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The Spectacle of Privacy: Geoffrey Hendricks's *Ring Piece* and the Ambivalence of Queer Visibility

DAVID J. GETSY

In 1971 the artist Geoffrey Hendricks (1931–2018) sat atop a mound of dirt, silently writing in a diary for twelve hours. He was not alone; the soil tumulus was situated in the center of the 69th Regiment Armory in New York City during the crowded, daylong annual Avant Garde Festival. Friends and gawkers watched and beseeched, but Hendricks performed isolation in their midst, ignoring their comments, barbs, and pleas (Fig.1).

This act symbolized Hendricks's acceptance of a personal transformation. In the previous months, he and his wife—the artist and writer Nye Ffarrabas (b. 1932), who then used the name Bici Forbes—ended their marriage and chose to pursue queer lives. Underneath the barrow on which Hendricks sat were buried relics of his divorce, including his marriage certificate and marital bed. The title of the work—*Ring Piece*—referred to the wedding ring that he had also intended to include. Throughout the twelve-hour performance, the formally dressed Hendricks talked to no one and remained focused on the diary writing, occasionally ringing a small bell tied with string to his ring finger. *Ring Piece* was a public performance of a private life at a moment of transition. Hendricks mourned what was past and faced the uncertainty of a future queer life for which there were few precedents and little acceptance in these inceptive years of the Gay Liberation movement.

Ring Piece is historically important as one of first widely seen works of New York performance art that addressed queer issues in the years after the Stonewall uprising in 1969—the symbolic beginning of the modern movements for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights. The work's historical precedence is rarely acknowledged in either histories of performance or of queer art. There have been remarkably few analyses of Hendricks's performances and even fewer of these have contextualized his practice in relation to the queer histories in which he was a participant.

As I will argue, Hendricks's work both engaged with and diverged from the prevailing lesbian and gay politics of visibility with their imperative to embrace identity and to “come out.” *Ring Piece* was directly about Hendricks's own coming out as gay. In it, he weighed into questions about how to represent that transformation; what are the gains and losses that come with claiming that identity; and how to endure the effects of being visible to scrutiny because of that claim. The divergent and deferred experiences of public and private in *Ring Piece* came to register the ways in which adopting a gay identity ushers in exposure and surveillance. Hendricks's work presented a concentrated image of intimate spectacle in which his personal resolve to live openly had the effect of casting him as an object of others' inquiries and intrusions. He posed these questions through a unique performance situation in which being public and being private collapsed into each other. Over the twelve hours of the event, Hendricks passively occupied the role of silent public spectacle (and topic of others' conversations) while concurrently narrating his experience in the diary written privately to himself as the performance unfolded.¹



1 Geoffrey Hendricks, *Ring Piece*, November 19, 1971, performance, 8th Annual Avant Garde Festival, 69th Regiment Armory, New York City (artwork © Geoffrey Hendricks Estate; photograph by Steve Balkin, provided by Steve Balkin)

With its willful burying of content, its deferral of disclosure, and its personal symbolism, *Ring Piece* is a work that offers no easy or transparent presentation of its queer themes. Rather, it demands dedication and duration to grasp its accounting of a queer life exposed to scrutiny. In short, while *Ring Piece* thematizes coming out, it also refuses to reduce Hendricks's life solely to that revelation. The depths of the emotional, personal, and political questions that *Ring Piece* addressed were withheld from instantaneous or casual view, only to be made available later when the publication of the diary in 1973 established a slow process of disclosure in which we realize how little we were able to see at first. As such, *Ring Piece* serves as a foundational formulation of a mode of tactical dissemblance and vexing of surveillance in queer art—a mode that, in recent decades, has flourished as a means to address the complexities, temporalities, and diverse experiences of queer life.²

Ring Piece demonstrates that an ambivalence toward identity's equation with visibility can nevertheless be replete with emotional, political, and social meaning and purpose. The case of *Ring Piece* spurs us to ask how life's transformations and intersections are leveled by accounts of identity that only recognize the previously recognizable. As I will demonstrate in my discussion of the overlapping stages of presentation, demurral, revision, and intimate disclosure over the year-and-a-half performance of *Ring Piece*, the proclaiming of identity was presented, by contrast, as a shifting terrain of ambivalence, agonism, resolve, revision, questioning, and resistance.

This essay provides the first comprehensive history of *Ring Piece*, situating it in relation to Hendricks's other autobiographical performances of the early 1970s as well as to larger contexts in art history, performance history, and queer history. In the first section, I

discuss the catalyzing effects of the newly public discourse of the Gay Liberation movement on Hendricks and provide an account of two performances that prepared the ground for *Ring Piece*. The critic and activist Jill Johnston played an important role for Hendricks at this time, and I also examine her writings' impact. In the second section, I reconstruct the events and situation of the *Ring Piece* performance at the Avant Garde Festival in 1971, analyzing Hendricks's loaded symbols and the audience's agonistic relationship to them. I assess the discrepancy between the external experience of festivalgoers and Hendricks's attempts to remain inwardly focused. In the third section, I then turn to the content of the published diary in which Hendricks later disclosed some of the personal and queer themes that he intentionally withheld from view. I read this book from 1973 as a second act of the performance, which compels a revision of its earlier silent spectacle. The fourth section expands the interpretative frame for *Ring Piece* to incorporate the ways in which Hendricks accounted for autobiographical performance in these years, and I discuss how the process of coming out underwrote his dialectical characterization of change and transformation. A guide for my analysis will be Samuel R. Delany's writings on the rhetorical shifts that occurred after the symbolic event of Stonewall. Delany's skepticism about the event-model of coming out and the single-issue focus of gay politics illuminates Hendricks's own. The final section discusses the performances that Hendricks created in the wake of *Ring Piece* to reprise its themes. Throughout, I question how Hendricks's performance interdigitated a shared political purpose for queer disclosure with an ambivalence about its costs. It was, after all, the weight of being seen as gay that Hendricks performed in *Ring Piece* with its meditation on his private life, his past, and his future.

ENDINGS: *FLUX DIVORCE* AND THE PUBLIC DISCOURSE OF GAY LIBERATION IN 1971

Though his work in performance spans decades, the years 1971 to 1974 were particularly active for Hendricks. In the 1960s he had become affiliated with New York Fluxus, whose heterogeneous practices were characterized by their dispensing with distinctions between art and life. Through everyday actions, open-ended instructions, chance coincidences, and gamelike objects, these artists bracketed experiences both mundane and spectacular under the excuse of "art." As a longtime professor in the experimental art department at Douglass College of Rutgers University, Hendricks played a pivotal institutional role for the group—as participant as well as curator and historian of the movement.³ His own work differed from many Fluxus artists in its focus on painting, and throughout his career he affixed images of clouds and skies to surfaces—not only on canvas but on anything, from clothing to vehicles to billboards. Fueled by his participation in the social and artistic networks of the Fluxus circle, in the 1960s Hendricks began to expand from painting into actions and performances. By the early 1970s, he developed a distinct performance practice (along with a robust approach to documentation in the forms of books and multiples). Hendricks came to distinguish himself from many other Fluxus artists in his forthright exploration of more personal and autobiographical themes.⁴ As he once beautifully declared, "Art is about getting deep, deep into your personal self, working, struggling (but all of this is not art), and then suddenly, you have left yourself for something universal."⁵

Hendricks created many performances on the theme of the queer transmutations of his life and relationships as a result of publicly coming out at this time. I will discuss two performances that immediately preceded *Ring Piece* in 1971: *Body/Hair* and *Flux Divorce*. In his works of that year, he explored the shared situation of public performance as a means to reconsider his relationships to his past, to his life, and to his social networks. "The art was the form that allowed me to go ahead and give structure to a personal situation," he later explained.⁶

Both Hendricks's personal transformation and the burst of autobiographical performance work he created in the early 1970s unfolded in direct response to New York City's rapidly expanding public discussions about homosexuality in the wake of the two-day Stonewall uprising in June 1969. Into 1970, New York saw continued protests (and riots) in reaction to police harassment as well as the first gay pride march (the Christopher Street Liberation Day March) marking the uprising's first anniversary.⁷

In these early years of Gay Liberation, perhaps the central rallying cry was for visibility. Post-Stonewall activists called for a new publicness as a means to defy the prevailing homophobia of American culture, with its legalized discrimination and censorship of queer lives. They urged others to stand up and be identified as lesbians and gays in defiance of the secrecy, blackmail, and shame that had been imposed on them. The call to "come out" of the closet became the central imperative of this identity politics, with the phrase meaning the act of disclosure to straight people. (Before Stonewall, the phrase "come out" had meant to make oneself known to the gay community.)⁸ To come out was to confront others' expectations of privacy with a public avowal of solidarity, identity, and a refusal to be invisible or ashamed. As Richard Meyer has argued in reference to the role of photography in the immediate post-Stonewall moment's activism, "'Coming out' was framed by the movement not simply as a private act of self-disclosure but as a public demand for visibility."⁹ This rhetoric and these politics of visibility would come to dominate the range of post-Stonewall political and social movements—all of which have, in their various manifestations and competing narratives, privileged the act of disclosure as fundamental. For a concentrated example of this demand to make gay identity publicly seen, we could look to the magazine that the Gay Liberation Front started publishing in the months after Stonewall. Its title took the imperative form to urge its readers: *Come Out!*¹⁰

Over the course of the next year, the call for greater visibility for lesbians and gays gained momentum, compelling new media coverage and debates nationally—but especially in New York. The early months of 1971, in particular, experienced an explosion of mainstream press coverage of lesbian and gay visibility, with regular news in the *New York Times* and heated exchanges in the *Village Voice* (Hendricks's local newspaper).¹¹ These widely read debates were sparked by the publication of Merle Miller's polemic "What It Means To Be a Homosexual" in the *New York Times Magazine* in January 1971.¹² Miller's essay so enraged the film critic Andrew Sarris that he offered a lengthy reply in a two-part article titled "Heteros Have Problems Too" in the *Voice*.¹³ While his diatribe (about how gay visibility oppressed straight men) was primarily directed at Miller, Sarris also took a swipe at Jill Johnston (1929–2010), the *Voice's* dance critic and soon-to-be author of the groundbreaking book *Lesbian Nation*.¹⁴ (Johnston had come out in the newspaper over the previous years.) This attack, in turn, spurred Johnston to write her watershed series "Lois Lane Is a Lesbian," published in the *Voice* in three parts in March 1971.¹⁵ Johnston's articles leveled a withering critique of homophobia and heteronormativity; they also demanded a new frankness. Their effect was electric, making Johnston a polarizing cultural icon.¹⁶ In the articles, she urged, "Now there is only one way for this social change to take place. And that is for all gay people, those who know it and accept it, to stand up and speak for themselves. There is no other way."¹⁷

Hendricks carried clippings of Johnston's "Lois Lane Is a Lesbian" with him, saying that her writing gave him reinforcement and language for his own process of self-acceptance and publicly coming out.¹⁸ Soon after Johnston's articles were published in March of 1971, Hendricks and Ffarrabas decided to live, respectively, as gay and lesbian.¹⁹ They each began to find new communities—Ffarrabas with feminist consciousness-raising groups (with Sidney Abbott, Barbara Love, and Kate Millett, with whom Ffarrabas was briefly partnered) and

Hendricks at the Gay Activists Alliance.²⁰ In May of that year, Hendricks began his series of performances that meditated on this change of life.

The first of these was the eight-hour performance *Body/Hair*, held at the independent art space Apple Gallery (Billy Apple's loft), in which Hendricks ritually shaved and collected the hair off his body in front of an audience. He understood it as a performance of becoming a child again, with the removal of body hair signaling a return to a state of newness and potential. He further characterized it as a relinquishing of conventional masculinity, writing "*Body/Hair* was about shedding, sloughing off skins, shedding of pretense. My shaved body became child and woman as well as man."²¹ This performance was akin to an ablution, in which he acknowledged the transformation he was undertaking (emboldened by Johnston's articles from two months earlier). It also signaled some of the themes that I will explore in *Ring Piece*. Hendricks later recalled of this work that it was about the difference between who one is and how one is seen. He said to his friend Dick Higgins (1938–1998), "With *Body/Hair* I was thinking of invisibility. I would do this, I would make the relics [of the shaved body hair], but on the street I would look the same as I always looked, with a big bushy beard and with hair."²² The vexed issue of visibility (and detectability) is pressing on queer lives. In this first work in his cycle of autobiographical meditations, Hendricks allegorized how the difficult and life-altering shift he was undergoing might be hidden from view or indiscernible to anyone with whom he was not intimate. Even though this performance involved Hendricks thinking about invisibility, it was a highly public act of vulnerability (Hendricks naked in a performance space shaving for eight hours) performed for the community of Fluxus artists, writers, and other attendees at events such as these at Apple Gallery.

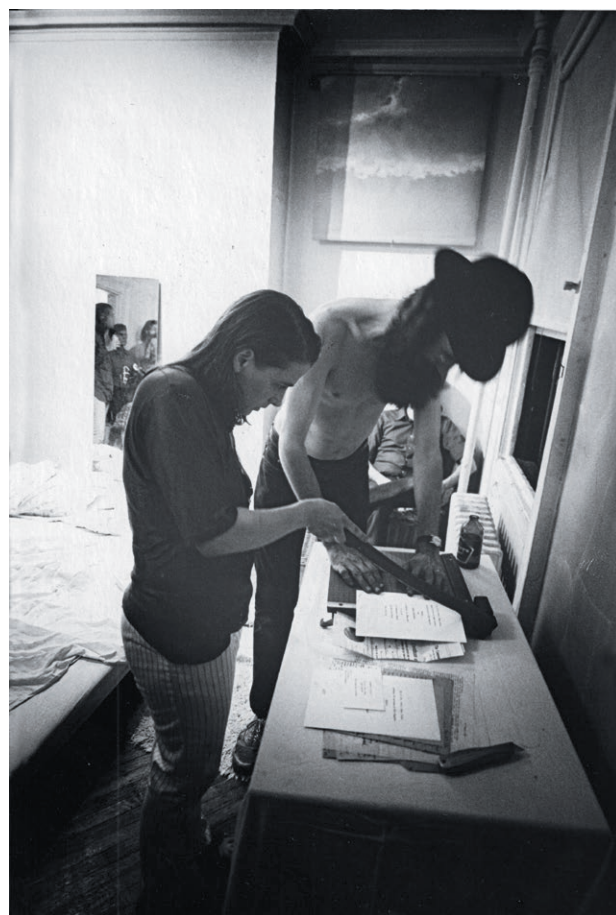
The disclosure of his sexuality and of his intent to live openly was declared more boldly to this community when Hendricks and Ffarrabas heralded the end of their marriage with the daylong *Flux Divorce* performance on June 24, 1971—their tenth wedding anniversary and, not uncoincidentally, just a few days before the Christopher Street Liberation Day March on the 27th. As Hendricks recalled, "And so with our 10th wedding anniversary coming along, it was like: How do we celebrate it? Because we were both, you know, queer and involved with others, and I just sort of tossed out the idea, what about a *Flux Divorce*? And it sort of resonated."²³ (Fig. 2)

The *Flux Divorce* became an event in the community of Fluxus artists in New York (including an appearance by Yoko Ono with John Lennon in tow).²⁴ Self-appointed Fluxus leader George Maciunas (1931–1978) took it upon himself to orchestrate much of it, which included dividing rooms of the house with barbed wire and walls of cardboard boxes as well as separating the garden into two halves with sheets of black plastic (Fig. 3). "Even the toilets were divided with cardboard," Hendricks noted.²⁵ For (and with) an audience of friends in these reconfigured domestic spaces, Hendricks and Ffarrabas engaged in two main performance actions. In "Division of Property," which occurred in their bedroom, they cut in half objects representing their marriage, such as the official certificate and their wedding invitation (Fig. 4). With a circular saw, they then cleaved in two their platform bed, mattress, wardrobe, and a wicker loveseat (Fig. 5). (Relics from "Division of Property" would be among the items buried in the tumulus later that year when *Ring Piece* was performed at the Avant Garde Festival.) In "Separation," there was a group performance. Hendricks explained, "In winter coats sewn



2 Nye Ffarrabas and Geoffrey Hendricks, invitation for *Flux Divorce*, 1971, offset lithograph divided between two sheets, each approximately 5½ × 3⅞ in. (13.9 × 8.4 cm). Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections and University Archives, Northwestern University (photograph provided by Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections and University Archives, Northwestern University)

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3 Geoffrey Hendricks and Nye Ffarrabas across the barbed wire dividing their house, *Flux Divorce*, June 24, 1971, performance at 331 West 20th Street, New York City (photograph by Peter Moore, provided by Geoffrey Hendricks Estate and the Peter Moore Photography Archive, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Libraries)

4 Geoffrey Hendricks and Nye Ffarrabas cutting in two the invitation to their wedding, *Flux Divorce*, June 24, 1971, performance at 331 West 20th Street, New York City (photograph by Peter Moore, provided by Geoffrey Hendricks Estate and the Peter Moore Photography Archive, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Libraries)

5 Geoffrey Hendricks and Nye Ffarrabas measuring their bed for its bisection, *Flux Divorce*, June 24, 1971, performance at 331 West 20th Street, New York City (photograph by Peter Moore, provided by Geoffrey Hendricks Estate and the Peter Moore Photography Archive, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Libraries)

back to back, with ropes tied to each of us, the women pulled at [Nye], the men pulled at me.”²⁶ This tug-of-war group performance, reported Johnston, was “symbolizing (re)unions with their own sex.”²⁷ Ffarrabas also melted large blocks of ice in the backyard—an image of the gradual thawing and release of the emotions they had kept frozen. Among these performance events and installations, the attendees had a party.

In keeping with a Fluxus blurring of art and life, the *Flux Divorce* served two purposes: it was a collective gathering of friends to celebrate Ffarrabas’s and Hendricks’s new lives as well as being a suite of collaborative performances on the theme of making two, again, from one. Ffarrabas invited Johnston, who wrote about it for the following week’s *Village Voice*:

Yoko told me she cried a little. I was moved myself when [Nye] informed me that she and Geoff came out recently. So that’s why there were so many gay people there. Gay women, actually. And old Flux people. George Maciunas. Jackson Mac Low. Ray Johnson. Barbara and Peter Moore. Like that. And Kate Millett. It was a beautiful event.²⁸

Johnston and Hendricks would soon become lifelong friends. Years later, she wrote that “*Flux Divorce* was a happy occasion because ties were cut that made other ties possible.”²⁹

Hendricks's and Ffarrabas's acts of coming out were celebratory and communal. At first, this declaration was directed at the community of friends who attended *Flux Divorce*, but it became publicized more widely when Johnston published it in the *Village Voice*. She would later recall, "Geoff says I brought him out in the *Village Voice* column in 1971."³⁰ Immediately, Hendricks found that the disclosure of his sexuality was no longer his own. It was now part of the public record, and he became—for all who read Johnston's very popular column—one of the "gay people" at the event. The implications of this would occupy Hendricks in *Ring Piece* and subsequent performances.

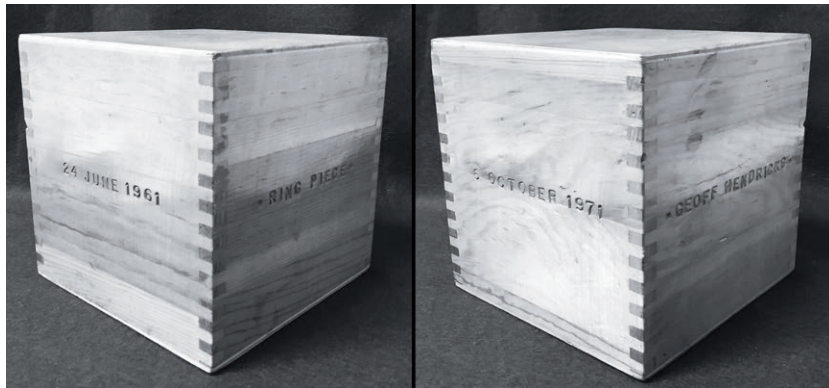
Michael Warner's analysis of publics and counterpublics offers a useful way of accounting for the impact of Johnston's act. Warner drew a distinction between audiences (say, at a live event) and the production of a public discourse through the recursive circulation of texts or images; publics are "in principle open-ended. They exist by virtue of their address."³¹ Both an audience and a public are composed of those known to each other alongside strangers, but a public is extensible to newcomers over time through its circulating texts. By definition, a public is a "relation among strangers," but "the exact composition of their addressed publics cannot entirely be known in advance."³² As readers of a text's address, we establish relations with other strangers through our participation in that discourse. A public (for instance, the reading public of Johnston's column) comprises an ongoing and shifting collectivity of strangers with shared knowledge and experience of reading. Johnston's columns had become increasingly autobiographical over the preceding years, creating a public of those invested in her accounts of her life (and the inevitable gossip about others'). Some readers rejected this confessional tone, whereas others made Johnston's writing a recurring voice in their lives. While Hendricks and Ffarrabas came out to an audience at *Flux Divorce*, Johnston broadcast it to this reading public.

Warner further defines "counterpublics": textual communities (again, of intimates and strangers) whose priorities are disallowed in or opposed to mainstream public discourses; queer counterpublics are one of his primary examples. Johnston's column was read both by a public readership and, intently, by a counterpublic looking for evidence of lesbian and gay life and community. In short, being outed in Johnston's column meant that this nomination was telegraphed to a queer counterpublic who avidly read Johnston's column as one of a very few regularly published textual registrations of queer life.³³ The importance of Johnston's serial writing in the late 1960s and early 1970s was that it offered to its counterpublic both evidence of queer existence and a language for its own self-realization. After all, this was what Johnston's "Lois Lane Is a Lesbian" had done for Hendricks. But by appearing in Johnston's column as one of the "gay people," Hendricks now found himself to be exposed within the counterpublic discourse that had enabled him—as an anonymous reader—to come out. Both Hendricks and Ffarrabas were thus transmuted into being *publicly* out, and Johnston's high-profile column cemented their gay and lesbian identities for both an invested queer counterpublic and a general public of *Village Voice* readers.

The intimacy, emotional complexity, and vulnerability of their acts of self-determination were thus opened to the scrutiny and gossip of strangers who then saw Ffarrabas and Hendricks through the categories of "lesbian" and "gay." This episode hypothesizes the performative effects of coming out in a homophobic society; the declaration casts one henceforth as a representative of that identity. As Warner reminds us, "Being publicly known as homosexual is never the same as being publicly known as heterosexual; the latter always goes without saying and troubles nothing, whereas the former carries echoes of pathologized visibility."³⁴ Hendricks's experiences of this centrifugal making-public of his private life—and his questioning of the performative effect of being publicly visible as a representative of gay identity—would become the central themes of *Ring Piece*.

After *Flux Divorce*, it took the rest of the summer for Hendricks and Ffarrabas to come to terms about how to navigate their increasingly separate lives while still being intertwined as parents of their two children. On October 6, Hendricks finally removed his wedding ring, signaling the full end of the marriage and the resolution that he and Ffarrabas

would live separately.³⁵ The removal of the ring was important for him, and that date (and the date of his marriage) were inscribed on the box that his friend Maciunas made to house it (Fig. 6). Maciunas's *Ring Piece* box (sharing the title with Hendricks's subsequent performance) was akin to the Fluxboxes he would make, and sealed within it were the ring and ten bells, one for each year of the marriage.³⁶ When handled, the box makes a gentle ringing sound. Soon after he took off the ring and discussed the wooden box with Maciunas, Hendricks decided to build a performance about this moment of transition and the new queer life he faced.



6 George Maciunas, *Ring Piece*, 1971, wood box containing ten bells and a wedding ring, 5 × 5½ × 5½ in. (12.7 × 13 × 13 cm). Collection of Geoffrey Hendricks Estate (photograph provided by Geoffrey Hendricks Estate)

As Hendricks would later explain to an interviewer, at this time he came to see “performance as giving structure to certain life events. Especially in 1971 which was the time when [Nye] and I were considering divorce and I was coming to terms with being gay.”³⁷ After he decided to take off his ring, he told Charlotte Moorman, the artist and organizer of the Avant Garde Festival, that he wanted the center of the Armory (where the festival was to be held that year) and that he would bury his ring in a dirt barrow “and sit on it for twelve hours—an act of mourning for the end of one important chapter of my life.”³⁸

CONCURRENCES: THE IMBRICATED EXPERIENCES OF *RING PIECE* AT THE ARMORY

Hendricks's *Ring Piece* took place in the midst of the cacophonous Avant Garde Festival on November 19, 1971. This was the eighth annual festival that Moorman organized, moving locations with each year's expansion.³⁹ The 1971 festival occupied the vast and art historically significant space of the 69th Regiment Armory at Lexington Avenue and Twenty-Fifth Street. Over 200 artists participated, with crowds well into the thousands. The festivals had a carnival-like atmosphere, and audiences ranged from the cognoscenti of performance art to casual visitors who looked on the festival's oddities with bemusement. Hendricks's silent performance stood at the center of a chaotic scene: video artist Shirley Clarke's 45-foot-tall neon *Video Ferris Wheel* with a television on every seat of a Ferris wheel rented from a circus; Otto Piene's 35-foot-tall inflatable glowing flowers; video installations by Nam June Paik and Shuya Abe; and an installation (*Images of the Present Tense II*) of one hundred blank but turned-on television sets by Douglas Davis—to name a few of the grandest constructions (Fig. 7).

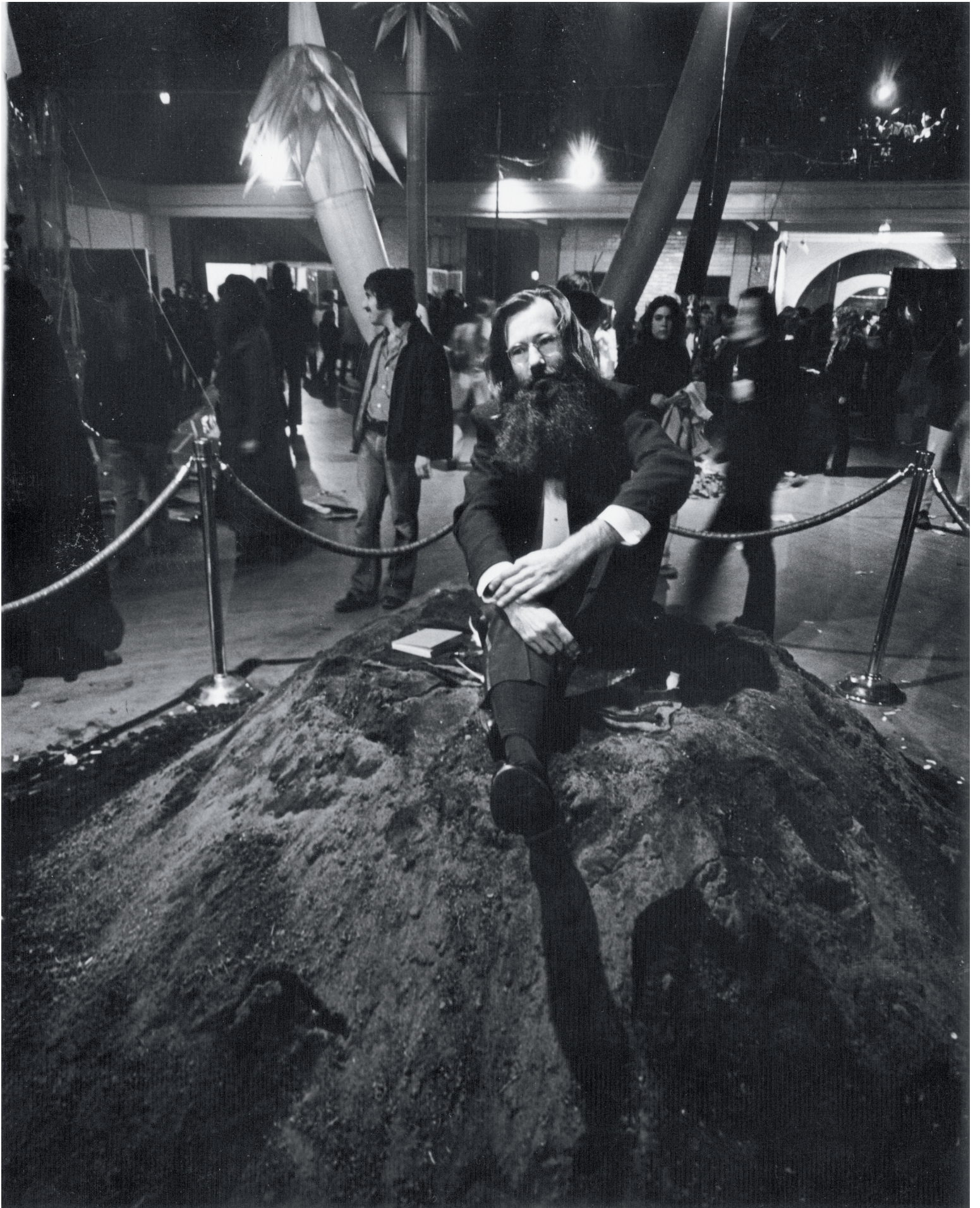
There was so much video and neon that Moorman decided not to use the Armory's lighting system, leaving the entire interior space well-illuminated by the glow of television screens. Performances included Ralph Ortiz's destruction actions, a teleconcert by the PULSA collective, Jim McWilliams's nine-foot birthday cake for Moorman (out of which she emerged), and art critic and foodie Gregory Battcock demonstrating how to make mayonnaise. Ono's *Amaze*, a maze made from Plexiglas (with a toilet at the core), was in a prominent place near the center of the Armory, and Lennon showed *Wind Piece* (two string quartets taking turns playing for the duration of the festival while a swiveling fan continually blew their sheet music to different pages) and *Baby Grand Guitar* (a gigantic guitar).⁴⁰ The presence of the celebrity couple drew many visitors who had never before heard of the avant-garde or the festivals. (Ono and Lennon played a bait and switch to avoid the crowds. In a work called *Fame*



7 View of 8th Annual Avant Garde Festival, 69th Regiment Armory, New York City, organized by Charlotte Moorman. Visible works include Otto Piene's inflatable glowing flowers at center, Yoko Ono's Plexiglas *Amaze* at bottom, and Shirley Clarke's *Video Ferris Wheel* at upper right (photograph by Peter Moore, provided by the Peter Moore Photography Archive, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Libraries)

Exchange, prankster-artist Joey Skaggs arrived in a limousine wearing a white suit in imitation of Lennon. While fans screamed and took photographs, Ono and Lennon arrived surreptitiously in a Datsun and slipped into the festival.)⁴¹ It was a major event. As one reviewer wrote, "College kids, socialites, a scattering of entire families from the neighborhood, and businessmen flowed through and flooded the place all day."⁴²

Despite—or perhaps because of—this chaos, Hendricks's solemn and silent performance at the core of the Armory held attention, offering a striking visual symbol in the form of the stoic Hendricks in his tailcoat sitting just above eye level on his barrow (Fig. 8). Hendricks's choice of "white tie" for his costume signaled a breaking of conventional rules of formalwear, and it was clearly at odds with the casualness of the Saturday afternoon viewers and the festive scene. As at least some of the onlookers would have noticed, it was also eveningwear being worn inappropriately in the daytime.⁴³ Its formality looked both out of place and out of time, contributing to the oddness of Hendricks's presence in the festival as well as to the gravity of his ritual. He would come to use this evening dress in other performances to symbolize formal rites and, in particular, the exchange (or mourning) of vows. Especially when such a formal tailcoat was worn by a white, early-middle-aged man (he was forty) with an ample beard, Hendricks was taken as a figure of authority or solemnity. (Many visitors attempted to ask the implacable Hendricks for directions.) There was a small label nearby identifying Hendricks and the title of the work, but many ignored it. The mound of dirt was cordoned off with red ropes (not velvet, but of the type). This barrier separated the silent, formal Hendricks from the throng of the crowd, elevating him as an attraction or specimen to be observed and inspected. Through it all, he sat silently writing in his red-covered diary, speaking to no one. "The piece was immediately a magnet for everybody," he later recalled.⁴⁴ Indeed, of the entire festival, the *Village Voice* chose photographs of Hendricks's *Ring Piece* and Clarke's *Video Ferris Wheel* for their cover story on it (written by Fred McDarrah, who also took the photos).⁴⁵



The tumulus on which Hendricks sat contrasted with the parade of technology, metal, and glass that dominated the festival's installations. It smelled, as dirt does, and it created an olfactory zone around his performance that would have further differentiated the experience for those who stood close and lingered. The smell of earth—and the fact it was an oasis of the organic—also drew ants. Hendricks remarked in the diary, “They were



8 Geoffrey Hendricks, *Ring Piece*, November 19, 1971, performance, 8th Annual Avant Garde Festival, 69th Regiment Armory, New York City (artwork © Geoffrey Hendricks Estate; photograph by Peter Moore, provided by the Peter Moore Photography Archive, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Libraries)

9 Geoffrey Hendricks contemplating a mouse, *Ring Piece*, November 19, 1971, performance, 8th Annual Avant Garde Festival, 69th Regiment Armory, New York City (artwork © Geoffrey Hendricks Estate; photograph by Fred W. McDarrah, provided by Getty Images)

doing their work purposefully, moving dirt and stuff, as if the Festival weren't here. The ants are a model for myself.”⁴⁶ As well, a number of white mice came to scamper up and around Hendricks. Over the course of the twelve-hour performance, more and more began to find their way to the mound. Hendricks sat impassively as they crawled around him and into his clothes (Fig. 9). Audience members began to think they were part of the piece, and some would-be do-gooders started to bring to the barrow the mice they found elsewhere around the venue. The mice were from another artwork

by Hendricks's close friend Higgins: the Fluxus score *Mice All Over the Place*. A Fluxus score comprised a set of repeatable, open-ended instructions to enact a performance event, and Higgins's *Mice All Over the Place* called for the release of a white mouse every half hour of the twelve-hour festival. Sitting in a corner of the Armory dressed in white, Higgins quietly let loose his mice and handed a questionnaire to anyone who approached him.⁴⁷ The mice made their way to Hendricks (often with the help of festivalgoers), but he was not aware they were part of Higgins's performance until after the conclusion of the day.

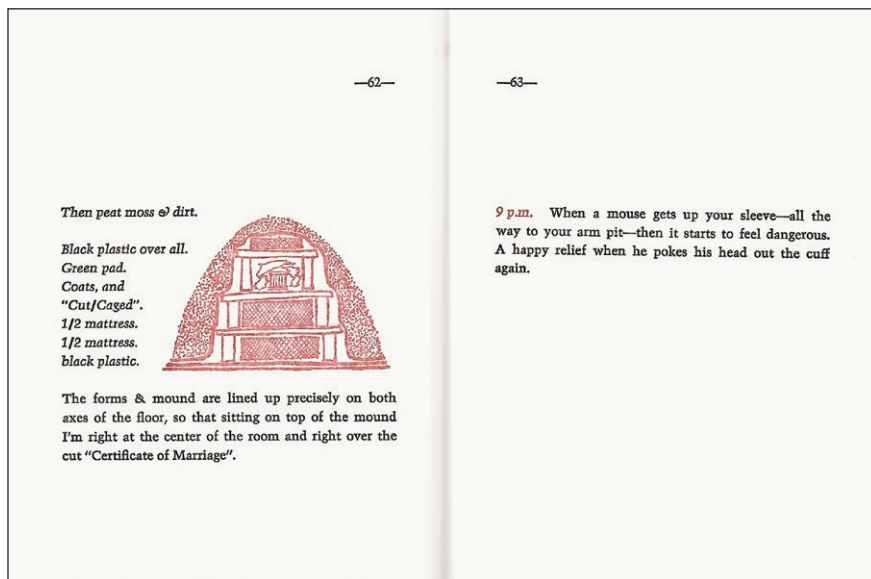
As he did with so much of his performance practice, Hendricks folded such happy coincidences, chance juxtapositions, and unruly engagements with others into his work, seeing these unforeseen additions as part of the work's participation in life. The agency of others (be they people or mice) created unexpected reactions, which Hendricks incorporated into the work much as he did other chance operations. For instance, the incursion of *Mice All Over the Place* became retroactively meaningful because Higgins was, like him, also a Fluxus artist who was queer and a parent. Over the years, the two would find reinforcement in each other, and the mice came to be seen by Hendricks as a symbol of that inter-reliance.⁴⁸ Near the end of the diary of the day's observations, Hendricks wrote, “Find out the mice are from a piece by Dick, which pleases me a lot for he's just the right person to interact with in/on a piece—and this piece in particular.”⁴⁹ In terms of the audience's view, the presence of the mice added further intrigue, setting the silent and impassive Hendricks into relief.

Another unexpected turn by an artist friend had previously compelled Hendricks to adapt the work to its circumstances: the box that Maciunas made to house the removed wedding ring had not been buried in the earth beneath him. Much as Higgins's white mice had altered Hendricks's original idea, so too did Maciunas come to inflect it. In the weeks before

the festival, Maciunas declared that he would boycott any artist who participated. For him, Moorman's attitude toward performance was overly generous, commercialized, and diluting. Not only did he assert "a position of total non-cooperation," he also declared his own yearlong performance about Moorman in which he would not speak directly to anyone who participated in her festival. (Hendricks contributed to Maciunas's work by posting a sign to this effect near the entrance to the festival before it began.)⁵⁰ Hendricks recalled of Maciunas's performance of nonengagement: "to satisfy that, Barbara Moore was the person who would communicate with George. And if one wanted to ask George about something, you'd call Barbara and you'd talk [through her] to George."⁵¹ Maciunas had enthusiastically completed the box, but Hendricks agreed to keep it out of the festival. Just as he had come to see the uninvited visits of Higgins's mice as important, Hendricks also came to appreciate the box's removal from the piece—what he called its "double invisibility."⁵²

Instead of Maciunas's box, Hendricks chose to bury items from the *Flux Divorce* (Fig. 10). He made his own box, *Cut/Caged*, to contain the cut marriage certificate. On the day before the performance, he decided that the major images from *Flux Divorce's* "Division of Property" (the bed) and "Separation" (the coats) would also be entombed, along with the black plastic that had divided their yard during that performance. The halves of the mattress were at different levels within the barrow, providing an unseen reiteration of the separation—of one becoming two again.

Hendricks envisioned *Ring Piece* as a meditation on his resolve to lead a new life, with the relics of his marriage as the foundation. As he wrote, the performance was "a rite of passage, a burial and putting to rest ten years of [my] life, and a rebirth, a new beginning."⁵³ For all the visible spectacle of the tall mound, the tailcoat, and the interloping white mice, *Ring Piece* also relied on what was unseen. Much like the earlier work *Body/Hair*, *Ring Piece* staged a dynamic relationship between vulnerable visibility of the performer and the



10 Geoffrey Hendricks, illustration of the buried contents in the mound, from the book *Ring Piece* (West Glover, VT: Something Else Press, 1973)

idea of the invisibility of symbols (in *Body/Hair*, Hendricks's shaved body in the weeks after the performance; in *Ring Piece*, the items buried in the barrow). Hendricks noted in his diary about the emotionally saturated objects that were buried beneath him: "All this is invisible."⁵⁴ Hendricks's diary writing was itself both a visible image for the audience and the private narration of the twelve hours of the performance; like the mound, it was offered as a visual symbol with its contents withheld. The overarching theme of the performance was its conjunctions of acts of concealment with the experience of exposure.

In her important study of Fluxus, Hannah B. Higgins has lucidly discussed the multiple roles of experience in Fluxus activities.⁵⁵ For instance, an event score or a Fluxkit (that is, a small box of objects and texts to be explored, played with, and contemplated) provides successive opportunities for a participant's unique and particular engagements with mundane objects or actions. At the same time, the Fluxkit or event score prompts a reflection on the importance or shared meaningfulness of those individual experiences. "As a project, rather, Fluxus modestly proposed the real value of real things and the possibility of deriving knowledge and experience from these things, in the belief that these proposals had implications for art and culture generally," Higgins argued.⁵⁶ The immediacy and variability of the event score or the Fluxkit allow for a series of distinct experiences in each activation and with each



11 Geoffrey Hendricks, *Ring Piece*, November 19, 1971, performance, 8th Annual Avant Garde Festival, 69th Regiment Armory, New York City (artwork © Geoffrey Hendricks Estate; photograph by Fred W. McDarrah, provided by Getty Images)

performer; these experiences are related to each other through the shared prompt of the score or object but are nevertheless *sui generis*. A Fluxconcert's scores, for instance, proliferate experiences. The work is experienced by the performer (who is using chance and improvisation), often in relation to other performers doing the same. The audience members who watch these unpredictable and unique interpretations of the score have different experiences of improvisation and collaboration. Each of these distinct but porous encounters with the score is equally valid as an outcome. As Higgins explains, the experiential is privileged in Fluxus for its unending variability and particularity while, at the same time, prompting reflection on the nature and context for those experiences and the material objects employed in them.

Ring Piece hinged on the imbricated dialectics of visible/invisible, public/private, and audience/performer to create multiple (and competing) zones of experience in and of the performance (Fig. 11). The richness of Hendricks's own experience of reflection and writing (and of the symbolic import of the invisible relics) was lost on most of the audience, who had little access to what Hendricks felt there—or who did not know what Hendricks had buried under his tall barrow. "People know nothing of these other things, all they take in is the strangeness of the situation," Hendricks observed in a diary entry from around 4pm that day.⁵⁷ The passerby might never realize anything of the struggle or the hope that were concentrated into this performance and its symbolic working through of Hendricks's redirection of his relations, family, and life. Nevertheless, he wrote, "The people around me are part of my piece."⁵⁸ The experience of spectacle by the onlookers was less invested in *Hendricks's* experience than it was a searching for confirmation of their own presence; their interruptions (whether of the

agonistic stranger or the sympathetic friend) prodded Hendricks to reflect not on himself but on their transient proximity. As Hendricks wrote in the diary, “people keep coming by to say ‘recognize me.’”⁵⁹

Among the traces of the anonymous festivalgoers, the diary also records the pleas of friends who came to visit and attempt to engage that day. Like any audience or public, the Avant Garde Festival’s crowds were composed of both friends and strangers. Hendricks wrote about friends such as Lil Picard yelling to get his attention—or Lennon making a funny face at him. Some were more aggressive: Hendricks’s friend and colleague Al Hansen did a performance (with Valerie Herouvis) titled *World War II* that involved Hansen in a silver suit and fedora regularly “shouting invectives into the Armory through a bullhorn,” as Steve Balkin recalled.⁶⁰ At times, Hansen crossed the cordon in an attempt to loudly intervene in Hendricks’s placid performance. In various ways, these friends also sought Hendricks’s acknowledgment or response, but he remained largely unengaged with them, no matter how much they meant to him (including his own children). However, there are a handful of significant moments of mutual recognition. Most notably, Hendricks made a point of acknowledging Higgins (with the only smile of the day) and Johnston.⁶¹ This is important because these two were the other queer friends who shared knowledge of the full meaning of the piece for him—and of the experience that it dramatized.

Despite its publicness and spectacle in the midst of a carnival atmosphere, *Ring Piece* was very much a private performance (Fig. 12). He observed, “I am here in total iso-



12 Geoffrey Hendricks writing in his diary, *Ring Piece*, November 19, 1971, performance, 8th Annual Avant Garde Festival, 69th Regiment Armory, New York City (artwork © Geoffrey Hendricks Estate; photograph by Fred W. McDarrah, provided by Getty Images)

lation—(cords around edge are important for this) in the midst of people.”⁶² The act of diary writing on which Hendricks engaged was for himself (at this stage). Some festivalgoers struggled to look over his shoulder and read what he was writing, but he blocked their efforts. He was attuned to these and other disruptions caused by the environment as he performed being private in public. The uninvited mice, for instance, also impeded his meditations. “Here I am wanting to focus inward and a mouse is nibbling at my crotch,” he observed.⁶³

Throughout the diary, we read of the negotiation of his attempt at reflective privacy and the intrusions of others (be they people or mice), who scrutinized, objectified, implored, or even mocked the silent Hendricks. “This is a piece about the silly unnecessary chatter and actions of people,” he wrote in the diary.⁶⁴ His experience of inward self-reflection was both distinct from and embedded within the experiences of the external spectators, who talked about and stared at the enigmatic silent spectacle.

These two levels of experience are both inter-reliant and agonistic. *Ring Piece* dramatized this conflict between his inward contemplation and his endurance of scrutiny. At the core of this public privacy were the buried contents of *Ring Piece* (the dissolution of a

heteronormative marriage in pursuit of a queer life) that symbolized both end and beginning. The performance was about embracing a new publicness and self-acceptance—but it also insisted on the importance of protecting against the harshness of the ensuing visibility. Seen in these terms, *Ring Piece* can be understood to allegorize the limitations of the performative act of coming out—that is, the act of making public the structuring difference of one’s supposedly private life.⁶⁵

It might be tempting to see the burying (or, rather, privacy) of the queer content of the *Ring Piece* performance as timorous or incomplete, but I refuse to cast that withholding in negative terms. Instead, I see *Ring Piece* as a *positive* performance of privacy in which “all this is invisible.” The invisible and the private are held in tension with spectacle and publicness in *Ring Piece*, and the work thematizes that tension as a queer reflection on a life in transformation. Like all of those who were hailed by the post-Stonewall call to come out, to be seen, and to stand up, this life was caught between political urgency and the vulnerability and surveillance that comes with opening up that which is private to others’ scrutiny. *Ring Piece* both responds to the need for visibility and is ambivalent about that making-visible. I will trace this ambivalence in relation to Hendricks’s interest in nonoppositional thinking later, but first it is important to discuss the second stage of *Ring Piece* in which the private content of Hendricks’s experience was made available to a public. About eighteen months

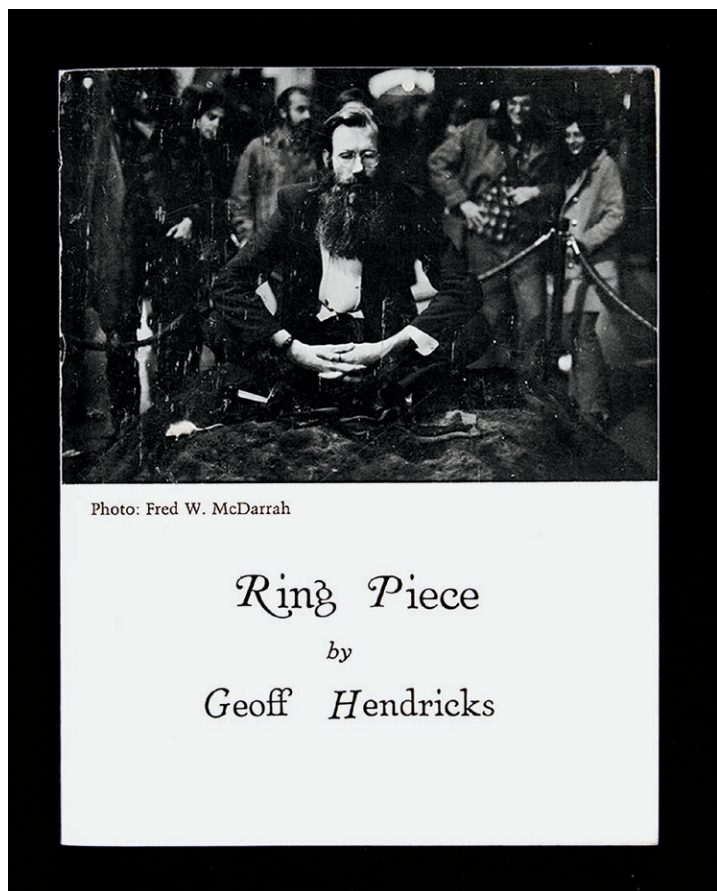
after the performance, Hendricks published his performance diary with Higgins’s Something Else Press, and the deferred disclosure of this artist book is the primary way that many (including myself) can see *Ring Piece* beyond its cultivation of silent spectacle. The publication of *Ring Piece* was not mere documentation but a crucial part of the extended performance.

REOCCURRENCES: READING *RING PIECE* AFTER 1973

Hendricks’s *Ring Piece* was an event experienced (in many ways) by a large number of visitors to the Armory on that day, and it can be positioned, as I have, in relation to the festival, to 1971, and to Hendricks’s other works that year. But *Ring Piece* can also be experienced through the deferred revelations that come with reading Hendricks’s narration of his attempts to maintain privacy despite being the object of scrutiny. *Ring Piece* as a performance has two acts that, together, reflect on the process of coming out and its implications. If this recursive performance is concerned with what it means to be queer in public, as I have argued, then the subsequent publication—that is, the making public—of the private content of Hendricks’s endurance of the event is crucial to understanding this theme (Fig. 13).

There are many examples of performers reflecting on their performances in writing, but *Ring Piece* differs in that it is a “real-time” account by the performer as it is happening. As such, it offers a unique opportunity for art history and for performance studies. In a 1974

review, Lawrence Alloway already remarked on this aspect of *Ring Piece*: “The book is the (rare) record of the thoughts and feelings of a participant in a participant-oriented event, and there is perhaps more to be gained from reading it than from having been one of Hendricks’ dumb witnesses in the 69th Regimental Armory.”⁶⁶ As Alloway notes, *Ring Piece* centered on Hendricks’s two actions: being a visible but inscrutable spectacle for others and—in the form of the diary—recording the thoughts, experiences, and associations of being so seen.



13 Cover of Geoffrey Hendricks, *Ring Piece* (West Glover, VT: Something Else Press), 1973

Diaries are always self-reflexively written to their author while also being self-consciously intended for other, future readers. Diary writing is a genre that performs a mediated personal revelation—one made not just to oneself but to an unforeseen and curious prospective readership that might have no personal connection to the author. To recall Warner's terms, a published diary postulates a public who, by definition, includes strangers (to the author and each other). Hendricks's decision to publish his diary of this concentrated twelve-hour experience, therefore, should be seen as a performance of deferred disclosure to a public—one that takes on special intensity in light of the buried emotional and queer symbols that made up its foundation. Later readers of the diary experience—however partially—the performance *from the inside* (an option not available to visitors on the day of the performance). The text offers all that was invisible during the performance, and it does so in a format that is more private and intimate—the tiny handheld book addressed to a public of solitary readers.

Ring Piece is a small book at a mere $5\frac{3}{8} \times 4\frac{1}{8}$ inches (13.7 × 10.5 cm), which is equivalent to the scale of the diary in which Hendricks wrote. Its eighty pages have generous space, and it is printed in two colors—black ink for the majority of the text and red ink for the title, the list of names of those mentioned, the times of day for each entry, and the occasional line drawings (of bells, of the tumulus, and so on) that are interspersed in the text. Before the reader opens *Ring Piece*, they may read the back cover, authored by Higgins. He describes Hendricks through a list of possibilities both profound and quotidian, saying Hendricks is apt to do such things as “smile,” “seriously consider his children Tyche and Bracken,” “be in love,” or “water the plants in his Church Street (New York City) loft.” In this list, Higgins also winks at his gay readers, noting that Hendricks might also be found “wearing his leathers”—in allusion to the gay leather culture that burgeoned in 1970s New York. In advertising the book, Higgins also showcased the themes of disclosure and the private made public. One flier for the book read “Would you like to know what Geoff Hendricks was writing in the that little red book on the mound of dirt in the center of the Armory at the Avant Garde Festival in 1971?”

Indeed, it is through the experience of reading the diary that we learn of the moments of annoyance, flashes of inspiration, and contemplation of past and future that occupied Hendricks that day. Readers also become privy to what is buried, what is mourned, and, more directly, Hendricks's matter-of-fact reflections on his life and surroundings. The diary's narration stages an incommensurability between its self-reflection and the intrusive perusals of the crowd; the central themes of the text center on feeling observed and wanting privacy. At one point in it, Hendricks wrote, using the enjambment of poetry:

I'm coming back—
uncovering it
. . . the dirt?

The problem
of people moving in
on my territory . . .
How many stupid questions
I could have answered
if I chose . . .⁶⁷

Such episodes of exhaustion at being another's object of scrutiny and of conversation aggregate throughout the entries Hendricks wrote in those twelve hours of sitting and being watched.

In the diary, Hendricks's only obliquely names *Ring Piece* as being about the transformation of his queer life through a desire to be open and public—that is, coming out.

Even though this issue is at the core (literally) of *Ring Piece*, Hendricks demurs from a singular statement of identifying the work as gay. In the diary, homosexuality is only made explicit twice. First, in the bio of Johnston (who had proven so inspirational for him), where Hendricks describes her as “columnist for *The Village Voice*, author of *Marmalade Me*, lesbian militant.”⁶⁸ Second, late in the afternoon in the diary’s entries,

—46—

How come this book is about momentary events, death imagery, etc. & not about sexual fantasies? It’s burial/non-burial of my wedding ring.

A group of men are talking next to the mound—one has a Gay Revolutionary Party button on.

Hendricks queries himself about his own discretion (Fig. 14): “How come this book is about momentary events, death imagery, etc., & not about sexual fantasies. It’s burial/non-burial of my wedding ring.” This line is coupled on the same page with the observation that sparked this self-re-creation: “A group of men are talking next to the mound—one has a Gay Revolutionary Party button on.”⁶⁹ These lines, for me, evidence Hendricks’s own grappling with identifying—as being seen as part of a taxonomic category. Throughout the book, the sensitive and poetic meditations on the life he is leaving behind and the uncertain future are central, and the diary constantly makes this manifest without naming the process as coming out. Like the performance itself, Hendricks’s diary is ambivalent about declaring—singly—a gay revelation. As I will discuss in the next section, this ambivalence centers on a skepticism about the irrevocable performative force of disclosing and identifying as gay. That is, even though *Ring Piece* responds to and thematizes Hendricks’s own process of coming out, it resists being reduced to that declaration.

I will not recount all of the events in the diary. Like the day itself, they shifted from the mundane to the monumental, and any extraction of a line here or there misses much of that flow. When I read the diary, it is precisely the play between the minor annoyances and the major

themes that strikes me so. With the knowledge of what is buried underneath (that any reader of the diary has), the recounting of events and of the microaggressions and microaffections of strangers and friends becomes greater than the sum of their parts. It is for this reason that I read *Ring Piece* diary as both an *account* and an *allegory* of being seen, being seen as, being seen to be, and being seen from now on.

Reading *Ring Piece* in this way, I have come to see its performance of ambivalence, its subtle codes, and its resistance to being easily identified as a rich accounting of the experience of naming oneself as “queer.” Exhaustion, defiance, annoyance, purpose, solidarity, isolation, spectacle, reclusiveness, vulnerability, and self-protection are among the feelings that recur when living with that self-nomination. It is these ambivalences and contradictions that the reductive rhetorics of “pride” and “coming out” belie—indeed, suppress. *Ring Piece*, in its temporal and geographic proximity to Stonewall, offers us an early expression of these mixed feelings, even as it is hailed by the urgency of that moment’s politics of visibility and accountability. In the next section, I will discuss how Hendricks’s performance of ambivalence was a manifestation of his pursuit of nonoppositional modes of thought, setting this against the emerging post-Stonewall rhetoric that cast the performative act of public disclosure in starkly binary and hierarchized terms.

“ONE IS ALWAYS BETWEEN AT LEAST TWO POINTS”: HENDRICKS’S NONOPPOSITIONAL THINKING, WITH GUIDANCE FROM SAMUEL R. DELANY’S “COMING/OUT”

When Hendricks prepared the manuscript of *Ring Piece* for publication, he appended a two-page free-verse poem titled “Island/Volcano” as a conclusion. The poem recasts the tumulus on which he sat, comparing it to both the “Island” (ground that rises above sea level) and

14 Geoffrey Hendricks, from the book *Ring Piece* (West Glover, VT: Something Else Press, 1973)

“Volcano” (the fiery core of the earth that breaks violently through its surface). An eruption is both destructive and productive; that is how some islands are formed. Hendricks likened this process to the transformation of his life, and he characterized his experience of the day (with the ants, the mice, the intrusions of people) as part of the life cycle of new growth out of the fertile destruction of the volcano. The poem concludes:

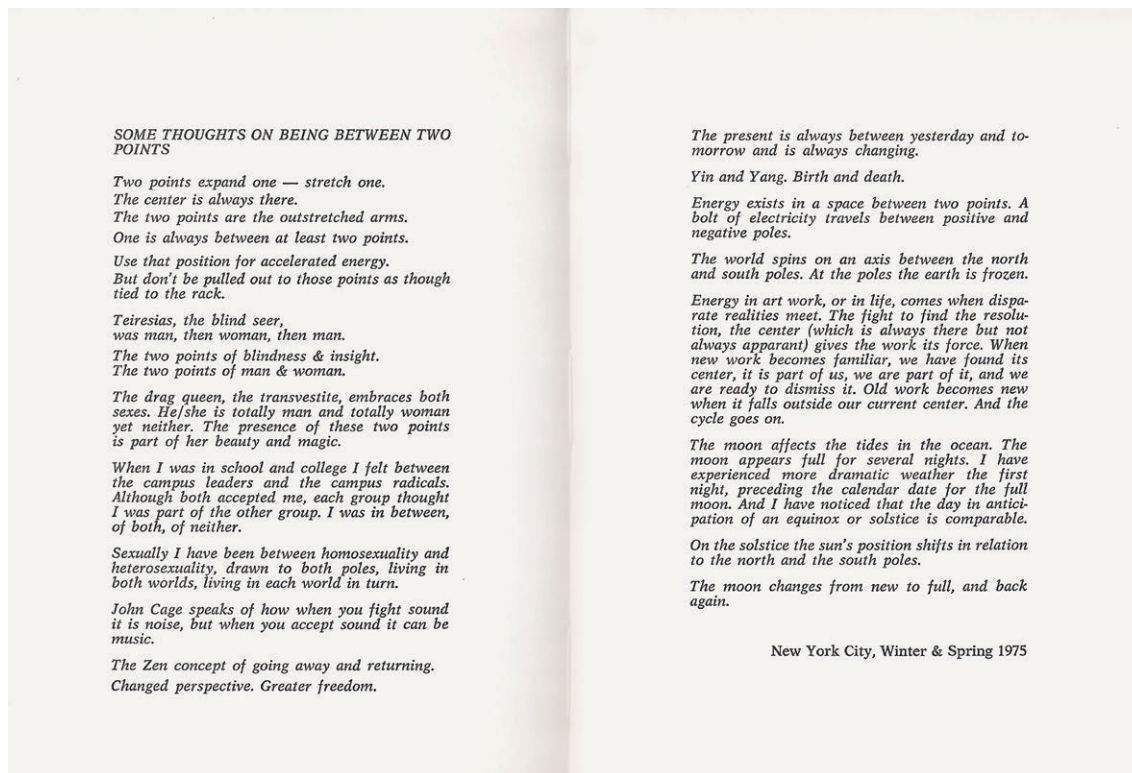
Evolving ecology.
New life image.
Growing out of/after tomb sculpture.
Image putting to rest old relationship.
New growth out of it.
Work/piece itself
part of this new growth.⁷⁰

While a volcanic eruption and coming out are both singular (and tumultuous) events, an extended ecological perspective on them would account for ongoing factors and forces that make each event just one of many linked in a process. Accordingly, *Ring Piece* was a rumination on (and mourning of) a past life, but the performance—both literally and symbolically—took the relics of that past as foundation for what was to come. (Hendricks also used the imagery of mourning and tomb sculpture, both of which are examples of how memories persist after the event of death and indeed give it—and the previous life—new meanings through retrospection or commemoration.)⁷¹ Like the volcanic soil that makes an island ecosystem thrive, Hendricks’s previous life was not left behind so much as built upon.

This poem is one of many examples in which Hendricks refused binarisms—especially in relation to the theme of transformation. The dyad of the poem’s title—Island/Volcano—points to his nonoppositional thinking (he sometimes also called it “dialectical”). Such mutually defining dyads recur throughout Hendricks’s writing and performances in these years especially. This was most strongly asserted in the 1974 performance (and subsequent publication) *Between Two Points / Fra Due Poli* in which Hendricks engaged with in-betweenness as a structure for understanding temporalities, geographies, and lives. He enacted private ritual performances in Norway and Italy in 1974, keeping a diary that wove together his observations of these landscapes and his reflections on his life and experiences. I will not here describe the performances or diaries except to say that their complexity rivals that of *Ring Piece*’s performance-publication sequence. I will focus instead on the framing comments Hendricks made about the rejection of strict or hierarchized binaries and how one is always “between two points.” This stance coalesced as he plumbed his personal history through his performances and diaries. (Hendricks made this clear: the publication *Between Two Points* concludes with an autobiographical chronology.)

Between Two Points was intended as a bookend to *Ring Piece*’s rumination on transformation. In it, Hendricks thought deeply about the undecidability between past and present, cause and effect, intention and chance. Over the course of these years between the two performances, Hendricks had been involved in a relationship with the playwright and performance artist Stephen Varble (1946–1984), and the two had expanded on *Ring Piece* to make a trilogy of *Silent Meditation* performances in which Hendricks again sat upon a mound of dirt. Their breakup in 1974 set the stage for a new period of self-reflection for Hendricks, and *Between Two Points* resulted. Its book theorizes an approach (begun with the 1971 performances) to historical and personal narrative in which past and present imbricate, leaving the space open for new meanings to emerge from old events—a carrying through of the Volcano/Island metaphor. Hendricks provided a concise synopsis of these priorities in his text “Some

Thoughts on Being Between Two Points,” written in 1975 as a forward to the diaries from 1974 (Fig. 15).⁷² It blends autobiographical reflections with a call for a different understanding of nonoppositions between positions, aspects, and times.



15 Geoffrey Hendricks, “Some Thoughts on Being Between Two Points” (1975), from *Between Two Points/Fra Due Poli* (Reggio Emilia: Edizioni Pari & Dispari, 1976)

“One is always between at least two points,” Hendricks wrote in the 1975 text, adding “But don’t be pulled out to those points as though tied to a rack.”⁷³ Both a spatial and temporal metaphor, this formula allows for a way of characterizing one’s history as layered and labile rather than as unidirectional and supersessive. Renouncing absolute and mutually exclusive binaries, Hendricks instead emphasized the relative mapping of “in-between” areas of nonopposed dyads. He compared this embrace of nonbinarism, at different times, to Idealist philosophy’s account of the dialectical overcoming

of contradictions or to the nonoppositional principles of Buddhism—an interest that he shared with many other of his Fluxus counterparts, who were inspired by John Cage’s theories and the composer’s partial adaptations of Zen.⁷⁴ These overlapping ideas infuse much of his work that broke down a dichotomy between art and life. They can be seen, for instance, in Hendricks’s sky paintings covering earthbound objects of use. As Shauna McCabe has argued in a thorough essay on the role of land and landscape in his skyworks, “Hendricks’s work consistently displaces such conventional dichotomies and reinforces the integration and continuity of terms—earth/sky, present/past, personal/political, male/female, rural/urban, self/other, nature/culture, local/global, space time, art/life.”⁷⁵ In-between, nonoppositional, and dialectic thinking were central to Hendricks’s attitudes toward life and art. He would recast restrictive and hierarchized binaries as related positions between which he found or located himself. For instance, in the 1975 text (and in other performances and texts) Hendricks praised the value of acknowledging gender’s complexity, multiplicity, hybridity, and mutability. “Two points expand one—stretch one,” he began.

In 1977 Higgins asked Hendricks about these themes. Referring to *Between Two Points*, Higgins prompted this exchange:

Higgins: You always set up dialectic. You’re a dialectic artist too. You’ve got North/South, Norway and Italy, obviously, but you also have public/private.

Hendricks: There is public/private, and in terms of mythology—public and private images, there is New World/Old World. Then there is—

Higgins: The Female and the Male.

Hendricks: And in the piece itself there is the solstice which is the point between two seasons. I’m most intrigued with that in-between area.⁷⁶

Hendricks's priorities—transformation and in-betweenness—were shaped by his gradual process of accepting his homosexuality. He wrote, “Sexually I have been between homosexuality and heterosexuality, drawn to both poles, living in both worlds, living each world in turn.”⁷⁷ Johnston would later emphasize this point in her assessment of Hendricks's work: “Geoff, amongst all his Fluxus friends, and other artists as well, may have the most heightened sense of the interaction and fusion of life and work, crystallized in rituals bridging the now and the here-after, because of the crucial transition he once made in his sexual identity.”⁷⁸ Throughout the text of the diary and chronology in *Between Two Points*, Hendricks made clear that his acceptance of his sexuality incited the disarrangement of his understanding of gender and recast his perspectives on personal relations. Coming out, consequently, necessitated a reevaluation of his own history, compelling him to recognize continuities that ran through episodes of visible change.

The multidirectional temporality that Hendricks upheld as fundamental to transformation stood in contrast to the rhetoric of coming out that congealed in these years immediately following the Stonewall uprising.⁷⁹ Both then (and now), its logic of disclosure is understood in starkly binary and hierarchized terms: before/after, secret/open, shame/pride, denial/acceptance, isolation/community are all implied by the founding binary of the closet metaphor's in/out. The limitations of this well-established rhetoric were examined by Samuel R. Delany (b. 1942) in his writings, which I find particularly helpful in characterizing the terms of *Ring Piece*. Like Hendricks's “between two points,” Delany wrote about the inadequacy of the coming out metaphor because it signaled a one-directional, one-time, transfiguring speech act. Delany's discussions of his own queer history and of the rhetoric of coming out have prompted me to see *Ring Piece* in deeper and more connected ways. Both Delany and Hendricks weave the autobiographical through their work as a central textual example. This is true of “Coming/Out,” Delany's 1997 essay that will be my focus; its argument is inextricable from his narrative recounting of his sexual life and friendships. In this essay, Delany argued that the event-model of coming out—which cast that act as the key defining moment in gay life—had failed to account for his own experiences.

Delany and Hendricks have obvious differences. Delany is a Black novelist and theorist, while Hendricks was a white painter and performance artist. Hendricks was also older, by eleven years, but the two—despite their differences—had analogous trajectories and timelines through the pre-Stonewall 1960s in New York City. Most important among their connections is that they both married and had children during this time, and each made a point of discussing the importance of their seemingly straight marriages (to women, incidentally, who also went on to pursue queer lives) and their children.⁸⁰ Even though their experiences of queer New York life, of marriage, and of privilege cannot be equated, it is this analogous perspective on family and its continuities that contributed to their distinct critical positions on the rhetoric of coming out as the definitive queer act (and on the resulting distortions this rhetoric imposed on the narratives of queer lives). Both examined coming out as politically important but exacting a cost.

In “Coming/Out,” Delany challenged the lesbian and gay movement's central imperative—the responsibility to disclose, to make visible. Delany argued that the focus on a singular moment of revelation was a means of siphoning energy away from the more complex discursive field in which sexual freedoms, kinships, and lives are defined and contested. He wrote, “The rhetoric of singular discovery, of revelation, of definition is one of the conceptual tools by which dominant discourses repeatedly suggest that there is no broad and ranging field of events informing the marginal.”⁸¹ Thinking both temporally and relationally, Delany saw the limitations of the coming out metaphor's unidirectional temporality as collapsing the more complex moments of self-definition, coalition, and resistance that makes queer lives livable. By contrast, he upheld a different temporal model that was not located in the watershed

event. He contended, “In the gradual, continual, and constantly modulating process of becoming who we are, all events take their meanings, characteristic or uncharacteristic, from the surrounding event field in which they occur. While certainly they contribute to what we are or are becoming, single events simply do not carry the explicative strength ‘definition’ and ‘identity’ denote. This is not to say some events aren’t more important than others.”⁸²

It is in observations such as these that I have found a vocabulary to talk about the queer foundations of Hendricks’s position that we are always “between two points.” Delany’s skepticisms about the discursive shift that occurred after Stonewall help put Hendricks’s performance of the endurance of coming out in 1971 into context. *Ring Piece* is, after all, a work drawn on autobiographical experience that seeks to understand the terms, symbols, and implications of that experience. While it was an event (a twelve-hour performance), it did not model singularity so much as it did multiple trajectories (some parallel, some diverging, some ending, others starting). Hendricks’s volcano metaphor speaks to this idea of transformation as continuity; however, on a more fundamental level *Ring Piece* casts doubt on a unidirectional, progressivist narrative of identity as moving from darkness to light and secrecy to openness (as the lesbian and gay rights movement’s rhetoric of coming out presents it).⁸³ In the performance, Hendricks countered this narrative with a performance of the endurance of the scrutiny that making visible and coming out (or being outed) brings, and he insisted on the ways in which that transmutation in the eyes of the public failed to recognize the continuities, depths, and complexities of his ongoing life.

Delany’s arguments elucidate the symbolic content I see in *Ring Piece*’s being in-between both visibility/invisibility and public/private. Hendricks dramatized the overlapping of these dyads in the performance in what I consider to be a critical ambivalence about the politics of queer visibility that were congealing as the dominant rhetoric in these years immediately following Stonewall. Again, neither Delany nor Hendricks deny the political importance of coming out; both see it as politically urgent but double-edged. Rather, they both question the idea of it as the exemplary and defining single event that changes irrevocably. That is, they share a common target in the reductive view of queer disclosure as uncomplicatedly positive and transmogrifying. Delany and Hendricks each counter this view with questions about crosscurrent temporalities, continuities within change, and the ways in which scrutiny and surveillance are served by acts of disclosure and affiliation with an identity.⁸⁴

At base, Delany’s complaint with the dominant rhetoric of coming out is about how it crystalizes the limitations of single-issue identities. He calls it the “philosophical paradox” at the heart of the discourse of the political movement for lesbian and gay visibility:

Differences are what create individuals. Identities are what create groups and categories. Identities are thus conditions of comparative simplicity that complex individuals might move toward, but (fortunately) never achieve—until society, tired of the complexity of so much individual difference, finally, one way or the other, imposes an identity on us.

Identities are thus, by their nature, reductive. (You do not need an identity to become yourself; you need an identity to become *like* someone else.)⁸⁵

However empowering, the adoption of the label gay (or queer) initiates a reduction of the individual to that group identity. In others’ eyes, they become a representative of that category, and the previously personal, individual, or invisible is recast as harshly and singularly visible and open to inspection.

Delany’s text also questions the ways that a singular logic of coming out into gay identity—especially in the rhetoric of the post-Stonewall moment he discusses—fails to be

intersectional and does not account for the different experiences and temporalities that make people who they are. While Delany does not make race an explicit focus in this essay, it is nevertheless central to his complaints about the single-issue focus of the gay rights movement and its rhetoric. Other Black scholars have also made analogous points when criticizing the come-out imperative for its ignorance of intersectional difference, its presumptive whiteness, and its erasure of the complexity of Black queer lives and kinships. Most compellingly, Marlon B. Ross has argued that the emphasis on coming out might be a “distracting act, one subsidiary to the more important identifications of family, community, and race within which one’s sexual attractions are already interwoven and understood.”⁸⁶ As Delany had previously set forth in his essay, an imperative that gay identity be performed as public disclosure can overtake and make invisible issues of race, of gender, and of different life trajectories and kinships (such as, for instance, the questions of parenting, of gender transformation, of happily living on the down-low, of being queer without being gay, or of being a part-time participant in nonnormative sex—all options that Delany defends in this and other texts).

Delany’s intersectional and multitemporal discomfort with the single-issue rhetoric of coming out sheds light on the problem that Hendricks also faced, albeit from a different position. That is, even though Hendricks was operating from within and inspired by the lesbian and gay rights movement as it was forming in these early years, he also doubted one of its key terms. His long-running belief in nonoppositional and dialectical thinking about transformation positioned Hendricks to address—through *Ring Piece*—the “philosophical paradox” of coming out as gay in 1971. *Ring Piece* was both visible and vulnerable, brave and ambivalent. Hendricks staged the harshness of visibility that came with being identified publicly as gay; he also resisted it through overlapping acts of withholding, deferral, and divulgence. It allegorized the tensions between the resolve to live openly and the endurance of others’ intrusive scrutiny, but it refused to give a simple or uncomplicated image of gay publicness or revelation as defining. Delany’s articulation helps us to see the full implications of the target of Hendricks’s ambivalence. Both shared a common object of skepticism.

BEGINNINGS, IN CONCLUSION

Ring Piece initiated a series of interrelated works by Hendricks in the years that followed. In addition to those prequels that I discussed earlier (*Body/Hair* and *Flux Divorce*), there were a cluster of other autobiographical performances before *Between Two Points* in which Hendricks worked through the transmutation of his life and his public outness. Most directly, he organized a weeklong series of performances for Apple Gallery in March of 1972, just four months after the performance at the Armory. Hendricks titled the series *Beginnings*, referring to the new life on which he was embarking—the ground for which was prepared by *Flux Divorce* and *Ring Piece*. This series (and its heralding of new directions) was catalyzed by the relationship Hendricks had started with Varble in the weeks after the Avant Garde Festival.

Hendricks had met Varble at one of the widely attended dances at the Gay Activists Alliance community center at the Firehouse on Wooster Street. Varble would go on to become a performance artist notorious for his unauthorized genderqueer performances that targeted New York art galleries and other sites of luxury commerce.⁸⁷ By the end of 1971, Varble had moved into Hendricks’s loft. The two began to collaborate, first with a February 22, 1972, performance of Jacki Apple’s score *Identity Exchange*. For the duration of a day, they became each other. Varble wore makeup and a long white beard made of packing material to signal the swapping of their identities (Fig. 16). They spoke as each other, and Varble even assumed the role of professor in Hendricks’s studio course at Douglass College, angering the department chair.⁸⁸ Costumes would become increasingly important to Varble’s conception



16 Geoffrey Hendricks and Stephen Varble, *Identity Exchange* (score by Jacki Apple), February 22, 1972, performance (photograph provided by Visual AIDS, New York)

17 Geoffrey Hendricks with Equinox, still from video documentation of *Equinox Piece for Stephen*, March 21, 1972, performed by Geoffrey Hendricks, Stephen Varble, Dick Higgins, and Tom Parrish, Jones Beach, New York, cinematography by Takahiko Iimura (provided by Geoffrey Hendricks Estate)

18 Stephen Varble (in the *Wooden Dress*, 1972) and Geoffrey Hendricks, performance at the memorial service for Ken Dewey, September 16, 1972, Dewey Family Estate, Far Hills, New Jersey (photograph provided by Visual AIDS, New York)

of performance, and he began to make elaborate gender-confounding ensembles from found and stolen objects. The first such costume—his *Wooden Dress*—was created for *Equinox Piece for Stephen*, which inaugurated the *Beginnings* series at Apple Gallery.

Hendricks called *Equinox Piece for Stephen* “a wedding of sorts.”⁸⁹ The performance began at sunrise on the vernal equinox at Jones Beach on Long Island.⁹⁰ Hendricks emerged naked from the water and was attended to and dressed in his formal wear by Higgins, Jackson Mac Low, Tom Parrish, and Takahiko Iimura (who documented the performance on video). Then, Varble appeared over a dune in the *Wooden Dress* and proceeded toward Hendricks, who presented him with a tortoise (named, like the performance, “Equinox” to reinforce the theme of an equal meeting of two halves, Fig. 17).⁹¹ Later that day, the performance continued in Apple Gallery with other collaborative actions going on into the evening. *Equinox Piece* reprised the symbolism of Hendricks’s formal evening wear worn inappropriately (in the morning) as a marital costume, and Varble’s *Wooden Dress* served as a wedding dress (that he nevertheless wore with a beard). The two would do a series of performances featuring these paired, transgressing costumes (Fig. 18).



19 Geoffrey Hendricks, *Silent Meditation Aachen*, with Stephen Varble, *Blind Walk/Four Seasons*, October 14 and 15, 1972, performance, Neue Galerie—Sammlung Ludwig, Aachen (photograph by Anne Gold, provided by Geoffrey Hendricks Estate)

The other performances that week in the *Beginnings* series included *Times Square Meditation* (which followed the format and theme of *Ring Piece*'s silent writing as spectacle); a wordless welcome celebrating the artist Wolf Vostell's arrival from Europe; a performance by Varble titled *White Spiders*; a video screening of the documentation of Hendricks's *Body/Hair* (as well as the *Identity Exchange* and *Equinox* collaborations with Varble); and the performance *Birth: A Meditation* ("an attempt to return in my mind to the birth of my two children, and be the one giving birth").⁹² Overall, the featuring of his new relationship and his commitment to his children in these performances must be understood in conjunction with *Ring Piece* and *Flux Divorce* as marking both change and continuity in Hendricks's relationships, which he made both public and meditative.

Of the collaborative performances that Hendricks and Varble did over the following two years, perhaps the most important are the sequel works that form a trilogy with *Ring Piece*—*Silent Meditation London* and *Silent Meditation Aachen*, both in 1972 (Fig. 19). In these performances, Hendricks again produced diaries written over the course of a day sitting on a barrow while wearing his white tie formal evening dress. However, these new works were

collaborations with Varble, who added to the silent spectacle by walking blindfolded around the mound in one of his elaborate costumes (in London wearing the *Wooden Dress* and performing *Blind Walk* with Equinox; in Aachen, four costumes representing the four seasons). Maciunas's *Ring Piece* box was buried in these two European iterations. (When *Silent Meditation London* was performed at the International Carnival of Experimental Sound in August 1972, the barrow was sand not dirt.) These works are distinct and evolving, but (like their prototype, *Ring Piece*) they reflect on life's transformations and continuities.

Hendricks did not end up publishing the diaries of the *Silent Meditation* performances, but he did attempt to find a publisher for the London diary with *Mouth of the Dragon*, a homosexual poetry journal (indicating his more direct address to a queer counterpublic for these new works). Higgins, who was a contributor to the journal, introduced Hendricks to the journal's editor, Andrew Bifrost, to whom Hendricks explained that the London performance "a love poem to Stephen."⁹³ While the diary was not ultimately published, Hendricks did present readings of the London and Aachen journals on the New York radio station WBAI in 1973, further marking his ambitions to retroactively disclose the private content of the diaries to a public.⁹⁴ In the London diary, Hendricks frequently discussed Varble and their relationship, and the performance was intended, like *Equinox Piece*, to meditate on their emotional and artistic intertwinement. I cannot here offer a full analysis of the London diary, but there is a useful moment in which the performance of private spectacle from *Ring Piece* is recalled. Speaking of Equinox, the tortoise who accompanied them to the United Kingdom to be part of the performance, Hendricks wrote: "In a funny way I'm like Equinox—a caged animal in the zoo to be looked at—captive of my own mound of dirt. But I also give freedom—a license to the audience to look—play to their own voyeurism."⁹⁵

This is the theme of *Ring Piece* and its rumination on the process of coming out and becoming visible as queer—a process in which Hendricks's private life and resolve became exposed to gossip, surveillance, and stereotyping. Hendricks understood why this was both personally and politically important, but he weighed the costs of becoming an object of scrutiny and a representative of a category. I must again cite Delany here, who wrote about the double-bind of queer visibility that, "As a result of Stonewall and the redefinition of 'coming out,' I had to consider that, while I approved vigorously of 'coming out' as a necessary strategy to avoid blackmail and to promote liberation, there seemed to be an oppressive aspect of surveillance and containment intertwined with it."⁹⁶ And, later in the essay, he declared that coming out "for all the act's utopian thrust, [is constrained] to a condition of heterosexist surveillance."⁹⁷ This is an apt way to describe the endurance of spectacle and scrutiny in Hendricks's public performances of private reflection on transitions, imbrications, and continuities across his trilogy of silent meditations.

* * *

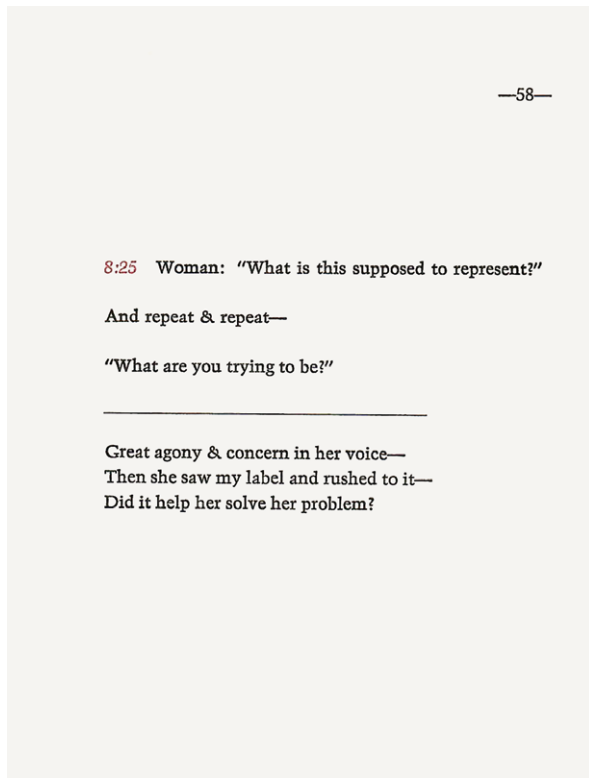
Ring Piece is both historically and theoretically significant because of the ways in which we can view it as being about both the historical moment of the post-Stonewall formation of the dominant rhetoric of the gay rights movement and about the endurance of becoming visible as queer. Its coupling of exposure and inscrutability performs a resistance to a winnowing rhetoric of gay identity in which making-public is celebrated as a scene of self-realization divorced from the life experiences that led one to that moment. For Hendricks (and Delany), such an account not only fails to give adequate accounting of one's experience, it ignores the complexity of life's pathways and intersections as well as obscures the surveillance and scrutiny that come with declaring oneself part of a (beleaguered and suspect) group identity.

Hendricks held that ends and beginnings were also always continuities. The multi-staged performance of *Ring Piece* allegorizes identity as an accruing and recursive temporal

process rather than as a stable category, and commitment is required to follow its moves from event to publication, from image to word, and from visible spectacle to intimate admission. In this regard, *Ring Piece* offers an exemplary case for how art history might register the politics of identity in different, less apparent, more successive, and durational ways. That is, with its activated relationship between event and documentation—and its unfolding of successive disclosures and their publics—the concerted deferral and ambivalent visibility of Hendricks's work presents an alternative to (and a lesson for) how art history has conventionally engaged with identity categories, such as sexuality, race, gender, and ability, solely through their readily apparent visual registrations. Because of its preoccupation with visual evidence and analysis, art history has tended to privilege a politics of visibility in its accounts of difference and of marginalized identities, tracking how and when they appear in (or are excluded from) the visual field and the canon. This pattern is especially true of queer and transgender art histories, and it has dominated accounts that advocate for these histories as well as those that try to dismiss or delimit them by demanding that gender or sexual differences make themselves immediately and starkly seen (and, consequently, open to surveillance or intrusive scrutiny). By contrast, many queer lives flourish by demurring, deferring, or protecting their disclosures. Such a skeptical relation to becoming visible runs counter to the rhetoric of coming out (and its emphasis on a single-issue definition of identity anchored in that watershed act), and I see Hendricks's work about the ambivalence of queer visibility—created in proximity to the inception of the modern lesbian and gay rights movement—as offering a case for how queer lives (and art) might exceed or evade categorizations of identity that are narrow, static, and homogenizing.

In claiming that *Ring Piece* thematizes the paradox of visibility that came to define the post-Stonewall LGBT rights movement, I know that I have sapped much of the poetry from Hendricks's performance. There is much more to be considered, not explained, in its humble beauty as an action and in the confessions of the diary. Hendricks would not have accounted for his work in the way I have here, and there are certainly other, less resolute, ways to imagine the performance and to read its unfolding in the form of Hendricks's own account of those twelve hours. I have read the text of *Ring Piece* in an invested manner in order to recast its observations of that day's experience in 1971, and I have done so by taking advantage of Hendricks's own commitments to a porous relationship between art and life, meaning and mundanity. I know these things, and I have done them in what I myself consider a transgression of the performance: I have made *visible* these queer themes. That contradiction is a considered one, and I have exposed the work's queer aspects (and their positing of ambivalence) in a manner that might seem not all that dissimilar to Johnston's good-natured outing of Hendricks in the *Village Voice*. I have pursued this paradoxical move because I think, much in the way Hendricks himself did in response to Johnston's call to come out, that a skepticism about visibility is different from hiding or erasure. Hendricks understood the political urgency of coming out and being visible, but he also faced the effects of public scrutiny and the flattening of a life into an identity. He engaged in acts of withholding, deferral, and intimate admission, and I see in the performance a demand that we acknowledge all that is obscured by a singular faith in coming out and claiming an identity. This essay—at the remove of some five decades and with its own purposefully crisscrossed chronological structure—is offered as another episode of *Ring Piece's* recursive enactment of resolve toward but ambivalence about queer visibility.

If I have tried too strenuously to draw out this context for *Ring Piece*, it is because I want to uphold its opacity and ambivalence as an untapped potential for a queer history of art—and for the ways in which all art histories come to recognize and track identities. *Ring*



Piece did not (and does not) look queer to everyone, yet it was. Histories of queer art have tended to privilege nonambivalence and visibility, with a resulting triumphal narrative of ever-increasing forthrightness and exposure. However, not all queer art appears as such at first blush, and *Ring Piece* models one version of a tactical dissemblance and sly aniconism that is an alternate current of queer art's history and potential. It does deserve a place in the narrative of the queer history of art in New York City, but it also is a reminder that there are many other queer forms of art and performance, which have not made themselves easily visible as such in that history.

If I could encapsulate the problem that I see *Ring Piece* addressing, it would be by pointing to the question—always unanswered—that was posed to Hendricks throughout that day (Fig. 20). The diary records three instances, but there were surely more. Nonplussed onlookers responded to this public spectacle of private reflection, yelling up at a beleaguered Hendricks, “What are you supposed to represent?”⁹⁸ That is a question only asked of those who are seen as performing as more than themselves.

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NOTES

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1. Published as Geoffrey Hendricks, *Ring Piece: The Journal of a Twelve Hour Silent Meditation* (West Glover, VT: Something Else Press, 1973).

2. *Ring Piece* is prescient to the burgeoning of queer art practices that spurn visibility, embrace afiguration, lean into dissemblance, refuse categorization, or vex protocols of evidence. I have discussed how recent work in abstraction addresses some of these concerns in David J. Getsy, “Ten Queer Theses on Abstraction,” in *Queer Abstraction*, ed. Jared Ledesma (Des Moines, IA: Des Moines Art Center, 2019), 65–75.

3. See Geoffrey Hendricks, ed., *Critical Mass: Happenings, Fluxus, Performance, Intermedia and Rutgers University 1958–1972* (New Brunswick, NJ: Mason Gross Art Galleries, Rutgers University, 2003).

4. For context, see Kristine Stiles, “Anomaly, Sky, Sex, and Psi in Fluxus,” in Hendricks, *Critical Mass*, 60–88.

5. Geoffrey Hendricks, *Between Two Points / Fra Due Poli* (Reggio Emilia: Edizioni Pari & Dispari, 1976), viii.

6. Geoffrey Hendricks, “Geoffrey Hendricks Interviewed by Lars Movin,” in *Geoffrey Hendricks: Day Into Night*, ed. Lise Seisbøll (Odense, Denmark: Kunsthallen Brandts Klædefabrik, 1993), 66.

7. See Steven F. Dansky, *Hot August Night / 1970: The Forgotten LGBT Riot* (Lexington, KY: Christopher Street Press, 2012) and the information-rich chronicle in Donn Teal, *The Gay Militants* (New York: Stein and Day, 1971).

8. This rhetorical shift is discussed in Samuel R. Delany, “Coming/Out,” in *Shorter Views: Queer Thoughts & The Politics of the Paraliterary* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1999), 67–97, which I examine at length later in this essay.

9. Richard Meyer, “Gay Power circa 1970: Visual Strategies for Sexual Revolution,” *GLQ* 12, no. 3 (2006): 447.

10. See “[Editorial Statement],” *Come Out!* 1, no. 1 (November 14, 1969): 1.

11. Among the many news reports and commentary, I would single out the impassioned essay by Vivian Gornick, “‘In Any Terms She Shall Choose’: Lesbians & Women’s Lib,” *Village Voice*, March 18, 1971, 5, 8.

12. Merle Miller, "What it Means To Be a Homosexual," *New York Times Magazine*, January 17, 1971, 9–11, 48–49, 57, 60.
13. Andrew Sarris, "Heteros Have Problems Too (1)," *Village Voice*, February 4, 1971, 5–6, 62; and "Heteros Have Problems Too (2)," *Village Voice*, February 11, 1971, 7, 10. In turn, a parody article was published about the Sarris-Miller-Johnston debate: Harold Nderland, "Asexuals Have Problems Too," *Village Voice*, February 25, 1971, 21. Interestingly, this article prompted a serious letter in defense of asexuality: "**Afraid to Ask," *Village Voice*, March 4, 1971, 4, 64.
14. Sarris, "Heteros Have Problems Too (1)," 6. Sarris not only misspelled her name but also belittled her as "Miss Johnson." Johnston had discussed her sexuality in her column since 1969, in particular (for the first anniversary of Stonewall) in Jill Johnston, "'Of This Pure But Irregular Passion,'" *Village Voice*, July 2, 1970, 29–30, 38–39, 55. Her columns were expanded upon in Jill Johnston, *Lesbian Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973).
15. Jill Johnston, "Lois Lane Is a Lesbian (1)," *Village Voice*, March 4, 1971, 9–10, 64; "Lois Lane Is a Lesbian (2)," *Village Voice*, March 11, 1971, 21, 28; and "Lois Lane Is a Lesbian (3)," *Village Voice*, March 25, 1971, 27–28, 38.
16. On the reception of Johnston's articles, see Martha Gever, *Entertaining Lesbians: Celebrity, Sexuality, and Self-Invention* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 89–92.
17. Johnston, "Lois Lane Is a Lesbian (1)," 64.
18. "Earlier [in 1971] Jill had written an article called 'Lois Lane is a Lesbian,' which was about her own coming out in a public sort of way. It was an article I clipped and carried around with me for a long long time, because it was very incisive and seminal. Jill became a very good friend." Geoffrey Hendricks and David J. Getsy, "Outing Queer Fluxus: Geoffrey Hendricks in Conversation with David J. Getsy," *PAJ: A Journal of Art and Performance* 127 (January 2021): 96. Hendricks earlier remarked, "I came to realize that the most personal meets the universal like red and purple on the color wheel, and of how Jill Johnston's writing have helped me in this realization." Hendricks, *Between Two Points*, 29.
19. This had been an incremental process. Hendricks said that "it sort of crystallized, came to the surface I guess around the time of Stonewall, or after Stonewall and the first gay march up to Central Park . . . we went with our kids [Bracken and Tyche] on our shoulders. And there in the house we had on 20th Street, [Ffarrabas] would have her consciousness raising groups with her women friends, Sidney Abbott and Kate Millett, and people like that." Oral history interview of Geoffrey Hendricks by Linda Yablonsky, August 17–18, 2016, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. The first Christopher Street Liberation Day March occurred on June 28, 1970. In multiple sources, he lists 1971 as the year he publicly came out. See, for instance, Hendricks, "Geoffrey Hendricks Interviewed by Lars Movin," 61. Johnston wrote that Hendricks first told a psychiatrist about his sexuality in 1958 (and was advised to suppress it) and that his gradual process of disclosure to friends began after 1969. Jill Johnston, "In the Meantime, Art was Happening," in Hendricks, *Critical Mass*, 169.
20. Geoffrey Hendricks, "On Love, Sexuality, Gender and Partnership: Thoughts for Conversation with David Getsy," 2016, unpublished manuscript, Geoffrey Hendricks Archive. The Gay Activists Alliance formed in the wake of Stonewall and established a community center at a decommissioned firehouse at 99 Wooster Street (from 1971 until arson destroyed it in 1974), which was the site of weekly dances that helped to build a more visible gay community. For context, see Teal, *The Gay Militants*; Barry D. Adam, "A Social History of Gay Politics," in *Gay Men: The Sociology of Male Homosexuality*, ed. Martin P. Levine (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 285–300; and Terence Kissack, "Freaking Fag Revolutionaries: New York's Gay Liberation Front, 1969–1971," *Radical History Review* 62 (1995): 103–34.
21. Hendricks, *Between Two Points*, 28.
22. Geoffrey Hendricks and Dick Higgins, *A 22 Year Old Manuscript Found in Attic of Artist's New York Residence* (New York: Money for Food Press, 1999), n.p.
23. Oral history interview of Geoffrey Hendricks by Linda Yablonsky, August 17–18, 2016, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
24. "John [Lennon] and Yoko [Ono] arrived in a limousine and parked in front, which was exciting for all my neighbors on the block. They came in and had some little document or picture or something that was cut in half. John gave me his half, 'For Geoff, love John.' Yoko gave her half to Nye." Hendricks and Getsy, "Outing Queer Fluxus," 96–97.
25. Hendricks, *Between Two Points*, 28.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Jill Johnston, "Between Sky and Earth [1992]," in *Secret Lives in Art: Essays* (Chicago: A Cappella Books, 1994), 154.
28. Jill Johnston, "Socials wit Jog & Yokel," *Village Voice*, July 1, 1971, 26. This account was later included in Johnston, *Lesbian Nation*, 210.
29. Johnston, "Between Sky and Earth," 154. In 1993, Hendricks staged a *Fluxprocession* in celebration of Johnston's marriage to Ingrid Nyeboe in Odense, Denmark (at that time the only country in the world to recognize same-gender marriage as legal). See Jill Johnston, "Wedding in Denmark," *Art in America* 82, no. 6 (June 1994): 75–76, and, for analysis of this event, Mary T. Conway, "A Becoming Queer Aesthetic," *Discourse* 26, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 66–89.
30. Johnston, "In the Meantime, Art was Happening," 169.
31. Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 73.
32. *Ibid.*, 74.
33. For further on Johnston's queer counterpublic, see Sara Warner, *Acts of Gaiety: LGBT Performance and the Politics of Pleasure* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 105–38; Gever, *Entertaining Lesbians*; and José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 115–30.
34. Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 52.
35. See chronology in Hendricks, *Between Two Points*, 111.
36. The bells are discussed in Hendricks, *Ring Piece*, 2–6.
37. Hendricks, "Geoffrey Hendricks Interviewed by Lars Movin," 61.
38. Hendricks, *Ring Piece*, 1.
39. See Hannah B. Higgins, "Live Art in the Eternal Network: The Annual New York Avant-Garde Festivals," in *A Feast of Astonishments: Charlotte Moorman and the Avant-Garde, 1960s–1980s*, ed. Lisa Graziose Corrin and Corinne Granof, exh. cat. (Evanston, IL: Block Museum of Art, 2016), 61–91.
40. See descriptions in Stephen Varble, "Interview with Charlotte Moorman on the Avant-Garde Festivals [1973]," in Hendricks, ed., *Critical Mass*, 179–80; and Joan Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist: The Improbable Life of Charlotte Moorman* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014), 261–65.
41. Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist*, 262–64; and Fred McDarrah, "Down to His Last Mouse," *Village Voice*, November 25, 1971, 90.
42. Carman Moore, "That Festival Was Needed," *Village Voice*, December 9, 1971, 49.
43. I thank Chloe Chapin for her advice on this point.
44. Elizabeth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle, "Interview with Geoff Hendricks," *Total Art Journal* 1, no. 1 (2011): 6.
45. McDarrah, "Down to His Last Mouse," 90–91.
46. Hendricks, *Ring Piece*, 20.
47. This score was inspired by an episode in which Higgins tripped while walking upstairs in his Vermont farmhouse, frightening two white mice. "a unique thing, since i have a cat. it seemed to me there were mice all over the place," he recalled. At the festival, Higgins sat in a corner of the Armory, dressed in white. To anyone who approached him there, he handed out a piece of paper with a single question; "And how are some of the ways you go upstairs?" Responses are recounted in Dick Higgins, "Mice All Over The Place," *Shantih* 1, no. 4/2.1 (Winter/Spring 1972): 8–10.
48. Hendricks later recalled that their bond began from their first meeting in the early 1960s: "It was subliminal at that point, certainly not expressed with either of us, but a quiet queer male bonding, unrecognized, un-visualized was beginning to take place. He was the other queer Fluxus artist." Stephens and Sprinkle, "Interview with Geoff Hendricks," 11. By the early 1970s, Higgins was also creating work that dealt openly with homosexuality, such as Dick Higgins, *Amigo* (Barton, VT: Unpublished Editions, 1972). See also Hannah B. Higgins, "Eleven Snapshots of Dick Higgins," in *Intermedia: The Dick Higgins Collections at UMBC*, ed. Lisa Moren, exh. cat. (Baltimore, MD: Albin O. Juhn Library & Gallery, 2003), 20–37. One of the key moments in Hendricks's obituary of Higgins was their confluence at the 1971 Avant Garde Festival. Geoffrey Hendricks, "Dick Higgins (1938–1998)," *Art on Paper* 3, no. 3 (January–February 1999), 24–25.
49. Hendricks, *Ring Piece*, 76.
50. *Ibid.*, 13.
51. Geoffrey Hendricks, "On Consciousness," interview by Ethan Shoshan, 2012, for the curatorial project *StrAnge*

Birds, Center for Book Arts, New York. <https://www.disiterate.com/art/strange-birds-2012>.

52. Hendricks, *Ring Piece*, 8. He later remarked that he “liked this idea of doing something that’s about this kind of void—this negative. You do it and it’s there but then it’s not used. And so it takes on a different kind of a life and a different kind of transformation.” Hendricks in Shoshan, *StrAnge Birds*.

53. Hendricks, *Between Two Points*, 111.

54. Hendricks, *Ring Piece*, 36.

55. Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

56. *Ibid.*, 61.

57. Hendricks, *Ring Piece*, 37.

58. *Ibid.*, 66.

59. *Ibid.*, 57.

60. Steve Balkin, addressing the addition of the missing quotation marks in the original, relayed this in conversations with me on July 1 and 9, 2021.

61. Hendricks, *Ring Piece*, 14, 30, 39, 56.

62. *Ibid.*, 14.

63. *Ibid.*, 35.

64. *Ibid.*, 16.

65. For a discussion of the contentious interdependence of private and public, see Phillip Brian Harper, *Private Affairs: Critical Ventures in the Culture of Social Relations* (New York: New York University Press, 1999). See also chapter 1 of Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*.

66. Lawrence Alloway, “Artists as Writers, Part Two: The Realm of Language,” *Artforum* (April 1974), 33.

67. Hendricks, *Ring Piece*, 45.

68. Hendricks, *Ring Piece*, n.p.

69. *Ibid.*, 46.

70. *Ibid.*, 78.

71. “A wake for the death of my marriage—the whole form reminiscent of tomb sculpture. (End of Romeo & Juliette),” *ibid.*, 14. It is worth noting that Hendricks did graduate work in art history at Columbia University under Rudolf Wittkower, studying ceiling paintings of Baroque churches—an experience that influenced his practice of sky painting.

72. Hendricks, *Between Two Points*, n.p.

73. From “Some Thoughts on Being Between Two Points,” in Hendricks, *Between Two Points*, v.

74. Hendricks had first seen Cage lecture in the early 1950s. Many of the Fluxus artists (but not Hendricks) met in a composition class taught by Cage in 1958–59. For Cage and Zen, see Kay Larson, *Where the Heart Beats: John Cage, Zen Buddhism, and the Inner Life of Artists* (New York: Penguin, 2012).

75. Shauna McCabe, “Picnic Everyday & Every Way: Art & Life, Bodies & Place,” in *Between Earth & Sky: In Knowing One, One Will Know the Other*, ed. Shauna

McCabe, exh. cat. (Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island: Confederation Centre Art Gallery, 2003), 15.

76. Hendricks and Higgins, *A 22 Year Old Manuscript*, 4.

77. Hendricks, *Between Two Points*, v.

78. Johnston, “Between Sky and Earth,” 157.

79. A useful snapshot is Laud Humphreys, *Out of the Closets: The Sociology of Homosexual Liberation* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972).

80. I offer a cautious comparison to Johnston, who felt the need to disavow her role as mother in the years of her most ardent lesbian activism, when her two children merely “dot the printscape of these early ‘70s essays like fugitive presences.” Addressing a similar impasse to Hendricks’s, she noted, “Before Stonewall, before 1980 really, motherhood and a lesbian existence were a contradiction in terms. . . . Under patriarchy, I had lost my children.” Jill Johnston, “Introduction,” in *Admission Accomplished: The Lesbian Nation Years (1970–75)* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1998), n.p.

81. Delany, “Coming/Out,” 74.

82. *Ibid.*, 67.

83. In a withering critique of the racist and exclusionary undertones of this rhetoric, Marlon B. Ross argues, “The ‘coming out’ or closet paradigm has been such a compelling way of fixing homosexual identification exactly because it enables this powerful narrative of progress, not only in terms of the psychosexual development of an individual and the sociopolitical birth and growth of a legitimate sexual minority group, but also more fundamentally as a doorway marking the threshold between up-to-date fashions of sexuality and all the outmoded, anachronistic others. This narrative of progress carries the residue, and occasionally the outright intention, borne within evolutionary notions of the uneven development of the races from primitive darkness to civilized enlightenment.” Marlon B. Ross, “Beyond the Closet as Raceless Paradigm,” in *Black Queer Studies*, ed. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 163.

84. As José Esteban Muñoz asserted in his discussions of Hendricks’s contemporaries (who, like him, postulated future forms of queerness in response to what was missing in the present), “Although the turn to the identitarian was important and even historically necessary [after Stonewall], it is equally important to reflect on what was lost by this particular process of formalization.” Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 115. Hendricks’s *Ring Piece* was indebted to the identitarian uprising of Stonewall, but it did not simply celebrate that paradigm shift.

85. Delany, “Coming/Out,” 88.

86. Ross, “Beyond the Closet as Raceless Paradigm,” 180. More recently, a critique of the disclosure imperative and the single-issue presumptions of the gay rights movement (and queer theory) is offered in C. Riley Snorton, *Nobody Is Supposed to Know: Black Sexuality on the Down Low* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

87. I first began interviewing Hendricks in 2011 for my work on what became the 2018 retrospective *Rubbish and Dreams: The Genderqueer Performance Art of Stephen Varble* at the Leslie-Lohman Museum and a related book project

(in progress). For a brief discussion of Varble’s work, see David J. Getsy, “Stephen Varble’s Xerographic Dreams,” in *Stephen Varble: An Antidote to Nature’s Ruin on this Heavenly Globe, Prints and Video from the Early 1980s*, exh. cat. (Lexington, KY: Institute 193, 2018), 3–28.

88. Hendricks and Getsy, “Outing Queer Fluxus,” 127–28.

89. Geoffrey Hendricks, *From Sea to Sky: Recasting the Riace Bronzes* (Verona: Francesco Conz Archive and Editions with Money for Food Press, New York, 2005), 35. In an unpublished text in the Visual AIDS Archive, Hendricks said *Equinox Piece* was “on one level our marriage ceremony.” Hendricks reiterated this in an interview with me on October 24, 2011.

90. Technically, March 20, 1972, was the vernal equinox, but some calendars regularly listed the 21st as each year’s official date. Hendricks recalled that *Equinox Piece for Stephen* “was for the Vernal Equinox. It’s something that we planned to take place at sunrise down at Jones Beach. I was in the water, naked, emerging out of the water, and come and meet Stephen, and we find this tortoise that we planted in the dunes or in beach grass and so forth, that we then take back with us to Billy Apple’s space on 23rd Street. We went back there and then performed throughout the whole day there. I was cutting wood, and I had built a small fire. Stephen was hanging lettuce leaves from clotheslines. We were interacting in different ways. This was all imagery that Stephen and I developed in our performances together.” Hendricks and Getsy, “Outing Queer Fluxus,” 98.

91. Tom Parrish recalled how cold it was on the beach that morning. Nevertheless, the image of Varble “in the *Wooden Dress*, it was fantastic.” Author’s interview with Tom Parrish, May 28, 2020.

92. Flier for *Beginnings*, Apple Gallery, March 21–25, 1972. Geoffrey Hendricks Archive.

93. Geoffrey Hendricks to Andrew Bifrost, December 29, 1975. Geoffrey Hendricks Archive.

94. For Pacifica Radio, WBAI New York, Geoffrey Hendricks and Mimi Anderson produced *Silent Meditation London* (broadcast on July 30, 1973) and *Silent Meditation Aachen* (on August 20, 1973). Recordings archived in the Geoffrey Hendricks Archive and the Leslie-Lohman Museum. These readings of these unpublished journals were preceded, on May 29, 1973, by a broadcast marking the publication of the *Ring Piece* book, which was read on air to the accompaniment of “festival sounds from a videotape by Shirley Clarke.” Mailer in the collection of David Platzker / Specific Object, New York.

95. Edited transcript of *Silent Meditation London* diary, 1972, Geoffrey Hendricks Archive. Hendricks recalled, “Equinox traveled with us, and at British customs there was the question of should it be quarantined but got through because we explained it was a musical instrument in a performance and would be with us the whole time and it would leave when we went.” Geoffrey Hendricks, email message to author, December 25, 2017.

96. Delany, “Coming/Out,” 90–91.

97. *Ibid.*, 96–97.

98. Hendricks, *Ring Piece*, 37. The variant forms “what is this supposed to represent” are on pages 40 and 58.