Likeconomy Piece

Despite the nausea she felt at the thought of the war economy, Michal B. Ron writes from this perspective about the summer exhibitions in Berlin. The exhibitions by Yoko Ono and Lygia Clark offered opposite ways of participating in art, one of which is no different from marking a 'like.' So, can marking a like end a war? Or does the like actually feed off it?

/ Michal B. Ron February 12, 2026

After the publication of the issue I edited for Tohu under the banner of Collective Forgetting, the economics of advertising allows me to reconsider. To recalculate. Within the collective forgetting, the numbers accumulate. One must forget over seventy thousand times. In Arabic. In Hebrew. In Thai... How can forgetting Babel be sustainable?

....

The thought of the war economy and the calculation it demands in bodies and corpses has an odor. The odor of charred flesh, of blood. Of smoke, of dust. The thought of a war economy is nauseating, even when I write about it from the safe place of the home economy, the kitchen table. I recall the Dadaist collage by Hanna Höch (1889-1978), *Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada Through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany* (1919). In the upper right corner, the country's leaders and its lords of war are presented as an "anti-Dada movement". Shira Wachsmann has identified, in this collage and in the brown-gray coloration of the newspaper clippings, a mold that refuses to disappear amid the historic effort to suppress it. As is the nature of mold, you can never get rid of it; it might only spread more.

I also recall another table, in a coffee shop, by Otto Dix (1891-1969): The Skat Players – *Card-Playing War Invalids* (1920). Soldiers with medals of valor on their uniforms sit, limbs severed, gambling on whatever luck they may have left, holding the cards in their teeth, their toes, or with prostheses. One of the prostheses is signed with: "Lower jaw: Maker – Dix. Real only with a photo of the inventor."

Another kitchen appears in Martha Rosler's *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975), where Rosler presents kitchen utensils in alphabetical order and shows their use. "*Knife*" is displayed between "*Juicer*" and "*Ladle*." Rosler holds the knife's handle in her fist and demonstrates three stabbing motions. We can only guess what imaginary body she uses the knife on. Earlier, Rosler brought the war into the kitchen with the photo montage "*Kitchen Red Stripe*" from the series **House Beautiful: Bring the War Home** (1967-1972). The work comprises a photo of a kitchen from a magazine, in which she embedded images of American soldiers from the Vietnam War, raiding the good capitalist American life. Making America Great Again?

מרתה רוסלר, סמיוטיקה של המטבח, 1975, וידיאו, 6:09 דקות



[1]

Martha Rosler, Semiotics of the Kitchen, 1975, video, 6:09 minutes.
Courtesy Studio Martha Rosler and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/Cologne/Maasberg

מרתה רוסלר, מטבח פס אדום, מתוך הסדרה Beautiful House: להביא את המלחמה הביתה, 1967-1972 **[2]**



[3]

Martha Rosler, Red Stripe Kitchen, from the series House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home, 1967-1972

Courtesy Studio Martha Rosler and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/Cologne/Maasberg

It had happened that a visit to an art exhibition left me feeling nauseous. It was Documenta 14, "Learning from Athens," in 2017, curated by Adam Szymczyk, about which I wrote in this magazine [4]. The exhibition expressed the economy of bodies in art with the practice of gender transition of Paul B. Preciado [5], who was a partner in the project, in the conditioning of the orgasmic-pornographic love [6] of Annie Sprinkle (b. 1954) and Beth Stephens (b. 1960) with nature, in the body drawings of Lorenza Böttner [7] (Böttner, 1959-1994), who, having lost her hands, drew them with her feet and mouth.

The books collected by Maria Eichhorn [8] (b. 1962) as part of the Rose Valland Institute [9] she founded, which was dedicated to locating copies illegally obtained from Jewish-owned libraries, and the shelves of confiscated literature in Martha Minujín's *Book Parthenon* (b. 1943), made me feel nauseous. Perhaps it was because of the dust, which appears in Georges Bataille's dictionary as follows: "Meanwhile, gloomy sheets of dust constantly invade earthly dwellings and uniformly contaminate them: as if preparing attics and old rooms for the imminent occupation of obsessions, ghosts, and spirits that feed on the rotten smell of old dust.1" I think of Roee Rosen's entertaining ode to the xenophobic Dyson vacuum cleaner, *The Dust Channel* (2016), which was presented at the same Documenta, and the nausea rises again.2 Like the scent of a madeleine cookie can evoke childhood memories. It was summer, Kassel was hot and humid, and I was pregnant.

Lorenza Böttner, Illustrations, Pastels, Paintings, Video, Archival Materials, 1975-1994, private collection, installation view, Neue Galerie, Kassel photo: Mathias Völzke. courtesy of the photographer **[10]**



[11]

Lorenza Böttner, Illustrations, Pastels, Paintings, Video, Archival Materials, 1975-1994, private collection, installation view, Neue Galerie, Kassel
photo: Mathias Völzke. courtesy of the photographer

I am looking for a way to think and write about the body and the economics of war, but I want to avoid being tormented by existential nausea. When I write in my kitchen, whose walls are standing, in a building that is not in a war zone, the danger of war is aesthetic, not lethal.3 The summer exhibitions in Berlin in 2025 provided such an aesthetic opportunity to think about the economy of the body in an artistic context: about the tension between two positions that advocate participation, even participatory art, the exhibitions of Yoko Ono (born 1933) at the Gropius Bau, "Peace is Power", and the National Gallery, "To Dream Together", and the retrospective of Lygia Clark (1920-1988) at the National Gallery. Both suggested different, contrasting ways of participating in their work. The first, I would argue, operates on a like economy: the audience, called upon to participate in the performance of the work, leaves an indexical mark on it, which in turn attests to the cumulative participation. The multiplicity of participations becomes quantitative capital. In the second, however, the work of art, in which the audience participates, becomes superfluous and is harnessed for therapy. Which practice has the power to bring about change, especially in times of war?

"The war is over! If you want it to. Merry Christmas from John and Yoko," announced Yoko Ono and John Lennon in advertisements published in the winter of 1969 in leading newspapers, such as The New York Times. This was part of a campaign that included posters plastered in the squares of major cities, and a Christmas song [12] recorded to promote the idea of peace. For peace, Yoko and John also spent a week in their honeymoon suite at a hotel in Amsterdam, in a "*bed-in*" *for peace* (1969). Yoko and John documented their next bed-in in Montreal in the film [13] *Bed-Peace* (a play on the words 'peace' and 'piece'). They explained to the reporters they invited to their hotel room that they wanted to sell peace as a product using a gimmick, just like soap. They wanted housewives to like peace and understand that peace and war are two competing products. This can be confusing because one might think that the product being sold by the posters and newspaper ads is the song, which in turn, along with *Bed-In for Peace,* is a campaign for Yoko and John's public relationship. For readers whose countries are at war, the announcement "The war is over! If you want it to" could be perceived as scandalous. But in the economy of social media, if the user wants it, "they can simply" like" the announcement. Can a like end a war? The cumulative impression is that the like actually feeds off of it.

Ono's early works, before her high-profile relationship with Lennon, were the most exciting in the retrospective presented at the Gropius Bau. In contrast to her later use of her celebrity status, her early works had an anonymous profile, although even then it was possible to participate in their execution. Ono, a musician who worked as a Fluxus artist, composed scores for the performance of a piece. For example, in *Conversation Piece* from the summer of 1962, published in the booklet *Grapefruit*4 (1964), which is particularly relevant to the bodily matters to which this issue is dedicated:

CONVERSATION PIECE

Bandage any part of your body.
If people ask about it, make a story
and tell.
If people do not ask about it, draw
their attention to it and tell.
If people forget about it, remind
them of it and keep telling.
Do not talk about anything else.

1962 Summer

The magic of the instructions that Ono suggests to us is that it really doesn't matter whether we carry them out or not. Planting the idea in our imagination is enough. Cut Piece (1964) was less anonymous and, in retrospect, left less room for imagination. The artist sat on a stage with a pair of scissors next to her. Every viewer was allowed to cut the fabric of the garment she was wearing. In the documentation of the performance at Carnegie Hall in New York (1965), it is clear that one of the

viewers took excessive liberties, using the permission given to him and cutting the artist's bra straps. That viewer remained anonymous in his participation, while the work became a performative expression of the audience. Even more so than the artist, who was not yet as well known as she is today, who sat passively, even a little frightened for a moment, while the scissors and the permission were in the hands of that participant. The tables are turned. Let's coin a term: public expressionism. Was this the moment when Ono understood the power of the audience to perform the works she had proposed for them?5

In later performances of *Cut Piece*, the artist and audience arrive more prepared and conscious of the event: in 2003, at the age of seventy, to complete the circle, the artist has added the instruction to send the piece of fabric you have cut to a loved one. For the retrospective at the Gropius Bau, Peaches (b. 1966), a well-known queer musician from Berlin, performed the work on the opening night of Gallery Weekend. The Berlin audience, which purchases all tickets for the event within twenty minutes of the sale opening, demonstrates great creativity in the ninety minutes at its disposal, with cuts and gestures that rise to the occasion alongside the celebrity sitting comfortably on stage in a pink designer dress and a "little mermaid" pose. With this expressive participation, a selfie economy can develop among the audience members.6

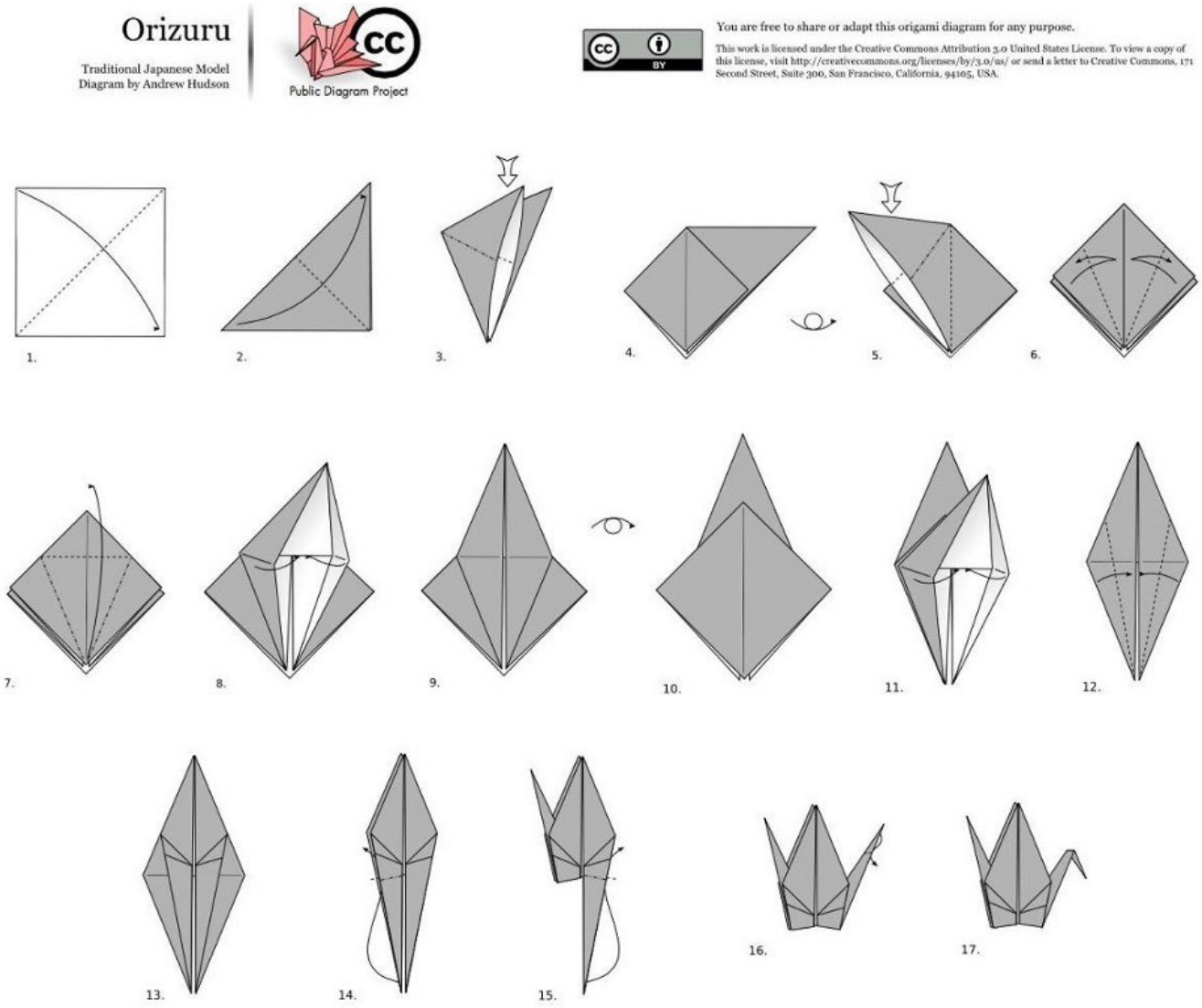
In three additional works, Ono returned to demonstrate her practices as a peace activist: *Add Color (*Refugee Boat *[14])* (2016), *Wishing Tree* (1996), and *Folding Cranes*, a project that reactivates her instructions from *The Art of Paper Folding* (1963): "Fold certain parts of the paper and read. Fold a crane and read. "In *Add Color (Refugee Boat)*, Ono places a boat in a white space and provides blue and white paint for visitors, who were invited7 "to reflect on global displacement and collective hope, making the work a platform for shared human experience."8 In practice, the space was filled with blue inscriptions in which FREE PALESTINE competed with BRING THEM HOME NOW, which in turn received the response: HOME AS IN EUROPE? IT'S PALESTINIAN LAND. As the room filled with blue, the audience's dedication to Ono's invitation to participate in the work and express their views was evident. But was this a vision of peace, of shared human experience, or of empathy?

The *wishing tree* served as another medium for expressing the public's wishes. Ono placed olive trees in a gesture that this Middle Eastern visitor perceived as clichéd and triggering, and encouraged the audience to write a wish on a piece of paper, hang it on the tree, and invite a friend to do the same. My seven-year-old daughter drew a horse and hung her wish on the tree. Guests from Israel who visited the exhibition with me made sure to wish for the return of the hostages. The messages were less public than those at the refugee camp, and were meant to remain so, like prayer notes at the Western Wall. There were many notes, and many olive trees: one was placed in the entrance plaza to the National Galerie, and others filled the atrium of the Gropius Bau. Will the olive trees bring the white dove of peace closer?

And from the dove to the cranes: they recalled the Japanese tradition of folding a thousand cranes to bring about healing, fulfill a wish, and bring world peace. In August 2014, Ono called on the public [15] through social media to fold cranes in preparation for the anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. At the National Galerie, she laid out sheets of paper for folding and instructions on a table. The cranes accumulated as visitors shared the instructions (without giving up halfway through the origami challenge). And where is peace?

Each page bore the inscription: YOKO ONO, DREAM TOGETHER, the artist's name and the title of the exhibition. The signature revealed the mechanism of participation that Ono promotes, no less than that peace: the space that had turned blue with the refugee boat, the olive grove filled with notes, and the table laden with cranes – all invite the audience to participate in Ono's work, which appropriates participation. The more, the better: Ono has signed thousands of cranes. The visibility and meaning of the work depend on the number of participants. And from collaboration comes the "share" button: the economic logic of "like" and "share," measured quantitatively. While this logic amplifies the artist and echoes her message, I ask again: Does Ono imagine that: WAR IS OVER! IF YOU LIKE IT.

. [16]



[17]
Paper crane folding instructions shared by Yoko Ono on the social media platform X **[15]**
5:42 PM, 5 August 2014

At the same time, the Nationalgalerie presented the first retrospective in Europe of Brazilian artist Lygia Clark. There are several similarities between Ono and Clark: both are women, both are foreigners, both are from the global South. Both emigrated or fled to the West from their wounded homelands: Ono from Japan to New York, still remembering the trauma of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and Clark from Brazil to Paris, after the military coup. Both produced groundbreaking works in the 1960s. Both invite the audience to participate in their art. However, their practices lead to opposite results.

Clark started out as a painter, a member of a collective that developed "Neo Concretismo," which sought to create works of art that would express the phenomenological experience of the viewer in

space, beyond the two dimensions of the canvas. After adopting the abstract practices of the Soviet Constructivists and Piet Mondrian, Clark had a breakthrough. She began creating three-dimensional objects that could be folded and explored in multiple ways by viewers. She called them "animals" (Bechos). There is even a "pocket [18]" animal, an object that fits into a trousers' pocket.

Clark continues to explore materials and how they feel in the hands of the observer, who becomes a participant. It is important to distinguish between Clark's "participant" and the "user" on social media.9 A series of various gloves and balls, for example, invites the participant to explore the range of possible sensations. Pressing on a plastic bag filled with air and topped with a stone simulates breathing. Complex costumes encourage participants to put them on and explore each other's bodies through them. Clark later developed her practice into collective works and therapy. She wrote about this turning point in a letter dated October 26, 1968, to her colleague Helio Oiticica (1937-1980), who remained in Brazil: "*Since Caminando* (*Walking*) (1963), the object has lost its importance for me, and if I still use it, it is so that it can become a mediator for participation."10 Walking was the moment when the work of art became superfluous. Once again, to perform it, to participate in it, one needs scissors and a piece of paper:

Caminando (*Walking*) is the name I gave to my latest project. Since then, I have attributed absolute meaning to the participant's immanent action. *Caminando* combines all possibilities of action: it allows for choice, the unexpected, and the transformation of virtuality into concrete effort. You can create Caminando yourself: take a white paper tape [...] and cut it crosswise. Then twist and glue it to form a Möbius strip. Next, take a pair of scissors, place it in the Middle of the tape, and cut it lengthwise without stopping. [...] If the tape is cut in this way, it becomes thinner and thinner, unfolding and weaving. In the end, the path that has been symbolically traversed here is so narrow that it cannot be cut any narrower.11

"Please note: Keep in mind that the expression is yours, and it belongs solely to the cutting. This is the **act**," Clark writes in the instructions she published in 196512. In the face of the audience's expressive participation in Ono's work, Clark's expression is characterized by independent self-participation. In contrast to the artist's cutting of the garment in *Cut Piece*, in *Caminando*, the cutting itself is the act. At the end of the act of walking, a curled piece of paper is obtained. And in fact, it is no longer needed. It does not need to accumulate in dozens or thousands; it does not need to remain; it is superfluous. Neither the artist's name nor the participant's appears on it. In Ono's early work, it was an idea planted in the imagination that did not require execution. In Ono's later work, many people were required, which also attests to their number. In Clark's later work, the participant's body is like the ladder in Wittgenstein's *Logical-Philosophical Treatise*, which can be discarded at the end of the climb, or in this case, the walk.

קיפול עגורים של יוקו אונו לעומת הליכה של ליג׳יה קלארק, בביצוע סטודנטים בקורס המבוא לתולדות האמנות באקדמיה לאמנות בלייפציג, קיץ 2025. **[19]**



[20]
Yoko Ono's Folding Cranes versus Lygia Clark's Caminando, executed by students in the introductory art history course at the Leipzig Academy of Art, summer 2025.

In negotiating the body of the artwork and that of the observer-participant, we might wonder: should the body participate in public, in the institutional art space, in the virtual reality of social networks, as Ono suggests? Conversely, Clark allows for an individual convergence of the body, which can be read as an aesthetic-political stance of resistance. A third possibility is offered by the act of protest, which is counted in bodies: in Berlin, Haifa, Myanmar.13 The nonviolent protest with two participants, Ono and Lennon performing on their honeymoon bed in a hotel room, as opposed to the doubling of protesters, oppressed by a military regime force, documented by soft fabric figures on the Artists' Street by Burmese artist Chaw Ei Thein [21] (b. 1969), displayed at the Berlin Biennale, "Passing the Fugitive On," also in the summer of 2025. Among other things, Thein presented a "protest wedding," in which fabric couples hold fabric banners embroidered with messages such as "Marry someone who hates military coups," an act that combines the private and the political, the pairing of bodies into a single economic entity in marriage with those couples standing together with others in an act of resistance.

And in times of war, should we take to the streets and museums to demonstrate our position? Against war? For peace? Should we take sides? Or should we take paper and scissors and go for a walk, each participant, wherever they may be, at an exhibition, in the kitchen, in exile, in their homeland, as Clark suggests? Or perhaps we should imagine peace, together, with our bodies, on top of Ono's body? What economy will you participate in?

- 1. Georges Bataille et al. *Encyclopedia Acephalica*, Robert Label and Isabelle Waldberg, eds., Iain White, trans. (Atlas Press, London, 1995), 4
- 2. An interview by Reem Ghanayem with Roee Rosen [22] has also been published in the current Tohu issue.
- 3. On the other hand, I think of Mahmoud Darwish's book, Memory of Forgetting, translated by Salman Masalha (Shocken 1989).
- 4. Yoko Ono, "Conversation Piece," *Grapefruit*, Wunternaum Press, Japan, 1964
- 5. It should be noted that in the instructions for the work published by Ono in Grapefruit, there is also a second version for the audience: according to the announcement, people in the audience are allowed to cut the clothes of others. The audience can continue to cut as they please.
- 6. This presented an unflattering picture of the Berlin audience, according to Johanna Adrian's review, “The Gap Between Poor and Stupid,” for the Süddeutsche Zeitung (May 4, 2025).
- 7. This is how Google's artificial intelligence summarized the idea behind the work.
- 8. Otto Dix’s Skat players do not like the ending of the war. Barely holding the cards, they would have encountered difficulty in folding cranes.
- 9. And from prosumer, the producer-consumer, a term coined by Alvin Toffler in the 1980s, as mentioned by Marie-France Rafael in her book Marie-France Rafael, Passing Images: Art in Post-digital Times, Floating Opera Press, 2022.
- 10. The letters were published in Clair Bishop, Participation, The MIT Press, 2006.
- 11. From the exhibition text [23], Lygia Clark. Retrospective, Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, 2025.
- 12. Lygia Clark, "'Walking along' – do it yourself," Signals 1.7 (1965), p. 7
- 13. For a seminar on “Art, Rights, and Laws” in the summer of 2025 at the Academy of Art in Leipzig, Adam Harfouch formulates the concepts of “Creative Resilience” and “Creative Freedom in the Body” with which he analyzed the practices of Tania Bruguera (b. 1968), Regina José Galindo (b. 1974), and Wafa Bilal (b. 1966). Harpooch explores the power of protest in the German context as an act that combines presence in a space of multiple bodies.

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[4] https://tohumagazine.com/article/problem-nostalgia-learning-athens-documenta-14
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