

Scott MacDonald

# Yoko Ono: Ideas on Film

Interview/Scripts

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## Contributors in this issue

Peter Brunette is the author of *Roberto Rossellini* (Oxford University Press), a biocritical study that will be reviewed in our next issue. He teaches at George Mason University in Fairfax, VA.

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William Johnson, our New York Editor, writes about experimental, documentary, and standard narrative films. His article in this issue is a companion to "The Liberation of Echo: A New Hearing for Film Sound," which appeared in our Summer 1985 issue. He lives in New York and sees an astonishing number and variety of movies.

Scott MacDonald's collection of interviews with independent film-makers, *A Critical Cinema* (University of California Press) is a basic resource in the field. He writes frequently for *Film Quarterly*, *Afterimage*, and other publications, and teaches at Utica College of Syracuse University.

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Views expressed in signed articles are the authors'.

Yoko Ono's relationship and partnership with John Lennon have given her access and opportunities she might never have achieved on her own, but her status as pop icon has largely obscured her own achievements as an artist. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the area of film-making. Between 1966 and 1971, Ono made substantial contributions to avant-garde cinema, most of which are now a vague memory, even for those generally cognizant of developments in this field. With a few exceptions, her films have been out of circulation for years, but fortunately this situation seems to be changing: in the spring of 1989 the Whitney Museum of American Arts presented a film retrospective (curated by John G. Hanhardt, assisted by Lucinda Furlong and Matthew Yokobosky) along with a small show of objects—1980s versions of conceptual objects Ono had exhibited in 1966 and 1967—and the American Federation of Arts plans to re-release Ono's films in the spring of 1990.<sup>1</sup>

Except as a film-goer, Ono was not involved with film until the 1960s, though by the time she began to make her own films, she was an established artist. At the end of the 1950s, after studying poetry and music at Sarah Lawrence College, she became part of a circle of avant-garde musicians (including John Cage and Merce Cunningham): in fact the "Chambers Street Series," a seminal concert series organized by LaMonte Young, was held at Ono's loft at 112 Chambers.<sup>2</sup> Ono's activities in music led to her first public concert, *A Grapefruit in the World of Park* (at the Vil-



Editing *Rape* in 1969:  
Yoko Ono, Eva Majlata,  
John Lennon,  
Nic Knowland

lage Gate, 1961) and later that same year to an evening of performance events at Carnegie Hall, including *A Piece for Strawberries and Violins* in which Yvonne Rainer (now a leading avant-garde film-maker) stood up and sat down before a table stacked with dishes for ten minutes, then smashed the dishes “accompanied by a rhythmic background of repeated syllables, a tape recording of moans and words spoken backwards, and by an aria of high-pitched wails sung by Ono.”<sup>3</sup>

In the early 1960s Ono was part of what became known as Fluxus, an art movement with roots in Dada, in Marcel Duchamp and John Cage, and energized by George Maciunas. The Fluxus artists were dedicated to challenging conventional definitions in the fine arts, and conventional relationships between artwork and viewer. In the early 1960s, Ono made such works as *Painting to See the Room Through* (1961), a canvas with an almost invisible hole in the center through which one peered to see the room, and *Painting to Hammer a Nail In* (1961), a white wood panel that “viewers” were instructed to hammer nails into with an attached hammer. Instructions for dozens of these early pieces, and for later ones, are reprinted in Ono’s *Grapefruit*, which has appeared several times in several different editions—most recently in a Simon and Schuster Touchstone paperback edition, reprinted in 1979.

By 1966, Ono had become interested in film, first in connection with Fluxus. She contributed three films to the *Fluxfilm Program* coordinated by Maciunas in 1966: two one-shot films shot at 2000

frames/second, *Eyeblink* and *Match*, and *No. 4*, a sequence of buttocks of walking males and females (part of the *Fluxfilm Program*, including *Eyeblink* and *No. 4*, is available through Filmmakers’ Cooperative in New York).<sup>4</sup> Along with several other films in the *Fluxfilm Program* (and two 1966 films by Bruce Baillie), *Eyeblink* and *No. 4* are, so far as I know, the first instances of what was to become an interesting mini-genre of avant-garde cinema: the single-shot film (films which are or appear to be precisely one shot long).<sup>5</sup> *No. 4* is interesting primarily as a sketch for her first long film, *No. 4 (Bottoms)* (1966). By the end of 1966 Ono was beginning to instigate substantial film projects, a number of which were based on “film scripts” she had written earlier (a few of these had been published in *Grapefruit*; others are published here for the first time).

*No. 4 (Bottoms)* remains one of the most interesting—perhaps *the* most interesting—film Ono has made. For 80 minutes all we see are human buttocks in the act of walking, filmed in black and white, in close-up, so that each buttocks fills the screen: the crack between the cheeks and the crease between hams and legs divide the frame into four approximately equal sectors; we cannot see around the edges of the walking bodies. Each buttocks is filmed for a few seconds (often for fifteen seconds or so; sometimes for less than ten seconds), and is then followed immediately by the next buttocks. The sound track consists of interviews with people whose buttocks we see and with other people considering whether to allow themselves to be filmed; they

talk about the project in general, and they raise the issue of the film's probable boredom, which becomes a comment on viewers' actual experience of the film. The sound track also includes segments of TV news coverage of the project (which had considerable visibility in London in 1966), including an interview with Ono who indicates the general conceptual design of the film—she estimates there are 365 bottoms filmed for 15 seconds each—and explains that the bottom is “the most defenseless part of the body” and that therefore by participating in her film, people were “showing faith to the world” and, presumably, working to remove boundaries between people. Later, in an essay published in *Film Culture* (Winter/Spring 1970, p.32) and reprinted in *Grapefruit*, she called participants in the film “saints of our time,” and predicted that in ten centuries people who see her film will see that the 1960s was “not only the age of achievements, but of laughter. This film, in fact, is like an aimless petition signed by people with their anuses.”

In the mid-1960s, *No. 4 (Bottoms)* seemed the epitome of outrageousness, of Marshall McLuhan's definition of art as “anything you can get away with.” To see it in 1989 is, however, a good bit more than an hour's worth of sixties nostalgia. *No. 4 (Bottoms)* is fascinating to watch and entertaining to listen to; it is a film that works on a variety of levels. For me its most exhilarating dimension is what it reveals about the human body. Because Ono's structuring of the visuals is rigorously serial, *No. 4 (Bottoms)* is reminiscent of Muybridge's motion studies, though in this instance the “grid” against which we measure the motion is temporal, as well as implicitly spatial: though there's no literal grid behind the bottoms, each bottom is framed in precisely the same way. What we realize from seeing these bottoms, and inevitably comparing them with one another—and with our idea of “bottom”—is both obvious and startling. Not only are people's bottoms remarkably varied in their shape, coloring, and texture, but no two bottoms move in the same way. And most surprisingly (for me), none of the hundreds of buttocks we see is a precisely “correct” bottom as “bottom” is defined by the fashion and advertising industries and by conventional film and television. For me, watching *No. 4 (Bottoms)* was a release from self-consciousness; it was as if I realized, for the first time, that my

bottom is OK and so is yours—that bottoms are just bottoms, usually a little droopy, often hairy or lined, sometimes blemished . . . but endlessly distinctive and entertaining.

On a more formal level *No. 4 (Bottoms)* is interesting both as an early instance of the serial structuring that was to become so common in avant-garde film by the end of the 1960s (in Michael Snow's *Wavelength* and Ernie Gehr's *Serene Velocity*, Hollis Frampton's *Zorns Lemma*, Robert Huot's *Rolls: 1971*, J. J. Murphy's *Print Generation* . . . ) and because Ono's editing makes the experience of *No. 4 (Bottoms)* more complex than simple descriptions of the film seem to suggest. As the film develops, particular bottoms and comments on the sound track are sometimes repeated, often in new contexts; and a variety of subtle interconnections between image and sound occur.

Like *No. 4 (Bottoms)*, Ono's next long film, *Film No. 5 (Smile)* (1968, 51 minutes), was an extension of work included in the *Fluxfilm Program*. Like her *Eyeblink* and *Match*—and like Chieko Shiomi's *Disappearing Music for Face* (in which Ono's smile gradually “disappears”), also on the *Fluxfilm Program*—*Film No. 5 (Smile)* was shot with a high-speed camera. Unlike these earlier films, all of which filmed simple actions in black and white, indoors, at 2000 frames per second, *Film No. 5 (Smile)* reveals John Lennon's face, recorded at 333 frames per second for an extended duration, outdoors, in color, and accompanied by a sound track of outdoor sounds recorded at the same time the imagery was recorded. *Film No. 5 (Smile)* divides roughly into two halves, one continuous shot each. During the first half, the film is a meditation on Lennon's face, which is so still that on first viewing I wasn't entirely sure for a while that the film was live action and not an optically printed photograph of Lennon smiling slightly. Though almost nothing happens in any conventional sense, however, the intersection of the high speed filming and our extended gaze creates continuous, subtle transformations: it is as if we can see Lennon's expression evolve in conjunction with the flow of his thoughts. Well into the first shot, Lennon forms his lips into an “O”—a kiss perhaps—and then slowly returns to the slight smile with which the shot opens. Near the end of the first shot something flies through the image (either a tiny bug

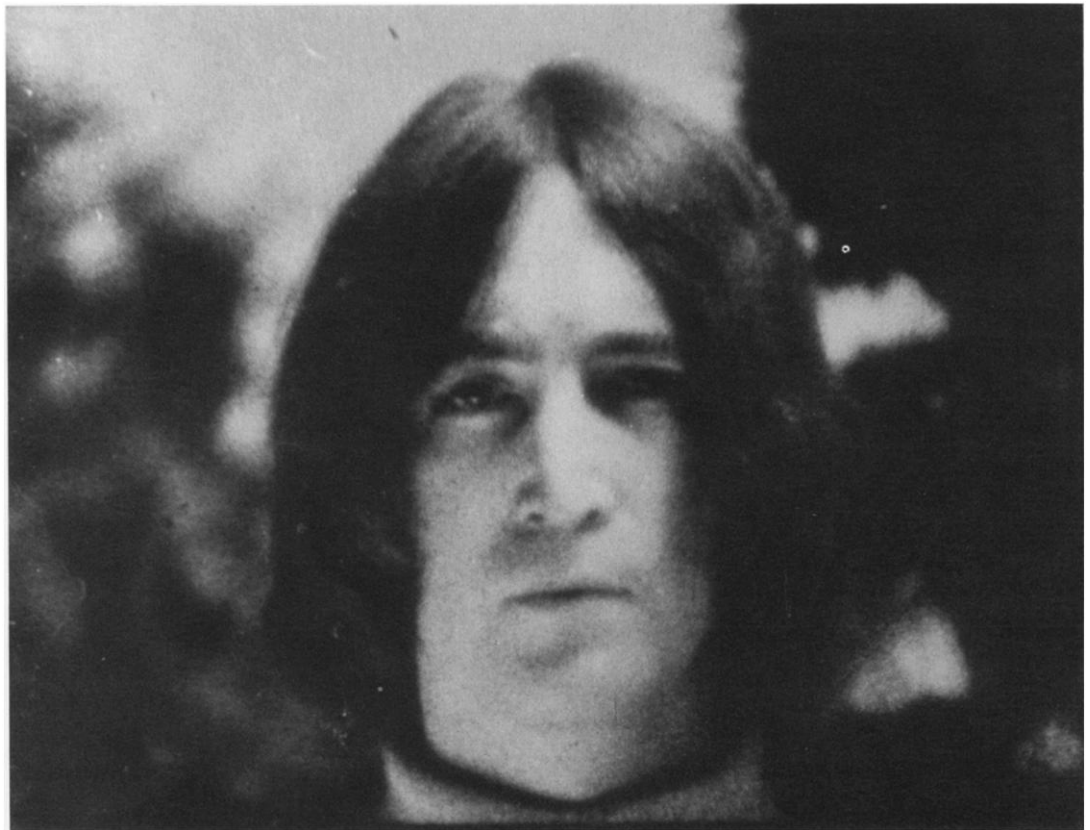
in the foreground or a bird in the background, I'm not sure) and its velocity is so much faster than other developments in the shot that it creates a funny, startling mini-drama. During the second shot of *Film No. 5 (Smile)*, which differs from the first in subtleties of color and texture (both shots are lovely), Lennon's face is more active: he blinks several times, sticks his tongue out, smiles broadly twice, and seems to say "Ah!" Of course, while the second shot is more active than the first, the amount of activity remains minimal by conventional standards (and unusually so even for avant-garde film). It is as though those of us in the theater and Lennon are meditating on each other from opposite sides of the cinematic apparatus, joined together by Ono in a lovely, hypnotic stasis.

The excitement Ono and Lennon were discovering living and working together fueled *Two Virgins* (1968) and *Bed-In* (1969), both of which were collaborations. *Two Virgins* enacts two metaphors for the two artists' interaction. First, we see a long passage of Ono's and Lennon's faces superim-

posed, often with a third layer of leaves, sky, and water; then we see an extended shot of Ono and Lennon looking at each other, then kissing. *Bed-In* is a relatively conventional record of the Montreal performance; it includes a number of remarkable moments, most noteworthy among them, perhaps, Al Capp's blatantly mean-spirited, passive-aggressive visit, and the song "Give Peace a Chance." Nearly all of Ono's remaining films were collaborations with John Lennon.

When the Whitney Museum presented Ono's films at its 1989 retrospective, *Rape* provoked the most extensive critical commentary. The relentless 77-minute feature elaborates the single action of a small film-making crew coming upon a woman in a London park and following her through the park, along streets and into her apartment where she becomes increasingly isolated by these cinematic tormentors. (Her isolation is a theme from the beginning since the woman speaks German; because the film isn't subtitled, even we don't know what she's saying in any detail.) The film was, ac-

Lennon's face in  
*Smile* (1968)





Filming of *Rape* (1969). Camera: Nic Knowland. Actress: Eva Majlata. Sound: Christian Wangler.

cording to Ono, a candid recording by cinematographer Nic Knowlton of a woman who was not willingly a part of this project. When *Rape* was first released, it was widely seen as a comment on Ono's experience of being in the media spotlight with Lennon. Two decades later, the film seems more a parable about the implicit victimization of women by the institution of cinema.

Though it raises some of the same issues, *Fly* is very different—and a wonder. With *No. 4 (Bottoms)* it is, in my view, Ono's most watchable film. Like *Rape* it has a number of historical precedents—Willard Maas's *Geography of the Body* (1943), most obviously—but it remains powerful and fascinating. Basically, *Fly* is Ono's production of another of her mini-“film scripts”—“Film No. 11 (Fly)” —though it is more elaborate, and at 37 minutes, shorter than the original concept. At first, a fly is seen, in extreme close-up, as it “explores” the body of a nude woman (she's identified as “Virginia Lust” in the credits); later more and more flies are seen crawling on the body, which now looks more like a corpse; and at the end, the camera pans up and “flies” out the window of the room. The remarkable sound track is a combination of excerpts from Ono's record *Fly* and music composed by Lennon. In general, the music changes mood as the film does.

*Up Your Legs Forever* is basically a remake of *No. 4 (Bottoms)*, using legs, rather than buttocks: the camera continually pans up from the feet to the upper thighs of hundreds of men and women, as we listen to the sound of the panning apparatus and

a variety of conversations about the project. Though *Up Your Legs Forever* has some interesting moments, it doesn't have the drama or the humor of *No. 4 (Bottoms)*.

The two Lennon films on which Ono and Lennon collaborated remain effective. *Apotheosis* is one of the most ingenious single-shot films ever made. A camera pans up the cloaked bodies of Lennon and Ono, then on up into the sky above a village, higher and higher across snow-covered fields (the camera was mounted in a hot-air balloon, which we never see—though we hear the device that heats the air) and then up into the clouds; the screen remains completely white for several minutes, and finally, once many members of the audience have given up on the film, the camera rises out into the sun above the clouds. It's a beautiful film to watch, a test and reward of viewer patience and serenity. For *Erection*, a camera was mounted so that we can watch the construction of a building, in time-lapse dissolves from one image to another, several hours or days later on. The film is not so much about the action of constructing a building (as a pixillated film of such a subject might be), as it is about the subtle, sometimes magical changes that take place between the dissolves. *Erection* is more a mystery than a documentation.

*Imagine* (1971), the final Ono/Lennon collaboration, is the one major Ono film I've not had an opportunity to see. Since 1971 Ono has made no films, though she did make a seven-minute video documenting response to a conceptual event at the Museum of Modern Art—*Museum of Modern Art*

*Show* (1971). She has also made several music videos which document her process of recovering from Lennon's death—*Walking on Thin Ice* (1981), *Woman* (1981), *Goodbye Sadness* (1982)—as well as records and art objects.

Of course, she remains one of the world's most visible public figures and the most widely known conceptual artist.

## Interview

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*Were you a moviegoer as a child?*

I was a movie buff, yes. In prep school in Tokyo you were supposed to go directly home after school. But most of us kids often went to the movies. We used to hide our school badges on our uniforms and sneak into the theater.

*Do you remember what you saw?*

Yes, I mostly saw French films. There was a group of kids who liked American films—Jimmy Stewart and Katharine Hepburn, Doris Day and Rock Hudson, Bob Hope and Bing Crosby—and there was another crowd of girls who thought they were intellectuals, and went to French films. I was in the French film group. We would go to see *The Children of Paradise*, that sort of thing. It was really a very exciting time. I loved those films.

*Did you see some of the early French surrealist films from the 1920s?*

Those things I saw much later. We're talking about when I was in high school in the late 1940s. I saw the surrealist films in the 60's in New York and Paris.

The films I saw in high school that were closest to surrealism were the Cocteau films, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Orpheus*. Those films really gave me some ideas.

*The earliest I know of you in connection with film is the sound track you did for Taka Iimura's Love in 1963; you hung the microphone out the window and that was the sound track. I know the later Fluxfilm reels that were made in 1966, but did the Fluxus group get involved with film before that?*

No. I think that one of the reasons why we couldn't make films or didn't think of making films was that we felt that it was an enormously expensive venture. At that time, I didn't even have the money to buy canvas. I'd go to army surplus shops and get that canvas that's rolled up. During that period, I felt that getting a camera to do a film was unrealistic.

*Grapefruit includes what I assume are excerpts from "Six Film Scripts," tiny descriptions of conceptual film projects. Two are included in Grapefruit. Where were others, or was the indication that there were six scripts a conceptual joke?*

No, there were six at first; then later there were others. At the time I wrote those scripts, I sent them, or most of them, to Jonas Mekas, to document them. Actually, that's why I have copies of them now.

*There seems to be confusion about the names and numbers of the films on the Fluxfilm Program (1966), and about who did them. I assume you made the two slow-motion films, Eyeblink and Match, and the first film about buttocks, No. 4.*

Those are mine, yes.

*Did people collaborate in making those films, or did everybody work individually and then just put the films onto those two Fluxus reels?*

One day George [Maciunas] called me and said he's got the use of a high-speed camera and it's a good opportunity, so just come over and make some films. So I went there, and the high-speed camera was set up and he said, "Give me some ideas! Think of some ideas for films!" There weren't many people around, at the beginning just George and . . .

*Peter Moore is credited on a lot of the slow motion films.*

Yeah, Peter Moore was there, and Barbara Moore came too. And other people were coming in—I forget who they were—but not many. It was a small apartment, I don't remember whose, but it wasn't George's. When I arrived, I was the only person there, outside of George. I don't know how George managed to get the high-speed camera. I don't think he paid for it. But it was the kind of opportunity that if you can get it, you grab it. So I'm there, and I got the idea of *Match* and *Eyeblink* and we shot these. I thought *Eyeblink* didn't come

out too well. It was my eye, and I didn't like my eye.

*I like that film a lot. Framed the way it is, the eye becomes erotic; it's suggestive of body parts normally considered more erotic.*

The one of those high-speed films I liked best was one you didn't mention: *Smoking*.

*The one by Joe Jones.*

Yes. I thought that one was amazing, so beautiful; it was like frozen smoke.

*There's a film on that reel called Disappearing Music for Face . . .*

Chieko Shiomi's film, yeah.

*I understand you were involved in that one too.*

Well, that was my smile. That was me. What happened was that Chieko Shiomi was in Japan at the time. She was coming here often; it wasn't like she was stationed in Japan all the time, but at the time I think she had just left to go to Japan. Then this high-speed camera idea came up, and when George was saying, "Quick, quick, ideas," I said, "Well, how about *smile*"; and he said, "No, that you can't do, think of something else." "But," I said, "*Smile* is a very important one. I really want to do it," because I always had that idea, but George keeps saying, "No you can't do that one." Finally, he said, "Well, OK, actually I wanted to save that for Chieko Shiomi because she had the same idea. But I will let you perform." So that's me smiling. Later I found out that hers was a disappearing piece; the concept is totally different from what I wanted to do. Chieko Shiomi's idea is beautiful; she catches the *disappearance* of a smile. At the time I didn't know what her title was.

*I assume No. 4 was shot at a different time.*

Yes. At the time I was living at 1 West 100th Street. It was shot in my apartment. My then husband Tony Cox and Jeff Perkins helped.

*The long version of the buttocks film, No. 4 (Bottoms) (1966), is still amazing.*

I think that film had a social impact at the time because of what was going on in the world and also because of what was going on in the film world. It's a pretty interesting film really.

Do you know the statement I wrote about taking any film and burying it underground for fifty years [See *Grapefruit*, Section 9, "On Film No. 4,"

paragraph 3, and "On Film No. 5 & Two Virgins," paragraph 2]? It's like wine. Any film, any cheap film, if you put it underground for fifty years, becomes a masterpiece. After fifty years it's interesting [laughter]. You just take a shot of people walking, and that's enough: the weight of history is so incredible.

*When No. 4 (Bottoms) was made, the idea of showing a lot of asses was completely outrageous. Bottoms were a less respected, less revealed part of the anatomy. These days things have changed. Now bottoms are OK—certain bottoms. What I found exhilarating about watching the film (maybe because I've always been insecure about my bottom!) is that after you see hundreds of bottoms, you realize that during the whole time you watched the film, you never saw the "correct," marketable jean-ad bottom. You realize that nobody's bottom is the way bottoms are supposed to be: they droop, or there are pimples—something is "wrong." I think the film would have almost as much impact now as it did then—though in a different way.*

Well, you see, it's not just to do with bottoms. For me the film is less about bottoms than about a certain beat, a beat you didn't see in films, even in avant-garde films then.

This is something else, but I remember one beautiful film where the stationary camera just keeps zooming toward a wall . . .

*Wavelength? Michael Snow's film?*

Right, Michael Snow. That's an incredibly beautiful film, a revolution in itself really. Bottoms film was a different thing, but just as revolutionary I think. It was about a beat, about movement. The beat in bottoms film is comparable to a rock beat. Even in the music world there wasn't that beat until rock came. It's the closest thing to the heartbeat. I tried to capture that again with *Up Your Legs Forever* (1970). But in *No. 4 (Bottoms)* it worked much better. Maybe it was the bottoms. That film has a *basic* energy. I couldn't capture it in *Up Your Legs Forever*.

*No. 4 (Bottoms) plays with your perceptions and your memory in different ways. For awhile it seems like a simple, serial structure, one bottom after another. Then at a certain point you realize, Oh I've seen that bottom before . . . but was it with this sound? No, I don't think so. Later you may see*



*another bottom a second time, clearly with the same sound. A new kind of viewing experience develops. Did you record all the bottoms and the spoken material for the track, and then later, using that material, develop a structure? It seems almost scored.*

Yes. I spent a lot of hours in editing. It wasn't just put together. The sequence was important. A sympathetic studio said that I could come at midnight or whenever no one was using the facilities, to do the editing. I got a lot of editing time free; that's how I was able to finish it.

*On the sound track some of the participants talk about the process of getting people to show up to have their bottoms recorded, but I'm not completely sure what the process was. You put an ad in a theatrical paper apparently.*

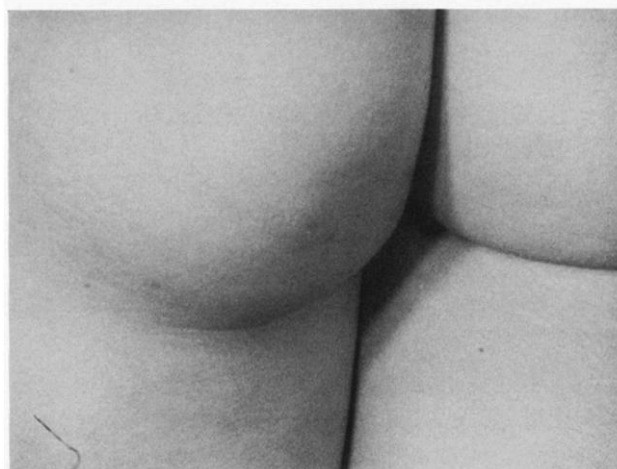
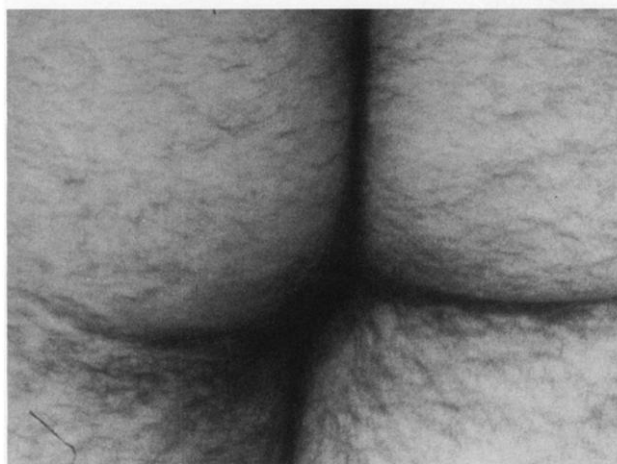
Well, we had an ad, yes, but most of the people were friends of friends. It became a fantastic event. You have to understand, the minute the announcement was made, there was a new joke about it in the newspapers everyday, and everybody was into it. It was an event. We filmed at Victor Musgrave's place, he was a very good friend who was very generous in letting me use his townhouse.

*Did you select bottoms or did you use everybody that was filmed? Were there really 365 bottoms involved?*

I didn't select bottoms. There was not enough for 365 anyway. And the impact of the film as a happening was already getting lost from filming for so long. And there was the rental of the camera and the practical aspect of the shooting schedule. At a certain point I just said, "Oh well, the number's conceptual anyway, so who cares. It's enough!"

*I assume that when you did the early Fluxus version of No. 4, you just followed people walking across an apartment. For the long film you'd built a machine to do the filming which allowed you to film in more controlled close-up; we can't see around the sides of the bodies the way we can in the earlier film.*

Well, in the first No. 4 I was pretty close too. But, as you say, it wasn't really perfect. In London we did it almost perfectly. My idea both times was very visual. All my films had very visual concepts behind them in the beginning. I mean No. 4 (Bot-



Shots from  
No. 4 (Bottoms)  
(1967)



*toms*) has many levels of impact—one being political, but originally I simply wanted to cover the screen with one object, with something that was moving constantly. In the course of seeing films, I had never seen a film where an object was covering the screen all the way through. There's always a background. The closest you get to what I mean is like some macho guy, a cowboy or something, standing with his back to the screen, but you always see a little background. The screen is never covered; so I thought, if you don't leave a background it might be like the whole screen is moving. I just wanted to have that experience. As you say, it didn't work in the early version, but it was the first idea I had for the film actually.

And also, the juxtaposition of the movement of the four sections of the bottoms was fascinating, I thought.

No. 4 (Bottoms) *reminds me of Eadweard Muybridge's motion photographs.*

Oh I see, yeah.

*Was the finished film shown a lot?*

Well, I finally got an OK from the censor and we showed it in Charing Cross Road. Then some American Hollywood producer came and said he wanted to buy it and to take it to the United States. Also, he wanted me to make 365 breasts, and I said, if we're going to do breasts, then I will do a sequence of one breast, you know, fill the screen with a single breast over and over, but I don't think that was erotic enough for him. He was thinking eroticism; I was thinking about the visual, graphic concepts—a totally different thing. I was too proud to make two breasts [laughter]. I think there was an attempt to take the bottoms film to the United States, but it was promptly confiscated by the censor.

*At customs?*

Yes.

*There's a mention on the sound track that you were planning to do other versions of that film in other countries, and the film ends with the phrase, "To Be Continued." Was that a concept for other films, or were there some specific plans for follow-ups?*

Well you see, all my films do have a conceptual side. I have all these scripts, and I get excited just to show them to people because my hope is that

maybe they will want to make some of them. That would be great. I mean most of my films are film instructions; they were never made actually. Just as film instructions, I think they are valid, but it would be very good if somebody makes them. I don't have to make them myself. The concepts themselves are interesting; they don't have to be *made* by me. And also, each film I made had a projection of future plans built into the idea. If somebody picks up on one of them, that's great.

At the time I was making films, what I felt I was doing was similar to what *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* did later. I wanted to involve the audience directly in new ways.

*How did Film No. 5 (Smile) (1968) come about?*

When I went to London, I still kept thinking about the idea of smile, so when I had the chance, I decided to do my version. Of course, until John and I got together, I could never have rented a high-speed camera. Well, maybe if I'd looked into it, I could have. I don't know, but I thought it would be too expensive.

*Did you know Lennon well at the point when you did Film No. 5 (Smile)?*

Yes.

*Because I wondered whether you made the film because you wanted to capture a certain complexity in him, or whether the complexity that's revealed in that seemingly simple image is a result of what the high-speed camera reveals, or creates, as it films.*

Well, certainly I knew John was a complex person. But the film wasn't so much about his complexity as a person. I was trying to capture the complexity of a visual experience. What you see in that film is very similar to how you perceive somebody when you are on acid. We had done acid trips together, and that gave me the idea. I wondered how do you capture this?

*It's a beautiful film.*

Well, of course, you know from the statements I made about *Smile* [See Ono, *Grapefruit*, "On Film No. 5 & Two Virgins": the second part of the book's final section, "9 ON FILMS" (the first part is about *No. 4 (Bottoms)*, the final part, about *Rape*)] that my idea was really very different from the film I finally made. My idea was to do *everybody's* smile. But when I met John, I thought, do-

ing everybody's smile is going to be impossible; and he can represent everybody's smile.

*What I find incredible about Smile is that as you watch John's face, it's almost as though you can see his mind working. I don't know whether it's an optical illusion, maybe it's created by the way that the camera works. But it's almost as though as you watch, the expression is changing every second.*

I know. It's incredible, isn't it? Of course I didn't know what exactly a high-speed camera would do. I knew in general, but I didn't quite know what the exact effect would be. And, of course, I never would have known unless George Maciunas had rented a high-speed camera and called me up. George was a very interesting person. He had a very artistic mind. I never knew why he didn't create his own art; he always wanted to take the role of helping create other peoples' work. But that combination was very good; he not only executed what we wanted, he gave us the opportunity to look into the areas we would never have looked into. He had that kind of mind.

*With Two Virgins (1968) you and John began collaborating on films and in the next few years there was a whole series of collaborations. Judging from the credits on the films, I assume that one or the other of you would get an idea and then both of you would work the idea out, and that whoever had the original idea for a particular film—that film was theirs. Normally, the directorial credit is considered the most important one, but on these films there's a more basic credit. It might be "Film by Yoko Ono"; "Directed and produced by John and Yoko." Am I correct: was it that whoever had the original concept for the film, that's whose film it was?*

Yes.

*I remember reading years ago in a collection of Rolling Stone interviews that when you and John got involved with politics and in particular with the Bed-In, it was partly because Peter Watkins had written you a letter. Is that how you remember it?*

Well, yes, Peter Watkins's letter was a confrontation to us, and at the time we had a conversation about what we felt we had been doing politically: "Well, I was doing this. Yes, I was doing that." As a Beatle, John was always asked, "What is your

position about the Vietnam War," or something else; and I think that their manager, Brian Epstein, was very concerned that they wouldn't make any statements, and so they didn't make any direct statements. But there was a covert statement that was made through an album cover that was censored, as you know. And I was standing in Trafalgar Square, in a bag, for peace and all that. So separately we had that awareness, and we were expressing it in the ways that we could. I was doing it more freely because it was easier for me. So we were comparing notes after getting the letter, and then we were saying, "Well what about doing something together, which was the Bed-In (and the film *Bed-In* [1969]), so Peter Watkins's letter definitely did mean something to us.

*How much control did you (or you and John) have over the way Bed-In looks? You credit a large crew on that film. What was your part in the final film, other than as performers?*

We always maintained careful control over the finished films. I was generally in charge of editing, which I did for that film, and for others, frame by frame. I mean I would have a film editor working with me—I don't know the technology—but I would be very specific about what I wanted. When Jonas [Mekas] did the John and Yoko screenings at Anthology [Anthology Film Archives], I had three editing machines and editors brought into our hotel room, and I edited *Bed-In* there because of the deadline.

I enjoy the editing part of film-making most of all; that's where the films really get made.

*Rape (1969) is often talked about as a parable of the media intruding into your lives, but when I saw it again the other week, it struck me as very similar to pieces in Grapefruit.*

Well, they keep saying that. I'll tell you what happened. By the time that I actually got to make the film, John and I were together, and the reporters were hounding us, but the *Rape* concept was something that I thought of before John and I got together.

*In Grapefruit there's "BACK PIECE," a part of which is "Follow someone for four hours."*

It was that kind of thing, right. But it was also a film script ["Film No. 5 (Rape, or Chase)"].

*How candid is the Rape footage? It no longer looks candid to me.*

It was completely candid—except for the effects we did later in the editing. The girl in the film did not know what was happening. Her sister was in on it, so when she calls her sister on the phone, her sister is just laughing at her and the girl doesn't understand why. Nic Knowland did the actual shooting. I wasn't there. Everything was candid, but I kept pushing him to bring back better material. The type of material he brought back at first was something like he would be standing on the street, and when a group of girls passed by, he would direct the camera to them. The girls would just giggle and run away, and he wouldn't follow. I kept saying he could do better than that, but he actually had a personal problem doing the film because he was a Buddhist and a peacenik: he didn't want to intrude on people's privacy. I remember John saying later that no actress could have given a performance that real.

I've done tons of work, and I don't have time to check it all out, but I wish I could check about this strange thing, which is that a lot of my works have been a projection of my future fate. It frightens me. It simply frightens me. I don't want to see *Rape* now. I haven't seen the *Rape* film in a long time, but just thinking about the concept of it frightens me because now I'm in that position, the position of the woman in the film.

*In the video Walking on Thin Ice (1981), we see a similar scene, but with you.*

I know. And why did I think of *that* song? After I wrote that song all sorts of trouble started to happen, all of which was somehow related to the song, that feeling of walking on thin ice. Sometimes I intentionally try to write something positive. But in a situation like that, art comes first. I really thought "Walking on Thin Ice" was a good song when it came to me. I had no qualms about recording it. The artistic desire of expressing something supersedes the worry, I suppose, and you think, ah it's nothing, it's fine, it's just a nice song or something; and then it turns out that it becomes my life and I *don't* want that.

Just recently I was in this film where I performed as a bag lady [*Homeless*, directed by Yukihiko Tsutsumi, unreleased as yet]. In fact, I was a bit concerned what it might mean to enact a bag

lady, in terms of future projections. But I reasoned that there are actors who die many times in films, but live long lives, so actually enacting death makes their real lives longer. Well, in the first scene it was a beautiful April day, one of those I'm-glad-to-be-in-New York days, and I'm wearing these rags and I'm pushing an empty baby carriage in this beautiful green environment. And as I was doing it, I remembered the song "Greenfield Morning" and the line, "I pushed an empty baby carriage all over the city." That was the first song we recorded for Yoko Ono's Plastic Ono Band, and I think it's in *Grapefruit*, too—I mean the instruction "Push an empty baby carriage all over the city" [See "CITY PIECE: Walk all over the city with an empty baby carriage"—1961 Winter, near the end of the first section (Music) of *Grapefruit*]. So I'm pushing the baby carriage and I'm thinking I don't want to *know* about this. That aspect of projection is interesting, isn't it?

Yes.

If you are somebody that makes films with a commercial concern or other concerns, other than just inspiration, maybe that sort of thing wouldn't happen. I don't know. But inspiration is very much connected with your life in the past and future.

*Apotheosis (1970) is a gorgeous film. It's one of the collaborations that's listed as John's film, though the idea of stripping things away until you've got a white screen is very much like some of your work.*

Well, I'll tell you what happened. I think some of the instructions are already there in *Grapefruit*, or maybe not, maybe it's one of the instructions that haven't been published [Ono is referring to the second version of "Film No. 1 (A Walk to the Taj Mahal)"]. There was a constant feeling of wanting to take an object that's on the ground—not necessarily an object, could be a person—in fact the original idea was a drunken guy walking in a snowy field; you don't see the drunken guy, but the camera suggests that he's drunk because of the way it moves. So he walks and sways, and finally the camera goes up in the sky. When we did the cover for the "Two Virgins" album, where we were both naked, one of us said, "Why don't we make a film where the camera moves from the ground up, shooting our naked bodies, and then just goes up in the air." Later, John said, "Well, let's make one

where the camera goes up.” So the idea stemmed from that. What happened, of course, was that we didn’t expect the balloon film to be the way it turned out. We went up in the balloon, and it happened to be a snowy day.

*You were in the balloon with the camera?*

Up to a certain point. The part where you go into the cloud, and then break out of the cloud, was taken later. The footage that came back from the lab was beautiful. It was just something that happened naturally, the dogs barking, everything that happened—it was an incredible experience. We didn’t expect it was going to be that beautiful. A lot of things just happen, you know.

*If you allow them to, I guess.*

Yes!

*Fly (1970) seems almost the opposite of Apotheosis in a way; it seems . . .*

Very much intentionally calculated?

*Right.*

It’s true.

*You did the sound [for the record album Fly] before you did the film. Had you had the idea in mind then?*

I was always thinking about the idea of fly. Actually, I was always fascinated with the pun “fly” and “fly” in English. There was also a conceptual event about flies and where they fly to.

*The piece you did for the Museum of Modern Art?*

Yes. Did you see that Museum of Modern Art catalogue [a 112-page, 1 foot × 1 foot catalogue—the title seems to be *Museum of Modern [F]Art* (Ono is carrying a shopping bag with the letter “F” directly beneath the Museum of Modern Art mar-

*Apotheosis (1970)*



quee)—which details her concept at length; the catalogue was designed by Ono and produced by Michael Gross]? At the end of that, I talk about how to fly.

*I know the video with the sandwich board guy in front of the Museum of Modern Art who interviews people about the Yoko Ono show that “isn’t there” [The Museum of Modern Art Show, 1971]. In the text for that piece, you explain how some flies were exposed to your perfume and let loose and that people are following those flies around to see where they land.*

The catalogue was made for that event; it had all sorts of interesting stuff in it, about how to fly and all that. All the pages are postcards that you could mail, so the catalogue and *Fly* piece could fly all over the place.

*So MoMA had this on sale?*

No, no, no, no! MoMA would not do it. MoMA was busy saying to people, “There’s no Yoko Ono show here.” People would come in and ask, is there a Yoko Ono show, and they would say no. They were very upset; they didn’t know what was going on. So I couldn’t sell the book anywhere. Nobody bought it, so I have piles of it.

*Earlier, in the mid-1960s, you did a number of descriptions of environmental boxes that the viewer would go inside of and images would be projected on the outside. Eyeblink was involved in a number of those descriptions, and another was called “Fly.” I guess the idea was that a viewer would go inside the box and on all sides you would project images that would create the sensation that the viewer was flying.*

How do you know about these boxes?

*I found the descriptions in the Fluxus Codex, in the Yoko Ono section [See Jon Hendricks, Fluxus Codex (New York: Abrams, 1988, p. 418 for the descriptions]. Was either piece ever built [I show her the descriptions]?*

They were never built. I haven’t seen these ideas since I did them. Whenever I had an idea, I sent it to George Maciunas. He probably kept them. I don’t even have the originals for these. I’ll have to get this book. You know, I have this thing about reading about me. When something about me is in a book, I mostly don’t want to know about it.

*One of the interesting things about watching the film Fly is that one’s sense of what the body we’re seeing is about, and what the film is about, is constantly changing.*

A cartoon in a newspaper gave me an idea. There’s this woman with a low-cut dress, and a guy is looking at her, and the guy’s wife says, “What are you looking at!” and the guy says, “Oh, I’m looking at a fly on her.” I wanted the film to be an experience where you’re always wondering, am I following the movement of fly or am I looking at the body? I think that life is full of that kind of thing. We’re always sort of deceiving ourselves about what we’re really seeing.

*Do you know the Willard Maas film Geography of the Body? It’s all close-ups of bodies, framed so that you can’t quite tell what body part you’re looking at—but they all look erotic. Eyeblink is a little like that, and Fly is full of that effect. If you go close enough, every part of the body looks the same, and they’re all equally erotic.*

Oh, there’s an incredible film instruction that has to do with that close-up idea. It’s a travelogue [“Film No. 13 (Travelogue)”]. You have a travelogue to Japan or somewhere, and you say, “Well, now I’m on Mount Fuji,” and there’s an incredible close-up of stones; and then, “We bathed in a mixed bath,” and you see just steam—you get it?—and then, “We ate noodles,” and you see an incredible close-up of noodles . . . so in effect you can make a travelogue of any country without going out of your apartment! “Then we saw geisha girls,” and you see an incredible close-up of hair [laughter]. I wanted to make that, but I just never got around to it.

*Freedom (1970), the little one-minute film of you trying to take your bra off was made the same year as Fly.*

Yeah, isn’t that a great little film?

*It’s so paradoxical. You show freedom as the ability to try to break free, which implies that you’re never really free.*

Right, exactly.

*You mentioned earlier that you didn’t think Up Your Legs Forever worked as well as No. 4 (Bottoms). I thought it was interesting to see that people’s one leg is very different from their other leg.*

The best thing about that film is the title, I

During the shooting of *Smile* (1968). Lennon being lit, Ono behind the high-speed camera



think. My first vision for that film was like going up all the legs, up, up, up, to eternity [“Film No. 12 (Ecstasy)”]. But in making it, that vision got lost because of what was necessary to film the legs. I don’t know how you can do what I originally had in mind.

*Jonas and Adolfas Mekas are thanked at the end of Up Your Legs Forever.*

Because they did the editing. That was one of the few films I didn’t edit myself.

*Somebody mentioned to me the other day, and I assume it’s not true, that Erection was originally a film about John’s penis. Was there a film like that?*

Yes, there was. But it wasn’t called *Erection*. I think it was called *Self Portrait*, and it wasn’t an erection, it was just a long shot of his penis. That was his idea. The funny thing was that *Self Portrait* was never questioned by the customs because of its title, and *Erection*, which was about the erection of a building, was questioned.

*Is there a relation between the 1971 version of Imagine and the recent Imagine: John Lennon?*

There’s no relationship. We wanted to make a surrealistic film in the tradition of Buñuel and Cocteau. It was John’s idea to say just one or two

words at the beginning, and make the rest of the film silent, like a silent movie. I liked that idea and we did it. I think that now it’s more or less known as a forefather of MTV. Each scene came from some idea John or I had. It was really a collaboration between John and me.

*I’ve heard a rumor that the American Federation of Arts might be re-releasing some of your films.*

They’re saying they want to do it. It’s just a question basically of going through the negatives and making a deal, that kind of thing.

*Which films are involved?*

There was a meeting between them and John Hanhardt and me, and I think they want John Hanhardt to select the films.

*It’d be so much fun to show those films again. There are whole generations now that have no awareness of them at all.*

*Are you involved in film now? Are you planning to make films? You made several videos in the early 1980s. They seem like a personal kind of art therapy; you seem to be trying to get hold of where you are at that point. But it’s been awhile since you’ve made a film.*

I don’t know; it might get to that. I’m one of

those people who can't do something unless I'm totally motivated. That's one of the reasons I jump from one media to another. I did the Whitney Museum show, and suddenly all the inspiration is sculptural; and then last night or the night before, I went to the studio to do some music. But I'm not getting that feeling like I gotta make a film—except for *The Tea Party* [see “Film No. 7 (Tea Party)”]: for the last several years I keep wanting to make that one, but because of the technical difficulties I don't seem to be able to get it together. I think one of the reasons I'm not making more films is that I've done so many film scripts. I'd like to see one of them made by somebody else. Maybe one day out of the blue I'll feel it so strongly that I'll make a film myself again.

## Notes

1. The Whitney published a small catalogue for the Ono show: *Yoko Ono: Objects, Films*. The catalogue includes two essays, one by John Hanhardt on the films, and the other by Barbara Haskell, on the objects.

Between the 1960s and the Whitney retrospective, Ono's films received almost no serious critical commentary and minimal historical notice. Jonas Mekas's January 14, 1971, review of the Ono/Lennon films is reprinted in *Movie Journal* (New York: Colliers, 1972); it's a brief review, Mekas in fine form—full of ideas (and enthusiasm) about *Apotheosis*, *Rape*, *Fly*, and *Up Your*

*Legs Forever* and about the audience he saw them with. In more recent years, Jim Hoberman is the one critic I'm aware of who has been consistently supportive of Ono's work. At the Cinema Histories, Cinema Practices 2 Conference in Milwaukee in 1982, he challenged the theoretically minded academics in attendance to remember and reconsider Ono's films. Hoberman reviewed *Rape* on the occasion of the Whitney's presentation of the film. He argues that *Rape* is “the purest illustration of Laura Mulvey's celebrated essay, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,’ published eight years after *Rape* was made”: “Basically, *Rape* presents a beautiful, extremely feminine woman in peril, her situation overtly sexualized by the very title. (The opening graveyard provides a suitably gothic location.) Although this scenario is a movie staple, the absence of a narrative strongly invites the audience to identify with the camera's (unmistakably male) look and recognize this controlling gaze as its own.” See *The Voice*, March 14, 1989, p. 57.

Daryl Chin reviewed the entire Ono show for *The Independent*: “Walking on Thin Ice: The Films of Yoko Ono,” April 1989, pp. 19–23. Chin creates a historical context for Ono's work, a context that includes both the Fluxus movement and the work of other avant-garde film-makers (Michael Snow, Carolee Schneemann). Chin senses a rage in Ono's films; it's a rage I don't feel.

2. See Haskell, “Yoko Ono: Objects” in the Whitney catalogue, p. 1.
3. Haskell, p. 2.
4. The complete *Fluxfilm Program*, including *Match*, is in the collection of Anthology Film Archives in New York.
5. See Scott MacDonald, “Putting All Your Eggs in One Basket: A Survey of Single-Shot Film,” *Afterimage* (March 1989), pp. 10–16.

## Scripts

What follows are 16 “film scripts” Ono wrote in the 1960s and a brief essay, “ADDENDUM '88,” she wrote for the Whitney Museum theater at the time of her show. Most of the film scripts (and the essay) are published here for the first time. As will be apparent, the film scripts are conceptual designs for films, not scripts in any conventional sense. They were written between 1964 and 1968, basically in two groups. The first—“Six Film Scripts by Yoko Ono”—was copyrighted in 1964. Three of the six scripts—“Film No. 3 (Ask audience to cut . . .),” “Film No. 5 (Ask audience the following . . .),” and “Film No. 6 (Omnibus Film)” —were originally published in *Grapefruit* in 1964, along with “Imaginary Film Series: Shi

(From the Cradle to the Grave of Mr. So),” which is also included here.

The remaining 9 film scripts were copyrighted in 1968. Because Ono's numbering of film scripts was always random and a matter of immediate convenience, several numbers overlap. I've tried to minimize confusion by including the complete titles and subtitles for each film script. Further complexity has resulted from the fact that Ono sometimes numbered completed films with no regard for the numbering of the film scripts. Throughout my introduction and our interview, and in this publication of the film scripts, I have presented film script titles in quotation marks and completed films in italics.

What would have been Ono's eighth film script exists, so far as I am able to determine, only as a pair of completed films known as *No. 4*: the 5½-minute short included by George Maciunas on his



1966 *Fluxfilm Program* and the 1967 feature, *No. 4 (Bottoms)*, produced independently in London. The film completed immediately after the feature *No. 4 (Bottoms)* is *Film No. 5 (Smile)*. The film script “Film No. 5 (Rape, or Chase)” was made in 1968 and entitled *Rape*. “Film No. 11 (Fly)” and “Film No. 12 (Ecstasy)” were made and released in 1970, as *Fly* and *Up Your Legs Forever*, respectively.

Ono made a special request that the texts of the film scripts be printed as they were, without correction. Therefore, Ono’s original spelling and syntax have been retained. According to Ono, the informality about detail was very much a part of the aesthetic she was working in: “In those days there was an incredible sense of immediacy and urgency in me and in my life. Whenever I had an idea, I would scribble it down on any piece of paper that was around. Not losing them was a miracle. Of course, many of them were lost, but these scripts that are left are enough to indicate the direction I was going in. Putting the scripts together before they got lost, typing them up, and sending them out was a tedious enough job for me that I never carefully read them back to correct them.”

We are also printing “ADDENDUM ’88” just as she wrote it.

Film No. 1 (A Walk to the Taj Mahal)  
[second version]

The film consists of snowfall only. The camera will make a walk movement of a person in the snow. The camera will move sometimes in circle, sometimes zigzag, sometimes slow, but mostly, will be in a normal speed. Then at the last point, it will go up to the sky. It should make the audience feel as if they are the ones who are walking in the snow and who go up into the sky.

This should take something like an hour for the total walk.

For the sound, ask the audience to hold bunch of white flowers and pick them slowly.

Film No. 2 (Mona Lisa & Her Smile)

Ask audience to stare at a figure (ANY FIGURE) for a long time and then immediately turn their eyes to the screen and see the reflection.

Film No. 3 (Ask audience to cut . . .)

Ask audience to cut the part of the image on the screen that they don’t like. Supply scissors.

Film No. 4 (Ask audience to stare . . .)

Ask audience to stare at the screen until it becomes black.

Film No. 5 (Ask audience the following . . .)

Ask audience the following:

1) not to look at Rock Hudson, but only Doris Day.

2) not to look at any round objects but only square and angled objects—if you look at a round object watch it until it becomes square and angled.

3) not to look at blue but only red—if blue comes out close eyes or do something so you do not see, if you saw it, then make believe that you have not seen it, or punish yourself.

Film No. 5 (Rape, or Chase)

Rape with camera. 1½ hr. colour synchronized sound.

A cameraman will chase a girl on a street with a camera persistently until he corners her in an alley, and, if possible, until she is in a falling position.

The camera will be taking a risk of offending the girl as the girl is somebody he picks up arbitrarily on the street, but there is a way to get around this.

Depending on the budget, the chase should be made with girls of different age, etc. May chase boys and men as well.

As the film progresses, and as it goes towards the end, the chase and the running should become slower and slower like in a dream, using a high-speed camera.

I have a cameraman who’s prepared to do this successfully.

Film No. 6 (Omnibus Film)

1) Give a print of the same film to many directors.

2) Ask each one to re-edit the print without leaving out any of the material in such a way that it will be unnoticed that the print was re-edited.

3) Show all the versions together omnibus style.

Imaginary Film Series: Shi (From the cradle to the grave of Mr. So)

A slow film taken in the time space of 60 years, following a person who's born and died. From about the 30th year, it becomes a film of a couple, as the man gets married. It really becomes "a film of waiting" towards the end since the film obviously starts to have a senile quality in its camera work, while the man in the film looks still robust. It is amazing that the death came so suddenly over the man in a form of diarrhea. Highly incredible film which makes one think.—You never know when you die.

#### A FILM OF SUPER-REALISM

SHI (From the cradle to the grave of Mr. So)  
Interview with the director, Mr. Toyama.

Tell me, Mr. Toyama, you are relatively unknown in the film world, do you think it had something to do with the fact that you were devoted to the making of this film "SHI" (this is no misprint—means "death" in Japanese) of super-realism, as they call now?

Yes, definitely.

How long did it take for you to make this film?  
Sixty years.

Incredible.

Well, you can say that, I suppose. But it could have been longer if he hadn't died then. I was lucky.

Now people are saying that this film will create a new move in the film world. Do you think this will happen?

It all depends on how you can outlive the film.

Yes, yes, I heard that in the end you were getting rather impatient, that you didn't know if you could wait until the death scene takes place. You didn't, of course, use any means to speed up the ending or anything?

No, no, everything took place naturally.

What was the cause of death?

Diarrhea.

I understand that the film was backed by a Japanese Ketchup Company?

Yes, and that's why the whole thing has a pink tone to it. They wanted me to use a red theme that reminds you of ketchup, but I used pink instead. But I made sure that the blood would look like ketchup, and the ketchup like blood, showing that both substances were equally essential. The ketchup company liked that. Also, this gave a little surrealistic touch to the film, which, otherwise, would have been too realistic.

Film No. 6 (A Contemporary Sexual Manual: 366 sexual positions)

1½ hr. colour separate soundtrack. cast: a woman, a man and a child.

The whole film takes place in a bedroom with a large double bed in the center and a window at the foot of the bed.

The film is a family scene of a quiet couple and a four years old daughter lying on the bed for the whole night. All they do is just sleep, and the 366 sexual positions are all in the mind of the audience. But this is not Andy Warhol: in a sense that this is basically a clean, healthy heterosexual scene spared from boredom.

This delicate change of positions made by the threesome has a slow erotic dance movement quality to it on one hand, and a comfortable domestic nature (scratching each other, etc.) on the other.

The contemporary sex, unlike what you see in blue films, reflects the complexity of our society, and it is subtle and multi-leveled. So in this film, you never see an obvious position as two people on top of each other, or actually making love in any form. They very rarely exchange words with each other and when they do, the sound is not synchronized so all you see is their mouth moving. But there is definitely an air of peaceful unity and coziness among the three.

The whole thing would be done in a way so that it would definitely pass the censors: which is a commercially important factor. There is no need to show the genitals, etc., though we're not going to do one of those 'under the sheets' scene, either.

There are occasional breaks that take place in the film: going to the toilet, for instance, (in which

case, all you see is one of them getting up and going out of the room and come back).

The camera will start panning from under the bed, then the foot of the bed, gradually goes up, and finally up over their heads until the window at the foot of the bed starts to cover the whole screen. This camera movement can be compared to the moon rising and then disappearing at the other end in the time space of 1½ hr.

The soundtrack in contrast to the screen consists mainly of tragic conversations between a couple who are about to split, whimpering of a child, whippers, sighs and love groans. Also, a sound-tape from a trafilgar square soap-bubble happening comes in as if they are sounds in a dream of one of them, or of the three, while they sleep. At dawn, milkbottle rattling and bird sounds will come in, and the film will end with increasingly heavy bird sound.

#### Film No. 7 (Tea Party)

1½ hr. Colour. Synchronized sound. Cast: a woman

A woman is having a tea party in a room. We never see others except the woman. She says "you weren't listening, were you". After that she says nothing for the whole film.

The film is basically about a room with many different time worlds in it. A clock is going fast like crazy. A sugar in a glass melts spasmodically. The woman's dress deteriorates very fast. A car passing in the street, which is reflected in the woman's eyes goes ever so slowly. A chair melts away like something made out of dust, etc. In the end, the telephone is the only thing remaining in the room. Everything else disappears with its own time rhythm.

The woman will have to be a Japanese woman with very good breasts. The scene has a peculiar mixture of Japanese tea ceremony and an English tea party.

#### Film No. 8 (Woman)

1½ hr. Colour. Separate sound track. Cast: one women

This is a film about pregnancy and delivery treated in a highly poetic way, as opposed to a medical report sort.

The pregnant woman is the only person in the entire film, which symbolizes the lonely venture of conception.

She is contemporary, very sensitive and intelligent. Her mentality in all phases of her thinking is equivelant to that of a man of high intelligence in our society.

The audience becomes intimated with her skin, her swell, her vomit, her walk, her smile, everything about her except her exterior circumstances, such as whether she is married, if she has a job, etc. That part of her background is completely obscure.

The whole film can be thought of as a solo dance movement of a pregnant woman: first very light and pretty—gradually the body protruding—heavy and slow, and finally the dramatic delivery and a complete stillness to follow, with an underline suggestion of peace/death (atonement).

We also see a lot of the town, the skies the stars through her pregnant eyes.

In the soundtrack, we go into her mind. It consists mostly of delivery groans, swearing, also, interviews of the woman done by imaginary reporters. The quality of the interviews are highly philosophic—something that can be compared to the last monologue in *l'etranger* by Camus. She first conceives of her experience as a cancer growing in her stomach, etc. She is committed. But why her and not the man? What is the relationship between her and the growth inside her? etc., etc.

Except for medical reports, no film-maker as yet has taken this subject for a film. Maybe it is because most film-makers are men, and they are sensitive to this subject. I have noticed that whenever a pregnant woman is shown in a photograph or a film, they are over beautified and romanticized with careful camera work.

I want to treat this film poetically, but not with unnecessary beautification.

I want all the girls in the world to see this film before they become pregnant. Some mother, because they have been wrongly informed that the pregnancy is the most gratifying thing for women, etc., they start to hate the child after the initial shock of going through the unglamarous reality of pregnancy.

I want to eliminate such tragedy in the world.

Financially, this is a film that can be made with minimum cost. Though it takes time to make it (6

months) and today, most film-makers would like to spend less time in making a film, I don't mind going through it, since I feel this is a very important film.

#### Film No. 9 (Don't Worry Love)

½ hr. to 45 mins. Colour highspeed camera synchronized sound.

This is a love message we send from England to all over the world and to the future.

The idea was conceived from the fact when a star blinks, we only conceive it 2000 years after it's actually blinked. And that they say that the love we feel now is the love that's been conceived by somebody 2000 years ago, or that somebody in the corner of the world is sending love vibrations just to keep us in love, etc.

The film will be 20 seconds each shot of people smiling and saying "don't worry love", but because the shots are done in highspeed, each smile would actually be synchronized to the highspeed motion so that what you actually hear would be a strange elongated version of "don't worry love".

I hope this film will make the whole world a shade happier and rosier, and that our smile would encourage people of 2000 years later, just as the blinking of stars. It is actually a film that would be most effective if it's seen in our great, great grandchildren's time.

We must get a galaxy of people with strong good vibrations to smile in this film—people who represent our age.

#### Film No. 10 (Sky)

It is a film about waiting.

First you see the sky, through a telescope that covers the whole screen. The effect is like seeing the sky from the bottom of a very deep well. Clouds pass through very slowly.

Four people all dressed up are on a top of the hill.

They are watching the sky.  
And waiting, and waiting.

Some small talk between the four (all improvised)

Then one suggests that he would bring something and goes off. Remaining three talks about the one who went off.

Then another one goes off

Remaining two talks about the two who went off.

Then the third one goes off.

Remaining one moves around by himself. Then goes off.

The first one comes back with an incense.

The second and third ones come back, too.

But they can't find any matches between them to light the incense.

One goes off to get matches.

Another one goes off to get something.

The remaining one lies down to take a nap.  
(notice that the fourth one never came back)

Matches are brought back.

The second one brings back a guitar.

He starts to play and three of them sing.

Then they decide that the singing might scare the "thing" away, so they stop singing.

(constant looking up of the sky and horizon)

Then one suggests that somebody should bring a big ladder. There is a discussion about who should bring the ladder. They draw straws and the one who got the shortest goes off.

Then he comes back and says he needs another one to help him bring it. So finally all three of them go together.

Then the three brings back a ladder—a huge ladder. Two holds the bottom and one goes up and looks at the sky with a huge telescope.

Still nothing.

Gradually, it gets dark and they use matches to see each other's faces.

It gets cold and they make fire.

Also, one person gets extremely cold, so the rest of them give all their coats.

Finally, they see the fourth guy, who was away all this time, come back.

"Have you guys seen it yet?"

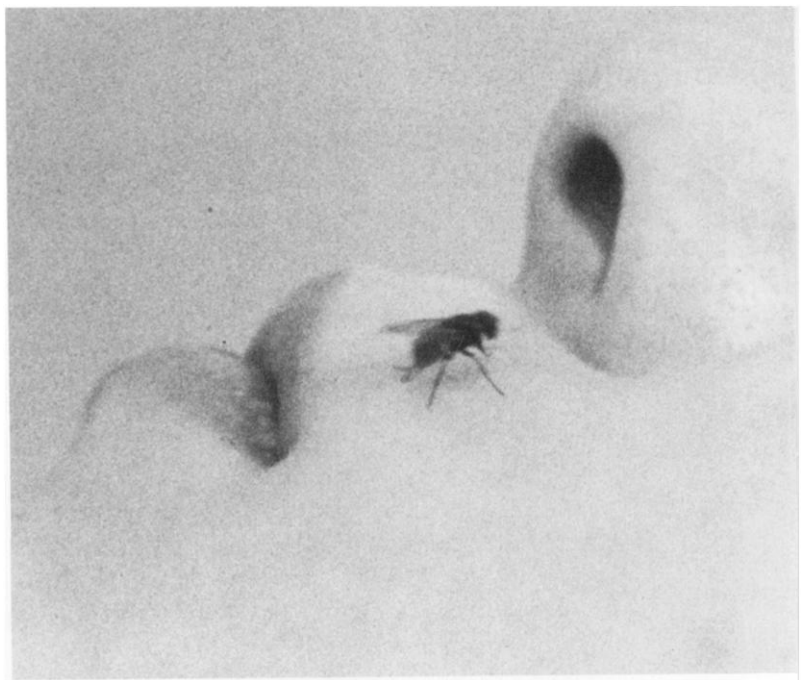
"No, not yet."

They are still checking the sky.  
Suddenly one says “look, look!”  
Everybody looks.

“Did you see it?”  
“No.”  
“Maybe”  
“. . . ?”

They put off the fire they made, which was getting low anyway.

And they go off with the ladder, telescope and each other.



*Fly* (1970)

#### Film No. 11 (Fly)

About a fly going from the toe to the head of a lying naked body, crawling very slowly. The whole film should take about an hour.

#### Film No. 12 (Esstacy)

THE CAMERA WORK OF THE FILM SHOULD CONSTANTLY GO UP, UP, UP NON STOP. COLLECT 367 PAIRS OF LEGS AND JUST GO UP THE LEGS (FROM TOES TO THE END OF THIGHS) PAIR AFTER PAIR AND GO ON UP UNTIL YOU RUN THROUGH THE WHOLE 367.

#### Film No. 13 (Travelogue)

Travelogue from a point of view of a person who could only see things in focus and close-ups. Show things in close-ups and in focus as the usual narration goes on about the things to discover and enjoy on your travel. For example, you introduce Tokyo and explain that what you see there are just knives—only because you focused in on a knife shop and *that* became Tokyo to you. On the screen, you don't see knives except a very large view of the blade or a tip of the blade without any background. You could explain how beautiful the Geisha girls are, but you only show strands of hair blowing in the wind in close-up. You talk about the mixed bath experience, and only show the steam. You talk about making love in the park and show two pieces

of grass waving. You talk about the experience in a noodle shop and show a close-up of the noodles without the background so the heap of noodles would look like an abstract expressionist painting.

This travelogue can be made without leaving your apartment.

Make a travelogue of your home country that expresses your focus.

Make travelogues of different countries that express your focus.

Make a travelogue of an imaginary country.

## Addendum '88

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Jonas Mekas once said that if the audience all walked out of your show, it meant that you were successful—or something to that effect. It was a sentiment shared by many of us in the avant-garde world at the time. It meant that you did not stoop so low as to try to entertain the audience but made a successful attempt in evoking strong emotions they were not ready to handle. It was Art vs. Entertainment.

Bottoms film was made in that tradition. I didn't think it would be so popular. A short was made in New York in '66 but the feature-length

version was made in London in '67 and probably appealed to the English sense of put-ons. Almost every day there was a little joke about my film in one of the English papers. Some of my serious avant-garde friends decided to drop me because they thought I sold out. One day I was walking down Kings Road and was spotted by some young people who started screaming my name. I remember thinking then that I would not want to be more famous than that since I would not only lose all my friends and my credibility as an artist, but would probably lose my (then) marriage which was getting a bit shaky anyway.

People called it the 'Bottoms' film, but the title of it was actually Film No. 4. "Why did you call it Film No. 4 and what are Films No. 1, 2 & 3?" was the usual question asked by journalists. "There were no Films No. 1, 2 & 3. I just liked the number 4" was my answer to that one. "Why did you choose 365 bottoms?" was the other standard question. "Who's counting? If you were, that was not what you were supposed to be doing". "Oh, what are we supposed to be doing then?" Film No. 4 mainly supplied a lot of laughs for people all over the world, most of whom never actually saw the film. Just the idea of it gave them a giggle. I found out much later that they were even giggling behind the Iron Curtain. No wonder my artistic friends dropped me. It was a total antithesis to Art per se. But actually *I* was the ultimate snob. I was going "Up Yours!" to the whole world including the avant-garde. It was a great high but also a lonely one.

The film was censored for general release as soon as it was completed. An announcement was then made that I and two thousand London youths would demonstrate in front of the Censor's Bureau to ask for the release of the film. Next morning I was there with Tony, my (then) husband and my daughter Kyoko. Tony carried Kyoko on his shoulders and I carried an armful of beautiful yellow daffodiles. Nobody was there except the reporters when we arrived. "Where are the rest of the people?—two thousand, we heard?" the reporters asked me. "They must be still asleep," I said. That gave them a laugh. I asked for the flowers to be sent up to Lord H., the gentleman who censored the film. We, 3 of us and the reporters all waited for a while. Then a girl came down from His Lord-

ship's office and asked me to go up with her. When I went to the office the place was already filled with flowers I had sent up. The door was closed on the smiling, curious faces of the staff. I was to have a private talk. No commitment was made, but I was given hope that the Lord would reconsider. The picture of me demonstrating with an armful of flowers got into the papers the next day. I've been told just recently that the news travelled as far as Ohio back then. It was also brave of the BBC News to show the Film footage on TV—close shots of naked bottoms walking—for the first time in BBC history, calling them "Censored bottoms"!

That summer would be the summer of flower children. The film censor would be reversed and Film No. 4 would have a big general release, opening in Charing Cross Road as London hippies would queue up, not so much to see the film as to take a stand. —But this was still early Spring. I remember the chilly morning breeze as we stood in front of the Censor's Bureau.

The success of the Film No. 4, however, opened up possibilities for me to make other films. Executives of big film companies readily gave me appointments to discuss about financing my next film. It didn't occur to me that some of them would just want to see what this strange phenomenon called Yoko Ono looked like. Was she really a woman? One American film executive who was on a short stay in London thought I was a girl who performed in the bottoms film and who was sent by the director to raise money. "I am the director" I said. "Oh, no, you can't be." That was supposed to be a compliment in '67 when nobody yet heard of "Woman Is The Nigger Of The World" or "Sisters O Sisters." I made a fast exit while the man was trying to fix a drink for me.

Another hurdle was my fear of disclosing my filmic ideas to prospective financiers in case they misuse them. My concern was justified in that already one famous body magazine wanted to commission me to make a pink version of the bottoms film. (A United States film company asked if I would make 365 breasts). I would not degrade my work that way. Sorry. That made them really mad . . . a bottoms film director . . . talking about degrading her work . . . who does she think she is? . . . Is she for real? Such comments found their way back to me. Try to raise money for a film with-

out disclosing the idea for it and you will find it not an easy matter. I remember one interview in particular where several men in dark suits were sitting behind a long table looking at me, trying to keep their faces straight as I spoke. "I see . . . but could we have *some* idea what the film is about?" "No, I'm afraid not."

I was extremely lucky though. Out of the blue I received a letter from an Austrian TV. They would like to commission me to make a film for them. They will give me carte blanche on the subject matter. It sounded really grand. That's how "Rape" was made. The idea of the film came to me long before the press assault became part of my life. It gives me the shivers now how prophetic that film was.

After "Rape" John and I decided to make films jointly. We enjoyed making films together. John came up with big ideas, or ideas that seemed big at least to me at the time. He thought of using the helicopter, for instance, which added a new dimension to our film venture. When John first said "Let's use a helicopter," I, who was supposed to

have sold out in a big way thought, "Oh, dear, aren't we getting a bit Hollywood?" The result was that beautiful scene of 'Jealous Guy' in *Imagine*. There was nothing so-called Hollywood about that one. We came from two opposite worlds and that meeting was a happy medium. I changed. After my partnership with John, I lost a little edge, in a nice way, I thought. I no more felt the need to protect my filmic ideas and released them all in print so that anybody could use them to make films. It was an act of cleansing for my spirit as a woman filmmaker who carried so many chips, *and* ideas, on her shoulder.

Out of the films the one I remember warmly is *IMAGINE*. The idea of not saying anything during the film except in the beginning to just say good morning to each other was John's. "Let's really upset them and end the film with us walking on water." (I'll let you guess whose idea *that* was!) We tried, that is, I know it looked a bit awkward, but it was a windy day and the waves were rough. Anyway, what you see is what you get. Enjoy.

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