgiastic *Naked Happenings* at nightclubs and discothèques, as well as at her studio. Eros was the main theme of these works. Eros, according to Marcuse, is the life force, as opposed to Freud’s death instinct. Making “the human body an instrument of pleasure

⁶¹ Herbert Marcuse, “Art as a Form of Reality,” in *On the Future of Art* (New York: Viking, 1970), 123-34.

⁶² Premiered in a New York theater in 1965 by the behavioral psychologist Timothy Leary, the psychedelic light show is the first neurological art form in human history, an art form that promoted visions akin to those acquired through LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide), without the spectator necessarily being on the drug. It helped to “turn on” never used cerebella zones of the human brain with an aim for positive social change. Timothy Leary, *Flashbacks, an Autobiography* (Los Angeles: T.J. Tarcher, 1983), 50, 227.

rather than labor,” Eros was the key to liberating people from “the dehumanizing conditions of profitable affluence.”⁶³ This phase of her work has been mostly interpreted in broad terms as closing a gap between art and life.⁶⁴ But Kusama was more ambitiously attempting to deploy her art as what Marcuse called “a force *in* the (given) society,” that “refuses to be for the museum or mausoleum,” and “wants to be *real*.”⁶⁵

At the dawn of the 1970s, the Nixon administration’s systematic attack on the counterculture movement induced greater disillusionment in those United States-based artists such as Kusama, who had emerged from totalitarian situations and who were decidedly anti-conformist. More specifically, this turn of events led Piene, Tambellini, and Kusama to cease their activities in New York around 1969. With the arrival of the new decade, it was above all Warhol’s bleak art that rose to the fore, while he established an ever more efficient business model to meet the needs of his clientele. In the “Conclusion,” I succinctly sum up my arguments in this study and discuss how in the late 1960s, the new utopianism that emerged after World War II ultimately failed while a greater spirit of social conformity began to preside over what Harvey calls a neoliberal world.⁶⁶

⁶³ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (original 1955; reprint, Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), xiii, xxiii, 22-23.

⁶⁴ For example, see Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 62, 65.

⁶⁵ Marcuse, “Art as a Form of Reality,” 127, 130. Emphasis as in original.

⁶⁶ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

CHAPTER ONE

1945-1957

RISING FROM TOTALITARIANISM

Sometime between January and July of 1956, anticipating her departure for Seattle in 1957, Yayoi Kusama burnt most of her early works on the banks of the Susuki River that runs behind her family home, pledging to “create many more and better works than those I destroyed.”⁶⁷ She remembers today that they were mostly *Nihonga* (a modern Japanese painting style entailing water soluble mineral pigments bound by deer-glue), a medium she had been acquainted with since January 1942, when her school replaced Matsumoto Noboru, an art teacher specializing in *yōga* (Western-style painting) with a *Nihonga* painter Hibino Kakei (né Teruo).⁶⁸ Just a month after Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor of 7 December 1941, this personnel change reflected the state policy of deploying culture to create fanatic nationalism during its aggressive colonial campaign called the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Aspiring to become an artist, Kusama, then thirteen, had no other choice but

⁶⁷ Yayoi Kusama, *Mugen no ami: Kusama Yayoi jiden [Infinity nets: Yayoi Kusama autobiography]* (Tokyo: Sakuhinsha, 2002), 76. This text is generally considered as a reliable source, but it was actually written by a ghostwriter. When compared with the primary sources, there exist some discrepancies in dating and other details.

⁶⁸ Hibino Kakei, letter to Harada Heisaku, 24 April 1989, folder “Yayoi Kusama,” Blanton Museum of Art Archives, University of Texas, Austin; Saeki Izumi (née Matsumoto), interview by Akie Terai based on the author’s questions. 15 March 2007. Full disclosure: Terai is the author’s mother, who grew up in Matsumoto and Saeki is Matsumoto Noboru’s daughter.

to take private lessons from Hibino.

Burning her *Nihonga* at the threshold of her career might have meant expunging dark memories of the war. She did save some works, however—a diverse array of things that included a wartime sketchbook, some *Nihonga*, *kōsai* (a resurgent genre in *Nihonga* that became prominent immediately after the war), early oil paintings, and mixed media. Mostly marked as “*hibaihin*,” or “not for sale,” in the artist’s unmistakable Japanese handwriting, these unsettling works were kept by Kusama until 2004, when concerned curators finally convinced her to move them to a fireproof storage facility at her hometown’s Matsumoto City Museum of Art.⁶⁹ The reason that Kusama wanted to keep them close to her was because they are the things most incised with memories of her growing up and maturing as an artist. In other words, they allowed her to remain in touch with her past.

Although Kusama’s mature paintings, for which she later became well known in New York, are usually large horizontal oil paintings made up of repeated small arcs, today known as her *Infinity Net* series, the works that critics in the fifties associated with her and evaluated highly were quite different. In fact, her “originality,” as observed by the critic Okamura Kenjirō in 1955, lay in her combining Surrealist “decalcomania and frottage methods that incorporated chance effects” and making

⁶⁹ These transitional works remained in storage at Kusama’s family house until her first retrospective in Japan in 1987. The former curator of Kitakyūshū City Art Museum remembers going to Kusama’s family home one day to fetch the early works for her retrospective. Since no one knew about the presence of these works, the artist curated them by herself. Nakajima Jun’ichi, unrecorded telephone interview by author, 10 April 2008. After the exhibition, the works were transferred to Kusama’s studio in Tokyo.

them her own.⁷⁰ Due to their un-canonical nature, little has been researched or written about them, however.

This chapter will focus mainly on Kusama's transitional works, those she exempted from destruction. These works might be seen as akin to the material testimonies of her response to Japan's tumultuous entry into the war and the post-war period, or as being variously inscribed with traces of her cultural, economic, political, and social conditions. In particular, five items—a wartime sketchbook (1945), *Lingering Dream* (1949), *On the Table* (1950), *Flower Spirit* (1955, dated as 1948) and *Gill* (1955)—will be examined in relation to their socio-historical milieu as carefully reconstructed from various archival sources including chronicles, newspaper articles, newsreels, as well from interviews.

A Sketchbook from 1945

The earliest work preserved in Kusama's Tokyo studio is a sketchbook that bears the English word "NOTEBOOK," embossed with fancy gold letters on a plain black cover (fig. 1.1). The date in red letters on the first page reads "Shōwa 20-nen 6-gatu" (June 1945), two months prior to the end of the Second World War, a dreadful time for the Japanese public. Kusama remembers how "American B29s" finally

⁷⁰ Okamoto Kenjirō, "Kitai sareru shin'jin: Kusama Yayoi" ["The hope of the art world: Yayoi Kusama"], *Geijutsu Shinchō* [*The new current in art*], 1955, magazine clipping, folder "1955," Kusama Papers. The Surrealist decalcomania technique was invented to achieve an accidental image by placing a blot of ink or a dab of paint onto a piece of paper, which is pressed against another sheet, creating two contingent patterns. Frottage is a technique for reproducing a given texture by laying a piece of paper over it and making a rubbing with a crayon or pencil. As elaborated in a later section of this chapter, Kusama's method was akin to, but not precisely, frottage.

reaching Japan's mainland in November 1944 "flew in the sky in broad daylight." The "air raid alert went off every day, so that I could barely feel my life."⁷¹ The living conditions were terrible, with magazines and newspaper articles listing insects and ground straw, for instance, as "edible."⁷² Alarmed and hungry, she was still able to fill the seventy-six pages of her sketchbook with no sign of haste or confusion.

Inside, the sketchbook reveals various life drawings of peonies. In Japan, the peony is regarded as the most beautiful of all flowers. However, up until page twenty-three, Kusama continued to draw damaged fragments of the peony, including withered and deformed flowers with insect-eaten leaves and darkened and shriveled pistils. For example, the first page captures a close up of a single peony -leaf with its top eaten by insects (fig. 1.2: pp.1-2). In view of the circumstances under which they were drawn, the fine pencil lines capturing the details of the leaf-veins might be seen as akin to strained human veins or nerves looking as though even a faint stimulus could inflict pain. The facing page bears a cluster of worm-eaten leaves. A broken tendril supported by the thin unyielding skin of the plant conveys its faint resistance against a greater natural force, as though reflecting the artist's own will.

Yayoi Kusama was born in mountainous Matsumoto City in the Nagano Prefecture of central Japan in 1929 to an affluent family that owned Nakatsutaya, a plant nursery. Yayoi was her parents' fourth and youngest child, the second daughter. Surrounded by the Japanese Alps, Matsumoto is a secluded place whose residents,

⁷¹ Yayoi Kusama, letter to author, 1 March 2007.

⁷² *Shōwa niman'ichi no zenkiroku: Shōwa day by day [The complete record of Shōwa's 20,000 days]* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1990), vol. 6, 50, 206.

back then, scarcely had even a chance to see the Pacific Ocean. Yet, the global economic depression crossed the Pacific and beset this isolated province. As Kusama clearly remembered: “I was born the year the stock market crashed [in New York],” forcing the family to sell parts of their land.⁷³

Before the depression, Nagano was famous for its silk industry. Raw silk, during World War I, ranked as Japan’s number one export item.⁷⁴ After the war, the sudden demise of the export silk market hit local farmers hard. For example, during the Great Shōwa Depression of 1927, Nagano’s silk manufacturers spent five yen to produce eight pounds of silk cocoons, which sold for two yen.⁷⁵ The situation was aggravated by the 1929 market crash. In the following year, the biggest local bank, Shinano Ginkō (Shinano Bank) went bankrupt. These events distressed the Kusamas’ family business, which afflicted young Yayoi’s psyche. According to her, “I got anxiety neurosis” because “I was [left] with [a] nurse” for a long time and “my mother did not take care of me.”⁷⁶ Yayoi’s mother, Shigeru, was the first-born daughter of a family that lacked a male heir, which meant she had to shoulder the burden of tremendous business responsibilities. If Yayoi’s memory about her mother is correct, the economic pressures her mother felt may have taken her attention away from her

⁷³ Audiotape of Kusama, interview by Karia and Munroe, 17 December 1988.

⁷⁴ Narai Osamu, *The Modern Japanese Economy* (Tokyo: Foreign Center, 1984), 11.

⁷⁵ *Nagano-ken hyakunen-shi [Hundred years of Nagano Prefecture]* (Matsumoto: Kyōdo Shuppan-sha, 1984), 62.

⁷⁶ Kusama, interview by Karia and Munroe, 17 December 1988.

youngest child.⁷⁷

Nagano was one example of Japan's nationwide economic crisis that led to a chain of political and social upheavals after the Manchurian Incident of 1931.⁷⁸ On 15 May 1932, a coup organized by a group of young naval officers ended Japan's parliamentary rule. Immediately after, the Financial Minister Takahashi Korekiyo launched harsh economic policies in order to maintain a smooth economic flow at home and secure markets abroad. Takahashi first took the nation off the gold standard. The resultant cheap domestic labor won the country a new global market.⁷⁹ Secondly, he approved major deficit spending to finance the expanded cost of operations in Manchuria.⁸⁰ This Keynesian economic policy stretched Japan's marketplace abroad. At the same time, it exploited socially marginalized people both at home and

⁷⁷ During the war, Shigeru not only looked after Nakatsutaya's business affairs, but was also involved in the National Defense Association group. A photograph of Kusama's mother with this group is in the family album at the Kusama residence, Nakajō, Matsumoto-City.

⁷⁸ Thinking of Japan's future, Colonel Ishikawa Kanji of the Kwantung army in Manchuria believed that the region's mineral-rich and fertile land could resolve agrarian poverty at home by receiving Japanese emigrant farmers. On October 18, 1931, Ishikawa's force blew up some tracks of the southern Manchurian railway at the major crossroads of Mukden (today's Shenyang), and announced it as the work of the Chinese military. The army used it as a pretext for attacking the Chinese regional armies. After the incident, Japan installed a puppet government in Manchūko (the former Manchuria) and began promoting the pan-Asian ideology of liberation from Western imperialism, or the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere. Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 186-88.

⁷⁹ Taking the nation off the gold standard led to the depreciation of the yen. One dollar purchased two yen in late 1931 but could buy five yen the following year.

⁸⁰ Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 192-93.

abroad.⁸¹ In 1932, the government also revised its policies toward the older colonies of Korea and Taiwan by exploiting colonial farmers as slave labor to supply raw materials for Japanese industry. At home, the grave unemployment situation was partially resolved by relocating 50,000 Japanese to Manchuria. With its silk industry suffering, Nagano ranked as the nation's top labor exporter, totaling 30,900, almost two percent of the prefecture's entire population.⁸² Japan's westward expansion into the Eurasian Continent and abuse of manpower were clearly felt by the Japanese people while Kusama was growing up. By 1945, one out of every two immigrants from Nagano would either be killed or never return from the continent.

Despite all these crimes against humanity, the new economic policy caused Japan's industrial output to rise 82 percent in a mere three years between 1931 and 1934. By 1936, its economic recovery rate had grown by about 50 percent, faster than any Western nation.⁸³ Its harsh economic policies did not benefit the starving populace, however, but, instead, favored the shareholders of the capital-intensive, heavy and chemical industries protected by the state since the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), or Japan's industrial and financial business conglomerates known as *zaibatsu*.

⁸¹ Keynes's *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* did not come out until 1936, but Keynes set out some of his key ideas in earlier publications, and it is possible that Takahashi was familiar with Keynesian thinking. John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd, 1936); Michael S. Lowler, *The Economics of Keynes in Historical Context: One Intellectual History* (Basingstoke, U.K. and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

⁸² In 1930 alone, Nagano's unemployed workers totaled 80,300. *Hundred years of Nagano*, 6, 10-11.

⁸³ Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 192.

These mega-corporations played a central role in Japan's colonial expansion, and the effects of this were acutely felt even in Matsumoto City. While growing up, Kusama witnessed the expansion of heavy industry, which generally replaced local, family-owned businesses, and Nagano quickly acquired a cluster of military factories. After the outbreak of full-scale war with China in 1937, Matsumoto's Fiftieth Regiment—as Kusama still clearly remembers today—was called up and sent to the continent.⁸⁴ These soldiers from the lower social strata were cannon fodder. Two out of every three Fiftieth Regiment soldiers either died or were wounded. Every time the dead were returned, civilians assembled along the main street from Matsumoto Station to honor the deceased whose remains had been placed in urns which their loved ones carried.

The war and economic depression initially stirred some socialist concerns among the people in Japan. For instance, in the industrial field, during the economic recession, the Home Ministry had originally promoted unions as potential sources of social stability. But after the second military coup in 1934, the new right-wing government purposely emulated the Nazi Law for the Organization of Labor and replaced unions with universal plant councils under the Campaign for Economic Revitalization. The new order stressed the spirit of cooperation and an agenda for a classless community, but with an emphasis on the nation and all things national. As a result, people began feeling that companies were effectively communities in which all members were equal before the emperor. In rural areas such as Matsumoto, the government began promoting a traditional sense of rural solidarity through agrarian

⁸⁴ Ibid., 10-11; Yayoi Kusama, fax to author, 4 June 2007.

nationalism. By 1937, a nationwide network of “discussion councils” was instituted in all workplaces. These were to be composed of worker and manager representatives who would cooperate to prevent conflicts. In the process, unions were abolished and individuals were woven into a system that paved the way for totalitarianism.⁸⁵ It was in this context of totalitarian governance that the military government mobilized the nation for an all-out war.

Under the military regime, students were essentially reduced to cogs in the machine of the war-mongering society. In the early days of the war, Kusama was mobilized to work in the field planting crops.⁸⁶ After the enactment of the revised Student Mobilization Act of July 1944, Kusama, together with her classmates, was recruited to work at Kureha Bōseki (Kureha Textile), a factory that produced fabrics for military uniforms and parachutes.⁸⁷ This new labor law mandated students fifteen and older (Kusama was fifteen years old in 1944) to toil until midnight.⁸⁸ The effects of these extreme conditions could be seen in these youth. In 1944, the average weight of a fifteen-year-old in Japan was 42.8 kilograms, down from 45.4 in 1942, and the situation got worse in the final year of the war.⁸⁹ The winter of 1944 and 1945 was exceptionally cold. Malnutrition, the smoke from damp wood used for heating, and

⁸⁵ Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 194-96.

⁸⁶ Yayoi Kusama, interview by Kawasaki Yōko based on author’s questions, Tokyo, Kusama Yayoi Studio, 11 May 2007.

⁸⁷ Kusama, letter to author, 1 March 2007.

⁸⁸ *Shōwa day by day*, 6: 50, 206.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 6: 294-95.

poor ventilation in factories affected the respiratory system of many workers.⁹⁰

Kusama remembers that working “without any nutritious food” and “breathing the dirty factory air” made her sick with pneumonia. The wartime sketchbook was among the works that she produced, while recuperating at home.⁹¹

In an oblique way, this plain-covered notebook encapsulates the wartime moment in Japan. This type of notebook with an English word on its cover was manufactured before the government’s ban on English as an enemy language in January 1943, and was most likely kept out of commercial circulation.⁹² During the period established under the National General Mobilization Law (*Sōdōin Taisei*) of 1941, the state attempted to control every single material and human resource in order to win the war.⁹³ Sketchbooks were no exception, rationed only to government-recognized professional artists.⁹⁴ In 1945, with only three years of professional training, Kusama was ineligible to receive government-rationed art supplies. Yet, apparently seeking to make images, she most likely acquired the

⁹⁰ Hamano Takiko, “*Watashi no taiken, kinrō dōin ni akekureta hibi*” [“My experience, days and nights spent in the student mobilization”], in *Hundred years of Nagano*, 62.

⁹¹ Kusama, letter to author, 1 March 2007.

⁹² *Shōwa day by day*, 6: 206.

⁹³ In 1938, the Japanese Diet ratified a National General Mobilization Law. It stipulated that, once a “time of national emergency” was declared, the bureaucracy could issue any orders necessary—without Diet approval—“to control material and human resources.” Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 212.

⁹⁴ Officer Suzuki (name as used in the article), “Defense Nation and Art,” *Mizue* (January 1941), quoted in Kazu Kaidō, “Reconstruction: The Role of the Avant-Garde in Post-war Japan,” *Reconstructions: Avant-Garde Art in Japan 1945-1965*, ed. David Elliot and Kazu Kaidō, exh. cat. (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art Oxford, 1985), 14.

notebook from some underground source.⁹⁵

Often bearing notations of the colors and qualities of the peonies, Kusama's careful sketches were preparatory drawings for *Nihonga*. Literally translated as “Japanese picture,” *Nihonga* was the painting practice most frequently associated with Japan's national art from the late 1880s through 1945. Originally, the term *Nihonga* was coined merely in order to distinguish Japan's local, water-based painting from European oil painting. However, in Japan's self-conscious process of reshaping the feudal system into a modern nation-state, *Nihonga* as “modern Japanese-style painting” emerged, helping to establish Japan's national identity.

The nation's modern history began at almost the same time as that of its Axis allies in World War II: Italy (1861) and Germany (1871). It was in the decade after the Meiji Restoration in 1867 that culture became conspicuously “national” in Japan. *Nihonga* becomes pivotal in that context. Interestingly, however, the American Orientalist Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908), who joined the faculty of Tokyo University in 1878 to teach philosophy and political economy, had an enormous influence on formulating the idea of a modern Japanese-style painting. Fenollosa happened to be in Japan during a critical time, when Japanese schools began relying on translated Western textbooks, and painters turned their backs on indigenous art to concentrate on oil painting. Being an amateur painter and a collector of *japonaiserie*, Fenollosa

⁹⁵ Since Kusama began studying *Nihonga* in 1941, it is almost certain that she acquired the notebooks without lines during the war so that she could use them as her sketchbooks. During the war, since paper money had no value, it is possible that Kusama have traded for the notebook with clothes or foodstuffs—the necessities of life. Terai's reply to the authors query about the wartime condition in Matsumoto. Akie Terai, e-mail to author, 23 June 2010.

lamented the loss of what he considered to be “authentic” Japanese culture. He thus urged the government to establish a national art and build the appropriate infrastructure: national museums, national art education, and state-supported juried exhibitions.⁹⁶ Somewhat ironically, the views on Japanese culture of Fenollosa, a foreigner, provided government officials with a lucid objective as to how they should formulate a national culture and image and present Japan to the outside world. By the late 1880s, government officials accepted Fenollosa as an authority on Japanese art.

According to the art historian Victoria Weston, it was a student of Fenollosa, Okakura Tenshin (né Kakuzō; 1862-1913) who was singly responsible for turning Fenollosa’s visions into political reality.⁹⁷ After entering the Ministry of Education as a government official, Okakura stressed the importance culture can play in the building of a new nation. While thinking of Japan’s new cultural identity, Okakura looked to nineteenth-century Europe as his model, and was especially impressed with the way European countries transformed themselves from feudal polities into modern nation-states. What became essential during this period of transition was the idea of “culture-based, language-based ethnic collectives,” which recast the concept of nation.⁹⁸ Okakura thus came to promote those aspects of culture that Fenollosa had regarded as uniquely Japanese, which helped to galvanize patriotism at home and

⁹⁶ Victoria Weston, *Japanese Painting and National Identity: Okakura Tenshin and his Circle* (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2004), 6.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2. Although the Tokugawa clan unified Japan in 1600, under the shōgunate, there existed various clan-based states called “*han*” in feudal Japan. Each *han* had a distinctive culture and spoke various dialects.

inspire respect abroad.

The government's outright promotion of national art at this early stage of its status as a modern nation-state deserves attention,⁹⁹ as it makes us re-think current, persistent inquiries regarding what was promoted as a distinctive Japanese identity, artistic nationalism, and matters concerning the cultural exchange between "East and West" in the field of modern Japanese art.¹⁰⁰ In fact, at its root, Japan's national culture is a mixture of various cultures. For example, with a view to making *Nihonga* internationally competitive, at its inception, Okakura's circle conceived of the new national art as itself a hybrid formation. Its members encouraged artists to draw from a wide range of sources, such as *Yamato-e* (a type of decorative art with heavy use of color, derived from eighth century Chinese art), *Kara-e* (a school of painting influenced by Zen), Maruyama Shijō style (some eighteenth-century paintings that incorporated a Western-style realism), as well as classical and modern European art. Considering that the foundations of Japanese art were generally predicated on Chinese art from the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420-581) and its technical and philosophical aspects were further determined through the subsequent emissaries to the Sui (581-618) and Tang (618-907) Dynasties, the concept of a distinctive culture

⁹⁹ The Japanese government also supported *yōga* (oil painting) but as part of Japan's Westernization programs. After entering the Ministry of Education's Art Bureau, Okakura worked to abolish Western-style drawing instruction in public schools in favor of Japanese brush painting and built a national art infrastructure by founding art schools and museums. *Ibid.*, 1, 6.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations*; Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*.

native to Japan becomes elusive.¹⁰¹ As identified with the Japanese military's propagandistic use of culture in the Meiji era, what lay beneath "the unquestioned and essentialistic national identity"¹⁰² was a political ideology that conjured up the prospect of "Japanese art" as a coherent whole.

When Japan aggressively expanded into Asia under its Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere program, the state authorities further turned fine arts into a propaganda tool. Under the patronage of the Army Information Section, the Army Art Association was established in 1939, two years after Japan entered the war with China. Addressing artists, one military officer wrote in 1941 in the art magazine *Mizue*: "If you do not follow our guidelines, we will stop the rations."¹⁰³ Paints and canvases were included in the rations, and so the government could threaten artists and direct them to produce war art.¹⁰⁴ After July 1941, anticipating war with the United States, the government tightened its control of information and, by so doing, solidified its hold over cultural representation. The government first consolidated various art magazines into *Shin Bijutsu (New Art)*, which, after October 1943, branched into *Bijutsu (Art)* and *Seisaku (Art-Making)*. These magazines mainly discussed *Nihonga* and the classical arts of Japan's allies, Germany and Italy. Often, their feature articles

¹⁰¹ Since the late 1980s, revisionist studies exist in the field of traditional Japanese art prior to Meiji Restoration (1867). See, for example, Michael Sullivan, *The Meeting of Eastern and Western Art* (Berkeley: University of California Berkeley Press, 1989); Joan Stanley-Baker, *Japanese Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2000).

¹⁰² Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations*, 2.

¹⁰³ Kaidō, *Reconstructions: Avant-Garde Art in Japan*, 14.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

were about the aesthetics and methods of war art encompassing graphic depictions of the battlefield. The role of culture, during Japan's colonial expansion, was to spur patriotism at home and impart a coherent identity to its colonies.

The military regime also used the education system as a tool for manipulating people's psychology. Reminiscing about her adolescent years, Kusama recalls: "I was troubled by the horribly conservative and remarkably backward education of Matsumoto-kōjo (the Matsumoto First Women's Upper School)."¹⁰⁵ What she referred to as conservative and backward was an educational system based on the Ministry of Education's infamous 1937 manifesto, "*Kokutai no hongei* (The cardinal principles of the national polity)."¹⁰⁶ This program promulgated above all the idea of "serving the Emperor and accepting the Emperor's august will as one's own."¹⁰⁷ As a result, for example, while Kusama was attending school, the teachers and students were forced by the military government to conceive of even *Goshin'ei* (photographs of the Emperor) as tantamount to the actual living God. A major task of pupils in elementary-school history classes, in the early days of the war, was to memorize and recite Japanese imperial genealogy. The world map, marked with Japanese colonial

¹⁰⁵ Kusama, letter to author, 1 March 2007.

¹⁰⁶ The important role played by "The cardinal principles of the national polity" during the war attracted scholarly attention in Japan only recently, after the translation of the retired naval officer Herbert Wunderlich's text was published in 1998. Herbert J. Wunderlich, *The Japanese Textbook Problem and Solution: 1945-1946*, trans. Gary Hoichi Tsuchimochi (Tokyo: Tamagawa Daigaku Shuppanyoku, 1998).

¹⁰⁷ Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 199.

territories, was taught as geography.¹⁰⁸ Every first day of the month, the students in Nagano had to show their national allegiance by bringing a lunchbox designed to represent the Rising Sun; thus, a red salted plum garnished the middle of a white-rice-filled box. The students' textbooks were full of anecdotes of military prowess. As part of this grand campaign, Hibino was hired to teach *Nihonga* at Kusama's school. Although Kusama was already fond of painting during her elementary school years,¹⁰⁹ *Nihonga* became necessarily the medium in which she first formally trained.

Notwithstanding the vehement nationalism that underscored *Nihonga*, what attracted Kusama to this would-be chauvinistic practice was its main principle, *jikohattatsu*. The Japanese word *jiko* in English is “self” and *hattatsu* is “development.” According to the distinguished scholar of *Nihonga*, Kawakita Michiaki, what *Nihonga* truly encouraged at its inception during the Meiji Period (1868-1912) was the creation of a distinctively individual expression by drawing from global arts from different periods with a view to making Japanese art internationally competitive.¹¹⁰ It was this aspect of self-development that interested Kusama and kept her engaged in *Nihonga* until 1950.

For Kusama, the concept of self-development had two meanings. One was a

¹⁰⁸ Okano Kaoruko, *Taiheiyō sensō ka no gakkō seikatsu* [*The school life under the Pacific War*] (Tokyo: Shinchō-sha, 1990), 9, 38-96, 100.

¹⁰⁹ Fujita Hisako, interview by author, Hamamatsu City, Shizuoka Prefecture, video recording by Matsumoto Takako, 25 January 2008.

¹¹⁰ Kawakita Michiaki, “Hayami Gyoshū no Geijutsu” [“Art of Gyoshū Hayami”], *Hayami Gyoshū sono hito to geijutsu* [*Gyoshū Hayami his art and personality*] (Tokyo: Yamatane Bijutsukan, 1977), 10.

mandate to invent her own original form of expression; the other was the necessity of cultivating her personality by engaging in art. The most unusual among her sketches, which appears on page sixty-two of her sketchbook, for instance, can be identified with the former (fig. 1.3). Here, Kusama (who most likely did not yet know about Surrealist frottage) experimented with the transfer of images by applying *sumi* (Chinese black ink) on a peony leaf and rubbing it onto a blank page. Other pages demonstrate details of branches (fig. 1.4) and young buds. In anticipation of coloring and working on a final composition, she notated meticulous observations regarding the colors and qualities of the peonies. In these pages, some technical experiments are also present. For instance, pages thirty-five and -six bear the subtle details of branch skin in realistic rendition. Pages forty-one and -two depict young branches in boldly simplified lines (fig. 1.5).

As wartime propaganda in various material forms permeated the national mindset, making reality increasingly remote, Kusama later recounted her feeling that: “imperialism and militarism melded together, [which] deprived individuals of their ability to develop free thinking.”¹¹¹ All journalistic articles underwent pre-publication censorship under the policy of *genron tōsei* (speech control). Newsreels were made up of bloodless fake battles that always ended in victory for the imperial army.¹¹² By 1941, 6.6 million radio receivers were bringing jingoistic news and entertainment to more than forty-five percent of all households, thus

¹¹¹ Audiotape of Yayoi Kusama, interview by Bhupendra Karia and Alexandra Munroe, Tokyo, 16-18 December 1988, CICA/ATT/001.05.

¹¹² Tape No. 16, Origin FAB 4169, Magnetic Recording Library, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

brainwashing people. As the dominant reality became in a certain sense fictional, Kusama remembered trying to confirm the actual existence of things by counting innumerable pebbles on the riverbank behind her family house.¹¹³ This was, after all, a time when the Ministry of Home Affairs inspected every personal letter in order to eliminate expressions of dissatisfaction and complaints against the government. By such measures, over time, individuals were denied freedom. Kusama's painstaking efforts to develop craftsmanship, polish her skills, and cultivate her aesthetic insights were in a way a means to liberate herself from the oppressive regime. Through these disciplines, she could attempt to confirm her own existence and become her own person. "Standing before life and death," what emerged as "the most important matter" for Kusama was the process of asking herself, "Who I am and how do I envision myself"; and art, especially *Nihonga*'s aspect of self-development, was essential to that process.¹¹⁴ By engaging in this practice, she could cultivate and nurture her distinctive personality, which enabled her to dissociate herself from totalitarian society.¹¹⁵

In the process of completing *Nihonga*, artists must first draw exhaustive studies of a subject from life until they come upon the lines that best represent it. Based on these sketches, they then make compositional studies. When a satisfactory design is finally composed, it will be made into a cartoon and transferred to a tableau

¹¹³ Yayoi Kusama, "Onna hitori kokusai gadan wo yuku" [*A lone woman goes into the international art world*], *Geijutsu Shinchō* [New current in art] (May 1961): 128.

¹¹⁴ Kusama, interview by Karia and Munroe, 17 December 1988.

¹¹⁵ Kusama, interview by Karia and Munroe, 17 December 1988.

base (usually hemp-based paper called *mashi*, which is durable, but has a very fragile surface), using carbon paper. Only after tracing every single line of the composition in *sumi* (black ink) may painters begin to apply colors.¹¹⁶ Since Kusama destroyed most of her early pieces in 1956, it is unknown whether or not she completed any *Nihonga* during the war. Judging from her circumstances, however, the social turmoil and the lack of resources likely kept her from completing any tableau in this period. Instead, the subject matter of her drawings—microcosmic views of plant life in the peony including its growth, decay, decline, and regeneration, in other words, its full lifecycle—seems to have fully absorbed her attention. She executed these drawings very carefully—the seventy-six pages of her sketchbook show no signs of haste or confusion. Perhaps by immersing herself in this way she was able to ameliorate her fears of the world around her.

Yet this world intervened in ways that directly affected Kusama. The government slogan, “Luxury is the enemy,” was repeated so often that it came to permeate popular consciousness during the war, and art that did not assist in the national war effort—such as the graphic depiction of battle scenes, or a manifestation of state propaganda—was deemed opulence. Still, in Kusama’s notebook (starting on page thirty-two) she captured beautiful blossoms (fig. 1.6). The final few pages were also reserved for fully blooming flowers (fig. 1.7). In these achromatic drawings Kusama experimented with graphite until one can almost sense the colors of the peonies and the artist’s joyous embrace of their beauty. Since the military government

¹¹⁶ Full disclosure: my own undergraduate training was in *Nihonga* at the Musashino Art University, Tokyo.

strictly prohibited pure aesthetic beauty, the sixteen-year old artist's embrace of beauty represented, in a way, her own modest resistance to the powers that governed society.

Because the fascist government ordered ordinary citizens to police each other for antipatriotic conduct, if Kusama's neighbors had seen her engaged in this seemingly bourgeois act—disobeying the government's mandate to work in the military factory and sketching in her family's plant nursery—she could have been reported and arrested.¹¹⁷ But Kusama recalled that drawing was more important to her than any other daily activity, considering that her “worldview was entirely formulated by engaging myself in painting.”¹¹⁸ When she graduated upper school in March 1945, Kusama decided that the national school had taught her nothing and remembers, “I tore my graduate certificate with both my hands and discarded it.”¹¹⁹ It was during these “dark, dead-end” days of the war that, disgusted by the rampant chauvinism in Japanese culture, Kusama also began to imagine leading the life of a professional artist and going overseas, so that she could “communicate with a wider

¹¹⁷ Kusama's classmate, Fujita Hisako remembers today that anti-nationalistic activities were strictly prohibited even in Matsumoto. Fujita, interview by author, 25 January 2008.

¹¹⁸ Kusama, letter to author, 1 March 2007.

¹¹⁹ Kusama, fax to author, 4 June 2007. In the fax, she specifically mentioned a “Students Mobilization Act,” that had deprived her from studying. Due to *hayaumare* [early-born] policy, because the Japanese school year begins in April, Kusama, who was born on 22 March 1929, graduated with the students born between April 1928 and March 1929, so that she graduated a year in advance of most of the students who were born in 1929.

audience, especially people abroad, through my art.”¹²⁰ *Jikohattatsu*

(self-development) was one such method that, she believed, could make her art internationally competitive.

The combination of the two atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima (August 6) and Nagasaki (August 9), the declaration of war by the Soviet Union (August 8), and the Soviet invasion of Manchuria (August 9), led the emperor to end the war, with his premiere radio broadcast announcing the nation’s surrender to the Allied Powers on 15 August 1945. Remaining aloof from the frantic climate of nationalism, Kusama recalls that she had been almost “certain” of, and “prayed every day” for this outcome.¹²¹ Not long after Japan’s surrender, in November 1945, Kusama promptly began her career as a professional artist by participating in regional open call competitive exhibitions. In her first such effort, she painted a work entitled “Minori” (Harvest) (fig. 1.8)—a crop of millet and cornhusks that became a rice-substitute immediately after the war—and submitted the painting to *Zen-Shinshū Bijutsuten* (All Shinshū region art exhibition).¹²² This is another work she cherished and kept in her studio until 2004. The piece was one of twenty-five admitted from the open competition in the *Nihonga* category, which, according to Matsumoto City Museum of Art curator Shibutami Akira, was quite an outstanding achievement for a

¹²⁰ Yayoi Kusama, “*Tobei o mae ni shite: Watashi no yume wa kakushite jitsugen suru*” [“On the eve of departure for the U.S.: My dream is thus about to come true], [unidentified magazine, probably 1957”], magazine clipping, folder “1957,” Kusama Papers.

¹²¹ Kusama, letter to author, 1 March 2007.

¹²² The author confirmed with Kusama that the illustrated work, previously known as *Untitled* is *Minori*. Kusama, interview by author, 24 January 2008.

sixteen-year-old woman.¹²³ Another recognizable name appearing in the catalog of this exhibition was Kusama's teacher Hibino Kakei.¹²⁴

Kusama was, however, one among a surprising number of upper-middle class women of her generation—including the artists Yoko Ono and Shigeko Kubota—who chose to become professionals after the war. This was not merely a fluke.

Traditionally, only lower-class Japanese women had worked to support their families in previous generations.¹²⁵ But during the war, with the establishment of the Women for National Defense Association (of which Kusama's mother was a member),¹²⁶ new legislation enabled upper- and upper-middle-class women to take on new social roles; in fact, forty-two percent of the civilian labor force was made up of women during wartime.¹²⁷ By becoming familiar with the workplace and later, after the enactment of the New Constitution in 1947, attaining equal access to education, Kusama's

¹²³ Shibutami Akira, "Respite for the Sprit," in *Yayoi Kusama*, 283.

¹²⁴ *Shōwa nijūnendo Zen-Shinshū bijutsutenrankai mokuroku* [*All Shinshū regional art exhibition catalogue, 1945*], folder "1945," Kusama Papers. According to the December 1945 issue of *Bijutsu* [*Art*], the sponsor of the exhibition was the Nagano Prefecture Agriculture Society. The show centered on submissions from professional artists evacuated from the metropolitan area to the Shinshū region, together with some local artists. The exhibition was held between 16 November and 12 December in the cities of Ueda, Matsumoto, and Iida. *Bijutsu* [*Art*] 2, no. 6 (December, 1945): 32.

¹²⁵ For example, women outnumbered men in the workforce of the silk industry. This fact is understood from the extant photographs of textile mills from the time. Gordon discusses women worker's protests during the depression era. Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 185.

¹²⁶ Kusama's mother's activities with the Women for National Defense Association are recorded in the family photo-album at the Kusama residence, Nakajō, Matsumoto-City.

¹²⁷ Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 195, 215.

generation of upper- and upper-middle-class Japanese women faced more professional possibilities, diminishing the imperative to marry.

Nonetheless, Kusama's conservative parents were fiercely opposed to the notion of her becoming an artist, on account of her class and gender. Kusama worked hard through 1947 to prove her artistic potential to them by submitting her *Nihonga* every year to competitive, juried, salon exhibitions.¹²⁸ In 1946, her *Nihonga* entitled *Kabocha (Pumpkin)*¹²⁹ was accepted by the second *Zen-Shinshū Bijutsuten*, which was held from 23 to 27 October in Nagano City and from 2 through 6 November in Matsumoto City.¹³⁰ In 1947, she participated in the first Nagano Prefectural Art Exhibition by submitting *Neko (Cat)*. With these impressive achievements, finally in 1948, right after a new constitution came into effect that mandated equal education for both sexes, Kusama's parents allowed her to apply to the Kyoto Shiritsu Bijutsu Sen'mon Gakkō (Kyoto City University of Arts), known for its progressive art education.¹³¹ This was the school where a young progressive *Nihonga* artist, Uemura

¹²⁸ Kusama, letter to author, 1 March 2007.

¹²⁹ Pumpkin was a substitute food for the rice staple during the war. Kusama came to regard the pumpkin as her emblem, or even as her alter ego and, until today, kept going back to this motif. She seems to have been drawn to its staunch look or rigidity, qualities that would enable it to survive adversity, which seems to equate with her attitude as an artist.

¹³⁰ *Dainikai Zen-Shinshū bijutsutenrankai mokuroku* [*The second all Shinshū region art exhibition catalogue*], folder "1946," Kusama Papers. While in art school, Kusama took one year off from such submissions, but after graduation, her work *Yoru no Heya (The Night Room)* was part of the second Nagano Prefectural Art Exhibition in 1949. "Asu Kusama-san no 'koten' aku" ["Miss Kusama's 'solo exhibition' opens tomorrow"], *Shinano Mainichi shinbun* [*Shinano Mainichi newspaper*], 17 March 1952, newspaper clipping, folder "1952," Kusama Papers.

¹³¹ A new constitution took effect in May 1947 that extended civil and political rights

Shōkō, who was one of the founding members of the resurgent *Nihonga* movement Sōzō Bijutsu (Creative Art), was teaching. However, her application was rejected and for one year, Kusama entered its affiliated preparatory school, Kyoto Bijutsu Kōgei Gakkō (Kyoto Municipal Hiyoshigaoka Upper Secondary School).¹³² Her initial motivation for attending art school was “to learn more about Eastern classical art,” represented by Chinese and Indian paintings and their philosophical backgrounds.¹³³ But as she became familiar with contemporary art through the urban art school, her direction shifted away from Asia to the world beyond.

Lingering Dream and Kusama’s Awakening

Zanmu (Lingering Dream) painted in 1949 (fig. 1.9) is among the few *Nihonga* works that Kusama chose not to destroy. Classified as her earliest and “closest approach to Surrealis[m],”¹³⁴ this work is intended to objectively convey Kusama’s inner feelings with coded structures of color, line, and subject matter, reflecting her interest in Symbolism during this time. The work’s principal motif, a sunflower, already strikes a chord with that Symbolist forefather, Vincent Van Gogh. In the

to women. The Japanese school year begins in April, so that students could not take advantage of the new constitution until 1948.

¹³²“*Taidan, Miura Kiyohiro/Kusama Yayoi*” [A dialogue between Kiyohiro Miura and Yayoi Kusama], *In Full Bloom: Yayoi Kusama, Years in Japan*, exh. cat. (Tokyo: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999), 24.

¹³³ Unknown writer, “‘*Kihin ni afurete iru,*’ *Matsumoto no Kusama-san Shiatoru de koten hiraku*” [“ ‘Full of gracefulness,’ Ms. Kusama of Matsumoto held a solo exhibition in Seattle”], *Asahi shinbun* [*Asahi newspaper*], 28 December 1957, newspaper clipping, Kusama Papers.

¹³⁴ Akira Tatehata, “Spontaneous Surrealism,” in *Love Forever*, 62.

immediate postwar years, such influential art critics as Uemura Takachiyo, writing in popular art magazines like *Mizue* and *Bijutsu techō* (Art notebook)—with which Kusama was surely familiar—enthusiastically encouraged artists to create “alphabets for a plastic language” with colors and forms that would correspond to certain human senses, reminiscent of the Symbolist pursuit of the “constants of visual art.”¹³⁵

In *Lingering Dream*, Kusama deftly employed the dark crimson tone laid in the foreground in order to suppress the entangled withered sunflowers that conjure the grim realities of the war, symbolized by the burnt earth. The unified tone in the foreground establishes a visual shield, guiding the viewers’ attention to a faint light over the horizon, suggesting the uncharted world beyond that she had dreamed of visiting during the war and that she was evidently still dreaming about (i.e. the work’s title, “lingering dream”) in 1949. Two juxtaposed colors—opposites on the color wheel, with three emerald butterflies against crimson foliage—scientifically give off, according to European color theory, a glowing effect and convey her buoyant feelings. In fact, color theory, especially the concept of the effects of opposing colors remains today one of the first things taught in middle-school art classes in Japan. Kusama likely learned it at the Municipal Hiyoshigaoka Upper Secondary School, where she

¹³⁵ Uemura Takachiyo, “*Bijutsu to kagaku*” [“Art and science”], in *Hyōron Shū* [*Correction of criticism*] (Tokyo: Shinjin-sha, 1948), 20; *Idem.*, “*Gendai kaiga no keifu* (2)” [“A genealogy of contemporary painting (2)”], *Bijutsu techō* [*Art notebook*], no. 11 (November 1948): 27. Kusama told the art historian Reiko Tomii that before moving to the United States: “I was reading various art magazines.” Audiotape of Yayoi Kusama, interview by Reiko Tomii, Tokyo, Cozy Corner Coffee Shop, 20 December 1988, CICA/ATT/001.14. In the fifties, she also wrote articles on art, which reveal that she must have read pivotal art magazines in Japan, such as *Bijutsu techō*, *Geijutsu Shinchō*, and *Mizue*.

took a course on aesthetics.¹³⁶

During her year at art school, Kusama's learning about European modernism mainly came in a mediated form, through vanguard *Nihonga* artists. In particular, she admired the painters Hayami Gyoshū (1894-1935) and Murakami Kagaku (1888-1939).¹³⁷ While keeping with aspects of non-Western traditions, these *Nihonga* painters boldly experimented with various European traditions. For example, in his best-known work, *Rafuzu (Nude)* (fig. 1.10) of 1920, Murakami portrayed a voluptuous semi-nude young woman's body in a see-through costume based on apparel traditionally worn by a Bodhisattva. Since nudity had never been regarded as an appropriate subject in either Japanese court or shōgunate (high art) paintings, the title and the topic of this work—a secular, semi-nude female model—suggest Murakami's unconventional approach to traditional Japanese-style painting.¹³⁸ Clearly, the topic Murakami selected has a rich history in European high art. On the other hand, the type of voluptuousness manifest in this work was drawn from an Eastern tradition—the sultry bodies of Indian Bodhisattvas. By integrating Eastern and Western traditions, in the spirit of *Jikohattatsu* (self-development), Murakami

¹³⁶ Yayoi Kusama, "Transcript," Folder "1949," Kusama Papers.

¹³⁷ Tatehata, *Love Forever*, 61.

¹³⁸ In Japan, *yōga* (oil painting) and *Nihonga* are two separate institutions with separate developments. During the Meiji period (1868–1912), *yōga* painters underwent European academic training. Since in Europe, the *académie* (study of the nude) is integral, they began working with depictions of the nude in the Meiji period (1868-1912). See for example, Norman Bryson, "Westernizing Bodies: Women, Art, and Power in Meiji Yōga," in *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, ed. Joshua S. Mostow (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 89-118. The nudes that began to appear in *Nihonga* stemmed from the influence of *yōga*. "*Rafu*" means "nude" in English. Murakami's *Rafuzu* depicted not a deity but a secular woman, which is an early example of this new genre in *Nihonga*.

effectively captured the carnal sensuality of a secular woman sublimated into the sacredness of a Buddhist effigy, a combination unthinkable in classical Japanese painting. What made the painting so modern was Murakami's projection of his personal approach to the ideal female icon as a modern human being.

Although Kusama never specialized in the human figure, she, too, strove in her methods and choice of subject matter to modernize her paintings. The motif of *Lingering Dream*—the withered branches and shriveled sunflowers—signifies the end of summer, falling within the traditional Japanese painting category of “beauties of nature.” Summer's end is associated with the Buddhist truth of impermanence and the inevitable sorrows of life, a subtext that Kusama seems to have intended to relate to her own wartime experience. The painting is not completely devoid of optimism, however. In Buddhism, the end marks a new beginning. By choosing the end of summer as her theme, Kusama anticipated the hard season of winter to come; yet beyond would lie a flowering spring, with which she attempted to convey her hopes for the future. The underlying sense of this eternal cycle of seasons, or cycle of life, had likewise animated her peony drawings.

Kusama also attempted to modernize this work by making a clear separation from the traditional Japanese spatial conception of *yohaku* (blank space) initially observed in the background of *Harvest* (fig. 1.8). In the Japanese painterly tradition, *yohaku* is of paramount importance as an expressive element that speaks of the artist's spiritual attainment: the achievement of an exquisite balance between the subject and the void is how traditional Japanese painters were evaluated. The significance of *yohaku* is its underlying conception of *yūgen*, which translates in English as

“profound, distant, or obscure,” a charged space where the artist’s energy cannot be seen, but only felt.¹³⁹ In *Lingering Dream*, Kusama replaced the blank background of *Harvest* with a descriptive blue sky, which does not belong to the tradition of Japanese painting, but lends this picture a textbook-adaptation of the Renaissance atmospheric perspective; the space is divided into foreground, middle ground, and background. But she modified European pictorial conventions by deliberately flattening the foreground and background, in a device similar to the spatial maneuvers of traditional *Yamato-e* painters.¹⁴⁰

By mixing a wide range of sources drawn from both traditional and modern East and West traditions, Kusama aimed in this work for international relevance, as she tried to achieve pictorial *jikohattatsu* (self-development)—*Nihonga*’s unique expression drawn from diverse sources. *Jikohattatsu*, a nurturing of the personality, can be understood also in relation to the impact of Zen Buddhism on traditional Japanese art. *Lingering Dream* now exists only in a heavily restored version. As is evident from an extant archival photograph (fig. 1.11), the original painting, especially its upper-left side, was far more detailed, a complex mixture of abstraction and realism. Her minute observations of the leaf veins in *Lingering Dream* bear an

¹³⁹ The account I cited here is based on how *Nihonga* painters at Musashino Art University in the 1980s interpreted and taught spatial concepts, which they learned from their masters during the first half of the twentieth century. To reiterate, the government consciously preserved these traditional aesthetic values (including Zen). Although, university-trained theorists have linked traditional Japanese art and nationalism, *Nihonga* painters were not necessarily themselves thinking of nationalism when they painted. Rather, they generally concentrated on aesthetics and spirituality in realizing their work.

¹⁴⁰ *Yamato-e* is Japanized Chinese painting, which can be characterized by broad flat decorative color planes without any sense of depth.

affinity to Hayami's exhaustive examination of reality, which can be seen in the leaves of his *Himawari (Sunflowers)* of 1922 (fig. 1.12). Early in his career, Hayami, according to Kawakita Michiaki, attempted to manifest "mystical feelings from religious ideas" in his paintings. However, being a product of modernity, Hayami felt that just illustrating religious subjects was too vague a pursuit. Only when he engaged in tireless scrutiny of an object could he open up the "earnest spiritual world" in his work.¹⁴¹

Among the paintings of Hayami that entail an investigation of reality, *Kyō no Maiko (Apprentice Geisha in Kyoto)* from 1920 (fig. 1.13) is the most assiduous in its examination of his subject and her things. Hayami depicted each woven frame of the *tatami* mats (traditional straw-woven Japanese floor mats), and the subtle details of tie-dying that appeared on *maiko*'s kimono. Hayami's apparent yearning to attain the spiritual through a tireless scrutiny of the real can best be understood in the context of Zen Buddhism, which reached Japan at the end of the twelfth century and significantly changed the course of Japanese art—art that until that time had either been merely decorative or had conveyed historical, literary, or religious narratives. With the arrival of Zen Buddhism, art-making would turn into an ascetic practice for some.

In Zen Buddhism, the duality of body and mind—as it inheres in Western culture—does not exist. Body and mind are conceived of as inter-related agencies. The goal for Zen practitioners was to cultivate a path to "*satori*" (enlightenment) through engaging in *do* (the way), which is a severe daily practice articulated by the

¹⁴¹ Kawakita, "Art of Gyoshū Hayami," 16-17.

phrase *munen musō* (no thought, no image). Insofar as Zen-based aesthetic practice is concerned, skill is not simply technique or artistry, but is equivalent to a spiritual phenomenon deployed to achieve enlightenment, and the skill for making art could be acquired only through positioning one's self in this state of *do*.¹⁴² For Hayami, only when engaging in tireless self-discipline through exhaustive scrutiny of reality, did the “earnest spiritual world” that he equated with enlightenment open up.¹⁴³ While completing his paintings, Hayami usually rented a room in a Zen temple where he lived the routine life of a monk. He began his day at four in the morning by cleaning his studio, attending the sitting (meditation session), and eating plain temple vegetarian food. After breakfast, he concentrated on painting until sunset.¹⁴⁴

The Zen philosophy underpinning Hayami's art was similar to Kusama's practice during her art-school year. In order to achieve *munen musō*, Kusama usually meditated before she began working on her paintings.¹⁴⁵ In *Lingering Dream*, though Kusama replaced *yohaku* with the descriptive blue sky, she kept the space charged by rendering minutely detailed foliage. Her extraordinary concentration in this picture can be seen in her intricate depiction of sunflower veins manifested with *Nihonga* pigments, which are an unsuitable medium for rendering such details. These pigments,

¹⁴² For further explanation, please see Rupert Cox, “A World Apart,” in *The Zen Arts, An Anthropological Study of the Culture of Aesthetic Form* (London and New York: Routledge Curzon in association with The Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 2003), 48-69.

¹⁴³ Kawakita, “Art of Gyoshū Hayami,” 16-17.

¹⁴⁴ *Idem.*, “Hayami Gyoshū nen'pu” [“Gyoshū Hayami chronology”], in *Gyoshū Hayami*, 94-95.

¹⁴⁵ Kusama, *Infinity Nets*, 68.

ground from natural stones, tend to be heavy and hard to maneuver. The detailed foliage in *Lingering Dream* thus suggests Kusama's self-imposed challenge of attaining great physical and psychic patience; her pursuit of a discipline meant to lead to enlightenment. Through ascetic self-discipline, she wished to manifest the invisible "spirit" that lurked behind nature.¹⁴⁶

Hayami also had such a keen awareness of European modernism that he might well have been the initial Symbolist influence on Kusama. His *Jumoku (Tree)* (fig. 1.14) of 1925, for example, was an amalgamation of the abstractness of Neo-Impressionist art, like that of Georges Seurat, and an exhaustive observation of nature, such as had initially existed in the Maruyama Shijō style. Hayami's teacher, Imamura Shikō was immensely influenced by the Symbolist artist Paul Gauguin, especially by his effort to unlearn academism. Later in his career, Hayami also attempted to primitivize his skills by incorporating a simple stylization he associated with classical Egyptian art (fig. 1.15). As for Kusama, the closest affinity to her sunflowers—with their swirling stems and angular petals—can be found in Balinese paintings reproduced in *Bijutsu* during the war (fig. 1.16). Thus, Kusama's radical stylization of sunflowers in *Lingering Dreams* may have come from the Pacific islands tradition.

Kusama's experimentation during this period with artistic styles from diverse cultures beyond East Asian boundaries can be linked to the larger crisis that *Nihonga* faced. Because it was deeply permeated with nationalism and conservatism, after the

¹⁴⁶ Audiotape of Yayoi Kusama, interview by Alexandra Munroe, Tokyo, Kusama Apartment, 18 December 1988, CICA/ATT/001.12.

war, various *Nihonga* artists began attempting to get rid of its stagnant attachment to the status quo.¹⁴⁷ In January 1948, the leading *Nihonga* figures from a younger generation based in Tokyo and Kyoto courageously left *Nitten*, the semi-governmental salon, and formed a new *Nihonga* organization, Sōzō Bijutsu.¹⁴⁸ Measuring 136.5 x 151.7 cm, *Lingering Dream* is significantly larger than any other surviving *Nihonga* by Kusama—for example, the 1948 *Onions* (fig. 1.17) measured merely 35.9 x 59 cm and *Harvest*, 58.5 x 72.5 cm. This large format is the standard size for the autumn salon exhibitions in Japan.¹⁴⁹ In fact, *Lingering Dream* was submitted to and accepted by the second Sōzō Bijutsu exhibition held between September and November 1949. This suggests that the work was most likely painted specifically for this renewal *Nihonga* exhibition after Kusama graduated from the art school in March 1949.

A year earlier, when Kusama arrived in Kyoto in the spring of 1948, Panreal, another progressive *Nihonga* group based in Kyoto, organized their first exhibition at the local Maruzen Gallery, proclaiming that art should profoundly relate to “the

¹⁴⁷ “Special Issue on ‘Sōzō Bijutsu,’” *Sansai* 25 (1 December 1948): 8.

¹⁴⁸ For more on Sōzō Bijutsu, see, for example, Chōken Ueshima, “*Bijutsukai kotoshi no momogoto*” [“Art world’s scandals this year”], *Bijutsu techō*, no. 12 (December 1948): 41. Kusama’s participation in Sōzō Bijutsu exhibition was previously dated 1951. However, the actual date is 1949, as documented in *Dai nikai Sōzō Bijutsu tenrankai shuppin mokuroku* [*The Second Sōzō Bijutsu exhibition catalogue*], “D-205,” Archives of Tokyo Contemporary Art Museum, Tokyo.

¹⁴⁹ Although the catalogue of the second Sōzō Bijutsu exhibition does not list the size of the artworks, the standard size for the contemporary *Nihonga* autumn salon is 100 *gō* (112 x 162 cm) or larger.

creation and development of social reality.”¹⁵⁰ Their exhibition featured radical abstraction, with which they challenged the traditional parameters of *Nihonga*. Under these circumstances, primitivism—especially in the form of exotic landscapes of Southeast Asian islands—was equally setting a new tone in postwar *Nihonga*. In one instance, with her intentionally simplified exotic landscape painting of southern islands, Hori Fumiko won the first Sōzō Bijutsu award in 1948.¹⁵¹ Kusama’s experiments with Symbolism and primitivism in *Lingering Dream* can thus be situated in the context of *Nihonga*’s radical transformation after the war.

Out of naïveté, however, immediately after graduation from art school, Kusama was still bent on establishing her career within the hierarchy of the *Nihonga* establishment. She went briefly to Kamakura City, east of Tokyo, to study under the *Nihonga* giant Maeda Seison. Since Maeda was a history painter and Kusama’s concentration was on plant motifs, her decision to study with Maeda was more likely political than artistic.¹⁵² Indeed, he was the single most politically influential painter in the traditional *Nihonga* world of this period. One of Maeda’s disciples was Hirayama Ikuo, who was later chosen to be the principal of the Tokyo National Arts University—the apex of the Japanese art world’s hierarchy.¹⁵³ But Maeda’s treatment

¹⁵⁰ Panreal Bijutstu Kyōkai [Panreal Art Association], “Panreal Sengen” [“Panreal Manifesto”], in *Panreal Sōseiki-ten* [*Genesis of Panreal Exhibition*], ed. Masahiro Shino and Nakai Yasuyuki, exh. cat. (Nishinomiya: Ōtani Kinen Bijutsukan, 1998), 3.

¹⁵¹ “Special Issue on *Sōzō Bijutsu*,” 22-23.

¹⁵² Digital recording of Yayoi Kusama, interview by author, Tokyo, Kusama Studio, 28 July 2006.

¹⁵³ Gaining recognition in *Nihonga* went beyond one’s painting skills. For example, it is a legend among *Nihonga* students that in order to ingratiate himself with Maeda,

of male and female disciples was significantly different. According to Kusama, even after equal rights were granted to both sexes in 1947, he failed to recognize women as men's equals.¹⁵⁴ For this reason, Kusama resigned from Maeda's studio, most likely before the summer of 1949 and went back to her parents' house in Matsumoto, where she painted *Lingering Dream*.

Lingering Dream bears a clue to this painful experience. While Kusama proudly signed *Harvest* solely with her first name "Yayoi," with two Chinese characters, before submitting *Lingering Dream* to Sōzō Bijutsu, she made a conscious decision to de-gender this work by signing it "Y. Kusama," lest the judges discriminate against her based on her gender, even though this relatively liberal organization Sōzō Bijutsu had given much attention to the female artist Hori Fumiko.¹⁵⁵ From the first, this organization used a democratic juried process to select work for its exhibitions, as was well known. In order to avoid any biases, juries were informed of only the title and the entry number of the artworks. Still, Kusama was careful not to be identified with her gender. At the same time, Sōzō Bijutsu's inclusion of women seems to have indicated a progressive attitude in accord with the postwar renewal of Japanese society represented by the equality granted both sexes.

during cold winter days, Hirayama warmed up Maeda's sandals inside his kimono breast pocket before the master wore them. Maeda was awarded a cultural medal in 1955.

¹⁵⁴ Digital recording of Yayoi Kusama, interview by author, Tokyo, Kusama Studio, 14 June 2004.

¹⁵⁵ Domon Ken, "Review Process [of Sōzō Bijutsu]," *Mizue*, no. 25 (1 December 1948): 22.

On the Table

After one submission to Sōzō Bijutsu, Kusama decided not to associate herself with any “group or party,” and went on her solitary path.¹⁵⁶ On 18 and 19 March 1952, she held her first solo exhibition at the Matsumoto City Civic Hall. This two-day exhibition was a clever gambit. She convinced a local newspaper, *Shinano Mainichi* to sponsor the exhibition. By deftly manipulating the mass media, on this occasion she emphasized her gender to let it symbolize postwar progress. The article that came out a night before the opening introduced her with an accompanying photograph, while reporting that her exhibition was “the talk of the Central Japan art world,” and that “great attention has been paid to her [Kusama’s] future” (fig. 1.18).¹⁵⁷ The following January, she was already featured in one of the major art magazines in Japan, *Atelier* and she began receiving nationwide attention. For her appearance in *Atelier*, Kusama wore a self-designed red-and-white sweater and a skirt that bore arced, organic patterns resembling her small abstract paintings (fig. 1.19). Moreover, she promoted herself as an original, a woman artist of eccentricity, different from the conservative Japanese mainstream art world.

Equally important, in this first solo exhibition, was a unique genre called *kōsai* listed in the exhibition’s invitation card.¹⁵⁸ The Chinese character *kō* means *nikawa*

¹⁵⁶ Yayoi Kusama, letter to Georgia O’Keeffe, 13 December 1955, folder “Georgia O’Keeffe,” Kusama Papers.

¹⁵⁷ “Asu Kusama-san no koten hiraku” [“Kusama’s exhibition opens tomorrow”], *Shinano Mainichi*, 17 March 1952, newspaper clipping, folder “1952,” Kusama Papers.

¹⁵⁸ Yayoi Kusama, “Invitation, First Solo Exhibition,” folder “1952,” Kusama Papers.

in Japanese, signifying the animal-glue used as a binder for *Nihonga*, while *sai* means “to paint.” Together, *kōsai* is literally, “animal-glue painting.” In postwar Japan, *kōsai* also denoted artists’ political response to *Nihonga*’s conservatism. This was articulated in the “Panreal Manifesto,” which said that artists must expand and substantiate the possibilities in *kōsai geijutsu* (art using a binder for *Nihonga*). The manifesto further encouraged an “exhaustive exploration of reality in art, in its *motif* and *matière* (facture),” beyond conventional limits.¹⁵⁹ Among Kusama’s extant works, *On the Table* (fig. 1.20) from 1950 fits this agenda.

If the Hanoverian Dadaist Kurt Schwitters defied traditional high art in his collages by incorporating urban refuse that reflected post-World War I realities, *Nihonga* practitioners upheld *kōsai* partly as their response to the severe lack of resources after the Second World War. For instance, Panreal artists sometimes substituted ceramic clay for certain pigments used in *Nihonga*, such as *ōdo* (yellow ochre) or *gofun* (white).¹⁶⁰ Similarly, in her recollection of the early 1950s, Kusama characterized *nikawa* (deer-glue) as the least expensive material in *Nihonga*, although it did become “expensive for me,” and she also “bought inexpensive house paints, mixed them with sand.”¹⁶¹

Careful scrutiny of *On the Table* reveals certain aspects of Kusama’s postwar

¹⁵⁹ Panreal Art Association, “Panreal Manifesto,” in *Genesis of Panreal*, 3.

¹⁶⁰ Nakai Yasuyuki, “‘Panreal Art Association’ Circa Establishment,” in *ibid.*, 14.

¹⁶¹ Yayoi Kusama, Fujimoto Tokuji, Ibe Masataka, “Kusama joshi wo kakonde geijutsukendan (Jō)” [“A prefectural art discussion with Miss Kusama (part one)”], *Shinano ōrai* [Coming and going to Shinano], October 1978, p. 18.

reality. The work was painted on a seed sack she scavenged from her family's plant nursery and stretched over a plywood panel, another *objet trouvé* from the family's house reconstruction. By mixing sand from the riverbank behind her home in *nikawa*, she skillfully built a surface with rough, convex, grey achromatic impasto, mimicking the facture of oil painting. Over this heavily built surface, she applied white (most likely house paint) and colors (most likely oils). Taken together, the work's coarse surface and assemblage of found objects totally debased *Nihonga*'s purported elegance. *On the Table* clearly embodied Kusama's revolt against the conservative system.

From the evidence of a similar painting captured in a photo of the 1952 exhibition (fig. 1.21), the subject matter of *On the Table* is likely an inverted vase with a Cubist-inspired, fragmented flower bouquet, a choice that points further to her active effort to innovate *Nihonga*. Her interests in Cubism can be associated with her interest in vanguard art generally. Kusama might have seen Alfred H. Barr, Jr.'s famous diagram, "From Impressionism to Modern Art," reproduced in the October 1948 issue of the contemporary art magazine *Bijutsu techō* (*Art notebook*). It accompanied an article by Uemura that touted abstraction as the "twentieth-century sensibility of internationalism," echoing the opinion of Barr, who was the founding director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.¹⁶² Uemura was the chief exponent of "Nihon Aban-Gyarudo Bijutsuka Kurabu" (Japan Avant-Garde Artists Club), established in 1947. As is clear from Kusama's recently uncovered 1954 letter

¹⁶² Uemura Takachiyo, "Gendai kaiga no keifu I" ["A genealogy of contemporary painting (1)"], *Bijutsu techō*, (October, 1948): 17.

to the artist Abe Nobuya, Uemura and another proponent of the Club, Takiguchi Shūzō, were two critics whom Kusama particularly paid attention to when, in 1950, she became engaged with avant-garde art.¹⁶³ However, with abstract paintings' bold simplification of forms, Kusama was unable to concentrate on details.

By her second solo show, held again at the civic hall between 31 October and 2 November 1952, she thus found watercolor a more suitable medium and discontinued using *Nihonga* media.¹⁶⁴ Unlike *kōsai*, which mandates an elaborate preparatory process, and oil, which requires a protracted period of time to dry and must be done in stages, watercolor lends itself more readily to spontaneity. One newspaper article reported that Kusama obsessively produced an average of fifty to seventy watercolors a day, and even over one hundred on some days.¹⁶⁵ In little over six months, she produced 270 small works she deemed presentable in her second exhibition (fig. 1.22).¹⁶⁶

Most importantly, the second solo exhibition sparked Kusama's lifelong interest in psychiatry. Nishimaru Shihō, a professor of psychiatry at the local Shinshū University, happened to visit the exhibition. He specialized in analyzing the brains of

¹⁶³ Yayoi Kusama, letter to Abe Nobuya, April 1954, Takemiya Gallery related correspondence-A, Takiguchi Shūzō Papers, Keiō University Archives, Tokyo.

¹⁶⁴ Between 1950 and 1952, Kusama also experimented with oil painting. See, Yamamura, *Mirrored Years*, 63-76.

¹⁶⁵ “*Kotoshi no hōpu, joryū gaka Kusama Yayoi*” [“This year's hope, a woman artist Kusama Yayoi”], *Chūbu keizai shinbun*, 12 January 1955, folder “1955,” Kusama Papers.

¹⁶⁶ “*Kusama Yayoi Ten*” [“Yayoi Kusama Exhibition”], newspaper clipping, folder “1952,” Kusama Papers.

geniuses and in detailing artists' pathographies as a way of studying their works.¹⁶⁷ On first seeing her work, Nishimaru determined that Kusama suffered from cenesthopathy; that is, though there was physically nothing wrong with her, she nonetheless experienced strange bodily sensations. In interviews, Kusama often mentions suffering from heart palpitations.¹⁶⁸ This condition was evidently an outcome of her taxing herself beyond her limits when she painted, which quickened her heart rate and, in turn, gave rise to strange bodily sensations. Immediately after their encounter, Kusama became the focus of Nishimaru's research. A month later, on 13 December 1952, he presented a scientific analysis on her art at the annual conference of the Kantō Psychiatric and Neurotic Association, held at the University of Tokyo.¹⁶⁹ His paper was entitled "Genius Woman Artist with Schizophrenic Tendency."¹⁷⁰ (It is important to note that Nishimaru did *not* diagnose Kusama as afflicted with schizophrenia, but merely described her as having a "schizophrenic tendency.") Nishimaru's presentation, where he, for the first time, introduced Kusama's artwork to a Tokyo audience, captured the immediate attention of a critic from the art magazine *Mizue* and of the psychiatrist Shikiba Ryūzaburō, who specialized in artists with mental disorders, both of whom happened to be in the

¹⁶⁷ Nishimaru Shihō, *Hōkōki: Kyōki o ninatte* [*Records of wandering: Taking on insanity*] (Tokyo: Hihyōsha, 1991), 65-9.

¹⁶⁸ Kusama, interview by Munroe, 14 December 1988.

¹⁶⁹ For details, see Midori Yamamura, "Kusama Yayoi's Early Years in New York: A Critical Biography," *Making A Home*, ed. Eric C. Shiner and Reiko Tomii, exh. cat. (New York: Japan Society and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 54-5.

¹⁷⁰ A copy of the conference proceedings, folder "1952," Kusama Papers.

audience.

Believing in Kusama's scientifically proven genius, *Mizue* put a work by this young Japanese woman on the cover of its May 1954 issue—unusual for a magazine that favored male European artists for its covers. Shikiba introduced Kusama's work to the Shirokiya Gallery at a department store in Nihonbashi, then one of the most established art spaces in Tokyo.¹⁷¹ In 1953, while preparing an application for the Japanese Ministry of Education's study abroad program, Kusama even asked Nishimaru and Shikiba to provide scientific proof that she was “a medically proven genius, no other similar example exists in Japan,” and the two obliged.¹⁷² Within one year, Kusama had three more solo exhibitions in Tokyo, at Mimatsu, Takemiya, and Kyūryūdō.¹⁷³ By March 1955, she was in the limelight of the Tokyo art scene for her “singular originality,” as Uemura enthusiastically called it in a review of her solo exhibition, curated by Takiguchi for Takemiya Gallery, then the foremost vanguard gallery in Japan.¹⁷⁴

In recent decades, her association with psychiatrists has often misled scholars to consider Kusama as seriously mentally ill or even “insane,” so much so that she

¹⁷¹ In modern Japan, fine art audiences are usually educated bourgeois who shop at department stores. Therefore, some of the major museums and galleries in Japan, such as Saison, Mitsukoshi, or Takashimaya are housed in department stores.

¹⁷² Kusama, letter to Abe.

¹⁷³ In the fifties, the recently opened Kyūryūdō was seen as a commercially powerful venue. At Kyūryūdō, Kusama's show followed shows of the French masters Odilon Redon and August Renoir.

¹⁷⁴ Uemura Takachiyo, “*Koseiteki na Eikyū to Kusama Yayoi*” [Originality of Eikyū and Yayoi Kusama], newspaper clipping, folder “1955,” Kusama Papers. Takiguchi was the adviser to Takemiya Gallery.

may be unable to live in normal society.¹⁷⁵ Although Kusama did suffer from anxiety neurosis, no critic in 1950s Japan had discussed her as a mentally ill artist (nor had she received such a diagnosis from psychiatrists). At the most, she was referred to as an “idiosyncratic child” (*tokui jidō*), in a 1956 newspaper article by Fukushima Tatsuo though in that essay, Fukushima was in fact arguing against the “groundless view” of some people who saw Kusama as an “idiosyncratic child.”¹⁷⁶ Otherwise, in more than forty press clippings on Kusama dating from 1952 to 1957, no one called her “idiosyncratic,” let alone mentally ill. All of these texts actually appraised her work positively, except for one review of her Takemiya Gallery exhibition that appeared in the March 1957 issue of *Atelier*.¹⁷⁷

Kusama’s early development and her critical successes cannot be separated from the favorable attention given to Surrealism in the mid-1950s in Japan.¹⁷⁸

Kusama’s attentiveness to Surrealism in the 1950s is, for example, apparent in her

¹⁷⁵ For example, in her seminal text introducing Kusama’s life and work, Alexandra Munroe posed the question whether Kusama is “insane.” Munroe, *Karia. Kusama*, 34. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word “insane” means “seriously mentally ill and unable to live in normal society.” *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, electronic dictionary (2000). “Insane” definition.

¹⁷⁶ Fukushima Tatsuo, “*Kusama Yayoi no geijutsu (jō)*” [“The art of Yayoi Kusama (part one)”], *Shin’yō Shinbun* [*Shin’yō Newspaper*], 22 November 1956, newspaper clipping, Folder “1956,” Kusama Papers. Midori Yoshimoto has so far been the only scholar to discuss Kusama’s early reception; she also points out that there was no direct reference to mental illness. Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 51.

¹⁷⁷ “*Kusama Yayoi koten*” [“Yayoi Kusama solo exhibition”], *Atelier* no. 337 (March 1955): 111.

¹⁷⁸ Haryū Ichirō, “*Nihon bijutsu no rokujūnendai to nanajūnendai*” [“Japanese art in the 1960s and the 1970s”], *Gendai kaiga no nijū nen* [*Twenty years of contemporary art*], exh. cat. (Gunma: Gunma Prefectural Modern Art Museum, 1984), 10.

close relationship with the Surrealist poet and critic, Takiguchi. Kusama's bold, line-based watercolors from this time also evoke Spanish Surrealist Joan Miró's various signs allegedly drawn from his unconscious. After the war, Miró's work first appeared in the August 1949 issue of *Atelier* magazine accompanied by Takiguchi's introduction. Takiguchi also contributed the preface for Kusama's second solo exhibition brochure. Immediately after this exhibition, Kusama went to Tokyo and, for the first time, met Takiguchi in person.¹⁷⁹ The meeting propelled her to experiment with decalcomania,¹⁸⁰ with her earliest work using this technique dating from 1953 (fig. 1.23).

Takiguchi, who befriended André Breton, Salvador Dalí, Miró, and Marcel Duchamp, avidly collected art books. Through him, Kusama most likely became familiar with various Surrealist interests, such as in the art of the insane and the art of the so-called primitive. In the 1950s, she gave Takiguchi a glass painting she had made, executed in a technique conventionally used in folk or naïve art (fig. 1.24). In a seminal article, "Ivan the Fool" from 1955, she wrote that she wanted her art to manifest things that existed "deep in the bottom of life," such as "the tempests, buds, wounds, and genitalia that provoked my anxiety," and the "hidden shadowy part of life on earth."¹⁸¹ Surrealism provided at once a fertile ground for Kusama to explore the depths of the human psyche and a way to critique polite society.

¹⁷⁹ Takiguchi Shūzō, "Yōsei yo eien ni" ["Eternal fairy"], *Yohaku ni kaku* (2) [*Marginalia*, 2] (Tokyo: Misuzu shobō: 1982), 305.

¹⁸⁰ For the explanation of this technique, see footnote 70.

¹⁸¹ Yayoi Kusama, "Iwan no baka" ["Ivan the fool"], *Geijutsu shinchō* [*New current in art*] (May 1955): 164-5.

Flower Spirit: Early Oil Painting

Flower Spirit (fig. 1.25), dated 1948, is presently considered to be Kusama's earliest known oil painting. The surface of this work is deliberately uneven, with thin projected lines framing the organic blood red and dark brown patterns in its center. Some of the central formation is intentionally scraped to show the whitish color beneath, where Kusama further added—in ink—patterns that look like those of leaf-veins. The uneven framing-structure is overlaid with tarnished white-net patterns. Since 1966, Kusama has been publicly stating that she suffers from hallucinatory visions wherein she sees “nets” and “dots” that have profoundly affected her artistic development and manifested themselves in her visual vocabulary.¹⁸² Notably, this painting is the first in Kusama's entire body of work that reveals such “nets,” or the ostensible visual equivalent of her psychotic symptoms.

However, despite the clearly inscribed date of 1948 on the painting's front side, when *Flower Spirit* was shown for the first time at Kusama's Tokyo retrospective in 1999, the work was cataloged as “circa 1948.”¹⁸³ This suggests that some doubts exist concerning the date of this painting. Her decision to embrace the Western method of oil paints during the cataclysmic period when Japan was transforming from a totalitarian state, through the United States-led Allied Power's directive, was hardly surprising, given that she had denounced nationalism and embraced a globalist view as an artist. *Flower Spirit* may, nonetheless, prompt us to

¹⁸² Yamamura, *Mirrored Years*, 64.

¹⁸³ Plate 9, *Full Bloom: Yayoi Kusama, Years in Japan*, 40.

ask two critical questions. First, in Japanese art education, a strict line between oil painting (*yōga*) and *Nihonga* exists. A year later in 1949, she still engaged in *Nihonga* and painted *Lingering Dreams*: Did she then actually know how to paint in oil in 1948? Second, it is also crucial to ascertain the credibility of her claims about her mental state. Are the net patterns due to the artist's having actual hallucinatory experiences: Is the painting an after-effect of such experiences?

Based on a recently uncovered color slide of *Flower Spirit* shot in 1956 (fig. 1.26), the short answer to both these questions is most likely “no.” The description on a slide-mount written in the artist's handwriting reads: “Kusama Yayoi's oil painting, the work 1955, Kusama Yayoi's family house, photograph by the Seattleite, Christiansen” (fig. 1.27). Robert Christiansen is a Seattle artist who happened to visit Kusama's family house in Matsumoto in the summer of 1956. Since he had a camera mounted with a roll of color positive film—rarely available in Japan—Kusama most likely requested him to take photographs of her latest artistic development.¹⁸⁴ *Flower Spirit*, as of today, (fig. 1.25) bears Kusama's signature, the date of 1948 (seven years earlier than the date that appears on the mount), and reveals the net component. But none of these details are present in the painting captured in the 1956 positive of *Flower Spirit*. Furthermore, a careful examination of *Flower Spirit* confirms that every detail legible in the slide is still visible beneath the nets. This suggests that

¹⁸⁴ Kenneth Callahan's student, the Seattle artist Neil Meitzler introduced the artist Robert Christiansen to Kusama. From Kusama's letters to Meitzler, during Christiansen's visit to Japan in 1956, it is clear he went to Matsumoto around July. Yayoi Kusama, letter to Neil Meitzler, 31 May and 7 September 1956, Neil Meitzler Papers, accession no. 2761, Special Collection Division, University of Washington Library, Seattle (hereafter cited as Meitzler Papers).

Kusama reworked the canvas at some later date, which complicates the conventional narrative of her biography.

Flower Spirit is not the only questionable case, however. Some of Kusama's early watercolors (fig. 1.28) that lately have emerged from private collectors are mostly drawn with simple, thin, bold lines in monochromatic *sumi* ink, without the obsessively repetitious dots that presently are regarded as the signature element of Kusama's art. They differ significantly in their color, density, and style from the works that remained with the artist until recently. From these observations, it seems that as long as her paintings stay around her, she has the habit of reworking them.

When then did Kusama repaint *Flower Spirit*? The answer lies in the most conspicuous addition, the "net," long known as one of her trademark motifs (fig. 2.29). Since she invented the motif in the United States in 1959 (see Chapter Two), while her early oil paintings were left in Japan, the probable date for the re-working is between 1973 and 1975, when Kusama transferred her early works from the family's storage space to the main house in Matsumoto. As I will demonstrate in what follows (see Chapter Three), after 1962, Kusama was often on prescribed minor tranquilizers and, for a while, became as a result unable to paint fine details. Therefore, after her return to Japan in 1973, she had to relearn manual skill by working on smaller scale artworks. As a basis for her rehabilitation, she most likely used her own earlier paintings.¹⁸⁵ By the early 1970s, nets and dots were firmly established as significant aspects of her art, and she might very well have then added these hallmark motifs onto

¹⁸⁵ Regarding Kusama's work on small pieces between 1973 and 1975, see, for example, Reiko Tomii, "Yayoi Kusama, *A Snake*," in *Warhol/Kusama*, exh. brochure (New York: D'Amelio Terrace, 1997).

Flower Spirit.

Aside from Kusama's penchant for repainting, there also exist possible cases of re-titling and the antedating of her early works. To date, little is known about Kusama's early oil paintings, however. To the question that I recently posed, "When and how did you learn to paint in oil?" Kusama's ready response is that she recalls receiving her first oil painting set around 1942 from the grandmother of a childhood friend as a souvenir from Tokyo.¹⁸⁶ In light of this incomplete answer, the examination of her early oil painting becomes an imperative, if not an easy task. Based on the extant exhibition photographs and catalogs that predate her departure for Seattle in 1957, Kusama appears to have exhibited oil paintings only once, in her first solo show held at the Matsumoto City Civic Hall on 18 and 19 March 1952 (fig. 1.29). Fewer than ten works from this exhibition are known to still exist; and not all of them have established production dates.

The difficulty in verifying details concerning Kusama's early works can be gleaned, for example, from the ephemera and photographic records left from her first solo exhibition. While the invitation card announces the presentation of about two hundred drawings, *kōsai*, works in oil, and watercolors, the exhibition brochure consists of a checklist of only a hundred forty-six works. Of these, fifteen are assigned titles, dimensions, and medium (eleven charcoals and four works in crayon), twenty-six have titles and dimensions, eighty-two have titles and method (*dessin* or "drawing"), and twenty-five are without titles though identified by method (*croquis*

¹⁸⁶ Yayoi Kusama, interview by Kawasaki Yōko based on author's questions, 20 March 2007.

or “quick sketches”). No titles listed in the brochure match known existing works. This may mean that Kusama re-titled her early paintings. Further, none of the works listed in this brochure is explicitly indicated as being an oil painting. Unfortunately, the dimensions listed in the brochure are unreliable. No listed sizes match any existing works. This is because Kusama gave all the dimensions using the *gō* system. Usually, each standard *gō* dimension can be converted into the metric system, but since Kusama painted on handmade panels, fabricated by a family-employed carpenter, the dimensions given in the brochure are at best approximations.

Although not every exhibited work may have been listed in the brochure, a good number of exhibition photographs serve as an invaluable aid to determining the production dates and other details of numbers of her early paintings. Five photographs survive from the first solo exhibition, documenting altogether fifty-two works displayed on the walls. Among them, only two extant oil paintings can be identified: they have been re-titled as *Accumulation of the Plants* (1950) and *Bud* (1951). This low survival rate of her early oil paintings is due to her aforementioned destruction of youthful works in 1956.

Evident also from the exhibition photographs is the absence of dates and signatures. Today, a majority of Kusama’s early paintings are signed and dated on the front side. Of the fifty-two works documented in the photographs, however, only one is signed and dated on the front: “1952 Y. Kusama” (fig. 1.29). Although this signature is not in a cursive style, the way she abbreviated her first name is identical to her signature in *Lingering Dream*. The abbreviated first name was most likely her standard signature at this time. This signature, however, differs from most of the

others found on the extant early oil paintings, which are generally signed with her full name: “Yayoi Kusama” in the same light-blue paint.¹⁸⁷ These identical signatures suggest that the early oil paintings remained without date and signature until some later date. As evidenced by Kusama’s 2008 documentary film, today she signs her work not when it is completed, but at the time it leaves her studio.¹⁸⁸ It is likely that, in preparing her March 1987 first retrospective held at the Kitakyūshū Municipal Museum of Art, Kusama assembled her early oils and signed and dated them all at once, based on her (fallible) memory. This would explain why most of the early works today bear the same style and color of signature and the dates on some works differ from the actual production date, as with *Flower Spirit*.

Kusama’s early lack of expertise in oil resulted in part from her parents’ termination of financial assistance after she returned to Matsumoto in 1949, for they were deeply disappointed to see their daughter leaving what they, by then, believed to be a promising *Nihonga* career. This made it difficult for her to gain formal training in oil, despite her interest. Her struggle, caused by her lack of knowledge in the technique, is painfully obvious on the back of *Bud* (fig. 1.30)—an oil painting captured in one of the extant photographs—which shows massive permeation of the expensive oil paints from the front side through the untreated jute sack. In order to stop the paints seeping through the cloth, Kusama tried lining the seed sack with thick

¹⁸⁷ *Lingering Dream* (1949) is arguably the first work Kusama signed in a Western order “Yayoi Kusama” (with an abbreviated “Y.”). Ever since she has been signing her works in alphabets. However, the signatures on her early oil paintings are too homogenous. For example, see *Yayoi Kusama*, 2004, 45, nos. 8, 9; 47, no. 14; 48, no. 11; 49, no. 13.

¹⁸⁸ Matsumoto Takako, *Yayoi Kusama I Love Me* (Tokyo: B.B.B., inc. 2008).

durable paper in the same way as *Nihonga* painters did to strengthen their work. Kusama was at this juncture clearly an entirely self-taught oil painter.

Kusama learned oil painting in a roundabout way. Although by the mid-1950s, she no longer belonged to “any group or party,” she was not indifferent to other artists as she experimented with non-*Nihonga* media.¹⁸⁹ Before her second solo exhibition in 1952, she participated in a group show with eleven other local artists, held at Matsumoto’s Fuji Department Store.¹⁹⁰ Kusama would have participated in the discussion that took place among these local artists, who were engrossed with the latest critical issues. She broadened her knowledge in such creative exchanges. Through the local avant-gardists, especially Matsuzawa Yutaka, the Nagano-based Japanese conceptual artist, she soon became acquainted with the active members of the official Avant-Garde Artists Club, such as Abe, Uemura, and Takiguchi.

In 1954, in her letter to Abe, Kusama reported: “I am now reading *Matière of Oil Painting* written by Oka Shikanosuke,” then a must-read textbook among art students.¹⁹¹ Indeed, the earlier version of *Flower Spirit*, as seen in the 1956 slide, shows experiments with *matière*, or facture. The organic central patterns were executed in layers and the painting’s borders were done in slightly projecting fine stripes. Finally, by 1955, Kusama was becoming skillful with oil paint. The original

¹⁸⁹ Yayoi Kusama, letter to Georgia O’Keeffe, 13 December 1955, folder “Georgia O’Keeffe,” Kusama Papers.

¹⁹⁰ Hitherto undocumented, this exhibition is mentioned in Yamazaki Kieko, untitled text, *Dai-nikai Kusama Yayoi shinsaku koten* [*The second Yayoi Kusama solo exhibition*], exh. cat. (Matsumoto: The Matsumoto City Civic Hall, 1952), folder “1952,” Kusama Papers.

¹⁹¹ Kusama, letter to Abe.

version of *Flower Spirit* most likely commemorated a moment of her achievement in mastering the new technique.

Gill

Due to alterations committed on her own early works, today it is difficult to understand the entire scope and full significance of Kusama's oeuvre produced between 1950 and 1955. However, there is one piece from that period for which Kusama particularly cared. The work is called *Era (Gill)* from 1955 (fig. 1.31). *Gill* was one of two works that—after the destruction of a body of her early works—Kusama went all the way from Matsumoto to Tokyo (in 1956) to borrow from its owner, Takiguchi, for her Seattle exhibition. The other work was *Tempted Sun* (fig. 1.32). But only *Gill* appears in a price list of her Zoe Dusanne Gallery exhibition in 1957.¹⁹² For her, *Gill* was a proud achievement of the mid-1950s that she wanted to present at her first United States exhibition.

In this abstract work, Kusama first applied light blue gouache over a jet-black foundation built with *sumi*-ink, allowing chance to help determine her composition. The use of decalomania suggests her continuous interest in Surrealist art. For Kusama, who spent impressionable years witnessing the war and its seemingly endless destruction and human exploitation, immediately after the war, she wanted to eschew “social realism and existentialism”—because she found the former too dogmatic, as it was used for

¹⁹² “Yayoi Kusama, Paintings: Watercolors & Pastels,” in folder “1957,” Kusama Papers. “The Gill,” is the eighth entry among the twenty-six works listed.

wartime propaganda, and the latter, too self-conscious.¹⁹³ Instead, like the Abstract Expressionists before her, she found fertile ground in the Surrealists' endeavor to explore the human psyche.

The Surrealist attempt to dislodge all rational control was especially important for Kusama. Her ambition can be further seen in her text, "Ivan the Fool" from 1955:

The Devil is at once an enemy of art and an ally of art. It resides only in freedom. No sooner had something been established, he would leave it.... Such devilish power is the power that provokes the earnest desire for spiritual freedom in eternity. A rising of that which is inexplicable allows people to see the world of yonder, wherein our spirit will be inspired to free itself.¹⁹⁴

The "Devil," according to her, is "Mephistopheles," an epic hero prepared to destroy myths, traditional values and customary ways of life for the sake of progress.¹⁹⁵ Her craving for such freedom cannot be separated from her wartime experience of totalitarianism—an oppressive society where the harsh laws and the extensive surveillance deprived individuals of their ability to think independently.

After the war, many of those who survived totalitarian regimes across the globe began problematizing the modern tendency toward totality. Among them, a Jewish philosopher who survived a Nazi prisoner-of-war camp, Emmanuel Levinas thought through his experience and established a formal set of ideas. "Totality," he

¹⁹³ Kusama, "Ivan the Fool," 164. *Ivan the Fool* (1886) is Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy's short story based on a Russian folktale of the same title. Its protagonist, Ivan, is the youngest of three male siblings. Unlike his brothers, who were tempted by money and military power, Ivan is simple-minded and listens to his heart rather than his mind. In the end, he defeats the devil and becomes the ruler of the country. In her article, Kusama combined Tolstoy's *Ivan the Fool* with Goethe's *Faust* and embraced Mephistopheles as a symbol of modern progress.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

explained, arises when individuals confuse their particularity with what they believe are their needs and happiness as encouraged by the exterior world and surrender their ability to think.¹⁹⁶ By contrast, “thinking” begins at the very moment when consciousness becomes a “consciousness of a particular being” that transcends his or her exterior condition. He identified such consciousness as circumventing or surpassing received biases through recourse to the “unconscious” or “instinct,” and explained it therefore, paradoxically, as a “consciousness without consciousness.”¹⁹⁷ According to Levinas, this desirable consciousness of one’s own, surpassing external influence can be achieved when a physiological body reveals “itself concretely in suffering,” with “the turning of the ‘I can’ [of the will] into a thing,” as he put it, to the point where “the essentially violable will can emancipate itself only by constructing a world in which it eliminates the occasions for betrayal.” In order to attain this state, he believed that the will needs to reach “to the point of making itself forget its for-itself,” to the degree of entailing physical suffering.¹⁹⁸

Levinas’s account helps in a way to explain Kusama’s obsessive pictorial practice from this period. In *Gill*, Kusama kept a deliberate distance from the automatist techniques of, say, Takiguchi (fig. 1.33) or Oscar Dominguez (fig. 1.34). After her initial phase of decalcomania, she pushed herself to an extreme degree to

¹⁹⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, “The *I* and the Totality,” in *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (London and New York: Continuum, 1998), 11, 13.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

concentrate on tiny details by adding countless, orange, alien-looking organisms, each measuring no more than three millimeters long. On the head of each microscopic creature, she carefully rendered between four to six antenna-like projections and left a blank space to make an eye-like opening. Similar to her *Nihonga*, the intricacy of this work must have demanded enormous and almost selfless concentration, which sometimes even resulted in heart palpitations.¹⁹⁹ That such a mental state took its toll on her health suggests that her concept of the unconscious deviated from the Surrealist commitment to engaging the unconscious through dreaming, fantasy, and hallucination in the process of creating art.

One reason that the postwar period may have prompted Kusama to again engage in austere practices was because this was an exceptionally confusing time for the Japanese populace. In the immediate postwar years, the United States-led Occupation government saw information as “one of the three essential components in carrying out United States foreign policy—the other two, of course, being military and economic.”²⁰⁰ As evidenced by the censorship materials brought back from Occupation Japan, the new government controverted every value imposed by the

¹⁹⁹ Kusama, interview by Munroe, 14 December 1988.

²⁰⁰ “The Department of State’s modern informational activities began in the late 1930s as a reaction to the cultural aggressiveness of Nazi Germany when Congress established a program to promote cultural relations with other countries in the Western Hemisphere.” “Chapter 1: The Department of State American Cultural and Informational Foreign Policy, 1945-1973,” in RG 59 File Project Description, 8, the National Archives, College Park, MD.; *United States Advisory Commission on Information Semiannual Report to the Congress* (March 1949), in RG 59, 250 Department of State Decimal File, 1945-1949, the National Archives, College Park, MD.

Japanese military regime.²⁰¹ In order to neutralize anti-American sentiment in Japan, the Occupation force used Japan's centralized information system and censored Japanese anti-American statements and information related to the atrocities of the war—most especially the two atomic bomb disasters. The “gill” of Kusama's title refers to the respiratory organ in aqueous animals; without a gill, these animals cannot survive. Only through engaging herself in art to the point of suffering, could Kusama apparently confirm her existence and think beyond exterior conditions.

At the onset of the Cold War, as Takeshi Matsuda's 2007 study convincingly argues, the United States government asserted its hegemonic position in part by promulgating its culture in the Axis countries (Germany, Italy, and Japan).²⁰² The government's strategic plan is elicited in a diagram (fig. 1.35) that appeared in the 1949 *United States Advisory Commission on Information*. The three essential divisions—“International Broadcasting,” “International Press and Publication,” and “International Motion Pictures”—systematically propagated the nation's industrial, economic, and cultural merits in eighty-four countries including the Axis nations. Cultural programs especially stoked a tremendous intellectual appetite in war-torn countries where people longed for any kind of news, commentaries, books, magazines, movies, and photographs. United States Information Service agents further established contact with receptive government officials, political leaders, newspaper editors, writers and journalists, directors of radio newscasts and program producers,

²⁰¹ The Gordon W. Prange Collection, McKeldin Library, The University of Maryland.

²⁰² Takeshi Matsuda, *Soft Power and Its Perils: U.S. Cultural Policy in Japan and Permanent Dependency* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

motion picture producers and distributors, education leaders, school teachers, labor leaders, business men, industrialists, church officials, scientists, and artists, in order to generate pro-United States opinions. These grass-root efforts ultimately permeated civic psychology and led people generally to accept all things American in the occupied territories.

In the early 1950s, except for the expatriate Japanese artists living in the United States, Japanese art magazines were not so eager to promote American artists. However, the establishment of twenty-three American Cultural Centers all over Japan would actively facilitate cultural exchange between Japan and the United States by teaching of English to Japanese people and making U.S. publications accessible.²⁰³ As a result of the concerted effort of the United States Information Service, of United States-Japan cultural exchanges, and of a policy that made English mandatory in school curricula during the Occupation, Japan's international cultural focus gradually shifted away from Paris to the United States.²⁰⁴

More precisely, Japan's artistic direction began to shift around 1950, when the Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Industry invited the Japanese-American artist Isamu Noguchi to live and work in Japan. In the December 1950 issue of *Atelier*, Noguchi wrote a lengthy article that amplified Clement Greenberg's famous 1948

²⁰³ Already in 1951, the total number of visitors to those sites and their extension programs had reached more than five million. Unknown writer, "General Fact Sheet, American Cultural Centers in Japan," 2, in B. 7359, RG 59, 250, the National Archives, the Department of State Decimal File, College Park, MD.

²⁰⁴ The first government-sponsored visa for an artist to go to New York City after the war was granted to Fujita Tsuguharu in 1949. "*Fujita Tsuguharu-shi Nyūyōku e tatsu*" ["Mr. Tsuguharu Fujita departs for New York"], in *Bijutsu techō* [Art notebook], no. 16 (April 1949): 7.

assertion and proclaimed that the “world’s art center was moving from Paris to the United States.”²⁰⁵ The following year, United States art had considerable exposure in Japan for the first time, when the *Yomiuri Independent Exhibition* showcased both United States and European artists.²⁰⁶ The Gutai artist Yoshihara Jirō, for example, remembers seeing a Jackson Pollock for the first time at the “Contemporary Painting of the United States and France Exhibition,” a special presentation of the “Independent” exhibition held at the Osaka Municipal Museum of Art. On a more individual level, civilians such as John C. Denman, an art collector, chief pilot of Northwest Airlines, and Tokyo resident, brought his art collection to Japan and loaned his artworks to exhibitions.

A decisive event that prompted Kusama to shift her attention to the United States was her participation in the *18th International Watercolor Exhibition* at the Brooklyn Museum in 1955. As part of a civic-level cultural exchange, the Brooklyn Museum asked the Japan Art Critics Association to select twenty-five of the most experimental and vanguard Japanese artists. The final selection consisted of fifteen established artists and ten emerging artists, including Kusama, whose main body of work from this period was done in “gouache and pastel.”²⁰⁷ This little-known

²⁰⁵ See, for example, Wada Wadao, “*Isamu Noguchi no koto*” [“About Isamu Noguchi”], *Atelier*, no. 286 (November 1950): 46-51; Isamu Noguchi, “*Gendai chōkoku no shomondai*” [“Various problems of contemporary sculpture”], *Atelier*, no. 287 (December 1950): 20-31; Clement Greenberg, “The Decline of Cubism” (1948), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticisms* vol. 2, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 211-215.

²⁰⁶ Okamoto Tarō, “*Sekai geijutsu no kakuritsu*” [“The establishment of world art”], *Atelier*, no. 292 (May 1951): 24-32.

²⁰⁷ “*Kusama Yayoi koten*” [“Yayoi Kusama solo exhibition”], *Fujin gahō* [Women’s

biennale was one of the first to introduce progressive Japanese contemporary artists to New York.²⁰⁸

Sales of two works from the Brooklyn exhibition appeared promising to Kusama, who was determined to make her living as a professional artist.²⁰⁹ By November 1955, after a failed effort to go to Paris with government sponsorship, she contacted American artists Georgia O’Keeffe and Kenneth Callahan, asking them to explore the possibility of mounting shows of her works in the United States and separately sending them her artwork.²¹⁰ Kusama first wrote to O’Keeffe on 15 November, saying that she had seen *Black Iris (II)* in the collection of John C. Denman. (This was the beginning of her correspondence with O’Keeffe.) She could have seen this work in a publication or at an exhibition at the Bridgestone Gallery in Tokyo in 1954.²¹¹ “I found in ‘Life’ Mr. Callahan’s work and himself in his

illustrated] (June 1955), magazine clipping, folder “1955,” Kusama Papers.

²⁰⁸ Yoshida Hodaka, “*Nihon no gendai sakuhin ni tsuyoi kanshin: Burukkurin kokusai suisai-ga ten o miru*” [“Strong interest in contemporary Japanese art: International watercolor exhibition in Brooklyn”], *Shinano Mainichi shinbun* [*Shinano Mainichi newspaper*], 17 May 1955, newspaper clipping, folder “1955,” Kusama Papers.

²⁰⁹ “*Kōhyō yonda ichi josei no e*” [“Painting by a Japanese female artist recognized at the international watercolor exhibition in Brooklyn”], *Chūnichī shinbun* [*Central Japan newspaper*], 24 September 1955, newspaper clipping, folder “1955,” Kusama Papers.

²¹⁰ Yayoi Kusama, letter to Neil Meitzler, 17 December 1955, Meitzler Papers; Yayoi Kusama, letter to Georgia O’Keeffe, 15 November 1955, folder “Georgia O’Keeffe,” Kusama Papers.

²¹¹ She could have seen it reproduced in Abe Nobuya, “*Shichi’nin no Amerika gaka no sakuhin*” [“Works by seven American artists”], *Atelier* (February 1951): 34-35. For the exhibition history of *Black Iris (II)*, see Barbara Buhler Lynes, *Georgia O’Keeffe Catalogue Raisonné*, vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 1154.

studio,”²¹² Kusama wrote in a letter to a Callahan student, the Seattle artist Neil Meitzler in 1956. She most likely saw the *Life* magazine article at the American Cultural Center, and acquired the addresses for both artists through the United States Information Service.²¹³

O’Keeffe forwarded Kusama’s artwork to the New York dealer Betty Parsons, who represented some East Coast-based Japanese immigrant artists, such as Kenzō Okada. Kusama’s watercolors were very different from the large, mostly abstract oil paintings that Parsons showed at her gallery, and she declined to offer Kusama an exhibition. For his part, Callahan brought the paintings to his dealer, Zoe Dusanne. Dusanne, an African-American, is regarded as the first Seattle dealer to have specialized in modern art. Her stable of artists included such Pacific Northwest figures as Guy Anderson, Callahan, Morris Graves, Mark Tobey, Kenjirō Nomura, and George Tsutakawa.²¹⁴ Known for her “courageous eye,”²¹⁵ Dusanne was familiar with the kind of sensibility presented in Kusama’s work in its intricate use of water-based mixed media on a small scale. After seeing her watercolors, Dusanne immediately offered Kusama her first United States solo exhibition.²¹⁶

²¹² Yayoi Kusama, letter to Neil Meitzler, 11 January 1956, Meitzler Papers.

²¹³ Kusama, letter to O’Keeffe, 15 November 1955.

²¹⁴ *Tribute to Zoe Dusanne: Modern Art Pavilion of the Seattle Art Museum*, exh. brochure (Seattle: Seattle Center, 1977), n.p., file “Yayoi Kusama,” Blanton Museum, University of Texas, Austin.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Zoe Dusanne, letter to Kusama, 14 January 1956, Zoe Dusanne Papers, accession no. 2430-4, Special Collections Division, University of Washington Libraries, Seattle. Hereafter, referred to as Dusanne Papers.

One reason that the Pacific Northwest figures came to Kusama's attention in the early 1950s is because they were receiving serious critical attention. Aside from the September 1953 article of *Life*, "Mystic Painters of the Northwest," which lionized Callahan, Anderson, Graves, and Tobey as mystic hermits, the painters from the region were selected to represent the United States at the 1956 São Paulo Biennale. Although Kusama's relationship to the group is one of resonance more than influence, *Gill*'s fairly large format (61 x 72.5 cm) and expanded use of materials, such as pastel, tempera, and oil (which, in *Gill*, appears as a band of red on the right-hand side) from this period is evocative of Callahan's relatively small paintings rendered in tempera, pastel, and watercolor on paper (fig. 1.36).

As a diligent learner, Kusama sometimes hired translators to read English books and articles to her, and toward the mid-1950s, she began increasingly to identify herself with the Pacific Northwest artists.²¹⁷ In 1955, alluding to the Seattle School of artists, she wrote: "I want to reside in the world, which is a halfway point between symbolism and mysticism."²¹⁸ After arriving in Seattle in 1957, she commented to a local newspaper: "Since there exist Tobey, Callahan, Graves, and Anderson, the leading artists dealing with mysticism born out of mechanical

²¹⁷ After receiving a copy of *Morris Graves* from Meitzler, Kusama wrote him back, saying she read it with a friend. Kusama, letter to Meitzler, 31 May 1956, Meitzler Papers. The friend mentioned in this letter is most likely her translator. Through the fifties and most of the sixties, she used translators to translate key articles that appeared in books and art magazines and to write English letters and statements. Some of those translations still exist in her archives.

²¹⁸ Kusama, "Ivan the Fool," 164-65.

civilization, I have been interested in Seattle.”²¹⁹ She seems to have also been sympathetic to the Pacific Northwest artists’ political concerns, their international approach, and their focus on the individual’s interiority.

Although the Pacific Northwest school was not a collective movement,²²⁰ the lives of Anderson, Callahan, Graves, and Tobey intersected from the late 1930s through the early 1940s, when they acted upon their shared opposition to the war and serious concerns for humanity. Their intellectual stand can best be understood from Callahan’s famous article, “Pacific Northwest,” which appeared in the July 1946 issue of *Art News*:

The rise of fascism in Europe and Asia directed the artists’ thoughts toward problems of humanity and its fate under political misdirection.... they [Northwest artists] saw the world composed of people, not races or nationals, and found the various ancient philosophies and religions, including Christianity, based on essentially the same chart of moral laws.²²¹

Due to the considerable presence of Asian and Native American populations in Seattle, there existed a history of communication between different cultures.²²² Not only had

²¹⁹ “*Kodoku no gaka Kusama Yayoi raishi*” [“Solitary artist Yayoi Kusama visits Seattle”], *Hokubei Hōchi*, 2 December 1957, p.5.

²²⁰ For example, see the essays by Cheryl Conkelton and Laura Landau, in *Northwest Mythologies: The Interactions of Mark Tobey, Morris Graves, Kenneth Callahan, and Guy Anderson*, ed. Cheryl Conkelton, exh. cat. (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2003).

²²¹ Kenneth Callahan, “Pacific Northwest,” *Artnews* 45 (July 1946): 24-25.

²²² There existed regular ocean-liner service between Yokohama and Seattle since 1896 that connected the two cities in fourteen days. In fact, when Kusama decided to go to the United States, she found her visa sponsor through the Nagano immigrant community in Seattle. The immigrants from Nagano hosted a welcome party for Kusama on 14 December 1957 at the local Japanese restaurant Maneki. “*Kusama Yayoi jō kangei kai*” [“Welcome party for Yayoi Kusama”]; “*Kusama kangeikai nigiwau*” [“Kusama’s welcome party bustled”], newspaper clipping, folder “1957,”

Graves and Tobey traveled in Asia extensively, but Anderson and Graves also attended Native American dance ceremonies at the Swinomish Indian reservation in the 1940s. Furthermore, all four artists appreciated the philosophical connections between Buddhism, Hinduism, and Bahá'í.²²³

Kusama's awareness of the Pacific Northwest artists' interests in non-Western culture is evident in her communication with Meitzler. On 22 February 1956, she sent Callahan and Meitzler the beautiful volumes from *Pageant of Japanese Art* (fig. 1.37). In her 20 March 1956 letter to Meitzler, she enthusiastically noted: "I was interested [in] your *dessin* and the story of Indian Dance which you saw in Seattle. Last year I saw also the Indian Dance in Tokyo."²²⁴ Kusama shared with the Pacific Northwest artists an aspiration for internationalism and an interest in a global range of culture, which she came to cherish through her rejection of wartime xenophobia and through *Nihonga's* concept of *jikohattatsu* (self-development). In addition, she was most likely aware that Japanese methods of two-dimensional composition, including *notan*—using gray tones of different values—had a real influence on artists like Tobey, Max Weber, and O'Keeffe.²²⁵ It was the Seattle artists' desire for cultural exchange that most likely encouraged Kusama to keep working with traditional media, such as *sumi-ink*, throughout the 1950s.

Kusama Papers.

²²³ Bahá'í is a Persian universalistic faith in which various manifestations of God throughout history are seen to contribute to human progress. Tobey was a renowned Bahá'í devotee.

²²⁴ Yayoi Kusama, letter to Neil Meitzler, 20 March 1956, Meitzler Papers.

²²⁵ Sheryl Conkelton, "Pantheons of Dreams," in *Northwest Mythologies*, 37-39.

Kusama as well agreed with the Seattle artists' mystical and symbolic approach to the subject of nature. The four Seattle artists attempted to convey the vastness of the universe through the smallest details of nature by delineating "an interconnectedness between humans and nature and microcosmic and macrocosmic aspects of the universe"²²⁶—an effort that resonates with Kusama's wartime drawings of peonies, for example. For Kusama, the Seattle artists' technique of rendering the inner world (fig. 1.38) and especially, their attempt to visually convey the "interrelationship between man, rock, and the elements,"²²⁷ in Callahan's words, seem to have given her a new idea as to how to depict her inner world, or "interior issue[s]."²²⁸ When she arrived in Seattle in 1957, Kusama, in agreement with Callahan's view, said her works "can be regarded as mystical symbolism, a manifestation of nature by regarding I, myself as nature, as an equal with rocks, trees and weeds."²²⁹

In terms of Symbolism, after the base for *Gill's* composition was achieved through a chance operation, she would use certain colors that she treated as the constants of her visual art—similar to the way she maneuvered colors in *Lingering*

²²⁶ Laura Landau, "Points of Intersection: Chronicling the Interactions of Tobey, Graves, Callahan, and Anderson," in *Northwest Mythologies*, 22.

²²⁷ Kenneth Callahan, quoted in Michael Johnson, ed., *Kenneth Callahan: Universal Voyage*, exh. cat. (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press in association with Henry Art Gallery, 1973), 26.

²²⁸ "Since my childhood, art has exclusively been my interior issue." Yayoi Kusama, "Pīpuru" ["People"], *Geijutsu Shinchō* (April, 1955), magazine clipping, folder "1955," Kusama Papers.

²²⁹ "Solitary artist," 5.

Dream. The colors in *Gill* recall the earth's basic elements. For instance, the band of red oil paint that appears on the work's right-hand side evokes fire. The blue in the central structure evinces an aqueous environment. A seepage of thin yellow paint applied over the decalcomania appears to represent light and heat, whereas a band of purple below evidently symbolizes cool temperature and shadow. The black lightning bolts rendered in the central structure seem to have resulted from a discharge of electricity that accumulated in the mist generated by the transformation of water evaporation induced by temperature changes.

The energy from the lightning gives life to the countless red molecular figures. From their varying sizes and movements, as animated in the painting, it is clear that they emerge first in the air in the painting's upper right-hand side with an explosive power, then spread around, and ultimately settle down on the bottom of the aquatic structure, colonizing the ground. Some figures in the foreground are shooting white roots-like projections downward so that they might suggest a primordial state of life akin to plants or bacteria. *Gill* indicates Kusama's continuing interest in the cycle of life and its mystery, yet in a far more abstract manner than her peony drawings. Her microcosms of life appeared to one Seattle reporter as "messages from outer space."²³⁰ In *Gill*, through her focus on interiority, Kusama successfully rendered an infinite universe.

As a survivor of the war and the Occupation, who viewed critically the excessive social controls imposed by technocracy and the way human individuality

²³⁰ John Voorhees, "Paintings to Disturb and Intrigue on Display," *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, December 18, 1957, p. 21.

was increasingly negated by a conformist society, Kusama drew her inspiration from a quasi-mystical experience brought about in part by taxing herself to an extreme degree. Only through such means could she earn a solid sense of her existence and could access to freedom. Thus, for her, individuality and an autonomous art, which was prohibited during the war, were becoming increasingly important. Her focus on irrational and mystical experiences is reminiscent of how Walter Benjamin, an important theorist of modernity, ambivalently valued the writings of Franz Kafka as works whose foci were determined by “mystical experience (in particular, the experience of tradition) and. . . by the experience of the modern big-city dweller.”²³¹ But mysticism born out of urban society can also be found in Tobey’s Bahá’í faith, especially in his participation in an ascetic nineteen-day fast, or Graves’ and Anderson’s inspiration drawn from Swinomish Indian dancers’ trance-like states during the course of their ceremonies.

In *Gill*, Kusama endeavored to embrace two irreconcilable ideas—the modern rationalism represented by her use of scientific color theory and the asceticism that she carried over from her *Nihonga* practice. The critic Fukushima Tatsuo thus observed in 1955 that the most prominent feature of Kusama’s “metaphysical mysterious work is that she stands on rationalist grounds, yet shows a strong resistance to anti-humanism.”²³² Above all, it was her resistance to anti-humanism

²³¹ Benjamin was decidedly ambivalent about his assessment of Kafka’s work. In the conclusion to his second, follow-up essay on Kafka, Benjamin wrote that it was “the purity and beauty of a failure” that made Kafka’s writings work. Walter Benjamin, “Some Reflections on Kafka,” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969), 141-5.

²³² Fukushima Tatsuo, “*Shinpiñū na sakuhin, chūmoku sareru Kusama Yayoi no*

which would effloresce in the paintings she went on to realize in New York. With full financial support from her parents, Kusama left Japan for Seattle on 18 November 1957, and would remain in the United States until 1970.²³³

koten,” [“Mysterious work, remarkable exhibition of Kusama Yayoi”], unknown newspaper, 6 April 1955, newspaper clipping, folder “1955,” Kusama Papers.

²³³ Regarding her parents’ financial assistance, see Yayoi Kusama, letter to Neil Meitzler, 17 November 1956, Meitzler Papers. Kusama’s departure on the 18 November was also announced in several Japanese newspapers. See, for example, “*Kusama-san, 18 nichi tobei*” [“Miss Kusama, leaving Japan on the eighteenth”], *Maiyū Shin’bun* [“Maiyū newspaper”], 15 November 1957, newspaper clipping, in folder “1957,” Kusama Papers.

CHAPTER TWO

1958-1962

INFINITY, THE ARTS OF ACTIVE SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

On 5 February 1962, Kusama was preparing a shipment of two huge canvases: *No. P.3.B.*, a 9'11" by 9'6" red and black painting, and *White X.X.A.* (fig. 2.34), a monumental 8'4" by 19'6" canvas—2 feet larger than Jackson Pollock's largest poured paintings—both from 1961.²³⁴ They were to be shipped from her studio at 53 East 19th Street in New York to the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam for a forthcoming international group show, "Tentoonstelling Nul" (Nul Exhibition), which would open on 9 March 1962.²³⁵ She originally designated these paintings as *Net*;²³⁶ in the 1970s she would call them *Infinity Nets*, the series title that is commonly used today.²³⁷

The earliest *Net* paintings from 1959 were typically large, white horizontal works painted in oil (fig. 2.1).²³⁸ The ground for the white *Net* was prepared in black (fig. 2.2). Once the foundation was dry, Kusama obsessively rendered small white

²³⁴ Yayoi Kusama, letter to Henk Peeters, 2 February 1962; Kusama calendar-diary, folder "Calendar-diary," Kusama Papers.

²³⁵ The exhibition closed on 25 March 1962.

²³⁷ Mario Yrissary, the Filipino-American artist and Kusama's neighbor in 1961, unrecorded conversation with author, New York, 29 August 2008.

²³⁸ Kusama began creating colored (green, red, violet, and yellow) *Net* paintings in 1960. She exhibited them that same year at the Gres Gallery in Washington, D.C. In New York, however, she showed them only in the backrooms of galleries.

arcs, each in a slightly different shape, until every square inch of the canvas was filled (fig. 2.3). She then finished her painting by applying a thin layer of white (fig. 2.4). Tailored to the dimensions of the walls, these canvases gave an “initial impression . . . of no-show,” recalled the critic Lucy Lippard.²³⁹ This required people to come closer, diminishing the divide between the subject (viewer) and the object (painting). Seen from up close, the broad delicate surface of the *Net* painting potentially induced a tension that gave the viewer a sense of his or her own scale and existence. Lacking any center to the composition—indeed, in a sense, lacking any composition—Kusama’s work suggested an ad infinitum expansion of tiny particles. It was these paintings that made the young Dutch artist and “Nul Exhibition” curator, Henk Peeters (b. 1925), sit up, take notice, and make Kusama part of his exhibition.

After World War II, the European art scene was becoming increasingly internationally focused and more attention was paid to works from artists from all over the world. Peeters first saw one of Kusama’s *Net* paintings in a print advertisement in the May 1961 issue of *Cimaise*.²⁴⁰ He later spotted three of the *Net* paintings—*White O.X.* (1960), *No. 2 J.B.* (1960), and *H Red* (1961)—at the “Internationale Malerei 1960-61” (15 July-24 September 1961), held at Walframs-Eschenbach, Aschaffenburg, Germany. That ambitious international exhibition featured arts from East Asia, Eastern and Western Europe, the Middle East,

²³⁹ Lucy Lippard, “Silent Art,” *Art in America* 55, no. 1 (January-February 1967): 61.

²⁴⁰ Henk Peeters, letter to Stephen Radich, 14 June 1961, folder “Yayoi Kusama,” box 5, Stephen Radich Papers, The Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C. Kusama’s inventory lists the shipment of three paintings to Galerie 59 for the “*Internationale Malerei*” exhibition. Kusama, Notebook No.1, Kusama Papers. *Cimaise* is a French art magazine.

North and South America, Scandinavia, and South Africa. Upon seeing Kusama's paintings, Peeters confirmed that affinities existed between this young Japanese-born artist and the circle of artists he was exhibiting with at the time, notably figures affiliated with such groups as the Italian Azimuth (1959-1960), the Dutch Nul (1960-1965), and the German Zero (1957-1966).²⁴¹ Consequently, he invited her to participate in the "Nul Exhibition."

Comparable to the way Kusama had imagined going overseas during the war, Peeters, who was an underground anti-Nazi activist during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands, today explains that in the postwar years, he and his peers had felt they had to go beyond "dangerous nationalism."²⁴² In the early 1960s, not many commercial galleries in Europe took a real interest in young artists, so some of those artists began raising their own funds to curate international exhibitions.²⁴³ "Nul" was one such artist-curated show.

Peeters recently explained that the "Nul Exhibition" was intended to represent new beginnings after the war by starting from zero (*nul* in Dutch).²⁴⁴ They were not

²⁴¹ Henk Peeters, letter to Yayoi Kusama, 10 September 1961, folder "Yayoi Kusama," box 5, Stephen Radich Papers, the Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

²⁴² Digital recording of Henk Peeters, interview by author, Hall, the Netherlands, 1 January 2007.

²⁴³ For example, Otto Piene and Heinz Mack began organizing evening exhibitions at their Düsseldorf studio in 1957. Between 1960 and 1962, the artist Mary Bauermeister hosted many performances at her studio in Köln. Peeters first organized a Zero exhibition (remake of the 1961 *Zero-Edition, Exposition, Demonstration* in Düsseldorf) at a local furniture shop that he named Galerie A in Arnheim between 9-30 December in 1961.

²⁴⁴ Peeters, interview with author, 1 January 2007.

alone in thinking this way. For the two founders of German Zero, Heinz Mack and Otto Piene, “zero” meant void, or a zone of silence, a form of fresh start tied to a concept of infinity (fig. 2.5).²⁴⁵ By the 1960s, this idea of infinity became increasingly discernible. According to one of the founders of the Italian Azimuth, Piero Manzoni, “zero” signified “the beginning of an infinite series” of artworks that he had begun creating in 1957.²⁴⁶ Kusama, too, was thinking about infinity with her *Net* paintings as is evidenced by her 1961 comments about these works: “This infinitely repeatable rhythm and monochrome surface constitute a new form of painting.”²⁴⁷

If every age has to generate its own thoughts and images that bespeak its own experiences, “infinity” was a commonly held concept that came to occupy the minds of many artists and intellectuals after the war. Reacting against the governing principles of the former Axis alliance (Germany, Italy, Japan, and their territories), many began to question modern totalitarianism. Emmanuel Levinas, the former Nazi prisoner-of-war, for example, in his groundbreaking philosophical book, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (1961), defined infinity as an essential human freedom that would produce infinite thoughts from infinite contents beyond socially

²⁴⁵ For example, the first three pages of *Zero 3* (fig. 2.5) illustrate “ZERO,” “bis,” “∞” (“Zero to Infinity”) that explains the group’s symbolic departure from Zero to infinite variety of new art. *Zero 3* (1961), n.p., in *Zero 1, 2, 3*, eds. Heinz Mack and Otto Piene (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1973), 51-53 (hereafter cited as *Zero*).

²⁴⁶ Piero Manzoni, “Artist Writing,” in *Piero Manzoni*, ed. Germano Celant, exh. cat. (London: Serpentine Gallery, 1998), 128.

²⁴⁷ Kusama, “A lone woman goes into the international art world,” 127-129.

imposed boundaries.²⁴⁸ Comparable ideas of freedom emerged among the Zero artists in Germany, who are said to have declared “their work to be a break with the past,” by daringly venturing into new media and modes of expression that enabled them to include performance and art actions.²⁴⁹ Similarly, Kusama’s experimental works tend in certain ways toward the dematerialization of art; thus, by 1967, her practice had developed to encompass “numerous body-painting Happenings, films, and fashion designs” as Midori Yoshimoto has observed.²⁵⁰

In view of the fact that most forms of art were annexed for purposes of social control during World War II, the concept of infinity, as it was ramified in visual art, could be associated instead with the ambition for “an art, which is an end in itself,”

²⁴⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (original in French, 1961; Hague: Nijhoff; reprint, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University, 1969), 29. Though little known in English-speaking countries, Levinas, according to Adriaan T. Peperzak, is today ranked among the most important philosophers of the twentieth century for providing a break from Western thought and philosophical practice that strives to reduce the universe into a panoramic overview and dialectical synthesis. Adriaan T. Peperzak, “Preface,” in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, eds. Robert Bernasconi, Simon Critchley, and Peperzak (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University, 1996), vii. Levinas was born in 1906, two generations before Kusama, and was active as a philosopher before World War II. He thus began publishing on his theoretical accounts on the war as early as 1951. His writings give clear insights into the minds of many who survived fascism.

²⁴⁹ Eleanor Jess Atwood Gibson, “The Media of Memory: History, Technology and Collectivity in the Work of the German Zero Group 1957 - 1966,” Ph.D. diss. (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2008), 1. Although the Zero artists declared their work to be a break with the past, Gibson suggests that Zero’s work in fact repeats, repositions, and responds to themes of the Second World War and the collective trauma of the war. *Ibid.*, iv.

²⁵⁰ Midori Yoshimoto, “Kusama Saves the World Through *Self-Obliteration*,” unpublished manuscript, 2011, 1, French translation published as “*Yayoi Kusama sauve le monde par la Self-Obliteration*,” in *Yayoi Kusama*, ed. Chantal Berét (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 2011).

borrowing a phrase from the U.S. artist, Barnett Newman, whose work Kusama and Peeters both admired. This “may sound like an art-for-art[’s-sake] position,” but “this position is really saying that the world is created by the artist,” so Newman argued.²⁵¹ In a related spirit, what characterized Nul and its inter-related groups could well be perceived as a form of “realism.” Not the literalism of the United States Pop Art, but a realism befitting what the artist Joseph Beuys later came to designate as “social sculpture,” which according to Beuys is: “the definition of art beyond the specialist activity carried out by artists to the active mobilization of every individual’s latent creativity, and then, following on from that, the molding of the society of the future based on the total energy of this individual creativity.”²⁵² These postwar artists believed that art can enrich humanity and nurture creativity. Their viewers could thus become active agents who would potentially help in building a new postwar society.

Being critical of the social conformity that helped advance totalitarianism, the artists working with Nul and its inter-related groups also promoted a strong individualism. Thus the curator Laura Hoptman assessed Kusama, along with Yves Klein and Manzoni (all affiliated with the “Nul Exhibition”), as “mavericks” of

²⁵¹ Barnett Newman, “Remarks at the Fourth Annual Woodstock Art Conference” (1952), in *Barnett Newman, Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. John P. O’Neill (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 246 (hereafter cited as *Newman Selected Writings*).

²⁵² Beuys extrapolated the notion of sculpture to his concept of social sculpture around 1973, as he intensified his lecturing activities with the aim to transform society. Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys*, exh. cat. (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1979), 207. Currently, Beuys’s early works are associated mainly with Fluxus. But judging from the photo-documentation (fig. 2.6), he participated in Zero’s first demonstration, “Zero-Edition, Exhibition, Demonstration,” in the year he assumed his teaching position at Düsseldorf Art Academy in 1961.

postwar art.²⁵³ At the same time, as in Peeters's earlier statement, their goals were wholeheartedly social, evincing an effort to establish a new human-centered society.

How did Kusama happen to arrive at her idea of infinity? Why did this concept gain importance among artists and intellectuals who were bent on analyzing fascism and conformist society? What was its significance? By drawing on the works of those associated with the 1962 "Nul Exhibition," I address these questions in this chapter. My analysis begins with a close examination of the development and influence of Kusama's *Infinity Nets* series during her early New York years (1958-1959). I will then investigate the idea of infinity as manifest in the works of Kusama and her European peers who were included in the 1962 "Nul Exhibition" in an attempt to find their shared perspectives.

1958: Kusama's Initial Development in New York

Kusama arrived in New York City on 27 June 1958.²⁵⁴ By early December, she moved to a spacious East Village loft at 70 East 12th Street, where one of the co-tenants of her building was Michael Goldberg, a second-generation Abstract

²⁵³ Hoptman also observed the "concrete nature" of the works by Zero artists, and discussed how their focus on aesthetics conjured up an "art-for-art's sake" mentality. Laura Hoptman, "Down to Zero: Yayoi Kusama and the European 'New Tendency,'" in *Love Forever*, 44, 52. Klein ultimately declined to participate in the 1962 "Nul Exhibition"; however, he was on Peeters's artist roster from the beginning of the planning for this exhibition.

²⁵⁴ This date can be traced to a letter Kusama wrote to Georgia O'Keeffe on 8 July 1958 in which she stated, "I am writing this letter on the eleventh day of my stay in New York City." Yayoi Kusama, letter to O'Keeffe, 8 July 1958, folder "Georgia O'Keeffe," Kusama Papers.

Expressionist painter.²⁵⁵ Her career in New York began, in a sense, in competition with the second generation of Abstract Expressionist artists. Following the model of Jackson Pollock's marshalling of photography, as a means both to record and promote his art, photo documentation of the artist's process generally was then at a peak.²⁵⁶ Soon after moving to the East Village, Kusama began hiring professional photographers to shoot publicity stills, while carefully propping and choreographing the shots, just as she had done in Japan, for her media audience.²⁵⁷ The difference in New York was her use of a professional photographer as a way to elucidate the artistic processes, methods, and intentions behind her work. These photographs, then, constitute an indispensable source for understanding her earliest development in New York.

Based on the year inscribed on the back of the prints (1958), her first shoot with Kenneth Van Sickle took place immediately after her relocation to a new studio in December 1958.²⁵⁸ Kusama's technique of manipulating photographs for the

²⁵⁵ Yayoi Kusama, interview by author, Tokyo, Yayoi Kusama Studio, 28 July 2006. The date of her move can be determined by two letters from her Detroit dealer, Robert N. Hanamura: one sent to Kusama's old address on the Upper West Side dated 17 November 1958; and the other, to her new downtown address, dated 28 January 1959. Robert N. Hanamura, letter to Yayoi Kusama, 17 November 1958; 28 January 1959, in folders "1958" and "1959," Kusama Papers.

²⁵⁶ In the 1950s, Hans Namuth documented Jackson Pollock working in his studio. Some other examples can be seen in *Artists in Their Studios: Images from the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art*, ed. Liza Kirwin, exh. cat. (New York: Collins Design, 2007).

²⁵⁷ Kusama was very particular as to how she should appear in her publicity stills. Regarding her instruction to photographers, see Zelevansky, *Love Forever*, 20, n. 46.

²⁵⁸ One of the photographs from this shoot eventually appeared in the June 1959 issue of the Japanese art magazine *Geijutsu Shinchō* (fig. 2.8). Yayoi Kusama, "Pīpuru"

purposes of self-promotion becomes evident when comparing an earlier image taken at her studio in Japan (fig. 1.19) to one of Van Sickle's publicity stills (fig. 2.7). The picture in Japan had been taken just after her second solo exhibition in November 1952. In the earlier photograph, Kusama stares confidently at the camera, while posing as if she were in the midst of examining her small watercolors. Her well-coiffed hair and clothes—all carefully coordinated with the elements in her abstract art—convey her self-assurance as an abstract artist. The later Van Sickle image, however, conveys an unsettledness and mobility, embodying in a way a statement she made in the later 1959 *Geijutsu Shinchō* article (fig. 2.8): “Currently, I am facing an important turning point in my art.”²⁵⁹ This photograph, with Kusama caught in mid-motion, hair disheveled, and wearing work clothes, was designed to give the impression of an impromptu, spontaneous action shot. Yet another image (fig. 2.9) reveals that, in actuality, she twice changed her shirt to coordinate with her paintings during the photo session.

In both of the later images by Van Sickle (figs. 2.7 and 2.9), Kusama surrounded herself with her paintings, which, in comparison to the watercolors in the 1953 image (fig. 1.19), are much larger. While the earlier works are all approximately 10 1/2” by 7 1/3”, the later works are far larger, reaching in two rows, almost to the 9-foot-high ceiling of her loft. Exposed to the Abstract Expressionists' immense canvases immediately after her arrival in New York, Kusama must have felt an urge to paint similarly large works in order to make her art competitive, not to mention

[People], *Geijutsu Shinchō* (June 1959): 31.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

visible, in the local scene. The large watercolors she painted were for the “Twentieth International Watercolor Exhibition,” which opened at the Brooklyn Museum in April 1959.²⁶⁰ Since she had had seven years of training in the water-based *Nihonga* technique, watercolor was the medium in which she felt most able to compete in New York.

Though watercolor was her primary medium at this time, Kusama did experiment in oil in New York, even as early as 1958. A small white canvas entitled *Pacific Ocean* (figs. 2.10) is discernible in the photograph and was most likely the same painting her Detroit dealer, Robert N. Hanamura mentioned in a letter to her in November 1958: “The work done while you were in Japan was very interesting. I particularly liked, however, your most recent oils which showed the influence, conscious or otherwise, of Western ideas.”²⁶¹ *Pacific Ocean* effectively anticipates the *Net* paintings. In 1958, however, Kusama was unsure of how to follow up on this painting. She recently explained that at the time she painted this work, she thought about how to develop it, by comparing the work’s emotionally restrained surface to the vast majority of her expressionistic watercolors.²⁶²

Though the early oil paintings would be an important precedent for work that

²⁶⁰ The show was going to open on 7 April 1959. Her preparation for the exhibition was mentioned in Hanamura’s letter. He wrote: “You are currently busy preparing for the Brooklyn Museum exhibit.” Robert Hanamura, letter to Yayoi Kusama, 28 January 1959. This submission to the Biennale and the work’s title are mentioned in an article by an unidentified writer, “*Kokusai suisai bien’nare ten Kusama-san ga shuppin*” [“Ms. Kusama submits to the international watercolor biennale”]; newspaper clipping, date unidentified, in folder “1959,” Kusama Papers.

²⁶¹ Robert Hanamura, letter to Yayoi Kusama, 17 November 1958.

²⁶² Yayoi Kusama, e-mail to author, 20 February 2009.

followed much later, it was in her expressive watercolors that her new awareness of the New York scene was initially revealed. One of them (fig. 2.11), a newspaper collage and watercolor, which is the second work from the right-hand side of the top tier in Van Sickle's photograph (fig. 2.7), is reminiscent of the collaged-newspaper foundation of Jasper Johns's encaustic paintings such as *Flag* (1954-1955). In her notebook from this period, Kusama wrote down the names of Johns, John Cage, and Mark Rothko, apparently pointing to her interest in their work.²⁶³

Though Pollock's name is not among those who appear in Kusama's notebook, she nonetheless seems to have found his works interesting. One of Van Sickle's photographs shows Kusama in the process of applying *sumi*-ink to a horizontal panel leaned against a wall (fig. 2.12). This photograph seems to be a kind of response to Hans Namuth's famous image of Pollock pouring fluid enamel paint over unstretched canvas laid on the floor from 1950 (fig. 2.13). Yet it was also a nod to traditional Japanese painters who, like Pollock, worked on paintings laid horizontally on the floor. In Van Sickle's photograph, however, Kusama's work is positioned vertically—in the Western way—though she was using a traditional Japanese medium, *sumi*-ink, to create her all-over (non)composition. With this Japanese-American combination, she forged a public persona as a culturally rooted artist with a dual association with the New York art scene and traditional Japanese art.

Originally, the Japanese adapted the use of *sumi*-ink painting from the Chan (Chinese Zen) monks at the end of the twelfth century.²⁶⁴ Ink painting in Japan,

²⁶³ Yayoi Kusama, Notebook No. 1.

²⁶⁴ The Indian monk Bodhidharma, who traveled to China around 520 A.D., is seen as

which developed as part of the Zen discipline in both the fine and martial arts during the Muromachi period (1333-1573), was best represented by the black-and-white ink paintings of Sesshū Tōyō (1420-1506). Kusama's use of *sumi*-ink in 1958 could thus point to her work's conscious association with Zen Buddhism.²⁶⁵ Although Western interest in Zen had begun in the nineteenth century, according to art historian Helen Westgeest, it was not until the 1950s that it came to play a greater role in the vanguard art scenes throughout Western Europe, Anglo-America, and Japan.²⁶⁶ In the 1950s, among the Japanese expatriate artist community in New York, the composer John Cage was especially known for his keen interest in Zen Buddhism. That community of artists included Cage's student Toshi Ichiyanagi and his then wife, Yoko Ono, with whom Kusama was acquainted.²⁶⁷

Cage's idea was to use Zen's focus on everyday life. In one influential musical composition, *4'33"* from 1952, Cage incorporated the Zen concept of nothingness. During the composition's performance, the pianist quietly sat in front of the piano for

the first patriarch of Zen Buddhism. He called his sect in China "Chan," based on the word *Dhyana* (meaning meditation in Sanskrit). Helen Westgeest, *Zen in the Fifties: Interaction in Art Between East and West*, exh. cat. (Waander Uitgevers, Zwolle: Cobra Museum voor Moderne Kunst Amstelveen, 1997), 11.

²⁶⁵ In the late 1950s in New York, while Daisetsu Suzuki was teaching at Columbia, a general interest in Zen arose. One of Kusama's early artist liaisons, Franz Kline was among those interested in Zen and calligraphy. Kusama was certainly aware of his work and her early New York paintings, too, became more calligraphic than in the watercolors she painted in Japan. The latter were evocative of the works by such Pacific Northwest or Surrealist painters as Miró.

²⁶⁶ Westgeest, *Zen in the Fifties*, 7.

²⁶⁷ Yoko Ono's name appears in Kusama's calendar diary, 16 July 1961. Folder "1961," Kusama Papers.

four minutes and thirty-three seconds without playing the instrument. The noises heard from the audience in the interim became the music. This experiment had no equivalent in Western music.

The work Kusama submitted to the Brooklyn watercolor exhibition in 1958, *Work No. 11* (fig. 2.14), however, fundamentally differed from Cage's passive music. Unlike the chance operation manifest in Cage's composition through the individual audience members, *sumi* lines in Kusama's *Work No. 11* were decisive and charged, in some ways comparable to the lines of Japanese calligraphy. Based on Alexandra Munroe's recent research, Kusama's essential disagreement with Cage is hardly surprising. This is because Cage's "famous use of chance operations too often described superficially and erroneously as 'Zen-like,'" as explained by Munroe, was "in fact based on the *I Ching*, a book of [Chinese] divination that is one of the Five Classics of Confucianism."²⁶⁸

Kusama seems, instead, to have been looking at the Abstract Expressionist Franz Kline, known for his large black and white canvases evocative of contemporary calligraphy, and his circle of artists. With the establishment of the International House of Japan in Tokyo in the 1950s, U.S.-Japan cultural exchange was facilitated and the vanguard circles in New York began to take special notice of Japanese

²⁶⁸ Alexandra Munroe, "The Third Mind: An Introduction," in *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860-1989*, exh. cat. (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2009), 22. Branden Joseph provides a more complex interpretation of Cage's concept of silence as a blend of the medieval European mystic, Meister Eckhart's divine essence and the Zen conception of "being and nothingness." Branden Joseph, *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2003), 46.

culture.²⁶⁹ For example, Kline had become familiar with calligraphy through the work of Japanese artist and calligrapher, Hasegawa Saburō. Hasegawa was one of the few people in Japan in the 1950s who could write knowledgably on American art. When Hasegawa first learned about Kline's work from his friend, Isamu Noguchi—who was invited by the Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Industry to live in Japan in the early 1950s—he immediately saw the resemblance between Kline's work and Japanese calligraphy. Hasegawa became interested in Kline, and, after contacting him, began sending Kline Japanese calligraphic magazines, which Kline reportedly appreciated.²⁷⁰ Kusama was surely aware of Hasegawa's interest in forging a link between Western abstract art and Japanese calligraphy, as this was well known in Japan. In fact, immediately after her arrival in New York, Kusama sought out Kline, who became one of her first acquaintances.²⁷¹

Despite Kusama's efforts to the contrary, *Work No. 11* remained a tentative effort within the context of the avant-garde scene in New York. Even with the larger format, *Work No. 11* did not possess the scale of works by Pollock or Newman. The plain paper collage used in *Work No. 11* differed significantly from Johns's strategic

²⁶⁹ The International House of Japan opened on 11 June 1955 in Tokyo. The purpose of this institution was to encourage Japanese people to interact with the rest of the world. Matsuda, *Soft Powers*, 136-37.

²⁷⁰ Hasegawa Saburō “*Kurain no e/Tarukō no tegami: Chūshō kaiga to Nihon*” [“Kline's paintings / Tal-Caut's letters: Abstract Art and Japan”], *Atorie* [Atelier] (July 1951): 15-21.

²⁷¹ Kusama's early acquaintance with Kline is mentioned by Kusama. Audiotape of Yayoi Kusama, interviewed by Bhupendra Karia and Alexandra Munroe, 17 December 1988, CICA/ATT/001.08. In her diary (1960-1963), Kline's name appears on 16 February and 17 March 1960. Folder “1960,” Kusama Papers.

use of newsprint, which was just discernible beneath his encaustics. In contrast, Kusama used collage to acquire chance effects, a holdover from the Surrealist-influenced practices she had learned in Japan. Further, her kinetic *sumi*-ink lines in this work were comparable to black lightning bolts, a style she had developed in her earlier work, *Gill* (1955) (fig. 1.31).

1958-1959: *Pacific Ocean*

In March 1959, Kusama held a second photo session with Van Sickle. From her writing, we know that this new series of photographs was intended to accompany a magazine article that would have introduced her life and art in New York to American readers.²⁷² A photograph from this session (fig. 2.15) suggests that after finishing *Work No. 11* for the Brooklyn exhibition, she launched a new project in the style that she developed in *Pacific Ocean*, a modest watercolor from 1958 that initially developed into the small oil painting of the same title that can be seen in Van Sickle's 1958 photograph (fig. 2.10). Kusama considered the original watercolor version of *Pacific Ocean* to be her first *Net* painting, remarking in a newspaper interview in 1961 that it was inspired by the expanse of "shallow space" made up of tiny waves spreading over the Pacific Ocean that she had seen during her flight from

²⁷² Kusama wrote in 1959: "Soon, my work and life story will be introduced in about a ten-page article in one of the leading magazines in the United States and already we made photographs," in Kusama, "*Amerika . . .*" ["America . . ." partial clipping from unidentified magazine, text signed as "In New York, March 26," probably 1959], Kusama Papers. With no record found in her archives, the article most likely was never realized.

Tokyo to Seattle.²⁷³

While the original watercolor *Pacific Ocean* does not survive, a similar work also entitled *Pacific Ocean*, from 1959, is a somewhat naturalistic depiction of waves seen from above made by rendering dark arcs while leaving blank spaces in between to serve as light reflections (fig. 2.16). After depicting countless waves, she applied thin layers of red and blue for suggestive depth. The works in the Van Sickle photograph (fig. 2.15), some even larger than *Work No. 11*, consisted of endlessly recurring waves, executed either in black brushstrokes on a light-colored foundation, or white on a black foundation, and still conveying spatial depth. Yet, the waves in the paintings captured in the Van Sickle photograph appear more unified. Her new means of building a large painting, methodically with tiny strokes profoundly changed her work's potential significance, and marked a radical departure from the dynamic composition of *Work No. 11*.

Around the time that Kusama began developing this new style, she jotted down in her diary the question: "Is originality of art necessary in its future?" which she answered, "Not necessarily."²⁷⁴ The idea of originality—being new, interesting, different to anything that had come before—preoccupied the second-generation of Abstract Expressionists, particularly after the advent of Pollock's celebrated poured

²⁷³ Unrecorded interview of Hart Perry (son of Kusama's Washington, D.C. dealer Beatrice Perry), by author, New York, 11 May 2007; Ōgane (name as used in the article), "*New York de hyōka sareta Kusama Yayoi no monokurōmu kaiga*" [Kusama's monochrome painting critically acclaimed in New York], *Yomiuri shinbun* [Yomiuri newspaper], 10 January 1961, a clipping, folder "1961," Kusama Papers.

²⁷⁴ Kusama, Notebook No. 1.

paintings.²⁷⁵ Kusama consciously distanced herself from this modernist tenet and decided to develop a series of “uninteresting paintings” based on a form of human behavioral obsession.²⁷⁶

In “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” Sigmund Freud introduced the concept of “obsession” as part of trauma psychology.²⁷⁷ Initially called “shell-shock,” the effects of trauma were first identified during the First World War, when otherwise brave and diligent soldiers began manifesting unaccountable symptoms of persistent panic, hysterical paralysis, and disabling nightmares. Freud described trauma as a long-forgotten, repressed, morbid anxiety that instinctually recurs as a repetition-compulsion principle and can drive a person to obsessive acts, thus creating lasting damage to the development of the individual. In 1960, Kusama explained that her approach in the *Net* paintings originated in a group of works that were “composed of minute points with *sumi* ink on white paper, like cells in countless chains” (fig. 2.17), which she began creating in the 1950s. As discussed in Chapter One, Kusama completed these watercolors obsessively at the average rate of fifty to seventy, and sometimes over one hundred, per day to the point of suffering from heart palpitations.²⁷⁸ While developing the watercolor version of *Pacific Ocean*, Kusama

²⁷⁵ *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, electronic dictionary (2000). “Originality” definition.

²⁷⁶ Kusama, “A lone woman,” 127-129.

²⁷⁷ Sigmund Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920), in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York; London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 594-625.

²⁷⁸ “This year’s hope, a woman artist Kusama Yayoi.” Kusama spoke about suffering from heart palpitations. Kusama, interview by Munroe, 14 December 1988.

seems to have consciously tackled the challenge of incorporating into her art an expression of an intimate symptom of psychic injury, which bound her work with her identity, as was manifest in her obsessive process of executing her net paintings. But she was not the only artist affected by what might be termed the repetition-compulsion principle. Examining post-World War II works by such war survivors as Tatsumi Hijikata, Tetsumi Kudō, and Tomio Miki (fig. 2.18), Alexandra Munroe wrote: “The term ‘Obsessional Art’ may apply to a particular aesthetic tendency in Japanese culture of the 1960s.”²⁷⁹ And that obsessional tendency emerged from the collective trauma of war.

Vestigial War, Zero, Nul, and Azimuth: The Intersection of European Vanguards, 1957-1961

Obsessional artistic practices might thus be seen as generational, pertaining largely to artists who came of age while living through the brutal effects of World War II. For example, the future Zero artist Günther Uecker, who exhibited with Kusama after 1960, began compulsively hammering nails into supports in the 1950s (fig. 2.19), an activity said to be provoked by his memory of boarding up the windows of his house as a young boy to protect against bomb blasts during the war in Germany.²⁸⁰ Recurring memories of the war and the desire to expunge the experience

²⁷⁹ Alexandra Munroe, “Revolt of the Flesh: Ankoku Butoh and Obsessional Art,” in *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 189.

²⁸⁰ Author’s conversation with David Leiber, the director of Zero’s principal gallery in New York City today, Sperone Westwater, unrecorded, New York, 10 December 2008.

of the Nazi occupation haunted other principal members of the German Zero (1957-1966) as well, the Dutch Nul (1961-1965), and the Italian Azimuth (1959-1960). In the mid-1950s, they thus all began their careers as adherents to “Art Informel” (“formless art movement” in English).

Characterized by paintings entailing unrestrained brushstrokes and thick layers of paint, Informel was the first postwar art movement with an international focus. For example, French art critic, Michel Tapié and Japanese critic, Sōichi Tominaga both characterized Informel as a movement that threaded through Italy, France, Spain, and the United States. Additionally, Yoshihara Jirō, the leader of the Gutai art movement in Japan, published the “Gutai Manifesto” in 1956 and discussed some affinities between Gutai members and the figures he conceived to be Informel artists, including Pollock and Georges Mathieu.²⁸¹

This postwar international tendency toward abstract art emerged as a development opposed to the nationalism entailed in the social realist art that dominated during World War II. As I have discussed in Chapter One, in Japan, a new form of abstract art emerged as a universal art movement in the postwar era in opposition to the nationalistic figurative art currents during the war. In Germany,

²⁸¹ Michel Tapié “*D’une Esthétique Autre*” [“Of another aesthetic”], *Mizue* no. 617 (December 1956): 23-28; Sōichi Tominaga, “*Kon’ichi no Kūkan*” [“Today’s Space”], *Ibid.*, 4-10. The December 1956 issue of *Mizue* with the subtitle “*Signifiant d’Informel*” was the first to introduce Art Informel in Japan. In the same month, commissioned by the art magazine *Geijutsu Shinchō*, Yoshihara Jirō, the leader of the Gutai art movement, published “*Gutai Bijutsu Sengen*.” Yoshihara Jirō, “*Gutai Bijutsu Sengen*,” *Geijutsu Shinchō* 7, no. 12 (December 1956); abridged and reprinted as “Gutai Manifesto,” in *Art in Theory: 1900-2000*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 698-701.

postwar art education began with a prewar avant-garde art “that had been exorcised by the National Socialists,” as Joe Ketner pointed out.²⁸² In the United States, many of the artists who worked on the Federal Arts Project mural paintings during World War II—including Philip Guston, Mark Rothko, and Jackson Pollock—afterwards sought a universal form of artistic expression and began painting abstract art.

Beyond these aspirations toward internationalism, similar to the way Kusama embraced Surrealism around 1952 (see Chapter One), for her generation of European artists, Art Informel provided a fertile ground to explore the depths of the human psyche. One of the Nul artists, Armando, while studying philosophy (and art history) at the University of Amsterdam between 1949 and 1954, taught himself the use of oil paints as a medium for expressing his innermost self.²⁸³ His paintings made in the 1950s—his so-called “*peintures criminelles*”—were executed in overlaid layers of paint mixed with sand and plaster, and were titled either *Paysage criminel* (Criminal Landscape) or *Espace criminel* (Criminal Space). According to Ernst van Alphen, author of *Armando Shaping Memory*, they were based on Armando’s memory of growing up in the immediate vicinity of the Amersfoort transit camp in the Netherlands.²⁸⁴ His *Espace criminel* (fig. 2.20), for example, is a large dark painting

²⁸² Joe Ketner, “Mackazin,” unpublished manuscript prepared for *Heinz Mack* (New York: Sperone Westwater, 2011), 3. The German-American scholar, Ketner has been interviewing his relatives in Germany to get firsthand accounts of postwar Germany.

²⁸³ “Armando,” in *Zero NY*, ed. Mattijs Visser, exh. cat. (New York: Sperone Westwater, 2008), 216 (hereafter cited as *Zero NY*); Ernst van Alphen, “Painting Confronts the Painting,” in *Armando: Shaping Memory* (Rotterdam: Nai Publishers, 2000), 33-36.

²⁸⁴ van Alphen, *Armando*, 33.

executed in oil and plaster. The work bears a few fossil-like figures in impasto. Blurred and formless, with no apparent logic and no clear image, this work could speak, however elliptically, of what he had witnessed during his adolescent years in the vicinity of the Amersfoort transit camp. Such haunting memories of the war became part of a barren landscape, elicited only through hostile feelings manifest in three thorny projections that appear on the work's left side. Such vestigial imagery and a sense of guilt—implied in the title of the so-called “criminal” series—about growing up as a Dutch citizen under the German occupation, grew to be a maddening obsession (according to van Alphen, Armando repeatedly tortured the surface of these paintings)²⁸⁵ for Armando as with many artists of his generation.²⁸⁶

Around 1960, however, all of the Azimuth, Nul, and Zero artists' styles abruptly took a turn away from expressionism in favor of geometric abstraction as seen in the works of another Dutch artist, Jan Schoonhoven (figs. 2.21a and 2.21b), or the Italian, Piero Manzoni (figs. 2.22a and 2.22b). Similar transformations may be observed in the works of many artists after their exposure to the monochrome exhibition of the French artist Yves Klein (1928-1962), a show that traveled to Milan (fig. 2.23), Düsseldorf (fig. 2.24), and London in 1957.²⁸⁷ Klein consciously

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ For example, Aldo Tambellini, the Italian-American artist who experienced World War II in Italy, tortured the surface of his *Destruction* series, which he began creating in the early 1960s.

²⁸⁷ Manzoni reportedly visited daily Klein's eleven monochrome panels at Milan's Galleria Apollinaire, and declared that Klein's paintings were a revelation to him. Nicolas Charlet, “The ‘monochrome epic,’” in *Yves Klein* (Paris: Société nouvelle Adam Biro, 2000), 70. Since the exhibition did not travel to the Netherlands, the Dutch artists saw Klein, most likely, at the *Monochrome Malerei* exhibition (1960);

distanced himself from the Art Informel participants, as he considered their existential angst “morbid,” and charged them with “void[ing] themselves into their paintings.” He, by contrast, vaunted his art as reflecting “the beautiful, the good, and the true.”²⁸⁸ While Klein’s paintings did not have much of an impact in England, in the former fascist countries his “personal genius and his universal attitude toward purification,” as Otto Piene (b. 1928) described it, were instant sensations.²⁸⁹ Piene attributed this to circumstances in postwar Germany that made the role of the artist “virtually negligible.”²⁹⁰ Klein’s self-assurance in his status as an artist and in his works’ purity and beauty also represented qualities prohibited under fascist totalitarianism, where art and artists were both reduced to mere vehicles of political ideology.

While attending the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie, Piene, along with his artist friend Heinz Mack (b. 1931) launched their careers in the Düsseldorf-based Informel, Group 53. However, dissatisfied with its “self-indulgent expressionism” according to Ketner, the pair, after the graduation, moved into adjoining studios at 69 Gladbacher

thus their style metamorphosed later than that of the artists based in Milan and Düsseldorf. Kusama’s and Rothko’s works were also on view at *Monochrome Malerei*. Many works in this exhibition were still expressionistic, done in the mode of Informel.

²⁸⁸ Yves Klein, “The Monochrome Adventure,” in *Yves Klein: Long Live the Immaterial!* exh. cat. (Nice: Musée d’art contemporaine; Prato: Museo Pecci, 2000), 80.

²⁸⁹ Otto Piene, “The Development of the Group Zero” (1964), in *Zero*, xxi.

²⁹⁰ Audiotape of Otto Piene, interviewed by Valerie Hillings, Cambridge, Mass., 19 November 1999, cited in Valerie Hillings, “Chapter Two: Pure Possibilities for a New Beginning: Zero (1957-1966),” in “Experimental Artists’ Groups in Europe, 1951-1968” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2002), 121.

Street.²⁹¹ By 1957, they deviated from the model established by the German Informel by curating the works they agreed with and staging a series of eight “Abendausstellungen” (“Evening Exhibitions”) in their studios. The first “Abendausstellung” in April 1957 took place at Piene’s studio.²⁹² At their fourth exhibition, held on 26 September 1957, Mack and Piene named their joint venture “Zero.” One reason for the name was that, as a symbol, the Arabic numeral “0” could be universally understood, thus symbolically transcending nationalism. But for them, it was most important that “Zero” not be seen as an “expression of nihilism or as a dada-like gag,” but as a signal of “pure possibilities for a new beginning.”²⁹³ For Mack and Piene, “zero” stood for the “incommensurable zone in which the old state turns into the new.”²⁹⁴

In May 1957, Düsseldorf’s Galerie Schmela launched its space with Yves Klein’s monochromes, which helped inaugurate a friendship among Klein, Mack, and Piene. Soon after their fourth jointly organized “Abendausstellung,” Klein, Mack, and Piene collaborated on a periodical project, *Zero*, which had a run of three issues.²⁹⁵ The first volume was published in March 1958. Klein contributed a lengthy essay, “My Position in the Battle Between Line and Color” and explained how his paintings enabled a break with the past by focusing on the potential of color. Artists’ social

²⁹¹ Ketner, “Mackazin,” 4.

²⁹² Ibid., 5.

²⁹³ Piene, “The Development of the Group Zero,” *Zero*, x.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Ketner, “Mackazine,” 5-6.

roles were essential to the two founders of Zero. Mack and Piene, as editors of *Zero 1*, thus asked leading cultural figures in Germany to answer the question: “Does contemporary painting influence the shape of the world?”²⁹⁶ The magazine also helped them to communicate their ideas about art beyond national boundaries. In 1961, Zero added its third member, Günther Uecker (b. 1930) to its “inner circle.”²⁹⁷ Together, the three curated exhibitions that assembled the works of an international array of like-minded artists, including the future founding-members of Azimuth and Nul.

The idea of zero was evidently a compelling one in some war-devastated societies in the wake of the collapse of the old order.²⁹⁸ In 1959, the Italian artist Piero Manzoni (1933-1963) participated in a mostly Art Informel exhibition at Kunstkring in Rotterdam, a show also entitled “Zero” (but distinct from the German Zero). On his way back to Milan, he visited Düsseldorf and became acquainted with Mack and Piene. Mack subsequently traveled to Milan and, through Manzoni, met members of the Italian vanguard.²⁹⁹ In Milan, this new artistic exchange between the Germans and Italians was centered on the short-lived Galleria Azimut and a magazine called

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 6.

²⁹⁷ Uecker is Yves Klein’s brother-in-law. Klein never became an official member of Zero.

²⁹⁸ For example, in the years immediately after the war, the term “*Stunde Nul*” [Zero hour] was used to signify a desired or supposed break with Nazism, as well as with the defeat and destruction of the war. In the 1960s in Japan, there existed a group called “Zero Jigen” [Zero Zone] and “Zero Association.” Four members of Zero Association joined the Gutai Art Association in 1954.

²⁹⁹ These artists included Enrico Castellani, Lucio Fontana, Nanda Vigo, Piero Dorazio, Arnaldo Pomodoro, Dadamano, and Francesco Lo Savio.

Azimuth (which had a run of two issues), both established in December 1959 by Enrico Castellani (b.1930) and Manzoni.

In 1960, the second issue of *Azimuth*, which included works by various Nul and Zero artists, was devoted to “The New Artistic Conception.” As discussed earlier, Klein’s influence pervaded the entire text. The principal contributor to this issue, the director of the Städt Museum in Leverkusen, Germany, Udo Kultermann, was even engaged in curating his own monochrome painting show entitled “Monochrome Malerei” (“Monochrome Painting”), which would open in March 1960.³⁰⁰ He reprinted his contribution to *Azimuth 2*, “Monochrome Malerei—Eine Neue Konzeption” (“Monochrome Painting—A New Conception”) in the “Monochrome Malerei” catalogue. This text defined the mostly monochromatic art emerging at the time as a “new artless art,” and argued for its importance in establishing reciprocal relationships between artist and viewer. Kultermann believed that new, radically reduced abstract art could amount to “creative expression” only through the exercise of the onlookers’ creative imagination.³⁰¹

Peeters (b. 1925), who also started his career with Informel, first met Manzoni during the Informel exhibition “Zero” in Rotterdam. In subsequent years, he traveled to Milan and, through Manzoni, met Castellani, Lucio Fontana (1899-1968), and other Milanese vanguard artists. From Manzoni, he learned about the German group, Zero.

³⁰⁰ Kusama and Rothko were participants in “Monochrome Malerei.”

³⁰¹ Udo Kultermann, “Monochrome Malerei—Eine Neue Konzeption” [“Monochrome Painting—A New Conception”], in *Monochrome Malerei* [*Monochrome Painting*], exh. cat. (Leverkusen: Städtisches Museum Leverkusen, Schloss Morsbroich, 1960), 2-3.

Late in 1960, he recalled that all German, Italian, and Dutch artists were aware of the new trend of artless art.³⁰² Wanting to create an exhibition comparable to Kultermann's sensational "Monochrome Malerei" of 1960, in the following year, Peeters, along with Armando (b. 1929), Jan Henderikse (b. 1937), and Jan Schoonhoven (1914-1994), established the Dutch group Nul and the magazine *De nieuwe stijl* [*The new style*] (which had a run of two issues).³⁰³

The year 1961 was also when Mark Rothko's solo exhibition took place at Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum. Peeters later recalled that at the inception of the Dutch group Nul, feeling some affinities to Rothko and other United States artists such as Barnett Newman, Ad Reinhardt, and Mark Tobey, he wrote to them and invited them to join his group. Only Newman wrote back to Peeters.³⁰⁴ Peeters was drawn to Newman's work and thinking, as Newman himself, though contemplating fascism from a temporal and spatial distance, similarly denied adhering to any "dogmatic principles" and made an "assertion of freedom,"³⁰⁵ maintaining that his

³⁰² "Perhaps [it] needed one year [after meeting Manzoni in Milan], then everybody knew what was going on." Audiotape of Henk Peeters, interviewed by Bhupendra Karia and E. Alkazi, Amsterdam Stedelijk Museum, 15 March 1989, CICA/ATT/001.49.

³⁰³ Some publications, such as *Die niederländische Gruppe Nul 1960-1965* [The Dutch Group Nul 1960-1965] give Nul's founding date as 1960. *Die niederländische Gruppe Nul 1960-1965. Zero und Paris 1960. Und heute* (Villa Merkel, Germany: The Galerie der Stadt Esslingen, 1997), 208. However, the 1962 "Nul" exhibition invitation states: "The Dutch group 'Nul' (since 1961) . . ." Folder "1962," Kusama Papers.

³⁰⁴ Peeters, interview by Karia and Alkazi, 15 March 1989. Newman's perspective on Nul will require further research and is beyond the purview of the current study.

³⁰⁵ Newman is known for his longstanding interest in anarchism, which is a political belief that laws and governments are not necessary. As discussed below, Newman's

almost monochromatic canvases were “full of meaning.”³⁰⁶ He saw his work as entailing a coming together of the physical and the metaphysical, a way to make reality.³⁰⁷ It was Newman’s huge canvases, in fact, that especially influenced Kusama’s initial breakthrough in New York.

1959: Emergence of the Nets

In April 1959, Kusama moved to a larger loft in New York at 39 East 30th Street, near the Empire State building. Perhaps in part to demonstrate the enormous size of her canvas, titled *A, B White Z* (93” x 142”), she photographed it juxtaposed with a stepladder (fig. 2.25). This dark canvas eventually became the first of the *Net* series, which took on alphabetic titles or designations. Kusama described the context for the work in 1961:

I rented a large studio and was faced with a black canvas so huge that I could not reach [its top] without using a stepladder. I began painting an expanse of particle-like white nets, almost devoid of tonality, as minute as I possibly could . . . In the bustle of a competitive and hectic New York, at the bottom of light and shadow of a contemporary civilization that moves forward with creaking noises, in the midst of this metropolis which symbolizes American pragmatism, I keep painting uninteresting paintings. This is a form of my resistance.³⁰⁸

Kusama’s move took place a month after “Barnett Newman: A Selection

anarchism entailed responsibility, which was the basis of his freedom principle.

³⁰⁶ Barnett Newman, “Frontiers of Space” (1962), in *Newman Selected Writings*, 251.

³⁰⁷ Barnett Newman, “Remarks at the Fourth Annual Woodstock Art Conference” (1952); “Interview with David Sylvester” (1965), in *Newman Selected Writings*, 246, 259.

³⁰⁸ Kusama, “A lone woman,” 128.

1946-1952,” the inaugural exhibition of a newly established contemporary art gallery, French and Company, a show curated by Clement Greenberg.³⁰⁹ Newman’s first New York exhibition in eight years drew the art world’s full attention, with its mural-size paintings impressing many by their stern simplicity. The largest among them, *The Cathedral* (1951) and *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* (1950-51) measured close to 96" x 215". Both works were largely monochromatic, marked with a few thin, vertical lines. Even more simplified, yet among the most painterly works in Newman’s oeuvre, were the next-to-the-largest, 96" x 108" paintings, *The Voice* (1950) and *The Name II* (1950).

Painted solely in shades of white, *The Name II* (fig. 2.26) and *The Voice* (fig. 2.27) exhibit soft painterly surfaces that Newman achieved by mixing a rough pigment ground of Magna with oil paint in *The Name II*, and egg tempera with enamel in *The Voice*. Two unpainted, thin vertical stripes divided *The Name II* into three equally sequenced rectangular segments. Leaving another set of unpainted areas on the left and right edges of the canvas, the picture was comprised of four vertical lines and three fuzzy white rectangles. Newman divided *The Voice* into two sections with a thin strip of vertical line toward its right-side edge. With their large, engulfing scale, Newman’s paintings—hung at an intentionally low level—facilitated closeness between the object and the viewers. With the viewers at close proximity (as Newman intended), it was impossible to grasp these works in terms of composition. Moreover, in the immediacy of the encounter, the subtle details, of brush-marks and stains began to unfold. Adding to the viewer’s experience, standing in front of the white paintings

³⁰⁹ Yolanda LeWitter was the gallery director. But French and Company asked the influential art critic Greenberg to curate their inaugural exhibition.

and looking at the far edges, the white canvases all but dissolve into the gallery's white walls, suggesting a potentially infinite expansion into space, intended to impart a feeling of emancipation. Of all the works exhibited in New York in the early 1959, Newman's two works come closest to Kusama's *A, B White Z*, in terms of their size and achromatic nature.³¹⁰ Two snapshots from 1964, in which Kusama appears, respectively, with Newman and with his close friend Rothko (fig. 2.28), document her contact with the two artists.³¹¹

During the Second World War, Newman and Rothko were deeply affected by the fate of European Jewry. "When Hitler was ravaging Europe," recounted Newman, the son of Polish immigrants, in an unpublished 1970 interview, the question of "what to paint seemed so tremendous—and the whole issue seemed such a vacuum that painting was dead because it couldn't say anything—it wasn't saying anything."³¹²

³¹⁰ Robert Rauschenberg painted his *White Paintings* in 1951 and exhibited in New York in 1953. Kusama came to New York in 1958, so she could not have seen that show by Rauschenberg. Robert Ryman began his white paintings in 1960, which was soon after Kusama's November 1959 Brata Gallery exhibition. It is possible that Kusama influenced Ryman.

³¹¹ Japanese women of Kusama's generation no longer wore kimonos in daily life, but they did wear them on special occasions. As recorded in figures 2.31, 2.32, 2.34-36, Kusama wore Western clothing to promote her *Net* paintings in 1961. Kusama wore a kimono at the opening receptions of her shows at Zoe Dusanne Gallery (1957), the Guggenheim Museum (1964), and the Nul Exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum (1965).

³¹² Barnett Newman, interviewed by Mitch Tuchman; interview transcript, folder "Newman, B.," Mitch Tuchman Papers, The Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C., 3. The people who died in concentration camps located in Poland numbered three million, whereas in Germany, the total was 160,000. Kazuo Nishii, ed. *Holocaust, Memory of Death Camp* (Tokyo: Mainichi Newspaper, 1999), 16. In 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt showed concerns over the media coverage of the Holocaust as it might give rise to public fear. Thus, in the United States, although Nazi atrocities were noted in the mainstream news media, press coverage on the Holocaust generally got marginalized (e.g., *The New York Times* published such items,

Not surprisingly, he stopped painting during the war. Rothko, an immigrant from Lithuania, was obsessed with Greek tragedy and Nietzsche's writings on the subject.³¹³ Tragedy was also the lens through which, after the war, Newman came to consider contemporary society.³¹⁴ Toward 1948, as the world experienced the shock of the first revelations of the concentration camps, explicit figuration disappeared from both Newman's and Rothko's paintings.

As suggested by Theodor Adorno's provocative statement, "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric,"³¹⁵ some postwar intellectuals considered the Holocaust to be a "premise for a nihilistic or a wholly unillusioned philosophy," and as "the hidden bases for the metaphysics of nullity and absence, for the urge to deconstruct

as a rule, inside the paper and cut them short, thus effectively trivializing the war against the Jews). Marvin Kalb, "Introduction: Journalism and the Holocaust, 1933-45," in *Why Didn't The Press Shout? American and International Journalism During the Holocaust*, ed. Robert Moses Shapiro (Newark, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 2003), 3-12. But Jewish-Americans, such as Newman, read about Nazi atrocities in, among other publications, the Yiddish language papers, the Jewish telegraphic agency, and English-language Jewish publications. Matthew Baigell, *Jewish Art in America: An Introduction* (Lanham, MD: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2007), 72.

³¹³ Anna C. Chave, "Introduction," *Mark Rothko: Subjects in Abstraction* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 18; "I'm interested only in expressing basic human emotions—tragedy, ecstasy, doom and so on," Mark Rothko, "Notes from a Conversation with Selden Rodman, 1956" (1957), *Writings on Art: Mark Rothko*, ed. Miguel López-Remiro (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 119.

³¹⁴ Newman wrote: "Our tragedy is again a tragedy of action in the chaos that is society." Barnett Newman, "The Sense of Fate" (1948), in *Newman Selected Writings*, 169.

³¹⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," in *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedeman, trans. Rodney Livingstone, et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 162.

all meanings and reach a vacuous center, so salient in postwar visions of the world.”³¹⁶ In 1948, the year that Newman painted his breakthrough piece *Onement I*, and while pondering its meaning for eight or nine months, he also began writing about a decline in Western aesthetics. In his exact words: “The Grecian form is so foreign to our present aesthetic interests that it has virtually no inspirational use. One might say that it has lost its culture factor.”³¹⁷ He thus challenged cultural and societal norms from within Western civilization. What Newman promoted instead were “antitechnique [and] antibrushwork.”³¹⁸ While he rejected mimesis of the natural world, however, he never fell for Dadaistic destruction. Instead, Newman focused on inventing what he described as “meta.” According to Shiff, when “Newman referred to the ‘meta,’ he may have been locating human experience beyond nature and beyond those sciences that take physical nature as their object.” But what Shiff defines as this concept of the “beyond what is known”³¹⁹ correlates, as I see it, with the idea of infinity.

In their attempt to resist the norms of Western aesthetics, *The Voice* and *The Name II* denied accustomed presumptions attaching to painting, especially by their color, composition, and the way the works were designed to be experienced through

³¹⁶ Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 15.

³¹⁷ Newman, “The New Sense of Fate” (1948), in *Newman Selected Writings*, 165-67.

³¹⁸ Richard Shiff, “To Create Oneself,” in *Barnett Newman: A Catalogue Raisonné*, ed. Ellyn Childs Allison (New York: Barnett Newman Foundation; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 8 (hereafter cited as *Barnett Newman*).

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

their monumental scale. These were the aspects of Newman's work that might have initially inspired Kusama's *Net* painting. The use of achromatic paints (black and white in Kusama's case) was meant to negate color. Kusama scaled her first *Net* painting, *A, B White Z* (93" x 142") (fig. 2.1) to a size comparable to that of *The Voice* (96 1/8" x 105 1/2"). By encouraging viewers to come closer, the scale of these immense canvases was designed to provide spectators with a physical experience, as opposed to a merely intellectual contemplation of the paintings. When a viewer was up close, Newman's mural-size painting became impossible to grasp as a whole, but the subtle details emerged.

And, upon seeing the five *Net* paintings—in varying sizes—Dore Ashton of *The New York Times*, reviewing Kusama's first solo exhibition in New York at the downtown artists' cooperative, the Brata Gallery in October 1959 (fig. 2.29), described them as an “infinitely extending composition utterly dependent on the viewer's patient scrutiny of the subtle transitions in tone.”³²⁰ Reviewing for *ARTnews*, Donald Judd saw a “variety of configuration and expression from point to point across the surface,”³²¹ in Kusama's *Net* paintings, while *Arts Magazine* critic Sidney Tillim perceived a “single plane of continuity,” in which there were “as many subtle variations of movement and pattern as the eye wishes to compose.”³²² Kusama herself remarked of her painting in 1961: “This infinitely repeatable rhythm and monochrome

³²⁰ Dore Ashton, “Art: Tenth Street Views,” *The New York Times* (October 23, 1959), a clipping in folder “1959,” Tokyo, Kusama Archives.

³²¹ Judd, “Reviews and Previewes: New Names This Month—Yayoi Kusama,” 17.

³²² Sidney Tillim, “In the Galleries,” *Arts* 34, no.1 (October 1959): 56.

surface constitute a new form of painting.”³²³

At the same time, Kusama positioned herself in certain ways at a conscious distance from Newman. For example, her *Net paintings* from 1959 were unfailingly painted in oil, whereas Newman employed a variety of media, as seen in the cases of *The Voice* (tempera and enamel) and *The Name II* (Magna and oil), and he deliberately employed varying techniques so as to paint each work differently. On the other hand, as seen in figure 2.2, Kusama methodically prepared the base of her *Net* paintings with black paint, then obsessively covered the foundation with deliberately uneven tiny arcs, each less than an inch in size.³²⁴

In *F*, a work from 1959, the black foundation is visible underneath the small white arcs of paint (fig. 2.29). Contrasting black and white, Kusama’s method emphasizes spontaneous, intuitive, and artfully amateurish gestures, which she consciously derived from the highly individualized brushwork of the traditional Japanese *Nanga* style, particularly a work attributed to Ike Taiga (1723-1766) (fig. 2.30).³²⁵ In this respect, Kusama differed from Newman, for she did not totally reject traditional ideas when those ideas proved useful or relevant to her practice.

Nanga, an abbreviation of the Chinese Southern School of Painting called *Nanshū-ga*, is the Japanese counterpart to the Chinese school of the scholar-amateur

³²³ Kusama, “A lone woman,” 127-129.

³²⁴ Some pieces made after 1960 are painted in acrylic, such as a small pink *Net* painting she gave to the Japanese critic Yoshiaki Tōno during his visit to New York in the early 1960s (now in the collection of the Toyama Modern Art Museum in Toyama, Japan).

³²⁵ Yayoi Kusama, e-mail to author, 26 February 2009.

or literati art that arose in Japan in the early eighteenth century.³²⁶ During the mid-Edo period (in the 18th century), literati artists deliberately emulated the Chinese scholar-amateur painters of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in protest against the decorative and commercialized *Hokushū-ga* (Northern School Painting), or academic painters of the Kanō and Tosa Schools, whom they considered to have lost their creative spirit. Possessing extensive knowledge of classical culture, literati painters were gifted practitioners, not only of painting, but also of poetry and calligraphy, and they placed a high value on a close link between artists' personalities and their works. Such literati painters from the Edo period as Taiga and Yosa Buson (1716-1783) developed their idiosyncratic characters by traveling extensively in their youth.

A portrait of Kusama from 1958 (fig. 2.9) suggests her identification with the Edo period literati artists, for she wears a triangular straw hat typically worn by Edo period travelers. Thus she signaled that, through her life's journey, she had cultivated her distinctive character. Also, in 1958 Kusama wrote that: "Under the light and shadow of capitalism and a highly mechanized civilization, personal identity gets buried."³²⁷ For her, confirming her own existence with her art and coming into her

³²⁶ Japanese literati tradition was influenced by the *Nanga* encyclopedia, *Kaishi-en Gaden* [The Mustard Seed Garden] (published originally in China in 1679; reached Japan in the late seventeenth century, and translated into Japanese in 1748). Christine Guth, *Art of Edo Japan, The Artist and City 1615-1868* (New York: H.A. Abrams, 1996), 159-162.

³²⁷ Kusama, "*Watashi no mita America no inshō (ge)*" ["An impression of the United States from my perspective (second-half)"], *Shinano chūbu maiyū shinbun* [*Nagano central evening post*], (March 19, 1958), a clipping from folder "1958," Tokyo, Kusama Archives.

own as a person (as detailed in Chapter One) was again becoming important during this time.

Transforming Dadaism

With her white paintings, Kusama could have had in mind also Robert Rauschenberg's famous *White Paintings* (1951), whose passive surfaces could reflect and absorb their ever-changing environment. And Rauschenberg's ideas for these works might have owed a debt to Newman's two white paintings of 1950. But Rauschenberg twisted Newman's white painting by incorporating something of the spirit of Marcel Duchamp's readymade by refusing the somewhat expressive brush marks that Newman had employed.³²⁸ Newman felt that Duchamp "failed to establish a meaningful alternative to more traditional imagery."³²⁹ And Kusama might have as well agreed with Newman. In conjuring the specter of "void" paintings, Tillim, however, observed in 1959: "What comes through from behind [Kusama's paintings] is no longer a naturalistic space but something like a memory of the place where things used to be rather than a void in which anything can happen."³³⁰ Kusama achieved this effect by introducing obsessive elements in her art.

Obsession can be imbued with multiple meanings. As Levinas observes, it first

³²⁸ When creating the *White Paintings*, Rauschenberg indeed wondered how far he "could push an object and yet [have it] still mean something." Audiorecording (recording date unknown. Release date, 2008) of Robert Rauschenberg, accessed 9 January 2012, http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/multimedia/audio/aop_tour_404.

³²⁹ Shiff, *Barnett Newman*, 4.

³³⁰ Tillim, "Yayoi Kusama."

brings to mind or resurrects a long-forgotten anxiety, which can help bring a person to his or her true consciousness, beyond the purview of normative social values (see Chapter One).³³¹ Obsession has, moreover, been identified as the intimate symptom of psychic injury. The repressed memory, according to Freud, recurs in a repetition-compulsion principle. Such a concept could be seen as correlating with the repetitive tiny particles of Kusama's *Net* paintings, or with the work's serial context. It may help explain also why Kusama's *Net* paintings reminded Tillim of "a memory of the place."³³² This conceivably oblique rendering of memory, or of the war's collective trauma, can be compared also with the tortured surfaces of Armando's serial Art Informel paintings.

Obsession can be viewed as more a form of ethical consciousness than a form of aesthetic contemplation.³³³ A photograph taken in 1959 in Kusama's new studio (fig. 2.25) reveals the dazzling light entering through the windows, which throws her into silhouette, alongside a massive dark canvas that forecasts the long hours to be endured until the painting is completed. The net motif that she chose to cover the canvas is also, loosely, a tracery of light, such as the light that sparkled on the crests of waves in *Pacific Ocean*, an image which, for Kusama, might have spiritual implications. She once described a *Net* painting as coming about "through an unusual

³³¹ Levinas, "The I and the Totality," in *Entre Nous*, 12.

³³² Tillim, "In the Galleries."

³³³ Susan A. Handelman, "The Rupture of the God," in *Fragments of Redemption: Jewish Thought & Literary Theory in Benjamin, Scholem, & Levinas* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University, 1991), 180.

light.”³³⁴ Inch by inch, she marked the huge canvas with strokes of white paint, a totally reflective substance, thus symbolically converting the black base-paint of the canvas ground into a pure reflection of light and rendering it almost as if it were immaterial. This process may be seen to parallel the way Kusama transcended her psychic limits through the obsessive depiction of minute details in her earlier *Nihonga* and watercolors. Such obsessional rendering became a means to establish a charged space where her energy could be felt, a notion continuous with her *Nihonga* practice (see Chapter One). In addition, her peculiar working style at times caused physical suffering.

Such obsession as physical suffering may relate to what Susan Handelman constructed as the moral significance potentially attaching to obsession.³³⁵ In a related observation in 1958, Kusama wrote: “Advanced technological society saturated by capitalism spoiled the natural senses of human beings,”³³⁶ so that pain and suffering were no longer comprehensible. On the other hand, Levinas observed that people had often sought meaning when experiencing pain; and, to him suffering appeared to have been “the price of reason and spiritual refinement.” Only through suffering, can people comprehend pain in others and foster a benevolent wisdom, “leading to the Good.”³³⁷ But modern tendencies often artificially suppress both physical and emotional pain in a variety of ways—through physical labor, psychiatric

³³⁴ Kusama, “A lone woman.”

³³⁵ Handelman, *Fragments of Redemption*, 180.

³³⁶ Kusama, “An impression of the United States.”

³³⁷ Levinas, “Useless Suffering,” in *Entre Nous*, 81, 83.

treatment, or medical operations, to name a few examples—thereby leading to a broad incomprehension of pain. Consequently, as Levinas saw it, human thought becomes imbalanced.

Such an attitude may have given Kusama more reason not to suppress her pain, as she toiled on her *Net* paintings in intense, concentrated periods, often skipping meals and sleep and consequently suffering heart palpitations. Through her work she attempted to comprehend, in her words, “the natural senses of human beings.”³³⁸ The aim was further to open up ethical perspectives on inter-human relationships, and to alter and expand one’s subjectivity toward a more benevolent and creative view of the other. Newman similarly considered, as Richard Shiff observed, that his art “could never be exclusively aesthetic”; to him, the “central issue was ‘moral.’”³³⁹ And morality became an important focus of philosophical inquiry for such postwar European philosophers as Levinas and Jean-Paul Sartre.³⁴⁰

Zero and Nul: A New Collaborative Model in Postwar Society

After the Second World War, issues concerning morality became paramount to all the figures affiliated with the Italian Azimuth, the Dutch Nul, and the German Zero. Similar to the way “self-development” had become important for Kusama during the Japanese military regime, enabling her to think on her own and make

³³⁸ Kusama, “An impression of the United States.”

³³⁹ Shiff, *Barnett Newman*, 5.

³⁴⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). Levinas’s *Totality and Infinity* addresses issues concerning freedom and moral consciousness after World War II.

judgments without being overly influenced by exterior conditions. This independence of thought and moral behavior—based on a credo of individual responsibility—was at the forefront of conscious thought in postwar Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands. Thus, when Mack and Piene, as editors of *Zero* magazine, raised a single question in their first issue, *Zero 1* (1958): “Does contemporary painting influence the shape of the world?,”³⁴¹ George Mucho, the former Bauhaus artist, replied that art is the “revolt of the spirit against men, for Man.”³⁴² Contrasting “men” with “Man,” Mucho advocated a revolution against the faceless anonymity of totalitarian society for the sake of creating a distinctive subjectivity.

With such an emphasis on individualism, artists needed to invent a new collaborative model that opposed the strict organizational structures endemic in fascism. Their unique view of collaboration became clearly recognizable for the first time in 1962, when *Zero* and *Nul* abandoned the European *Nouvelle Tendance*, or New Tendency. The first of the *Nove Tendencije* [New Tendency] exhibitions had taken place in 1961 in Zagreb, Yugoslavia, and was organized by a frequent *Zero* evening-exhibition participant, the Brazilian artist Almir Mavignier, together with an art critic, Matko Mestrovic, and the gallery director Bozo Bek. Artists affiliated with *Azimuth*, *Nul*, and *Zero* dominated the show. But disagreements between those artists who emerged from the former totalitarian states and those who did not became noticeable once the Paris-based *Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel* (GRAV) began taking the initiative and tried to set up the movement's new headquarters in Paris in

³⁴¹ Mack and Piene, *Zero 1* (1958), in *Zero*, 3.

³⁴² George Mucho, untitled contribution to *ibid.*, 7.

1962.³⁴³

In that year, GRAV published their first brochure, *Groupe de recherche d'art visuel*. They first listed the members of Groupe N, Groupe T, and Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel under each heading. They then categorized various artists associated with the New Tendency under three labels: "Nuance Constructiviste, Concret," "Nuance néo-dada," and "Nuance Tachiste." Nul and Zero artists were labeled as "Nuance néo-dada," and Kusama as "Nuance Tachiste."³⁴⁴ This was especially disconcerting for the artists affiliated with Nul and Zero, since they desired to invent new expressions, and not be categorized under "nihilism or as a dada-like gaga," as Piene phrased it.³⁴⁵ Peeters therefore protested being categorized under Neo-Dadaism in his letter to Kusama in 1963, noting as well his disagreement with the rigid geometry that dominated the works of the GRAV artists.³⁴⁶

Zero's historical reassessment came late in 1992 with Anette Kuhn's first scholarly monograph.³⁴⁷ Until then, scholars tended to interpret Zero within the more

³⁴³ Centre de recherche d'art visuel, letter to Kusama. 19 January 1962. Folder "1962," Kusama Papers. Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel (GRAV, 1960-1968) consisted of the French artists, François Morellet, Joël Stein, and Yvaral; the Spaniard, Francisco Sobrino; the Argentinians, Horacio Garcia-Rossi and Julio Le Parc. Azimuth as a group no longer existed in 1962.

³⁴⁴ *Groupe de recherche d'art visuel* (Paris: Galerie Denise René and Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel, 1962), n.p. Folder "1962," Kusama Papers.

³⁴⁵ Piene, "The Development of the Group Zero," in *Zero*, x.

³⁴⁶ Henk Peeters, letter to Yayoi Kusama, 28 September 1963, Kusama Papers.

³⁴⁷ Anette Kuhn, *Zero, Eine Europäische Avantgarde* [*Zero, a European Avant-garde*] (München: Galerie Heseler; Essen: Galerie Neher, 1992). There also exist some important exhibition catalogs. The Galerie der Stadt Esslingen/Villa Merkel, Germany has organized a series of exhibitions related to Zero: *Die*

established movements active in Europe, such as Op and Kinetic arts, therefore lumping it in with the New Tendency,³⁴⁸ and not much had been written on Nul. Yet much earlier, in 1968, the art historian Jack Burnham had observed two disjunctive tendencies among the manifestations of abstraction in postwar Europe. He wrote:

The split came between those groups and individuals who stressed experimental objectivity, anonymity, perceptual psychology, and socialism, and those who stood for individual research, recognition, poetry, idealism, immateriality, luminosity, and nature.

In Burnham's view, the artists related to the New Tendency were associated with the former, while the artists affiliated with Zero allied with the latter.³⁴⁹ In 1973, the artist and art historian Douglas Davis similarly argued that Zero tended to be "romantic and idealistic,"³⁵⁰ which was also Valerie L. Hillings's point in her 2002 dissertation.³⁵¹ But Piene himself described Zero as entailing both idealism and realism, for he believed that idealism could become effective only with an underlying aspiration for "realism."³⁵² Thus, from a certain perspective, what characterized Zero and its inter-related groups could be called a form of "realism"—such as was entailed

niederländische Gruppe Nul 1960-1965. Und Heute (1993); *Zero und Paris; Zero aus Deutschland 1957-1966. Und heute* (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 1999); and *N&O, Enne & Zero : motus, etc.* (Bozen, Germany: The Museum für Moderne Kunst, 1996).

³⁴⁸ See, for instance, Hoptman, *Love Forever*, 43-45.

³⁴⁹ Jack Burnham, *Beyond Modern Sculpture: The Effects of Science and Technology on the Sculpture of This Century* (New York: George Braziller, 1968), 247.

³⁵⁰ Douglas Davis, *Art and the Future: A History/Prophecy of the Collaboration Between Science, Technology, and Art* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 56.

³⁵¹ Valerie Hillings, "Chapter Two: Pure Possibilities," 122-123, 207-210, 224, 230.

³⁵² Piene, "The Development of the Group Zero," in *Zero*, xx.

in Newman's paintings.

The second "Nove Tendencije" show in 1963 took place without Zero and its affiliated artists.³⁵³ By 1964, Mack, Piene, Uecker, and Peeters no longer associated with *Nouvelle Tendence—recherche continue* (NTrc), objecting to what they saw as its tendency to be too strictly organized and ideological. Piene, instead, described his group in 1964 as having "no president, no leader, no secretary; there are no 'members,' there is only a human relationship."³⁵⁴ Piene's idea of collaboration was similar to Levinas's idea in 1951 of creating a new human-centered society, where each individual was essentially free, yet bound to others by having moral encounters with, and being responsible for them, beyond socially imposed law and order.³⁵⁵

1961: *Infinity Nets* and Becoming

Kusama's encounter with Newman's large paintings seems to have gradually opened up a new perspective for her regarding the environment in which she sought to show her paintings, reflecting her new awareness of the viewer. This focus on the viewer becomes evident when we compare Kusama's earlier 1959-60 photographs of

³⁵³ Hillings, "Pure Possibilities for a New Beginning: Zero (1957-1966) and the Geography of Collaboration," in *Zero NY*, 190. However, Piene and Uecker are included in the catalogue. They most likely withdrew from the exhibition at the last minute when the exhibition catalogue was already printed. *Nove Tendencije 2* (Zagreb, Yugoslavia: Galerija Suvremene Umjetnosti, 1963). Schoonhoven, Armando, Peeters, Uecker, and Mack's participation is mentioned in *Zero: Avant-garde internationale des années 1950-1960* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2006), 280. Further research from primary sources is necessary on "Nove Tendencije 2."

³⁵⁴ Piene, "The Development of the Group Zero," in *Zero*, xxi.

³⁵⁵ Levinas, "Is Ontology Fundamental?" (1951), in *Entre Nous*, 5-10.

the *Net* paintings, with the later images taken at her second solo exhibition in New York in 1961. During her initial development of the *Net* paintings, around the time of the earlier photographs, Kusama captured both single images of the paintings as well as her works in a group at the studio (figs. 2.1 and 2.31).

While no photographs seem to exist from her first solo exhibition in New York in October 1959, there are pictures from her November 1959 Nova Gallery exhibition in Boston.³⁵⁶ Because of the poor quality of the lighting and compositions, these photographs seem to have been taken by an amateur, rather than a professional photographer (fig. 2.32).³⁵⁷ By May 1961, however, Kusama was using professional photographers to document her second solo exhibition in New York, using both color and black and white film. Photographs of this show, held at the Stephen Radich Gallery, reveal the evolution of Kusama's *Net* paintings and the care she took in placing them around the gallery. Before the exhibition, she measured each wall in the gallery and tailored two of her largest canvases carefully to its dimensions, hanging wall-sized paintings at the entrance (fig. 2.33). Upon entering the gallery, the viewer first encountered, the largest and most ambitious works; *White B. S. Q.* (1961), 96" x 390" (fig. 2.4) and *White XXA* (1961), 96" x 234 1/4" (fig. 2.34). Five smaller-scale pieces on the gallery's north walls followed (figs. 2.35a, 2.35b, and 2.36). Since from a distance her paintings appeared as blank canvases, viewers were forced to come closer to the works. At such close range, the works were no longer about the illusion of space to look at, but they engulfed the viewer in an almost physical way—as in the

³⁵⁶ Boston has historically been culturally conservative. Unlike the Brata Gallery show, Kusama's Nova Gallery exhibition did not receive much attention.

³⁵⁷ Despite their poor quality, Kusama kept these photographs in her archives.

cases of Newman's *The Voice* and *The Name II*.

Newman's explanation for his mural-size paintings from 1965 helps provide clues to Kusama's intentions for these huge works. Newman wrote that his large-scale paintings offer the viewer:

a sense of [one's] own scale. . . . I hope that my painting has the impact of giving someone, as it did me, the feeling of his own totality, of his own separateness, of his own individuality, and at the same time of his connection to others, who are also separate.³⁵⁸

It is quite possible that Newman was aware of Levinas's 1961 book, *Totality and Infinity*, which questioned essential human freedom in the wake of the Nazis' totalitarian society. In that text, Levinas remarked that "the individual person becomes free and responsible not by fitting into a system but rather by having one's own sense of totality by fighting against the system and by acting on his own."³⁵⁹ This person, who possesses a sense of his/her "totality," as Newman puts it, is the moral being, as Levinas sees it. As Newman explains, "you can only feel others if you have a sense of your own being."³⁶⁰

In my own experience of standing in close proximity to Newman's large painting, *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* (1950-1951), the work initially overwhelms with its intense, engulfing red color. After this initial sensation, the work's thinly painted, delicate surface heightens my own self-awareness. Since the work's surface is so fragile, the Museum of Modern Art—long home to *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*—once protected this

³⁵⁸ Barnett Newman, "Interview with David Sylvester," in *Newman Selected Writings*, 257-58.

³⁵⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 18.

³⁶⁰ Newman, *Newman Selected Writings*, 258.

work with a metal barrier. But after Ann Temkin, the curator of Newman's 2002 retrospective exhibition, joined the museum's curatorial staff in 2004, she made a decision to remove the work's protection.³⁶¹ Educated viewers are, of course, aware that it is not appropriate to touch paintings. But for Newman, entrusting an unprotected painting to viewers and inviting them to come closer meant leaving it to their "uncoerced moral judgment, performed under conditions of incomplete knowledge and without any guarantee of correctness or success," as Shiff explains, which was why he assessed Newman's work as "not grounded in anything secure, but in risk."³⁶² In the period following World War II, Newman was not alone in taking a deliberate risk. His friend, Mark Rothko, similarly asked people to come closer to his work—he once said, the ideal distance from which to view his paintings is eighteen inches.³⁶³

Levinas and Newman both believed, in the words of the latter, that the "one who was so intoxicated with the love of personal freedom" needed to respect the identity of others as much as he was conscious of his own.³⁶⁴ As Levinas said, it was in this "intersubjective relation, the relationship of one person to another," that "rationality of the knowledge that is immanent in being," and the "ethical subject," would

³⁶¹ After MoMA's 2010-11 Abstract Expressionist Exhibition, people began increasingly viewing Newman from close up, which put *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* at risk, such that, as of 2012, the protection is back.

³⁶² Shiff, *Barnett Newman*, 3, 6.

³⁶³ Jeffrey Weiss, ed. *Mark Rothko* (Washington, D.C.: The National Gallery; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 262.

³⁶⁴ Newman, "'The True Revolution Is Anarchist!': Forward to Memories of a Revolutionist by Peter Kropotkin" (1968), in *Newman Selected Writings*, 45.

emerge.³⁶⁵ This rationality of knowledge became increasingly important after the war.

Levinas postulated:

Since Plato, Western tradition has subordinated the sensation of the particular to the knowledge of the universal. It seems that we are reduced to subordinating the relations between beings to the structure of beings, metaphysics to ontology, the *existentielle* to the existential.³⁶⁶

According to Levinas, this kind of thinking amounted to the premise for a totalitarian society.

Along comparable lines, Newman wrote in 1963: “My whole life has been a struggle against becoming an object!”³⁶⁷ He thus, in Shiff’s words, “intended his version of abstract art to eliminate the sense of an objectified ‘non-object’ as well as all traces of the traditional art object.”³⁶⁸ Newman’s account of making his painting into a “non-object,” thereby allowing his viewers to feel that his painting was almost a part of themselves, can be understood in the context of the installation of Kusama’s *Net* paintings in 1961. Her colossal *Net* paintings without frames blurred the border between painting and wall, giving one the initial impression that the exhibit was “nothing but walls,” forcing the viewer to come closer.³⁶⁹ At close range, as art historian Izumi Nakajima recently observed, the *Net* paintings’ tremendous scale

³⁶⁵ Levinas, “Author’s Preface,” in *Entre Nous*, vii.

³⁶⁶ “Is Ontology Fundamental?,” in *ibid.*, 5.

³⁶⁷ Shiff, *Barnett Newman*, 5.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁶⁹ Earl Kerkam quoted in “Brata,” in *Tenth Street Days: The Co-ops of the 50’s*, exh. cat. (New York: Pleiades Gallery and The Association of Artist-Run Galleries, 1977), n.p.

shatters the “familiar subject/object binary relationship between viewer and work”; the “relationship in this nearness is always partial,” Nakajima adds, such that the “art work is not completely ‘objectified.’”³⁷⁰

The experience afforded by Kusama’s work deprived the spectator of the opportunity to grasp the work as a whole, instead providing what might be called a face-to-face encounter with the painting. In Levinas’s idea of infinity, the “face” is an important concept. What he postulated as a “face” cannot be characterized as consisting in recognizable features, such as nose, eyes, or a forehead, but must be understood in the immediacy of an encounter, as an artifact of nearness. It is this nearness which makes it impossible for one to grasp the other through physical features as mere data, a form of apprehension that, he believed, deprived a person of his or her humanity. And it was this nearness that helped prevent Kusama’s *Net* paintings from being objectified by her viewers. During the war, the objectification of human beings—including the judging of people based on certain facial features—had facilitated killing people “like cutting down trees, or slaughtering animals.”³⁷¹ Kusama herself had had the experience of working in a military factory and thus becoming a potential U.S. bombers’ target during the war.³⁷² On the other hand, Levinas believed that in a face-to-face encounter, one could see the vulnerability and humanity of a person. Hence: “To be in relation with the other face-to-face” would

³⁷⁰ Nakajima, *Psychoanalysis and the Image*, 151.

³⁷¹ Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 8-9.

³⁷² During the war, U.S. military planes mostly attacked military facilities in Japan.

lead one “to be unable to kill.”³⁷³

Kusama wanted to insinuate humanity into her *Net* paintings by providing something like a face-to-face encounter, which would in a way subsume the viewer. This new awareness of the viewer escalated with the political Happenings that she began creating in 1967 (see Chapter Four) to openly protest the war and societal violence more generally. The Zero and Nul artists similarly saw creating “reality” as their task, which for them meant a “human reality,” established through genuine ethically-founded relationships.³⁷⁴ This was similar to what Newman once famously stated: that his art, if “read properly would mean the end of all state capitalism and totalitarianism.”³⁷⁵

Pure Beginning to Infinity: *Zero-Edition, Exposition, Demonstration*

Similar to the way Kusama explored new possibilities in painting based on her idea of infinity, Klein, Mack, and Piene were eager to find “pure possibilities for a new beginning” in postwar Düsseldorf.³⁷⁶ For instance, in the first issue of *Zero* magazine, *Zero 1* of 1958, Klein discussed the battle between line and color. For him, lines represented “our psychological boundaries, our history, our education,” whereas color was “nothing but sensitivity turned into matter . . . in [a] primordial

³⁷³ Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 6, 9.

³⁷⁴ “What I think the artist does is to create reality By ‘reality,’ I mean human reality.” Barnett Newman, “Remarks at the Fourth Annual Woodstock Conference” (1952), in *Newman Selected Writings*, 245.

³⁷⁵ *Idem.*, “Frontiers of Space,” in *ibid.*, 251.

³⁷⁶ Piene, “The Development of the Group Zero,” in *Zero*, x.

state,” which can be seen but not “read.” Still, Klein noticed that even if a single color occupied an entire painting, people would conceive of painting relationally and associatively, if various monochromes in different sizes were hung together. In order for him to realize art in its “full and pure sensibility,” his next project was to develop ten equivalent paintings done in a dark ultramarine that he called International Klein Blue—a color that putatively had never before existed on earth (fig. 2.23). He hoped that his new monochromes would enable people to escape from “the stifling effects of well-known representations and deep-rooted rules.”³⁷⁷ It was Klein’s monochromes—though in various colors³⁷⁸—that Mack and Piene initially encountered in Düsseldorf in 1957 (fig. 2.24). For Mack and Piene, the monochrome was not “a dada-like gag,” but a means to mark a new beginning. Their conscious separation from the historical Dada puts Zero in the same camp with Newman and Kusama. What has now become Zero’s landmark, the seventh evening exhibition, which celebrated the publication of *Zero 1* in April 1958, was entitled “The Red Picture,” dedicated solely to the monochrome painting. Still the major quest posed by their publication was: “Does Contemporary Painting Influence the Shape of the World?”³⁷⁹ This question implied that the artists affiliated with Zero believed that

³⁷⁷ Yves Klein, “*Ma position dans le combat entre la ligne et la couleur*,” in *Zero 1* (1958), n.p., reprinted and translated as “My Position in the Battle Between Line and Color,” in *Zero*, 10.

³⁷⁸ Despite Klein’s desire to exhibit all blue paintings, the owner of Galerie Schmela, Alfred Schmela was concerned about sales and insisted that Klein should hang various monochromes for his exhibition. Joe Ketner, in conversation with author, unrecorded, Natick, MA, 8 May 2011.

³⁷⁹ Mack and Piene, *Zero*, 3.

their seemingly apolitical monochromatic paintings could indeed have the potential to influence the shape of the world.

The ultimate goal of Klein's monochromes was to remove any associative value from color. He thus dematerialized painting by presenting in the spring of 1958 an empty gallery space as his work (fig. 2.37) in an exhibition entitled "The Void" or "Monochrome Exacerbations" held at the Galerie Iris Clert. Piene likewise thought color's intrinsic value and its rational function difficult to expunge. Among other things, he recognized that colors can be used as classifiers, such as in the phrases "the sky is blue [or] the earth is brown," or as signifiers, such as in "red warning and traffic lights, blue parking signs." But he noticed that "color is in its very own domain when its light value is the determinant value," and although light could still face various form-color relationships, he believed that if light can be used to "overcome the dimension of time, [it] will lead us to color as true color, as light, as energy."³⁸⁰ Consequently, Zero members came to incorporate light and time in their art, using technology.³⁸¹

The Swiss artist Jean Tinguely (1925-1991), who showed his work in January 1959 at Düsseldorf's Galerie Schmela (the same gallery that had featured Klein's

³⁸⁰ Otto Piene, "Die fabre in unterschiedlichen wertbereichen," in *Zero I* (1958), n.p., reprinted and translated as "Color in Different Value Systems," in *Zero*, 20-21.

³⁸¹ Art historian Heik Van Den Valentyn traced back in time the Zero artists use of light and time in their works. To make his argument, he points to the 1920 "Realist Manifesto" written by two Constructivists, Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner and adopted by Zero. He also provides a brief description of the Bauhaus instructor László Moholy-Nagy and his *Light-Space Modulator* (1921-1930) and discusses a postwar example, Lucio Fontana's *Ambient Spaziale* (1951). Heik Van Den Valentyn, "Utopian, Real and Light-Kinetic Spaces of the Zero Period," in *Zero NY*, 285-95.

Monochromes), inspired Mack and Piene's use of technology and movement. At this exhibition, Tinguely incorporated a U.S. war-propaganda strategy to disseminate flyers throughout the city and dropped 150,000 copies of his manifesto, "For Static," from an airplane. In it, he implored "everyone to live in the present as well as embrace change and transformation."³⁸² Not content with formal aesthetics, his aim was to transform society. Thus, Zero's ultimate goal was at once social and aesthetic.

Two months later in March 1959, Tinguely, along with Pol Bury (1922-2005), Paul van Hoeydonck (b.1925), and Daniel Spoerri (b.1930) organized an exhibition entitled "Vision in Motion—Motion in Vision" for the artist-run alternative space, Hesselhuis in Antwerp.³⁸³ The exhibition title had its roots in the posthumously published book, *Vision in Motion* by the former Bauhaus instructor, László Moholy-Nagy. Piene later explained that this had been the first Zero exhibition that focused solely on postwar artists (born between the late 1920s and mid-1930s), whose works moved beyond monochrome painting and dealt with light-reflecting surfaces, serial structures, and, most importantly, "motion."³⁸⁴

In the following year, Italian artist Enrico Castellani wrote that for him, it was

³⁸² Hillings, *Zero NY*, 182.

³⁸³ Originally a port storehouse, Hesselhuis was converted into an alternative, avant-garde space for exhibitions, film screenings, debates, and performances of experimental theater and music by a group of young Antwerp artists, G. 58 (1958-1962). The show included Robert Breer, Pol Bury, Yves Klein, Heinz Mack, Enzo Mari, Bruno Munari, Otto Piene, Dieter Roth, Jesús Rafael Soto, Daniel Spoerri, Jean Tinguely, Günther Uecker, and Paul van Hoeydonk.

³⁸⁴ Piene, *Zero*, xxi; Hillings, *Zero NY*, 183.

important that “infinity . . . was able to form itself” in artists’ work.³⁸⁵ Heik Van Den Valentyne has further clarified Castellani’s idea of infinity as embodied by “new materials and kinetic-dynamic installations; the elements of air, water and fire established themselves as materials that could represent life and its vital power.”³⁸⁶ This relationship between natural elements and human beings figured in Piene’s writing, too, where he described one of Zero’s goals as an “attempt to rehumanize the relationship between man and nature,” not by “putting the artist into the position of a fugitive from [the] ‘modern world’ but rather having the artist use the tools of actual technical invention as well as those of nature.” He thus chose the nexus “relationship nature/man/technology” as one of the leading subjects of *Zero 3*.³⁸⁷ The final image of this *Zero* journal, published in 1961, is a photograph of a launching rocket emblazoned with the word “Zero” (fig. 2.38). According to Eleanor Jess Atwood Gibson, this

rocket launch was intended to signify the break with the past and the inauguration of the new artistic style that the group embraced; symbolizing their technological orientation and interest in artistic explorations of movement and space.³⁸⁸

It was this dynamic, transformative aspect of the group’s aim, as translated into the flow of human energy embodied in the first Zero demonstration in 1961, that initially inspired the Dutch Nul artists. What preceded the 1962 “Nul

³⁸⁵ Enrico Castellani, “Continuity and Newness,” in Enrico Castellani and Piero Manzoni, eds., *Azimuth 2* (Milan: Galleria Azimut, 1960), n.p.

³⁸⁶ Van Den Valentyn, *Zero NY*, 293

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ Gibson, “The Media of Memory,” 15.

Exhibition”—the exhibition in which Kusama participated—was Nul’s December 1961 event, “Expositie, Demonstratie, Zero” (fig. 2.39)—an exhibition and demonstration that took place at Arnheim’s Galerie A. This event was itself a reprise of a Zero exhibition that opened in Düsseldorf on 5 July 1961.³⁸⁹ Entitled “Zero-Edition, Exhibition, Demonstration,” and accompanied by a demonstration, the show celebrated the publication of the third and largest volume of *Zero* magazine, subtitled “Dynamo.” Postwar European art up until that moment had been dominated by anguish-filled expressionism and Dadaistic destruction. Zero’s event symbolically demarcated a “zero zone” and declared its intent to construct the visual field anew, helped by the “dynamo” of public energy.

The *vernissage* of “Zero-Edition, Exhibition, Demonstration” began in the Old Town section of Düsseldorf at 9 p.m., with Uecker drawing a gigantic sixteen-foot-diameter “zero” with white paint (fig. 2.40) and demarcating the Zero Zone on the street in front of the boarded-up Galerie Schmela (fig. 2.41).³⁹⁰ Immediately after, men and women in black smocks that bore the word “ZERO” began blowing soap bubbles celebrating the optimism of this new beginning (fig. 2.42). Subsequently, Piene’s first homemade hot-air balloon (fig. 2.43), in the shape of a rocket, was released into the air and hovered above the crowd, empowered by the new beginning and illuminated by the light from a television shoot. Media coverage not only helped Zero members broadcast their beliefs, but also—since there was a general clamor to be on television—excited the demonstrators.

³⁸⁹ *Zero: Avant-garde internationale des années*, 276.

³⁹⁰ Hillings, *Zero NY*, 126.

Reportedly, the evening's highlight was the knocking of a hole in the barricade that bore the word "ZERO" in large white characters (fig. 2.41); through that opening the spectators could catch a glimpse of the exhibition inside (fig. 2.44).³⁹¹ This symbolic demolition was a gesture toward transcending the old society. Behind the barricade was a brightly lit gallery revealing a variety of artworks, made out of unconventional and mostly intangible materials, such as light, shadow, and smoke, rendering the artwork immaterial (fig. 2.45). Later, in a letter to Kusama, Peeters explained that what interested him in art was that which was "not or not yet visible."³⁹² With an art "not or not yet visible" came the idea of an overflowing imagination that could shape our future; this notion is what Mack and Piene emulated in their illustration "Zero to Infinity," which graced the first three pages of *Zero 3* (fig. 2.5). For Levinas, infinity was "a surplus always exterior to the totality" and by totality he meant the tendency to objectify and unify the existence of things.³⁹³

Zero not only sparked Nul, but also inspired other participants in the *vernissage*, including Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) and Nam June Paik (1928-2006) (fig. 2.45). After his participation in the Zero demonstration of 1961 (fig. 2.6), Beuys began transforming some of his previously static sculptures into Fluxus performances; and later, he famously mixed art and social activism. In Paik's case, having grown up

³⁹¹ Hillings previously wrote that the hole already existed in the barricade. *Ibid.* However, judging from the photo-documentation (figs. 2.41 and 2.44), the hole was probably made during the demonstration as a symbolic demolition of the old culture.

³⁹² Peeters, letter to Kusama, 11 November 1964, in folder "Henk Peeters," Kusama Papers.

³⁹³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 22.

in a Korean bourgeois household that sided with the Japanese during Japan's colonial occupation, he was disenchanted by the lack of political ideology in capitalism and thus initially idealized Marxism. Yet, during the Korean War, encountering the dispossession and violence of Communism, the eighteen-year-old became deeply disillusioned by Marxism as well, and went to study music. His first inspiration for freedom came from Arnold Schönberg's music, and in 1956 he left Japan for Germany to further study Schönberg.³⁹⁴

After taking John Cage's summer course at Darmstadt in 1958, Paik began composing and performing anarchic, mind-awakening, yet highly destructive performances that he initially viewed as an act of freedom. His well-known composition, *One for Violin* (fig. 2.46) entailed hammering a violin against a table until it was demolished. After he encountered works by Zero, however, Paik's work slowly developed from destructive anarchism to initiatives that encouraged audience participation in the creative process.³⁹⁵ "Exposition of Music-Electric-Television" (fig. 2.47), which took place at Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal, Germany in March 1963, was the first exhibition for which Paik constructed an installation using television (which not yet a fine-art medium, but would become a signature for him).

³⁹⁴ Hun-Yee Jung, "Moon and Time: Nam June Paik Seen from the Korean Perspective," in *Nam June Paik and Korea: From Fantasy to Hyperreality*, exh. cat. (Madrid: Fundación Telefónica, 2007), 115-17.

³⁹⁵ Midori Yamamura, "The Whole Human Being Is Ontology: Nam June Paik in a Global Context," unpublished conference paper presented at "The Gift of Nam June Paik 1," for *Now Jump Festival*, Seoul, Nam June Paik Art Center, 4 February 2009. According to Piene, Paik openly acknowledged his artistic debts to Piene. Piene, response to author's question, February 2010. I also heard about Paik's remark from MoMA curator Barbara London, in conversation.

Piense's mechanical art was no small influence on Paik's transition away from anarchism, according to Paik's long-time friend, Mary Bauermeister. Soon after participating in the Zero demonstration in 1961, Paik's art began to develop interactive aspects that encouraged viewer participation as a way of completing the work.³⁹⁶ Paik had come to value an idea of freedom similar to the one postulated by Levinas, that the individual can become free only by acting responsibly and fighting against the system.³⁹⁷

“Tentoonstelling Nul”

Zero was the German eponym for the Dutch Nul. However, by the time of Nul's Stedelijk Museum exhibition (9-25 March 1962), the group's identity was firmly established, so that, for the first time, they used the Dutch term “Tentoonstelling nul” (“Nul Exhibition”). According to the show's curator, Peeters, the group's aim was to invent their own zero zones in the spirit of the Dutch seventeenth-century reformist painter, Pieter Saenredam.³⁹⁸ After the Protestants'

³⁹⁶ The artist Mary Bauermeister, in conversation with author at the *Now Jump Festival*, Seoul, 4 February 2009. Bauermeister held many events at her studio, where Paik had performed, and the cultural critic Theodor Adorno regularly attended. In an interview, Paik also once commented: “My first friends were Fluxus people, who were always anti-something—anti-music, anti-art, anti-Stockhausen, etc. But the new video generation was pro-something—‘constructing’ a new society with the new tool of video.” David Ross, “A Conversation with Nam June Paik,” in *Nam June Paik: Video Time, Video Space*, eds. Thomas Kellein and Toni Stooss (Stuttgart: Edition Cantz, 1991), 57.

³⁹⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 18.

³⁹⁸ Peeters, quoted in *Alg Dagblad Rotterdam* [National Newspaper, Rotterdam], 8 March 1962, clippings from “Nul 1962,” Stedelijk Museum Archives, Amsterdam.

removal of all Catholic influences, Saenredam's church sketches objectively captured light-filled sparse church interiors—including altarpieces and statuary. For Peeters, the whitewashed walls and ceilings of Saenredam's work echoed the new beginning that the Dutch group envisioned by removing all Nazi influences and by resuscitating the sense of humanity lost during the fascist era. Since the show was not funded by the museum, Peeters raised some of the funds and covered all the remaining costs from his own savings, and the sale of catalogues and posters to the participant artists.³⁹⁹ Lacking a sponsor meant, however, that he had greater freedom to formulate his own visions for the show.

The ambitious exhibition featured twenty-three artists (twenty-one of whom were male, two female),⁴⁰⁰ born in such diverse areas of the globe as Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. All of them lived and worked as professionals in Western countries. In addition to the founding members of Azimuth, Nul, and Zero, Herman de Vries (b. 1931) was mainly connected with Nul. Dadamania (née Eduarda Manio [1935-2003]), belonging to the Italian group PUNTA, was one of the Azimuth gallery exhibitors; and Pol Bury (1922-2005) was a co-founder of COBRA (1949-1951).

³⁹⁹ The exhibition received some donations from a variety of local businesses. This was not enough to cover the cost of the exhibition, leaving Peeters completely broke afterwards. Peeters, interview by author, 1 January 2007.

⁴⁰⁰ The exhibition catalogue lists twenty-five artists. But Francesco Lo Savio and Arman could not make it to the show. Peeters, interview by author, 1 January 2007; John Anthony Thwaites, "*Der Geist der Wüste stirbt, Die Ausstellung 'NUL' in Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam,*" in *Deutsche Zeitung [German Newspaper]*, no. 75 (1962), original in German in 1962; reprint in French as Thwaites, "*L'esprit du desert meurt L'exposition 'Nul' au Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam,*" in *Zero und Paris*, 209.

The rest of the artists participated as independents: the Swiss, Christian Megert (b. 1936); the Belgian Jef Verheyen (1932-1984); the Brazilian, living in Germany, Almier Da Silva Mavignier (b. 1925); the French, Bernard Aubertin (b. 1934); the Germans, Herman Goepfert (1926-1982), Uli Phol (b. 1935) and Oskar Holweck (b. 1924); the German, living in Philadelphia, Hans Haacke (b. 1936); the Argentinean-Italian Lucio Fontana (1899-1968); the Italian Piero Drazio (1927-2005); and Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929). Most of the artists were born between 1925 and 1935, grew up during the Great Depression, witnessed the rise of nationalism, came of age during World War II, came from the areas where U.S. reform policies were carried out and therefore embarked on their careers while the U.S. Department of State propagated its cultural policies in war-ravaged territories.

As the viewers stepped inside the “Nul Exhibition,” they first encountered the wall pieces consisting of shadows and light reflections by the Belgian artist Bury and the German Goepfert (fig. 2.48). Most of the works in the exhibition, in fact, used light as their medium. This medium helped the participant artists to dematerialize their artwork and allowed them greater freedom to interpret and develop new methods, marking a new beginning in postwar art. According to the show’s floor plan, four of the museum’s ten galleries were converted into three thematic spaces devoted to various experimentations in light (fig. 2.49).⁴⁰¹ Light reflections were the focus of the “Salle de glace [*sic*]” (Mirror Room),⁴⁰² while the “Salle de lumière” (Light

⁴⁰¹ The floor plan shows twelve galleries. However, Megert used two adjacent galleries for the entrance and the “*Salle de glace*.” The gallery by the exit was used for documentation.

⁴⁰² The “*Salle de glace*” translates as “Ice Room” in English. However, this room

Room) evoked what Piene described in 1968 as Zero's interest in transforming objects and human beings from "dark to bright."⁴⁰³ There was also a "Salle obscure" (Dark Room).

The remaining seven galleries—loosely arranged by medium—explored light in other ways. Three of Kusama's *Net* paintings, which she once described as having been realized "through an unusual light," appeared in the sixth gallery in the exhibition.⁴⁰⁴ Kusama's works were paired with the Belgian artist, Verheyen's yellow paintings faded by sunlight.⁴⁰⁵

Converting some of the galleries into individual, whole environments was another prominent characteristic of the "Nul Exhibition." Thus one of Kusama's wall-size paintings, *White X.X.A* from 1961 (fig. 2.34), which had originally been presented as an environmental piece at the Stephen Radich Gallery, graced one wall. The creators of the works in the *Salle de glace*, *Salle obscure*, and *Salle de lumière*, converted their exhibition spaces into environments, as described below.

Salle de Glace

The *Salle de glace* consisted of two adjoining galleries installed by the Swiss

consisted of four artworks based on mirrors. I presume what the Dutch artists meant was "*La salle des glaces*," which is the "room of mirrors," in English.

⁴⁰³ Piene, *Zero*, xxi.; *Idem*, "Darkness and Light," in *Azimuth 2*, n.p.

⁴⁰⁴ Kusama, "A Lone Woman," 128

⁴⁰⁵ *Alg Dagblad Rotterdam*. Two of three works were from a shipment of 5 February 1962—*No. P.3.B.* (1961) and *White X.X.A* (1961)—and one other work was one of the three paintings—*White* (1960), *J.B.* (1960), and *H Red* (1961)—she had sent to Galerie 59 for the "Internationale Malerei" exhibition.

artist, Megert and was the first environment the viewer encountered in the “Nul Exhibition.” Upon entering the first gallery, spectators were blinded by the harsh glare of a military floodlight, installed on the opposite wall (fig. 2.50, no.1). During wartime, these lights were used to pinpoint targets, so this was an obvious reference to the war. Recurring war memories were shared with other artists in this exhibition. At the same time, on account of its remarkable strength, the light could also be seen as a breaching of the onlookers’ consciousness, analogous to the symbolic destruction demonstrated by the punching of a hole in the barricade at the 1961 Zero demonstration. Megert intended, with this work, to mark a new beginning.

Once the onlookers’ eyes adjusted somewhat, they found their reflections in large mirrors mounted on the left-side wall (fig. 2.51).⁴⁰⁶ Today, Megert explains that his use of mirrors was meant to make some reference to the Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre who profoundly influenced his art.⁴⁰⁷ As with Levinas, Sartre was thinking of the loss of morality during the war and thus pondered human behavior, or the nature of being. However, unlike Levinas’ views on the “rationality of the knowledge” as “immanent in being,” Sartre regarded human consciousness as a “purely empty formula,” in a way confirming the ontological claims defined by his predecessors, such as Hegel and Heidegger.⁴⁰⁸ In his masterwork, *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Sartre wrote: “My appearance for myself as an individual . . . is

⁴⁰⁶ Franziska Megert (wife of Christian Megert), e-mail to author, 10 April 2009.

⁴⁰⁷ Franziska Megert, e-mail to author after confirming the facts listed with Christian Megert, 28 March 2009.

⁴⁰⁸ Levinas, “Author’s Preface,” in *Entre Nous*, vii.

conditioned by the recognition of the Other.” Working under the aegis of Hegelian intersubjectivity, Sartre believed that the unreflective consciousness of the human being “cannot be inhabited by a self; the self was given in the form of an object and only for the reflective consciousness.”⁴⁰⁹ By deploying mirrors, what the designer of the *Salle de glace* hoped to offer was an opportunity for the viewers to explore their existence by rendering them as Other.

The two works that occupied the first gallery further presented some possible allusions to Sartre’s philosophy. For instance, the experience of floodlight can be compared to a bleaching of the viewers’ consciousness, such that they arrived at an unconscious state akin to what Sartre described as “being-in-itself.” By contrast, Sartre designated “being-for-itself” as the moment when self-consciousness becomes pure self-identity—a moment such as might have been induced when viewers recognized their own reflections in the large mirrors after overcoming the initial shock of encountering the floodlight.⁴¹⁰

The distinctiveness of Megert’s work became clearer in the annexed gallery (fig. 2.50, nos. 3 and 4) when he positioned his viewer to come face to face with his or

⁴⁰⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 320, 346. To date, much of Post-World War II European art has been interpreted as centering on Sartre’s Existentialism. For example, see Sarah Wilson, “Paris Post War: In Search of the Absolute,” in *Paris Post War: Art and Existentialism 1945-55*, ed. Frances Morris (London: Tate Gallery, 1993), 25-52. But, as I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, for many artists and intellectuals—including Zero and Nul artists’ groups, Newman, and Kusama—the existential issue at stake was not “how” humans make their decisions (which was Sartre’s focus), but “how one can decide” without necessarily conforming to social demands (which was Levinas’s focus). Thus differing notions of freedom, creativity, and ethics became important in the period immediately following World War II.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 320.

her own reflection. Central to Sartre's argument on self-identification was the concept of the Other as the mediator that conditioned the *cogito*.⁴¹¹ Megert, on the other hand, did not set preconditions on the participation of the Other in his installation. Four works occupying the second gallery of the *Salle de glace*, two "Mirror Objects" and two "Mirror Books," were paired mirror installations. The former was made up of two 59" x 16" mirrors suspended from metal strips positioned at different angles on facing walls, while the latter was a pair of books made out of mirrors (figs. 2.52 and 2.53) facing each other and placed on pedestals that repeatedly projected the viewers' physiognomies, both from a distance and up close, undistorted and distorted. Having the onlookers face their own reflections was meant to prompt an intense process of engaging, exploring, and finding the self from within, not as an objectification of the self in the Other's gaze—in other words, a process meant to invite a form of self-recovery from a fascist totalitarian society.

The last work in the room, *Wall With the Hanging Mirrors* (fig. 2.54) was a 236-inches-wide wall installation made up of twenty-two rectangular mirrors placed in two rows. A vertical pair of mirrors hung from the same cord was ceaselessly in motion so that the reflections of "self" in these mirrors were constantly metamorphosing, symbolically suggesting a transformation of being. Megert's attempts to intensify the viewer's self-awareness, though different in medium, shared an essential concept with Kusama's mural size *Net* painting, such as *X.X.A*, which were equally meant to heighten the viewer's self-awareness.

⁴¹¹ *Cogito* comes from the Latin phrase most famously used by Descartes: "ego cogito, ergo sum" (I think, therefore I am). In philosophy, one usually refers to the aspect of "mind" in Descartes' mind-body dualism when talking about the "cogito."

Salle Obscure

In sharp contrast to the light-filled *Salle de glace*, the Dutch artist Armando covered the walls of the *Salle obscure* with black linen, creating a dark and muted environment. On one of the walls he installed a monumental work entitled *Tires* that featured thirty black car tires in various sizes randomly affixed to the wall (fig. 2.55). Three remaining walls were each occupied by a work called *Bolts* (fig. 2.56). Armando began working with real-life objects—such as tires and bolts—after helping establish Nul in 1961. His use of tires was likely a nod to Robert Rauschenberg’s *Monogram* (published in *Azimuth 1*), in which he introduced an actual tire and a stuffed goat into a painting or “combine.” For Armando, using banal objects as part of his creative process within the traditional arena of high art represented a rebellion against the conventions of art and an exploration of political and ethical issues.

For *Tires*, Armando invited the art handlers to place the tires wherever they wished. When making *Bolts*, the artist screwed 18, 32, and 169 black metal bolts, respectively, into the surface of readily available industrial plywood panels each painted in black. Though the artist made *Bolts*, no special skill was required for this work; anyone could similarly fix the bolts. In both works, as in Duchamp’s readymades, Armando negated the conventions of authorship. The “obscurity” of the *Salle obscure*, then, was in part an obscurity of authorship. Since Armando was the one who had set up the basic rules for his works, he, of course, did not completely surrender his authorship, however.

More importantly, the concept of the Other introduced in these works was not

a “mediator,” as postulated by Sartre, but a collaborator, so that ordinary people could make their own judgments and develop their creativity by participating in the works’ production process. Armando’s idea of the author as collaborator resulted from his experiences with and after the war, as particularly evidenced in his *Cords of Barbed Wire* of 1962 (fig. 2.57). Consisting of several cords of barbed wire coiling around sheet metal, this was a hostile work that could easily scratch and injure the viewer. His use of barbed wire resonates with his childhood memory of growing up near the Amersfoort transit camp, which was surrounded by barbed wire. Though his connection to the war is less obtrusive in *Bolts*, Armando added an olfactory element reminiscent of the war and of growing up in the Nazi-occupied Netherlands by drenching the bolts in rifle-cleaning oil before affixing them to the wood panels.⁴¹² Additionally, *Salle Obscure* was filled with the smell of rubber from the tires.

In his attempts to take humble objects and turn them into something “artistic” and “poetic,” Armando took a conscious turn away from Duchamp. His use of everyday objects was designed to strip them of their normal functions and to attach, instead, “other qualities (such as beauty),” in order to “bridge the gap between art and the world,” making art accessible for all walks of life.⁴¹³ With his art, Armando’s ultimate goal was to nurture humanity and to provide a break from universal ways of thinking so that each person, when facing morally charged circumstances—such as his own feelings of helplessness after witnessing a Jewish prisoners’ transit camp—could

⁴¹² Armando, interview by Yvonne F.M. Ploum, based on author’s questions, Amersfoort, Hoofd Armando Museum, 27 October 2009.

⁴¹³ Armando, interview by Ploum, 27 October 2009.

make his or her own judgments. Piene, one of the authors of *Salle de Lumière*, approached his art with similar aims.

Salle de Lumière

The Nul exhibition's eighth gallery, the *Salle de lumière* was the first *Zero Raum* (Zero Room) put together by Zero's principal members—Mack, Piene, and Uecker.⁴¹⁴ In the darkened gallery, Piene projected five kinetic light arts entitled *Light Ballet*. Each *Light Ballet* casts light beams into the surrounding space through a perforated rotating disk. The illumination from *Light Ballet* was used as the primary light source in the darkened gallery for works by Mack and Uecker (fig. 2.58).

Altogether, the works by Piene, Mack, and Uecker orchestrated a magnificent spectacle of light that included the dimension of time. According to Van Den Valentyn, Fontana, forefather to the Zero artists, “perceived the basis of the transition from abstract to dynamic art . . . developed in space and time.”⁴¹⁵ Piene's projected kinetic light beams purposefully evoked notions of time. Temporality was also key in Mack's *Light Dynamo*, visible on the left in the background of figure 2.58. The lines and planes in the metal relief in Mack's work were reflecting light-patterns in infinite varieties that changed based on the spectators' movements and consequent perceptions. Similarly, Uecker's *Light Disk* (fig. 2.59), a motorized nail-covered white disk—the rim of which appears as two serrated lines of light in the foreground

⁴¹⁴ Aside from the two founders (Mack and Piene) and Uecker, who joined the group in 1961, Zero did not have permanent members. Rather, the erstwhile members were determined by their participation in exhibitions curated by Mack, Piene, and Uecker.

⁴¹⁵ Van Den Valentyn, *Zero NY*, 289.

of *Zero Raum* (fig. 2.58)—slowly rotated and created continuously shifting shadow formations.⁴¹⁶

Zero Raum represented another attempt by Piene, Mack, and Uecker at collaboration. In 1964, Piene elaborated on this effort: “We collaborate . . . but we are convinced that teamwork is nonsense if it tries to . . . rule out individuality or personal sensibility.”⁴¹⁷ Based, at least in part, on their experiences of growing up in Nazi Germany, the core members of Zero resisted anonymity or the dismissal of authorship. They believed a new totality could only be achieved through freedom. The three thus collaborated “not as an alternative to individual work in a socialist age,” as Piene phrases it, but such that each could contribute his own distinctive work to enhance the “possibility to creativity.”⁴¹⁸ This focus by Zero artists on “self” has been interpreted by Burnham, Davis, and Hillings as a romantic and idealistic tendency. However, especially for Mack and Piene who were trained in the German classical idealist philosophy, their renewed interests in “self” at this moment after the war came from a larger philosophical quest that many who had survived fascist totalitarianism sought in the postwar period.

The views of Mack and Piene toward European philosophy are similar to those articulated in the 1958 edition of Zero’s journal, *Zero I*, by art critic Franz Roh who summed up European philosophical thoughts as “unclear formulations” that, for

⁴¹⁶ Thwaites, *Zero und Paris*, 209; Hillings, “Experimental Artists’ Groups in Europe,” 194.

⁴¹⁷ Otto Piene, “Press Release” (1964), Howard Wise Gallery, New York.

⁴¹⁸ Otto Piene, “Zero and the Attitude,” manuscript, April 1956, Düsseldorf, cited in Hillings, “Experimental Artists’ Groups in Europe,” 117.

centuries, had focused on resolving “certain pseudo-problems or distorted, even confused, answers.”⁴¹⁹ Referring to Adorno in 2010, Piene postulated that formal sets of ideas only paralyzed things.⁴²⁰ Roh, however, expressed his wish that contemporary painting would produce a “view of reality” that could “spiritually” influence its spectator.⁴²¹ In the same *Zero* volume, art historian Hans Sedlmayr argued that art “influences the shape of the world” and such art could only be produced by “absolutely free men [and women].”⁴²² Levinas had written already, however, about a break from universal ways of thinking. His “new ontology” of 1951 postulated that no theory of knowledge exists prior to the actual experience of coming to know. In this process of formulating knowledge beyond an established system of justice or preconceived notions, art enriches humanity and, in so doing, can become an instrument of change.⁴²³

In order to create their art beyond preconceived aesthetic notions, Piene, Mack, and Uecker—similar to Armando’s *Salle obscure*, or Newman’s *The Voice*, which were meant to intensify the viewer’s self-awareness—designed *Salle de Lumière* as an interactive art form inasmuch as spectators participated in the process by “switching groups of lights and motors via a ‘homespun yet technically sound’ switchboard, the

⁴¹⁹ Franz Roh, contribution to *Zero 1* (1958), n.p., in *Zero*, 3.

⁴²⁰ Piene, response to author’s question, 27 February 2010.

⁴²¹ Roh, *Zero*, 3.

⁴²² Hans Sedlmayr, contribution to *Zero 1* (1958), n.p., in *Zero*, 7.

⁴²³ Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 6, 9. The “new ontology” that Levinas postulated in this work was a treatise on anti-theoretical thinking that emerged out of his critique of Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl.

size of a fairly large desktop,” as Piene explains it.⁴²⁴ Instead of encouraging a solely intellectual approach to assessing *Salle de lumière*, its interactive nature allowed the viewer the actual experience. Such a collaborative role by the viewer was also evident in another work by Piene, entitled *Please Turn*, installed in the gallery adjacent to *Salle de lumière* (fig. 2.60). At a glance, this work had a remarkable resemblance to Marcel Duchamp’s 1926 motorized discs inscribed with puns (fig. 2.61) with one important exception. While Duchamp’s work automatically turned and transformed letters on a disc into Dadaistic white lettering, *Please Turn* asked viewers to move a large black disc attached to a heavy sawhorse. Instructions, written in white letters and in English indicated, “Please turn extremely slowly.” Piene’s use of English signaled his occupation experience. As in Japan, during the Allied Occupation (1945-1949 in Germany), English was made mandatory in German schools. By 1962, it became a common language among the “Nul Exhibition” participants from Germany, Italy, Japan, and the Netherlands.⁴²⁵

Please Turn was lit from the facing side. The spectators in this work became the activators of the light that filled the space between the light source and the artwork.⁴²⁶ Piene believed that by activating the space, his viewers broke the “static

⁴²⁴ Piene, interview by Hillings, 19 November 1999.

⁴²⁵ Although a majority of Dutch read and understood German, after the war the Dutch also harbored some resentment against Teutonic culture. For people in the Netherlands, the use of English signaled a new era brought by the United States.

⁴²⁶ Hillings described Piene placing a light behind the disk. Hillings, “Experimental Artists’ Groups in Europe,” 197. However, the photograph proves that it was lit from the facing side.

character of . . . modern art [that] paralyzed both light and color.”⁴²⁷ Piene further conceived of light as energy that could be “converted mysteriously into the spectator’s vital energy.” His work, then, was intended to function as a transforming element of life.⁴²⁸ With the interactive component, Piene—like Armando, Kusama, and Newman—tried to transform Dada of the prewar period into a new form of aesthetic expression, which was becoming increasingly important after the war.

Theodor W. Adorno, a future *Zero* aficionado, remarked already in 1949 while examining the United States’ capitalist culture industry:

For no authentic work of art and no true philosophy, according to their very meaning, has ever exhausted itself in itself alone, in its being-in-itself. They have always stood in relation to the actual life-process of society from which they distinguished themselves.⁴²⁹

Adorno was among the first critics after the war to speculate about culture’s role as a means for social control in modern society.⁴³⁰ In 1964, Adorno’s fellow Frankfurt School philosopher Herbert Marcuse, in his *One-Dimensional Man*, further elaborated how, in an advanced industrial society, consumer capitalism integrates individuals into a totally administered world of thought and behavior that threatens human

⁴²⁷ Otto Piene, “*Über die reinheit des lichts*,” in *Zero 2: Vibration* (1958), n.p., reprinted and translated as “On the Purity of Light,” in *Zero*, 46.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴²⁹ Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society,” in *Can One Live After Auschwitz?*, 150.

⁴³⁰ Another important writing on “pure” art is Clement Greenberg’s “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” *Art in Theory* (1939), 539-49. The text was written immediately after the August 1939 Russo-German pact. At the time, Greenberg was profoundly disillusioned by Communist Russia and saw political possibilities in pure art.

freedom and individuality.⁴³¹

At the onset of global capitalism Zero and Nul artists also vehemently protested the accelerating commodification of art. Instead, they strongly believed in art in its “full and pure sensibility,” to reiterate Klein’s words,⁴³² aligned with photographer Max Burchartz’s *Zero I* article in which he articulated that art “created by human hands, is part of the unfolding of life.” He, too, thought of art as a potential instrument for social change, writing: “Works of art, like creative thought in other areas, are catalytic agents.”⁴³³ After Zero and Nul had become more established, by 1964, Piene, wrote that “most of us . . . succeeded in remaining on our feet as artists who do not want their spirit (and sensation) to be overwhelmed by the mind or even by intellectual visual research.”⁴³⁴ The artists affiliated with Nul (including Kusama) saw art as the actual experience of coming to know something or someone, an experience related to Levinas’s idea of a new ontology. They envisioned a process of formulating knowledge outside established systems or preconceived notions and, instead, based on innovative and creative ideas. Such a “beyond coincides, in my view, with the idea of infinity.

For the artists affiliated with Nul, their initial and urgent task after the war was self-recovery from the totalitarian situation. Kusama’s earlier work in Japan thus

⁴³¹ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).

⁴³² Yves Klein, *Zero*, 10.

⁴³³ Max Burchartz, in *Zero I*, n.p., reprinted and translated in *Zero*, 5.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

centered on freeing her thinking from Japan's militaristic totalitarian society. In New York, after encountering Newman's monumental canvases that were designed to heighten the viewers' self-awareness, Kusama began also considering the role of her audience members. This resulted in her breakthrough works, a series of white *Net* paintings. The *Net* paintings' serial context and repetitive nature followed in a way from the war's collective trauma, as did much of the work of her European counterparts, such as Armando and Uecker. It was with her *Net* painting that the Nul exhibition curator, Henk Peeters initially felt an affinity. This led to Kusama's association with Zero and Nul groups until their dissolution in 1966. For the majority of Zero and Nul artists, their goals were social as well as aesthetic. They believed that art could enrich humanity and provide a break from universalistic ways of thinking, thereby becoming an instrument of change.

These artists' convictions regarding art's relation to life were meant to come to fruition in Nul's first outdoor site-specific art project, "Zero op Zee" ("Zero on the Sea"), which was supposed to take place at the Scheveningen pier in the Netherlands (fig. 2.62) (see Chapter Four).⁴³⁵ This exhibit would have advanced the tendency after World War II of artists on both sides of the Atlantic to problematize the interstices between art and life.⁴³⁶

⁴³⁵ Henk Peeters, letter to Kusama, 12 September 1965. Kusama Papers.

⁴³⁶ In the United States, as the British art historian David Hopkins observed, that tendency took the form of strongly anti-bourgeois sentiments. Hopkins associated these anti-bourgeois feelings with the "ideology of a newly emerging class of 'business liberals.'" David Hopkins, "The Politics of Modernism: Abstract Expressionism and the European *Informel*," in *After Modern Art, 1945-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 11.

CHAPTER THREE

1960–1966

OBJECTS INTO ART:

THE CANONIZATION OF AMERICAN POP AND THE CASE OF KUSAMA

Cultural Diversity: The New York Art World in the Immediate Postwar Years

Between the years 1942 and 1946, personal income doubled for most of the United States population and the stock market rose by an average of eighty percent per annum.⁴³⁷ This unprecedented war-induced prosperity stimulated new hunger for luxury goods. With the booming economy, and with the emergence of a New York School of artists, farsighted art dealers, such as Charles Egan, Samuel Kootz, and Betty Parsons, all opened galleries in midtown Manhattan and began exhibiting, among others, various New York-based artists.⁴³⁸ Their artist rosters included: Isamu

⁴³⁷ For information about the postwar economy, see Lester Chandler, *Inflation in the United States 1940–1948* (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1976); Joseph P. Crockett, *The Federal Tax System in the United States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1955); Harold G. Vatter, *The United States Economy in the 1950s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

⁴³⁸ This generation of dealers followed in a way an example set by Peggy Guggenheim's legendary Art of This Century Gallery. Guggenheim featured some New York School artists alongside Surrealists and European non-objective artists. Her gallery was an extremely popular destination for New York artists. For example, Philip Pavia, who would in 1949 establish the 8th Street Club, entered in his journal: "We went to her [Guggenheim's] gallery month after month. What an education it was." Philip Pavia, "War of the Roses," in *Club Without Walls: Selections from the Journals of Philip Pavia*, ed. Natalie Edgar (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 2007), 21-23.

Noguchi, Willem de Kooning, Louise Bourgeois, Franz Kline, and Joseph Cornell (Egan); Hans Hofmann, Adolph Gottlieb, Robert Motherwell, and William Baziotés (Kootz); and Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, and Agnes Martin (Parsons). To the general public in the United States, however, Paris was still the cultural capital. Young artists just out of the military, such as Ellsworth Kelly and Robert Rauschenberg, went to Paris to study art under the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 (GI Bill of Rights). Only after Jackson Pollock's death in 1956 did the prices of works by the New York School artists (among them Baziotés, Hofmann, Motherwell, Pollock, and Rothko) begin to equal those of modern European masters (such as Vasily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, and Fernand Léger). A viable market outside of Paris began to flourish.⁴³⁹

Still, "what happened at MoMA; at Kootz, at Parsons, at Egan's," according to the New York-based, Paris-born Louise Bourgeois, was "not the avant-garde; it was completely establishment!"⁴⁴⁰ Though Bourgeois had showed at Egan, she was part of Manhattan's downtown art scene, which she considered the really important vanguard scene in New York.⁴⁴¹ It was into this downtown scene that Kusama assimilated after arriving in New York in June 1958.

⁴³⁹ Deirdre Robson, "The Market for Abstract Expressionism: The Time Lag Between Critical and Commercial Acceptance," *Archives of American Art Journal* 25, no. 3 (1985): 19–23.

⁴⁴⁰ Louise Bourgeois, interview by Ann Eden Gibson, Brooklyn, 24 September 1987. Ann Eden Gibson, "Preface," in *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), xi.

⁴⁴¹ Bourgeois showed also at the downtown Peridot Gallery.

Without knowing anyone and speaking little English, Kusama first mingled with the local Japanese and Japanese-American communities to learn about the New York art world.⁴⁴² But she soon decided to launch her career from downtown, where many émigrés and artists of color lived and worked. Among the artists Kusama recorded meeting downtown, sculptor Philip Pavia is a key figure.⁴⁴³ In 1949, Pavia initiated a loosely knit artists' organization, the Club, and hosted a Friday-evening lecture series at the Club's loft on Eighth Street. "We didn't have any color prejudice," Pavia later asserted.⁴⁴⁴ This may have been true when Kusama met Pavia in 1958, but during the Club's inception in the late 1940s and the early 1950s, cultural "others" and women still needed to struggle to gain their fair citizenship.

Though Pavia encouraged racial diversity at the Club, African-American artist Hale Woodruff recalled that the majority of Anglo-American Club members had only a limited understanding of his culture.⁴⁴⁵ In addition, the original tenets of the Club's charter membership did not allow women.⁴⁴⁶ Ruth Abrams claimed that she, along

⁴⁴² During Kusama's early years in New York, the Japanese-American architect George Matsuda helped her significantly (between 1961 and '64, Kusama lived in Matsuda's loft and used it as her studio. (Their relationship was platonic.) Among Brata's cooperative artist members was Japanese painter Nanae Momiyama. Momiyama most likely helped initiate Kusama's contact with the gallery. By November 1960, Kusama was exhibiting together with the Japanese artists, Minoru Kawabata, Kenzo Okada, and Yukiko Katsura at Gres Gallery in Washington, D.C. A brief interview with them appears in Thomas Wolfe, "Japanese Artists Say: New York City Has Plenty They Like," *The Washington Post*, 15 November 1960, B8.

⁴⁴³ Kusama, "Amerika . . ."

⁴⁴⁴ Philip Pavia, cited in Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism*, 122.

⁴⁴⁵ Hale Woodruff, cited in *ibid.*, 122.

⁴⁴⁶ Ruth Abrams, cited in *ibid.*, 152.

with Pavia and Milton Resnick had initially discussed “the idea of forming an artists club,” but once the Club opened, she found herself excluded from being a charter member because of its policies toward women. But by 1952, the Club listed two female charter members.⁴⁴⁷ Commenting on this circumstance, Bourgeois observed that the men were not “ignoring us,” but they simply “did not know [that] we existed.”⁴⁴⁸

The conditions for women and cultural others in the downtown scene must have improved by the time Kusama moved to 70 East 12th Street in December 1958.⁴⁴⁹ In the following March, she published a short article which said:

I made many friends. . . . Painters, sculptors, photographers, actresses, playwrights, poets, and magazine editors—all sorts of people visit my studio. All these people live near my studio. I also became acquainted with such leaders of New York-ism as [Willem] de Kooning, Franz Kline, and Philip Guston. I met many times with the poet Frank O’Hara, the painter Sam Francis, an editor of *It Is*, Philip Pavia.⁴⁵⁰

One reason that the downtown scene appealed to Kusama was its tolerance for foreigners. A leading figure in this circle, the Dutch immigrant Willem de Kooning, for instance, felt that the uptown gallery scene alienated non-native artists.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁷ The Club’s list of thirty-two “Charter Members” from 1952 included Mercedes Matter and Perle Fine. Abrams was listed under “Regular Members” that year. Edgar, *Club Without Walls*, 149, 150.

⁴⁴⁸ Bourgeois, cited in Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism*, 142.

⁴⁴⁹ Kusama moved from an Upper West Side apartment to this location. Digital recording of Yayoi Kusama, interview by author, Tokyo, 28 July 2006.

⁴⁵⁰ Kusama, “Amerika . . .”

⁴⁵¹ Jack Tworkov, interview by Calvin Tomkins, 19 April 1978, in Calvin Tomkins Papers, IV.C.4, MoMA Archives (hereafter cited as CT Papers).

The heated discussions after the Club's Friday-evening lectures were often carried over to the neighborhood Cedar Tavern. "That was a wonderful time," recalled sculptor Tom Doyle. "You could talk to de Kooning, you could talk to Franz Kline. . . . They were just accessible. It was like an education to be there."⁴⁵² For newcomers and young artists, going to the Club and the Cedar Tavern was the way to make the right connections in the 1950s. This was most likely how Kusama became acquainted with Pavia, de Kooning, Kline and others.

The majority of artists gathered at the Club, after 1952, showed their works at the artist-run cooperative galleries on and around Tenth Street. These cooperatives operated in a democratic spirit: after being admitted by the committee and paying a small monthly fee, members could exhibit their works by taking turns. Many women and minority artists showed in these galleries early in their careers.⁴⁵³ Since generating revenue was not their main concern, in the late 1950s, when Abstract Expressionism was already passé, the cooperatives could become seedbeds for such non-commercial experiments as Happenings, as well as for the figurative tendencies that paved the way for the U.S. emergence of Pop art in the 1960s.⁴⁵⁴ Between the

⁴⁵² Tom Doyle, interview by author, video recording by Takako Matsumoto, Connecticut, 10 October 2006.

⁴⁵³ "Women were always equal members in the coops and shared equal responsibilities. There were many women artists on 10th St. and all coops had women members." Norman Konter, reply to Joellen Bard's questionnaire. Joellen Bard, Ruth Fortel, and Helen Thomas's Exhibition Records of *Tenth Street Days: The Co-Ops of the '50s*, Series 1: Records of *Tenth Street Days: The Co-Ops of the '50s, 1953–1977*, Box 1/3, Archives of American Art, Washington, DC.

⁴⁵⁴ "A lot of things were going on" in the cooperative galleries. Attending Happenings was like going to the theater for penniless artists in the late 1950s. Doyle,

late 1950s and early 1960s, Donald Judd, Allan Kaprow, Claes Oldenburg, and Tom Wesselmann all showed their work in these cooperatives. When seven galleries on Tenth Street held their openings on the same night, most of the New York contemporary art world showed up, giving emerging artists the best possible exposure. Commercial dealers spotted promising artists and drafted them for uptown galleries.⁴⁵⁵

Between 1954 and 1962, while MoMA was organizing numerous international exhibitions, the museum's curators mindfully included a diverse cast of artists. For example, under MoMA's aegis, the African-American artists Jacob Lawrence and Norman Lewis, as well as the women artists Loren McIver, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Hedda Stern showed at the 1956 Venice Biennale. McIver and Louise Nevelson represented the United States at the 1962 Venice Biennale. Although Nevelson was not publicly out as a lesbian, she was most likely the first lesbian to represent the nation at this prestigious venue. Waldo Rasmussen of MoMA's international program reminisced in 1994 that since many men and women on the staff of MoMA were gay—including Philip Johnson, Frank O'Hara, and Rasmussen himself—their identity was “very important” in “coloring the [museum's] program.”⁴⁵⁶ The MoMA curators emphasized the quality of the artworks they selected, however, rather than the artists' racial, ethnic or sexual identities. Despite his Dutch citizenship, de Kooning

interview by author, 10 October 2006.

⁴⁵⁵ “Uptown” gallery is a generic term for commercial galleries located in both midtown and uptown Manhattan.

⁴⁵⁶ Waldo Rasmussen, interview by Sharon Zane (transcript), 1 November 1994, 152. MoMA Oral History Project, MoMA Archives, New York, NY.

represented the United States at the 1954 Venice Biennale, as did his fellow downtown artist, the Egyptian-born Ibram Lassaw. Such openness toward nationality, race, gender, and sexuality in the downtown scene seems to have led Kusama to believe that some day she could be accepted just as an “artist” without being pigeonholed as a woman and/or as Japanese or “oriental” in the parlance of the era.⁴⁵⁷

Kusama joined the cooperative Brata Gallery in 1958 through the recommendation of African-American Abstract Expressionist artist Ed Clark.⁴⁵⁸ There, in October 1959, she held her first solo exhibition in New York, making a successful debut. From among the five large white *Net* paintings on display, the future Minimalist Judd bought two works and the up-and-coming young painter Frank Stella bought another.⁴⁵⁹ Evidently, her paintings made a strong impression on key players in the emergent New York art scene.⁴⁶⁰ The show’s favorable outcome led to a contract with an uptown commercial gallery, Stephen Radich, a dealer Kusama had met through the Japanese-American Abstract Expressionist, Matsumi Kanemitsu.⁴⁶¹

At Radich, Kusama had her second solo exhibition in New York in May 1961,

⁴⁵⁷ As discussed in footnote 311, while promoting the *Net* paintings, Kusama wore plain, rather bourgeois-looking Western clothes.

⁴⁵⁸ Digital recording of Ed Clark, Kusama’s neighbor from 1961 until about 1964, interview by author, 8 July 2004.

⁴⁵⁹ Audiotape of Donald Judd, interview by Alexandra Munroe and Reiko Tomii, 8 December 1988, CICA/ATT/001.36. Unfortunately the young artists did not keep their purchase records, so it is impossible to determine which other artworks they purchased during their formative years.

⁴⁶⁰ For my discussion and critical response to this exhibition, see Chapter Two.

⁴⁶¹ Kusama, interview by author, 28 July 2006.

which drew curatorial attention. During the fall–winter season of 1961, her monochromatic paintings were on view at the Whitney Annual and the Carnegie International exhibitions (one painting per show). Both events were considered significant gateways for successful young artists.⁴⁶² While these important exhibitions ran, Kusama’s Washington, D.C. dealer, Beatrice Perry, arranged solo exhibitions for her at the Chicago and Washington, D.C. branches of the Gres Gallery. Perry believed that, with new developments in transport and communication systems, an important aspect of post-World War II art would be its racial, cultural, and sexual diversity.⁴⁶³ The artists she represented included the Colombian artist Botero, the Catalan painter Antoni Tàpies, the Abstract Expressionist Grace Hartigan, and the female Polish sculptor Alina Szapocznikow.

With a burgeoning Abstract Expressionist art market, once “big money started to come into the [New York] art world about 1957-1959,”⁴⁶⁴ wrote Calvin Tomkins, many U.S. art dealers began thinking of expanding their businesses in Europe. In a 19 July 1961 letter to Kusama, Perry revealed her ambitious plans for “the new Gres Galleries,” which “will be the first gallery in the world to have two American galleries [in Chicago and New York] as well as a gallery in Paris.”⁴⁶⁵ Perry, who would soon become a world traveler, believed that postwar art was marked by

⁴⁶² Kusama showed *Number III, B.P. Red* at the Whitney and a purple painting, *The West*, at the Carnegie International, both from 1960.

⁴⁶³ Hart Perry, interview by author, 11 May 2010.

⁴⁶⁴ Calvin Tomkins, “Leo Castelli–Bio,” CT Papers.

⁴⁶⁵ Beatrice Perry, letter to Yayoi Kusama, 19 July 1961, Kusama Papers.

internationalism and multiculturalism. Seeing Kusama as embodying racial, cultural, and sexual diversity, Perry hoped to make her one of the principal protagonists of the gallery's roster. Though in 1961, Kusama had an exclusive contract with the Stephen Radich Gallery for her representation in New York, Perry's ambitious plans ultimately won her over. This resulted in Kusama terminating her contract with the Radich Gallery on 28 October so that she could enter into an exclusive business relationship with Perry.

Contrary to what one might expect after such a quick start to her career, however, Kusama had no solo exhibition for the next two-and-a-half years in New York. This was due, in part, to Perry's failure to secure a gallery space in Manhattan.⁴⁶⁶ But this hiatus also corresponded with a larger trend in New York away from cultural diversity, once the careers of the second generation of postwar New York dealers took off, including most notably Leo Castelli (né Krausz) and his former wife, Ileana Sonnabend (née Schapira), who, like Perry, thought of their business as global in its scope.⁴⁶⁷

Dadaism Resurgent: An Early History of the Leo Castelli Gallery

⁴⁶⁶ Kusama, letter to Richard Hu Bellamy, 29 January 1963, Kusama Papers. In the extant letters, Perry never disclosed details of her business venture, Gres Gallery in Washington, D.C. closed in March 1962.

⁴⁶⁷ Hiroko Ikegami provides an excellent account of Galerie Ileana Sonnabend's early operations as well as Castelli's transatlantic marketing strategy. According to Ikegami, because the art market in Paris had been internationally focused since the nineteenth century, the city had worked out strategies for dealers to reach out to other European capitals. Hiroko Ikegami, "A Triumph in Paris," in *The Great Migrator: Robert Rauschenberg and the Global American Art* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2010), 17-55.

One influential group in the downtown scene included Jews who had fled from persecution in Europe. For instance, Jan Muller, who represented the United States at the 1962 Venice Biennale, and who helped establish the cooperative Hansa Gallery, was a Jew who had fled Hamburg.⁴⁶⁸ Leo and Ileana Castelli, a Jewish couple who had fled Nazi-occupied France, joined the Club. By 1952, Leo was among the Club's charter members and the couple regularly attended its events.⁴⁶⁹ Over the course of the following two decades, Castelli would go on to become arguably the world's most influential art dealer.⁴⁷⁰ "For someone who performs so admirably in his profession," however, "Castelli got a surprisingly late start," remarked Tomkins.⁴⁷¹

Born in 1907 in Austro-Hungarian Trieste, Leo Krausz grew up speaking German at school and Italian at home. His mother's maiden name was Castelli.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁸ Hansa was the second cooperative that opened on Tenth Street and moved to 59th Street in October 1964. Since the gallery operated as a cooperative, despite its midtown location, I regarded it as related to the downtown movement.

⁴⁶⁹ Edgar, *Club Without Walls*, 149; Ileana Sonnabend, interviewed by Calvin Tomkins (transcript), 11 February 1976, in "Leo Castelli–Bio," 26.

⁴⁷⁰ Calvin Tomkins, "Profile: A Good Eye and a Good Ear, Leo Castelli" (draft, 5 March 1976), 2. CT Papers, II.A.76. Barbara Rose also referred to: "Leo Castelli, the New York dealer who sold Europe on the idea of American Art." Barbara Rose, "Put Your Money Where the Talent Is: That's the Winning Formula of Top Art Men Vollard and Castelli," *Vogue*, August 1977, 146.

⁴⁷¹ Tomkins, "Profile" (draft), 10.

⁴⁷² See Leo Krausz, "Birth Certificate," Archive of the Trieste Synagogue, reprinted in Annie Cohen-Solal, *Leo & His Circle: The Life of Leo Castelli* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 35. Leo's father was a Hungarian Ashkenazi Jew and his mother was a Sephardic Jew. Cohen-Solal, *Leo & His Circle*, xxii-iii. In Hungary, during Joseph II's reign (1780–1790), the decree *Systematica Gentis Judaicae Regulatio* ordered Jews to stop using Hebrew and Yiddish in favor of German. During this time, Jewish schools under state supervision opened and Jewish children were permitted to attend Christian schools. György Haraszti, "A Short History of the Jews in Hungary: The

After the Italian annexation of Trieste in 1919 during Mussolini's reign, the family was forced eventually to Italianize their surname, which they did in 1935, when it became Krauss-Castelli.⁴⁷³ Graduated from the University of Milan with a law degree, Leo moved to the Romanian capital, Bucharest, and married Ileana Schapira, the second daughter of a local industrial magnate, Mihai Schapira. Partly to escape rising anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, he got a job with the Paris branch of Banca d'Italia and the couple moved to Paris.⁴⁷⁴ There, in the spring of 1939, with financial support from his father-in-law, Leo helped Ileana's old school friend's husband, architect René Drouin, to launch Galerie René Drouin. Since the war broke out that September, he lost an opportunity to get fully involved in the gallery business, however. With much difficulty and with a visa purchased with Schapira's money, on 15 April 1941, Leo, along with Ileana and their daughter Mina Gylia Krauss-Castelli arrived in New York.⁴⁷⁵ At their adopted home, out of fear of anti-Semitism, the family dropped Krauss from their surname. Leo's parents and an older sister Silvia were trapped in

Turkish Occupation and Resettlement (1541–1790),” in *In the Land of Hagar: The Jews of Hungary: History, Society and Culture*, ed. Anna Szalai (Tel Aviv: Beth Hatefutsoth and Ministry of Defense Publishing House, 2002), 37.

⁴⁷³ Cohen-Solal, *Leo & His Circle*, xx. Krauss-Castelli is the name registered in the immigration record. The family dropped “Krauss” after they arrived to the United States. “List or Manifesto Alien Passengers to the United States Immigrant Inspector at Port of Arrival,” 15 April 1941.

⁴⁷⁴ Leslie Camhi, “The Seer Ileana Sonnabend, the Legendary Gallery Owner Who Died Recently at the Age of 92, Had an Eye for the Art That Nobody Else Wanted. Their Loss,” *New York Times Magazine* (2 December 2007): 208.

⁴⁷⁵ The daughter Nina Julia was listed as “Mina G.” In Slavic, her full name is most likely Mina Gylia. “List or Manifesto Alien Passengers.”

Budapest.⁴⁷⁶ He would have no news of them between 1939 and 1945.⁴⁷⁷

U.S. military records indicate that on 1 July 1941, the thirty-three-year-old Castelli enlisted in the United States army.⁴⁷⁸ Though much older than the average enlisted man, he spoke five European languages and in 1944, at the age of thirty-seven, was recruited by the military intelligence service.⁴⁷⁹ After completing training in January 1945, he was stationed in Bucharest. There, he got a letter from his sister and finally learned that his parents had perished in the war.⁴⁸⁰ Like many traumatized survivors, Castelli never spoke of the Holocaust at home, so far as his daughter remembers.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁶ Tomkins, “Profile” (draft), 12–15.

⁴⁷⁷ *Idem.*, “Leo Castelli–Bio,” 4.

⁴⁷⁸ “Leo Castelli,” Selective Service System Records, National Archives and Records Administration, Lee’s Summit, MO.

⁴⁷⁹ His dates of service were 2 February 1944 to 14 March 1946. “Leo Castelli,” Military Personnel Records, National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, MO.

⁴⁸⁰ Tomkins, “Leo Castelli–Bio,” 4. In his profile of the gallerist, Tomkins identified the causes of death of Castelli’s parents as follows: his mother “died of multiple sclerosis and the father from a foot infection that went untreated.” Tomkins, “Profile” (draft), 15. This account was based on his interview with Ileana Sonnabend. She told Tomkins: “His Father’s death was painful for Leo. He had been wounded by the bombing in Budapest, and there was no medicine—everything was needed for the army. His mother died of multiple sclerosis there. Their last years were very sad.” Sonnabend, interview by Tomkins, transcript, 11 February 1976, “Leo Castelli–Bio”, 28. Castelli’s sister, Silvia Reitter, who lost in touch with her parents during the war recently explained to Cohen-Solal that her mother drowned in the Danube and she found her father in an infirmary, who passed away shortly after. Cohen-Solal, *Leo & His Circle*, 158-59. According to Castelli’s another biographer Judith Goldberg, who extensively interviewed him before his death, Castelli never spoke about the death of his parents. Judith Goldberg, telephone conversation with the author, unrecorded, 29 October 2007.

⁴⁸¹ “I never discussed the Holocaust with my father.” Nina Sundell (née Mina Gylia

Castelli's war experience reveals an important, yet unrecognized aspect of postwar American art. In many ways, the vision of new American art promoted by Castelli and his powerful network of dealers was shaped by profound anti-European feelings resulting from the collective trauma of the Second World War. Only after his discharge from the military in March of 1946 did Castelli find a path for his heretofore "indolent, and directionless" life, as Tomkins put it.⁴⁸² In that year, he forged a tie with MoMA by making a gift of artworks, and he began private art dealing.⁴⁸³ After the Club was established in 1949, the Castellis would join. Ileana remembered in 1976 that the "mental and emotional climate of these" gatherings they attended at the Club was "somewhat chauvinistic." But it was on the whole agreeable to them since they were so "disillusioned with Europe then," and "never wanted to see it again." As Sonnabend explained, their new interest in art was underscored by

Krausz-Castelli), e-mail message to the author, 9 October 2007. Castelli's son, Jean-Christoph told Cohen-Solal that his father "never offered much of his past." He thought: "maybe his Jewishness was one of the most personal things of all for my father, therefore, one of the most difficult [things] to access." Cohen-Solal, *Leo & His Circle*, xxiv.

⁴⁸² After his arrival in New York, "Castelli registered at Columbia University as a graduate student in economic history; he was initially thinking of becoming a teacher." Though Tomkins specifies the year 1957 (the year when Castelli opened his gallery) as marking the definitive shift in Castelli's life, Tomkins also wrote that after his military service, Castelli "halfheartedly" completed "his graduate studies at Columbia. But his real education was just beginning, and his university was the Museum of Modern Art. Tomkins, "Profile" (draft), 10, 14–15.

⁴⁸³ MoMA curator Dorothy Miller remembers his visit to the museum with a gift—a newly published limited edition of a French book on Jean Dubuffet, and two drawings of Salvador Dali—in 1946. He most likely acquired them through Drouin, as he was going to become the gallery's New York representative. *Ibid.*, 14, 16.

profound “anti-European feeling.”⁴⁸⁴ The Castellis found new European painting uninteresting, but felt that American painting was fascinating. They thus enthusiastically embraced the downtown art scene.

Not until 1957, however, did the Castellis open their own gallery. And during the gallery’s early operation, Leo and Ileana did not exclusively focus on U.S. artists. They showed what they owned, together with the work of a few second-generation Abstract Expressionists—among them Paul Brach, Norman Bluhm, and Jon Schueler—and a couple of young European artists.⁴⁸⁵ These early shows, according to Tomkins, did not “electrify the art world.”⁴⁸⁶ But the end-of-season group exhibition in May of 1957 included the young Johns and Rauschenberg, along with Bluhm, Alfred Leslie, Morris Louis, and Marisol. Notably, in reviewing the exhibition, Robert Rosenblum described Johns’s work as showing a “vital neo-Dada

⁴⁸⁴ Sonnabend, interview by Tomkins (transcript), 11 February 1976, “Leo Castelli–Bio,” 26.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 25. According to Rauschenberg, in the gallery’s early operation, Ileana’s taste dominated. *Ibid.*, 39. Wealthier than Castelli’s family, Sonnabend’s immediate family was able to escape the Holocaust, which seems to have created in her more tolerance for European culture. From the outset, she was not reluctant to take on European artists, whereas I observe that Castelli initially had a hard time accepting European artists. His taste in art became more explicit after the couple’s divorce in 1959. Castelli’s strategy as a dealer became clearer after Johns’s January 1958 exhibition, which was when he began focusing more on the U.S.-born artists. Once the gallery was fully established, Castelli took on certain European artists (such as Hanne Darboven and Jan Dibbets). “Some Castelli artists see this as an indication of pressure from Konrad Fischer and Gian Enzo Sperone . . . who represent many of Castelli’s artists abroad and who presumably hope the system can be made to work both ways.” *Ibid.*, 64.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

spirit.”⁴⁸⁷ The following January, when Castelli succeeded in capturing the art world’s full attention by mounting Johns’s first solo exhibition, a “neo-Dada-pyrotechnic” was how *ARTnews* introduced Johns’s *Target with Four Faces* (1955), which graced the cover of its January 1958 issue—an honor usually reserved for painters who had already achieved a certain stature.⁴⁸⁸ Soon, Castelli himself began promoting Johns and Rauschenberg by stressing their works’ connection with Dada:

In the beginning it was Jasper and Bob. They seemed to have recognizable elements out of the past, out of Dada, out of Abstract Expressionism. Then Frank Stella—I felt in an obscure way that his geometric abstraction was related to Jasper. Then come the Pop Artists—back to Dada again. A whole group that emerges suddenly, all influenced by Jasper’s first show—they all admit it; the spirit of his work permitted them to do what they did.⁴⁸⁹

Although Rauschenberg did not consider his art as a mere resurgence of Dada,⁴⁹⁰ Castelli was particularly receptive to Dada’s skepticism concerning dominant systems of Western knowledge and power. Known for shrewd tactics in public relations, after his initial success, Castelli repeatedly spoke of the importance of Dada in postwar art.

Objects into Art: A Global Intersection

Critic Lawrence Alloway wrote in 1960:

⁴⁸⁷ Robert Rosenblum, “Castelli Group,” *Arts* 31, no. 8 (May 1957): 53.

⁴⁸⁸ Fairfield Porter, “Cover,” *ARTnews* 56, no. 9 (January 1958): 5.

⁴⁸⁹ Castelli, cited in Tomkins, “Profile” (draft), 8.

⁴⁹⁰ Ikegami, *The Great Migrator*, 31.

NEW YORK JUNK CULTURE, ever since Rauschenberg, has been attached to Dada by the critics. In a way this is true, but only if you scrap the general picture of Dada. Connections between Dada and the new work must allow for the fact, pointed out by Thomas B. Hess in his review of the first NEW MEDIA—NEW FORMS exhibit, that there is no protest in New York junk culture, that it is “in favor of society.” This is true, but does not break the link with Dada, for the movement was more than the corny nihilistic *programme* usually ascribed to it, as by John Canaday reviewing the forerunner of this exhibit: “its tomfoolery was inspired by genuine anger.” In fact, what Dada did was establish a new relation between pop art and art. It brought expendable and repeatable objects into the timeless and unique field of art. Duchamp’s readymades and Picabia’s monkey doll called PORTRAIT OF CEZANNE used mass-produced objects, and Dada collages and typography accepted the mass media (ads, newspaper layout).⁴⁹¹

Johns’s first solo exhibition at Castelli, from which MoMA unprecedentedly acquired four works,⁴⁹² was followed by Rauschenberg’s March 1958 solo exhibition; both had an enormous impact on the New York scene. Already in June 1960, the Martha Jackson Gallery attempted to historicize the new contemporary trend with the exhibition “New Forms—New Media” (figs. 3.1 and 3.2).⁴⁹³ The show focused on artists ranging from Kurt Schwitters to Johns and Rauschenberg and thus

⁴⁹¹ Lawrence Alloway, “Junk Culture as a Tradition,” *New Forms—New Media I*, exh. cat. (New York: Martha Jackson Gallery, 1960), n.p. Orthography as in original.

⁴⁹² Barr and his assistant Dorothy Miller decided to buy *Green Target*, a small *White Numbers*, *Target with Four Faces*, and *Flag*. But the acquisitions committee did not pass *Flag*. Philip Johnson bought it as a promised gift to the museum and later donated it. Tomkins, “Profile” (draft), 29–30.

⁴⁹³ “New Forms—New Media” emerged out of Johns’ and Rauschenberg’s exhibitions, as in a way, did Allan Kaprow’s first constructed environment, and John Cage’s twenty-five-year retrospective concert in New York, all of which took place in 1958. (Cage’s name also appears in Kusama’s notebook from around 1959.) For a full picture of the late 1950s, see Barbara Haskell, *Blam! The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism, and Performance, 1958–1964* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1984). Haskell saw “New Forms—New Media” as the culmination of a new “junk culture” that Rauschenberg initiated in 1953. Since space is limited, I will focus here on the artists’ introduction of new commercial materials.

demonstrated a connection between historical Dada and the late 1950s Dadaistic tendency. The British Pop art critic Lawrence Alloway, who wrote the catalogue text, explained how the newfound, optimistic embrace of commonplace objects decisively differed from the cultural insurgency of historical Dada, alluding, instead, to a new era of “Pop art,” using the term for the British movement. Not until about 1962, however, was “Pop” a commonly accepted term in the United States. Prior to that, people variously addressed this new international trend as “commonism” and “New Realism.”⁴⁹⁴ Alloway’s explanation of the logic behind junk culture and how it would lead to Pop art, already prominent in England, influenced many United States artists who, suddenly in 1960, began embracing everyday objects and motifs.

Martha Jackson’s timely show took place four months prior to the Nouveau Réalisme manifesto in Paris and almost one and a half years before Sidney Janis Gallery’s much-heralded exhibition, “The New Realists” (fig. 3.3). Jackson’s exhibition attracted massive public attention, including television coverage by CBS.⁴⁹⁵ A sequel, “New Media—New Forms, Version 2,” opened on 27 September 1960. After this exhibition, and around the year 1960, many artists in New York, including Flavin, Judd, Kusama, Oldenburg, and Warhol, began eagerly embracing commonplace objects.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁴ For instance, in 1962, when the dealer Irving Blum showed Warhol’s *Campbell’s Soup Can* series, he recalled: “there was no such term as Pop Art...Ivan [Karp] had coined the term ‘commonism,’ which luckily didn’t stick.” Irving Blum, interview by Tomkins, transcript, “Leo Castelli-Bio,” 57.

⁴⁹⁵ Martha Jackson, “New Media—New Forms,” *New Forms—New Media*, n.p.

⁴⁹⁶ Haskell wrote that, “many, in [their] attempt to categorize this art, attached to it the then ubiquitous label, Neo-Dada.” But Alloway used the term “Dada” in *New*

In Kusama's case, when she first arrived in New York five months after Johns's landmark 1958 exhibition, his name was one of the first that she noted in her notebook.⁴⁹⁷ Initially though, she merely paid attention to the collage elements underlying Johns's encaustic paintings (see Chapter Two). Since she was always mindful of how social history helped to shape artwork,⁴⁹⁸ "New Forms—New Media" conveyed to her the importance of accepting "mass-produced objects, just because they are what is around," as Alloway put it.⁴⁹⁹ It likely impressed Kusama, moreover, that "New Forms—New Media" included several women artists and was global in scope: participants included Karel Appel, Lee Bontecou, Alberto Burri, Chrissy, Claire Falkenstein, Jean Follette, Yves Klein, Renee Miller, Louise Nevelson, Alfonso Ossorio, Lil Picard, Takis, Antonio Tàpies, Alice Terry, Teshigahara Sofū, Walasse Ting, and Gutai's Motonaga Sadamasa and Yoshihara Jirō, a roster that suggested she might fare well in this new movement. She, moreover, was aware that, between 1959 and 1962, Jackson offered one of her gallery artists, Louise Nevelson, a monthly stipend and a solo exhibition every other year. Since Kusama faced much financial difficulty in New York, her bid to join Martha Jackson's roster was also a

Forms—New Media. In the early 1960s, "Neo-Dada" was not yet a commonly accepted term.

⁴⁹⁷ Kusama, Notebook No. 1, Kusama Papers.

⁴⁹⁸ "Oftentimes, when exhausted from my work, I took a break at The Museum of Modern Art, New York. In front of a massive art history and looking at the paintings that survived, I analyzed the conditions and the society as backgrounds of the works' conception, as if to find answer to the numerical formula." Kusama, *Infinity Nets*, 36–37. She hired translators and had them translate many key texts or articles while living in New York. Some still remain among Kusama's personal papers.

⁴⁹⁹ Alloway, *New Forms—New Media*, n.p.

bid to achieve much needed financial security.

Kusama's first assemblage dates to 1960. Only after she saw "New Forms—New Media," did she take her earlier red, monochromatic painting and sew discarded egg cartons onto the back, calling it *Untitled* (fig. 3.4). Differing from the collage that appears in her 1958 *Work No. 11* (fig. 2.14), she used the cartons as the base of this new work. Kusama then overpainted their concave circular areas in black and white, which emphasized their gridded structures. In this way, even while dealing with "junk," the stress in her work was formal and abstract.

Soon after making *Untitled*, Kusama began to persistently pitch her works to the Martha Jackson Gallery, hoping to be included in the nascent global art movement that the dealer was promoting. After repeated attempts, she managed to schedule a studio visit by gallery manager, Rolf G. Nelson. At the last minute, however, Nelson cancelled the studio visit, thus thwarting Kusama's bid for gallery representation.⁵⁰⁰ This disappointment, together with problems with malnutrition, and the stress of meeting her financial needs (see Chapter Two) combined to push her into a deep depression. It is marked in her diary on 22 July 1960 (a day after Nelson's cancellation), that Kusama jumped from her second-floor window, injuring herself,

⁵⁰⁰ Kusama's first meeting with the dealer is recorded on June 30th at 2 p.m.—six days after the closing of "New Forms—New Media." Jackson seems to have promised a studio visit by Nelson. Kusama waited ten days and on July 11th, she called Nelson. He probably did not come to the phone, so she visited the gallery at 10:30 a.m. on July 12th. He probably neglected her or was absent. On July 13th at 10:30 a.m., Kusama called Jackson, who finally scheduled Nelson's studio visit for July 20th at 5:30 p.m. But the visit was cancelled. On July 21st at 11 a.m., she called up Nelson. Then on July 22, 1960, Kusama marked "sick" (*byōki*) in red on her calendar. Thereafter, all her activities were suspended until the end of August 1960.

but surviving.⁵⁰¹

In contrast with Kusama's persistent approach, which seems to have turned off Jackson and her assistant, Warhol—who worked as a commercial designer for more than ten years—had more tactical social skills. At his Upper East Side townhouse, he introduced the guests to his latest artwork in a setting with a “sophisticated, campy, conglomeration of folk sculptures, hand-painted store signs, penny arcade machines, carousel horses, and even a stuffed peacock,” as David Bourdon remembered.⁵⁰² He quickly captured Jackson's attention. In 1961, Jackson included two of his works, *Typewriter* and *Telephone* (figs. 3.5a and 3.5b), in the group exhibition. By early 1962, she began selling his works on consignment and tentatively scheduled his first solo exhibition in New York for December of that year. In July 1962, however, having just returned from Europe, Jackson wrote to Warhol “to say that reactions to his work [in Europe] had been negative” and thus she cancelled his exhibition.⁵⁰³

One reason that the embrace of commonplace objects became important in New York during this time was because, in the early 1960s, many artists there still

⁵⁰¹ For the details of her first nervous breakdown, see Yamamura, “Yayoi Kusama's Early New York Years,” 59.

⁵⁰² David Bourdon, *Warhol* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989), 6. Warhol bought a townhouse at 1342 Lexington Avenue in August 1960 and moved there that September. Each floor of his house was divided into two with a central hall separating the two rooms. He received the guests in the back room on the parlor level. The front room of this floor was his commercial studio and the center hall was filled with Americana. During this time, Warhol kept his art studio separate and preferred not to show it to his visitors. Bourdon began visiting Warhol's townhouse in 1962. George Frie and Neil Printz, eds. *The Andy Warhol Catalog Raisoné 1: Paintings and Sculpture, 1961–1963* (London: Phaidon, 2002), 468.

⁵⁰³ Frie and Printz, *The Andy Warhol Catalog Raisoné*, 1: 471.

looked to trends in Europe. The Swedish-born Oldenburg, for instance, explained the importance to him of the French critic Pierre Restany, who told him “about the activities of the New Realists” in Paris.⁵⁰⁴ He tried “to point out to” the critic Barbara Rose that “I was under this influence, things happening in Europe”; and through Restany, Oldenburg recalled, “I came into contact with them [the Nouveaux Réalistes] and their ideas,” and “so [did] George Segal.” Later, he affirmed that, “The idea of *The Store*”—his important project from 1961—“was really almost a New Realist idea.”⁵⁰⁵ But due perhaps to an American bias among American critics at the time, Rose seems to have neglected Oldenburg’s comments. Still, the name of one of the Nouveaux Réalistes, Arman, also appears in Kusama’s calendar-diary on the 1st and 3rd of December of 1961.⁵⁰⁶ Certain artists in New York seem to have comprehended Pop art as part of a larger global trend.

Making a Myth of American Art: Donald Judd and the Nineteenth Street Loft

The global phenomenon of “pop art, neo-Dada, New Realism, or whatever we

⁵⁰⁴ In May 1960, with a manifesto published in the catalogue of an exhibition at the Galerie Apollinaire in Milan, Restany hailed the arrival of Nouveau Réalisme. Pierre Restany, *Arman, Dufrêne, Hains, Yves le Monochrome, Tinguely, Villeglé*, exh. cat. (Milan: Galerie Apollinaire, 1960), n.p. On 27 October, Restany and eight artists—Arman, François Dufrêne, Raymond Hains, Yves Klein, Martial Raysse, Daniel Spoerri, Jean Tinguely and Jacques Villeglé—signed a joint declaration of Nouveau Réalisme. Their shared vision was “*nouvelles approches perceptives du réel*” (new perceptual approaches to reality). In diverse ways, this transnational group of artists tried to integrate objects into their art, rather than subjecting them to interpretation by drawing, painting, or sculpture.

⁵⁰⁵ Claes Oldenburg, interview by Paul Cummings, transcript, 27 December 1973, 162, Archives of American Art, Washington, DC.

⁵⁰⁶ Kusama, December 1961 calendar diary, folder “1961,” Kusama Papers.

finally agree to call it,” said Hilton Kramer at MoMA’s “Pop Art Symposium” in 1962,⁵⁰⁷ had an immense impact on a group of artists befriended by Kusama in the early 1960s. On 1 September 1961, she moved to a space downstairs from Donald Judd at 53 East 19th Street, where she remained until early 1964.⁵⁰⁸ Their artist neighbors included Eva Hesse, who resided in an adjoining building, and Frank Stella, who lived not far away on 16th Street.⁵⁰⁹ Kusama remembers today that Judd and his then best friend, Flavin often came down to her loft where the three of them fervently discussed the future direction of art.⁵¹⁰ Flavin remembered that these discussions sometimes lasted until four in the morning.⁵¹¹ Flavin, Judd, and Stella would all come to be known as Minimalist artists, while Hesse was in time categorized as a post-Minimalist. However, in the early 1960s, all of them were working under the sway of what Alloway called “junk culture,” and playing with the idea of creating

⁵⁰⁷ Hilton Kramer, “A Symposium on Pop Art,” *Arts Magazine* (April 1963): 38.

⁵⁰⁸ Through Ed Clark, Kusama had helped find Judd a large flat that could also serve as his studio. Kusama, *Infinity Nets*, 185. When the downstairs space from him became available, Judd let Kusama know about it. Judd, interview by Munroe and Tomii, 8 December 1988. The date of her move is recorded in Kusama’s calendar diary as 1 September 1961. According to her bankbook, Kusama moved from 53 East 19th Street to 211 Mott Street around August 1964. Bankbook, folder “1964,” Kusama Papers. Before moving to the Mott Street residence, Kusama briefly lived with Beatrice Perry’s family. Hart Perry, interview by author, 11 May 2010.

⁵⁰⁹ According to Stella, Kusama sometimes baby-sat for their daughter. Frank Stella, interview by author, video recording by Takako Matsumoto, New York, 2 May 2010.

⁵¹⁰ Digital recording of Yayoi Kusama, interview by author, 14 June 2004, Tokyo, Kusama Studio.

⁵¹¹ Flavin does not specifically mention Kusama’s name, however. “Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Frank Stella, New Nihilism or New Art? Interview with Bruce Glaser” (1964), in *Minimalism*, 198 (hereafter cited as “Interview with Glaser”). This interview is now regarded as a cornerstone in the history of Minimalism.

objects with industrial materials and found objects.

Hesse's former husband, Tom Doyle, today remembers visiting Kusama's studio "together with Eva," most likely in the fall of 1962. He saw *Accumulation No. 2* (fig. 3.6) and many airmail stickers on her desk. He recalls: "That kind of compulsiveness about the work later enabled Eva to do the very compulsive work that she did," an observation confirmed by a comparison between a 1962 work of Kusama's and a later work of Hesse's (figs. 3.7 and 3.8).⁵¹² By 1964, Hesse's Abstract Expressionist-inspired early paintings would begin to unfold into Surrealist-inspired reliefs, introducing things from everyday life, such as cords, steel washers, and rubber. Then in 1965, amazed by the technical proficiency of Bontecou, Hesse began venturing into sculpture.⁵¹³

During his formative years, Judd spent considerable time assisting Kusama. And "in the fall of 1961," curator Thomas Kellein observed, "crucial aesthetic changes" took place for Judd.⁵¹⁴ While studying for a Master's degree in art history at Columbia University between 1957 and 1963, Judd was engaged less in making art

⁵¹² Doyle, interview by author, 10 October 2006. Doyle also remembers seeing Judd at Kusama's studio.

⁵¹³ According to Lippard, after a dinner one night with Bill Giles and Lee Bontecou, Hesse wrote: "I am amazed at what that woman can do. Actually the work involved is what impressed me so. The artistic result I have seen and know. This was the unveiling to me of what can be done, what I must learn, what there is to do. The complexity of her structures, what is involved, absolutely floored me." Eva Hesse cited in Lippard, *Eva Hesse*, 56.

⁵¹⁴ Thomas Kellein, "The Whole Space: The Early Work of Donald Judd," in *Donald Judd: Early Works 1955–1968*, exh. cat. (Bonn: VG Bild-Kunst, 2002), 34.

than in writing art criticism, through which he helped Kusama significantly.⁵¹⁵ Meantime, Kusama seems to have been an inspiration for his early development as an artist. He later recalled learning “a lot” from her, noting that “she was kind of a model for me,” and “I like a lot of her work.”⁵¹⁶ Her novice peers could easily have considered Kusama an example also by virtue of her public visibility. By the fall of 1961, she had had five solo exhibitions in the United States,⁵¹⁷ and that year her works were represented in the Whitney Annual and the Carnegie International.

Judd remembered competing with Kusama early in his career by, for instance, introducing chicken wire in his work. He first incorporated it in a painting in 1961 (fig. 3.9). Since Judd had used chicken wire in painting, Kusama chose to use it in a sculpture, her *Dressing Table* from 1963 (fig. 3.10).⁵¹⁸ Flavin explained that his own concern during this time was to treat “painting as object, as a physical object.”⁵¹⁹ This was the reason why his art around 1962 emulated “more and more [an] industrial object.” For instance, the way he “accepted the fluorescent light for itself. It *is* an

⁵¹⁵ See, for example, Judd, “Reviews and Previewes: New Names This Month—Yayoi Kusama,” 17; Donald Judd, “Local History,” *Arts Yearbook 7: New York—The New Art World* (1963): 22–35. Judd never finished his degree.

⁵¹⁶ Judd, interview by Munroe and Tomii, 8 December 1988.

⁵¹⁷ The five solo exhibitions included: Zoe Dusanne Gallery (1958), Brata Gallery (1959), Nove Gallery (1959), Gres Gallery (1960), and Stephen Radich Gallery (1961).

⁵¹⁸ Judd, interview by Munroe and Tomii, 8 December 1988. Chicken wire was integral to Judd’s and Kusama’s larger interest in junk art.

⁵¹⁹ Dan Flavin, cited in “Interview with Bruce Glaser,” 198.

industrial object.”⁵²⁰ He then began employing fluorescent light, in the place of paint, to provide color. Stella, meantime, wanted to keep the industrial paint on his canvas “as good as it was in the can.”⁵²¹

When Judd began to transform his painting into more object-like works, by employing commonplace materials, Kusama’s example seems to have influenced that transition. Judd’s goal at the time becomes clearer when we contrast his two early works, *Untitled (DSS 2)* from 1960 (fig. 3.11) and *Untitled (DSS 26)* from 1961 (fig. 3.12).⁵²² The ghost-like biomorphic lines that in *DSS 2* still convey some illusion of depth, are transformed in *DSS 26* into an emotionally restrained, solid, wall-like surface. Kusama might have consulted with Judd about this transition since he elided the sense of illusion in part by mixing black Liquitex with sand. His method is comparable to how Kusama initially painted her *kōsai*, where she mixed house paint with sand (see Chapter One). In a review of Kusama’s work from 1959, Judd described her *Net* paintings as “a black ground overlain with a wash of white.”⁵²³ After painting his plywood with black Liquitex mixed with sand, Judd then covered the uneven surface with heavily diluted cadmium red.⁵²⁴

In the same 1959 review, Judd interpreted Kusama’s *Net* paintings as “both

⁵²⁰ Ibid., Emphasis as in original.

⁵²¹ Stella, in *ibid.*, 199.

⁵²² With few exceptions, all of Donald Judd’s works are “Untitled.” The inventory numbers preceded by “DSS” refer to Brydon Smith, ed., *Donald Judd, A Catalogue of the Exhibition*, exh. cat. (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 1975).

⁵²³ Judd, “Yayoi Kusama,” 17.

⁵²⁴ Kellein, “The Whole Space,” 34.

complex and simple,” as they unfolded a “variety of configuration and expression from point to point across the surface,” which the viewer experienced in the passage of time.⁵²⁵ One prominent characteristic of Judd’s mature work, according to the art historian David Raskin, is the disparity between what can be visually observed and the work’s physicality. Thus, viewers can often find surprising configurations by walking around Judd’s objects. For instance, the frontal view of Judd’s *Untitled* (fig. 3.13) from 1966, looks like ten purple bars of various widths hanging from an aluminum bar. But from the side, the purple bars turn out to be L-shaped elements that cradle the upper bar.⁵²⁶ In another, earlier piece, the frontal view of *Untitled (DSS 37)* (fig. 3.14) from 1963 suggests an inverted letter T. But from the side, what appeared as a vertical bar turns out to be a frame holding a black aluminum sheet with vertically striped slits. The viewers’ perception of the distance between each slit would shift as they strolled around this work, leading them to invent the work continuously afresh, as it were, with the passing of time.

While pondering the temporal dimension in his art, it is possible that Judd also paid attention to the Düsseldorf-based international artists’ group Zero (see Chapter Two). Writing in 1973, Alloway observed that in their use of “monolithic or modular forms,” the German Zero artists preceded “minimal art in the United States.”⁵²⁷ Those Minimalists-to-be, Judd and Flavin most likely became aware of Zero’s

⁵²⁵ Judd, “Yayoi Kusama,” 17.

⁵²⁶ Raskin made an excellent analysis of this work. See David Raskin, “Judd’s Moral Art,” in *Donald Judd*, ed. Nicholas Serota, exh. cat. (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), 79–80.

⁵²⁷ Lawrence Alloway, “Viva Zero” (1973), in *Zero*, x.

achievements initially through an exhibition catalogue after Kusama participated in “Tentoonstelling nul” (“Zero Exhibition”) held at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in March 1962 (fig. 3.6). Judd’s claim in a February 1964 radio discussion (including also Flavin and Stella) was that: “I’m totally uninterested in European art and I think it’s over with.”⁵²⁸ That assertion has discouraged scholars from analyzing the relation of Judd’s formative works to those of his European contemporaries. But others in his cohort, such as Stella in the same interview, demonstrated awareness of European art. Noted Stella:

The [Paris-based] Group[e] de Recherche d’Art Visuel actually painted all the patterns before I did—all the basic designs that are in my painting—not the way I did it, but you can find the schemes of the sketches I made for my own paintings in work by Vasarely and that group in France over the last seven or eight years.⁵²⁹

One can deduce that, in his formative years, Judd was also not unaware of European developments.

In the early 1960s, Judd sometimes helped Kusama, who could not write letters in English, to compose important correspondence to European contacts. He would thus have become somewhat aware of the issues and developments at stake, especially among Zero-related artists in Europe.⁵³⁰ His exposure to the European

⁵²⁸ Judd, “Interview with Glaser,” 198. Judd’s xenophobia may have resulted from deriving certain political and aesthetic views from Barnett Newman, an artist he deeply respected. For Newman’s disenchantment with Europe, see my Chapter Two.

⁵²⁹ Stella, in *ibid.*, 197. Stella’s geometric style, however, matured in the fall of 1959, a year earlier than GRAV was established as a group.

⁵³⁰ In the 1960s, Kusama used various translators for her correspondence. Judd’s visits to Kusama’s loft are sometimes recorded in her calendar diary. For instance, on 26 January 1961, she logged, “Judd came with the manuscript.”

vanguard through Kusama could help account for why some aspects of his pivotal text, “Specific Objects” (1964), are similar to the Italian artist Enrico Castellani’s “Totality in the Art of Today,” as published in the 1962 Zero catalogue, *Tentoonstelling nul* (fig. 3.6). In that text, Castellani described the general tendency of his work (fig. 3.15) as “no longer [being] part of the domain of painting or sculpture.”⁵³¹ Judd echoed these words in 1964 when he wrote: “Half of the best new work in the last few years has been neither painting nor sculpture.”⁵³² Castellani saw a kinship between his new work and “the monumental character of architecture.”⁵³³ For his part, Judd referred to “the new three-dimensional work” as “more or less environmental.”⁵³⁴ In his text, Judd further considered Castellani’s wall relief and Yves Klein’s monochromes among the few “European paintings,” that were also “related to objects.”⁵³⁵

A “milestone” among Judd’s early works, according to Thomas Kellein, who investigated the artist’s early works, is a 1961 blue Liquitex painting with a wavy line, *Untitled (DSS 15)* (fig. 3.16a).⁵³⁶ Klein is best known for his monochromes (fig. 3.16b) with blue pigment covering the entire canvas including the side. He first

⁵³¹ Enrico Castellani, “Totality in the Arts of Today,” in *Tentoonstelling Nul*, ed. Henk Peeters (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1962), n.p.

⁵³² Donald Judd, “Specific Objects,” written in 1964, published in *Arts Yearbook 8* (1965), in *Donald Judd. Early Works*, 86.

⁵³³ Castellani, “Totality in the Arts of Today,” n.p.

⁵³⁴ Judd, “Specific Objects,” 91.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁵³⁶ Kellein, “The Whole Space,” 24.

exhibited in New York as part of a Leo Castelli group show along with Johns and Rauschenberg in October 1959. His work was again on view in 1960 at the Staempfli Gallery, in an exhibition called “Paris Obsessions” (which included one monochrome painting) and at Martha Jackson Gallery’s “New Forms—New Media” (which featured one sponge sculpture). Later, in April of 1961, Klein’s first solo exhibition in the United States, “Yves Klein: le monochrome” opened at Leo Castelli. Castelli did not consider the show to be successful.⁵³⁷ In the 1970s, he told an interviewer: “Nothing in Europe [was] good enough to sustain the effort. . . . I even had an Yves Klein show, which was totally rejected here—the blue paintings.”⁵³⁸ Despite the dealer’s negative account, Judd and Stella each acquired one of Klein’s blue monochromes.⁵³⁹ For Judd, it was only after finishing his own distinctive version of a blue near-monochrome painting, in 1961, that he could finally overpaint some of his earlier landscapes. He also looked for a color equally significant to him as “International Klein Blue” was to Klein, ultimately settling on a cadmium red.

The “origins” of Klein’s art “were alchemical rather than empirical,” in the

⁵³⁷ Castelli and Klein did not get along well. For example, after coming back from New York, the Japanese art critic and Klein’s friend, Segi Shinichi remembered how Klein made fun of Castelli, trying to find a difference in each monochrome so that he could explain why identical works were differently priced. Digital recording of Segi Shinichi, interview by author, Tokyo, 19 July 2006.

⁵³⁸ Castelli, statement of unknown date, before 1976, cited in “Leo Castelli-Bio,” 12.

⁵³⁹ Klein was an early influence on Judd, according to Peter Ballantine (formerly Judd’s assistant), in conversation with the author, New York, 8 May 2004. Though it is not possible to determine the purchase date, Judd owned Klein’s *Untitled* (Blue Monochrome) from 1957. Craig Rember (collection manager, Judd Foundation), e-mail to author, 24 March 2009. The work was sold at Christie’s in 2006. In 1964, Stella reported having one of Klein’s paintings, in “Interview with Glaser,” 200.

words of art historian Robert Pincus-Witten.⁵⁴⁰ But for Flavin, Judd, and Stella—since Klein’s work in New York was first shown with that of Johns and Rauschenberg—his blue monochromes likely translated materially as a kind of ready-made, industrially-oriented half-object / half-painting. In “Specific Objects,” Judd thus appraised “Yves Klein’s blue paintings” as the only contemporary painting that qualified as “unspatial.” His blue monochromes fulfilled Judd’s view of the desirable new artistic direction by getting “rid of the problems of illusionism and of literal space,” making “neither painting nor sculpture” that “related to objects.”⁵⁴¹

In 1964, in order to further industrialize the process of making his art, Judd began employing Bernstein Brothers Sheet Metal Specialties, Inc., to fabricate his Minimalist works. Though Kusama was never categorized as a Minimalist artist, in December of 1963, she had taken a mechanical process to its limit and printed posters that she used as wallpaper for her first environment, *Aggregation: One Thousand Boats Show* (fig. 3.17).

However diverse their work, this cohort of young artists had much in common. They tended to share also their connections within the art world. Judd credited Kusama for presenting his work to the dealer Richard Bellamy during a studio visit, most likely in May 1962, to consider her for a possible solo exhibition.⁵⁴² Bellamy eventually took on Judd and Flavin. Judd later recounted: “I was taken for the gallery,

⁵⁴⁰ Robert Pincus-Witten, *Yves Klein USA* (Paris: Éditions Dilecta, 2009), 37.

⁵⁴¹ Judd, “Specific Objects,” 89, 92, 94.

⁵⁴² Judd, interview by Munroe and Tomii, 8 December 1988. The date of Bellamy’s studio visit, see Yamamura, “Yayoi Kusama’s Early New York Years,” 61.

but Yayoi wasn't," and "Yayoi would liked to have been in Green Gallery."⁵⁴³ In early 1962, as her exclusive dealer, Beatrice Perry, had failed to open her promised gallery in New York, Kusama desperately looked for an influential representative in New York.⁵⁴⁴ Since she considered the Green Gallery to be the "most active" in the vanguard scene, she longed to join it.⁵⁴⁵ She had good prospects, because Bellamy, who was known as an astute connoisseur of new art, had expressed interest in her work even before opening his gallery in 1960.⁵⁴⁶ He was also known to be receptive to Asian artists, as he was himself partly of Asian decent (his mother having been a Chinese immigrant to the United States). However, for reasons that will become clearer in what follows, Kusama's avenue to the Green Gallery eventually closed.

The Archrival

In the fall of 1961, Kusama's inventory listed two new works of "stickers," indicating the shift of her focus away from the abstract *Net* paintings to her new choice of medium. In her 1963 WABC radio interview with Gordon Brown, Kusama recalled that in 1961, she had made "many collages of postage stamps, airmail stickers, and paper dollars."⁵⁴⁷ Bypassing the prevailing optimism about consumer

⁵⁴³ Judd, interview by Munroe and Tomii, 8 December 1988.

⁵⁴⁴ Kusama, letter to Bellamy, 29 January 1963.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁶ Richard Hu Bellamy, postcard to Yayoi Kusama, 18 August 1960, Kusama Papers.

⁵⁴⁷ Kusama, "Miss Yayoi Kusama: Interview Prepared for WABC Radio by Gordon Brown, Executive Editor of *Art Voice*" (1963), in *De nieuwe stijl/The New Style 2* (Amsterdam: Nul Publication, 1965), 162.

society initially described by Alloway, however, her new body of work communicated a degree of unease with consumer society through the obsessive repetition of commonplace objects.

Accumulation of Stamps No. 63 from 1962 (fig. 3.18) is one of her early collages, executed on top of one of her 1958 *sumi*-ink paintings. From the arrangement of the mass-produced labels used in this work, it appears she began working from the upper-left corner by sticking labels from top to bottom, then completing row after row, moving from left to right. In this arrangement, Kusama registered the variation of her hand by misaligning some of the labels, at times overlapping later rows with earlier rows or creating wider gaps between stickers. She thus imparted a tension between the regularity of the machine-made labels and the irregularity of their placement. Furthermore, the stickers' edges are deliberately cut off at the edge of the base paper, suggesting (as in some of Mondrian's paintings), a continuation of the stickers beyond what is visible. Indirectly, this work could be seen to illustrate her choice of words in a 1963 radio interview: "I feel as if I were driving on the highway or carried on an endless conveyor belt until my death."⁵⁴⁸

Loosely invoking the modern factory production line, her collage gave her onlookers an inkling of industrial capitalism, which converted practically everything—from labor to land—into commodities, slowly changing anterior values or human motivations measured, in the economic historian Karl Polanyi's words, by "honor and pride, civic obligation and moral duty, even self-respect and common

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

decency,” into “hunger and gain,” and mandating every individual to live on profits.⁵⁴⁹ By intentionally distorting the mass-produced labels, Kusama resisted, in a however limited or symbolic way, values associated with capitalism, which she felt was beginning to annihilate all humane qualities.

The serial repetitions in her work “looked so much like Warhol[’s],” reminisced Oldenburg in 1989.⁵⁵⁰ And it is possible that her anxiety-ridden obsessive repetition had captured the young Andy Warhol’s attention. Jackson McLow remembers that, at this time in the early 1960s, Warhol “ran around New York taking in everything,” aggressively seeking to establish himself in the New York art world.⁵⁵¹ Though Kusama no longer remembers having exhibited her sticker collage in New York, Judd reported that one of her collages was shown in a group show just before Warhol himself began working with the serial images. The exhibition took place in the fall of 1961 at the Stephen Radich Gallery in the Upper East Side gallery district, not far from Andy Warhol’s residence.⁵⁵² Of course, Warhol could have missed the exhibition. But Judd thought that he had seen her work.⁵⁵³ This is because

⁵⁴⁹ Karl Polanyi, “Our Obsolete Market Mentality,” in *Primitive, Archaic, and Modern Economies*, ed. George Dalton (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 69–70.

⁵⁵⁰ Audio recording of Claes Oldenburg, interview by Alexandra Munroe and Reiko Tomii, New York, 21 February 1989, CICA/ATT/001.47.

⁵⁵¹ Jackson McLow cited in Wolf Vostell, “No Blood Please “ (1977), in *No!art: Pin-Ups, Excrement, Protest, Jew-Art*, eds. Seymour Krim and Boris Lurie (Berlin and Köln: Edition Hundertmark, 1988), 18.

⁵⁵² Kusama, interview by author, 28 July 2006; Judd, interview by Munroe and Tomii, 8 December 1988; in 1961, Warhol lived about ten blocks away from Radich Gallery.

⁵⁵³ Judd, interview by Munroe and Tomii, 8 December 1988. A number of curators and critics have also remarked Kusama’s influence on canonical male artists of the

the gallery had a large shop window facing the street, through which passersby could gaze at the artworks on display. The exhibition in question is mentioned in Kusama's letter to her Washington, D.C. dealer Beatrice Perry, dated 19 September 1961. She wrote that the group show was going to "open on September 21st for three weeks," and she was participating because "this will be my last chance showing my work in New York this season."⁵⁵⁴ She uncharacteristically failed to record the works she brought to the Radich Gallery. However, it is quite possible that after her successful May 1961 Radich exhibition, Kusama regained her confidence and revisited her experiments with the banal objects that she began to use in 1960, according to Judd's recollection. Since the group show represented her last chance to show her work in New York during the 1962 season, Kusama may well have introduced one of her latest experiments, in order to gain critical attention and to position herself within the nascent Junk art movement in New York.

Warhol, for his part, had begun painting images from advertisements and comic strips in early 1961. The paintings' banal subjects effectively collapsed the interstices between art and life, just as Alloway encouraged in his "New Forms—New Media" catalogue text.⁵⁵⁵ After accidentally encountering similar comic-based

1960s. See, for example, Munroe, Karia ed., *Kusama*, 20; Kim Levin, "Odd Woman Out." According to Judd, one of Kusama's works used to hang on Warhol's Factory wall. But this work was not among the ones auctioned after his death in 1986, making it impossible to identify it. Judd, interview by Munroe and Tomii. 8 December 1988.

⁵⁵⁴ Yayoi Kusama, letter to Beatrice Perry, 19 September 1962, in Folder "Beatrice Perry," Kusama Papers.

⁵⁵⁵ The potential subject matters Alloway listed which he termed "non-hierarchical," included: "table cloths, kitchen utensils, light bulbs, animals, baseballs, reproduction of Old Masters, hats, packing crates, comic strips, love stories, Coca Cola." Alloway,

paintings by Roy Lichtenstein at Leo Castelli, however, he mindfully avoided an overlap with the rising art star and quickly abandoned this direction. In the latter half of 1961, he looked for new images and techniques that could establish him in the new movement. That December, Warhol painted his first image of a *Campbell's Soup Can*. Johns's *Painted Bronze* (1960), two hand-painted Ballantine Ale cans, in a way anticipated Warhol's soup cans. Warhol's interest soon turned to more extensive repetition of his commonplace objects, however, and in the following month, he began multiplying his soup can image.⁵⁵⁶

It is possible that Warhol noticed the Greek-born female artist Chryssa's repetitive imagery at the "New Forms—New Media" exhibition (fig. 3.2). But the timing of his turn to repetition was closer to Kusama's 1961 exhibition. Once he had been established in the art world, it was his multiplication of images that gave rise to discussion as to whether or not Warhol's art "foster[ed] critical or subversive apprehension of mass culture and the power of the image as commodity," as Thomas Crow framed it.⁵⁵⁷

In 1987, Crow scrutinized a number of Warhol's early portraits and the "Death" series and argued that the artist's choices of subject matter and treatment of images were emotionally charged visions of American life.⁵⁵⁸ But Warhol's often

New Forms—New Media I, n.p.

⁵⁵⁶ Frie and Printz, *The Andy Warhol Catalog Raisonné*, 1: 64.

⁵⁵⁷ Thomas Crow, "Saturday Disasters: Trace and Reference in Early Warhol," *Art in America* (May 1987): 130, 132.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 129-36.

photo-based works have most often been interpreted as evincing emotional detachment, in part by obscuring the visible marks of an artist's hand, thus calling into question the role of the artist as the author of an artwork. The "impersonality" widely observed in American Pop art was explained by Oldenburg as reflective of the artists' milieu; Pop emerged, he argued, as "the reaction to the painting of the last generation, which is generally believed to have been a highly subjective generation."⁵⁵⁹

The two editors of Warhol's *Catalog Raisonné*, George Frie and Neil Printz, have lately demonstrated how Warhol carefully planned and executed his images to make them look impersonal. When Warhol worked on his single portrait of *Campbell's Soup Can*, for example, he first clipped source materials from two different advertisements (figs. 3.19a and 3.19b) and made Photostats to project onto the primed canvas. After deciding on an image and a composition (fig. 3.20), he carefully traced the projected image onto the canvas, using a pencil. He then painted outlines in black, and filled in the other colors.

What helped make Warhol a successful painter, I believe, was the particular attention he paid to details. For example, in order to impart a clean, mechanical look to a row of fleurs-de-lis that appears at the bottom of one soup can from the Mönchengladbach type (fig. 3.20), he carved a stamp out of an art gum eraser, and printed them one by one. Toward the edges, he reduced the ink, so that the symbols would appear to recede. For his later, serial composition of the cans, Warhol selected

⁵⁵⁹ Claes Oldenburg in "Claes Oldenburg, Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol: A Discussion with Bruce Glaser" (1964), in *Pop*, ed. Mark Francis (London: Phaidon, 2005), 234 (hereafter cited as "A Discussion with Glaser").

Campbell's corporate logo (fig. 3.19c)—the most iconic-looking soup can image—and this time, he made a stencil from the source image, so that he could give the images a more uniform look.⁵⁶⁰

Around March 1962, Warhol developed further his art gum eraser technique with another commercial image and made his first version of the accumulated stamps, *S&H Green Stamps* (fig. 3.21). Using three plates carved out of the eraser, this work evinced an openly handmade-quality, which was perhaps unsatisfactory to Warhol, who, in an interview in the fall of 1963, legendarily proclaimed: "I want to be a machine."⁵⁶¹ Subsequent to *S&H Green Stamps*, Warhol thus used a single image, again made out of an art gum eraser. This time, he was able to achieve a cleaner repetition of the image of the airmail sticker in a work entitled *Red Airmail Stamps* (fig. 3.22). However, he was apparently not fully satisfied with this work, for after *Red Airmail Stamps*, he began experimenting with silkscreen.

In his first screen-print painting series, *One-Dollar Bills* (fig. 3.23),⁵⁶² he avoided creating a clean repetition of the transferred images of the illustrated one-dollar bill. Instead, he misaligned the images and, at some points, made them

⁵⁶⁰ One reason that Warhol's identity as a painter was called into question from the time he first produced such works was due to his previous experience as a commercial artist. Basing his independent work on commercial techniques represented a fusion of high and low culture that "was unthinkable to many, who saw it as the harbinger of a larger threat to establish social and cultural distinctions," wrote Sara Doris. Sara Doris, *Pop Art and the Contest Over American Culture* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1.

⁵⁶¹ Gene R. Swenson, "What Is Pop Art? Answer from 8 Painters, Part 1" (1963), in *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews*, ed. Kenneth Goldsmith (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2004), 18.

⁵⁶² Frie and Printz, *The Andy Warhol Catalog Raisonné*, 1: 131.

intentionally faded, which achieved a tension between the regularity of the transferred images and the registration of a degree of the accidental, an effect somewhat comparable to that seen in Kusama's *Accumulation of Stamps No. 63* (fig. 3.18).

In June 1962, Kusama and Warhol both participated in the same group show at the Green Gallery along with Robert Morris, Claes Oldenburg, James Rosenquist, Richard Smith, Robert Whitman, and Philip Wofford. Kusama consigned two furniture sculptures covered by sewn and stuffed protuberances as well as four sticker collages, which incorporated actual stickers.⁵⁶³ The director of Green Gallery, Richard Hu Bellamy, chose to showcase Kusama's first soft sculptures, *Accumulation No. 1* (armchair) and *No. 2* (couch), in the main gallery (figs. 3.24 and 3.25), which was a successful strategy. Reviewing the Green Gallery exhibition, *The New York Times* critic Brian O'Doherty expressed awe at Kusama's "surrealist couch and chair," which he described as having "broken out frighteningly," while he held an unfavorable opinion of the paintings by Warhol, Rosenquist and others that hung in the main room of the exhibition.⁵⁶⁴ Such opinions would soon start to change, however, as Warhol became part of the art world's establishment. As of 1962, however, Kusama and Warhol were effectively equals and similarly ambitious. Visiting the Green Gallery exhibition in June 1962, the artist Martha Nilsson Edelheit remembers that in the gallery's backroom, Kusama and Warhol were sitting in front of

⁵⁶³ Kusama, Notebook No. 2, Kusama Papers.

⁵⁶⁴ He assessed: "the paintings in this exhibition are bad." Brian O'Doherty, "Season's End: Abstractions and Distractions," *The New York Times*, 17 June 1962, p. 103.

Bellamy, trying to impress him with each proclaiming: “I only show with stars.”⁵⁶⁵

Within that category, they most definitely did not include each other.

Soft Sculptures

One of Kusama’s most original contributions to the New York art world was her sewn soft sculpture, which Oldenburg later called her “psychotic art” with a “very aesthetic direction.”⁵⁶⁶ This body of work began to emerge soon after MoMA’s “Art of Assemblage” exhibition (2 October-12 November 1961). Unlike the more Dada-focused “New Forms—New Media,” “Art of Assemblage” included some Surrealist assemblages, such as Yves Tanguy’s sewn soft-sculpture (fig. 3.26), which sparked Kusama’s initial interest in Surrealism. The show’s catalogue-reproduced two mannequins—one by Salvador Dali and the other by Wolfgang Paalen (figs. 3.27a and 3.27b). Kusama was particularly drawn to the Surrealists’ innovative use of materials. The mannequins use by Dali and Paalen may have inspired her *Macaroni Girl* (fig. 3.28) of 1963, while Tanguy’s sewn soft sculpture (fig. 3.26) may have encouraged her to sew her own sculptures. Two months after the “Art of Assemblage” exhibition, Kusama’s calendar-diary includes entries about acquiring a piece of furniture (January 31, 1962) and a rowboat (February 6, 1962). Judd remembered pushing the rowboat on dollies through the streets with her.⁵⁶⁷ In March 1962, she created the

⁵⁶⁵ Judith Stein, interview with Martha Nilsson Edelheit. Judith Stein, e-mail to author, 20 March 2010.

⁵⁶⁶ Oldenburg, interview by Munroe and Tomii, New York, 21 February 1989.

⁵⁶⁷ Judd, interview by Munroe and Tomii, 8 December 1988.

first of her *Accumulation* series, *Accumulation No. 1* (armchair) as well as the second egg-carton relief (fig. 3.29), both fraught with psychosexual undertones.

Kusama's interest in household objects, such as a couch and an armchair in early 1962, reflected the latest trend in New York. In 1961, Martha Jackson included Warhol's paintings of a *Telephone* and *Typewriter* (figs. 3.5a & 3.5b) in a group exhibition, and Castelli showcased Lichtenstein's comic-based paintings depicting the domestic environment. Then, on 1 December 1961, "just in time for the Christmas shopping season," as described by Bruce Altshuler,⁵⁶⁸ Oldenburg began selling his 107 artworks mimicking consumer products, ranging "from \$21.79 for a painted plaster oval mirror to \$899.95 for the large figure of a bride" at his new studio, an old storefront located at 107 East 2nd Street. He called this two-month-long storefront campaign "The Store." In an interview with Barbara Rose in 1969, he explained that the "museum is a bourgeois institution . . . but the store, the popular museum, is beneath—and therefore safe from—bourgeois values."⁵⁶⁹ At MoMA's "Pop Art Symposium" in 1962, Leo Steinberg further interpreted "pop art" as "middle-class values" unseating the bourgeoisie and "play[ing] his [bourgeois] role with a vengeance." He saw that "What was peripheral [middle-class value] becomes central," representing a change in strategy in contemporary art.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁸ Bruce Altshuler, "From Pop Triumphant: A New Realism," in *Pop Art: A Critical History*, ed. Steven Henry Madoff (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California, 1997), 397.

⁵⁶⁹ Barbara Rose, "The Ray Gun Manufacturing Company," in *Claes Oldenburg*, ed. Rose, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 65.

⁵⁷⁰ Leo Steinberg, "A Symposium on Pop Art," in *Arts Magazine*, 40.

By 1962, a newly emergent junk culture in New York began to increasingly resonate with subject matter traditionally gendered as feminine. This development was somewhat troubling for women artists, however. “If the first major Pop artists had been women,” observed Lucy Lippard, “the movement might never have gotten out of the kitchen.”⁵⁷¹ But since it was principally male artists who were dealing with a “woman’s domain,” as Cécile Whiting put it, critics began considering “Pop’s ability to ride the line between high art and consumer culture” as a destabilizing factor.⁵⁷² Since the artists’ gender could make a difference in the way an artwork was received, for women who later became known as Pop artists especially, expressions of sexuality and gender grew to be vital aspects of their artworks.

As discussed earlier, influenced in part by Alloway’s interpretation of Pop art, male artists such as Wesselmann and Lichtenstein often took an (ostensibly) optimistic approach to consumer culture, while female artists tended to be more overtly critical and anxiety-ridden about consumerism. Art historian Joan Marter, for instance, interpreted Mimi Smith’s rubber-mat wedding gown and other clothing made out of household objects as proto-feminist, and as critiquing women’s roles in the domestic sphere. Marter also interpreted the Paris-born Venezuelan artist Marisol’s *Love*—Marisol’s mouth serving as a pedestal for a Coca-Cola bottle—as indicative of consumerist anxiety.⁵⁷³ Even as she incorporated household objects in

⁵⁷¹ Lucy Lippard, “Household Images in Art,” in *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women’s Art* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1976), 56.

⁵⁷² Cécile Whiting, “Introduction,” in *A Taste For Pop: Pop Art, Gender and Consumer Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 2-5.

⁵⁷³ Joan Marter, “Blasting Another Canon: The Women of Pop Art” (paper presented

her work, Kusama, like Smith and Marisol, eschewed an optimistic embrace of mass culture. In her case, too, a heightened attention to sexuality and gender were key. In this regard, her December 1961 encounter with the psychiatrist Yasuhiko Taketomo turned out to be instrumental.

Although Kusama was already exposed to psychiatry in Japan through her acquaintance with the psychiatrist Shihō Nishimaru, Japanese psychiatric practice in the 1950s differed significantly from Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis as practiced in the West. Nishimaru specialized in dissecting actual human brains to analyze the properties attached to genius and in creating artists' pathographies in order to study their works.⁵⁷⁴ Taketomo offered Kusama something new, and she seems to have been truly intrigued by his psychoanalytical interpretation of her work. In his opinion, her creativity was driven by her obsessive-compulsive disorder, which was part of the anxiety neurosis that afflicted her. Kusama kept a handwritten note from Taketomo that explained her neurosis in both English and Japanese.⁵⁷⁵ According to Taketomo's note, a patient suffering from this neurotic disorder exhibits irrational thoughts (obsession) that would result in repetitive behaviors (compulsion).

After her encounter with Taketomo, Kusama began deliberately harnessing the terms of psychoanalysis to explain her work. She was particularly drawn to Freudian

at the Second Annual Feminist Art History Conference at American University, Washington, D.C., 5 November 2011).

⁵⁷⁴ In one case, Nishimaru created a pathography of the renowned Japanese novelist Sōseki Natsume by searching for a relationship between Natsume's work and his bipolar tendency. Nishimaru, "Records of wandering," 65–69.

⁵⁷⁵ Yasuhiko Taketomo, handwritten note, ca. 1962. Folder "1962," Kusama Papers.

symbolism.⁵⁷⁶ When Kusama conceptualized the *Accumulations*, she explored deeply in her psyche the feelings that Freud labeled “uncanny,” and which she herself described as *kyōfu* (“fear”). At this time, she developed the image of the phallus, which became the principal component in this new series.⁵⁷⁷ Freud defined the idea of the uncanny as repressed “infantile morbid anxiety from which the majority of human beings have never become quite free.”⁵⁷⁸ Therefore, an uncanny experience is also a recurring experience that springs from what Freud introduced as “the castration-complex.”⁵⁷⁹ He connected this complex with Oedipus, a mythical Greek king of Thebes who unknowingly killed his father and married his biological mother.⁵⁸⁰

Freud also tied these complex thoughts to the issue of sexual preference. Freud believed that in order for a child to develop heterosexual desires, the “Oedipus

⁵⁷⁶ In one statement, she wrote: “Freudian sexual components are certainly present.” Kusama with Gordon Brown, “Kusama, Kusama, Kusama (World’s First Obsessional Artist),” typescript, 1966, Kusama Papers. This could be seen as comparable to the way Salvador Dali used “Freud’s texts as a source of his work, the same way medieval artists mined the Bible,” as art historian Keith Jordan frames it. Keith Jordan, response to the author’s conference paper, “Yayoi Kusama: Trauma and Gendered Reception of Women’s Mental Health,” presented at *The Second Mid Atlantic Women’s and Gender Historians’ Biennale* in 2006. Keith Jordan, e-mail message to author, 2 June 2006. Her neighbors from this early 1960s period testify today that she referred to herself not by the first-person pronoun “I,” but as “Yayoi,” just as Dali referred to himself as “Dali.” Doyle, interview by author, 10 October 2006; Yrissary (Kusama’s neighbors from 1962), conversation with author, 29 August 2008.

⁵⁷⁷ Kusama, *Infinity Nets*, 39-40.

⁵⁷⁸ Sigmund Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’” (1919), in *On Creativity and the Unconscious* (New York: Harper, 1958), 161.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 151, 157.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 137.

complex must collapse”—for boys, via castration anxiety and for girls, via penis envy.⁵⁸¹ Since Kusama predicated the idea for the *Accumulation* series in part on Freud, the repetitive phallus rendered in these works could be interpreted in terms of both castration anxiety and penis envy.

According to Freud, an unsuccessful resolution to the Oedipus complex can result in neurosis, pedophilia, and homosexuality.⁵⁸² He further explained that, “a doubling or multiplication of the genital symbol,” sprung from the “soil of unbounded self-love, from the primary narcissism.”⁵⁸³ These explanations may have resonated with Kusama as she reckoned with her own troubling and unconventional sexuality. Her artist-neighbor from the early 1960s, Ed Clark, remembers Kusama telling him she was a “lesbian.”⁵⁸⁴ And in a 1969 interview, Kusama declared that she was “carrying the banner for homosexual liberation.”⁵⁸⁵ Her psychiatrist from the 1980s, however, described Kusama as “asexual.”⁵⁸⁶ Yet Kusama also did have heterosexual relationships, though sex did not seem to be especially important to her personal life. In her 1997 interview with Andrew Solomon, for example, she described her liaison

⁵⁸¹ Freud, “The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex,” in *The Freud Reader*, 662.

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*, 664; *Idem.*, “On Narcissism: An Introduction,” *Ibid.*, 552, 54-56.

⁵⁸³ *Idem.*, “The ‘Uncanny,’” in *On Creativity*, 141.

⁵⁸⁴ Digital recording of Ed Clark, interview by author, New York, 9 October 2006.

⁵⁸⁵ “Nyūyōku dōman’nakade sekkusu o enshutsu suru Nihon jōsei” [“A Japanese woman who directs sex in the middle of New York City”], *Heibon Panchi* [*Heibon Punch*] 6, no. 44, 10 November 1969, p.133.

⁵⁸⁶ Yoshihito Tokuda, interview by Alexandra Munroe, Tokyo, 26 December 1988, CICA/ATT/001.25.

with Joseph Cornell as “an ideal relationship,” explaining that she “disliked sex and he was impotent so we suited each other very well.”⁵⁸⁷ Her unconventional approach to sexuality is further suggested in her portrait from around 1967 (fig. 3.30). The image captures Kusama wearing a tie and a monkey fur coat, aggressively looking into the camera while flaunting a single phallic object placed near her crotch, suggesting the phallus that she might wish to have. What made this seemingly hostile image approachable is Kusama’s humor, in this instance, expressed through the placement of the truncated phallus on a kitchen spoon.

The *Accumulations*—which she produced with assistants—significantly differed, of course, from the preceding *Net* paintings.⁵⁸⁸ In 1998, Lynn Zelevansky explained Kusama’s turn to the phallus as a bid “to ward off [her] anxiety.”⁵⁸⁹ Two years later, Mignon Nixon suggested a political reading for the “graphic rendering of the penis-as-fragment” in Kusama’s work which “send[s] up the phallic symbol as an emblem of patriarchal authority.” With “its compulsive repetition,” the “phallus could be *lost*,” suggesting that our conventional idea of patriarchy, could be thwarted and altered.⁵⁹⁰ Both writers made important points. If the phallus, as a symbol of patriarchy, was a source of Kusama’s anxiety, then, as Nixon suggested, the artist

⁵⁸⁷ Kusama, interview by Andrew Solomon, *Artforum* (February 1997): 73.

⁵⁸⁸ According to Helen Yrissary, one of Kusama’s friends who assisted her in making soft sculptures, five people from the neighborhood routinely helped Kusama to complete a large number of sculptures in a short period of time. Helen Yrissary, interviewed by Heather Lenz, video recording by Hart Perry, 29 August 2008.

⁵⁸⁹ Zelevansky, *Love Forever*, 18.

⁵⁹⁰ Nixon, “Posing the Phallus,” 103, 108, 111-114. Emphasis as in original.

needed to grapple with the phallus in order to improve her situation. Kusama was never married and never conformed to the roles socially imposed on women of her generation in Japan. In light of her refusal to conform, her *Accumulation* series might be seen in part also as an effort to destabilize conventional ideas of sexuality. Particularly in comparison to works by those in the female Pop and New Realist art cohorts in New York, such as Marisol and Niki de Saint Phalle, Kusama made sexuality the key factor in her work, especially by extrapolating from Surrealism. The resultant objects seem to have immediately intrigued the young Oldenburg, who shared her interests in psychoanalysis.⁵⁹¹

In the first half of 1962, Oldenburg was desperate to find a means to transform his *Store* and his time-based Happenings into self-contained works that could be shown in uptown commercial galleries. In his own words, he wanted to make “art that would fit inside the gallery The sort of things you would have in the living room,” what he called “salon art.”⁵⁹² He also wanted to work with “material that is organic-seeming and full of surprises, inventive all by itself.” But in 1961, he did not consider sewing as part of his practice. He wrote:

[W]ire, which has a decided life of its own, paper, which one must obey and

⁵⁹¹ In a 1973 interview, Oldenburg explained: “Fetishism is an extremely important thing to me both in the object-making and in the Happenings. Fetishistic behavior—that book, *Sexual Aberrations* by Stekel, which is so important to the happenings, which is about people acting out all kinds of things in relation to objects and so on. All the rituals that are listed in there were very influential on happenings. So that’s a very important—I mean one could see it as a psychological I mean rather than a religious property of the object.” Oldenburg, interview by Cummings, transcript, 27 December 1973, 200.

⁵⁹² In this portion of the interview, he specifically spoke about his soft sculptures. Oldenburg, interview by Cummings, transcript, 27 December 1973, 218.

will not be ruled too much, or cardboard, which is downright hostile, or wood with its sullen stubbornness Yet I also require loose form. Plaster and paper are not only necessities, they perform in a living manner. I am naturally drawn to “living” material, and it gives me great pleasure to experience the freedom of material with my hands.⁵⁹³

In the Green Gallery group exhibition of June 1962, where Kusama premiered her *Accumulation No. 1* and *No. 2* (figs. 3.24 and 3.25), Oldenburg (who had not yet launched his own soft sculpture series) showed a suit with a shirt and tie made of muslin “dipped in plaster, placed on a wire, a chicken wire...[which] then...gets hard.”⁵⁹⁴ He would later admit that he was most interested in Kusama’s sewn sculptures, going so far as to say that he went to all of her exhibitions through 1964. In his exact words: “I remember Sofa [1962], I remember a boat [1963-64], I remember ladder [1964].” But he has also firmly denied her influence: he has said that his soft sculpture developed separately from hers, because his work already had a “very cloth-like look.” And he informed people erroneously that the date of the group show with Kusama was 1963.⁵⁹⁵ But the timing of the advent of his soft sculpture is too close to their June 1962 group show to accept his explanation at face value. Immediately after this show, Oldenburg “used [the space of] Green Gallery [which

⁵⁹³ Barbara Rose, “The Baroque Style of Mr. Anonymous,” in *Claes Oldenburg*, 152.

⁵⁹⁴ Oldenburg, interview by Munroe and Tomii, 21 February 1989.

⁵⁹⁵ Oldenburg used a sewn prop entitled “Upside-Down City” in his *Ray Gun Theater* around May 1962. *Claes Oldenburg: An Anthology* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 1995), 142–43. However, he never produced any sewn-piece as an independent artwork until after July 1962. A photograph of Oldenburg making his first giant soft sculptures at the closed Green Gallery during this summer is reproduced in Rose, *Claes Oldenburg*, 201.

was closed for the summer] for making a lot of sculpture pieces” (fig. 3.31).⁵⁹⁶

Despite his desire to “experience . . . material with my hands,” since he did not know how to sew, Oldenburg delegated his then wife, Patty Mucha, to labor over his new body of works. Mucha now recalls, “I was very proud of the work I did for Claes. Their existence had a lot to do with my ability to sew...and his need to make big sculpture.”⁵⁹⁷ These became his first soft sculptures, which he has lately described as “metamorphic” sculptures—meaning, ordinary objects that he transformed into something else by manipulating their materials, texture, or size.⁵⁹⁸

In June 1962, when Kusama first showed her sewn soft sculpture, much of the art audience, including New York critics, would likely have been residing in their summer homes. Exhibitions held in this month usually attracted very little attention, as opposed to shows held at the season’s opening in September. Critical attention thus eluded both Kusama’s soft sculptures and collages. According to Kusama, Bellamy offered her a solo exhibition at Green Gallery in September 1962. But she had to postpone, since she did not yet have enough sculptures to fill the gallery.⁵⁹⁹ It was

⁵⁹⁶ Oldenburg, interview by Munroe and Tomii, 21 February 1989.

⁵⁹⁷ Patty Mucha, e-mail message to the author, 20 September 2006. According to Oldenburg, Mucha not only visualized his ideas, but her viewpoint in regard to sewing influenced the conception of his work. Oldenburg, interview by Cummings, transcript, 27 December 1973, 179.

⁵⁹⁸ Oldenburg, cited in Carol Kino, “Going Softly into a Parallel Universe,” *The New York Times*, 17 May 2009, AR 30. Recently, Oldenburg has begun sounding as if the softness of his work is not an essential factor. However, when he spoke in 1989, he claimed it was the softness that initially brought a singular importance to his work. Oldenburg, interview by Munroe and Tomii, 21 February 1989.

⁵⁹⁹ Kusama, interview by author, 14 June 2004. This information emerged in response to the author’s question: “Why do you remember the date of the group show that

Oldenburg who got the opportunity and instead showed in the September slot, where he premiered the sewn-soft sculptures that brought him immediate international attention.⁶⁰⁰

Of course, artists in general typically work in some measure under the influence of other artists. At the time of Kusama's critical upsurge in 1989, Oldenburg and Judd both unequivocally pointed out her influence on Warhol, for example. And Oldenburg additionally suggested the impact of her work on the young Lucas Samaras.⁶⁰¹ It is evident that Kusama's work had an impact. But critics did not recognize her as an influential artist. The most compelling explanation for that omission is the fact that, despite the inclusion of a few female artists, such as Chryssa, Marisol, and Bontecou, the early sixties art world was still highly homophilic. And it was "a world where both men and women are trying to please men in power," recalled Louise Bourgeois.⁶⁰² The best seasonal slots in first-rate galleries were usually reserved for young male artists to give them the best possible exposure. Warhol, as one of those rising male artists, carefully avoided having his work overlap with Lichtenstein's comic-based paintings, while Kusama's work was, by contrast,

actually took place in June as in September?"

⁶⁰⁰ It is quite possible that Oldenburg's solo exhibition was offered to him in June, since he created all his new works for the September exhibition between July and August. For the reception of Oldenburg's exhibition, see, for example, Sidney Tillim, "Month in Review," *Arts Magazine* (November 1962): 36-38.

⁶⁰¹ Oldenburg, interview by Munroe and Tomii, 21 February 1989; Judd, interview by Munroe and Tomii, 8 December 1988.

⁶⁰² Louise Bourgeois "Sixty-one Questions" (1971), in *Destruction of the Father Reconstruction of the Father: Writings and Interviews, 1923-1997* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998), 94.

permissible to draw from because he likely recognized that, as a Japanese national and a woman, she was destined to be marginalized and diminished. Just so, Oldenburg once assessed her work as not “central to the scene.”⁶⁰³

After Oldenburg’s exhibition, Bellamy included Kusama only three times in group shows, but no longer considered representing her. By the time she secured a new gallery and exhibited her own sewn sculptures, in December of 1963, Oldenburg had switched to Sidney Janis, an established gallery, and was fully recognized in the New York scene.⁶⁰⁴

The Age of Anxiety

Judd remembered that Kusama “was irritated by Warhol,” but her shock at seeing Oldenburg’s sewn sculptures at Green Gallery was immeasurable, as she had reportedly become “very paranoid about the New York art situation.”⁶⁰⁵ Another artist-neighbor from this period, Ed Clark, remembers that she suddenly became obsessed with the thought that her ideas might be appropriated, which compelled her to close all the curtains on the windows of her loft facing Park Avenue and Nineteenth Street.⁶⁰⁶ Kusama’s translator from this period remembered also that in 1962 she

⁶⁰³ Oldenburg, interview by Munroe and Tomii, 21 February 1989.

⁶⁰⁴ During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Janis was a very important gallery. Ed Clark, who was Janis’s art handler, remembers that Kusama, trying to establish her reputation, sent her artwork to the gallery once during the owner’s absence so as to set up a viewing for an important collector. She wanted the collector to think that Janis represented her. Clark, interview by author, 8 July 2004.

⁶⁰⁵ Judd, interview by Munroe and Tomii, 8 December 1988,

⁶⁰⁶ Clark, interview by author, 9 October 2006.

obsessively closed all her windows, and had great difficulty leaving her studio.⁶⁰⁷

Indeed, a photograph taken in the fall of 1962 shows huge canvases serving as screens, placed before the large windows (fig. 3.32).⁶⁰⁸

The tension Kusama experienced due to her perceived rivalries as well as her desperate need to have a solo exhibition featuring her new body of work drove her to furiously complete, with the help of many assistants, a massive number of sewn sculptures in a short period. The stress of it all drove Kusama in 1962 to her second nervous breakdown since arriving in New York.⁶⁰⁹ In an unpublished manuscript from 1966, she described this 1962 depression: “I was gravely afflicted by the feeling as if one minute were one hour long.”⁶¹⁰ On 29 September 1962, eleven days after Oldenburg’s opening, Kusama was likely suffering from anxiety neurosis and took Doriden (a prescription “minor tranquilizer”), as noted in her calendar diary.⁶¹¹ This

⁶⁰⁷ Kusama’s translator in 1962, Kiyoharu Miura, mentions her “obsessive-compulsive neurosis.” Miura cited in *Full Bloom*, 26. A notation of Kusama sending a letter to Miura during her hospitalization appears in her November 1962 calendar diary.

⁶⁰⁸ The date of the photograph can be determined by Kusama’s hairstyle. Kusama appears in newly styled bangs in Oldenburg’s *Sports* performance, photographed on 5 October 1962. *Claes Oldenburg: An Anthology*, 167. Since Kusama’s hair is still long in Figure 3.32, it was most likely shot sometime before 5 October 1962.

⁶⁰⁹ Helen Yrissary, interviewed by Lenz, 29 August 2008.

⁶¹⁰ Kusama, untitled Japanese statement, ca. 1966, Kusama Papers.

⁶¹¹ In the recent *Claes Oldenburg: An Anthology*, the date of Oldenburg’s Green Gallery exhibition is recorded as “September 24–October 20.” David Platzker, “Selected Exhibition History,” *Oldenburg: An Anthology*, 536. In Rose’s 1970 “Chronology,” the date is registered as “September 18–October 3.” Rose, “Chronology,” 201. Since Kusama noted in her calendar diary the opening of the exhibition as 18 September, I follow Rose’s chronology. Kusama, calendar diary,

is the first time between 1960 and 1963 that Doriden is mentioned in her calendar diary. Being mindful of her health, she recorded the days she took this medicine. Although an October page is missing from her calendar-diary, November includes a notation that indicated that she had been taking Doriden for ten consecutive days, beginning on 9 November. On 24 November, she may have attempted suicide, and was hospitalized at St. Luke's Hospital for her first stay in the psychiatric ward there.⁶¹²

Kusama had arrived in the United States during the “golden age of post-World War II pharmaceutical science.” As will be discussed more fully in the following chapter, a number of psychiatrists during this time believed that neurological conditions were caused by chemical imbalances in the body. The aim increasingly became to achieve balance with psychotropic drugs.⁶¹³ Doriden and its 1955 generic antecedent Miltown were the first minor tranquilizers that became available by prescription in North America. In 1957 alone, “Americans had filled 36 million prescriptions for Miltown” and more than “a billion tablets had been manufactured.” In the late 1950s and early 1960s, these tranquilizers earned the moniker, “Executive Excedrin” and they became widely used by women as well as “businessmen, male talk

September 1962. “Minor tranquilizers are referred to as ‘minor’ to distinguish them from drugs such as Thorazine or reserpine, first called major tranquilizers and now more commonly classified as antipsychotics or neuroleptics.” Andrea Tone, *The Age of Anxiety: A History of America's Turbulent Affair with Tranquilizers* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), ix. Tone was the first historian to publish a book on minor tranquilizers.

⁶¹² Kusama wrote: “I lost my confidence and out of despair, cut my wrist with a blade.” Kusama, untitled Japanese statement, ca. 1966, Kusama Papers.

⁶¹³ Tone, *The Age of Anxiety*, ix.

show hosts and celebrities.”⁶¹⁴

After being discharged from the hospital on 1 December 1962, Kusama was instructed by a doctor at St. Luke’s Hospital to take Miltown during the day and Doriden at night.⁶¹⁵ An almost weekly doctor’s appointment is noted in her calendar-diary, beginning on 29 November 1962 through the end of 1963.⁶¹⁶ After the hospitalization, there were only four days, during the following February, for which she did not record taking Doriden. For a considerable period in 1963, in short, Kusama would have been sedated all day long. These medications brought about hallucinatory experiences in Kusama. She later wrote that after the hospitalization, she “suffered from . . . hallucination.”⁶¹⁷ Related to this experience, Kusama also once recounted in a friendly interview with two Matsumoto acquaintances that, “while [I was] sleeping, tulips would multiply and cover the ceiling.”⁶¹⁸

In 1963, Kusama began mentioning hallucinatory experiences clearly associated with her recent, second nervous breakdown. Although in 1960, she had described her *Infinity Net* series simply as being “painted flat on undivided space,”⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., xvi.

⁶¹⁵ A sheet that bears the instruction for her medication and two diagrams has been found inserted in Kusama’s Notebook No.1. It is written on the stationery of her doctor at St. Luke’s Hospital.

⁶¹⁶ Kusama, calendar diary, 1962 and 1963.

⁶¹⁷ Yayoi Kusama, untitled Japanese statement, ca. 1966.

⁶¹⁸ Kusama cited in, Fujimoto, Ibe, and Kusama, “With Miss Kusama,” 23.

⁶¹⁹ Yayoi Kusama, “Excerpts from ‘Postwar Reflections’ by Yayoi Kusama” (1960), Kusama Papers.

she changed her tune in her 1963 radio interview with Gordon Brown: “My nets grew beyond myself and beyond the canvases I was covering with them. They began to cover the walls, the ceiling, and finally the whole universe.”⁶²⁰ December of 1963 saw the creation of her *Aggregation: One Thousand Boats Show* (fig. 3.17).⁶²¹ The work featured one boat sculpture surrounded by 999 reproductions (the poster of the exhibition).

This work can be seen as developing from her earlier practice. In traditional Japanese contexts, the number “1,000” marked a transcendence into another state.⁶²² By rendering “one” actual boat with its “999” reproductions (thus the reference to “1,000”), Kusama symbolically illuminated the spiritual element of her work originally associated with the concept of *jiko-hattatsu* or self-development (see Chapters One and Two), in an effort to elevate her inner being by challenging her psychic limits. Her new Environment, which consisted of one white sculpture and its multiplied images, may also be seen as having been influenced by Louise Nevelson’s 1959 magnum opus, *Dawn’s Wedding Feast*. In 1959, Nevelson stunned the New York art world by transforming one entire gallery of MoMA’s “Sixteen Americans”

⁶²⁰ Kusama, “Miss Kusama,” 163.

⁶²¹ Ibid.

⁶²² In the 1960s, Kusama installed her *Aggregation: One Thousand Boats Show* twice: once at the Gertrude Stein exhibition (1963-4) and again at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (1965). She left the floor of the fairly small Stein Gallery uncovered, whereas she covered both the walls and the floor of the larger Stedelijk Museum gallery. This reveals that she was not concerned with the actual number of posters. Rather, “999” held a conceptual significance for her.

exhibition into a roomful of white sculptures made out of found objects.⁶²³ Though the connection between Kusama and Nevelson is little known, Kusama took over Nevelson's former studio on Mott Street in 1964. In 1959, however, Kusama still had not yet begun making sculpture. Once she did, in 1962, it is possible that she thought of Nevelson's impressive Environment. At the same time, by multiplying a single image of a boat through a mechanical process and by constructing an architectural space, Kusama's *Aggregation: One Thousand Boats Show* correlated with certain tactics used by Judd and Flavin.

For Kusama, especially, employing industrial processes during her bouts of depression became crucial, as it helped her to compensate for the declining productivity caused by the tranquilizers. With the drugs, she was unable to concentrate on intricate work. A photograph of her studio from around October 1962 (fig. 3.32) records a number of soft sculptures she had created, including an armchair, couch, dining table and chairs, rowboat, shoes, and a floor mat. When Kusama finally had a chance to show her *Accumulation* sculptures in bulk at the Richard Castellane Gallery in her 1964 *Driving Image Show* (figs. 3.33 and 3.34), all the large-scale works—*Ten-Guest Table* (fig. 3.33), *Accumulation No.1* and *No.2*, and *Row Boat* (fig. 3.34)—had already been captured in the 1962 shot (fig. 3.32), which meant they were close to two years old. New works made for the Castellane exhibition were relatively small or easy to create: *Traveling Life* (1964), *Macaroni Girl* (ca. 1963), and some

⁶²³ At least one photograph of Kusama attending Oldenburg's Happening on 5 October 1962 exists. *Oldenburg: An Anthology*, 167. The curator, Alice Denney, remembers performing a Happening in Kusama's *Boats Show* (1963-'64) along with four other young women all wearing red leotards. Digital recording of Alice Denney, interview by author, Washington, D.C., 20 December 2006.

household objects. In other words, she hardly made any new large works in 1963, except for one sewn soft sculpture, *Dressing Table*, registered in her inventory, and one *Arm Chair* dated as 1963, suggesting her still crippled productivity in early 1964.⁶²⁴

If Bellamy had decided to represent her, or if Perry had successfully opened her gallery in Manhattan, Kusama's art might have developed differently. However, Perry failed to open her gallery. Faced with two artists making sewn sculpture, Bellamy believed Oldenburg was the better bet for his gallery. Oldenburg had been represented in Martha Jackson's "New Forms—New Media" and had even designed the poster for the exhibition, and in 1961 he had a solo exhibition with Jackson. Believing in Oldenburg's artistic potential, Bellamy financially backed Oldenburg's "Store," the project the artist had begun in December 1961.

Meanwhile, the art Kusama produced during her nervous breakdown began reflecting the side effects of the prescription drugs. Thus, the reproductions in *Boat* that covered the entire wall gave her viewer an inkling of the hallucinations that she said she saw while being treated for her nervous breakdown. She also started exploring the causes of her mental instability and thinking of ways to transcend her situation. In this way, her art might be said to have emerged from what feminist art historian Anna C. Chave calls "fissures in the sociocultural field," with reference to the terrain of some proto-feminist women's artwork.⁶²⁵ And by multiplying the

⁶²⁴ Kusama, Notebook No. 2. Aside from the above, one *Arm Chair* from 1963 exists in the collection of Akron Art Museum (acquisition #1970.54).

⁶²⁵ Chave, "I Object," 159.

phallus in *Aggregation: One Thousand Boats Show*, Kusama made a bid to unsettle patriarchal convention, as Nixon pointed out.

For this site-specific installation, Kusama hired two photographers to capture her in the nude (fig. 3.17) eliciting a tension between her unclothed body and the proliferating phalli. In 2010, Kusama remarked of a similar boat sculpture, *Violet Obsession* (1994), that she chose the boat as a vehicle that could advance her career.⁶²⁶ However belated, the comment suggests Kusama's desire to overcome her situation in an overwhelmingly male-dominated society. By 1968, this desire would take the form of political activism based on her distinctive version of sexual revolution (see Chapter Four and Conclusion).

At the opening reception of *Aggregation: One Thousand Boats Show*, Kusama remembers that Warhol came and exclaimed: "Wow, Yayoi, wonderful!"⁶²⁷ In various respects, Kusama and Warhol had similar imaginations. Around March 1961, while planning for his first solo exhibition at Ferus Gallery, Warhol began thinking of building an obsessive environment using the repetitive soup-can images (fig. 3.35) that would comment on consumer culture. But he finally decided to build such a claustrophobic environment only after Kusama's *Boats Show*. On 11 December 1963, the dealer Sam Wagstaff pressed in a letter to Warhol that he hoped, "you will be able to make a sculpture of a pile of white boxes with silkscreen sides as we talked about

⁶²⁶ Yayoi Kusama, "*Violet Obsession*," audio guide for the exhibition "Mind and Matter: Alternative Abstractions, 1940 to Now" (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010).

⁶²⁷ Kusama, *Infinity Net*, 39.

one day.”⁶²⁸ Kusama’s *Boats Show* opened a few days later, on 17 December. His first invoice for the box sculpture screens was dated 2 January 1964, demonstrating that Warhol began conceptualizing his new sculptures immediately after the Christmas holidays. As mentioned in Wagstaff’s letter, he had had an idea for his box sculpture. But Kusama’s exhibition seems to have ignited his ambition to finally realize his obsessive environment, which was not an easy task. This is because, unlike Kusama, Warhol was reluctant to employ a fully mechanical process and preferred to work manually.

The 2 January invoice signaled the beginning of Warhol’s nearly 355 box sculptures, which he would exhibit at Stable Gallery between 21 April and 9 May 1964 (fig. 3.36). In a little over fifty days,⁶²⁹ he and his assistants silk-screened about 1,675 sides of the imitation grocery cartons at his new studio, which he would come to call the “Factory.” The workload Warhol undertook, in fact, was so enormous that, even with assistants, it was not easy.

The process by which Warhol accomplished his labors revealed through photographs of unfinished works. One by Billy Name-Linich (fig. 3.37) reveals the rows of *Campbell’s Tomato Juice* cartons printed with only a red screen, suggesting Warhol’s assembly-line production. However, Warhol’s working methods were not shortcuts. The whole process entailed applying a base coat, background colors, and

⁶²⁸ Frie and Printz, *The Andy Warhol Catalog Raisonné*, 2-A: 53.

⁶²⁹ The earliest invoices from a cabinetmaker that correspond to the size of each plywood box date from 25 February 1964, which means most of the box sculptures were made between March and April 1964. Frie and Printz, *The Andy Warhol Catalog Raisonné*, 2-A: 54.

screen prints on all sides of the grocery cartons and finally, retouching details, which was evidently done by Warhol himself (fig. 3.38).

Like his male Pop art peers, Wesselmann and Rosenquist, Warhol created imitations of commodities through manual operations done according to his aesthetic standards. Critic David Bourdon, who filled in for Warhol's assistant one weekend to help him with screen painting remembered that, "Andy complained that I was making them [his silk screen paintings] too arty." Their aesthetic difference was later resolved by a heavy downpour that leaked through the roof of Warhol's studio, which destroyed all Bourdon's paintings, and "Andy redid them his way."⁶³⁰

In 1966, when Warhol finally decided to order his *Cow Wallpaper* (fig. 3.39) straight from an actual factory, he still had a hard time fully depending on technology. So he decided to design the base image for his wallpaper. He first chose an image of a cow (fig. 3.40), and he then determined the best balance between subject and background. He finally ordered a black-and-white screen, and screen-printed the original.

Rooms

While Pop art was taking shape as a movement, Oldenburg remarked that there was "a lot of communication between artists because the art world is a very small one and you can sense what other people are doing."⁶³¹ Under the influence of "friends like Jim Dine and Roy Lichtenstein and Andy [Warhol]," together with his earlier

⁶³⁰ Bourdon, *Warho*, 6.

⁶³¹ Oldenburg, "A Discussion with Glaser," 234.

interests in Jean Dubuffet and the French novelist Ferdinand Céline, Oldenburg began working with specific images, such as painted reliefs of consumer products, which he called “city materials.” With the exception of his Green Gallery exhibition, Oldenburg preferred to show his “city materials” as Environments. In January 1964, he, along with Rosenquist, Segal, and Dine, was part of the Sidney Janis Gallery’s “Four Environments by Four New Realists” exhibition. In it, Oldenburg introduced *Bedroom Ensemble* (fig. 3.41), a replicated domestic environment filled with trendy furniture and a fashionable female garment decorated with a leopard pattern and matching vinyl purse.

Three months later, between 20 April and 9 May, Kusama competed with Oldenburg by introducing her second Environment, *Driving Image Show* (figs. 3.33 and 3.34). The exhibition took place at the little-known Richard Castellane Gallery. Kusama may have considered Oldenburg’s stylish room too clean and isolated, as though it were a furniture showroom. She thus revisited Allan Kaprow’s Environment for his groundbreaking *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* and made her audience complicit in her Environment. As with Kaprow’s Happening, which had some sound components—such as a band playing toy instruments or a woman squeezing an orange—in her jam-packed room with objects, Kusama incorporated a sensory effect by spreading dry pasta on the floor. The impact of the sensation was evidently considerable. Tom Doyle, who attended the show’s opening, still remembers today the sound and feel of the cracking macaroni under his feet.

Unlike Oldenburg’s impersonal and almost cinematic environment, Kusama’s work seems to have visualized her anxiety through two rooms filled with food and sex

symbols. Almost all the household objects in her environment are compulsively covered with phallic protuberances or dry pasta. And the artist posed mischievously in front of the phalli-embedded dining table with a knife and fork as though preparing to cut up a male sexual organ (fig. 3.33). Kusama extrapolated from her experience with hallucinogens in these rooms, further, by attaching countless flower and leaf decals to some scavenged furniture and household objects, almost as if they could go on to “cover the walls, the ceiling, and finally the whole universe,” as she later phrased it.⁶³²

Four months later, between 16 September and 10 October, inspired by Kusama’s anxiety-ridden room, Lucas Samaras exhibited his own bedroom transferred from his apartment to Green Gallery (fig. 3.42). Filled with his artworks and art materials, the room in effect replicated his laboratory, the site where his ideas emerged, while also conveying his own artistic anxiety and struggle. After this exhibition, the Pace Gallery—which aggressively sought to represent Pop art in New York—approached Samaras for representation. As seen in these three rooms from 1964, by Oldenburg, Kusama, and Samaras, there existed mutual influences among artists who variously experimented with and drew from a kind of junk aesthetic. However, while Pace, Janis, and other ambitious galleries represented some female artists,⁶³³ they generally preferred to take on male artists and aggressively promoted their careers, which contributed to their visibility in the art world.

⁶³² Kusama, “Miss Kusama,” 163.

⁶³³ Pace represented Nevelson and Janis represented Marisol.

1964 Venice Biennale: Canonization of American Pop Art

In early 1964, Oldenburg was showing with the prestigious Sidney Janis Gallery and Warhol with the Stable Gallery. This would all change after the 1964 Venice Biennale, however. Many young artists at the time sought to show with the Leo Castelli Gallery. Writing in 1998, curator Laura Hoptman observed that this first government-organized U.S. pavilion at the biennale—where one of Castelli’s gallery artists, Rauschenberg won the first grand prize ever awarded to the United States—signaled “the definitive transfer of cultural power from Paris to New York,”⁶³⁴ with Pop art as its distinctive brand. “Paris art dealers and critics” were of course upset. In a 1965 article, Calvin Tomkins reported that the French “tend to interpret the success of Rauschenberg, and of American pop art in general, as the result of a dark international conspiracy against the School of Paris,” with the U.S. government playing “its part.”⁶³⁵

At home, the members of the Committee of the International Association of Plastic Art, Inc. (an association that represented eleven established national art societies) were also displeased. Before the 1964 biennale, they thus wrote a letter to the director of the United States Information Agency (U.S.I.A.) about Pop art’s promotion by “certain circles.”⁶³⁶ A year earlier, on 9 September 1963, Kusama

⁶³⁴ Hoptman, *Love Forever*, 50.

⁶³⁵ Calvin Tomkins, “The Big Show in Venice,” *Harper’s Magazine* 230, no. 1379 (April 1965): 104.

⁶³⁶ The letter stated: “American pop art,” selected by the 1964 Commissioner of the Venice Biennale, Alan Solomon as “the latest vogue” in the United States was conceived only in “certain circles.” “As you undoubtedly know, an exhibition of American pop art,” by this time had been “rather extensively toured in Europe.”

described her irritation with the recent New York scene in her letter to the Dutch Nul artist Henk Peeters:

Those galleries representing Pop art are very nationalistic and exclusive ones. Under those galleries, young critics and museum people have worked hand in hand with all possible mass communication media, have introduced Pop art to the world. This Pop art, they think, are [*sic*] the second hit made in U.S.A., following the previous action painting.⁶³⁷

Given the visibility of Rauschenberg's "Combines" in Europe already in 1960 (see Chapter Two), and the genesis of Pop art in 1952 in England,⁶³⁸ it is somewhat puzzling that this perception of an abrupt shift in cultural power was seen as taking place in the mid-1960s, during the brief period of President Kennedy's liberal Democratic administration. And, after all, numerous U.S. critics believed by the late 1950s that the "center of art" had moved or "was moving from Paris to New York."⁶³⁹

Art historian Laurie J. Monahan offered an explanation steeped in the political climate of the times by discussing the response to the 1964 biennale in a Cold War context. Specifically, she interpreted the U.S. government's sudden interest in

Harold Weston, the chairman of United States Committee of the International Association of Plastic Arts, Inc., letter to Carl Rowan, the director of U.S.I.A., 11 April 1964. Venice Biennale Files, USIA (64-045), Smithsonian Institution Archives, n.p. (hereafter cited as VB files).

⁶³⁷ Yayoi Kusama, letter to Henk Peeters, 9 September 1963, Kusama Papers.

⁶³⁸ In general, the London-based Independent Group is seen as the first Pop art manifestation.

⁶³⁹ Mark Stevens and Annalyn Swan, *de Kooning: An American Master* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2005), xiv. Such U.S. critics as Harold Rosenberg and Clement Greenberg, in the 1950s, began discussing Abstract Expressionism as unique to American soil. However, as demonstrated in Chapter One and Two of this study, many people outside the United States initially considered the postwar abstract art tendency as an international phenomenon.

supporting the U.S. involvement in the international biennale of Venice as an effort to counterbalance the Soviet Union's cultural programs by incorporating avant-garde art as part of its foreign policy.⁶⁴⁰ Also discussing the 1964 biennale, Hiroko Ikegami more recently analyzed how "Team Leo Castelli"—a nexus of dealers, collectors, museum directors, and critics—cultivated the "tastes for new American art."⁶⁴¹ I would add that the government's inexperience in organizing the biennale as well as its interest in producing a sensational exhibition was seen as an opportunity by a coterie of international buyers led by Castelli. Castelli himself was, of course, originally from Europe. But his initiatives gave rise to an increasing American presence in the marketplace, which, in the eyes of some European onlookers, reflected "a dark international conspiracy," as Tomkins put it. In the United States, the actions of what Ikegami called "Team Leo Castelli" in time effectively served to marginalize those in the art world operating outside dominant cultural, gender, and racial boundaries. And at the subsequent biennale of 1966, Kusama would in a way protest the new establishment by calling international attention to her independently entered *Narcissus Garden* (discussed at the conclusion of this chapter).

As farsighted U.S. dealers, who were also first-generation immigrants from Europe, Castelli and his former wife, Sonnabend ventured early into the European market.⁶⁴² In 1962 Ileana Sonnabend took over the Galerie Lawrence in Paris, a space

⁶⁴⁰ Laurie J. Monahan, "Cultural Cartography: American Design at the 1964 Venice Biennale," in *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, Montreal 1945-1964*, ed. Serge Guilbaut (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 369-417.

⁶⁴¹ Ikegami, *The Great Migrator*, 24-25.

⁶⁴² The couple divorced in 1959 and Ileana married Michael Sonnabend in 1961.

that belonged to the brother of MoMA curator, William Rubin. She later explained, “I wanted Bob’s [Rauschenberg] and Jasper’s [Johns] work to be seen then, in Europe.”⁶⁴³

But the opportunity for Castelli and Sonnabend to firmly establish their global reputation was consolidated with the 1964 biennale. After MoMA stopped sponsoring the São Paulo and Venice biennales in 1962, President Kennedy’s Fine Arts advisor, August Heckscher decided to take over the task under the aegis of the government’s propaganda bureau, the United States Information Agency (U.S.I.A.).⁶⁴⁴ That agency appointed Lois Bingham of the Smithsonian as Chief of the Fine Arts Section, U.S.I.A. Exhibition Division.⁶⁴⁵ Since Bingham considered the Jewish Museum’s recent contemporary art exhibitions to be particularly excellent, the agency appointed Alan Solomon, the director of the museum and one of Castelli’s close associates, as the U.S. commissioner for the 1964 Venice Biennale.⁶⁴⁶ The government suggested that

⁶⁴³ Sonnabend, interview by Tomkins, transcript, 29.

⁶⁴⁴ Carl T. Rowan, letter to Major General John K. Hester, 1 May 1964. VB files. MoMA stepped down from organizing these two costly exhibitions due to financial constraints.

⁶⁴⁵ Porter A. McCray, interviewed by Sharon Zane, transcript, 23 May 1991, 82. MoMA Oral History Project, in MoMA Archives.

⁶⁴⁶ Solomon’s appointment letter from the U.S.I.A. stated: “During the past year the excellent exhibitions of contemporary art presented by the Jewish Museum have attracted our particular interest.” Donald M. Wilson, Acting Director, the U.S.I.A., letter to Alan Solomon, 7 November 1963, VB files. Alice Denney, the former Assistant Director of the Washington Gallery of Modern Art and the 1964 Venice Biennale Deputy Commissioner and Exhibition Registrar for six weeks, remembers today that Bingham saw the artists shown at the Jewish Museum at her gallery in Washington, D.C., and had great admiration for their work. Denney, interview by author, 20 December 2006.

Solomon form a committee of art professionals who would review his selection, but he declined. He declared that he would be solely responsible for the exhibition.⁶⁴⁷

Between 1954 and 1962, when MoMA sponsored the biennales, it had elected different museums to organize every other exhibition.⁶⁴⁸ Moreover, within MoMA, an informal committee of curators and scholars screened the chosen artists for all biennales with final approval coming from the trustees.⁶⁴⁹ The French-born art historian Serge Guilbaut has vehemently argued for the existence of a conspiracy between MoMA's International Program and the United States government agencies, designed to establish U.S. cultural hegemony during the Cold War. But from the archival records, it is clear that MoMA's international program operated independently from the government. As staff member Elizabeth Bliss Parkinson Cobb said, "The government [during the Cold War] did nothing for the arts in this

⁶⁴⁷ According to Solomon, he was "given complete freedom to make a personal statement of my view of present conditions through the selection of the work to be shown." Alan Solomon, "Preface," in *XXXII Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte Venezia 1964*, exh. cat. (New York: The Jewish Museum, 1964), n.p.; he left the museum on 1 July 1964. Jean M. White, "U.S.I.A. Venice Exhibition Will Lean to 'Pop Art,'" unidentified newspaper clipping, VB files.

⁶⁴⁸ For example, the Art Institute of Chicago and Baltimore Museum of Art respectively organized the 1956 and the 1960 Venice Biennales.

⁶⁴⁹ For instance, René d'Harnoncourt was the official 1954 Venice Biennale commissioner. But Alfred Barr and James Sweeney did the major work. They first settled on Ben Shahn. They then counterbalanced Shahn's social realism with Willem de Kooning's abstract art. At the time, de Kooning was a Dutch citizen, but the curators did not make the decision on the basis of citizenship, but on aesthetic grounds and with a view to new tendencies in art made in the United States. Finally the trustees approved the exhibition. McCray, interview by Zane, 23 May 1991, transcript, 76, 135–36. In terms of the representation of women and artists of color, see the second subsection of this chapter.

country. . . . in Europe they said, we had nothing in this country except Cadillac and bubble gum, that we didn't have any culture."⁶⁵⁰ So, in order to introduce U.S. art abroad, Nelson Rockefeller set up an international program in the museum in 1952 with a grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund.⁶⁵¹

Once the government took over the biennale exhibitions from MoMA, however, U.S. participation in international exhibitions took on an increasingly propagandistic tone.⁶⁵² In order to produce an effective show, U.S.I.A. officials stated at the press conference for the 1964 Venice Biennale, the "exhibit is not intended to be a well-rounded representation of contemporary American art,"⁶⁵³ but rather depended on a single commissioner's "particular interests, experience, and background," because "the visitors want to see the most avant-garde art, the new movements that are coming in."⁶⁵⁴

Solomon selected eight artists who ranged from making hard-edged abstraction to producing Neo-Dada and Pop art. Of these—John Chamberlain, Jim Dine, Johns, Oldenburg, Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, Stella, and

⁶⁵⁰ Elizabeth Bliss Parkinson Cobb, interview by Sharon Zane, 6 July 1988, transcript, MoMA Oral History Project, MoMA Archives, 51.

⁶⁵¹ McCray, interview by Zane, transcript, 51–52.

⁶⁵² The intention of the government, especially the U.S.I.A., was—as has been overstated by Guilbaut and others—to promote the "dynamic image" of Abstract Expressionism as a symbol of "democracy" and to assert the "creative free spirit which is America." Robert Sivard, "The Venice Biennale Art Exhibit," a government memorandum to "Mr. Harris" (first name not given), 14 August 1964, BV files.

⁶⁵³ White, "U.S.I.A. Venice Exhibition Will Lean to 'Pop Art.'"

⁶⁵⁴ David Parson, Acting General and Congressional Liaison, letter to Senator Kenneth E. Keating, 23 July 1964, BV files.

Rauschenberg—Leo Castelli represented half.⁶⁵⁵ In the July 1964 issue of *ART International*, Castelli capitalized on this coup through an advertisement (fig. 3.43) that listed the names of the artists on view at Documenta (Kassel), the Venice Biennale, and in venues in both London and Paris. Making analogies to a military target with a tongue-and-cheek humor, an arrow above the gallery logo targeted the old cultural capital of Paris. The ad underscored his gallery's ability to bring out new talents and put together an international network of dealers. Art dealer Robert Elkon remarked that in working to expand his business in Europe, Castelli "established these outlets like a general mapping out a campaign. He arranged with other dealers so his artists would gain visibility all over the world."⁶⁵⁶ Another business associate, Joseph Helman proclaimed in 1976: "We're all on his [Castelli's] side. We all want Jasper Johns to prevail."⁶⁵⁷

In order to build a transatlantic market, Castelli explained in an interview that he focused on featuring mostly American artists. "This disciplined sacrifice that I imposed upon myself not to deal with any European [art]," was going to become "immensely useful in the end. Because that sort of monopoly . . . did create a

⁶⁵⁵ At the time, Castelli represented Johns, Louis, Rauschenberg, and Stella. Tomkins, who went to the 1964 biennale as a reporter thus wrote: "To those who knew a conspiracy when they saw one, the real mastermind behind it all was Leo Castelli, and the proof was Castelli's coup in 'fixing' the 1964 Venice Biennale." Tomkins, "Profile" (draft), 44.

⁶⁵⁶ Robert Elkon, interview by Calvin Tomkins, transcript, 14 February 1976, Tomkins, "Leo Castelli-Bio," 61.

⁶⁵⁷ Joseph Helman, interview by Calvin Tomkins, transcript, 12 February 1976, Tomkins, "Leo Castelli-Bio," 63.

market.”⁶⁵⁸ His efforts paid off, as evidenced by Düsseldorf gallery owner Konrad Fischer’s mid-1970s remark that Castelli was “the only American dealer,” whom people “really know in Europe, the one they talk about.”⁶⁵⁹

As Castelli’s business expanded, by 1976, his accountant Susan Brundage explained that the Castelli Gallery became “a sort of wholesaler to a network of galleries he has really developed over the years.”⁶⁶⁰ During this time, Castelli himself explained that “about 50 percent of the works sold here [at Castelli Gallery] went to Los Angeles, Minneapolis, and a few other cities; about 40 percent went to Europe, and only 10 percent to New York.”⁶⁶¹ His business tactics, according to the West Coast dealer Peter Blum, were to package an exhibition of his gallery artists. Blum would take care of the shipping cost and sell what he could. From the 50 percent commission on sale, Blum took 30 percent and Castelli got 20 percent. Blum would then return the unsold pictures.⁶⁶² The galleries that went into partnership with Castelli were also given the option to buy the works at a discount of up to 40 percent.⁶⁶³

⁶⁵⁸ Leo Castelli, interview by Paul Cunnings, 14 May 1969-8 June 1973, Archives of American Art, Washington, DC, cited in Ikegami, *The Great Migrator*, 41.

⁶⁵⁹ Konrad Fischer, interview by Calvin Tomkins, transcript, 13 January 1976, 55. CT papers, II.B.29.

⁶⁶⁰ Susan Brundage, interview by Calvin Tomkins, transcript, 7 January 1976, Tomkins, “Leo Castelli–Bio,” 48.

⁶⁶¹ Castelli, interview by Tomkins, transcript, *ibid.*, 25.

⁶⁶² Blum, interview by Tomkins, transcript, *ibid.*, 57.

⁶⁶³ Brundage, interview by Tomkins, transcript, *ibid.*, 48.

As a result of his market monopoly, by 1968, Castelli's right-hand man, Ivan Karp remembered that only the opinions of "ten, fifteen people" came to matter.⁶⁶⁴ However exaggerated that number may be, it gave rise to what Ikegami called "Team Leo Castelli," which was "a very closely knit group of people" that, according to Castelli, included "Bob Rosenblum [who] was a big factor, also Leo Steinberg and Alan Solomon."⁶⁶⁵ Among those artists who rose to commercial prominence and later became canonical American artists from this milieu, one would find very few women, and even fewer artists who were non-white. "The history of canon formation," the literary theorist John Guillory expounded, "would appear as a kind of conspiracy, a tacit or deliberate attempt to repress the writing of those who do not belong to a socially or politically powerful group or whose writing does not in some overt or covert way express the 'ideology' of the dominant groups."⁶⁶⁶

Warhol was perhaps the first artist to see the new business potential in Castelli. In June 1964, the same month as the biennale's opening, he left Stable Gallery and joined Leo Castelli. And that same month, Warhol already had begun preparing his new series, the *Flowers*. The first silkscreen invoice for forty-eight by forty-eight-inch *Flowers* dates to 22 June. Once he had a clearer idea of the exhibition,

⁶⁶⁴ Ivan Karp, interviewed by Barbara Rose, audio recording, ca. 1968, cassette tape side B. "Papers of Barbara Rose," Archives of American Art, Washington, DC.

⁶⁶⁵ Leo Castelli, interviewed by Barbara Rose, audio recording, April 1968, cassette tape side 1, side 1. "Papers of Barbara Rose," Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

⁶⁶⁶ John Guillory, "Canon," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, eds. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 234.

he ordered, in August, the eighty-two by eighty-two-inch silkscreen for the largest of the *Flowers* (fig. 3.44) that would occupy one side of the main gallery of the exhibition. The date for the show was set for 21 November –17 December 1964. With this new series, Warhol's aim was to establish a beautiful and decorative space. For that purpose, he planned to evenly spread the multi-colored twenty-four by twenty-four-inch *Flowers*—in four horizontal rows, seven in a row—across the gallery's floating panel (fig. 3.44).⁶⁶⁷

Scholars writing on Warhol's silkscreen technique prefer to interpret it as a "reproduction of a reproduction," as Andreas Huyssen phrases it, while also positing that, for Warhol, "it is not reality itself that provides the content of the work of art, but rather a secondary reality."⁶⁶⁸ Another way of understanding Warhol, however, is to see that his "second reality" was the result of his imagination. For example, he based his *Flowers* series on reproductions that accompanied an article about color processing in the June 1964 issue of *Modern Photography* (fig. 3.45). To illustrate the effect of different exposure times and filter settings, the article reproduced the same image of flowers several times. A spread for the magazine in the Warhol archive shows both the original photographs and Warhol's interventions. For this decorative painting, he made a square unit just as one would a decorative tile and clipped a yellow flower originally in the upper right side of the image, pasting it on top of another reproduction. This created the compositional balance he desired. He then made the base of the final silkscreen by cutting out the photograph into a perfect

⁶⁶⁷ Frie and Printz, *The Andy Warhol Catalog Raisonné*, 2-A: 280-83.

⁶⁶⁸ Andreas Huyssen, "The Cultural Politics of Pop," in *After the Great Divide* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), 143.

square.

Interpretations of Warhol's use of mechanical reproduction have not generally given full weight to the artist's creative quotient. In comparing Warhol's *Flowers* (fig. 3.44) with their parody by Elaine Sturtevant from 1965 (fig. 3.46), however, it becomes evident that her version, which is based on the pure silkscreen process, is quite different. Sturtevant's works reveal random color distribution and gaps between the printed screens; by contrast, Warhol's printed screens perfectly match his *Flowers* paintings and reveal subtle color variations. This is because he mostly hand painted the *Flowers* series, each of which actually comprise three layers: flowers, background, and screen. According to Frie and Printz who conducted research in 2002, Warhol first used acetate to trace his flowers onto the canvas (fig. 3.47). He then masked off certain edges of the flowers and applied color by hand (fig. 3.48). After the paint dried, he masked for a second time from the interior of the flowers and painted the green background also by hand; then he printed the halftone screen. Each *Flowers* painting is thus a unique piece.

Aside from manually creating individual works, Warhol made careful aesthetic choices by choosing fluorescent paints manufactured by the Day-Glo Color Corporation (the same paint Kusama used in her psychedelic Happenings, see Chapter Four) and arranging the *Flowers*, in order to establish an aesthetically pleasing decorative space. Warhol's tactics paid off. As evidenced in critic Peter Schjeldhal's reminiscence that he saw the *Flowers* series at Paris Sonnabend Gallery in 1965 and was deeply moved by "the beauty, raciness and cruelty of those pictures."⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶⁹ Peter Schjeldhal, "Andy Warhol 1928-87: A Collage of Appreciations from the

On the other hand, British newspaper writer Roger Vaughan, when he visited Warhol's "Factory" in 1965, had a different impression of Warhol's *Flowers*. He reported that the artist had pulled out "a handful of tiny canvases, five-by-five inches, covered with the same flower print." Warhol had said to him, "They come six to a package, and you get six different colors. Each set costs \$30." To Vaughan, Warhol "sounded like he was selling Christmas wrappings."⁶⁷⁰

At the time, with his miniature pictures, Warhol seemed to have emulated Oldenburg's Store gambit by pricing his *Flowers* at \$5.⁶⁷¹ A 1964 radio interview revealed that he hoped for greater accessibility to his art, so that "the people who don't know about art would like it better."⁶⁷² Such desire on the part of Warhol and other Pop artists prompted "a predominantly young art audience" in the Federal Republic of Germany in the late 1960s to "interpret American Pop art as protest and criticism, rather than affirmation of an affluent society," as Huyssen has explained it. To their eyes, American Pop art was an attempt "to liberate high art from the isolation in which it had been kept in bourgeois society They preferred to think that this

Artist's Colleagues, Critics and Friends," *Art in America* (May 1987): 137.

⁶⁷⁰ Roger Vaughan, "Superpop or a Night at the Factory," *The Sunday Herald Tribune* (8 August 1965), pp. 7-9.

⁶⁷¹ Arthur Danto remembers Warhol's 5 x 5" *Flowers* sold for \$5 each at Leo Castelli in 1964. Arthur C. Danto, "Warhol and the Politics of Prints," in *Andy Warhol Prints: A Catalogue Raisonné, 1962-1987*, eds. Frayda Feldman and Jörg Schellmann (New York: Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, Inc. and the Andy Warhol Foundation for the visual Arts, 2003), 14.

⁶⁷² Warhol, conversation with Glaser, *Pop*, 237; Andy Warhol, "Andy Warhol: My True Story" (1966), interview by Gretchen Berg, in *I'll be Your Mirror*, 90.

art was intended to denounce the lack of values and criteria in art criticism.”⁶⁷³

On the contrary, however, the very bourgeois culture that Pop art rebelled against quickly absorbed it and, by 1965, had reached its florescence.⁶⁷⁴ This meant an escalation in the prices of the works. In an interview with Mitch Tuchman in 1970, Castelli, for instance, explained how the “prices of Jasper have gone up in a fantastic way,” while pointing out Johns’s *Flag* hung over a mantelpiece at his residence.⁶⁷⁵ Right after Johns’s first solo exhibition in 1958, Castelli was selling Johns’s *Flag* for \$600. A few years later, he raised its price to \$1,500 and by 1970, *Flag* was the most expensive among Johns’s works. In little more than a decade, it fetched over \$600,000, one thousand times the original price.⁶⁷⁶ “Jap’s [Jasper’s] success was so spectacular,” Tuchman said, adding, “people who will see this [television program] in the provinces” will be curious to know that “the paintings of Jap . . . were selling” a lot. He then shot the whole sequence again, making sure that he covered the entire history of prices.⁶⁷⁷

Reminiscing about the 1960s New York scene in her 1988 semi-autobiographical novella, *Woodstock Phallus Cutter*, Kusama lamented that with such dramatic increases in prices, art was becoming “just another consumer

⁶⁷³ Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 141-43.

⁶⁷⁴ Doris, *Pop Art and the Contest over American Culture*, 2.

⁶⁷⁵ Mitch Tuchman, “Interview [tran]Script, ‘Castelli, Leo,’” 294. Mitch Tuchman Papers, Archives of American Art.

⁶⁷⁶ Castelli, interview by Tomkins, transcript, 10 January 1976, “Leo Castelli–Bio,” 92. A similar article with slightly different prices was published by Robert Pincus-Witten, “The Best of the Best: Leo and Toiny Castelli at Home with Their Art,” *House and Garden*, April 1986, p. 228.

⁶⁷⁷ Tuchman, “Interview [tran]Script, ‘Castelli, Leo,’” 294–97.

product.”⁶⁷⁸ Huyssen expressed concern in 1975 that too much emphasis on profit might bring a myopic focus on art’s exchange value rather than its content.⁶⁷⁹ Of course, Pop art was not solely about profit, however. German collector Peter Ludwig’s outstanding collection of Pop art in Cologne focuses on its political potential. Some of the works in the Ludwig collection, such as Eduard Paolozzi’s *War Games* (1967), Ronald B. Kitaj’s *Austro-Hungarian Foot Soldier* (1961), Lichtenstein’s *Takka Takka* (1962) and Warhol’s *Jackie* series (1965), all made people think about war and politics. These works provided a politicized context for the plain images of consumer products—such as Oldenburg’s food effigies and Warhol’s *Boxes of Campbell’s Soup Cans* and *Brillo*—in the collection, such that they too could be constructed as mounting a critique of the material affluence that saturated daily life, while undercutting people’s inclinations towards critical thinking.

During this time, some were concerned about the growing professionalization of the art market as a whole. In protest over the conspicuous commodification of art, Elaine Sturtevant, for example, created an imaginary art department store in 1965 (fig. 3.46), filled with reproductions of works sold at Castelli. This came just a year after the Italian press had condemned the American work at the Venice Biennale as “‘dehumanized,’ and ‘despiritualized’ art . . . devoid of all human values.”⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷⁸ Yayoi Kusama, *Wuddosutokku inkei giri* [*Woodstock Phallus Cutter*] (Tokyo: Peyotoru Kōbō, 1988), 165.

⁶⁷⁹ Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 152.

⁶⁸⁰ The best reading for the dealers’ strategy at the onset of global capitalism is Ikegami’s *The Great Migrator*. “Italian, re: Comment on the Venice Biennale,” *U.S. Information Service Message* #7, 6 July 1964. VB files.

Narcissus Garden

In June 1966, at the Venice Biennale, Kusama impressed the audience with her *Narcissus Garden*—fifteen hundred mechanically produced shining mirrored balls on two lawns in front of the Italian Pavilion at the Giardini (fig. 3.49). The oldest international contemporary art exhibition, the Venice Biennale has been described as “the Olympics of art.” In such an exhibition, which places an emphasis on state-sponsored pavilions, Kusama’s independently entered, site-specific installation and performance, for which she had official permission, signaled a countervailing phenomenon of the 1960s art world: that of transnationalization.⁶⁸¹ Appearing in a way to preserve the aura of art, the beauty of her work spoke by and for itself. Her *Narcissus Garden* thus captured more attention than most of the works displayed in the national pavilions.⁶⁸²

At *Narcissus Garden* (fig. 3.50), Kusama flaunted her ethnicity and gender during three performances, once wearing a knee-length girlish dress, once a red leotard, and once a golden kimono and silver sash. In that way, she foreshadowed the masquerades of the feminist art movement of the 1970s in the United States, with its

⁶⁸¹ See Kusama, *Infinity Nets*, 49. Kusama’s Milan gallery, Galleria d’Arte del Naviglio, negotiated the details of *Narcissus Garden* with the biennale’s administrative office.

⁶⁸² *Narcissus Garden* drew significant media attention. Publications that featured this work include: Norman Narotzky, “The Venice Biennial: Pease Porridge in the Pot Nine Days Old,” *Arts Magazine* 40, no. 9 (September-October 1966) 42-44; Irene Brin, “Milledue cadauna” [“Twelve hundred”], *L’Europeo* 22, no. 26 (23 June 1966): 71; “Merchants of Venice,” *Newsweek* 17, no. 26 (27 June 1966): 90; and Milena Milani, “Una biennale tutta sexy” [“A very sexy biennale”], *ABC* 7, no. 27 (3 July 1966): 45-48.

quest for what Chave describes as “authentically different art, marked by women’s experience.”⁶⁸³

The work was, however, also her public protest against the recent shifts in the cultural politics of Pop, as the movement had begun to prevail in the global art market. In this respect, she would later single out the most canonized among Pop artists, Andy Warhol as her archrival.⁶⁸⁴ Through *Narcissus Garden*, Kusama competed with Warhol’s “Factory” by having her balls fabricated at an actual factory. She then declared: “Today’s art has become exceedingly expensive, detached from the masses,”⁶⁸⁵ and sold the balls for 1,200 lira, or \$2 each.

Kusama’s *Narcissus Garden* critiqued the recent, increasing professionalization of the art market by offering her work for sale without a middleman. The fact that she treated her art not as a precious object but as a commodity provoked the biennale officials, however. As her performance attracted public attention, the officials found out about her non-sanctioned sales and, soon after, Kusama’s performance was terminated.⁶⁸⁶ But Kusama had wished to make her price

⁶⁸³ Chave, “I Object,” 104.

⁶⁸⁴ Kusama’s manager from 1968, James Golata remembered in 1989 how, in the 1960s, she competed with Warhol by getting more write ups than him. Audio recording of James Golata, telephone interview by Alexandra Munroe, 11 January 1989, CICA/ATT/001.38; Kusama also singled out Warhol as her archrival. Kusama, *Infinity Nets*, 190.

⁶⁸⁵ Kusama, unpublished Japanese manuscript, “*Narushisusu Gāden to geijutsu no jiyū to kaihō* [*Narcissus Garden*, freedom and liberation of art],” 1966, folder “1966,” Kusama Papers.

⁶⁸⁶ Since “The Biennale represents the artists in the sale of the works, and the sales are negotiated through a special and unique office of the General Secretary and with the Administrative Office of the Biennale,” Kusama’s action was deemed illegal.

comparable to certain earlier works by Oldenburg (from his *Store*) and Warhol (his miniature *Flowers* paintings). Before *Narcissus Garden*, her dealers had sold her *Accumulation* sculptures for as much as \$1,800, a price more or less matching what was then fetched for the work of Johns.⁶⁸⁷ With *Narcissus Garden*, she spiritedly commented on her male counterparts' lack of "balls" by suggesting that she would carry on her own Pop struggle for the genuine democratization of art.⁶⁸⁸

In various respects, in their early careers Kusama and Warhol were similar. Except for a brief period in the late 1960s, both artists actually preferred to work with their hands. Both deftly manipulated the machinery of mass media and positioned themselves as cult figures. Both were not heterosexual by instinct. There was one definitive difference between Warhol and Kusama, however. "Warhol," as Benjamin Buchloh observed, "was uniquely qualified to promote the shift from visionary to conformist,"⁶⁸⁹ whereas Kusama was and is essentially an anti-conformist artist, as

Unknown writer, "Article 24," *La Biennale Di Venezia Regulations* (Venice: La Biennale Di Venezia, 1966), VB files. The installation of *Narcissus Garden* remained until the end of the biennale. Kusama went back to New York in July and did not have the money to go back to Venice to deinstall the work. She never found out what had happened to *Narcissus Garden* after the biennale. Kusama, interview by author, 28 July 2006.

⁶⁸⁷ \$1,800 is a price for Kusama's *Armchair* (1963). The date of purchase is not mentioned in the document. Since she gained gallery representation in 1963, I surmise this price was between 1963 and 1965. Gordon Locksley, letter to Orel Thompson of Akron Art Institute, 14 December 1970, in folder "Kusama, Yayoi," Akron Art Museum.

⁶⁸⁸ Kusama says she sold the mirrored balls as if they were "hotdogs or hamburgers." Kusama, interview by author, 28 July 2006.

⁶⁸⁹ Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Andy Warhol's One-Dimensional Art: 1956–1966" (1989), in *Andy Warhol*, ed. Annette Michelson (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 2001), 4.

demonstrated by this study.

In an interview with G.W. Swenson in 1963, Warhol (dis)ingenuously praised social conformity in modern life:

Someone said that Brecht wanted everybody to think alike. I want everybody to think alike. But Brecht wanted to do it through Communism, in a way. Russia is doing it under government: It's happening here all by itself without being under a strict government; so if it's working without trying, why can't it work without being Communist? Everybody looks alike and acts alike, and we're getting more and more that way. I think everybody should be a machine.⁶⁹⁰

Yet Warhol carefully conceived, composed, and executed—or oversaw the execution of—his art. And his impeccable paintings, underlined by his unique aesthetic sensibility, were seen readily as part of high culture once they were on the market, notwithstanding his borrowings from low culture.

By contrast, when Kusama stood in the middle of her *Narcissus Garden* (fig. 3.49), she presented herself as an agent for change. Her desire for transformation in the mid-1960s seems to have grown out of her own shifting circumstances. Once people began seeing Pop art as increasingly unique to American soil, critics started to view Kusama's art differently. For example, in 1962, a formative year for Pop art, the critic Brian O'Doherty positively assessed her *Accumulations* by associating them with Surrealism. In 1964, however, Edward Kelly discussed the same *Accumulations* as counterparts to Lee Bontecou's "high relief" art, charging that these works all represented the "great female archetype in its most ugly, destructive aspect."⁶⁹¹

⁶⁹⁰ Warhol, interviewed by Swenson, "What Is Pop Art?," 18.

⁶⁹¹ Edward Kelly, "Neo-Dada: A Critique of Pop Art," *The Art Journal* 23, no. 3 (Spring 1964): 200. Kelly's writing was one of the early examples that reflected a

Though her 1964 “Driving Image Show” received some serious attention,⁶⁹² by 1966, *Kusama’s Peep Show* (fig. 4.3) held at Richard Castellane Gallery between 16 March and 22 April 1966 garnered merely a paragraph in *Arts Magazine* and *Art News* among the regular exhibition reviews.⁶⁹³ Yet Lucas Samaras’s comparable *Mirror Room* (fig. 3.51), exhibited six months later at the Pace Gallery, resulted in a six-page interview in *Artforum* and a seven-page special feature in *ARTnews*, both in October 1966.⁶⁹⁴ Once Kusama saw herself being inexorably marginalized or typecast, she decided defiantly to emphasize both her ethnicity and gender, as she did notably during her three performances at the *Narcissus Garden* (fig. 3.50).

When Green Gallery closed in May 1965 for financial reasons,⁶⁹⁵ Castelli met

decline in the reception of female artists in New York. In 1964, Bontecou was still part of “Documenta.” In 1965, some critics, such as Donald Judd, extended the readings of her work beyond the sexual by writing: “The image extends from something as social as war to something as private as sex, making one an aspect of the other.” Donald Judd, “Lee Bontecou” (1965), in *Donald Judd, Complete Writings 1959-1975* (Nova Scotia, Canada: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; New York: New York University Press, 2005), 179. As the U.S. Pop Art movement became more established, however, toward the late 1960s critics and dealers increasingly neglected female artists.

⁶⁹² Gordon Brown, “Obsessional Painting,” *Art Voices* (March 1964): 29-31.

⁶⁹³ Peter Schjeldahl, “Reviews and Previews: Kusama,” *Art News* 65, no. 3 (May 1966): 18; William Berkson, “In the Galleries: Kusama’s ‘Peep Show,’” *Arts Magazine* 40, no. 7 (May 1965): 70.

⁶⁹⁴ Alan Solomon, “An Interview with Lucas Samaras,” *Artforum* (October 1966): 39–44. Diane Waldman, “Samaras: Reliquaries for St. Sade,” *ARTnews* (October 1966): 44–46, 72–75.

⁶⁹⁵ The Sculls, who were backing the gallery, withdrew their financial assistance, which was the main reason for its closure. Bellamy did not manage money well, as evidenced by the Green Gallery’s inability to make ends meet after five years in

with Bellamy and decided to take on many of his artists, including Judd, Flavin, and, ultimately, Oldenburg, all of whom agreed to join his gallery.⁶⁹⁶ The artists represented by Castelli Gallery would eventually be considered icons of U.S. painting and sculpture of the later twentieth century. As an instance of a kind of consequence, once the 1960s American art canon was established, the Butler Institute of American Art in Youngstown, Ohio, reorganized their collection and de-accessioned several Kusama pieces. Two of her works were auctioned at a charity event for the Cleveland Ballet. In the early 1970s, Ohio resident Henry Hawley reportedly paid a mere \$7.50 for her *Baby Carriage* (1966) from the *Accumulation* series.⁶⁹⁷

As evidenced by the bouts of depression logged in Kusama's calendar diary, the neglect she experienced often distressed her. Yet she never gave up on her career and never stopped believing in herself. By 1967, Kusama began formulating art designed to prompt the viewer in other ways, to reconsider the familiar. *Narcissus Garden* was just the beginning of a body of work that meant to spark social transformation.

business.

⁶⁹⁶ Castelli considered himself Bellamy's "pupil." Leo Castelli, interviewed by Judith Stein, 6 March 1996. In fact, about 50% of Castelli Gallery's stable of artists in the 1970s was Bellamy's picks. According to Tomkins, at the closing of Green Gallery, Bellamy "offered" Castelli first choice. The list included Morris, Judd, Poons, Wesselmann, and Samaras. Johns told him to take Morris. Rose also urged Morris. Stella liked Judd, and "again and again I did take artists that Dick [Bellamy] discovered—Serra, [and] Nauman." Castelli, interview by Tomkins, transcript, "Leo Castelli-Bio," 21 (backside)–22.

⁶⁹⁷ Henry Hawley, telephone interview by author, 19 July 2007.

CHAPTER FOUR

1965-1968

EROS AND LIBERATION

On 12 March 1966, Kusama wrote out a plan for her first psychedelic artwork and sent it to the two organizers of an exhibition “Zero on Sea” (fig. 2.62), Leo Verboon and Albert Anthing Vogel. “I have a tape of music that is to be played during the exhibition. The tape is two hours long and is all Beatle[s] music.”⁶⁹⁸ The exhibition, scheduled to open in April 1966 at Scheveningen Pier, Den Haag, in the Netherlands, was conceived as Europe’s pioneering site-specific art event (though it did not in the end take place).⁶⁹⁹ Kusama’s music tape was part of her proposed new environmental sculpture entitled *Love Forever*—an 84-inch high and 112-inch wide mirror-lined kaleidoscopic hexagonal room (fig. 4.1). With strobe lights covering the ceiling, “at times,” Kusama explained, “all [the lights] will go out,

⁶⁹⁸ Yayoi Kusama, letter to Leo Verboon and Albert Vogel, 12 March 1966, folder “Orez,” Kusama Yayoi Studio, Tokyo. Hereafter, referred to as Kusama Papers.

⁶⁹⁹ The real-estate developer Maatschappij Zeebad Scheveningen commissioned two owners of Galerij Orez, Leo Verboon and Albert Vogel, to organize this show. The two organizers traveled all around the world and were prepared to invite more than fifty artists. But the show was aborted on 25 March 1966 since several works turned out to be too expensive to realize; additionally, no insurance companies wanted to risk covering this unprecedented public art project. International Galerij Orez, letter to Yayoi Kusama, no date, ca. July 1965, folder “Galerij Orez,” Kusama Papers. While preparing for Zero on Sea, Kusama was simultaneously conceptualizing two outdoor pieces: *Narcissus Garden* and *Love Forever*. Kusama, letter to Verboon and Vogel, 12 March 1966.

except” for those that spell out “‘love’ and ‘sex.’” Circular give-away pins printed with “Love Forever” (fig. 4.2) would reinforce these words. Kusama wrote that the pins were reminiscent of those used for election campaigns in the United States.⁷⁰⁰ Kusama based *Love Forever* on studies by behavioral psychologist, Timothy Leary. His 1966 article, “The Molecular Revolution,” asserted that exposing a person to a peculiar amalgam of sound, flashing lights, and projected images could generate visions similar to those experienced through LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide) by activating dormant parts of the brain. Of course, each psychedelic experience is different and this formula might not work for everyone. But Leary argued that transformative experiences of this type could ultimately change a person’s perception of the world, which in turn could lead to social change.⁷⁰¹

Initially characterized as art that “has been significantly influenced by psychedelic experience” induced by mind-expanding psychoactive drugs—such as mescaline (peyote), psilocybin (the “sacred” mushroom), and LSD⁷⁰²—psychedelic art is today said to be characterized by “artistic experiment and dissenting politics,”

⁷⁰⁰ Kusama, letter to Verboon and Vogel, 12 March 1966.

⁷⁰¹ Timothy Leary, “The Molecular Revolution” (1966), in *Timewave Zero/A Psychedelic Reader*, eds. Bovier, Lionel, and Mai-Thu Perret (Graz, Austria: Grazer Kunstverein, 2001), 24-25. As demonstrated by the composer-musician Brad Garton at the 2010 Guggenheim symposium on Kandinsky, we can now see through CT scans that certain sounds stimulate unused parts of the brain. Brad Garton, presentation, “The Universe Resounds: Kandinsky, Synesthesia, and Art,” 12 January 2010.

⁷⁰² Jean Houston and Robert E. L. Masters, eds. *Psychedelic Art* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 17. This book is the earliest most comprehensive United States survey on psychedelic art.

as the curator Christoph Grunenberg phrases it.⁷⁰³ With active hallucinogens effectively releasing people from the rationality of established social systems, and fueling for many a desire to change those systems through alternative values, the psychedelic movement became politicized. The movement was supported by many educated middle-class youths, a population that was increasingly distrustful of U.S. society during the 1960s, especially on account of the Vietnam War and the military draft it entailed. In *Love Forever*, Kusama intended to offer her viewers a psychedelic experience without the use of actual hallucinogens by letting them encounter multimedia sensations inside the mirrored enclosure. The fleeting illuminations of the words “LOVE” and “SEX” were part of a political message promoting peace and social transformation, which Kusama believed could be realized only through sexual revolution.

Since the exhibition “Zero on Sea” was aborted on 25 March 1966, Kusama never had a chance to realize *Love Forever*. However, in that same month in New York she built her first psychedelic artwork, *Kusama’s Peep Show* (fig. 4.3). Though the ceiling lights of *Peep Show* did not spell out “LOVE” and “SEX,” the blue, red, white, and yellow light bulbs on the ceiling were programmed to flash on and off several times per second. The lights’ reflections inside the mirrored enclosure created a kaleidoscopic pattern. In 1967, Kusama would further develop the basic idea of *Peep Show* into her first “audio-visual-light performance,” a project entitled *Self-Obliteration* (fig. 4.4). The spectacle was modeled after Leary’s conceit of a neurological art form, which he called a “sound-and-light show,” and which he

⁷⁰³ Grunenberg, *Summer of Love*, 11.

premiered at the New Theater in New York in 1965.⁷⁰⁴

From the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, the term “psychedelic” also designated a wide range of aesthetic and stylistic manifestations encompassing fashion, music, film, and interior and graphic design in the expanding counterculture.⁷⁰⁵ During Kusama’s psychedelic period, she had a particularly inventive output that covered a wide range of creative genres including fashion, film, theater, and publications.⁷⁰⁶

This phase of Kusama’s work has been interpreted as her attempt to close the gap between art and life through performance art.⁷⁰⁷ It is my assertion, however, that Kusama was more ambitiously attempting to deploy her art as what the principal theorist of the New Left movement, the Frankfurt School philosopher, Herbert Marcuse called, “a force *in* the (given) society”⁷⁰⁸ by changing people’s way of thinking and building a new aesthetic environment. Through her psychedelic art and, more specifically, her evocations of love and sex, or Eros, as Marcuse termed it, the goal of Kusama’s psychedelic art was to bring about social change.

By drawing on a film and on photo-documentations from various stages of her development, the present chapter focuses on a period between 1965 and

⁷⁰⁴ Leary, *Flashbacks, an Autobiography*, 227. Kusama mentioned in an interview that she remembered one of Leary’s sound-and-light shows. Kusama, interview by Munroe, 18 December 1988.

⁷⁰⁵ Grunenberg, *Summer of Love*, 11.

⁷⁰⁶ See two issues of Kusama’s tabloid newspaper, *Kusama Presents an Orgy of Nudity, Love, Sex & Beauty* (n.d.), in folder “1969,” Kusama Papers.

⁷⁰⁷ Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 62, 65.

⁷⁰⁸ Marcuse, “Art as a Form of Reality,” in *On the Future of Art*, 127, 130. Emphasis as in original.

1968. My analysis begins with a close examination of Kusama's photographic collaboration with Japanese photographer, Eikoh Hosoe (b. 1933) in 1965 and 1966, photos that captured a transitional moment when Kusama discovered consciousness-expanding drugs. I will further investigate the social significance of Kusama's psychedelic Happenings, including notably her audio-visual-light performance *Self-Obliteration*, her *Body Painting*, and her *Naked Happening*. I will also provide a comparative context for Kusama's political views in relation to those of certain of her contemporaries, namely Warhol, Piene, and Tambellini.

Brave New World

Since 1962, Kusama had been treating or, in a sense, suppressing her anxiety neurosis by taking the tranquilizers Doriden and Miltown. (As discussed in Chapter Three, her anxiety neurosis evidently resulted in part from her intense artistic competition with her male artist peers in New York.) Her situation might evince some aspects of Aldous Huxley's 1932 futuristic fantasy, *Brave New World*. Set in AD 2540, this novel portrayed a totalitarian state with a populous coerced into submission by a mind-altering drug called *soma*, said to give users enjoyable so-called "hangover holidays" and thus to eliminate all dissatisfaction.⁷⁰⁹ Huxley's novel poignantly grapples with the question of human freedom in a pharmacologically controlled society, which by the 1960s was very nearly an average citizen's reality in the United States. According to historian Theodore Roszak, in 1967 alone, "Americans consumed

⁷⁰⁹ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1932; reprint, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946).

some 800,000 pounds of barbiturates—and then some ten billion amphetamine tablets to counteract the barbiturates.”⁷¹⁰

Medical historian Andrea Tone wrote that “feminist researchers in the 1970s frequently blamed [the] mistreatment of women” with tranquilizers, which helped suppress women’s emotional distress and disorders.⁷¹¹ Beatnik writer William S. Burroughs provides a vivid description of the experience of someone on this type of narcotic: “It kills the pain and pleasure implicit in [human] awareness. While the factual memory of an addict may be quite accurate and extensive, his emotional memory may be scanty and, in the case of heavy addiction, approaching effective zero.”⁷¹²

The effects of this sort of mind control were in a way, arguably, captured through the collaborative work of Kusama and Hosoe, as for example in two photographs entitled, *Kusama in Infinity Mirror Room* (figs. 4.5 and 4.6). *Infinity Mirror Room* was a site-specific installation piece from the artist’s November 1965 solo exhibition, “Floor Show,” which included a panel on the floor covered by phallic protuberances surrounded by mirror-lined walls.⁷¹³ Both images of *Kusama in*

⁷¹⁰ Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflection on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1969), 169.

⁷¹¹ Tone, *The Age of Anxiety*, xviii.

⁷¹² William S. Burroughs, “Afterthought on a Deposition,” in *Naked Lunch* (Paris: Olympia Press, 1959; reprint, New York: Grove Press, 1966), xx.

⁷¹³ Kusama hired an architect to make a detailed construction plan of *Infinity Mirror Room* tailored to the irregularly shaped walls of the Richard Castellane Gallery. “Floor Plan of *Infinity Mirror Room*” (fig. 4.10), in folder “1965,” Kusama Papers. Kusama’s fifth solo exhibition in New York was entitled “Floor Show” and is now

Infinity Mirror Room do not depict the mirrors, however. This is because the photographs date to the early fall of 1965 during Hosoe's brief sojourn in New York, and before Kusama had completed the *Infinity Mirror Room*. These images may be seen, then, as a blueprint for Kusama's forthcoming work.

For *Kusama in Infinity Mirror Room*, Kusama and Hosoe created multiple exposures of Kusama, who is lying on a field of red, polka-dotted, stuffed phallic protuberances with her face up, and her hands grasping her breasts (fig. 4.6). This erotic gesture is reminiscent of Hosoe's photographs that delineate the coded, erotic body language of male and female *Butoh* dancers. The layered, double exposed image was also a technique he had used previously (fig. 4.7).

Between 1964 and 1965, Kusama lived next door to the Chinese-American photographer, Lock Huey. She frequented his storefront studio and asked him to help her develop her negatives to certain specifications.⁷¹⁴ By the time Hosoe visited Kusama in the fall of 1965, she was well versed in darkroom procedures and may have contributed to the processing that resulted in the multiple exposures of the photographs. Hosoe explained recently to Midori Yoshimoto, however, that he had

mainly remembered for *Infinity Mirror Room*. However, the exhibition was made up of two parts: The largest section of the show was "a room in which all of the sculptures were placed flat on the floor" and the walls were "covered with mirrors which extended the image theoretically to infinity." The second room consisted of "various kitchen objects (dishpans, spatulas, ladles, dustpans, baby carriages, and so forth) with the spotted or striped material stretched over them." The central work in this room, *My Flower Bed*—whose image was used for the show's publicity—consisted of "a large bloom" made out of thousands of overlapping gloves and old bedsprings painted red (fig. 4.11). Michael Benedict, "New York Letters," *Art International* (January 1966): 98.

⁷¹⁴ Video recording of Lock Huey, interview with author, Chatham, New York, 13 May 2010.

attached a prism to his camera lens in order to acquire the multiple imagery.⁷¹⁵ Though he seemed to have been referring to the 1965 photographs, Hosoe must have been thinking of his collaboration with Kusama the following year. Their 1966 collaborative portfolio, *14th Street Happening* (fig. 4.8) reveals multiple exposures resulting from the use of a prism as is evidenced by the color positives which indicate that the images were indeed captured through a camera lens.⁷¹⁶ However, both images of *Kusama in Infinity Mirror Room* exist only in print. Moreover, upon close scrutiny of these images, one is able to see that Hosoe acquired an effect similar to mirror reflections—likely stemming from Kusama’s concept for her forthcoming work, *Infinity Mirror Room*—by making a full exposure of the negative on light-sensitive paper. He then used a dodging tool to mask the center of the print and manipulated its outer zone by moving the negative three times in one of the photographs (fig. 4.5), and four times in the other (fig. 4.6). The end result was multiple-exposure in a print that created kaleidoscopic images, comparable to mirror-like reflections.⁷¹⁷ What, then, did Kusama want to manifest in these photographs?

Both works (figs. 4.5 and 4.6) render Kusama’s body, duplicated as if by a kaleidoscope, anchored to a field of phallic protuberances. She seems conscious, yet

⁷¹⁵ Eikoh Hosoe, e-mail of 7 February 2004, cited in Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 215, n. 69.

⁷¹⁶ Takako Fujibayashi, Kusama’s assistant, e-mail to author, 17 August 2010. The negatives of *Kusama in Infinity Mirror Room* have not been found.

⁷¹⁷ The holography artist Michael Weynon provided this insight into Hosoe’s print technique. Michael Weynon, unrecorded conversation with author, New York, 15 August 2010.

immobile, which is similar to what Burroughs described as the effects of the “pain-killer” that makes the user’s “factual memory . . . quite accurate and extensive,” yet the emotional capacity “scanty,” and the user unresponsive.⁷¹⁸ A later photograph by someone unknown was taken inside *Infinity Mirror Room* (fig. 4.9). In it the artist stands in the middle of the room, raising her hands above her head and pantomiming almost as if there were a large mirror in front of her. Kusama seems to be locked inside the mirrored enclosure, unable to communicate with the outside world. Both *Kusama in Infinity Mirror Room* and this later photograph parallel circumstances of Kusama’s own life around 1962 when she was in a way locked inside her own mind in a way through prescription drug usage just after having a nervous breakdown (see Chapter Three). A doctor at St. Luke’s Hospital in New York prescribed Miltown for the day and Doriden for the night, keeping her sedated much of the time.⁷¹⁹ Later, recalling this experience she wrote: “After the event [hospitalization], I was bedridden for one month, suffered from nausea, hallucination, and, above all, lethargy.”⁷²⁰ *Kusama in Infinity Mirror Room* cast the artist as immobile and

⁷¹⁸ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, xx.

⁷¹⁹ A sheet that bears the instruction for her medication and two diagrams has been found inserted in Kusama’s Notebook No. 1. It is written on the stationery of her doctor at St. Luke’s Hospital, but she says she does not remember the name of this doctor. Both documents are in the Kusama Papers.

⁷²⁰ Around the fall of 1966, Kusama drafted an initial account in Japanese of her hallucinatory experiences, and then translated it into English herself. Jay Jacobs, the art critic, modified it, most likely in consultation with Kusama, before turning it over to Gordon Brown to copyedit. Kusama, untitled Japanese statement, 1966; Kusama with Jay Jacobs, untitled draft statement in English, 1966; Kusama, “Statement by Yayoi Kusama,” typescript, 1966; Kusama with Gordon Brown, “Kusama, Kusama, Kusama (World’s First Obsessional Artist),” typescript, 1966. All documents are in Kusama Papers.

incapable of overcoming her own situation.

The Doors of Perception

After *Infinity Mirror Room*, Kusama's work began making an abrupt shift, from confined self-reflexive environments to works that required the viewers' active participation, as seen in two successive works: *Peep Show* of March 1966 (fig. 4.3) and *Narcissus Garden* in June of the same year (fig. 3.49). For *Peep Show*, Kusama encouraged viewers to peer into a room through two 8" x 8" windows placed in the first and third walls of a hexagonal box (fig. 4.1). When two people were "peeping" at the same time, their reflections would intermix, infinitely bouncing off the mirrored walls; thus in this inaccessible space, an "I" could begin to mix with an "Other." This blend between "I" and "Other" is also pronounced in *Narcissus Garden*, which featured 1,500 mechanically-produced mirrored balls on two lawns in front of the Italian Pavilion at the 1966 Venice Biennale. While the viewing subject would be continuously reflected on the mirrored surfaces, the open-air installation allowed the world around to enter into the matrix as reflected in the mirrored surfaces. Bringing the mirrored reflections outdoors, *Narcissus Garden* enabled a sort of communication between audience members (fig. 3.50) and their surroundings. Kusama further priced her balls affordably at 2,000 lire or \$2 a piece, and sold them to attendees. Through this act she simultaneously increased the accessibility of her work, making it available to people from all walks of life, and critiqued the rampant commerciality of U.S. Pop Art (see Chapter Three). Thus she challenged the established commercial

system of an art world that she nonetheless also believed could improve her personal situation.

Kusama's new attempts to overcome her situation by fostering what she believed was positive social change took place during the time of Leary's new studies of the effects on the human psyche of various psychoactive drugs. His first public lecture on the ability of the drugs to expand consciousness took place at Cooper Union in New York in December 1964.⁷²¹ This event drew significant media attention, which helped to promulgate the use of mind-altering drugs at an even faster pace.⁷²² Kusama remembers trying out non-prescription psychoactive drugs for the first time around 1965.⁷²³ Her experience of active hallucinogens gradually influenced the development of her work after her November 1965 *Infinity Mirror Room*.

Although hallucinogens have a long tradition in human history,⁷²⁴ Western scientists in general began paying serious attention to them only after the surfacing of the Nazi experiments with psychotropic drugs on Jewish prisoners during the Second

⁷²¹ Although Kusama has not commented on Leary's Cooper Union lecture, she clearly remembered "Timothy Leary's big lecture at Fillmore East Theater. And also [Leary's friend] Allen Ginsberg, they were taking drugs," as were "John Lennon and Yoko." Kusama, interview by Munroe, 18 December 1988.

⁷²² Leary, *Flashbacks*, 206-227.

⁷²³ Munroe asked Kusama, "When [did] you first experiment [with drugs]?" Kusama replied: "Early, 1965 or something." She also remembers people using: "heroin and also morphine, marijuana, mescaline, too. LSD, too." Kusama, interview by Munroe, 18 December 1988.

⁷²⁴ According to Leary, "English Romantic poetry of the nineteenth century was almost entirely drug inspired," including that by such authors as Shelley, Keats, Robert Louis Stevenson, Coleridge, and Byron. "Even Charles Darwin dug his inspiration from the opium bottle." Leary, *Flashbacks*, 53.

World War. One of the earliest studies on hallucinogens was done in 1952 by a young British clinical psychologist, Humphry Osmond, who looked specifically at mescaline. In his research, Osmond found a “structural similarity between . . . mescaline and adrenaline molecules, implying that psychiatric conditions . . . might be a form of self-intoxication caused by the body mistakenly producing its own hallucinogenic compounds.”⁷²⁵ By the time of Osmond’s study, Western psychologists had been aware that chemical reactions could induce various levels of human consciousness and, with Osmond’s findings, they were beginning to understand the reasons why hallucinogens have been inspiring and stimulating artistic creativity for centuries.

With an awareness of Osmond’s research, Huxley found a new emancipation in hallucinogenic drugs and an escape from the coerciveness of the barbiturates with which he had previously grappled in *Brave New World*. He wrote to Osmond and offered himself as a guinea pig for the psychologist’s clinical research. In May 1953, under Osmond’s supervision, Huxley took mescaline and detailed this experience in a new book, *The Doors of Perception* (1954), which became extraordinarily influential to the psychedelic generation. In his book, Huxley described the human brain and nervous system functioning as a valve that establishes itself in relation to one’s social experiences. Once set up, the valve controls and screens the mind-at-large. Huxley’s hypothesis was that the psychoactive drugs could turn on never-activated parts of the cerebella, thereby expanding human consciousness. The drugs, then, could potentially

⁷²⁵ Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain, *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD* (New York: Grove Press, 1985), 45.

be used for changing human perception and, by extension, human behavior.⁷²⁶

In the early 1960s, the use of active hallucinogens became oddly politicized, in part through Leary's denunciations of the CIA's covert mind control research based at Harvard University's medical school, which operated under the code name "MK-ULTRA."⁷²⁷ Using narcotics as a tool for social control through the surreptitious administration of drugs and other chemicals to certain individuals, MK-ULTRA took over Nazi drug experiments. Leary, who was a young research psychologist at Harvard at the time, was unaware of MK-ULTRA's existence as he began studying separately active hallucinogens as part of his behavioral studies for the Psychology department. At one point, the CIA contacted him and warned him that he would be "allowed to conduct his experiments as long as it did not get out of hand," and he eventually came across the government MK-ULTRA project.⁷²⁸

Born in 1920, Leary described himself as a child of the Jazz Age—a generation that, as he viewed it, believed in the improvisational and innovative capacities of human beings—and he had admired Benjamin Spock as its "great philosopher." Spock's *Baby and Child Care* (1946) encouraged parents to let their children "improvise and innovate."⁷²⁹ At the same time, Spock observed "ever-changing patterns of interactions within the person and with others," which he considered

⁷²⁶ Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (New York: Harper, 1954).

⁷²⁷ Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, 5.

⁷²⁸ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁷²⁹ Timothy Leary, "Preface," in *An Annotated Bibliography of Timothy Leary*, eds. Michael Horowitz, Billy Smith, and Karen Walls (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1988), 6-7.

inherent to human social behavior. Spock had thus seen the concept of the “interpersonal” as the key factor in human behavior, which became the initial focus of Leary’s research.⁷³⁰

Once Leary became familiar with the potential of mind-altering drugs, following Huxley’s “valve” idea he hypothesized that one could “reboot” the human brain to recover its initial improvisational and innovative state and to alter unwanted behaviors such as, for instance, that stemming from hostility in prisoners. He thus launched a prison-rehabilitation program at Harvard. For his treatment, he administered a dose of psilocybin to the prisoners, re-imprinting their brains and successfully inducing positive changes in almost all of their behaviors. The end result was, by his account, a significant improvement in their mental health.⁷³¹

The worthwhile results, however, posed only threats to the CIA. Once Leary became aware of MK-ULTRA and its focus on using the “brain-change drugs for mind control,” he took a fiercely oppositional stance to the government’s direction. Leary believed that active hallucinogens could change the human brain and help people overcome their “narrow social conditioning” for “positive social change[s],”⁷³² including with regard to the Vietnam War. According to his principles, this development could put an end to “wars, class conflicts, racial tensions, economic exploitation, religious strife, ignorance, and prejudice.”⁷³³ Soon, he moved beyond

⁷³⁰ Ibid., 8.

⁷³¹ Leary, *Flashbacks*, 85-90.

⁷³² Ibid., 50.

⁷³³ Ibid.

the field of science and began plotting a “neurological revolution.”⁷³⁴

Epitomized by his relentlessly quoted slogan, "Turn on, tune in, drop out," Leary's psychedelic revolution could be achieved in three simple stages, as he outlined it. First, people needed to “turn on” inactive brain cells with mind-expanding drugs that would help open out their perception beyond what he called the “symbol system.” Second, by the phase “tune in,” Leary encouraged people to “harness your internal revelations to the external world around you”; he explained that active hallucinogens can stimulate innovative and creative zones of the human brain, and “right before our eyes . . . the new music, the new poetry, the new visual art, the new film” would occur. Such creative output would, he predicted, enrich the world around us and help cultivate individual personalities. Third, by the directive to “drop out,” Leary instructed people to “detach yourself, unhook the ambitions and the symbolic drives and the mental connections which keep you addicted and tied to the immediate tribal game.”⁷³⁵

These ideas for human revolution were largely unprecedented. Beginning with the French Revolution of 1789, as eminent twentieth century philosopher Hannah Arendt asserts, “the role of revolution was no longer to liberate men from the

⁷³⁴ Ibid. He was also dismissed from Harvard. According to a *New York Times* article, he failed to conduct his scheduled class lectures. “Harvard Recalls Statement,” *The New York Times*, 12 March 1966, p. 25. Leary claimed, however, that he had fulfilled all of his teaching obligations. The decision to dismiss him, according to Jay Stevens, was allegedly influenced by his role in popularizing the then-legal psychedelic substances among Harvard students and faculty members. Jay Stevens, *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* (London: Heinemann, 1988), xvii.

⁷³⁵ Leary, “The Molecular Revolution,” 24-25.

oppression of their fellow men,” but to gain “abundance,” in the context of capitalism.⁷³⁶ Leary’s psychedelic revolution was the first anti-capitalist revolution that focused on people’s spiritual well being. He encouraged his young followers to take “a year or two off,” before settling down in society. After “growing beards, wandering around the country, fooling with new forms of consciousness,” induced by active hallucinogens, he guaranteed that their “coming back [to society] will be much enriched.”⁷³⁷

Leary’s tenets were hugely influential, especially to the sons and daughters of white, middle-class, conservative American families, particularly those young men facing being sent to the warfront in Southeast Asia. They seem often to have viewed themselves as having nothing to lose, so the prospect of changing their worldview and dropping out of society seemed appealing. These educated middle-class youths were also the major force behind the New Left movement. This movement first emerged among dissenting Communist Party intellectuals and campus groups in the United Kingdom, and later, alongside campus radicalism, was promulgated around the globe. The main theorist of the movement, Marcuse considered drugs too easy of a solution to re-orient established ways of thinking.⁷³⁸ However, it was politically charged

⁷³⁶ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: The Viking Press, 1963), 57-58.

⁷³⁷ Leary, “The Molecular Revolution,” in *Timewave Zero*, 25-26.

⁷³⁸ Marcuse wrote: “Awareness of the need for such a revolution in perception, for a new sensorium, is perhaps the kernel of truth in the psychedelic search. But it is vitiated when its narcotic character brings temporary release not only from the reason and rationality of the established system but also from that other rationality which is to change the established system, when sensibility is freed not only from the exigencies of the existing order but also from those of liberation.” Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1969), 37.

youth who packed Leary's December 1964 Cooper Union lecture on consciousness expansion and brain-change through psychoactive drugs.⁷³⁹ Hence, the proliferation of drugs and New Left politics went hand in hand, and drugs became extremely popular among youth engaged in dissenting politics. All of this had no small impact on Kusama.

Love Forever: Love, Sex, and Synesthesia

In addition to her political views, Kusama's abiding interest in modern psychology led to her nod to Leary's psychedelic revolution. Not only did she begin experimenting with active hallucinogens probably soon after Leary's December 1964 Cooper Union lecture on the subject, but by early September of 1965 she had begun developing an idea for her first psychedelic artwork, *Love Forever*.⁷⁴⁰ This turn came immediately after Leary demonstrated his world premiere of neurological art, which he called "sound-and-light show," in the late summer of 1965 in New York.⁷⁴¹ The earliest drawing for *Love Forever*, delineating a huge octagonal room, appears on the

⁷³⁹ Leary, *Flashbacks*, 206-227.

⁷⁴⁰ This idea also coincided with a visit from two gallerists from the Netherlands. Kusama first received an invitation to "Zero on Sea" by mail. Leo Verboon, letter to Yayoi Kusama, 2 July 1965. Verboon and Vogel visited her in New York and explained the project in early September. This visit is mentioned in E. Melvill van Carnbee (a gallery assistant), letter to Yayoi Kusama, 15 September 1965. Both letters are in the "Galerij Orez" folder, Kusama Papers.

⁷⁴¹ Leary, *Flashbacks*, 227. The event was held at the New Theater. The event anticipated his famous lecture tour, the psychedelic celebration *Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out*, which he launched in 1966. For details on Leary's lecture, one can listen to an LP, Timothy Leary and The League for Spiritual Discovery, *Psychedelic Celebration: Turn On Turn In Drop Out*, Mercury MG-21131, 1966.

architectural plan of Kusama's November 1965 *Infinity Mirror Room* (fig. 4.10). In the following January, she met up with an electronic engineer, Edward J. Maydock, and asked him to build a device that could make light bulbs flash at certain intervals.⁷⁴² The final work became a hexagonal mirror-lined room with flashing lights, which she premiered as *Kusama's Peep Show* between 16 March and 22 April 1966 at Richard Castellane Gallery in New York (fig. 4.3). For the entire duration of this exhibition, Beatles music played alongside this kinetic work.⁷⁴³

Leary had postulated that a certain amalgam of sound, flashing lights, and projected images “would demonstrate what an LSD session is like,” thus sparking never-activated cerebral zones that would expand human perceptions, ultimately helping to alter worldviews.⁷⁴⁴ Historically, this neurological state—whereby stimulation of one sensory cognitive pathway leads to involuntary experiences in a secondary sensory cognitive pathway—has been interpreted as “synesthesia.” Mirrors, too, could be utilized during a psychedelic event to elicit a mind-altered state.⁷⁴⁵

⁷⁴² Edward J. Maydock, letter to Yayoi Kusama, 3 January 1966, Kusama Papers.

⁷⁴³ The scheduled opening date was 15 March 1966. This was later changed to March 16th. See “Kusama's Peep Show,” and the preview invitation, Vertical File, “Yayoi Kusama,” Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC. During the summer of 1966, Kusama re-titled the work, *Endless Love Show*. See *Multiplicity*, exh. cat. (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1966), n.p.

⁷⁴⁴ Leary, *Flashbacks*, 227, 229-30.

⁷⁴⁵ Curator Chrissie Iles observed that during a psychedelic event, a mirror “appears repeatedly as a portal, or doorway,” contributing as well to a mind-altered state. Chrissie Iles, “Liquid Dreams,” in *Summer of Love*, 70-72. Leary did not himself use the term “synesthesia.” For more on synesthesia, see Kerry Brougher, et al., *Visual Music: Synesthesia in Art and Music Since 1900* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005).

Sound, flashing lights, projected images and the use of mirrors were all elements that became essential to Kusama's psychedelic art.

For Leary, equally important to the idea of altering human behavior through psychedelic art was the prospect of reinvention of the environment. Because our surroundings make imprints on the human brain, reinventing them can produce, according to Leary, "levels of consciousness, stages of imprinting [information], [and] psycho-geometry."⁷⁴⁶ Kusama was sensitive to the potential impact of a transformative environment in her concept for *Peep Show* when she merely invited the viewer to peer inside the room through two windows. In *Love Forever*, however, she planned to let viewers walk inside the mirrored room to experience sensations with their whole bodies. But this work was never realized. Kusama eventually partially dismantled *Peep Show* to use its elements as props for her numerous psychedelic Happenings, which were also intended to bring about social change by altering human behavior through synesthetic effects.

The words "LOVE" and "SEX," which Kusama had planned to incorporate in *Love Forever* may further connect this work with the dissenting politics of the New Left. According to Paul Prince, an ex-hippy who has described his experiences during the decade, the supporters of the New Left hailed from a "spiritually malnourished generation who had grown up in the conservative 'gray flannel fifties,'" a generation "starved for authentic emotional experiences with others, the world, and the mysteries of life."⁷⁴⁷ With the rapid escalation of the war in Southeast Asia and increasing

⁷⁴⁶ Leary, *An Annotated Bibliography*, 8.

⁷⁴⁷ Paul Prince, "Dancing on the Edge: Re-Collecting the Sixties," in *High Societies*:

social unrest, many members of his generation began questioning the social conditions of their time and urging authority figures to “reverse the direction of progress,” in Marcuse’s words, by breaking the “fatal union of productivity and destruction, liberty and repression,” and shaping the human world in accordance with “Life Instincts.”⁷⁴⁸

Marcuse believed that people were generally miserable since they were “efficiently manipulated and organized” by “the dehumanizing conditions of profitable affluence” called capitalism, a system that values labor over pleasure.⁷⁴⁹ If the human body can become an instrument of pleasure rather than labor, then he believed that people would be more satisfied and the world could become a better place.⁷⁵⁰ Many New Left supporters advocated such ideas and wanted to “fight for Eros against Death”⁷⁵¹; thus, “make love, not war” became their slogan. One significant aspect of active hallucinogens is the increase of sensorial experiences. Marcuse noted that the sensual effects of hallucinogens held a particular appeal to the New Left, and he himself supported what he termed “Polymorphous sexuality.”⁷⁵²

Kusama’s use of popular music also connected her new work with dissenting

Psychedelic Rock Posters of Haight-Ashbury, ed. D. Scott Atkinson, exh. cat. (San Diego, CA: San Diego Museum of Art, 2001), 6.

⁷⁴⁸ Marcuse, “Political Preface 1966,” in *Eros and Civilization*, xi.

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, xiii, xxiii.

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, xiii.

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid.*, xxv.

⁷⁵² Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 37.

politics. From the early 1960s in the United States, popular music played a significant role in the Civil Rights and anti-Vietnam War movements.⁷⁵³ One reason for this was that the “baby boom” following the Second World War swelled the population of young adults in the 1960s. By the early 1960s, “in America, as in a number of European countries,” Roszak reported, “a bit more than 50 percent of the population is under twenty-five years of age.”⁷⁵⁴ For the politically motivated young, songs by Bob Dylan, among others, were social catalysts. Kusama, who also reacted strongly against the U.S. intervention in Vietnam, sought an idiom that could connect her art with the youth engaged in that struggle. One solution for her was to introduce music by the Beatles, a group especially admired by peace-loving hippies.

In the mid to late 1960s, the New York art world in general became unusually politicized. On 18 April 1965, for example, a group called “Writers and Artists Protest” ran a paid advertisement in *The New York Times* entitled “End Your Silence.” Endorsed by 407 writers and artists, this advertisement stated an anti-Vietnam War stance. In early 1965, two prominent protest groups, “Artists and Writers Dissent” and “Artists Protest,” were also established.⁷⁵⁵

⁷⁵³ For example, in the early 1960s, Joan Baez would sing “We Shall Overcome” at political rallies, which became an anthem of the Civil Rights movement. Bob Dylan’s often politically-charged lyrics inspired many young people, including some of the Students for Democratic Society (SDS). Mike Marqusee, *Chimes of Freedom: The Politics of Bob Dylan’s Art* (New York and London: The New Press, 2003), 9. Though the Beatles’s music was not generally considered as political as the songs of Dylan, its countercultural aspects emerged increasingly over the course of the 1960s.

⁷⁵⁴ Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, 27.

⁷⁵⁵ Francis Frascina, *Art, Politics and Dissent: Aspects of the Art Left in Sixties America* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 21.

Being particularly interested in modern psychology, Kusama framed a unique brand of dissident art that went hand in hand with the use of active hallucinogens. To the question, “Which drugs were you on in those days? Which drugs were popular then?” Kusama strategically replied only to the latter and said: “Heroin and also morphine, marijuana, mescaline too. LSD too.”⁷⁵⁶ But her answer signals us as to how attentive she was to the psychotropic drugs of her time. Furthermore, between 1966 and the early 1970s, Kusama’s once introspective personality suddenly changed and she became bold and outgoing, taking her art to the streets and nightclubs and actively engaging in outright political protest. It is not unlikely that such marked changes in her character were to some degree induced by her use of disinhibiting drugs, including active hallucinogens.⁷⁵⁷

Flower Umbrella: Aspiring to Bring Art to the Street

Kusama has long been known for imposing strict control over photographers so that she could determine exactly how her image would appear.⁷⁵⁸ But it was also

⁷⁵⁶ Kusama, interview with Munroe, 18 December 1988.

⁷⁵⁷ Kusama’s personality abruptly changed around 1965. She attributed this to successful psychiatric treatment suggesting that that it cured her and took away all her worries and anxieties during this period. Digital recording, Yayoi Kusama, interview by author, Tokyo, Kusama Studio, 28 July 2006. She related a similar account to Midori Yoshimoto. Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 76, n. 102. According to Robert de Ropp, during the mid-twentieth century, psychiatrists were successfully treating obsessional neurosis with LSD-25. It is possible that this was the treatment assigned to Kusama by her psychiatrists. See Robert S. de Ropp, *Drugs and the Mind* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1957), 241.

⁷⁵⁸ The photographer Lock Huey said that during his photo session with Kusama, she made all the decisions so that his role was just to press the shutter. Huey, interview by author, 13 May 2010; a similar account appears in Zelevansky, *Love Forever*, 20.

true that she carefully chose her photographers based on their areas of expertise and skills. For instance, while documenting her abstract *Net* painting, Kusama mainly used Rudolph Burckhardt, who was best known for his images of such Abstract Expressionists as Jackson Pollock, whom he photographed at work in his studio. For a time she considered having her portrait made by fashion photographer Hal Reiff. But once Kusama had decided to immerse herself in the late 1960s counterculture movement, she hired *The Village Voice* photographer Fred W. McDarrah, who was known for photographing beatniks and other such cultural insurgents. It is noteworthy, then, that after Kusama received a commission to produce her first outdoor artwork for the “Zero on Sea” exhibition in the Netherlands, she hired Peter Moore. She chose one of his images from this session, in fact, to promote her November 1965 *Floor Show* (fig. 4.12). Dating from the show’s opening—3 November 1965—her session with Moore took place around mid-September, immediately after Verboon and Vogel visited her studio.

Moore is known for documenting time-based Fluxus events and Happenings. Just before his photo session with Kusama, in the summer of 1965, he photographed Allan Kaprow’s *Calling*, which consisted of three performers wrapped in silver foil and rags, waiting to be picked up by a cab on the street and to travel across Manhattan. The publicity still that Kusama selected for her November exhibition was an interior: *Kusama Lying on My Flower Bed* (fig. 4.12).⁷⁵⁹ But recently uncovered undeveloped

⁷⁵⁹ I regard this as a publicity image for *Floor Show* because there is a similar picture by another photographer named Hiro (as credited) that graced the cover of *Art Voices* 4, no. 1 (Winter 1965) (fig. 4.11). Since Moore charged reproduction fees, it is possible that Kusama hired a less-known second photographer, Hiro, and asked him to

color positives from Kusama's Tokyo Studio (figs. 4.13a and 4.13b) suggest that the photo session took place also outdoors.⁷⁶⁰ In these images, Kusama nonchalantly holds a flower-adorned umbrella while posed before two of Manhattan's midtown landmarks—the Empire State Building (fig. 4.13a) and the Pan-American Building (fig. 4.13b).⁷⁶¹ Between 1968 and 1969, various other Manhattan landmarks would become backdrops for Kusama's anti-Vietnam War demonstrations, called *Anatomic Explosions* (fig. 4.56). In examining these images in 2006, Kusama explained that, for her, photography sometimes served as an “experimental tool” that, at times, helped her to grapple with and develop ideas that led to further work.⁷⁶² Nine months before her first outdoor installation and performance work, *Narcissus Garden* (fig. 3.49), these images in a way encapsulated a significant moment when she began thinking of bringing her art to the street.

Kusama's initiatives were but part of a larger postwar tendency to bring art to the outdoors. Beginning in 1955, the Japanese vanguard group Gutai staged exhibitions in a park, on stage, and even in the blue sky. (Some Gutai members, such as the group's leader Jirō Yoshihara and his son Michio, as well as Atsuko Tanaka

base his photographs on Moore's original image under the condition that she could reproduce his images free of charge, and that he would get a credit.

⁷⁶⁰ The author discovered this set in July 2006 in Kusama's studio in Tokyo. In these images, Kusama wears the same hairstyle and the exact same attire as in Moore's *Kusama Lying on My Flower Bed*—a neatly pressed red shirt and matching pair of leggings (fig. 4.12). Moreover, the color of the leaves in the background of figure 4.13b suggests that the shots were made around early fall.

⁷⁶¹ Kusama had used the same umbrella as a prop in *Walking Piece* of 1966 (figs. 4.14a and 4.14b).

⁷⁶² Kusama, interview by author, 28 July 2006.

and Sadamasa Motonaga, were meant to take part in “Zero on Sea.”) In 1961, the German Zero (fig. 2.43) and Dutch Nul (fig. 2.39) artist groups were bringing their art to the street, as discussed in Chapter Two of this study—inspired by even earlier outdoor works by Yves Klein (fig. 4.15) and Jean Tinguely.

In the United States, art critic Lucy Lippard considered Fluxus and other time-based ephemeral arts as tending toward “dematerialization.” In her book, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, Lippard defined Fluxus and the Happenings that emerged in the New York scene around 1957 as the first wave of Conceptualism.⁷⁶³ She identified as a second wave a new tendency toward dematerialization which “emerged from Minimalism,” a movement that became prominent around 1965.⁷⁶⁴ Despite the art world’s renewed interests in Duchampian Dada (see Chapter Three), Lippard saw that for this second wave of Conceptualists, “Duchampian ‘claiming’” was only an “occasional strategy.” The second wave was “less formal, less rooted in the subversion of art-world assumptions and art-as-commodity,” as Lippard phrased it.⁷⁶⁵ Moreover, “in contrast to Minimalism’s rejectively self-contained” attitude, the new wave of “Conceptual art was about saying more with less.”⁷⁶⁶

⁷⁶³ Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973). Lippard mentions that the Fluxus artist, Henry Flynt, coined the term “conceptual art” around 1960 and saw Fluxus as the first wave of Conceptualism.

⁷⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, xiii.

⁷⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁷⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, xiii.

Many prominent second-wave Conceptual artists, however, rarely departed from profit-generating circuits. Well-known Conceptual artists, such as Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner, both belonged to the Leo Castelli Gallery, the foremost purveyor of contemporary art in the second half of the twentieth century. By exhibiting artifacts relating to their occasionally ephemeral projects, the second wave of Conceptualists was able to make some money and also draw critics' attention.

In addition to the “cooler, Minimal art-oriented Conceptual mainstream,” as Lippard phrased it,⁷⁶⁷ there were other artists, such as NO!art, Group Center, and the Guerrilla Art Action Group, who were more outspoken and action-oriented in their politics and less accepted by commercial dealers for that reason. It follows that critics also tended to overlook these artists, which has led to delays in their being included in art historical analyses. And in the latter half of the 1960s, Kusama's practice began resonating with that of others characterized this more far-reaching, anti-establishment fervor.

Already on 12 July 1962, an important downtown countercultural figure, Aldo Tambellini (Kusama's future sponsor), together with his comrade rebels called Group Center,⁷⁶⁸ tried to crack the nutshell of the art world's closed system. They staged an

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid., x.

⁷⁶⁸ In 1962, Tambellini founded Group Center with the artists Elsa Tambellini, Ron Hahne, Ben Morea, and Don Snyder. Later, Jackie Cassen and Peter Martinez joined the group. The group wanted to establish a better connection between the artists and the community. Aldo Tambellini, “A Syracuse Rebel in New York,” in *Captured: A Film/Video History of the Lower East Side*, ed. Clayton Patterson (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005), 43.

anti-Capitalist protest called “The Screw” in front of major museums in New York.⁷⁶⁹ In this performance-based event, Tambellini, “dressed in a black suit and tie with a gold screw tie-clip,” read the “Manifesto of the Screw,” while a Puerto Rican trio sang a cappella his “Song of the Screw.” During the ceremony, his then wife, Elsa Tambellini, put on a five-foot tall *papier-mâché* screw with the Stars and Stripes on its top, and danced to the music.⁷⁷⁰

Tambellini believed that “creation” is not about commodifying arts for “a status seeking class. Creation is the vital energy of society.”⁷⁷¹ In a press release of 1962, he wrote:

Wall Street is making our art.
The galleries are making our art.
The Museums are making our art.
The critics are making our art.
WHERE IS THE ARTIST?⁷⁷²

Brought up in fascist Italy, Tambellini felt that the artists in the United States were getting reduced to “conformist[s] today,” as they were in Mussolini’s Italy.⁷⁷³ He manifested his concerns by undertaking guerrilla actions together with Group

⁷⁶⁹ These institutions included The Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. *Ibid.*, 42.

⁷⁷⁰ *Ibid.* In 1962, a New York City Ordinance mandated that any demonstration taking place in the city must display the American flag, so Tambellini placed a tiny flag on a screw.

⁷⁷¹ Statement of 1962, cited in *ibid.*, 43.

⁷⁷² Aldo Tambellini, “For Immediate Release,” 6 July 1962, Tambellini Papers, Salem, MA (hereafter cited as Tambellini Papers). Orthography as in original.

⁷⁷³ As cited in unidentified article in *The Daily Princetonian*, 8 May 1967, n.p., clipping from Tambellini Papers.

Center.⁷⁷⁴ He hoped that publicity might help him to amplify his concerns beyond the art world to the larger society. He later recalled that there were eighteen reporters present at “The Screw” event. However, not “one of them” published “an article,” presumably because of the outright critique of social systems which he expressed in the event.⁷⁷⁵

In 1965, Kusama, like Tambellini, was feeling the limits of working in the commercialized art world. She thus began exploring new possibilities by shifting her concept of her viewers from elite collectors to a mass audience. In the early fall of 1965, however, she still had a list of gallery and museum shows lined up: four solo exhibitions in New York, Milan, and Essen; six group exhibitions in Japan, Sweden, the Netherlands, and the United States.⁷⁷⁶ Busy as she was with these events and with travels in between,⁷⁷⁷ her first outdoor artwork did not occur until *Narcissus Garden*,

⁷⁷⁴ Other activities of Group Center included protesting the policies of The Museum of Modern Art by picketing during exhibition openings. The members, disguised in workmen’s attire, visited powerful uptown galleries at night and marked the sidewalk with the circular logo containing the word “centerfuge.” Tambellini, “Syracuse Rebel,” 44.

⁷⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁷⁷⁶ Kusama’s solo exhibitions between November 1965 and July 1966 included: “Floor Show,” Richard Castellane Gallery, New York (November 1965); “Driving Image Show,” Galleria d’Arte del Naviglio, Milan (January 1966); “Peep Show,” Richard Castellane Gallery (March 1966); “Driving Image Show,” Galerie M.E. Thelen, Essen, West Germany (May 1966). Her group exhibitions included: “White on White,” De Cordova Museum (November 1965); “*Zaigai Nihon Sakka Ten—Yōroppa to America*” [Japanese artists living in Europe and the United States], Tokyo Modern Art Museum (15 October-28 November 1965); “The Inner and the Outer Space,” Moderna Museet, Stockholm (December 1965-January 1966); “Multiplicity,” Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (April 1966); and, “Transforming Object,” The Museum of Modern Art, New York (June and July 1966).

⁷⁷⁷ She traveled to Italy in January 1966 for the opening of the Naviglio exhibition

the site-specific installation and performance work that she presented in June 1966 at the Venice Biennale. Although she still targeted her works for a fine art audience, Kusama, like Tambellini, sent a critical and cynical message about the condition of the mid-1960s commercial art world (see Chapter Three). Only after coming back from the Venice Biennale could she finally concentrate on expanding her reach, by realizing “many Happenings at the parks, theaters, and public places.”⁷⁷⁸ Once she embraced a time-based ephemeral art, however, documentary photography became an integral element in her art production.

Walking Piece and 14th Street Happening: Eros and Alienation in Urban Space

In 1966, during his annual pilgrimage to the United States, Hosoe again called on Kusama.⁷⁷⁹ This visit resulted in two photography portfolios: *14th Street Happening* (fig. 4.8) and *Walking Piece* (fig. 4.16). Reflecting Hosoe’s penchant for hyperbole, in these portfolios, Kusama again performed exaggerated gestures. At the same time, both works were shot outdoors: *14th Street Happening* took place on the sidewalk in front of Kusama’s 404 East 14th Street studio;⁷⁸⁰ *Walking Piece* was shot

and inspected the Venice Biennale site where she would later install *Narcissus Garden*. She returned to New York in mid-February, went to the Netherlands in April 1966, and stayed in Europe until July to work on *Narcissus Garden* at the Biennale.

⁷⁷⁸ Yayoi Kusama, letter to Karl-Ernst Jöllenbeck, the director of Galerie M.E. Thelen, Essen, 2 August 1966, Kusama Papers.

⁷⁷⁹ During the Occupation period, Hosoe became interested in U.S. culture and he began visiting the country annually after 1964. *Eikoh Hosoe Laboratory of Photography*, available from <http://www.eikoh-hosoe.jp/profile.html>; accessed 20 September 2010.

⁷⁸⁰ Kusama moved to this location on 1 March 1965. The building has a fire escape

against Manhattan's downtown industrial landscape. These initiatives seem to reflect Kusama's consuming interest, since the fall of 1965, in bringing her art to the street. However, during this time Hosoe was also interested in creating art outdoors as he began shooting his best-known collections entitled, *Kamaitachi* ("Weasel's Sickles"), in rural Japan in 1965.⁷⁸¹

"*Kamaitachi*" is a small, invisible mythical Japanese creature that is hostile and attacks good people walking in rice paddies. For Hosoe, the creature became symbolic of lurking memories of the war. Hosoe had first learned about *kamaitachi* while living in a small farming village in northern Japan as a pre-teen evacuee during World War II. In September 1965, together with the *Butoh* dancer Tatsumi Hijikata (b. 1928), Hosoe visited a village similar to the one in which he had spent his adolescent years and began taking photographs of Hijikata performing against the backdrop of village scenes. By dressing in traditional farming garments, and occasionally using a Japanese military flag as his prop, Hijikata personified *kamaitachi* (fig. 4.17). The two repeatedly went back to the same village throughout 1968; Hosoe published the collection in 1969.

When Hosoe visited Kusama in 1966, he was preoccupied with the idea of his new collection, *Kamaitachi*, which seems eventually to have influenced their collaboration. Both 1966 portfolios by Hosoe conjure up Kusama's wartime

on its façade from which Hosoe shot *14th Street Happening*. Larry Rivers owned this building (Kusama knew Rivers through Beatrice Perry since 1960). One image contains a bus. Yoshimoto described the scene: "A tourist bus also stayed for a while so that passengers could see the event." Yoshimoto, 70. However, there is a bus stop in front of the building and the bus in question was a city bus.

⁷⁸¹ Ekoh Hosoe, *Kamaitachi* (first published in 1969; reprint, New York: Aperture, 2009).

adolescent years: a knee-length, black dress in *14th Street Happening* evokes a schoolgirl uniform; in *Walking Piece*, an erotic pink *juban*, or young unmarried woman's undergarment for her kimono, sown with flowers, butterflies, and cranes, was an example of a sumptuous item banned under the Japanese military regime, suggesting some of the luxuries Kusama might have longed for during the war years (see Chapter One). Given her attire combined with her hyperbolic gestures, it might be tempting to think that Hosoe was the director of both portfolios (figs. 4.8 and 4.16). The concept for the portfolios, however, firmly rests with Kusama as well. In *Kamaitachi*, Hosoe had based his work on memories of his pre-pubescent years spent in rural Japan and it is likely that he asked Kusama to wear clothes reminiscent of wartime. But Kusama addressed contemporary issues, too, by posing her body in confrontational ways within the urban space around her, ways that evince her experiences living and working in New York as a Japanese woman.

Using a prop from a collaboration they had done the previous year, *Kusama in Infinity Mirror Room* (figs. 4.5 and 4.6), this shoot most likely began with *14th Street Happening* (fig. 4.8). With braided hair and a knee-length girlish dress, Kusama transformed herself into a pre-pubescent schoolgirl, innocently sleeping on an assemblage of red-polka-dotted cushions (fig. 4.18). But the girl is grasping her breasts. Once the onlookers become aware of her sexually suggestive gesture, the polka-dotted cushions might begin to appear as disturbing, oversized, amassed phalli. The phallus is the dominating element in each of the five images of *14th Street Happening* (fig. 4.8). For example, in figures 4.18, 4.19, and 4.22, phalli surround her, confine her, in certain ways, shape her, absorb her, drawing her down into their

world.

Twice, Kusama displaced her body from the phallic confinement as evidenced in figures 4.20 and 4.21 of the *14th Street Happening*.⁷⁸² In figure 4.20, for instance, Kusama, framed by multiples of her own image, lay directly on the asphalt, which evidently drew some interest or sympathy from passersby, though she appears sound asleep. More people are amassed around her here than in the other images. The kaleidoscopic images are akin to those in *Kusama in Infinity Mirror Room* (fig. 4.5 and 4.6) and are, arguably, suggestive of her suffering “from nausea, hallucination, and above all lethargy,”⁷⁸³ after using minor tranquilizers, which she took to remedy the breakdowns she suffered, in part evidently as a consequence of the constraints imposed upon her as a woman and a cultural “other.”⁷⁸⁴

If the images of *14th Street Happening* might suggest Kusama’s sense of the impossibility of transcending her situation, *Walking Piece* (fig. 4.16), a series of eighteen color slides that documented a walk Kusama took that began in front of her studio on 14th Street (fig. 4.24b), rendered her wide awake and boldly venturing around lower Manhattan. Yoshimoto described her exotic attire in *Walking Piece* as taking “advantage of being seen as an outsider in order to make herself stand out and

⁷⁸² The images of *14th Street Happening* remain in color positives. This suggests that by 1966, Hosoe had learned to use a prism to shoot his images. Regarding Hosoe’s use of the prism, see the earlier discussion in this chapter and Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 215, n. 69. The author posed this question to Hosoe by e-mail, but he never replied.

⁷⁸³ Kusama, untitled Japanese statement, 1966.

⁷⁸⁴ Yamamura, *Mirrored Years*, 88-96.

attract attention.”⁷⁸⁵ Curator Rachel Taylor alludes to the artist’s “double ‘outsider’ status,” and interpreted this work as Kusama’s “first expressions of a subjective approach to mapping the city that has come to be defined as ‘psycho-geography,’” rendering herself as “adrift and homeless in a harsh and foreign environment.”⁷⁸⁶ An image from the portfolio (fig. 4.23b), in which the artist nostalgically gazes at the sea, might suggest the loneliness she feels because of being far from home.

While most interpret Kusama’s exotic outfit to be a kimono, it is actually a traditional Japanese undergarment, adding an erotic tone to this work. Kusama sets her eroticized body in an outlandish contrast with the desolate environment of lower Manhattan, rendering the city’s “psycho-geography,” to borrow a term from Taylor, as masculine. Most significantly, Kusama’s signature, the phallic protuberances disappear from *Walking Piece*, or they might be said to have been replaced by the bare urban landscape. The background of one photograph (fig. 4.14a), for example, contains a row of huge, gray phallic columns constituting the façade of a monstrous electronic power plant. The visual distortion achieved by a fish-eye lens exaggerates the bleakness of the industrial building soaring above the artist. In another image (fig. 4.23a), Kusama is traversing a wide deserted street. In every image, the artist seems deliberately feminine, at times even girlish, with her braided hair and the pink *juban* accentuated by a red sash. Despite her girlish look, these portraits reveal a grown

⁷⁸⁵ Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 70.

⁷⁸⁶ Rachel Taylor, “Walking Piece, Narcissus Garden, Self Portraiture 1966,” in Morris ed., *Kusama*, 109.

woman (fig. 4.24a), decidedly staring off into the distance, conveying her strong will to insert herself into, and so to challenge the circumstances in which she found herself.

To understand the larger context of time and place in *Walking Piece*, it is helpful to consider descriptions of culture and urban settings in the late 1960s and early '70s, a time when, according to Jill Dawsey, the urban environment “registered as increasingly homogenous, increasingly colonized and saturated by capital.”⁷⁸⁷ New York City in particular, after World War II, was subsidized by “federal funds [entrusted] to local authorities,” who famously set Robert Moses to work on his urban renewal project. According to the urban planner, Tom Angotti, the sites for these urban renewal projects was “very often low-income communities of color,”⁷⁸⁸ who almost always ended up being dislocated. Aldo Tambellini, who, like Kusama, lived in Manhattan’s Lower East Side in the early 1960s, indeed remembers today that people of color, especially blacks and people of Puerto Rican descent in the neighborhood, were getting displaced, as the developers tore “down block after block” south of Delancey Street.⁷⁸⁹

Vacant lots and buildings often contributed to a targeted neighborhood’s decline at its inception. After the decline, wealthy real estate developers would

⁷⁸⁷ Jill Christina Dawsey, “The Use of Sidewalks: Women, Art, and Urban Space, 1966-’80,” Ph.D. diss. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2008), 5. The dissertation deals with feminism and the mid-twentieth century urbanism. The first chapter focuses on Kusama.

⁷⁸⁸ Tom Angotti, *New York for Sale: Community Planning Confronts Global Real Estate* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008), 45.

⁷⁸⁹ Tambellini, “A Syracuse Rebel in New York,” 41.

purchase land inexpensively and initiate upscale urban redevelopment. This “produced a system of land use with gaping inequalities”⁷⁹⁰ that, according to Angotti, created a situation that distinguished and alienated certain classes and races.⁷⁹¹ Of course, some urban renewal projects, such as Peter Cooper’s Lower East Side development did provide housing for working and middle class populations, as the government originally planned. But it is also true that much of post-war urban renewal in New York City created a significant increase in the number of people who could no longer afford housing, and who ended up in homeless shelters or on the streets.

One of them, an African-American homeless man (fig. 4.25), appears in *Walking Piece*. This is the only instance where Kusama engaged with another person in this portfolio of eighteen images. The man sits on a dirty downtown sidewalk, alongside garbage. By focusing on him, Kusama illuminated a marginal space in Manhattan, which she seems to have associated with herself at the time of this work. She further elicited her feelings of estrangement from the city in four sequential images (figs. 4.26 through 4.29) that appeared three frames after the image of the homeless man. These images revolved around two red brick walls adjoined at a corner, which looks almost like the bow of a ship with the effect of the fish-eye lens that Hosoe used to shoot this sequence. The lens made the walls appear to swell in the middle and project their sharp, bow-like corner aggressively toward Kusama (fig. 4.27). The massive structure occupies almost the entire background of these images.

⁷⁹⁰ Angotti, *New York for Sale*, 44-46.

⁷⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

In front of this impenetrable, expansive, high, looming wall, in a way symbolizing the city, Kusama performed exaggerated gestures of anger (fig. 4.26), sorrow (figs. 4.27 and 4-28), and alienation (fig. 4.29), conveying a sense of her social frustration.

The basic organizational structure of these brick walls was a grid, a schema emblematic of urbanism and its attendant implications. The grid does not lend itself to spontaneity, and thus suggesting the mechanism of modernity which Marcuse described that it “has welded blessing and curse into one rational whole.”⁷⁹² He further explained that this mechanism, favored by modern social systems, in a way undergrids “the political machine, the corporate machine, the cultural and educational machine.”⁷⁹³ The modern city had fallen under the edicts of planners, politicians, and corporate elites who redefined the modern urban environment. And the “whole ha[d] become too big, its cohesion too strong, [and] its functioning too efficient.”⁷⁹⁴ Rendering herself incompatibly colorful, carnal, and tender, in *Walking Piece*, Kusama visibly challenged with her own body those mechanisms of modernity that conditioned her circumstance; she alluded to an alternative set of values, related to Eros, by strolling the city in her undergarment, which would soon start coloring her art in distinctive ways.

New York, Circa 1966: Expanded Media and Psychedelia

Aside from *Walking Piece* and *14th Street Happening*, the only record of

⁷⁹² Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, xvii.

⁷⁹³ Ibid., xvi-vii.

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid., xvii.

Kusama's outdoor projects after she came back from Venice in early July of 1966 is a classified ad that promoted a 9 July 1966 "party with Joe Jones and the Tone Deafs." While Kusama's name is not mentioned in the advertisement, various connections between her and events at that party exist. Joe Jones was the Fluxus artist with whom Kusama would collaborate in 1967 in her audio-visual-light performance entitled, *Kusama's Self-Obliteration*, the first of its kind that was given her name. Jones's live music "machine," called the Tone Deafs—an amplified choir of thirty endlessly croaking live frogs in a tank full of water—played the music for Kusama's 1967 light show. The venue for Jones's party, Grouptwoonetwo in Woodstock, was the location of Kusama's first film (with Jud Yalkut) from 1967, which was also called *Kusama's Self-Obliteration*.

The omission of Kusama's name from Jones's 1966 event may have been due to her travel. At the time Jones placed the advertisement Kusama was still in Europe. He was most likely unsure whether she would be back from Europe in time to lead this event. But a slogan now commonly associated with Kusama appears in the advertisement: "Become one with eternity." Other attractions mentioned in the ad also bespeak a connection to Kusama, such as the "live bikini models" and "polka dot dance." All of the similarities between Jones's event and Kusama's later audio-visual-light shows strongly point to her authorship or collaboration. The 1966 "party" seems to have entailed a preliminary attempt at ideas she had been forming since the fall of 1965. Kusama first made a notation of an idea to create a "sound and visual" spectacle in her notebook in the fall of 1965, before a page that indicates her

January 1966 travel plan to Europe.⁷⁹⁵

The 1966 party belonged to a larger mid-1960s' psychedelic movement. The full text that appeared in the advertisement reads:

BECOME ONE WITH ETERNITY. OBLITERATE YOUR PERSONALITY.
BECOME PART OF YOUR ENVIRONMENT. FORGET YOURSELF.
SELF-DESTRUCTION IS ONE WAY OUT! ON YOUR TRIP TAKE ALONG
ONE OF OUR LIVE BIKINI MODELS. POLKA DOT DANCE.⁷⁹⁶

The lines were adapted from a popular psychedelic manual entitled, *The Psychedelic Experience* from 1964 (co-authored by Leary and his associates, Ralph Metzner and Richard Alpert).⁷⁹⁷ Based on Tibetan ideas surrounding death and rebirth, this manual outlined a psychedelic experience in three distinctive phases. The first was to discipline one's self into an egoless state by having "no visions, no sense of self, [and] no thoughts," and thus to "OBLITERATE YOUR PERSONALITY." The second was to experience reality "in the form of hallucinations," as stated in the manual, or to "TRIP" (get high), as promoted by Jones's group. The third was to liberate the self from the ego by means of "SELF-DESTRUCTION."⁷⁹⁸ These parallels suggest that Leary was a great inspiration to both Kusama and Jones. And, of course, their

⁷⁹⁵ Kusama Notebook No. 2, Kusama Papers. This notation appears together with her preliminary plans for "Zero on Sea."

⁷⁹⁶ Newspaper advertisement of a public event, "Party with Joe Jones and the Tone Deafs," on 9 July 1966 at Grouptwoonetwo. Unidentified newspaper, Kusama Papers.

⁷⁹⁷ Richard Alpert, Timothy Leary, and Ralph Metzner, *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead* (New York: Citadel Press, 1964).

⁷⁹⁸ Explanations are from *ibid.*, 13, 15. The descriptions in capital letters are from "Party with Joe Jones and the Tone Deafs," 9 July 1966. The year 1966 was determined through the day of the event; 9 July was a Saturday in 1966, which makes this event the earliest among Kusama's published *Self-Obliteration* events.

“audio-visual-light performance” echoed Leary’s own “sound-and-light show,” which he performed in the late summer of 1965.

Originally, “the lightshow bubbled into existence in San Francisco during the Beat era of the mid-50s,” wrote Edwin Pouncey.⁷⁹⁹ But it added a distinctive dimension of psychedelic culture to the East Coast after Leary’s “sound-and-light show” and his scientific explanations for his neurological art. His premier light show coincided with the widespread availability of LSD on the street in 1965.⁸⁰⁰ Already in that year, and presumably after Leary’s performance, a young self-taught painter, Isaac Abrams, reportedly founded the Coda Gallery on East Tenth Street in New York. He “featured painting, sculpture, and multimedia light shows under the heading of ‘psychedelic art.’”⁸⁰¹

The critic David Bourdon remembered this time also as one when “American youth literally faced an acid test.”⁸⁰² The curator Paul Prince recalls of this period:

Friends would return from trips to the Bay Area with strange, handmade flyers announcing psychedelic “happenings.” They described euphoric gatherings with elaborate multimedia light shows that closely followed the musical pulse, ritually filling the vibrating dance halls with moving, liquid color and curious imagery.⁸⁰³

⁷⁹⁹ Edwin Pouncey, “Light Laboratories,” *Frieze* 46 (May 1999): 56.

⁸⁰⁰ Steven Watson, *Factory Made: Warhol and the Sixties* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003), 249.

⁸⁰¹ David S. Rubin, “Stimuli for a New Millennium,” in *Psychedelic: Optical and Visionary Art Since the 1960s*, exh. cat. (San Antonio, CA: San Antonio Museum of Art in association with Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2010), 21.

⁸⁰² Bourdon, *Warho*, 218.

⁸⁰³ Prince, *High Societies: Psychedelic Rock Posters*, 6.

As Bourdon described it, such multimedia spectacles were the latest in entertainment for hipsters in that they “simulated the sights and sounds experienced under the influence of LSD with pulsating and polarized light projections and electronic sound distortions.”⁸⁰⁴ When people were already on drugs, the light shows intensified their psychedelic experiences, by stimulating their perceptual faculties, according to Leary, “with pinpoint accuracy.”⁸⁰⁵ The proliferation of psychotropic drugs and these expanded media thus went hand in hand.

But expanded media in general, during this mid-1960s period, was part of a larger artistic trend in New York. For example, Otto Piene, who had been working with light projections since 1960 in Germany, premiered his *Light Ballet* in New York in 1964. Since 1963, Aldo Tambellini was separately experimenting with hand painted color slides in ways that seem to have indirectly influenced Leary.⁸⁰⁶ In January 1965, Tambellini introduced his version of a light-projected environment, which he called “Electromedia.” By Electromedia, he meant a collapse of traditional distinctions between certain artistic fields—such as painting, literature, dance, film, and music—with an “overlapping series of evenly pitched performances by painter, dancer, and poet.” In his first Electromedia performance entitled, “Black,” Tambellini teamed up with the dancer Carla Blank and the AMBRA poets, Norman Pritchard and

⁸⁰⁴ Bourdon, 218.

⁸⁰⁵ Leary, *Flashbacks*, 229.

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid. Once he decided to launch his “neurological art,” Leary and his cohort visited to meet the light artists. Though the artists’ names are unmentioned, they were most likely Tambellini’s Group Center cohort, Jackie Cassen and her then partner, Rudi Stern. Both became Leary’s light artists. It is possible that Cassen and Stern were initially influenced by Tambellini’s color slide projection.

Ishmael Reed.⁸⁰⁷ Tambellini projected more than forty hand-painted glass slides, which he termed “lumagrams,” on Blank’s body, while Blank danced to two poets’ readings.⁸⁰⁸

By November 1965, the emerging trend of light projections became so prominent in New York’s cultural scene that the filmmaker Jonas Mekas and his cohort decided to host a month-long festival called the “Expanded Cinema” at the Film-Makers’ Cinémathèque. The festival featured “a couple dozen experiments with multiple projections and with film-plus-live-action.” The pioneer video artist Nam June Paik “manipulated video images on a dozen old TV sets,” and Robert Rauschenberg staged a “marvelous piece of electronic music” synchronized with a film mimicking a live dancer. Tambellini presented *Black Zero* (fig. 4.30), the Electromedia performance in which he projected, what the critic Howard Junker described as, “fantastic” hand-painted slides onto a black balloon that “slowly inflated, bobbing, and tossing the image around” until it reached about 6 feet in diameter and burst into pieces.⁸⁰⁹

Warhol also participated in the festival. But in November 1965, he was not thinking of cinema in terms of an expanded environment. He thought of “expansion” more conceptually, and introduced subjects from everyday life in his cinema. He simply showed a single-screen film in the festival. However, once he realized that

⁸⁰⁷ AMBRA poets were politically-oriented black poets based in Manhattan’s Lower East Side during the time of the Civil Rights Movement.

⁸⁰⁸ Tambellini, “A Syracuse Rebel,” 45.

⁸⁰⁹ Howard Junker, “The Underground Renaissance,” in *Nation* (27 December 1965), page unknown. Tambellini Papers.

others were physically expanding the use of film with projections, Warhol released a statement during the festival, stating: “Everyone is being so creative for this festival that I thought I would just show a bad movie.”⁸¹⁰ Being competitive with the other artists, however, Warhol quickly began capitalizing on what he saw at the festival. Immediately after the event, he started to assemble an entourage of poets, dancers, and musicians and called his group Warhol’s “Up-Tight”—a forerunner of his infamous Exploding Plastic Inevitable. Between 8 and 13 February 1966, he returned to the Film-Makers’ Cinémathèque for his premier multimedia show.⁸¹¹

Drugs, Celebrities, and Objectification of Women: Andy Warhol’s Dom

During the month of April 1966, Warhol sublet an enormous second-floor dance hall in the Polski Dom Narodowy (National Polish Home), known also as the “Dom,” at 23 St. Marks Place in New York from the Group Center artists, Jackie Cassen and her partner, Rudi Stern. Cassen and Stern, who were the light artists for Leary’s spectacle, had originally rented the space for their own “Theater of Light” project. Warhol’s entourage turned it into a hypnotic psychedelic extravaganza.⁸¹²

⁸¹⁰ Ibid. Though Junker’s article from 1965 describes Warhol’s contribution to the festival as a single-screen film, there is a more recent mention by David Bourdon of “Warhol’s two evenings, November 22 and 23, [which] featured split-screen movie projections accompanied by a rock group and the early glimmers of a light show.” Bourdon fails to mention his source, so more investigation is needed. Bourdon, *Warhol*, 218.

⁸¹¹ Ibid., 221.

⁸¹² Watson, *Factory Made*, 270; Bourdon also mentions that the lease of the Dom was to Jackie Cassen. Bourdon, *Warhol*, 223. Cassen, a former member of Tambellini’s Group Center, met the artist Rudi Stern and the two went to live with Leary at the Millbrook (Leary’s psychedelic colony). Once Leary began producing his light show,

The makeshift nightclub was Warhol's singular contribution to the expanded media field. All the walls of the Dom were painted in white for film projection. The room had a revolving mirrored ceiling fixture. Warhol brought another large mirrored fixture that normally sat on the Factory floor. When both rotated with spotlights aimed at them in the dark, they reflected swirling pinpoints of light all over the room. In addition, Warhol brought in strobe lights. Similar to Kusama's *Peep Show*, his lights were programmed to flash on and off several times per second, and they emitted pulsating rhythms. Bourdon remembered, "Just placing one's closed eyes near a flashing strobe could produce an exhilarating sensation of animated colored patterns," so that no one even "needed to drop acid" to get high.⁸¹³

Nonetheless, drugs were an integral part of the Dom. Bourdon remembered during the Dom's opening night, two members of Warhol's entourage, Ondine and Brigid Polk, circulated through the crowd and "gave friends and acquaintances pokes of amphetamine."⁸¹⁴ While the majority of the 1960s rebels saw the liberatory effects of drugs, another early supporter of Warhol's psychedelic venture, Carol Dolph Gross considered the drugs and the rapes that sometimes ensued as having been the dark

Cassen and Stern became Leary's light artists, meaning the projectionists in the psychedelic sound-and-light show. Although these light artists have not entered canonical art history, they were an integral part of the 1960s psychedelic art movement. According to Tambellini, Cassen signed a lease with the Polski Dom Narodowy to initiate her own space, which ultimately became the "Trip." She most likely sublet the space to Warhol before she turned it into her own space. Tambellini, e-mail to author, 3 July 2011. By July 1967, the Dom became the Electric Circus Nite Club.

⁸¹³ Bourdon, *Warhol*, 223-24.

⁸¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 224.

side of the Dom and other wild, artist-hosted parties. She gave an example of a big party “at Rauschenberg’s place on Lafayette Street,” where she remembered seeing “a very innocent looking girl going out with three tough looking” guys and later coming back “with her clothes torn and her face all bloody. They had gang raped her in the corridor, and nobody had heard her screams because the music was so loud.”⁸¹⁵ This party was not officially part of Warhol’s Dom, nor did Gross witness the actual rape. Still, Jonas Mekas remembered the Dom as “the most violent, loudest, and most dynamic [intermedia] exploration.”⁸¹⁶

The choice of drugs for Warhol and his inner circle was reportedly amphetamines and methamphetamine (known also as “speed”).⁸¹⁷ The amphetamine class generally heightens alertness and makes its users aggressive and restless by increasing energy. Leslie Iversen’s recent research further indicates that “many amphetamine users” became more sexually “excited when on the drugs.”⁸¹⁸ But in 2002, Branden W. Joseph argued that Warhol’s Dom events represented a form of subcultural resistance supported by “delinquents, drag queens, addicts, and hustlers,” constituencies whom not even the 1960s political dissenters “recognized as being

⁸¹⁵ She told Calvin Tomkins that she hosted “a lot of the plannings [*sic*] for what became the Exploding Plastic Inevitable” in her living room. Carol Dolph Gross, Transcript of Carol Dolph Gross, interview by Calvin Tomkins, New York, 3 August 1978, Papers IV C. 36, The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Hereafter, “Tomkins Papers.”

⁸¹⁶ Watson, *Factory Made*, 273.

⁸¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 271.

⁸¹⁸ Leslie Iversen, *Speed, Ecstasy, Ritalin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 17, 25.

human.”⁸¹⁹ But the planners of the Dom events were Warhol’s straight male assistants, Paul Morrissey and Gerard Malanga. These events tended to present women merely as beautiful objects there to titillate heterosexual males’ sexual desire. All of this contributed to the Dom’s dark side, mentioned by Gross.

The events at the Dom usually began by projecting three Warhol movies simultaneously onto three screens installed in the rear stage and two flanking walls. “After a while [when] there [were] no more films,” a writer reported that there was “much more dancing.” Then the Velvets and Nico took over the stage.⁸²⁰ Warhol’s house band at the Factory, the Velvet Underground, was known for their provocative lyrics and nihilistic outlook. Warhol used the Dom to promote the Velvets, placing Morrissey in charge of marketing for them. Morrissey thought that: “The group needed something beautiful to counteract the kind of screeching ugliness they were trying to sell” and imagined “the combination of a really beautiful girl standing in front of all this decadence.”⁸²¹ He arranged it so that a beautiful German model, Nico (née Christa Paffgen), became the center of the group.

Nico had come to New York from Europe hoping to stop modeling, however. Placed at the center of the Velvets, she later recalled, “I felt like a mannequin,” that “I was a model on the stage” doing the “same thing I had done for ten years, and I was

⁸¹⁹ Branden W. Joseph, “‘My Mind Split Open’: Andy Warhol’s Exploding Plastic Inevitable,” *Grey Room*, no. 8 (Summer 2002): 97-98.

⁸²⁰ Unidentified writer in a clipping from Calvin Tomkins Papers IV C. 37, The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Tomkins Papers.

⁸²¹ Victor Bockris and Gerard Malanga, *Up-tight: The Velvet Underground Story* (New York: Quill, 1983), 11.

sad because it was not a development.”⁸²² Nico was not alone in being disappointed by the way women were treated at the Factory. Another talented young woman seeking to establish her reputation in the film industry, Barbara Rubin, tried to realize her vision of cultural revolution by including Bob Dylan in *Screen Test*.⁸²³ Rubin was able to get in contact with Dylan and shot his *Screen Test*. Reportedly, Warhol was eager to shoot a film with Dylan, yet Dylan showed open disdain for the factory atmosphere.⁸²⁴ Rubin’s contributions at the Factory were reportedly significant,⁸²⁵ however, in the end, her work simply became part of *Andy Warhol’s Screen Test*. Rubin did not remain with the Factory long. Part of the reason she left may relate to her not receiving enough credit for her work.

The ads that appeared in *The Village Voice* on the Dom’s opening night promoted: “Live Music Dancing, Ultra Sounds, Visions, Light works, Food, Celebrities and Movies: ALL IN THE SAME PLACE AT THE SAME TIME.”⁸²⁶ Such famous figures as Allen Ginsberg, Walter Cronkite, and Jackie Kennedy stopped by the Dom spontaneously and reportedly appeared on its stage.⁸²⁷ Similar to Warhol’s voyeuristic films—such as *Sleep* (1963)—the nightly spectacle at the Dom

⁸²² Watson, *Factory Made*, 275.

⁸²³ Bourdon, *Warhol*, 255.

⁸²⁴ After the filming of his *Screen Test*, Bob Dylan appropriated Warhol’s *Double Elvis* and reportedly turned it into “his dart board” and, later, traded it for a piece of furniture. Watson, *Factory Made*, 255.

⁸²⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸²⁶ *Ibid.*, 271. *The Village Voice*, 7 April 1966.

⁸²⁷ Bourdon, *Warhol*, 224.

combined the voyeurism of celebrity sightings with exhibitionism. The environment, according to David Bourdon, “encouraged people to see themselves as they wanted to be.”⁸²⁸ Unlike Kusama’s psychedelic audio-visual-light performances, which were designed to activate dormant parts of the human brain and to help alter human perceptions of the world, the Dom enticed people to behave like celebrities. In short, it was a place for people to see and be seen.

Part of the attraction of the Dom, especially for young progressive people, was the presence of alternative types, such as the beatnik poet Ginsberg. Also a regular at the Factory was Valerie Solanas, the young female playwright and self-styled feminist radical. After playing a trivial role in one of Warhol’s films, *I, a Man*, Solanas became disappointed with the Factory and turned notoriously violent. On 2 June 1968, she attempted to assassinate Warhol.⁸²⁹ The incident has been attributed to her aberrant mental condition. But it was also true that the Factory was not at all an ideal place for women seeking forms of revolution.

Still, the dancer Mary Woronov, who was transformed into a beautiful dominatrix in skits performed at the Dom, viewed herself as having occupied a dominant position as part of Warhol’s multimedia spectacle, *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* (E.P.I.), which was organized by Warhol’s right-hand man, Malanga. He pulled together Woronov, as well as Warhol’s inner circle: Ingrid Superstar,

⁸²⁸ Watson, *Factory Made*, 271.

⁸²⁹ Valerie Solanas was a separatist feminist, who founded a group called “Society for Cutting Up Men,” or SCUM, and authored its manifesto.

Ronnie Cutrone, and Eric Emerson.⁸³⁰ Malanga scripted and choreographed each song of the Velvets. Since the Velvets adopted their name from Michael Leigh's book about an early 1960s secret sexual subculture, Malanga based his skits for the E.P.I. on sado-masochism.⁸³¹ In them, Malanga was the main character on stage while Woronov was his principal partner.⁸³² He wore skin-tight, black leather pants, and grabbed his favorite prop, a whip, to exhibit his sexual perversion (fig. 4.31).⁸³³ He dressed Woronov similarly and, according to Watson, "taught her the routines, handed her a whip, and transformed her into a beautiful dominatrix," so that she would titillate aberrant male sexual desires.⁸³⁴

This is the ambiguous sense in which Woronov occupied a dominant position, in Warhol's entourage. After using amphetamines, people with sexual abnormalities, including a penchant for "sado-masochistic behavior," are "particularly prone to a higher intensification of sexual behavior," observed Iversen.⁸³⁵ "Whipping, chains, leather underwear . . . torture, mock executions," a writer explained in 1969, represented "a kind of death substitute," such that "death is the ultimate kick" of

⁸³⁰ Watson, *Factory Made*, 272.

⁸³¹ Michael Leigh, *The Velvet Underground* (New York: Macfadden-Barttel, 1963).

⁸³² "He [Malanga] was always on his knees to me with his head bowed, and I was always above him. We were female/male, but I was never hanging on him, the roles were switched." Mary Woronov, cited in Watson, *Factory Made*, 274.

⁸³³ *Ibid.*, 273.

⁸³⁴ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁸³⁵ Iversen, *Speed*, 25.

sado-masochism.⁸³⁶ Death was a topic on which Warhol himself had long been fixated, as notably in his 1963 *Death Series*. During his psychedelic period, Gross remembered “Warhol and Paul Morrissey sitting [in the] back [of the Factory] and encouraging” people to take drugs, “so they could film” the effects of it.⁸³⁷ Chronic abuse of methamphetamine can result in psychosis and cardiovascular damage, both with the potential for death.⁸³⁸ At the Dom, Warhol remained a cool puppeteer throughout—he was neither an advocate for mind-expanding drugs, nor did he perform on stage—and he maintained a certain distance from the burlesque, seldom venturing “from his station on the balcony” (fig. 4.32).⁸³⁹ And for Warhol, death became in a sense “the ultimate kick.”⁸⁴⁰

In stark contrast to Warhol’s fixation on death, some members of the New Left began to favor what Marcuse categorized as the “Life Instinct.” This was why, in May 1966, when Warhol and the E.P.I. performed at the Fillmore West in San Francisco, the West Coast audience—especially those who were reacting against received ideas of culture, gender, and politics—had openly shown some resentment. “Some of the Fillmore regulars,” wrote Warhol’s biographer Steven Watson, “left after an hour and

⁸³⁶ “The Etiquette of Orgy,” in *Scenes* 11, no. 3 (November 1969): 18, Kusama Papers.

⁸³⁷ Gross, interview by Tomkins, 3 August 1978.

⁸³⁸ Shane Darke, Sharlene Kaye, Rebecca McKetin, and Johan DuFlou, “Major Physical and Psychological Harms of Methamphetamine Use,” *Drug Alcohol Review* 27 (May 2008): 255-56. “Amphetamine-related deaths in the U.S.,” according to Iversen, “occur at rates of several hundred per year.” Iversen, *Speed*, 135.

⁸³⁹ Bourdon, *Warhol*, 218, 224.

⁸⁴⁰ “The Etiquette of Orgy,” 18.

wandered around the lobby muttering about bad trips.”⁸⁴¹ Among them, Rosebud Pettet remarked that he thought human “consciousness” cannot be raised “by talking about whipping each other and taking really bad drugs,” but only “by talking about enlightened or political subjects.”⁸⁴² The young Californian writer A. D. Coleman defended the Fillmore goers:

The audience for that event was not composed of New York’s middle-class culture-hound intellectuals hell-bent on displaying their avant-garde cool; these were happy young people out to have a good time listening to music and dancing. That the Warhol entourage turned them (and me) off completely suggested to me that, taking away all the bullshit about the role of the artist and his battle with society, Andy Warhol and associates are out to put the world on a bumner.⁸⁴³

“An intense splatter of nihilism” is how Paul Jay Robbins of *The Los Angeles Free Press* portrayed the event. For Robbins, the entire troupe offered “neither art nor order but contempt, contempt, which is death by negation.”⁸⁴⁴

The resentment was mutual, however. One of Warhol’s confidants, Morrissey, provocatively dubbed the “Fillmore Auditorium,” the “Swillmore Vomitorium,” and remarked: “I’d rather sit and watch a clothes dryer in the Laundromat,” than the Fillmore’s dreamy light projection of images of the moon and a camera obscura.⁸⁴⁵ The Fillmore’s light projection was quickly replaced by Warhol’s deadpan movies, and the E.P.I.’s light artist Danny Williams illuminated Gerard Malanga’s

⁸⁴¹ Watson, *Factory Made*, 286.

⁸⁴² Rosebud Pettet, cited in *ibid.*

⁸⁴³ A. D. Coleman, cited in *ibid.*

⁸⁴⁴ Paul Jay Robbins, cited in *ibid.*, 284.

⁸⁴⁵ Paul Morrissey, cited in *ibid.*, 285.

sado-masochistic performance, paced by the decadent Velvets' songs. "Why don't they take heroin? That's what the really good musicians take," is how Morrissey challenged the choice of drugs used by most of the Fillmore performers—LSD and marijuana.⁸⁴⁶

By railing against political changes, in various respects, Warhol's psychedelia reinforced patriarchal norms. This gave Kusama plenty of reasons to oppose Warhol and to support Leary's psychedelic revolution. Leary had been earnestly engaged in the movement by taking LSD himself, detailing its effects, and proposing imaginative uses of drugs for social change. Since the LSD experience evokes sensations comparable to the mystical and spiritual, once the U.S. government imposed a ban on LSD, in October 1966, Leary established a pseudo-religious movement called "the League for Spiritual Discovery"—in short, LSD—and settled in as its "High Priest."⁸⁴⁷ Leary promoted the League's revolutionary politics through a traveling lecture series called "(Psychedelic Celebration) Turn On Tune In Drop Out," which was the light show performance Kusama remembered.⁸⁴⁸ Leary's psychedelic spectacle usually began with a scientific discussion on psychotropic drugs, followed by the sound-and-light show, which offered its audience an analogous experience to taking LSD. In her light show performance, Kusama adapted Leary's formula and fashioned herself as the "high priestess" of her movement.

⁸⁴⁶ Morrissey, cited in *ibid.*, 283, 285.

⁸⁴⁷ Leary wrote the press release for the League and held a press conference at the Fairmont Hotel, San Francisco, 12 December 1966. Leary, *Annotated Bibliography*, 187.

⁸⁴⁸ Kusama, interview by Munroe, 18 December 1988.

Flower Power: Hippies and the New Left

Though Marcuse considered drugs too easy a solution for achieving alternative worldviews, he nonetheless viewed the hippie subculture, which included arts derived from the “‘trip,’ ‘grass,’ ‘pot,’ ‘acid,’ and so on,” as a vital part of the New Left aesthetic.⁸⁴⁹ This was because, for some elements of the New Left, aesthetics were no longer that which had been, in Marcuse’s words, “absorbed in the art gallery, within the four walls, in the concert hall, by the market, and adorning the plazas and lobbies of the prospering business establishments,”⁸⁵⁰ and certainly not “the higher culture in which the aesthetic values (and the aesthetic truth) had been monopolized and segregated” from day-to-day reality.⁸⁵¹ He even lamented that the radical “rebels against the established culture,” revolted “against the beautiful.” Much of contemporary art in his view was “not beautiful.”⁸⁵² He instead revisited a philosophical tradition that focused the analysis of art on the concept of the “beautiful,” and stated that traditionally the “beautiful has been interpreted as ethical and cognitive ‘value,’” so that the beautiful was the “sensuous appearance of an idea” that had been translated into material existence.⁸⁵³

The “aesthetic was always very important” also in Kusama’s art, reminisced

⁸⁴⁹ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 35.

⁸⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁸⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁸⁵² *Ibid.*, 46.

⁸⁵³ *Ibid.*, 42.

James Golata, the manager of her psychedelic Happenings.⁸⁵⁴ Continuing from her earlier practice (see Chapter One and Two), Kusama believed that aesthetics can be the force behind a given society that can redeem suffering, bring pleasure, and address a stagnant situation. The majority of Kusama's followers in the period after 1967 were hippies.⁸⁵⁵ And there existed many common elements between the hippy subculture and the New Left. For example, some elements of the New Left considered aesthetics a "second reality" that can translate the "productive imagination into the first reality," as Marcuse put it.⁸⁵⁶ Hippies, too, generally embraced among other things: fashion, music, film, and interior and graphic design of the expanding counterculture of this period.⁸⁵⁷ Such elements as "refus[e] to be for the museum or mausoleum," and "wan[t] to be *real*," according to Marcuse, comprise an art that may serve as "a force *in* the (given) society."⁸⁵⁸

Affinities between Kusama and some elements of the New Left can also be found in their shared ideas of freedom. The alternative Left emerged out of a growing skepticism that any sort of "establishment may initiate a new order of totalitarian suppression."⁸⁵⁹ It urged "freedom" from past and present ideologies of Left and

⁸⁵⁴ James Golata, cited in Munroe, Karia ed., *Kusama*, 29.

⁸⁵⁵ "My daring Happenings received sweeping supports from the hippies. This is because their claim for retrieving humanity and my artistic claim to send shock waves to people had a lot in common." Kusama, *Infinity Nets*, 93.

⁸⁵⁶ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 42.

⁸⁵⁷ Grunenberg, *Summer of Love*, 11.

⁸⁵⁸ Marcuse, "Art as a Form of Reality," 127, 130. Emphasis as in original.

⁸⁵⁹ *Idem.*, *An Essay on Liberation*, vii-viii.

Right. But liberty in itself was not necessarily constructed as an unalloyed good. With the brutal war building up in Southeast Asia, in 1968 Marcuse was adamant that the “amalgam of liberty and [commercial] aggression” was enabling the “massive exploitive power of corporate capitalism” in Vietnam and elsewhere and that “poverty and exploitation were products of economic freedom.”⁸⁶⁰ As the Vietnam War intensified, the most sensitive of student radicals similarly realized that even freedom had become a dangerous idea in advanced capitalism. Many members of the New Left thus came to believe that they needed to build an environment in which the struggle for existence loses its ugly, aggressive features by inventing a “new freedom.”⁸⁶¹

A related principle of freedom emerged in Kusama’s psychedelic spectacles. In her case, it manifested in her advocacy for love and in the forms of polka dots. As discussed in Chapter Two, Kusama originally believed that every individual was essentially free, yet bound to others through moral encounters, and thus responsible for them. In her psychedelic art, this idea was symbolized by polka dots. She outlined the concept of her polka dots in an interview from 1968 as follows:

Polka dots can’t stay alone, like the communicative life of people, two and three and more polka dots became movement When we obliterate nature and our bodies with polka dots, we become part of the unity of our environment. I become part of the eternal, and we obliterate ourselves in Love.⁸⁶²

⁸⁶⁰ Ibid., x, 6, 7, 11; Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, xiii-xiv.

⁸⁶¹ *Idem.*, *Eros and Civilization*, 10.

⁸⁶² Kusama cited in Yayoi Kusama, interview by Jud Yalkut, “The Polka Dot Way of Life,” in *New York Free Press*, 15 February 1968, p.9.

Kusama explained elsewhere that each dot symbolized a free individual.⁸⁶³ What connects free human beings and nature was a morality that represented “Love.”

Certain elements of the New Left espoused a form of love termed Eros because, in Marcuse’s terms, it “receives and reacts to certain stimuli and ignores and repels others in accord with the introjected morality.”⁸⁶⁴ Eros sometimes figured, then, as an essential element that could bring together free human beings, “a new Reality Principle,” as phrased by Marcuse. Comparable to Emmanuel Levinas’s idea of a new human-centered society, a goal of the New Left was to formulate a new society based on this “new Reality Principle.”⁸⁶⁵ Unlike the traditional idea of utopia (“sites with no real place”), Marcuse believed that this new society is a possible world, but that that world had been “blocked from coming about by the power of the established society.”⁸⁶⁶ From his perspective, the feasibility of the new society was based on an “attainable level of liberation,” which was “not merely self-determination and self-realization, but rather the determination and realization of goals which enhance, protect, and unite life on earth.”⁸⁶⁷

Such a collapse between self and universe aligns with what Kusama

⁸⁶³ In her semi-fictional play, *The Story of Tokyo Lee*, Kusama’s alter ego, Tokyo Lee, for example, encourages the crowd to “become as free as the polka dots, free themselves.” Yayoi Kusama, *The Story of Tokyo Lee: Dramatic Collage in 10 Parts*, unpublished manuscript (ca. 1970), Kusama Papers, 47.

⁸⁶⁴ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 6-7.

⁸⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, xv.

⁸⁶⁶ *Idem.*, *An Essay on Liberation*, 3-4.

⁸⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

relentlessly promoted after her June 1967 *Self-Obliteration* performance: the aim to “become one with eternity.”⁸⁶⁸ Earlier that year, Kusama had begun exploring the idea of *Self-Obliteration* with her new photo-portraits by commissioning a troupe of photographers: Francis Keaveny, Hal Reiff, Fred McDarrah, and Seymour Wally. Keaveny’s image was never published and was most likely the first among the four (fig. 4.33). With an appeal to hippies and flower people in mind, in this image Kusama covered her nude body with large flower decals. However, the flower image may have come to seem too decorative to her, for Kusama eventually abandoned this motif. In Reiff’s image, round decals replaced the flowers, manifesting a polka-dot pattern (fig. 4.34). In McDarrah’s image—a frontal portrait of Kusama wearing a monkey fur coat on her bare skin (fig. 4.35)—she would further place decals in the background in order to amalgamate her body and her environment so that she could convey the idea of “obliteration.” This is how the polka dot became a key component in *Kusama’s Self-Obliteration* performance. Kusama ultimately settled on the images by Reiff and McDarrah for publicizing her psychedelic spectacle.⁸⁶⁹

By the time Wally shot Kusama’s campaign image for her July 1967 *Body Festival* (fig. 4.36), her idea of *Self-Obliteration* was firmly established. She again

⁸⁶⁸ For instance, in a classified ad, “Self-Obliteration,” in *The Village Voice*, 7 July 1967, newspaper clipping, Kusama Papers.

⁸⁶⁹ The image by Reiff appeared in: “Slumgoddess,” in *The East Village Other* (underground periodical), 15 June-1 July, 1967, clipping in folder “1967,” Kusama Papers. The image by McDarrah appeared in: “Yayoi Kusama,” in *The Village Voice*, 15 June 1967, clippings in folder “1967,” Kusama Papers. Joe Jones also promoted *Self-Obliteration*. He rented a delivery tricycle, wore a bike flight suit Kusama had designed, and drove “around 2nd Avenue with an advertisement” (most likely made with Reiff’s image). Tambellini, “A Syracuse Rebel,” 54.

used two floor panels from *Infinity Mirror Room* in this portrait. But this time, the dotted pattern on the stuffed phalli would match with the polka dot pattern that covered her torso. Blending her body into the background, Kusama visually became, as she said, “part of the unity of our environment.”⁸⁷⁰

Kusama’s Self-Obliteration

On three consecutive nights, between 16 and 18 June 1967, Kusama finally demonstrated the audio-visual-light performance under her own name, *Kusama’s Self-Obliteration*, at the Black Gate Theater in Manhattan. Established by Piene and Tambellini, the Black Gate was the first theater in Manhattan dedicated to Electromedia. Piene and Tambellini were never psychedelic artists. However, their interest in the psychedelic movement is apparent in the mission statement of the Black Gate: “Man does not need his eyes but to function with 13 billion cells in his brain.”⁸⁷¹ The theater was situated on the second floor of Tambellini’s Gate Theatre—a two-hundred-seat theater on Second Avenue and Tenth Street that mainly screened experimental films. Among the events Tambellini presented at the Gate Theatre was a sold-out program, “Psychodelia Tune In,” in which Ralph Metzner, Leary’s chief associate, discussed “Psychedelic No-Art.”⁸⁷²

Kusama’s Self-Obliteration fit right into the context of psychedelic culture.

⁸⁷⁰ Kusama, interview by Yalkut, “The Polka Dot Way of Life,” 8.

⁸⁷¹ Tambellini, “A Syracuse Rebel,” 54.

⁸⁷² Tambellini founded the Gate Theatre in March 1966. Metzner’s lecture took place in September 1966. *Ibid.*, 50.

And she promoted her own event with the sexy self-portraits shot by Reiff and McDarrah (figs. 4.34 and 4.35). These images held enough appeal that, Tambellini remembers, her event drew a standing room only crowd.⁸⁷³ Parallel to Leary's sound-and-light show, "Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out," Kusama began her light show with a lecture by the art critic Gordon Brown. Brown first discussed the significance and importance of Kusama's art. Her light show followed, evincing (figs. 4.4 and 4.37) a magnificent amalgam of light, sound, fashion, and painting.

One of the goals of the psychedelic light shows was to alter the spectators' normal process of perception through the lighting effects. Kusama attempted this by lighting the entire venue using blue-black light. She appeared on stage wearing a white body stocking.⁸⁷⁴ Under the special light effects, her body emerged as a blue-white glow while her limbs and head appeared quite dark (fig. 4.4). To take further advantage of the blue-black light, she introduced fluorescent paint in her light shows. With it, Kusama painted polka dots on tall, beautiful, white models wearing silver bathing suits while synchronizing the sound from the Tone Deafs. She was not the sole creator at the event, however, as the models themselves occasionally took paintbrushes and painted dots on Kusama's white body stocking (fig. 4.37). The performers on stage also painted the furniture in the background. Once the stage light was turned off, the entire space sunk under a deep blue color, except the areas that had been painted with fluorescent colors. The final impression was of nothing but

⁸⁷³ Digital recording of Aldo Tambellini, interview by author, Boston, 14 November 2010.

⁸⁷⁴ Tambellini, "A Syracuse Rebel," 54.

wriggling polka dots, a gambit foreshadowing a much later work of Kusama's, *I am Here but Nothing* of 2000 (fig. 4.38).

Before the 1967 event, Kusama promised her audience an experience of “extermination, emptiness, nothingness, infinity, endlessness, a trip, self-obliteration, [and] self-destruction.”⁸⁷⁵ With this performance, Kusama symbolically obliterated the spectators’ egos by merging all human beings and material things into one universe under the blue-black light. *Kusama’s Self-Obliteration* thus proposed to demonstrate how everything on earth was interconnected, based on a delicate balance manifested by her dotted pattern.

This event also marked the beginning of Kusama’s use of polka dots. An article in *The Village Voice* reported that Kusama “is now very involved with polka dots. Really involved.”⁸⁷⁶ Jones’s “self-playing music machines with no end and stop” further complemented Kusama’s unique brand of “endlessness.”⁸⁷⁷ One reviewer keenly observed: “It is the self and the endlessness, that concerned Kusama’s obsessional mind.”⁸⁷⁸

Soon after the premier of *Kusama’s Self-Obliteration*, which introduced her psychedelic art, she transformed herself into the “polka dot high priestess.” In the following month, July of 1967, she began appearing in parks and hip hangouts as a would-be agent for social change. A blueprint for Kusama’s psychedelic revolution

⁸⁷⁵ “Slumgoddess,” n.p.

⁸⁷⁶ “Yayoi Kusama,” *The Village Voice*, 15 June 1967.

⁸⁷⁷ “Slumgoddess,” n.p.

⁸⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

can be found in her 1967 film made with the experimental filmmaker Jud Yalkut, and also entitled *Kusama's Self-Obliteration*. Kusama and Yalkut began shooting this work at her Black Gate Theater performance.⁸⁷⁹ In the following year, competing with Warhol's psychedelic extravaganzas, Kusama often projected this film on the back wall of her psychedelic spectacles.

Categorized under "synaesthetic film,"⁸⁸⁰ this work was intended to induce mind-altered states in its viewers. The film roughly consisted of three parts. The exterior vista, "Horse Play," (fig. 4.39) and the interior scenes of Kusama's various audio-visual-light performances were linked up by the specter of various Manhattan landmarks being obliterated by wriggling polka dots (fig. 4.40). The film starts with a birth scene of the polka-dot high priestess. Kusama, in a red gown, stands in the middle of a green field, obsessively pasting the white circular decals on a dark-brown horse and, occasionally, on herself. In a 1968 interview about this film, Kusama asserted: "Everything originated from polka dots."⁸⁸¹ In the film, she obliterates a tree trunk, cat, and three nude male models (fig. 4.41), first using leaves in the woods, and later round decals.⁸⁸² Since the polka dots were Kusama's symbol of freedom, they suggested her simultaneous marking of people and things with an emblem of

⁸⁷⁹ Kusama interview by Yalkut, "The Polka Dot Way of Life," 8.

⁸⁸⁰ In a copy of the page from (date unknown) *Filmmaker Cooperative Catalogue* listing the film, attached to Jud Yalkut, "Resume," file "Yayoi Kusama," Blanton Museum of Art Archives, University of Texas, Austin.

⁸⁸¹ Kusama interview by Yalkut, "The Polka Dot Way of Life," 8.

⁸⁸² For Kusama, the leaf veins most likely substitute for the netting component of her *Net* paintings.

freedom, as a bid to release them from social confinements, as well to collapse the boundaries between self and universe. Polka dots thus united each liberated life on earth and made them “become one with eternity.”⁸⁸³

The scene in the film, then, suddenly switches to giddy polka dots wriggling over the New York Stock Exchange (fig. 4.40), the Statue of Liberty, the Woolworth tower, the Empire State Building, the United Nations buildings, and images of daily commuters and office workers. Once public nudity began to be permitted in art in New York beginning in January 1968, some of these places became the actual sites for Kusama’s so-called “press Happenings” (fig. 4.56).⁸⁸⁴ Happenings are art events that synthesized planned and improvised theatrical activity. In New York, by some accounts, this art form evolved in the late 1950s as an extension of the radical, gestural paintings of Jackson Pollock. Kusama politicized the Happening through her press events. In one interview, she explained that the main purpose of the outdoor Happenings was to “perform Happening exclusively for press.” She wanted to voice her concerns about contemporary society to a “global audience through mass media.”⁸⁸⁵

Kusama’s ultimate goal, however, was to strategically engage people in her projects, changing their ways of thinking and so, ultimately, the course of society.

⁸⁸³ “Self-Obliteration,” *The Village Voice*, 7 July 1967.

⁸⁸⁴ Al Van Starrex, “Some Far-out Fashion With and Without Clothes,” *Mr.* 13, no. 8 (July 1969): 41.

⁸⁸⁵ Nakamaru Kaoru, “Kusama Yayoi ha naze Nyūyōku de nuguka” [Why does Yayoi Kusama strip herself in New York?], *Shūkan Post* [*Weekly Post*] 12 September 1969, p. 59.

Her works in this regard can be divided into three distinct, yet simultaneously occurring projects: *Body Festival* (July—September 1967); audio-visual-light performances such as *Kusama's Self-Obliteration* (June 1967—December 1968); and *Mass Erotic Happenings* (ca. 1967—ca. 1970) as well as *Naked Happening* (January 1968—ca. 1970). Kusama and Yalkut began shooting scenes for Kusama's *Self-Obliteration* at the very first performance of the light show that she gave at the Black Gate Theater in order to promote her new artistic campaign. Her next step was to organize various body-painting events at: Gourptwoonetwo in Woodstock, the Electronic Circus Nite Club in New York, and at her own studio in Manhattan.⁸⁸⁶

Body Festival

In her efforts to convert art into what Marcuse called “a force *in* the (given) society,”⁸⁸⁷ Kusama held numerous *Body Festivals* at Washington Square and Tompkins Square Park, downtown in New York City during the weekends of July and August 1967, with the permission of the city's Department of Parks & Recreation.⁸⁸⁸ The 16 July 1967 *Sunday News* described her first event at Tompkins Square Park. Kusama “arrived at the park at 2:15 P.M. with Minol Araki, a male artist who lives in Tokyo. They were carrying rolled-up paper, buckets of paint and brushes.” She first

⁸⁸⁶ Kusama interview by Yalkut, “The Polka Dot Way of Life,” 9.

⁸⁸⁷ Marcuse, “Art as a Form of Reality,” 127, 130. Emphasis as in original.

⁸⁸⁸ From extant flyers, it appears that Kusama hosted *Body Festivals* on the following dates and in the following places: 15 July (Sat.), Tompkins Square Park; 16 July (Sun.), 30 July (Sun.), 6 August (Sun.), 20 August (Sun.), Washington Square Park; 1 and 2 Sept. (Fri. and Sat.), Chrysler Art Museum, Provincetown, Massachusetts.

unrolled the several pieces of long rectangular paper (each about 7”x 3’) in parallel rows on the ground (fig. 4.42). The two artists then “began painting pictures and designs on the paper.” Shortly after, Kusama—with long black hair and dressed in a bright red leotard, matching pair of boots, and cowgirl hat, which were all covered with round, white decals emblemizing the polka-dot high priestess—dipped her “brush into a paint bucket, pulled up one man’s shirt, and painted a red spot on his bare back” (fig. 4.43). She followed this by painting “a red spot on [the] bare leg” of another man who pulled up his pants leg. Soon, a crowd of hippies and other onlookers gathered around her. She eventually “covered [them all] with red, white, blue and green spots” (fig. 4.44). Some participants even “grabbed paintbrushes and joined in the painting.”⁸⁸⁹

Kusama’s own account of her first *Body Festival* appears, in a way, in the unpublished manuscript of her semi-fictional play, *Story of Tokyo Lee*. In that play, one day the protagonist, Lee, visits Tompkins Square Park and encounters many “lonely people” sitting “in small groups.” Lee “asks one of the boys why he looks so unhappy; he tells her [that] he’s afraid, he’ll be drafted and sent to Vietnam.” Lee “offers to paint him with her magic polka dots.” She painted dots on the boy’s “face and hands; it’s hot—and he takes off his shirt. Soon, she is painting his back and chest. The other kids in the park quickly gather around her, grooving on the rainbow colors and the giddiness of the painter.” She started singing “polka dots in song.” As Lee passes by the crowd, it responded to Lee’s “magic” with smiles. At the same time, Lee

⁸⁸⁹ Hugh Wyatt and Donald Singleton, “Find Bodies in East Side Park: Covered All Over With Strange Spots!” in *Sunday News*, 16 July 1967, p.4.

encourages the crowd to “become as free as the polka dots, free themselves and free the park.”⁸⁹⁰ Just so, *Body Festival* was Kusama’s message for liberation and was among her responses to the war.

Continuing from her idea of infinity, Kusama considered freedom not to be merely a way to liberate the individual from oppression. It was also about establishing a new human-centered society where each individual was essentially free, yet bound to others through moral obligations that went beyond socially imposed law and order. In *Body Festival*, one such moral encounter was realized by erotic sensations produced by the participants painting each other’s nearly nude torsos. Eros entails affectionate feelings that were meant, ideally, to organically connect autonomous beings and through these links bring about a new society. In an interview, Kusama observed that “hippies” were especially concerned that “they understand” these moral issues.⁸⁹¹

At her second *Body Festival* held on 16 July 1967 at Washington Square Park, hippies were the major participants in the event. *The Village Voice* article reported that while “Kusama, the polka dot high priestess” had moved around the crowded fountain area and added “dots of color to the participants,” hippies and other types “painted each other’s faces, arms, legs, and chests with day-glo colors.”⁸⁹² In an article from 13 August 1967, Kusama asked rhetorically, “Why I do what I do?” Her own reply was:

⁸⁹⁰ Kusama, *The Story of Tokyo Lee*, 47.

⁸⁹¹ Kusama, cited in Singleton and Wyatt, “Find Bodies in East Side Park,” 4.

⁸⁹² “Scenes,” in *The Village Voice*, 20 July 1967, 16.

We have forgotten the beauty of our bodies. Why are we so ashamed and contrite? The nude body is all we own. Youth came to watch. They participated. They want love in their together[ness] now. We all need our forever[ness] now.⁸⁹³

The slogan Kusama used for *Body Festival* was “Love Forever” which she promulgated through accompanying “Love Forever” campaign pins.⁸⁹⁴

Audio-Visual-Light Performances

During the late 1960s, hippies and those in the New Left generally believed that the key to bringing about social change was to transform their environment. Marcuse, for instance, argued that “the material and intellectual reconstruction of society” could be achieved by “creating the new aesthetic environment.”⁸⁹⁵ Leary, too, from a behavioral psychological perspective, explained that one’s environment establishes “levels of consciousness” and builds human “psycho-geometry.” Reinventing the environment could thus help alter human behavior and, ultimately, contribute to transforming the ways in which society was organized.⁸⁹⁶

After Leary’s original sound-and-light show performance and the accompanying lecture in 1965, many politically motivated young people began creating light shows in such youth hangouts as discotheques and alternative theatres. Warhol’s *Dom* came out of this trend as did Kusama’s “Tea-Dancer” performance,

⁸⁹³ Kusama, cited in Alfred Carl, “Call Her Dotty,” in *Sunday News*, 13 August 1967, p.10, 31.

⁸⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁸⁹⁵ Marcuse, “Art as a Form of Reality,” 37, 48.

⁸⁹⁶ Leary, *Annotated Bibliography*, 8.

thirty-two nightly performances at a hip hangout, Electric Circus Nite Club.⁸⁹⁷ She entered a contract with Electric Circus in August 1967, a month after it had begun operating. Kusama's choice of the Electric Circus, the same venue that had taken over the Dom, was almost surely borne of her fervent opposition to Warhol's psychedelic venture.⁸⁹⁸

At the Electric Circus, Kusama collaborated with the psychedelic rock band, the Group Image.⁸⁹⁹ The light environment at the Electric Circus was produced by the multimedia collective Pablo Light Show. It maneuvered twenty-four projectors from the light gallery (fig. 4.45) situated behind the membranes that surrounded the dance floor (fig. 4.46). In addition, Pablo Light Show operated overhead projectors, strobes, and color wheels for the front projections.⁹⁰⁰ Patrick R. Firpo, who headed Pablo Light Show, explained in 1970 that generally the light artists created "their acid trips—their experiences, changes and feelings."⁹⁰¹ This was achieved at the Electric Circus by synchronizing the acid rock, the image projection, and the overhead

⁸⁹⁷ Kusama, a flyer for Tea-Dancers at the Electric Circus Nite Club, Kusama Papers. Kusama most likely approached the newly opened nightclub immediately after debuting *Body Festival* on 15 July 1967

⁸⁹⁸ In her autobiography, Kusama described Warhol as her rival. Kusama, *Infinity Nets*, 190. Kusama's manager, James Golata, also clearly remembered how she had competed to gain more publicity than Warhol. Golata, interview by Munroe, 18 January 1989.

⁸⁹⁹ Kusama interview by Yalkut, "The Polka Dot Way of Life," 8.

⁹⁰⁰ Charles Forberg, "Multi-Media and the Theater," *Theatre Crafts* (January/February 1970): 43. This article features different light artists speaking about their light shows.

⁹⁰¹ Patrick R. Firpo cited in *ibid.*, 22.

lighting. Such combinations of sound with flickering lights and filmographic images, similar to Kusama's *Peep Show*, would lead the audience through an involuntary sensory pathway. Kusama staged her audio-visual-light performance in this synaesthetic environment, which represented a sharp contrast with the Dom, where the choice of drugs—amphetamines—tended to make people especially alert and aggressive.

Kusama is less than 5 feet tall and could easily be eclipsed on an overcrowded dance floor. Thus, for her Electric Circus performance, she hired the tall white female models to be the performers. Sporadically covered with white polka dots,⁹⁰² the models wore silver bikini bathing suits and personified the high priestesses in Kusama's audio-visual-light show. They danced to the pulsating sound-and-light environment. Some of them occasionally went up on stage, where projected images of Kusama appeared, and interacted with the image in order to make Kusama part of the whole spectacle.⁹⁰³

With the light projections coming from all walls, the Electric Circus space offered visitors the sensation of floating in a field of constantly changing and moving images. Firpo explained that the Electric Circus light show equipment was “self-generated and self-created for a specific purpose.” Differing from Malanga's heavily scripted sado-masochistic theater, every light show was a fresh, unique,

⁹⁰² In *Kusama's Self-Obliteration* (film), the decals and slide projections are visible upon close examination. Yayoi Kusama and Jud Yalkut, *Kusama's Self-Obliteration* (film), Kusama Papers

⁹⁰³ This performance appears in the film *Kusama's Self-Obliteration*. One of the recognizable projected images is Kusama standing inside her *Infinity Mirror Room*.

inventive, and spontaneous undertaking.⁹⁰⁴ This was why Joshua White, who headed Joshua's Light Show at the Fillmore East Auditorium and who collaborated with Kusama in 1968, described his group's operative principle, as "We do not program." He synchronized his light projections to the sounds and actions on the stage, making them spontaneous and interactive (fig. 4.47).⁹⁰⁵

Another Fillmore light artist, Thomas Shoesmith, explained his attempts to disorient "people's normal perception" by establishing "the light environment," so that his audience would "reconsider certain basic things in the ways they related to the world."⁹⁰⁶ Such reassessment of "basic things" was common among youth of draft age during the late 1960s when many radical student activists supported Marcuse's controversial book *One-Dimensional Man* (1964). This book explored the development of new forms of social control that limited people's thinking, resulting in what Marcuse called a "one-dimensional man."⁹⁰⁷ As he told it, the forces behind the new conformist society in the aftermath of the Second World War were the "so-called consumer economy and the politics of corporate capitalism." Marcuse expounded that capitalism had adjusted people's "rational and emotional faculties" to the "market and its policies" while the media deftly veiled "the liberties of [an]

⁹⁰⁴ Firpo, cited in "Multi-Media and the Theater," 22.

⁹⁰⁵ Joshua White cited in "Multi-Media and the Theater," 41. On 6 and 7 December 1968, Kusama and her performers presented *Kusama's Self-Obliteration* (fig. 4.58) as the opening act for Fleetwood Mac and Country Joe and the Fish at Bill Graham's Fillmore East Auditorium. Performances took place at 8 p.m. and 11:30 p.m. on both days. "Employment Contract" and a flyer, folder "1968," Kusama Papers.

⁹⁰⁶ Thomas Shoesmith, cited in "Multi-Media and the Theater," 11.

⁹⁰⁷ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*.

exploitative order,” resulting in creating “a second nature of man.” Technocratic controls integrated individuals into the existing system of production and consumption.⁹⁰⁸ It was this second nature, built through “technocracy,” that the youthful counterculture movement set out to defy. Invoking the new rationality and sensibility in forms of new spatial constructions, they believed that the new aesthetic environment would reorient the way ordinary men and women related to reality.

“The ultimate environment” of the light show, explained another light artist, Fred Stern, was “one where things are taking place not only from a controlled projection point of view for environmental physical change, but also in terms of people-to-people action.”⁹⁰⁹ This is where the performative elements of the light show became important. In this respect, one of the roles of the dancers in Kusama’s nightly events at the Electric Circus was to initiate people-to-people action, by way of pasting white decals on the audience members. Such interactions opened up communication among visitors. On one rainy day, “when St. Marks Place was closed to traffic,” Kusama merrily remembered that her audio-visual-light performance culminated “in the gigantic Electric Circus street party.” Thousands of people from the Electric Circus jammed the street, while Kusama’s “dancers performed on the balcony through projections from across the street.”⁹¹⁰

Such extraordinary gatherings at the Electric Circus became possible because

⁹⁰⁸ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, x, 6, 7, 11; *Idem, Eros and Civilization*, xiii-xiv.

⁹⁰⁹ Fred Stern, cited in “Multi-Media and the Theater,” 37.

⁹¹⁰ Kusama interview by Yalkut, “The Polka Dot Way of Life,” 8.

the audio-visual-light performance brought “people out of the feeling of being in a theatre,” as Firpo explained it. The light shows made their audience members participants, “part of the whole action—the whole scene.” For the light artists, “culture” was thus a “living” thing, as opposed to the shows at the Broadway theaters, which they saw as a “farce—it’s a dollar and cents thing.”⁹¹¹

During this time, Kusama similarly alluded to New York’s art scene as “茶番” (*chaban*) or a “farce.”⁹¹² 茶 (Cha) is a Chinese character for “tea.” By calling her troupe of dancers the “Tea Dancers” and bringing them to the exact spots where Warhol and the E.P.I. had previously performed, Kusama may have been attempting to overshadow and critique Warhol. From her perspective, he promoted pursuits and values that needed to be challenged—such as sado-masochism, voyeurism, and social conformity. Tambellini, whom critics in the sixties saw as “a leader of [the cultural] rebels,”⁹¹³ says now that he did not identify Warhol with the “underground.” Mainly Tambellini saw Warhol as already part of the art world establishment by 1966 when Warhol began promoting the E.P.I. in lower Manhattan.⁹¹⁴

Naked Happenings

One major goal of Kusama’s psychedelic revolution was to liberate both men

⁹¹¹ Firpo, cited in “Multi-Media and the Theater,” 14.

⁹¹² Golata, interview by Munroe, 18 January 1989.

⁹¹³ “Black 2 Performance, The Bridge Theater,” a clipping from Aldo Tambellini Papers.

⁹¹⁴ Tambellini, interview by author, 18 September 2010.

and women from their repressed sexuality. As a means to an end, Kusama began publicly presenting *Naked Happenings*. The first such Happening had been staged on 3 November 1967 at the Orez Gallery in The Hague, The Netherlands.⁹¹⁵ The event was part of the *vernissage* (special viewing) for Kusama's solo exhibition, entitled "Infinity Polka Dot Room" (fig. 4.48). Later on that night, she hosted a second event in the neighboring town of Delft. Both events were captured on the Dutch television station KPI's *Kunstprogramma* (cultural program).⁹¹⁶

The first event at Orez Gallery turned out to be less successful than the Delft version. Unlike her previous audio-visual-light performances at the Black Gate Theater and Electric Circus, which created a place for her performers to be less self-conscious, Kusama's first *Naked Happening* was held at an overcrowded gallery that was brightly lit because it was filmed for television (fig. 4.49). The performers were sequestered in one corner of the room. This circumstance made the performers—one female and four males who were stripped down to the waist⁹¹⁷—overtly self-conscious and visibly nervous as they painted each other. Kusama did not participate in this Happening. In contrast, at the event held at the Catholic student society called Novum Jazz, in Delft, she performed clad in a black sleeveless body stocking and matching pair of tights (fig. 4.50).

⁹¹⁵ Kusama interview by Yalkut, "The Polka Dot Way of Life," 8. *Kusama's Self-Obliteration* film (1967) suggests that she staged some *Naked Happenings* at her studio prior to this first public presentation.

⁹¹⁶ Kusama, in Carrier number V 24977, *Kunstprogramma KPI* (16 November 1967), Netherlands Instituut voor Beeld en Geluid.

⁹¹⁷ The female performer became topless only for a brief moment.

Kusama's second *Naked Happening* was held on the occasion of the Dutch artist, Jan Schoonhoven's fifty-third birthday celebration (Delft being Schoonhoven's hometown). The scene began with Kusama quickly moving her paintbrush from the chest to the knee of a fully naked male body, adding a tone of erotic foreplay. She then swiftly painted four more naked men, including the artist, Schoonhoven. Facial close-ups revealed the performers' mixed feelings of nervousness and sensual excitement.

"Kusama's obsession with dots and infinity," suggested a writer reporting on her Happenings, "goes back to [her] childhood when as a little girl during World War II, she wandered along the river beds of Japan, counting stones to take her mind off the terror of it all."⁹¹⁸ That experience of war contributed to her later fierce opposition to the Vietnam War; thus, in one sequence of her *Naked Happening*, Kusama sent a form of anti-war message by inscribing the word "Love" on the back of a performer. With her *Naked Happenings*, Kusama tried to negate patriarchal power by engaging men in a way consonant with the conceit of "flower power," which entailed deflecting the exercise of power by giving flowers to the police and other authoritarians. A telling passage from Kusama's semi-fictional play, *The Story of Tokyo Lee* states that, "people who wear clothes are frustrated. That is why there is so much war and killing." The frustration to which she referred was sexual in nature and Tokyo Lee's way to mitigate this was by encouraging people of both sexes to participate in her *Naked Happenings*. Lee declared: "All must fight against [creating]

⁹¹⁸ Based most likely on Kusama's interview for the article, unidentified writer, *Man*, 46, partial clipping, folder "1968," Kusama Papers.

dirty, egoistic men” by way of finding “a new way to make love.” Kusama’s *Naked Happenings* were “a purified version of the 42nd Street Coney Island”⁹¹⁹—42nd Street then being the center of the sex industry in Manhattan. Kusama believed that repressed sexual desires were at the root of such covert and harmful sexual activities as prostitution and rape.⁹²⁰

Making sex “easy, available, and natural,” believed Barry Melton, a co-founder of the country rock band, Country Joe and the Fish, would contribute to a significant decrease in sex crimes. Melton shared the stage with Kusama at the Fillmore East Auditorium in 1968. He remembers today that the 1960s concept of “free love” coincided with a greater availability of contraceptives, which, for “a handful of young people,” resulted in a genuine attempt “to redefine much of what was taken for granted about the way human being[s] relate to one another.”⁹²¹ With some elements of the New Left emphasizing the “Life Instinct,” many youths came to believe that once people learned to enjoy sexual freedom, the unending chain of wars could be broken and peace would reign supreme.⁹²² In her *Naked Happenings*, Kusama, like Marcuse and others, also celebrated the Life Instinct, which she, too, believed could change the course of a war-driven society. Sexual liberation could thus

⁹¹⁹ Ibid.

⁹²⁰ Kusama recounted how she had been programmed to believe, growing up, that “sex is dirty, shameful, and thus needed to be concealed,” which led her to fear it. Kusama, *Infinity Nets*, 40.

⁹²¹ Barry Melton, “Everything Seemed Beautiful: A Life in the Counterculture,” in *Long Time Gone: Sixties America Then and Now*, ed. Alexander Bloom (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 153.

⁹²² Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, ix, 21-54.

help contribute to social revolution.

Once public nudity in art became legal in New York, in January 1968,⁹²³ Kusama promptly brought her *Naked Happenings* to Manhattan nightclubs, including the Palm Gardens Ballroom (21 January), the Gymnasium Discotheque (26-27 January), and the Blue Dome (9-10 February). In these events, she often collaborated with the Group Image. The events consisted of two parts. The first half began with *Body Festival*: several performers stripped on the dance floor and started painting each other, encouraging the audience to partake in the event.⁹²⁴ The second half had an overtly political tone. It began with the dancers burning, or tearing up the American flag. They then draped themselves in its remnants and “gyrated to the highly amplified strains of Kate Smith’s *God Bless America!*”⁹²⁵

In these well-publicized events, Kusama emphasized that her dancers were

⁹²³ “When nudity was permitted in art in New York, beginning January 1968, Kusama went on a naked spree, not only body painting nudes in public to demonstrate her philosophy, but having people remove their clothes and polka dotting each other in discotheques and public places to the delight of the press . . . “ Al Van Starrex, “With and Without Clothes,” *Mr.* 13, no. 8, July 1969, p. 41.

⁹²⁴ In these events, Kusama was usually fully clothed, and was either participating in the body painting or directing her dancers from the sidelines.

⁹²⁵ “Kusama Incredible,” in *The Village Voice*, 15 February 1968; *Man*, 45 [1968], clipping, folder “1968,” Kusama Papers. Dancer / choreographer Yvonne Rainer similarly incorporated the flag and nudity in her part of the “Judson Flag Show” (1970) (fig. 4.51), as a way to make “a statement with stronger political overtones.” Said Rainer, further: “To combine the flag and nudity seemed a double-barreled attack on repression and censorship.” Jon Hendricks and Jean Toche were the planners of the “Judson Flag Show,” which took place in September of 1970. It was held to protest recent arrests of people purportedly desecrating the American flag. Beginning in November 1970, Rainer launched a performance entitled, *War*, where she again used the American flag (but not nudity) as a prop. Yvonne Rainer, “Judson Flag Show,” in *Work 1961-'73* (Halifax, Canada: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1974), 161, 171, 172.

“making love, not war!” A writer from *Man* magazine reported the response:

Reactions to these naked happenings range from shocked incredulity, disgust or embarrassment among older members of Kusama’s large audience to amusement and cheers from younger spectators, mostly American college men eligible for service in Vietnam and their teenage girlfriends.⁹²⁶

Another journalist, Al Van Starrex saw Kusama’s “public nudity as a trend of the times—a part of teenage protest against Establishment mores and morals.”⁹²⁷ A *Village Voice* writer observed: “Many people in our time regard utopia as a sexual, rather than a social, ideal, and we have been told that the younger generation is finally overthrowing 2,500 years of Platonic idealism in favor of tactility.”⁹²⁸

Kusama’s Self-Obliteration (Play)

Kusama’s most severe anti-war protest took place on the 1st and 2nd of March 1968 at the Cooper Square Arts Theater in the form of a wry comedy called *Kusama’s Self-Obliteration*. It began at 11 p.m. with an audience of over 300 attendees. In the narrow storefront theater, photographers and reporters milled around the stage. Suddenly the lead singer of the rock and roll band, the Dayz Beyond, burst into song.⁹²⁹ With this signal, the performers—three men draping their flanks and waist

⁹²⁶ *Man*, 45.

⁹²⁷ Al Van Starrex, “Kusama and Her ‘Naked Happenings,’” in *Mr.*, August 1968, p. 39.

⁹²⁸ Ross Wetzsteon, “‘Mass Naked Happening’ The Way of All Flesh: Stripping for Inaction,” in *The Village Voice*, 1 February 1968, p. 9.

⁹²⁹ The title of the play is inscribed on the back of a photograph of this event. Kusama Papers. The descriptions that follow of *Kusama’s Self-Obliteration* at the Cooper Square Arts Theater are based on an article by an unidentified writer,

with the flag—appeared on the stage. From stage left, “a fat nude girl” appeared. Then, “three more appear[ed], two men completely nude and a young tall girl, her loins hidden by an American flag.” They began painting each other on stage, until “a Negro cop,” played by one of the performers, “starts hedging his way through the crowd,” yelling, ““You’re all under arrest”” (fig. 4.52). The naked men and women disobeyed the order of the supposed policeman and began fighting back, wrestling him to the ground. The “girls pull[ed] off his pants and shout[ed] ‘Peace Brother!’” Soon the “policeman,” now fully naked, began taking part in *Kusama’s Self-Obliteration*.⁹³⁰

These naked young men and women may have held to the idea that what is “obscene is not the picture of a naked woman who exposes her pubic hair but that of a fully clad general who exposes his medals rewarded in a war of aggression,” as Marcuse put it in 1969, adding, “obscene is not the ritual of the Hippies but the declaration of a high dignitary of the Church that war is necessary for peace.”⁹³¹ In the second act of *Kusama’s Self-Obliteration*, Kusama and her naked performers boldly disgraced authoritative symbols of nation, culture, and religion, which they evidently indeed regarded as obscene. Simultaneously, on the stage, performers twisted and broke hula hoops; a man with a suit and tie, wearing an American flag as

“Watching Girl in Long Underwear Play Artist,” in *The East Village Other* 3, no. 14 (8-14 March): 6, 15.

⁹³⁰ All this time, Kusama—fully clothed with red leotards and a long, black fur coat, covered here and there with white polka dots—stood off to the side and directed the performers.

⁹³¹ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 8.

a kind of turban, had his head attached to a meat grinder (fig. 4.53); and Kusama obliterated a reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* with her signature polka dots (fig. 4.54).

Next, the projection of the film, *Kusama's Self-Obliteration*, began on the stage screen. The "stage" took on "the appearance of double-time celluloids" as a birth story of Kusama as the high priestess of polka dots was projected above, with the live action simultaneously being performed in the space below. The music blared loudly, accompanied by flashing strobe lights that, according to Kusama, helped disinhibit the performers making "people no longer ashamed of themselves."⁹³² The nude girls and boys caressed each other on stage. Then the "policeman" regained his consciousness and began whipping a girl, who ran off the stage. In the words of one attendee, "everything is breaking up and moving backwards as if being rewound. Suddenly there is just an empty stage."⁹³³

The final act opened with a phonograph blasting the "Star Spangled Banner." The nude performers returned on stage carrying a naked man enacting the role of Jesus Christ tied on a cross. Kusama covered the Christ-like body with polka dots (fig. 4.55). Once she finished painting, the cross was set down on the floor. Young men and women frolicked around the dotted Christ figure "and cavort[ed] in homosexual and heterosexual play." The music switched to "God Bless America." Kusama, wearing a white polka-dot-covered red leotard, joined the group. She held Christ

⁹³² Kusama cited in Ishikawa Yoshihiro, "Jicchi ni mitekita amerika no sei kaihou buri" [Firsthand account of sexual liberation in the United States], in *Hōseki* [Gem], December 1969, p. 316.

⁹³³ "Watching Girl," 15.

tightly, trying to seduce him into her orgiastic world, so the world's moral code could be altered. After a time, she left the Christ figure and bowed to the audience announcing that the show was over.⁹³⁴

The Medium is the Message: Kusama's Press Happenings

By 14 July 1968, following the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, and with a presidential election slated for November, the political overtones in Kusama's Happenings had increased. She shifted her *Naked Happening* from theater settings to what she called "Press Happenings," or outdoor demonstrations (fig. 4.56).⁹³⁵ Twisting the words "atomic explosion" to become "Anatomic Explosion," in this new series, she brought a troupe of performers to the streets. Returning to a new version of the strategy she had used while still in Japan to help establish herself in the male-dominated Japanese art world, Kusama, now in New York and in the age of television, believed that "Avant-garde artists should use mass communication as traditional painters use paints and brushes." A goal of *Anatomic Explosion* was to exploit the system of technocracy to help deliver her personal message to wide and unsuspecting audiences.⁹³⁶

⁹³⁴ Ibid.

⁹³⁵ Kusama explained in an interview: "I stage these Happenings exclusively for the benefit of the press. Through mass media, the news reaches to the public throughout the world." Nakamaru, "Why Yayoi Kusama strips herself in New York?," 59.

⁹³⁶ Kusama, artist statement, quoted in Munroe, Karia ed., *Kusama*, 30. Other *Anatomic Explosion* venues in 1968 included: Liberty Island (17 July); First Presbyterian Church on Fifth Ave. at 11th Street and St. Mark's Church (first week of August); *Alice in Wonderland Statue*, Central Park (mid-August); the United Nations (9 September); Wall Street (15 October); the Board of Elections, 80 Varrick Street (3

The individual performances of the *Anatomic Explosions* lasted only for a short time and heavily targeted the mass media, most importantly, big news agencies such as Associated Press and United Press International. For example, the first *Anatomic Explosion*, held in front of the New York Stock Exchange, lasted merely five minutes. After arriving at the site, Kusama quickly sprayed blue paint on four nude dancers as they swayed to the erotic rhythms of a bongo drum. Despite such short appearances, some of the performances were mentioned in more than 700 newspaper articles throughout the world.⁹³⁷ “There is a lurking sense that there is absolutely nothing she would not do for publicity,” a journalist who attended one of Kusama’s events professed, “and in large measure she has succeeded in her aims.”⁹³⁸

Kusama staged a dozen similar *Naked Happenings* at various landmarks in Manhattan until November of 1968, protesting economic exploitation, taxes, violence, and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Her final event in that year took place immediately after the crucial election that installed a new Republican leader, Richard Nixon, in office. On 11 November, Kusama released “An Open Letter to My Hero, Richard M. Nixon” and wrote: “Dear Richard, calm your manly fighting spirit!” She promised to “adorn your hard masculine body” with “polka dots” until he would lose his ego and discover that, “You can’t eradicate violence by using more violence.”⁹³⁹

November); and, Reade Street near Lower Broadway (11 November).

⁹³⁷ Among her *Anatomic Explosion* performances, there are, for instance, more than 700 articles regarding one entitled *Grand Orgy* done at MoMA (fig. 4.61). The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

⁹³⁸ *After Dark*, May 1968, 46, Clippings, folder “1968,” Kusama Papers.

⁹³⁹ Yayoi Kusama, “An Open Letter to My Hero, Richard M. Nixon,” 11 November

Kusama was not alone in thinking of subversive approaches to technocracy. Warhol said in a 1971 interview, for example, “No one escapes the media. Media influences everyone. It’s a very powerful weapon.” Then he concluded: “media *is* art.”⁹⁴⁰ Piene and Tambellini similarly saw a future for art in mass media. Tambellini believed that television could democratize the ownership of art. Once the video recorder became commercially available, he promptly acquired it and began producing video art. On 21 December 1967 ABC news featured an interview with Tambellini regarding his new artworks based on television. He explained that his art was based on light emanating from the monitor, which he believed to be a form of energy that would energize people broadly and help reorient them in society.⁹⁴¹ In 1968, Tambellini and Piene jointly produced the world’s first one-hour art television show, entitled *Black Gate Cologne* for a German channel, WDR (fig. 4.57).

This futuristic program consisted roughly of two parts: The first segment featured people who had gathered at the Black Gate Theater. They collectively and playfully held Piene’s mile-long, helium-inflated polyethylene tube above their heads, while mechanical sounds whirred in the background. Projections of Tambellini’s hand-painted black and white slides occasionally interrupted the scene. In the latter half of the program, these black and white images took over the entire scene. Tambellini’s early, hand-painted, abstract films and slides had been superimposed on

1968, in Kusama Papers. Emphasis as in original.

⁹⁴⁰ Gerard Malanga, “A Conversation with Andy Warhol” (1971), in *I’ll be Your Mirror*, 194, 196. Emphasis as in original.

⁹⁴¹ Tambellini, “A Syracuse Rebel,” 54-55; DVD of “Aldo Tambellini Interview at The Black Gate Theater,” New York, 21 December 1967, Tambellini Papers.

his video art, which he called “Black TV” (1968). The sound effects in *Black TV* are mostly white noise, except for one section where a newscaster relentlessly repeats: “Senator Kennedy has been shot,” ending with a question: “Is it possible?” Then people’s screaming and chaos take over the film. Illustrating the shock of the assassination, the projected image on the wall began shaking. The spectators at the Black Gate Theater experienced the virtual sensation of being embroiled in political turmoil.

Such an amalgam of art, activism, and popular entertainments was also at the crux of Kusama’s art during the late 1960s. On 6 and 7 December 1968, *Kusama’s Self-Obliteration* was the opening act for Country Joe and the Fish’s performance at Bill Graham’s Fillmore East. Having opened its doors in March 1968, this legendary rock venue in the East Village, New York, was the East Coast anchor of Graham’s Fillmore West in San Francisco, where Warhol and the E.P.I. had performed two years earlier in 1966.⁹⁴² The Fillmore claimed to be a unique place for the sixties psychedelic rock scene. Its list of performers included such headliners as Jefferson Airplane, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, and Bob Dylan. Some of these artists’ songs were intimately connected to civil rights protests and the anti-war movement. For example, in the fall of 1965, Country Joe and the Fish promoted their first EP⁹⁴³ in conjunction with the first teach-in against the Vietnam War held at the University of California’s Berkeley campus. Their songs for civil rights and the anti-war movement

⁹⁴² The Fillmore East was located at 6th Street and Second Avenue, New York.

⁹⁴³ An *EP* (short for *extended play*) is a musical recording, which contains more music than a single, but is too short to qualify as a full album or LP.

soon attracted young radicals. In fact, the leftist group, Students for a Democratic Society, was the sponsor for their first tour of northwestern colleges. Joshua White, the light artist at the Fillmore East, who produced the light environment for *Kusama's Self-Obliteration* (fig. 4.58) recalls that in the psychedelic culture the audience went, not for what the market told them to embrace, but for “what they truly liked” and what thrilled them. As such, Kusama proved a vital artist within that culture.⁹⁴⁴

Kusama's Mass Erotic Happenings

By 1969, Kusama, who claimed to be “carrying the banner for homosexual liberation,”⁹⁴⁵ moved her headquarters to a notably gay and lesbian-identified sector of Manhattan—two floors in a rental building at 404 Sixth Avenue, near Washington Square Park. Through administering two body-painting studios—one on the second floor of her studio called Village Square Body Painting, and the other, Studio One, at 664 Sixth Avenue—she grappled with received ideas of sexuality as heterosexual and monogamous. During this time, she also organized so-called *Kusama's Mass Erotic Happenings*, or orgy parties.⁹⁴⁶ In an article from 1969, Kusama asked rhetorically, “Why do I host orgy parties and Happenings?” and replied, “This is because, first, the public demands them. The issues related to sex are also my own issue that I confront.

⁹⁴⁴ Joshua White, unrecorded telephone interview by author, 12 February 2007.

⁹⁴⁵ “A Japanese woman who directs sex,” in *Heibon Punch*, 133.

⁹⁴⁶ According to a reporter, Kusama “has been insisting that homosexuality is a normal conduct.” Ibid. Nakamaru, “Why does Yayoi Kusama strip,” 59.

At the same time it is the common issue for all the people.”⁹⁴⁷

Once she began considering “the issues related to sex,” not limited to her own personal issues, the way she presented herself indicated a striking shift from her previous *faux naïf* self-portraits, which she produced to promote her Happenings in 1966 (fig. 4.34), to receiving visitors at her new studio in front of an outsized photograph of a naked woman splaying her arms and legs.⁹⁴⁸ The images in her works likewise showed a notable shift from the phallic, as found in her *Accumulation* series (fig. 3.33), for example, to the vulvic or vaginal, through life-size photographs of women displaying their genitalia, which she sold in 1969 through Kusama Poster Enterprise (fig. 4.59).

Images of women’s most intimate and erotic body parts were long taboo in public spheres. By making the vulva openly visible in quotidian reality, Kusama aimed less to display explicitly sexualized female body parts for the erotic interests of heterosexual male viewers than to represent female sexuality in a way akin to prehistoric female effigies—those female statuettes endowed with exaggerated sexual features.⁹⁴⁹ Kusama was not alone in this endeavor. In the mid-sixties, such

⁹⁴⁷ “A Japanese woman who directs sex,” in *Heibon Punch*, 133.

⁹⁴⁸ Nakamaru, “Why does Yayoi Kusama strip,” 58. According to Aldo Tambellini, her *faux naïf*-type of portrait attracted large male audiences to Kusama’s Black Gate Theater Happening. Tambellini, interview by author, 14 November 2010.

⁹⁴⁹ “The dominant reality remains that creative capacity in the west has historically, reflexively been deemed the province of ‘bachelor machines,’ autogenous creators of ‘*filles nées sans mère*’ (daughters born without mothers), as Francis Picabia’s Dada formulation had it”: so notes Anna Chave, who further cites French literary theorist Hélène Cixous’ 1976 statement that, in general, “the origin is a masculine myth.” It followed that the ambition to reclaim the vagina as the site of origin and creativity “was commonplace in early feminist practice.” Anna C. Chave, “Is this good for

proto-feminist artists as Louise Bourgeois, Lynda Benglis, Lee Lozano, Yoko Ono, Carolee Schneemann and Hannah Wilke all variously began exploring aspects of female sexuality. This tendency can be understood, in one way, as the female artists' effort to invert "the tired origins story whereby Man creates Art by creating Woman," as Anna Chave phrases it.⁹⁵⁰ But Kusama had plenty of other reasons besides. As demonstrated in Chapter Three of this study, she was painfully aware that in patriarchal society, people are generally attuned to accepting male artists alone as the source of innovative artistic styles and movements.

In Kusama's particular case, a campaign for sexual liberation went hand in hand with the proliferation of psychotropic drugs. Specifically, psychoactive drugs, with their impact intensified through synaesthetic effects—the unique use of light and sound—played a key role in *Kusama's Mass Erotic Happenings*. She remembered how initially people attending her orgy parties hesitated to take off their clothes.⁹⁵¹ So they first drank liquor, smoked marijuana, and engaged in body painting. The "dreamy artistic atmosphere" that accompanied the body painting induced libidinal sensations in the participants, which were intensified by acid rock and "special light equipment." In these parties, Kusama used black light to establish a "totally different environment," which, she explained—in addition to the sensual mood heightened by

Vulva?' Female Genitalia in Contemporary Art," in *The Visible Vagina*, exh. cat. (New York: Francis M. Naumann Fine Art, LLC and David Nolan Gallery, Inc., 2010), 7–9.

⁹⁵⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁹⁵¹ Ishikawa, "Firsthand account of sexual liberation," in *Hōseki*, 316. For "*Kusama's Mass Erotic Happening*, the members paid \$25 and were invited to a dark room.

the drugs and synaesthesia—invoked what she called “demonic feelings in the participants’ subconscious.”⁹⁵²

In these gatherings, participants were encouraged to explore diverse sexual behaviors and find their own sexual preferences beyond socially prescribed or encouraged models. Short articles (not written by Kusama) in a tabloid newspaper entitled *Kusama Presents an Orgy of Nudity, Love, Sex & Beauty* focused on the unconventional sexual conduct rife at her events, including homosexual, anal, and female sensual pleasure seeking.⁹⁵³ The active hallucinogens Kusama introduced into her psychedelic Happenings—LSD, marijuana, and psilocybin—are non-addictive and therefore less dangerous. Some scientists in the twenty-first century are, moreover, reconfirming the therapeutic effects of active hallucinogens, and federal regulators have lately resumed granting approval for experiments.⁹⁵⁴ According to *New York*

⁹⁵² Ibid., 314.

⁹⁵³ The publisher of the tabloid was Enterprise Modern Service, Inc. Kusama signed a contract with the company in November 1969. “Agreement,” in folder “1969,” Kusama Papers. In this tabloid, Kusama promoted orgy parties and sold by mail order 8mm and 16mm color film recordings of *Kusama’s Mass Erotic Happenings* through Kusama International Film Production. “Kusama: Easter Sunday Bust Out,” in *Metropolitan Swinger*, 1–5 May 1969, p. 7, folder “1969,” Kusama Papers.

⁹⁵⁴ However, because reactions to hallucinogens can vary widely depending on the setting, experimenters are cautioned to follow medical safety guidelines. With proper supervision, hallucinogens can be used to treat depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, end-of-life anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder, among other conditions, and can also provide benefits that are unavailable with non-hallucinogenic treatments. John Tierney, “Hallucinogens Have Doctors Tuning In Again,” *The New York Times*, 11 April 2010, available from Internet http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/12/science/12psychedelics.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=Seeking%20Medical%20Uses,%20Doctors%20Tune%20Back%20Into%20Hallucinog

Times writer John Tierney, experimenters with these drugs almost unequivocally described “their egos and bodies vanishing as they felt part of some larger state of consciousness in which their personal worries and insecurities vanished.”⁹⁵⁵

The problem was that Kusama’s *Mass Erotic Happenings* took place only under such drug-induced artificial circumstances and without well thought-out political commitment. This was the reason why Marcuse himself did not approve of the use of psychedelic drugs as an effective political solution.⁹⁵⁶ Nonetheless, many under his influence in the New Left—including Kusama’s followers—optimistically believed that once people learned to enjoy sexual freedom, the human body could become an instrument of pleasure rather than labor.⁹⁵⁷ This, they believed could bring an end to the unceasing chain of wars such that peace would reign supreme. They embraced drugs on this basis, so that they could easily explore diverse sexual behaviors while under mind-altered states, without necessarily changing their essential ideas about sexuality.⁹⁵⁸

[ens&st=cse](#) accessed 12 April 2012.

⁹⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁵⁶ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 35.

⁹⁵⁷ *Idem.*, *Eros and Civilization*, xiii, xxiii, 22-23.

⁹⁵⁸ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, ix, 21-54. According to Barry Melton, free sex came hand-in-hand with oral contraceptives, which became commonplace in the mid-1960s. People no longer had to worry about pregnancy. Melton, *Long Time Gone*, 153.

On the eve of the feminist art movement and in the year of the Stonewall Riots, however, exploring sexual pleasure in all its possibilities appeared to some to be an important step forward for a women's revolution—a break with age-old traditions. Thus a sexually adventurous female character featured in Kusama's tabloid article could categorically declare, for instance, "Personally, I never considered marriage."⁹⁵⁹

But ultimately, Kusama's would-be revolution depended on her audience. Her *Mass Erotic Happenings* and body-painting studio could have no effect without her participants' solid political commitment. For instance, at her body-painting studio, clients could paint male and female nude models in a 1.5-by-1.5-meter private booth.⁹⁶⁰ As discussed earlier in this chapter, she saw body painting as a way for human beings to redefine their ways of relating to one another. Body painting was a relatively easy way for some young people to make an income. A 1969 article on the lives of body-painting models in Manhattan reported that many models, especially those who migrated from commercial sex work, also "lay-for-pay" behind closed doors.⁹⁶¹ Moreover, adopting a trendy façade, some commercial sex establishments ventured into the body-painting business themselves, so that they could expand their

⁹⁵⁹ The Executive (pseudonym), "Million Dollar Pussy," in *Kusama Presents an Orgy of Nudity, Love, Sex & Beauty* 1, no. 2 [1969], 18.

⁹⁶⁰ Nakamaru, "Why Does Yayoi Kusama Strip?," 59. Clients paid \$20 per hour to paint male and female nude models and photograph them. For \$25, clients were allowed to take off their clothes and paint each other with the models.

⁹⁶¹ Joe Mancini, "Screwed, Blewed & Tattooed," in *Scenes* 11, no. 3 (November 1969): 47.

clientele. Thus by the end of 1969, according to one source, “more than half of New York City’s six or seven body painting studios were good old-fashioned whorehouse[s].”⁹⁶² But Kusama has explained that her body-painting models were not allowed to have intercourse with the clients.⁹⁶³ She and some other studio owners sincerely believed in body painting as a contemporary art form and administered “legitimate body-painting” enterprises. But for customers to distinguish so-called legitimate studios from brothels became increasingly difficult, which complicated Kusama’s revolutionary goal.⁹⁶⁴

In late 1969, however, Kusama was still hopeful. On 24 April in that year, in order to advance the cause of sexual revolution, Kusama opened a fashion boutique and introduced her line of clothing that was designed to be worn in her *Mass Erotic Happenings*. Even as she initiated a commercial enterprise, as in her earlier years, Kusama struggled against the forces of mass production and mass consumption that together underwrote an oppressively stable, monolithic, and mechanized capitalist culture. She declared her opposition to “mechanized conformity and machine-made mediocrity,” and wrote in a press release that “The best way of looking human is to go around completely nude, but if you must wear clothing and still want to look individual,” you must “wear hand-made things.”⁹⁶⁵ Under her direction, the Kusama

⁹⁶² Ibid., 49–50. Male models also went into prostitution; according to Mancini, “body-painting has replaced male service in this town.”

⁹⁶³ Ibid.

⁹⁶⁴ Ibid., 48.

⁹⁶⁵ Yayoi Kusama, “Priestess of Nudity, Yayoi Kusama Opens Fashion boutique,” in folder “1969,” Kusama Papers. The address of her fashion boutique is Kusama’s

Fashion Institute, as she called it, produced entirely handmade clothes. Including unisex, mod, peekaboo, and see-through outfits, Kusama's clothes prominently featured cut-outs. These strategically placed holes adventurously exposed "what's underneath"—breasts, buttocks, and both male and female genitals (fig. 4.60).⁹⁶⁶ The "holes," she explained "are part of my Holy War to exterminate the establishment."⁹⁶⁷ Kusama's wearable art was conceived as fiercely political, as was her attempt to deploy her political art as "a force *in* the (given) society," as Marcuse described it, that "refuses to be for the museum or mausoleum," and "wants to be *real*."⁹⁶⁸ But she soon began to be disillusioned by the government's systematic attack on the counterculture movement. By 1970, she completely withdrew from political engagement through her art, and was never again involved in politics on a substantial level.

studio building. It is uncertain which floor of her studio the fashion boutique occupied.

⁹⁶⁶ "A Japanese woman who directs sex," 132.

⁹⁶⁷ Yayoi Kusama, "For Immediate Release, Nudist Queen Designs Clothes for Department Stores," in folder "1969," Kusama Papers.

⁹⁶⁸ Marcuse, "Art as a Form of Reality," 127, 130. Emphasis as in original.

CONCLUSION

As the four chapters of this dissertation have demonstrated, Kusama's art and her psyche were intimately connected, and the shifts in her work's evolution visibly occurred in tandem with her life's most difficult events. Through an analysis of her work and its milieus, the present study identified particular issues and challenges Kusama faced in society. Among them, her experience of war and her gender (the "second sex," as Simone de Beauvoir indelibly named it) were key factors in shaping her practice. As "Chapter One: 1945-1957, Rising from Totalitarianism" demonstrated, growing up under the Japanese military's totalitarian regime, Kusama initially embraced art as a non-conformist pursuit. However, wanting to establish her career after World War II, she tried to join the establishment by apprenticing to a prominent *Nihonga* painter, only to find out that her gender represented a hindrance in the traditional art world. She thus began venturing into vanguard art.

And equally significant factor in this study was the internationalism that emerged after World War II. Although Japan's modern history has always been

internationally oriented,⁹⁶⁹ after the war, U.S.-led Allied Powers systematically propagated a U.S.-centered model of industrial, economic, and cultural development in all Occupied territories. As a testament to this new internationalism, Kusama arrived in Seattle in 1957 and proceeded to New York in 1958. Since she emerged during a significant moment of political, economic, and cultural globalization, this interdisciplinary study of Kusama comparatively explored the conditions of modernity she encountered in Japan, the United States, and Europe.

On arriving in New York in 1958, Kusama blended in with war refugees, new immigrants, and newly emerging artists from lower social classes, including some who had studied art under the GI Bill of Rights. It was this culturally diverse environment that enabled her to make a successful debut at Manhattan's downtown cooperative gallery, Brata, in 1959, a time when European artists and curators were closely observing the budding New York scene. Some of them, especially the artists and curators affiliated with the German Zero group, immediately recognized the achievement of Kusama. With their invitation, she began exhibiting in Europe in 1960. "Chapter Two, 1958-1962: Infinity, the Arts of Active Social Engagement" discussed the parallels between Kusama, Barnett Newman, and the Dutch Nul and the German

⁹⁶⁹ As demonstrated in Chapter One of this study, Japan's modern history began at almost the same time as that of its Axis allies, Italy and Germany. During the early Meiji period, Japan paid close attention to and adopted the way European countries transformed from feudal polities into modern nation-states. After the global economic depression in 1929, the Japanese new right-wing government purposely emulated the Nazi Law for Organization and, ultimately, became part of the Axis coalition.

Zero artists' groups; how the experience of war led these artists to question the social conformity which was endemic to fascism, and how they all came to grapple with commonly held issues of liberation and moral consciousness.

With the global war and the U.S.-led Allied Occupation that followed, the significant internationalization of postwar art in Japan, the United States, and Europe, began rendering unique locations and the concept of a local or national art less relevant. However, the postwar art that we know best today is overwhelmingly that of Western, especially U.S.-based white male artists. This is owing in large part to the successful efforts of certain U.S. dealers to establish what was in effect a market monopoly. "Chapter Three, 1960-1966: Objects into Art, the Canonization of Pop Art, and the Case of Kusama," investigated how a newly professionalized U.S. art market wound up marginalizing once-promising signs of an internationalist and multicultural spirit in New York's art scene. Propelled in part by anti-European feelings that sprung from war atrocities, the leading art dealer of the 1960s, Leo Castelli, and others in his cohort by 1964 had very nearly created a monopoly for Castelli's gallery artists, who were carefully branded as uniquely American.

In 1962, when Kusama began showing at Green Gallery, a prominent vanguard venue in New York, she exhibited along with future Castelli artists, including Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Claes Oldenburg, James Rosenquist, and Andy Warhol. Had she been a U.S.-born white male artist, it seems she might well have

succeeded within U.S. Pop and Minimalist ambits. Instead, the fact of her being a Japanese immigrant woman worked against her. “If the first major Pop artists had been women, the movement might never have gotten out of the kitchen,” Lucy Lippard observed sardonically in 1976.⁹⁷⁰ Since it was impossible for Kusama to hide her identity, she instead addressed issues of sexual identity by introducing Freudian elements in her art. Being alienated from the mainstream art scene, Kusama also began to explore unconventional venues for her work with a view to attracting, not merely an art audience, but more widespread public attention. In her first site-specific installation and performance work, *Narcissus Garden*—which involved 1500 mirrored-balls, priced at two-dollar a piece, placed on the lawns in front of the Italian Pavilion at the 1966 Venice Biennale—Kusama publicly critiqued Pop art’s having become mere haute-bourgeois collectibles.

As the Vietnam War intensified, some sectors of the New Left severely criticized consumer capitalism for enmeshing individuals within a totally administered world of thought and behavior. Kusama, who grew up under Japan’s totalitarian regime, reinforced her own earlier opposition to social conformity. In the late 1960s, when she shifted her focus away from an elite to a mass public, she became actively engaged in the psychedelic movement, which entailed a would-be

⁹⁷⁰ Lippard, *From the Center*, 56.

anti-capitalist revolution. “Chapter Four, 1965-1969: Eros and Liberation” scrutinized some of Kusama’s politically charged psychedelic Happenings that were documented in photography, comparing her endeavors with Warhol’s psychedelic spectacle, the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, as well as with the initiatives of a founder of German Zero, Otto Piene, and his collaborator, a U.S.-born artist who grew up in fascist Italy, Aldo Tambellini. Converting her political aspirations into action, she created numerous psychedelic audio-visual-light shows, which were designed to activate dormant parts of the brain and, in so doing, to help counter capitalist values.⁹⁷¹

Kusama also staged various anti-Vietnam War demonstrations at different Manhattan landmarks and attempted to promote sexual liberation with her orgiastic *Naked Happenings* at nightclubs and discothèques, as well as at her studio. Eros was the main theme of these works. Eros, according to Marcuse, is the life force, as opposed to Freud’s death instinct. Making “the human body an instrument of pleasure rather than labor,” Eros was the key to liberating people from “the dehumanizing conditions of profitable affluence.”⁹⁷² Kusama shared her political interests with Piene and Tambellini who grew up under fascism. Celebrating the life force,

⁹⁷¹ Premiered in a New York theater in 1965 by Leary, the psychedelic light show is the first neurological art form in human history, an art form which promoted visions akin to those acquired through LSD, without the spectator necessarily being on the drug. It helped to “turn on” never used cerebella zones of the human brain with an aim for positive social change. Leary, *Flashbacks*, 50, 227.

⁹⁷² Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, xiii, xxiii, 22-23.

Kusama's Happenings were at odds with Warhol's more sinister psychedelic spectacles. Given her adverse experiences of being a woman in patriarchal societies, Kusama became eager to join forces with the ongoing sexual revolution. This effort of hers—to transform received ideas about gender and sexuality in order to shift the course of society—makes Kusama today an important precursor to the feminist movement of the 1970s.

Toward a New Feminist Historiography

I set out to explore how Kusama's art was distinctively shaped by her experience during the initial globalization of art in the period following World War II. As a feminist art historian of color, I considered it important to uncover various fragments of histories that had been eclipsed or excluded by canonical history. Any history is a written record that reflects a personal perspective, and that perspective is inevitably influenced by the governing structure of society, which is an unequal structure, as Michel Foucault has made clear, produced by the conjunctions of sexuality and power.⁹⁷³

In Kusama's case, since her first U.S. retrospective exhibition in 1989, she has been understood mostly as being outside mainstream history. However, at the height

⁹⁷³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 48.

of the 1960s political dissent, people in New York's countercultural milieu accepted her as one of their own. This can be seen, for example, in the 1969 "Easter Sunday 'Bust-Out,'" when Kusama and Louis Abolafia—the Love candidate for mayor of New York City—kicked off the latter's mayoral campaign on 6 April at the Sheep Meadow in Central Park, and some "100–125,000" people gathered at the peak of the festival (fig. 5.1) to show their support for Abolafia and Kusama.⁹⁷⁴

The site of this magnificent Happening was marked by a flying kite, under which guitars were strummed.⁹⁷⁵ "A girl opened a big box of yellow flowers and began to hand them around," noted a reporter, as "a boy wandered around with a bag of [give-away] tiny plastic bird whistles."⁹⁷⁶ Soon, the whole park was filled with the sound of happy trilling. Abolafia wanted to realize his vision that "the Revolution is not just a radical affair; it is a social, artistic and cultural endeavor."⁹⁷⁷ His belief reflected a vein of New Left philosophy, which considered art as an essential force that could shape the quality and the appearance of things in a way that would, in turn,

⁹⁷⁴ "Kites, Fists Fly at 'Love-In, Be-In,'" in *The New York Times*, 7 April 1969, p. 25; Robert J. Cahn, "To The Editor," *The Village Voice*, 17 April 1969, a clipping, folder "1969," Kusama Papers.

⁹⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁷⁶ Leo Shull, "City Desk on B'Way, Kusama Strikes Again," in *Show Business*, 19 April 1969, p. 17, folder "1969," Kusama Papers.

⁹⁷⁷ "This Year . . . ! Easter Sunday Bust-Out," a flyer for *Bust-Out*, folder "1969," Kusama Papers.

influence social realities and people's ways of life. According to its main theorist, Herbert Marcuse, this spelled "the *Aufhebung* [sublation] of art," the "end of the segregation of the aesthetic from the real," which was equally a goal for Kusama, during this late 1960s period.⁹⁷⁸

The Sheep Meadow "love-in" did indeed entail a synthesis of various aesthetic forms that, in diverse ways, affected social realities. Abolafia arrived "lugging a crate of big apples" and told the crowd to help themselves.⁹⁷⁹ With that cue, people began sharing the food they brought to this free-form picnic.⁹⁸⁰ (According to Marcuse, even cooking could be part of New Left aesthetics.⁹⁸¹) "A lovely girl" was giving people beautifully decorated Easter eggs, while Abolafia was distributing his campaign posters.⁹⁸² A reporter described the atmosphere in the park as "very jovial and high."⁹⁸³

On account of the social changes that began taking place with President Nixon's "law-and-order campaign" of 1968, however, by the end of 1969, the utopian

⁹⁷⁸ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 32.

⁹⁷⁹ Shull, "City Desk," 17.

⁹⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁹⁸¹ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 32.

⁹⁸² Shull, "City Desk," 17.

⁹⁸³ "Kusama: Easter Sunday Bust Out," in *Metropolitan Swinger*, 7.

aspirations of these youths began to vanish. That disillusionment was partly due to the intensification of the Vietnam War, including the attendant reports of the My Lai Massacre and the use of napalm and of Agent Orange, a cancer-causing defoliant. After the Chicago Democratic Convention of 1968 and the violent crackdown on peaceful protesters there, an increasing number of frustrated left-wing militants became radicalized and began to talk about the need for violence.⁹⁸⁴ Under the Nixon administration, the FBI would attempt to cripple all forms of political and cultural dissent by escalating its assault on freedom of expression.⁹⁸⁵

A cornerstone of Nixon's so called "law-and-order campaign" of 1968 was the drive to curtail drug abuse. While the government's drug eradication ploys were allegedly designed to crack down on the abuse of controlled substances, FBI head J. Edgar Hoover issued a top-secret memo that stated: "Since the use of marijuana and other narcotics is widespread among members of the New Left, you should be on the alert to opportunities to have them arrested on drug charges."⁹⁸⁶ According to historians of LSD, Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain, the Nixon regime pushed through a series of "no-knock laws allowing police to break into homes of suspected drug users, unannounced and armed to the hilt, to search for a tiny tab of LSD or a pipeful

⁹⁸⁴ Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, 226–27.

⁹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

of pot.”⁹⁸⁷

Of all the radicals, Nixon reportedly regarded Timothy Leary—who helped inspire Kusama’s psychedelic artwork after 1965 (as detailed in Chapter Four)—as the most dangerous man in the United States. As evidenced by his participation in the 1969 California gubernatorial race, Leary’s drug-proliferation campaign was fiercely political. Since narcotic use was widespread among members of the New Left, with their support, Leary might very well have won the election. Not long before Election Day, however, on 21 January 1970, he was unexpectedly convicted for his 1968 arrest for carrying two roaches of marijuana, and ultimately sentenced to thirty years.⁹⁸⁸ Since “no critics of LSD—journalistic or psychiatric, yet cited a convincing statistic or made reference to a published scientific study demonstrating danger,” Leary surmised in 1968 that the whole “hysteria over these drugs” was manufactured partly to fuel the government’s crackdown on oppositional politics.⁹⁸⁹

⁹⁸⁷ Lee and Shlain, for example, list, in 1969:

John Sinclair, leader of the White Panther Party in Michigan, was sentenced to nine and a half years in prison for giving two marijuana joints to an undercover officer; Lee Otis Johnson, a black militant and antiwar organizer at Texas Southern University, was given a thirty-year jail term after sharing a joint with a narc; Mark Rudd, an SDS militant who played a prominent role in the uprising at Columbia University, was fingered for drugs by an informant; and police in Buffalo, New York, planted dope in a bookstore run by Martin Sostre, a black anarchist who served six years in prison before Amnesty International successfully interceded on his behalf. *Ibid.*, 225-26.

⁹⁸⁸ Leary, “Preface,” in *An Annotated Bibliography*, 5.

⁹⁸⁹ Timothy Leary, *The Politics of Ecstasy* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1968),

During the stormy start of the 1970s, the FBI also expanded its surveillance of a number of big-name rock musicians.⁹⁹⁰ Furthermore, on 22 March 1970, a small bomb exploded at the Electric Circus Nite Club, a hip hangout near Fillmore East in Manhattan's East Village. Fifteen people were injured.⁹⁹¹ The incident marked the beginning of a decline in the wild and creative side of 1960s club culture. The curator Dan Cameron reminisced that negative publicity attaching to the underground nightclub scene led to a visible shift from “a '60s countercultural ethic to '70s disco consumption,” and gave people a sense that only successful “businesses in America [can] become a part of [its] cultural history.”⁹⁹²

In the 1970s, at the onset of free-market neoliberalism, people's perceptions of

78.

⁹⁹⁰ Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, 226. In one instance, “Hoover's men shadowed” John Lennon and Yoko Ono on their entry to the United States. His song, “Give Peace a Chance” had become “the anthem of the antiwar movement.” “High energy rock songs,” wrote Lee and Shlain, were also “clarion calls to revolt.” They included The Rolling Stones' “Street Fighting Man”; Steppenwolf's “Born to Be Wild”; The Doors' “Break on Through to the Other Side”; and Jefferson Airplane's “We Are All Outlaws.”

⁹⁹¹ The Electric Circus closed a year and a half later and in 2003 the building became part of the Lower East side gentrification project and was converted into upscale apartments and retail space; available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electric_Circus_\(nightclub\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electric_Circus_(nightclub)); Internet; accessed 27 February 2011; <http://www.nyrocker.com/blog/tag/electric-circus/>; or <http://theboweryboys.blogspot.com/2007/08/friday-night-fever-electric-circus.html> Internet; accessed 24 March 2011.

⁹⁹² Dan Cameron, *Artforum 1997 The Year in Review*, file “Visual Music,” Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden.

the world rapidly changed along with political shifts, as the marketplace expanded its power, and the role of the state was diminished.⁹⁹³ In the art world this shift was reflected, for instance, in the United States government's decreasing role concerning U.S. participation in the international exhibitions of Venice and São Paulo, which the state began overseeing in 1962 under the Kennedy administration. On 28 September 1969, the Chief of International Art Programs at the Smithsonian Institution, Lois Bingham, gave a speech at the São Paulo Biennale conference about the "complex and multiple aspects" of so-called cultural diplomacy. From her seven years of handling international biennales, Bingham understood that "national participation" in the Venice and São Paulo biennales made them "overly significant in the political arena," and that "Government involvements can introduce unfortunate political overtones that discolor the purely artistic and cultural aims of the organizers of international events." In the same speech, she further pointed out that the United States' "biennial participation has been used to manipulate certain artists into commercial prominence."⁹⁹⁴ Whereas the state could have acted to redress this situation, a Department of State memorandum shows that by 1971, the Nixon administration fully endorsed the reign of the marketplace, emphasizing "a return to reliance on private

⁹⁹³ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.

⁹⁹⁴ Lois Bingham, "Proposal read by Lois Bingham to Sao Paulo Biennial Conference," São Paulo, 28 September 1969, VB files.

efforts and funding with regard to [international] art exhibitions.”⁹⁹⁵

By 1973, the critic Lucy Lippard concluded, “the present gallery-money-power structure [in New York] is so strong that it’s going to be very difficult to find a viable alternative to it.”⁹⁹⁶ Four years before, on 18 October 1969, when the Metropolitan Museum of Art opened its centennial exhibition, “New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940–1970,” the curator Henry Geldzahler had picked about one third of the forty-one artists in the exhibition from a single gallery, Leo Castelli. Some of Castelli’s gallery artists—including Flavin, Judd, Morris, Oldenburg, Rosenquist, and Warhol, who all launched their careers with Kusama in 1962—by today have achieved almost mythical status. That status was realized partly through monopoly capitalism, a structure that allows a very small sector of society to make inordinate gains.

In 1969, however, some leading art critics were skeptical of Geldzahler’s connoisseurship. The conservative *New York Times* critic John Canaday, for one, criticized his exhibition as “an aesthetic-political- commercial power combine.”⁹⁹⁷

⁹⁹⁵ The Department of State, memorandum to the Smithsonian Institution, 25 May 1971, “Folder 1: Sao Paulo Biennial, 1970–1971,” Box 39 of 287, Record Unit 321, Smithsonian Institution Archive.

⁹⁹⁶ Lippard, *Six Years*, xix.

⁹⁹⁷ John Canaday, *The New York Times*, 12 October 1969, cited in Calvin Tomkins, *Off the Wall: Robert Rauschenberg and the Art World of Our Time* (New York: Penguin Books, 1980), 280.

Kusama also assailed the Metropolitan's exhibition by releasing a statement entitled "Museum Politics," which argued that Geldzahler's show was about "politics and profit rather than sound, unbiased aesthetic judgment." Further, she observed "a touch of discrimination" in view of the fact that "only one woman . . . is included" in the exhibition. "Famous women artists, such as Marisol, Nevelson, O'Keeffe, Chryssa and Bontecou are excluded." Some of the "kinetic and mechanical art" that Kusama considered "among the strongest art trends of our time" was also excluded. In her analysis, the show equally failed "to recognize happenings which have become a household word and greatly influenced the contemporary theatre," and "the creators of light shows have been completely ignored." In sum, Kusama observed that generally, "art [in] which viewers actively participate has been omitted."⁹⁹⁸

Within the context of this "aesthetic-political-commercial" nexus, and of the political and economic changes that took place around 1970, Andy Warhol's reputation would significantly improve. By May 2007, for instance, Warhol's *Green Car Crash (Green Burning Car I)* would sell at auction for \$71,720,000 and set a record for an artwork made after 1960. The key to Warhol's success, as I see it, is

⁹⁹⁸ Yayoi Kusama, "Museum Politics," from an unidentified magazine, probably from 1969, magazine clipping, folder "1969," Kusama Papers. The only female artist included in the show was Helen Frankenthaler, who had had intimate ties to the powerful critic Clement Greenberg.

what Benjamin Buchloh called his lack of “critical resistance.”⁹⁹⁹ It follows that, “in the end,” as Kenneth Goldsmith put it, Warhol “reflects on us.”¹⁰⁰⁰ His success, then, can be seen as reflecting a global ideological shift that took place after the radical student uprising of 1968, when right-wing politicians internationally started policing freethinking. This in turn, gave rise to an ever more efficient model of free-market capitalism or neoliberalism and a new pattern of exploitation, in which a very small percentage of the population is getting richer and the poor are perpetually exploited. In the United States this pattern was begun in significant part by the Nixon administration’s policies, including the war against the 1960s counterculture movement. In this respect, postmodernism, as Jameson pointed out and Harvey affirmed, was indeed “nothing more than the cultural logic of late capitalism.”¹⁰⁰¹ As a result of the political shift toward the radical right, perceptions of 1960s utopianism have altered, and Kusama’s reputation was quickly eclipsed.

Kusama went back to Japan permanently in 1973. In part as a result of the

⁹⁹⁹ Buchloh, “Andy Warhol’s One-Dimensional Art,” 37.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Kenneth Goldsmith, “Preface,” in *I’ll be Your Mirror*, xxxv. Two Warhol biographers, Steven Watson and Pat Hackett, have pointed out that Warhol was politically conservative. According to Watson, Warhol “declared himself apolitical, voted only once, and avoided demonstrations of all kinds.” In Hackett’s account, during the tumultuous 1960s, the Factory “had remarkably few connections to the political activities.” Watson, *Factory Made*, xv; Pat Hackett, *Warhol Diaries* (New York: Warner Books, 1989), xii.

¹⁰⁰¹ See, Jameson, 88; Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 11, 44, 45, 48.

hostile reception she met with from (male) critics, she decided to take refuge in a mental health clinic in Tokyo in 1977. After her experience in New York, she no longer considered relocating abroad. Because of her refusal to conform to the existing societal model, scholars in Asia and the West today consider Kusama predominantly a kind of outsider artist, and downplay her role in the 1960s radical political movements. However, as my investigation has shown, Kusama pioneered radically different modes of art, motivated in part by the bias she faced in society.

This is why an historically-conscious feminist approach proves effective in Kusama's case. By uncovering specific historical fragments that have vanished over time, it is possible to reduce blind spots, and destabilize the art historical status quo. Through the deployment of feminist strategies, the world can potentially become a more progressive and unbiased place. As the present study has shown, it is only within such a context that an artist like Yayoi Kusama could once and for all be fully appraised—and appreciated.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

UNPUBLISHED SOURCES

1. Archival Material

Akron Art Museum, OH.

Yayoi Kusama Files.

Aldo Tambellini Archives, Salem, MA.

Aldo Tambellini Papers.

Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Barbara Rose Papers.

Mitch Tuchman Papers.

Records of *Tenth Street Days: The Co-Ops of the '50s, 1953–1977*.

Stephen Radich Papers.

Blanton Museum of Art Archives, University of Texas, Austin, TX.

Yayoi Kusama Files.

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Visual Music Files.

Keiō University Archives, Tokyo, Japan.

Takiguchi Shūzō Papers.

Kusama Yayoi Studio, Tokyo.

Yayoi Kusama Papers.

Notebook, No.1-3.

Calendar diary, 1960-63.

The Gordon W. Prange Collection, McKeldin Library, The University of Maryland,
MD.

The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Tape No. 16. Origin FAB 4169. Magnetic Recording Library.

The National Archives, College Park, MD.

RG 59, 250. Department of State Decimal File, 1945-49.

Selective Service System Records.

National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, MO

Military Personnel Records.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

Vertical Files, Yayoi Kusama.

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
USIA (64-045). Venice Biennale Files.
Record Unit 321.

Special Collection Division, University of Washington Library, Seattle, WA.
Neil Meitzler Papers.
Zoe Dusanne Papers.

Stedelijk Museum Archives, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
Nul 1962 Files.
Nul 1965 Files.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY.
Calvin Tomkins Papers.
Yayoi Kusama Files.

Yves Klein Archives, Paris, France.

2. Interviews in Research Collection

Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
Oldenburg, Claes. Interviewed by Paul Cummings, 27 December 1973.

Fine Arts Library, University of Texas, Austin, TX.
Oral History Archive. The Center for International Contemporary Arts.
[Sound cassettes of interview in this source will be indicated by an ID code beginning with CICA/ATT/001, which corresponds with "Oral Documentation." In *Yayoi Kusama: A Retrospective*, edited by Bhupendra Karia, 134. New York: The Center for International Contemporary Arts, 1989.].

The Museum of Modern Art Archives. Oral History Project, New York.
Cobb, Elizabeth Bliss Parkinson. Interviewed by Sharon Zane, 6 July 1988.
McCray, Porter A. Interviewed by Sharon Zane, 23 May 1991.
Rasmussen, Waldo. Interviewed by Sharon Zane, 1 November 1994.

3. Interviews Conducted by the Author

Armando. 27 October 2009, e-mail.
Ballantine, Peter. 8 May 2004, New York, NY.
Bauermeister, Mary. 4 February 2009, Seoul, Korea.
Clark, Ed. 8 July 2004, New York, NY.
Clark, Ed. 9 October 2006, New York, NY.
Denney, Alice. 20 December, Washington, D.C.
Doyle, Tom. 10 October 2006, Roxbury, CT.
Fujibayashi Takako. 17 August 2010, e-mail.
Fujita Hisako. 25 January 2008, Hamamatsu City, Shizuoka Prefecture, Japan.

Goldberg, Judith. 29 October 2007, telephone interview, New York, NY.
 Hawley, Henry. 19 July 2007, telephone interview, Washington, D.C.
 Huey, Lock. 13 May 2010, Chatham, NY.
 Jordan, Keith. 2 June 2006, e-mail.
 Ketner, Joe. 8 May 2011, Natick, MA.
 Kusama, Yayoi. 14 June 2004, Tokyo, Japan.
 Kusama, Yayoi. 28 July 2006, Tokyo, Japan.
 Kusama, Yayoi. 1 March 2007, letter.
 Kusama, Yayoi. Interview by Kawasaki Yōko based on author's questions, 20 March 2007.
 Kusama, Yayoi. Interview by Kawasaki Yōko based on author's questions, 11 May 2007. Tokyo, Kusama Yayoi Studio.
 Kusama, Yayoi. 4 June 2007, fax.
 Kusama, Yayoi. 24 January 2008, Tokyo, Japan.
 Kusama, Yayoi. 20 February 2009, e-mail.
 Kusama, Yayoi. 26 February 2009, e-mail.
 Megert, Franziska. 28 March 2009, e-mail.
 Megert, Franziska. 10 April 2009, e-mail.
 Mucha, Patty. 20 September 2006, e-mail.
 Nakajima Jun'ichi. 10 April 2008, telephone interview, New York, NY.
 Peeters, Henk. 1 January 2007, Hall, the Netherlands.
 Perry, Hart. 11 May 2007, New York, NY.
 Piene, Otto. 27 February 2010, New York, NY.
 Rember, Craig. 24 March 2009, e-mail.
 Robinson, Julia. 26 March 2010, e-mail.
 Saeki Izumi (née Matsumoto). Interview by Akie Terai based on the author's questions, 15 March 2007, e-mail.
 Segi Shin'ichi. 19 July 2006, Tokyo, Japan.
 Stella, Frank. 2 May 2010, New York, NY.
 Sundell, Nina. 9 October 2007, e-mail.
 Tambellini, Aldo. 14 November 2010, Boston, MA.
 Tambellini, Aldo. 3 July 2011, e-mail.
 Terai Akie. 23 June 2010, e-mail.
 Weynon, Michael. 15 August 2010, New York, NY.
 White, Joshua. 12 February 2007, telephone interview, New York, NY.
 Yrissary, Mario. 29 August 2008, New York, NY.

4. Other Unpublished Sources

Dawsey, Jill Christina. "The Use of Sidewalks: Women, Art, and Urban Space, 1966-'80." Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 2008.

Castelli, Leo. Interviewed by Judith Stein, 6 March 1996. E-mail to author.

Edelheit, Martha Nilsson. Interviewed by Judith Stein, 20 March 2010. E-mail to author.

- Gibson, Eleanor Jess Atwood. "The Media of Memory: History, Technology and Collectivity in the Work of the German Zero Group 1957–1966." Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2008.
- Hillings, Valerie. "Experimental Artists' Groups in Europe, 1951-1968." Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2002.
- Ketner, Joe. "Mackazin," unpublished manuscript prepared for *Heinz Mack*. New York: Sperone Westwater, 2011.
- Kusama, Yayoi. "*Violet Obsession*." Audio guide for the exhibition, "Mind and Matter: Alternative Abstractions, 1940 to Now." New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010.
- Marter, Joan. "Blasting Another Canon: The Women of Pop Art," paper presented at "The Second Annual Feminist Art History Conference," 5 November 2011. American University, Washington, D.C.
- Yamamura, Midori. "Yayoi Kusama: Trauma and Gendered Reception of Women's Mental Health," paper presented at "The Second Mid Atlantic Women's and Gender Historians' Biennale," 4 June 2006. St. Louis, MO.
- . "The Whole Human Being Is Ontology: Nam June Paik in a Global Context," paper presented at "The Gift of Nam June Paik 1," *Now Jump Festival*, 4 February 2009. Nam June Paik Art Center, Seoul, Korea.
- Yoshimoto, Midori. "Kusama Saves the World through *Self-Obliteration*," unpublished manuscript in English. Translated and published as "*Yayoi Kusama sauve le monde par la Self-Obliteration*." Ed. Chantal Berét. Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 2011.
- Yrissary, Helen. Interviewed by Heather Lenz, video recording by Hart Perry, 29 August 2008. New York, NY.

PUBLISHED SOURCES

1. Writings by Yayoi Kusama

"*Iwan no baka*" ["Ivan the Fool"]. *Geijutsu Shinchō* [New Current in Art] (May 1955): 164-65.

"*Watashi no mita Amerika no inshō (ge)*" ["An impression of the United States from my perspective (second-half)"]. *Shinano chūbu maiyū shinbun* [Nagano Central Evening Post], 19 March 1958.

"*Pīpuru*" ["People"]. *Geijutsu Shinchō* [New Current in Art] (June 1959): 31.

“*Onna hitori kokusai gadan o yuku*” [“A Lone Woman Goes into the International Art World”]. *Geijutsu Shinchō* [*New Current in Art*] (May 1961): 127-30.

“*Nyūyōku gaitō de zen’ra pātī o yatta watashi*” [“I Hosted Nudist Parties on Streets in New York”]. *Gendai* [*Today*] (December 1968): 288-297.

“To the Editor.” *The Village Voice*, 17 April 1969.

“*Waga tamashii no henreki to tataikai*” [“Odyssey of My Struggling Soul”]. *Geijutsu seikatsu* [*Art life*] (November 1975): 96-113.

Manhattan jisatsu misui jōshūhan [*Manhattan Suicide Addict*]. Tokyo: Kosakusha, 1978. Reprint, Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1984.

Kurisutofā danshōkutsu [*Hustler’s Grotto*]. Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1984.

Wuddosutokku inkei giri [*Woodstock Phallus Cutter*]. Tokyo: Peyotoru Kōbō, 1988.

Mugen no ami: Kusama Yayoi jiden [*Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama*]. Tokyo: Sakuhinsha, 2002.

2. Solo Exhibition Catalogues

Applin, Jo. *Yayoi Kusama*, London: Victoria Miro Gallery, 2008.

Azumaya Takashi, David Elliott, Yayoi Kusama, Machida Kou, Nanjō Fumio, and Sakamoto Ryūichi. *Kusama Yayoi: Kusamatrix*. Tokyo: Mori Art Museum, 2004.

Brown, Gordon, Udo Kultermann, Nakahara Yūsuke, and Herbert Read. *Obsession: Yayoi Kusama*. Tokyo: Fuji Television Gallery, 1982.

Dai nikai Kusama Yayoi shinsaku ten [*The Second Yayoi Kusama New works’ Exhibition*]. Matsumoto: The First Community Centre, 1952.

Dehara, Hitoshi, Yayoi Kusama, Matsumoto Tohru, Minamishima Hiroshi, and Shibutami Akira. *Yayoi Kusama*. Tokyo: The National Museum of Modern Art, 2004.

Frick, Thomas, ed. *Love Forever: Yayoi Kusama, 1958-1968*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1998.

Gautherot, Franck, ed. *Yayoi Kusama: Performance and Environment, 1962-2000*. Dijon: Le Consortium, 2001.

———. *Yayoi Kusama: The Mirrored Years*. Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen and Dijon: Le Consortium, 2009.

Guattari, Félix, and Yayoi Kusama. *Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Explosion*. Tokyo: Fuji Television Gallery, 1986.

Hayashi Kiichirō, Kajiwara Hakuko, Kanda Naoko, Alexandra Munroe, and Tani Tetsuo. *Kusama Yayoi ten: Hajikeru uchū* [*Yayoi Kusama exhibition: Bursting galaxies*]. Tokyo: Sōgetsu Art Museum, 1992.

Hoptman, Laura, and Julia Peyton-Jones. *Yayoi Kusama*. London: Serpentine Gallery, 2000.

Karia, Bhupendra, ed. *Yayoi Kusama: A Retrospective*. New York: The Center for International Contemporary Arts, 1989.

Kirshner, Judith Russi. *Yayoi Kusama: Obsessional Vision*. Chicago: Arts Club of Chicago, 1997.

Kusama, Yayoi, and Akira Tatehata. *Yayoi Kusama*. Venice: XLV Biennale di Venezia, 1993.

Kusama, Yayoi, Minemura Toshiaki, Nakajima Jun'ichi, Nakazawa Shin'ichi, and Herbert Read. *Kusama Yayoi ten* [*Yayoi Kusama exhibition*]. Kitakyūshū: Kitakyūshū Municipal Museum of Art, 1987.

Morris, Frances, ed. *Yayoi Kusama*. London: Tate Publishing, 2012.

Nakahara Yusuke, and Pierre Restany. *Kusama Yayoi ten* [*Yayoi Kusama exhibition*]. Tokyo: Fuji Television Gallery, 1984.

Neri, Louise, ed. *Yayoi Kusama*. New York: Gagosian Gallery, 2009.

Seki Hiroko, ed. *In Full Bloom: Yayoi Kusama, Years in Japan*. Tokyo: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999.

Soul Burning Flashes. Tokyo: Fuji Television Gallery, 1988.

Yayoi Kusama Now. New York: Robert Miller Gallery, 1998.

3. Books and Group Exhibition Catalogues on Kusama

Armando, Henk Peeters, Hans Sleutelaar, Cornelis Bastiaan Vaandrager, and Hans Verhagen, eds. *De nieuwe stijl* [*The new style*]. Vol 2. Amsterdam: Nul Publication, 1965.

Chave, Anna C. "Outlaws: Women, Abstraction, and Painting in New York, 1967-1975." In *High Times Hard Times: New York Painting 1967-1975*, edited by Katy Siegel, 115-142. New York: Independent Curators International, 2006.

- Dai nikai Sōzō Bijutsu tenrankai shuppin mokuroku* [*The Second Sōzō Bijutsu exhibition catalogue*]. Tokyo and Kyoto: Sōzō Bijutsu Kyōkai, 1949.
- Elliot, David, and Kazu Kaidō, eds. *Reconstructions: Avant-Garde Art in Japan, 1945-1965*. Oxford, UK: Museum of Modern Art Oxford, 1985.
- Fer, Briony. *The Infinite Line: Re-Making Art After Modernism*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004.
- Grunenberg, Christoph, ed. *Summer of Love, Art of the Psychedelic Era*. Liverpool: Tate Liverpool, 2005.
- Jones, Amelia. *Body Art: Performing the Subject*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.
- . “Yayoi Kusama.” In *Feminism—Art Theory—An Anthology, 1968-2000*, edited by Hilary Robinson, 570-74. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2001.
- Kaprow, Allan. *Assemblage, Environment and Happenings*. New York: H. N. Abrams, 1966.
- Katz, Jonathan D., and David C. Ward, eds. *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*. Washington, D.C.: The National Portrait Gallery, 2010.
- Kultermann, Udo, ed. *Monochrome Malerei*. Leverkusen: Städtisches Museum Leverkusen Schloss Morsbroich, 1960.
- Lippard, Lucy. *Pop Art*. New York: Praeger, 1966.
- Minioudaki, Kalliopi, and Sid Sachs, eds. *Seductive Subversions: Women Pop Artists, 1958-1968*. Philadelphia: University of the Arts, 2010.
- Molesworth, Helen, ed. *Part Object, Part Sculpture*. Ohio: Wexner Center for the Arts, 2005.
- Multiplicity*. Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1966.
- Munroe, Alexandra, ed. *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky*. New York: The Guggenheim Museum, 1994.
- Nakajima, Izumi. “Yayoi Kusama between Abstraction and Pathology.” In *Psychoanalysis and the Image*, edited by Griselda Pollock, 127-160. Malden, MA and London: Blackwell Publisher, 2006.
- Nishimaru Shihō. *Hōkōki: Kyōki o ninatte* [*Records of wandering: Taking on insanity*].

- Tokyo: Hihyōsha, 1991.
- Peeters, Henk, ed. *Tentoonstelling Nul*. Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1962.
- Posner, Helaine. "Negotiating Boundaries in the Art of Yayoi Kusama, Ana Mendieta, and Francesca Woodman." In *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation*, edited by Whitney Chadwick, 156-171. Cambridge, MA: The MIT List Center, 1998.
- Rodenbeck, Judith F. "Yayoi Kusama: Surface, Stitch, Skin." In *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art: In, Of, and From the Feminine*, edited by Catherine de Zegher, 149-155. Boston: The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, 1994.
- Schimmel, Paul, ed. *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Objects, 1949-1979*. Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Arts, 1998.
- Takiguchi Shūzō. "Yōsei yo eien ni" ["Eternal fairy"]. In *Yohaku ni kaku (2)* [*Marginalia*, 2], 305. Tokyo: Misuzu shobō: 1982.
- Tomii, Reiko. "Yayoi Kusama, A Snake." In *Warhol/Kusama*, n.p.. New York: D'Amelio Terrace, 1997.
- Yamamura, Midori. "Kusama Yayoi's Early Years in New York: A Critical Biography." In *Making A Home*, edited by Eric C. Shiner and Reiko Tomii, 52-64. New York: Japan Society and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.
- Yoshimoto, Midori. "Performing the Self: Yayoi Kusama and Her Ever-Expanding Universe." In *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York*, 45-77. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005.
- Yayoi Kusama*. London: Phaidon Press, 2000.
- ZERO, Avant-garde Internationale des années 1950-1960* [*ZERO, International Avant-garde, The Years 1950-1960*]. Düsseldorf: Museum Kunst Palast, 2006.
- 4. Articles and Reviews in Periodicals on Kusama**
- Ashton, Dore. "Art: Tenth Street View." *The New York Times*, 23 October 1959.
- Benedict, Michael. "New York Letters." *Art International* 10, no. 1 (January 1966): 98.
- Berkson, William. "In the Galleries: Kusama's 'Peep Show.'" *Arts Magazine* 40, no. 7 (May 1965): 70.

- Brin, Irene. “*Milledue cadauna*” [“Twelve hundred”]. *L’Europeo* 22, no. 26 (23 June 1966): 71.
- Brown, Godron. “Obsessional Painting.” *Art Voices* (March 1964): 29-31.
- Camhi, Leslie. “Woman on the Verge.” *The Village Voice*, 14 July 1998.
- Carl, Alfred. “Call Her Dotty.” *Sunday News*, 13 August 1967.
- Celant, Germano. “Yayoi Kusama.” *Interview* (June 2005): 76-80.
- Fer, Briony. “Objects Beyond Objecthood.” *Oxford Art Journal* 22, no.2 (1999): 25–36.
- Forum voor architectuur en daarmee verbonden kunsten* 20, no. 3 (June 1967).
- Friis-Hansen, Dana. “Yayoi Kusama’s Feminism.” *Art + Text*, no. 49 (September 1994): 48-55.
- Fujimoto Tokuji, Ibe Masataka, and Yayoi Kusama. “*Kusama joshi wo kakonde geijutsukendan (jō)*” [“A Prefectural Art Discussion with Miss Kusama (Part One)”]. *Shinano ōrai* [Coming and going to Shinano], October 1978.
- Fukushima Tatsuo. “*Kusama Yayoi no geijutsu (jō)*” [“The Art of Yayoi Kusama (Part One)”]. *Shin’yō Shinbun* [Shin’yō Newspaper], 22 November 1956.
- “*Happuningu no jouō Kusama Yayoi no Banpaku Sanka Sengen*” [“A Happening Queen, Yayoi Kusama’s Expo Participation Manifesto”]. *Shūkan Post* [Weekly Post], 30 March 1969.
- Hoptman, Laura. “The Princess of the Polka Dot.” *Harper’s Bazaar*, March 1998.
- . “The Return of Yayoi Kusama.” *MoMA* (July/August, 1998): 6-9.
- Ishikawa Yoshihiro. “*Jicchi ni mitekita amerika no sei kaihō buri*” [“The firsthand account of sexual liberation in the United States”]. *Hōseki* [Gem] (December 1969): 314-17.
- Judd, Donald. “In the Galleries: Yayoi Kusama.” *Arts* 38, no. 10 (September 1964): 68-9.
- . “Local History.” *Arts Yearbook 7: New York—The New Art World* (1963): 22–35.
- . “Reviews and Previewes: New Names This Month—Yayoi Kusama.” *Art News*

- 58, no. 6 (October 1959): 17.
- . “Specific Objects.” *Arts Yearbook* 8 (1965): 74–83.
- Kelly, Edward T. “Neo Dada: A Critique of Pop Art.” *Art Journal* 23, no. 3 (Spring 1964): 192-201.
- “Kites, Fists Fly at ‘Love-In, Be-In.’” *The New York Times*, 7 April 1969.
- “*Kodoku no gaka Kusama Yayoi raishi*” [“Solitary artist Yayoi Kusama visits Seattle”]. *Hokubei Hōchi*, 2 December 1957.
- “*Kotoshi no hōpu, joryū gaka Kusama Yayoi*” [“This year’s hope, a woman artist Yayoi Kusama”]. *Chūbu keizai shinbun*, 12 January 1955.
- Koplos, Janet. “The Phoenix Returns.” *Art in America* 87, no. 2 (February 1999): 92-98.
- Kroll, Jack. “Yayoi Kusama.” *Artnews* 60, no. 3 (May 1960): 15.
- Kultermann, Udo. “The Art of Kusama Unveils Female Worldview.” *Sculpture* 16, no. 1 (January 1997): 26-31.
- “Kusama: Easter Sunday Bust Out.” *Metropolitan Swinger*, 1–5 May 1969.
- “Kusama Incredible.” *The Village Voice*, 15 February 1968.
- “*Kusama Yayoi koten*” [“Yayoi Kusama solo exhibition”]. *Atelier*, no. 337 (March 1955): 111.
- Larson, Kay. “Social Work,” *New York* (6 November 1989): 114.
- Levin, Kim. “Odd Woman Out.” *The Village Voice*, 31 October 1989.
- Lippard, Lucy R. “Eccentric Abstraction.” *Art International* 10, no. 9 (November 1966): 28, 34-40.
- . *Pop Art*. New York: Praeger, 1966.
- . “Silent Art.” *Art in America* 55, no. 1 (January-February 1967): 58-63.
- Mancini, Joe. “Screwed, Blewed & Tattooed.” *Scenes* 11, no. 3 (November 1969): 47-51.
- “Merchants of Venice.” *Newsweek* 17, no. 26 (27 June 1966): 90.

- Milani, Milena. “*Una biennale tutta sexy*” [“A very sexy biennale”]. *ABC* 7, no. 27 (3 July 1966): 45-48.
- Mikami Mariko. “*Kusama Yayoi to Minimarizumu—kanshōsha to jikan*” [“Yayoi Kusama and Minimalism—Viewer and Time”]. *Bigaku [Aesthetic]* 55, no. 4 (Spring 2005): 70-83.
- Nakamaru Kaoru. “*Kusama Yayoi ha naze Nyūyōku de nuguka*” [“Why does Yayoi Kusama strip herself in New York?”]. *Shūkan Post [Weekly Post]*. 12 September 1969.
- Narotzky, Norman. “The Venice Biennial: Pease Porridge in the Pot Nine Days Old.” *Arts Magazine* 40, no. 9 (September-October 1966) 42-44.
- Nixon, Mignon. “Posing the Phallus.” *October*, no.92 (Spring 2000): 98–127.
- . “o + x.” *October*, no. 119 (Winter 2007): 6–20.
- “*Nyūyōku dōman’nakade sekkusu o enshutsu suru Nihon jōsei*” [“A Japanese woman who directs sex in the middle of New York City”]. *Heibon Panchi [Heibon punch]*. 10 November 1969.
- O’Doherty, Brian. “Season’s End: Abstractions and Distractions.” *The New York Times*, 17 June 1962.
- Pollock, Griselda. “Three Thoughts on Femininity, Creativity and Elapsed Time.” *Parkett* 59 (2000): 107-113.
- Preston, Stuart. “Twentieth-Century Sense and Sensibility.” *The New York Times*, 7 May 1961.
- “Scenes.” *The Village Voice*, 20 July 1967.
- Schjeldahl, Peter. “Reviews and Previews: Kusama.” *Art News* 65, no. 3 (May 1966): 18.
- Shull, Leo. “City Desk on B’Way.” *Show Business*, 19 April 1969, 1, 17.
- Singleton, Donald and Hugh Wyatt. “Find Bodies in East Side Park: Covered All Over With Strange Spots!” *Sunday News*, 16 July 1967.
- Smith, Roberta. “Intense Personal Visions of a Fragile Japanese Artist.” *The New York Times*, 20 October 1989.
- . “60’s Minimalism, Looking Handmade.” *The New York Times*, 24 May 1996.

- Solomon, Andrew. "Dot Dot Dot." *Artforum* 35 (February 1997): 66-77.
- Sommers, Ed. "Letter from Germany: Yayoi Kusama at the Galerie M.E. Thelen, Essen (May)." *Art International* 10, no. 8 (October 1966): 46.
- Tanikawa Atsushi. "Zōshoku no genma" ["Phantom of multiplication"]. *Bijutsu techō* [*Art Notebook*] 45, no. 671 (June 1993): 65-77.
- Thompson, Mimi "Yayoi Kusama," *Bomb* (Summer 98): 91.
- Tillim, Sidney. "In the Galleries." *Arts* 34, no.1 (October 1959): 56.
- Tomkins, Calvin. "On the Edge." *The New Yorker* (7 Oct. 1996): 100-03.
- Turner, Grady. "Yayoi Kusama." *Bomb* (Winter 1999): 62-69.
- Uno, Kuni'ichi. "Kyosei to uchū: Kusama Yayoi ten" ["Castration and cosmos: Yayoi Kusama exhibition"]. *Bijutsu techō* 40, no. 599 (September 1998): 117-127.
- Van Starrex, Al. "Some Far-out Fashion With and Without Clothes." *Mr.* (July 1969).
- . "Kusama and Her 'Naked Happenings.'" *Mr.* (August 1968).
- Voorhees, John. "Paintings to Disturb and Intrigue on Display." *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, 18 December 1957.
- "Watching Girl in Long Underwear Play Artist." *The East Village Other* 3, no. 14 (8-14 March 1968): 6, 15.
- Wetzsteon, Ross. "'Mass Naked Happening' The Way of All Flesh: Stripping for Inaction." *The Village Voice*, 1 February 1968.
- Worth, Alexi. "Kusama Dot Com." *The New York Times Style Magazine*, 24 February 2008.
- Yalkut, Jud. "The Polka-Dot Way of Life (Conversation with Yayoi Kusama)." *New York Free Press* 1, no.8 (15 Feb. 1968): 8-9.
- Zelevansky, Lynn. "Flying Deeper and Farther: Kusama in 2005." *Afterall* (Spring/Summer 2006): 54-62.
- 5. Books and Articles on Japanese Art and History**
- Abe Nobuya. "Shichi'nin no Amerika gaka no sakuhin" ["Works by seven American artists"]. *Atorie* [*Atelier*] (February 1951): 34-35.

Bijutsu [Art] 2, no. 6 (December, 1945): 32.

Bryson, Norman. "Westernizing Bodies: Women, Art, and Power in Meiji Yōga." In *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, edited by Joshua S. Mostow, 89-118. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003.

Cox, Rupert. *The Zen Arts, An Anthropological Study of the Culture of Aesthetic Form*. London and New York: Routledge Curzon in association with The Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 2003.

Domon Ken. "Review Process." *Mizue*, no. 25 (1 December 1948): 22.

Hosoe Ekoh. *Kamaitachi*. New York: Aperture, 2009.

"Fujita Tsuguharu-shi Nyūyōku e tatsu" ["Mr. Tsuguharu Fujita Departs for New York"]. *Bijutsu techō [Art notebook]* no. 16 (April 1949): 7.

Gendai kaiga no nijū nen [Twenty Years of Contemporary Art]. Gunma, Japan: Gunma Prefectural Modern Art Museum, 1984.

Gordon, Andrew. *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*. New York and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Guth, Christine. *Art of Edo Japan, The Artist and City, 1615-1868*. New York: H.A. Abrams, 1996.

Hasegawa Saburō. "Kurain no e/Tarukō no tegami: Chūshō kaiga to Nihon" ["Kline's Paintings/Tal-Caut's letters: Abstract Art and Japan"]. *Atorie [Atelier]* (July 1951): 15-21.

Kawakita Michiaki. *Hayami Gyoshū sono hito to geijutsu [Gyoshū Hayami: His Art and Personality]*. Tokyo: Yamatane Bijutsukan, 1977.

"Kokubō kokka to bijutsu (zadankai)" ["Defense Nation and Art (Round-Table discussion)"]. *Mizue* (January 1941): 129-39.

Matsuda, Takeshi. *Soft Power and Its Perils: U.S. Cultural Policy in Japan and Permanent Dependency*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007.

Munroe, Alexandra. *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860-1989*. New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2009.

Nagano-ken hyakunen-shi [One Hundred Years of Nagano Prefecture]. Matsumoto: Kyōdo Shuppan-sha, 1984.

Narai, Osamu. *The Modern Japanese Economy*. Tokyo: Foreign Center, 1984.

- Noguchi, Isamu. “*Gendai chōkoku no shomondai*” [“Various Problems of Contemporary Sculpture”]. *Atorie [Atelier]*, no. 287 (December 1950): 20-31.
- Okamoto Tarō. “*Sekai geijutsu no kakuritsu*” [“The establishment of world art”]. *Atelier*, no. 292 (May 1951): 24-32.
- Okano Kaoruko. *Taiheiyō sensō ka no gakkō seikatsu [The school life under the Pacific War]*. Tokyo: Shinchō-sha, 1990.
- Shino Masahiro, and Yasuyuki Nakai, eds. *Panreal Sōseiki-ten [Genesis of Panreal Exhibition]*. Nishinomiya: Ōtani Kinen Bijutsukan, 1998.
- Shōwa niman’ichi no zenkiroku: Shōwa day by day [The complete record of Shōwa’s 20,000 days]*. 19 vols. Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1990.
- “Special Issue on ‘Sōzō Bijutsu.’” *Sansai* 25 (1 December 1948): 8.
- Stanley-Baker, Joan. *Japanese Art*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 2000.
- Sullivan, Michael. *The Meeting of Eastern and Western Art*. Berkeley: University of California Berkeley Press, 1989.
- Tominaga Sōichi. “*Kon’ichi no Kūkan*” [“Today’s Space”]. *Mizue*, no. 617 (December 1956): 4-10.
- Uemura Takachiyo. “*Gendai kaiga no keifu (1)*” [“A Genealogy of Contemporary Painting (1)”]. *Bijutsu techō [Art notebook]*, no. 10 (October 1948): 17.
- . “*Gendai kaiga no keifu (2)*” [“A Genealogy of Contemporary Painting (2)”]. *Bijutsu techō [Art notebook]*, no. 11 (November 1948): 27.
- . In *Hyōron shū [Correction of Criticism]*. Tokyo: Shinjin-sha, 1948.
- Ueshima Chōken. “*Bijutsukai kotoshi no momegoro*” [“Art World’s Scandals this Year”]. *Bijutsu techō [Art notebook]*, no. 12 (December 1948): 41.
- Wada Wadao. “*Isamu Noguchi no koto*” [“About Isamu Noguchi”]. *Atorie [Atelier]*, no. 286 (November 1950): 46-51.
- Westgeest, Helen. *Zen in the Fifties: Interaction in Art Between East and West*. Waander Uitgevers, Zwolle: Cobra Museum voor Moderne Kunst Amstelveen, 1997.
- Weston, Victoria. *Japanese Painting and National Identity: Okakura Tenshin and His*

Circle. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2004.

Winther-Tamaki, Bert. *Art in the Encounter of Nations: Japanese and American Artists in the early Postwar Years*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001.

Wunderlich, Herbert J. *The Japanese Textbook Problem and Solution, 1945-1946*. Translated by Gary Hoichi Tsuchimochi. Tokyo: Tamagawa Daigaku Shuppankyoku, 1998.

Yoshihara Jirō. "Gutai Bijutsu Sengen." *Geijutsu Shinchō* 7, no. 12 (December 1956); abridged and reprinted as "Gutai Manifesto." In *Art in Theory: 1900-2000*, edited by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, 698-701. London: Blackwell Publishing, 2002.

Yves Klein: Long Live the Immaterial! Nice: Musée d'art contemporaine; Prato: Museo Pecci, 2000.

6. Books and Articles on Art and History Outside Japan

Allison, Elynn Childs, ed. *Barnett Newman: A Catalogue Raisonné*. New York: Barnett Newman Foundation; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

Alloway, Lawrence. "Junk Culture as a Tradition." In *New Forms—New Media I*, n.p. New York: Martha Jackson Gallery, 1960.

Atkinson, D. Scott, ed. *High Societies: Psychedelic Rock Posters of Haight-Ashbury*. San Diego, CA: San Diego Museum of Art, 2001.

Baigell, Matthew. *Jewish Art in America: An Introduction*. Lanham, MD: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2007.

Bard, Joellen, ed. *Tenth Street Days: The Co-ops of the 50's*. New York: Pleiades Gallery and The Association of Artist-Run Galleries, 1977.

Brougher, Kerry, Olivia Mattis, Jeremy Strick, Ari Wiseman, and Zudith Zilczer. *Visual Music: Synesthesia in Art and Music Since 1900*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005.

Bourdon, David. *Warhol*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989.

Bourgeois, Louise. *Destruction of the Father Reconstruction of the Father: Writings and Interviews, 1923-1997*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998.

Bovier, Lionel, and Mai-Thu Perret, eds. *Timewave Zero/A Psychedelic Reader*. Graz, Austria: Grazer Kunstverein, 2001.

- Buhler Lynes, Barbara. *Georgia O'Keeffe Catalogue Raisonné*. 2 vols. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999.
- Burnham, Jack. *Beyond Modern Sculpture: The Effects of Science and Technology on the Sculpture of This Century*. New York: George Braziller, 1968.
- Callahan, Kenneth. "Pacific Northwest." *Artnews* 45 (July 1946): 24-25.
- Camhi, Leslie. "The Seer Ileana Sonnabend, the Legendary Gallery Owner Who Died Recently at the Age of 92, Had an Eye for the Art That Nobody Else Wanted. Their Loss." *New York Times Magazine*, 2 December 2007.
- Castellani, Enrico, and Piero Manzoni, eds. *Azimuth and Azimut*. Milano: A. Mondadori, 1984.
- Celant, Germano, ed. *Piero Manzoni*. London: Serpentine Gallery, 1998.
- Chandler, Lester. *Inflation in the United States, 1940–1948*. New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1976.
- Charlet, Nicolas. *Yves Klein*. Paris: Société Nouvelle Adam Biro, 2000.
- Chave, Anna C. *Mark Rothko: Subjects in Abstraction*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989.
- . "Sculpture, Gender, and the Value of Labor." *American Art* (Spring 2010): 27-30.
- . "'Is This Good for Vulva?': Female Genitalia in Contemporary Art." In *The Visible Vagina*, 7-27, 114-117. New York: Francis M. Naumann Fine Art, LLC and David Nolan Gallery, Inc., 2010.
- Cohen-Solal, Annie. *Leo and His Circle: The Life of Leo Castelli*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010.
- Conkelton, Cheryl, ed. *Northwest Mythologies: The Interactions of Mark Tobey, Morris Graves, Kenneth Callahan, and Guy Anderson*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2003.
- Crockett, Joseph P. *The Federal Tax System in the United States*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1955.
- Davis, Douglas. *Art and the Future: A History/Prophecy of the Collaboration Between Science, Technology, and Art*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973.

- Die niederländische Gruppe Nul 1960-1965. Und Heute.* Stuttgart, Germany: Edition Cantz, 1993.
- Doris, Sara. *Pop Art and the Contest Over American Culture.* London: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Edgar, Natalie, ed. *Club Without Walls: Selections from the Journals of Philip Pavia.* New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 2007.
- “The Etiquette of Orgy.” *Scenes* 11, no. 3 (November 1969): 15-22.
- Feldman, Frayda, and Jörg Schellmann, eds. *Andy Warhol Prints: A Catalogue Raisonné, 1962-1987.* New York: Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, Inc. and the Andy Warhol Foundation for the visual Arts, 2003.
- Firpo, Patrick R., et al. “Multi-Media and the Theater.” *Theatre Crafts* (January/February 1970): 4-47.
- Francis, Mark, ed. *Pop.* London: Phaidon, 2005.
- Frascina, Francis. *Art, Politics and Dissent: Aspects of the Art Left in Sixties America.* Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999.
- Frie, George, and Neil Printz, eds. *The Andy Warhol Catalog Raisonné.* 2 vols. London: Phaidon, 2002.
- Gibson, Ann Eden. *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Goldsmith, Kenneth, ed. *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews.* New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2004.
- Groupe de recherche d'art visuel.* Paris: Galerie Denise René and Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel, 1962.
- Hackett, Pat, with Andy Warhol. *Warhol Diaries.* New York: Warner Books, 1989.
- Handelman, Susan A. *Fragments of Redemption: Jewish Thought & Literary Theory in Benjamin, Scholem, & Levinas.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University, 1991.
- Haskell, Barbara. *Blam! The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism, and Performance, 1958-1964.* New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1984.
- Hopkins, David. *After Modern Art, 1945-2000.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000.

- Ikegami, Hiroko. *The Great Migrator: Robert Rauschenberg and the Global American Art*. Cambridge, MA, and London: The MIT Press, 2010.
- Johnson, Michael, ed. *Kenneth Callahan: Universal Voyage*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press in association with Henry Art Gallery, 1973.
- Joseph, Branden W. “‘My Mind Split Open’: Andy Warhol’s Exploding Plastic Inevitable.” *Grey Room*, no. 8 (Summer 2002): 80-107.
- . *Random Order*. Cambridge, MA, and London: The MIT Press, 2003.
- Judd, Donald. *Donald Judd: Complete Writings, 1959-1975*. Nova Scotia, Canada: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; New York: New York University Press, 2005.
- Jung, Hun-Yee. “Moon and Time: Nam June Paik Seen from the Korean Perspective.” In *Nam June Paik and Korea: From Fantasy to Hyperreality*, 115-17. Madrid: Fundación Telefónica, 2007.
- Kellein, Thomas. *Donald Judd: Early Works, 1955–1968*. Bonn: VG Bild-Kunst, 2002.
- Kellein, Thomas, and Toni Stooss, eds. *Nam June Paik: Video Time, Video Space*. Stuttgart: Edition Cantz, 1991.
- Kino, Carol. “Going Softly into a Parallel Universe.” *The New York Times*, 17 May 2009.
- Kirwin, Liza, ed. *Artists in Their Studios: Images from the Smithsonian’s Archives of American Art*. New York: Collins Design, 2007.
- Krim, Seymour, and Boris Lurie, eds. *No!art: Pin-Ups, Excrement, Protest, Jew-Art*. Berlin and Köln: Edition Hundertmark, 1988.
- Kuhn, Anette. *Zero, Eine Europäische Avantgarde [Zero, a European Avant-garde]*. München: Galerie Heseler; Essen: Galerie Neher, 1992.
- Lippard, Lucy R. *Eva Hesse*. New York: New York University Press, 1976. Reprint, Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1992.
- . *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women’s Art*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1976.
- . *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973.

- López-Remiro, Miguel, ed. *Writings on Art: Mark Rothko*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Mack, Heinz and Otto Piene, eds. *Zero 1, 2, 3*. Translated by Howard Beckman. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1973.
- Morris, Frances, ed. *Paris Post War: Art and Existentialism 1945-55*. London: Tate Gallery, 1993.
- Hadler, Mona. "Lee Bontecou's 'Warnings.'" *Art Journal* 53, no. 4 (Winter, 1994): 56-61.
- Houston, Jean, and Robert E. L. Masters, eds. *Psychedelic Art*. New York: Grove Press, 1968.
- Kalb, Marvin. "Introduction: Journalism and the Holocaust, 1933-45." In *Why Didn't The Press Shout? American and International Journalism During the Holocaust*, edited by Robert Moses Shapiro, 3-12. Newark, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 2003.
- Madoff, Steven Henry, ed. *Pop Art: A Critical History*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California, 1997.
- Malanga, Gerard, and Victor Bockris. *Up-tight: The Velvet Underground Story*. New York: Quill, 1983.
- Meyer, James, ed. *Minimalism*. London: Phaidon Press, 2000.
- Michelson, Annette, ed. *Andy Warhol*. Cambridge, MA, and London: The MIT Press, 2001.
- Monahan, Laurie J. "Cultural Cartography: American Design at the 1964 Venice Biennale." In *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, Montreal 1945-1964*, edited by Serge Guilbaut, 369-417. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990.
- N&O, Enne & Zero: motus, etc.* Bozen, Germany: The Museum für Moderne Kunst, 1996.
- Nishii Kazuo, ed. *Holocaust, Memory of Death Camp*. Tokyo: Mainichi Newspaper, 1999.
- Nove Tendencije 2*. Zagreb, Yugoslavia: Galerija Suvremene Umjetnosti, 1963.
- Oldenburg, Claes. *Claes Oldenburg: An Anthology*. New York: Guggenheim Museum

- Publications, 1995.
- O'Neill, John P. ed. *Barnett Newman, Selected Writings and Interviews*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990.
- Patterson, Clayton, ed. *Captured: A Film/Video History of the Lower East Side*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005.
- Pincus-Witten, Robert. *Yves Klein USA*. Paris: Éditions Dilecta, 2009.
- Porter, Fairfield. "Cover." *ARTnews* 56, no. 9 (January 1958): 5.
- Pouncey, Edwin. "Light Laboratories." *Frieze* 46 (May 1999): 56-59.
- Rainer, Yvonne. *Work 1961-'73*. Halifax, Canada: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1974.
- Restany, Pierre. *Arman, Dufrêne, Hains, Yves le Monochrome, Tinguely, Villeglé*. Milan: Galerie Apollinaire, 1960.
- Robson, Deirdre. "The Market for Abstract Expressionism: The Time Lag Between Critical and Commercial Acceptance." *Archives of American Art Journal* 25, no. 3 (1985): 19-23.
- Rose, Barbara. "Put Your Money Where the Talent Is: That's the Winning Formula of Top Art Men Vollard and Castelli." *Vogue*, August 1977.
- Rose, Barbara, ed. *Claes Oldenburg*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970.
- Rosenblum, Robert. "Castelli Group." *Arts* 31, no. 8 (May 1957): 53.
- Rubin, David S. *Psychedelic: Optical and Visionary Art Since the 1960s*. San Antonio, CA: San Antonio Museum of Art in association with Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2010.
- Schjeldhal, Peter. "Andy Warhol 1928-87: A Collage of Appreciations from the Artist's Colleagues, Critics and Friends." *Art in America* (May 1987): 137.
- Serota, Nicholas, ed. *Donald Judd*. London: Tate Publishing, 2004.
- Shapiro, Robert Moses, ed. *Why Didn't The Press Shout? American and International Journalism During the Holocaust*. Newark, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 2003.
- Smith, Brydon, ed. *Donald Judd, A Catalogue of the Exhibition*. Ottawa: The National

- Gallery of Canada, 1975.
- Solomon, Alan. "An Interview with Lucas Samaras." *Artforum* (October 1966): 39–44.
- Stevens, Mark, and Annalyn Swan. *de Kooning: An American Master*. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2005.
- "A Symposium on Pop Art." *Arts Magazine* (April 1963): 36-45.
- Szalai, Anna, ed. *In the Land of Hagar: The Jews of Hungary: History, Society and Culture*. Tel Aviv: Beth Hatefutsoth and Ministry of Defense Publishing House, 2002.
- Tapié, Michel. "D'une Esthétique Autre" ["Of another aesthetic"]. *Mizue*, no. 617 (December 1956): 23-28.
- Tillim, Sidney. "Month in Review." *Arts Magazine* (November 1962): 36-38.
- Tisdall, Caroline. *Joseph Beuys*. New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1979.
- Tomkins, Calvin. "The Big Show in Venice." *Harper's Magazine* 230, no. 1379 (April 1965): 98-104.
- . *Off the Wall: Robert Rauschenberg and the Art World of Our Time*. New York: Penguin Books, 1980.
- van Alphen, Ernest. *Armando: Shaping Memory*. Rotterdam: Nai Publishers, 2000.
- Vaughan, Roger. "Superpop or a Night at the Factory." *The Sunday Herald Tribune*, 8 August 1965.
- Visser, Mattijs, ed. *Zero NY*. New York: Sperone Westwater, 2008.
- Waldman, Diane. "Samaras: Reliquaries for St. Sade." *ARTnews* (October 1966): 44–46, 72–75.
- Watson, Steven. *Factory Made: Warhol and the Sixties*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2003.
- Weiss, Jeffrey, ed. *Mark Rothko*. Washington, D.C.: The National Gallery; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.
- Whiting, Cécile. *A Taste For Pop: Pop Art, Gender and Consumer Culture*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Wolfe, Thomas. "Japanese Artists Say: New York City Has Plenty They Like." *The Washington Post*, 15 November 1960.

XXXII Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte Venezia 1964. New York: The Jewish Museum, 1964.

Zero aus Deutschland 1957-1966. Und heute. Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 1999.

Zero und Paris 1960. Und heute. Villa Merkel, Germany: The Galerie der Stadt Esslingen, 1997.

7. Theoretical, Critical Writings, and Other Sources

Adorno, Theodor W. *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*. Edited by Rolf Tiedeman. Translated by Rodney Livingstone, et al. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.

Alpert, Richard, Timothy Leary, and Ralph Metzner. *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead*. New York: Citadel Press, 1964.

Angotti, Tom. *New York for Sale: Community Planning Confronts Global Real Estate*. Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2008.

Arendt, Hannah. *On Revolution*. New York: The Viking Press, 1963.

Barthes, Roland. *Image, Music, Text*. New York: Nooday Press, 1988.

Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt. Translated by Harry Zohn. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969.

Bernasconi, Robert, Simon Critchley, and Adriaan T. Peperzak, eds. *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University, 1996.

Bloom, Alexander, ed. *Long Time Gone: Sixties America Then and Now*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Burroughs, William S. *Naked Lunch*. Paris: Olympia Press, 1959. Reprint, New York: Grove Press, 1966.

Chave, Anna C. "'I Object': Hannah Wilke's Feminism." *Art in America* (March 2009): 104.

———. "'Normal Ills': On Embodiment, Victimization, and the Origins of Feminist

- Art.” In *Trauma, Visuality, and Modernity*, edited by Eric Rosenberg and Lisa Saltzman, 132-157. Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2006.
- Craighead, W. Edward, and Charles B. Nemeroff, eds. *The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology and Behavioral Science*. 3 vols. New York: John Wiley & Son, 2001.
- de Ropp, Robert S. *Drugs and the Mind*. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1957.
- Docherty, Thomas, ed. *Postmodernism: A Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.
- Foucault, Michel. “Of Other Spaces.” In *The Visual Culture Reader*, edited by Nicholas Mirzoeff, 29-236. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.
- . “What Is an Author?” in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, 101-20. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.
- . *The History of Sexuality*. Vol. 1. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon, 1978.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Freud Reader*, edited by Peter Gay. New York; London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989.
- . *On Creativity and the Unconscious*. New York: Harper, 1958.
- Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Cambridge, MA and Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1990.
- . *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Hoffman, Eva. *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History and the Legacy of the Holocaust*. New York: Public Affairs, 2004.
- Horowitz, Michael Billy Smith, and Karen Walls, eds. *An Annotated Bibliography of Timothy Leary*. Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1988.
- Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1932. Reprint, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946.
- . *The Doors of Perception*. New York: Harper, 1954.
- Huyssen, Andreas. *After the Great Divide*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986.

- Iversen, Leslie. *Speed, Ecstasy, Ritalin*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Keynes, John Maynard. *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1936.
- Kubler, George. *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*. New Edition. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008.
- Leary, Timothy. *Flashbacks, an Autobiography*. Los Angeles: T. J. Tarcher, 1983.
- . *The Politics of Ecstasy*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1968.
- Lee, Martin A., and Bruce Shlain. *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD*. New York: Grove Press, 1985.
- Lentricchia, Frank, and Thomas McLaughlin, eds. *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-other*. Translated by Smith, Michael B. and Barbara Harshav. London and New York: Continuum, 1998.
- . *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University, 1969.
- Lowler, Michael S. *The Economics of Keynes in Historical Context: One Intellectual History*. Basingstoke, U.K. and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Marcuse, Herbert. "Art as a Form of Reality." In *On the Future of Art*, 123-34. New York: Viking, 1970.
- . *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*. 1955. Reprint, Boston: Beacon Press, 1966.
- . *An Essay on Liberation*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1969.
- . *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1964.
- Marqusee, Mike. *Chimes of Freedom: The Politics of Bob Dylan's Art*. New York and London: The New Press, 2003.
- O'Brian, John, ed. *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticisms*. 4 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- Ono, Yoko. "The Feminization of Society." In *Yes Yoko Ono*, edited by Alexandra Munroe and Jon Hendricks, 299-300. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000.

Polanyi, Karl. *Primitive, Archaic, and Modern Economies*, edited by George Dalton. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971.

Roszak, Theodore. *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflection on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1969.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*. Translated by Hazel E Barnes. New York: Pocket Books, 1966.

———. *Notebooks for an Ethics*. Translated by Daid Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Stevens, Jay. *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream*. London: Heinemann, 1988.

Tierney, John. "Hallucinogens Have Doctors Tuning In Again." *The New York Times*, 11 April 2010.

Tone, Andrea. *The Age of Anxiety: A History of America's Turbulent Affair with Tranquilizers*. New York: Basic Books, 2009.

Vatter, Harold G. *The United States Economy in the 1950s*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

FILM AND SOUND RECORDINGS

Body Festival ("Naked Happenings" from Orez Gallery, Novum Jazz, and the Balans Art Fair). Carrier no. V 24977, *Kunstprogramma KPI*, 16 November 1967, Netherlands Instituut voor Beeld en Geluid.

Kusama's Self-Obliteration. Yayoi Kusama (art dir.), Jud Yalkut (scenario and art dir.). New York: Shady Film Production, 1967.

Metamorphoses: L'Ecole de New York. Jean Antoine (dir.). Brussels: Radio Télévision Belge de la Communauté Française, 1965.

Psychedelic Celebration: Turn On Turn In Drop Out. Timothy Leary and The League for Spiritual Discovery (dir.). CITY: Mercury MG-21131, 1966.

Yayoi Kusama I Love Me. Takako Matsumoto (dir.). Tokyo: B.B.B., 2008.