

AUTONOMY AS A TEMPORARY COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE:
ANNA HALPRIN'S DANCE-EVENTS, DEWEYAN AESTHETICS,
AND THE EMERGENCE OF DIALOGICAL ART IN THE SIXTIES

by

Tusa Shea
BA, University of Victoria, 2002
MA, University of Victoria, 2005

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the Department of History in Art

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

Focusing on the event-based work of San Francisco dancer and choreographer, Anna Halprin, this dissertation argues that relational art and aesthetics is an integral feature of modernism that can be traced to the emergence of dialogue in art practices of the 1950s and 60s. I argue that John Dewey's pragmatist aesthetics provided Anna Halprin, and other artists in her circle, with a coexistent experiential site for art's conception and production. This alternative aesthetic model was based on an embodied, holistic approach to aesthetic experience that was fundamentally different from the Kantian-based formalism articulated by Clement Greenberg. Uncovering this alternative aesthetic model matters, not only because it is a neglected tradition with contemporary theoretical resonance, but because it allows us to see that event-based art produced during the 1960s was not merely deconstructive; it also had a constructive social purpose, namely the modeling of temporary, non-totalizing communal experiences. I analyze this contingent collectivism through an anarchist lens, in order to demonstrate that anarchic principles and models of agency were enacted and kept operational in art communities, networks, and events and, furthermore, were supported by holistic philosophies grounded in concrete experience.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Rich and Emma.

Introduction

Since the 1990s a growing number of artists, critics, and art historians have commented on the communicative turn in contemporary art. In *The Reenchantment of Art* (1991), Suzi Gablik describes this as a paradigm shift from an outmoded patriarchal “dominator” model based on Cartesian dualism, to a feminine “partnership” model based on relational and ecological modes of thinking. “Within the dominator system,” she writes,

art has been organized around the primacy of objects rather than relationships, and has been set apart from reciprocal or participative interactions... it has become trapped within a rigid model of insular individuality. To reverse this priority... implies a radical deconstruction of the aesthetic mode itself.¹

Similarly, in his book *Relational Aesthetics* (1998), Nicolas Bourriaud senses a paradigm shift:

The possibility of a relational art (an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space), points to a radical upheaval of the aesthetic, cultural and political goals introduced by modern art.²

According to Bourriaud, art today has a new focus on human social context rather than individual experience; it is intersubjective and “takes being-together as a central theme.”³

In agreement with Gablik and Bourriaud, as well as other authors who have added to the growing literature on what has variously been called relational, dialogical, conversational, participatory, community-based, or socially engaged art practices, art

¹ Suzi Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 62.

² Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics, Relational Aesthetics. Collection Documents Sur l'Art* (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2002), 14.

³ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 14.

historian Grant Kester argues in *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (2002) that formal aesthetic theory is limited by the idea that art is a stable structure or thing. Because of this, it fails to grasp the processes of dialogue and interaction in works that are “organized around a collaborative, rather than a specular, relationship with the viewer.”⁴

While I agree that formalist aesthetics does not provide a useful way to understand contemporary dialogical art practices, a central claim of this dissertation is that an emphasis on the creation of human relationships through a dialogical approach was already present in a number of event-based works produced by American interdisciplinary artists on the margins of the high-art world during the late 1950s and 60s. Even though mainstream art criticism and history may not have had the vocabulary with which to effectively understand its social purpose, dialogical art was emerging in a variety of art practices that expanded beyond discrete formal divisions into an unspecified territory inhabited by artists, poets, musicians, dancers, performers, and filmmakers who focused on the participatory “event.” Initially, art critics and historians attempted to frame such practices in relation to the dominant analytical paradigm of formalism or its foremost alternative at the time, the existential “act.” Both positions, however, tended to adopt an individualist stance informed and supported by a Marxist-based argument against mass culture’s “all-consuming” totalitarian drive.⁵ From this perspective, the individual experience of autonomous art was understood as a primary mode of opposition

⁴ Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2004), 11.

⁵ Both Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg were influenced by the Marxist argument against mass culture and the ideological role of representation, which led them to defend art’s autonomy. They each reasoned that if mass culture communicates through the common languages and symbols that reinforce an oppressive society, then autonomous art must avoid using those common languages and symbols.

to mass culture and its codification of authentic human experience. As a result of the privileged position of individualism within this context, commentators tended to miss the significance of event-based art's dialogical and participatory impulses. Instead, the development of event-based art – subsumed first under the umbrella term “Neo-dada” and later “Performance Art” – has been incorporated into an art historical narrative in which Kantian aesthetics (about which I will have more to say in the following chapters) assumes a universal position, absorbing all other approaches as merely oppositional and discounting the possibility of alternative developments in postwar art practices.

Although most contemporary scholars acknowledge that the seeds of the “new” relational paradigm were sowed in the 60s, they prefer not to pursue its historical threads. For Bourriaud, as for Gablik, the emergence of relational art in the 1990s required a “clean break” with the past. As Bourriaud puts it, “[relational art’s] basic claim – the sphere of human relations as artwork venue – has no prior example in art history, even if it appears, after the fact, as the obvious backdrop of all aesthetic practice.”⁶ Bourriaud, like Gablik, wants to separate contemporary relational art practices from an insufficient aesthetic formalism by claiming that it is new. The motives for this break are understandable; a rupture with the past could prevent a misreading of current art practices through “yesterdays concerns,” which Bourriaud fears will lead to a continual misinterpretation of relational art as either aesthetically insufficient or as social activism and not art at all.⁷ Yet this “break” is itself close to reproducing the avant-garde notion of opposition. In contrast, other scholars have argued that what Gablik and Bourriaud have characterized as a *new art practice* might be better understood as a *new critical*

⁶ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 44.

⁷ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 60.

recognition of an ongoing mode of artistic inquiry. As Miwon Kwon, Mary Jane Jacobs, and others have pointed out, it is entirely possible that the current turn toward a dialogical approach in art “represents neither a new movement in the field nor a newly politicized aesthetic sensibility, but rather a moment of arrival in which a well-developed mode of practice that had been undervalued in mainstream art finally receives broader cultural acceptance.”⁸

In this dissertation I uncover one of the origins of this “undervalued” mode of practice and examine how it manifested within interdisciplinary experimentation across the arts during the 1960s. Specifically, I focus on event-based works produced by San Francisco dancer and choreographer Anna Halprin.⁹ Widely acknowledged as a forerunner of the Judson Dance Group and a pioneer of improvisation, Halprin’s name is often mentioned along-side the better-known names of John Cage and Allan Kaprow in art historical texts that focus on the development of happenings and performance art, yet the works she produced are rarely elaborated on.¹⁰ While this scant attention to her actual contributions can be seen as evidence of her “outsider” status – she was, after all, a dancer – the fact that she appears in art history texts at all points to the ambivalent position she, like so many interdisciplinary artists, occupies; for, why mention her at all if there is so little to say?

⁸ Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2002), 107. Kwon is referring here to comments by Mary Jane Jacobs and Eleanor Heartney in relation to public art that attempts to create a dialogue within a community context.

⁹ Ann Halprin changed her first name from Ann to Anna in 1972. Throughout this dissertation, I refer to her consistently as Anna Halprin.

¹⁰ An exception is theatre historian Janice Ross. Although Halprin’s contributions to the development of the “Happening” have been increasingly acknowledged by art historians, she is often added as a footnote to the better-known names of the main American exponents, John Cage, Robert Rauchenburg, Merce Cunningham, Allan Kaprow, Claes Oldenburg, Jim Dine, Robert Whitman, Red Grooms, George Brecht, Kenneth Dewey and Milan Knizek.

The outsider status of interdisciplinary artists has a built-in gender bias. Few would question the presence of composer John Cage in art historical texts, for example. As Mariellen Sandford has pointed out in her introduction to *Happenings and Other Acts* (1995), “In much of the literature on Happenings and Fluxus, there is a regrettable underrepresentation of women artists...”¹¹ This omission of women from the historical record should surprise no one, even though a number of women, including Alison Knowles, Yoko Ono, Carolee Schneeman, Yvonne Rainer, and Jill Johnston, among many others, produced and participated in early interdisciplinary events. Accordingly, Halprin’s marginalization can be understood as the result of a series of art-institutional and gender biases that favour visual, object-centred, individualist, monologic practices – a standpoint that Suzy Gablik describes as promoting and sustaining “dominator attitudes of self-assertion over social integration, a hard, intellectual approach over intuitive wisdom, and competitiveness over cooperation...”¹² Halprin was in many ways a marginal figure in the visual arts; but, she was also an influential collaborator, teacher and practitioner of socially engaged event-based art.¹³ I suspect, however, that it is not the depth of her influence, her status as a dancer, nor her gender that has entirely prevented her from occupying a larger space within the art historical discourse, but rather the difficulty of

¹¹ Mariellen Sandford, *Happenings and Other Acts* (London: Routledge, 1995), xxi.

¹² Gablik, *Reenchantment*, 62.

¹³ Her famous outdoor dance stage, at her home on Mt. Tamalpais in the Bay Area, provided a non-commercial venue for early events staged by Merce Cunningham, John Cage, Robert Morris, Robert Whitman, and the poet Michael McClure, among others. Some of her early students include Morris, Paul Taylor, Meredith Monk, Trisha Brown, Yvonne Rainer, Simone Forti, Ruth Emmerson, and Sally Gross. She collaborated widely with people from many disciplines including actor John Graham, theatre director Ken Dewey, artist Bruce Conner, and San Francisco Tape Music Center composers La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Morton Subotnick, Folke Rabe, and Pauline Oliveros. In addition, she performed her own participatory events at a variety of arts festivals in Rome, Venice, Zagreb, Helsinki, Warsaw and Stockholm, as well as in a number of cities in Canada and the United States. Anna Halprin, *Moving Toward Life: Five Decades of Transformational Dance* (University Press of New England, 2003).

fitting her unconventional dialogical approach into the prevailing art historical narrative of the period.

As I shall demonstrate, Halprin, who purposefully worked outside of the New York art centre, experienced a freedom from avant-garde “convention” and market expectations that enabled her to develop an alternative practice that was not solely limited by the “hegemony of stylistic aesthetics” that dominated New York-based art practice and criticism. Halprin, I argue, was influenced less by a reaction *against* the Kantian formalist aesthetics that prevailed in American art, than by an alternative holistic perspective that privileged the notion of “intersubjectivity” through what philosopher Shannon Sullivan has identified as a “transactional” body, and which finds its basis in a combination of John Dewey’s pragmatist aesthetics, Bauhaus principles and Gestalt therapy.¹⁴ More than any other American event-based artist of her time, Halprin interrogated the power differential operating between the artist and the audience, and in this way she pioneered a dialogical art practice. This dissertation asks: how might Anna Halprin’s dialogical practice disrupt the conventional art historical narrative of event-based art? And, how might that disruption alter contemporary claims for a *new* relational aesthetics?

Art historians tend to place event-based practices such as Halprin’s within a history of “oppositional” avant-garde performance that originated with Futurism and Dada and was reintroduced by composer John Cage, through events at Black Mountain College and his classes at the New School for Social Research, to a postwar generation of “neo-dadaists” that included Allan Kaprow, as well as members of Fluxus and the Judson

¹⁴ Shannon Sullivan, *Living Across and through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism and Feminism* (Indiana University Press, 2001).

Dance Group. In this familiar narrative, avant-garde performance is both aligned with “action painting” and positioned in opposition to the dominant Kantian aesthetic theory promoted by Clement Greenberg. Thus, event based art of the 60s is usually discussed in terms of the birth of “neo-dada” – a label I have eschewed here in favor of the less value laden “event-based art.” Labeling the wide variety of events produced by artists with varying aims and intentions as neo-dada is to mistakenly interpret them solely as a continuation of the modernist program to shock the viewer into an awareness of the failure of symbolic systems of communication, and this is part of what Gablik, Bourriaud, Kester and others, including myself, want to avoid. Thus, I take a different approach in this dissertation by positioning postwar event-based art as a practice embedded in an alternative understanding of the individual’s relationship to the collective that was based on a holistic approach to reality as an embodied experiential process. Indeed, it would be short-sighted to see the turn toward embodied experience and process as solely a “counter” or oppositional *reaction* to formalist aesthetics or autonomous art; this perpetuates the idea that event-based works were merely deconstructive. Certainly, on one level, such works potentially sought to destabilize the signifying power of representation; however, in this study I contend that the “dialogical” nature of some event-based practices played an equally significant role, *constructing* temporary collective experiences that were invisible to mainstream culture and its mechanisms of representation.¹⁵

Anna Halprin’s event-based art practice did not only seek to subvert conventional modes of communication through a self-reflexive critique, but also to engage audience-

¹⁵ Other artists who fit into this West Coast avant-garde exploration of dialogue include the assemblage artist Wallace Berman, assemblagist/filmmaker Bruce Conner, filmmaker Stan Brakhage, and poet Michael McLure.

participants in an “experiential dialogue” that created a temporary form of non-totalizing collectivity. This temporary collectivity offered a socially engaged alternative to the dominant individualism promoted by formalist aesthetics. Indeed, event-based art that draws on the intersubjective experience of participants to create a temporary site of communal exchange emerges from a different set of values than the autonomous art object. In participatory works it is the event itself that creates temporary autonomy from the coercive State form of collectivity. While Halprin’s explanations of her event-based works were not explicitly political, her belief in non-alienating dialogue and the construction of “non-totalizing” community is implicit in the events she produced and emanated from her early exposure to holistic and dialogical principles. Totalizing communities are hierarchical, authoritarian and modeled on the State form. Through the use of codified abstraction a totalizing community tends to privilege a static collective identity. A non-totalizing community, on the other hand, refuses to stabilize and is, thus, continuously shifting and changing. A non-totalizing community alters the relationship between the individual and the collective from one of oppression to one of cooperative experience. Before I explain how my study approaches the issue of collectivity in dialogical art practice, it is necessary to define these two terms, “dialogical” and “holistic,” more precisely and in relation to John Dewey’s pragmatist aesthetics because I will also argue throughout this dissertation that Halprin’s focus on participatory experience put Dewey’s largely forgotten aesthetic approach into practice.

Deweyan Aesthetics

John Dewey developed what could be called a pragmatist “relational aesthetics” in the 1930s.¹⁶ His book of 1934, *Art as Experience*, offered an alternative to the Kantian aesthetic notion that art is a stable structure or thing and instead emphasized that art is an active process that involves both the artist and the audience. Though Dewey is remembered today mainly for his progressive educational philosophy, he had a pervasive and significant influence on the development of American art during the 1930s and 40s that has yet to be fully explored. Stewart Beuttner has argued that Dewey’s aesthetic philosophy was the driving force behind the Federal Arts Project, and Mary Emma Harris and other scholars have argued that the founding of Black Mountain College grew out of, and put into wider art practice, Deweyan social and aesthetic principles.¹⁷ Dewey’s ideas also influenced individual artists; *Art as Experience* was read by a wide range of both European and American avant-garde artists including Joseph Albers, John Cage, Roberto Matta Echaurren, Wolfgang Paalen, Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock, and Allan Kaprow, and had a wide-cast influence on others as well.¹⁸ Curiously, however, the impact of Dewey’s thinking on American art *practice* has not yet been the focus of a major art historical study; although recently, and significantly, both Jeff Kelley and

¹⁶ This should not be confused with Ezra Pound’s “Pragmatic Aesthetics,” which he developed in the late 1930s largely through conversations with the philosopher George Santayana. See David Kadlec, *Mosaic Modernism: Anarchism, Pragmatism, Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 81.

¹⁷ See chapter three for more on this.

¹⁸ Stewart Buettner, “John Dewey and the Visual Arts in America Source,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Summer, 1975), 383- 391

Hannah Higgins have reconnected Dewey's pragmatist aesthetics to the work of Fluxus artists and Allan Kaprow.¹⁹

As philosopher Richard Shusterman has argued, the main reason that Dewey's pragmatist aesthetics has been left out of the historical record has much to do with the dominance of analytic philosophy within academia in general.²⁰ Dewey's understanding of art as experience upholds the notion that analytical divisions will only diminish a richer and more fulfilling understanding of organic unity.²¹ Indeed, Shusterman argues "it is crucial to note how radically [Dewey's] emphasis on continuity contrasts with the analytic approach, whose very name connotes division into parts and which prides itself on the clarity and rigor of its distinctions."²² In Dewey's pragmatist aesthetics all things are understood in relation rather than isolation. This is distinctly different from the dominant analytical aesthetic tradition laid down by Kant, which is rooted in "the spectator theory of knowledge."

For Dewey, knowledge is gained by doing, not observing. Thus, according to his holistic approach, art should not be treated as an isolated object to be categorized, classified, or standardized, but rather should be experienced as the result of the human organism interacting with materials and events in a social environment; art's purpose "is

¹⁹ See Jeff Kelley ed., *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life: Allan Kaprow* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003) and Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

²⁰ Shusterman, Beuttner, and Sullivan all state this. Shusterman also points out that the resurrection of Dewey's ideas stems from the similarities between holism and poststructuralism, neither of which allows for known discrete entities. Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1992), 5.

²¹ For a comprehensive philosophical discussion of Dewey's pragmatist aesthetics see Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1992). It is important to note, however, that Dewey claimed he did not subscribe to Hegelian notions of cosmic harmony or the absolute. See: Dewey, "Experience, Knowledge and Value: A Rejoinder," in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, P. Schilpp ed. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press), 517-608.

²² Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, 14.

to serve the whole creature in his unified vitality.”²³ To subject art to categorization is to not only impoverish its meaning, but to establish set ways of understanding that lead to a “narrowed and dulled life-experience.”²⁴ Not surprisingly, this seemingly nebulous holistic approach was difficult to reconcile with the extensive analytical institutional apparatuses already set up to support the production, critique, study and consumption of art. Dewey did not shy away from examining and condemning these connections, in particular blaming the isolation of art within museums on larger systems of nationalism and capitalism.²⁵ In addition to this, Dewey’s pragmatist aesthetics of experience appeared to many art historians and critics to be locked into an incommunicable individual experience that had no basis in a shared language.²⁶ Thus, within the established system of aesthetics, Dewey’s approach had no analytical use.²⁷ The result is that discussion of Dewey’s alternative aesthetics is largely neglected within the art critical and historical record.

To understand Dewey’s pragmatist aesthetics as individualistic, however, is a misreading. For Dewey, experience is never an individual or private event because it is part of a holistic process; “Experience in the degree in which it *is* experience,” he wrote, “is heightened vitality. Instead of signifying being shut up within one’s own private feelings and sensations, it signifies active and alert commerce with the world; at its height

²³ John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 122.

²⁴ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 28.

²⁵ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 28.

²⁶ For negative reviews of *Art as Experience* see, for example, Stephen Pepper, “Some Questions on Dewey’s Aesthetics,” (orig. 1939) in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, P. Shilpp ed, Evanston: Northwestern University, 369-390; and Benedetto Croce, “On the Aesthetics of Dewey,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 6 (1948): 203-207.

²⁷ I discuss this in greater detail in chapter three.

it signifies complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events.”²⁸ Crucially, Dewey privileges embodied experience over analytic thought. Because we are “live creatures” we come to know the world through embodied participation rather than through objective observation; in this way, the mind and body are understood as a continuity rather than a binary. Furthermore, he understands the body as “transactional,” as existing in a continuously merging relationship with its environment. Accordingly, this holistic approach surpasses binary oppositions of body and mind, self and world, art and life, artist and audience, and instead sees these as relational parts within a whole.²⁹

As Daniel Belgrad notes in *The Culture of Spontaneity*, a significant feature of holistic thinking and being is its emphasis on dialogue and relationships between things.³⁰ The term “dialogical” was originally theorized in a different context by the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin as a way to understand how literary works are in constant communication with other works, other authors, and readers’ experiences, and therefore can never resolve any single or unified meaning. This “dialogical” approach offers an alternative to the “monological” message translated by the art object from the artist to the viewer, which artists and critics of the present day have found so problematic. Dewey did not use the specific term “dialogical” but rather referred to the process and relation of organic life to its environment: “life goes on in an environment,” he wrote in

²⁸ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 25.

²⁹ In the United States during the 1930s a variety of related holistic theories, also referred to as “field theories,” provided alternative ways to think about reality. As cultural historian Daniel Belgrad explains, the sources feeding this alternative position include “the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, the gestalt therapy of Paul Goodman, and even Zen Buddhism,” a list to which I would add both John Dewey’s pragmatist philosophy and the affinity-based anarchism transmitted to West Coast artists by prominent writers, Paul Goodman and Robert Duncan. See, Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 114. See also, Allan Antliff, *Anarchy and Art: From the Paris Commune to the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2007), see especially chapter 6 “Gay Anarchy,” 113-132.

³⁰ Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 114.

chapter one of *Art as Experience*, “not merely *in* it but because of it, through interaction with it. No creature lives merely under its skin; its subcutaneous organs are means of connection with what lies beyond its bodily frame, and to which, in order to live, it must adjust itself ...”³¹ In this way, there is a constant “relational process” between subjects, things, and spaces; no thing exists as a unified or complete entity in an empty space. Indeed, “Experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of live creature and enviroing conditions is involved in the very process of living.”³² For Dewey, there is no moment of resolution or finality. Instead, he founds his aesthetics, and his general philosophy, on the process of experience as an ongoing *embodied* dialogue with the world: “Experience is the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication.”³³ Thus, in holistic terms, to take a dialogical approach is not merely a back and forth conversation but is to accept the notion of continuous feedback and change.

Even from this brief overview of Dewey’s emphasis on holism and dialogue, it should be clear that despite contemporary claims for a *new* relational aesthetics, there are good reasons to consider that there is also a longer *history* of relational art and aesthetics. The impact of Dewey’s holistic philosophy may not be overt within the art critical or historical record, but I argue that his influence can be seen in experientially based American art *practices* of the 50s and 60s. Curiously, even though holism is identified by some contemporary scholars as a defining characteristic of the new relational aesthetic,

³¹ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 19.

³² Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 42.

³³ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 28.

no one has yet connected this to Deweyan pragmatist aesthetics. Rather, holism is frequently introduced as a result of the new paradigm shift. As Gablik writes,

The emerging new paradigm reflects a will to participate socially...³⁴ the holistic paradigm is bringing inner and outer – subjective and objective -- worlds closer together. When this perception of a unified field is applied to human society and to culture, it makes us a codetermining factor in the reality-producing process; we are not just witnesses or spectators.³⁵

This desire to see the present as the origin of a new paradigm is heightened by the postmodernist drive to destabilize continuity through deconstruction. Ironically, at the same time that historical continuity is disrupted, poststructuralist theory has demonstrated the insufficiency of the analytic approach and the complexity of our construction of knowledge – implicating the “observer,” revealing the abstracting force of solid categories, and critiquing dualisms – and in this way has aided in drawing previously marginalized holistic thinkers into present-day discussions of identity, community, and dialogue.³⁶ As Shusterman points out, for example, the poststructuralist negation of the closed or unified object is paralleled in Dewey’s aesthetics:

Just as poststructuralism argues that a text’s meaning is constantly changing because it is the product of the ever changing context of language... so Dewey argues that the work’s meaning is constantly changing. For it is the product of the ever changing context of experience, which always involves the interactive play between the relatively stable art product and the organism and its enviroing factors, which are both in continual flux.³⁷

The deconstructive turn of analytic thinking has in many ways legitimated the complex, even vague, relationships earlier identified by holistic field theories. But, this does not

³⁴ Gablik, *Reenchantment*, 7.

³⁵ Gablik, *Reenchantment*, 22.

³⁶ I am also thinking here of how Deleuze and Guattari have aided in resurrecting other theorists such as Mikhail Bakhtin.

³⁷ Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, 31.

mean that process, intersubjectivity, and dialogue should only be understood through more recent analytic poststructuralist interpretations.

Though Bourriaud, Gablik, and Kester all offer new ways of understanding dialogical art, my purpose here is not to re-read Halprin's work through these contemporary lenses, but rather to reveal the existence of a prior aesthetic of experience that was put into practice by a number of artists, but has largely remained invisible. This is not to position Dewey as the sole source of a monolithic category of "relational art" either. Although my study focuses on the influence of Deweyan aesthetics within the American art context of the 50s and 60s, I also want to acknowledge that there are other avenues for pursuing the genealogy and histories of dialogical art and aesthetics. For example, art historian Martin Patrick has recently argued that Fluxus artist Robert Filliou was a forerunner to current relational art practices. Filliou's statement, "Whatever I say is irrelevant if it does not incite you to add up your voice to mine," conveys the fundamental importance of dialogue in his art and philosophy of "eternal creation."³⁸ Similarly, Joseph Beuys, another artist with early Fluxus ties, envisioned art as an ongoing dialogue that he called "social sculpture" – a key feature of which was the idea that human freedom is creative action.³⁹ Both artists emphasized audience participation in acts of communal creativity.

Like Filliou and Bueys, the French artist Jean-Jaques Lebel also articulated similar concerns. A former Surrealist who circulated in the Fluxus milieu, Lebel played a key role in forging relationships between European and American event-based artists

³⁸ Robert Filliou quoted in Martin Patrick, "Unfinished Filliou: On the Fluxus Ethos and the Origins of Relational Aesthetics," *Art Journal* (Spring-Summer 2010), 52.

³⁹ Claudia Mesch, "Institutionalizing Social Sculpture: Beuys Office for Direct Democracy through Referendum Sculpture," in Mesch and Viola Michely eds, *Joseph Beuys the Reader*, 211.

during the postwar period. He collaborated with Allan Kaprow, Claes Oldenberg, Yoko Ono, and Carolee Schneeman, and he both participated in Happenings in New York as well as invited American artists to participate in his *Festival of Free Expression* in Paris in 1964. Crucially, for Lebel event-based art was not simply a matter of the artist using real space and time as a medium, it was fundamentally about *non-alienating* communication; “the Happening” he wrote, “puts into action (as opposed to merely represents) the varying relationships between individuals and their psycho-social environment. In these conditions the voyeur, by his very deficiency, has no part in the action.”⁴⁰ Lebel claimed that since art has been separated from society as an object of disinterested aesthetic judgment, this has led to a mutual “voluntary blindness and a refusal of communication.” The Happening is thus “a new language” that enables us to “look beyond the subject/object relationship,” and instead establish “a relationship between subject and subject. No one, now, is (exclusively) a spectator... There is no monologue, but dialogue, exchange...”⁴¹ For Lebel this was an explicitly political tactic with which to avoid the ideological imperative of representation.

Not all relational art practices and theories emerged from the Fluxus milieu, however. An important early theorist of the dialogical model is the British artist and new media theorist Roy Ascott. In his foundational essay of 1966, “Behaviorist Art and the Cybernetic Vision,” Ascott described what he saw as a shift from the monological to the dialogical:

The dominant feature of art of the past was the wish to transmit a clearly defined message to the spectator, as a more or less passive receptor, from the artist as a unique and highly individualized source... [art today] by

⁴⁰ Jean Jaques Lebel, “On the Necessity of Violation,” *New Writers 4* (London: Calder and Boyers, 1967), 33.

⁴¹ Lebel, “Necessity,” 14-15.

contrast is concerned to initiate events... art has shifted from the field of objects to the field of behavior, and its function has become less descriptive and more purposive.⁴²

Pre-dating Gablic and Bourriaud by thirty years, Ascott called this new approach “behaviorist art” and further developed his theories to incorporate the hypertextual and rhizomatic field of the internet during the 1980s and 90s. In response to works produced by artists such as Ascott, Filliou, Beuys, Lebel, and many others, new media art historian Frank Popper identified a move toward a relational aesthetic model in the conclusion to his first book published in 1975, *Art – Action and Participation*. “The classical framework of aesthetics has been irretrievably breached,” he wrote,

Notions like the tangible work of art, the individualistic artist, the passive spectator and the detached theoretician can all be considered as things of the past. ... The new aesthetic is closely identified with a new democratic art, in which the enhancement of the individual takes place within the patterns of society (with positive and negative factors making up a true dialectic), but at the same time the power of aesthetic decision lies in the hands of all.⁴³

Anticipating Bourriaud’s description of the contemporary relational artist as the creator of situations that foster social relations, Popper wrote that the artist no longer creates objects, instead he “takes part in the setting up of this climate in which relations of a purely aesthetic order can be forged within different people and different types of psychological and physical phenomena.”⁴⁴

⁴² Roy Ascott, “Behaviorist Art and the Cybernetic Vision” in Edward Shanken ed. *The Telematic Embrace* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 110.

⁴³ Frank Popper, *Art – Action and Participation* (London: Studio Vista, 1975), 278-280.

⁴⁴ Popper, *Art-Action and Participation*, 278.

Any of the above avenues would be productive paths for uncovering a genealogy of the concept of “relational” or “dialogical” aesthetics or pursuing specific contextual histories. My study, however, is rooted in an American context. Although I do to some extent follow a genealogy of concepts in this dissertation, I am interested in illuminating a specific socio-cultural historical moment. Because Gablik, Bourriaud, and Kester have focused on art of the present day, none considers that art works produced outside of art institutions during the sixties may have been drawing on an alternative aesthetic model, which is precisely what I will argue here. Instead of viewing the emergence of dialogical art as a “clean break,” or rupture with the past, I will argue that it is best understood as an artistic development that coexisted alongside the dominant aesthetic model.

The Problem of the collective

Because of the key role played by discourse in fostering collectivity, one of the major concerns of contemporary artists who engage in dialogical and relational art practices is how to negotiate the social terrain without reproducing and supporting relationships of unequal power. Current scholarship has identified the significance of dialogical art’s community-building function and focused on the crucial question of whether or not it is possible for such works to initiate non-totalizing collectivity. As Gablik points out: “Art that realizes its purpose through relationships – that collaborates consciously with the audience and is concerned with how we connect with others – can actually *create* a sense of community.”⁴⁵ For Bourriaud, as well, relational art’s ability to create a temporary

⁴⁵ Gablik, *Re-enchantment*, 158.

collective experience is part of its meaning; “The subversive and critical function of contemporary art” he writes, “is now achieved in the invention of individual and collective vanishing lines, in those temporary and nomadic constructions whereby the artist models and disseminates disconcerting situations.”⁴⁶ Neither Bourriaud nor Gablik, however, discuss the problematic history of modern art’s role in the construction of collectivity because both advocate a clean (post-modern) break from the past. By separating relational art from the autonomous art of the past, these authors no longer have to contend with the complex frameworks that implicate modern art in both the construction and the negation of totalizing collectivity.

Grant Kester, on the other hand meets this question head on. Kester isolates a key problem of dialogue in art – that is, its transgression of autonomy and its subsequent downward spiral into a totalizing mass culture. In his book *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, Kester unpacks the complex historical relationship between autonomous art, dialogue, and collectivity. He engages in a discussion of the crucial issue of art’s autonomy, charting its genesis in Kantian aesthetics, where it occupied a privileged place in the creation of an ideal collectivity, through to its modern form wherein that ideal collectivity was acknowledged as a utopian dream that art could only point towards through formal nondiscursivity.⁴⁷ Within the dominant aesthetic framework, art that engages in dialogue is art that participates in the creation of a collective. The problem for artists producing relational art works, then, is whether or not a non-totalizing collective is possible. According to the art historian, Miwon Kwon, the collective always exerts its dominance over the individual; she sees the

⁴⁶ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 30.

⁴⁷ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 28-34.

individual and the collective as oppositional forms of being and is suspicious of collectivist art projects that simply affirm the viewer's sense of being either included or excluded from a social issue. Kester, however, is not willing to abandon all forms of human collectivism "to the wilderness of incipient fascism."⁴⁸ He recognizes that "discursive violence occurs whenever one individual speaks for another, no matter how firmly anchored he or she is within a given collective," but he also stresses that some communities come into existence "through a process of dialogue and consensus formation rooted in specific historical moments and particular constellations of political and economic power."⁴⁹ Such "politically coherent communities" can be seen as possessing contingent identities that are always in negotiation. But Kester's understanding of collectivity is, like Kwon's, ultimately built on a hegemonic model in which individuals are subject to a form of abstraction as they cohere into collectives.

Although I draw frequently on Kester's well-founded and meticulous arguments, I resituate autonomy in the contingent site of embodied experiential engagement. My approach brings autonomy back into relation with dialogue and community as a temporary zone of experiential engagement. In this way, I attempt to transgress the binary model of the individual versus the collective and, instead, I posit an alternative model of collectivity that is based not on stable representations but on the hybrid, contingent, and temporary conditions of the "event."

One of the central aims of this dissertation is to demonstrate how Anna Halprin's event-based art works created temporary forms of non-totalizing collectivity; thus, it is necessary to consider the impact of Jurgen Habermas's Marxist-based concept of the

⁴⁸ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 157.

⁴⁹ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 150.

“public sphere” – meaning the *visible* public sphere of communal political identity.⁵⁰ Within this model, representation is the crucial “social glue” that holds collective identities together. Habermas’ thesis is the foundation of Benedict Anderson’s important study, *Imagined Communities*, in which he argues that it has historically been through the mass production of texts and images in publications (and now, television, radio, and the internet) that representations are embedded simultaneously in the minds of multiple readers/viewers to create an imagined sense of community.⁵¹ This imaginary is most often treated as the realm in which ideological thought masks social reality through stabilized forms of representation. All forms of representation can be thought of as ideological when they integrate and reaffirm a communal set of images that support the dominant culture. Indeed, this condition is the foundation of the Marxist opposition to mass culture, which leads inevitably to the totalizing model of collectivity I am calling into question.

The Marxist-based theory of how collective identity is formed and sustained has long dominated analyses of the “new social movements” of the sixties, such as the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, and environmentalism, which engaged with mass culture and are understood to have displaced class as the “universal” struggle. As sociologist Richard Day points out in *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (2005), within this Marxist-based paradigm new social movements are treated as unified political defensive entities that employ the same logic of hegemony as the State itself. This critical approach to the period does yield insights, however it cannot

⁵⁰ See for example, Nick Crossley and John Michael Roberts, *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere* (Blackwell, 2004), 1-27; See also, Sandra Jovchelovitch, *Knowledge in Context: Representations, Community and Culture* (Routledge, 2007).

⁵¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 1991), 7.

account for the contingent and fluid communal identity that manifested in the art events I will examine here. The temporary collectives I am examining are “invisible” because they lack stabilizing forms of representation within the “public sphere.” To paraphrase Day, they “escape the categories of traditional social movement theories.”⁵²

Day is interested in the rise of non-hegemonic, or “affinity-based,” activist practices that do not seek the universal transformation of society as a totality.⁵³ He points out that collectivity is not always a unified entity and suggests that the newer social movements emerging since the 1990s – as opposed to those that preceded them – can be distinguished by the following: they have shifted from a political to a social/cultural terrain; they are not interested in capturing state power; and they “prefigure alternatives” – that is, they practice in the present the future changes they seek.⁵⁴ In this dissertation, I enlist Day’s conception of affinity-based social movements in order to demonstrate that these tendencies were also manifested in the alternative event-based art practices produced by interdisciplinary artists outside of the hub of avant-garde art-making in New York.⁵⁵

Artists working on the margins of the dominant art world, such as Halprin, produced event-based works that modeled temporary non-totalitarian collectives. Such practices reveal “a *politics of the act* driven by an *ethics of the real*,” in which the State as

⁵² Richard Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 45.

⁵³ Day, *Gramsci*, 69.

⁵⁴ Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present* (London, Hutchinson Radius 1989), 11-20.

⁵⁵ In his book of 1946, *Art and Social Nature*, anarchist writer and Gestalt therapist Paul Goodman advocated the creation of affinity-based collectives: “the libertarian,” he wrote, “does not look forward to a future state of things which he tries to bring about by suspect means; but he draws now, so far as he can, on the natural force within him that is no different in kind from what it will be in a free society.” Paul Goodman, *Art and Social Nature* (New York: Vinco Publishing Co., 1946), 2.

the source of political freedom is bypassed in favour of enacting change through alternative models of collectivity rooted in open and informal community networks.⁵⁶ This allows us to go beyond the Marxist “logic of hegemony” and understand how artists were able to ground their art events in process-oriented holistic, philosophies. Halprin understood collectivity as a *relational* mode of individuality. In her creation of events, she modeled what anarchist writer Hakim Bey calls “Temporary Autonomous Zones” – intense, contingent, and shifting sites of freedom that manifest outside the stabilizing, coercive State form. This approach brings the relationship between embodied experience and autonomy into focus.

Although Anna Halprin was not personally involved in anarchist politics, the collective experience she sought to manifest through art events was non-totalizing; in this way, she put a foundational anarchist social principle into practice. It is not surprising that Halprin’s practice would find affinity with anarchist social goals since, at its foundation, her pragmatist-based art practice shared anarchism’s rejection of abstraction. Although there is not a great deal of scholarship addressing the relationship between American pragmatism and anarchist thought, both sources privilege embodied action over abstract contemplation. Anarchism’s political roots in the United States were largely informed by European anarchist theorists such as Mikhail Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin, Leo Tolstoy and Max Stirner, and activist immigrants such as Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman.⁵⁷ European anarchist thought found an affinity with American individualism in the ideas of writers such as Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, but also

⁵⁶ Richard Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005), 15.

⁵⁷ Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 4.

with American pragmatist thinkers, William James and John Dewey. As David Kadlec notes in *Mosaic Modernism: Anarchism, Pragmatism, Culture*, James' intellectual engagement with European anarchist thought led him to describe his commitment to concrete experience and process as "anarchistic," and he adapted anarchist anti-Statist ideas to his own articulations of American "exceptionalism".⁵⁸ John Dewey was never as philosophically engaged in anarchist thought as James; however, Dewey's socialist politics, his commitment to direct experience, participation, and dialogue, as well as his interaction with anarchist artists and thinkers, positions him within the constellation of intellectual and cultural "anarchistic" theorists. In particular, Dewey was a friend of America's best known early 20th-century anarchist-communist, Emma Goldman; he petitioned for her readmission to the United States after her deportation in 1919, he addressed a reception for her at City Hall in New York in 1934, and he supported and visited the Ferrer Modern School, established by Goldman and other anarchists in New York in 1910.⁵⁹ Dewey was also friends with anarchist artists and writers such as Hutchins Hapgood, Max Eastman and Ezra Pound. As David Kadlec puts it, "anarchists and pragmatists contributed to an evolving twentieth-century conceptual matrix," and this was both generated and absorbed by artists and writers through direct and indirect political and intellectual channels.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ David Kadlec, *Mosaic Modernism: Anarchism, Pragmatism, Culture* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 22.

⁵⁹ Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices: an oral history of anarchism in America* (Princeton University Press, 1995), 493. See also, Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 26. John Dewey was also a vocal supporter of other anarchist figures such as Sacco and Vanzetti, Alexander Berkman, and Carlo Tresca.

⁶⁰ David Kadlec, *Mosaic Modernism: Anarchism, Pragmatism, Culture* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 10.

For our purposes, anarchist social theory is especially valuable because it allows for the inclusion of direct embodied experience in social movement theory. In contrast, Marxist-based conceptions of collectivity simply relegate direct experience to the realm of the unknowable and untheorizable. The result is that the direct experience of the body in forming social collectivity is neglected, and instead the body is treated as a text constructed through discourses and regimes of power already existing within the dominant hegemonic social form. This blind spot leads us to one of the key reasons why I have chosen to explore Halprin's events through social movement theory as opposed to performance theory, which is more often enlisted in art historical studies of event-based art practices: I want to emphasize the *experiential* goal of embodied *participation* rather than the poststructuralist notion of the "performance of self." That is, I posit that the body is something more complex and material than a "text."

Feminist philosopher Judith Butler's influential theorizing has shaped performance studies scholarship; but, she tends to approach the visible body as a surface text constituted by discourse. "Words, acts, gesture and desire," she writes, "produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause."⁶¹ Butler is concerned with creating a space of subversive performative acts by emphasizing that what happens on the surface of the body is really an illusion of a stable core of identity. In order to do so she enlists the poststructuralist argument that subjects are constructed by texts, and texts, in turn, are always incomplete. Thus, there can be no essential subject, and identity, accordingly, is fluid. In other words,

⁶¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 416.

she creates a certain amount of agency for the subject through the notion of “performativity” in which the subject is constructed within a discursive matrix through the acts it performs.

Yet, as literary theorist Carrie Noland points out, identity construction theories such as Butler’s tend to neglect the *experience* of performing cultural signs such as gender.⁶² These acts may be experienced, but in the Butlerian matrix they only matter through their performativity – that is, through their circulation within discourse. In this way, the material body seems to be subsidiary to her investigation of identity construction. It is not that there is no lived body in Butler’s complex concepts of identity, but, according to her, what we understand as “the body” is the product of systems of signification and representation. I find Butler’s approach productive and in no way want to imply that bodies are “essential” or “natural”; however, as Shusterman points out, holistic thinking similarly destabilizes unified subjects. According to the holistic understanding of the body there is no stable surface on which meaning could ever be “written” for long. The material body itself is unstable and always in a process of moving between experience and performance, between inner being and outer being. Considering Dewey’s holistic approach in these terms, our embodied existence is transactional; as Shannon Sullivan explains, “the boundaries that delimit individual entities are permeable, not fixed, which means that organisms and their various environments – social, cultural, and political – are constituted by their mutual influence and impact on each other.”⁶³ It is

⁶² Carrie Noland, *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 188-189.

⁶³ Sullivan, *Living Across and Through Skins*, 1.

a dynamic, ongoing transformation that allows for the theorizing of co-constitutive processes between corporeality and abstracting forces.

I part ways with the poststructuralist reading of the body as text on one more point; in order to instantiate the body as a text, Butler requires a hegemonic model of sociality that positions individual agency against a repressive social order, which she then destabilizes. In this way, her concept of performativity preserves the separation of the individual from the collective. Other performance art scholars have followed suit; Peggy Phelan and Diana Taylor both enlist Butlerian notions of performativity when they describe the performative as creating ruptures between the representation and the real that offer spaces of resistance to any totalizing or unified narrative.⁶⁴ Amelia Jones, too, approaches “body art” as “a set of performative practices that, through such intersubjective engagement, instantiate the dislocation or decentering of the Cartesian subject of modernism.”⁶⁵ This way of understanding embodiment assumes the centrality of the Cartesian subject and therefore, through opposition, is always reaffirming it. Moreover, for Jones, body art is “antiformalist” and seeks to invoke the avant-garde tactic of dislocating the viewer.⁶⁶ Looking at event-based practices in this way leads us back to the dominant art historical narrative of centre/opposition in which any art that is not formalist is interpreted as deconstructing formalism.

While it would surely be revealing to look back at Halprin’s event-based practice using Butler’s poststructuralist tools, I believe it is even more productive to look at Halprin’s practice in relation to Dewey’s holistic pragmatist aesthetics and its kinship

⁶⁴ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (Routledge, 1993), 2; and, Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Duke University Press, 2003), 3.

⁶⁵ Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 1.

⁶⁶ Jones, *Body Art*, 13.

with anarchist social theory. Unlike poststructuralism, Dewey's holistic approach does not privilege or rewrite the body as "text," but rather emphasizes the transactional and unfinished nature of embodied experience; anarchist social theory, too, seeks to negate abstractions of the self. In this dissertation, I focus on the historical moment when Halprin produced her dialogical practice, which was influenced, not by poststructuralism, but by holistic thinking.⁶⁷ Embodied experiential engagement was a crucial part of Deweyan aesthetics and Halprin's practice. According to this holistic approach the body is always in a state of transition; thus, it cannot be understood as purely individual nor as purely constructed. As Sullivan explains, "If bodies are transactionally constituted, then bodies are not lumps of passive matter imprinted with significance and meaning by an active culture. Nor are bodies sealed off from culture such that... they remain untouched by culture."⁶⁸ There is no social realm without the body; the social and bodily are co-constitutive. Consequently, the binary between body and mind or subject and object is collapsed into a holistic perspective.

Though I have eschewed poststructuralist theories of performativity and instead seek to uncover a holistic influence, my genealogical approach to history is itself a result of poststructuralism. I look at how concepts of autonomy, collectivity and subjecthood have been constructed through an analysis of key aesthetic and art critical texts and situate Halprin's training and practice in relation to the prevailing readings focusing on performance theory in order to reveal how the frameworks around her shape what we can know about her work. Although there were few published sources on Halprin's work when I began writing this dissertation, scholarly interest in her work has increased, and a

⁶⁷ Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 32.

⁶⁸ Sullivan, *Living Across and Through Skins*, 2.

number of studies from a variety of disciplines have contributed to the construction of a more comprehensive understanding of Halprin's collaborative and interdisciplinary practice.

The foremost scholar of Halprin's work is drama historian Janice Ross, who has written a comprehensive biography of Halprin's life and work, *Anna Halprin: Experience as Dance* (2007). Ross's biography is a rich historical source that adds a valuable analytical voice to previous published sources that comprised mainly interviews with Halprin or her own written descriptions and interpretations of her practice. One of the undesired results of a biographical approach to Halprin's work, however, is that it tends to reinforce the idea that she followed her own idiosyncratic path and was disengaged from the hub of experimental activity in New York.⁶⁹ Fortunately, Ross has also discussed Halprin in relation to the New York context in several scholarly articles, bringing her long overlooked interdisciplinary practice into view and establishing her significance, especially in relation to the development of Judson Dance and, more recently, minimalism.⁷⁰ Similarly, in *How to do things with dance: Performing Culture in Post War America* (2010), dance historian Rebeccah Kowal reads Halprin's events as a form of avant-garde defamiliarization that was allied with direct action-oriented social activism during the 1960s. Yet, placing Halprin within this milieu tends to reinforce the

⁶⁹ In particular, Halprin denies any influence from Cage: "I was not influenced by John or Merce, not one single bit. I just thought what they did was interesting and fun. I even asked them to teach here. But my influences were just being in nature...I was searching for a new way to move. And I had a very strong education in somatics... I was really looking to the natural world to find out how nature operates. And this is where my information came from. John's came from philosophy [and especially from] Zen." Anna Halprin, interviewed by David W. Bernstein, *The San Francisco Tape Music Centre: 1960s Counterculture and the Avant-Garde* (Berkeley: U of Cal Press, 2008), 230-231.

⁷⁰ Two recent examples are: "Anna Halprin's Urban Rituals." *The Drama Review* 48, 2 (Summer 2004); and "Atomizing Cause and Effect: Ann Halprin's 1960s Summer Dance Workshops." *Art Journal* (Summer 2009): 64.

problematic narrative I have been addressing.⁷¹ What is needed is a rethinking of the centre/opposition narrative that shapes how we understand artists such as Halprin.

On this score, a more productive trajectory for incorporating Halprin's work into the larger discussions of participatory and community based art has been undertaken in the field of cultural geography. Peter Merriman's recent article "Architecture/dance: choreographing and inhabiting spaces with Anna and Lawrence Halprin" (2010), places Anna and her husband Lawrence Halprins' collaborative practice within the context of the "American Bauhaus," which sought to rethink the relationship between the moving body and space, design and everyday life, and the audience and the performer.⁷² Reading Halprin's work in the context of collaborative community-based art practices is particularly productive because it allows for connections between disciplines and artists to come to the forefront. My study adds another perspective to these various interpretations by demonstrating that Halprin was drawing from an alternative aesthetic that emphasized embodied experience, participation and dialogue. The holistic philosophy underpinning Halprin's practice is an avenue for relating her work to that of other artists. I am arguing that her work was not idiosyncratic, but was part of a larger movement toward dialogue in art and non-hierarchical collectivity in life.

To sum up, my argument is this: contrary to contemporary claims, dialogical or relational art is not new but, rather, is an integral feature of modernism whose origins can be traced to the 1950s and 60s. I discuss this "undervalued" mode of practice and

⁷¹ See, for example, Rebekah J. Kowal's analysis of Halprin's *Five Legged Stool* in *How to do Things with Dance: Performing Change in Postwar America* (Wesleyan University Press, 2010).

⁷² Peter Merriman, "Architecture/dance: choreographing and inhabiting spaces with Anna and Lawrence Halprin," *Cultural Geographies* 17 (4), 2010: 427-449

examine how it manifested within interdisciplinary experimentation across the arts during this period, focusing on the work of Anna Halprin⁷³. I argue that John Dewey's pragmatist aesthetics provided Halprin and other artists in her circle with a "parallel" or coexistent rather than "oppositional" site for art's conception and production. This alternative aesthetic model was based on an embodied, holistic approach to aesthetic experience that was fundamentally different from the Kantian-based formalism of Clement Greenberg. Uncovering this aesthetic model matters, not only because it is a neglected tradition with contemporary theoretical resonance, but because it allows us to see that event-based art produced during the 1960s was not merely deconstructive: it also had a constructive social purpose, namely the modeling of temporary, non-totalizing communal experiences.

Chapter one introduces Anna Halprin to an art history audience by exploring her early training and her event-based practice in relation to the dominant histories of modern dance and the birth of the happening. The purpose of this chapter is to trace her interdisciplinarity to her early immersion in an approach to dance as a holistic rather than an individualistic practice. I argue that her approach is fundamentally rooted in two sources largely neglected by historical discussions of American modernist art and dance: John Dewey's pragmatist aesthetics and Bauhaus interdisciplinarity. I demonstrate that Dewey's notion of experiential engagement played a key role in fueling her desire to understand event-based art as an embodied experience rather than a performative event.

Chapters two and three analyze why Halprin's dialogical emphasis was invisible to the dominant art criticism and history of the New York high art world in the 60s and

⁷³ Ann Halprin changed her name to Anna Halprin in 1972. Throughout this dissertation, I refer to her consistently as Anna Halprin.

where her alternative ideas came from. These chapters are largely theoretical and undertake a genealogical analysis of the dominance of Kantian aesthetics and the historical development of the autonomous art object. In order to clarify the relationship between art, individualism, and autonomy, in chapter two I outline the dominant postwar critical perspective in which autonomous art was seen as an antidote to totalizing mass culture. The dominant model of collectivity coheres through discourse, which requires the individual to use fixed representational systems in order to communicate; the effect is that lived experiences become abstracted and objectified in the form of texts and images. The collective, thus, tends to be understood as a unified social formation held together through representational forms and systems that stifle diversity and, at the same time, comprise the visible public sphere of communal political identity. Artistic opposition to this kind of totalizing collectivity and its mass cultural expression tended to adopt either a formalist approach informed by critical theory, or an existentialist approach that emphasized the freedom of the authentic “act.” Chapter two concludes with an analysis of the primacy of these two positions, and their dependency on notions of autonomous art works with special “powers of resistance” to totalizing collectivity.

In chapter three, I introduce an alternative model of collectivity based on a philosophical concept of intersubjective identity and experiential engagement that, while it may not have displaced the dominant Marxist-based opposition to the totalizing collective, was especially influential for artists who engaged in event-based practices. This model of collectivity was supported by an array of holistic “field” theories, from Alfred North Whitehead’s process philosophy to John Dewey’s pragmatist philosophy to Zen Buddhism. In this chapter, I analyze two holistic theoretical positions that influenced

Anna Halprin: John Dewey's philosophy and Fritz Perls and Paul Goodman's Gestalt Therapy. Connecting Halprin's work to these holistic theories creates a richer understanding of the socially constructive purpose of her dialogical events and relates her works to those of other artists engaged in the creation of participatory events. I argue that the two models of collectivity outlined in chapters two and three were parallel, rather than oppositional. To support this argument, I enlist Richard Day's deconstructive analysis of the Marxist "logic of hegemony" and argue for understanding Halprin's practice as an instance of an anarchist aesthetic based on affinity.

In chapter four, I delve more deeply into the body's role in both resisting and creating collectivity. Embodiment was crucial to Anna Halprin's development of a dialogical practice and was a critical point of departure for event-based art in New York during the late 1950s. At the centre of art criticism and production, however, the body was ensnared within the oppositional model of the individual versus the collective and its associated binaries. I explore these two ways of understanding the relationship between embodiment and collectivity through a comparison of how Anna Halprin and Allan Kaprow both reacted to audience violence during staged events. I demonstrate that for Halprin, who pursued a holistic approach, bodies are relational and transactional; they are never actually fixed or discrete stable units. Instead, organisms and environments are constantly being remade. This approach resists a moment of resolution or finality, and this has substantial ramifications for developing a concept of non-hierarchical, anarchic collectivity.

In chapter five, I bridge the gap between theory and practice by reading the event based works produced by Anna Halprin through the lens of Hakim Bey's "Temporary Autonomous Zone." I focus on Halprin's engagement with what she called "mutual

creation,” and investigate how she explored the relationship between the individual and the collective through her audience participation series of 1967, *Ten Myths*. I analyze the ways in which Halprin’s events have been framed within the dominant historical discourse as either avant-garde performance or community performance, and I offer the dialogical as an alternative frame.

This study contributes to an ongoing discussion of dialogue and collectivity in art. It expands the scope of the discussion by introducing issues of inter-disciplinarity and by situating the development of dialogical art within alternative, anti-authoritarian thought-systems and beliefs of holism and pragmatist philosophy, which were preserved, expanded and largely disseminated from Black Mountain College during the 50s. It claims that dialogical art is not something invented in the 1990s, but is rather an alternative art form that developed within an affinity-based system of social, cultural, and political resistance to the dominant culture and the oppressive State form. Finally, it contributes to the reassessment of the politics of modernism and the emerging field of anarchist studies.

Chapter One

ANNA HALPRIN'S INTERDISCIPLINARY DANCE EXPERIENCE

In this dissertation, I offer a new point of entry for understanding the emergence of dialogical art out of event-based practices in which the experience of the lived body created a temporary site of non-hierarchical collectivity. With this larger goal in mind, the purpose of this chapter is to introduce art historians who might not be familiar with Anna Halprin's career to her work and to trace her interdisciplinarity to an early immersion in an approach to dance as a holistic rather than an individualistic practice. Her approach is fundamentally rooted in two sources largely neglected by the once dominant historical narratives of American modernist art and dance: John Dewey's pragmatist aesthetics and Bauhaus interdisciplinarity. Throughout this dissertation, one of my underlying goals is to demonstrate that Dewey's notion of "experiential engagement" played a key role in fuelling a widespread desire to understand art as an active participatory event. In order to begin uncovering this neglected history, I first explore some of the reasons why art and dance intersected during the postwar period by examining the emphasis on individualistic, authentic, embodied experience in both dance and art practices and criticism in New York.

While it is within the context of the open experimentation of the happening and the blurring of art and life that visual art and dance explicitly intersected during the late 1950s, there is a tendency within art history to pre-empt this merger by characterizing "action painting" as a kind of "dance" resulting in an object that is somehow more than an object. The most often cited intersection of modernist American art and dance is

around Hans Namuth's film and photographs of 1951 depicting Jackson Pollock performing his drip painting; a performance which art critic Robert Goodnough termed a "ritual dance."⁷⁴ Namuth later explained that he set out to portray Pollock's painting process as a dance, writing that "Pollock's method of painting suggested a moving picture – the dance around the canvas, the continuous movement, the drama."⁷⁵ Dance historian Roger Copeland argues that Namuth's film "demonstrated... that abstract expressionism was animated in part by a *desire to transform painting into dancing*."⁷⁶ This desire, Copeland asserts, "is an essential (if often neglected) component of [these artworks'] identity."⁷⁷ While this point is debatable, a shared desire for an active and direct form of communication that would resist totalizing collectivity lies at the heart of both modernist American dance and painting.⁷⁸ This desire was not only metaphorical; it was "alive" and expressed by the gesturing body.

For abstract expressionist painters, the gesturing body was understood to communicate in an "authentic" and primal way that would resist the mediation of shared textual and visual languages. In part, this understanding of the authentic body emerged from Surrealist-inspired notions that tied the physical body to the unconscious mind, notions that in turn contributed to Robert Motherwell's concept of "plastic automatism."⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Robert Goodnough, "Pollock Paints a Picture," *Art News* 50, No. 3 (May 1951), 60.

⁷⁵ Hans Namuth, "Photographing Jackson Pollock," in *Pollock Painting*, Barbara Rose, ed (New York: Agrinde, 1978), np.

⁷⁶ Roger Copeland, *Merce Cunningham* (London: Routledge, 2004), 54 (italics original).

⁷⁷ Copeland, *Merce Cunningham*, 54.

⁷⁸ As Barbara Rose and Rosalind Krauss have both pointed out, Namuth's film framed Pollock and influenced how others read his work.

⁷⁹ Robert Hobbs, "Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism: From Psychic to Plastic Automatism," in Isabelle Dervaux ed., *Surrealism USA* (New York: National Academy Museum, Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2005), 56-65. It is important to realize, however, that Roberto Matta Echaurren was also influenced by his reading of John Dewey, as was Motherwell. There has been scant research on this topic; for one example, see Stewart

In general, though, body gesture was widely understood as a form of communication that existed prior to codified language; in this way it was understood as a site of freedom from socially and culturally constructed understandings of reality. As an art practice, dance was often tied to ancient ritual and characterized as an art form that predated both music and language.⁸⁰ Thus, for postwar artists body gesture, and by analogy dance, held an attraction as a form of individualistic authentic expression emerging from primal modes of communication and ritual.

In their attempts to liberate the body from abstracting forces, American postwar artists looked to the mark-making and rituals of other cultures, as well as the visual expression of marginalized people within Western culture. Writing in 1949, Robert Motherwell explained that “the rejection by the School of New York of prevailing ideologies... has led us, like many other modern artists, to affinities with other cultures...”⁸¹ The influence of the ideogram, for example, is evident in the work of Lee Krasner, Ad Reinhardt, Adolph Gottlieb, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, and Jackson Pollock, who looked to the semi-abstract signs of prehistoric First Nations cultures.⁸² By the late 1940s, however, Pollock had moved beyond the ideogram and the calligraphic mark to the spontaneous gesture, which, disengaged from the conventions of writing, became a direct record of the movement of the entire body. Although many

Buettner, “John Dewey and the Visual Arts in America,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Summer, 1975), 383- 391

⁸⁰ Helen Thomas, *Dance, Modernity and Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), 8.

⁸¹ Motherwell quoted in Stephanie Terenzio ed., *The Collected Writings of Robert Motherwell* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 61.

⁸² Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 83. Yet, as Art Historian Amelia Jones has pointed out, when artists linked the kinetic body to authenticity, they were invoking a universalizing concept that does not account for cultural, ethnic, or gender-based differences, but continues to privilege a “disinterested” white Western male subject. Amelia Jones, “Survey: Body,” in Tracey Warr ed. *The Artist's Body* (London: Phaidon, 2000), 20.

artists, Rothko in particular, described themselves as creating from “within” the pictures they painted,⁸³ it was Pollock who most fully engaged with the embodied process of art making. As he famously stated, “On the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can... literally be in the painting.”⁸⁴

Yet, it is important to be mindful that Pollock is not literally “in” the finished painting. As Rosalind Krauss has pointed out, it was Namuth’s film of Pollock painting on a sheet of glass that preserved and repeated this conflation of the artist and his work within the camera frame.⁸⁵ Pollock’s gestural movements seem to be embedded within the work, and in this way his movements merge with the object; the object takes on a trace of subjecthood. My purpose, however, is not to interrogate this confusion of the object and the artist, but rather to call attention to the political invocation of the kinetic body as a site of freedom and anti-collectivism – to the notion that the body is essentially *individualistic*. In contrast, the intersection of art and dance that emerges in Anna Halprin’s event-based work has its roots in a set of holistic influences that emphasized the *communal* liberatory power of direct embodied experience. One of the goals of this chapter is to point out how Halprin’s dance training and practice differed significantly from the dominant historical narratives of both the emergence of post-modern dance and happenings. This difference emerges more clearly if we first compare Halprin’s dance experience to the prevailing historical narrative of the development of American modern

⁸³ Mark Rothko, “I Paint Very Large Pictures (1951),” in Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz eds. *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art* (University of California Press, 1996), 26.

⁸⁴ Jackson Pollock, “My Painting,” *possibilities 1* (Winter 1947-48): 79, in Patricia Hills, *Modern Art in the USA: Issues and Controversies of the 20th Century* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2001): 170.

⁸⁵ Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1993), 301.

dance between the 1930s to 60s, which in several ways that I shall point out, parallels the shift from expressionism to formalism in visual art criticism of that period.

The Development of Modern Dance and the Liberated Body

American modern dance opposed the conventions of European ballet, with its focus on narrative, imitation, and prescribed movements, and instead emphasized individual creativity through interpretive and expressive movement.⁸⁶ Along with the American dancers Loie Fuller and Ruth St. Denis, the American founder of the “free dance” movement, Isadora Duncan, and the German founder of *Ausdruckstanz*, Mary Wigman, ushered in a period of modern dance that challenged the Cartesian privileging of the mind over the body by reinstating the body’s association with nature.⁸⁷ Duncan and Wigman were both influenced by the 19th-century revival of the body and its links to other cultures.⁸⁸ In particular they were inspired by Nietzsche’s Dionysian ethos – an impulse toward the wild abandon of intoxicating passion and sensory pleasures. Duncan called him “the first dancing philosopher,” and Wigman chose *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as the subject for one of her early choreographed performances.⁸⁹ As dance historian Melissa Ragona has pointed out, “both had a vision of dance as a bacchic experience that

⁸⁶ For an overview of women in the history of modern dance see, Christi Adaire, *Women and Dance: Sylphs and Sirens* (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1992).

⁸⁷ Thomas, *Dance, Modernity and Culture*, 8.

⁸⁸ Melissa Ragona, “Ecstasy, Primitivism, Modernity: Isadora Duncan and Mary Wigman,” *American Studies* 35, no. 1 (Spring 1994), 48.

⁸⁹ Isadora Duncan, *My Life* (New York, 1955), 80. On Wigman, see Ragona, “Ecstasy, Primitivism, Modernity,” 48-49. Wigman initiated the *Ausdruckstanz*, or expressive dance, movement in Germany based on her interest in Nietzsche’s existential body and her studies with Dalcroze at his Hellerau school, near Dresden. Along with one of her teachers, Rudolf von Laban, Wigman moved to Zurich in 1914 where they both engaged in Dada performances at Hugo Ball’s Cabaret Voltaire.

transgressed traditional western divisions of mind and body, of present and past.”⁹⁰ These early proponents of modern dance brought primitivist ideals of a liberated authentic body together with the modernist search for universal forms of movement informed by two rhythmic movement educators, Françoise Delsarte (1811-1871) and Emil Jaques Dalcroze (1865-1950).

Delsarte and Dalcroze both attempted to establish primary forms of movement which would free the body from dance conventions but also from cultural and social conventions. Such movements would supposedly be closer to the “natural” rhythms of the body, and in this way they would undo socialization and return the body to an authentic state. Delsarte, who enjoyed widespread popularity in the United States through Genevieve Stebbins’ publication *The Delsarte System of Expression* (1885), based his system on his own observations of human movement and breathing. Delsarte established a set of expressive stances and gestures that he claimed corresponded to inner thoughts and emotions; these were meant to be symbolic universal forms. His ideas influenced the American dancer Ruth St. Denis, who, together with her husband Ted Shawn, started the Denishawn School of Dance (est. 1915), which provided a foundational education for major American modern dance proponents Martha Graham, Louis Horst, Charles Weideman, and Doris Humphrey.⁹¹

Like Delsarte, Emile-Jaques Dalcroze was a musician and teacher who developed a system of teaching music through rhythmic movement, known as eurhythmics. He derived his approach from the ancient Greek ideal that an artistic spirit

⁹⁰ Ragona, “Ecstasy, Primitivism, Modernity,” 47.

⁹¹ In 1914 Ruth St. Denis and her husband Ted Shawn formed the Denishawn Dance Company and founded a school in Los Angeles a year later. Thomas, *Dance, Modernity, and Culture*, 24.

should be expressed through the body rather than the linguistically-oriented mind.⁹² One of the results of his method, he wrote, was “to put the completely developed faculties of the individual at the service of art and to give the latter the most subtle and complete of interpreters – the human body.”⁹³ In 1910, he founded a school in the Hellerau suburb of Dresden, Germany, where students, including Mary Wigman and Rudolf von Laban, learned to produce “plastic expression” of music as they experienced it.⁹⁴ Wigman and Duncan galvanized the foundational tenets of the modern dance movement by uniting in their performances the theorizing of Delsarte and Dalcroze with the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche and, in the case of Duncan, a commitment to socialist politics. These forces – universal forms, existential freedom, and socialist politics – provide the early foundations on which modern dance developed.

As a number of dance scholars explain, at its epicenter in New York City American modern dance moved towards an increasingly left-wing modernism during the 1930s.⁹⁵ At this time, workers’ dance groups offered working-class participants the opportunity to engage in purposeful collective movement that enacted freedom and, as Mark Franko states, “transformed labor and its product into a sensuous experience rather

⁹² Emile-Jaques Dalcroze, *The Eurythmics of Jaques Dalcroze*, (Widside Press, 2007).

⁹³ Dalcroze, *The Eurythmics of Jaques Dalcroze*, 8.

⁹⁴ Along with one of her teachers, Rudolf von Laban, Wigman moved to Zurich in 1914 where they both engaged in Dada performances at Hugo Ball’s Cabaret Voltaire. See, Melissa Ragona, “Ecstasy, Primitivism, Modernity: Isadora Duncan and Mary Wigman,” *American Studies* 35, no. 1 (Spring 1994), 48.

⁹⁵ See for example, Ramsay Bert, *Alien Bodies* (Routledge, 1998), 125; Mark Franko, *The Work of Dance: Labor, Movement, and Identity in the 1930s* (Connecticut: Wesleyan U Press, 2002), 8; Ellen Graff, *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942* (Duke University Press, 1997); and Rebekah J. Kowal, *How to do things with Dance: Performing Change in Postwar America* (Wesleyan University Press, 2010).

than a commodity.”⁹⁶ The spirit of the revolutionary dance movement is encapsulated in the directness of the New York City Workers Dance League’s slogan: “Dance is a Weapon in the Revolutionary Class Struggle.”⁹⁷ Accordingly, their choreography emphasized the group rather than the solo dancer, and content was largely social rather than personal.⁹⁸ From the late 1930s onward, however, American modern dance was developing a hierarchy of genres that separated theatrical dance from social issues.⁹⁹ A number of dance scholars agree that dance critic John Martin can be credited with helping to construct genre divisions between modern dance as high art and modern dance as a socially informed practice through his critical commentary in *The New York Times*, his lectures at the New School for Social Research (1931-38), and his foundational book *The Modern Dance* (1933). In response to a performance by the Workers Dance League, Martin cautioned, “To use art as a weapon, it is essential to see that first of all you have caught your art.”¹⁰⁰ He criticized the Dance League for its ideological purpose in promoting partisan politics, and, in this way, supported a more general shift in the arts away from collectivism and toward individualism.

In the late 1930s modern dance moved from a left-wing critical modernism to a largely formalist model.¹⁰¹ Martin’s theorizing about dance, though more focused on expression, resembles Clement Greenberg’s codification of modernism in which each of

⁹⁶ Mark Franko, *The Work of Dance: Labor, Movement, and Identity in the 1930s* (Connecticut: Wesleyan U Press, 2002), 2.

⁹⁷ Ellen Graff, *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942* (Duke University Press, 1997), 7.

⁹⁸ Graff, *Stepping Left*, 15.

⁹⁹ Franko, *The Work of Dance*, 8.

¹⁰⁰ John Martin, “Success Scored by Dance League,” *New York Times*, December 24, 1934.

¹⁰¹ See for example, Ramsay Bert, *Alien Bodies* (Routledge, 1998), 125; Franko, *The Work of Dance*, 8; and Graff, *Stepping Left*.

the arts must strive for unity and purity within their respective mediums.¹⁰² “The arts,” according to Greenberg, “are to achieve concreteness, ‘purity,’ by becoming ‘abstract’ or nonfigurative.”¹⁰³ For dance, this entailed making the “literal essence of its medium” – movement – its content. Martin understood modern dance as a combination of form and expression that communicates directly with the viewer through abstracted movement and gesture. As he explained, modern dance is neither illusionistic nor self-expressive; “it is not interested in the spectacle, but in the communication of emotional experiences – intuitive perceptions, elusive truths – which cannot be communicated in reasoned terms or reduced to mere statement of fact.”¹⁰⁴ Indeed, like abstract expressionist painting, modern dance required a “sensitive” and informed viewer “to fill in the space and complete the form.”¹⁰⁵ Both gestural abstract painting and dance were understood as communicating directly and authentically with the viewer; according to Martin, the kinetic body of the dancer communicates its meaning through “metakinesis,” a form of kinetic empathy experienced by the spectator.¹⁰⁶ In this way, watching and performing becomes a unified experience when the viewer feels a kind of “inner mimesis” with the actions of the dancer -- a topic I will return to in chapter four.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Dance historians who have used Greenberg’s aesthetic position as a foundation for theorizing including, Marshall Cohen, Roger Copeland, Stephanie Jordan and Sally Banes.

¹⁰³ Clement Greenberg, “Sculpture in Our Times,” *Arts Magazine* 32 (June 1958): 22.

¹⁰⁴ John Martin, “The Dance” in Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen eds. *What is Dance?: Readings in Theory and Criticism* (Oxford University Press, 1983), 22.

¹⁰⁵ Martin, “The Dance,” 27.

¹⁰⁶ John Martin, *The Modern Dance* (Dance Horizons Incorporated, 1965), 13.

¹⁰⁷ John Martin developed the notion of metakinesis from his understanding of philosopher Theodor Lipps’ theory of “Einfühlung” in which one can experience virtual movement through empathetic “inner mimesis”. While watching a dance or a sport, one identifies the movements of the player with one’s own body memory and then projects those sensations onto what one sees. For Martin, metakinesis was simply a fact. His acceptance of this form of primal embodied communication both essentializes and universalizes human experience. I discuss this in greater detail in chapter four. For more on Theodore Lipps and how his concepts relate to art see Arnold Berleant, *Art and Engagement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press,

Martin particularly promoted the work of Denishawn trained dancer Martha Graham, who had moved away from the “ornamental” dance style of Ruth St. Denis to produce a starkly abstracted style of movement with angular body positions and jarring rhythms.¹⁰⁸ Her dancing was presented as a way to activate the audience through formal innovation rather than as entertainment; in this way, modernist dance practice, like abstract painting of the same era, opposed mass culture. Graham and other Denishawn trained dancers, such as Doris Humphrey and Charles Weideman, used their simplified “pure” movements to express what they understood as “universal” thematic concerns that increasingly appealed to mass audiences as well. By the late 1940s, explains dance historian Sally Banes, modern dance had become the establishment, and younger dancers such as Merce Cunningham began to move even further away from expression towards pure form.¹⁰⁹

Cunningham, formerly a soloist in Graham’s company (1939-45), ushered in a formalist, or perhaps more precisely a *concretist* phase of modernist dance in which movement – any movement – became the content. According to Banes, Cunningham began with the principle that “you don’t need externally expressive features to create significance in a dance when movement already is intrinsically significant ‘in its bones.’”¹¹⁰ Concrete dance parallels the concretist approach to art wherein an object is experienced directly, as an object in and of itself, rather than interpreted. For example, in Fluxus artist George Brecht’s *Solo for Violin, Viola or Cello*, the instrument is polished

1991), 17; and, on Lipps’ *Einführung* and sociality see Michael E. Morrell, *Empathy and democracy: feeling, thinking, and deliberation* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 42-44.

¹⁰⁸ Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers* (Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 2.

¹⁰⁹ Banes, *Terpsichore*, 5.

¹¹⁰ Banes, *Terpsichore*, 6.

rather than played. Similarly, in Cunningham's dance the spectator is not meant to interpret a specific message from an expressive gesture, but rather to directly experience its meaning according to his or her own present context. Cunningham's practice can be understood as both concretist and also as self-referential because he engaged with the traditional techniques of dance and made those structures part of the content. Cunningham's work, in turn, inspired a deconstructive approach that is often categorized under the umbrella term "postmodern dance" and which emerged within an atmosphere of experimental Happenings and Fluxus events at the Judson Church in Greenwich Village. With postmodern dance, the performance is understood as a critical commentary about itself and the expectations of the audience: the context of dance, in particular, is highlighted.¹¹¹ This approach is characterized as an oppositional form – referring back to the central tenets of dance even as it forces the viewer to understand that these tenets are constructs. It therefore works within the dance idiom. As an oppositional practice, postmodern dance is usually aligned with neo-dada and minimalist art practices. As Sally Banes has noted, a number of Halprin's former students and collaborators became immersed in the postmodern dance milieu that centred around the Judson Church, including Yvonne Rainer, Simone Forti, Robert Morris, Lamonte Young, and James Waring.¹¹²

Anna Halprin, on the other hand, was not engaged in an oppositional deconstructive practice, but rather in a coexistent, constructive one. As dance historian Janice Ross states, Halprin's dance-events were not so much reactions against the "dominant trends in American dance (as some of the Judson Church rebels were doing)"

¹¹¹ Banes, *Terpsichore*, 17.

¹¹² Banes, *Terpsichore*, 9.

as they were explorations of intersubjective experience that “wedded her work instead to 1960s social issues.”¹¹³ I argue that Halprin’s approach is grounded in an alternative understanding of aesthetic experience that parallels, rather than opposes or deconstructs, the dominant formalist approach. It emerges from a pragmatic understanding of the social role of the arts in Deweyan philosophy and Bauhaus principles, which later encouraged her adaptation of Gestalt therapy in participatory events. Here, I provide an introduction to Halprin’s interdisciplinary practice, first by highlighting the influence of pragmatism and holism on her early dance training, and second by positioning her practice in relation to the emergence of the Happening at the hub of high art and dance production in New York. It should be noted (and it will soon become obvious) that this is not a comprehensive biographical overview; indeed, Anna Halprin, dance historian Janice Ross, and movement artists Libby Worth and Helen Poynor have all provided rich and detailed biographical information in other sources.¹¹⁴ I am isolating the holistic approach evident in both Deweyan philosophy and Bauhaus interdisciplinarity and relating this to Halprin’s own focus on collaboration and dialogue.

Dance as Experience: A Holistic Approach

Anna Halprin’s adult dance training began in 1938 with pioneering dance educator Margaret H’Doubler at the University of Wisconsin. H’Doubler was foremost an

¹¹³ Janice Ross, “Anna Halprin and the 1960s: Acting in the Gap between the Personal, the Public, and the Political,” Sally Banes ed., *Reinventing Dance in the 1960s: Everything was Possible*, (University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 45.

¹¹⁴ See Janice Ross, *Anna Halprin : Experience as Dance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); and Libby Worth and Helen Poynor, *Anna Halprin* (London: Routledge, 2004).

educator and not a professionally trained dancer. Unlike many other dance teachers of the time who trained the body for performance, she emphasized embodied experience of movement as a form of holistic education.¹¹⁵ Traditional dance instruction focused on the idea that the body is an instrument controlled and trained by the mind. In contrast, H'Doubler taught her students that experience should take precedence over performance. "Too often," she wrote, "the tendency is to center dance education in performance, with the emphasis on technical skill, instead of studying the subject as a whole and using creative motor experience as the basis of instruction."¹¹⁶ From her perspective, everyone could learn to dance and everyone could benefit from the experience.¹¹⁷ H'Doubler's teaching profoundly influenced Halprin's own privileging of the somatic over the performative in dance.

As Janice Ross points out, H'Doubler was influenced by the pragmatist philosophy and progressive educational teachings of John Dewey, in which embodied experience and participation were seen as foundational to learning.¹¹⁸ H'Doubler had attended Dewey's seminar on "Democracy and Education" at Teachers College, Columbia University in 1916, and the influence of *Art as Experience* (1934) can be seen clearly in her own work, *Dance: A Creative Art Experience* (1940), in which she characterized dance as an educational tool, an embodied experience, and a democratic art

¹¹⁵ H'Doubler, though not well known today outside the field of dance, provided the foundational education for many dance-oriented physical education teachers during the 1930s. Thomas, *Dance, Modernity and Culture*, 111.

¹¹⁶ Margaret H'Doubler, *Dance: A Creative Art Experience* (U of Wisconsin Press, 1962), 64.

¹¹⁷ Janice Ross, *Experience as Dance* (Berkeley: University of Cal Press, 2007), 28.

¹¹⁸ Ross, *Experience as Dance*, 28.

activity with a social purpose.¹¹⁹ The basis for any experience, according to H'Doubler, was embodied interaction; "the body" she wrote, "... is the agent through which we receive impressions from the external world and by which we communicate our meaning."¹²⁰ As Halprin later noted, as a result of her early training with H'Doubler and her exposure to Deweyan philosophical principles, "from the start I was into dance as an experience."¹²¹

To understand dance as an experience is to approach it as a somatic practice that heightens embodied self-awareness. For H'Doubler increased body consciousness was not an individualistic or narcissistic preoccupation but was rather, in the Deweyan sense, part of a holistic relationship between an organism and its environment that was fundamentally physiological at its root. H'Doubler was not alone in her focus on dance as a form of holistic education. Both H'Doubler and Halprin were influenced by Mabel E. Todd's notion of "ideokinesis," outlined in her book *The Thinking Body* (1937). Like H'Doubler, Todd's understanding of body movement was informed both by scientific analysis of human anatomy and a holistic approach to the "body-mind" in which the active body provides meaningful feedback to the whole organism. As Todd explained, "The correlation of visceral, psychic and peripheral stimuli, underlying muscle response, involves the whole of man. It is the very perception of nerves, viscera and organic life.

¹¹⁹ Ross, *Experience as Dance*, 29. H'Doubler explained that "one of the greatest values of any art is its power to carry the individual beyond himself into a broader world of imaginative experience and understanding." Margaret H'Doubler, *Dance: A Creative Art Experience* (U of Wisconsin Press, 1962), 164. In addition to the ideas of Dewey, H'Doubler also understood the social role of art through the writings of Robert Henri and Yrjö Hirn. H'Doubler quotes from Henri's *The Art Spirit* (Philadelphia, J.B. Lippincott Company, 1923), in which he explains that art is for everyone; and she also refers to Yrjö Hirn's *The Origins of Art* (New York, 1900), in which he explains that art emerges from the need to communicate. See, Margaret H'Doubler, *Dance a Creative Art Experience* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1962), 51. Janice Ross, *Experience as Dance*, 53.

¹²⁰ H'Doubler, *Dance a Creative Art Experience*), 63.

¹²¹ Anna Halprin, "The San Francisco Dance Workshop," *Theatre Paper no. 6* (1977), 2.

The whole body, enlivened as it is by muscular memory, becomes a sensitive instrument responding with a wisdom far outrunning that of man's reasoning or conscious control."¹²² Both Todd and H'Doubler emphasized the experience of body movement as a source of meaningful knowing that is largely unconscious, and which could provide social benefits; "Self understanding," wrote H'Doubler, "is the basis of understanding other selves."¹²³

Like the proponents of the earlier "free dance" movement, H'Doubler, too, saw the social utility of dance as originating in primitive society and continuing on in folk dances that allow for "full play without any premium on formal technique."¹²⁴ Reiterating a commonly held belief, she wrote, "It is in the life of primitive society that we recognize the tremendous power of dance as a socializing force."¹²⁵ As noted above, in the United States during the 1930s, this notion of dance as a site of freedom was combined with socialist principles in the Federal Theater Project, which supported actors and dancers as workers expressing working-class values. Indeed, Mark Franko argues that "dance became a central cultural practice of the radical decade."¹²⁶ Moreover, during this period, modern dance had a "significant amateur infrastructure" which included open dance classes for working-class people.¹²⁷ Immersed within this context, H'Doubler proclaimed, "We have an army of young enthusiasts – students, dance groups, dance artists and

¹²² Mabel E. Todd, *The Thinking Body: A study of the balancing forces of Dynamic Man* (A Dance Horizons Book Princeton Book Publishers, 1980; first published by Paul B. Hoeber Inc., 1937), 3.

¹²³ H'Doubler, *Dance, A Creative Art Experience*, xxvii.

¹²⁴ H'Doubler, *Dance, A Creative Art Experience*, 23.

¹²⁵ H'Doubler, *Dance: A Creative Art Experience*, 7.

¹²⁶ Franko, *The Work of Dance*, 3.

¹²⁷ Franko, *The Work of Dance*, 3.

teachers.”¹²⁸ Halprin’s early exposure to body movement as a form of physical knowing and social development had a long-lasting impact and encouraged her life-long involvement in community arts, such as founding the Marin County Childrens’ Dance Cooperative in 1947.¹²⁹ It also informed her decision to establish the San Francisco Dance Workshop in 1956, which focused on direct experience, rather than a repertory company focused on performance.

This decision was also shaped by another early association with a holistic way of working that stemmed from Bauhaus principles. In 1943 Halprin met Walter Gropius while her husband Lawrence was studying architecture at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. Walter and Ise Gropius befriended the younger couple and drew them into their artistic social circle, which included Marcel Breuer and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy.¹³⁰ Anna Halprin sat in on several of the design seminars at Harvard and absorbed Gropius’ idea that the classroom should be an interdisciplinary workshop where students actively engage in the creation of their ideas. As the founder of the Bauhaus in 1919, Gropius had set out to reform art education in Germany by bringing all of the art disciplines into relation with one another. Bauhaus students enrolled in workshops as apprentices to a master teacher; however, cooperation and collectivity were stressed above notions of individualism. These goals of interdisciplinary cooperative association were modeled on similar reform experiments undertaken by Russian Constructivists at INKhUK, with the expectation that a new concept of cooperative artistic creation would help construct a

¹²⁸ H’Doubler, *Dance: A Creative Art Experience*, 7.

¹²⁹ Libby Worth and Helen Poynor, *Anna Halprin* (London: Routledge, 2004), 7.

¹³⁰ Ross, *Experience as Dance*, 59.

new cooperative society.¹³¹ Bauhaus design concepts involved both social imperatives and the notion of *gestalt*, or holism, in which spaces, structures, and the objects within them work together to create a “total environment.” Such basic gestalt values are evident in Halprin’s early experiments with space and improvised movement.

In 1943, for example, she put the Bauhaus principles she had gleaned from the School of Design to use, teaching an intensive summer course for dance educators -- “Visual Design and Dance” — at the New Hampshire home of dance patron and educator Barbara Mettler.¹³² “I was influenced by the way the designers worked,” she recalled, “ so first I did an analysis of space based on the influence of the Harvard School of Design, and then I designed this course for dancers.”¹³³ At the request of Gropius, she gave a lecture to the Harvard Design School on “Dance and Architecture,” in which she emphasized the relationship between body movement and space.¹³⁴ The following fall, she began a series of evening dance classes for architecture students in her studio, where she had the designers build environments out of found materials and then physically experience these constructed spaces by moving in and around them. Through this early use of Bauhaus concepts of interdisciplinarity and holism, Halprin increasingly sought to create a “total experience” akin to Oscar Schlemmer’s concept of “total theatre.” Schlemmer saw the Bauhaus theatre as a unified synthesis of all the arts – in particular architecture and movement – that would revive the audience’s desire for play and

¹³¹ Gunter Berghaus, *Theatre, Performance, and the Historical Avant-Garde* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 191.

¹³² Ross, *Experience as Dance*, 59. Barbara Mettler had trained with Mary Wigman and later went on to explore dance improvisation beginning in 1952 when she established a dance studio in Tuscon, Arizona. Barbara Mettler, *Group Dance Improvisations* (Tuscon Arizona: Mettler Publications, 1975).

¹³³ Anna Halprin quoted in Ross, *Experience as Dance*, 59.

¹³⁴ Anna Halprin, “Dance and Architecture,” n.d. Anna Halprin Papers, San Francisco Museum of Performance and Design, 11 (62).

creativity. Although Halprin specifically refers to Schlemmer's theatre experiments as an inspiration for her own interdisciplinary practices, it is best to understand this in the general sense noted above rather than in specific terms. For example, Schlemmer's elimination of the organic body from the mechanized stage was not something she explored.¹³⁵ Halprin's combination of interdisciplinary collaboration within a workshop environment in which spaces were built from found materials and experienced through body movement was something she continued to explore collaboratively with her husband, the environmental architect Lawrence Halprin.¹³⁶ This ongoing engagement helped shape her later conception of the San Francisco Dancers' Workshop as a site of collective experimentation and improvisation.

After moving to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1945, following Lawrence's US Navy posting at the shipyards, Halprin met former Graham Company dancer Welland Lathrop.¹³⁷ Between 1946 and 1955, they formed a partnership, and Halprin immersed herself in practicing and teaching modern dance (fig. 1). Then, in the Spring of 1955, at the invitation of Martha Graham, she participated in a short run of an "American Season of Dance" at the American National Theatre Academy (ANTA) in New York City.

¹³⁵ Oskar Schlemmer, "Man and Art Figure," in Walter Gropius and Arthur S. Wensinger, eds., *The Theatre of the Bauhaus* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 25. Original German version: Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, Oskar Schlemmer, and Farkas Molnar, *Die Bühne im Bauhaus* (Mainz: Florian Kupferberg, 1965).

¹³⁶ See Halprin, Lawrence, Jim Burns, and Anna Halprin. *Taking Part: A Workshop Approach to Collective Creativity*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974

¹³⁷ Although Anna Halprin was indeed following her husband west, she also expressed her desire to leave the east coast in a note to a friend, writing "Now I'm glad I'm going to California – I want to be left alone... I'm not interested in acclaim – I'm only interested in creating out of the soil and the people a healthy, fresh dance that is alive and vital..." Quoted in Janice Ross, *Experience as Dance*, 60-61.



Figure 1. Anna Halprin and Welland Lathrop at their studio in San Francisco, 1949. Photo by Philip Fein.

There, she experienced a catalyst that led her to purposefully separate herself from the traditions of modern dance. “For two weeks I watched modern dancers performing,” she wrote: “something inside me started going dead.”¹³⁸ According to Halprin, the repetition and imitation she encountered in this showcase of modern dance left her feeling disconnected:

Something disturbed me. I noticed that everybody in Martha Graham’s company all looked like imitations of Martha Graham, everybody in Doris Humphrey’s company all looked like imitations of Doris Humphrey, all the dancers looked like imitations of the leading choreographer. I wasn’t able to connect. I felt depressed, discouraged, distrustful, and I knew my career as a modern dancer had just died.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Anna Halprin, “Discovering Dance,” *The Lomi School Bulletin* (Summer 1981): 14.

¹³⁹ Halprin, “Discovering Dance,” 14.

Although the dancing body is never completely severed from its lived values, through standardization of movement in choreographed steps and the spectator/performer format of presentation, the lived body is not just aestheticized but also objectified. This process is strikingly illustrated in the machine-like synchronized choreography of, for example, the British Tiller Girls or Busby Berkeley musical numbers, but it is just as embedded in any standardized and repeatable performance.¹⁴⁰ This would lead Halprin to ponder the problematic intersection of embodied subjectivity and the objectification of the body in dance performance. Her response was novel; rather than adopting an oppositional or deconstructive stance, she embedded dance in an approach to the body that was experiential and constructive. She emphasized the dancing body as a dialogical experience rather than a performative object.¹⁴¹ After returning from the 1955 ANTA performance, she ended her seven-year partnership with Lathrop and embarked on an exploration of dance as experience through her newly christened San Francisco Dancers' Workshop.¹⁴² To undertake this exploration, she returned to the somatic and holistic

¹⁴⁰ In his essay "Mass Ornament", Sigfried Krakauer famously commented on the mechanical body represented in the British Tiller Girl performances: "A button is pressed and a girl contraption cranks into motion, performing impressively... all the parts begin to roll, the waves fall into their cycles... Finally an inaudible signal brings the mechanical action to a stop, and the dead whole automatically decomposes itself into its living parts." As quoted in Franko, *The Work of Dance*, 33 .

¹⁴¹ With her emphasis on experience, on the surface Halprin's approach to the body has much in common with the existentialist concern for the authentic act. In accordance with existentialism, she privileged concrete experience over abstract thought and explored the concept of an intersubjective state of existence. Nevertheless, her understanding of intersubjectivity went beyond the notion of conflict theorized by Sartre, to embrace the Gestalt principle of the "contact field," according to which subjects are always in a process of forming in dynamic relation to other subjects.

¹⁴² Lathrop and Halprin met in 1946. He had formerly danced with Martha Graham's touring company and taught at the Cornish School in Seattle. During Halprin's partnership with Lathrop, dancer James Waring attended Halprin's improvisation classes, and Janice Ross notes that he took these ideas with him to New York in 1949 where he influenced the Judson Dance Group. Ross, *Experience as Dance*, 93.

foundations she had acquired during her early training with H'Doubler and her encounter with Gropius at the Harvard School of Design.¹⁴³

Initially, Halprin used her workshop environment to step outside of what H'Doubler referred to as “deadly conformity” – the repetition and imitation of dance styles that leads to the objectification of the body which Halprin had found so defeating at the ANTA performance. With this goal in mind she began to experiment with improvisation with a group of dance collaborators, including former students from the Lathrop years, John Graham, A.A. Leath, and Jenny Hunter-Groat, as well as untrained Bay Area poets, musicians, painters, and architects.¹⁴⁴ “I wanted to explore in a particular way,” she explained, “breaking down any preconceived notions I had about what dance, or movement, or composition was. I began setting up situations where we could rely only on our improvisational skills. Everything was done, for quite a few years, with improvisation.”¹⁴⁵ During this time, Halprin led a series of summer improvisation workshops on an open-air dance deck (fig. 2), designed and built by her husband Lawrence and architect Arch Lauterer in 1953, at the Halprin’s home in Kentfield, which were attended by a number of dancers and artists who would go on to found and participate in the Judson Dance Group, including Simone Forti, Robert Morris, Trisha Brown, Yvonne Rainer, and composer La Monte Young.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Ross, *Experience as Dance*, 29.

¹⁴⁴ Anna Halprin, quoted in “Three Decades of Transformational Dance,” Rachel Kaplan ed., *Moving Toward Life: Five Decades of Transformational Dance* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1995), 6.

¹⁴⁵ Anna Halprin quoted in Rainer interview, Kaplan ed., *Moving Toward Life*, 77.

¹⁴⁶ Janice Ross, “Anna Halprin’s Urban Rituals,” *The Drama Review* 48, 2 (Summer 2004), 51. More recently, Ross has linked Halprin’s workshops to the emergence of minimalist dance and art; see Ross, “Atomizing Cause and Effect: Ann Halprin’s 1960s Summer Dance Workshops,” *Art Journal* (Summer 2009): 64.



Figure 2. A. A. Leath, Anna Halprin, and Simone Forti on the dance deck, Kentfield, California, 1954. Photo by Warner Jepson.

Through improvisation, Halprin began to develop what she called “dance-dialogues,” which can be seen emerging in early works such as *The Flowerburger: a Dance Dialogue for Three People* (1959). The dance was performed by Halprin, A.A. Leath, and John Graham, and it emerged from improvised actions which were restricted to sitting, standing and falling. During the piece, the dancers recited random lines from three poems by the anarchist poet Richard Brautigan, with whom Halprin began collaborating in the late 50s. Several reviews provide a picture of how the event typically unfolded. The three dancers would enter the performance area from within the audience: Halprin entered dragging a suitcase; Leath, who was already sitting with the audience, stood up; and Graham staggered into the area wearing a baggy overcoat. The three became more and more interactive with each other as they boisterously moved toward the

stage – pushing, shoving and shouting. During the first performance in San Francisco, the audience was implicated in the actions through their proximity; for example, some audience members were stepped on or pushed out of the way.¹⁴⁷ Once on stage, the dancers dragged chairs around, knocking them over and bumping into each other while becoming increasingly entangled in both the chairs and each other's clothing. In the San Francisco (1959-60) and Vancouver (1961) performances, the audiences reacted by shouting back at the dancers, at which point the performers temporarily collapsed into static postures and gazed back at the audience before resuming their sitting, standing, and falling actions.

Alfred Frankenstein, theatre critic for the *San Francisco Chronicle* likened *The Flowerburger* to “one of the madder dramatic jests of Samuel Beckett indescribably performed by artists who are equally adept at dancing and the projection of spoken lines.”¹⁴⁸ Certainly, it had elements of absurdity – especially considering the humorous lines of Brautigan's poem, which states matter-of-factly: “Baudelaire opened up a hamburger stand in San Francisco, but he put flowers between the buns.” Yet, it also contains elements that would later emerge more strongly in Halprin's mature conception of “mutual creation,” including collaboration, improvisation, and audience participation. For example, when the San Francisco Dancers' Workshop performed this dance at the Festival of Contemporary Arts in Vancouver, BC, in 1961, they prefaced it with a lunchtime participation event in which the audience was encouraged to improvise various

¹⁴⁷ In at least two of the performances of this “dance” in San Francisco (1959) and Vancouver (1961) this jostling of the audience drove many to leave the performance. For more on this event see, Ross, *Experience*, 138-139.

¹⁴⁸ Alfred Frankenstein quoted in *Festival of the Contemporary Arts*, University of British Columbia, 1961. BC Binning Fonds, Box 4 File 1, UBC.

noises while the performers moved on stage. *The Province* newspaper noted the enthusiasm of the audience in a brief description: “the audience was clapping, stamping, whistling, making whshshing noises, breathing through harmonicas and eating lunch.”¹⁴⁹

Halprin’s exploration of improvisation extended to her interdisciplinary collaborative work on multimedia events with several anarchist-pacifist Bay Area artists, including Brautigan, poet Michael McLure, artist Bruce Conner, and filmmaker and poet James Broughton. As Broughton noted, at the time “San Francisco was still a very small place, so everybody in the arts knew everybody else.”¹⁵⁰ In his definitive study of this West Coast avant-garde, *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry and Politics in California* (1995), Richard Candida Smith argues that they forged art practices that were less reliant on the criticism and market forces shaping art production in New York City. A core development that emerged from this autonomy was a strong emphasis on the creation of interdisciplinary arts communities forged through interpersonal dialogue. As Smith explains:

The models for artistic communication were personal relationships and dialogue. ...Personal belief remained meaningless until it was expressed to others and received response. The desired end result of freedom was not the solitude of individual belief, but a strengthened because uncoerced collective agreement that took into account a greater variety of experience.¹⁵¹

California art networks and communities were not discipline specific and collaboration between artists, filmmakers, poets, dancers and other performers was prevalent. Art historian Rebecca Solnit notes, “What was important at the time... was the milieu, the

¹⁴⁹ Francean Campbell, “Audience Noises all part of the Act,” *The Province*, 10 February 1961.

¹⁵⁰ Broughton as quoted in Ross, *Experience as Dance*, 118. See also, David W. Bernstein, *The San Francisco Tape Music Centre: 1960s Counterculture and the Avant-Garde* (Berkeley: U of Cal Press, 2008), 268.

¹⁵¹ Richard Candida Smith, *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry, and Politics in California* (University of California Press, 1995), 141.

underground in which artists in all media collaborated and cross-pollinated¹⁵² In 1960, for example, the Dancers' Workshop participated in an interdisciplinary evening of art in Marin County that included dances by the Workshop as well as a poetry reading by Brautigan, an exhibition of artworks by Manuel Neri and Joan Brown, and music by Stanley Shaff and Douglas McEarchern.¹⁵³ Richard Candida Smith explains, "Sometimes these communities were geographically based, sometimes they took the form of professional associations, but most frequently they consisted of ad hoc networks of friends who supported each other's efforts to create what they hoped would be a new kind of actively engaged audience."¹⁵⁴

A fruitful collaboration occurred between the Dancers' Workshop and several Bay Area experimental composers who were involved with the innovative San Francisco Tape Music Centre. In 1960, at the prompting of John Cage, Halprin was contacted by La Monte Young who, along with Terry Riley, was studying music at UC Berkeley.¹⁵⁵ As Halprin recalled, she was intrigued by Young and Riley's improvised sound experimentation; "La Monte and Terry were like partners... And they used to come to the studio down here. We would improvise and they would improvise. Some of the things that they would do would be to use the glass doors and just run their fingers down the glass or down the wall, and they'd take chairs and [drag them across the floor] until you get these very challenging sounds."¹⁵⁶ As Halprin had been doing for a number of years,

¹⁵² Rebecca Solnit, *Secret Exhibition: six California artists of the cold war era* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1990), viii.

¹⁵³ Bernstein, *The San Francisco Tape Music Centre*, 268.

¹⁵⁴ Candida Smith, *Utopia and Dissent*, xviii.

¹⁵⁵ Halprin had met Cage in 1946 at the YMCA Annual Young Choreographers Concert in New York. Worth and Poyner, *Anna Halprin Routledge Practitioners Series* (London: Routledge, 2004), 8.

¹⁵⁶ Anna Halprin Interview, David W. Bernstein, *The San Francisco Tape Music Centre*, 230.

Young and Riley would improvise by using whatever they found in their immediate environment, creating sounds out of random objects or even, as Halprin noted, the walls themselves. Young, Riley, and the Dancer's Workshop collaborated on several experimental dance/sound events including the short works, *Still Point* (1960) and *Visions* (1960).

Through Young and Riley, Halprin was introduced to other experimental composers, and in 1963 the Dancer's Workshop moved to a studio space at 321 Divisadero, which they shared with Morton Subotnik and the San Francisco Tape Music Centre, as well as the Berkeley public radio station KPFA.¹⁵⁷ As David Bernstein explains, "During its five-year existence, the San Francisco Tape Music Center provided an ideal environment for a significant interaction between the counterculture and the West Coast avant-garde."¹⁵⁸ In a recent interview with Bernstein, Halprin vividly recalled the collaborative atmosphere at Divisadero Street:

There was a huge auditorium which we all used for performances, and a wonderful big lobby where we could exhibit our work. It was a facility that enabled us to do a variety of activities, which included having many guest musicians and guest dancers. I remember Julian Beck and the Living Theatre visited us, and we had events with the Dancers' Workshop and the Living Theatre. John Cage [attended] performances there, and sculptors [such as] Seymour Chwast collaborated with us. He would have us build an environment [in which] people [would] move. ...There was so much interaction between what was going on that there were absolutely no boundaries. What was popular art, what was fine art, what was experimental art all got kind of moved together...¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Anna Halprin, interviewed by David W. Bernstein, *The San Francisco Tape Music Centre*, 222. KPFA was a non-commercial FM radio station run cooperatively and operated by the Pacifica Foundation.

¹⁵⁸ Bernstein, *The San Francisco Tape Music Centre*, 2.

¹⁵⁹ Anna Halprin, interviewed by David W. Bernstein, *The San Francisco Tape Music Centre*, 223-238.

Interdisciplinary collaboration at the Divisadero Street centre encouraged Halprin to expand dance beyond movement to incorporate sound, voice, speech, spaces and props.¹⁶⁰ Like the artists working across disciplines at the hub of avant-garde experimentation in New York, Halprin understood her practice as a hybrid form. In keeping with this, she has repeatedly stated that she did not identify with dance as a discrete discipline.¹⁶¹ “I was at a dance critic’s conference,” she explained, “and I was referred to as doing religious dance. I don’t do religious dance! It’s not religious, it’s not political, it’s not therapy, it’s not anthropology, it’s not sociology, and yet it’s all of those things. I’ve come to trust that because I am an artist, and come from that perspective, that what I make is art.”¹⁶² Artists working across and between disciplines during the sixties pioneered immersive and interactive forms with the underlying ideal of radical participation in an ongoing dialogue about what it means to be human. This blurring of the boundaries between artistic disciplines culminated in the “art event” – more commonly referred to as the happening. Across the continent in New York, Allan Kaprow responded to this widespread florescence of hybridity by boldly proclaiming that, “Young artists of today need no longer say ‘I am a painter,’ or ‘a poet,’ or ‘a dancer.’ They are simply ‘artists.’ ... People will be delighted or horrified, critics will be confused or amused, but these, I am certain, will be the alchemies of the 1960s.”¹⁶³

In spite of the prevalence of interdisciplinarity within the arts, Kaprow’s vision of an intermedial, immersive, and interactive art was still subject to the disciplinary

¹⁶⁰ Anna Halprin quoted in Rainer interview, Kaplan ed., *Moving Toward Life*, 79.

¹⁶¹ Anna Halprin, quoted in Rainer interview, *Moving Toward Life*, 100.

¹⁶² Anna Halprin, quoted in an interview with Nancy Stark Smith, “Three Decades of Transformative Dance,” in Kaplan ed., *Moving Toward Life*, 24.

¹⁶³ Allan Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock (1958)” in Jeff Kelley ed. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life: Allan Kaprow* (University of California Press, 2003), 9.

boundaries imposed by critics and historians. Ironically, Kaprow helped to solidify these boundaries by placing the Happening within a visual arts lineage and explaining it as an outgrowth of action painting. As art historian Paul Schimmel asserts, Kaprow “played a pivotal role in positioning himself and his colleagues in the lineage of Pollock, Gutai, and the assemblagists.”¹⁶⁴ By his own admission, Kaprow felt caught in a binary that required either an alignment with the dominant formalist explanation championed by Clement Greenberg or an oppositional avant-garde stance, and his early theorizing tended to incorporate both. Kaprow’s article of 1958, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” along with his subsequent publication of 1964, *Assemblage, Environments, Happenings*, envisioned the Happening as an evolution of forms, from painting to assemblage, to environments, and finally to live events. “I developed a kind of action-collage technique, following my interest in Pollock,” he explained, “... the action-collage then became bigger, and I introduced flashing lights and thicker hunks of matter. These parts projected farther and farther from the wall and into the room, and included more and more audible elements... Now I simply filled the whole gallery up.”¹⁶⁵ Early on, Kaprow theorized this as the formal principle of “extension”— meaning extension of the field and frame of painting.¹⁶⁶ As the “painting” moved out into the room and filled the space with the objects, sounds, and sensations of everyday life, Kaprow realized that the audience must become part of the work in order to overcome the “cultural expectations attached to theatrical

¹⁶⁴ Paul Schimmel, “Leap into the Void: Performance and the Object,” *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-79* (Thames and Hudson Inc, 1998), 59.

¹⁶⁵ Allan Kaprow, “A Statement,” in Michael Kirby, *Happenings: an illustrated anthology* (New York: E.P. Dutton Inc, 1965), 45-46.

¹⁶⁶ Kaprow, *Assemblage*, 159.

productions.”¹⁶⁷ He downplayed the role of dance and theatre, insisting on the visual origins of the Happening; “our prime sources were visual, he wrote in 1965, “whatever non-visual outcome these led to.”¹⁶⁸

It was not Kaprow alone who reinforced the visual origins of the Happening. As theatre historian Michael Kirby noted in *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology*, “The fact that the first Happening in New York, and many succeeding ones, were presented in the Reuben Gallery – sometimes on the same three-or four-week rotation schedule that is common with art galleries – serves to emphasize the fundamental connection of Happenings with painting and sculpture.”¹⁶⁹ Yet, to this standard account Kirby added that the conception of event-based art solely as an evolution of painting “is based on a misunderstanding; ...there is a historical progression to Happenings,” he writes, “that is basically unrelated to painting, collage, or assemblage. And... is, by its nature, susceptible to a much wider range of influences than the collage theory allows.”¹⁷⁰ Kirby’s foundational essay traces event-based art to its precedents in avant-garde theatre, citing Futurist and Dada cabaret, Bauhaus theatre, expressionist and modern dance, as strong influences on the Happening. Importantly, Kirby points out that modern dance was “one of the most direct influences on Happenings.”¹⁷¹ In addition to John Cage’s collaboration with dancer Merce Cunningham at Black Mountain, Kirby also mentions

¹⁶⁷ Kaprow, *Assemblage*, 187.

¹⁶⁸ Allan Kaprow, “In Response,” in Mariellen Sandford ed., *Happenings and Other Acts*, 219. What is curious about Kaprow’s line up of influences – Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism – is that the first two avant-garde movements cited were largely engaged in politically saturated anarchic events rather than the production of art objects. This provides another example of how these movements were incorporated into art history through the objects that survive.

¹⁶⁹ Michael Kirby, *Happenings: an illustrated anthology* (New York: E.P. Dutton Inc, 1965), 11.

¹⁷⁰ Kirby, *Happenings*, 24.

¹⁷¹ Kirby, *Happenings*, 36.

the lesser known names of Anna Halprin and James Waring, as well as Paul Taylor who performed a number of experimental dance events at Rutgers University in 1957-58 which Kaprow attended while teaching there.¹⁷² Key participants in events and Happenings at the Judson Church included former students of Halprin's, Yvonne Rainer, Simone (Forti) Morris, and Trisha Brown.¹⁷³

Commenting on the ambivalent position of dance in the avant-garde milieu surrounding the Judson Church, dance critic Jill Johnston has pointed out that during the sixties many "dancelike" contextualized activities took the form of art Happenings and, likewise, a number of Happenings were performed as dances at the Judson Dance Theatre. "Dance quote unquote," Johnston notes, "was a leading conundrum of the day."¹⁷⁴ This is especially so because during the 1950s and 60s dance in the United States was a relatively under-theorized discipline.¹⁷⁵ Much dance theory derived from the Greenbergian framing of modernism in which the various arts strived for purity within their respective mediums.¹⁷⁶ This formalist approach was increasingly promoted in opposition to the expressionistic approach which, for Greenberg, meant an "exploitation" of the medium beyond its essence into the contaminated social realm of everyday life. Thus, dance-Happenings, or event-based dances, that transgressed the borders of the formal principles of dance as a medium were interpreted by a number of commentators as an oppositional strategy to deconstruct the institution of dance. As the artist Robert

¹⁷² Kirby, *Happenings*, 38. See also in the same anthology, Allan Kaprow, "18 happenings in 6 parts / the production," 72.

¹⁷³ Ross, *Experience as Dance*, 168.

¹⁷⁴ Jill Johnston in Sally Banes ed. *Reinventing Dance in the 1960s* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 98.

¹⁷⁵ Jane C. Desmond, ed. *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1997), 1.

¹⁷⁶ A number of dance historians have used Greenbergian aesthetics as a foundation for their theorizing, including Marshall Cohen, Roger Copeland, Stephanie Jordan, and Sally Banes.

Morris wrote in his “Notes on Dance,” from 1965, “...there is undeniably a need for a criticism devoted to focusing the problematic and the viable in recent dance activity... And it would be revealed, I am sure, ...that dance like the other disciplines is no less involved in a dialogue of self-criticism.”¹⁷⁷

This was true at the centre of avant-garde art and dance where self-reflexive deconstructive approaches did come to the fore; however, Halprin’s practice increasingly moved away from shock and dislocation towards an emphasis on the direct experience of the somatic body rather than the condition of performance. For example, when several of her early works received negative audience reactions, beginning especially with *Five Legged Stool* in 1961 (which I will discuss in more detail in chapter four), Halprin searched for a way to understand the relationship between the performer and the audience rather than continue to antagonize them. This search led her to incorporate Gestalt Therapy techniques into her workshop practice. Halprin met the founder of Gestalt Therapy, Fritz Perls, in 1964 through former dance student and psychologist Frank Baum, when she attended a group therapy session in which Perls’ attention to the direct experience of the “now” resonated with her own pragmatic and holistic approach to dance. Her work with Perls helped her to understand each art event as a collaboration between participants.¹⁷⁸

A representative example of how Halprin’s artistic practice departed from the self-reflexive formalism of the avant-garde dance milieu can be seen in her collaborative workshop-based events with her husband, landscape architect Lawrence Halprin. For

¹⁷⁷ Robert Morris, “Notes on Dance” Mariellen Sandford ed., *Happenings and Other Acts*, (London: Routledge, 1995), 172. Reprinted from *Tulane Drama Review* 10, no. 2 (1965).

¹⁷⁸ For more on Halprin’s work with Perls see Ross, *Experience as Dance*, 175-176.

Anna Halprin, dance was not an autonomous art form “involved in a dialogue of self criticism,” but rather an embodied experience embedded in social and environmental issues. The organism/environment relationship was emphasized in both her early Deweyan dance education and also in the Bauhaus principles taught at the Harvard Design School. These were sustained throughout her career, both in praxis and analysis, in large part through her collaborative working relationship with Lawrence. In a description of *Five-Legged Stool*, for example, he described her practice as “making theatre out of physical images in ordinary life, of simple occurrences and the most deeply rooted relationships between people.” He articulated the importance of embodied experience and its relationship to environment in holistic rather than avant-garde terms: “...she wants most, I think, to create an environment – a landscape, if you will, within which both audience and performers are part of the cast and the events are common to them both.”¹⁷⁹

In July of 1966, the Halprins, together with a number of other interdisciplinary collaborators including dancer Norma Leistiko, cinematographer Joseph Ehreth, set and lighting designer Patrick Hickey, composer Morton Subotnik and geographer Richard Reynolds, put their ideas into practice in the first *Experiments in Environment* series.

They produced a month-long series of workshops and field trips that brought 29 dancers and 15 architects together to engage in collective, creative, constructive events that involved experiencing a heightened awareness of the body and its relationship to the environment (fig. 3). These collaborative events took place in various urban

¹⁷⁹ Lawrence Halprin, “A Discussion of Five-Legged Stool” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 29, 1962, 3.

environments in San Francisco (fig. 4), as well as the Sea Ranch Community, designed by Lawrence, in Sonoma County.



Figure 3. Experiments in Environment Workshop participants, 1966, Sea Ranch, California. Photo by Joe Ehreth.

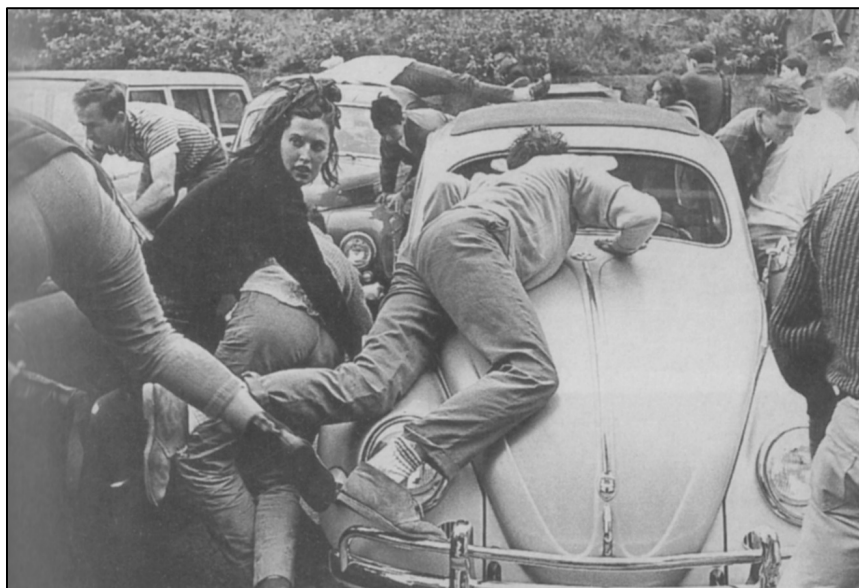


Figure 4. Experiments in Environment Automobile Event, San Francisco, 1966. Photo by Paul Ryan.

Unlike the happenings and events that took place at the Judson Church and Ruben Gallery in New York, the Halprin's did not stage their explorations in a gallery, nor did they organize it as a performance. Instead, the workshop process allowed for a collaborative and community-centred experience. For example, in one event, the dancers and architects were asked to build structures made out of driftwood on the beach near Sea Ranch. People built caves and platforms, "temples," homes, public forums, and other structures based on their individual and group needs (fig. 5).



Figure 5. Experiments in Environment remnants of the driftwood village, Sea Ranch, California, 1966. Photo by Joe Ehreth.

For Lawrence and Anna Halprin, the driftwood village was “a model of an ideal human city, a city which had a place for every human purpose. ...where individual diversities added up to a collective form.”¹⁸⁰ According to dance critic Jack Anderson, who

¹⁸⁰ Jack Anderson, “Ann Halprin believes the potency of avant-garde theatre increases when artists learn each other’s arts,” *Dance Magazine* (Nov. 1966), 57.

chronicled the *Experiments in Environment* series in the November 1966 issue of *Dance Magazine*, the driftwood village was an instance of bringing the “personal and the communal” together in an artistic process.

It is in such events that the holistic, community-centred, collaborative elements of Anna Halprin’s practice come to the forefront and can be connected more clearly to both holistic pragmatist aesthetics and Bauhaus principles. At the time, however, mainstream art critical and historical sources read such works as deconstructive of the gallery space, the divisions between disciplines, or the boundaries between art and life. In what follows I explain how the socially constructive goals of such event-based art projects have been overshadowed by the art historical tendency to limit their significance to either formalist or “oppositional” existentialist perspectives.

Chapter Two

POSTWAR INDIVIDUALISM: ART CRITICAL FRAMEWORKS AND THE EXCLUSION OF DIALOGUE

Looking back to the 1960's, Allan Kaprow recalled that for artists practicing event-based art in New York City there was no real way to “bypass the framing devices, perceptual clichés, and values of traditional modern art.”¹⁸¹ As Kaprow explained, neither the artists nor their audiences could escape the hegemony of stylistic aesthetics: “The philosophical sense of what was happening,” he wrote, “was unclear to most of us... Even if artists intuited what had to be done, the prospect of a clean break from everything in the high-arts world was not only frightening, but unclear in method. The Western tradition in which artists were trained, and still are trained, provoked none of the key questions; neither did it provide alternative models.”¹⁸² At the centre of art practice in New York, both the art market and the dominant criticism created a context in which artists, as Kaprow put it, “were always obliged to put on a show.”¹⁸³ Within these constraining expectations, anything presented as art tended to be critically understood through an individual experience of “disinterested” aesthetic judgment.

Yet, as argued in chapter one, not all experimentation with event-based art was contained within the “high art” world. In an interview with Richard Kostelanetz, Anna Halprin emphasized that her goal was to produce “a collective statement based on the need for audience and performers to be assembled; so that what occurs is a process that

¹⁸¹ Allan Kaprow, “The Real Experiment,” in Jeff Kelley ed., *Allan Kaprow: Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley: U of Cal Press, 2003), 207.

¹⁸² Kaprow, “The Real Experiment,” 206.

¹⁸³ Kaprow, “The Real Experiment,” 208.

evolves out of both the moment and all the people there.”¹⁸⁴ While she acknowledged that in many of her events part of the intention “was to remove any separation from life and art in a very personal and individual way,” she also made it clear that this took place through an unfolding process of dialogue.¹⁸⁵ In the following excerpt, she explains how she encouraged a “dialogical” approach during a series of events focusing on the role of the audience:

...the audience was given paper and pencil and asked to write whatever was going on in their minds as a direct reaction to what we as performers were doing. At the end of the performance we collected their responses and invited any of them to a subsequent session where their responses would be read aloud and organized into a script. We selected responses, put them on separate cards, indicated time intervals; then we decided that at the next performance we would select a person from the audience, costume him, place him on a platform, and have him read from these cards. The performers would in turn respond to what the cards contained as their directions for selecting whatever was to be performed. The person from the audience was called ‘The Mouth’. ...In essence, this experiment was an attempt to allow the internal process of creation to be shared... Audience and performer mutually evolved their own production.¹⁸⁶

What she describes is not the traditional avant-garde attempt to assert an individualist sense of alienation or dislocation. It is an inclusive dialogical mode of communication through the duration of process and the experiential engagement of each participant. For Halprin, as for a number of other artists who worked on the disciplinary and geographical margins of the art world, an autonomous art that relied on the individual’s aesthetic judgment to transcend the social body was untenable. Instead, she drew from alternative sources to create temporary, embodied, intersubjective experiences in which collectivity

¹⁸⁴ Anna Halprin, interviewed by Richard Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means: An Introduction to happenings, kinetic environments, and other mixed-means performances* (New York: The Dial Press Inc., 1968), 73.

¹⁸⁵ Halprin, *Theatre of Mixed Means*, 73.

¹⁸⁶ This description is based on a series of events taking place in 1968. Halprin, *Theatre of Mixed Means*, 64.

was understood as a relational mode of individuality. In her own words, “I want all the personal responses of my company members to be evident in themselves and also to unite into a communal experience.”¹⁸⁷

One of the goals of this and the following chapter is to explain where Halprin’s awareness of an alternative to the hegemony of stylistic aesthetics came from. I will explore the alternative holistic philosophical sources of her dialogical practice in chapter three; in this chapter, I want first to come to an understanding of why the dialogical approach central to her practice was, and has remained, largely invisible in the historical narrative of what has come to be known as “performance art.” I focus particularly on the ways in which art critics and historians initially interpreted event-based art according to criteria established by formalist aesthetics during the postwar period. As hybrid art practices flourished, commentators – Kaprow included – generally attempted to position them in relation to the analytical paradigm of formalism promoted by Clement Greenberg, or its foremost alternative at the time, existentialism, advanced by Harold Rosenberg. As Norman L. Kleeblatt asserts in the recent exhibition catalogue *Action, Abstraction, Reaction*, in America these two art critics “shaped and dominated the art history of the period.”¹⁸⁸ Though their positions appeared oppositional, both men promoted an individualist stance anchored by the emancipatory role of autonomous art and framed by a Marxist-informed argument against mass culture’s totalitarian drive.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ Anna Halprin as quoted by Jack Anderson in “Ann Halprin believes the potency of avant-garde theatre and dance increases when these artists learn each other’s arts,” *Dance Magazine* (Nov. 1966), 57.

¹⁸⁸ Norman L. Kleeblatt ed., *Action, Abstraction, Reaction: Pollock, De Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976* (New York: The Jewish Museum, 2007), 10.

¹⁸⁹ Although individualism was privileged, the individual tended to be defined and framed in opposition to a repressive and static collective. For more about this, see Thomas R. Flynn, *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

In order to explain how this set of interrelated frameworks led historians and critics of art and aesthetics to neglect the significance of event-based art's dialogical impulses, I begin by clarifying the dominant postwar understanding of art's relationship to the interconnected binary oppositions of autonomy versus collectivity, high versus mass culture, and representation versus experience.

Postwar Anti-Collectivism: Autonomous Art vs. Mass Culture

During the postwar period, the notion of a collective experience of art was negatively linked to a fear of both mass culture and totalitarianism. From 1939 onward, in what Serge Guilbaut has called “the de-Marxization of the American intelligentsia,” many American and Western European leftist intellectuals renounced the collective socialist vision and instead took up an individualist stance.¹⁹⁰ As Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette describe it, in the postwar United States “collectivism was portrayed as a colorless pastiche of state-run unions, collective farms, rows of indistinguishable housing projects and legions of look-alike Young Pioneers...”¹⁹¹ Such Cold War propaganda issued from a well-grounded fear of the “herd” mentality and the accompanying facility of “creeping fascism” in the collective form itself – indeed, Marxist critical theorists of the Frankfurt School who spent the war years in America underlined the dominating and

¹⁹⁰ Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 35. See, for a standard example, Arthur Koestler, Richard Wright, Louis Fischer, Ignazio Silone, Andre Gide and Stephen Spender, *The God that Failed* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949).

¹⁹¹ Stimson and Shollet eds, *Collectivism After Modernism*, 7.

repressive nature of capitalist and socialist collectivism. Fundamentally, this aversion to collectivism was part of a larger quarrel with the very nature of collectivity itself.

For this dissertation to properly argue its claims that an emphasis on dialogue was present, but critically undervalued, in event-based works produced on the margins of the art world during the 1960s, and that such works encouraged a non-totalizing form of collectivity, it is essential to understand that the dominant model of collectivity was, and continues to be, based on a definition of the individual subject as a static and finite entity. As art historian Grant Kester notes, “conventional models of community are premised on the concept of centred, self-identical subjects coming into communion through the mutual recognition of a shared essence.”¹⁹² This “shared essence,” Kester points out, can be seen through both positive and negative lenses: in its manifestation as “community” the collective “serves to honor and sustain a shared consciousness shaped by common experiences of life and labor.”¹⁹³ On the other hand, in a negative manifestation such as nationalism, the collective is “often established through an abstract, generalizing principle that does as much to repress specific differences as it does to celebrate the points of common experience.”¹⁹⁴

The vehicle of this “generalizing principle” is discourse, which requires the individual to use fixed representational systems in order to communicate; the effect is that lived experiences become abstracted and objectified in the form of texts and images. In this way, conventional modes of communication tend to manipulate and limit the meanings of actual experience – with often unforeseen or even harmful results. Avant-

¹⁹² Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 154.

¹⁹³ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 15.

¹⁹⁴ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 15.

garde poets and artists addressed this in their visual and textual works, and it became a particularly widespread and acute social issue with the rise of fascism in Europe leading up to and after the Second World War.¹⁹⁵ In 1933, for example, Austrian cultural critic Karl Kraus – an influential figure for a number of Frankfurt School theorists – illustrated the ideological tendencies of abstract communication in the following satirical portrait of Hitler’s propagandist Joseph Goebbels:

He has attitude and empathy, he knows about stimulus and impetus, application and implication, dramatic presentation, filmic transposition, flexible formulation and the other aids to radical renewal, he has experience and perspective, indeed both for reality and vision, he has life-dynamics and world-philosophy, he approves of ethos and pathos, but also mythos, he supplies subordination and integration into the living-space and working-space of the nation, he embraces the emotional realm of community and the vitalism of personality, he professes loyalty to kith and kin and international solidarity and favors synthesis...¹⁹⁶

Through such strings of empty signifiers, Kraus demonstrated that the very language we use to communicate is inherently flawed; as a codification of human experience, language masks authenticity with ideology. In a more explicit attack on the political susceptibility of such abstract language, George Orwell wryly explained in his often quoted essay of 1946, "Politics and the English Language," that "In our time... villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called

¹⁹⁵ For an in-depth analysis and discussion of artists’ engagement with the inability of words to convey authentic selfhood or to help us understand existence, see Simon Morley, *Writing on the Wall* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

¹⁹⁶ Karl Kraus as quoted in Edward Timms, *Karl Kraus Apocalyptic Satirist: The Post-War Crisis and the Rise of the Swastika* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), 527.

pacification.”¹⁹⁷ This abstract tendency was not limited to texts, but was widely exploited through visual propaganda as well. Commenting on the coercive use of representational forms, this time informed by an existentialist perspective, art critic Harold Rosenberg, in his 1948 article “The Herd of Independent Minds,” concluded that “communication means a formula, whether in the images of a work of art or in the rhetoric of opinions ...”¹⁹⁸

The notion that static individuals communicate abstract generalizations, which then forge totalizing collective identities through formulaic repetition, created a deep skepticism of both discursive forms and the collectives they sustain. Indeed, the dominant model of collectivity that prevailed throughout the modern period continues to complicate any attempt to conceptualize a non-totalizing collective experience of art. The propensity of the “abstract, generalizing principle” to repress and stifle diversity, notes theatre historian Baz Kershaw, has led to a condition in which “Anything that smacks of collectivism, whether in the ‘traditions’ of conservative thinking or in the ‘communes’ of left-wing Utopias, is treated with suspicion, so that sometimes even the slightest hint of ‘community’ becomes a disease of the imagination...”¹⁹⁹ Regardless of whether it is seen as a “shared” or “repressive” identity, the collective tends to be understood as a unified social formation held together through representational forms and systems, making it perpetually susceptible to ideology. It is this negative, and seemingly unsurpassable,

¹⁹⁷ George Orwell, ‘Politics and the English Language’ in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus eds. (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1968), first published in *Horizon*. GB, London. April 1946.

¹⁹⁸ Harold Rosenberg, “The Herd of Independent Minds: Has the Avant-Garde its own mass culture?”, *Commentary* (September 1948), 251.

¹⁹⁹ Baz Kershaw, *The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard* (London: Routledge, 1999), 192.

aspect of collectivity – characterized as modernist collectivism – that fueled the fervor of postwar individualism and the more specific recoil amongst some artists and critics away from the notion that art should engage in a collectivizing dialogue with society.²⁰⁰

In artistic circles of the postwar U. S., the binary of the individual versus the collective – and its accompanying prohibition of dialogue – was predominantly framed within the argument of high versus mass culture. Commentators tended to interpret the proliferation of mass culture as a dangerous downhill slide toward totalitarianism; in opposition stood high culture and its autonomous art. Cultural historian Andreas Huyssen claims that the concept of high culture’s resistance to mass culture was deeply imbricated into the very birth of Modernism. As he puts it, “Modernism constituted itself through a conscious strategy of exclusion, an anxiety of contamination by its other: an increasingly consuming and engulfing mass culture.”²⁰¹ During and after the Second World War this discourse was most comprehensively articulated by intellectuals associated with the Marxist-based critical theory of the Frankfurt School, in particular Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno. In the postwar U.S., Marxism tended to be understood as a failed *practice* because in its manifestation as Communism it repressed the individual; however, as a structural critical *theory* it played a crucial role in revealing the mechanisms of domination and subordination within the collective form. In this way, although individualism was privileged, it was also defined in opposition to, and isolated within, a hegemonic social order – a dominating collective identity perpetuated through visual and textual representations. Because both Greenberg and Rosenberg incorporated this

²⁰⁰ Stimson and Shollet eds, *Collectivism After Modernism*, 6.

²⁰¹ Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Indiana University Press, 1986), vii.

perspective into their art criticism, it will be helpful to take a closer look at the Marxist framing of mass culture and its antithesis, autonomous art.

In their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), Adorno and Horkheimer established an understanding of how mass culture produces the “culture industry,” which threatens to engulf high culture through conditions of uniformity and predictability. “Culture today is infecting everything with sameness...” they explain, “film, radio, and magazines form a system. Each branch of culture is unanimous within itself and all are unanimous together. Even the aesthetic manifestations of political opposites proclaim the same inflexible rhythm.”²⁰² This “inflexible rhythm” syncopates to the beat of the industrial machine and the military march. It replaces authentic individuality with standardized imitation. In such a rigid and oppressive system, Adorno and Horkheimer tell us, all forms of culture, including folk and high culture, are swallowed up and commodified as mass products, with the result that high cultural art forms become indistinguishable from advertising or entertainment.²⁰³ “The whole world,” they pessimistically concluded, “is passed through the filter of the culture industry.”²⁰⁴

Although it presents a bleak outlook, Marxist critical theory has provided a useful explanation of how certain kinds of representational forms – the stable, repeatable, and predictable texts and images produced by and for mass culture – function ideologically by masking the inconsistencies of social reality with the appearance of a logical, universal social space. Through the culture industry’s mass production of texts and images in publications, television, and radio, such representations are embedded

²⁰² Max Horkheimer and Theodore W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Edmund Jephcott trans. (Stanford University Press, 2002), 94.

²⁰³ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 120-167.

²⁰⁴ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 99.

simultaneously in the minds of multiple viewers to create an imagined sense of collective identity.²⁰⁵ This “imagined community” inhabits the social imaginary – an arena in which the images, myths, beliefs, and ideals that inform our cultural and political unconscious intermingle.²⁰⁶ The social imaginary is the realm in which ideological thought masks social reality through stabilized forms of representation, which in turn integrate and reaffirm a communal set of images that support the dominance of mass culture. Representation, then, is a key vehicle for the “social glue” (or ideological thinking) that holds collective identities together. Thus art, as another form of representation with potential for social critique, plays an important role in relation to the creation – or disruption – of collectivity.

If, following Adorno and Horkheimer’s argument, ideology relies on stable, repeatable, and predictable representations, then to counter it requires a disruptive form that would encourage the individual to see social reality from a detached position. Autonomous art – high culture’s foremost creation – was believed to provide a path to just such an estrangement from social conditioning. “In an age of repressive collectivism,” Adorno would later conclude, “the power of resistance to compact majorities resides in the lonely, exposed producer of art.”²⁰⁷ This notion of autonomous art as an antidote to the fascist tendencies of totalizing collectivity pervaded the critical thought of diverse commentators in the American art world of the post-WWII period,

²⁰⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 1991), 7.

²⁰⁶ For an in-depth explanation of the Marxist take on the social imaginary see, Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (MIT Press, 1987). For a historical look at the social imaginary see, Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004).

²⁰⁷ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London: Routledge, 1984), 321.

from formalists to existentialists, and helped to entrench the prohibition of “dialogue’s” radical potential.

Notably, both Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg reasoned, following the logic of Adorno and Horkheimer’s thesis, that if mass culture communicates through the common languages and symbols that reinforce an oppressive society, then autonomous art must avoid using those common languages and symbols. For Adorno, the key to an artwork’s autonomy was its critical relationship to the bourgeois social totality. The authentic work of art does not create illusion, it emphasizes formal experimentation: “A successful work... is not one which resolves objective contradictions in a spurious harmony, but one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure.”²⁰⁸ Thus, for Adorno, works of art that speak to society in its own familiar language strengthen alienation by encouraging the viewer to look no further than their cultural norms, which reinforce the conditioning of a repressive system.²⁰⁹ In this way, Adorno sees art as politically emancipatory only if it is non-discursive.

In a similarly Marxist-informed stance, Rosenberg echoed the need to separate art from social discourse in order to prevent contamination from mass culture. So insidious was this contamination in Rosenberg’s eyes that he claimed it had created “a mass culture of ‘individuals’ too.”²¹⁰ For Rosenberg, however, it was not through form but through the opportunity to act spontaneously that art could initiate freedom from ideological thinking. “Only the blank canvas,” he wrote, “...offered the opportunity for a doing that would not

²⁰⁸ Adorno quoted in Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Boston: Little Brown and Co.,1973), 179.

²⁰⁹ Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 184.

²¹⁰ Harold Rosenberg, “The Herd of Independent Minds,” 246.

be seized upon in mid-motion by the depersonalizing machine of capitalist society.”²¹¹

Drawing from both Marxist theory and existentialist philosophy, Rosenberg interpreted the individual artist’s ability to act in free will as a site of social critique; the resulting artwork would then dislocate the viewer from a familiar understanding of the conventional language of communication. “For the work of art,” he explains, “takes away from its audience its sense of knowing where it stands in relation to what has happened to it and suggests to it that its situation might be quite different...”²¹²

For Greenberg too, art had to maintain its autonomy from the social totality in order to preserve its transformative potential. In his often-cited article, “Avant-garde and Kitsch” (1939), Greenberg enlisted a socialist-inflected, formalist language in which “Content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art... cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself.”²¹³ In this way, authentic art is held at a remove from its social context of production and tied to “universal” values of purity and freedom. In contrast, he reminds us, “popular, commercial art and literature” is formulaic and requires only consumption, providing an ideal vehicle for propaganda.²¹⁴ Any art that defied formal purity by moving into the realm of social dialogue was necessarily contaminated by ideological thinking. Although they may have had differing perspectives and aims, Greenberg, Rosenberg, and Adorno each relied on art’s autonomy as a critical position. Autonomous art’s resistant stance, however, meant that it had no social function in the here and now. Adorno saw this as the only option, reasoning that “...rather than

²¹¹ Harold Rosenberg, “Action Painting: A Decade of Distortion,” *Art News* 61, no. 8 (December 1962), 42.

²¹² Harold Rosenberg, “The Herd of Independent Minds,” 246.

²¹³ Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” *Partisan Review* 6, no. 5 (Fall 1939): 35.

²¹⁴ Clement Greenberg, “Avant Garde and Kitsch” in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism: Volume 4, Modernism with a Vengeance: 1957-1969* (University of Chicago Press), 51.

obeying existing social norms and thus proving itself to be ‘socially useful’ – art criticizes society just by being there.”²¹⁵ Thus, art assumed a self-imposed silent opposition to the “inflexible rhythm” of the culture industry. Yet, as Marxist scholar John Roberts has summarized, in this way “art can only sustain its authenticity by defeating all attempts to render it a readily available shared experience.”²¹⁶ Art in this context must deny comprehension and communal transmission.

The emphasis on formal abstraction and dislocation in abstract expressionist painting, as a prime example, tended to produce art that only a select audience could understand. This is perhaps most famously expressed by Barnett Newman in his puzzling statement that *if* people could read his paintings properly, “it would mean the end of all state capitalism and totalitarianism.”²¹⁷ These are high stakes for the uncomprehending masses; if art is to have such political efficacy, one might question, is disinterested aesthetic judgment a valid means to achieve it? Indeed, why has art been overloaded with responsibility for human freedom? In order to make sense of these and other questions, I want to briefly outline the historical construction of the theory of autonomous art upon which this “non-dialogical” perspective is based. This will allow us to understand how art became the prime vehicle of individual freedom from the repressive collective and how it ended up constituting a non-dialogical means of attaining that freedom.

²¹⁵ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 321.

²¹⁶ John Roberts, “Arnold Hauser, Adorno, Lukacs and the Ideal Spectator,” *Marxism and the History of Art: From William Morris to the New Left*, Andrew Hemingway ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2006), 168.

²¹⁷ Barnett Newman, “Frontiers of Space: Interview with Dorothy Gees Sackler” (1962), in O’Neill, *Barnett Newman, Selected Writings and Interviews* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 251.

Autonomous Art: A Brief Overview

As philosopher Larry Shiner points out in *The Invention of Art*, the social role of art was not a point of debate until art production became an autonomous sphere and forced the question of its function within the larger society.²¹⁸ The ongoing argument between those who claim that art should be self-contained and those who believe art should be socially useful is, at its foundation, based on the same assumption that art already is an independent realm that has an external or critical relationship to the rest of society.²¹⁹ How did art come to have this autonomy from the social body – its special “power of resistance” – in the first place? And, furthermore, how could art’s autonomy then allow the individual to transcend society?

The answer to the latter question lies in the reciprocally supportive relationship established at the end of the 18th century between two different kinds of autonomy – individual autonomy from the state and art as an autonomous “subsystem” within the social totality.²²⁰ At this time, burgeoning Romantic opposition to rationalism posited individual freedom as the central value of human life, and artistic expression became a key source of that freedom.²²¹ Philosopher Charles Taylor identifies this as an overarching discourse of “expressivist individualism,” which created an enhanced cultural and social role for the arts and simultaneously provided the foundation for an array of social justice and liberation theories.²²² The idea that art and freedom are

²¹⁸ Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2001), 222.

²¹⁹ Shiner, *Invention*, 223.

²²⁰ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 24.

²²¹ Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 24.

²²² Taylor, *Hegel*, 21.

intrinsically linked is so ingrained in Western discourses of modernity that it continues to inform conventional understandings of the role of contemporary art within society today.

In its original Enlightenment formulation, the notion of individual autonomy from the superstructure of society was not a goal in itself, but rather a means of realizing a new democratic public – based on an ideal of ancient Greek Athens – where the social bond would be created through rational agreement about what was true and real.²²³ Essentially, this was a search for freedom from one (coercive and dominating) collective in order to create another (free and consensual) collective. Within this search for an ideal collectivity, the desire for individual authenticity played a key role. As Regina Bendix notes, “the call for ‘authenticity’ implied a critical stance against urban manners, artifice in language, behavior, and art, and against aristocratic excesses; it promised the restoration of a pure unaffected state of being.”²²⁴ The social role of the authentic individual was to create a new “Free State” with other authentic individuals. The idea that aesthetic experience could enable the individual to take an initial step outside of the existing social body was forged within this search for an authentic rational self.

At this time, a separate category of “fine arts” was emerging, both in relation to the above philosophical debates and as a result of institutional developments. Intellectual deliberation about what constituted the “fine arts” was part of a general reorganization of the established liberal arts system, which was destabilized by the elevation of the sciences during the Enlightenment.²²⁵ As Shiner notes, a diverse group of writers, including Denis Diderot, Moses Mendelssohn, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, and others, debated a set of

²²³ Jacques Ranciere, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 25.

²²⁴ Regina Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity: the formation of folklore studies* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 16.

²²⁵ Shiner, *The Invention of Art*, 79.

criteria – namely, imitation, genius, imagination, pleasure, and taste – with which to define the “fine arts.”²²⁶ Broadly speaking, it was the principle of “pleasure over utility” that gradually established the boundary between art and other fields such as science and mathematics, or forms of production such as craft work or engineering.²²⁷ Art’s defining purpose became to provide a specifically “aesthetic pleasure.” Equally important, as art historian Peter Bürger emphasizes, the emergence of art as a separate sphere arose in tandem with the development of bourgeois society.²²⁸ Understood in this way, art is a product of the growth of capitalist modes of production which divided formerly overlapping areas of life such as economics, religion, politics, and culture into separate realms with their own institutional frameworks.²²⁹

Most historians of art and aesthetics single out the aesthetic theorizing of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) as “providing the first systematic justifications for the modern system of art as a whole.”²³⁰ For both men, aesthetic taste was, above all, disinterested, and this separation of the aesthetic from any specific desire or purpose solidified art’s autonomy from the social sphere of production and its universality as a “sense common to all.” In his *Critique of Judgment* (1790) Kant laid out a foundational concept based on the rational individual’s judgment of taste. He began by connecting the separate spheres of “sense” and “reason” by way of “a middle term between [sense and reason]... this is judgment...,” which “is independent of all

²²⁶ Shiner, *The Invention of Art*, 86.

²²⁷ Shiner, *The Invention of Art*, 80.

²²⁸ Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-garde*, 24.

²²⁹ Jurgen Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Polity Press, 1992), 20 - 26

²³⁰ Peter Bürger, Jaques Ranciere, Clement Greenberg, are a few. See Shiner, *The Invention of Art*, 146.

interest,” and thus universal.²³¹ According to Kant, aesthetic judgment is free of all rules and purposes such as financial interest or the moral imperative of duty.²³² At the same time, however, the freedom to acquire the capacity for aesthetic judgment requires an individual have both the leisure time and the financial means to refine their faculty of taste – in practice, defining characteristics of the educated upper classes. Ignoring the privileged social status of his ideal aesthete, Kant writes that “taste can be called *sensus communis* with more justice than sound understanding can, and the aesthetical judgment, rather than the intellectual, may bear the name of a sense common to all.”²³³ In brief, for Kant aesthetic judgment was a universal experience that tied individuals together through rational agreement. Although Kant did not pursue it, the very idea of a *sensus communis* – at once individual and universal – opened the way for a potential relationship between aesthetic judgment of the autonomous art object and individual autonomy from the social body.²³⁴

It was through Friedrich Schiller’s *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1793) that this relationship was made explicit. As Bürger notes, for Schiller “it is on the very basis of its autonomy, its not being tied to immediate ends, that art can fulfill a task that cannot be fulfilled any other way: the furtherance of humanity.”²³⁵ Indeed, Schiller’s treatise provides many of the philosophical foundations for modern art practices that claim a social role for art. Schiller’s concept of “aesthetic education” preserved key

²³¹ Immanuel Kant, “III The Critique of Judgment as a means of connecting the two parts of Philosophy in a whole,” *The Critique of Judgment, Aesthetics*, (Oxford University Press, 2008), 76.

²³² Kant, *Critique*, 145-146.

²³³ Kant, *Critique*, 138.

²³⁴ Shiner, *The Invention of Art*, 147.

²³⁵ Bürger, *Theory of the Avant Garde*, Michael Shaw trans. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 44.

aspects of Kantian aesthetics, including the necessity of disinterested aesthetic judgment and the principle of universal taste. However, he posited that aesthetic perception is an expressive and active ideal rather than a rational and contemplative one, and claimed that art's autonomy gives it a specifically social and educative role to fulfill. Schiller's treatise on aesthetics articulated the Romantic notion that we are alienated from our authentic selves by a rational society and the only path to autonomy from that society is through the expressive freedom of art. Anticipating Adorno, Schiller reasoned that "If man is ever to solve that problem of politics in practice he will have to approach it through the problem of the aesthetic, because it is only through Beauty that man makes his way to Freedom."²³⁶ This is art's special "power of resistance" in its nascent Romantic formulation, which does not admit, pessimistically, to isolation but optimistically seeks an improved "higher" form of potential collectivity.

Writing in the aftermath of the French Revolution, Schiller came to understand the impossibility of eradicating a corrupt State by the force of individuals who themselves are subject to the limitations of that State. One of the key obstacles was that the division of labour had created a class society that alienated us from one another:

...out of the botching together of a vast number of lifeless parts a collective mechanical life results... enjoyment was separated from labour, means from ends, effort from reward... And so gradually individual concrete life is extinguished, in order that the abstract life of the whole may prolong its sorry existence, and the State remains eternally alien to its citizens...²³⁷

²³⁶ Schiller, Friedrich. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters*, translated by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 9. My primary source, Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: In a Series of Letters, translated by Reginald Snell* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1954), translates this as "...if we are to solve that political problem in practice, follow the path of aesthetics, since it is through Beauty that we arrive at Freedom. p.27.

²³⁷ Schiller, *Aesthetic*, translated by Reginald Snell (London: Routledge, 1954), 40-41.

Thus fragmented, the reality of each individual's concrete experience is perpetually subordinated to an oppressive collective identity.²³⁸ Nevertheless, as Kant had revealed, within each individual lies a potential for freedom that can be accessed by unifying sense and reason.²³⁹ Schiller posits that these are actually two opposing *forces* of human life: the "sense drive," which is physical and therefore bound by the constraints of time, and the "form drive," which is abstract and therefore eternal. These two forces can be united by what Schiller calls the "play drive."²⁴⁰ Indeed, the object of the play drive is to combine the two opposing objects of the sense drive (life) and the form drive (shape) into "living shape, a concept which serves to denote all aesthetic qualities of phenomena and – in a word – what we call Beauty..."²⁴¹ Thus, Schiller concludes that cultivation of aesthetic sense and the capacity for aesthetic judgment of Beauty will allow individuals to transcend their present fragmented social condition.²⁴² As Schiller writes:

All other forms of communication divide society because they relate exclusively either to the private sensibility or to the private skillfulness of its individual members, hence to that which distinguishes man from man; only the communication of the Beautiful unites society because it relates to that which is common to all.²⁴³

Schiller not only articulated the idea that man's development of an aesthetic sense would lead him to freedom, he combined this notion with the Kantian principle that only a certain kind of art – a truly beautiful art – could appeal to the "wholeness of man." "In a

²³⁸ Schiller, *Aesthetic*, 35.

²³⁹ Schiller is building here on Kant's notion that man is divided between sense (or nature) and reason. Reason provides man with moral unity while "nature strives to maintain multiplicity." Schiller, *Aesthetic*, 33.

²⁴⁰ Schiller, *Aesthetic*, 74.

²⁴¹ Schiller, *Aesthetic*, 76.

²⁴² Schiller, *Aesthetic*, 138.

²⁴³ Schiller, *Aesthetic*, 138.

truly beautiful work of art,” Schiller tells us, “the content should do nothing, the form everything; for the wholeness of Man is affected by the form alone and only individual powers by the content.”²⁴⁴ This is because content restricts the mind to particulars – it appeals to the limiting conditions of the individual – while, hypothetically, form can be appreciated on the same universal level that creates the social bond. In this way, Schiller linked universal formal beauty to a free “Aesthetic State.”

While this link between form and freedom would remain unbroken until the mid-20th century, the idea that an individual’s aesthetic experience could lead to the creation of an ideal public spirit had been problematized during the Romantic period by the rise of mass culture and consumerism, which produced its own cultural forms that appeared to appropriate art’s aesthetic role as a means of achieving an authentic experience.²⁴⁵ The crux of the problem was that most people were unable to distinguish between art and the products of mass culture; thus it became increasingly important to distinguish “authentic” art by making it less comprehensible to the masses. From this point onward, the defining features of autonomous art – the expression of individual freedom through universal form and its separation from the social sphere – were used to serve seemingly conflicting ends. Approached in broad terms one can frame this, as does Bürger in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, as a question of which art movements support art’s autonomy and which oppose it.²⁴⁶ In this respect, one can categorize late 19th-century Aestheticism and Modernist formalism as art movements that accept art’s autonomy and aspire to transcend society,

²⁴⁴ Schiller, *Aesthetic*, 106.

²⁴⁵ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 28.

²⁴⁶ Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 49.

and Bürger's "historical avant-garde" – including Futurism, Dada, and Russian Constructivism – as movements that oppose the separation of art from life.

As Grant Kester demonstrates, however, both approaches are merely two sides of the same coin. In the conventional art historical narrative, the formalist line of art criticism, from Roger Fry and Clive Bell's theory of "Significant Form" through to the postwar theorizing of Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried, constitutes the dominant aesthetic theory of Modernism. All other approaches, including the "historical avant-garde," are positioned as oppositional. Within this framework, explains Kester, works of art that "retreat" into formalism seek to reveal their meaning in an instant aesthetic experience that occurs individually and defies communal transmission; avant-garde art operates through shock tactics that destabilize the viewer's understanding of conventional systems of representation. Such works communicate didactically either through direct epiphany or an experience of dislocation; neither mode allows for an ongoing process of dialogue. Thus, the "historical avant-garde" is assessed as a failed attempt to merge art and life that is trapped within the same "counter-hermeneutic paradigm" as formalist abstraction.²⁴⁷

According to this perspective, the avant-garde's desire to locate the potential for autonomy in the realm of existence rather than in the mediating form of the aesthetic object has been interpreted as an oppositional strategy that failed in two ways. First, because avant-garde movements did not merely engage in deconstructive *acts*, but also expressed themselves through representational forms, they were seen to have participated in their own cooptation. Second, as Bürger points out from a Marxist perspective, their

²⁴⁷ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 18.

avant-garde “attempt to reintegrate art into the life process [was] itself a profoundly contradictory endeavor. For the (relative) freedom of art vis-à-vis the praxis of life is at the same time the condition that must be fulfilled if there is to be a critical cognition of reality.”²⁴⁸ In other words, an art no longer distinct from the practice of life loses its capacity to criticize life. The historical avant-garde’s attempts to integrate autonomous art into the practice of life were seen to have failed because, just as Adorno and Horkheimer later lamented in their *Dialectic*, the all-consuming culture industry brought about a “false sublation” of art. In the face of the culture industry’s “inflexible rhythm,” the role of art’s autonomy became simply to remind individuals of the *possibility* of a better, future collective. The only successful resistance in this context was a turn toward individualism and a resolution of purposeful silence. “In many respects a negative position to be sure,” the painter Robert Motherwell confirmed in 1950, “but not without its pathos or a kind of dumb, obstinate rebellion at how the world is presently organized.”²⁴⁹

Greenberg, Rosenberg, and the Hegemony of Silence

Thus, in the American postwar context artistic opposition to mass culture’s totalitarian drive tended to adopt an individualist stance, either through a formalist approach informed by Clement Greenberg’s Kantian aesthetics or through an existentialist approach, brought to prominence by Harold Rosenberg. Although they appeared to hold

²⁴⁸ Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 50.

²⁴⁹ Robert Motherwell, “The New York School” (1950), in Dore Ashton ed., *The Writings of Robert Motherwell* (U of Cal Press, 2007), 94.

antithetical aesthetic positions, both critics were informed by a Marxist understanding of mass culture, both focused on painting, both positioned New York as the art center, and both touted individualism.²⁵⁰ In the rest of this chapter, I will explore their two – seemingly opposed – arguments, and demonstrate how their art criticism, by privileging individual aesthetic perception as a site of emancipation from ideological forms, excluded any relevant consideration of dialogical engagement through art.

Most scholars would agree with Donald Kuspit’s statement that “the significance of Clement Greenberg cannot be overestimated.”²⁵¹ Greenberg’s art criticism has been so influential that, as Barbara M. Reise summed up in 1968, “everyone concerned with contemporary art seems to take some sort of stand in relation to it.”²⁵² As Reise explained, Greenberg’s role as editor of the *Partisan Review* (1940-42), his familiarity with Marxist thought, and his acquaintance with a number of New York artists enabled him to promote American modernist painting through articles that reached a wide public.²⁵³ As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Greenberg initially articulated his concepts in Marxist-inflected language; however, during the 1940s he increasingly moved away from this political affiliation and began to focus on establishing the necessity of a purely formalist critique. As Kuspit notes, the shift away from Marxism was likely a response to criticism that his writing expressed “sectarian taste.”²⁵⁴ By

²⁵⁰ Irving Sandler, “Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg: Convergences and Divergences,” in Norman L. Kleeblatt ed., *Action, Abstraction, Reaction: Pollock, De Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976* (New York: The Jewish Museum, 2007), 19.

²⁵¹ Donald Kuspit, *Clement Greenberg: Art Critic* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), 3.

²⁵² Barbara M. Reise, “Greenberg and the Group: A Retrospective View,” *Studio International* 175, no. 902 (June 1968), 314-16.

²⁵³ Reise, “Greenberg and the Group,” 314-16.

²⁵⁴ Kuspit, *Greenberg*, 5.

adopting a purely formal critical stance he was able to appeal more broadly to a wide audience of readers, and establish his “credo of the normative.”²⁵⁵

Fundamentally, Greenberg’s success in this regard rested on the fact that his criticism sought its authority in Kantian philosophy – in the absoluteness of art’s autonomy as perceived through a process of disinterested contemplation known as aesthetic judgment. Because his criticism was based in Kantian aesthetics it dovetailed neatly with the larger discourses of high versus mass culture and individualism versus collectivism, and consequently with much of the aesthetic theorizing of the Frankfurt School, in particular that of Adorno. Greenberg, like Adorno, inherited Schiller’s Kantian vision of art as the only path to individual freedom and emphasized the necessity of disinterested aesthetic judgment in achieving that freedom. As Kuspit explains, Kant’s notion that aesthetic judgment is disinterested and universal allowed Greenberg to “take distinctions intuited in the course of aesthetic experience as signs of a general consciousness of art.”²⁵⁶ This enabled him to develop a systematic set of criteria with which to analyze all art – first by limiting the discussion of art to that which “was unique in the nature of its medium” and second, by privileging larger conceptual patterns over immediate sensibilities. “Thus would each art,” Greenberg concluded, “be rendered ‘pure,’ and in its ‘purity’ find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence.”²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ Kuspit, *Greenberg*, 6.

²⁵⁶ Kuspit, *Greenberg*, 15.

²⁵⁷ Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” 309.

For Greenberg it was “unity,” above all, that made a work of art aesthetically successful and, thus, universally meaningful.²⁵⁸ Such ideal unity cannot be found in life, but only within the autonomous art object, and only works of art that make the medium their content can be fully autonomous.²⁵⁹ In this way, Greenberg was able to neatly divide art into two general and hierarchical categories: the “unified” and the “expressionistic.”²⁶⁰ At the pinnacle, unified art respects the boundaries of the medium, whereas “expressionistic” art tends “to exploit the medium beyond its resources and to bankrupt it, making it act exclusively in the name of the logic of life rather than in the name of its own subtle logic.”²⁶¹ Thus, by privileging “purity” and “unity” in art, and making these aspects defining features of autonomous art, Greenberg dismissed the assembled and event-based works produced by painters such as Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, and Allan Kaprow – commonly classified amongst the first of the neo-dadaists – as non-art. Because their art works attempted to transgress the “subtle logic” of the medium of painting, Greenberg, along with other formalist art critics, perceived them as having failed to uphold the autonomous status of the “authentic” art object and equated their work with the “failed” historical avant-garde experiment to merge art and life. Hence, the pejorative connotations of neo-dada, and Greenberg’s own “failure to predict and inability to discuss – or even ‘see’ – this kind of art.”²⁶²

While Greenberg’s allegiance to formalism denied him access to the idea that such hybridity might have its own contemporary resonance, an existentialist

²⁵⁸ Kuspit, *Greenberg*, 30-56.

²⁵⁹ Clement Greenberg, “The New Sculpture,” in *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Publishing, 1961), 139.

²⁶⁰ Kuspit, *Greenberg*, 42.

²⁶¹ Kuspit, *Greenberg*, 40.

²⁶² Reise, “Greenberg and The Group,” 314.

interpretation of art as an act of liberation, brought to the forefront by Harold Rosenberg's 1952 article "The American Action Painters," provided an alternate lens through which to understand the works produced by so-called neo-dada artists. Existential thought was not new to the postwar period; the writing of Søren Kierkegaard, for example, was widely known in American intellectual and artistic circles by the mid-1940s.²⁶³ The writing of Friedrich Nietzsche, too, provided existential underpinnings for the historical avant-garde. This is particularly evident in Futurism and, subsequently, Dada. In both movements a fixation on action and a critical attitude toward morality and universal truth bears the stamp of Nietzsche's call to "liberate oneself from many things that oppress, inhibit, hold down, and make heavy."²⁶⁴ Indeed, the artist Robert Motherwell recalled that Rosenberg's notion of "action as liberation" was indebted to a statement of Dadaist Richard Huelsenbeck, reprinted in the 1951 anthology, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, in which he stated that "the Dadaist should be a man who has fully understood that one is entitled to have ideas only if one can transform them into life – the completely active type, who lives only through action..."²⁶⁵ Such statements correspond to Nietzsche's claim that "We do not belong to those who have ideas among books... Our first questions about the value of a book, of a human being, or a musical composition are: Can they walk? Even more, can they dance?"²⁶⁶

²⁶³ Dore Ashton ed., "Introduction," *The Writings of Robert Motherwell* (U of Cal Press, 2007), 9. According to Ashton, Robert Motherwell, Mark Rothko and Philip Guston, as well as other postwar painters, were actively reading and discussing the writing of Soren Kierkegaard, which had appeared in a volume edited by W.H. Auden in the early 1950s.

²⁶⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Walter Kaufmann trans. (New York: Random House, 1977), 343.

²⁶⁵ Richard Huelsenbeck, quoted in Stephen C. Foster, *The Critics of Abstract Expressionism, Studies in the Fine Arts: Criticism, No. 2* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1980), 28.

²⁶⁶ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, , 322.

More directly, Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism, with its focus on alienation, anguish, and the absurdity of life, was introduced to the postwar American art scene through essays in the *Partisan Review* (1946), and his plays *No Exit* and *The Flies*, which were produced in New York the following year.²⁶⁷ Championing an individualist viewpoint in which freedom and authenticity are pinnacle achievements, existentialism was generally critical of bourgeois conformity and the influence of mass culture. For artists, existentialist philosophy offered a ready language of individualism that emphasized freedom and action. Art critic Irving Sandler recalled that "existentialism ...was the philosophy that most interested artists and critics in the late 1940s and the 1950s."²⁶⁸ Yet, as art historian Alfred H. Barr noted in 1952, the use of existential language was not necessarily reflective of a profound understanding or commitment to existentialism on the part of artists: "...one often hears Existentialist echoes in their works," he wrote, "but their 'anxiety,' their 'commitment,' their 'dreadful freedom' concerns their work primarily."²⁶⁹ Indeed, existentialist "echoes" permeate the commentary of a number of artists whose concerns were "existential," but not necessarily *existentialist* in the Sartrean sense. In his 1944 article "The Modern Painter's World," Robert Motherwell, for example, had expressed his own individualist views on the artist's relationship to society in a language that coincided with an existentialist position, writing

²⁶⁷ Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity*, 104-106.

²⁶⁸ Irving Sandler, "Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg: Convergences and Divergences," in Norman L. Kleeblatt ed., *Action, Abstraction, Reaction: Pollock, De Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976* (New York: The Jewish Museum, 2007), 30.

²⁶⁹ Alfred H. Barr, "The New American Painting (1952)," in Stiles and Selz eds., *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, 42.

that “Modern art is related to the problem of the modern individual’s freedom. ...modern artists have not a social, but an individualist experience of freedom....”²⁷⁰

It was not until Rosenberg’s contentious article was published that an explicitly existentialist interpretation of abstract expressionist painting entered the mainstream of American art criticism. “At a certain moment,” he famously wrote, “the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act – rather than as a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze or ‘express’ an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event.”²⁷¹ For Rosenberg, “action painting” was a method of “extinguishing the object” – a notion Greenberg would outright dismiss. Likely with Greenberg in mind, Rosenberg explained that, “the new American painting is not ‘pure art,’ since the extrusion of the object was not for the sake of the aesthetic... What matters is the revelation contained in the act.”²⁷² As Greenberg later pointed out, Rosenberg’s interpretation relied on the existentialist notion that authentic identity could be discovered in the act.²⁷³ To Greenberg, Rosenberg’s interpretation led to a situation in which the paintings produced through

²⁷⁰ Robert Motherwell, “The Modern Painter’s World,” *DYN 1*, no. 6 (November 1944): 9-14; reprinted in Hills ed., *Modern Art in the USA*, 166. A stronger influence on Motherwell, and a number of other action painters was the existential writing of Soren Kierkegaard, which stressed an ethical approach to choice. For more on this, see Dore Ashton ed., “Introduction,” *The Writing of Robert Motherwell* (U of Cal Press, 2007), 1-13.

²⁷¹ Harold Rosenberg, “The American Action Painters,” *Art News 51*, no. 8 (December 1952): 22-23, 48-50. This essay was originally written for Sartre’s journal *Le Temps Moderne*; as Debra Bricker Balkan explains, “The American Action Painters” was written at the request of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, one of the editors at the time, for an article on American painting. See, Balkan, “Harold Rosenberg and the American Action Painters,” in Norman L. Kleeblatt ed. *Action/Abstraction: Pollock, DeKooning, and American Art, 1940-76* (New York: Yale University Press, 2008), 209.

²⁷² Harold Rosenberg, “The American Action Painters,” *Art News 51*, no. 8 (December 1952): 23

²⁷³ Clement Greenberg, “How Art Writing Earns its Bad Name,” *The Second Coming Magazine 1*, No. 3 (March 1962): 59. At the same time, however, it is important to note that media representations of Pollock’s painting – in particular Hans Namuth’s photographs for a 1951 issue of *Art News* and his film of 1951, which featured Pollock aerobically “acting” on and in his canvases – may have further prompted Rosenberg’s interpretation of “action painting.”

these “acts” were not art, but rather “the record of solipsistic ‘gestures’ that could have no meaning whatsoever as art – gestures that belonged to the same reality that breathing and thumbprints, love affairs, and wars... belonged to.”²⁷⁴ Greenberg’s blindness to art’s social context is certainly in evidence here; nevertheless, he does make a point. Even though Rosenberg presciently articulated that the object is merely the “record” of art, he compartmentalized the “act” of art as a private individual experience for the artist alone.²⁷⁵ “A good painting in this mode,” wrote Rosenberg, “leaves no doubt concerning its reality as an action and its relation to a transforming process *in the artist*.”²⁷⁶ Because Rosenberg interpreted Abstract Expressionism through the lens of existentialist alienation, he tended to separate it from the social world, writing that “Liberation from the object meant liberation from the ‘nature,’ society, and art already there.”²⁷⁷ Thus, even while Rosenberg offered an alternative interpretation of art as an act rather than an object, he maintained the notion that art and art making was isolated from sociality.

In privileging the individual, existentialism was accused – initially by Marxists – of overlooking the primacy of the social in human life. In *Being and Nothingness* (1943) Jean-Paul Sartre had laid out the central tenets of this philosophy, according to which identity is neither natural nor cultural but is created through existence; the individual is

²⁷⁴ Greenberg, “How Art Writing Earns its Bad Name,” 59.

²⁷⁵ Rosenberg’s opinion was shared by a number of action painters; Robert Motherwell, for example, wrote in his 1954 article “The Painter and the Audience,” that “for most painters nowadays, examination is self-examination – this is all that we are accustomed to ...” Motherwell, “The Rise and Continuity of Abstract Art,” in Ashton ed., *The Writings of Robert Motherwell* (Berkeley: U of Cal Press, 2007), 176. This solitariness, he had earlier explained, is not “caused solely by his desire, whether conscious or unconscious, to remain aloof from the world surrounding him,” but is due to the lack of an audience capable of understanding the meaning of what he termed “plastic automatism”. See Motherwell, “The Rise and Continuity of Abstract Art,” (1951) in Ashton ed., *The Writings of Robert Motherwell*, 160-161.

²⁷⁶ Rosenberg, “The American Action Painters,” 49. According to Rosenberg, a good painting is “a genuine act, associated with risk and will.” *Ibid*.

²⁷⁷ Rosenberg, “The American Action Painters,” 23 (my emphasis).

thus a subject with the capacity for free will rather than merely socially constructed and oppressed.²⁷⁸ This position seemed to assert that the social sphere played a minor part in shaping the individual. Sartre attempted to redress such assumptions in his essay of 1945, “Is Existentialism a Humanism?,” in which he elaborated on his concept “being-for-others.” One cannot be free, Sartre reasoned, unless all are free.²⁷⁹ Individuals, therefore, are never completely disengaged from relationships to one another. Nevertheless, even though Sartre defined this as a form of “inter-subjectivity,” he posited that “the intimate discovery of myself is at the same time the revelation of the other as a freedom which confronts mine...”²⁸⁰ Indeed, for Sartre “conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others.”²⁸¹ According to this view, the self and the other are treated as discreet and stable “units” who alienate one another. This “othering” process takes place through the act of looking. When a subject is confronted by “the gaze” of another subject they become aware that they are also an object in the other’s world – they are objectified. Thus, this objectifying tendency in Sartrean existential thought positioned the individual as a discrete entity in opposition to a static repressive collectivity perpetuated through a discourse of abstract language and symbols.

In keeping with the existentialist emphasis on freedom from the coercive social totality, Rosenberg’s aim was to explain action painting as a form of direct communication that eludes the codification of ideology; “Only the individual can communicate experience,” he noted, “and only another individual can receive such a

²⁷⁸ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 3 ed., trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Citadel, 1965).

²⁷⁹ Thomas R. Flynn, *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism: the test case of collective responsibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 35.

²⁸⁰ Jean Paul Sartre, “Is Existentialism a Humanism,” (1946) in Walter Kaufman ed., *Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre* (Meridian Publishing Company, 1989).

²⁸¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 340.

communication.”²⁸² Although he asserted that the individual is isolated within society, Rosenberg did, importantly, attempt to articulate the embodied condition of the individual, which would become a crucial feature of Anna Halprin’s work. In this way, Rosenberg stepped outside of the Marxist framework in which even the human body cannot escape the standardizing and oppressing forces of the culture industry. “Only culture treats the body as a thing that can be owned,” Adorno and Horkheimer had warned, and “only in culture has it been distinguished from mind... as the object, the dead thing, the corpus.”²⁸³ Rather than characterizing the body as an object, Rosenberg adopted a Nietzschean stance, writing that embodiment gives the individual a “metaphysical advantage” over the culture industry: “The fact that [the individual’s] experience has a body means that mass culture is to him like a distorting mirror in an amusement park; whereas the ‘enlighteners’ whose world is made up entirely of mental constructions, live inside the mirror.”²⁸⁴ Here, Rosenberg echoes Nietzsche’s criticism of representation in *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which he asserts that it is only through the body in action – in particular the dancing body – that individuals no longer “see their mirror images;” for the dancer, as the site of embodied action, “is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art.”²⁸⁵

For modernist artists and writers, the gesturing body tended to be understood as existing outside of social codification; its agency stemmed from its association with

²⁸² Rosenberg, “The Herd of Independent Minds,” 252.

²⁸³ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 193.

²⁸⁴ Rosenberg, “The Herd of Independent Minds,” 252.

²⁸⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Walter Kaufmann trans. (New York: Random House, 1967), 35 and 37. Rosenberg is also likely referring to Sartre’s character Roquentin’s accusation that “People who live in society have learned to see themselves in mirrors...” from the novel *Nausea* p. 29, 1964 ed.

“primitive” or pre-linguistic modes of communication.²⁸⁶ An example is Robert Motherwell’s surrealist-inspired notion of “plastic automatism” in which the notations and marks manifested through spontaneous body gestures are held to be “free” from social oppression. In like fashion, Jackson Pollock used his own gesturing body as a way to return to a pre-socialized state of creation. In this context, gestures were understood to embody authentic expression. In contrast, representational images or texts had been filtered through social codes, and therefore were subject to the ideological forces of socialization. Importantly, the kinetic body was seen as profoundly non-dialogical – a topic I discuss in greater detail in chapter four.

Considering the sources of Rosenberg’s interpretation of action painting, and his claim that the act extinguishes the object, the continued presence of the art object after the act is problematic. Indeed, the art object is clearly more like a “dead thing” than a living embodied action.²⁸⁷ What is the role of the viewer then, in the presence of such an object? Rosenberg’s understanding of the link between embodied action and freedom from the social totality did not acknowledge the mediating operations taking place between the act of the individual artist, the object, and the viewer. His existentialist argument fails to account for the role of the art object in this process. For Rosenberg, the autonomous sphere of art provided the individual artist with the opportunity to perform an embodied act; the resulting art work maintained its status as a representation of

²⁸⁶ A number of scholars have recently examined this aspect of modernist art. See, for example, Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject*; and Noland, *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture*

²⁸⁷ As art critic Peter Selz summed up in 1956, “As we cannot watch the ritualistic dance itself, but only its record, we are left to watch a dead record of a once agitated action.” Peter Selz, “A New Imagery in American Painting,” *College Art Journal* 15, No. 4 (Summer, 1956), 292.

individual experience.²⁸⁸ Thus, Rosenberg preserved the notion that the art object – the record of the gesture – communicates through an instant “revelation,” ultimately requiring a disinterested aesthetic judgment in order to “speak.” Thus, the viewer remains a passive receptacle for the content of the art. In this way, he sidestepped the dialogical aspects of experiential engagement that would become increasingly important to the event-based art of the sixties – in particular, events in which embodiment was a central site of *intersubjective* experience.

Given the pervasiveness of the language of individualism and its emphasis on freedom, it is not surprising to find Allan Kaprow wavering between an “existentialistic” and a formalist interpretation of event-based art. In his article of 1961 “Happenings in a New York Scene,” he temporarily aligned event-based art with existentialist ideals, explaining that “Happenings are not just another new style. Instead, like American art of the late 1940s, they are a moral act, a human stand of great urgency, whose professional status as art is less a criterion than their certainty as an ultimate existential commitment.”²⁸⁹ Yet, in an effort to engage with the then dominant narrative of modernist art history and criticism, Kaprow also underscored the formal connection between painting and event-based art. In his often quoted article of 1958, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” Kaprow created a rhetorical space within the art critical arena for serious discussion of event-based art works by relating them to the most visible of the “action painters.” Pollock, he wrote, had “left us at the point where we must become

²⁸⁸ Rosenberg was aware of the problems inherent in calling a painting an event, writing, “What is a painting that is not an object, nor the representation of an object, nor the analysis or impression of it, nor whatever else a painting has always been – and which has also ceased to be an emblem of a personal struggle? It is the painter himself changed into a ghost inhabiting The Art World.” Harold Rosenberg, “The American Action Painters,” 49.

²⁸⁹ Allan Kaprow, “Happenings in the New York Scene,” in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, Jeff Kelley ed. (Berkeley: U of California Press, 2003), 21; reprinted from *Art News* 60, no.3: 36-39, 58-62.

preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life, either our bodies, clothes, rooms, or, if need be the vastness of Forty-Second Street.”²⁹⁰ From his own art practice and his participation in events staged by other New York artists, Kaprow discerned a lineage between the creation of “agglomerates to three-dimensional assemblages large enough for a spectator to enter...” to happenings which “involve movements, costumes, sounds, lights, and scents as well as forms and colour.”²⁹¹ He interpreted this as an evolution of painting, moving out of the canvas and into life itself:

The pieces of paper curled up off the canvas, were removed from the surface to exist on their own, became more solid as they grew into other materials and, reaching out further into the room, finally filled it entirely. Suddenly, there were jungles, crowded streets, littered alleys, dream spaces of science fiction, rooms of madness, and junk-filled attics of the mind...²⁹²

Here, art is envisioned as a form that grows and seeks an ever increasing creative fulfillment in life. Kaprow’s vision, nevertheless, roots event-based art in painting and, thus, in form. This led Kaprow to initially theorize that the evolution of action painting into happenings followed the formal principle of “extension.”²⁹³ According to this principle, the materials one works with grow in any desired direction creating the field as

²⁹⁰ Allan Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” *Art News* 57, no.6 (1958): 57.

²⁹¹ William C. Seitz, *The Art of Assemblage*, 91.

²⁹² Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, 165.

²⁹³ The tendency to frame event-based art in relation to formal principles was widespread. In the exhibition and catalogue of 1961, *The Art of Assemblage*, curator William C. Seitz theorized, for example, that the technique of “juxtaposition” was a constant running through twentieth-century avant-garde art, literature, music, and theatre. Drawing from Roger Shattuck’s influential book, *The Banquet Years: the origins of the avant-garde in France* (1955), Seitz understood juxtaposition as a formal method employed across media boundaries by artists, writers, filmmakers, and composers to expose the limits of representation. By appropriating fragments of texts, sounds, and images from the shared vocabulary of mass culture and assembling them in non-linear ways, artists who assembled their works encouraged a concrete deconstruction of the dominant culture. For Seitz, juxtaposition “embraced three-dimensional as well as two-dimensional works, much of the tradition of Dada and Surrealist objects, ‘environments’ large enough to be physically entered, and that most multiform of events, the ‘Happening.’” Seitz, *Artforum*, Aug. 1963, 23.

one goes along. Essentially, Kaprow states, this is an evolution of the fields of the frame and surface in painting.²⁹⁴ His privileging of the object turns the expansive and potentially dialogical event into a form that deconstructs, and in this way is always tied to, its own aesthetic frame. Accordingly, the happening has been categorized as a dislocative oppositional approach that shocked the viewer into questioning the institution of art through its refusal to communicate through conventional codes. Kaprow's painting-based narrative of the development of happenings has had a profound impact on the art historical record. To move beyond such a reading, Kaprow suggested, meant to question the very definition of art. "The real weakness of much vanguard art since 1951," he wrote in 1961, "is its complacent assumption that art exists and can be recognized and practiced. I am not so sure whether what we do now is art or something not quite art."²⁹⁵

Kaprow's struggle to articulate the meanings of event-based art – whether through existential language or through formal principles – supports his later assessment that at the centre of art practice in New York during the 60s there was no viable alternative to stylistic aesthetics. Although they appeared to provide opposite aesthetic theories, Greenberg's and Rosenberg's approaches both promoted an individualist stance anchored by the emancipatory role of autonomous art and framed by a Marxist-informed argument against mass culture's totalitarian drive. Neither questioned the role of autonomous art, nor offered any alternatives to the belief that art should resist engaging in a dialogic relationship with society. Indeed, the prior respective perspectives understood autonomous art – with its special power of resistance to the collective – as the foremost antidote against mass culture and its ideological mode of communication. And, this belief

²⁹⁴ Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, 159.

²⁹⁵ Kaprow, "Happenings in the New York Scene," 21.

was deeply entrenched within the overarching Modernist binary oppositions of autonomy versus collectivity, high versus mass culture, and representation versus experience that shaped art theory and practices in the post-WWII United States.

Within this context of interrelated discourses, the dialogical approach central to Anna Halprin's practice was rendered "invisible." In order to recognize that Halprin was engaging in a dialogical mode of communication through event-based art practices, it is necessary to move outside of this autonomy-based binary frame and regard her work as an independently formulated practice that drew from alternative philosophical sources and influences based on direct experience and holism, or *gestalt*. These sources shared three guiding principles. First, they understood the body as "transactional," existing in a continuously merging relationship with the environment. Second, like existentialism, they privileged concrete experience over abstract thought. Third, they supported the notion of an "intersubjective" state of existence in which the other is not understood necessarily as a source of *conflict*, but rather as a source of *affinity*. This perspective presupposes a different conception of both the individual and the collective that allows for a dialogical mode of communication that does not entail the perpetuation of a totalizing collective.

Chapter Three

EMBODIMENT AND DIALOGUE IN THE COMMUNAL ART EXPERIENCE

Through her event-based practices Anna Halprin has emphasized embodiment and dialogue in the creation of a communal art experience for over forty years. This chapter relates this dialogical practice to a philosophical approach to reality as an embodied holistic experience evidenced in the work of other artists associated with the experimental Black Mountain College. In her definitive biography of Halprin, theatre historian Janice Ross points out that Halprin's self-imposed geographical and professional isolation from the "high art" world of modern dance in the mid 1950s allowed her to follow her own path without pressure to either conform to or oppose the dominant modern dance tradition that centred around the choreography of Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey. This important insight, however accurate, positions Halprin as a maverick, isolated from the rest of the art world and disconnects her from the larger overarching philosophical and theoretical ideas in which she was embedded. While Halprin had indeed made a conscious decision to work outside of the art centre of New York, I argue that her decision stemmed from her early adoption of Deweyan pragmatist aesthetics and other holistic approaches to art and life that privilege embodied experience.

To fully understand how Halprin arrived at this dialogical approach, one has to keep in mind that during the postwar period there was a wide range of holistic philosophical sources, generally known as "field" theories, that focused on direct

experience, which artists could draw from.²⁹⁶ In broad terms, field theories seek to explain reality as a process of dynamic change, shifting the focus away from static objective reality and toward the embodied experience. To engage in such an experience would unite the mind and the body, and thus overcome the primacy of both dualism and rationalism. Field theories complicate the clear-cut binaries of autonomy versus collectivity, high versus mass culture, and representation versus experience by demonstrating that any dichotomy is part of a continuum. Moreover, field theories tend to see collectivity as a set of “intersubjective” relationships based on the idea that “reality [is] understood to emerge from a conversational dynamic” between embodied subjects.²⁹⁷ In this way, field theories make room for alternative models of collectivity that do not rely solely on representational systems, but rather cohere temporarily through experiential engagement. As noted in chapter one, of particular importance to Anna Halprin were John Dewey’s pragmatism, Bauhaus principles of interdisciplinarity and holism, and, from the mid-1960s onward, Fritz Perls’ and Paul Goodman’s therapeutic adaptation of Gestalt psychology.

Dewey’s experiential philosophy was widely accessible to American artists who sought to emphasize art’s socially embedded, communicative function. Indeed, Halprin has stated that her approach to dance as experience was founded on Dewey’s “humanistic and experiential emphasis.”²⁹⁸ Dewey provides a common philosophical source for a number of artists and writers who sought to create socially-embedded and non-hierarchical works, including Robert Motherwell, Paul Goodman, John Cage, and Allan

²⁹⁶ Belgrad, *Spontaneity*, 120-141.

²⁹⁷ Belgrad, *Spontaneity*, 5.

²⁹⁸ Anna Halprin, “The San Francisco Dancers’ Workshop,” *Theatre Papers* 6 (1977), 2.

Kaprow – all of whom had ties to Black Mountain College.²⁹⁹ Dewey’s long professorship in the Department of Philosophy at Columbia University from 1904 until his retirement in the 1930s, ensured his significance for Americans concerned with art, politics, and culture. As already noted, he was a prominent intellectual figure and a prolific social commentator, publishing numerous articles in *The New Republic* and *Nation*. Amongst other accomplishments, Dewey co-founded the American Civil Liberties Union and the New School for Social Research in New York City, and he was a member of the board of Black Mountain College.³⁰⁰ His holistic approach to social formation and pragmatist aesthetics provides an alternative to both the Marxist and existentialist framings of the individual’s relationship to the collective as codified by the Frankfurt School and Rosenberg and the formalist understanding of that configuration in the arts.

In addition to Dewey’s experiential philosophy, Gestalt was a second holistic approach to reality that impacted on postwar American artists.³⁰¹ During the late 1920s in Germany, Gestalt theorists and artists at the Dessau Bauhaus had taken a reciprocal interest in each other’s work; Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, and Joseph Albers were a few of the artists influenced by German psychologists and theorists Max Wertheimer,

²⁹⁹ See Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993); and, Stewart Beuttner, “Dewey and the Visual Arts,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 33 (1975), 383-391.

³⁰⁰ George Dykhuizen, *The Life and Mind of John Dewey*, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973, reissued 1978).

³⁰¹ As Daniel Belgrad points out, in a 1946 article entitled “Beyond the Aesthetic,” the American painter Robert Motherwell wrote that gestalt, with its focus on “the interaction of the body-mind and the external world,” could provide an alternative conceptual foundation for relating art to society. See, Robert Motherwell, “Beyond the Aesthetic,” as quoted in Belgrad, *Spontaneity*, 143.

Kurt Koffka, Wolfgang Köhler, Carl Einstein, and Rudolph Arnheim, among others.³⁰²

When a number of Gestalt psychologists emigrated to the United States in the 1930s, they brought their ideas to the attention of American intellectuals and artists. Kohler and Koffka both accepted professorships in psychology at American universities, while Wertheimer became a faculty member at the New School For Social Research in New York City where he established a centre for the study of Gestalt psychology.³⁰³ Dewey himself took an interest in Gestalt principles, befriending Wertheimer in 1933 and inviting him to his home to discuss Gestalt theory.³⁰⁴ Like Dewey's notion of "experiential engagement," Gestalt, as a general principle, is concerned with the perception of synergistic, or holistic, effects within a field of events and interactions. It is a theory of perception in which the whole cannot be reduced to its parts without noticeable "impoverishment." In Carl Einstein's words, it seeks "to contest deadly generalizations and the rationalistic impoverishment of the world, to sever the chains of causality, to unravel the web of significations."³⁰⁵ In the postwar United States, Paul Goodman, an anarchist pacifist, writer, and co-founder of American Gestalt therapy with psychologist Fritz Perls, saw an affinity between Dewey's experiential philosophy,

³⁰² For more about the history of the relationship between Gestalt Psychology and art see the following: Roy R. Behrens, "Art Design and Gestalt Theory," *Leonardo* 31, No. 4 (1998): 299-303; Roger Rothman and Ian Verstegen, "Arnheim's Lesson: Cubism, Collage and Gestalt Psychology," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65, No. 3 (Summer 2007): 287-298; and, on Carl Einstein, see Einstein, "Gestalt and Concept (Exerpts)," translated by Charles W. Haxthausen, *October* 107 (Winter 2004): 169-76.

³⁰³ Brett King and Michael Wertheimer, *Max Wertheimer and Gestalt Theory*, (New Brunswick NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2005), 250.

³⁰⁴ In 1933 Max Wertheimer emigrated to the U.S. on the invitation of Alvin Johnson to teach at the New School for Social Research in New York City as part of an emergency program to help Jewish intellectuals escape Nazi persecution. Not long after Wertheimer arrived, John Dewey invited him and his wife to his home to discuss gestalt theory. See, King and Wertheimer, *Max Wertheimer and Gestalt Theory*, 250.

³⁰⁵ Einstein, "Gestalt and Concept (Exerpts)," 169.

Gestalt psychology, and an anarchist understanding of social cohesion.³⁰⁶ Goodman's writing synthesizes Deweyan philosophy and Gestalt together in a non-hegemonic approach (which I will discuss in more detail) to both the individual's and art's relationships to society.

The fact that Goodman's anarchist philosophy resonates with Gestalt therapy stems from deep ties between anarchism and Gestalt. Both Fritz and Laura Perls were influenced by the writing of anarchists Martin Buber, Gustav Landauer, and Jan Christian Smuts; and, as Ansel Woldt and Sarah Toman point out, Gestalt therapy developed out of social philosophy as much as it did out of psychotherapeutic practice. As they note, "for many early contributors to Gestalt therapy, anarchy was an antidote to fascism and the key to a more utopian society."³⁰⁷ Anna Halprin collaborated with Fritz Perls during the mid-1960s, and she put many of Goodman and Perls' Gestalt therapy exercises into practice in her audience participation workshops. Her association with Perls, who she first met in 1964 when she attended one of his group therapy sessions, helped her to understand that the audience, like the performer, was part of an interrelated "organism/environment field." Perls, who had a sustained interest in theatre that began in his youth when he trained in expressionist acting with Max Reinhardt in Berlin, had been immersed since the late-fifties in Goodman's artistic and social network, which included

³⁰⁶ Goodman, Perls and his wife, Laura Perls, were the cofounders of Gestalt Therapy in the United States. Both Goodman and Perls were interested in exploring anarchism as the basis for community. Gestalt Therapy was additionally influenced by anarchist principles through Martin Buber's philosophy of relationships and dialogue and fellow gestalt psychologists Franz Koffka and Jan Christian Smuts. In 1969 Fritz Perls established a Gestalt Kibbutz in Lake Cowichan, British Columbia, where he formed a utopian community founded on anarchist principles. See, Ansel L. Woldt and Sarah M. Toman, *Gestalt Therapy*, (Sage Publications Inc., 2005), 14.

³⁰⁷ Woldt and Toman, *Gestalt Therapy*, 14.

John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and the founders of Living Theatre, Julian Beck and Judith Malina.³⁰⁸

In what follows, I trace the development of event based art that was informed by this combination of Deweyan philosophy and Gestalt theory in order to present an alternative to the Marxist-based understanding of the relationship between the individual and the collective, which obscured an understanding of this holistic trend in American art. I begin by outlining Dewey's concept of a "new individualism" that would not be defined by the capitalist/bureaucratic/nationalist nexus. As he noted, "there is a perversion of the whole ideal of individualism to conform to the practices of a pecuniary culture. It has become the source and justification of inequalities and oppressions."³⁰⁹ In contrast to this, Dewey posited a "new individuality consonant with the present conditions," one that was not opposed to the collective, but one founded on actively participating in "actual society."³¹⁰ I then investigate how Dewey's experiential conception of the individual as socially embedded encouraged exploration of field theories at Black Mountain College in North Carolina between 1933 and 1956. Black Mountain is widely acknowledged as the incubator of multi-media and interdisciplinary art practices that flourished in the late 50s and 60s, but it was also, importantly, a model of alternative communal living in which the performing arts played a heightened role. Here, I take a fresh look at Black Mountain College through the lens of field theory; I

³⁰⁸ Martin Shepard, *Fritz* (New York: Saturday Review Press, E. P. Dutton & Co., 1954), 22. In New York, Perls attended Living Theatre productions and according to Julian Beck he provided inspiration for their participatory event *Paradise Now*. See Belgrad, *Spontaneity*, 149

³⁰⁹ John Dewey, *Individualism Old and New* (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1930), 18.

³¹⁰ Dewey, *Individualism*, 32.

focus on Black Mountain College as a site of intersection fusing the experiential event and non-totalizing collectivity.

It is important to note, however, that my point is not to claim that Anna Halprin was following a doctrine set out by Dewey and put into practice at Black Mountain. She had never attended Black Mountain College, and her understanding of Dewey was filtered through the teachings of her early mentor Margaret H'Doubler. Nevertheless, she combined the Deweyan focus on experience with her other interests in the Bauhaus and Gestalt, all of which informed the core themes of experience, interdisciplinarity, and non-totalizing collectivity that were explored and nurtured at Black Mountain College.³¹¹ These themes were crucial to Halprin's development of dialogical event-based works. What I aim to do here, then, is to uncover a process-oriented understanding of the social role of art that has been undervalued in the art historical record and then demonstrate how Halprin's events figure in this wider constellation of ideas, events, and actors, which could also productively encompass works produced by John Cage, Allan Kaprow, and members of Fluxus, among others. The writing of Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg may have shaped the criticism and subsequent art historical evaluations of the 1950s and 60s, however, the Deweyan holistic approach fostered at Black Mountain College was an equally significant influence on art *practice* during the same period.

³¹¹ Although Anna Halprin had never been to Black Mountain College, her name is linked to its legacy. In a 1969 special issue of *Esquire* magazine, theatre critic Elenore Lester surveyed the most significant performance artists of the 60s, "who gave their all to free your shackles and blow your mind." In the centre spread, juxtaposed against a photograph of Black Mountain College, "a spiritual home for the experimentors," stood John Cage, Jackson MacLow, Judith Malina and Julian Beck, Richard Schechner, Ellen Stuart, Allan Kaprow, Saul Gottleib, Tom O'Horgan, Merce Cunningham, Dick Williams, and Anna Halprin. Lester, "The Final Decline and Total Collapse of the American Avant-Garde, *Esquire* (May 1969) 142-145.

As noted in chapter two, the notion that all collectives are susceptible to totalizing forces stems from a Marxist understanding of social cohesion that privileges the “logic of hegemony.” Field theory, on the other hand, provides an alternative approach to collectivity that privileges what sociologist Richard Day has called a “logic of affinity.” In order to clearly articulate how field theory engenders a dialogical approach and how this approach can transcend the oppositional stance of individual versus society that structured the art criticism of Greenberg, Rosenberg and the central theorists of the Frankfurt School, it is necessary to first be clear about the difference between “non-totalizing collectivity” and the Marxist understanding of social cohesion. Recall that the individualist stance taken up by both formalist and existentialist critics was premised on a belief that there was only one possible form of collectivity, held together through representational systems and always prone toward totalitarian oppression. From this point of view, it was impossible for art to engage with life without eradicating its potential for a critical perspective. This argument was supported and perpetuated by Marxist critical theorists, who argued an overarching “logic of hegemony” set the individual artist and his autonomous art object against a totalizing and all-consuming mass culture.³¹² It was the totalizing aspect of collective identity that many artists and intellectuals of the cold war period sought to avoid, as noted in the previous chapter. Marxist theory privileges a political, or State-based, mode of social change that takes place within the visible “public sphere” of communal political identity.³¹³ It assumes that social cohesion is established through fixed representational systems and that social change can only be effected by a

³¹² This term is from Day, *Gramsci is Dead*.

³¹³ Day, *Gramsci is Dead*, 14. See for example, Nick Crossley and John Michael Roberts, *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere* (Blackwell, 2004), 1-27; See also, Sandra Jovchelovitch, *Knowledge in Context: Representations, Community and Culture* (Routledge, 2007).

collective entity that seeks to overthrow and capture State power. Within this model, art resists ideology by refusing to engage in dialogue, which is understood as crucial for the process of collective identity formation. Stepping outside of this Marxist paradigm, which so rigidly, albeit comprehensively, theorized oppressive social operations, we can envision other forms of collectivity that counter the State form, not by challenging it, but by offering alternatives to Statist or authoritarian collectivity.

The Non-totalizing Collective and Field Theory

Not all collectives conform to traditional definitions of political organization; many operate outside of the established parameters of the political system creating spaces that are both local and temporary. Such collectives can be thought of as “invisible” within the Marxist model because they lack stabilizing forms of representation within the public sphere. Richard Day explains, they “escape the categories of traditional social movement theories.”³¹⁴ According to Day, such collectives can be productively understood through a non-hegemonic model that is based on a logic of affinity – that is, “non-universalizing, non-hierarchical, non-coercive relationships based on mutual aid and shared ethical commitments.”³¹⁵ Day’s concept of affinity-based logic is rooted in what he identifies as an anarchist current in contemporary “newer social movements.”³¹⁶ As he points out, anarchist theories have long advocated a non-violent, social, rather than political, revolution; in Mikhail Bakunin’s theory of social transformation, for example, “social

³¹⁴ Day, *Gramsci is Dead*, 45.

³¹⁵ Day, *Gramsci is Dead*, 9.

³¹⁶ Melucci, *Nomads*, 11-20.

revolution is a spontaneous uprising with no leaders or preformed goals.”³¹⁷ In general, an affinity-based model of social cohesion posits face-to-face, cooperative experience. Resistance to the dominant State form lies in the ability to enact and model non-totalizing collectivity in the present, even if only as a limited manifestation. Because it is “invisible” such collectivism cannot be successfully repeated and stabilized by any Statist or authoritarian structure. Indeed, invisibility is an asset to the collective when it prevents detection and cooptation. An anarchist affinity-based collectivity escapes the Marxist dominant/oppositional binary which is inscribed within the same logic structure of what it claims to oppose; “the hegemony of hegemony.”³¹⁸

Dewey was not an anarchist, but his social philosophy encapsulates an affinity-based logic because it alters the relationship between the individual and the collective by embedding the embodied subject in lived experience and supporting a non-hierarchical, holistic view of the world. Dewey recognized that not all collectives model the State form. As he noted in *The Public and its Problems*, some are associations “which are too narrow and restricted in size to give rise to a public [...] Immediate contiguity [and] face to face relationships, have consequences which generate a community of interests, a sharing of values, too direct and vital to occasion a need for political organizations.”³¹⁹ Dewey’s political views were progressive and radically democratic, and he was a keen critic of the nation State, which he defined as a form of “collectivity via capitalism” that extinguishes “organic” collectivity. “I do not think it is fantastic,” he wrote, “to connect

³¹⁷ Day, *Gramsci is Dead*, 113.

³¹⁸ Day, *Gramsci is Dead*, 8. This notion of affinity-based logic can be extended outside of social theory to encompass the theorizing of Mikhail Bakhtin, whose notions of the festival, the carnivalesque, and the dialogical are all non-hegemonic concepts.

³¹⁹ Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*, 39.

our excited and rapacious nationalism with the situation in which corporateness has gone so far as to detach individuals from their old local ties and allegiances but not far enough to give them a new centre.”³²⁰ The answer, according to Dewey, was not to define the individual in opposition to the social collective – as per Marxist critical theory – but rather to redefine the individual as an active participant in *actual* society. Thus, Dewey distinguished the “imagined community” of nationalism from the active participation of face-to-face relationships and privileged the latter. In other words, he does not assume that ideology controls individuals on an embodied level; the embodied experience of participation in actual society – a form of intersubjective dialogue – cannot be captured or reproduced by abstracted or codified representational forms.

To comprehend Dewey’s concept of the “new individual” it is important to understand that for him the individual is embedded in and connected to a social/environmental field of unfolding experiences. Dewey’s pragmatist approach to reality emphasized that the world is experienced, not as an empty container filled with static objects, but rather through a continuum of situations and events. According to Dewey, the shifting relationship of the human organism to its environment is crucial; individuals are both embodied and embedded in a social world. As he states in *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938), “In actual experience, there is never any such isolated singular object or event; an object or event is always a special part, phase, or aspect, of an environing experienced world – a situation There is always a field in which observation of this or that situation, object, or event occurs... We live and act in

³²⁰ Dewey, *Individualism Old and New*, 59.

connection with the existing environment, not in connection with isolated objects.”³²¹ For Dewey, experience is intersubjective and dependent on interaction. “Instead of being shut up within one’s own private feelings and sensations,” he wrote, “[experience] signifies active and alert commerce with the world; at its height it signifies complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events.”³²²

Crucial to this holistic understanding of the organism and its environment is Dewey’s notion of the “transactional body.” For Dewey, the body and mind are not separate but constitute what he called a transactional “body-mind.” In the first place, he explains, “body-mind simply designates what actually takes place when a living body is implicated in situations of discourse, communication, and participation...”³²³ Philosopher Shannon Sullivan points out that Dewey’s concept of a transactional body-mind rejects not just mind-body dualism but also the division between subject and world, or organism and environment.³²⁴ Subjects, for Dewey, are body-mind transactions constituted through a reciprocal influence between organism and environment that is both dynamic and constant. Accordingly, physical bodies are not sealed off from the permeability of the external world. The body is never a finished or closed entity; it rather exists as a constant merging with the world. “Organisms,” Dewey explained, “do not live without air and water, nor without food ingestion and radiation. They live, that is, as much in processes across and ‘through’ skins as in processes ‘within’ skins.”³²⁵

³²¹ John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1938), 68.

³²² Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 19.

³²³ John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (Later Works vol 1, p. 217, Ed. Jo Ann Boydston, 17 vols. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988-91.

³²⁴ Sullivan, *Living Across and Through*, 3.

³²⁵ Dewey, *Knowing and the Known*, 119.

Dewey's holistic understanding of the individual embedded the embodied subject in sociality. He recognized that it was not collectivity per se that was the problem. Rather, it was collectivity based on "quantification, mechanization, and standardization" – that is, the ideological functions of the mechanized industrial nation State – that suppressed individual freedom.³²⁶ According to Dewey, because of our emphasis on mechanization in the service of economic gain, our ideas of collectivity and social life are based on the capitalist corporation rather than the individual's experience.³²⁷ Dewey called the present mode of individualism that treats each human subject as a unit within the capitalist system "economic individualism." To alter this system, he reasoned, we first need to rethink the individual and to see each, not in terms of an economic unit of labour, but as an active embodied – what he called "organic"– participant. Thus, Dewey's response to mass culture and the mechanization of life was neither as pessimistic as Marxist critical theory nor as totalizing. For Dewey, the individual and the collective are part of a field of interconnected and contingent situations and events that cannot be abstracted into fixed oppositional social forms.³²⁸

Dewey's critique of the capitalist state and its "perversion" of individualism, coupled with his field model of reality as an embodied experience of unfolding situations, shaped his understanding of the role of art in society. In his only book on aesthetics, *Art as Experience* (1933), he outlined his concept of art's socially embedded nature, which

³²⁶ Dewey, *Individualism Old and New*, 59.

³²⁷ Dewey, *Individualism Old and New*, 36.

³²⁸ Dewey, *Individualism Old and New*. Dewey draws the conclusion (which no doubt had an impact on Marshall McLuhan and a host of artists who used technology to create experiential art works) that what we need to do is change the focus of our use of technology from financial gain to the liberation and enrichment of human life. Implicit in this is that financial gain is not the key to human liberation or enrichment. The key, according to Dewey, is interaction, experience, and participation. Through direct participatory democracy we create a collective that is non-hierarchical and cooperative, and in which each person has the opportunity to participate in a way that reflects their skills and expertise.

provides an alternative to Kantian aesthetics. As noted in the previous chapter, for Kant the separate spheres of sense and reason are united through disinterested aesthetic judgment. In contrast, Dewey asserts that aesthetic judgment cannot be disinterested because it is an embodied experience. Kant, as Dewey notes, “was a past-master in first drawing distinctions and then erecting them into compartmental divisions;” yet, “when elements united in experience are separated, the resulting esthetic theory is bound to be one-sided.”³²⁹ In such a context, he writes, “prestige goes to those who use their minds without participation of the body and who act vicariously through the control of the bodies and labour of others.”³³⁰ According to Dewey, mind and body are already a whole. Indeed, for Dewey, there is no bypassing the body on the path to freedom via art:

‘Sense’ covers a wide range of contents: the sensory, the sensational, the sensitive, the sensible, and the sentimental, along with the sensuous. It includes almost everything from bare physical and emotional shock to sense itself – that is, the meaning of things present in immediate experience. Each term refers to some real phase and aspect of the life of an organic creature as life occurs through sense organs. But sense, as meaning so directly embodied in experience as to be its own illuminated meaning, is the only signification that expresses the function of sense organs when they are carried to full realization. The senses are the organs through which the live creature participates directly in the ongoings of the world around him.³³¹

Importantly, Dewey did not preserve art’s autonomous status, but instead embedded art in everyday life as a form of experiential communication. “Experience is the result, the sign, and the reward,” he reasoned, “of that interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation

³²⁹ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York, Minton, Balch & Company, 1934), 252.

³³⁰ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 21.

³³¹ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 22.

and communication.”³³² Thus, art communicates not through universal aesthetic judgment, but through experiential engagement. For Dewey, art’s purpose is not to preserve a utopian ideal of unity, but rather to enhance our participatory experiences of the here and now.³³³ Embodied experience overflows conceptual compartments.

Yet, because Dewey’s theory was based on a shifting and contingent field of experience in which there are no clear standards for critical judgment, it was not useful for art criticism, and it provided little access for a system of valuation. In contrast, Greenberg’s Kantian aesthetics applied quantifiable rules to the “value” of individual art objects, ranking them hierarchically in a repeatable and systematic way. Thus Greenberg’s formalist system of evaluation lent itself to becoming a standard. From a Greenbergian perspective, Dewey is merely re-hashing a naïve expressivist individualist view of art that seeks refuge in private feelings and emotions, and this, he would argue, is the foundation of “bad” art criticism. In contrast, for Dewey, Greenberg’s art criticism is part of a system of valuation that isolates art from the realm of embodied experience and converts it into a unit of capital. These positions have little in common from which to effectively argue against each other, and this, for the most part, has relegated Dewey’s field theory to the margins of the art critical/historical narratives dealing with this period.

Nevertheless, even if Dewey’s experiential approach to aesthetics was marginalized, his philosophy resonated with a cross-section of influential avant-garde artists and writers who were drawn to such affinity-based logic, including Robert

³³² Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 22.

³³³ It should be noted that Dewey’s ideas about unity are experientially based. He rejected theories of Hegelian cosmic unity.

Motherwell, John Cage, Allan Kaprow, and Paul Goodman.³³⁴ Notably, Goodman linked Dewey's experiential philosophy to an anarchist social model and the holistic perspective of Gestalt psychology. For Goodman, these respective approaches to philosophy, social theory, and psychology shared an emphasis on embodied collective experience as the ideal social form.³³⁵ Embodied collective experience provided Goodman with an alternative to the totalizing collectivity of the State form; in his essay "Reflections on Drawing the Line," he wrote that non-hegemonic communities can be created in the here and now if one simply acts in accordance with a "naturally" non-hierarchical approach to life. "The libertarian," he wrote, "does not look forward to a future state of things which he tries to bring about by suspect means; but he draws now, so far as he can, on the natural force in him that is no different in kind from what it will be in a free society...*Merely by continuing to exist and act in nature and freedom, the libertarian wins the victory, establishes the society*; it is not necessary for him to be the victor over any one."³³⁶ Through their affinity-based perspectives of social cohesion Goodman, and

³³⁴ Dewey's influence can be detected in American post WWII artists' emphasis on "experience" as a key component of their work. Daseitz Suzuki, whose Zen teachings were a crucial influence on John Cage, was himself heavily influenced by Dewey; Allan Kaprow read *Art as Experience* in the late 1940s, underlining passages and filling the book with marginalia; and the novelist and playwright Paul Goodman described himself as a disciple of Dewey. See Jeff Kelley, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, xii. See also, George J. Leonard, *Into the Light of Things: the art of the commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage* (Chicago University Press, 1994). And, Weltman, Burton, "Revisiting Paul Goodman: Anarcho-syndicalism as the American Way of Life," *Educational Theory* 50, No. 2 (Spring 2000), 179.

³³⁵ The notion that there was a "natural social form" grew out of, and gained authority from, evolutionary biology's emphasis on co-creative interaction as the basis for successful adaptation. Terms such as "ecology," "holism," and "organic" have been widely used in social, cultural and political theorizing. That philosophers and social theorists would use the problematic notion of "human nature" as a reasoning point reveals the strong influence of Darwinian thought at this time. In *Mutual Aid: A factor of Evolution*, for example, anarchist Peter Kropotkin enlisted the evolutionary biological model as evidence of human cooperation and affinity. Similarly, gestalt theory is based on the idea that "organism and environment are understood to be in a constant natural dialogue, an ongoing series of 'creative adjustments' which make man at home in his body, his community, his natural habitat." This is akin to Dewey's assertion that "an object or event is always a special part, phase, or aspect, of an environing experienced world." John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1938), 68.

³³⁶ Italics original. Paul Goodman, "Reflections on Drawing the Line," in Taylor Stoehr ed. *Drawing the Line: The Political Essays of Paul Goodman* (New York: Free Life Editions Inc., 1977), 3.

to an extent Dewey, comprehended a form of social cohesion that would not perpetuate a dominant/oppositional binary. Instead, they both advocated the creation of a new radically democratic society emerging from within and situated parallel to the old one.

As a writer who moved in avant-garde art circles, Goodman was part of a network of artists who sought to create socially-embedded and non-hierarchical art, including John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Jackson MacLow, Judith Malina, Julian Beck, and Robert Duncan – all of whom were involved in anarchist pacifism and experimental performance and had ties to Black Mountain College.³³⁷ Goodman himself taught at Black Mountain during the 1940s and again in the summer of 1950, and he frequently described it as an “intentional community.”³³⁸ An affinity-based approach emerging from, not necessarily anarchist politics, but certainly a non-hierarchical and experientially-based understanding of social cohesion, can be discerned in the intersection of art-events and communal life at Black Mountain College. Indeed, Black Mountain College uniquely highlights the socially constructive role of early event-based practices. Tracing the development of event-based art from its roots in a socially-embedded form of artistic experimentation provides an alternative understanding of the emergence of post-war event-based art. By following this alternative narrative we can see that event-based art was not merely an oppositional deconstructive practice, but was also

³³⁷ See Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993); and, Allan Antliff, *Anarchy and Art: From the Paris Commune to the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2007), 113-132.

³³⁸ Both Dewey and Goodman saw educational communities as potential models of an ideal organic collectivity. Dewey had a profound effect on Paul Goodman’s understanding of the role of education in social change. Dewey’s Laboratory School in Chicago (1896-1904) advocated a child centred approach to education that understood experiential learning and active participation as a social process embedded in a community. Paul Goodman called this “incidental learning” and contrasted it to the current system of schooling as “universal social engineering.” See, Goodman, “The Present Moment in Education,” in Taylor Stoehr ed. *Drawing the Line*, 71; see also, Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-education and the Community of Scholars* (1964).

constructive because it was directly linked to alternative ideas of social experience and collectivity. While neither Anna Halprin nor a number of other artists who produced event based art – including Allan Kaprow – had attended Black Mountain College, these artists shared the holistic understanding of reality that was explored and put into artistic practice at Black Mountain.

Field Theory in Practice: the shared art experience at Black Mountain College

Black Mountain College was a vital force behind the cultural and artistic transmission of field theory. The College was founded by John Andrew Rice, a friend and former colleague of Dewey, in 1933. Rice, like Dewey, was a leading voice for progressive and experimental education during the 1930s and 40s, and he criticized passive learning of theoretical knowledge from books in favor of active learning through direct experience, interdisciplinarity and community life.³³⁹ Writing in *Harper's Magazine* (1936), Rice argued a typical education “is to be got through spoken – or what is more remote – printed language,” which presents only a codified abstraction of lived reality.³⁴⁰ “To read a play,” he noted, “is good, to see a play is better, but to act in a play however awkwardly is to realize a subtle relationship between sound and movement.”³⁴¹ As the socialist journalist Louis Adamic observed of his own experience during a two and a half month visit to Black Mountain in 1935,

³³⁹ John Andrew Rice, “Fundamentalism and the Higher Learning,” *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, 174 (Dec. 1936 - May 1937), 587-596.

³⁴⁰ Rice, “Fundamentalism and the Higher Learning,” 588.

³⁴¹ Rice, “Fundamentalism and the Higher Learning,” 588.

There, education is *experience* that involves in action the whole person. There, an increasingly successful effort is made to perfect a procedure of education predicated upon the concept that both the world and the individual who is to be prepared for it are changing, moving, dynamic – a concept which challenges, on the one hand, the unconscious notion of the great old institutions that both the world and the individual are static, and, on the other, the more conscious idea of the so-called progressive schools that the world is static and the individual is not.³⁴²

Importantly, the notion that both the individual and the world are shifting and dynamic rather than static entities reveals an alternative understanding of the relationship between the two. Such thinking echoes Dewey's assertion that "Society is of course but the relations of individuals to one another... And all relations are interactions, not fixed molds."³⁴³ Indeed, "the effort of Black Mountain College," wrote Adamic, "is to produce individuals rather than individualists... the individual must also be aware of his relation to others. In Black Mountain College, the whole community is his teacher."³⁴⁴ Above all, experiential engagement was aided through a non-hierarchical communal lifestyle modeled on the "village."³⁴⁵ An important aspect of this face-to-face collectivity was the increased value of shared group experience.

The communal life central to Black Mountain was maintained through the cooperation of the faculty and the students. Everyone participated in decision-making processes, performed daily chores, and engaged in demanding physical labour and farm

³⁴² Louis Adamic, Education on a Mountain, *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, 172 (Dec. 1935 – May 1936), 520.

³⁴³ Dewey, *Individualism Old and New*, 85.

³⁴⁴ Adamic, "Education on a Mountain," 521.

³⁴⁵ In an extended quotation based on conversations with students and faculty at Black Mountain, Adamic stressed the importance of the experiential learning that takes place within the communal village: "Individualism had a hard time in the village, but the right to individuality was recognized per force..." In contrast to this, the nuclear family is isolated from communal experience and thus understands collective life only through the dominant state form. Adamic, "Education on a Mountain," 522-523.

work. Faculty, in the early years, often attended one another's classes as students.³⁴⁶ The Black Mountain model of community diverged from the conventional idea that "everyone is trying to be superior" and instead encouraged good will and cooperation.³⁴⁷ As Adamic enthusiastically described, "It challenges the existing chaos and the methods of fascism and communism. It goes beyond all three and has a method to get there."³⁴⁸ This ideal of community, however, did not always function ideally in practice. Commenting on what he called Black Mountain's "ridiculously ambitious and Utopian...intention," in a 1945 article for *Partisan Review*, faculty member Eric Bentley pointed out its failure to live up to its social ideals: "the peculiar difficulty of the experimental college is that small numbers and community living make of every personal irritation a communal fever... Black Mountain never works smoothly for long at a time. Somebody is always leaving in a huff or being pushed out..."³⁴⁹ Bentley's desire for things to "work smoothly" may reflect his frustration with the lack of bureaucratic organization at Black Mountain, which in the absence of designated administrative staff, involved both faculty and students in the day to day running of the school. "There is no board of trustees," he wrote, "no president or other head with constitutional power to hire and fire... Business is discussed and transacted by elected boards and committees on which the student body is

³⁴⁶ Adamic, "Education on a Mountain," 526-527. For a critical look at Black Mountain College's failure to live up to this community ideal see, Eric R. Bentley, "Report from the Academy: The Experimental College," in Mervin Lane ed., *Black Mountain College: Sprouted Seeds, an anthology of personal accounts* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 110-117. Originally published in *Partisan Review* 12, 3 (1945).

³⁴⁷ Adamic, "Education on a Mountain," 522.

³⁴⁸ Adamic, "Education on a Mountain," 522.

³⁴⁹ Bentley, "Report from the Academy," 116. Originally published in *Partisan Review* 12, 3 (1945). For more about Bentley's criticism of Black Mountain College see Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College* (MIT Press, 2002), 69-70.

represented....”³⁵⁰ Rather than arguing that Bentley’s characterization of the College is somehow less correct than Adamic’s (or the other way around) it is more productive for our purposes to acknowledge that, for the most part, both faculty and students were willing to risk “communal fever” in order to put this non-hierarchical community life into practice. As M.C. Richards later recalled, “The College appeared to be ‘open.’ If you pressed hard, you would discover boundaries. As I see it now, the boundaries were simply the forms of each other’s being.”³⁵¹

At Black Mountain a crucial step in creating a holistic experiential understanding of the individual’s relationship to the world was to encourage an “artistic approach to life as a whole and to everything in life.”³⁵² Indeed, the arts played a central role in the creation of community. This was consistently noted in the College newsletters; in 1944, for example, the *Black Mountain College Bulletin* explained to prospective students that “faculty and students, many of whom have no special training in the arts, participate in community plays, concerts, drawing and designing classes, and building. There is constant artistic activity of various kinds which is a normal part of the community life and in which almost everyone participates in one way or another.”³⁵³ As Adamic quoted Rice, encouraging an artistic approach to life would result in individuals who “will know and feel that life is essentially not competitive but calls for co-operation everywhere, and that, lest humanity perish, men must cease spending most of their energy scheming how

³⁵⁰ Bentley, “Report from the Academy,” 116.

³⁵¹ M.C. Richards, “Black Mountain College: A Golden Seed,” in Mervin Lane ed., *Black Mountain College: Sprouted Seeds, an anthology of personal accounts* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 172.

³⁵² Adamic, “Education on a Mountain,” 519.

³⁵³ “Black Mountain College Bulletin No. 8,” North Carolina State Archives Digital Collection, Black Mountain College Collection.
<http://digitalstatelibnc.contentdm.oclc.org/ncstatearchives/browse.php?CISOROOT=%2Fp249901coll44&CISOSTART=1,61>.

to harm one another, and begin looking toward a goal...”³⁵⁴ According to Rice these artist/creators will not separate themselves from society, but “will go into the centre of life and belong there.”³⁵⁵ This contrasts with Adorno, Greenberg, and Rosenberg’s shared belief that the artist must gain autonomy from society in order to maintain a critical perspective and fend off the ever-encroaching mass “culture industry.” As a central component of community at Black Mountain College, the arts created links between the different faculty members and students, which provided an impetus for interdisciplinary experimentation and collaboration.

At the hub of the art department were former Bauhaus teachers Josef and Anni Albers who promoted the Bauhaus philosophy of synthesizing the various arts into forms that transcend the division between fine and applied art.³⁵⁶ Josef Albers invited a number of distinguished European émigré artists to teach at Black Mountain, including Bauhaus colleagues Fernand Leger, Walter Gropius, Lyonel Feininger, and Xanti Schawinsky who taught stage design from 1936 to 1938. Schawinsky’s highly experimental and multimedia staged events reflect his education with Oskar Schlemmer, whose concept of “total theatre” had an impact on Anna Halprin’s work as well. In particular, Schlemmer’s theorizing highlighted the liberating role of the organic body. In his essay “Man and Art Figure” of 1925, he identified the universal mechanization of life as an unavoidable

³⁵⁴ Adamic, “Education on a Mountain,” 519.

³⁵⁵ Adamic, “Education on a Mountain,” 519.

³⁵⁶ Vincent Katz, *Black Mountain: Experiment in Art* (MIT Press, 2003), 75. Anni Albers set up the weaving workshop at Black Mountain College and worked there for 16 years. Josef Albers, like some other members of faculty at Black Mountain, shared an interest in ideas of holism and Gestalt theory while at the Dessau Bauhaus, and had attended a series of lectures by Count Karlfield von Durkheim on “simultaneous contrast” in 1930-31. See, Behrens, “Art, Design, and Gestalt Theory,” 299-303.

process from which only the organic body could escape.³⁵⁷ The central idea behind “total theatre,” as espoused by Schlemmer and his colleague Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, was to abolish the boundary between the stage and the spectator and at the same time combine the various media of sound, image, and movement into a “total experience.”³⁵⁸ Schawinsky’s first production at Black Mountain, *Spectodrama: Play, Life, Illusion*, combined a “symphonic interaction and effect; color and form, movement and light, sound and word, gesture and music.”³⁵⁹ “My purpose” wrote Schawinsky, “was to use the stage for demonstrations in which all media and all branches of knowledge and artistic endeavor found an expression.”³⁶⁰

The atmosphere of collaborative freedom continued to foster similar experiments in “total theatre” through the Light-Sound-Movement Workshops organized by Betty and Peter Jennerjahn in 1948-51, Verse and Theatre classes conducted by Charles Olson, and experimental multimedia events staged by John Cage, Merce Cunningham and Robert Rauchenberg.³⁶¹ The Jennerjahn’s Light-Sound-Movement workshops incorporated

³⁵⁷ Oskar Schlemmer, “Man and Art Figure,” in Walter Gropius and Arthur S. Wensinger, eds., *The Theatre of the Bauhaus* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 25. Original German version: Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, Oskar Schlemmer, and Farkas Molnar, *Die Bühne im Bauhaus* (Mainz: Florian Kupferberg, 1965).

³⁵⁸ Schlemmer, “Man and Art Figure,” 25.

³⁵⁹ Xanti Schawinsky, quoted in Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain: An Experiment in Community* (New York: Dutton, 1972), 98.

³⁶⁰ Katz, *Black Mountain: Experiment in Art* (MIT Press, 2003), 75.

³⁶¹ Wulf Herzogenrath, “John Cage an Artist who Accepts Life,” *Sounds of the Inner Eye* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 15. During the same period (1949-48) Charles Olson taught a course, “Verse and the Theatre,” which similarly incorporated musical instruments, masks, projected images, and coloured slides into an exploration of voice and movement. Olson was interested in exploring poetry’s roots in dramatic speech and action. In his essay of 1950, “Projective Verse,” he advocated a spontaneous spoken verse that would be more enactment than symbol. His quest for a socially embedded and active poetics was developed in relation to the ideas of his mentor, William Carlos Williams, whose emphasis on embodiment, action, and field can be likened to Dewey’s experiential philosophy. In his essay of 1950, Olson explained that projective verse, unlike conventional printed text, is “composition by field.” Accordingly, projective verse is not purely visual – that is, it is not merely representational – but is a sensory process that creates movement that is felt in the “breath” and the “ear.” In this way, he emphasized the embodied experience of projective verse, writing that “breath is man’s special qualification as an animal. Sound is a dimension he

multi-media elements by combining improvised short dramatic pieces with music, dance, and projected slides. As Peter Jennerjahn recalled, “The Workshop involved the basic ingredients of theatre, such as sound, movement, lighting, and costumes. ...One of the leading objectives was to score all the elements to be used on an equal footing.”³⁶² According to Jennerjahn, these workshop pieces evolved through a process of experimentation and discussion in which the finished piece would unfold through the ongoing suggestions and ideas of the participants. As he described it, “these pieces were like sparks that glowed briefly and were done.”³⁶³ With its focus on fragmentation and simultaneity, John Cage’s now famous *Theatre Piece No. 1* of 1952, commonly referred to as the first “Happening,” echoed the formal explorations initiated by Schawinsky and the Jennerjahns. During Cage’s event, Charles Olson and M.C. Richards read from their poetry; Robert Rauschenberg, whose white paintings hung from the ceiling above the audience, played old recordings on a gramophone; Merce Cunningham danced; David Tudor played piano; and Tim La Farge and Nick Cernovich projected films and slides, while Cage delivered a lecture on Zen, punctuated by a number of silences. These seemingly random events were orchestrated by Cage through a timed score and a predetermined physical arrangement of the set, which incorporated the audience.³⁶⁴ In art historical scholarship, there has been much emphasis on Cage’s pairing of Zen and Dada-

has extended. Language is one of his proudest acts...” Verse, as an active embodied experience, eludes the ideological component of communication. Notably, Olson celebrated this in a communal event known as the “Glyph Exchange” in 1951. The event emphasized that embodied experience is not isolated but takes place within an environmental field that includes communal experience. For more on this see Katz, *Black Mountain College: Experiment in Art*, 187.

³⁶² Peter Jennerjahn, “The Arts at Black Mountain College,” *Structurist* no. 43/44 (2003/2004), 96.

³⁶³ Jennerjahn as quoted in Katz, *Black Mountain*, 188.

³⁶⁴ For descriptions of this event see, John Cage, interview with Mary Emma Harris, 1974, in *Conversing with Cage*, Richard Kostelanetz ed. (New York: Limelight Editions, 1988), 104; and Francine du Plessix Gray, “Black Mountain: The Breaking (Making) of a Writer,” *Black Mountain College: Sprouted Seeds*, Mervin Lane ed. (Knoxville: U of Tennessee Press, 1990), 300.

esque random events as an avant-garde tactic to “stun” the audience into a fresh awareness of reality. However, I would argue that Cage’s use of indeterminacy, his inclusion of spontaneous action, and his attention to the relationship between the audience and the performers can also be seen as an attempt to remove the potentially didactic elements of “total theatre.”

It is crucial to note that the multi-media experiments at Black Mountain were not produced in an atmosphere conducive to totalitarianism, but rather within a collective experience that had non-hierarchical goals. This fusion of “total theatre” with the quest for a non-hierarchical community created a unique context for experimentation with event-based art works. The non-totalizing social purpose of performance-based works produced at Black Mountain College differed from the social objectives of the Wagnerian “total work of art,” with its Schillerian aspirations to an Aesthetic State. As noted in chapter two, Schiller turned to aesthetics as a source of social emancipation, concluding that “it is only through Beauty that man makes his way to freedom.”³⁶⁵ Wagner absorbed Schiller’s idea of aesthetic judgment as the “sensus communus” which allows individuals to communicate on a universal level and wedded this to his own nationalist agenda; thus, the result of a total aesthetic experience would be a collective united through the universal language of aesthetic judgment. Nevertheless, the unity of the Aesthetic State, as Adorno and Horkheimer later pointed out, was “one in [its] enthusiastic obedience to the rhythm of the iron system” of mass culture.³⁶⁶ The total work of art as propaganda communicates through standardized, repeatable, and predictable representations and gestures. Such spectacles seek to dominate and overwhelm the spectator – to immerse

³⁶⁵ Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters*. Translated by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967, 9.

³⁶⁶ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 120.

them in an aesthetic experience over which they have no control, and which is held to be universal. With its susceptibility to the codification and abstraction of ideology, Wagner's "total work of art" leant itself to fascist appeals, reaching its apotheosis in the Nazi spectacles of the *Reichsparteitag* rallies of 1934 – documented and further aestheticized for propaganda purposes in Leni Reifenstall's *Triumph of the Will*.³⁶⁷

As noted, however, the community goals of Black Mountain College were anything but totalitarian. Paul Goodman's notion of "communitas" is a useful and enduring alternative concept for understanding the goals for community life at Black Mountain College. In his book of 1947, *Communitas: Means of Livelihood and Way of Life*, co-authored with his architect brother Percival, Goodman recommended a non-hierarchical form of collectivity held together through personal experiences of solidarity. For Goodman, "communitas" referred to a feeling of togetherness that occurs in an unstructured community where everyone is equal. The anthropologist Victor Turner has elaborated on Goodman's concept, explaining communitas as a "moment when compatible people – friends, congeners – obtain a flash of lucid mutual understanding on the existential level, when they feel that all problems, not just their problems, could be resolved, whether emotional or cognitive, if only the group, which is felt (in the first person) as 'essentially us,' could sustain its *intersubjective* illumination..."³⁶⁸ This is not to be confused with the "imagined community" of nationalism, however, which relies on the repetition of abstracted and codified texts and images in order to communicate and sustain its manifestation. Rather, communitas exists only in the experience; it is

³⁶⁷ The *Reichsparteitag* was the Nazi party rally day.

³⁶⁸ Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 47 (my emphasis).

embodied and temporary. As Turner explains, “the spontaneity and immediacy of *communitas* – as opposed to the jural-political character of (social) structure – can seldom be sustained for long.”³⁶⁹ Indeed, the close contact of individuals, noted Goodman, often leads to a moment of crisis in which instead of trying to “hammer out an ideal for us all... the community tends to break up.”³⁷⁰ Goodman’s notion of an open, non-hegemonic, and temporary collective was informed by the combined force of his anarchist pacifist beliefs and his understanding of the gestalt notion of “ecological holism” in which an organism is always shifting in relation to its changing environment.³⁷¹ Using the same language of gestalt, Turner explained that “*communitas* exists in a kind of ‘figure-ground’ relationship with social structure...[it] may be said to exist more in contrast than in active opposition to social structure, as an alternative and more ‘liberated’ way of being socially human...”³⁷² Thus, *communitas* can be understood as a temporary feeling of community that constitutes its own collectivity – in other words, it does not seek a hegemonic resolution or an oppositional stance toward the social realm.

It is in relation to this shifting experience of *communitas* that we can productively situate the wide array of interdisciplinary events that took place at Black Mountain College throughout the 40s and early 50s. Drawing on the notion of *communitas*, Victor Turner has theorized that both social and stage drama are akin to the liminal spaces of rituals and festivals, in which participants step outside of conventional social roles and

³⁶⁹ Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, 47.

³⁷⁰ Paul and Percival Goodman, *Communitas: Means of Livelihood and Ways of Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), 109.

³⁷¹ Theodore Roszack, *The Making of A Counter Culture* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1968), 188.

³⁷² Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, 51.

norms to experience an alternative form of intersubjective participation. Another way of understanding this alternative conception of the lived body and the social space it produces can be accessed through Mikhail Bakhtin's notions of the "carnavalesque" and the "grotesque body." Bakhtin, too, recognized that not all social experience is of the type that inscribes social codes. Some social experience happens outside of the visible public sphere of communal political identity. In his study, *Rabelais and his World* (1965), Bakhtin used the medieval carnival as an example of a folk festival in which official culture is turned upside down. The carnival "is a pageant without footlights and without a division in performers or spectators."³⁷³ This space of the "carnavalesque" is enacted outside of dominant power structures. It is an unofficial festival of the people, where no one presides and arbitrariness prevails. The carnivalesque inverts conventional social hierarchy by raising the debased (bodily) above the exalted in a continuous transition. Bakhtin further theorized a "grotesque" body that is not sealed off from the permeability of the external world. This body is not finished; rather, like Dewey's mind-body, it is a material body that eats, drinks, and eliminates in a constant integration with the environment. Crucially, this body is not merely individualistic, but also allows for an alternative conception of collectivity outside of fixed and hierarchical "official culture."

As previously noted, event-based works by avant-garde artists – Alfred Jarry's experimental theatre, Futurist *serate* and "Theatre of Surprise," Dada cabaret, and Artaud's "Theatre of the Absurd" – tend to be treated as deconstructive, as in Bürger's Marxist reading. However, it is important to acknowledge that, in their participatory

³⁷³ M.M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* (U of Minnesota Press, 1984), 122.

forms, they also had the constructive potential noted by Bakhtin and Turner.³⁷⁴ In order to fully recognize that the constructive potential of events was not necessarily totalizing, we need to look through the lens of affinity-based logic. Indeed, the contingent and fluid communal identities that tended to manifest through art events are more akin to the affinity-based model of social cohesion than the traditional hegemonic model of collectivity.

Because event-based group experiences are temporary, they do not enter into the social imaginary unless they are also represented through stabilized texts or images that can be repeated and disseminated on a wide scale. By looking at event-based art as a temporary form of collective experience we can see that it has a communicative and a community-building function; and, it was largely within a communal environment of non-hierarchical collectivity that hybrid event-based practices were explored at Black Mountain College. As M.C. Richards later summarized, the crux of the Black Mountain experience was “integrating art with thinking and community work.”³⁷⁵ When Black Mountain closed its doors in 1956, a number of faculty and students sought to recreate the communal art experience in new contexts. M. C. Richards, Karen Karnes, David Weinrib, John Cage, and David Tudor relocated to Rockland County, New York and formed the Gate Hill Cooperative Community on land purchased by former Black

³⁷⁴As Günter Berghaus states, although the avant-garde is usually interpreted as a “destructive force... characterized by opposition, protest, negativity; it also experimented with new forms of expression and anticipated in its creations a liberated art practice.” Berghaus, *Theatre, Performance, and the Historical Avant-garde*, 39. This is also noted by Gunter Berghaus, *Theatre, Performance, and the Historical Avant-Garde*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Rosalee Goldberg, *Live Art Since 1960* (Harry N. Abrams: 1998); and Stephen C. Foster ‘Event Structures and Art Situations’ in *Event Arts and Art Events, Studies in the Fine Arts: The Avant-Garde, No. 57* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988), 3-10

³⁷⁵ M.C. Richards, “Black Mountain College,” 175.

Mountain College students Paul and Vera Williams.³⁷⁶ As Paul Goodman described these spreading nodes, “perhaps the very transitoriness of such intensely motivated intentional communities is part of their perfection. Disintegrating, they irradiate society with people who have been profoundly touched by the excitement of community life, who do not forget the advantages but try to realize them in new ways.”³⁷⁷ Indeed, Black Mountain College was a key force maintaining an alternative understanding of the role of art in the individual’s relationship to the collective. The core themes incubated at Black Mountain, including direct experience, interdisciplinary practice, and the formation of non-totalizing community, constitute an alternative context for the development, practice and reception of event-based art. Contextualizing Halprin’s work as part of a more general trend creates a richer understanding of her events and their significance.

In this and the previous chapter, I have outlined two coexisting collectivist models – on one hand, a Marxist-based concept of social cohesion based on the ideological role of representational forms, and, on the other hand, an anarchic understanding of social cohesion through intersubjective experience. In chapter two, I examined the effects of the Marxist model of hegemonic collectivity on an understanding of post-WWII art and art criticism in New York; in this chapter, I offered an alternative to this model by exploring

³⁷⁶ Oral History Interview with Karen Karnes, August 9 and 10th, 2005, Smithsonian Archives of American Art. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/karnes05.htm>. Close by, living in an old church, were members of the USCO community which included painter Steve Durkee, poet Gerd Stern, and former San Francisco Tape Music Centre technician Michael Callahan, who were frequent visitors and collaborators at Gate Hill. As Gerd Stern recalls, the bohemian enclave that developed in Rockland County was a central node in a rhizomatic network of activist artists and anarchists including Michael McLure, Igal Rudenko, Bayard Rustin, and David Koren. Vera Williams, he notes, did all the covers for *Resistance*, an anarchist publication. Gerd Stern interviewed by Victoria Morris Byerly, 1996, in “From Beat Scene Poet to Psychedelic Multimedia Artist in San Francisco and Beyond, 1948-1978,” *Online Archive of California*. <http://content.cdlib.org>: 51- 53.

³⁷⁷ Goodman, *Communitas*, 109. Goodman himself continued to seek non-hierarchical community experiences and became a guiding force and a teacher at the San Francisco State Experimental College, which was the largest academic underground organized by students during the 1960s.

the influence of holistic theories on art practices at Black Mountain College. In doing so, my goal is twofold. First, I want to reveal how these two models of collectivity influenced the ways in which art's social role can be understood. The analytic Marxist model buries event-based art's dialogical characteristics, whereas the holistic anarchic model allows them to come to the fore. As demonstrated in chapter two, "Happenings" are generally understood to have developed out of action painting; in the alternative narrative explored in this chapter, the force behind the development of event-based art was interdisciplinary experimentation centred in embodied collective experience. Following this alternative narrative reveals that "Happenings" were more than oppositional deconstructive practices. They were constructive because they were directly linked to a non-hegemonic concept of social experience that is anarchistic in the sense that it attempts to resist coercive systems of control by drawing on process, contingency, and participation in collectivity.

Above all, my primary aim in articulating these two frameworks for the development of event-based art has been to establish a connection between Anna Halprin's understanding of the event as a dialogical collective experience and the wider constellation of events and actors that converged at Black Mountain College during the 1940s and 50s. Anna Halprin's dialogical response to the objectification of the body in performance grew out of the same holistic approach inspiring those at Black Mountain College, as both were heavily influenced by pragmatist aesthetics. Halprin's early dance training emphasized the primacy of direct experience and communication, and her later engagement with Gestalt therapy reinforced the figure/ground nature of human social experience. The interdisciplinary "event" provided Halprin with a medium through which

to explore intersubjective relationships between the individual and the collective through face-to-face embodied dialogue.

In the following chapter, I return to the crucial and complex issue of the body and its role in collective formation and disruption. I examine how, though the body was largely treated as a non-discursive and radically individualistic medium of artistic expression in high modernist discourse, because it is both the seat of individual subjectivity and the interface to the social world bodily expression surpasses conceptual divisions of the individual versus the collective. I explore the role of the body in relation to the emergence of dialogical art practices through an analysis of how Halprin and Allan Kaprow reacted to audience hostility encountered during art events.

Chapter Four

THE GESTURING BODY: RECONFIGURING THE ARTIST/VIEWER RELATIONSHIP

In this chapter, I delve more deeply into the body's role in both resisting and creating collectivity. Embodiment was crucial to Anna Halprin's practice and a critical point of departure for event-based art in New York during the late 1950s. At the centre of art criticism and production, however, the body was ensnared within the oppositional model of the individual versus the collective and its associated binaries. Thus, when Harold Rosenberg referred to the body as a site of freedom, he was drawing on an essentialist and primitivist understanding of body gesture as a pre-linguistic form of *direct one-way* communication.³⁷⁸ Within the anti-collective, anti-discursive, and radically individualist modernist high art world, the "natural" body of the artist provided a means of resisting mass culture and politics. Yet, as noted in chapter two, the artist's embodied experience was privileged over and separated from the viewer's primarily visual experience by the silent art object. This fixed hierarchical relationship was undergirded by the romantic notion that the artist's body is free and capable of producing authentic experience – it is already at a critical distance from the social and cultural regimes of power that supposedly control and shape the viewer. In this way, the artist defines and differentiates himself by constructing his binary "other" – the viewer – through the work of art that permits access only at a visual distance.

³⁷⁸ Rosenberg, "The Herd of Independent Minds," 252.

Perhaps the best-known proponent of the visual bias in modernist American art was, as Caroline Jones argues, Clement Greenberg. “Not surprisingly,” she writes, “in developing the method subsequently known as ‘formalism,’ [Greenberg] fetishized sight, which had traditionally been the sense capable of producing the most ‘distance’ from the body.”³⁷⁹ As Greenberg himself declared in 1958: “the human body is no longer postulated as the agent of space in either pictorial or sculptural art; now it is eyesight alone.”³⁸⁰ Even artists and critics who disagreed with Greenberg’s formalist stance were deeply enmeshed in modernity’s visual bias. Mark Rothko, for example, famously lamented that his paintings would be “impaired by the eyes of the unfeeling.”³⁸¹ Similarly, Robert Motherwell distinguished the active body of the artist from the passive vision of the audience in his essay “The Painter and the Audience” (1954).³⁸² His generation of painters, he argued, had no authentic audience “since in modern society the audience rarely sees the actual process of art...”³⁸³ Motherwell seems to suggest that if viewers saw the process of a painting as it was being made, they would then understand it differently, perhaps, as Barnett Newman had hoped, more completely or accurately. Note, however, that Motherwell assumes his audience has a predominantly visual function; he does not suggest that viewers could themselves engage in the act of painting, but rather

³⁷⁹ Caroline Jones, “The Mediated Sensorium,” in Jones ed., *Sensorium: Embodied Experience, Technology, and Contemporary Art* (MIT Press, 2006), 8. See also, Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg’s Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (U of Chicago Press, 2005).

³⁸⁰ Greenberg as quoted in Jones, *Eyesight Alone*, original from “Sculpture in Our Time,” *Arts Magazine* (June 1958).

³⁸¹ Mark Rothko, as quoted in “Notes from a conversation with Selden Rodman, 1956” in Miguel López-Remiro ed., *Writings on Art: Mark Rothko* (Yale University Press, 2006), 119.

³⁸² Motherwell, “The Painter and the Audience” (1954), in Ashton ed., *The Writings of Robert Motherwell*, 177.

³⁸³ Motherwell, “The Painter and the Audience” (1954), in Ashton ed., *The Writings of Robert Motherwell*, 177.

that they should *see* the process being enacted by an artist. Here, Motherwell, intentionally or not, supports the “spectator theory of knowledge” in which knowing is modeled on seeing rather than doing.³⁸⁴

Harold Rosenberg may have invoked the kinetic body of the “action painter,” but the visually organized relationship between the artist and the audience remained largely intact.³⁸⁵ Like the critics and commentators who followed him, Rosenberg linked action painting to the performative arts of dance and theatre. “In turning to action,” he wrote, “abstract art abandons its alliance with architecture, as painting had earlier broken with music and the novel, and offers its hand to pantomime and dance.”³⁸⁶ The underlying notion is that the dancing body is somehow free and authentic, and this authenticity is also embodied in the gestural mark. Yet, even if a viewer were to watch the process of action painting, the artist/spectator relationship would not change. Hans Namuth’s film of Jackson Pollock performing his drip painting, for example, accentuated the embodied nature of the artist but merely as a performance for the viewer to watch.³⁸⁷ The dance around the canvas was Pollock’s own embodied experience: any experience an audience derived from this film would be spectatorial. Thus, if the kinetic body of the artist was

³⁸⁴ John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty* (New York, Capricorn Books, 1960), 23.

³⁸⁵ Rosenberg’s abhorrence of mass culture played a strong and enduring role in shaping his understanding of art; even as late as 1972 he was reminding readers that “given the patterns in which mass behaviour, including mass education, is presently organized, art is the one vocation that keeps a space open for the individual to realize himself in knowing himself.” For Rosenberg, art was essentially and necessarily a monologue. In response to the florescence of happenings and other event-based art forms during the 1960s and 70s, he preserved the non-dialogical approach to art, referring to such events as spectacles: “the beyond-art artist is not an artist at all, no matter how talented he may be as an impresario of popular spectaculars.” Rosenberg, like many of his contemporaries, continued to claim that there was no worthy audience for art. Rosenberg, *The De-Definition of Art* (U of Chicago Press, 1972), 13.

³⁸⁶ Harold Rosenberg, “Hans Hoffman: Nature into Action,” *Art News* 56, No. 3 (May, 1957): 34.

³⁸⁷ As art historian Amelia Jones has noted, the performing body of the artist was most frequently represented by images of Jackson Pollock, as photographed and filmed by Hans Namuth in 1950-51. Jones, *Body Art Performing the Subject*, 53.

going to be involved in the creation of meaning in art, then within the anti-collective action painting milieu there was only one way in which this could happen: as a predominantly visual and individual experience of a performance.

This tightly wound relationship was about to unravel. In this chapter, I argue that invoking the body resulted in a significant unintended consequence. Within the modernist art world the body was largely understood as a non-dialogical medium of individual expression; however, because it is both the seat of individual subjectivity and the interface to the social world the material body overflows the kinds of divisions imposed by the performer/spectator relationship. When interdisciplinary artists brought the artist, the work, and the viewer into the same lived space, they foregrounded their respective unequal relationships. Perplexing questions emerged: how is it that one body can be resistant, natural, and authentic while another body is passively molded by abstract forces of codification? In other words, if we exist in the same lived space, can we both be subjects? If the artist stands before me presenting his work, can I answer back? Audiences of the 60s tested such questions, often through direct action. In what follows, I pursue these questions through a comparison of the different ways in which Allan Kaprow and Anna Halprin reacted to audience hostility during their early staged events. My purpose is to demonstrate that, at the centre of art production and criticism in New York, the role of the body was limited to either a “passive” or a “resistant” body, and both excluded dialogue. On the periphery of the modernist scene developing in New York City, Halprin’s understanding of the body’s role in communication was developing from an alternative pragmatist aesthetics rooted in John Dewey’s holistic approach to

experience. Rejecting the “spectator theory of knowledge,” Halprin’s experiential engagement fostered knowledge through doing rather than seeing.³⁸⁸

Before exploring how Kaprow and Halprin each attempted to deal with the questions raised by the meeting of bodies in lived space, it is necessary to understand that the concept of embodiment emerging in New York was, and still is, tangled up with the hegemonic binary model of the individual versus the collective.³⁸⁹ So that we can move forward at the same pace, it will be helpful to review some of the prevalent theoretical approaches to embodiment and social space.

Passive and Resistant Bodies

As a result of the Cartesian mind/body dichotomy in western culture, bodies have generally been treated either as surfaces constructed through regimes of observation and representation or as essentially natural and resistant. Moreover, within western modernity the body has traditionally been understood as inferior to the mind; it is the binary “other” to the mind’s superior rationality. Only one sense – the visual – was privileged through its supposed direct link to rational thought. Indeed, Rene Descartes noted that in his own search for truth he “did nothing but wander through the world, trying to be a spectator

³⁸⁸ In his book *The Quest For Certainty* Dewey argues against the spectator theory of knowledge, in which “the theory of knowing is modeled after what was supposed to take place in the act of vision.” (23) Instead, Dewey proposes an embodied approach to knowing in which the material experience of the active subject brings knowing and doing together. Despite Kaprow’s own reading of Dewey’s *Art As Experience*, his entrenchment within the binary world of high art production prevented him from seeing embodiment as crucial to the construction of dialogue. For Kaprow, the body was a discreet unit; for Halprin, it was transactional.

³⁸⁹ This is especially pertinent because for this dissertation to argue that it is possible to have a non-totalizing collective experience, two seemingly opposed ways of understanding embodiment – the individual and the collective – need to be united.

rather than an actor in all the dramas that are played out on that stage.”³⁹⁰ According to Cartesian thinking, sight provides a necessary objective distance between the spectator and the object of his or her gaze.

Early arguments against visual dominance in western culture tended to essentialize the physical body as being closer to nature than the mind. The notion of the body as liberator from social codes emerged out of the nineteenth-century “rediscovery of the body” – a widespread, anti-Cartesian shift amongst some philosophers, intellectuals and artists toward privileging the body as an organism within which the rational mind plays a subordinate role.³⁹¹ When Walt Whitman sang the body electric in *Leaves of Grass* and rhetorically asked “...if the body were not the soul, what is the soul?” he was proclaiming the physical body as the unified self.³⁹² Likewise, when Nietzsche wrote, “... body am I entirely, and nothing else; and soul is only a word for something about the body,”³⁹³ he was celebrating the material body while refuting Descartes’s declaration that “this me – that is, the soul by which I am what I am – is completely distinct from the body.”³⁹⁴ As literary theorist Carrie Noland explains in her recent book, *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture*, these commentators were ultimately responding to early-nineteenth-century physiological discoveries that the body

³⁹⁰ Rene Descartes, *A Discourse on the Method of Correctly Conducting One’s Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences*, trans. Ian Maclean (Oxford U. Press, 2006), 25.

³⁹¹ Thomas, *Dance, Modernity, and Culture*, 20.

³⁹² Walt Whitman, “I Sing the Body Electric,” *Leaves of Grass* (D. Mackay, 1883), 81.

³⁹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, as quoted in *The Portable Nietzsche*, selected and translated by Walter Kaufmann (Penguin Books, 1976), 146.

³⁹⁴ Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method, Optics, Geometry, and Meteorology*, tr. Paul J. Olscamp (Indiana U. Press, 1965), 28.

is not merely the instrument of the mind, but also provides meaningful feedback; it is a source of concrete knowing that cannot be separated from the mind.³⁹⁵

This effort to privilege the material body over the mind bolstered an essentialist romantic tradition of viewing the body as “natural” and existing prior to culture, or even language. Although the 19th-century thinkers mentioned above generally sought to unite the mind and body, they also continued to adhere to related binaries that associated the body with the irrational, the feminine, and the primitive. Nietzsche’s conception of the Dionysian as symbolic of the savage, instinctive, and ultimately natural man is one influential example of this primitivist conception of the body. Accordingly, the physical body was associated with nature as the opposite of civilization and its rationalist basis, and subsequently linked to “organic” social forms and the rituals of so-called primitive societies. Within Western culture, where vision had long been the privileged sense most closely aligned with the mind, the physical body was often seen through this romantic primitivist lens and tied to notions of otherness.

As pointed out in chapter one, the primitivist view of the body is especially apparent in the emergence of modern dance, where the kinetic body was understood as capable of direct and primal expression. This understanding of body movement as a form of authentic communication was articulated by the modernist dance critic John Martin through his notion of “metakinesis,” in which a viewer can experience virtual movement through empathetic “inner mimesis”. While watching a dance, for example, one apparently identifies the movements of the dancer with one’s own body memory and then

³⁹⁵ Noland, *Agency and Embodiment*, 65. Some of these thinkers include Julien Offray de la Mettrie whose *L’homme machine* of 1748 presented a materialist view that human behavior is dependent on body state. Pierre Georges Canbanis’ *Rapports du physique et du moral de l’homme* of 1802 took up Mettrie’s materialist argument.

projects those sensations onto what one sees.³⁹⁶ For Martin, metakinesis was simply a fact; “nobody invented it,” he wrote, “it has always been true. It was true when the early man of savagery conveyed his sense of the mystery of death, and when he stirred a whole tribe into warlike frenzy by leading them into a particular kind of dance.”³⁹⁷ Martin’s understanding of modern dance as both natural and direct essentializes and universalizes human experience. For, as other scholars would argue, seemingly “natural” gestures are socially constructed.

Indeed, it was through the study of ritual movement and gesture in “other” cultures that the sociological notion of the constructed body began to develop. As Carrie Noland explains, the concept of the socialized body was largely nurtured within a French phenomenological context by the anthropologist Marcel Mauss, who, in *Techniques of the Body* (1935), established an ethnological tradition of understanding body gestures as culturally significant.³⁹⁸ Mauss was greatly influenced by the sociologist Emil Durkheim and the philosophy of Henri Bergson and, in turn, he influenced the writing of a wide variety of prominent thinkers from Maurice Merleau-Ponty to George Bataille.³⁹⁹ Essentially, Mauss drew attention to the role of body gestures in perpetuating cultural practices and focused on how societies impose specific practices on the body. From this point of view there is no pre-social self or body – bodies are inscribed with meaning

³⁹⁶ It is possible that this is true. The recent scientific discovery of mirror neurons would seem to suggest there is a physiological basis for a form of “metakinesis.” See for example, M. Acoboni, Molnar-Szakacs I, Gallese V, Buccino G, Mazziotta JC, et al. (2005) “Grasping the Intentions of Others with One’s Own Mirror Neuron System.” *PLoS Biol* 3(3): e79. doi:10.1371/journal.pbio.0030079. Regardless of the physiological proof, however, Martin’s concept still imagines a universal language of gestures accessible to everyone in spite of cultural difference.

³⁹⁷ Martin, *The Modern Dance*, 14.

³⁹⁸ Noland, *Agency and Embodiment*, 18.

³⁹⁹ According to Noland, “Mauss inaugurated a major paradigm shift in the social sciences, one that has had wide repercussions in the domains of philosophy, literature, art, and performance.” *Agency and Embodiment*, 20.

through cultural and social construction. This is known in sociology as a “constructionist” view in which the social forges the individual. A similar stance fuels the Marxist understanding of the cultured body as “corpus” and the more recent and extreme example of the Foucauldian body as a passive receptor of social control. Foucault brought the visual bias into sharp focus when he rearticulated Jean-Paul Sartre’s notion of the gaze as a form of social control. According to Foucault, scientific regimes of observation have resulted in a panoptic culture organized around a politics of seeing; “the gaze that sees,” he famously wrote, “is a gaze that dominates.”⁴⁰⁰ Following suit, post-structuralist feminist scholarship has revealed the deep gender bias inherent in Western culture’s occularcentrism. As Luce Irigaray writes, “In our culture, the predominance of the look over smell, taste, touch, and hearing has brought with it an impoverishment of bodily relations. The moment the look dominates, the body loses its materiality.”⁴⁰¹

While Sartre – and to a greater degree later post-structuralists such as Foucault, Irigaray, and Judith Butler – articulated the “othering” mechanisms of the dominance of vision, his fellow existentialist, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, complicated the basic premise by pointing out that the actual body is the interface between consciousness and the world of objects and materials: vision is embodied. In his book of 1945, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Ponty exposed the dualism inherent in the notion of the other by introducing the “lived body” into existential thought. According to Ponty, the body is not a material *object* but exists as it is lived and experienced. In other words, we experience the world through embodied perception in which the self or subject is relational to the physical

⁴⁰⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A. M. Sheridan (Routledge, 2003), 39.

⁴⁰¹ Luce Irigaray cited in Clive Owens, “Feminism and Postmodernism,” H. Foster ed., *Postmodern Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 1985), 70.

body. This is in opposition to the notion of a mind-self ordering the “flesh machine” to perform acts. Even in thought, Ponty reminds us, the body is always present because consciousness is directly affected by the spatial experience of the body. Yet philosophy, lamented Ponty, fails to accommodate the intertwining of the body and its environment because it always imposes the concept of subject and object onto experience. The subject relates to the world only through the body. It is the locus of perception. As Ponty puts it, “our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space. It applies itself to space like a hand to an instrument.”⁴⁰² In this way the body acts upon perception of space. We are always locating ourselves within a spatial environment from the perspective of our body. We act upon space through our experience of being embodied. Space is never a static geometric container of objects but is perceived and organized by the body.

A number of other scholars have also pursued the crucial relationship between the body and social space that Ponty exposed.⁴⁰³ In *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), media theorist Marshall McLuhan proposed that the isolation of vision from the other senses produced the notion of an objective point of view, which led to the development of the individual subject, the nation State, and the modern corporation.⁴⁰⁴ According to McLuhan the visual regime of modernity was largely imposed by print culture and

⁴⁰² Maurice Merleau Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963), 5.

⁴⁰³ The range of philosophers who focus on the body and its social role are too numerous to mention, but include such notables as John Dewey, William James, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau Ponty and Simone Weil, to mention a few. Some prominent scholars who trace the “visualism” of Western Culture include Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (U of Toronto Press, 1962); Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World* (Routledge, 2002); Erich Auerback, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton U Press, 2003); and more recently Martin Jay, “Scopic Regimes of Modernity” in Hal Foster ed., *Vision and Visuality* (Bay Press, 1985) 3-23; and Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (U of Cal Press, 1994).

⁴⁰⁴ See Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: the making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 1962); and Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1964, reprinted 1996).

resulted in a form of “visual space” that is primarily representational. This is a space of signs and abstractions of the sort that post-WWII artists had firmly rejected – a political space of ideologies and totalizing collectives. Within such a space, individual subjects are treated as static and finite entities who share universal values and whose differences are repressed by abstractions and codifications. At roughly the same time that McLuhan was interrogating the privileging of the eye as the root of enlightenment rationalism, the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre reinterpreted “visualism” and its tendency toward abstraction rather than lived experience as a regime of power in which the embodied subject was marginalized.⁴⁰⁵ As Lefebvre concurred with Ponty: “Western philosophy has betrayed the body, it has actively participated in the great process of metaphorization that has abandoned the body; and it has denied the body. The living body, being at once subject and object cannot tolerate such conceptual division ...”⁴⁰⁶

This brief overview of some of the arguments criticizing mind-body dualism hardly does justice to the complex genealogy of the concept of embodiment or to the various theories it encompasses.⁴⁰⁷ But it does highlight the tenacious centrality of the Cartesian binary model. As these thinkers identified, within this model, there are two dominant ways of understanding the body: at one end of the spectrum the body is treated as an essential biological entity, and at the other it is treated as a social construction. The

⁴⁰⁵ The pairing of writing systems with visual dominance was the focus of Marshall McLuhan’s book *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962), which Lefebvre acknowledged as an influence on his own theorizing in this area. See Cavell, *McLuhan in Space*, 29. According to Lefebvre, “to underestimate, ignore and diminish space amounts to the overestimation of texts, written matter, and writing systems, along with the readable and the visible...” Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Donald Nicholson Smith Trans (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 62.

⁴⁰⁶ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 405.

⁴⁰⁷ For a more in-depth investigation into theories of the body in Western thought see Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), and the more recent Noland, *Agency and Embodiment*.

physical body is seen as an individual body and the socially constructed body as embedded in collectivity. Thus, when scholars discuss collectivity they are almost always invoking the constructed body – a body without material or kinetic functions: the body as “text.” The individual material body, on the other hand, is usually treated as distinct from a collective formation. Yet, as Lefebvre proclaimed, “the whole of social space proceeds from the body.”⁴⁰⁸ In other words, the body is always a lived body, and, in this way, is both disruptive and constructive. Thus, the lived body occupies a liminal space in which it is never wholly authentic nor completely constructed. The dialogical nuances of the lived body as a site of transaction between subjects, however, were largely invisible within the hegemonic binary model at the centre of art production in the United States during the 1950s and 60s.⁴⁰⁹

I discuss the lived body’s potential to transcend representational space in greater detail, and in relation to the Deweyan transactional body, toward the end of this chapter. For now, I want to return to the post-WWII art context in which the artist’s body was largely understood as a non-dialogical medium of individual expression and the viewer’s body as a social construction. These two kinds of bodies were held in check by the art object’s visual bias; its message could be accessed only through the mediation of representational (visual) space. Through his “Happenings,” Allan Kaprow was confronted with a situation in which the artist was no longer separated from the viewer by the art object but came into direct contact with the audience in social space. Similarly,

⁴⁰⁸ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 405.

⁴⁰⁹ There are numerous theories of lived space (Lefebvre), counter-environments (McLuhan), *communitas* (Goodman/Turner), temporary autonomous zones (Hakim Bey), or the carnivalesque (Bakhtin), in which we can experience alternative bodies outside of the public sphere.

Anna Halprin became increasingly aware of the power differential between the audience and performer as she purposefully attempted to overstep the traditional boundaries and expectations of dance performance, especially in the confrontational improvised events she produced between 1962-66. In what follows, I explore how they each articulated and responded to the problematic ways in which the body in social space alters the relationship between the artist and the audience.

The Lived Body and Audience Participation

Let us begin by revisiting Kaprow's assertion that the happening grew out of action painting in his article of 1958, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock." He starts out by positioning Pollock as the heroic artist, reaffirming his mythical status as a genius and a creator: Pollock is "amazingly childlike... manifestly frank and uncultivated, unsullied by training, trade secrets, finesse..."⁴¹⁰ According to Kaprow, Pollock has a capacity to access his authentic embodied self and translate this through matter in primal and ritualistic gestures. Kaprow enlists Pollock as a shaman figure who magically opened a passage between two worlds that had previously tended to occlude each other: art and life. There is a high degree of mystery here, and it is not at all clear how, other than through his privileged position as an artist with an "authentic" body, Pollock managed to leave this legacy for Kaprow.

What is clear is that Kaprow derives from Pollock's embodied action painting the merging of two kinds of space – the representational space of the art object and the lived

⁴¹⁰ Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," 7.

spaces of the artist and the viewer. For Kaprow, Pollock had created an art that “tends to lose itself out of bounds, tends to fill our world with itself...”⁴¹¹ He interprets this merger as a typical avant-garde confrontation: “I am convinced,” he wrote, “that to grasp a Pollock’s impact properly, we must be acrobats, constantly shuttling between an identification with the hands and body that flung the paint... and submission to the objective markings, allowing them to entangle and assault us.”⁴¹² This observation adheres to the avant-garde model of the artist-provocateur forcing the viewer into a confrontation that will dislocate him from habitual perception. Kaprow concludes by listing the materials for a new kind of art that will spill out into the actual world: “paint, chairs, food, electric and neon lights, smoke, water, old socks, a dog, movies...” These are certainly everyday things, and Kaprow is explicit in noting that they can only be transformed by artists: “Not only will these *bold creators* show us, as if for the first time, the world we have always had about us but ignored, but they will disclose entirely unheard of happenings and events...”⁴¹³

Shortly after this article was published in 1958, Kaprow, as one of these bold creators, orchestrated an environment at the Hansa Gallery, entitled “Allan Kaprow: An Exhibition.” As his “action collage” moved out into the room and filled the space with the objects, sounds, and sensations of everyday life, Kaprow realized that anyone who entered the space would also become part of the work. Therefore, he constructed a space in which “we do not come to look *at* things. We simply enter, are surrounded, and become part of what surrounds us, passively or actively according to our talents for

⁴¹¹ Kaprow, *The Legacy of Jackson Pollock*, 6.

⁴¹² Kaprow, “Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” 5.

⁴¹³ Kaprow, “Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” 9.

‘engagement’...”⁴¹⁴ As he perceptively noted, “the fine arts traditionally demand for their appreciation physically passive observers, working with their minds to get at what their senses register. But the Happenings are an active art, requiring that creation and realization, artwork and life be inseparable.”⁴¹⁵ Yet, both active and passive behaviors presented problems for Kaprow. On one hand, some people who attended his events did not know what they were encountering and tended to stand around waiting for a performance to begin. As he noted, “a group of inactive people in the space of a Happening is just dead space.”⁴¹⁶ On the other hand, when audience members improvised during an event, Kaprow struggled to reconcile his urge to control them; “At first, I thought, how can I keep these people still? ...If during the sound performance someone says something that I don’t like, should I shut him up?”⁴¹⁷ His solution to this frustration was to give each person present a role. But, as he was about to realize, when art moves into lived space – even through something as seemingly innocuous as the creation of an environment – it opens itself to the power relations already established within social space.

This was clearly evident in his subsequent well-known event, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959). It is worth providing some detail about how this happening was orchestrated because it highlights the difficulty that accommodating the viewer’s body entails. Prior to the event, a form letter was sent by “Reuben-Kaprow Associates” to 75 people inviting them to collaborate with Kaprow in performing and experiencing the

⁴¹⁴ Kaprow, “Notes on the Creation of a Total Art” (1958), 11.

⁴¹⁵ Kaprow, “The Happening is Dead,” 64.

⁴¹⁶ Kaprow, *Assemblage*, 196.

⁴¹⁷ Allan Kaprow, in an interview with Richard Kostelanetz. *The Theatre of Mixed Means*. London: Pitman, 1970, 110.

event. These initial letters were followed by invitations which gave a brief description of what would take place and advised that admission would be by advance reservation only. Over a series of six evenings, this group of invitees converged at the Reuben Gallery's loft space where Kaprow had constructed three temporary rooms divided by semi-transparent plastic walls and furnished with folding chairs for the audience. As the audience arrived for the first event, they received a program with instructions stating that there would be six parts to the performance and each part would begin and end with the signal of a bell. They also received three cards that told them which room to sit in during which part. According to theatre historian Michael Kirby, "the program admonished the spectator to be sure to follow the individual directions he had been given and to change his seat at the specified time."⁴¹⁸ On the program was a list of the "Cast of Participants" which included Kaprow, Robert Whitman, Sam Francis, Alfred Leslie, George Segal, Lucas Samaras, Rosalyn Montague, Shirley Prendergast and others. Also listed anonymously were "The visitors – who sit in various chairs."⁴¹⁹

The events consisted of various task-like actions carried out by the above named participants. Rosalyn Montague, for example, entered one of the rooms and walked up to a table set with twelve glasses, twelve orange halves and a juice-squeezer and proceeded to squeeze one of the halves into a glass. She then drank the juice and continued the same action for each of the remaining eleven orange halves. Various such actions took place simultaneously in each room to the accompaniment of sound and light effects (fig. 6). According to Kaprow, all of the scripted actions in this early happening were "tightly

⁴¹⁸ Kirby, "18 Happenings in 6 Parts," 71.

⁴¹⁹ Kirby, "18 Happenings in 6 Parts," 71.

imposed.”⁴²⁰ Based on interviews with the participants, Michael Kirby describes how this took place:

The movements of the performers – as they would consistently be throughout the presentation – were clear, simple and unspontaneous. Their faces never expressed feeling or emotion. They walked slowly, carefully, almost stiffly, and always in straight lines parallel to one of the walls: all turns, as if marching, would be at right angles (or an about-face), and they would never cross the space diagonally.⁴²¹

...All of the movements in *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* were very carefully rehearsed.... If the performers seemed to be counting steps, it was because they were. Steps, the number of counts between movements, the duration of positions – everything was controlled. Rehearsals began at least two weeks before the first performance.⁴²²

Clearly, this happening was strictly choreographed, with little space for random occurrences or input from either the performers or the audience.

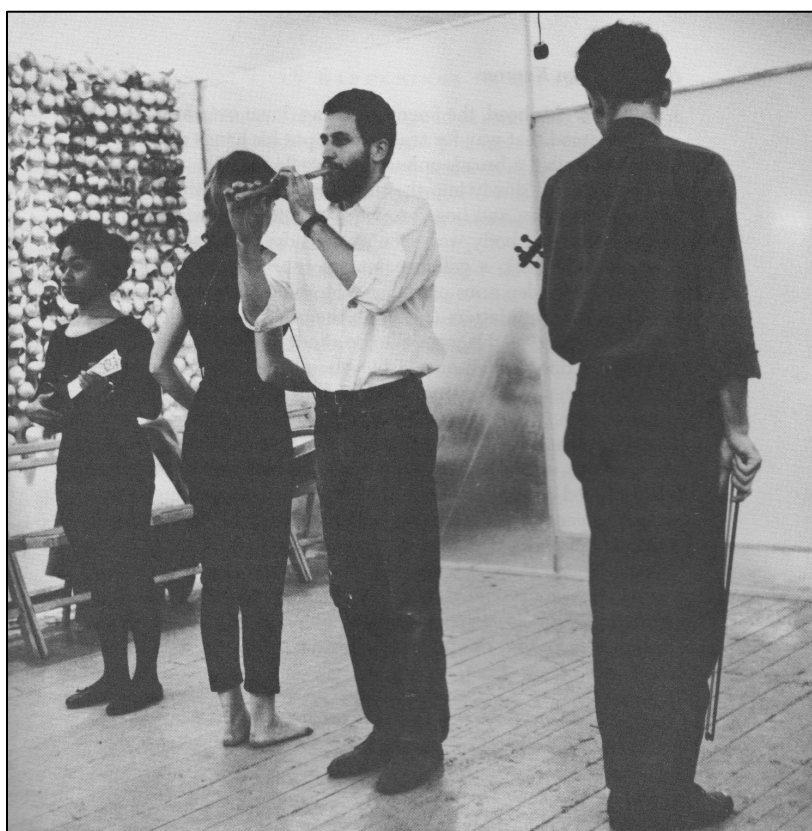


Figure 6. *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, Allan Kaprow in centre with participants, 1959, New York City. Collection of the artist.

⁴²⁰ Kaprow, interview with Richard Kostelanetz. *The Theatre of Mixed Means*, 110.

⁴²¹ Kirby, “18 Happenings in 6 Parts,” 72.

⁴²² Kirby, “18 Happenings in 6 Parts,” 75.

Kaprow was made acutely aware of the inequities of social space, however, when a few participants spontaneously disrupted some of the events with unscripted sounds and actions. During one event, for example, the artist Alfred Leslie incurred Kaprow's disapproval when instead of producing the random straight lines he was instructed to paint, he arranged these lines into four-letter words.⁴²³ It is not surprising that participants might react against the instruction cards, the tightly regimented actions, the serious mode of their deployment, or the ringing bell that told them when to move. After all, when you script actions, time them, and enforce compliance, then you are exerting control over a social space. In an interview with Richard Kostalanetz, Kaprow explained that it was not so much the unexpected actions and sounds made by the audience that bothered him, but rather "an aggression against me; that's what I didn't like."⁴²⁴ What he was experiencing was the diminution of his authorial privilege and an increasing awareness of his social position amongst a collective group.

Kaprow readily admitted that he "had no idea how to make people happy with the situation at that time; so [he] floundered about for a number of years trying to find out."⁴²⁵ For him, at this time, the question revolved around how to encourage participants to engage in events in a way that would be productive for them and his own expectations. His initial solution was to attempt to eliminate the audience/performer relationship by giving each person a clearly defined role. "I think it is a mark of mutual respect," he wrote, "that all persons involved in a Happening be willing and committed participants who have a clear idea what they are to do. This is simply accomplished by writing out the

⁴²³ Kirby, "18 Happenings in 6 Parts," 81.

⁴²⁴ Kaprow, quoted in Kostalanetz, 109.

⁴²⁵ Kaprow, quoted in Kostalanetz, 110.

scenario or score for all and discussing it thoroughly with them beforehand.”⁴²⁶ Kaprow’s solution defines the parameters of the Happening, with the artist acting as a kind of director who creates a situation in which the participants have an experience. He likened this to a “game” in which all participants know the rules and agree to play by them; “if you agree to play my game, you agree to play by my rules, just as I would play by yours.”⁴²⁷ In other words, the participants agree to subject themselves to another’s will for a predetermined amount of time. This “game” may create a situation in which artist and participant engage in an experience together, but it holds both within a hierarchical structure that does not allow for dialogue. In an interview, Kaprow recalled that John Cage, who was in attendance at *18 Happenings*, “objected to being told to go from one space to another.”⁴²⁸ Cage described his experience in terms of his own anarchist beliefs:

Though I don’t actively engage in politics, I do as an artist have some awareness of art’s political content, and it doesn’t include policemen. ... We look at our lives, at the anarchist moments, or spaces, or times, or whatever you want to call them, and there these things that I’m so interested in – awareness, curiosity, ect. – have play. It is not during organized or policed moments that these things happen.⁴²⁹

Indeed, in hindsight Kaprow recognized that “a reason it did not work was that it was too controlled, and people do not like to be controlled in that way.”⁴³⁰

The embodied experience of the participants in this event overstepped the division between the spectator/performer relationship, yet the social space created by *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* replicated (one might say almost parodied) the dominant

⁴²⁶ Kaprow, *Assemblage*, 196.

⁴²⁷ Kaprow quoted in Kostelanetz, 110.

⁴²⁸ Joan Marter, “Interview with Kaprow, Dec. 1995” in Joan Marter ed. *Off limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde, 1957-1963* (Rutgers University Press, 1999), 135.

⁴²⁹ Michael Kirby and Richard Schechner, “An Interview with John Cage,” reprinted in Mariellen Sandford ed. *Happenings and Other Acts*, 69.

⁴³⁰ Kaprow quoted in Kostelanetz, 110.

collective social form with its hegemonic social order. It could be argued that the temporary nature of this event negated the establishment of any totalizing collectivity; temporary events tend to disrupt repetition and stability through the body's *potential* for spontaneous action (as Alfred Leslie demonstrated).⁴³¹ Yet, as theatre historian Baz Kershaw cautions, merely reducing "the scope of the claims made for cohesiveness of community or the unifying powers of communitarianism" to the local and temporary, although "a common defense against... attacks on the idea of the collective," does not necessarily avoid the traps of ideology or violence.⁴³² As he notes, fascist spectacle was often localized and took place within an event-structure timeline.⁴³³ This is certainly not the kind of space Kaprow was aiming to create, yet his role as an artist/director and his engagement of a largely visually activated audience (seated, watching) replicates a space of representation in which some bodies are authentic and free and others are not. Indeed, Kaprow's art experience up to this point had largely been based on organizing works around a visual relationship with the viewer. Moreover, Kaprow's happening preserved the autonomy of art in the avant-garde sense because it relied on the assumption of art's autonomy in order to "educate" an audience supposedly alienated from their authentic selves. Yet, when the art, the artist, and the viewers exist in the same social space, the privileged autonomy of the artist evaporates, and he now must exert social power in order

⁴³¹ The notion of Bakhtin's carnivalesque emerges here. Alfred Leslie's improvisation during *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* is an example of how the impure or debased (in this case both the bawdy use of mass culture slang and the unscripted use of the spontaneous body) brings the sacred or exalted (here, the space of high art) down to the level of the profane.

⁴³² Baz Kershaw, *The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard* (London: Routledge, 1999), 192.

⁴³³ Kershaw, *The Radical in Performance*, 192.

to have control over the space. Not surprisingly, audience hostility and disruption was common during happenings and events throughout the 1960s.

Like Kaprow, Anna Halprin was initially perplexed by the negative audience reaction to several of her early collaborative events, first experienced in 1962 with her performance of *The Five Legged-Stool*. Her response, however, was to focus on dialogue rather than scripting. Unlike Kaprow, who entrenched his own practice within the tradition of modernist action painting, Halprin denied that lineage and positioned her practice as coexistent with, but not oppositional to, what was going on at the centre of art and dance production. In an interview with David Bernstein, she recalled the collaborative atmosphere of her San Francisco Dancers Workshop, and tied it to earlier Bauhaus principles of collaboration and interdisciplinarity:

... we would create these wonderful, spontaneous... what Allan Kaprow called ‘happenings.’ But I never called them happenings; I always called them ‘events.’ I didn’t even know about happenings. It was a wonderful time for a kind of Bauhaus type of experimentation by multidisciplinary artist working together.... For me, the idea of collaborating with other artists was a very natural way of working...⁴³⁴

As argued in previous chapters, Halprin was influenced less by a reaction against formalist aesthetics, than by the notion of experiential engagement emerging from her early exposure to holistic principles, including Dewey’s pragmatist philosophy and her interest in Bauhaus concepts. Indeed, from the late 1950s onward, Halprin was working within an interdisciplinary environment similar to Kaprow’s, but instead of pursuing an

⁴³⁴ Anna Halprin, interviewed by David W. Bernstein, *The San Francisco Tape Music Centre: 1960s Counterculture and the Avant-Garde* (Berkeley: U of Cal Press, 2008), 223. In this quote, she is describing the collaborative atmosphere at Divisadero Street, which her Dancers Workshop shared with the San Francisco Tape Music Centre.

individual artistic practice she had been engaging in collaborative workshops that focused on improvisation with her San Francisco Dancers' Workshop.

Whereas Kaprow's first Happening was largely an individual project in which the freedom and spontaneity of other subjects was curtailed by predetermined rules and restrictions, Halprin's focus on the "shared actions" involved in improvisation led her to approach each event as what Margaret Gilbert calls a "we-goal," in which a satisfactory end result is shared by all participants as a "plural subject".⁴³⁵ Sharing a we-goal does not imply submitting individuality to a collective identity because people can belong to multiple groups and act as individuals at the same time.⁴³⁶ Gilbert provides clarification through the example of two people setting out for a walk: "...going for a walk together with another person," she argues, "involves participating in an activity of a special kind, one whose goal is the goal of a plural subject, as opposed to the shared personal goal of the participants. ... going for a walk involves an 'our goal' as opposed to two or more 'my goals.'"⁴³⁷ This notion of "we" is implicit in group improvisation where the goal is to move in relation to the environment and other bodies. Improvisation is action without a predetermined script; it evolves over time and there is no one specific outcome. The "we goal" of improvisation is the experience and action itself. With improvisation, the dancer's body is poised for uncontrolled freedom but, in concert with other bodies, must negotiate a path of movement in a dialogical relationship. Improvisation was a core

⁴³⁵ Margaret Gilbert, "Walking Together: A Paradigmatic Social Phenomenon," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy XV: The Philosophy of the Human Sciences*, Peter A. French, T.E. Uehling, Jr., and H.K. Wettstein eds (University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 9. For more on "we-modes" and "we-goals" see Raimo Tuomela, *The Philosophy of Sociality: The Shared Point of View* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3-45.

⁴³⁶ Raimo Tuomela, *The Philosophy of Sociality: The Shared Point of View* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3.

⁴³⁷ Gilbert, "Walking Together: A Paradigmatic Social Phenomenon," 9.

principle of the Dancers' Workshop; it was used as a dialogical tool that required each participant to react proprioceptively to the environment, including other bodies. As Halprin explained in 1965, "we used improvisation to explore space and certain kinds of dynamics. We would set up a situation where two people had a focus that concerned the amount of space between them. They would improvise to get a feeling of what could happen, and what one person did would elicit a reaction from the other..."⁴³⁸

For Halprin, exploration of improvised movement went hand-in-hand with an exploration of the physical body that led to the inclusion of voice, breathing, and even shouting; "Free-association became an important part of the work," she stated, "This would often manifest itself in dialogue. We began to deal with ourselves as people, not dancers."⁴³⁹ Halprin's early attempts to include the audience consisted of encouraging them to create improvised sounds, which she and her dance partners reacted to in a "dance-dialogue."⁴⁴⁰ In this way she increasingly confronted the complex problem of the objectification of the performer: "The person who is the performer is working with his body as an instrument," she explained, "He's making sounds and he's doing everything as if he were an object, when actually he's more than an object. He's full of the most fantastic psychological phenomena..."⁴⁴¹ Recognizing themselves as subjects rather than objects, Halprin and her dance partners became increasingly aware of their relationship to each other and the audience.

⁴³⁸ Anna Halprin quoted in Rainer interview, Rachel Kaplan ed., *Moving Toward Life: Five Decades of Transformational Dance* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1995), 77.

⁴³⁹ Anna Halprin quoted in Rainer interview, Rachel Kaplan ed., *Moving Toward Life: Five Decades of Transformational Dance* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1995), 77. The works that came out of this period include *Trunk Dance* and *Four Square* (1959).

⁴⁴⁰ Francean Campbell, "Audience Noises all part of the Act," *Vancouver Province*, 10 February 1961. BC Binning Fonds, Box 4, File 1, UBC.

⁴⁴¹ Rainer Interview, 97.

Out of a four-year period of improvisation, experimentation, and collaboration came the foundational work, *Five-Legged Stool* (1962), which directly led Halprin to focus on and explore performer/audience interaction (fig. 7). In a similar way to Kaprow's first happening, Halprin's two-act work consisted of herself and other artists performing repetitive tasks with props.⁴⁴² Dance critic Robert J. Pierce offers a condensed description of the performance:

It was designed as a sensory experience without continuity or meaning... The performers used the stage, the aisles, the basement, the ceiling, and even the sidewalk outside to perform on. They poured water, changed clothes, threw colorful objects up in the air, fell down, handed empty wine bottles up to a disembodied hand dangling down from the ceiling. At the end, feathers wafted down onto an empty stage for a full five minutes.⁴⁴³

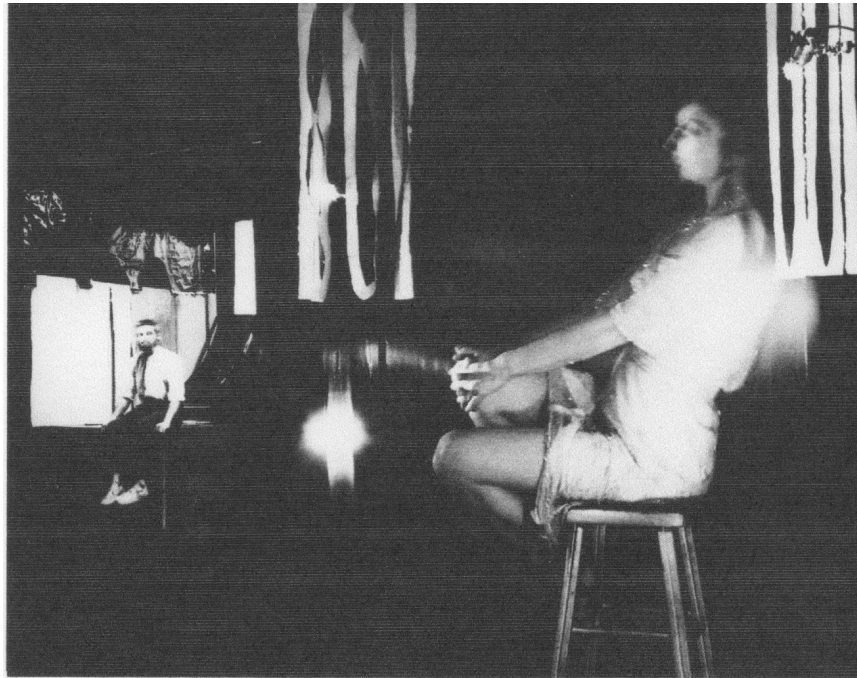


Figure 7. *Five-Legged Stool*, 1962, Playhouse Theatre, San Francisco. Photo by Warner Jepson.

⁴⁴² The others included John Graham, Lynn Palmer, and A.A. Leath.

⁴⁴³ Robert J. Pierce, "The Anna Halprin Story: Dancing in the Streets, in Prisons, in Hallways," *Village Voice* (March 10, 1975): 93.

Halprin's final task was to move the glass bottles from the stage surface by balancing on a stool and passing them overhead into the rafters to an offstage hand. The finale of the show occurred just as Halprin's task was completed and a plume of feathers was released from above to drift silently downward onto the performance area. The performers' various movements were accompanied by collaborative visual effects by painter Jo Landor, lighting by Patric Hickey, and experimental sound by Morton Subotnik – described by the *San Francisco Examiner* as “a bedlam of taped and live noises – jet engines, yelping dogs, crashing piano chords and ambient voices.”⁴⁴⁴ As Halprin explained it, this was the first performance in which the Dancers' Workshop purposefully attempted to surpass the traditional relationship of the performer to the audience by breaking the fourth wall:

Up until then, we had been content with using the space we had. But I got discouraged with having to be up there [on the stage] in that relationship to an audience. I began to look at the lobby, the aisles, the ceilings, the floor...What happened was that the audience was in the centre and the performance went all around them, above them and below them and in front of them, and outside, sometimes they would hear things from the street....⁴⁴⁵

This attempt to breach the traditional audience/performer division was, like Kaprow's own experience, fraught with unforeseen difficulties. “Something happened in that performance that we never experienced before, and which began to establish a next step,” recalled Halprin in an interview with Yvonne Rainer, “We got a violent audience reaction. That's when people started throwing things at us...”⁴⁴⁶ While experiential

⁴⁴⁴ Stanley Eichelbaum, “Playhouse Dance Bedlam,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 7 May 1962, 37.

⁴⁴⁵ Halprin, as quoted in “Rainer Interviews Halprin (1965)” Kaplan ed, *Moving Toward Life*, 83 - 85 .

⁴⁴⁶ Halprin, as quoted in “Rainer Interviews Halprin (1965)” Kaplan ed, *Moving Toward Life*, 85. Indeed, several of the pieces performed by the Dancers' Workshop during the first half of the 1960s provoked a

engagement and blurring the boundaries between performer and spectator had been an ongoing and developing feature of the Dancers' Workshop, it was only after the audience became physically violent that Halprin realized she had to confront the operations taking place between the performers' actions and the audience and to understand how these aspects of the multi-sensory event were interrelated. Aside from the audience talking loudly during the performance, Halprin was stunned and perplexed by their efforts to physically affect and interpenetrate the events:

One time during the bottle dance... people in the audience started shouting and throwing shoes at us. We were completely naïve about what we were doing. We didn't know this would affect anyone else... we couldn't figure out what was wrong, or why everybody was getting so excited. People would walk out in a rage.⁴⁴⁷

In many of the early events staged by the Dancers' Workshop the audience members were being forced to step out of the traditional passive spectator role, yet they were given no control over the event itself. Subjected to the dislocation of their senses and the disruption of their expectations of being entertained, they reacted in unpredictable ways.

In an avant-garde performance, this disruption of expectations would have served as either a comment on the failure of conventional modes of communication or a form of shock followed (ideally) by the epiphany of a new perspective; pushing an audience to the point of throwing things was seen as a success in Dada performance, for example. Dance historian Rebekah J. Kowal has argued that Halprin's practice employed this avant-garde tactic as a way of "cultivating viewers' critical judgment and interpretive

violent reaction from the audience, including a 1965 performance of *Parades and Changes* at the University of California, Berkeley, where a distressed audience member seized a kerosene lantern – the only source of light in the auditorium – and smashed it, leaving at least one of the dancers injured and everyone in darkness.

⁴⁴⁷ Halprin, as quoted in "Rainer Interviews Halprin (1965)" Kaplan ed, *Moving Toward Life*, 85

faculties, positioning them as equal (albeit unwitting) partners in the work of meaning making.⁴⁴⁸ Kowal likens this to direct action protests and sit-ins: “both Halprin’s work and the sit-ins deployed defamiliarization to spark action. Highlighting compromising ideological and social structures, they revealed to onlookers their complicity in maintaining them, then enlisted viewers in a process of re-patterning to transform subjugating habits of mind and behavior.”⁴⁴⁹ However, I want to point out that *Five Legged Stool* does not mark the maturing of Halprin’s practice but rather a turning point. Her response to audience hostility took a radically different direction. Refusing to continue to dislocate the audience from a critical position, she responded by exploring the potential for collective embodied experiential dialogue, which would take place through the collaborative creation of participatory events.

Halprin, who had been working in a collaborative atmosphere for some time, realized that this relationship between the performers and audience involved social power dynamics; “I was concerned...” she stated, “that we had this kind of power to stir people up. If we have this kind of power how should we use it? ... For the first time, I realized there was a real encounter going on between audience and performers. This is what we were interested in exploring next.”⁴⁵⁰ To prepare for a dialogical approach to audience participation that would allow for the autonomous behaviour of the spectator but maintain a “we-goal,” Halprin built on holistic ideas informed by the Deweyan approach to direct experiential engagement. As noted above, Dewey’s pragmatist aesthetics and philosophy rejected the spectator theory of knowledge. Instead, he emphasized experiential

⁴⁴⁸ Rebekah J. Kowal, *How to do things with Dance*, (Wesleyan University Press, 2010), 239.

⁴⁴⁹ Kowal, *How to do things with Dance*, 230.

⁴⁵⁰ Halprin, as quoted in “Rainer Interviews Halprin (1965)” Kaplan ed, *Moving Toward Life*, 93 .

engagement of a “transactional” body-mind. For Dewey, people are never passive spectators. They exist and create meaning in relation to what they do in transaction with the world. As philosopher Shannon Sullivan explains, Dewey’s notion of the transactional body emphasizes that bodies are not passive, sealed packages of flesh, autonomous from the world around them. They are permeable “patterns of behavior or action that occur across and by means of trans-various environments.”⁴⁵¹ This co-constitutive relationship between an active body and its environment undercuts the dominant binary model without merely reversing the binary to privilege the body over the mind, nature over culture, or the self over the world. Thus it is no longer tenable to assume that bodies are either resistant individual “essential” bodies or socially constructed “texts.” Instead, bodies are always in transaction between discursive practices and individualized ways of reshaping them and bringing them back into relation with the world and other subjects. This does not mean that the self dissolves into the world; it exists in relationship to it.

Dewey’s concept of the transactional body bears a noticeable similarity to how Fritz Perls and Paul Goodman’s Gestalt therapy envisions the body’s relationship to the environment. Thus, it is no surprise that Anna Halprin would find Perls’ approach useful. Crucially, these related approaches recognize that bodies are not finite, fixed, or stable, but are, in fact, transitional and dynamic. In Gestalt therapy, all experience takes place at what is known as the “contact-boundary” between the organism and its environment. This is not so much a traditional boundary that separates, as the term is commonly used, but rather a site of interaction that connects the organism to its environment – also known

⁴⁵¹ Sullivan, *Living Across and Through Skins*, 3.

as the “organism/environment field.”⁴⁵² Goodman’s symbiotic approach to the body’s gestalt relationship to the environment was influenced in particular by his reading of Peter Kropotkin’s anarchist conception of biological ecology as the model for human individuality. Kropotkin explains, “when a physiologist speaks now of the life of a plant or an animal, he sees an agglomeration, a colony of millions of separate individuals rather than a personality, one and invisible... The individual is quite a world of federations.”⁴⁵³ This notion of the body as a permeable agglomeration spills over into a model of sociality as well. As Perls and Goodman explain in Volume II of *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality*, “when we say ‘boundary’ we think of a ‘boundary between;’ but the contact-boundary, where experience occurs, does not separate the organism and its environment; rather it limits the organism, contains and protects it, and *at the same time* it touches the environment.”⁴⁵⁴ Thus, the body cannot be separated from its environment without diminishing its actual meaning. As Perls and Goodman further explain, “the human organism/environment is, of course, not only physical but social.”⁴⁵⁵ For Halprin, acknowledging the inter-relational and transactional characteristics of embodied experience led her to appreciate that “the individual, in order to realize his or her potential, needed the reality of a group situation where more life-like experiences and diversity could be confronted...”⁴⁵⁶ Indeed, a key idea within Gestalt therapy is that conflict between organisms is not merely destructive but can be a productive aspect of the

⁴⁵² Perls et al, *Volume II: Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality*, 268.

⁴⁵³ Peter Kropotkin, “Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Idea,” in *Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets*, ed. Roger N. Baldwin (New York: Dover, 1970), 118-119.

⁴⁵⁴ Perls et al, *Volume II: Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality*, 269.

⁴⁵⁵ Perls et al, *Volume II: Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality*, 269.

⁴⁵⁶ Halprin and Kaplan, *Moving Toward Life*, 112.

“contact field.”⁴⁵⁷ Perls’ therapy provided a somatic way of understanding embodied experience in the here and now. It is, like Dewey’s approach, holistic; that is, it pays attention to the body-mind and its relationship to the environment in order to effect change. Somatic practices such as deep breathing in yoga, for example, attempt to relax muscles that might be constrained through anxiety or anger and which result in chronic pain or tension. By embracing the transactional body, Halprin was able to approach conflict as a dialogical process, rather than suppress it through imposed rules, which I will demonstrate in chapter five through an analysis of her event series *Ten Myths*.

This is different from Kaprow’s initial solution to audience unpredictability and uncertainty, which was to script actions and sounds in what he likened to a game format.⁴⁵⁸ In *18 Happenings* he attempted to side-step unpredictable social power dynamics through an in-built structure with finite boundaries. His game model, however, was a solution to confrontation between individual subjects understood as static and finite entities. In order not to misrepresent Kaprow, however, it is worth noting that, like Halprin’s *Five Legged Stool*, Kaprow’s earliest art events do not represent his lifetime’s work. They were experimental works through which he honed his later practice of “un-acting.”⁴⁵⁹ By the mid sixties, Kaprow had come to acknowledge that happenings had “affinities with practices marginal to the fine arts, such as parades, carnivals, games, expeditions, guided tours, orgies, religious ceremonies, and such secular rituals as the

⁴⁵⁷ Perls et al, *Volume II: Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality*, 397.

⁴⁵⁸ Kaprow quoted in Kostelanetz, 110.

⁴⁵⁹ For more on Kaprow’s later event-based art practices see Jeff Kelley and Allan Kaprow, *Childs Play: the art of Allan Kaprow* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). Halprin participated in Kaprow’s 1964 event at the Spring Festival of Fine Arts at the University of California, Berkeley, entitled “Paper.” Kaprow organized the event, which consisted of a number of simultaneous actions taking place in a parking garage. For more on this see Kelley and Kaprow, *Childs Play*, 100.

elaborate operations of the Mafia; civil rights demonstrations; national election campaigns...”⁴⁶⁰ Yet, he did not differentiate between unofficial face-to-face social practices and highly structured and imposed practices such as election campaigns. As Kaprow’s early experience with audience aggression demonstrates, within the Modernist art world, the body was understood as either a non-dialogical resistant and individual body or as the “corpus” – the objectified body filtered through the codes of mass culture. This binary concept of the essential versus the constructed body prevented historians of art and aesthetics from comprehending event based art’s dialogical impulses.⁴⁶¹ Yet, the material body’s incontrovertible ties to lived experience helped to reconfigure the relationship between the artist and the viewer by overflowing such conceptual divisions, and thus calling attention to the mystification inherent in the artist’s claim to transmit messages directly to the passive viewer. Improvisations such as Alfred Leslie’s and those of the frustrated audience watching *Five Legged Stool* are manifestations of the lived body’s capacity to overflow and surpass official control.

For Halprin, who pursued a holistic approach, bodies are relational and transactional; they are never actually fixed or discrete stable units. Instead, organisms and environments are constantly being remade. This approach resists a moment of resolution or finality, and this has substantial ramifications for developing a concept of non-hierarchical collectivity. In chapter three, I likened this collectivity to Goodman’s and Turner’s related notions of “*communitas*,” in which collective experiences resist permanence in order to negate power struggles that characterize hierarchical social

⁴⁶⁰ Allan Kaprow, “Happenings Are Dead,” 64.

⁴⁶¹ The art historical response to the introduction of the body was the invention of “performance art” a category that fits into a spectator theory of knowledge.

structures: instead, their power lies in the temporary “we goal” experienced by the participants. In the following chapter, I analyze Anna Halprin’s participation workshop series of 1966-67, *Ten Myths*, through Hakim Bey’s anarchist lens of the “Temporary Autonomous Zone” and explore Bey’s concept in relation to her practice of “mutual creation.”

Chapter Five

10 MYTHS: MUTUAL CREATION AND THE NON-TOTALIZING COLLECTIVE

In response to violent audience reactions to several of the Dancers' Workshop performances, Anna Halprin inaugurated a series of participation events known as *Ten Myths*.⁴⁶² These experimental events involved audience-participants in an “experiential dialogue” that offered a socially engaged alternative to the dominant individualism promoted by formalist aesthetics and dislocative avant-gardism. At the same time, they were enacted in order to put the social power dynamics existing between individuals into a process-based dialogue that modeled a temporary form of non-totalizing collectivity. As Halprin explained her artistic stance: “the old idea of the artist is that he was intuitive, which meant that he knew what he was doing but nobody else did. Therefore he had power. He was a hero and his art came down to you. I find that kind of hierarchical structure oppressive.”⁴⁶³ In contrast, she stated, “as an artist I am interested in methods of working collectively. I want to give up power in order to help other people find their own creativity in meaningful ways.”⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶² I focus my analysis on the first two *Myths* series, which began with *Ten Myths* on October 5, 1967, and spread over ten Thursday evenings through to mid-December. A second series entitled *Seven Myths* began in the new year on February 8, 1968 and ran until March 21, and other *Myths* events were also held in May of 1968. Although initially all of the *Myths* series were held at the Divisadero Street studio, some were staged at other locations sponsored by The University of Oregon New Theatre Experience (Feb. 10 1968), The Festival of Contemporary Arts at San Jose State College (1969), The Private Arts Foundation in Bethesda, Maryland (1969), and the Case Western University Student's Union in Cleveland, Ohio (1970). Anna Halprin Papers 32, Museum of Performance and Design, San Francisco, California.

⁴⁶³ Anna Halprin quoted in Wilma Salisbury, “Getting High on People,” *The Plain Dealer*, 25 January 1970, 1E.

⁴⁶⁴ Halprin quoted in Salisbury, “Getting High on People,” 1E.

The call to embrace one's own creativity may sound stale to contemporary ears, however, given the holistic stance underwriting Halprin's practice her statement merits more serious consideration. Creativity, in the sense that Halprin is using it here, is an *active* inter-relational process that links the art experience to embodied presence, direct engagement and participation. A more currently used term, "poetics," emerging from Fluxus and Situationist theory, has largely superseded the use of the term "creativity" in discussions of art and can help us to appreciate the initial spirit of her statement.⁴⁶⁵ In *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, for example, Laurence Louppe explains that a poetics "breaks with the dichotomy that opposes the actor and the receiver: it 'devectorises' ...the traditional one-way conception of communication and places the work of art at the heart of a shared 'work'."⁴⁶⁶ This is akin to what Dewey states in *Art as Experience*: "The work of art is ... a challenge to the performance of a like act of evocation and organization, through imagination on the part of the one who experiences it."⁴⁶⁷ According to the holistic pragmatic approach, art's purpose is to prompt an active creative response, not a passive contemplative response.

⁴⁶⁵ Poetics is a term used frequently in Situationist theory. The Situationist International's signature mode of subversion was a form of poetics known as "détournement." This tactic involved removing images, texts, or objects from their original context and then assembling these fragments with other fragments to create new "deconstructive" meanings. In this way, détournement destabilized commodified meanings and exceeded them by inventing new, unpredictable, and free relationships. Essentially, détournement reveals that there are meanings outside of the constraints of the spectacle; however, I do not want to imply that American West Coast artists such as Halprin were in any way following a Situationist program, especially because of the primacy of the SI's Marxist-based critique of bourgeois society, which is not paralleled in Halprin's work. The Situationists rigorously theorized their alignment with the experiential aspects of life and their critical stance toward the spectacle, whereas Halprin, and other West Coast artists, tended to produce art that forged experiential links without engaging in political theory to explain their works. In their separate ways, however, both groups were critical of the mediated world of appearances and both sought liberation through the experiential.

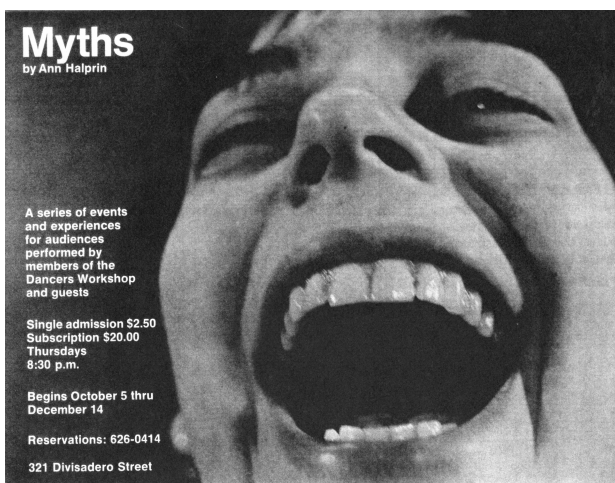
⁴⁶⁶ Laurence Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, translated by Sally Gardner, (Alton, Hampshire: Dance Books Ltd, 2010), 4.

⁴⁶⁷ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 278.

Significantly, the creative art experience advocated by Halprin takes place in the embodied present moment; creative action is itself a dialogue negotiated in presence. In this chapter, I argue that because embodied dialogue defies abstraction on a fundamental level, it has important repercussions for the kinds of social relations generated. To do this, I build on my previous argument that in order to understand how direct experience can also be a dialogue that models non-hierarchical collectivity it is necessary to first understand embodiment through its holistic approach as “transactional” and, second, to understand collectivity as an affinity-based social practice. In the preceding chapters I emphasized the similarities between Dewey’s holism, Paul Goodman’s anarchist-based concept of “*communitas*,” and Fritz Perl’s and Goodman’s Gestalt therapy in order to make a case for using an anarchist social movement lens to understand Halprin’s work. In particular, I stressed that they share an emphasis on experience as something more than an individual internal end-point and embodiment as a transactional state of being that is always in dialogue with its environment. In other words, they share a deeply dialogical foundation that places the embodied participant in the forefront and refuses to substitute “texts” for actual bodies. Here, I explore the community-building role played by the body in Halprin’s *Ten Myths*, and then I use Hakim Bey’s anarchist concept of the “Temporary Autonomous Zone” as an interpretive lens that allows for the connection between embodied experience and non-hierarchical collectivity to come to the forefront.

Ten Myths: an experiment in mutual creation

Anna Halprin and a group of collaborators staged *Ten Myths* on a series of Thursday evenings between October 1967 and February 1968 at her Divisadero Street studio (fig. 8).⁴⁶⁸ Each event was loosely structured to allow participants to explore subjects such as conflict, aggression, celebration, and play. Halprin described her role as threefold: preparing a problem, selecting collaborators, and guiding the event. She worked together with members of the Dancers' Workshop, as well as musician Casey Sonnabend and artist Patrick Hickey, who arranged lighting and props, to provide an environment conducive to participation and set conditions that would promote “self-generating creativity.”



For the most part, participants were not trained dancers. They were an eclectic mix of students, professors, artists, businessmen, architects, tourists, homemakers and other curious individuals who responded to a series

Figure 8. *Ten Myths* advertisement, 1967, San Francisco. Collection of the artist.

⁴⁶⁸ Any interpretation of ephemeral events of the past is shaped by the archival documents and the testimonies of the participants. In this case, what remains of *Ten Myths* are Halprin's accounts, newspaper reports, commentary by members of the Dancer's Workshop, the testimony and written comments of public participants, photographs, and Halprin's written "scores," which she developed during the course of staging *Ten Myths*. My description is based on these sources and is not intended to revive the experience through words but rather to familiarize the reader with the sequence of the events and to highlight their dialogical purpose. I therefore draw out and emphasize aspects that are pertinent to my own analysis.

of announcements inviting them to engage in mutual creation.⁴⁶⁹ “Each evening” stated the press release, “will explore a different relationship between the audience and performers, and between our awareness, our bodies, and our environments. The audience should not be bound by accustomed passivity, by static self-images or by restrictive clothing.”⁴⁷⁰ An average of fifty people came to each event, and many attended consistently.

Although the focus was on participation, no one was forced to engage beyond his or her comfort level or to stay if they wished to leave; indeed, participants were often briefed before an event to ensure that no one would feel coerced. As Halprin wrote, the experience “was not like that of a frightened nightclub patron pressured by a performer or friend to get up on stage and make a fool of himself.” In other words, events focused on direct experience rather than performance.⁴⁷¹ As part of each event Halprin, her dancers, and any of the members of the public who wished participate, would have a discussion session after the initial activity subsided. Sometimes this would take the form of group conversation, or participants would write down their responses and suggestions for future events. From these sessions, Halprin noted:

We learned how things worked, and then we based our next *Myth* on something that didn't work but could have. ... We quickly noticed that we had to evolve structures that were free enough to allow everyone to become involved in his own way, avoiding any feeling of manipulation, but

⁴⁶⁹ A series of questionnaires given to the public participants also provides us with a picture of how they responded, what they liked, what they did not like, and what kinds of people attended these events. The majority were university students, but there were also a chemist, teacher, interior designer, physicist, writer, psychologist, professor, and the ages ranged from 19-50. None of the participants were registered in the Dancers' Workshop classes. Museum of Performance and Design, San Francisco, California, Anna Halprin Papers 32, 1932-1994, “Dancers' Workshop questionnaires, Ten Myths.”

⁴⁷⁰ Rockwell quoted in “Mutual Creation,” *Tulane Drama Review* (Fall, 1968), 163.

⁴⁷¹ Halprin, “Mutual Creation,” *Tulane Drama Review* (Fall, 1968), 163.

simultaneously we had to set up boundaries... they had to be aware that they were a collective, not just 50 individuals on private trips.⁴⁷²

Halprin and her collaborators attempted to create a dialogue that would further a process in which an event would have experiential meaning for all present. Although the initial purpose of the *Myths* series was to explore the audience/performer relationship, with Halprin and her collaborators acting as guides or models, participants quickly transcended this relationship to become collaborators themselves. According to Halprin, “Myths became a total involvement through audience participation.... Not in any abstract way but through physical actions.”⁴⁷³

Above all, participants were encouraged to physically experience each event. It is crucial to note that although Halprin envisioned *Myths* as a series of “archetypal” experiences, each would be worked out in an embodied dialogue with no rigid structure enforced on the group.⁴⁷⁴ In this way, there would be room for unpredictable elements to occur. More importantly, she explained that a myth is not only a discursive structure outside of oneself. “The symbol of people’s myth,” stated Halprin, “is their own body. How people experience their body is their story.”⁴⁷⁵ What might she mean here, and how can we understand myth as an embodied form without seeing it through a constructionist lens? As we already know, Halprin’s understanding of how the body is implicated in collectivity was informed by holistic principles in which dance is not so much a

⁴⁷² Halprin as quoted in Douglas Ross, “An Interview With Ann Halprin,” *Tulane Drama Review* (Fall 1968), 174.

⁴⁷³ Anna Halprin, “Introductory Statement, Ten Myths,” Museum of Performance and Design, San Francisco, California, Anna Halprin Papers 32, 1932-1994.

⁴⁷⁴ Halprin, “Introductory Statement, Ten Myths.”

⁴⁷⁵ Kaplan, *Moving towards life*, 1995, 203.

performance for others as an embodied experience that integrates physical bodies and their environments. This distinction is significant and bears review.

Recall that the critical approach to the body tends to interpret it either as a surface on which a text is produced by discourses of power or as the essentialist “natural” body. One of the limitations of categorizing bodies as “natural” is that they tend to be understood as either deeply immersed in a hidden inner world of inexpressible feeling or subject to a generalizing force at work in which expressive gestures are seen as universally understood signs across time and different cultural contexts – as in the example of John Martin’s metakinesis. Conversely, if we allow that body gestures are socially constructed, then interpretations tend to assert that bodies are merely surfaces on which a text is written and performed. According to this paradigm, only the surface of the body has the ability to be discursive since it is the “mirror” of socially constructed identity – an abstract language that can be codified and shared. In this way, the body as text will always be subject to ideological violence and implicated in totalizing collectivity. Halprin’s understanding of the body is closer to the former essentialist view; indeed, Janice Ross has described Halprin’s conception of the natural body as a “fount of deep knowledge that can be nudged into expression through performance.”⁴⁷⁶ However, Ross does not interrogate Halprin’s concept of the natural body in terms of its “transactional” qualities, an aspect that becomes especially evident through her use of Gestalt therapy techniques.

As noted, Gestalt therapy emphasizes the experience rather than the representation (or performance) of self. Thus, if we begin with the holistic notion that bodies are

⁴⁷⁶ Janice Ross, “Anna Halprin’s Urban Rituals,” *The Drama Review* 48, 2 (T182), Summer 2004, 53.

“transactional” processes, then no gesture is isolated and can stand for one meaning alone. Each manifests in relation to external and internal transactions that, as Dewey emphasizes, are always moving through the permeable boundaries of self and world. Dance ethnographer Deidre Sklar describes the body in a similar way as a process “that organizes as it apprehends and becomes what it organizes ...the body does not hold experience,” she notes, “rather, it is experience, a process rather than an object.”⁴⁷⁷ In Gestalt therapy, this process is called the “contact boundary,” which is explained as “the organ of a particular *relation* of the organism and the environment.”⁴⁷⁸ Contact, according to Perls and Goodman, is not a single act with an end-point. Contact occurs as a process between the organism and the environment; it is a physical experience in which one becomes aware of the sensate self *as action*. To put it another way, Gestalt therapy focuses on the present moment as experienced by the embodied individual, but since there is no fixed or stable “now” to pin down, this means embracing a changing “now.” One actively adjusts to an ongoing process occurring within the organism/environment field.⁴⁷⁹ Anna Halprin integrated Gestalt therapy techniques into her workshop practice as a way to focus the body-mind on the present moment and to maintain awareness that the “contact boundary” is the self in dialogue with its environment. In order to make a case for *Ten Myths* as a model of non-totalizing collectivity, I first want to explore how she employed the physical body in the various events of the series to create collectivity – both successfully and problematically. Although there were ten events, I focus here on the arc of the first seven: “Creation,” “Atonement,” “Trails,” “Totem Chairs,” “Maze,”

⁴⁷⁷ Deidre Sklar, *Dancing with the Virgin – Body and Faith in the Fiesta of Tortugas, New Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 193.

⁴⁷⁸ Perls and Goodman, *Gestalt Therapy Vol. 2*, 269 (my emphasis).

⁴⁷⁹ Perls and Goodman, *Gestalt Therapy Vol. 2*, 267.

“Dreams,” and “Carry.”⁴⁸⁰ My initial goal is to highlight the role of the body in *Ten Myths* while providing a description of what took place. Once the events become clear, I then address two problematic areas that emerge.

The first *Myth*, “Creation,” began by “tapping awareness” into the body through a direct physical encounter between individuals. This ushered the unfamiliar attendees gently into the participation environment through physical activation and highlighted the experiential nature of embodied communication in collective formation.

As participants entered the studio space they could see that the chairs usually reserved for an audience had all been hung on the walls at various elevations. Clearly, they would not be sitting in the usual audience formation. Several lit platforms and risers offered alternate spaces to assemble or sit, and people congregated in these areas. In this first event, all of the action was initiated by members of the Dancers’ Workshop. One performer walked to the centre of the room, then another joined her and began tapping her body in a rhythmic pattern that was soon echoed by a drumbeat. The rhythm was meant to encourage movement in response to the tapping. More performers joined the activity and formed a chain that led to the seated visitors, who were then brought into the action and subsequently improvised a circular dance.⁴⁸¹ This gentle initiation into group body contact might appear at first to gloss over the challenges of conflict between the individual and the collective; indeed, it would be overly simplistic and equally undesirable to expect an immediate experience of physical “togetherness” to erase social

⁴⁸⁰ For the eighth event, “Masks,” each person was given an apple to eat and paired with another. These pairs were asked to watch each other’s faces intently for a while and then use their hands to physically mould each other’s facial gestures. They were then asked to alter their behaviour based on the face they were given. The final two events, “Storytelling” and “Ohm,” focused on the relationship between the individual and the community through shared group actions and vocalization.

⁴⁸¹ Anna Halprin, “Notes on Myths,” Museum of Performance and Design, San Francisco, California, Anna Halprin Papers 32, 1932-1994.

issues and problems that participants may have brought with them from the larger context outside of the studio space. It is crucial to remember that neither erasing nor solving conflict was the point of *Ten Myths*. One of the goals was to examine how conflict can also be a dialogue that leads to process and growth. No single *Myths* event can be fully understood in isolation as a complete performance, each is part of an evolving process. This gentle initiation into participation was followed by a much more confrontational event, “Atonement.” The contrast between the first two events is instructive.



Figure 9. San Francisco Dancers' Workshop and participants performing "Atonement" from *Ten Myths*, 1967, San Francisco. Photo by Casey Sonnabend.

Unlike “Creation,” “Atonement” (fig. 9) offered no direct physical contact between participants. For this second event, participants were briefed prior to entering the studio in order to ascertain whether or not they wanted to undertake an hour-long experience that was

essentially a dislocative sensory overload. Those who chose to participate entered the studio one by one where they encountered a blinding spotlight and a loud continuous drum roll played by Casey Sonnabend, who was seated in the centre of the room. The walls, ceiling and floor had been covered with the same repeating newspaper page, pointing to one of the common vehicles of abstract group identity – the mass media. Participants were instructed to choose a position and remain still and silent for one hour.

“Atonement” stands out among all the other *Myths* events for its static imperative. The relative ease of bodies moving in improvised rhythmic patterns in “Creation” posed little challenge, but to stand still in the face of intense sound, light, and visual stimulus is both restricting and isolating in a way that mirrors individual alienation in representational space. In “Atonement” one is forced “inside” by the sensory assault, and yet, in this way, is also forced to focus more intensely on one’s embodied dialogue with the “external” world. There is constant oscillation between “inner” and “outer,” and this relationship constitutes a continuum of experience in the contact field. Thus, the environment/organism relationship becomes paramount.

Halprin likened this event to “the ordeals in primitive initiation rites.”⁴⁸² A rite of passage into a group through shared experience is one method of generating a communal bond. According to anthropologist Victor Turner, a rite of passage tends to follow a series of steps involving a “journey,” or passage in which an individual enters a liminal state of being between the familiar and the unknown through both physical and social isolation. This liminal state of being lost, so to speak, prompts a search for insight or knowledge. The individual is then reintroduced to the social group, and the passage is acknowledged.⁴⁸³ In “Atonement,” each participant faced the same barrage of sensory overload while maintaining outward stillness. Each experienced a physical encounter within a dislocative environment that brought sensory awareness to the forefront. With its emphasis on dislocation, this event is also akin to an avant-garde art object or performance in which the participant is positioned as the agitated passive viewer – albeit

⁴⁸² Anna Halprin, as quoted in Jack Anderson, “Materials of Myths: An Ann Halprin Workshop,” *Dance Magazine* (April 1968), 59

⁴⁸³ Victor Turner, “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage,” *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (1967).

in this case knowingly so. If this were an avant-garde performance, then the goal of dislocation would end with the audience taking their individual experience out of the studio and into the wider world where they might then use that experience of critical distance to look with fresh eyes. Here, however, participants became part of an ongoing dialogue by sharing their experiences with other members of the group during a debriefing session, as well as through subsequent events. In one exercise following “Atonement,” they were asked to select two words that best described their encounter. Reducing the words to two was intended to limit the tendency to abstract lived experience through discourse.⁴⁸⁴ According to Halprin the words selected were usually opposites such as “scared and strong,” and the gaps between these words invited creative (or poetic) dialogue.⁴⁸⁵ Through the fragmentation of shared language Halprin was using the tactic of defamiliarization in order to elicit a more challenging conversational relationship – one that would not reproduce the conventional language of the “spectacular” world, but would nevertheless promote communication.

The third event, “Trails,” (fig. 10) combined the body contact of the first event with the dislocation of the second by having all the participants blindfolded. They were divided into groups of ten people and asked to hold hands to form a line. Then, each person at the designated end of the line was instructed to move forward to find their place at the head of the line using only their spatial awareness and sense of touch. “The experience of being cut off from sight, on which we rely so much in everyday life,” Halprin later wrote, “awakened people to new ways of perceiving. They had to give over

⁴⁸⁴ Halprin, quoted in Anderson, “Materials of Myths,” 59.

⁴⁸⁵ Halprin, quoted in Anderson, “Materials of Myths,” 59.

to trust, in order to tolerate strange hands and bodies exploring them.”⁴⁸⁶ Compared to the isolating experience of “Atonement,” “Trails” immersed the participants in embodied group contact. By depriving themselves of the dominant sense of sight, participants limited their ability to objectify their experience as spectacle. Touch, in particular, takes the place of sight in this event, and participants had to “read” the environment through their hands and bodies. This event used the avant-garde tactic of dislocation – removing sight forces the participants to “see” in a new way – and at the same time the participants are working constructively to build a haptic landscape in which the “contact boundary” becomes a palpable space negotiated in embodied dialogue with one another. The tactic combines deconstruction of visual dominance with a constructive temporary collective purpose.



Figure 10. Participants performing "Trails" from *Ten Myths*, 1967, San Francisco. Photo by Casey Sonnabend.

⁴⁸⁶ Anna Halprin, “Myths,” Museum of Performance and Design, San Francisco, California, Anna Halprin Papers 32, 1932-1994.

The first three events were largely orchestrated and developed by Halprin and her close collaborators at the Dancers' Workshop. It was during the fourth event, "Totem Chairs," (fig. 11) that the participants began to take a more proactive role in creation. Initially,

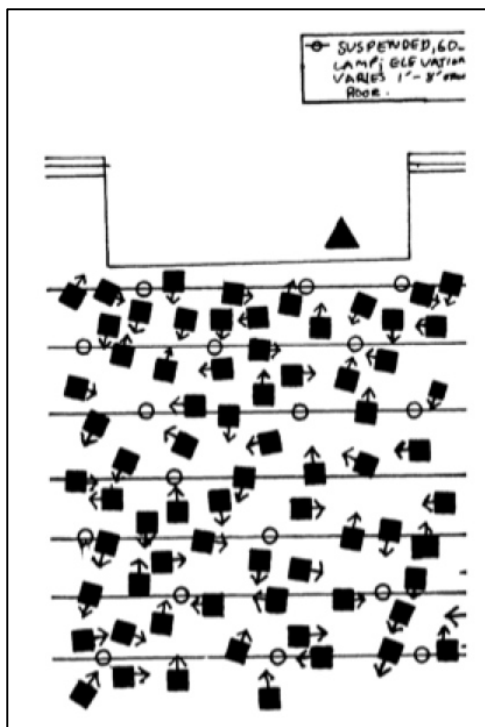


Figure 11. San Francisco Dancers' Workshop Score for "Totem Chairs," from *Ten Myths*, 1967.

Halprin planned to have the audience sit next to and observe designated performers who were costumed and surrounded by empty chairs. After they balked at this passive role, however, Halprin encouraged the participants to take the evening in whatever direction they wanted. The entire group eventually constructed a "gigantic totem pole" out of all the chairs in the room and then enacted a dance procession around it.⁴⁸⁷ The evening ended with anarchist-pacifist poet and filmmaker James Broughton talking to the group about myths, chairs, and totems.⁴⁸⁸ "Totem Chairs" and

the following two events "Maze" and "Dreams" constitute a process of working through problems inherent in group dynamics, specifically the ways in which individuals exert power over others. "Totem Chairs" marks the beginning of a more complex dialogue between Halprin, her collaborators, and the participants who attended the event. Because Halprin was sensitive to hierarchical social structures she was equally mindful that

⁴⁸⁷ Anna Halprin, "Myths," Museum of Performance and Design, San Francisco, California, Anna Halprin Papers 32, 1932-1994.

⁴⁸⁸ Broughton was a participant in Kenneth Rexroth's Friday meetings and was also a member of the Radical Faeries. Richard O. Moore, Brenda Hillman, Paul Ebenkamp, *Writing the Silences* (University of California Press, 2010), x.

dialogue between participants could result in unforeseen outcomes. Indeed, the idea of “mutual creation” invites each participant to take an active role in creating an event.

The fifth event, “Maze,” (fig. 12) became a prime example of mutual creation. During this *Myth*, several members of the Dancers’ Workshop took up positions within a maze constructed from a grid of wire, plastic and newspaper, with the purpose of confronting the audience at strategic points during their exploration. The plan was for the audience to move through the maze and then come out whenever they wanted. They were then invited to enter the briefing room and write words that represented their experience before returning back to the maze again. The participants, however, had a different response. Instead of following the plan, they pulled apart the original maze and constructed one of their own. Journalist Robert Pierce offers the following description:



the audience was asked to go through a labyrinth of clear and opaque plastic and paper, then to write whatever words came to mind with crayons and to repeat the sequence. Before long, the rhythm broke down and the audience chaotically destroyed the maze. Then they built a new one and remained in it. Some remained for hours. They had made it their own. It had been a sensory experience, but it had also been a symbolic one, involving destruction and rebuilding, death and rebirth.⁴⁸⁹

Figure 12. San Francisco Dancers' Workshop and participants performing "Maze" from *Ten Myths*, 1967. Photo by Casey Sonnabend.

⁴⁸⁹ Robert Pierce, “The Anna Halprin Story,” *Village Voice*, 10 (March 1975): 5.

Rather than stop the process of destruction, Halprin's own response to what might have looked like a disaster for a director was to work with the group through the chaotic process. Initially she was horrified that "the group tore apart this beautiful form with exuberant violence and wild energy..."; but, she acknowledged, "what they left, or reconstructed, while crude by comparison, was more beautiful in its responsiveness to what was happening at that very moment."⁴⁹⁰ For the participants, confrontation with the maze environment prompted creative direct action, which manifested in a desire to structure their own space. For Halprin, such moments of confusion were part of a process of dialogue that would lead to moments of order in a constant cycle of deconstruction and construction.

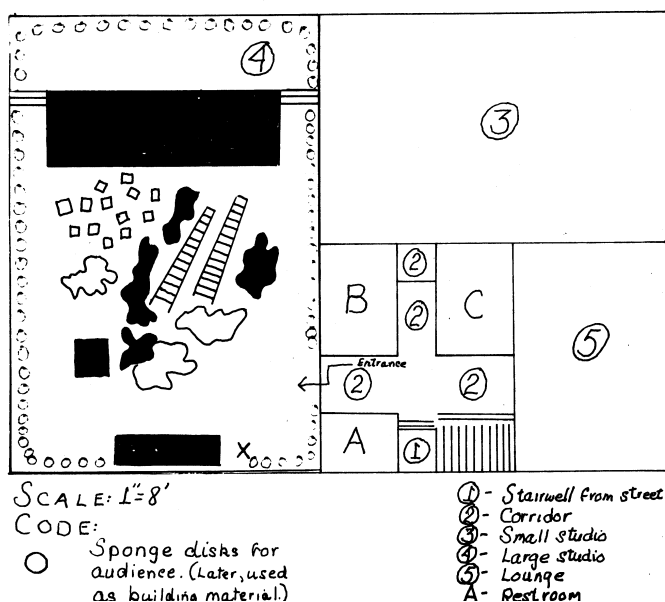


Figure 13. San Francisco Dancers' Workshop Score for "Dreams" from *Ten Myths*, 1968.

In response to participants' desire to control their own environment, for the sixth myth, "Dreams," (fig. 13) Halprin divided the participants into two groups. Each was asked to construct an environment for the other group from assorted props that included random

⁴⁹⁰ Anna Halprin, "Myths notes" Museum of Performance and Design, San Francisco, California, Anna Halprin Papers 32, 1932-1994.

objects such as ropes, ladders, boxes, risers and so forth. Halprin had used similar exercises in collaboration with her husband Lawrence Halprin for their “Experiments in Environment” workshop series, described in chapter one.⁴⁹¹ Here, she was asking the participants to consider issues of process, play and engagement, but also free will and safety – essentially to take on the responsibility that she herself had been assuming for the group. According to Halprin, the event particularly generated discussion about the difference between the two groups. One group created a challenging obstacle course that they tried to run the other group through, causing hostile feelings between them. A key issue that emerged was the exertion of power over other bodies.

To further explore this, the seventh event, “Carry,” (fig. 14) marked a return to



Figure 14. San Francisco Dancers' Workshop and participants performing "Carry" from *Ten Myths*, 1968, San Francisco. Photo by Casey Sonnabend.

body contact. It was structured around participants voluntarily carrying another person through a passage between two groups. The groups entered the studio and sat on risers facing each other as a sustained time interval with drumming ensued. Then, Halprin asked if anyone would volunteer to choose a person and carry him

through the passage between the two groups. Individuals began to pick up other people and carry them. After a while, Halprin asked if two people would volunteer to carry one

⁴⁹¹ See chapter one for a description and analysis of this collaborative workshop.

person, then three, then four, increasing the number of volunteers. She then asked if those who wanted to be carried would stand in the passage, so that eventually everyone was either carrying or being carried. According to Halprin, carrying has symbolic significance: “We are carried in the womb and carried to the grave. A bride is carried over the threshold. A hero is carried in triumph by his companions.”⁴⁹² We also “carry” our own bodies, and in this event we voluntarily carry someone else’s. Part of the experience is to feel the weight of the other as an immediate and physical personal responsibility – to make the other, as a subject not an object, a physically present being. It should be difficult at this level of physical effort to objectify or abstract another person, and yet while some participants found it cathartic to place their bodies in the hands of others, some found the experience frightening and manipulative.

One of the problems encountered in trying to interpret these events in a meaningful way is that experiences vary from person to person, and there is no way to measure how fully “engaged” or “collective” an experience is. As one participant in a later version of *Myths* noted “if you feel part of a community, then the community exists – at least for you. But the community didn’t exist for everyone – it didn’t exist for me.”⁴⁹³ Thus, a number of commentators have wondered, aside from the direct experience itself, what is the point of all this togetherness – how might this be effective in the wider social world? How can we talk about this, and, further, why should we understand this as art? Halprin noted this confusion at the time and answered obliquely:

The question may be asked... is *Myths* an art experience at all, a “happening,” a group recreation (therapy) or an evocation of long buried, half-forgotten selves? Is it tribal folk art, participation mystique, or the

⁴⁹² Halprin quoted in Anderson, “Materials of Myths,” 59.

⁴⁹³ Michael Birtwistle quoted in “Ann Halprin: a symposium,” *Cleveland After Dark*, January 21, 1970, 5.

emergence of a libidinal community. Perhaps *Myths* is all of this depending on ... “where you’re at.”⁴⁹⁴

Her open-ended response emerges from her commitment to direct experience and her rejection of abstraction. In a recent workshop for Movement Research held in New York (2010) she asked the participants if dance makes a difference; “I can’t preach it,” she stated, “you have to experience if it makes a difference to you.”⁴⁹⁵ However, it is possible to theorize the embodied experience of *Ten Myths* productively in relation to art and dialogue. In what follows I first briefly address some of the reasons why scholars have found it difficult to categorize and understand these kinds of art events, and then I provide a more rigorous analysis of them through an anarchist lens.

Ten Myths: an Art Experience?

There are two prevalent ways that Halprin’s events have been framed within scholarly discourse. One is as avant-garde art performance; this is the dominant frame for understanding event-based art within art history, and, as noted in previous chapters, it understands such works within the linear narrative of an oppositional avant-garde art tradition. Its insufficiencies for our purposes have already been examined; chiefly, I have argued that to categorize Halprin’s events as performance art is to trap them within the binary of spectator/performer and to ignore their experiential holistic basis – a basis that allows for a constructive understanding of the embodied *dialogical* imperative of event

⁴⁹⁴ Anna Halprin, General Introductory statement, *Ten Myths*, Museum of Performance and Design, San Francisco, California, Anna Halprin Papers 32, 1932-1994.

⁴⁹⁵ Anna Halprin, Workshop for Movement Research, New York City, 2010. Jerome Robbins Archive of the Recorded Moving Image, Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

based art. This reading supports the individualism versus collectivism binary that precludes social dialogue and tends to see collectivism as a negative totalizing force.

A more sympathetic frame for understanding Halprin's work is "community performance." Attention to community art practice is common in theatre history and criticism as well as anthropology, and tends to allow for productive analogies to ritual, festival, and other popular cultural forms. With its American roots in turn-of-the-century social programs such as the Settlement House Movement and later related initiatives such as the Federal Arts Project and Dewey's own *Art as Experience*, Halprin's events fit more comfortably into a community performance art framework.⁴⁹⁶ Indeed, throughout the 50s and 60s, much of her artistic practice took the form of community-based work with children, including teaching dance at two settlement homes and establishing the Marin County children's dance cooperative, as well as collaboration with her husband Lawrence Halprin on community planning projects in which citizens worked actively to develop a vision of their built and landscaped environment.⁴⁹⁷ However, there are two problematic issues that arise related to the "community performance" approach to understanding event-based art. First, there can be a tendency to romanticize the notion of community as a positive feeling of "togetherness" and to see the collective art event

⁴⁹⁶ The Settlement House Movement began as a British 19th-century social reform movement in which philanthropic individuals – often privileged women of the upper and middle classes -- settled in urban poor neighborhoods in order to promote culture and art, education, socializing, and health improvement. This movement spread to the United States when Jane Adams and Ellen Gates Starr established the Hull House in Chicago. In the U.S. immigrant neighborhoods were often targeted for Settlement Homes. Another notable participant in this movement was the anarchist and social activist Dorothy Day.

⁴⁹⁷ Libby Worth and Helen Poyner, *Anna Halprin* (London: Routledge, 2004), 7. Halprin's work with children throughout her career has always been community-centred. She was instrumental in forming the Marin Dance Cooperatives beginning in 1947, which provided an affordable and open forum for children to learn body movement and dance.

uncritically as a “healing” practice.⁴⁹⁸ Art historian Miwon Kwon explains that the assumption of “mythic unity” suppresses diversity by absorbing gender, race, culture and class under one generalized group identity, and, in this way, it masks social inequity behind an appearance of commonality.⁴⁹⁹ Indeed, theatre historian Richard Schechner has taken Halprin to task for her optimistic belief in the power of community, questioning whether dancing while blindfolded, holding hands, chanting, and building mazes can have any real effect on larger more complex social issues, such as systemic violence.⁵⁰⁰

Second, the connection between community art and “healing” has also led to interpretations of Halprin’s work as a form of “group therapy.” This perspective sees her events as psychologically therapeutic for individuals and relates her work to the human potential movement. From the mid-60s onward, Halprin integrated therapeutic bodywork into her Dancers’ Workshop practice, including Gestalt therapy, Rolfing, Feldenkrais and Psychokinetic Visualization.⁵⁰¹ Through her association with Fritz Perls, she began to teach at the Esalen Institute, and in 1978 she established the Talampa Institute together with her daughter, Daria Halprin, to explore the relationship between psychology, body therapy and creativity. As a result of these later developments, a number of scholars have

⁴⁹⁸ In *Conversation Pieces*, Grant Kester discusses the problematic ethical implications for artists engaged in community based art in which “each new site, issue or community becomes another opportunity to reaffirm the artist’s social transcendence through the language of art, which can bridge cultural differences and heal social divisions,” 140.

⁴⁹⁹ Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 119.

⁵⁰⁰ See Richard Schechner and Anna Halprin, “Anna Halprin: A Life in Ritual. An Interview.” *TDR* 33, No. 2 (Summer, 1989): 67-73. Schechner’s two main difficulties with Halprin’s work are understanding how experience is translated to a spectator and how dance can be efficacious – for example, how the *Circle the Earth* dance could bring world peace. He wants to know if Halprin actually believes that her dances bring about specific effects. Her response is that “Efficacy in this sense is not cause and effect. The purpose is to awaken people to peace and move them to action – to concrete peaceful actions in their lives,” 73.

⁵⁰¹ For more about this see Worth and Poynor, *Anna Halprin*, 62-64.

interpreted events such as *Ten Myths* as art therapy – an individualistic pursuit having little to say about art outside of the experience itself.⁵⁰²

On a larger scale of insufficiency, however, community performance and avant-garde performance approaches share a common problematic assumption; both tend to understand the collective as a particular kind of hegemonic socio-political structure. This fosters interwoven problems, already explored in chapter two, as the individual is defined as an abstract unit of the collective and the collective coheres through discourse – that is, the sharing of fixed representational signs between disembodied universal subjects. In this way, a generalized static identity that represses individual autonomy and ignores embodied experience is imposed. The problem with this model is that it cannot account for communalist events that neither presume relations of abstraction nor adhere to definitions of performance. In other words, it cannot understand works that do not seek a representational presence within the visible “public sphere” of communal identity.⁵⁰³ With its tidy structural parameters, the dominant model of collectivity ignores the role of embodiment in the creation of “social glue” and the proactive nature of temporary face-to-face collective manifestations. Neither the avant-garde nor the community performance approaches can do the work to clear us of this analytic tangle, a dilemma which has prompted Grant Kester, for example, to question, “Is it indeed possible to conceive of an emancipatory model of dialogical interaction?”⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰² A recent publication describes Halprin as “an experimental dance artist and ritualist, creating participatory events for social change and community healing.” See, Petra Koppers, *Community Performance: an Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2007), 27.

⁵⁰³ See for example, Crossley and Roberts, *After Habermas*, 1-27; See also, Jovchelovitch, *Knowledge in Context: Representations, Community and Culture*

⁵⁰⁴ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 89.

I suggest that, in order to do so, we understand participatory collective events as cohering, not through representation, but through the somatic transactional body. In order to understand what is at stake here, I want to look at Halprin's events so as to highlight the connection between embodied experience and the creation of temporary non-hierarchical collectivity. Halprin's events can be understood as enactments of a non-totalizing collective experience akin to anarchist writer Hakim Bey's concept of the "Temporary Autonomous Zone." Like Paul Goodman's formulation of "communitas," the Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ) refers to an alternative space of freedom that emerges in unmediated moments of direct experience and recedes as those experiences are abstracted and represented.⁵⁰⁵ It can be productively compared to the liminal space of Mikhail Bakhtin's "festival." Indeed, for Bey, the event is a "peak experience" in which participants step outside of conventional behavior into a "festival interval." A TAZ has no end-goal or desired product; it is a tactic that strikes at ideas, but avoids permanent solutions.⁵⁰⁶

Of particular importance is how the TAZ privileges the holistic transactional body. In anarchist social relations a body cannot be understood as a thing owned or abstracted by a State – as a number or an identity certificate, for example.⁵⁰⁷ Likewise, in holistic thinking the body is understood as an active process that always exceeds the kind of objectification upon which the machinations of representation rely. Both pragmatism and anarchism firmly reject the abstractionist approach of instrumental rationality and

⁵⁰⁵ Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z., The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (New York: Autonomedia, 2003), 99.

⁵⁰⁶ Bey, *T.A.Z. The Temporary Autonomous Zone*, 101.

⁵⁰⁷ For example, in "Anarchism: What it Really Stands For," Emma Goldman explains that along with liberation from government, what anarchism stands for is "the liberation of the human body from the dominion of property..." See Emma Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays* (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1917), 68.

acknowledge that the body fosters a different kind of knowledge gained through direct experience. Bey's anarchist social model allows us to address the two problematic areas of critique that arise in Halprin's *Ten Myths* and have prompted commentators to question its efficacy. The first criticism is that the embodied group experience in these events did not solve issues of violence or conflict – neither for individuals nor for the collective. The second criticism is that the temporary collectivity generated was meaningful only in the moment and was otherwise socially and politically ineffectual.

A strong criticism of participatory experiential events is the naive belief that face-to-face encounters will solve the totalizing problems of abstract collectivism. The idea being subjected to doubt is that problems of bureaucratic or state oppression can be overcome by generating empathy through a face-to-face exchange of ideas and feelings. Yet, in two of the *Myths* events, “Dreams” and “Carry,” physical manipulation and conflict were experienced on both individual (physical) and collective (abstract) levels. For example, during a conversation between Halprin and three dancers from the Dancers' Workshop, conflicting perceptions of “Carry” revealed that it was an experience of catharsis for some and fear for others.⁵⁰⁸ Face-to-face dialogue did not ensure cooperation or group cohesion. After hearing Halprin praise the “authenticity” of untrained participants, one of the dancers describes how a group who was carrying her tried to turn her in a somersault, a distressing and physically painful experience in which she felt that she was being treated as an object rather than a subject:

When you are working with dancers there is always care and love for the body. Even if you're mad and use your greatest energy, a dancer won't break your bones, because he knows about the body. 'Carry' would have stopped

⁵⁰⁸ “Comments From Some Workshop Dancers,” *Tulane Drama Review* (Fall 1968): 175.

much earlier if it had been in a class. At first it was beautiful... but it went on and on, and I felt I was being used. They forgot that it was me, the person.⁵⁰⁹

For the dancer, an embodied experience of “mutual creation” did not preclude objectification of her body. Violence ensued when the participants carrying her failed to understand her distress. One of the questions Halprin asked the dancer in response to her statement is why she did not use words to communicate with the other participants when she wanted them to stop. The dancer replied that she did not want to disrupt the communal atmosphere, so she chose to act contrary to her own embodied knowledge.⁵¹⁰ Yet, as noted earlier, one of the specific goals of *Ten Myths* was to foreground conflict in order to open it up to a dialogical process. In fact, a key issue that *Ten Myths* brought to the forefront is that all violence has both an embodied and an ideological component.

Another more detailed example will help to further illustrate the purpose of foregrounding conflict in this way. In one version of the sixth *Myth*, “Dreams,” two groups constructed challenging environments for each other to experience. One group “organized a series of ordeals, [in which participants...] were lifted and passed over head in the air, then rolled on soft sponge rubber..., then abruptly hoisted up against a block, faced into a bright light, [and] shoved into a carton which was being noisily hit from the outside.”⁵¹¹ Some members of the group undergoing these obstacles were so offended and disturbed by the hostile environment created by the organizing group that they left. One participant even took Halprin aside and reprimanded her “for not only having allowed it to go in this direction, but accused [her] of deliberately pointing in that way.

⁵⁰⁹ Dancer 3 quoted in “Comments From Some Workshop Dancers,” *Tulane Drama Review* (Fall 1968): 175.

⁵¹⁰ One wonders if a participant not trained in dance would have endured the painful process.

⁵¹¹ Anna Halprin, *Ten Myths Notes: Myth II Alter the Environment*, np, nd. Museum of Performance and Design, San Francisco, California, Anna Halprin Papers 32, 1932-1994.

He was outraged that such feelings should be expressed.”⁵¹² Although Halprin interpreted this in gendered terms, stating, “It has been observable that the men constitute a powerful aggressive energy, and at times their violence, although constructively ritualized, has in fact frightened away forever, members of their group,” she also made it clear that to “ritualize aggression” through such an experience was part of the constructive dialogical purpose of *Ten Myths*.⁵¹³

It is revealing that the man who felt especially victimized during “Dreams” appealed to an authority – in this case to Halprin. His reaction to conflict was to step outside of the event and re-establish order through the rules of the dominant “social contract.”⁵¹⁴ Within the event itself, however, there was also diminished conflict without an appeal to external authority. Instead, a verbal dialogue between participants allowed them to associate their physical experiences in the obstacle course with other less tangible forms of violence, namely, State totalitarianism and racism. In exploring physical violence and manipulation, the participants likened the experience to excessive force and the negation of subjectivity. The evening ended in a dance.⁵¹⁵ While it could be argued that this verbal dialogue itself was also an intervention of external authority – in this case codified language – such an argument ultimately depends on a constructionist view of the individual subject. I am taking a holistic approach that sees bodies as participating in

⁵¹² Anna Halprin, *Ten Myths Notes: Myth II Alter the Environment*, np, nd.

⁵¹³ Anna Halprin, *Ten Myths Notes: Myth II Alter the Environment*, np, nd.. Halprin’s gendered readings are idiosyncratic. She did not address the fact that many of the outraged participants were also men, and that more men attended her group events than women.

⁵¹⁴ The social contract here refers generally to the idea that individuals agree as a collective group to adhere to rules and conventions that protect them from harming each other. Most commonly, the social contract describes a political relationship between individuals and their governing state form. An assumption is that without the social contract individuals would act idiosyncratically according to their own desires for power or according to individual conscience. See April Carter, *The Political Theory of Anarchism* (London: Routledge and Kegan & Paul Ltd., 1971), 14-17.

⁵¹⁵ Anna Halprin, *Ten Myths Notes: Myth II Alter the Environment*, np, nd.

dialogue through experience. Embodied dialogue is not separate from, nor is it equal to, textual language. It operates in relation.

There are two approaches to conflict evident in this event. One seeks to negate power struggles between people by invoking the political order present within the dominant society. The other seeks to understand power through an embodied dialogue between people. This distinction can be further clarified. One of the solutions to violent acts perpetrated by individuals is to establish abstract rules that make up the “social contract.” The underlying logic here is that as individuals cohere into collectives they mutually consent to give up autonomy in order to gain the benefits of political order. A core assumption in Western culture is that without this social contract life would be, as philosopher Thomas Hobbes described it, “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”⁵¹⁶ Physical violence and other forms of direct harm affect both individuals and the ability of members of a collective to generate a feeling of belonging or trust through mutual support. However, the social contract itself is also, in its rationalizing abstracting capacity, a form of violence against the individual. Just as physical violence disrupts our ability to establish a sense of community, so too does the violence of abstraction precisely because it separates us from our embodied selves. It substitutes itself for face-to-face embodied sociality; this is a form of violence similar to being physically restrained or wounded because it amputates the body from the mind and privileges only the latter.

⁵¹⁶ Thomas Hobbes. *Leviathan: Or the Matter, Form, and Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiastical and Civil*, ed. by Ian Shapiro (Yale University Press; 2010). The anarchist theorist Peter Kropotkin offered a different view of human sociality based on mutual aid rather than competition. He criticized Hobbes’ version of humanity in a violent and competitive “state of nature,” and, using Darwin’s theory of evolution as a starting point, he understood that all animals – even humans – exist and thrive in a cooperative symbiotic relationship to each other and their environments. Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid a Factor of Evolution* (London: Heinemann, 1902).

http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/kropotkin/mutaidch3.html

We can see this in both of the above examples from *Ten Myths*. In the case of “Dreams,” physical challenges were offensive not only because they were abrupt and possibly physically or emotionally painful, but because they objectified and abstracted the participants’ identities in the same way that the generalizing forces of, say, racism deny the direct experience and the diversity of a subject’s relations. Similarly, the physical experience of being turned in a somersault hurt, but so too did being treated as an object. Recognition of affinity – of another’s subjecthood – is a social connection, whereas objectifying the “other” is a form of violence that we experience as pain. Thus the pain experienced by the participants had both direct physical and abstract components, as events themselves allowed for the connection between the abstract and the concrete to be experienced. Temporary events such as *Ten Myths* do not erase or solve conflicts, but they do allow for the experience of creating a process through which to address them without succumbing to the abstracting operations of State intervention and authority. In this way, *Ten Myths* temporarily reconnected sensory knowledge to sociality. Thus, participants gained the embodied experience of collectivity with all its processes of order and disorder. As Halprin pointed out, “ritualizing violence” makes it physically present: “it is there to deal with.”⁵¹⁷ I want to keep this notion of experiencing an alternative social space in which conflict is physically present in mind as I address the other main criticism of participatory art events, which is that they are politically ineffective and matter only in the moment of experience.

One may argue that, seen through the standard logic of hegemony, a face-to-face temporary mode of collective experience brought about through an ephemeral art event is

⁵¹⁷ Anna Halprin, *Ten Myths Notes: Myth II Alter the Environment*, np, nd. Museum of Performance and Design, San Francisco, California, Anna Halprin Papers 32, 1932-1994.

invisible to the public sphere and, therefore, politically ineffectual. For example, some of the dialogue generated by both “Dreams” and “Carry” dealt with issues of physical violence between men and women, but this did not resolve any systemic gender biases within the wider social context. Permanent solutions, however, were never the point of *Ten Myths*. The point was not to move toward resolution, but to maintain an unfolding process. Process is always precarious and therefore active and in dialogue. It compromises and sabotages analytic certainty and totalizing social structures. Tellingly, none of the *Ten Myths* events attempted to *solve* specific social conflicts. For example, even though the third *Myth*, “Trails,” eliminated the objectifying power of the gaze, the haptic collective it formed did not dissolve or take the place of other collective identities in the wider social sphere, but instead emerged within them temporarily to provide a heightened sensory experience of the contact zone. In this way, during the event, collectivity became a palpable experience rather than an abstract concept based on reductive racial or gendered stereotypes. *Ten Myths* created collective identities that were not entirely stable, essentializing, or totalizing, but rather were rhizomatic, contingent “zones” where participants could temporarily experience autonomy from dominant social codes and structures.

Although it would seem that these manifestations of freedom experienced by individuals could have no lasting impact, sociologist Alberto Melucci’s approach to new social movements can help us to see that temporarily enacting autonomous zones of collectivity has a two-pronged effect. This begins by making the power systems that “hide behind the rationality of organizational or administrative procedures” into

physically present operations.⁵¹⁸ As Melucci notes, “power which is recognizable is also negotiable, since it can be confronted, and because it is forced to take differences into account.”⁵¹⁹ At the same time, “rendering power visible,” as he puts it, also underlines the fact that it is usually masked by the rationality of organizational and bureaucratic procedures.⁵²⁰ Thus, it not only reveals what was hidden, but reveals the procedural nature of masking operations of power. Second, making power, conflict, and difference physically present reunites us temporarily with our bodies, and reinforces the body’s role as the primary medium of communication.⁵²¹ To suggest that direct experience ends with an individual is to imagine the body as a sealed container of experience. The transactional body, on the other hand, should be understood as a process of exchange within a network of relations. With this understanding we can interpret embodied experience as a “signal” that travels through individual bodies’ experiences into networks of relations. Both Bey and Melucci use Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s social model of the “rhizome” in which networks of relations between groups and individuals are dynamic, non-linear and non-hierarchical.⁵²² Such networks are embedded in everyday life, and the individuals who unfold them are not stable or unified; they are constantly changing and producing meanings through relationships with others.⁵²³ As a case in point, the architect and artist Chip Lord, a founding member of the art collective Ant Farm, explained how his own

⁵¹⁸ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present* (Hutchinson Radius, 1989), 76. Melucci’s framework for analyzing new social movements is influenced by phenomenology, Gestalt therapy, and process-oriented approaches that emphasize the active construction of collective identity; see 183.

⁵¹⁹ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 77.

⁵²⁰ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 76.

⁵²¹ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 115.

⁵²² For more see Karen Houle, “Micropolitics,” in Charles J. Stivale ed., *Gilles Deleuze: Key Concepts* (McGill-Queens University Press, 2005), 90-91.

⁵²³ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 61.

experience in the Halprins' "Experiments in Environment" Workshops in 1967 shaped his other endeavors: "I carried the workshop with me for almost a year. It was a very strong influence. I would continually come back and relate to it as a measurement for what I was doing in everyday life... That's interesting, having an experience, and event that you carry with you."⁵²⁴ As Paul Goodman noted, the temporary experience of *communitas* may disintegrate, but the people who shared the embodied experience "irradiate society" through new enactments and realizations that signal a desire for meaningful alternatives to the dominant social system.⁵²⁵ In this way, enacting a TAZ both models an alternative form of collectivity that puts autonomy into practice and provides an embodied experience that travels through networks of relations.

Paradoxically, by creating events in which an embodied face-to-face dialogue engenders temporary collectivity, Halprin and her participants manifested a social space that was physically present but invisible to the State. According to Bey, "the Temporary Autonomous Zone's greatest strength lies in this invisibility – the State cannot recognize it because History has no definition of it... as soon as the Temporary Autonomous Zone is named [that is, re-presented or mediated] it must vanish."⁵²⁶ In this way, experiential forms such as *Ten Myths* can be understood as social spaces that purposefully escape the stabilizing tendencies of the dominant system. Because the art event is temporary, it does not engage in any direct conflict with the dominant collective form, it models a non-totalitarian collective in the here and now. Not engaging in conflict with the State is a way of subverting the struggle for power that characterizes hierarchical social structures

524 Chip Lord interviewed by Paul Baum in Halprin, Lawrence, Jim Burns, and Anna Halprin. *Taking Part: A Workshop Approach to Collective Creativity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974), 214 & 216.

⁵²⁵ Goodman, *Communitas*, 109.

⁵²⁶ Bey, *T.A.Z.*, 99.

and totalizing communities. As Richard Day points out, to oppose the State through its own established channels of political opposition is simply to remain within the same logic of hegemony, with the shared goal of seizing and maintaining power. An affinity-based approach, on the other hand, seeks to bring to light the limitations of the established political process.⁵²⁷

It is important to understand Halprin's participatory events in relation to the larger political context of California, especially from 1965 onward, when the Watts Riots brought civil rights issues into the realm of direct action, and social liberation movements including Free Speech, Civil Rights, Students for a Democratic Society and anti war activism gained momentum and fed into a countercultural disillusionment with hegemonic political structures. As social historian Theodore Roszack notes, "in a world dominated by vast political abstractions decked out in glittering propagandistic symbols, slogans, and statistical measures: nation, party, corporation, urban area, grand alliance, common market, socio-economic system..." the counterculture looked "to a style of human relations that characterizes village and tribe, insisting real politics can only take place in the deeply personal confrontations these now obsolete social forms allow."⁵²⁸ At the same time, however, to call this widespread revolutionary ferment a "counter" culture reflects the hegemonic logic of the Marxist based New Left, in which power was to be seized rather than dispersed. Yet, as Antonio Negri points out, "the mass refusal of the disciplinary regime... was not only a negative expression but also a moment of creation..."⁵²⁹ Thus, it would be a mistake to simply attribute the kinship between

⁵²⁷ Day, *Gramsci*, 691.

⁵²⁸ Roszack, *The Making of A Counter Culture*, 54.

⁵²⁹ Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Empire*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 274.

participatory events such as *Ten Myths* and the more general rise of direct action and cooperative community-building to a countercultural defensive reaction against the establishment because *Ten Myths* was first and foremost a constructive act of “mutual creation.” Halprin’s artistic commitment to direct experience did not emerge out of the counter-culture per se, but shares some significant roots in pragmatism and anarchism with the counter cultural turn towards direct action and participatory democracy that took place across the U.S. during the 60s.⁵³⁰ It is equally important, therefore, not to lose sight of the fact that the affinity-based logic of anarchist social practices has strong roots in artistic practices – particularly art events.

Looking at *Ten Myths* through the lens of the TAZ can also help us understand more clearly that it was an art work. *Ten Myths* created a space to step outside of the dominant social and political system and experience temporary freedom from abstraction. Here, however, freedom resides not in stable things such as an art object or the special abstracted status of the artist, but in the dynamic embodied experience. Clearly, *Ten Myths* does not adhere to the traditional Kantian notion of disinterested aesthetic experience in which it is through the mind’s contemplation that one can attain a critical distance. According to the Kantian model, the artist is granted a special status of autonomy from society, and aesthetic qualities are imbued in the art object and made available to the sensitive viewer through contemplation. Nor is *Ten Myths* a revival of Schiller’s “play drive,” which continues to rely on aesthetic judgment as “sensus communus”. Instead, following the holistic model, freedom is accessible via the sensate self – that is, to paraphrase Dewey, through experience as an embodied organism in

⁵³⁰ April Carter, *Direct Action and Democracy Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 6.

dialogue with the world. In this way, everyone has the same capacity to enact freedom from abstraction through direct experience. The critical distance necessary for an aesthetic experience lies not in the special status of the artist or the object he creates but in the body because embodiment is our existential mediator. Bodies, in Melucci's words "permit direct and intuitive perception, as a form of knowledge which is different from 'instrumental' rationality, and which allows the discrete fragments, times and discontinuities of experience to be synthesized."⁵³¹

Crucially, experiential embodied engagement does not have to be understood as an individualistic pursuit. According to the Kantian model, bodies are seen as individualistic and resistant to dialogue, but this view is premised on the notion that bodies are sealed and dialogue is always codified. Accordingly dialogue, as a discursive form, acts upon the embodied subject, but the fact that dialogue is also experienced, and in this way is also acted upon, gets little attention within this paradigm. Holism and affinity-based logic systems allow for a conception of bodies and societies as transactional processes that act upon each other. Locating aesthetic experience in embodied experience is not simply to replace the art object with the viewer's body: rather, in order to have a creative experience one must be in a process of dialogue. The notion of non-hierarchical collectivity is central to this understanding of embodied group experience as art. If one is being creative, then, from a holistic perspective, one is necessarily in a non-oppressive relationship with others because creation is an ongoing process that does not seek a hegemonic moment.⁵³² Creative dialogue happens between subjects, not within

⁵³¹ Melucci, *Nomads*, 115.

⁵³² This is something that Guy Debord recognized when he stated, "It must be understood once and for all that something that is only a personal expression within a framework created by others cannot be termed a creation."

individuals. As a form of “mutual creation,” Halprin’s *Ten Myths* enacted community directly through participation in events as opposed to stabilized representational forms. It did not seek to solve social conflict, it offered an alternative space that revealed the violent nature of abstraction and, at the same time, provided a space of embodied sociality. Understanding direct experience through the holistic lens of pragmatist aesthetics allows us to see its dialogical role in constructing anarchic temporary collective zones of autonomy. Such participatory works prefigure the direction of contemporary relational art practices in which, as art critic Nicolas Bourriaud writes, “the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real...”⁵³³

Guy Debord as quoted in Stuart Home, *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currants from Lettrism to Class War* (Aporia Press and Unpopular Books, London, 1988), 29.

⁵³³ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 13.

Conclusion

MUTUAL CREATION: PRAGMATIST AESTHETICS, ANARCHISM, AND DIALOGICAL ART

I began this dissertation with a two-part question: how might Anna Halprin's dialogical art practice disrupt the conventional art historical narrative of event-based art? And, how might that disruption alter recent claims for a "new" relational aesthetics? In asking these questions, I was motivated by contemporary scholars' lack of attention to historical relational art practices and their attribution of current relational art to a paradigm shift. As a number of scholars have noted, the need for a "clean break" in order to incorporate dialogical modes of communication into the discussion and practice of art, as well as the difficulty of building a history of relational art and aesthetics, can be traced to the hegemony of Kantian aesthetics in the construction of modern art theory, criticism and history. At the hub of art production and criticism in New York during the late 50s and 60s, art critics and historians tended to frame event-based art practices such as Halprin's in opposition to the dominant analytical paradigm of Greenberg's Kantian formalism. Not only did this result in art critics neglecting event-based art's dialogical and participatory impulses, it effectively silenced any theorizing of the development of relational or dialogical art in the broader art historical discourse of the period.

As a result, Anna Halprin has been positioned as an "outsider" connected to the development of Judson Dance and Happenings through her former students, Simone Forti, Robert Morris, and Yvonne Rainer, and associated, at a considerable remove from the central story, with better-known artists such as John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and Allan Kaprow.

This study, in contrast, unveils the vital role played by holistic philosophies and practices in shaping her understanding of the individual's embodied relationship to collectivity. My reading of Anna Halprin's art events in relation to a nexus of holistic philosophies, social theories, and artistic practices that include John Dewey's pragmatist aesthetics, Bauhaus interdisciplinarity, Gestalt therapy and Paul Goodman's anarchist synthesis of these approaches, reveals that her participatory events were more than mere deconstructions of the dominant formalist art object and its gallery space or the performer and her proscenium. Like other artists involved in interdisciplinary art events, Halprin explored the relationship between the artist and the audience. However, the fact that that she has never been fully integrated into the conventional narrative built around artists such as Cage and Kaprow allows us to see that her practice was not embedded in an oppositional stance in which the viewer is shocked into an awareness of the gap between the real and the representation. Instead, she made that gap a palpable physical experience through dialogue and embodied participation in a temporary event. In other words, her events were not deconstructive reactions to formalist aesthetics, they were constructive processes that provided an experience of embodied sociality. Revealing and understanding the holistic sources of Halprin's focus on experience, dialogue and participation destabilizes the centre/opposition narrative that has prompted contemporary scholars to seek a "clean break" from the past, and demonstrates that there are alternative narratives informing modernism's post WWII history that have yet to be fully explored.

The three viewpoints of pragmatism, Gestalt, and anarchism share an emphasis on direct experience/action as a process of relations between people, events, and things that cannot be fully understood if isolated from the context of a holistic situation. In each case,

these ways of understanding human experience are based on biological models of symbiotic ecosystems that privilege the organic state of embodiment as a site of transaction; all three of these approaches reject abstraction in favour of direct experience. In this way, my discussion of Halprin's alternative art practice is also addressing the larger matter of the difference between an analytic spectator theory of knowledge rooted in rationalism and the pragmatist notion that knowledge lies in the practice of sensory engagement with the actual. The pragmatist philosopher William James described this difference between rationalism and pragmatism succinctly: "on one side the universe is absolutely secure, on the other it is still pursuing its adventures."⁵³⁴ Holistic theories assert that knowledge cannot be pinned down to an abstraction or a generalized representation without severely restricting the dynamic nature of human experience. On the other hand, we can strive to share experiential knowledge through a constant process of reaching toward mutual understanding in face-to-face encounters. By and large, this has not been seen as a workable model for the pursuit of knowledge in western academia.

Instead, a rationalist analytic approach has predominated, and, although the reasons for the dominance of analytical theory in western academia are too broad and complex to re-articulate here, I would like to point out one of its negative impacts on relational art and aesthetics. A restrictive consequence of the privileging of abstraction in the construction of knowledge is the failure of analytic systems to acknowledge that embodied experience produces meanings; in other words, such systems fail to recognize that the body does not just take in information but also unfolds contexts. The denial of the body's role in knowledge construction has deep roots in the privileging of visualism and rationalism in western

⁵³⁴ William James, *Pragmatism* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1908), 599.

philosophy. Even the poststructuralist turn away from stable narratives and unified subjects continues the analytic tradition of privileging abstraction over experience. In the late 1960s, when French poststructuralist theorists overturned the Marxist approach to understanding the individual's relationship to the collective, they problematized the universal truths and absolutes of structuralist conceptions of knowledge. For Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault and, more recently, Butler, the key to deconstructing dualism and decentering the subject is revealing the socially constructed nature of discourses of power.⁵³⁵ In art history, the result has been a history of event-based art that pays close attention to the interplay of visualism, representation, and discourses, but which cannot account for embodied experiences, except by treating the body as a text.

However, as Richard Shusterman points out, earlier holistic field theories, in which relations between people, things, and events prevent the stabilizing forces of abstraction from resting on certainty, perform a similar task to deconstruction without diminishing the relevance of embodied experience. Nor is this a simple return to an essentialist subject and its unified body, for there is no stability in the inconclusive realm of experiential knowledge. In contrast to poststructuralist theories that privilege text, for the holistic thinkers I have turned to in this dissertation – Dewey, Goodman, Perls, and Kropotkin, among others – it is through the organic body and its relationship to its environment that meanings can be understood, in Dewey's terms, as “moving across and through skins” and discrete units can be recontextualized as unfolding processes within the complexity of organic systems. Holism may not attain the rigor of analytical poststructuralist theory, however, lack of rigor is not a deficit in understanding participatory art that seeks to initiate dialogue and relations. In fact,

⁵³⁵ For more on the relationship between poststructuralism and anarchism see Allan Antliff, “Anarchy, Power, and Poststructuralism,” *SubStance* #113, Vol. 36, no. 2, 2007, 59.

participation itself is a stance of inquiry that does not seek to establish rigid categories, but focuses instead on the *act* of understanding. It embraces the notion that theory can be embodied through practice.

Anna Halprin's self-exile from the centre of avant-garde performance in New York makes her work a prime "case study" of an alternative art practice embedded in a holistic understanding of the individual's relationship to the collective. However, she was far from alone in this pursuit. Tracing the holistic trajectory, her artistic goals can be related to other artists who sought to create socially-embedded and non-hierarchical works. Holistic principles of pragmatism, anarchism, and Gestalt, and the individuals and collectives that fostered and promoted them, provide us with an alternative version of the origins of dialogical art. Anna Halprin put Dewey's pragmatist aesthetics into practice by making direct experience the point of her events. Dewey was an influential philosopher whose book, *Art as Experience*, resonated with a wide variety of artists during the postwar period, including Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock, Allan Kaprow, John Cage, and Paul Goodman. By offering an alternative to the Kantian aesthetic notion that art is a stable structure or thing and instead emphasizing that art is an active process involving both the artist and the audience, his aesthetics demonstrate a theoretical proximity to the more prevalent theories of existentialism and phenomenology, which, in contrast to pragmatism, have been integrated into the dominant art historical narrative. Dewey's holistic stance provides a parallel source for understanding the development of event-based art in which embodiment, direct experience, and "mutual creation" can be seen as vital to the construction of temporary non-hierarchical collectivity.

Embodied sociality is a foundational practice and principle shared by both American pragmatism and anarchism that tends to get overlooked within the analytical model. Because embodied experience cannot be quantified analytically, the central connection between Dewey's emphasis on direct experience and the primacy of direct action in anarchist social theory cannot easily be uncovered through the analysis of discourses. In contrast, the holistic approach brings this shared purpose to the forefront. Indeed, anarchism is a social and political theory that can accommodate the embodied subject without either essentializing the body or treating it as a surface constructed by discourses. Analyzing Halprin's events through the anarchist lens of Hakim Bey's Temporary Autonomous Zone allows us to see how embodied experience can be social and political, rather than merely individualistic. Because Bey's anarchist model of sociality does not seek a hegemonic moment, it provides an alternative collectivity, modeled on the logic of affinity rather than hegemony, which helps to clarify the social meaning of direct experience.

Understanding the connections between pragmatism, anarchism, and Gestalt theories and practices sheds new light on recent critical assumptions through which contemporary relational art is currently being historicized – namely as a “clean break.” While I understand the desire to disconnect from the limitations of formalist art theory, I maintain that it is vital to use this shift in thinking to reassess the existing historical narrative. A major limitation of the “clean break” premise is that it does not require us to rethink any of the canonical divides or previously held beliefs about art and its histories: the centre/opposition narrative remains in place, alternative aesthetics such as Dewey's have no relevance, and the mutual goals of pragmatism and anarchism remain hidden. If we understand dialogical art as the result of a paradigm shift or see it only from a poststructuralist stance, we maintain the status quo. This

effectively precludes the need to recover previously invisible networks of relations between artists prior to the 1990s. It also conceals a relationship between the rise of affinity-based logic in new social movements and the development of relational art practices.

By turning to historical social theory and philosophical sources, this study opens up questions about the crucial role played by artists in enacting anarchist principles after a period when anarchist activism had been largely purged from American politics. As Allan Antliff argues, political anarchism in the United States had lost significant ground to Marxism by the 1930s. Marxist politics and critical theory emphasized a hegemonic view of social and political relations – one in which art was instrumentalized and its political significance side-lined.⁵³⁶ At the same time, a number of artists, writers, and poets, such as Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, Clyfford Still, John Cage, Paul Goodman, William Carlos Williams, Kenneth Rexroth, Kenneth Patchen and Robert Duncan, to mention only a notable few, developed anarchist activism within the cultural realm through artistic creation. As Newman wrote in his foreword to the 1968 reissue of Kropotkin's *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, “What is particular about anarchism is not its criticism of society but the creative way of life it offers that makes all programmatic doctrines impossible.”⁵³⁷

The parallel narrative explored in this dissertation highlights the fact that anarchic principles and models of agency were enacted and put into practice within the art world. Anarchist politics may have declined in the leftist political sphere, but the “creative way of life it offers” was kept operational in art communities, networks, and events and, furthermore, was supported by holistic philosophies and theories that were grounded in

⁵³⁶ Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde*, 211-212.

⁵³⁷ Barnett Newman, “‘The Revolution is Anarchist!’: Foreword to *Memoires of a Revolutionist* by Peter Kropotkin,” in Newman and John P. O’Neill ed. *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 45.

concrete experience. Indeed, it is in the cultural field that consistent efforts to bring about affinity-based social organization can be discerned. Recall, for example, the role of creative dialogue in sustaining community at Black Mountain College and the Gate Hill Cooperative Community in New York State; a similar purpose emerged in anarchist arts communities in San Francisco cohering around Kenneth Rexroth's Libertarian Circle and Robert Duncan's and Jess Collins' Ubu Gallery.⁵³⁸ Richard Candida Smith has argued that in California at this time the arts became "an increasingly potent social force, apparently posing questions of relevance to contemporary society that no other human activity seemed as readily poised to answer..."⁵³⁹ Could it be that the anarchist principles emerging in new social movements of the late 60s did not shift from the political to the cultural terrain, as Richard Day and others have claimed, but in actuality already inhabited the cultural realm? That is, was it in the cultural realm that anarchist social principles and political ideals planted the seeds of the affinity-based newer social movements? This relationship between newer social movements and dialogical art practices has yet to be explored, but the question does foreground the central role played by art in promoting affinity-based logic as the ideal model for sociality. Approaching relational art as the result of a "clean break" submerges the anarchistic ideals inherent in contemporary art works that seek to engage the audience in a dialogue or to initiate relations between people and events.

Anna Halprin was not an anarchist; nevertheless, the temporary autonomous zones she created can be more clearly and thoroughly understood through an anarchic social model in which embodiment and creation play key roles. As art historian Claire Bishop

⁵³⁸ See, for example, Antliff, "Gay Anarchy," *Anarchy and Art*, 113-129.

⁵³⁹ Candida Smith, *Utopia and Dissent*, xxi.

has pointed out, “if relational art produces human relations, then the next logical question to ask is what types of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?”⁵⁴⁰ For Anna Halprin the answers to these questions are clearly based on non-hierarchical collectivity. Her face-to-face embodied relations were enacted in order to put the social power dynamics existing between individuals into a process-based dialogue that attained a temporary state of collectivity. These collectives did not try to erase or solve conflicts but instead provided an experiential process through which to address them as they occurred and without the authoritarian intervention of the State. In this way, the relations produced by Anna Halprin’s events temporarily reconnected embodied experience with social experience. Her affinity-based approach to collectivity allows us to alter our understanding of the role of dialogue in the collective experience of art. Event-based art can be seen as a dynamic and temporary zone of collective autonomy.

⁵⁴⁰ Claire Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” *October* 110 (Fall 2004), 65.

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