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Gender and the Collaborative Artist Couple

Candice M. Greathouse
Georgia State University

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GENDER AND THE COLLABORATIVE ARTIST COUPLE

by

CANDICE GREATHOUSE

Under the Direction of Dr. Susan Richmond

ABSTRACT

Through description and analysis of the balancing and intersection of gender in the collaborative artist couples of Marina Abramović and Ulay, John Lennon and Yoko Ono, and Christo and Jeanne-Claude, I make evident the separation between their public lives and their private lives, an element that manifests itself in unique and contrasting ways for each couple. I study the link between gendered negotiations in these heterosexual artist couples and this division, and correlate this relationship to the evidence of problematic gender dynamics in the artworks and collaborations.

INDEX WORDS: Collaboration, Artist couples, Gender dynamics.

GENDER AND THE COLLABORATIVE ARTIST COUPLE

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CANDICE GREATHOUSE

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

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in the College of Arts and Sciences

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2014

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CANDICE GREATHOUSE

Committee Chair: Susan Richmond

Committee: Maria Gindhart

John Decker

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to and would not have been possible without Curtis Ames.

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INTRODUCTION

“Collaborative art”, a term used to describe the creative process by which there is no singular author, has been an artistic practice from antiquity, and since its earliest use in contemporary art practices of the 1960s, has become increasingly visible in the twenty-first century art world. There are many types of artistic collaboration, be it short-term, such as the collaborative pairing of Andy Warhol and Basquiat in the mid-1980s, or long-term, as in the case of Gilbert and George, a collaborative couple that has been creating together since 1970. The collaboration can consist of a minimum of two artists, as referenced in the examples above, or of many, as with Fluxus in the 1960s, a collective of artists whose collaborations spread internationally and whose work is often cited as the beginnings of conceptual collaborative art . More recently, artist collaborations have evolved to include artists that are no longer living, such as with the “Do It” performances¹, or with many strangers, in events like flash mobs, or even virtually, with thousands of anonymous participants, as is the case with drawsum, an “open art collaborative,” accessible and editable online only at www.drawsum.com, to anyone who wishes to be involved.

Out of the many variations that can be described as artist collaborations, this research will exclusively focus on case studies of several heterosexual artist couples and their collaborative art practices. The necessity for such a small selection of artists excludes the possibility of a comprehensive or complete study on collaborative practices more generally, I instead give a careful examination and analysis of several well-known collaborative artist couples and the differing ways that their heterosexual couplings and artist practices are could be seen as

¹ Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Do It: The Compendium* (New York: Independent Curators International) 2013.

ultimately predicted by their prescribed gender, in their public and private lives. The artworks and relationships of Marina Abramović and Ulay, John Lennon and Yoko Ono, and Christo and Jeanne-Claude are to be explored in this paper. These artists have been selected firstly due to fitting my parameters of long-term heterosexual collaborative artist couples, along with their celebrity/notoriety as collaborative partners and the insufficiency of the scholarly research that explores the balancing and intersection of gender in their practice, their public lives, and their private lives. I have chosen to address the artist couples by their first names only, and speak of them primarily as a pair, along with not giving primary acknowledgement or preference to any individual artist in each pairing, regardless of fame or gender. This decision acknowledges their status not only as important artists in their public lives, but also as private couple in their personal lives.

It is necessary to examine the meaning of the word “collaborate”, as it can be defined in two ways. The foremost definition and usage articulates “collaborate” as, “To work in conjunction with another or others, to co-operate; esp. in a literary or artistic production.”² This definition clearly applies to collaborative art practices, and can be seen to denote a positive and productive connotation. Artistic collaborations imply a recursive process where individuals work together to achieve shared goals, equivalent responsibility and shared authorial credit in the resulting creations, and are frequently non-hierarchical. However, the second definition is, “to co-operate with the enemy,”³ in extreme contrast to the prior definition. The etymology of “collaborate” shows that the word dates back to 1871, and derived its negative and pejorative connotations during World War II, where a “collaborator” was someone who coop-

² “Collaborate,” Oxford English Dictionary, accessed May 8, 2014, 2014, <http://www.oed.com>.

³ Ibid.

erated with the Nazi German occupiers.⁴ Here “collaboration” instead implies an unequal power dynamic that reinforces hierarchy. In this paper I will explain that both definitions can be seen as applicable to the collaborations of the discussed heterosexual artist couples, who are entering into the practice of artistic collaboration as suggested in the primary definition, yet, conversely may also be seen as entering into a working relationship with an unequal power dynamic.

Artistic collaboration between partners is largely meant to provide equal weight and authorship to participants- here specifically, I argue that this was a goal of each of these collaborative couples. Heterosexual couples are intrinsically, due to cultural stereotypes of gender, a partnership of inequals.⁵ Through my interest and research into these couples, I began to question these partnerships and the perceived underlying conflicts that I felt were critical to the discussion of the collaborations. As male and female collaborators who also maintain a private romantic relationship, could these artist couples be considered as working with the “enemy” in regards to their public practice? I mean this in regards to the secondary definition of “collaborate”, which is relevant due to the inherent power struggle and potentially antagonistic relationship between genders. And if the goal was to reach/create a non-hierarchical ideal of equivalence in these public collaborations, can these artists be seen as successfully reaching this, due to the contradiction of being simultaneously involved in a private romantic relationship where gender inequality is the operational norm?

⁴ Ibid

⁵ For information of sex and gender theory/politics, see Raewyn Connell’s concept of Hegemonic Masculinity in “Masculinities”, 1995, Anthony Giddens’ ideas on intimacy in “The Transformation of Intimacy”, 1992, Gayle Rubin’s essay “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex”, 1975, and Catharine MacKinnon’s many studies on sexuality, such as “Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State”, 1983.

The following research does not and cannot offer definitive answers to these hypothetical questions and ideas, but instead it explores the manifestation and intersection of gender dynamics in the public works and private lives of three artistic couples and collaborators, with an emphasis on each couple's distinctions between the public and private. I am interested in the blending, or lack of, the private and public lives of these couples, an important distinction that manifests itself differently with each couple, and it seems that in at least one case, the resistance to such a blending with an emphasis instead on the separation of public and private lives, appears to have had an effect. I significantly incorporate the artists' personal and shared biographies into my analysis, which as a method must be noted to have its flaws. Biography can subjectively modify or distort historical facts, however as my purpose involves study into the artists personal and private relationships, its use is inescapable. I aim to provide a juxtaposition of the subjective biographical material and personal analysis with objective source material and physical artworks. I also must note that this conversation in regards to gender and its manifestation in the collaborative works of each couple may at times seem biased, contradictory or problematic, however I suggest that the cultural institutionalization of these gendered stereotypes is already overtly simplistic and reductive, and to discuss gendered dynamics as the potential basis for artistic impetus is never clear-cut, and often messy.

Chapter One focuses on Marina Abramović and Ulay. Their twelve-year artistic alliance resulted in numerous iconic performances that are discussed through descriptive analysis and a critique of their use of prescribed gender norms. Marina Abramović and Ulay's work together consistently tested their physical and mental limits and required viewers to imagine the space of connection between human beings where the boundaries of what constitutes each

other dissolve in conditions of human resemblance, interaction, need and trust. While several of their collaborative projects successfully articulated what they described as a unified, hermaphroditic self, as the relationship progressed and the line between their public work and private lives blurred, their performances began to reinforce gender stereotypes rather than redefine them.

In Chapter Two, I discuss John Lennon and Yoko Ono, or the Beatle and "the world's most famous unknown artist."⁶ Their marriage and corresponding brief collaborative career that ended with his abrupt death in 1980, was used as a public platform to promote peace, music, equality, and love. Through their union of art and music in the late 1960s and 70s, John and Yoko experimented in a variety of media, including film, music, and performance art, and challenged the separation between life and art, instead acknowledging that there were no boundaries between public and private for them. I discuss their public collaborative works that relate to gendered stereotypes and the propagation of them, and their unsuccessful attempts to subvert and reverse traditional gendered domestic roles in their private relationship.

Chapter Three analyzes Christo and Jeanne-Claude's partnership from their marriage in 1960 until Jeanne-Claude's death in 2009. In negotiating identity as a collaborative couple, their focus was on the branding of "Christo," later to become the rebranded, "Christo and Jeanne-Claude." The couple produced ephemeral and fleeting "wrapped" objects and environments, although the reattribution of early works that were originally solely credited to Christo to both he and Jeanne-Claude brings into question the importance of her contributions. Christo

⁶ Johnstone, Nick. Yoko Ono "Talking." (London: Omnibus Press, 2010) 8.

functioned as a trademark, or a brand name until that point – encompassing the works that Christo made, with the help of Jeanne-Claude. I discuss how Christo and Jeanne Claude’s artistic partnership and career seemed to be remarkably professional, with a clear separation between their private lives and public works. Their relationship and collaborative body of work may have escaped some of the problematic gender issues due to that separation.

CHAPTER ONE – MARINA ABRAMOVIC & ULAY

Marina Abramović and Uwe Laysiepen (Ulay) share the same birthdate of November 30, born in 1946 and 1943, respectively. They met on November 30, 1975, their shared birthday, and they immediately embarked as a collaborative duo.⁷ The artistic partnership that emerged simultaneously with their romantic relationship was utilized to allow Marina and Ulay to explore the inner workings of these pairings. Their twelve-year collaboration resulted in numerous iconic performances that ultimately reinforced prescribed gender norms as opposed to reimaging them. Through intense physical and mental exercises/performances, Marina and Ulay's work together aimed to create a self-described unified, hermaphroditic self. This chapter will analyze their personal biographies and selected works throughout their collaborative career that are most representative of this gendered hybridity, successful or unsuccessful.

Both Ulay and Marina were successful artists in their own right before they began collaborating, Ulay as a German performance artist and photographer, and Marina, as a Serbian performance artist in the former Yugoslavia. Ulay 's solo work as a performer and experimental photographer involved an obsessive exploration of aspects of identity and gender, where his own self-image and body were his materials. For two years in his daily life, Ulay wore drag, living and documenting the world of transvestites and transsexuals, or wearing half drag, existing as part female, part male, which is how he appeared when he met Marina.⁸ Marina also used her body as her primary medium of choice. Her early performances experimented with physical limitations and thresholds, as both an artist and a female. She often performed

⁷ Thomas McEvelley, *Art, Love, Friendship: Marina Abramović and Ulay, Together & Apart* (Kingston, NY: McPherson & Company, 2010), 37.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 261.

nude, and would cause bodily harm to herself, or let others do so. For example, in *Rhythm 0*, 1975 (Figure 1), she presented herself as a passive, stereotypical female figure to the audience. Marina allowed the audience to use her body as an unresisting object, in any way they desired, including stripping her, inflicting sexual assaults, and physical violence.

The pair decided to form a metaphysical hermaphroditic collective being upon embarking on their relationship and collaboration. Hermaphroditism can be described as an intersex condition in which an individual possesses physiological characteristics of both sexes. However, as an intersex condition, individuals described as hermaphroditic could be considered to be simultaneously both male and female but they are also, paradoxically, neither one nor the other. It is in this way that Marina and Ulay considered themselves to be complimentary pairs, each providing what the other lacked, in order to make a complete whole. Marina and Ulay referred to themselves as a collective hermaphroditic being called “the other” or “that Self,” and spoke of themselves as parts of a “two-headed body.”⁹

Ulay and Marina dressed and behaved like twins (already strongly resembling each other in build and appearance), and aimed to create a relationship of complete trust. Their earliest works, from 1976 to 1980 are part of Ulay and Marina’s series of *Relation Works*, durational performances that were described as “work which both lives off of and feeds into the investigation of relationship between two humans as they try to relate simultaneously to one another... highly focused performances in which each of them was thrown back both on his or her

⁹ Charles Green, “Doppelgangers and the Third Force: The Artistic Collaborations of Gilbert & George and Marina Abramović/Ulay,” *Art Journal* 59:2 (2000): 39.

own patience and endurance and on the supportive partnership with which they faced the world together.”¹⁰

Talking About Similarity, 1976 (Figures 3, 4), is one of the earliest collaborative performances and can be interpreted in multiple ways. Ulay sews his mouth closed during the performance, leaves, and Marina operates as his voice, answering questions from the audience that Ulay is physically prevented from responding. Playing with the dynamics of gender and cultural understanding of traditional male and female roles, this early work can be seen as reinforcing the passivity of the female, which is in direct contrast to the strength of the male. Ulay, by investing in the act of seeming self-mutilation, and also disallowing himself the potential to speak, harkens to the stereotypical male figure that is assertive, in control, domineering, and in charge, as Marina sits, as a pseudo-dummy, answering questions directed to him, for him, “until I make a mistake and answer for myself.”¹¹ She references the female figure, the dutiful partner, who has no voice except for speaking in agreement with the male.

Mary Richards, an art historian, writes extensively about sacrifice in regards to this performance. Although Ulay was made to be a self-inflicted mute, Marina can be seen to offer a stereotypical female sacrifice, only existing in the performance space as a projective screen for Ulay.¹² Again, this is significant when considered in relation to their gendered identity; Ulay, as a male figure, could masochistically voice his experience through Marina, and therefore was manipulating the power and placing Marina in the position of the sadist, reinforcing his underlying power (he is empowered by making himself, by choice, powerless, martyred).

¹⁰ McEvelley, *Art, Love, Friendship*, 58.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹² Mary Richards, *Marina Abramović* (London; New York: Routledge, 2010) 20.

This sacrifice seems to reinforce/expose/complicate the notion that they are a fused self. Marina and Ulay can be seen as reinforcing gender stereotypes, with Marina volunteering her own identity for the sake of Ulay's, but an alternative analysis I would like to offer is that they are reversing roles, and Marina is now speaking in place of and for Ulay, owning the power and having the ultimate say, where Ulay has none. Ulay has sacrificed his voice, power, and physical presence, deferring to Marina. Regardless, even a role reversal still leaves the pair locked in a power struggle – reversing gendered power dynamics isn't changing them, something that is also problematic in John Lennon and Yoko Ono's collaboration.

This way of distinguishing the individual actions of the partners is not the only way to read Marina and Ulay's works. The claim of a fused being is enforced throughout all performances, representing the space being negotiated, which allows an alternative mode of analysis to be discussed. The actions of the combined figure of the merged self acknowledge the separate actions of each of the bodies similarly to a body's left and right hands working in tandem. Charles Green embraces this interpretation and further suggests Ulay and Marina's collaboration as "blurred and doubled the 'normal' figure of the artist as an individual body."¹³ For Green, Marina and Ulay's hermaphroditic body more "resembled a third hand, a doppelganger, or a phantom extension of the artist's joint will."¹⁴ Green's analysis, which is significantly informed by Marina and Ulay's own discussion of their work, however fails to reference the utilization of how this third hand is approximated and created, as the creators of this "third hand," it supposes that both Marina and Ulay contributed equally to its making. Is this hand conceptually "birthed" from its artist "parents"?

¹³ Green, "Doppelgangers and the Third Force," 37.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Though an intriguing concept, this metaphorical third hand or force that Green describes may be more accurately articulated as a union, as the merging of two beings into one metaphysical fused self, as opposed to a third, newly formed additional creation. In terms of authorship, the collaborative credit acknowledges the figures of Marina Abramović and Ulay as a pairing of two separate individuals, not as a representative third figurehead. I prefer to relate their collaboration to Aristophanes's discussion of hermaphroditism in Plato's *Symposium*, though not a contemporary example, as used in Carolyn Heilbrun's book, *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny*. In Plato's writings on love, Aristophanes says that human beings were originally spherical and bisexed/hermaphroditic androgynous figures and subsequently split into two opposite sexed halves, male and female. The halves wander lonely through the world forever seeking one another.¹⁵

Heilbrun expands this thinking through her concept of androgyny—the realization of man in woman and woman in man, a popular theory at the time of Marina and Ulay's collaboration.¹⁶ This discussion seems more applicable to the union of Marina and Ulay, where through their individual actions in performances they operated in relation to one another to unite their corresponding male and female halves, combined to create this singular hermaphroditic body. Conceptually, this collaborative body now made into one figure fully imbues the primary definition of collaborate, as Marina and Ulay worked jointly to create this merged form, a form that can be also seen to counteract the secondary definition of collaborate. By theoretically merging their male and female halves into a whole, they cannot be seen as cooperating with the enemy, for the enemy has been neutralized.

¹⁵ McEvelley, *Art, Love, Friendship*, 196.

¹⁶ Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (New York: Knopf, 1973).

Representations of the creation of the fully fused performative hermaphroditic self are made fully visible by Ulay and Marina in *Breathing In/Breathing Out*, 1977, one of several performances in which they explore the notions of linkage and unification. For *Breathing In/Breathing Out*, the pair seemed truly to function as a unified self, as they shared the most essential of all life's needs: breath. The two artists were seated opposite each other, locked in what appears to be a passionate embrace. However, their noses were plugged, their mouths were locked together, and they have constrained themselves to remain so for as long as possible, only taking in the other's exhalation.

By subverting the most basic of human operations, the symbiotic couple engaged in self-sabotage to realize their fused being fully.¹⁷ As two individuals sharing the same breath, in and out, the stereotypical male and female dynamic of control was relinquished. Instead the performance offered a "dissolution of binary based power" and created the actual morphed self towards which Marina and Ulay had worked.¹⁸ In the end, their "choices forced each other into an unsustainable interdependence that would become mutually suffocating,"¹⁹ and they collapsed, unconscious after sixteen minutes. *Breathing In/Breathing Out* also references the obsessive aspect of romantic relationships, the necessity to do everything with and for another, and the toxicity and fleetingness of the situation – it is not sustainable. This performance is the embodiment of the hermaphroditic union and their relationship at its most extreme.

¹⁷ Richards, *Marina Abramović*, 19.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 20.

Within their performances, Green writes, “extreme self-absorption spectralized their bodies, so their collaborative body became their real body.”²⁰ Marina and Ulay utilized the gallery as a liminal space, a transitional space contextualized through its association with showing artworks, where conventional rules (here the implied rules of gender) can be broken, ignored, manipulated, as a space to merge into this hermaphroditic form, which seems to transgress and transform the binary of gendered figures. This transgression is illustrated through the complex logic of many performance pieces, when gendered roles are reversed, convoluted, or combined.

The private and psychological relationship between Marina and Ulay is pivotal to the discussion of the works. These collaborative performances are not only between two artists; they are between two (supposed) life partners, which heightens the tension and meaning of the works. The public works may not have been possible without the provocative incorporation of the private, romantic relationship. This internalized connection reinforces the all or nothing, life or death struggle in the performances. To use Chris Burden’s performance, *Shoot*, as an example: Burden was shot in the arm by his assistant, not by his lover. “Assistant” implies not only a job and a working relationship, but also a hierarchy of power, with the “employer,” here being Burden, as an authority figure. Shooting Burden was an assigned task, and the refusal to cooperate would have potentially only caused the loss of the position, to be carried out by another hired assistant.

With Ulay and Marina’s works, however, the power in the form of authorship is meant to be shared, as is the responsibility for their respective roles within the context of any

²⁰ Green, “Doppelgangers and the Third Force,” 42.

given performance. Their works speak to an intrapersonal understanding (they reference the desire for telepathy often), and trust in each other, that would be likely impossible in a strictly professional relationship. Thomas McEvilley, a close friend and art historian, writes of their complex relationship in his book *Art, Love, Friendship* - the title of which alone succinctly defines how intertwined their artistic practice was with their biography; their love life was inseparable from their artistic lives. In this book McEvilley writes, "Marina and Ulay made art in part through their love for one another."²¹ As they defined this love through the conjoined phantom identity, their individual identities became less accessible in performances and public life.

Here, an argument needs to be posited with respect to Marina and Ulay's public and private life. Were their public lives and performances separate from their private identities? Do Marina and Ulay, in their private lives still exist as this fused hermaphroditic self? The gender issues of the hermaphrodite they created have already been analyzed in terms of performance, but what can be said about outside of the gallery, outside the performance in regards to their lives? Even though the performance work was not possible without the presence of the romantic coupling, it would seem that their private experiences could not escape from the demands of the performances. In private life, they maintained a traditional male and female separation of duties. Marina knitted, cleaned, and cooked, while Ulay drove, built structures for their performances, and managed the money.²² This heteronormative male/female negotiation of responsibility is reflective in several of their *Relation Works*.

²¹ McEvilley, *Art, Love, Friendship*, 26.

²² *Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present*, directed by Matthew Akers (2012; Chicago, IL: HBO Productions/Music Box Films, 2012) DVD.

One performance that is representative of a problematic relationship with gendered stereotypes is *Relation in Space*, 1976 (Figures 5, 6). This work is Ulay and Marina's first and one of their best-known collaborations. The performance begins with Marina and Ulay, both nude and positioned approximately sixty feet apart, facing one another. For the next fifty-eight minutes, the two walked towards each other over and over again. Each time they approached each other, they collided. With each pass, the couple increased their speed and the resulting collisions became more and more significant. The two artists describe this performance as "two bodies running for one to each other, like two planets, and mixing male and female energy into a third component that we called 'that self.'" ²³

However, this seminal work seems to be more about male/female conflicts than about the creation of either a fused, or third, self. As the art historian James Westcott notes, "Ulay had to restrain his full power, otherwise Abramović would have been knocked down too easily."²⁴ With this in mind, *Relation in Space* cannot be understood as a testing of limits, but instead an exercise demonstrating the illusion of a balance of power between the male/female binary. There seems to be an inherent problem with limiting one's own potential for the sake of another, preemptively removing any sense of competition. Creating the semblance of equality/commonality of human experience through restraint only reinforces the biological differences between the two gendered performers.

This performance seeks to demonstrate equality between the sexes but does so only on the most superficial of levels. Although the artists claim this performance, like many of

²³ Marina Abramović, Eugenio Viola, and Diego Sileo, *Marina Abramović: Italian Works/Method* (Pero, Milan: 24 Ore Cultura, 2012) 99.

²⁴ James Westcott, *When Marina Abramović Dies : a Biography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010) 100.

their others, is simply a collection of “apparently meaningless actions,”²⁵ it is difficult to view this performance as a transgression of gender norms through this self-described meaningless action. Within the confines of the liminal gallery, it appears as though this performance functions as an editorial commentary reinforcing the differences between the genders.

By 1980, the *Relation Works* had drawn to a close and Marina and Ulay began creating new performances, such as *Rest Energy*, and a long-term performance series, *Nightsea Crossing*. At this juncture in their relationship and career, the focus and subject of the work exhibits a change, moving away from relating to sameness towards relations of difference.²⁶ This can be seen as a response to their inability to achieve their hermaphroditic union based on sameness. *Rest Energy*, 1980 (Figure 7), which operates as a transitional piece, still references the sort of passive aggressive competitiveness and physicality so evident in their earlier works but offers another layer of complexity – the possibility of death. Marina and Ulay stood, separated by a taut bow, the arrow pointed directly at Marina’s heart. Microphones attached to both hearts recorded the increasing number of heartbeats. Commenting on the relationship of hunter and prey, *Rest Energy* also “embodies the life-and-death intensity of the male and female relationship,”²⁷ specifically Marina and Ulay’s intense coupling.

The long-term performance series *Nightsea Crossing*, 1981 – 1987 (Figure 8), featured numerous variations of the typical durational performance over those years. Marina and Ulay remained seated in a chosen space (typically a museum or exhibition venue) on either side of a table, for up to ninety (nonconsecutive) days, seven hours a day, not communicating,

²⁵ Abramović, Viola, and Sileo, *Marina Abramović*, 115.

²⁶ Jan Debbaut, and Thomas McEvelley, *Modus Vivendi: Ulay & Marina Abramović : 1980-1985* (Eindhoven, Netherlands: Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, 1985) 11.

²⁷ McEvelley, *Art, Love, Friendship*, 41.

motionless, and fasting. The silence and fasting often continued into their private lives, for the remaining seventeen hours of each day. The demonstrations of silence in the performances of Marina and Ulay mark a necessity to avoid patriarchal language. Through action (including the action of immobility) and silence, communication is ultimately pre-linguistic and genderless, and necessitates a sort of telepathy between the partners.

Often, Ulay and Marina spoke of themselves simply as “bodies,” and said that it was “not important that we are man and woman.”²⁸ With this in mind, it can be assumed that issues of gender were not the primary conceptual impetus behind their performative practices. Yet, while this may be true, some critics maintain that gender was an important and often critical part of the conversation that relates to their entire oeuvre. McEvelley’s writings and interviews prove invaluable for the discussion of gender in their “artistic collaboration that has emphasized mediations and balancings of the male and female principles.”²⁹ He reinforces that before their collaborations and during, as articulated above, both explored gender stereotypes in their work, such as with *Rhythm 0*, where Marina relinquished control of her body, existing as a stereotypical passive female body to be used, and in Ulay’s early performances experimenting with drag. Conversely, Marina, in regards to her early, solo works before their collaboration, and specifically of *Rest Energy* says, “The courage to do the piece seemed more male...I took a completely male approach, really go-for-it and heroism and the possibility of being killed.”³⁰

Marina expands upon her gendered conception of energy to say of beginning their collaboration, “as soon as we were together my female energy came out and I really felt I

²⁸ Green, “Doppelgangers and the Third Force”, 42.

²⁹ McEvelley, *Art, Love, Friendship*, 259.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 260.

didn't need to be like a man anymore. [Ulay] was acting out the male/female issue already. Then after we met he just shaved the other side too, so he became a man."³¹ McEvelley then notes that Ulay "had assumed the severe patriarchal role that she had played for herself in earlier works, and she was now wholly compliant."³² Ulay and Marina most successfully articulate these notions of gendered difference with the work, *Modus Vivendi. Modus Vivendi* or 'Way of Living', 1984-1985, is a life-size photographic series of works shot on Polaroid in which Marina and Ulay, as silhouettes, represent symbolic icons of male and female archetypes of womanhood, maleness and union.³³ Here the conceptually essential underlying and unspoken subject of their work becomes fully conscious as they talk about difference as opposed to similarity.³⁴ *Modus Vivendi* marks a strong departure from the early works, both stylistically (this is their first/only non-performative work) and in content, as they acknowledge their male and female halves and relinquish the hermaphroditic body.

Ulay and Marina continued to perform *Nightsea Crossing* around the world. In what would be their last performance in 1987, Ulay, in intense physical pain from inhibited movement, could not continue after the fourteenth day, and told Marina the performance was over. Marina refused to leave the table and said the performance would continue without Ulay. The empty chair would signify Ulay's absence. Marina says of this final performance, which would continue for nineteen days total, in regards to her role as the female half in their works:

³¹ Ibid

³² Ibid

³³ Debbaut and McEvelley, *Modus Vivendi*, 12.

³⁴ Ibid., 11.

Yes, until *Nightsea Crossing*, and then not anymore. The difference was that he some how gave up and I didn't want him to give up. Then we had an almost physical fight because he wanted me to give up too because he said it looked ridiculous if I was sitting there alone. And I was thinking that we were working with different limits and we should show them, we should allow the public to see everything, without the embarrassment. But he wanted to draw a line between the public and the private. And then everything went to pieces because he punished me in the private life and I went on in the public life, trying to act both roles at once.³⁵

This statement acknowledges that Marina felt the public and private lives were now intertwined, something that is evident in their last works once they acknowledged the gendered divide in the collaborative artworks. Furthermore, in contrast to earlier performances, Marina now refused to limit her strength to match Ulay's, as Ulay had previously in performances such as *Relation in Time*, clearly demonstrating a significant shift in their dynamic of power, no longer desiring to be equals – and making relevant again the second definition of collaborate, as the once merged couple began separating and conflicting.

In *The Lovers*, also known as The Great Wall Walk, 1988 (Figure 9), which is Marina and Ulay's final performance, performed immediately after *Nightsea Crossing*, this merging of public and private lives is most evident, and finalized. The accompanying text for this performance, like the other works, sets clear parameters, "Ulay and I end our relations with this project. The concept is to approach each other from the two ends of the Great Wall of China. He begins in the Gobi Desert and I begin at the Yellow Sea; we meet halfway in between. We

³⁵ McEvelley, *Art, Love, Friendship*, 266.

each walked 2000 kilometers to say good-bye. Duration: 90 days. Last meeting on June 3, 1988.”³⁶

Ulay and Marina’s original conceptualization of this journey, which was close to eight years in the making, had the pair traveling to meet in the center and marry, not separate. In this performance Marina began to express a return to her originally defined “male” energy, or part. Marina began the walk at the east end, known as the masculine end of the Great Wall, at the shore of the Yellow Sea; Ulay began at the Gobi Desert, the west end, the female end.³⁷ Their preparations for this walk vastly differed, and reinforced the heteronormative behavior of the pair in private life. Ulay prepared for austere living months in advance, Marina said others would take care of her. However, on the walk, Marina was more dedicated; she walked more, she did not participate in drinking and celebrations, and was more exact in following the parameters of the walk, quoted as saying, “I walk every fucking centimeter of the wall.”³⁸ Through those ninety days of walking, Marina suffered. “I need beauty around me”, she said through her tears. Ulay, looking at desolate Gobi desert, says, “I wouldn’t mind living here a few years”, as McEvelley, a participant on the trip, documents.³⁹

The Lovers, also referred to as the Great Wall Walk, functions differently than any of their previous works. The all-encompassing journey merged both their private and public life in a way they had struggled for their performances to do. In hindsight, I suggest that their public performances can be seen as metaphors for their private life as well. The earliest *Relation Works* (1975-1980) functioned as violent and competitive attempts to relate as equals and

³⁶ Ibid., 65.

³⁷ Thomas McEvelley, *Sculpture in the Age of Doubt* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing Inc., 1999) 188.

³⁸ McEvelley, *Art, Love, Friendship*, 141.

³⁹ Ibid.

achieve a hermaphroditic union, as they were simultaneously consumed with their romantic partnership. In the early 1980s, their performances focused on inaction and silence, as their words and movements betrayed that goal. Within the later works, including *Modus Vivendi* and *The Lovers*, Marina and Ulay had relinquished the struggle to achieve the hermaphroditic union but now merged the public and private lives. It is significant that in merging the private and public lives, and simultaneously relinquishing the hermaphroditic union their roles are more obviously conventionalized along traditional notions of gender. These final performances were working within the conventional constructs of culturally and stereotypically defined notions of man and woman, and most successfully encapsulated and exploited the issue of gender to create a more complicated, and potentially more complete, notion of sexual difference and union.

The works described in this chapter express the materialization of the metaphorical hermaphroditic union by Marina and Ulay in a variety of ways. A conceptual analysis corroborates the fact that many of their performances often reinforced gender stereotypes as opposed to redefining them, regardless of their intentions. Marina and Ulay embarked upon both literal and figurative feats of endurance that tested the limits of both their personal and professional relationships, and ultimately resulted in the demise of both. Unable to escape the conventional constructs of patriarchally defined notions of man and woman, they created scenarios based on trust and reciprocity that simultaneously struggled for their sense of gendered self to be eroded or subsumed for the sake of the other.

Ulay and Marina, perhaps unconsciously, drew upon their shared, heteronormative understanding of both the male and female as mutually interdependent, and created culturally consistent manifestations of gender through their shared experiences, both public and

private. However, their collaboration is indicative of the inconsistent dynamic of intersubjectivity that exists in all relationships – as they attempted to make tangible the spaces of connection that signified the ultimately tenuous and unsustainable union between the two.



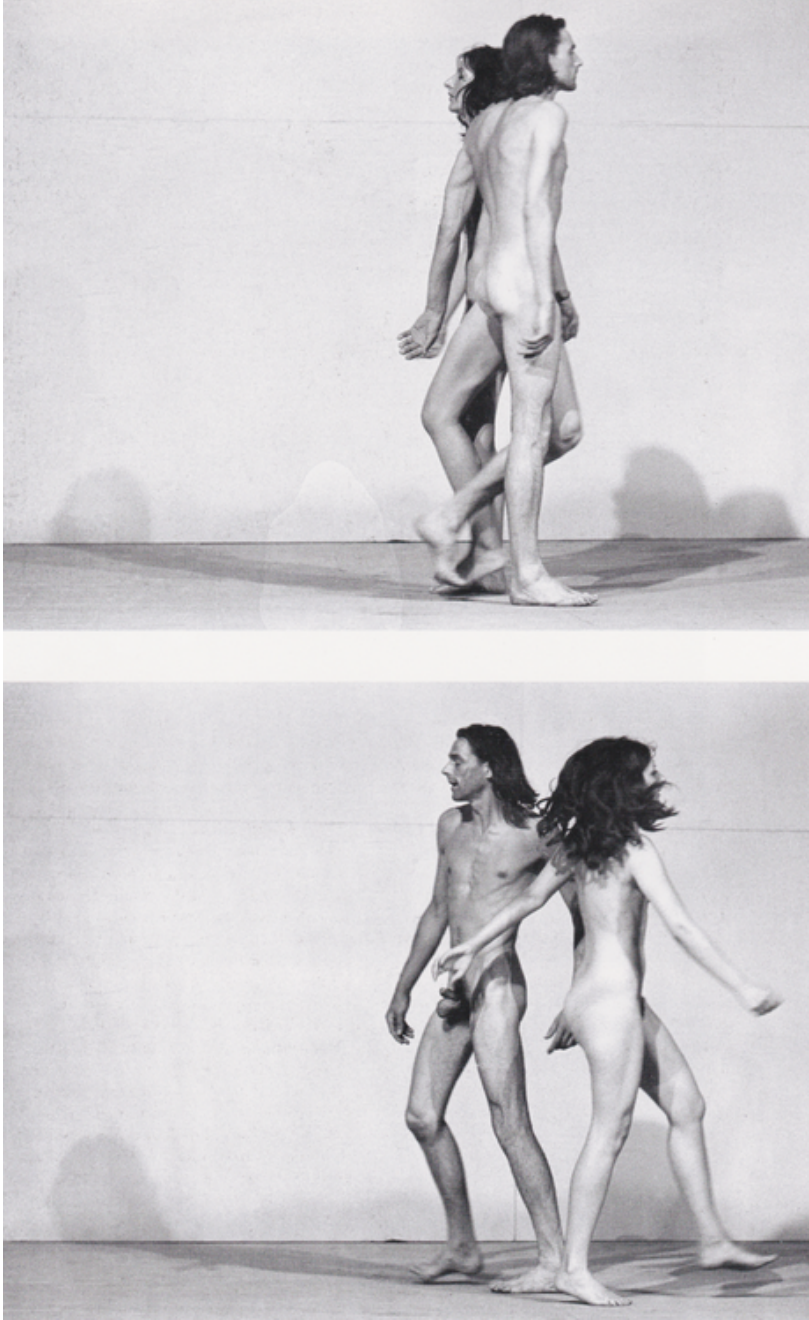
Figure 1: Marina Abramović, *Rhythm 0*, 1974



Figure 2: Ulay, *sHe*, 1973



Figures 3, 4: Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Talking About Similarity*, 1976



Figures 5, 6: Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Relation in Space*, 1978

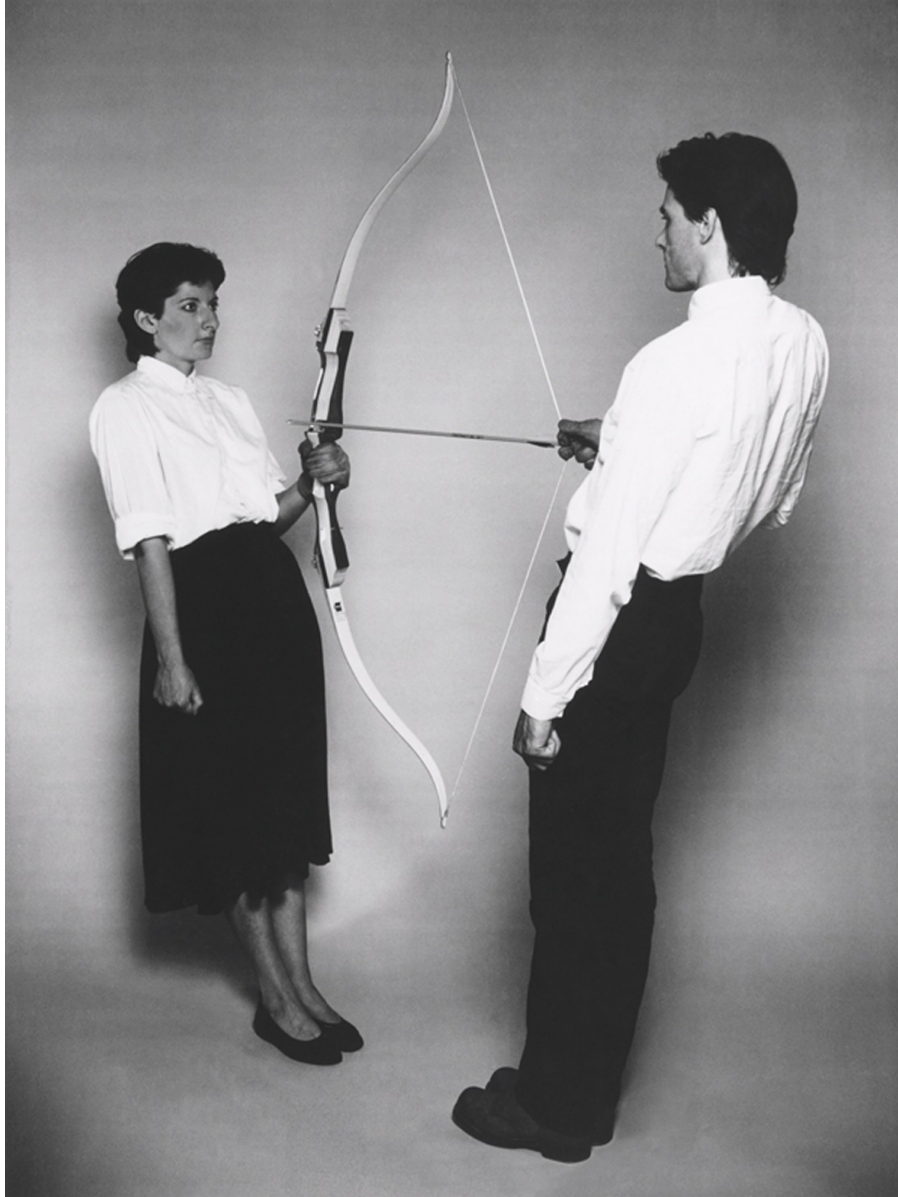


Figure 7: Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Rest Energy*, 1980



Figure 8: Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Nightsea Crossing*, (*Documenta 7 Kassel, 7 days*), 1982



Figure 9: Marina Abramović and Ulay , *The Lovers* (The Great Wall Walk), 1988

CHAPTER TWO - JOHN LENNON AND YOKO ONO

In this chapter I discuss John Lennon and Yoko Ono, or the Beatle and "the world's most famous unknown artist,"⁴⁰ as John once titled her. Simultaneously aimless and directed, John and Yoko's marriage and corresponding brief collaborative career were used to promote peace, music, love, and most controversially, the reversing of traditional gendered domestic roles. Through their union of art and music in the late 1960s and 70s, John and Yoko experimented in a variety of media, including film, music, and performance art, before John's murder in 1980. From acorn plantings to Yoko's miscarriages, every facet of their relationship and artistic career is thoroughly documented through both numerous personal interviews and media coverage. Analysis of this documentation is quite common by Beatles' researchers, but not for art historical purposes. Through evaluation and incorporation of these materials and their biography, I will describe Yoko and John's dissolution of the boundaries between the public and private, and their collaborative preoccupation with gender roles, which ultimately reinforced the conception of collaboration as being "to co-operate with the enemy."⁴¹ I will also show how John and Yoko were critically defined/attacked by the media and popular culture through their gender (and Yoko's race as well), John labeled as "infantilized" and Yoko discounted as a "muse," among other things.

Yoko Ono was born in 1933 and raised in Tokyo to a wealthy Japanese banking family. Yoko's family moved constantly between Japan and the U.S., and she was educated in both countries, being the first woman admitted to study philosophy at Japan's Gakushuin Uni-

⁴⁰ Johnstone, *Yoko Ono "Talking"*, 8.

⁴¹ "collaborate," Oxford English Dictionary, accessed May 8, 2014, 2014, <http://www.oed.com>.

versity and continuing her education at Sarah Lawrence College in New York. Dropping out of college, she soon became an integral part of the Fluxus movement, helping to expand it in Japan, and began working with many New York conceptual artists including John Cage and George Maciunas. She was influenced by the belief that “the boundaries between art and life should be eliminated,”⁴² and this would resonate through her work and collaboration with John Lennon. During the early 1960s, Yoko's work, now heralded as “proto-feminist” consisted of conceptual instruction and sound pieces, most notably the performance *Cut Piece*, 1964 (Figure 10), where Yoko subjects herself to the impulses and actions of the audience participation, who cut the clothing off her passive and unresisting body until she was nude.

John Lennon, originally from Liverpool, England, was born in 1940, and experienced a traumatic childhood, living largely with his extended family, with limited contact with his mother and father. He admittedly was an uninterested and disruptive student, often failing his examinations, and was expelled from the Liverpool School of Art. In the early 1960s, the Beatles were formed and by the mid-1960s had become world famous. On November 6, 1966, in an art gallery, “the wondrous mystic prince and the exotic Oriental dragon lady met.”⁴³ John recalled to Rolling Stone:

There was a sign that said, Hammer A Nail In, so I said, ‘Can I hammer a nail in?’ But Yoko said no, because the show wasn't opening until the next day. But the owner came up and whispered to her, ‘Let him hammer a nail in. You know, he's a millionaire. He might buy it.’ And so there was this little conference, and finally she said, ‘OK, you can

⁴² Joan Hawkins, *Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) 118.

⁴³ Barry Golson and David Sheff, *The Playboy Interviews with John Lennon and Yoko Ono* (New York: Playboy Press, 1981) 86.

hammer a nail in for five shillings.’ So smartass says, ‘Well, I’ll give you an imaginary five shillings and hammer an imaginary nail in.’ And that’s when we really met. That’s when we locked eyes and she got it and I got it and, as they say in all the interviews we do, the rest is history.⁴⁴

This romanticized first meeting articulates the idealization of John and Yoko’s union – that it was a meeting and merging of two equals who fully understood one another. John and Yoko embarked on a collaborative career slowly, Yoko continued to make her artwork, with John as her financial sponsor, as she also would contribute her vocals to several of the Beatles’ songs.

In May of 1968, after “dating” for two years (both were married to other people), John and Yoko left their spouses and embarked on their collaborative career and relationship together. They created their first collaborative music album, *Unfinished Music #1: Two Virgins*, and an accompanying film, also their first, *Two Virgins*, the cover featuring the pair completely nude (Figure 11). Yoko and John stayed awake all night, creating the album, which consists of arrhythmic shrieks, whispers, moans, background sounds, unintelligible noise, and other atonal sounds that was more influenced by her Fluxus sound experimentation than John’s work with the Beatles. This first collaboration, perhaps representative of musical foreplay, concluded at dawn when John and Yoko consummated the relationship. The film consists of John’s face superimposed on Yoko’s, so we see both of them simultaneously layered along with numerous visual effects, along with a prolonged scene of the two kissing and embracing.

Regardless of the filmic and musical worth of these twin offerings, notably a record paired with a film, symbolic of their artistic interests, what is most relevant about this work

⁴⁴ Jonathon Cott and Christine Doudna, *The Ballad of John and Yoko* (Garden City, N.Y.: Dolphin Books, 1982) 32.

is the acknowledgement of the pair in regards to their public and private lives. Creating artwork exclusively about their relationship dissolved the private and public lives, already an issue because of Yoko and John's celebrity and the media attention placed on the pair. Yoko and John's relationship is accounted for in their works, or at least, abstractedly documented as it manifested itself in their life and art. "Our life is our art," John said, and he also expressed that their collaborative albums were "a record of our life together."⁴⁵ The abstract and autobiographical *Unfinished Music* series continued with the albums, *Unfinished Music #2: Life with the Lions* in early 1969, and *Wedding Album*, later the same year, which offered an extravagant box set of duplicated mementos, including sets of photos, drawings by Lennon, a reproduction of the marriage certificate, a photograph of their wedding cake, and a booklet of press clippings about the couple.

John and Yoko continued to parade their private lives in public as art immediately after their wedding in which life events were viewed as performances. For example, *Bed-Ins for Peace* consisted of two weeklong events in Amsterdam and Montreal where they "honeymooned" in bed and invited the press. Turning the celebrity of their marriage into an opportunity to promote world peace, John and Yoko attempted to subvert war with love, and its physical manifestation, sex. Yoko, a vehement second-wave feminist, said surprisingly during one of the *Bed-Ins*, "If I was a Jewish girl in Hitler's day, I would approach him and I would become his girlfriend. After 10 days in bed, he would come to my way of thinking."⁴⁶ Here Yoko literally speaks of "cooperating with the enemy" and more, acknowledging the supposed power

⁴⁵ Francine Prose, *The Lives of the Muses : Nine Women & the Artists They Inspired* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002) xxiii.

⁴⁶ *Bed Peace*, directed by John Lennon and Yoko Ono (1969; New York: Bag Productions/Yoko Ono Lennon, 1969).

of female sexuality, a tool capable of being used to manipulate the minds of men, apparently enough to end wars...and the Beatles?

This arguably anti-feminist, or essentialist mode of thought can also be translated to John and Yoko's relationship. Beatles fanatics and friends alike have made much of Yoko's perceived control over John. Did she, as a female, in fact see John, a well-known misogynist, as the enemy, and seek to empower herself (and all females) by collaborating/manipulating him? Perhaps, Yoko was aware she was working with the enemy, and John Lennon was the enemy, as male, but Yoko as a foreigner, a Japanese woman, was also the enemy. The attacks on Pearl Harbor were still fresh and, especially to Beatles fans, this "dragon lady" collaborating with a Beatle was seen as a threat. Throughout these years, John was still technically (and foremost to the media), a Beatle. In late 1969, the Beatles disbanded, and Yoko has largely been determined as the reason for that. Regardless of the actual impetus for the long-coming break, Yoko's presence in John's life had a profound effect, and vice versa. They continued to experiment collaboratively with music and created several films, some of which are problematic and obsessive representations of gender, sexuality, and power, most notably *Freedom* and *Rape*.

Freedom, 1970 (Figure 12), a two-minute slow-motion film that displays an anonymous body, played by Yoko, offers a strategically cropped viewpoint so only the female's torso is viewable, with the breasts as the main focal point. Clad in a magenta bra, the breasts are almost exposed as the body's hands struggle to rip the bra apart from the center, to no avail. The titling of *Freedom* implies that this film is about the socially mandated stipulation that women must contain/restrain their breasts, however it reads more clearly as a filmic striptease. Again, Yoko functions as a headless anonymous female body, offering up for display only

breasts and the implicit promise that they will be exposed. The video incites arousal and invites the male gaze in this objectification of the female figure. Furthermore, in terms of celebrity, these films had a much larger reach than the typical art videos of the time, which John and Yoko were aware of, and therefore is indicative of a continued propagation of the objectification of women's bodies.

Rape, 1969 (Figures 13,14), is perhaps Yoko and John's most controversial film.

At seventy-eight minutes long, Yoko's website, [imaginepeace.com](http://www.imaginepeace.com) describes *Rape* as "The implacable, continuous and brutal harassment of a girl by a male camera crew."⁴⁷ Filmed from the point of view of a predator, a young woman is followed for well over an hour, throughout town, even to her apartment. This young woman did not agree to be filmed, and was truly terrified to be followed. Much has been written about this film by the media, for whom the film functioned as a comment on the press intrusion about which the celebrity couple frequently complained.⁴⁸ This film by John and Yoko is inconsistent for the pair who purposefully chose to stage their romance on the public stage, and use it as a platform for peace, among other things. The film is full of contradictions that manifest themselves on several conceptual levels. John and Yoko had, from the beginning of their relationship, maintained that it was a pairing of equals, without the typical male-female power dynamic. To create a film that consists of having a young beautiful woman harassingly followed by four strange men and cameras is not an acknowledgement of equality but a reinforcement of the power and powerlessness of men and women, respectively.

⁴⁷ Imagine Peace, accessed June 2, 2014, <http://www.imaginepeace.com/archives/11634>.

⁴⁸ Mark Richardson, "You Say You Want a Revolution: How Yoko Ono's *Rape* Could Have Changed the World," *Senses of Cinema Online Journal*. July 2004, 32 (July 2004), accessed May 28, 2014, http://sensesofcinema.com/2004/feature-articles/yoko_ono_rape/.

Joan Hawkins, a film historian, articulates that *Rape* capitalizes on the injustice it seeks to expose by filming this woman, a foreigner who does not speak the language, without her permission. The woman is not acting, instead she is physically and truly rendered helpless as she begs for the camera crew to stop, until she surrenders at the end of the film, cornered in her room, unaware of what may happen next, and only then does the filming stop.⁴⁹ This visual and filmic rape is about power, not only the real power of the phallic camera to the woman, but also the cinematic power of the male gaze, and the overarching power of John and Yoko, at their insistence in creating this film. Yoko defended this film aggressively, stating, “leave our morals alone”⁵⁰ in press conferences, a defense that the young woman being filmed was not able to offer. John said of the film, “We are showing how all of us are exposed and under pressure in our contemporary world. This isn't just about the Beatles. What is happening to this girl on the screen is happening in Biafra, Vietnam, everywhere.”⁵¹ Ironically, John and Yoko chose to magnify and exploit the powerlessness of a young, beautiful foreign woman as their example, even though they had spent the previous years adamantly defending Yoko, for whom many of those adjectives also apply.

Other art films in John and Yoko's oeuvre maintain this preoccupation with sexuality and the gendered body, though not in such controversial ways, such as in *Fly* and *Erection*. *Fly*, 1970 (Figures 15, 16), in extreme close-up follows a fly's movement and point of view for twenty-five agonizing minutes as it slowly travels along the body of a nude woman from head to toe, as viewers also hear a fly buzzing loudly as the only audio component of the work. The

⁴⁹ Hawkins, *Cutting Edge*, 120.

⁵⁰ Richardson, “You Say You Want a Revolution.”

⁵¹ Imagine Peace, accessed June 4, 2014, <http://imaginepeace.com/archives/6759>.

catatonic women is representative of an objectified female form, as the fly is offered free reign to explore every part of her body, reminiscent of a rape victim. *Erection*, 1971, documents a nineteen-minute time-lapse film capturing the construction of the London International Hotel, and functions as a play on words as the aptly titled film shows the building as it is being erected, and rising from nothing. Based on previous filmic works, which have been centered on representations of the body, viewers were likely expecting instead a bodily erection. Conversely, John and Yoko also produced the self-indulgent *Self Portrait*, 1969, which was a slow-motion sequence of John's penis in a semi-erect state.

The film, *Up your Legs Forever*, 1970, featured over 300 pairs of legs, “donated” for peace. This label of “peace” is applied to numerous works by John and Yoko, without any conceptual backing, and notably here, where the film functions as a teaser, and again reinforces the theme of objectifying the human form, though in this film they include male and female bodies. Up-up-up, the camera pans up from the naked front-facing legs from the feet to the upper thighs before quickly cutting to a new pair of legs. This happens again and again for 70 minutes, with each pair of legs reintroducing the anxiety attached to the potential revealing of genitalia, which is never shown, until the end, where two pairs of legs facing backwards are shown simultaneously. The camera pans up, as it has done hundreds of times during the film, but continues to travel up, to the posteriors of the couple, who are shown to be John and Yoko.

All of Yoko and John's film works can be contextualized in regards to Yoko's early art career, as a Fluxus artist and proto-feminist artist. Many of the collaborative film works of John and Yoko operate in a similar fashion to Yoko's solo films, such as *Bottoms*, 1966, a five minute film of close-ups of human buttocks, but are arguably far from other Fluxus films, such

as those of Carolee Schneemann. Schneemann, a feminist artist, was involved with Fluxus and also blurred the boundaries of public and private with her film work, which documented her personal life and relationships. There is a strong contrast between John and Yoko's films and Schneemann's films, made during the same time. Schneemann's work visually narrates a more balanced view of gender, such as in *Fuses*, 1967. In *Fuses*, Schneemann and her then-partner are seen having sex, the film giving equal weight to both participants, differing from male-oriented pornography, and also fully exposing their most private moments, now public.

John and Yoko's films are also indicative of the overwhelmingly public and exposed nature of John and Yoko's relationship, made transparent by their frequent personal interviews and the corresponding media scrutiny. During these formative years (1968-1972), while their films remained collaborative and experimental, Yoko and John had moved apart musically, creating separate musical albums that maintaining their typical and dissimilar styles, Yoko in avant-garde noise, and John with rhythmic Beatles-esque offerings. Yoko and John continued to sensationalize their relationship by broadcasting personal events in their lives such as Yoko's several pregnancies and miscarriages, and also their 18-month separation from 1973-1975 (John's "Lost Weekend"), holding firm to their belief that there was no separation of public and private lives for the pair.

On October 9, 1975, on John's 35th birthday, Yoko gave birth to Sean Ono Lennon. This moment was to mark a collaborative silence on behalf of the pair, as John and Yoko agreed to retire from art, music, and the public sphere, a period known as the "Private Years." Without explanation, John and Yoko ceased to present their lives together as art offered up for public scrutiny. For the next five years, John and Yoko lived at home in nearly total seclusion,

with John taking care of Sean while Yoko managed the couple's financial affairs. This total reversal of traditionally-accepted domestic roles, which now labeled John as the househusband and Yoko as businesswoman, or financial head of the household, is referenced by Jonathon Cott, a Rolling Stone writer and frequent interviewer of the John and Yoko, as reminiscent of “Egypt in the fifth century BC, [where] women attend market and are employed in trade, while men stay at home and do the weaving.”⁵² Egyptian culture and artifacts were a subject of fascination for Yoko, so perhaps the impetus for this arrangement was from such. Regardless of similarities to ancient Egyptian households, John and Yoko’s division of labor was quite controversial, and also did not reconcile the inequitableness of the labor involved with one parent exclusively raising the children. As opposed to a union of equals as John and Yoko had previously claimed, now the switching of domestic positions served as reinforcement that their relationship was less about equality and more of a contradiction that undermined that belief.

Yoko and John returned to the public eye in 1979, when they began working on and promoting *Double Fantasy* (Figure 17), their first collaborative album in a decade. Released a few weeks before his abrupt death, this record proved to be John’s last musical work. A sentimental account of their relationship, *Double Fantasy* is a play on words; at its most tangible, it is a type of freesia, but John also felt it was the “perfect description of marriage to Yoko.”⁵³ Ono said that the titling of the album was descriptive of the understanding of a heterosexual relationship that “we don't have to unify our thoughts totally, as man and woman, we each have a

⁵² Cott and Doudna, *The Ballad of John and Yoko*, xxiii.

⁵³ John Lennon, Bob Miles and Yoko Ono. *Testimony - The Life And Times Of John Lennon In His Own Words*, (1980; Synergie OMP/One Media Publishing, 2007) MP3.

separate fantasy.”⁵⁴ In *Double Fantasy*, Yoko’s songs were interspersed with John’s instead of relegated to one LP side, the B-side, as they had worked previously. John, in interviews to Rolling Stone explained:

It's the first time we've done it this way. I know we've made albums together before, like *Live Peace in Toronto 1969* where I had one side and Yoko had the other. But *Double Fantasy* is a dialogue, and we have resurrected ourselves, in a way, as John and Yoko – not as John ex-Beatle and Yoko the Plastic Ono.⁵⁵

With alternating songs, the record does function exactly as a dialogue or conversation, with one partner addressing the other, the other partner responding, and “what we are left with is the jumpy unease one gets around a couple who keeps interrupting each other.”⁵⁶ This interesting analysis also seems to offer a subtle critique of Yoko and John’s relationship, for John was well known for interrupting Yoko in interviews. But what dialogue were they creating, what was this conversation about? Music critic Geoffrey Stokes suggested the theme of *Double Fantasy* was, “Basically misogynist...vampire-woman-sucks-life-out-of-man-who-enjoys-every-minute-of-his-destruction” in a *Village Voice* review titled “The Infantilization of John Lennon.”⁵⁷ Robert Christgau, another music critic, offered a more-in-depth song-by-song analysis, culled from Stokes:

From the nursery-rhyme reversal of "Cleanup Time"--the queen counts the money while the king makes bread and honey--to the passive-active combo of (John's) "I'm Los-

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Cott and Doudna, *The Ballad of John and Yoko*, 187.

⁵⁶ Francine Prose, *The Lives of the Muses*, 356.

⁵⁷ David Gutman and Elizabeth Thompson, *The Lennon Companion Twenty-Five Years of Comment*, (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2004) 228.

ing You" and (Yoko's) "I'm Moving On" to the abject abstraction of "Woman" to the father-and-son equation of "Beautiful Boy" to the acute separation anxiety of "Dear Yoko" to "Hard Times Are Over," the album celebrates a love "so all-fired powerful it exists without (present) pain, without conflict." When John croons about "the little child inside the man," he's articulating a bedrock assumption of the marriage, and while I'd call his matrifying mythicization of Yoko "basically sexist" rather than "basically misogynist," I'm no less suspicious of what it suggests.⁵⁸

The majority of the reviews focused on the material and content of the album, although the songs themselves were quite catchy. But *Double Fantasy*, John and Yoko's concept album about their relationship, now transcribed into pop music (as opposed to the mid-60s variations of avant-garde noise) had put themselves in an exposed position where the strengths and weaknesses of the album, featuring "hints of subordination and condescension"⁵⁹ were projected onto the relationship. This record invites the discussion and judgment of John and Yoko's marriage as art, because if the relationship is art, and the music is art, which is simultaneously about the relationship, then the space where these ideas merge and separate is nebulous or nonexistent. If Yoko and John's life is art (their mantra), and their marriage is art, and their art (as perceived by their critics) is "bad", then by default, so is their marriage. It is a theoretical conundrum. Furthermore, when the music and art is perceived as sexist or misogynist, then, inherently, so is the relationship. Ultimately, John and Yoko's album about their love functions most successfully (beyond the pop catchiness of it) as an internal and expository analysis of the flaws of their collaborative obsession with gendered roles during their relationship.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Since John's death in December of 1980, when a deranged Beatles fan murdered him, Yoko, now his widow, has maintained his musical legacy while continuing to make her own conceptual art and music. Public perception, previously so cruel to her for "breaking up the Beatles," continued and expanded. Rather than viewing their work together as that of a collaborative duo, Yoko's detractors frequently relegate her contributions to that of one in the position of muse. Analysis of their relationship is a major part of each new biography or release of artifacts from his life, and for John and Yoko it is important to discuss the lasting public perception and labeling of each of them, because of their fame and celebrity and how they navigated through the public eye/sphere/realm. After John and Yoko's infamous meeting in 1966, Yoko became the object of media attention overnight, and was harassed for her involvement with a Beatle.

An *Esquire* magazine article published in 1969 with the racist headline of "John Lennon's Exclusive Gloupie" is just one extreme example of the notably anti-woman, anti-Asian backlash against Yoko. John is quoted as saying to Rolling Stone that the Beatles' fans had a "cultural allergy to her gender and race... she's a woman, and she's Japanese; there's racial prejudice against her and there's female prejudice against her. It's as simple as that."⁶⁰ Partly due to the still prevalent discounting of women and the open racism to people of Japanese descent in a post-war United States, Yoko's treatment by the media propagated the stereotype of

⁶⁰ Jan Webber, "The Rolling Stone Interview: John Lennon, Part II," Rolling Stone, February 4, 1971, 75, accessed June 20, 2014, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/lennon-remembers-part-two-19710204>.

the dragon lady, a cultural epithet meant to characterize East Asian women as “calculating, conniving and all around evil.”⁶¹

More subtly, and perhaps more indicative of an underlying and persistent patriarchal disposition against strong, intelligent females, is the conception/relabeling of Yoko as a muse or Venus, a theory that has grown in popularity since the bias against Yoko’s womanhood and Asian ethnicity has become politically incorrect, and the remaining Beatles have admitted Yoko was not the cause of the band’s disintegration. The analysis of contemporary muses in *The 20th Century Muse* acknowledges, “by its mythological origin, the muse is a feminine noun—Muse, the name of the nymph who inspired Numa,”⁶² and more notably refers to the nine muses of Greek mythology, Zeus’s daughters and goddesses of poetry, music, and the arts. Marking Yoko as a muse preserves John as the productive, creative, active male artist and relegates Yoko to the passive female, whose role is to serve as inspiration to the artist but has no legitimate claim to creative ownership.

Yoko understood the drawbacks of being relegated to the role of the muse as opposed to being recognized as an artist in her own right. Even at the risk of being vilified as interfering or controlling, she made it a point to ensure that it was publicly evident to not only her and John’s fan-base but also their critics that the level of her involvement in their collaborative process was significantly greater than that of a muse, and that she should be credited as John’s equal in their collaborative career. Even today, these misconceptions of Yoko are referenced in pop culture as well. For example, female celebrities who are romantically involved

⁶¹ Philip Herbst, *The Color of Words: An Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Ethnic Bias in the United States* (New York: Intercultural Press, 1997) 72.

⁶² Annette Vezin and Luc Vezin, *The 20th-Century Muse* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2003) 6.

with musicians are labeled a “Yoko.” One notable song lyric about her (by the antifeminist titled male band, Barenaked Ladies) goes, “You can be my Yoko Ono/ You can follow me wherever I go...If I were John and you were Yoko/I would gladly give up musical genius/Just to have my own personal Venus,” clearly distinguishing Yoko as a “groupie” and sex object who John gave up his “musical genius” for.⁶³

However, Yoko wasn’t the only object of public scrutiny and critical backlash. John also shared in this experience, and the media attacks on him were just as harsh. As previously noted, his relationship with Yoko as manifested in *Double Fantasy* resulted in what has been characterized as “infantilization.” John was often scorned for how he had been brain-washed by Yoko. Apparently, John often sounded dutiful and robotic, which fueled the widespread theory that Yoko possessed and controlled John. So was John Yoko’s “Hitler,” did she spend a few days with him, “cooperating with the enemy,” and manipulate his thinking through sex? This description would necessitate an understanding that women can in fact, control men through sex, and that men can be controlled by sex, a problematic understanding and stereotype of male/female relationships. Furthermore, this would be dependent on the assumption that Yoko did not have an equal footing with John until she manipulated him, although their meeting of equals was something they had mythologized from the beginning of their relationship.

Ultimately, John and Yoko’s oft-discussed and idealistic portrayal of their private romantic relationship and collaborative works are unsuccessful at creating a non-hierarchical ideal of equivalence, due to their obsession and failure to transcend gendered stereotypes,

⁶³ Barenaked Ladies, *Be my Yoko*, (1989: Sire Records, 1992)

along with the lack of boundaries between their public and private lives. John and Yoko, a pair of artists who fell in love, began working with each other collaboratively and spontaneously. Their every move was documented and later analyzed by the media, both due to their celebrity and their own broadcasting. The public works of Yoko and John described in this chapter, though lacking a thorough and conceptual understanding of the issues such as sexuality and gender that they addressed and often contradicting them, hand in hand with their private relationship, aimed to publicly and privately convolute traditional gender roles. These works also made evident the conceptualization of their collaborative practice as art itself, and is indicative of the difficulty of equally dividing the labor of creation and inspiration in heterosexual collaborative artist couples.



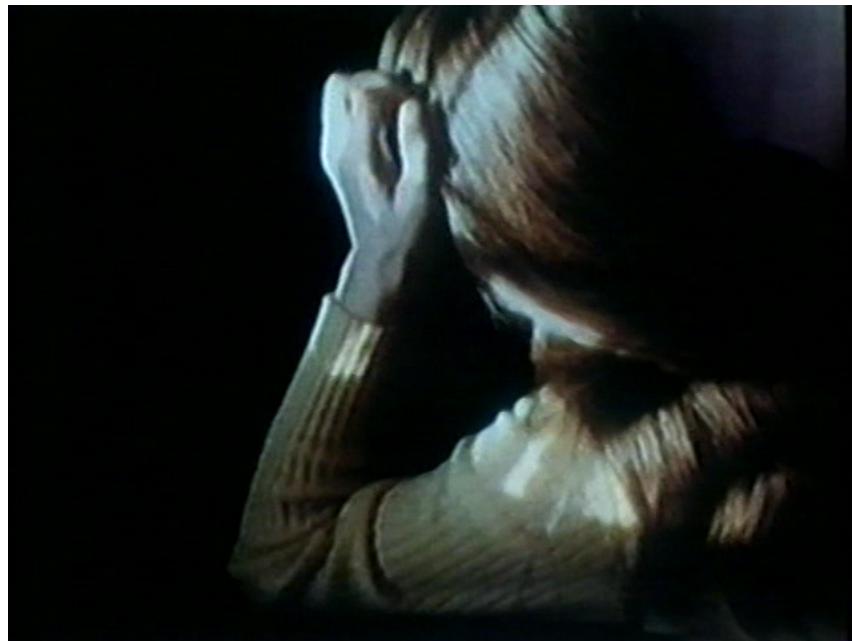
Figure 10: Yoko Ono, *Cut Piece*, 1964 at Yamaichi Concert Hall, Kyoto, Japan.



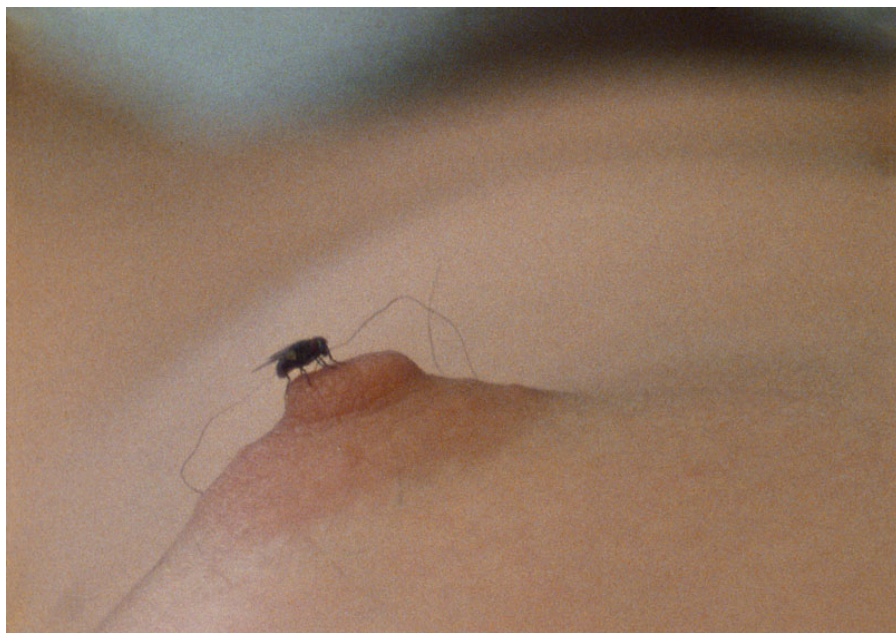
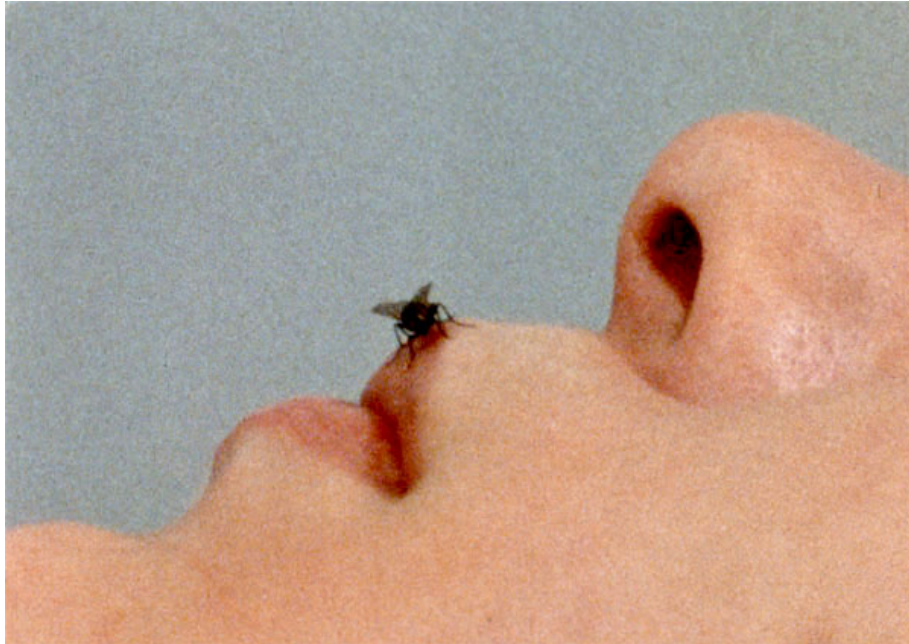
Figure 11: John Lennon and Yoko Ono, *Two Virgins* album cover and back



Figure 12: John Lennon and Yoko Ono, *Freedom*, 1970



Figures 13. 14: John Lennon and Yoko Ono, *Rape*, 1968



Figures 15, 16: John Lennon and Yoko Ono, *Fly*, 1970



Figure 17: John Lennon and Yoko Ono, *Double Fantasy*, 1980

CHAPTER THREE– CHRISTO AND JEANNE-CLAUDE

This chapter will analyze Christo and Jeanne-Claude's partnership from their marriage in 1960 until Jeanne-Claude's death in 2009. Christo and Jeanne Claude's relationship and collaborative body of work seems to have escaped some of the problematic gender issues and romantic entanglements into which the other couples in this research have fallen. While they have an interesting romantic history (she was engaged, and subsequently married, while pregnant with his child, and he had an affair with her half-sister), their artistic partnership and career seemed to be remarkably professional, with a clear separation between their private lives and public works. In negotiating identity as a collaborative couple, their focus was on the branding of "Christo," later to become the rebranded, "Christo and Jeanne-Claude." The couple produced ephemeral and fleeting "wrapped" objects and environments, although the reattribution of early works that were originally solely credited to Christo to both of them brings into question the importance of her contributions. Christo functioned as a trademark, or a brand name until that point – encompassing the works that Christo made with the help of Jeanne-Claude.

Analysis of their work is largely determined from and by secondary sources that have been approved and distributed by the Christo Corporation, headed by Christo himself and Jeanne-Claude. Other than individual critics' reviews or (some) exhibition catalogs, published source material such as documentaries, biographies, and books have been funded primarily by Christo and Jeanne-Claude, created with their intense involvement, and approved by them. Furthermore, their artworks are not sold through galleries or art dealers, or at all. Preparatory drawings and collages are sold by the artists to fund larger, site-specific, environmental art pro-

jects, and all projects are fully orchestrated from inception to realization exclusively by Christo and Jeanne-Claude. Maintaining this degree of control of the distribution of art and corresponding materials has allowed the artists to cultivate carefully controlled and crafted public personae that focus exclusively on the creation of art, not on the romantic relationship. Furthermore, Christo and Jeanne-Claude insist that the artworks are purely an aesthetic creation, meant to invoke wonder, joy, and beauty as the viewer comes across the work, and nothing more. As such, an analysis of their work through a gendered lens proves largely impossible and useless. I will instead contextualize, through these approved interviews and sources, the evolution of the professional collaborative relationship and how gender may be seen to have influenced their branding/rebranding and division of labor.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude were born in the same hour on the same day, on June 13 in 1935. Christo Vladimirov Javacheff was born in Gabrovo, Bulgaria, to a Bulgarian industrialist family. Jeanne-Claude Denat de Guillebon was born in Casablanca, Morocco, of a high-ranking French military family. Christo left Bulgaria in 1957, when he stowed away on a train, losing his Bulgarian citizenship and becoming a stateless person. Fleeing to Austria, he attended the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts briefly until he moved again to France. Artistically inclined from a young age with an aptitude for realistic drawings and paintings, Christo began experimenting with tactile materials, moving beyond painting, before he ultimately began encasing/wrapping objects, at first small items in his studio such as paint cans and containers. As a means of survival, Christo also completed portrait commissions, which he likened to prostitution, and signed with his last name, "Javacheff."

Jeanne-Claude Denat de Guillebon, raised by her mother and adopted father, the General Jacques de Guillebon, studied Latin and philosophy at the University of Tunis, but spent the majority of her time socializing, “I was a society girl doing nothing, absolutely nothing.”⁶⁴ The couple first met in Paris in 1958, when they were both twenty-three, where he was introduced as a friend of her parents, who had commissioned numerous portraits from Christo. Jeanne-Claude was engaged at the time to Phillippe Planchon, and Christo became briefly involved with her sister, Joyce. Shortly before her wedding, Jeanne-Claude began an affair with Christo and became pregnant with his child. Jeanne-Claude briefly married Planchon, but divorced him shortly after the honeymoon. Christo and Jeanne-Claude's only child, their son Cyril, was born in May of 1960. Jeanne-Claude and Christo were married in November of 1962. Of their marriage Jeanne-Claude said, “I very much wanted to be married...He kept saying that an artist must be committed to his art and nothing else. But his art competed with our lives, like another woman, only more so.”⁶⁵ This committal to art that seemed equivalent to an extramarital affair and that competed with their lives soon began to function instead as a shared commitment, as Jeanne-Claude began working intimately with Christo to produce his works of art.

When Jeanne-Claude first met Christo he was working on his series of *Packages and Wrapped Objects* in 1958 (Figure 18). He introduced her to art, educating her through tours to the Louvre, following an evolutionary curriculum from ancient art to twentieth-century painting and sculpture.⁶⁶ By the time of their marriage, Jeanne-Claude had a keen understanding of conceptual art, fueled by her passion and love for Christo. Jeanne-Claude frequently said

⁶⁴ Burt Chernow, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude : A Biography* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002) 65.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

she became an artist because of her love for Christo, "I was not an artist when I married Christo, but I became one. If Christo had been a dentist, I would have become a dentist."⁶⁷

The above series of quotations are revealing and indicative of Jeanne-Claude's natural disinclination towards the arts. Ultimately, her decision to be an artist was purely out of love for Christo not love for art, or necessity, as Christo's was. Their merging is dissimilar from the previous couples, Marina and Ulay or John and Yoko, who were each independent artists before they became a collaborative duo. Jeanne-Claude, in their joint biography, relates an anecdote from their early relationship, "You spent the whole day making those stupid packages, and you won't make a portrait," Jeanne-Claude complained to Christo, a commissioned portrait being the equivalent of several months' expenses. Christo replied, "If my packages are so stupid, then there's the door." Jeanne-Claude acknowledges, "From that day on, I adored the packages."⁶⁸ Again dissimilar from the other couples in my research, their collaboration existed for close to thirty years as a silent partnership, and Jeanne-Claude's role was not acknowledged until 1994, when they decided to officially change the artist name "Christo" into the artists "Christo and Jeanne-Claude."

Attributed on Christo and Jeanne-Claude's website as their first collaboration, *Stacked Oil Barrels and Dockside Packages, Cologne Harbor, 1961* (Figure 19)⁶⁹, was organized and created at the same time as Christo's first personal exhibition, at the Galerie Haro Lauhus, in Cologne in 1961. Not only the first collaboration, their comprehensive website describes it as

⁶⁷ Calvin Tomkins, "The Gates To the City" *New Yorker*, March 29, 2004, accessed June 9, 2014, http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/03/29/040329fa_fact_tomkins.

⁶⁸ Chernow, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, 102.

⁶⁹ Note – all large indoor and outdoor installations before 1994 were originally credited to Christo only and revised in 1994 as collaborative works of Christo and Jeanne-Claude.

their first “temporary outdoor environmental work of art,”⁷⁰ a description which will continue to be applied to their works. The temporary structure existed for two weeks along the Cologne Harbor, and all materials were borrowed from dockworkers. Using stacked oil drums and large rolls of industrial paper covered in tarpaulins and secured with rope, this work was a larger extension of the body of work Christo had previously executed on his own for years.

Contradicting this, Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s biography and numerous other sources list *Wall of Oil Barrels – The Iron Curtain, Rue Visconti, Paris, 1961-62* (Figure 20), as the first collaboration. This temporary installation existed for a mere eight hours on June 27, 1962, closing/blocking the Rue Visconti, the narrowest street in Paris with a wall made of eighty-nine oil barrels. This barricade served as a protest against the Berlin Wall, and took close to a year to plan. The disruptive installation was unapproved by the city’s administration, was met with protest, and the police ordered it dismantled immediately. Reports document Jeanne-Claude as the extravagant protector of the work, clad in Christian Dior as she fiercely and stubbornly refused its removal until the exhibition had concluded.

The matter of which collaboration was officially the first is largely irrelevant. What these installations and the information surrounding them acknowledge is that Christo was the exclusive administrator of conceptual ideas, and Jeanne- Claude functioned as the ever-willing assistant to support him and his ideas. There was a clear division of labor that operated along the lines of typical male/female relations, as Jeanne- Claude commented on her early role in the works, “I helped him by bringing him wood and nails, running errands, and at the

⁷⁰ “Christo and Jeanne-Claude” Official Website, accessed July 12, 2014, <http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/projects/stacked-oil-barrels-and-dockside-packages>.

same time looking after Cyril [their son].”⁷¹ Christo presented these ideas and works on his own, as his solo and individual creation. These larger installations were similar in style and concept to his smaller wrapped pieces and barrels that he was creating and exhibiting simultaneously, objects that Christo has also retained sole authorship of to this day.

Charles Green, who also wrote extensively about Christo and Jeanne-Claude, notes the contradictory nature of Christo’s statements in interviews from earlier periods, which carried little reference to Jeanne-Claude’s importance in the creation of works, “The work is a huge, individualistic gesture that is entirely decided by me.”⁷² The discussion of authorship comes into play not only in regards to Christo and Jeanne-Claude, but also in dealing with outsider influence or control. Christo is quoted as saying, “It [the work] is the idea of one man. I make the point in discussion of my art that I do not do commissions; I decide my projects and how to do them. The projects continually translate this great individualism, this creative freedom.”⁷³ Creating work with no sponsors or outside influence/input allowed Christo complete control of projects, something he was fiercely and notoriously protective of, except perhaps in regards to his long-private collaboration with Jeanne-Claude.

Christo persisted in working independently on smaller wrappings that he exhibited in galleries and the like, wrapping cars, motorcycles, furniture, constructed storefronts, and even women. Christo said of his experiences wrapping females, “The idea of obscuring a person’s sex by wrapping...the cloth made the figures anonymous, ambiguous. That fascinated me.

⁷¹ Chernow, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, 139.

⁷² Charles Green, *The Third Hand*, (Minneapolis, MN: Univ of Minn. Press) 128.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

I was impressed that the forms were no longer male or female. They became unknown.”⁷⁴ The wrapped female made genderless through this action can be seen an analogous to Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s relationship and works. Through this cloaking, either tangible in the art works, or intangibly manifested in the secrecy of the collaboration and careful constructions of the Christo brand, this was the process in which Christo (and Jeanne-Claude?) retained control of their private lives, and to a degree, also their public ones. By utilizing control over every aspect of a work, from inception to documentation and funding, they can be seen as shielding themselves along with their art. The work of art was a part of "real life" that created a fiction (a wrapped building was not the same when wrapped, it was something else entirely created by Christo and Jeanne-Claude) and the wrapping can again be seen as a metaphor for how they compartmentalized their private lives and relationship.

In 1964, Christo and Jeanne-Claude moved permanently to New York. While Christo was creating new works constantly, Jeanne-Claude was equally consumed operating as Christo’s unofficial manager and dealer. The domestic division of labor was still in place, Christo was receiving all artistic credit, as Jeanne-Claude remained dedicated but subservient to his art. Jeanne-Claude, dressed up in Christian Dior from her youth, played hostess and invited well-known artists to visit Christo’s studio while aggressively promoting his art, and says of her experiences, “Americans found me too aggressive because I would answer for Christo,”⁷⁵ as Christo still had a limited grasp of English. Others had a similar reaction to Jeanne-Claude; she was described by journalist Jesse Kornbluth as “a domineering, driven, humorless shrew,”⁷⁶ and Ivan

⁷⁴ Ibid., 123.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 136.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 135.

Karp, an art dealer, author, and American gallerist, articulated his opinions about her: “Jeanne-Claude gave her whole life to fiercely promoting Christo’s art...There was a kind of endless beseeching for his cause. It isn't unusual to find a dedicated artist’s wife, but this was more intense...”⁷⁷

The pair continued to make large temporary works for which Christo retained sole credit for at the time, most notably *Wrapped Fountain and Wrapped Medieval Tower, Spoleto, Italy, 1968* (Figures 21, 22), and *Wrapped Kunsthalle, Bern, 1967-68*, an art museum in Bern, Switzerland. The two exhibitions occurred simultaneously, and resulted in Jeanne-Claude entirely organizing *Wrapped Fountain and Wrapped Medieval Tower*, including selecting the wrapped locations after the predetermined opera house was refused due to fire laws, while Christo managed *Wrapped Kunsthalle*. Indicative of Jeanne-Claude’s growing responsibility to these projects, she began to refer to the projects in a familial way, “They are our children,”⁷⁸ she said of the now gigantic packages she once detested and competed with. Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s relationship endured and the collaborative work evolved and grew in scale and complexity, they became more and more dependent on each other, operating as a team with identical goals, Christo’s goals, and it became impossible to imagine a project not “driven by their dual force.”⁷⁹

Wrapped Coast, One Million Square Feet, Little Bay, Sydney, Australia, 1968-69 (Figure 23) marked a pivotal project and year for Christo and Jeanne-Claude. This year, Christo concluded his smaller independent wrappings and began to work exclusively on these monu-

⁷⁷ Ibid., 135.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 175.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 193.

mental temporary undertakings, also with Jeanne-Claude, who remained his silent partner. *Wrapped Coast* was the largest single artwork ever made at this time, larger than Mount Rushmore, and Christo and Jeanne-Claude's most extensive, expensive, and visually engrossing project to date. The coast was wrapped for a period of ten weeks, encased in a covering of synthetic woven fiber fabric and secured to rocks with polypropylene rope, creating a visual and physical barrier that conceptually redefined the coast and challenged the inherent beauty of nature. Jeanne-Claude played an integral role in the completion of this project, growing more certain in her role as artist and executor, even if unofficially. Imant Tillers, an artist and volunteer for *Wrapped Coast* who was intimately involved with its execution, said of Jeanne-Claude's role, "Jeanne-Claude was very vocal, very assertive. Christo was quieter. I thought she was a great force on location. When things went wrong, she shouted orders."⁸⁰

Christo and Jeanne-Claude's gigantic projects, which took extensive lobbying and planning time, are defined by their "software" and "hardware" periods. The "software" stage is when the project exists only as Christo's initial drawings and models and in the artists' initial unrealized idea.⁸¹ Much of this time is spent applying for permits and permissions, along with fighting legal battles and public protests against the ideas. The "hardware" period is the time during which the project is physically built and exhibited, generally lasting a few weeks or months, compared to the prior decades or years of planning. And after this labor of love, dedication, and time, these visually astonishing feats of scale are meant to convey only the immedi-

⁸⁰ Ibid., 194.

⁸¹ <http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/timeline>

ate simplicity of a beautiful, sensory vision, imbued with love, tenderness, and the fleetingness of a rainbow.⁸²

Valley Curtain, Rifle, Colorado, 1970-72 (Figure 24), is a notable piece that exemplifies this fleetingness, existing for a mere twenty-eight hours after two and a half years of planning due to wind speeds that exceeded sixty miles per hour. The project was described as a 1,200 foot long “curtain made of woven synthetic fabric, suspended on a steel cable, about 1,500 feet long, anchored to the two mountaintops with foundations.”⁸³ Jeanne-Claude and Christo chose to have this installation at the Rifle Gap, on the western slope of the Rocky Mountains, in Rifle, Colorado, an “unusually narrow valley.”⁸⁴ Originally it was to be white, the typical color choice of Christo, but Jeanne-Claude made her first documented aesthetic decision, successfully arguing for the curtain of fabric to be a brighter color, eventually settling on a bright orange.

Valley Curtain proved to be an important work not just because of its momentariness and Jeanne-Claude’s aesthetic decisions; it was also the first project that was created through the previously discussed Christo Corporation. Undertaken mostly for liability purposes, to protect assets in the event of catastrophe, incorporation served another function. “Christo” became a brand, a trademark, a business, no longer an artist or man, but an organizational tool that represented Christo, and later Jeanne-Claude. The corporation still maintained the clear and gendered division of labor, making use of the art and design skills of its employee Christo, and the marketing and managerial skills of Jeanne-Claude. Christo said of the corporation’s of-

⁸² <http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/faq>

⁸³ Chernow, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, 201.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

ficers, "My wife, Jeanne-Claude, who is the manager of all the projects, is the president and treasurer of the corporation."⁸⁵ In the world of business, Jeanne-Claude's status within the corporation would be considered to be a position of significant power. However, in the art world, where talent and creativity are privileged over business acumen, Jeanne-Claude's role within the collaborative relationship could be seen as being a position of lower importance with respect to Christo's. Whereas he assumes the romanticized role of the artistic 'genius', she is the perceived assistant, managing affairs in service to his singular creative vision, a division that seems to further complicate issues related to gendered implications within their practice.

Green discusses Christo and Jeanne-Claude's corporate identity as a doppelganger, or their "business arm," reminiscent of Marina and Ulay's "third hand." Claiming that they created an additional entity that negotiated their transitional artist identity through their business model, I would take that a step further and suggest the branding has the additional, likely unplanned advantage of creating an un-gendered entity/space by which the artist, or artists could be represented. It is relevant to bring up the definitions of collaborate here. Clearly, Christo and Jeanne-Claude easily fulfill the primary definition of collaborate, as they worked together time and time again to create joint works of art (even if there was no joint artistic credit at the time). Similarly to Marina and Ulay's collaboration, the public branding of "Christo" as a trademark that could encompass himself and Jeanne-Claude as a genderless entity can also be seen to counteract the secondary definition of collaborate. By combining their efforts into a

⁸⁵ Green, Charles, "Disappearance and Photography in Post-Object Art: Christo and Jeanne-Claude." *Afterimage* 27, 3 (1999): 13.

named creation that was representative of both Jeanne-Claude and Christo, the artists are not collaborating with the enemy, they have joined forces and united together instead.

In 1994, many years and many works later (such as *Surrounded Islands, Biscayne Bay, Greater Miami, Florida, 1981- 83, The Pont Neuf Wrapped, Paris, 1975-85, and The Umbrellas, Japan-USA, 1984-91*), Christo and Jeanne-Claude publicly announced that they wanted to be known as a single entity represented now as the brand of “Christo and Jeanne-Claude,” and that all large outdoor and indoor installations would be retroactively labeled as the work of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, while other works would continue to be credited exclusively to Christo. They said of this merging, “because Christo was already an artist when they met in 1958 in Paris, and Jeanne-Claude was not an artist then, they have decided that their name will be “Christo and Jeanne-Claude,” NOT “Jeanne-Claude and Christo,”⁸⁶ and Christo further clarified of their roles:

The drawings are the scheme for the project, after that, we do everything together:

Choose the rope, the fabric, the thickness of the fabric, the amount of fabric, the color.

We argue, and we think about it. Everybody knows that we’ve worked together for over

30 years. There’s no point in arguing about who does what. The work is all that

matters.⁸⁷

This sweeping declaration fails to address the inconsistencies that this transition from a singular artist to a collaborative couple raised. Green questioned, “when and why did Jeanne-Claude ‘become’ an author?”⁸⁸ a relevant question considering many of Christo’s

⁸⁶ <http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/common-errors>

⁸⁷ Chernow, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, 196.

⁸⁸ Green, *The Third Hand*, 128.

statements that suggested the opposite, that the works were original ideas from his singular genius. While this acknowledgement, however delayed, was a significant statement in regards to gender relations in their collaboration, making them equal and interdependent in regards to the works, the impetus for such is still unclear and contested. Green states that Christo and Jeanne-Claude's son, Cyril, requested they "come out" as collaborators. Another source, culled from personal interviews with the partners, explains that Jeanne-Claude became infuriated during a lecture after an attendee excluded her from a conversation.⁸⁹ Jeanne-Claude said in an interview with the *Journal of Contemporary Art*, "I have not said a thing for thirty-five years and it is my fault. Now I have changed my mind."⁹⁰ In other conversations Jeanne-Claude has been adamant as to her role in the artworks, saying of one project, "I'm not only an administrator of Christo's beautiful ideas. For instance, *The Surrounded Islands* (Figure 25) was my idea. Most of the people don't know that."⁹¹ Jeanne-Claude sharply admonishing another interviewer, acknowledging that while Christo alone does all of the drawings, "the only things I do myself is write the checks, pay the bills and pay the taxes. Everything else is Christo and Jeanne-Claude, including the creativity. It's about time that people correct this mistake."⁹² This so-called mistake is one that Christo and Jeanne-Claude ultimately reinforced for close to thirty years, and a statement that rings largely untrue considering their own approved documentation of projects that shows otherwise.

⁸⁹ Irving Sarnoff and Suzanne Sarnoff, *Intimate Creativity Partners in Love and Art* (Madison, WS: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002) 86.

⁹⁰ Gianfranco Mantegna, "Interview with Christo and Jeanne-Claude," *Journal of Contemporary Art*, accessed June 12, 2014, <http://www.jca-online.com/christo.html>.

⁹¹ Green, *The Third Hand*, 128.

⁹² Mantegna, <http://www.jca-online.com/christo.html>.

The lingering doubt associated with the tactic of renaming works is further problematized by the ways in which Jeanne-Claude's roles shifted as a result of the natural progression of their collaborative practice. As Christo's wife, Jeanne-Claude was likely exposed to almost every aspect of his creative process. As such, over time, responsibilities and creative decisions shifted. While early on Jeanne-Claude's administrative efforts were integral to realizing Christo's artistic vision, over time she began to make creative decisions as well. By 1994, it seems as though they both felt Jeanne-Claude's contributions to their creative practice were in need of reevaluation for one reason or another. Were Jeanne-Claude's administrative organizational contributions weighed by Christo and herself as creative solutions and equal to Christo's artistic decisions? The sole original idea to wrap items was envisioned and executed before their first meeting, Christo's concept that Green articulates as a "repeated, emphatically masculine, signature gesture."⁹³ Or was this a conciliatory gesture, a retroactive thank-you to his dutiful wife who was ever-present and supportive, willing to do whatever was necessary to further the art regardless of her initial interest, who once viewed Christo's art making with jealousy and compared it to an extramarital affair? For Jeanne-Claude, it was love, not art that motivated her to become an artist, quoted as saying, "I could tell you it was art, but he was one hell of a lover."⁹⁴ Does it ultimately matter what the impetus was for her? And how do these impossible-to-answer questions reflect upon the conceptualization of gender and their collaboration?

Through the wrapping of works and their carefully crafted public persona/brand, Christo and Jeanne-Claude can be seen as transcending gendered difference in collaboration if discussed from their trademarked entity. Deeper analysis raises more questions than answers,

⁹³ Green, *The Third Hand*, 133.

⁹⁴ Chernow, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, 144.

as their precisely crafted public persona was separated from their “wrapped” and concealed private lives and relationship, a subject that was seldom discussed in relation to the art. Their public collaboration functioned through a near-complete and gendered division of labor (even though Christo and Jeanne-Claude have spent enormous time countering this), which is evident in their earlier works. Their gendered division of labor is more apparent in the earlier work...did their coming to the realization that they both had equal or equivalent roles in the process help Christo and Jeanne-Claude define their collaborative practice? It does seem clear, however, that the specific jobs each held were all integral to the completion of these monumental projects. In any case, their success seems to be a result of their having transcended whatever inherent gendered differences there were in their collaborative practice through the separation of their private lives from their public works. For the couple that, after a certain point, flew in separate planes in case one crashed, so the other could continue the work, the death of Jeanne-Claude in 2009 proved the lasting power of their collaboration. Christo, determined to complete their mid-process works, is still actively working towards their shared goals, now entirely on his own.



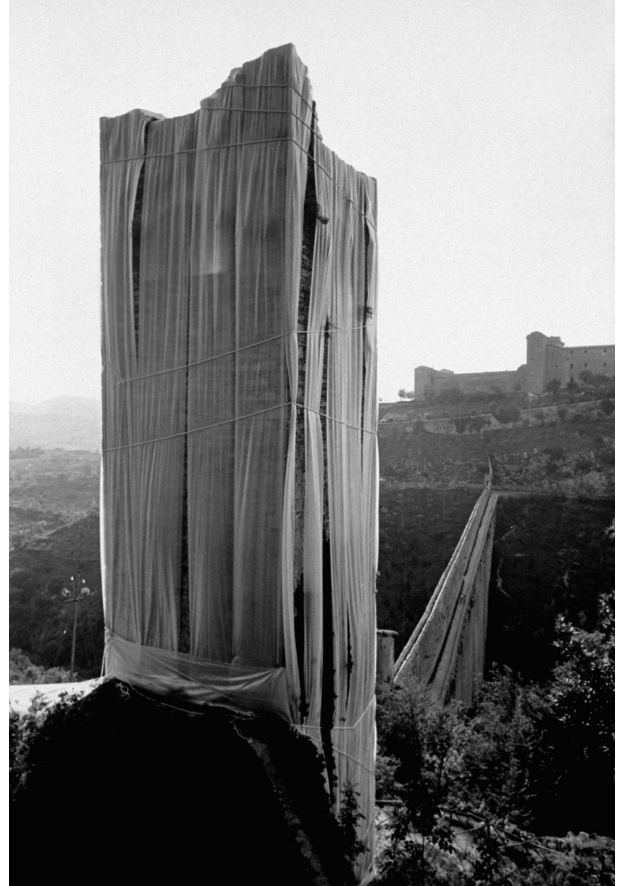
Figure 18: Christo, *Wrapped Cans*, 1958



Figure 19: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Stacked Oil Barrels and Dockside Packages, Cologne Harbor, 1961*



Figure 20: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Wall of Oil Barrels – The Iron Curtain, Rue Visconti, Paris, 1961-62*



Figures 21,22: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Wrapped Fountain and Wrapped Medieval Tower, Spoleto, Italy, 1968*



Figure 23: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Wrapped Coast, One Million Square Feet, Little Bay, Sydney, Australia, 1968-69*



Figure 24: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Valley Curtain*, Rifle, Colorado, 1970-72



Figure 25: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Surrounded Islands*, Biscayne Bay, Greater Miami, Florida, 1980-83



Figure 26: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *The Gates*, Central Park, New York City 1979-2005

CONCLUSIONS

The long-term heterosexual collaborative artist couples of Marina Abramović and Ulay, John Lennon and Yoko Ono, and Christo and Jeanne-Claude along with their corresponding public artworks and private relationships have been explored in previous chapters. This paper aimed to discuss the potential contradiction of artistic collaboration by heterosexual artist couples. Artistic collaboration is a recursive practice where the members work together to achieve shared goals and equal responsibility and authorial credit in the artistic creations, and is generally non-hierarchal, and it was according to these goals that the collaborations of the discussed couples functioned. Yet when public collaboration was utilized by these heterosexual couples who were, due to culturally pervasive stereotypes of gender, involved in a private, romantic partnership of inequals, it affected the gendered dynamics of the collaborative work – unless there was a clear separation of the public and private lives. I also incorporated the definitions of “collaborate,” as both definitions may be seen as applicable to the collaborations of heterosexual artist couples. My research has explored the manifestation of gender in the public works and private lives of three artistic couples and collaborators, with an emphasis on each couples’ distinctions between the public and private.

Chapter One focused on Marina and Ulay. Their twelve-year artistic alliance resulted in numerous iconic performances that are discussed through descriptive analysis and a critique of their use of prescribed gender norms. While several of their collaborative projects successfully articulated what they described as a unified, hermaphroditic self, as the relationship progressed and the line between their public work and private lives blurred, their performances began to reinforce gender stereotypes rather than redefine them. For Marina and Ulay,

their public/private separation was more evident in earlier works as they attempted to create a merged hermaphroditic union that also made irrelevant the definition of collaborate in terms of working with the enemy. Their later works, which moved from relating to sameness to commenting on difference, were further complicated as their public works and private lives became intertwined, which resulted in the demise of the collaborative union along with the romantic one.

Chapter Two discusses the collaborative practice of John and Yoko, in which there was no separation between their public and private lives. Instead they opposed this separation, and insisted that there were no boundaries between life/art/public/private for them, and it is evident that their body of work suffered because of it. Before John's abrupt death in 1980, their marriage and collaborative career that spanned music and art was used as a public platform to promote peace, music, love, and equality – albeit unsuccessfully. John and Yoko's collaborative public works ultimately reinforced gendered stereotypes and furthermore propagated them, in addition to their unsuccessful attempts to subvert and reverse traditional gendered domestic roles in their private life.

Chapter Three analyzed Christo and Jeanne-Claude's collaboration from their marriage until Jeanne-Claude's death in 2009. Known for their ephemeral and fleeting "wrapped" objects and environments, Christo and Jeanne-Claude maintained a complete separation between the public and private, and built a consistent body of work that is the least at odds with gender discrepancies. Negotiating identity as a collaborative couple, they focused on the branding of "Christo," later to become the rebranded, "Christo and Jeanne-Claude," after the reattribution of early works that were originally solely credited to Christo to both he and

Jeanne-Claude. I discussed how Christo and Jeanne Claude's artistic partnership and career seemed to be remarkably professional, with a clear separation between their private lives and public works. Due to that separation, their relationship and collaborative body of work may have escaped some of the problematic gender issues that affected the other collaborative couples.

Through description and analysis of the balancing and intersection of gender in the practice of these three couples, I have made evident the separation (or lack of) between their public and their private lives, an element that manifests itself in unique and contrasting ways for each couple. It seems there is a clear link between gendered negotiations in these heterosexual artist couples and the division between public and private lives. The more divisive the separation between the private, sexual relationship and the public collaboration that produces artwork is, the more successfully the collaborative heterosexual couple can negotiate/transcend/escape from the unequal gender dynamics that are imbued in their private lives.

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