representation of skin colour and racial difference at the centre of our narratives about portraiture and the self. Furthermore, her descriptions of paint surfaces and her incorporation of technical studies—by making vivid the artist's process and the material qualities of the art object—draw our attention to the very notions of embodiment that she argues are at issue in the portraits she analyses.

Overall, however, there is more text than image in Fend's study. The singling out of particular paintings to bear heavy rhetorical weight carries interpretative risks; Fend wants to make an argument about portraiture, and the representation of the human body, writ large, but her selection—a few Fragonards, a few post-Revolutionary Davids, a Girodet, a Benoist, and a few Ingres—represents only a fraction of the portraiture produced between 1700 and 1850. Fend excludes entire media in which the representation of skin is of paramount concern (sculpture, pastel) as well as the work of the best-known oil portraitists of the period (Nicolas de Largillière, Jean-Marc Nattier, Alexander Roslin, Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, François Gérard). What is left are the names most familiar to twenty-first century art historians, and the paintings that are the most extreme in their treatment of skin. Except for a discussion of neoclassicism, these examples are not placed in a larger artistic context. Fend's arguments could well have important consequences for our understanding of the Rococo or of Romanticism, but she does not address these broader fields of visual production or their historiography.

Fend's inconsistent invocation of historical and cultural context poses a similar problem. Her analyses of portraits by David, Girodet, and Benoist are set against the history of the guillotine and the abolition of slavery during the French Revolution, yet this gesture towards the cultural conditions of portraiture is not repeated for her other examples. Her attention to the portrait sitter's personal stakes in these representations of self is similarly uneven; her consideration of Fragonard's fantasy portraits explicitly sets aside evidence of the sitters' identities provided by a recently discovered drawing that has upended our understanding of these paintings, but in the case of David's portrait of his sister-in-law, she sees familial tensions written on the sitter's face. Moreover, her analysis of portraiture's role in the definition of class identity is largely based on Foucault's notion of modern bourgeois subjectivity, an approach that flattens historical nuance and ignores more recent historical scholarship on class and selfhood.

Despite these issues, *Fleshing Out Surfaces* is indispensable reading for anyone interested in the cultural construction of the body and the theory and practice of portraiture. Fend's focus on the representation of skin, and the connections she makes between medical and anatomical treatises, Enlightenment philosophical considerations of body and self, and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century aesthetic theory provide a productive vocabulary for talking about portraiture, and indeed about visual culture more broadly. Densely written and provocative, *Fleshing Out Surfaces* complicates our understanding of what, and how, portraiture represents, and provides innumerable jumping-off points for future scholarship.

Notes

1. See Craig Koslofsky, 'Knowing Skin in Early Modern Europe, *c.* 1450–1750', *History Compass*, vol. 12, no. 10, October 2014, pp. 794–806; Evelyn Welch's Wellcome Trust-funded 'Renaissance Skin' project; see <http://www.renaissanceskin.ac.uk> [accessed 16 January 2018]; and Daniela Bohde and Mechthild Fend (eds), *Weder Haut noch Fleisch: Das Inkarnat in der Kunstgeschichte* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 2007).
2. Rosenthal, Angela, 'Visceral Culture: Blushing and the Legibility of Whiteness in Eighteenth-Century British Portraiture', *Art History*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2004, pp. 563–92; Melissa Hyde, 'The 'Makeup' of the Marquise: Boucher's Portrait of Pompadour at Her Toilette', *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 82, no. 3, September 2000, pp. 453–75; Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, 'Pompadour's Touch: Difference in Representation', *Representations*, vol. 73, no. 1, Winter 2001, pp. 54–88.

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'A Machine in the Garden'

Johanna Gosse

Gloria Sutton, *The Experience Machine: Stan VanDerBeek's* Movie-Drome *and Expanded Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015) 79 b&w ills, 272 pp, £30.00 Hardcover, ISBN: 9780262028493

In November 1969, during his residency at the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the American artist Stan VanDerBeek (1927–1984) drafts a proposal, entitled 'Notes on . . . Artist in Residence to the World'. VanDerBeek outlines his nascent concept for a global residency programme, where troupes of artists would tour the world to promote transcultural artistic exchange and education. He envisions the residency programme as an artistic 'Hope Ship', but rather than bringing health care and humanitarian aid to underserved and remote populations, it could offer aesthetic education, technical training, and access to advanced equipment, studio and performance space. Participating artists would make work involving telecommunications and broadcast

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media, and train others to use these technologies. VanDerBeek even suggests a range of potential transportation modes for the mobile residency—a cargo plane, a large ship, even a 'portable air dome'—the latter an obvious nod to Buckminster Fuller's various designs for modular, floating domiciles. He concludes with the statement: 'I see my idea as an experiment in global aesthetics and communication, bringing together artist's [*sic*] from all over the world to work together with the latest technologies in an attempt to understand that it is the world itself that we relate to, and it is the people and the artist's [*sic*] of the world that we all relate to.'

Here, and in many of his other writings, VanDerBeek articulates his vision of advanced global telecommunications and networked media as an aesthetic Esperanto for the Information Age. Yet, if we consider the historical and institutional conditions from which this particular proposal emerged—MIT in 1969, at the height of the war in Vietnam—these lofty aspirations are undercut by political contradictions, and a not-so-subtle whiff of cultural imperialism. Whereas Fuller regarded unrestricted human mobility and sophisticated technology as potential solutions to global inequality, suffering, and waste, VanDerBeek appears to have been a more ambivalent techno-utopian, an artist who was clearly invested in recuperating the transformative possibilities of new media technology but who struggled to reconcile this potential with its instrumental role within the military industrial apparatus. In her timely and meticulously researched book, *The Experience Machine: Stan VanDerBeek's* Movie-Drome *and Expanded Cinema*, Gloria Sutton deftly navigates these fundamental tensions as they surface in VanDerBeek's complex and under-explored oeuvre.

If one thing is clear from the many proposals, plans, and manifestos that he drafted over his career, VanDerBeek was an artist who thrived in the provisional mode. Like his idol Bucky Fuller, he generated more concepts than he could realise during his lifetime, which was cut short by cancer at age 57. Radically heterodox in methodology, VanDerBeek rejected disciplinary boundaries and medium-specific hierarchies, and, as a result, courted failure as a matter of course. Perhaps due to this audacious embrace of risk (which, at least superficially, resembles the entrepreneurial ethos of contemporary start-up culture), curatorial interest in VanDerBeek has spiked in recent years, leading to his work's appearance in several group and solo exhibitions.[1]

If it is fair to say that VanDerBeek is having a moment, *The Experience Machine* is required reading for understanding why. Marshalling extensive archival research, finely tuned visual and discursive analysis, and, most helpfully, by contextualising his work within the broader field of postwar experimentation, Sutton's study illuminates VanDerBeek's complex legacy and unpacks its relevance in the current moment, a time when the projected moving image, immersive and interactive multimedia, and advanced technological experimentation—all hallmarks of his practice—have emerged as major tendencies within contemporary art, if not its dominant modes.

Initially celebrated in the late 1950s for his stop-motion collage films (which notably inspired Terry Gilliam's animated credit sequence for *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (1969–74), a bit of trivia that Sutton omits), VanDerBeek emerged as one of the foremost figures affiliated with art and technology experimentation during the 1960s. He is often cited for coining two key terms within the field of experimental film: 'underground cinema', a category that describes his earlier animated films, and 'Expanded Cinema' (notably, capitalised), which denotes his later involvement in live multimedia events. *The Experience Machine* focuses on the latter category, arguing that his invention of the term underscores 'durational media's incommensurability with the more established genres of visual art' (p. 21). Laudably, Sutton allows this incommensurability to stand, resisting the temptation to collapse the 'purposefully messy enterprise' (p. 22) of Expanded Cinema into the broader field of postwar avant-garde art production, and thus forcibly contain its unruly, boundary-pushing sensibilities.

With his DIY aesthetic, an idiosyncratic, slightly manic verbal style, and affinity for communal living arrangements, VanDerBeek today looks like the ideal artist representative of the postwar counterculture. Yet, as Sutton documents, he maintained consistent ties to mainstream institutions throughout his career, through his roles as employee, fellow, professor, or artist-in-residence at a number of powerful foundations, major universities, media outlets, governmental bodies, and large corporations; from the Rockefeller Foundation to MIT, Bell Labs to PBS, NASA, and CBS. These links, Sutton suggests, render the conventional opposition, between the artist-as-countercultural-bohemian versus complicit sell-out, both inadequate and irrelevant. Instead, she takes the seeming paradoxes undergirding his practice as an opportunity to chart a more useable genealogy for contemporary art, and particularly the rise of a 'network aesthetic' in digital culture. Ultimately, moving away from the ossified critical discourses of modernist medium-specificity allowed VanDerBeek and, so by extension, Sutton, to 'underscore[s] the idea that visual art itself is its own type of feedback mechanism that turns on a set of a relations, not a technology' (p. 2). This insight represents the book's central claim and, in many ways, its most lasting contribution.

Sutton's solution to the complex methodological problems posed by VanDerBeek's diverse and experimental oeuvre is to focus on a single work, the *Movie-Drome* (1965)—an immersive media installation featuring an elaborate arrangement of slide and film projectors, all housed within a

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repurposed, 30-foot diameter mail-order grain silo constructed by VanDerBeek in the woods near his home at Gate Hill, a residential artist's cooperative in Stony Point, New York founded by former faculty and students of the legendary Black Mountain College. The media spectacle conjured within the *Drome*'s cylindrical interior spanned from obscure found footage to still photography to contemporary newsreels, a proto-digital 'mash-up' assembled in real time. In his 1965 manifesto, 'Culture: Intercom and Expanded Cinema: A Proposal and a Manifesto', VanDerBeek dubbed the *Movie-Drome* an 'experience machine', and envisioned a worldwide network of interconnected *dromes* that could store, transmit, and broadcast images using (at the time, nascent) satellite communications technology.[2] In the words of critic Leo Goldsmith, the *Drome* functioned like an 'artisanal, site-specific YouTube channel'.[3]

Before turning to VanDerBeek's 'experience machine', Sutton introduces her project with an intricate infographic designed by Fluxus impresario, George Maciunas. This flow-chart-slash-avant-garde-family-tree, known as the 'Expanded Arts Diagram', appeared in *Film Culture* in 1966, the thirty-year anniversary of Alfred H. Barr Jr's iconic *Cubism and Abstract Art*, which was the cover illustration for the catalogue of his eponymous 1936 MoMA exhibition. As the postwar sequel to this defining avant-garde genealogy, Maciunas's chart functions as a visual introduction to what Sutton terms the 'network typology', one which also provides the conceptual logic for the *Movie-Drome*. Indeed, looking at Maciunas's graph, keywords such as 'indeterminism', 'simultaneity', and 'use of junk' link a variety of practices, movements, and historical moments more in the fashion of digital metadata tags than taxonomic designations. Rather than map direct lines of historical causality or ancestry, Maciunas's chart identifies 'key points or nodes within the diverse historical and cultural contexts of the 1960s' (p. 24), generating a conceptually consistent diagram of the burgeoning network aesthetic.

Following Maciunas, Sutton situates VanDerBeek's Expanded Cinema on a continuum between Allan Kaprow's Happenings and Fluxus intermedia, artfully managing to translate this liminal status into a discursive focus. Inasmuch as Maciunas's chart captured in graphic form the historical constellation of intermedia practice in the mid-1960s, the *Movie-Drome* represents a similar convergence of the avant-garde art, cinema, and technology contained not in a map but in the architecture of a Fuller-esque dome (which, Sutton helpfully specifies, is more 'Dymaxion' than 'geodesic' in form). Accordingly, the *Drome* emerges as a physical expression of this nascent discourse, as a 'critical nexus' of the same complex constellation of ideas and events that Maciunas was simultaneously attempting to map.

Throughout, Sutton stresses that VanDerBeek's *Movie-Drome* was not so much a finished work as a nascent prototype for networked media technologies, and by extension, the new forms of 'networked subjectivity' that have emerged in tandem with them. To this end, she argues for the *Movie-Drome*'s designation as a modular interface rather than as an autonomous, complete work of media installation (p. 14). This distinction helps flesh out how the *Drome* models a networked subject, or what she terms 'immersive subjectivity', characterised by an interest in 'the instantaneous, the immediate, and a desire for presence that continues to prevail in contemporary art' (p. 197). As such, Sutton claims, 'the *Movie-Drome* offered a radical reformulation of subjectivity as an accretive process, in what could be considered in [VanDerBeek's] own terms a collage experience "where you take and reshape"' (p. 17).

Sutton's first chapter focuses on a 1966 conference on Expanded Cinema staged during the Fourth New York Film Festival, which was the occasion for *Movie-Drome*'s public premiere. During the Festival, VanDerBeek invited a group of participating artists, film-makers, and critics to embark on a bus trip to upstate New York to visit the *Drome*. The audience, which included art and film luminaries such as Andy Warhol, film-maker Agnès Varda, and critic Annette Michelson, was unimpressed by the *Drome*, many regarding it as a flop. Sutton clearly chooses this deliberately anti-climactic debut to emphasise the risky nature of VanDerBeek's practice. But the scene also recalls another infamous event from nearly two decades earlier, which took place during the 1948 summer session at Black Mountain, a year before VanDerBeek enrolled at the college. As visiting professor, Bucky Fuller had gathered a group of faculty and students to construct a geodesic dome using hundreds of venetian blind slats, a material that proved itself to be structurally inadequate. When the dome refused to stand, the project acquired the joking nickname, *Supine Dome*. Even if VanDerBeek's *Movie-Drome* may have been architecturally sound, its debut echoed this legendary failed experiment, one that Fuller claimed was deliberately designed to demonstrate the 'critical limits' of his chosen material.

The role of Black Mountain College as a laboratory for testing 'critical limits' provides the focus for the second chapter, which narrates VanDerBeek's experience at the college and the impact of its experimental ethos on his practice. This sequence of convergences between VanDerBeek and Fuller provides Sutton an opportunity to trace their strong intellectual affinities. Looking back to the residency proposal from 1969, its dual emphasis on high-tech experimentation ('I see my idea as an experiment in global aesthetics and communication') and on the social and relational dimensions of artistic practice ('it is the world itself that we relate to, and it is the people and the artist's [*sic*] of the world that <u>we all</u> relate to') was no doubt shaped by his time at Black Mountain, where VanDerBeek

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arrived in 1949. His makeshift, DIY ethos was undoubtedly influenced not only by formative encounters with John Cage and Fuller at Black Mountain but also by its emphasis on 'learning by doing', an approach inherited from the progressive educational theories of American Pragmatist philosopher, John Dewey. Both the *Drome* and VanDerBeek's unrealised residency proposal could thus be read as high-tech mobilisations of the college's groundbreaking pedagogy, transported from its bucolic lakeside campus in the Blue Ridge Mountains to the remote backwoods of upstate New York, and ultimately, around the globe.

The third chapter offers a detailed theorisation of how VanDerBeek aimed to reshape the sensorium through immersive media, generating a new model of 'networked subjectivity' which, Sutton argues, defines the late information age. VanDerBeek's intermedia experimentation thus works on two levels: dissolving the model of the artistic medium as a specific and autonomous entity, and dispersing the unified spectator into a collective social body. Sutton traces an emerging understanding of the subject as an assemblage of effects, or what she calls a 'multimedia subjectivity', which she relates to the gradual dissemination of postwar cybernetics discourse into the broader cultural sphere during this period.

The final two chapters similarly reposition the *Movie-Drome* within new historical and conceptual constellations. Chapter four contextualises VanDerBeek's work within the Foucauldian theory of heterotopic space in relation to the eighteenth-century salon-style fine art exhibition, and two avant-garde examples, El Lissitzky's *Cabinet of Abstract Art* 1926 and Frederick Kiesler's *Spatial Theater* of 1924. The last chapter shifts focus from the architectural and conceptual dimensions of the *Movie-Drome* to VanDerBeek's subsequent work with computer-generated animation, focusing on the *Poemfield* series that he developed in residence at Bell Labs with the intention of projecting inside the *Movie-Drome*.

It is here that the relationship between VanDerBeek and Cage begins to come more clearly into view. The two first met at Black Mountain, where in 1952 VanDerBeek participated in Cage's landmark *Theater Event #1*, often referred to as the first 'happening'. Later, as neighbours at Gate Hill, they collaborated on a number of different projects, including VanDerBeek's computer film *Poemfield No. 7* (1971), which receives focused treatment in this chapter. Yet, Sutton is not invested in positioning Cage as a single, totalising influence; in rendering him more of a background figure, she avoids the trap of hereditary overdetermination, in which 'influence' serves as an art historical silver bullet. While she clearly regards Fuller as the more significant precursor, this decentring of Cage also clears space for less vaunted figures from VanDerBeek's Black Mountain (and later, Gate Hill) days, such as the hugely influential yet critically neglected writer and ceramicist, M.C. Richards.[4]

However, clarifying the distinction between Cage and Fuller's conceptualisations of experimentation would help situate Sutton's analysis of VanDerBeek within a broader discussion of the legacy of Black Mountain's experimental pedagogy in American culture. Arguably, for Fuller, experimentation was a means to an end. Trial and error were part of the pursuit of good design that could solve the world's problems, and entailed the progressive elimination of chance and failure in the service of this project. By contrast, Cage viewed chance and indeterminacy as aesthetic ends in themselves.[5] Establishing where VanDerBeek sits in relation to these competing understandings would link Sutton's investigation of the *Movie-Drome* and 'immersive subjectivity' to an emerging body of historical scholarship that directly addresses the legacy of Black Mountain on the American neo-avant-garde and the rise of interactive and immersive media.[6]

While *The Experience Machine* is a generative and rigorous work of scholarship, catalysing new avenues and tributaries of historical inquiry, it also sits squarely within an established critical tradition. For more than a century, American artists and cultural critics have been preoccupied with the complex and increasingly co-dependent relationship between art and technology, from Henry Adams's essay 'The Dynamo and the Virgin' (1900) to Lewis Mumford's *Art and Technics* (1952). One text that stands as both a contemporary of the *Movie-Drome* and a mid-century analogue to Sutton's project is Leo Marx's *The Machine in The Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, published the year before VanDerBeek wrote his 'Culture: Intercom' manifesto.[7] A foundational figure in the field of American Studies, Marx analyses the literary and artistic trope of technology intruding upon a pastoral American landscape, and frames this as a symptom of modern industrialisation. One of Marx's central examples is Henry David Thoreau's *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854), in which the Transcendentalist philosopher describes hearing the rattling and whistling of a steam locomotive in the distance during his rural sabbatical—an acoustic manifestation of modernity's inescapable and irreversible reach.

One wonders whether Cage had read Leo Marx when in February 1976, five years after collaborating with VanDerBeek on *Poemfields #7*, he debuted a new intermedia performance called *Lecture on the Weather*, which was inspired by Thoreau's writings and atmospheric sound recordings made at Walden Pond.[8] At the beginning of the performance, Cage reads a brief 'preface' in which he identifies three key characteristics of American national identity: imperial expansion, environmental devastation, and anti-intellectualism. Cage designates Thoreau and Fuller as critical counter-examples to these tendencies, identifying them as foremost American representatives of 'ingenuity', 'intelligence', and 'aspirational thought'. Using language

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strikingly reminiscent of VanDerBeek's own impassioned calls for social connectivity and transformation, Cage states:

> More than anything else we need communion with everyone. Struggles for power have nothing to do with communion. Communion extends beyond boarders: it is with one's enemies also. Thoreau said: 'The best communion men have is in silence.'

Lecture on the Weather anticipates a future climate, now present, marred by global war and global warming, where global 'communion' is the best and only antidote. Grounding his anti-imperialist, eco-critical polemic in the dual inheritances of American Transcendentalism and American techno-utopianism, Cage's analysis straddles the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, while subtly betraying a certain romanticism behind his strident anarcho-aleatory aesthetics. Yet, as Sutton's vital study demonstrates, VanDerBeek clearly also belongs in Cage's abbreviated inventory of American aspiration, ingenuity, and intelligence. As an experiment in 'expanded' techno-pastoralism that anticipated the contemporary media ecology of social networks and immersive virtual reality, the *Movie-Drome* also provides an impetus for Sutton's 'expanded' approach to art history as a network of mutually constitutive influences rather than a strictly evolutionary taxonomy (*pace* Barr).

By resituating the *Movie-Drome* as a pivotal, paradigm-shifting *interface* rather than a failed trial run or obscure art historical footnote, Sutton's study conducts a series of strategic decentrings and reorientations of traditional art historical narratives and values: from Cage to Fuller; from urban centre to rural periphery; from institutional site (gallery, museum, cinema) to makeshift DIY structure; and finally, from completed art work to a provisional, experimental event. Sutton charts a new course in which the reciprocal links of the network, rather than the unidirectional telos of the genealogical chart, provides a fitting visual metaphor for the new methodologies necessitated by an artist like VanDerBeek. Ultimately, if we accept that VanDerBeek's 'machine in the garden' prototyped the present, we must also admit that the ultimate political implications of digital age paradigms such as 'networked subjectivity' and 'global connectivity' remain to be seen. Moreover, if the twenty-first century representative of 'American ingenuity and intelligence' is far more likely to hail from Palo Alto than a rural commune, VanDerBeek may indeed bear some responsibility for this shift. Nevertheless, *The Experience Machine* reveals that while a handful of radical artists, theorists, writers, and visionaries may have anticipated certain aspects of contemporary culture, often with uncanny precision, they did not view their own cultural or political situation as a foregone conclusion but rather as a perpetual work-in-progress: a hopeful reminder in increasingly unpredictable and divided (however 'networked') times.

Notes

1. Some prominent examples include the New Museum's 'Ghosts in the Machine' from 2012, the 2013 Venice Biennale, the Whitney Museum's 'Dreamlands: Immersive Cinema and Art, 1905–2016', as well as solo shows such as his long-awaited 2011 retrospective, 'Stan VanDerBeek: The Culture Intercom', at MIT's List Visual Arts Center, and a 2015 exhibition of his *Poemfields* computer films at Andrea Rosen Gallery.
2. The concept of an 'experience machine' that simulates reality would later be taken up as a philosophical thought exercise. In his 1974 book *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, American philosopher Robert Novick invoked the possibility of a pleasure-giving 'experience machine' to argue against the hedonistic premise that the pursuit of pleasurable experience and wellbeing is the ultimate purpose and goal of life. The concept has also had a significant afterlife in cyberpunk science fiction literature and film, for instance in the virtual reality thriller, *Strange Days* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1995), and, perhaps most iconically, the digital dystopian film trilogy, *The Matrix* (The Wachowski Brothers, 1999/2003).
3. Leo Goldsmith, 'Stan VanDerBeek', *Art Agenda*, 16 June 2015. Accessed at: http://www.art-agenda.com/reviews/stan-vanderbeek/
4. Sutton references the work of art historian Jenni Sorkin, whose recent book *Live Form: Women, Ceramics, Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016) recovers Richards's critical legacy in the postwar avant-garde.
5. The distinctions between Cage's and Fuller's approach to experimentation are precisely elaborated in Branden Joseph's 'Hitchhiker in an Omni-Directional Transport: The Spatial Politics of John Cage and Buckminster Fuller', originally published in 1997 and recently reprinted in the edited collection *Experimentations: John Cage in Music, Art, and Architecture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).
6. See Fred Turner's *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia and American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), and Eva Diaz's *The Experimenters: Chance and Design at Black Mountain College* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).
7. Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).
8. *Lecture on the Weather* was commissioned by the Canadian Broadcasting Company in 1975 to commemorate the American Bicentennial the following year. Cage worked in collaboration with two other artists: composer Maryanne Amacher, who contributed atmospheric weather-based sound recordings captured at Walden Pond, and Chilean artist Luis Frangella, who created a film comprised of photographic negatives of nature sketches from Thoreau's journals. After Cage read his polemical 'preface', a chorus of twelve individuals simultaneously recited selections from *Walden*, Thoreau's journals, and the 'Essay on Civil Disobedience', these excerpts chosen and scored by means of I-Ching chance operations.

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