

# N O T H I N G : A User's Manual

An Introductory Essay and Preliminary Bibliography  
Compiled by Information As Material

Yoko Ono's 1963 *Tape Piece II/ Room Piece* instructs: "take the sound of the room breathing."<sup>1</sup> It goes on to stipulate an evenly-spaced frequency of daily auscultations, as if the participant were a nurse on rounds, tasked with monitoring the interior architecture's vital signs: "1. at dawn/ 2. in the morning/ 3. in the afternoon/ 4. in the evening/ 5. before dawn." Like contemporaneous compositions by La Monte Young and John Cage, *Room Piece* takes part in the development of what Seth Kim-Cohen has termed a "non-cochlear" sonic art: interactions that extend beyond mere hearing and might not be humanly audible at all.<sup>2</sup> From another perspective, Ono's figuration of pulmonary chambers recognizes the ambient frequencies deflected by any architecture in its capacity as a resonant space. Those same properties of wave reflection and interference were later amplified by Alvin Lucier's landmark *I Am Sitting in a Room* (1969) and more recently by Jakob Kirkegaard's *4 Rooms* (2006), in which a recording of the ambient sounds in an empty room are played back into that empty room and rerecorded, with the process repeated until the initial silence returns as swells of surf-like hiss above a rumbling sonic wash. What appears to be empty space, Ono and Kirkegaard reminds us, is alive with something to which we were simply not paying sufficient attention. Furthermore, the final imperative of Ono's score, "bottle the smell of the room of that particular hour as well," aligns her work with two of Marcel Duchamp's enigmatic late readymades: the empty 50cc ampoule *Air d'Paris* (1919) and the relabeled perfume bottle *Belle Haleine eau de Voilette* (1921).<sup>3</sup> One could continue to trace other associations, but the point is that for a work which seems to have nothing to it, *Room Piece* gestures toward a surprising number of intertexts. Moreover, implicit in Ono's diurnal schedule is the assumption that whether audible or not, the sound of the room will fluctuate — that "nothing" is in fact fluid and variable and varied and multiple.

With that assumption of multiplicity in mind, the bibliography that follows this essay presents a theoretical and historical context for the recurrent turn to various modes of absence and absenting in contemporary art. It is meant to serve as a prêt-à-lire syllabus for an introductory open-learning module and as a resource for seminars in art history, theory, and praxis. In part, it seeks to indicate the surprisingly wide range of significations that have been assigned to aporiae which might on first thought all seem to be indistinguishably alike: from a proxy communication of the unspeakable to an existentialist surrender in the face of a dire sense of emptiness; from metaphysical refusal to a spiritual meditation; from the structural conditions of form to a range of metaphoric and allegorical themes; from the

social and institutional focus of anti-object practices to the exaggeration of a substrate's facture; from the overwhelmingly excessive to the nearly insufficient. In short, as these texts collectively attest, any single definition of *nothing* collapses under the weight of the competing and contested meanings of the various multiple *noughts* that have been made available to contemporary artistic practice by a host of theorists, writers and artists. The texts listed in our preliminary bibliography document how squarely the concept of nothing lies at the heart of a number of otherwise quite different aesthetics: from Dada to Abstract Expressionism; from the Cage circle and Fluxus to monochrome abstraction; from minimalism to conceptual art; from Western metaphysics to Eastern cosmology; from performance to institutional critique, artists' books to cinema. Since contemporary art practices either trace their lineages to these modernist and post-modernist traditions or emerge as a reaction against those traditions, a clearer understanding of the dynamic operation of nothingness in those twentieth-century movements can lead to a richer and more nuanced understanding of the arts today.

The bulk of the material listed below, however, focuses on the twenty-first century, where one can see how the continued symbolic power of nothing motivates, underwrites, and frames the diversity of contemporary art and critical thought (indeed, an entire issue of a scholarly journal was recently devoted to the topic).<sup>4</sup> Unleashed into arenas that all have their origins in figuration, presentation, and communication (work that in one way or another puts something forward, issues a statement, instigates a dialogue, or merely purports to offer some thing in some way), nothing — a refusal to offer, an offer without object, a full negation or partial withdrawal — poses a challenge to those assumptions about the fundamental operation of the arts, and it proposes a radical alternative to work grounded in figurative, communicative, or semantic models. In the process, moreover, an insistence on the paradoxically positive value of "nothing" sets into motion a series of provocative and productive dialectic operations between a number of charged poles: dissolution and materiality; form and content; format and form; evacuation and a plenitude; the blockage of participation and the invitation to fill in a blank; censorship and assertion; the impossibility of witness and the witnessing of the unspeakable; nihilism and spiritual faith.

To begin with, focusing on nothing invites one to speculate on what might have been there in place of the announced or recognized absence, as well as on what remains despite that absence. Lucy Lippard famously characterized the period from 1966 to 1972 as

the time of the "dematerialization" of the art object.<sup>5</sup> Those *anni mirabiles* announced the revolution in artistic forms and modes of exhibition which set the terms for our current art world by reconceptualizing the relationships between thinking and viewing, object and process, artists and audience. That reconceptualization shifted the focus from merely looking at objects to thinking about ideas, and it nominated the intellectual sophistication of a project over and above the aesthetic craft of a polished product. In the process, the denigration of art objects ("secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious," as Lippard described their demoted forms) pointed towards the logical conclusion that an objects' attributes — and ultimately even the object itself — might be dispensed with entirely, leaving nothing behind.<sup>6</sup> Ironically, however, the most abstract and minimal works of conceptual art depended precisely on their material supports and the specifics of their environments, which were only cast into greater relief by the withdrawal of other elements. Consider, for an iconic instance, Robert Rauschenberg's 1951 *White Paintings*. Decades before Lippard's "six years," his series of paintings themselves were deprecated in the same way as her "dematerialized" objects: simple, unremarkable stretched canvases with a layer of white commercial house-paint unpretentiously distributed with a roller in a deskilled application (Rauschenberg insisted that anyone could apply the paint). But the minimal simplicity of that uninflected achromatic object is precisely what allowed John Cage to notice the shadows and dust motes that transformed the paintings into animated works that could enter into dialogue with film and dance as much as with easel painting.<sup>7</sup> When the ostensible "content" of a work is absent, its formal properties step up to assume the role; where nothing is proffered, nothingness itself becomes the subject. From Kasimir Malevich's *White on White* (1918) to David Batchelor's *Found Monochromes* (1997, ongoing), the history of the monochrome plane repeatedly demonstrates this law of conservation within the symbolic economy of the artwork. At its most abstract, art reveals the most literal and material conditions of its own possibility.

Similarly, clearing away any particular concrete image or object allows one to focus on a work's abstract categorical status, its cultural context, and its social function. If one of the defining roles of the avant-garde is to interrogate the category of art, then a means of focusing on that category without being distracted by particulars will be one of its most effective tactics. The epistemological deployment of nothing where the art object is expected is one of those means. By the same token, nothing has been an effective tool in the critique

of institutions. In 1974, for example, Michael Asher had the privacy wall separating the exhibition space and the office space of the Claire Copley Gallery (Los Angeles) removed, thereby architecturally and visually connecting the otherwise segregated commercial and aesthetic activities taking place in the gallery, putting office work on display as performance art and foregrounding quotidian commercial activities as special events. More subtle removals had been proposed a few years earlier by Lawrence Weiner. The descriptive titles of two works in his 1968 textual exhibition *Statements* stipulate the dimensions of their absences: *A Square Removed from a Rug in Use*, and *A 36" x 36" Removal to the Lathing or Support Wall of Plaster or Wallboard from a Wall*. As Benjamin Buchloh observes:

Both interventions [ . . . ] inscribe themselves in the support surfaces of the institutions and/or the home which that tradition had always disavowed. The carpet (presumably for sculpture) and the wall (for painting), which idealist aesthetics always declares as mere "supplements," are foregrounded here not only as parts of their material basis but as the inevitable future location of the work [ . . . ] neither one of these surfaces could ever be considered to be independent from their institutional location, since the physical inscription into each particular surface inevitably generates contextual readings dependent upon the institutional conventions and the particular use of those surfaces in place.<sup>8</sup>

Given the particularity of those contextual readings, and the visual bias that still pertains to terms like "display" and "exhibition," the curatorial problems posed by works predicated on nothing are both challenging and revealing. As the second section of the bibliography illustrates, such works force curators to confront fundamental questions about the limits of authenticity, documentation, replication and re-enactment, and the specificity of sites. As with Weiner's geometric removals, those sites have aesthetic as well as political resonances. Matt Sheridan Smith's exhibitions of empty museum display plinths, for instance, reminds us that the supports for vitrines and sculptures — pieces of furniture we are not normally meant to contemplate beyond trying to avoid knocking into them — bear a striking resemblance to the minimalist sculpture that populated galleries in the late 1960s. Moreover, exhibitions of nothing have foregrounded not only the role of the audience in creating or completing a "work," but also the conventions and implicit contracts that silently define norms of participation and interaction, as well as an audience's own expectations of what they are owed in a cultural economy by galleries, artists and art. Graciela Carnevale's *Acción del encierro* (Buenos Aires, 1968), for instance, begins like many of the "empty gallery" exhibits

mentioned in the readings here, but rather than leaving gallery-goers to puzzle over what they were meant to see, or locking them out of a closed gallery altogether, she locked the unsuspecting audience *inside* the gallery. Carnevale's *Action* turned the exhibition "opening" into an enclosing, and by doing so she redefined the social event of privileged spectatorship as a kind of false imprisonment.

Even in less violent and physically extreme circumstances, when faced with nothing audiences often realize that the totalizing impassiveness of an absence can seem like a foreclosure or refusal; but the space opened by nothing can also provide the ground for intervention and new activity. The audience attending a performance of John Cage's notorious 4'33", for instance, might feel cheated, or deprived of hearing a virtuoso musician play an instrument; but they might also feel liberated and promoted by the reversal that puts them effectively on stage, making them responsible for the sounds they would normally attempt to suppress and ignore in other concert settings. With the same dual power of blocking and opening, nothing can be a method of censorship, an exercise of silencing power, but it can also be a resistant refusal to play along according to the rules of a dominant discourse. Ken Gonzales-Day's *Erased Lynching Series* (2000-2013), for example, engages some of the public silences and historical under-representations in American history by reprinting photographs of lynchings in which the image of the victim and rope have been removed. With a similar logic, allegories of nothing can offer a way out of the logical impasse of how one might express the inexpressible and give voice to what has been rendered unspeakable through trauma, ethical prohibition, historical amnesia, or affective extremes. With logics similar to the typographic design of Gérard Wajcman's novel *L'interdit* (1986), which prints only fragmentary footnotes running below otherwise blank pages as one response to the manifold problems of representing the Shoah, a number of public memorials have made recourse to sculptural absences and architectural voids.<sup>9</sup> Horst Hoheisel's negative-form monuments, for instance, include a 1987 Kassel project memorializing a fountain destroyed by Nazi's, but rather than rebuilding the fountain or raising a monument Hoheisel sunk an inverted, hollow-concrete cast of the original fountain form twelve-meters deep below the site of the vandalized original. Similarly, Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz's *Monument Against Fascism* (Hamburg, 1986) began as a galvanized-steel column that the public could inscribe as a petition against fascism while it slowly sank into the ground over the course of a decade. With even less to show, Gerz's *2,146 Stones: Monument Against Racism* (Saarbrücken,

1990) surreptitiously repaved the cobblestones of a public square after secretly inscribing the underside of certain cobbles with the names of Nazi-desecrated Jewish cemeteries, leaving nothing on display but everything underfoot.

As our preliminary reading list demonstrates, nothing has been fetishized as the ensign of existentialist despair and nihilist denial, but it has also served as a foundational principle for religious and spiritual affirmation, from Jewish mysticism to Buddhism to personal expressions of faith. Eva Hesse's *Hang Up* (1966), for instance, consists of an oversized, excessively cloth-wrapped vacant frame with a looping cable awkwardly protruding into the gallery as if making an haphazard bid to impound the spectators' space in front of an absent picture — where the insistent frame frames nothing other than a view of the gallery wall behind it. Hesse declared the work to be:

the most ridiculous structure that I ever made and that is why it is really good. It has a kind of depth I don't always achieve and that is the kind of depth or soul or absurdity or life or meaning or feeling or intellect that I want to get.<sup>10</sup>

With a similar combination of casual sweep and sequester, Mira Schendel's *Trenzinho* (1965) — a delicate concatenation of blank Japanese paper sheets strung on nylon thread between adjacent gallery walls — has been described as an expression of Schendel's "own interpretation of the meaning of nothingness, of loneliness, of being alone in the world."<sup>11</sup> The similarly lyrical repetitions of Agnes Martin's abstract geometry of parallel lines on off-white canvases have also been understood as manifestations of a philosophical reflection of nothingness and an emptying of the ego, or as a visualization of the ideas voiced in her notes: "humility, [. . .]/ she does not do anything/ all of her ways are empty."<sup>12</sup> An experience of negation without lack has also been described as the encounter with nothingness elicited by Martin's canvases, which shape the awareness of their own contemplative viewers until they achieve "a fluid, pacific, and expansive state of concentration, or a kind of full emptiness."<sup>13</sup>

Nothing, accordingly, serves as a litmus test for our cultural assumptions and ideologies, and it provides a secure purchase on the poetics behind a range of Non-Western art and its Western derivatives (including Martin's Taoist evacuation of the ego and the Zen resonance of Ono's *Room Piece*, which directly inflected the ostensibly "blank" works of Ono's Fluxus colleagues Ken Friedman, Nam June Paik, and John Cage). "I have nothing to

say," as Cage famously put it, taking up the idiom and following it with a dismantling turn and koan-like twist: "and I am saying it." Echoes of Eastern philosophies aside, the torque on Cage's sentence comes from the double duty *nothing* performs as both a metaphorical concept and literal state. This duality — between "the nothing that is not there and the nothing that is," as Wallace Stevens puts it in the final line of his poem "The Snow Man" — was one of the key concepts animating the radical modernism toasted by Stéphane Mallarmé in a salute to "n'importe ce qui valut le blanc souci de notre toile [whatever was worthy of the white attention of our canvas]."<sup>14</sup> Recall, for instance, the second section of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which theatricalizes the "nervousness" that for many exemplified the modern condition:

"What is that noise?"  
The wind under the door.  
"What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?"  
Nothing again nothing.  
"Do  
"You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember  
Nothing?"<sup>15</sup>

Or, as Virginia Woolf narrativized the disquieting, *unheimlich* indeterminacy of a personified modernist Nothing in the second section of *To the Lighthouse*: "Nothing stirred in the drawing-room or in the dining-room or on the staircase...."<sup>16</sup> A decade later, in *Everybody's Autobiography*, Gertrude Stein would retain a similarly palpable and positive sense of "nothing," insisting on its value: "it takes a lot of time," Stein explained, "to be a genius, you have to sit around so much doing nothing, really doing nothing"; later in the book, Stein avers: "generally speaking anybody is more interesting doing nothing than doing anything."<sup>17</sup> All of these statements, however, are complicated by a pervasive modernist racial rhetoric that equated nothingness with blackness.<sup>18</sup> In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, for example, Stein declares that African-Americans "were not suffering from persecution, they were suffering from nothingness."<sup>19</sup> William Carlos Williams, similarly, asserts: "When they [*sc.* African-Americans] try to make their race an issue — it is nothing. In a chorus singing *Trovatore*, they are nothing. But saying *nothing*, dancing *nothing*, 'NOBODY,' it is a quality."<sup>20</sup> The ability of nothing to receive such strong and paradoxical cultural coding, and to undertake so much political work, should remind us to read the texts in the following bibliography with a critical, historicist ear — and to refrain from too hastily imposing our

own preconceptions about nothingness on the surprisingly heterogeneous significations and symbolic powers the concept has held.

In the end, we should also remember that if everything has been said before, nothing has as well. In the early eighteenth century, Louis Coquelet penned an entire book as an encomium to Nothing, in which he argued:

Mais non seulement il vaut mieux parler de Rien, préférablement à tout ce qui de dit et s'écrit parmi nous la plupart du temps, mais j'ose encore soutenir que Rien est digne de toutes nos louanges par lui-même, et qu'on ne doit jamais oublier Rien, quant il s'agit de préconiser le mérite et la vertu [. . .] Rien souvent nous paraît quelque chose, et quelque chose souvent nous paraît rien. Rien se trouve partout, et ne réside nulle part.

But not only is it better to speak of Nothing, better in fact than most of what is said and written in our society, but I venture to propose that Nothing is worthy of all our praises on its own terms, and that we must never forget Nothing when it comes to advocating for merit and virtue [. . .] Nothing often appears to us as something, and something often seems in the end to be nothing after all. Nothing is everywhere and resides nowhere.<sup>21</sup>

Even as it can never quite be fixed, since it "resides nowhere," Nothing, for Coquelet, is ubiquitous, and in structural terms an overwhelming plenitude often has the same effects as nothingness' complete evacuation. To put this in concrete terms, like the difference between anechoic silence and white-noise static, the practical difference between Yves Klein's *Le Vide* (1958) and Arman's *Le Plein* (1960) was negligible; the former emptied a gallery of objects while the latter heaped it so full of detritus it could not be entered, but both obviated the ostensible function of the Galerie Iris Clert in Paris: to accommodate spectators who wished to view art. These twin poles — the absence of particulars and the overwhelming abundance of details so that nothing in particular can be properly comprehended — work dialectically toward the same end. Accordingly, nothing and everything can operate as interchangeable terms in certain systems, and so many of the claims that follow here in the name of nothing might apply equally as well to the sublime of the infinite. "Every something," as John Cage argued, following a metaphysics long familiar to Indian and East Asian philosophies, "is an echo of nothing."<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, a similar exchange also operates contextually. As the idea of the artwork came, over the course of the twentieth century, to engage and accommodate the everyday, merging with quotidian experience via deskilled activities and relational aesthetics, art praxes that might conceivably encompass anything — including nothing at all

— ultimately threatened to evacuate themselves into the extremes of their own possibility. As Cuban filmmaker Julio García Espinosa predicted in 1969: "el arte no va a desaparecer en la nada, va a desaparecer en el todo [art is not going to disappear into nothingness, it is going to disappear into everything]."<sup>23</sup>

Like Coquelet's elegy, the curriculum mapped by the following bibliography refuses to nothing nothing (to employ the rare transitive use of the verb: "to reduce to nothing; to consider or treat as worthless or unimportant").<sup>24</sup> Instead, this preliminary course of reading attempts to sketch the kind of volume that Gustave Flaubert dreamt of one day writing. Flaubert confessed: "ce qui me semble beau, ce que je voudrais faire, c'est un livre sur rien [what seems beautiful to me, what I would like to make, is a book about nothing]."<sup>25</sup> Flaubert had closely studied the work of the stern seventeenth-century critic Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, and he would have known Boileau-Despréaux's well-turned phrasing of the popular maxim: "quand on n'a plus rien, il faut tout hasarder [when you have nothing, you must risk everything]."<sup>26</sup> What follows are thus the tokens of a series of serious wagers, however playfully their games are engaged.

# Why is there something rather than nothing?

Gottfried Wilhelm Freiherr von Leibniz

[G. W. Leibniz: Philosophical Essay, trans. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989): 210]

Nor is there any void, for void is nothing, and nothing cannot be. Nor does it [sc. what is] move, for it has no place to which it can withdraw, but is full. If there were void, it would withdraw to the void; but since there is not void, it has nowhere to withdraw to.

Melissus of Samos

[*A History of Greek Philosophy Vol. 2: The Presocratic tradition from Parmenides to Democritus*, ed. WKC Guthrie (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1965): 104]

It seems that when we say *that which is not*, we don't say something contrary to *that which is*, but only something different from it.

Plato

[*The Sophist*, 257b *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997): 280]

## Section I: Thinking Nothing of It

Roy Sorensen: from "Nothingness," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2012), Edward N. Zalta (ed.) <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/nothingness/>>.

Parmenides (Fragment 6), trans, David Gallop: *Parmenides of Elea: Fragments* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984): 61.

Blaise Pascal: from *Pensées*, in *Thoughts*, trans. W. F. Trotter (NY: Collier, 1910): 28.

Immanuel Kant: from *Critique of Pure Reason*, in *Eighteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Lewis White Beck (New York: Free Press, 1966): 288-289.

Martin Heidegger: from *Letter to Ernst Jünger, "Concerning 'The Line'"*, in *Philosophical and Political Writings*, ed. Manfred Stassen (NY: Continuum 2003): 120-142.

Bracha Ettinger Lichtenberg: "This is the Desert, Nothing Strikes Root Here: A Talk with Edmond Jabès," *Routes Of Wandering: Nomadism, Voyages and Transition in Contemporary Israeli Art*, ed. Sarit Shapira (Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 1991): 246–256.

Rachel Elior: from "Hasidism: Historical Continuity and Spiritual Change," *Gershom Scholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism: 50 Years After*, ed. Peter Schaeffer and Joseph Dan (Tübingen: Mohn, 1993): 321-323.

Daniel Matt: from "Ayin: The concept of nothingness in Jewish mysticism", *Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*, ed. Robert K. Forman (Oxford, 1990): 121 to 125, i.e. opening to "even being cannot be there" (125) and 127-128 i.e. from "Maimonedes did not endorse..." to "...is negated of every conception" and 131-134, i.e. "the deepest mystery of the Sefirotic process" to "...becomes visible for a fleeting moment."

Ludwig Wittgenstein: from *Philosophical Investigations* § 55-59, in *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958): 27-29.

Roland Barthes: from "The Bourgeoisie As a Joint-Stock Company," *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1972): 137-145.

Roland Barthes: from *Neutral*, trans. Rosalind E. Krauss and Denis Hollier (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005): 38; 39; 69.

Friedrich Nietzsche: "The Genealogy of Morals, Essay III, Section 28," *The Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989): 162-163.

Gilles Deleuze: "Nihilism," *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983): 147-159.

Jean-Paul Sartre: "Presence to Self," *Being and Nothingness: an essay on phenomenological ontology* trans. Hazel Barnes (NY: Philosophical Library, 1956): 73-79.

Julia Kristeva: "The Semiotic Chora Ordering the Drives," and "Husserl's Meaning: A Natural Thesis Commanded by the Judging Subject," *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984): 25-37.

Jacques Derrida from "The Double Session," *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Continuum, 2004): 254-262 and 264-265; i.e. from "What we will thus be concerned with here" to "...language whose gambol this is" and from "In the constellation of blanks" to "...very act of separating from it".

Jean-François Lyotard: from "Avant-Garde," *The Inhuman*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991): 89-93. i.e. from "In 1950-1, Barnett Baruch Newman...." to "sublime any more."

Michel Foucault: from "Madness, Absence of Work," *Critical Inquiry* 21: 2 (Winter, 1995): 293-296; i.e. from "To say that madness is disappearing today" to "where nothing is said."

Luce Irigaray: from "The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry," *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985): 40-43; i.e. from "The reproach against the mother...." to "...only if a *single* desire is in control."

Judith Butler: from "The Rock of the Real," *Bodies that Matter: on the discursive limits of "sex"* (Oxon: Routledge, 1993): 148-158; i.e. from "Zizek begins his critique" to "...manageability of unspeakable loss."

Theodor Adorno: from "Meditations on Metaphysics," *Negative Dialectics* (Bloomsbury, 1981): 379-381; i.e. from "Associated with the slogans of 'Emptiness' and 'senselessness' is that of" to "what is damned as nihilism."

Paul Virilio: "Cryptic Architecture," in *The Paul Virilio Reader*, ed. Steve Redhead (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004): 16-18.

Moran Pearl: "Negative Casting as a Container of Memory," *Transgressing Boundaries: Humanities in Flux*, ed. Marija Wakounig and Markus Peter Beham (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2013): 138-141.

Margarita McGrath: "Mapping Architecture's 'White Space'," *Feminist Practices: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Women in Architecture*, ed. Lori Brown (Farmham: Ashgate, 2011): 218-223.

Jean Baudrillard: "Conspiracy of Art," in *The Conspiracy of Art*, trans. Ames Hodges (New York: Semiotext(e), 2005): 25-29.

Griselda Pollock: "Introduction: Trauma and Artworking," *After-Affects / After-Images: Trauma and Aesthetic Transformation in the Virtual Feminist Museum* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013): 1-11.

The scientific imagination ultimately suffers the same fate as 'e-tainment'; it comes to resemble that of those TV viewers who thought the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11 was merely another disaster movie, or that of the Islamist suicide attackers no doubt dying happy at becoming actors on a global super-production in which *reality would tip over* once and for all *into electronic nothingness.*

Paul Virilio

[*"Ground Zero," The Paul Virilio Reader*, ed. Steve Redhead (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004): 251]

Contrary to the discourse of reality and rationality, which counts on the fact that there is something (meaning) rather than nothing and therefore claims to have its final foundation in the guarantee of an objective and decipherable world, radical thought wagers on the illusion of the world. It claims to be illusion restoring the non-veracity of facts, the non-signification of the world, making the opposite hypothesis that there might be nothing rather than something, and tracking this nothing running underneath the apparent continuity of meaning.

Jean Baudrillard

[*"Radical Thought," The Conspiracy of Art*, trans. Ames Hodges (New York: Semiotext(e), 2005): 166]

D. T. Suzuki: "Is Zen Nihilistic," *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (NY: Grove Press, 1964): 48-57.

Ueda Shizuteru: "The Core of the Kyoto School: Nishida's Nothingness and Nishitani's Emptiness", in *Japanese and Continental Philosophy: Conversations with the Kyoto School*, eds. Bret Davis and Brian Schroeder and Jason Wirth (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 22-31.

Lee Joon: from "Void: Mapping the Invisible in Korean Art," *Void in Korean Art* (Seoul: Leem/Samsung Museum of Art, 2007): 18-21.

François Jullien: from "Allow Effects to Come About," *Treatise on Efficacy: Between Western and Chinese Thinking*, trans. Janet Lloyd (University of Hawai'i Press, 2004): 109-113 i.e. from "There are two ways of understanding emptiness" to "like a great bellows."

François Jullien: "Empty and Full," *The Great Image Has No Form, Or On the Nonobject Through Painting*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009): 75-90.

Brian Rotman: "Number, Vision, Money," *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987): 7-26.

David Darling: "Empty Set" entry in *The Universal Book of Mathematics: From Abracadabra to Zeno's Paradoxes* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2004): 106.

E. J. Lowe: Section III from "Number, Unity, and Individuality," *Philosophy* 78: 3 (2003): 330-334.

Nick Montfort: from "Null Code Programs," *Trope* 13: 3 (Cambridge: Trope Tank, 2013): 4-8. i.e. from "Programs are most typically" to "...are not really possible."

I said that what was most exciting was  
when nothing was happening, I said  
that saints should naturally do nothing  
if you were a saint that was enough and  
a saint existing was everything, if you  
made them do anything then there was  
nothing to it they were just like any one  
so I wanted to write a drama where no  
one did anything where there was no  
action and I had and it was the Four  
Saints and it was exciting. [...] After all  
the business of an artist is to be really  
exciting and he is only exciting, when  
nothing is happening.

Gertrude Stein

[*Everybody's Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1937): 292]

Well, it seems to me that there is an attitude that tends toward McLuhanism, and this attitude would tend to see the museum as a null structure. But I think the nullity implied in the museum is actually one of its major assets, and that this should be realized and accentuated. The museum tends to exclude any kind of life-forcing position. But it seems that now there's a tendency to try to liven things up in the museums, and that the whole idea of the museum seems to be tending more toward a kind of specialized entertainment. It's taking on more and more the aspect of a discothèque and less and less the aspect of art. So, I think that the best thing you can say about museums is that they really are nullifying in regard to action, and I think that this is one of their major virtues. It seems that your position is one that is concerned with what's happening. I'm interested for the most part in what's not happening, that area between events which could be called the gap. This gap exists in the blank and void regions or settings that we newer look at. A museum devoted to different kind of emptiness could be developed. The emptiness could be defined by the actual installation of art. Installations should empty rooms, not fill them.

Robert Smithson

[*"What Is a Museum?: A Dialogue between Allan Kaprow and Robert Smithson"* *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996): 43]

## Section II: Nothing to Show for It

Lucy Lippard: "The Dematerialization of Art," in *Changing Essays in Art Criticism* (NY: Dutton, 1971): 255-276.

Michael Baldwin: "Remarks on Air Conditioning: an extravaganza of blandness," *Arts Magazine* 42: 2 (November, 1967): 22-23.

Keith Arnatt: "Is it Possible for Me to Do Nothing as My Contribution to This Exhibition," *I'm a Real Photographer: Keith Arnatt, Photographs 1974-2002*, ed. David Hurn and Claire Grafik (London: Chris Boot, 2007): 142-143.

Stanley Brouwn: "How Empty Is This Space?" (Städtisches Museum Mönchengladbach, 1970).

Robert Smithson: "Some Void Thoughts on Museums," *Arts Magazine* 42: 2 (November, 1967): 41.

Gustav Metzger: "Years Without Art," *Art into Society / Society into Art* (London: ICA, 1974).

Sally Yard on Sophie Calle's "Last Seen," *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect*, ed. Kynaston McShine (MoMA, 1999): 136-138.

Kathryn Hixson: "Truth or Dare: Losing Control of How Things Mean," *New Art Examiner* 23 (Summer 1996): 18-23.

Francis McKee: "From Zero to Nothing in No Time," *Nothing*, ed. Graham Gussin and Ele Carpenter (Sunderland: Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, 2001): 16-30.

Mathieu Copeland: "Qualifying the Void," *Voids: A Retrospective*, ed. John Armleder, Mathieu Copeland, Laurent Le Bon, Gustav Metzger, Mai-Thu Perret, Clive Phillpot, and Philippe Pirotte (Zürich: JPR | Ringier, 2009): 167-171.

Ingrid Schaffner: "Doing Nothing," *The Big Nothing*, (Philadelphia: ICA, 2004): 17-33.

Ralph Rugoff: "How to Look at Invisible Art," *Invisible – Art about the Unseen 1957-2012* (Hayward Gallery, 2012): 5-27.

Pierre Bismuth: "Never Believe an Artist Who Says Their Work Is About Nothing: The Culture Consumer's Fear of the Void," *Nothing*, ed. Graham Gussin and Ele Carpenter (Sunderland: Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, 2001): 180-182.

Michael Asher, from "December 30, 1969 -- March 1, 1970 / Spaces / Museum of Modern Art, New York", in *Writings 1973-1983 on Works 1969-79*, ed. Benjamin Buchloh (Halifax: NSCAD, 1984?): 24; 30.

You'll never get anyone to pay for the  
Guggenheim to stay empty all year,  
though to me that would be a  
marvelous idea.

Allan Kaprow

[*"What Is a Museum?: A Dialogue between Allan Kaprow and Robert Smithson"* *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996): 48. Copyright Estate of Robert Smithson]

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: Once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being...becomes itself through disappearance.

Peggy Phelan

[*Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993): 146]

From the birth of conceptual art in the 1960s down to the immediate present visual artists have constantly been addressing the idea of nothing. Despite its permanence in the artistic field, however, nothing is still an act of bravado that has to be ventured again and again. These works of art present challenges for both the curator and the exhibition installation. What frame of reception is appropriate for works that take the void and silence as their themes? The question that all these artists raise, from their various perspectives — namely, if and how nothing can be communication — becomes particularly explosive within the framework of an entire exhibition. How does one present nothing? The same understanding proves to be a tightrope act in that it demands a certain concession of the viewers. They have to be prepared to get involved in omission, in intermission, in a moment of concentrated reflection. Faced with the overflowing variety of images in our society, however, this moment of experience can have a cathartic effect. The daily overstimulation is replaced by a selective sensitization, the focusing of specific sense organs on highly concrete works that demand concentration and quiet, even silence. Many of the works are only constituted in the imagination, the view in ward of the person perceiving — silence inevitably remains an element of the dialogue, of the exchange between work and the person confronting it.

Max Hollein

[“Preface,” *Nichts/Nothing*, ed. Martina Weinhart and Max Hollein (Frankfurt: Hatje Cantz, 2006): 5]

Maria Eichorn and Mai-Thu Perret : "Institutional Exposure," *Voids: A Retrospective*, ed. John Armleder, Mathieu Copeland, Laurent Le Bon, Gustav Metzger, Mai-Thu Perret, Clive Phillpot, and Philippe Pirotte (Zürich: JPR | Ringier, 2009): 145-151.

Anne Moeglin-Delcroix: "Neither Word nor Image: Blank Books," *Voids: A Retrospective*, ed. John Armleder, Mathieu Copeland, Laurent Le Bon, Gustav Metzger, Mai-Thu Perret, Clive Phillpot, and Philippe Pirotte (Zürich: JPR | Ringier, 2009): 397-407.

Michael Gibbs, from "All or Nothing," *All or Nothing: An Anthology of Blank Books* (Derbyshire: RGAP, 2005): 7-23.

**"I can see the whole room!  
...and there's nobody in it!"**

Roy Lichtenstein

It is from zero, in zero, that the true  
movement of being begins.

Kazimir Malevich

### Part III. The Empty Set

Kazimir Malevich: from "God Is Not Cast Down," *Bog ne skinut* (1922): np.

Honore de Balzac: from "The Unknown Masterpiece," trans. Peter Collier (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 57-66.

Wassily Kandinsky: "Empty Canvas," in *Complete Writings on Art* (Da Capo, 1994): 780-783.

Thierry de Duve: "A Critical Reinterpretation," *Kant after Duchamp* (MIT, 1998): 248-263.

Ulrike Ghering: "Reinventing the White Icon," *Nichts/Nothing*, ed. Martina Weinhardt and Max Hollein (Frankfurt: Hatje Cantz, 2006): 71-77.

Branden Joseph: from "White on White," *Critical Inquiry* 27: 1 (Autumn 2000): 90-96.

Robert Rauschenberg: transcription from untitled interview, *Robert Rauschenberg: Man at Work*, dir. Chris Granlund (London: Phaidon Video, n. d.).

John Cage: "Lecture on Nothing," *Silence: Lectures and Writing by John Cage* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961): 109-126.

Dylan Trigg: from "Silence, Violence, and Nothingness," *The Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia, and the Absence of Reason* (NY: Peter Lang, 2006): 11-13.

Elizabeth Zuba: "Introduction," *Not Nothing: Selected Writings by Ray Johnson, 1954-1994* (New York: Siglio, 2014): 2-6.

Natalie Kosoi: "Nothingness Made Visible: The Case of Rothko's Paintings," *Art Journal* (Summer 2005): 21-31.

Antonio Tapiés: "Painting and the Void," trans. Cathy Douglas and Patricia Matthews, in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, eds. Christine Stiles and Peter Selz (1996): 57-58.

Josip Vanista: "Gorgona: What's That? (this is what I think)," *Gorgona* (Berlin: Zak | Branicka, 2013): n.p. [pamphlet to accompany the exhibition "Please Attend"]

Yves Klein "Hotel Chelsea Manifesto," *Yves Klein: Long Live the Immaterial*, ed. Gilbert Perlein and Bruno Cora (Delano Greenridge Editions, 2000): 85-88.

Benjamin H. D. Buchloh: "Yves Klein: Abstraction's Afterlife," in *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955-1975* (Cambridge: MIT, 2000): 263-269.

Ad Reinhardt: "Art in Art/ Is Art-As-Art/ (Art-As-Art Dogma Part III)," *Lugano Review* 5-6 (1966): 85-89.

Write Nothing!

Read Nothing!

Say Nothing!

Print Nothing!

Suzanne Mar, Elena Nikolaeva, Alexandr Ranov, Riurik Rok, Oleg Erberg

[*"Decree Concerning the Nothingists of Poetry," Dog's Box: or, Works by the Creative Office of the Nothingists during the 1920-1921 r.r.*, ed. Sergei Sadikov (Moskow: Khobo, 1921)]

Douglas Huebler: "Untitled Statements, 1968," in *Art Povera*, ed. Germano Celant (New York: Praeger, 1969): 43.

Robert Barry and Patricia Norvell: "May 30, 1969," *Recording Conceptual Art: Early Interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kaltenbach, LeWitt, Morris, Oppenheim, Siegelaub, Smithson, Weiner by Patricia Norvell*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Patricia Norvell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001): 89-92 (ending with the sentence "... 'sciences and philosophy don't enter.'

Robert Smithson and Patricia Norvell: "June 20, 1969," *Recording Conceptual Art: Early Interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kaltenbach, LeWitt, Morris, Oppenheim, Siegelaub, Smithson, Weiner by Patricia Norvell*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Patricia Norvell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001): 126-134.

Graciela Carnevale: "Statement," in *Listen, Here, Now! Argentine Art of the 1960s*, ed. Andrea Junta and Ines Katzenstein (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2004) 299–301.

Christine Kozlov: "Untitled Statement," in *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects*, ed. Donald Karshan (New York Cultural Center, 1970): 9.

Briony Fer: from "Bordering on Blank: Eva Hesse and Minimalism," *Art History* 17: 3 (September, 1994): 424-435.

Robert Pincus-Witten: "Barry Le Va: The Invisibility of Content," *Arts Magazine* 50 (October 1975): 60-67.

Antoni Tàpies, "Painting and the Void," trans. Cathy Douglas and Patricia Matthews, in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, eds. Christine Stiles and Peter Selz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996): 57.

Denis Lejeune "Chance in the Thought of François Morellet" *The Radical Use of Chance in 20th Century Art* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012): 157-160.

Ulises Carrión: "The New Art of Making Books," *Kontexts* 6-7 (1975): n.p.

Robert Filliou, "Good-for-Nothing-Good-At-Everything," in *Teaching and Learning as Performance Arts* (Cologne: Verlag Gebr. Konig, 1970): 79-80.

Yuir Sobelev: "Design of a Trap to Capture the Emptiness," in *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*, ed. Laura Hoptman and Thomás Pospisyl (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2002): 25-27.

Ilya Kabakov: "On the Subject of 'The Void,'" *Total Enlightenment: Moscow Conceptual Art 1960–1990*, eds. Boris Groys, Max Hollein, and Manuel Fontán del Jundo (Ostfildern: Hatje Canty Verlag, 2008): 366–375.

I think one likes to think there is no difference between the experience of looking at a work of art and looking at not a work of art...One can face the work and have that sense of emptiness..., of nothingness, when in fact there is a great deal to be seen.

One can look at a wall and have a similar experience of nothing of interest or one can find great interest in looking at an area of wall, or at anything.

Jasper Johns

[David Sylvester: *Interviews with American Artists* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001): 168]

RB: Why the void and not the created space? There is something about void and emptiness which I am personally very concerned with. I guess I can't get it out of my system. Just emptiness. Nothing seems to me the most potent thing in the world.

CA: I would say a thing is a hole in a thing it is not.

Carl Andre and Robert Barry

[*Arts Magazine* 47 (1972): 46]

I try to deal with things that maybe other people haven't thought about, emptiness, making a painting that isn't a painting. For years people have been concerned with what goes on inside the frame. Maybe there's something going on outside the frame that could be considered an artistic idea.

Robert Barry

[quoted in Lucy Lippard, *Six Years* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997): xii]

Mikhail Epstein: "Emptiness as a Technique: Word and Image in Ilya Kabakov," *Russian Postmodernism: New Perspectives on Post-Soviet Culture*, ed. Mikhail N. Epstein, Alexander A. Genis, Slobodanka M. Vladiv-Glover (New York: Berghahn, 1999): 299-337.

Anthony Gardner: "Aesthetic of Withdrawl," from "Aesthetics of Emptiness and Withdrawl: contemporary European art and actually existing democratization," *Postcolonial Studies* 13: 2 (2010): 185-191.

Mikós Erdély: "A History of Chance," trans. John Bátki, *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*, ed. Laura Hoptman and Thomás Pospiszyl (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2002): 96-97.

Mikós Erdély: from "Theses for the Marly Conference of 1980," trans. John Bátki, *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*, ed. Laura Hoptman and Thomás Pospiszyl (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2002): 101.

Tehching Hsieh: "One Year Performance (1985-1986)," [transcribed from his website: <http://www.one-year-performance.com>].

Adrian Parr: "Berlin and the Holocaust," *Dilemma and Memorial Culture: Desire, Singular Memory and the Politics of Trauma* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008): 143-158.

Fred Camper: "Shoah's Absence," *Motion Picture* 1: 3 (Winter/Spring 1987): 5-6.

Ivone Margulies, "Nothing Happens: Time for the Everyday in Postwar Realist Cinema," *Nothing Happens: Chantal Ackerman's Hyperrealist Everyday* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996): 21-41.

Kuan-Hung Chen: "Text and Context (II): A Religio-Philosophical Articulation of *Tianshu*," *Xu Bing and Contemporary Chinese Art: Cultural and Philosophical Reflections*, ed. Hsingyuan Tsao, Roger T. Ames (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011): 80-84.

Thomas Kellein, from "Interview with Hiroshi Sugimoto," *Hiroshi Sugimoto: Time Exposed*, ed. Thomas Kellein, trans. David Britt (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995): 91-95.

Guy Brett, "Activamente o Vazio," *No Vazio do Mundo: Mira Schendel*, ed. Sônia Salzstein (São Paulo: Editora Marça d'Agua, 1996).

Craig Owens: "Allan McCollum: Repetition & Difference," *Art in America* 71: 8 (September, 1983): 130-132.

Lynn Cooke and Allan McCollum: "Interview," *Carnegie International* Volume 1 (1991): 100.

David Batchelor and Jonathan Rée: "Nothings," *Found Monochromes*, Vol. 1: 1-250, 1997-2006 (London: Ridinghouse, 2010): 297-99.

Martina Weinhart: from "Seeing Nothing," *Nichts/Nothing*, ed. Martina Weinhart and Max Hollein (Frankfurt: Hatje Cantz, 2006): 11-25.

Dada smells of nothing, it is nothing,  
nothing, nothing.

It is like your hopes: nothing.

Like your paradise: nothing

Francis Picabia

[*"Manifest Cannibale Dada," Dadaphone 7* (March, 1920): 3]

I am anti-artistic. I am anti-nothing. I  
am opposed to making formulas.

Marcel Duchamp

[quoted in Michale Langer: *Kunst am Nullpunkt: ein Analyse der Avantgarde im 20. Jahrhundert* (Worms: Werner'sche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1984): 71]

Gorgona is serious and simple.

Gorgona is for absolute transience in art.

Gorgona seeks neither work nor result in art.

It judges according to the situation.

Gorgona is contradictory.

It defines itself as the sum of all its possible definitions.

Gorgona is constantly in doubt. . . .

Valuing most that which is dead.

Gorgona speaks of nothing.

Undefined and undetermined.

Josip Vanista

[*Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*, ed. Laura Hoptman and Thomás Pospiszyl (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2002): 136]

Eleonora Fabião: "History and Precariousness: In Search of a Performative Historiography," *Perform, Repeat, Record*, ed. Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012): 122-134.

Maria Vassileva: "Where There Is a Woman There Is no Silence," *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* (Köln: Walther König, 2010): 319-322.

Maurizio Cattelan and Bob Nickas: "Interview," *Index* 20 (September, 1999).

Wendy Lotterman: "Sophie Calle, Absent," *Bombsite*, 11 February 2013:  
<http://bombsite.com/issues/1000/articles/6999>. Accessed 8 February 2014.

Homi Bhabha: "Anish Kapoor: Making Emptiness," *Anish Kapoor* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1998): 11-41.

Mr. Greg: "Art and Politics: An Interview with Peter Mlakar of the NSK"  
[[http://www.3ammagazine.com/entarchives/2002\\_dec/interview\\_peter\\_mlakar.html](http://www.3ammagazine.com/entarchives/2002_dec/interview_peter_mlakar.html)]

Nicolas Bourriaud and Kim Sooja: "Interview," *Kim Sooja: Conditions of Humanity* (Lyon: Contemporary Art Museum, 2003): 45-59.

Claire Lui "Being & Nothingness," *Print* 58: 2 (March/April 2004): 90-95.

Mark Cooley: "Absence / Presence: a Conversation with Artist Charles Cohen"  
[<http://rhizome.org/discuss/view/23105/>]

Klaus Besenbach: "Measuring the Universe" [interview with Roman Ondák], *Flash Art* No. 268 (October, 2009).

Laurie Anderson and Charles Seife: "Talk About Nothing" (Rubin Museum of Art, 19 December, 2010).

Vincent Broqua: "Quand la Lettre Migre: Le Rien Intensif de Caroline Bergvall," *À partir de rien: esthétique, poétique, politique de l'infime* (Paris: Michel Houdiard, 2013): 103-126.

Derek Beaulieu: "A Box of Nothing," *A Box of Nothing* (Calgary: 100 têtes press, 2011).

Wu Hung, from "Qui and Xu: Erasure and Remembrance," *A Story of Ruins: Presence and Absence in Chinese Art and Visual Culture* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012): 21-30; 202-203.

Martin Creed and Viestarts Gailītis: "The Fear of Emptiness"  
[[http://www.artterritory.com/en/texts/interviews/1732-the\\_fear\\_of\\_emptiness\\_](http://www.artterritory.com/en/texts/interviews/1732-the_fear_of_emptiness_/)/]

Alessandra Cianetti: "What Is Nothing? An Interview with Li-E Chen"  
<http://flaneur.me.uk/06/what-is-nothing-an-interview-with-li-e-chen/> [2012]

Bert Greene: I was very impressed and I was equally impressed by what he said. A close friend of ours, Aaron Fine, was dying of cancer. He had wanted to come and see Andy but couldn't, so sent a question in his place. I said, "Andy, Aaron wants to know why you picked the Campbell's soup can to paint." "Tell him," he said, "I wanted to paint nothing. I was looking for something that was the essence of nothing and the soup can was it."

[quoted Victor Bockris: *Warhol: The Biography* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2003): 154]

[Reinhardt's] painting of 'the last paintings anyone can make,' like the circularity of his writing, began [...] that self-reflexive spiral which was also painting's self-erasure in its very act of completion.

Joseph Kosuth

[*American Art of the 1960s*, Studies in Art No. 1, ed. John Elderfield (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1991): 36, n. 52]

Miya Ando interview:

[http://www.nondualitymagazine.org/nondualitymagazine.2/nonduality\\_magazine.1.miyaando.interview.htm](http://www.nondualitymagazine.org/nondualitymagazine.2/nonduality_magazine.1.miyaando.interview.htm)

Neha Choksi and Craig Dworkin (interview): "We Are All Meat, Striving to Be Human," *Art India* XXIX: 5 (2015).

The Tibetans have a nice word for emptiness: when they speak of 'full emptiness.' There is a void but it's a positive void. In our culture you get information all the time, reading papers, watching television. There is always something coming in. All my work is about emptying the mind, to come to a state of nonthinking.

Marina Abramovic

[Bernard Goy: "Interview with Marina Abramovic," *Journal of Contemporary Art* 3: 2 (1990): 49-50]

A white sheet of paper is for us primarily a symbol of the void, a part of the universe we have selected, not simply a sheet upon which pictures are drawn. Here we are working above all in a symbolic void and space and only secondarily on paper. [ . . . ] Form and the void are not opposites, they are two aspects of the same reality which always function together.

Leonhard Lapin

[*Tühjus ja raum — Void and Space* (Tallinn: Estonian Art Academy, 1998); quoted from *Art of the Baltics: The Struggle for Artistic Expression Under The Soviets, 1945-1991*, ed. Alla Rosenfeld and Norton T. Dodge (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2002): 138, n. 158]

The pictures are intended to operate in the mind above all: to come back when they're no longer visible. It's the representation of the invisible, the omitting that opens deeper layers of significance. No work of art should have a clear-cut meaning, it must have many, and that's why you have to bring in this area of void.

Luc Tuymans

[*"Luc Tuymans in Conversation with Udo Kittelmann"* *Ende* (Cologne: Salon Verlag, 2009): 27]

Realizing that the work cannot be planned, but only carried out, that it has value, truth, and reality only through the words which unfold it in time and inscribe it in space, he will begin to write, but starting from nothing and with nothing in mind — like a nothingness working in nothingness.

Maurice Blanchot

[ "Literature and the Right to Death," *Work of Fire*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995): 304]

One day, when I was studying with Schoenberg, he pointed out the eraser on his pencil and said, "This end is more important than the other."

John Cage

[*"Indeterminacy," Silence: Lectures and Writing by John Cage* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961): 270]

Nothing stirring anywhere. Nothing to  
be seen anywhere. Nothing to be  
heard anywhere. Room once full of  
sounds. Faint sounds. Whence  
unknown. Fewer and fainter as  
time wore on. Nights wore on. None  
now.

Samuel Beckett

[*"Krapp's Last Tape," Collected Shorter Plays* (New York: Grove, 1984): 266]

## Notes to the Essay

<sup>1</sup> Yoko Ono: *Grapefruit: A Book of Instructions and Drawings* (Tokyo: Wunternaum, 1964): np.

<sup>2</sup> Seth Kim-Cohen: *In The Blink Of An Ear: Toward A Non-Cochlear Sonic Art* (London: Continuum Books, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Ono, *Grapefruit*, np. One might think as well of Piero Manzoni's deflation of artistic inspiration — or what is often regarded as so much hot air — in his *Fiat d'artista* (1960): the remains of a collapsed balloon no longer containing the eponymous artist's breath that once gave it a sculptural, volumetric form.

<sup>4</sup> Angelaki: *Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, ed. Antti Salminen and Sami Sjöberg 17: 3 (2010).

<sup>5</sup> Lucy Lippard: *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972: a cross-reference book of information on some esthetic boundaries: consisting of a bibliography into which are inserted a fragmented text, art works, documents, interviews, and symposia, arranged chronologically and focused on so-called conceptual or information or idea art with mentions of such vaguely designated areas as minimal, anti-form, systems, earth, or process art, occurring now in the Americas, Europe, England, Australia, and Asia (with occasional political overtones)*, edited and annotated by Lucy R. Lippard (New York: Praeger, 1973).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, vii.

<sup>7</sup> John Cage: "On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work," *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961): 102.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin H. D. Buchloh: "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter, 1990): 135.

<sup>9</sup> Gérard Wajcman: *L'Interdit: roman* (Paris: Denoël, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> Cindy Nemser: "An Interview with Eva Hesse," *Artforum* VIII: 9 (1970): 60.

<sup>11</sup> Geaninne Guimaraes, audio program Museum of Modern Art (New York) to accompany the exhibition *Tangled Alphabets: Leon Ferrari and Mira Schendel* (5 April – 15 June, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Anna C. Chave: "Agnes Martin: 'Humility, the Beautiful Daughter . . . All of Her Ways Are Empty,'" *Agnes Martin*, ed. Barbara Haskell (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1992): 138. Writing about Agnes Martin, Arthur P. Shimamura explains that her "almost completely white canvases, suggested a representation of nothingness" [*Experiencing Art: In the Brain of the Beholder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 69].

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, 150.

<sup>14</sup> Wallace Stevens, "The Snow Man," *Poetry* XIX: 1 (October, 1921): 4.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Stearns Eliot: *The Waste Land* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1922): 10-11. For an overview of the culture of neurasthenia, see Tom Lutz: *American Nervousness, 1903: an anecdotal history* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

<sup>16</sup> Virginia Woolf: *To The Lighthouse* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1930): 196.

<sup>17</sup> Gertrude Stein: *Everybody's Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1973): 70; 112. Kim Sooja's *A Needle Woman* (2001) articulates the same sentiment by focusing on Sooja's back while she stands immobile among the commotion of various locations, the rest of the world revolving around her deliberate inactivity.

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<sup>18</sup> Aldon Lynn Nielsen: *Reading Race: White American Poets and the Racial Discourse in Twentieth Century* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988); see especially the end of the Introduction and Chapter 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*, ed. Carl van Vechten (New York: Vintage, 1990): 224.

<sup>20</sup> *In the American Grain* (New York: New Directions, 1965): 209.

<sup>21</sup> Anonymous [Louis Coquelet]: *L'Eloge de Rien, dédié à Personne, avec une postface: Troisième Edition, peu revûë, nullement corrigée, & argumentée de plusieurs Riens, ou on à joint L'Eloge de Quelque Chose* (Paris: Antoine de Heuqueville, 1730): 10-11.

<sup>22</sup> John Cage: "Lecture on Something," *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961): 131.

<sup>23</sup> Julio Garcia Espinosa: *Un largo camino hacia la luz* (Havana: Ediciones Unión, 2000): 30.

<sup>24</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Edition, ed. John Simpson and Edmund Weiner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>25</sup> Gustave Flaubert: *Correspondance*, vol. 2, ed. Jean Bruneau (Paris: Gallimard, 1980): 31.

<sup>26</sup> Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux: "Traité du sublime," *Oeuvres complètes de Boileau Despréaux* (Paris: Didot, 1865): 327.