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**“A Poet of ‘non-*ressentiment*?’ Lawrence Alloway, Ray Johnson, and the Artworld as a
Network”**

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Abstract:

Drawing upon material from the Lawrence Alloway Papers and the Dick Higgins Papers in the GRI, this paper considers Ray Johnson’s mail art in relation to British critic Lawrence Alloway. Johnson’s practice mirrored several aspects of Alloway’s analysis of the artworld as a network. However, Alloway harboured reservations about the system’s complicities, while Johnson’s recalcitrant behaviour, allied to the deceptively playful surfaces of his work, betray a strongly ambivalent attitude. These latent anxieties and antagonisms suggest the complexities of communication and social interaction which subtended the expanded post-war artworld.

A Poet of ‘non-*ressentiment*’? Lawrence Alloway, Ray Johnson and the Artworld as a Network

The Special Collections at the Getty Research Institute contain a small but revealing portion of the correspondence between the British critic Lawrence Alloway and the mail artist Ray Johnson. These items mainly comprise of postcards, letters and collages mailed to Alloway and his wife, Sylvia Sleigh. The material prompts further reflection upon the two figures, since the relationship between them is not simply fortuitous. There are striking convergences between the ideas of Alloway and the nature of Johnson’s practice. The playfulness of Johnson’s work, with its wry wordplay and oblique references to both the artworld and the field of popular culture, chimes with Alloway’s inclusive notion of the “expanded field” of culture, coined in 1958. Further, in 1972, Alloway proposed the notion of the artworld as a network. Here the artwork is subject to dispersal within a complex, self-sustaining system of distribution and reproduction. Johnson’s self-titled New York Correspondance School (NYCS) used the artworld as a canvas for his collages and mail art pieces.

The networked system described by Alloway formed part of a broader shift towards the “information economy.” Mail art is symptomatic of this, prefiguring the emergence of the internet in the 1990s with its possibilities for connection and communication.¹ However, there is a tendency to view this shift in a somewhat celebratory manner. It will be seen that anxieties subtend both the act of communication, and the increasingly interconnected artworld. Although Alloway described the network with characteristic sobriety, he was nonetheless an inhabitant of that very system, harbouring reservations about its complicities. Likewise, Johnson’s difficulties with artists, museums and buyers of his work are well-known. The convergence between

Alloway's ideas and Johnson's practice might indicate that both figures breezily accepted a tolerant and expanded artworld. However, closer examination suggests that their attitudes were not quite so straightforward, and that a more nuanced reconsideration of those changes is required. Alloway's published remarks on Johnson's work unwittingly suggest this.

Alloway's writings on Johnson artist consist largely of two pieces: a review of the exhibition "Ray Johnson's History of the Betty Parson's Gallery," published in *The Nation* in February 1973; and a contribution to a special feature on the NYCS in *Art Journal* in Spring 1977. In the latter piece, Alloway remarked that "Ray Johnson can be regarded as a poet of non-*ressentiment*[.]"ⁱⁱ The use of the term "poet" is notable, as Alloway remarked in his earlier review from 1973:

In Ray Johnson's collages words and images are inextricable: the denotation of proper names and the chains of visual associations unravel. These collages are not designed to be seen in a single, all-encompassing glance, like a Motherwell collage; on the contrary, they are intricate and discursive, a nest of clues that solicit close attention. They are to be read.ⁱⁱⁱ

The use of the term "poet" refers not only to the linguistic functioning of Johnson's work, with its chains of reference and visual-verbal play. It also refers to Johnson's participation in events and in poetry publications such as *Mudfish* and *The Umuzzled Ox*. The discursive nature of Johnson's work will be discussed more later, but what is perhaps most interesting about Alloway's remark is his use of the term *ressentiment*, taken from Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887). If there were any doubt about its significance, the term appears three times in Alloway's short piece. The term has no exact equivalent in either German or in English:

“resentment” is too limited, whereas *ressentiment* defines a more protracted sense of injustice. Nietzsche’s genealogy ascribes the birth of *ressentiment* and its “inversion of values” (*Umkehre der Werte*) to the emergence of Judaeo-Christian morality, which provided a moral code for the oppressed. Judaeo-Christian morality is described by Nietzsche as “the *ressentiment* of those beings who, being denied the proper response of action, compensate for it only with imaginary revenge.” This revenge is fought via the Word, led by the priestly caste of whom Nietzsche writes with such trepidation. The oppressed say “no” to the world, scorning the transience of its material pleasures, embracing instead the righteousness of moral superiority, and its promise of salvation. In the same passage, he adds

Whereas all noble morality grows out of a triumphant saying “yes” to itself, slave morality says “no” on principle to everything that is “outside”, “other”, “non-self”: and this “no” is its creative deed.^{iv}

What is revealing about Alloway’s use of the term is that its slippery meaning exceeds his intentions. Alloway’s intended meaning is not difficult to infer: he implies that the artist of *ressentiment* is the archetypal New York School painter who, whether conceived by Clement Greenberg or Harold Rosenberg, is alienated from mainstream society. For Greenberg, the artist’s oppositional stance took the form of the preservation of aesthetic value threatened by capitalist instrumentality. For Rosenberg, in his famous essay “The American Action Painters” (1951), opposition resided in the act, or gesture, of the artist as a liberating socio-political metaphor.^v Both notions, however, say “no” to the “other” of mass culture and its complacent audience: since for the Modernists, both were indissolubly linked with the emergence of industrial capitalism.

On the other hand, Alloway regarded Ray Johnson's practice as exemplary of a different attitude: one which was discernable amongst the generation of artists who succeeded the New York School. This attitude was characterised by the broad range of practices emergent at the turn of the 1960s. In contrast to Modernism, Johnson and his generation cast off the alienation of the 1950s by saying 'yes' to mass cultural imagery (if not to mass culture itself). Take, for instance, Johnson's early *moticos*, such as *Elvis Presley no.1* (ca. 1956-57) or *Untitled (Hand Marilyn Monroe)* (1958): these were amongst the first artworks to utilise pop imagery. The latter work in particular, which suggests the obsessions of the teenage fan pinning Marilyn to the bedroom wall, bears out Adrian Henri's remark that "Ray Johnson was, in the 1950s, very much an equivalent of Richard Hamilton."^{vi} If anything, Johnson's work pre-empted Richard Hamilton's *My Marilyn* (1965) by several years. Johnson's early *moticos* exemplify the breadth of the heterogeneous "fine art-pop art continuum" advocated by Alloway in 1958. Here, popular culture was not conceived as a homogeneous threat, as conceived by Modernist critics, but rather a means by which the audience could share in its signs and symbols: constructing one's identity through the appropriation of its productions by tailoring them towards one's own interests. In this respect, Alloway's views parallel those of the sociologist David Riesman, who made a similar critique of Modernist attitudes towards mass culture.^{vii}

Aside from this broader cultural designation, Alloway also remarked upon the ways that movements as diverse as Pop and Assemblage utilised objects from the world with their own extra-artistic spheres of usage, bringing them into an artistic context and facilitating a participatory relationship with the object.^{viii} If the viewer "shares" in the same world of signs and objects as the artist, it is but a small step to the more explicitly participatory nature of mail art.

Johnson's practice of "on-sending" involved sending mail art drawings or collages in the post, which would be modified by the recipient and passed on to another member of the network, who would add further modifications before returning the piece to Johnson. Johnson's practice was thus described by William S. Wilson as an art "not of social comment, but of sociability."^{ix} This term dovetails with Alloway's notion of "commonality," which described the "shared" nature of Pop and Assemblage.^x The notion of "sociability" also dovetails with the new sensibility Alloway discerned amongst Abstract Expressionism's successors. However, Alloway's essay "Network: the artworld described as a system" (1972) provides a more comprehensive account of the structures which are entwined with Johnson's practice.

In the "Network" essay, Alloway adopts aspects of systems theory. He describes the artworld not as a straightforward hierarchy, but as a complex, self-sustaining organization: "a shifting multiple goal coalition," to use the term Alloway borrows to describe this fluid, malleable structure.^{xi} Within this complex system, the production of art objects is almost incidental to the apparatus within which the artwork has become enmeshed. As Alloway writes, the system's "output" is not the artwork itself, which "exists prior to distribution": instead, the output is the system itself, which exists to produce and distribute objects, whether physically, through reproduction or via critical and scholarly publications.^{xii} The artwork's dispersal into this interconnected system of distribution separates the work's meaning from the artist's original intention, as layers of meaning are accreted through different interpretations by viewers, critics and curators. Alloway calls this the "alienation by distribution effect."^{xiii} From the point of view of the 1950s, "alienation" had a pejorative connotation; however, Alloway uses the term as a neutral description of the process: elsewhere in his writings, he claimed that the dispersal of

meaning was a beneficial consequence of widening access to culture.^{xiv}

Johnson's collages are very carefully constructed, some are worked on over periods of many years. These works can consist of drawing and lettering in India ink, in addition to collaged elements, some of which are excised directly from previous works. The result can be richly textured and decorative: take, for instance, the series of "portraits" from the early 1970s, such as *Henry Fonda Foot Dollar Bill* (1970). Johnson's mail art pieces, however, took on a simpler format: postcards or sheets of letter paper containing drawings, instructions, stamped insignias, or collaged elements. These correspondence pieces lack the dense materiality of the singular art object subject to the network's systems of reproduction and interpretative multiplicity: instead, they were already constituted by and through the distributional system of the mail. Since mail art pieces were often co-authored by Johnson and a chain of recipients/senders, they cannot always be traced back to an initial time and place, or to a singular author.

This complexity, and the dispersed nature of Johnson's work entails difficulties for those who wish to write about it. In 1977, Alloway expressed regret at not having written more extensively on the artist, conceding that the proliferation of meaning and reference in Johnson's work was simply too confusing to delineate. Johnson himself claimed that although mail art originated in 1943, it has no definable origin. He gave up on keeping track of mail art, conceding in 1984 that

this natural generosity of image and idea and information is something I can only extend so far. I don't have the time any more. And the information itself would just keep on accelerating, it just keeps on accelerating and expanding.^{xv}

The complexity of Johnson does not just extend outwards: the works themselves are equally complex, revelling in visual and verbal puns. For instance, *Pals Slap* (1968) contains a newspaper photograph of David Eisenhower kissing his wife: Eisenhower's hand caresses his wife's cheek, but the image can be read alternatively as a "slap" in the face, which is played upon further by the reverse palindrome of the title. Johnson also re-uses visual signifiers which may only obliquely refer to the subject. William S. Wilson has written of Johnson's capacity to pick up an aspect of a person "which might be central or marginal," and to then accumulate or build the image around the correspondences that this initiates.^{xvi} To take one of many examples, *Mondrian Comb* (fig. 1: 1969) displays a series of adjacent "snake" motifs which recur throughout Johnson's career: here they resemble a comb, which is played off against a photograph of Piet Mondrian in his New York studio. From an art-historical perspective, the wavy lines might be read as a visual joke about Mondrian's rejection of curvilinear forms in his painting. But there is a more straightforward joke: the bald man with a comb. This incidental relation is crucial to Johnson's eccentric worldview. Wilson adds:

Ray Johnson is a realist for whom reality is in designed or coincidental correspondences, a fabric of metaphors. The correspondences imply no "higher reality."^{xvii}

Johnson's "reality," according to Wilson, rests upon metaphor, similarity or correspondence between visual or verbal signifiers: it is a self-contained reality. In this respect it parallels the self-contained nature of the networked artworld described by Alloway. There is a further similarity. Wilson remarks elsewhere that Johnson's practice "constructs a structure that has no foundation[.]"^{xviii} Wilson's remark refers to the deconstructive linguistic play at work in Johnson's collages, but it also refers to the decentred nature of mail art as it circulates around its

chain of senders and recipients. The fluid nature of mail art mimics the processes of the networked artworld, especially in its poetic rendering of gallery invites and other forms of correspondence. Those processes are “intimate bureaucracies,” to use Craig Saper’s apposite phrase: further, the phrase captures the ambivalence of mail art, which parodies or renders poetic the structures of bureaucracy, while nonetheless working within those very structures.^{xix}

Alloway was not the only critic to write about the networked artworld: it was also discussed by Harold Rosenberg in his essay “The American Art Establishment” (1965). He noted that the decentred nature of its social scene confounded the ambitions of newcomers and hangers-on eager to make their way to its centre. He writes:

...outsiders who have made their way into the core of the establishment discover in bewilderment and consternation that the center is no different from the outer edge—in short, that there is no center, only individuals and institutions without a dominant authority or etiquette.^{xx}

The fluent, non-hierarchical nature of the network is schematised in Johnson’s piece “The History of Art News” (fig.2), mailed to Alloway in 1970. The piece consists of a uniform grid of identikit rabbit-heads drawn onto paper. Each is accompanied by the names of critics and curators such as Barbara Rose, Marcia Tucker and Gene Swenson. The fluidity and interconnection of the participants is signified by the fact that each name corresponds to an identical visual signifier. However, although the rabbit-heads suggest equivalence, as one “reads” the piece the reader cannot help but notice that some names are more noticeable than others. An implicit hierarchy is at work, although it is a fluid, mobile hierarchy rather than one “frozen in layers like a pyramid,” to use Alloway’s term from “The Long Front of Culture” in

1958.^{xxi}

This fluidity was later remarked upon in Alloway's "Network" essay: the distinctions between critics, curators, dealers and collectors became increasingly fluid: this is something that Alloway had experienced himself as "a curator, teacher, and an art critic, usually two at a time." He offers the example of Henry Geldzahler as someone who "typifies the interconnections of roles in the system very well."^{xxii}

Not everyone was sanguine about this development, however. Alloway and Geldzahler were satirised by Dick Higgins in his essay "Intermedia" in 1965. He attacked them for their association with Pop Art, which he condemned for its "aridity," adding that "None of the ingenious theories of the Mr. Ivan Geldoway combine can prevent [it] from being colossally boring and irrelevant."^{xxiii} As Martin Patrick has recently remarked, this "mythical beast" was "a conflation of three integral figures, Ivan Karp (dealer), Henry Geldzahler (curator) and Lawrence Alloway (critic)[.]"^{xxiv} However, one needs to qualify Patrick's remark by noting that the unpacking of this conflated "mythical beast" misses the overlapping of roles which is intrinsic to the networked structure (Geldzahler working as a dealer and curator; Alloway as a critic and curator).

Higgins and Johnson knew each other: Higgins even set up Something Else Press as a vehicle to disseminate Johnson's work.^{xxv} The Dick Higgins Papers at the GRI contains mail art pieces sent by Johnson. They suggest a shared antagonism towards Pop and its advocates such as Alloway. Amongst the correspondence is a mail art piece in two different states, as it has been successively scrawled upon (figs. 3 and 4). The earlier drawing consists of a compounded image, and is framed by Johnson's trademark rabbit-heads. Within this nested structure is the shape

which Johnson would use in his parodic classifications of female breasts, seen in works such as *Mark* (1969) and *Henry Fonda Foot Dollar Bill* (1970). The image is further modified into a pair of underpants. Finally, a flaccid, nested L-shaped design has been added, which is reminiscent of a distended right-angled Frank Stella painting such as *Creede II* (1961). This “melted” L-shape is derived from a “swan neck” motif found elsewhere in Johnson’s work: it reappears in other collages such as *Chuck Close with Swan* (1974-90). Beneath, is the compounded legend “Stellawrence Alloway’s underwear”: the suffix “Stel” is clearly a later addition, perhaps as the connection between Alloway and the Stella L-shape became apparent.

Alloway had curated the show *Systemic Painting* in 1966, which exhibited Stella’s Irregular Polygon painting *Wolfeboro 4* (1966). These paintings were prized by Michael Fried in his landmark essay “Shape as Form: Frank Stella’s Irregular Polygons” (1966-67) for embodying an aesthetic transcendence which allayed the threat of Minimalism (or, indirectly, the commercialism of Pop).^{xxvi} From the current historical perspective, the lines between Pop and abstraction are less clearly drawn, although Alloway recognised this from an early stage, placing Stella within a broader framework of abstract painting in his catalogue essay.^{xxvii} However, the critique of the Higgins-Johnson combine suggests that such convergences are complicit with the mechanisms of the burgeoning art market. Stella’s paintings were valuable commodities, where value may be conferred by either the Modernist critic or by the astute placement of the curator.

The “History of Art News” piece, with its non-hierarchical structure, suggests that the circulation of names functions as a signifier of value. John Coplans remarked that during his tenure at *Artforum*, visibility for an artist in the magazine was not enough: to make an impact, an artist required a “big name” critic to write about the work.^{xxviii} Johnson’s piece, however, focuses

upon *Art News* which, by 1970, had long been usurped by *Artforum* as the major contemporary art magazine in the U.S. In his choice of *Art News*, Johnson betrays an ambivalence towards the New York School which was associated with the journal. This problematises the broader shift towards a new sensibility in the 1960s, Although his mail art practice correlates with the decentred structures of the expanded network, “The History of Art News” harks back to a smaller, less career-oriented artworld.

Alloway, too, expressed reservations about this new condition, even if he took a largely favourable attitude towards it: the artworld, he writes, exhibits an “unsettling connectivity.”^{xxix} This phrase is curious for its use of the adjective “unsettling” in conjunction with the kinds of processes which Alloway otherwise described as benign. But it points to broader concerns which were also noted by Rosenberg, who highlighted that the fluidity and decentred nature of the artworld entailed a certain degree of anxiety amongst its participants. Those who are not part of the artworld are prone to imagine a degree of conspiracy involved in the establishment of reputations: the conflation, or “interconnection” of roles described by Alloway might be seen as a conflict of interest in other fields; Geldzahler, for instance, was noted for socialising with artists while practising as a prominent curator.

This point about Geldzahler, where the “distance” between the curator and artist is abolished, is related a broader issue: the abolition of the time-lag between “historical” and “contemporary” art in museum policy. Artists such as Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg enjoyed retrospectives at the relatively young ages of 34 and 38.^{xxx} Taken in tandem with the overlapping of roles, one might suspect that strings are being pulled: but in the artworld, no-one can be certain that pulling strings will guarantee the correct outcome. As Rosenberg writes:

The sum of it is that no dealer, curator, buyer, or critic, or any existing combination of these, can be depended upon to produce a reputation that is more than a momentary flurry. The result is widespread anxiety—the anxiety of individuals and groups concerning both their own status and that of the art which they exhibit, deal in, comment on, create.^{xxx}

The fluid structure described by Alloway, and the playful nature of Johnson’s practice, are subtended by anxiety over status, which is unstable and impermanent. These anxieties formed part of broader debates in the postwar U.S: most notably, in sociological works such as Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) and William H. Whyte’s *The Organization Man* (1957). Rosenberg reviewed this literature very critically, coining the term “Orgman criticism.” He noted, however, that at its heart was a particular concern:

among the grand metaphysical themes of [the 1950s], the one that has proved perhaps the most fascinating and persistent has been that of “alienation”—the loss by the individual of personal identity through the operation of social processes.^{xxx}

Riesman had claimed that a shift had taken place in the post-war period: from the “inner-directed” individual allied to the Protestant work ethic, to the “outer-directed” individual who was more attuned to, and more reliant upon, the social network within which work and life were now subsumed. This new “outer-directed” sociability was a function of the expanded post-war middle class as the post-industrial economy took shape. Many commentators interpreted Riesman’s study as either a lament for a lost individualism, or as a threat to the autonomy of the self: a reading which Riesman himself was at pains to correct.^{xxx} For Riesman, the shift was simply a different orientation to the world which entailed social adjustment. It is worth noting

that Alloway met Riesman during his first trip to the US, and that the term “antagonistic co-operation,” coined in the catalogue for *This Is Tomorrow* (1956), was derived from Riesman’s study.^{xxxiv} This term captures the ambivalence of both Riesman’s term, and Alloway’s conception of the cultural field, where alliances are continuously forged and broken.

This notion of the “outer-directed” individual and its attendant anxieties can be profitably related to the network: in a professionalized, career-oriented artworld, the artist must be increasingly “outer-directed”: attending gallery openings and events, making oneself visible and positioning oneself. This social functioning comes to form an increasingly important part of the decisions made in the artworld. In particular, “gossip” takes on increasing importance.

Rosenberg remarks that

One substance overlies all the elements of the establishment, from museum personnel to dinner hostesses. That substance is talk. The art establishment subsists on words—much more, in fact, than it does on pictures. Talk within the establishment has more power than elsewhere because decisions are less sure and the consequences of acting on them more uncertain[.]^{xxxv}

The focus on “talk” is particularly relevant to Johnson’s practice. Both Alloway and Wilson described his work in linguistic terms. But Johnson’s mail pieces also form part of this discourse of “talk” where information is circulated, reputations are formed, or gossip is shared simply for enjoyment. Mary Josephson, in a perceptive review in 1973, has claimed that “gossip.. is, after all, Johnson’s medium.”^{xxxvi} The artist was rarely seen at gallery openings, although he remained remarkably well-informed nonetheless, his mail art operating as a surrogate by which to glean information of its operations. His card sent to Alloway (fig.5) is an invite to a Johnson show at

Woodpecker Gallery, but it also function as one of Johnson's "face/fake collages." It contains an oblique references to Alloway's writings on Christo. Johnson cites Alloway's remark, that "Christo is preoccupied with the mystery of same-size." This remark is undercut by Johnson's vulgar remark at the opposite side of the card, which puns both on the reference to size, and upon the hard and soft "c" sounds in his self-titled face/fake collages. Johnson writes "my C is a tiny bit longer than your K."

This parodic use of the convention of gallery mailing demonstrates Johnson's use of the artworld network as conduit for his poetic interventions. In doing so, it bears out Saper's notion of "intimate bureaucracy," not least because of the ambivalence which Johnson betrays towards his interlocutor. As Lucy Lippard has remarked, Johnson's is a "curiously inverted and even at times misanthropic kind of sociability."^{xxxvii} Johnson does not neutrally embrace the communication network: he acknowledges the complexities and difficulties that human interaction entails. In *The Paper Snake* he writes:

At one point, I gave up on communication with people, and decided that my correspondence art existed for only one person—me. I previously thought that it existed only for you—me and you—and then I decided that you were no longer necessary.^{xxxviii}

A latent hostility might be discerned in a fictional cheque for a million dollars, mailed to Alloway in 1965 (fig.6). Johnson is signatory to both the cheque and the work: a Dada gesture of artistic nominalism. The elision of the distinction between the work and its nominal value might be read as a critique of the market for contemporary art as an object of investment. But given that Johnson's art is not primarily one of "social comment," one might instead discern *ressentiment* in the gesture. Grace Glueck has remarked that Johnson was 'New York's most famous unknown

artist.^{xxxix} This was not a term which Johnson appreciated, since it acknowledged a lack of recognition in comparison with his contemporaries. Seen in this context, Johnson's cheque can be read as an act of wish-fulfilment. The playful gesture betrays ambivalence nonetheless: a grievance against his lack of success, but a simultaneous wish to be part of the very system from which he felt insufficiently recognised.

Johnson's ambivalence was also revealed by his behaviour towards potential buyers of his work. As David Bourdon recalled in his open letter after Johnson's death: "Anyone who attempted to buy or sell your work without your knowledge risked offending you."^{xl} Anyone attempting to buy *with* Johnson's knowledge also risked causing offence. He would enter into protracted negotiations with prospective buyers, constantly changing the terms and conditions. Bourdon remarks in the same passage above that Peter Schuyff offered 25% less than the asking price for a \$2,000 collage (a silhouetted portrait of Andy Warhol). Johnson agreed, before neatly excising precisely 25% of the work. This kind of behaviour functioned as a way for Johnson to assert his own terms, but it also functioned as an act of self-abnegation.

Johnson's strategies of resistance and obstruction, allied to the ephemeral nature of his mail art correspondence, align him with Fluxus figures such as George Brecht and Robert Filliou. In a recent essay on La Cédille qui Sourit, the artist-run space in Villefranche, Natilee Harren has claimed that the space was "an alternative to the high-market art commodity along with its attendant notions of uniqueness, material integrity, and cultural and monetary value." Instead, Brecht and Filliou made "a concerted effort to construct other models for the art object and its distribution[.]"^{xli} Johnson's distributional method, in addition to his uncompromising posture, suggests a similar inclination towards co-operation or sociability as an antidote to the

alienation of capitalism. However, Johnson's sensibility opens up a cleavage between himself and Filliou's notion of intersubjectivity.

As Harren remarks, Filliou's accompanying illustration to *Poème invalide* (1965), published in the Belgian journal *Phantomas*, depicts a schematised figure with limbs in the shape of cedillas. The hook-like cedillas reach out for connection to others, suggesting, in Harren's words, "a fully relational model of subjectivity that, while individual, desires to be fulfilled or made able by connecting to others."^{xlii} Johnson's "misanthropic sociability" does not suggest the same fruitful connection. Nor did he share the utopian aims of Fluxus. Instead, Johnson's work acknowledges a more fraught interconnection: more broadly, it suggests that the theme of "alienation" in relation to social processes was not simply superseded by the social and cultural changes of the 1960s.

Alloway's "Network" essay was written in the aftermath of the artworld's heyday in the 1960s: by 1972, he described it as "exhibit[ing] numerous dysfunctions."^{xliii} The artworld felt the impact of the recession of the 1970s: strikes at MoMA by disgruntled curatorial staff; museum budget deficits at institutions such as the Pasadena Museum of Art; and a downturn in the art market. Alloway followed these matters closely, as can be seen by the copious files in the archive, which include internal memos from museums, and clippings from the *The Wall St. Journal* and *The New York Times*.^{xliv} A handwritten manuscript, which predates the "Network" essay, jots down some of Alloway's thoughts on the dysfunctions of the museum system.^{xlv}

Similar thoughts appear in the closing section of the essay, where Alloway muses upon the future development of the gallery and museum system, particularly given the ephemeral, transient or inaccessible nature of much radical art in the 1960s. He describes these

developments as indicative of a “crisis of confidence.. in the distribution system.”^{xlvi} He muses that future innovation is unlikely to come from within the institutional confines of museums and galleries themselves, given the broader logic of development over the last three centuries. Alloway briefly sketches a history stemming from the distribution of prints in the 17th century to the emergence of public exhibitions in the 18th and 19th centuries; finally, this led to the heterogeneous networked system of the post-war period.

Johnson’s mail art was a symptom of this networked system, but his relationship to the system was complex. Johnson’s mailings to artists and critics such as Alloway and Higgins might be said to form part artworld discourse, but his mailings were not limited to this sphere: indeed, the very nature of mail art is continually expansive. Further, we have seen that Alloway’s notion of Johnson as a “poet of non-*ressentiment*,” while apposite, required qualification. The term neatly differentiated between Johnson’s “outer-directed” sociability with the “inner-directed” attitude of the New York School. However, Alloway’s term failed to account for the latent hostilities and anxieties which subtended Johnson’s communications: in doing so, Alloway anticipated some of the more celebratory accounts of mail art. In Johnson’s work, communication is never as straightforward or benign as advocates of communication theory claim.

Having teased out the wider implications of Alloway’s brief remarks on Johnson, the following issues might be worthy of further consideration. Firstly, we might wish to reconsider whether the anxieties of the self common to the 1950s were wholly superseded by the emergence of “cool” new practices and attitudes in the 1960s. Secondly, given the ambivalent nature of Johnson’s “intimate bureaucracies,” we might also reconsider our assumption of the avant-

garde's oppositional relationship to the emergent networked system of the 1960s. For instance, we noted that Johnson's work did not neatly fit into the oppositional position occupied by Fluxus artists such as Brecht and Filliou. It seems apposite, however, to finish with an instance of Johnson's inscrutable ambivalence: an undated mailing to the Whitney Museum, which simply reads: "Dear Whitney Museum, I hate you. Love, Ray Johnson."

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Captions

Fig. 1. Ray Johnson (American, 1927-1995). *Mondrian Comb* (1969). Mixed media collage. 25 x 27.5 inches. The Estate of Ray Johnson, Richard L. Feigen & Co, New York.

Fig. 2. Ray Johnson (American, 1927-1995) “The History of Art News,” mailed to Lawrence Alloway 1970, ink on paper. Lawrence Alloway papers 1935–2003, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2003.M.46: Box 8 folio 37.)

Fig. 3. Ray Johnson (American, 1927-1995) Mail art sent to Dick Higgins, undated. Dick Higgins papers, 1960-1994 (bulk 1972-1993), ink on paper, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. Research Library, Accession no. 870613, Box 17, folder 49.

Fig. 4. Ray Johnson (American, 1927-1995) Mail art sent to Dick Higgins (second state), undated. Dick Higgins papers, 1960-1994 (bulk 1972-1993), ink on paper, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. Research Library, Accession no. 870613, Box 17, folder 49.

Fig. 5. Ray Johnson (American, 1927-1995) Mail art sent to Lawrence Alloway. 1968. Lawrence Alloway papers 1935–2003, ink and stamp on postcard, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, accession no.2003.M.46: Box 8, folder 18.

Fig. 6. Ray Johnson (American, 1927-1995). Mail art sent to Lawrence Alloway, 1965. Lawrence Alloway papers 1935–2003, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, accession no.2003.M.46: Box 8, folder 18.

ⁱ Annmarie Chandler and Norie Neumark, Ed., *At a Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2005).

ⁱⁱ Lawrence Alloway, "Ray Johnson," in Edward M Plunkett *et al*, "Send Letters, Postcards, Drawings and Objects," *Art Journal* 36, no.3, (Spring 1977): 236.

ⁱⁱⁱ Lawrence Alloway, "Art," *The Nation* (February 5, 1973): 190.

^{iv} Friedrich Nietzsche, "First Essay," *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Keith Ansell-Pearson Ed., trans. Carol Diethe, (Cambridge University Press, 2006), §10, 21.

^v The very complexity of what is meant by "action" has been recently discussed by Robert Slifkin, "The Tragic Image: Action Painting Refigured," *Oxford Art Journal* 34 (June 2011): 227-46.

^{vi} Adrian Henri, cited in Michael von Uchtrap, "Ray Johnson: Biography," *The Journal of Black Mountain College Studies*, 2 (Spring 2012).

^{vii} For Alloway's views on mass culture, see "The Arts in the Mass Media," *Architectural Design* 28, vol.2 (February 1958), republished in Richard Kalina Ed., *Imagining the Present: Context, Content and the Role of the Critic* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006). For Riesman's similar views, see "Listening to Popular Music," in *Individualism Reconsidered and Other Essays* (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1954).

^{viii} Alloway writes, "proximity and participation replace distance and contemplation as the communicative style of the object." "Junk Culture," *Imagining the Present*, 2006, 80.

^{ix} William S. Wilson, in Ray Johnson, *The Paper Snake* (New York: Something Else Press, 1965), unpaginated.

^x Alloway, *American Pop Art* (Macmillan: New York, 1974): 7.

^{xi} Alloway, "Network: the artworld described as a system," *Artforum* 11, no.1 (September 1972):

29. Alloway cites the phrase from D.S Pugh, D.J. Hickson, C.R. Hinings, *Writers on Organizations*, (Harmondsworth, 1971): 81.

^{xii} Alloway, "Network," 1972, 29.

^{xiii} Alloway, "Network," 1971, 28.

^{xiv} See Alloway, "Art and the Expanding Audience," and "Systems of Cross-Reference in the Arts: On Translation," in Kalina Ed., *Imagining the Present*, 2006.

^{xv} Ray Johnson, cited in Henry Martin, "Should an eyelash last forever? An interview with Ray Johnson," in Donna de Salvo and Catherine Gudis, Ed., *Ray Johnson: Correspondences* (Columbus, OH and Paris: Flammarion and Wexner Center for the Arts 1999): 198. Originally published in *Lotta poetica* 2, no.6 (February 1984): 2-24.

^{xvi} William S. Wilson, "NY Correspondance School," in *Ray Johnson, Ray Johnson* (New York: Between Books, 1977), unpaginated.

^{xvii} Wilson, "NY Correspondance School," 1977.

^{xviii} Wilson, "Reference and Relation," *Ray Johnson, Ray Johnson* (New York: Between Books, 1977): back cover. Cited in de Salvo and Gudis Ed., *Ray Johnson*, 1999, 28.

^{xix} Craig J. Saper, *Networked Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1991): 16-19.

^{xx} Harold Rosenberg, "The American Art Establishment," *Esquire*, January 1965. Republished in *Discovering the Present: Three Decades in Art, Culture and Politics* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1973): 115.

^{xxi} Alloway, "The Long Front of Culture," in Kalina Ed. *Imagining the Present*, 2006.

^{xxii} Alloway, "Network," 1972, 29.

^{xxiii} Dick Higgins, "Intermedia," in *foew&ombwhnw: a grammar of the mind and a phenomenology of love and a science of the arts as seen by a stalker of the wild mushroom* (New York: Something Else Press, 1969): 13, 15.

^{xxiv} Martin Patrick, "Unfinished Filliou: On the Fluxus Ethos and the Origins of Relational Aesthetics," *Art Journal* 69, no.1-2 (Spring-Summer 2010): 54.

^{xxv} Dick Higgins, "The Hatching of the Paper Snake," *Lightworks*, 22 (2000): 26-28.

^{xxvi} Michael Fried, "Shape as Form: Frank Stella's Irregular Polygons," in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

^{xxvii} Lawrence Alloway, *Systemic Painting*, exh. cat. (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1966): 19.

^{xxviii} Coplans adds, "In a sense the article is not important at all. It's who wrote the article that's important." Cited in Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-74* (New York: Soho Press, 2000): 448.

^{xxix} Alloway, "Network," 1972, 29.

^{xxx} Alloway, "Network," 1972, 29.

^{xxxi} Rosenberg, "The American Art Establishment," 1973, 112.

^{xxxii} Harold Rosenberg, "The Orgamerican Phantasy," in *The Tradition of the New* (New York: Da Capo, 1994): 270.

^{xxxiii} Riesman claimed that he did not conceive of the "outer-directed" society as a simple threat to the self's autonomy. David Riesman, *Faces in the Crowd*, abridged edition (New Haven, CT:

Yale University Press, 1965): 12. For a discussion of Riesman, see Robert Genter, *Late Modernism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010): 73-89.

^{xxxiv} See Courtney Martin, “Artworld, Network and Other Alloway Keywords,” *Tate Papers* 16 (Autumn 2011): n.39. For comments on Alloway’s use of the term “antagonistic cooperation,” see Nigel Whiteley, *Reyner Banham: Historian of the Immediate Future* (Cambridge: MIT Press 2002): 90 n. 427. See also David Riesman, with Reuel Denney and Nathan Glazer, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950) and William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man* (New York, Doubleday, 1957).

^{xxxv} Rosenberg, “The American Art Establishment,” 1973, 113-14.

^{xxxvi} Mary Josephson, [review of Ray Johnson], “History of the Betty Parsons Gallery,” *Art in America*, May-June, 1973.

^{xxxvii} Lucy Lippard, “Special Deliverance,” in de Salvo and Gudis, Ed., *Ray Johnson: Correspondences*, 1999, 147.

^{xxxviii} Ray Johnson, cited in Nancy Princenthal, “Artists Book Beat,” *Print Collector's Newsletter* 23 (January-February 1993): 237. Also cited in Lippard, “Special Deliverance,” 1999, 147.

^{xxxix} David Bourdon, “Cosmic Ray,” *Art in America* 83 (October 1995): 109.

^{xl} Bourdon, “Cosmic Ray,” 1995, 110.

^{xli} Natilee Harren, “La cédille qui ne finit pas: Robert Filliou, George Brecht and Fluxus in Villefranche,” *Getty Research Journal*, no.4 (2012): 129.

^{xlii} Harren, “La cédille,” 2012, 134.

^{xliii} Alloway, “Network,” 1972, 31.

^{xliv} Amongst the clippings are articles such as “Troubled Museums: Many U.S. Exhibitors Reel Under Burden of Own Popularity- Institutions Face Growing Security Costs, Inflation, Militancy from Employes [sic]- And ‘Lord Nelson’ Disappears,” *Wall St Journal* (1 Nov, 1971): 1 + 23; Barbara Isenberg, “Pasadena Museum ‘Ambition vs. Endowment,’” *Wall St Journal* (Aug 30, 1971); Joshua C. Taylor, “Why Should Anyone Go to a Museum Anymore?” *New York Times*, (Sunday September 30, 1973). Lawrence Alloway papers 1935–2003, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, accession no.2003.M.46: Box 15, Folio 5.

^{xliv} Lawrence Alloway, untitled, undated ms., Lawrence Alloway papers 1935–2003, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, accession no.2003.M.46: Box 15, folio 14. Alloway notes such factors as “[Director] and trustee indifference,” the “expansion of museums” and “inflation and recession.”

^{xlvi} Alloway, “Network,” 1972, 32.