

12 Structures
Scores by
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The Centre of Attention
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Green Street

Acquire a Japanese folding scroll. Keep it in a blank state. After a minimum of ten years, or on the death of the performer, inscribe the name of the performer, the date of acquisition and the date at the time of inscription. The performance continues until the scroll is filled with inscriptions.

1959

New London, Connecticut

The Judgment of Paris

Present three images in an installation. Place a shelf or platform beneath each image is. Invite each viewer to choose the image he or she judges most beautiful.

Permit the viewer to judge between images by placing a golden apple beneath the chosen image.

1964

San Diego, California

White Bar

A bar or tavern in a simple room. The room is either plain, light wood, or wood painted white. The bar is a wooden table or a long board.

Only clear liquors are served. The liquors are lined up on the bar or on shelves behind the bar. There are many rows of clean glasses.

On the bar, there is a bowl of limes.

1964

Los Angeles, California

Light Table

Set a wooden table with many candles of different kinds, large and small, colored and plain, ordinary and shaped, normal and scented.

Place the candles on the table. Stand thin candles in candlesticks and candleholders. Stand thick candles and square candles directly on the table. Anyone who wishes to bring new candles may place them on the table.

Light the candles.

1966

Mt. Carroll, Illinois

Rock Placement

Move large rocks to an area.

1967

San Diego, California

Paper Architecture

Hang a large sheet or several large sheets of paper.

Inscribe the sheets are with full-scale architectural features, such as doors, windows, or stairs, or with objects such as furniture, lamps, books, etc. Use these drawings to imagine, create, or map an environment. The drawings may create or map new features in an existing environment. They may mirror, double or reconstruct existing features in situ or elsewhere.

To create relatively permanent features with the drawings, apply them directly to a wall.

1968-1972

San Francisco, California

Ordinary Objects

Place things on the floor.

1970

Santa Barbara, California

Water Table

Set a full formal table with full service for four.
All service is white porcelain or clear glass.
Fill all objects, utensils, etc., with water.

1971

Syracuse, New York

Woolen Goods

Observe an unexplained silence.

1973

Tucson, Arizona

Precinct

Construct a rough slab, cube, or table of natural stone or wood.

On the table, people may place hand-made models or objects in wood or clay.

1991

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Alchemical Theater

Assemble four elements.
Place the elements.
Act upon the elements.

1992

Oslo, Norway

Centre Piece

Imagine a life.
Live it.

2003
Torna Haellestad, Sweden

Green Street

The scroll for this event came from a little Japanese shop on Green Street in New London, Connecticut, where I first bought such Japanese artifacts as ink, scrolls, and brushes. I acquired the scroll in 1959. The performance using the original scroll is still in progress. I have not yet written my name in the scroll.

The scroll is either at the Alternative Traditions in Contemporary Art collection at University of Iowa or at the Henie Onstad Art Center in Hovikodden, Norway. I never found anyone willing to take responsibility for accepting the scroll and carrying the piece forward.

In the 1960s and 1970s, I wondered what would happen if one gave away a book or scroll to pass from person to person in an ongoing performance. I experimented with the idea by circulating blank books with a request that people contribute to them and pass them on.

Most iterations of the experiment involved blank books, bound books with blank, white pages. On one or two occasions, I used scrolls. On others, I used old journals, account books, or diaries that I managed to acquire at a discount.

Each book contained a request inside the front cover asking the person who receives the book to execute an artwork or drawing

in the book, then give it or mail it to another friend. I requested the person who completed the book to return it to me. Between 1968 and 1974, I mailed and gave away many such books. The collection in Iowa contains examples of the blank books I used for the drawing project or other projects. None of the books sent out for the drawing project ever returned.

Over the years, I have wondered why no completed books ever returned. Many issues probably come into play. While time, duration, and commitment are the key philosophical notions for a project such as this, choice and voluntary participation in social networks may be why no books returned.

Most of the blank books went to people in Fluxus network or the mail art network. The book contained the invitation to participate. I did not ask whether people would agree to take part. In effect, this approach tested the possibility of communication and commitment using open-ended, one-way communication in a social network. This is an obvious problem when commitment in social networks requires both communication among participants and voluntary assent.

In 1967, Stanley Milgram conducted a famous experiment asking sixty people in Omaha, Nebraska to attempt to deliver packages to people they did not know by sending packages to people who would be likely to know someone who could move

the package closer to its destination. This gave rise to the famous notion of “six degrees of separation,” the idea that there are only six degrees of separation between anyone on the planet and anyone else. As important as the experiment was, it has often been misunderstood. Only a few of the packages reached their destination, and replications of the experiment have had poor or inconclusive results.

Recently, Duncan Watts replicated the Milgram experiment by attempting to get email messages from volunteers to individuals whom they did not know by sending messages through chains of intermediaries. While requests to 61,168 volunteers led to 24,000 started chains, a scant 384 reached their target.

While I was studying psychology and social science at the time I mailed my first books, I wasn't attempting to replicate Milgram's work. I was exploring something different and more philosophical. If I were to describe the project in terms of network issues, I suspect I would consider Albert Hirschman's work more relevant. Hirschman had a knack for looking at problems from unusual perspectives, bringing social insight and economic theory to bear on a wide range of issues. His work might yield insight into why no books ever came back to me.

Robust networks are stable, hardy institutions. Nevertheless, networks require a continual energy inputs and development

to remain robust. The wealth and poverty of networks means that the art networks I used for this project were far more fragile than I realized. The fact that these networks were never robust in any genuine sense should have enabled me to predict the results. The networks into which I sent the blank books were art world networks. They were a sub-set of the larger world of economic and social actors rather than the kind of ideal community that we sometimes assume the art world to be.

If I were to attempt the blank book project today, I would structure it in a very different way.

Even though none of the books ever came back to me, I did come across traces of the books several times. In my travels across the United States and Canada, I met artists who had received a book, worked on it, and passed it on. They told me wonderful stories about their involvement with the books. I had the sense that even though the books did not return, something interesting and useful had happened for people who took the project for what it was meant to be.

On one occasion, I actually saw a book. I was at the studio of an artist who proudly brought a book out to show me. About a dozen and a half pages were complete. These pages were wonderful, and many pages showed the traces of careful work over time. This took place a year or two

after I had sent the book out, and the book was far from complete.

The requests asked the artist who completed the book to return it to me at Fluxus West in San Diego. I left that address in 1979, and it has been years since mail sent to San Diego reached me. Perhaps some books are still making their way around the world. One or two may yet to attempt a return journey to a place that no longer has any connection with Fluxus or with me.

Then again, as Stanley Milgram and Duncan Watts learned, it is neither a small world, nor a big world, but a somewhat lumpy world with different networks linking parts of the world with huge gaps and chasms separating islands of interaction.

It is probably for the best that no one ever agreed to continue my Green Street scroll.

The Judgment of Paris

Between 1964 and 1968, I constructed the first versions of this work from such objects as postage stamps, cans of food, books, architectural models, or furniture. I realized this project in different versions

and variations in San Diego, Los Angeles, Pasadena, and Ventura, California, as well as in Mt. Carroll, Illinois, and New York.

In 1989, I built the second version in Oslo, Norway. This version consists of objects or images depicting women, included statues, pictures from magazines, photo panels, and other images.

The Judgment of Paris has always been one of my favorite myths. Greek mythology was an enormous interest to me. One of the first books I purchased as a youngster was a collection of classical myths, and I devoured classical authors and mythology in the library. The archetypal themes of Greek mythology recur in literature, drama, and art. While the influence of mythological material is clear in many works, other works borrow and rework mythological themes in disguised form. George Polti argued that there are only thirty-six plots in the entire history of drama. Many of these appear in the myths.

This piece was the double reworking of a theme. The first version of the event used ordinary material artifacts, endowing them with the attributes and virtue of actors to explore their nature in a material culture. It reworked the myth by dignifying these artifacts with the attributes of the original mythic actors.

Many events create a theater of the object. Objects act or participate in the action. Several of my events feature objects as

actors or characters. The first version of this event is such a project.

The second version of the event returned to the original myth by using images of women. The meaning of the piece changes based on the choice of image, the obvious or subtle nature of the source, the character of the model and the pose. This, too, is a statement on the character and effect of myth.

White Bar

White Bar was the score for several performances and events from 1964 on. The first full realization of White Bar took place in 1968 for a party at the San Francisco Fluxhouse on Dolores Street. We built the bar without building the entire room. We organized a small party serving only clear liquors. The liquors were vodka, rum, and tequila. We mixed the liquors with fresh orange juice and fresh limejuice or served them neat.

White Bar was also the basis of a collection of clear liquors I assembled at the flat where I lived with Arvid Johannessen in Norway. From 1988 to 1992, I brought back a bottle of local clear liquor every time I traveled to a foreign country. We

had loza rakuja from Jugoslavia, bailloni from Hungary, raki from Turkiye and ouzo from Greece, kirschwasser and pflumi from Switzerland, grappa from Italy, vodka from Finland – as well as vodka from Iceland, Poland, Russia, Sweden, Norway and Ireland – eiswetter and Furst Bismarck from Germany, brandwijn from the Netherlands and dozens of different kinds of clear fruit distillates from all over Europe. Some of them were quite good. Some were terrible.

One night we had a small party at the flat. Oyvind Storm Bjerke, art historian and chief curator of the Henie Onstad Museum, attended. Arvid proudly pointed to the collection. Oyvind went over, looked over the bottles, judiciously uncorked a few and sniffed them. After a few minutes inspection, he nodded knowingly and said: "Dette maa bli den definitiv samling av verdens daarligste brennevinner." – "This must be the definitive collection of the world's worst liquors."

The collection disappeared before we could organize a proper realization of the White Bar. A few weeks after Oyvind's comment, we had another party. The filmmaker Jan Schmidt finished the entire collection in one night.

Rock Placement

My father and I realized the first performance of this event at Fluxus West in San Diego, California in July of 1967. We moved rocks from the hills behind Fluxus West to landscape the front yard of the house at 6361 Elmhurst Drive.

A few years ago, my wife and I moved a collection of rocks from the Skaane countryside to our house in Torna Hællestad, a village established in the twelfth century. The rocks have moved from place to place around the yard. Sometimes, they form nice piles. Other times, they line the paths and walkways of the garden. I often wonder when the work exists and when it does not.

Paper Architecture

I installed the first version of Paper Architecture at the Fluxus West center on Divisadero Street in San Francisco. I later exhibited it as part of my project in the exhibition "Intermedia - Fluxus - Conceptual Art" at Montgomery Art Gallery, Claremont College, Claremont, California in May 1973.

Part of the idea for this piece came from my mother. Our home in San Diego had a wall with windows that offered a boring view of a neighbor's wall and part of his yard. My other constructed sliding screens over the window and painted a bright, tropical garden scene on the screens. After a few years, it seemed as though the garden view was the view from that side of the house.

In recent years, I have discovered that the term "paper architecture" has come into wider usage. I have seen the term "paper architecture" used in at least nine ways:

- 1) Drawn architecture that is not intended to be built,
- 2) Drawn architecture that is intended to be built and will possibly be built even though it has not yet been built,
- 3) Drawn architecture that is intended to be built but will never be built,
- 4) Drawn architecture that is impossible to build,
- 5) Drawings of imaginary architecture that has never been built but would, in theory, be buildable,
- 6) A term of derision applied to the written works of architects that discuss or conceptualize architecture. This usage seems to cover theory and philosophy of architecture in books and articles, whether or not the books contain drawings or proposals in any of the earlier five senses,
- 7) Architectural models built in paper or in cardboard,
- 8) Physical buildings made of paper-based substances,
- 9) A philosophical but ambiguous usage applied to art works that play conceptually with images of and references to architecture.

While the term "paper architecture" is recent, some of these ideas date back many millennia.

My original use of the term was a philosophical play on issues in architecture, design, and art. I also associate the term with concepts of diagramming, modeling, and representation.

A few years ago, I discovered an interesting discussion on an architecture and design list concerning the origin and first use of the term "paper architecture." Some list members attributed the creation of the term to me. The lack of a published citation of this term earlier than 1968 suggests that I may have coined the phrase "paper architecture." On other occasions, I suspect that I may have heard the phrase and pressed it into use or joined the words from different parts of a conversation into a new phrase.

Ordinary Objects

In 1970, I had a conversation with the director of the art gallery at University of California at Santa Barbara about the possibility of an exhibition at the university.

He invited me to visit him, asking me to bring examples of my work and some of the pieces I might like to exhibit.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, I drove the Fluxmobile regularly between the San Francisco Bay Area and San Diego. The first time I drove south after the conversation, I made an appointment to see him. The day that I left, I grabbed a selection of objects and projects from my studio, threw them into a box, and took them with me.

When I got to Santa Barbara, we spoke together for a while. Then he asked me to bring in my work.

I went to the Fluxmobile and fetched the box. I brought the box into his office, opened it, and unpacked the objects, placing them on the floor, along the length of a wall.

He looked at the objects for a while. Perhaps it was along while. I am not sure, but it seemed that way to me.

Finally, he looked at me and said, "But these are just ordinary objects."

At first, I thought he understood my work very well. Later, I realized that he saw these objects in a very different way than I did.

Water Table

This piece was created at the invitation of Yoko Ono and John Lennon for their exhibition, "This is Not Here" at The Everson Museum. Yoko and John invited artists to create works involving water. This was my work. Yoko and John's assistants executed and installed the original version of Water Table for me in the guest artist area of the exhibition.

Bill Vazan reconstructed it in 1974 for my solo exhibition at Vehicule, Quebec.

I reconstructed it a third time in Vienna for the exhibition Fluxus Subjektiv at Galerie Krinzinger. This was the first time that I constructed the realization of this score.

The third reconstruction appears in the special Fluxus issue of Kunstforum. The work is misattributed to Daniel Spoerri because the menu pictured on the table came from Restaurant Daniel. Restaurant Daniel loaned us the dishes and tableware for the installation, and I used their menu as a basis of a drawing placed on the table. The restaurant had nothing to do with Daniel Spoerri.

The title Water Table refers to the project, and to the idea of a water table in geological terms.

Woolen Goods

For the first performance of this work in Tucson, Arizona in July of 1973, the original score read, "An unexplained silence is observed."

In Tucson, I worked at Omen Press, a small publishing house specializing in Sufi literature and mystical books. The word Sufi refers to the woolen robes that Sufi mystics wore. That gave rise to the title Woolen Goods.

This event may be realized by installing a stack of neatly folded blankets and other woolen goods.

Precinct

Several times over the years, I have made pieces that involve exchanging objects or art works with people, or giving them works, or creating places within which they may exchange or give objects.

This piece allows others to give.

It is also related to a number of projects involving shrines.

Alchemical Theater

This piece requires a collection of the four elements, earth, air, fire, and water. These elements may be organized in containers, in some raw form, or in a combination.

The elements may be rearranged in different ways during the exhibition.

This publication has been produced by the Centre of Attention for Ken Friedman's '12 Structures' exhibition at the Centre of Attention, London in April 2004.

More background information is available from the Centre of Attention's website:
<http://www.thecentreofattention.org>

